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Title: Delia Blanchflower

Author: Mrs. Humphry Ward

Release Date: January, 2006 [EBook #9665]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on October 14, 2003]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DELIA BLANCHFLOWER *****

Produced by Andrew Templeton, Juliet Sutherland, Charlie Kirschner
and PG Distributed Proofreaders

DELIA

BLANCHFLOWER

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

AUTHOR "LADY ROSE'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

Frontispiece in color by

WILL FOSTER

DELIA BLANCHFLOWER

Chapter I

"Not a Britisher to be seen--or scarcely! Well, I can do without 'em for a bit!"

And the Englishman whose mind shaped these words continued his leisurely survey of the crowded salon of a Tyrolese hotel, into which a dining-room like a college hall had just emptied itself after the mid-day meal. Meanwhile a German, sitting near, seeing that his tall neighbour had been searching his pockets in vain for matches, offered some. The Englishman's quick smile in response modified the German's general opinion of English manners, and the two exchanged some remarks on the weather--a thunder shower was splashing outside--remarks which bore witness at least to the Englishman's courage in using such knowledge of the German tongue as he possessed. Then, smoking contentedly, he leant against the wall behind him, still looking on.

He saw a large room, some seventy feet long, filled with a miscellaneous foreign crowd--South Germans, Austrians, Russians, Italians--seated in groups round small tables, smoking, playing cards or dominoes, reading the day's newspapers which the funicular had just brought up, or lazily listening to the moderately good band which was playing some Rheingold selection at the farther end.

To his left was a large family circle--Russians, according to information derived from the headwaiter--and among them, a girl, apparently about eighteen, sitting on the edge of the party and absorbed in a novel of which she was eagerly turning the pages. From her face and figure the half savage, or Asiatic note, present in the physiognomy and complexion of her brothers and sisters, was entirely absent. Her beautiful head with its luxuriant mass of black hair, worn

low upon the cheek, and coiled in thick plaits behind, reminded the Englishman of a Greek fragment he had admired, not many days before, in the Louvre; her form too was of a classical lightness and perfection. The Englishman noticed indeed that her temper was apparently not equal to her looks. When her small brothers interrupted her, she repelled them with a pettish word or gesture; the English governess addressed her, and got no answer beyond a haughty look; even her mother was scarcely better treated.

Close by, at another table, was another young girl, rather younger than the first, and equally pretty. She too was dark haired, with a delicate oval face and velvet black eyes, but without any of the passionate distinction, the fire and flame of the other. She was German, evidently. She wore a plain white dress with a red sash, and her little feet in white shoes were lightly crossed in front of her. The face and eyes were all alive, it seemed to him, with happiness, with the mere pleasure of life. She could not keep herself still for a moment. Either she was sending laughing signals to an elderly man near her, presumably her father, or chattering at top speed with another girl of her own age, or gathering her whole graceful body into a gesture of delight as the familiar Rheingold music passed from one lovely motif to another.

"You dear little thing!" thought the Englishman, with an impulse of tenderness, which passed into foreboding amusement as he compared the pretty creature with some of the matrons sitting near her, with one in particular, a lady of enormous girth, whose achievements in eating and drinking at meals had seemed to him amazing. Almost all the middle-aged women in the hotel were too fat, and had lost their youth thereby, prematurely. Must the fairy herself--Euphrosyne--come to such a muddy vesture in the end? Twenty years hence?--alack!

"Beauty that must die." The hackneyed words came suddenly to mind, and haunted him, as his eyes wandered round the room. Amid many coarse or commonplace types, he yet perceived an unusual number of agreeable or handsome faces; as is indeed generally the case in any Austrian hotel. Faces, some of them, among the very young girls especially, of a rose-tinted fairness, and subtly expressive, the dark brows arching on white foreheads, the features straight and clean, the heads well carried, as though conscious of ancestry and tradition; faces, also, of the bourgeoisie, of a simpler, Gretchen-like beauty; faces--a few--of "intellectuals," as he fancied,--including the girl with the novel?--not always handsome, but arresting, and sometimes noble. He felt himself in a border land of races, where the Teutonic and Latin strains had each improved the other; and the pretty young girls and women seemed to him like flowers sprung from an old and rich soil. He found his pleasure in watching them--the pleasure of the Ancient Mariner when he blessed the water-snakes. Sex had little to say to it; and personal desire nothing. Was he not just over forty?--a very busy Englishman, snatching a hard-earned holiday--a bachelor, moreover, whose own story lay far behind him.

"Beauty that must die" The words reverberated and would not be dismissed. Was it because he had just been reading an article in a new

number of the Quarterly, on "Contemporary Feminism," with mingled amazement and revolt, roused by some of the strange facts collected by the writer? So women everywhere--many women at any rate--were turning indiscriminately against the old bonds, the old yokes, affections, servitudes, demanding "self-realisation," freedom for the individuality and the personal will; rebelling against motherhood, and life-long marriage; clamouring for easy divorce, and denouncing their own fathers, brothers and husbands, as either tyrants or fools; casting away the old props and veils; determined, apparently, to know everything, however ugly, and to say everything, however outrageous? He himself was a countryman, an English provincial, with English public school and university traditions of the best kind behind him, a mind steeped in history, and a natural taste for all that was ancient and deep-rooted. The sketch of an emerging generation of women, given in the Quarterly article, had made a deep impression upon him. It seemed to him frankly horrible. He was of course well acquainted, though mainly through the newspapers, with English suffragism, moderate and extreme. His own country district and circle were not, however, much concerned with it. And certainly he knew personally no such types as the Quarterly article described. Among them, no doubt, were the women who set fire to houses, and violently interrupted or assaulted Cabinet ministers, who wrote and maintained newspapers that decent people would rather not read, who grasped at martyrdom and had turned evasion of penalty into a science, the continental type, though not as yet involved like their English sisters in a hand-to-hand, or fist-to-fist struggle with law and order, were, it seemed, even more revolutionary in principle, and to some extent in action. The life and opinions of a Sonia Kovalevski left him bewildered. For no man was less omniscient than he. Like the Cabinet minister of recent fame, in the presence of such femmes fortes, he might have honestly pleaded, mutatis mutandis, "In these things I am a child."

Were these light-limbed, dark-eyed maidens under his eyes touched with this new anarchy? They or their elders must know something about it. There had been a Feminist congress lately at Trient--on the very site, and among the ghosts of the great Council. Well, what could it bring them? Was there anything so brief, so passing, if she did but know it, as a woman's time for happiness? "Beauty that must die."

As the words recurred, some old anguish lying curled at his heart raised its head and struck. He heard a voice--tremulously sweet--"Mark!--dear Mark!--I'm not good enough--but I'll be to you all a woman can."

She had not played with life--or scorned it--or missed it. It was not her fault that she must put it from her.

In the midst of the crowd about him, he was no longer aware of it. Still smoking mechanically, his eyelids had fallen over his eyes, as his head rested against the wall.

He was interrupted by a voice which said in excellent though foreign English--

"I beg your pardon, sir--I wonder if I might have that paper you are standing on?"

He looked down astonished, and saw that he was trampling on the day's New York Herald, which had fallen from a table near. With many apologies he lifted it, smoothed it out, and presented it to the elderly lady who had asked for it.

She looked at him through her spectacles with a pleasant smile.

"You don't find many English newspapers in these Tyrolese hotels?"

"No; but I provide myself. I get my Times from home."

"Then, as an Englishman, you have all you want. But you seem to be without it to-night?"

"It hasn't arrived. So I am reduced, as you see, to listening to the music."

"You are not musical?"

"Well, I don't like this band anyway. It makes too much noise. Don't you think it rather a nuisance?"

"No. It helps these people to talk," she said, in a crisp, cheerful voice, looking round the room.

"But they don't want any help. Most of them talk by nature as fast as the human tongue can go!"

"About nothing!" She shrugged her shoulders.

Winnington observed her more closely. She was, he guessed, somewhere near fifty; her scanty hair was already grey, and her round, plain face was wrinkled and scored like a dried apple. But her eyes, which were dark and singularly bright, expressed both energy and wit; and her mouth, of which the upper lip was caught up a little at one corner, seemed as though quivering with unspoken and, as he thought, sarcastic speech. Was she, perchance, the Swedish Schriftstellerin of whom he had heard the porter talking to some of the hotel guests? She looked a lonely-ish, independent sort of body.

"They seem nice, kindly people," he said, glancing round the salon.

"And how they enjoy life!"

"You call it life?"

He laughed out.

"You are hard upon them, madame. Now I--being a mere man--am lost in admiration of their good looks. We in England pride ourselves on our

women, But upon my word, it would be difficult to match this show in an English hotel. Look at some of the faces!"

She followed his eyes--indifferently.

"Yes--they've plenty of beauty. And what'll it do for them? Lead them into some wretched marriage or other--and in a couple of years there will be neither beauty nor health, nor self-respect, nor any interest in anything, but money, clothes, and outwitting their husbands."

"You forget the children!"

"Ah--the children"--she said in a dubious tone, shrugging her shoulders again.

The Englishman--whose name was Mark Winnington--suddenly saw light upon her.

A Swedish writer, a woman travelling alone? He remembered the sketch of "feminism" in Sweden which he had just read. The names of certain woman-writers flitted through his mind. He felt a curiosity mixed with distaste. But curiosity prevailed.

He bent forward. And as he came thereby into stronger light from a window on his left, the thought crossed the mind of his neighbour that although so fully aware of other people's good looks, the tall Englishman seemed to be quite unconscious of his own. Yet in truth he appeared both to her, and to the hotel guests in general, a kind of heroic creature. In height he towered beside the young or middle-aged men from Munich, Buda-Pesth, or the north Italian towns, who filled the _salon_. He had all that athlete could desire in the way of shoulders, and lean length of body; a finely-carried head, on which the brown hair was wearing a little thin at the crown, while still irrepressibly strong and curly round the brow and temple; thick penthouse brows, and beneath them a pair of greyish eyes which had already made him friends with the children and the dogs and half the grown-ups in the place. The Swedish lady admitted--but with no cordiality--that human kindness could hardly speak more plainly in a human face than from those eyes. Yet the mouth and chin were thin, strong and determined; so were the hands. The man's whole aspect, moreover, spoke of assured position, and of a keen intelligence free from personal pre-occupations, and keeping a disinterested outlook on the world. The woman who observed him had in her handbag a book by a Russian lady in which Man, with a capital, figured either as "a great comic baby," or as the "Man-Beast," invented for the torment of women. The gentleman before her seemed a little difficult to fit into either category.

But if she was observing him, he had begun to question her.

"Will you forgive me if I ask an impertinent question?"

"Certainly. They are the only questions worth asking."

He laughed.

"You are, I think, from Sweden?"

"That is my country."

"And I am told you are a writer?" She bent her head. "I can see also that you are--what shall I say?--very critical of your sex--no doubt, still more of mine! I wonder if I may ask "--

He paused, his smiling eyes upon her.

"Ask anything you like."

"Well, there seems to be a great woman-movement in your country. Are you interested in it?"

"You mean--am I a feminist? Yes, I happen to dislike the word; but it describes me. I have been working for years for the advancement of women. I have written about it--and in the Scandinavian countries we have already got a good deal. The vote in Sweden and Norway; almost complete equality with men in Denmark. Professional equality, too, has gone far. We shall get all we want before long?" Her eyes sparkled in her small lined face.

"And you are satisfied?"

"What human being of any intelligence--and I am intelligent," she added, quietly,--"ever confessed to being 'satisfied'? Our shoe pinched us. We have eased it a good deal."

"You really find it substantially better to walk with?"

"Through this uncomfortable world? Certainly. Why not?"

He was silent a little. Then he said, with his pleasant look, throwing his head back to observe her, as though aware he might rouse her antagonism.

"All that seems to me to go such a little way."

"I daresay," she said, indifferently, though it seemed to him that she flushed. "You men have had everything you want for so long, you have lost the sense of value. Now that we want some of your rights, it is your cue to belittle them. And England, of course, is hopelessly behind!" The tone had sharpened.

He laughed again and was about to reply when the band struck up Brahms's Hungarian dances, and talk was hopeless. When the music was over, and the burst of clapping, from all the young folk especially, had died away, the Swedish lady said abruptly--

"But we had an English lady here last year--quite a young girl--very

handsome too--who was an even stronger feminist than I."

"Oh, yes, we can produce them--in great numbers. You have only to look at our newspapers."

His companion's upper lip mocked at the remark.

"You don't produce them in great numbers--like the young lady I speak of."

"Ah, she was good-looking?" laughed Winnington. "That, of course, gave her a most unfair advantage."

"A man's jest," said the other dryly--"and an old one. But naturally women take all the advantage they can get--out of anything. They need it. However, this young lady had plenty of other gifts--besides her beauty. She was as strong as most men. She rode, she climbed, she sang. The whole hotel did nothing but watch her. She was the centre of everything. But after a little while she insisted on leaving her father down here to over-eat himself and play cards, while she went with her maid and a black mare that nobody but she wanted to ride, up to the Jagd-hütte in the forest. There!--you can see a little blue smoke coming from it now"--

She pointed through the window to the great forest-clothed cliff, some five thousand feet high, which fronted the hotel; and across a deep valley, just below its topmost point, Mark Winnington saw a puff of smoke mounting into the clear sky.

--"Of course there was a great deal of talk. The men gossiped and the women scoffed. Her father, who adored her and could not control her in the least, shrugged his shoulders, played bridge all day long with an English family, and would sit on the verandah watching the path--that path there--which comes down from the Jagd-hütte with a spy-glass. Sometimes she would send him down a letter by one of the Jager's boys, and he would send a reply. And every now and then she would come down--riding--like a Brunhilde, with her hair all blown about her--and her eyes--Ach, superb!"

The little dowdy woman threw up her hands.

Her neighbour's face shewed that the story interested and amused him.

"A Valkyrie, indeed! But how a feminist?"

"You shall hear. One evening she offered to give an address at the hotel on 'Women and the Future.' She was already of course regarded as half mad, and her opinions were well known. Some people objected, and spoke to the manager. Her father, it was said, tried to stop it, but she got her own way with him. And the manager finally decided that the advertisement would be greater than the risk. When the evening came the place was bondø; people came from every inn and pension round for miles. She spoke beautiful German, she had learnt it from a German

governess who had brought her up, and been a second mother to her; and she hadn't a particle of *mauvaise honte*. Somebody had draped some Austrian and English flags behind her. The South Germans and Viennese, and Hungarians who came to listen--just the same kind of people who are here to-night--could hardly keep themselves on their chairs. The men laughed and stared--I heard a few brutalities--but they couldn't keep their eyes off her, and in the end they cheered her. Most of the women were shocked, and wished they hadn't come, or let their girls come. And the girls themselves sat open-mouthed--drinking it in."

"Amazing!" laughed the Englishman. "Wish I had been there! Was it an onslaught upon men?"

"Of course," said his companion coolly. "What else could it be? At present you men are the gaolers, and we the prisoners in revolt. This girl talked revolution--they all do. 'We women *intend* to have equal rights with you!--whatever it cost. And when we have got them we shall begin to fashion the world as *we* want it--and not as you men have kept it till now. *Gare à vous!* You have enslaved us for ages--you may enslave us a good while yet--but the end is certain. There is a new age coming, and it will be the age of the free woman!--That was the kind of thing. I daresay it sounds absurd to you--but as she put it--as she looked it--I can tell you, it was fine!"

The small, work-worn hands of the Swedish lady shook on her knee. Her eyes seemed to hold the Englishman at bay. Then she added, in another tone.

"Some people of course walked out, and afterwards there were many complaints from fathers of families that their daughters should have been exposed to such a thing. But it all passed over."

"And the young lady went back to the forest?"

"Yes,--for a time."

"And what became of the black mare?"

"Its mistress gave her to an inn-keeper here when she left. But the first time he went to see the horse in the stable, she trampled on him and he was laid up for weeks."

"Like mistress, like mare?--Excuse the jest! But now, may I know the name of the prophetess?"

"She was a Miss Blanchflower," said the Swedish lady, boggling a little over the name. "Her father had been a governor of one of your colonies."

Winnington started forward in his chair.

"Good heavens!--you don't mean a daughter of old Bob Blanchflower!"

"Her father's name was Sir Robert Blanchflower."

The tanned face beside her expressed the liveliest interest.

"Why, I knew Blanchflower quite well. I met him long ago when I was staying with an uncle in India--at a station in the Bombay presidency. He was Major Blanchflower then"--

The speaker's brow furrowed a little as though under the stress of some sudden recollection, and he seemed to check himself in what he was saying. But in a moment he resumed:--

"A little after that he left the army, and went into Parliament. And--precisely!--after a few years they made him governor somewhere--not much of a post. Then last year his old father, a neighbour of mine in Hampshire, quite close to my little place, went and died, and Blanchflower came into a fortune and a good deal of land besides. And I remember hearing that he had thrown up the Colonial Service, had broken down in health, and was living abroad for some years to avoid the English climate. That's the man of course. And the Valkyrie is Blanchflower's daughter! Very odd that! I must have seen her as a child. Her mother"--he paused again slightly--"was a Greek by birth, and gloriously handsome. Blanchflower met her when he was military attachØ at Athens for a short time.--Well, that's all very interesting!"

And in a ruminating mood the Englishman took out his cigarette-case.

"You smoke, Madame?"

The Swedish lady quietly accepted the courtesy. And while the too insistent band paused between one murdered Wagnerian fragment and another, they continued a conversation which seemed to amuse them both.

* * * * *

A little later the Englishman went out into the garden of the hotel, meaning to start for a walk. But he espied a party of young people gathered about the new lawn-tennis court where instead of the languid and dishevelled trifling, with a broken net and a wretched court, that was once supposed to attract English visitors, he had been already astonished to find Austrians and Hungarians--both girls and boys--playing a game quite up to the average of a good English club. The growing athleticism and independence, indeed, of the foreign girl, struck, for Winnington, the note of change in this mid-European spectacle more clearly than anything else. It was some ten years since he had been abroad in August, a month he had been always accustomed to spend in Scotch visits; and these young girls, with whom the Tyrol seemed to swarm, of all European nationalities other than English, still in or just out of the schoolroom; hatless and fearless; with their knapsacks on their backs, sometimes with ice-axes in their hands; climbing peaks and passes with their fathers and brothers; playing lawn-tennis like young men, and shewing their shapely forms sometimes,

when it was a question of attacking the heights, in knicker-bocker costume, and at other times in fresh white dresses and bright-coloured jerseys, without a hint of waist; these young Atalantas, budding and bloomed, made the strongest impression upon him, as of a new race. Where had he been all these years? He felt himself a kind of Rip van Winkle--face to face at forty-one with a generation unknown to him. No one of course could live in England, and not be aware of the change which has passed over English girls in the same direction. But the Englishman always tacitly assumes that the foreigner is far behind him in all matters of open-air sport and physical development. Winnington had soon confessed the touch of national arrogance in his own surprise; and was now the keen and much attracted spectator.

On one of the grounds he saw the little German girl--Euphrosyne, as he had already dubbed her--having a lesson from a bullying elder brother. The youth, amazed at his own condescension, scolded his sister perpetually, and at last gave her up in despair, vowing that she would never be any good, and he was not going to waste his time in teaching such a ninny. Euphrosyne sat down beside the court, with tears in her pretty eyes, her white feet crossed, her dark head drooping; and two girl companions, aged about sixteen or seventeen, like herself, came up to comfort her.

"I could soon shew you how to improve your service, Mademoiselle," said Winnington, smiling, as he passed her. Euphrosyne looked up startled, but at sight of the handsome middle-aged Englishman, whom she unkindly judged to be not much younger than her father, she timidly replied:--

"It is hateful, Monsieur, to be so stupid as I am!"

"Let me shew you," repeated Winnington, kindly. At this moment, a vigilant English governess--speaking with a strong Irish-American accent--came up, and after a glance at the Englishman, smilingly acquiesced. The two comforters of Euphrosyne, graceful little maids, with cherry-coloured jerseys over their white frocks, and golden brown hair tied with the large black bows of the *_Backfisch_*, were eager to share the lesson, and soon Winnington found himself the centre of a whole bevy of boys and girls who had run up to watch Euphrosyne's performance.

The English governess, a good girl, in spite of her accent, and the unconscious fraud she was thereby perpetrating on her employers, thought she had seldom witnessed a more agreeable scene.

"He treats them like princesses, and yet he makes them learn," she thought, a comment which very fairly expressed the mixture of something courtly with something masterful in the Englishman's manner. He was patience itself; but he was also frankness itself, whether for praise or blame; and the eagerness to please him grew fast and visibly in all these young creatures.

But as soon as he had brought back Euphrosyne's smiles, and roused a new and fierce ambition to excel in all their young breasts, he dropped

the lesson, with a few gay slangy words, and went his way, leaving a stir behind him of which he was quite unconscious. And there was no Englishman looking on who might have told the charmed and conquered maidens that they had just been coached by one of the most famous of English athletes, born with a natural genius for every kind of game, from cricket downwards.

* * * * *

On his way to the eastern side of the pass on which stood the group of hotels, Winnington got his post from the _concierge_, including his nightly _Times_, and carried it with him to a seat with which he was already familiar.

But he left the _Times_ unopened, for the spectacle before him was one to ravish the senses from everything but itself. He looked across the deep valley of the Adige, nearly four thousand feet below him, to the giant range of the Dolomite Alps on the eastern side. The shadow of the forest-clad mountain on which he stood spread downwards over the plain, and crept up the mountains on the farther edge. Above a gulf of deepest blue, inlaid with the green of vineyards and forest lakes, he beheld an aerial world of rose-colour--the giant Dolomites, Latemar, Rosengarten, Schlern--majestic rulers of an upper air, so pure and luminous, that every tiny shadow cast by every wisp of wandering cloud on the bare red peaks, was plainly visible across the thirty miles of space.

Rosengarten, with its snowless, tempest-beaten crags, held the centre, flushing to its name; and to the right and left, peak ranged beyond peak, like courtiers crowding to their king; chief among them a vast pyramid, blood-red in the sunset, from which the whole side, it seemed, had been torn away, leaving a gash so fresh it might have been ripped by a storm of yesterday, yet older perhaps than Calvary....

The great show faded through every tone of delicate beauty to a starry twilight,--passion into calm. Winnington watched till it was done, still with the Keatsian tag in his mind, and that deep inner memory of loss, to which the vanished splendour of the mountains seemed to make a mystic answering. He was a romantic--some would have said a sentimental person, with a poet always in his pocket, and a hunger for all that might shield him from the worst uglinesses of life, and the worst despairs of thought; an optimist, and, in his own sense, Christian. He had come abroad to wander alone for a time, because as one of the busiest, most important and most popular men in a wide country-side, he had had a year of unceasing and strenuous work, with no time to himself; and it had suddenly been borne in upon him, in choosing between the Alps and Scotland, that a man must sometimes be alone, for his soul's health. And he had never relished the luxury of occasional solitude so sharply as on this pine-scented evening in Tyrol.

It was not till he was sitting again under the electric light of the hotel verandah that he opened his _Times_. The first paragraph which his eye lit upon was an obituary notice of Sir Robert Blanchflower "whose death, after a long illness and much suffering, occurred last week in Paris." The notice ended with the words--"the deceased baronet

leaves a large property both in land and personalty. His only child, a daughter, Miss Delia Blanchflower, survives him."

Winnington laid down the paper. So the Valkyrie was now alone in the world, and mistress no doubt of all her father's wealth. "I must have seen her--I am sure there was a child about"; he said to himself again; and his thoughts went groping into a mostly forgotten past, and as he endeavoured to reconstruct it, the incident which had brought him for a few weeks into close relations with Robert Blanchflower, then Major Blanchflower of the--Dragoons, came at last vividly back to him.

An easy-going husband--a beautiful wife, not vicious, but bored to death--the inevitable third, in the person of a young and amorous cavalry officer--and a whole Indian station, waiting, half maliciously, half sadly, for the _banal_ catastrophe:--it was thus he remembered the situation. Winnington had arrived on the scene as a barrister of some five years' standing, invalidated after an acute attack of pneumonia, and the guest for the winter of his uncle, then Commissioner of the district. He discovered in the cavalry officer a fellow who had been his particular protégé at Eton, and had owed his passionately coveted choice for the Eleven largely to Winnington's good word. The whole dismal little drama unveiled itself, and Winnington was hotly moved by the waste and pity of it. He was entertained by the Blanchflowers and took a liking to them both. The old friendship between Winnington and the cavalryman was soon noticed by Major Blanchflower, and one night he walked home with Winnington, who had been dining at his house, to the Commissioner's quarters. Then, for the first time, Winnington realised what it may be to wrestle with a man in torment. The next day, the young cavalryman, at Winnington's invitation, took his old friend for a ride, and before dawn on the following day, the youth was off on leave, and neither Major nor Mrs. Blanchflower, Winnington believed, had ever seen him again. What he did with the youth, and how he did it, he cannot exactly remember, but at least he doesn't forget the grip of Blanchflower's hand, and the look of deliverance in his strained, hollow face. Nor had Mrs. Blanchflower borne her rescuer any grudge. He had parted from her on the best of terms, and the recollection of her astonishing beauty grows strong in him as he thinks of her.

So now it is her daughter who is stirring the world! With her father's money and her mother's eyes,--not to speak of the additional trifles--eloquence, enthusiasm, &c.--thrown in by the Swedish woman, she ought to find it easy.

The dressing-gong of the hotel disturbed a rather sleepy reverie, and sent the Englishman back to his _Times_. And a few hours later he went to a dreamless bed, little guessing at the letter which was even then waiting for him, far below, in the Botzen post-office.

Winnington took his morning coffee on a verandah of the hotel, from which the great forests of Monte Vanna were widely visible. Upwards from the deep valley below the pass, to the topmost crags of the mountain, their royal mantle ran unbroken. This morning they were lightly drowned in a fine weather haze, and the mere sight of them suggested cool glades and verdurous glooms, stretches of pink willow herb lighting up the clearings--and in the secret heart of them such chambers "deaf to noise and blind to light" as the forest lover knows. Winnington promised himself a leisurely climb to the top of Monte Vanna. The morning foretold considerable heat, but under the pines one might mock at Helios.

Ah!--Euphrosyne!

She came, a vision of morning, tripping along in her white shoes and white dress; followed by her English governess, the lady, as Winnington guessed, from West Belfast, tempered by Brooklyn. The son apparently was still in bed, nor did anyone trouble to hurry him out of it. The father, a Viennese judge *_en retraite_*, as Winnington had been already informed by the all-knowing porter of the hotel, was a shrewd thin-lipped old fellow, with the quiet egotism of the successful lawyer. He came up to Winnington as soon as he perceived him, and thanked him in good English for his kindness to Euphrosyne of the day before. Winnington responded suitably and was soon seated at their table, chatting with them while they took their coffee. Euphrosyne shewed a marked pleasure in his society, and upon Winnington, steeped in a holiday reaction from much strenuous living, her charm worked as part of the charm of the day, and the magic of the mountain world. He noticed, however, with a revival of alarm, that she had a vigorous German appetite of her own, and as he watched the rolls disappear he trembled for the slender figure and the fawn-like gait.

After breakfast, while the governess and the girl disappeared, the father hung over the verandah smoking, beside the Englishman, to whom he was clearly attracted. He spoke quite frankly of his daughter, and her bringing up. "She is motherless; her mother died when she was ten years old; and since, I must educate her myself. It gives me many anxieties, but she is a sweet creature, *_dank sei gott_*! I will not let her approach, even, any of these modern ideas about women. My wife hated them; I do also. I shall marry her to an honest man, and she will make a good wife and a good house-mother."

"Mind you choose him well!" said Winnington, with a shrug. His eyes at that moment were critically bent on a group of Berliners, men of the commercial and stock-broking class, who, with their wives, had arrived a couple of nights before. The men were strolling and smoking below. They were all fat, red-faced and overbearing. When they went for walks, the man stalked in front along the forest paths, and the woman followed behind, carrying her own jacket. Winnington wondered what it might be like to be the wife of any of them. These *_Herren_* at any rate might not be the worse for a little hustling from the "woman movement." He could not, however, say honestly that the wives shewed any

consciousness of ill-fortune. They were almost all plump, plumper even than their husbands, expensively dressed and prosperous looking; and the amount of Viennese beer they consumed at the forest restaurants to which their husbands conducted them, seemed to the Englishman portentous.

"Yes, my daughter is old-fashioned," resumed the ex-judge, complacently, after a pause. "And I am grateful to Miss Johnson, who has trained her very well. If she were like some of the girls one sees now! Last year there was a young lady here--_Ach, Gott!_" He raised his shoulders, with a contemptuous mouth.

"Miss Blanchflower?" asked Winnington, turning towards the speaker with sudden interest.

"That I believe was her name. She was mad, of course. _Ach_, they have told you?--of that _Vortrag_ she gave?--and the rest? After ten minutes, I made a sign to my daughter, and we walked out. I would not have had her corrupted with these ideas for the whole world. And such beauty, you understand! That makes it more dangerous. _Ja, ja, Liebchen--ich komme gleich!_"

For there had been a soft call from Euphrosyne, standing on the steps of the hotel, and her fond father hurried away to join her.

At the same moment, the porter emerged, bearing a bundle of letters and newspapers which had just arrived. Eager for his _Times_ Winnington went to meet him, and the man put into his hands what looked like a large post. He carried it off into the shelter of the pines, for the sun was already blazing on the hotel. Two or three letters on county business he ran through first. His own pet project, as County Councillor,--a county school for crippled children, was at last getting on. Foundation stone to be laid in October--good! "But how the deuce can I get hold of some more women to help work it! Scandalous, how few of the right sort there" are about! And as for the Asylums Committee, if we really can't legally co-opt women to it, as our clerk says"--he looked again at a letter in his hand--"the law is an ass!--a double-dyed ass. I swear I won't visit those poor things on the women's side again. It's women's work--let them do it. The questions I have to ask are enough to make an old gamp blush. Hallo, what's this?"

He turned over a large blue envelope, and looked at a name stamped across the back. It was the name of a well-known firm of London solicitors. But he had no dealings with them, and could not imagine why they should have written to him.

He opened the letter carelessly, and began to read it,--presently with eager attention, and at last with amazement.

It ran as follows:

"From Messrs. MORTON, MANNERS & LATHOM,
Solicitors,

Adelphi,
London, W. C."

"Dear Sir,--We write on behalf of Lord Frederick Calverly, your co-executor, under Sir Robert Blanchflower's will, to inform you that in Sir Robert's last will and testament--of which we enclose a copy--executed at Meran six weeks before his decease, you are named as one of his two executors, as sole trustee of his property, and sole guardian of Sir Robert's daughter and only child, Miss Delia Blanchflower, until she attains the age of twenty-five. We believe that this will be a complete surprise to you, for although Sir Robert, according to a statement he made during his last illness to his sister, Miss Elizabeth Blanchflower, intended to communicate with you before signing the will, his weakness increased so rapidly, after it was finally drawn up, that he was never able to do so. Indeed the morning after his secretary had written out a clear copy of what he himself had put together, he had a most alarming attack from which he rallied with difficulty. That afternoon he signed the will, and was just able to write you the letter which we also enclose, marked by himself, as you will see. He was never properly conscious afterwards, and he died in Paris last Thursday, and was buried in the Protestant cemetery at Mont Parnasse on the Saturday following. The will which was in our custody was opened in London yesterday, by Lord Frederick Calverly, in Miss Blanchflower's presence. We understand from her that she has already written to you on the subject. Lord Frederick would also have done so, but that he has just gone to Harrogate, in a very poor state of health. He begs us to say that he is of course quite aware that your engagements may not allow you to accept the functions offered you under the will, and that he will be in considerable anxiety until he knows your decision. He hopes that you will at least accept the executorship; and indeed ventures to appeal very strongly on that account to your old friendship for Sir Robert; as he himself sees no prospect of being able to carry out unaided the somewhat heavy responsibilities attaching to the office.

"You will see that a sum of £4000 is left to yourself under the will."

We remain, dear Sir,

Your obedient servants,

MORTON, MANNERS & LATHOM.

"(Solicitors.)"

"MARK WINNINGTON, Esq., J. P.

Bridge End, Maumsey,
Hants."

A bulky document on blue paper, and also a letter had dropped to the ground. Winnington stooped for the letter, and turned it over in stupefaction. It was addressed in a faltering hand, and marked, "To be forwarded after my death." He hastily broke the seal.

"MY DEAR MARK WINNIXGTON,--I know well what I am laying upon you. I have no right to do it. But I remember certain days in the past, and I believe if you are still the same man you were then, you will do what I ask. My daughter ought to be a fine woman. At present she seems to me entirely and completely out of her mind. She has been captured by the extreme suffrage movement, and by one of the most mischievous women in it; and I have no influence with her whatever. I live in terror of what she may do; of what they may lead her to do. To attempt to reason with her is useless; and for a long time my health has been such that I have avoided conflict with her as much as possible. But things have now come to such a pass that something must be done, and I have tried in these last weeks, ill as I am, to face the future. I want if I can to save Delia from wasting herself, and the money and estates I should naturally leave her, upon this mad campaign. I want, even against her will, to give her someone to advise and help her. I feel bitterly that I have done neither. The tropics ruined me physically, and I seem to have gone to pieces altogether the last few years. But I love my child, and I can't leave her without a real friend or support in the world. I have no near relations, except my sister Elizabeth, and she and Delia are always at feud. Freddie Calverly my cousin, is a good fellow in his way, though too fussy about his health. He has a fair knowledge of business, and he would have been hurt if I had not made him executor. So I have appointed him, and have of course left him a little money. But he could no more tackle Delia than fly. In the knock-about life we have led since I left the Colonial Service, I seem to have shed all my old friends. I can think of no one who could or would help me in this strait but you--and you know why. God bless you for what you once did for me. There was never any other cloud between my poor wife and me. She turned to me after that trouble, and we were happy till the end.

"I have heard too something of you from Maumsey people, since I inherited Maumsey, though I have never been able to go there. I know what your neighbours think of you. And now Delia is going to be your neighbour. So, drawing a bow at a venture, as a dying man must, I have made you Delia's guardian and trustee, with absolute power over her property and income till she is twenty-five. When she attains that age--she is now nearly twenty-two--if she marries a man approved by you, or if you are satisfied that her connection with militant suffragism has ceased, the property is to be handed over to her in full possession, and the trust will come to an end. If on the contrary, she continues in her present opinion and course of action, I have left directions that the trust is to be maintained for Delia's life-time, under certain conditions as to her maintenance, which you will find in the will. If you yourself are not willing to administer the trust, either now or later, the property will devolve to the Public Trustee, for whom full instructions are left. And at Delia's death it will be divided among her heirs, if she has any, and various public objects.

"I cannot go further into details. My strength is almost out. But this one thing may I beg?--if you become my child's guardian, get the right person to live with her. I regard that as all-important. She must have a chaperon, and she will try to set up one of the violent women who have divided her from me. Especially am I in dread of a lady, an

English lady, a Miss Marvell, whom I engaged two years ago to stay with us for the winter and read history with Delia. She is very able and a very dangerous woman, prepared I believe, to go to any length on behalf of her 'cause.' At any rate she filled Delia's head with the wildest suffragist notions, and since then my poor child thinks of nothing else. Even since I have been so ill--this last few weeks--I know she has been in communication with this woman. She sympathises with all the horrible things they do, and I am certain she gives all the money she can to their funds. Delia is a splendid creature, but she is vain and excitable and they court her. I feel that they might tempt her into any madness.

"Goodbye. I made the doctor give me strychnine and morphia enough to carry me through this effort. I expect it will be the last. Help me, and my girl--if you can--for old sake's sake. Goodbye."

Your grateful old friend,

"ROBERT BLANCHFLOWER."

"Good heavens!" was all Winnington could find to say, as he put down the letter.

Then, becoming aware, as the verandah filled after breakfast, that he was in a very public place, he hastily rose, thrust the large solicitor's envelope, with its bulky enclosures into his coat pocket, and proceeded to gather up the rest of his post. As he did so, he suddenly perceived a black-edged letter, addressed in a remarkably clear handwriting, with the intertwined initials D. B. in the corner.

A fit of silent laughter, due to his utter bewilderment, shook him. He put the letter with all its fellows into another pocket and hurried away into the solitude of the woods. It was some time before he had succeeded in leaving all the tourists' paths and seats behind. At last in a green space of bilberry and mossy rock, with the pines behind him, and the chain of the Dolomites, sun-bathed, in front, he opened and read his "ward's" first letter to him.

"DEAR MR. WINNINGTON,--I understood--though very imperfectly--from my father, before he died, that he had appointed you my guardian and trustee till I should reach the age of twenty-five, and he explained to me so far as he could his reason for such a step. And now I have of course read the will, and the solicitors have explained to me clearly what it all means.

"You will admit I think that I am placed in a very hard position. If my poor father had not been so ill, I should certainly have tried to argue with him, and to prevent his doing anything so unnecessary and unjust as he has now done--unjust both to you and to me. But the doctors absolutely forbade me to discuss any business with him, and I could do nothing. I can only hope that the last letter he wrote to you, just before his death, and the alterations he made in his will about the same time, gave him some comfort. If so, I do not grudge them for one

moment.

"But now you and I have to consider this matter as sensible people, and I suggest that for a man who is a complete stranger to me, and probably altogether out of sympathy with the ideas and principles, I believe in and am determined to act upon--(for otherwise my father would not have chosen you)--to undertake the management of my life and affairs, would be really grotesque. It must lead to endless friction and trouble between us. If you refuse, the solicitors tell me, the Public Trustee--which seems to be a government office--will manage the property, and the Court of Chancery will appoint a guardian in accordance with my father's wishes. That would be bad enough, considering that I am of full age and in my right mind--I can't promise to give a guardian chosen in such a way, a good time. But at any rate, it would be less odious to fight a court and an office, if I must fight, than a gentleman who is my near neighbour in the county, and was my father's and mother's friend. I do hope you will think this over very carefully, and will relieve both yourself and me from an impossible state of things. I perfectly realise of course that my father appointed you my guardian, in order to prevent me from making certain friends, and doing certain things. But I do not admit the right of any human being--not even a father--to dictate the life of another. I intend to stick to my friends, And to do what my conscience directs.

"Should you however accept the guardianship--after this candid statement of mine--you will, I suppose, feel bound to carry out my father's wishes by refusing me money for the purposes he disapproved. He told me indeed that I should be wholly dependent on my guardian for money during the next three years, even though I have attained my legal majority. I can say to you what I could not say to him, that I bitterly resent an arrangement which treats a grown person like a child. Such things are not done to men. It is only women who are the victims of them. It would be impossible to keep up friendly relations with a guardian, who would really only be there--only exist--to thwart and coerce me.

"Let me point out that at the very beginning a difference must arise between us, about the lady I am to live with. I have chosen my chaperon already, as it was my moral, if not my legal right to do. But I am quite aware that my father disapproved of her, and that you will probably take the same view. She belongs to a militant suffrage society, and is prepared at any moment to suffer for the great cause she and I believe in. As to her ability, she is one of the cleverest women in England. I am only too proud that she has consented--for a time--to share my life, and nothing will induce me to part with her--as long as she consents to stay. But of course I know what you--or any ordinary man--is likely to think of her.

"No!--we cannot agree--it is impossible we should agree--as guardian and ward. If indeed, for the sake of your old friendship with my father, you would retain the executorship--I am sure Lord Frederick Calverly will be no sort of use!--till the affairs of the will, death-duties, debts, and so on, are settled--and would at the same time

give up _any_ other connection with the property and myself, I should be enormously grateful to you. And I assure you I should be very glad indeed--for father's sake--to have your advice on many points connected with my future life; and I should be all the more ready to follow it, if you had renounced your legal power over me.

"I shall be much obliged if you will make your decision as soon as possible, so that both the lawyer and I may know how to proceed."

Yours faithfully,

DELIA BLANCHFLOWER.

Mark Winnington put down the letter. Its mixture of defiance, patronage and persuasion--its young angry cleverness--would have tickled a naturally strong sense of humour at any other time. But really the matter was too serious to laugh at.

"What on earth am I to do!"

He sat pondering, his mind running through a number of associated thoughts, of recollections old and new; those Indian scenes of fifteen years ago; the story told him by the Swedish lady; recent incidents and happenings in English politics; and finally the tone in which Euphrosyne's father had described the snatching of his own innocent from the clutches of Miss Blanchflower.

Then it occurred to him to look at the will. He read it through; a tedious business; for Sir Robert had been a wealthy man and the possessions bequeathed--conditionally bequeathed--to his daughter were many and various. Two or three thousand acres of land in one of the southern counties, bordering on the New Forest; certain large interests in Cleveland ironstone and Durham collieries, American and South African shares, Canadian mortgage and railway debentures:--there was enough to give lawyers and executors work for some time, and to provide large pickings for the Exchequer. Among the legacies, he noticed the legacy of £4000 to himself.

"Payment for the job!" he thought, and shook his head, smiling.

The alternative arrangements made for transferring the trust to the Public Trustee, should Winnington decline, and for vesting the guardianship of the daughter in the Court of Chancery, subject to the directions of the will, till she should reach the age of twenty-five, were clear; so also was the provision that unless a specific signed undertaking was given by the daughter on attaining her twenty-fifth birthday, that the moneys of the estate would not be applied to the support of the "militant suffrage" propaganda, the trust was to be made permanent, a life income of £2000 a year was to be settled on Miss Blanchflower, and the remainder, i.e. by far the major part of Sir Robert's property, was to accumulate, for the benefit of his daughter's heirs should she have any, and of various public objects. Should Miss Blanchflower sign the undertaking and afterwards break it, the Public

Trustee was directed to proceed against her, and to claim the restitution of the property, subject always to her life allowance.

"Pretty well tied up," thought Winnington, marvelling at the strength of feeling, the final exasperation of a dying man, which the will betrayed. His daughter must somehow--perhaps without realising it--have wounded him to the heart.

He began to climb again through the forest that he might think the better. What would be the situation, supposing he undertook what his old friend asked of him?

He himself was a man of moderate means and settled habits. His small estate and modest house which a widowed sister shared with him during six months in the year, left him plenty of leisure from his own affairs, and he had filled that leisure, for years past, to overflowing, with the various kinds of public work that fall to the country gentleman with a conscience. He was never idle; his work interested him, and there was no conceit in his quiet knowledge that he had many friends and much influence. Since the death of the girl to whom he had been engaged for six short months, fifteen years before this date, he had never thought of marriage. The circumstances of her death--a terrible case of lingering typhoid--had so burnt the pity of her suffering and the beauty of her courage into his mind, that natural desire seemed to have died with her. He had turned to hard work and the bar, and equally hard physical exercise, and so made himself master both of his grief and his youth. But his friendships with women had played a great part in his subsequent life. A natural chivalry, deep based, and, in manner, a touch of caressing charm, soon evoked by those to whom he was attached, and not easily confounded in the case of a man so obviously manly with any lack of self-control, had long since made him a favourite of the sex. There were few women among his acquaintances who did not covet his liking; and he was the repository of far more confidences than he had ever desired. No one took more trouble to serve; and no one more carelessly forgot a service he had himself rendered, or more tenaciously remembered any kindness done him by man, woman or child.

His admiration for women was mingled indeed often with profound pity; pity for the sorrows and burdens that nature had laid upon them, for their physical weakness, for their passive role in life. That beings so hampered could yet play such tender and heroic parts was to him perennially wonderful, and his sense of it expressed itself in an unconscious homage that seemed to embrace the sex. That the homage was not seldom wasted on persons quite unworthy of it, his best women friends were not slow to see; but in this he was often obstinate and took his own way.

This mingling in him of an unflinching interest in the sex with an entire absence of personal craving, gave him a singularly strong position with regard to women, of which he had never yet taken any selfish advantage; largely, no doubt, because of the many activities, most of them disinterested, by which his life was fed and freshened; as a lake is by

the streams which fill it.

He was much moved by his old friend's letter, and he walked about pondering it, till the morning was almost gone. The girl's position also seemed to him particularly friendless and perilous, though she herself, apparently, would be the last person to think so, could she only shake herself free from the worrying restrictions her father had inflicted on her. Her letter, and its thinly veiled wrath, shewed quite plainly that the task of any guardian would be a tough one. Miss Blanchflower was evidently angry--very angry--yet at the same time determined, if she could, to play a dignified part; ready, that is, to be civil, on her own conditions. The proposal to instal as her chaperon, instantly, without a day's delay, the very woman denounced in her father's last letter, struck him as first outrageous, and then comic. He laughed aloud over it.

Certainly--he was not bound in any way to undertake such a business. Blanchflower had spoken the truth when he said that he had no right to ask it. And yet--

His mind dallied with it. Suppose he undertook it, on what lines could he possibly run it? His feeling towards the violent phase of the "woman's movement," the militancy which during the preceding three or four years had produced a crop of outrages so surprising and so ugly, was probably as strong as Blanchflower's own. He was a natural Conservative, and a trained lawyer. Methods of violence in a civilised and constitutional State, roused in him indignant abhorrence. He could admit no excuse for them; at any rate no justification.

But, fundamentally? What was his real attitude towards this wide-spread claim of women, now so general in many parts of the world admitted indeed in some English Colonies, in an increasing number of the American states, in some of the minor European countries--to share the public powers and responsibilities of men? Had he ever faced the problem, as it concerned England, with any thoroughness or candour? Yet perhaps Englishmen--all Englishmen--had now got to face it.

Could he discover any root of sympathy in himself with what were clearly the passionate beliefs of Delia Blanchflower, the Valkyrie of twenty-one, as they were also the passionate beliefs of the little Swedish lady, the blue-stocking of fifty? If so, it might be possible to guide, even to control such a ward, for the specified three years, at any rate, without exciting unseemly and ridiculous strife between her and her guardian.

"I ought to be able to do it"--he thought--"without upsetting the apple-cart!"

For, as he examined himself he realised that he held no closed mind on the subject of the rights or powers or grievances of women. He had taken no active part whatever in the English suffragist struggle, either against woman suffrage or for it; and in his own countryside it mattered comparatively little. But he was well aware what strong forces

and generous minds had been harnessed to the suffrage cause, since Mill first set it stirring; and among his dearest women friends there were some closely connected with it, who had often mocked or blamed his own indifference. He had always thought indeed, and he thought still--for many reasons--that they attributed a wildly exaggerated importance to the vote, which, as it seemed to him, went a very short way in the case of men. But he had always been content to let the thing slide; having so much else to do and think about.

Patience then, and respect for honest and disinterested conviction, in any young and ardent soul; sharp discrimination between lawful and unlawful means of propaganda, between debate, and stone-throwing; no interference with the first, and a firm hand against the second--surely, in that spirit, one might make something of the problem? Winnington was accustomed to be listened to, to get round obstacles that other men found insuperable. It was scarcely conceit, but a just self-confidence which suggested to him that perhaps Miss Blanchflower would not prove so difficult after all. Gentleness, diplomacy, decision,--by Jove, they'd all be wanted! But his legal experience (he had been for some years a busy barrister), and his later life as a practical administrator had not been a bad training in each and all of these qualities.

Of course, if the girl were merely obstinate and stupid, the case might indeed be hopeless. But the picture drawn by the Swedish woman of the "Valkyrie" on her black mare, of the ardent young lecturer, facing her indifferent or hostile audience with such pluck and spirit, dwelt with him, and affected him strongly. His face broke into amusement as he asked himself the frank question--"Would you do it, if you hadn't heard that tale?--if you knew that your proposed ward was just a plain troublesome chit of a schoolgirl, bitten with suffragism?"

He put the question to himself, standing on a pinnacle of shadowed rock, from which the world seemed to sink into blue gulfs beneath him, till on the farther side of immeasurable space the mountains re-emerged, climbing to the noonday sun.

And he answered it without hesitation. Certainly, the story told him had added a touch of romance to the bare case presented by the batch of letters--had lent a force and point to Robert Blanchflower's dying plea, it might not otherwise have possessed. For, after all, he, Winnington, was a very busy man; and his life was already mortgaged in many directions. But as it was--yes--the task attracted him.

At the same time, the twinkle in his grey eyes shewed him ironically aware of himself.

"Understand, you old fool!--the smallest touch of philandering--and the whole business goes to pot. The girl would have you at her mercy--and the thing would become an odious muddle and hypocrisy, degrading to both. Can you trust yourself? You're not exactly made of flint: Can you play the part as it ought to be played?"

Quietly, his face sank into rest. For him, there was that in memory, which protected him from all such risks, which had so protected him for fifteen years. He felt quite sure of himself. Ever since his great loss he had found his natural allies and companions among girls and young women as much as among men. The embarrassment of sex seemed to have passed away for him, but not the charm. Thus, he took what for him was the easier path of acceptance. Kindly and scrupulous as he was, it would have been hard for him in any case to say No to the dead, more difficult than to say it to the living. Yes!--he would do what was possible. _The Times_ that morning contained a long list of outrages committed by militant suffragists--houses burnt down, meetings disturbed, members attacked. In a few months, or weeks, perhaps, without counsel to aid or authority to warn her, the Valkyrie might be running headlong into all the perils her father foresaw. He pledged himself to protect her if he could.

* * * * *

The post which left the hotel that evening took with it a short note from Mark Winnington to Messrs. Morton, Manners & Lathom, accepting the functions of executor, guardian and trustee offered him under Sir Robert Blanchflower's will, and appointing an interview with them at their office; together with a somewhat longer one addressed to "Miss Delia Blanchflower, Claridge's Hotel, London.

"DEAR MISS BLANCHFLOWER, Pray let me send you my most sincere condolence. Your poor father and I were once great friends, and I am most truly sorry to hear of his death.

"Thank you for your interesting letter. But I find it impossible to refuse your father's dying request to me, nor can I believe that I cannot be of some assistance to his daughter. Let me try. We can always give it up, if we cannot work it, but I see no reason why, with good will on both sides, we should not make something of it.

"I am returning to London ten days from now, and hope to see you within a fortnight.

"Please address, 'Junior Carlton Club, Pall Mall.'"

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

"MARK WINNINGTON."

On his arrival, in London, Winnington found a short reply awaiting him.

"DEAR MR. WINNINGTON,--As you please. I am however shortly leaving for Maumsey with Miss Marvell, who, as I told you, has undertaken to live with me as my chaperon.

"We shall hope to see you at Maumsey."

Yours faithfully,
"DELIA BLANCHFLOWER."

A few days later, after long interviews with some very meticulous solicitors, a gentleman, very much in doubt as to what his reception would be, took train for Maumsey and the New Forest, with a view to making as soon as possible a first call upon his ward.

Chapter III

"We ought soon to see the house."

The speaker bent forward, as the train, sweeping round a curve, emerged from some thick woods into a space of open country. It was early September and a sleepy autumnal sunshine lay upon the fields. The Stubbles just reaped ran over the undulations of the land in silky purples and gold; the blue smoke from the cottages and farms hung poised in mid air; the eye could hardly perceive any movement in the clear stream beside the line, as it slipped noiselessly by over its sandy bed; it seemed a world where "it was always afternoon"; and the only breaks in its sunny silence came from the occasional coveys of partridges that rose whirring from the harvest-fields as the train passed.

Delia Blanchflower looked keenly at the English scene, so strange to her after many years of Colonial and foreign wandering. She thought, but did not say--"Those must be my fields--and my woods, that we have just passed through. Probably I rode about them with Grandpapa. I remember the pony--and the horrid groom I hated!" Quick the memory returned of a tiny child on a rearing pony, alone with a sulky groom, who, out of his master's sight, could not restrain his temper, and struck the pony savagely and repeatedly over the head, to an accompaniment of oaths; frightening out of her wits the little girl who sat clinging to the creature's neck. And next she saw herself marching in erect--a pale-faced thing of six, with a heart of fury,--to her grandfather, to demand justice on the offender. And grandpapa had done her bidding then as always; the groom was dismissed that day. It was only grandmamma who had ever tried to manage or thwart her; result, perpetual war, decided often for the time by the brute force at command of the elder, but ever renewed. Delia's face flamed again as she thought of the most humiliating incident of her childhood; when Grandmamma, unable, to do anything with her screaming and stamping self, had sent in despair for a stalwart young footman, and ordered him to "carry Miss Delia up to the nursery." Delia could still feel herself held, wriggling and shrieking face downwards, under the young man's strong arm, unable either to kick or to scratch, while Grandmamma half fearful, half laughing, watched the dire ascent from the bottom of the stairs.

"Male tyranny--my first taste of it!" thought Delia, smiling at herself. "It was fated then that I should be a militant."

She looked across at her friend and travelling companion, half inclined to tell the story; but the sight of Gertrude Marvell's attitude and expression checked the trivial reminiscence on her lips.

"Are you tired?" she said, laying her hand on the other's knee.

"Oh, no. Only thinking."

"Thinking of what?"--

"Of all there is to do."--

A kind of flash passed from one face to the other, Delia's eyes darkly answering. They looked at each other for a little, as though in silent conversation, and then Delia turned again to the landscape outside.

Yes, there was the house, its long, irregular line with the village behind it. She could not restrain a slight exclamation as she caught sight of it, and her friend opposite turned interrogatively.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing--only there's the Abbey. I don't suppose I've seen it since I was twelve."

The other lady put up an eye-glass and looked where Miss Blanchflower pointed; but languidly, as though it were an effort to shake herself free from pre-occupying ideas. She was a woman of about thirty-five, slenderly made, with a sallow, regular face, and good, though short-sighted eyes. The eyes were dark, so was the hair, the features delicate. Under the black shady hat, the hair was very closely and neatly coiled. The high collar of the white blouse, fitting tightly to the slender neck, the coat and skirt of blue serge without ornament of any kind, but well cut, emphasized the thinness, almost emaciation, of the form. Her attitude, dress, and expression conveyed the idea of something amazingly taut and ready--like a ship cleared for action. The body with its clothing seemed to have been simplified as much as possible, so as to become the mere instrument of the will which governed it. No superfluity whatever, whether of flesh on her small bones, or of a single unnecessary button, fold, or trimming on her dress, had Gertrude Marvell ever allowed herself for many years. The general effect was in some way formidable; though why the neat precision of the little lady should convey any notion of this sort, it would not at first sight have been easy to say.

"How old did you say it is?"--she asked, after examining the distant building, which could be now plainly seen from the train across a stretch of green park.

"Oh, the present building is nothing--a pseudo-Gothic monstrosity, built about 1830," laughed Delia; "but there are some old remains and foundations of the abbey. It is a big, rambling old place, and I should think dreadfully in want of doing up. My grandfather was a bit of a miser, and though he was quite rich, he never spent a penny he could help."

"All the better. He left the more for other people to spend." Miss Marvell smiled--a slight, and rather tired smile, which hardly altered the face.

"Yes, if they are allowed to spend it!" said Delia, with a shrug. "Oh well, anyway the house must be done up--painted and papered and that kind of thing. A trustee has got to see that things of that sort are kept in order, I suppose. But it won't have anything to do with me, except that for decency's sake, no doubt, he'll consult me. I shall be allowed to choose the wall-papers I suppose!"

"If you want to," said the other drily.

Delia's brows puckered.

"We shall have to spend some time here, you know, Gertrude! We may as well have something to do."

"Nothing that might entangle us, or take too much of our thoughts," said Miss Marvell, gently, but decidedly.

"I'm afraid I like furnishing," said Delia, not without a shade of defiance.

"And I object--because I know you do. After all--you understand as well as I do that _every day_ now is important. There are not so many of us, Delia! If you're going to do real work, you can't afford to spend your time or thoughts on doing up a shabby house."

There was silence a moment. Then Delia said abruptly--"I wonder when that man will turn up? What a fool he is to take it on!"

"The guardianship? Yes, he hardly knows what he's in for." A touch of grim amusement shewed itself for a moment in Miss Marvell's quiet face.

"Oh, I daresay he knows. Perhaps he relies on what everyone calls his 'influence.' Nasty, sloppy word--nasty sloppy thing! Whenever I'm 'influenced,' I'm degraded!" The young shoulders straightened themselves fiercely.

"I don't know. It has its uses," said the other tranquilly.

Delia laughed radiantly.

"O well--if one can make the kind of weapon of it you do. I don't mean of course that one shouldn't be rationally persuaded. But that's a

different thing. 'Influence' makes me think of canting clergymen, and stout pompous women, who don't know what they're talking about, and can't argue--who think they've settled everything by a stale quotation--or an appeal to 'your better self'--or St. Paul. If Mr. Winnington tries it on with 'influence'--we'll have some fun."

Delia returned to her window. The look her companion bent upon her was not visible to her. It was curiously detached--perhaps slightly ironical.

"I'm wondering what part I shall play in the first interview!" said Miss Marvell, after a pause. "I represent the first stone in Mr. Winnington's path. He will of course do his best to put me out of it."

"How can he?" cried Delia ardently. "What can he do? He can't send for the police and turn you out of the house. At least I suppose he could, but he certainly won't. The last thing a gentleman of his sort wants is to make a scandal. Every one says, after all, that he is a nice fellow!"--the tone was unconsciously patronising--"It isn't his fault if he's been placed in this false position. But the great question for me is--how are we going to manage him for the best?"

She leant forward, her chin on her hands, her sparkling eyes fixed on her friend's face.

"The awkward thing is"--mused Miss Marvell--"that there is so little time in which to manage him. If the movement were going on at its old slow pace, one might lie low, try diplomacy, avoid alarming him, and so forth. But we've no time for that. It is a case of blow on blow--action on action--and the publicity is half the battle."

"Still, a little management there must be, to begin with!--because I--we--want money, and he holds the purse-strings. Hullo, here's the station!"

She jumped up and looked eagerly out of the window.

"They've sent a fly for us. And there's the station-master on the lookout. How it all comes back to me!"

Her flushed cheek showed a natural excitement. She was coming back as its mistress to a house where she had been happy as a child, which she had not seen for years. Thoughts of her father, as he had been in the old days before any trouble had arisen between them, came rushing through her mind--tender, regretful thoughts--as the train came slowly to a standstill.

But the entire indifference or passivity of her companion restrained her from any further expression. The train stopped, and she descended to the platform of a small country station, alive apparently with traffic and passengers.

"Miss Blanchflower?" said a smiling station-master, whose countenance

seemed to be trying to preserve the due mean between welcome to the living and condolence for the dead, as, hat in hand, he approached the newcomers, and guided by her deep mourning addressed himself to Delia.

"Why, Mr. Stebbing, I remember you quite well," said Delia, holding out her hand. "There's my maid--and I hope there's a cart for the luggage. We've got a lot."

A fair-haired man in spectacles, who had also just left the train, turned abruptly and looked hard at the group as he passed them. He hesitated a moment, then passed on, with a curious swinging gait, a long and shabby over-coat floating behind him--to speak to the porter who was collecting tickets at the gate opening on the road beyond.

Meanwhile Delia had been accosted by another gentleman, who had been sitting reading his Morning Post on the sunny platform, as the train drew up. He too had examined the new arrivals with interest, and while Delia was still talking to the station-master, he walked up to her.

"I think you are Miss Blanchflower: But you won't remember me." He lifted his hat, smiling.

Delia looked at him, puzzled.

"Don't you remember that Christmas dance at the Rectory, when you were ten, and I was home from Sandhurst?"

"Perfectly!--and I quarrelled with you because you wouldn't give me champagne, when I'd danced with you, instead of lemonade. You said what was good for big boys wasn't good for little girls--and I called you a bully--"

"You kicked me!--you had the sharpest little toes!"

"Did I?" said Delia composedly. "I was rather good at kicking. So you are Billy Andrews?"

"Right. I'm Captain now, and they've just made me adjutant down here for the Yeomanry. My mother keeps house for me. You're coming here to live? Please let me say how sorry I was to see your sad news." The condolence was a little clumsy but sincere.

"Thank you. I must go and see to the luggage. Let me introduce you to Miss Marvell--Captain Andrews--Miss Marvell."

That lady bowed coldly, as Delia departed. The tall, soldierly man, whose pleasant looks were somewhat spoiled by a slightly underhung mouth, and prominent chin, disguised, however, by a fine moustache, offered assistance with the luggage.

"There is no need, thank you," said Miss Marvell. "Miss Blanchflower and her maid will see to it."

And the Captain noticed that the speaker remained entirely passive while the luggage was being collected and piled into a fly by the porters, directed by Miss Blanchflower and her maid. She stood quietly on the platform, till all was ready, and Delia beckoned to her. In the intervals the soldier tried to make conversation, but with very small success. He dwelt upon some of the changes Miss Blanchflower would find on the estate; how the old head-keeper, who used to make a pet of her, was dead, and the new agent her father had put in was thought to be doing well, how the village had lost markedly in population in the last few years--this emigration to Canada was really getting beyond a joke!--and so forth. Miss Marvell made no replies. But she suddenly asked him a question.

"What's that house over there?"

She pointed to a grey façade on a wooded hill some two miles off.

"That's our show place--Monk Lawrence! We're awfully proud of it--Elizabethan, and that kind of thing. But of course you've heard of Monk Lawrence! It's one of the finest things in England."

"It belongs to Sir Wilfrid Lang?"

"Certainly. Do you know him? He's scarcely been there at all, since he became a Cabinet Minister; and yet he spent a lot of money in repairing it a few years ago. They say it's his wife's health--that it's too damp for her. Anyway it's quite shut up,--except that they let tourists see it once a month."

"Does anybody live in the house?"--

"Oh--a caretaker, of course,--one of the keepers. They let the shooting. Ah! there's Miss Blanchflower calling you."

Miss Marvell--as the gallant Captain afterwards remembered--took a long look at the distant house and then went to join Miss Blanchflower. The Captain accompanied her, and helped her to stow away the remaining bags into the fly, while a small concourse of rustics, sprung from nowhere, stolidly watched the doings of the heiress and her friend. Delia suddenly bent forward to him, as he was about to shut the door, with an animated look--"Can you tell me who that gentleman is who has just walked off towards the village?"--she pointed.

"His name is Lathrop. He lives in a place just the other side of yours. He's got some trout-hatching ponds--will stock anybody's stream for them. Rather a queer customer!"--the good-natured Captain dropped his voice. "Well, good-bye, my train's just coming. I hope I may come and see you soon?"

Delia nodded assent, and they drove off.

"By George, she's a beauty!" said the Captain to himself as he turned away. "Nothing wrong with her that I can see. But there are some

strange tales going about. I wonder who that other woman is. Marvell--Gertrude Marvell?--I seem to have heard the name somewhere.--Hullo, Masham, how are you?" He greeted the leading local solicitor who had just entered the station, a man with a fine ascetic face, and singularly blue eyes. Masham looked like a starved poet or preacher, and was in reality one of the hardest and shrewdest men of business in the southern counties.

"Well, did you see Miss Blanchflower?" said the Captain, as Masham joined him on the platform, and they entered the up train together.

"I did. A handsome young lady! Have you heard the news?"

"No."

"Your neighbor, Mr. Winnington--Mark Winnington--is named as her guardian under her father's will--until she is twenty-five. He is also trustee, with absolute power over the property."

The Captain shewed a face of astonishment.

"Gracious! what had Winnington to do with Sir Robert Blanchflower!"

"An old friend, apparently. But it is a curious will."

The solicitor's abstracted look shewed a busy mind. The Captain had never felt a livelier desire for information.

"Isn't there something strange about the girl?"--he said, lowering his voice, although there was no one else in the railway carriage. "I never saw a more beautiful creature! But my mother came home from London the other day with some very queer stories, from a woman who had met them abroad. She said Miss Blanchflower was awfully clever, but as wild as a hawk--mad about women's rights and that kind of thing. In the hotel where she met them, people fought very shy of her."

"Oh, she's a militant suffragist," said the solicitor quietly--"though she's not had time yet since her father's death to do any mischief. That--in confidence--is the meaning of the will."

The adjutant whistled.

"Goodness!--Winnington will have his work cut out for him. But he needn't accept."

"He has accepted. I heard this morning from the London solicitor."

"Your firm does the estate business down here?"

"For many years. I hope to see Mr. Winnington to-morrow or next day. He is evidently hurrying home--because of this."

There was silence for a few minutes; then the Captain said bluntly:

"It's an awful pity, you know, that kind of thing cropping up down here. We've escaped it so far."

"With such a lot of wild women about, what can you expect?" said the solicitor briskly. "Like the measles--sure to come our way sooner or later."

"Do you think they'll get what they want?" "What--the vote? No--not unless the men are fools." The refined, apostolic face set like iron.

"None of the womanly women want it," said the Captain with conviction. "You should hear my mother on it."

The solicitor did not reply. The adjutant's mother was not in his eyes a model of wisdom. Nor did his own opinion want any fortifying from outside.

Captain Andrews was not quite in the same position. He was conscious of a strong male instinct which disavowed Miss Blanchflower and all her kind; but at the same time he was exceedingly susceptible to female beauty, and it troubled his reasoning processes that anybody so wrong-headed should be so good-looking. His heart was soft, and his brain all that was wanted for his own purposes. But it did not enable him--it never had enabled him--to understand these extraordinary "goings-on," which the newspapers were every day reporting, on the part of well-to-do, educated women, who were ready--it seemed--to do anything outrageous--just for a vote! "Of course nobody would mind if the rich women--the tax-paying women--had a vote--help us Tories famously. But the women of the working-classes--why, Good Lord, look at them when there's any disturbance on--any big strike--look at Tonypandy!--a deal sight worse than the men! Give them the vote and they'd take us to the devil, even quicker than Lloyd George!"

Aloud he said--

"Do you know anything about that lady Miss Blanchflower had with her? She introduced me. Miss Marvell--I think that was the name. I thought I had heard it somewhere."

The solicitor lifted his eyebrows.

"I daresay. She was in the stone-throwing raid last August. Fined 20s. or a month, for damage in Pall Mall. She was in prison a week; then somebody paid her fine. She professed great annoyance, but one of the police told me it was privately paid by her own society. She's too important to them--they can't do without her. An extremely clever woman."

"Then what on earth does she come and bury herself down here for?" cried the Captain.

Masham shewed a meditative twist of the lip.

"Can't say, I'm sure. But they want money. And Miss Blanchflower is an important capture."

"I hope that girl will soon have the sense to shake them off!" said the Captain with energy. "She's a deal too beautiful for that kind of thing. I shall get my mother to come and talk to her."

The solicitor concealed his smile behind his Daily Telegraph. He had a real liking and respect for the Captain, but the family affection of the Andrews household was a trifle too idyllic to convince a gentleman so well acquainted with the seamy side of life. What about that hunted-looking girl, the Captain's sister? He didn't believe, he never had believed that Mrs. Andrews was quite so much of an angel as she pretended to be.

Meanwhile, no sooner had the fly left the station than Delia turned to her companion--

"Gertrude!--did you see what that man was reading who passed us just now? Our paper!--the Tocsin."

Gertrude Marvell lifted her eyebrows slightly.

"No doubt he bought it at Waterloo--out of curiosity."

"Why not out of sympathy? I thought he looked at us rather closely. Of course, if he reads the Tocsin he knows something about you! What fun it would be to discover a comrade and a brother down here!"

"It depends entirely upon what use we could make of him," said Miss Marvell. Then she turned suddenly on her companion--"Tell me really, Delia--how long do you want to stay here?"

"Well, a couple of months at least," said Delia, with a rather perplexed expression. "After all, Gertrude, it's my property now, and all the people on it, I suppose, will expect to see one and make friends. I don't want them to think that because I'm a suffragist I'm going to shirk. It wouldn't be good policy, would it?"

"It's all a question of the relative importance of things," said the other quietly. "London is our head quarters, and things are moving very rapidly."

"I know. But, dear, you did promise! for a time"--pleaded Delia.

"Though of course I know how dull it must be for you, when you are the life and soul of so many things in London. But you must remember that I haven't a penny at this moment but what Mr. Winnington chooses to allow me! We must come to some understanding with him, mustn't we, before we can do anything? It is all so difficult!"--the girl's voice took a deep, passionate note--"horribly difficult, when I long to be standing beside you--and the others--in the open--fighting--for all I'm worth. But how can I, just yet? I ought to have eight thousand a year, and Mr.

Winnington can cut me down to anything he pleases. It's just as important that I should get hold of my money--at this particular moment--as that I should be joining raids in London,--more important, surely--because we want money badly!--you say so yourself. I don't want it for myself; I want it all--for the cause! But the question is, how to get it--with this will in our way. I--"

"Ah, there's that house again!" exclaimed Miss Marvell, but in the same low restrained tone that was habitual to her. She bent forward to look at the stately building, on the hill-side, which according to Captain Andrews' information, was the untenanted property of Sir Wilfrid Lang, whom a shuffle of offices had just admitted to the Cabinet.

"What house?"--said Delia, not without a vague smart under the sudden change of subject. She had a natural turn for declamation; a girlish liking to hear herself talk; and Gertrude, her tutor in the first place, and now her counsellor and friend, had a quiet way of snubbing such inclinations, except when they could be practically useful. "You have the gifts of a speaker--we shall want you to speak more and more," she would say. But in private she rarely failed to interrupt an harangue, even the first beginnings of one.

However, the smart soon passed, and Delia too turned her eyes towards the house among the trees. She gave a little cry of pleasure.

"Oh, that's Monk Lawrence!--such a lovely--lovely old place! I used often to go there as a child--I adored it. But I can't remember who lives there now."

Gertrude Marvell handed on the few facts learned from the Captain.

"I knew"--she added--"that Sir Wilfrid Lang lived somewhere near here. That they told me at the office."

"And the house is empty?" Delia, flushing suddenly and vividly, turned to her companion.

"Except for the caretaker--who no doubt lives some where on the ground-floor."

There was silence a moment. Then Delia laughed uncomfortably.

"Look here, Gertrude, we can't attempt anything of that kind there: I remember now--it was Sir Wilfrid's brother who had the house, when I used to go there. He was a great friend of Father's; and his little girls and I were great chums. The house is just wonderful--full of treasures! I am sorry it belongs to Sir Wilfrid--but nobody could lift a finger against Monk Lawrence!"

Miss Marvell's eyes sparkled.

"He is the most formidable enemy we have," she said softly, between her closed lips. A tremor seemed to run through her slight frame.

Then she smiled, and her tone changed.

"Dear Delia, of course I shan't run you into any--avoidable--trouble, down here, apart from the things we have agreed on."

"What have we agreed on? Remind me!"

"In the first place, that we won't hide our opinions--or stop our propaganda--to please anybody."

"Certainly!" said Delia. "I shall have a drawing-room meeting as soon as possible. You seem to have fixed up a number of speaking engagements for us both. And we told the office to send us down tons of literature." Then her face broke into laughter--"Poor Mr. Winnington!"

* * * * *

"A rather nice old place, isn't it?" said Delia, an hour later, when the elderly housekeeper, who had received them with what had seemed to Delia's companion a quite unnecessary amount of fuss and family feeling, had at last left them alone in the drawing-room, after taking them over the house.

The girl spoke in a softened voice. She was standing thoughtfully by the open window looking out, her hands clasping a chair behind her. Her thin black dress, made short and plain, with a white frill at the open neck and sleeves, by its very meagreness emphasized the young beauty of the wearer,--a beauty full of significance, charged--over-charged--with character. The attitude should have been one of repose; it was on the contrary one of tension, suggesting a momentary balance only, of impetuous forces. Delia was indeed suffering the onset of a wave of feeling which had come upon her unexpectedly; for which she had not prepared herself. This rambling old house with its quiet garden and early Victorian furniture, had appealed to her in some profound and touching way. Her childhood stirred again in her, and deep inherited things. How well she remembered the low, spacious room, with its oak wainscoting, its book-cases and its pictures! That crayon over the writing-table of her grandmother in her white cap and shawl; her grandfather's chair, and the old Bible and Prayer-book, beside it, from which he used to read evening prayers; the stiff arm-chairs with their faded chintz covers; the writing-table with its presentation inkstand; the groups of silhouettes on the walls, her forbears of long ago; the needlework on the fire-screen, in which, at nine years old, she had been proud to embroider the white rose-bud still so lackadaisically prominent; the stool on which she used to sit and knit beside her grandmother; the place on the run where the old collie used to lie--she saw his ghost there still!--all these familiar and even ugly objects seemed to be putting out spiritual hands to her, playing on nerves once eagerly responsive. She had never stayed for long in the house; but she had always been happy there. The moral atmosphere of it came back to her, and with a sense of the old rest and protection. Her grandfather might have been miserly to others; he had always been kind to her. But

it was her grandmother who had been supreme in that room. A woman of clear sense and high character; narrow and prejudiced in many respects, but sorely missed by many when her turn came to die; a Christian in more than name; sincerely devoted to her teasing little granddaughter. A woman who had ordered her household justly and kindly; a personality not soon forgotten.

"There is something of her in me still," thought Delia--"at least, I hope there is. And where--is the rest of me going?"

"I think I'll take off my things, dear," said Gertrude Marvell, breaking in on the girl's reverie. "Don't trouble. I know my room."

The door closed. Delia was now looking out into the garden, where on the old grass-slopes the September shadows lay--still and slumbrous. The peace of it, the breath of its old-world tradition, came upon her, relaxing the struggle of mind and soul in which she had been living for months, and that ceaseless memory which weighed upon her of her dying father,--his bitter and increasing recoil from all that, for a while, he had indulgently permitted--his final estrangement from her, her own obstinacy and suffering.

"Yes!"--she cried suddenly, out loud, to the rosebushes beyond the open window--"but it had a reason--it had a reason!" She clasped her hands fiercely to her breast. "And there is no birth without pain."

Chapter IV

A few days after her arrival, Delia woke up in the early dawn in the large room that had been her grandmother's. She sat up in the broad white bed with its dimity curtains, her hands round her knees, peering into the half darkened room, where, however, she had thrown the windows wide open, behind the curtains, before going to sleep. On the opposite wall she saw an indifferent picture of her father as a boy of twelve on his pony; beside it a faded photograph of her mother, her beautiful mother, in her wedding dress. There had never been any real sympathy between her mother and her grandmother. Old Lady Blanchflower had resented her son's marriage with a foreign woman, with a Greek, in particular. The Greeks were not at that moment of much account in the political world, and Lady Blanchflower thought of them as a nation of shams, trading on a great past which did not belong to them. Her secret idea was that out of their own country they grew rich in disreputable ways, and while at home, where only the stupid ones stayed, they were a shabby, half-civilised people, mostly bankrupt. She could not imagine how a girl got any bringing up at Athens, and believed nothing that her son told her. So that when the young Mrs. Blanchflower arrived, there were jars in the household, and it was not long before the spoilt and handsome bride went to her husband in tears, and asked to be taken away. Delia was surprised and touched, therefore, to find her mother's

portrait in her grandmother's room, where nothing clearly had been admitted that had not some connection with family affection or family pride. She wondered whether on her mother's death her grandmother had hung the picture there in dumb confession of, or penance for, her own unkindness.

The paper of the room was a dingy grey, and the furniture was heavily old-fashioned and in Delia's eyes inconvenient. "If I'm going to keep the room I shall make it all white," she thought, "with proper fitted wardrobes, and some low bookcases--a bath, too, of course, in the dressing-room. And they must put in electric light at once! How could they have done without it all this time! I believe with all its faults, this house could be made quite pretty!"

And she fell into a reverie,--eagerly constructive--wherein Maumsey became, at a stroke, a House Beautiful, at once modern and aesthetically right, a dim harmony in lovely purples, blues and greens, with the few fine things it possessed properly spaced and grouped, the old gardens showing through the latticed windows, and golden or silvery lights, like those in a Blanche interior, gleaming in its now dreary rooms.

Then at a bound she sprang out of bed, and stood upright in the autumn dawn.

"I hate myself!" she said fiercely--as she ran her hands through the mass of her dark hair, and threw it back upon her shoulders. Hurrying across the room in her night-gown, she threw back the curtains. A light autumnal mist, through which the sun was smiling, lay on the garden. Stately trees rose above it, and masses of flowers shewed vaguely bright; while through the blue distances beyond, the New Forest stretched to the sea.

But Delia was looking at herself, in a long pier-glass that represented almost the only concession to the typical feminine needs in the room. She was not admiring her own seemliness; far from it; she was rating and despising herself for a feather-brained waverer and good-for-nothing.

"Oh yes, you can talk!" she said, to the figure in the glass--"you are good enough at that! But what are you going to do!--Spend your time at Maple's and Waring--matching chintzes and curtains?--when you've promised--you've promised! Gertrude's right. There are all sorts of disgusting cowardices and weaknesses in you! Oh! yes, you'd like to go fiddling and fussing down here--playing the heiress--patronising the poor people--putting yourself into beautiful clothes--and getting heaps of money out of Mr. Winnington to spend. It's in you--it's just in you--to throw everything over--to forget everything you've felt, and everything you've vowed--and just wallow in luxury and selfishness and snobbery! Gertrude's absolutely right. But you shan't do it! You shan't put a hand to it! Why did that man take the guardianship? Now it's his business. He may see to it! But you--you have something else to do!"

And she stood erect, the angry impulse in her stiffening all her young body. And through her memory there ran, swift-footed, fragments from a rhetoric of which she was already fatally mistress, the formulae too of those sincere and goading beliefs on which her youth had been fed ever since her first acquaintance with Gertrude Marvell. The mind renewed them like vows; clung to them, embraced them.

What was she before she knew Gertrude? She thought of that earlier Delia as of a creature almost too contemptible to blame. From the maturity of her twenty-one years she looked back upon herself at seventeen or eighteen with wonder. That Delia had read nothing--knew nothing--had neither thoughts or principles. She was her father's spoilt child and darling; delighting in the luxury that surrounded his West Indian Governorship; courted and flattered by the few English of the colonial capital, and by the members of her father's staff; with servants for every possible need or whim; living her life mostly in the open air, riding at her father's side, through the sub-tropical forests of the colony; teasing and tyrannising over the dear old German governess who had brought her up, and whose only contribution to her education--as Delia now counted education--had been the German tongue. Worth something!--but not all those years, "when I might have been learning so much else, things I shall never have time to learn now!--things that Gertrude has at her finger's end. Why wasn't I taught properly--decently--like any board school child! As Gertrude says, we women want everything we can get! We must know the things that men know--that we may beat them at their own game. Why should every Balliol boy--years younger than me--have been taught his classics and mathematics,--and have everything brought to him--made easy for him--history, political economy, logic, philosophy, laid at his lordship's feet, if he will just please to learn!--while I, who have just as good a brain as he, have had to pick up a few scraps by the way, just because nobody who had charge of me ever thought it worth while to teach, a girl. But I have a mind!--an intelligence!--even if I am a woman; and there is all the world to know. Marriage? Yes!--but not at the sacrifice of everything else--of the rational, civilised self."

On the whole though, her youth had been happy enough, with recurrent intervals of ennui and discontent. Intervals too of poetic enthusiasm, or ascetic religion. At eighteen she had been practically a Catholic, influenced by the charming wife of one of her father's aides-de-camp. And then--a few stray books or magazine articles had made a Darwinian and an agnostic of her; the one phase as futile as the other.

"I knew nothing--I had no mind!--"she repeated with energy,--"till Gertrude came."

And she thought with ardour of that intellectual awakening, under the strange influence of the apparently reserved and impassive woman, who had come to read history with her for six months, at the suggestion of a friend of her father's, a certain cultivated and clever Lady Tonbridge, "who saw how starved I was."

So, after enquiry, a lady who was a B.A. of London, and had taken first-class honour in history--Delia's ambition would accept nothing less--had been found, who wanted for health's sake a winter in a warm climate, and was willing to read history with Governor Blanch-flower's half-fledged daughter.

The friendship had begun, as often, with a little aversion. Delia was made to work, and having always resented being made to do anything, for about a month she disliked her tutor, and would have persuaded Sir Robert to send her away, had not England been so far off, and the agreement with Miss Marvell, whose terms were high, unusually stringent. But by the end of the month the girl of eighteen was conquered. She had recognised in Gertrude Marvell accomplishments that filled her with envy, together with an intensity of will, a bitter and fiery purpose, that astounded and subdued a young creature in whom inherited germs of southern energy and passion were only waiting the touch that starts the ferment. Gertrude Marvell had read an amazing amount of history, and all from one point of view; that of the woman stirred to a kind of madness by what she held to be the wrongs of her sex. The age-long monopoly of all the higher forces of civilisation by men; the cruel and insulting insistence upon the sexual and maternal functions of women, as covering the whole of her destiny; the hideous depreciation of her as an inferior and unclean creature, to which Christianity, poisoned by the story of Eve, and a score of barbarous beliefs and superstitions more primitive still, had largely contributed, while hypocritically professing to enfranchise and exalt her; the unflinching doom to "obey," and to bring forth, that has crushed her; the labours and shames heaped upon her by men in the pursuit of their own selfish devices; and the denial to her, also by men, of all the higher and spiritual activities, except those allowed by a man-made religion:--this feminist gospel, in some respects so bitterly true, in others so vindictively false, was gradually and unsparingly pressed upon Delia's quick intelligence. She caught its fire; she rose to its call; and there came a day when Gertrude Marvell breaking through the cold reserve she had hitherto interposed between herself and the pupil who had come to adore her, threw her arms round the girl, accepting from her what were practically the vows of a neophyte in a secret and revolutionary service.

Joyous, self-dedicating moment! But it had been followed by a tragedy; the tragedy of Delia's estrangement from her father. It was not long before Sir Robert Blanchflower, a proud self-indulgent man, with a keen critical sense, a wide acquaintance with men and affairs, and a number of miscellaneous acquirements of which he never made the smallest parade, had divined the spirit of irreconcilable revolt which animated the slight and generally taciturn woman, who had obtained such a hold upon his daughter. He, the god of his small world, was made to feel himself humiliated in her presence. She was, in fact, his intellectual superior, and the truth was conveyed to him in a score of subtle ways. She was in his house simply because she was poor, and wanted rest from excessive overwork, at someone else's expense. Otherwise her manner suggested--often quite unconsciously--that she would not have put up

with his household and its regulations for a single day.

Then, suddenly, he perceived that he had lost his daughter, and the reason of it. The last year of his official life was thenceforward darkened by an ugly and undignified struggle with the woman who had stolen Delia from him. In the end he dismissed Gertrude Marvell. Delia shewed a passionate resentment, told him frankly that as soon as she was twenty-one she should take up "the Woman's movement" as her sole occupation, and should offer herself wherever Gertrude Marvell, and Gertrude's leaders, thought she could be useful. "The vote must be got!"--she said, standing white and trembling, but resolute, before her father--"If not peaceably, then by violence. And when we get it, father, you men will be astonished to see what we shall do with it!"

Her twenty-first birthday was at hand, and would probably have seen Delia's flight from her father's house, but for Sir Robert's breakdown in health. He gave up his post, and it was evident he had not more than a year or two to live. Delia softened and submitted. She went abroad with him, and for a time he seemed to throw off the disease which had attacked him. It was during a brighter interval that, touched by her apparent concessions, he had consented to her giving the lecture in the Tyrolese hotel the fame of which had spread abroad, and had even taken a certain pleasure in her oratorical success.

But during the following winter--Sir Robert's last--which they spent at Meran, things had gone from bad to worse. For months Delia never mentioned Gertrude Marvell to her father. He flattered himself that the friendship was at an end. Then some accident revealed to him that it was as close as, or closer than ever; that they were in daily correspondence; that they had actually met, unknown to him, in the neighbourhood of Meran; and that Delia was sending all the money she could possibly spare from her very ample allowance to "The Daughters of Revolt," the far-spreading society in which Gertrude Marvell was now one of the leading officials.

Some of these dismal memories of Meran descended like birds of night upon Delia, as she stood with her arms above her head, in her long night-gown, looking intently but quite unconsciously into the depths of an old rosewood cheval glass. She felt that sultry night about her once more, when, after signing his will, her father opened his eyes upon her, coming back with an effort from the bound of death, and had said quite clearly though faintly in the silence--

"Give up that woman, Delia!--promise me to give her up." And Delia had cried bitterly, on her knees beside him--without a word--caressing his hand. And the cold fingers had been feebly withdrawn from hers as the eyes closed.

"Oh papa--papa!" The low murmur came from her, as she pressed her hands upon her eyes. If the Christian guesses were but true, and in some quiet Elysian state he might now understand, and cease to be angry with her! Was there ever a great cause won without setting kin against kin? "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." "It wasn't my

fault--it wasn't my fault!"

No!--and moreover it was her duty not to waste her strength in vain emotion and regret. Her task was doing, not dreaming. She turned away, banished her thoughts and set steadily about the task of dressing.

* * * * *

"Please Miss Blanchflower, there are two or three people waiting to see you in the servants' hall."

So said the tall and gentle-voiced housekeeper, Mrs. Bird, whose emotions had been, in Miss Marvell's view, so unnecessarily exercised on the evening of Delia's home-coming. Being a sensitive person, Mrs. Bird had already learnt her lesson, and her manner had now become as mildly distant as could be desired, especially in the case of Miss Blanchflower's lady companion.

"People? What people?" asked Delia, looking round with a furrowed brow. She and Gertrude were sitting together on the sofa when the housekeeper entered, eagerly reading a large batch of letters which the London post had just brought, and discussing their contents in subdued tones.

"It's the cottages, Miss. Her Ladyship used always to decide who should have those as were vacant about this time of year, and two or three of these persons have been up several times to know when you'd be home."

"But I don't know anything about it"--said Delia, rising reluctantly.

"Why doesn't the agent--why doesn't Mr. Frost do it?"

"I suppose--they thought--you'd perhaps speak a word to Mr. Frost, Miss," suggested Mrs. Bird. "But I can send them away of course, if you wish."

"Oh no, I'll come"--said Delia. "But it's rather tiresome--just as"--she looked at Gertrude.

"Don't be long," said Miss Marvell, sharply, "I'll wait for you here." And she plunged back into the letters, her delicate face all alive, her eyes sparkling. Delia departed--evidently on a distasteful errand.

But twenty minutes later, she returned flushed and animated.

"I am glad I went! Such tyranny--such monstrous tyranny!" She stood in front of Gertrude breathing fast, her hands on her hips.

"What's the matter?"

"My grandmother had a rule--can you imagine anything so cruel!--that no girl--who had gone wrong--was to be allowed in our cottages. If she couldn't be provided for in some Home or other, or if her family refused to give her up, then the family must go. An old man has been up

to see me--a widower with two daughters--one in service. The one in service has come to grief--the son of the house!--the usual story!--the speaker's face had turned fiercely pale--"and now our agent refuses to let the girl and her baby come home. And the old father says--'What am I to do, Miss? I can't turn her out--she's my own flesh and blood. I've got to stick to her--else there'll be worse happening. It's not _justice_, Miss--and it's not Gospel.' Well!--Delia seated herself with energy,--"I've told him to have her home at once--and I'll see to it."

Gertrude lifted her eyebrows, a gesture habitual with her, whenever Delia wore--as now--her young prophetess look. Why feel these things so much? Human nerves have only a certain limited stock of reactions. Avenge--and alter them!

But she merely said--

"And the others?"

"Oh, a poor mother with eight children, pleading for a cottage with three bedrooms instead of two! I told her she should have it if I had to build it!--And an old woman who has lived fifty-two years in her cottage, and lost all her belongings, begging that she mightn't be turned out--for a family--now that it's too big for her. She shan't be turned out! Of course I suppose it would be common sense"--the tension of the speaker's face broke up in laughter--"to put the old woman into the cottage of the eight children--and put the eight children into the old woman's. But human beings are not cattle! Sentiment's something! Why shouldn't a woman be allowed to die in her old home,--so long as she pays the rent? I hate all this interference with people's lives! And it's always the women who come worst off. 'Oh Mr. Frost, he never pays no attention to us women. He claps 'is 'ands to his ears when he sees one of us, and jest runs for it.' Well, I'll make Mr. Frost listen to a woman!"

"I'm afraid Mr. Winnington is his master," said Gertrude quietly. Delia, crimson again, shrugged her shoulders.

"We shall see!"

Gertrude Marvell looked up.

"Look here, Delia, if you're going to play the part of earthly Providence to this village and your property in general--as I've said to you before--you may as well tell the 'Daughters' you can't do anything for them. That's a profession in itself; and would take you all your time."

"Then of course, I shan't do it," said Delia, with decision. "But I only want to put in an appearance--to make friends with the people--just for a time, Gertrude! It doesn't do to be _too_ unpopular. We're not exactly in good odour just now, are we?"

And sitting down on a stool beside the elder woman, Delia leant her head against her friend's knee caressingly.

Gertrude gave an absent touch to the girl's beautiful hair, and then said--

"So you will take these four meetings?"

"Certainly!" Delia sprang up. "What are they? One at Latchford, one at Brownmouth--Wanchester--and Frimpton. All right. I shall be pelted at Brownmouth. But rotten eggs don't matter so much when you're looking out for them--except on your face--Ugh!"

"And the meeting here?"

"Of course. Can't I do what I like with my own house? We'll have the notices out next week."

Gertrude looked up--

"When did you say that man--Mr. Winnington--was coming?"

"His note this morning said 4:30."

"You'd better see him alone--for the first half hour anyway."

Delia made a face.

"I wish I knew what line to take up. You've been no use at all, Gertrude!"

Gertrude smiled.

"Wait till you see him," she said coolly. "Mother-wit will help you out."

"I wish I had anything to bargain with."

"So you have."

"Pray, what?"

"The meeting here. You could give that up. And he needn't know anything of the others yet awhile."

"What a charming opinion he will have of us both, by and bye," laughed Delia, quietly. "And by all accounts he himself is a simple paragon.--Heavens, how tiresome!"

Gertrude Marvell turned back to her letters.

"What does anyone know about a man?" she said, with slow deliberation.

The midday post at Maumsey brought letters just after luncheon. Delia turning hers over was astonished to see two or three with the local postmark.

"What can people from _here_ be writing to me about?"

Gertrude absorbed in the new weekly number of the _Tocsin_ took no notice, till she was touched on the shoulder by Delia.

"Yes?"

"Gertrude!--it's too amazing!" The girl's tone was full of a joyous wonder. "You know they told us at head-quarters that this was one of the deadest places in England--a nest of Antis--nothing doing here at all. Well, what do you think?--here are _three_ letters by one post, from the village--all greeting us--all knowing perfectly who you are--that you have been in prison, etcetera--all readers of the _Tocsin_, and burning to be doing something--"

"Burning something?" interposed the other in her most ordinary voice.

Delia laughed, again with the note of constraint.

"Well, anyway, they want to come and see us."

"Who are they?"

"An assistant mistress at the little grammar-school--that's No. 1. No. 2--a farmer's daughter, who says she took part in one of the raids last summer, but nobody knows down here. Her father paid her fine. And No. 3. a consumptive dressmaker, who declares she hasn't much life left anyway, and she is quite willing to give it to the 'cause'! Isn't it wonderful how it spreads--it spreads!"

"Hm"--said Miss Marvell. "Well, we may as well inspect them. Tell them to come up some time next week after dusk."

As she spoke, the temporary parlour-maid threw open the door of the room which Delia had that morning chosen as her own sitting-room.

"Are you at home, Miss? Mrs. France would like to see you."

"Mrs. France?--Mrs. France? Oh, I know--the doctor's wife--Mrs. Bird was talking of him this morning. Well, I suppose I must go." Delia moved unwillingly. "I'm coming, Mary."

"Of course you must go," said Gertrude, a little peremptorily. "As we are here we may as well reconnoitre the whole ground--find out everything we can."

* * * * *

In the drawing-room, to which some flowers, and a litter of new books and magazines had already restored its inhabited look, Delia found a woman awaiting her, in whom the girl's first glance discerned a personality. She was dressed with an entire disregard of the fashion, in plain, serviceable clothes. A small black bonnet tied under the chin framed a face whose only beauty lay in the expression of the clear kind eyes, and quiet mouth. The eyes were a little prominent; the brow above them unusually smooth and untroubled, answering to the bands of brown hair touched with grey which defined it. But the rest of the face was marked by many deep lines--of experience, or suffering?--which showed clearly that its owner had long left physical youth behind. And yet perhaps youth--in some spiritual poetic sense--was what Mrs. France's aspect most sharply conveyed.

She rose as Delia entered, and greeted her warmly.

"It is nice to see you settled here! Dr. France and I were great friends of your old grandmother. He and she were regular cronies. We were very sorry to see the news of your poor father's death."

The voice was clear and soft, and absolutely sincere. Delia felt drawn to her. But it had become habitual to her to hold herself on the defensive with strangers, to suspect hostility and disapproval everywhere. So that her manner in reply, though polite enough, was rather chilly.

But--the girl's beauty! The fame of it had indeed reached Maumsey in advance of the heiress. Mrs. France, however, in its actual presence was inclined to say "I had not heard the half!" She remembered Delia's mother, and in the face before her she recognised again the Greek type, the old pure type, reappearing, as it constantly does, in the mixed modern race. But the daughter surpassed her mother. Delia's eyes, of a lovely grey blue, lidded, and fringed, and arched with an exquisite perfection; the curve of the slightly bronzed cheek, suggesting through all its delicacy the fulness of young, sensuous life; the mouth, perhaps a trifle too large, and the chin, perhaps a trifle too firm; the abundance of the glossy black hair, curling wherever it was allowed to curl, or wherever it could escape the tight coils in which it was bound--at the temples, and over the brow; the beauty of the uncovered neck, and of the amply-rounded form which revealed itself through the thin black stripe of the mourning dress:--none of these "items" in Delia's good looks escaped her admiring visitor.

"It's to be hoped Mr. Mark realises his responsibilities," she thought, with amusement.

Aloud, she said--

"I remember you as quite a little thing staying with your Grandmother--but you wouldn't remember me. Dr. France was grieved not to come, but it's his hospital day."

Delia thanked her, without effusion. Mrs. France presently began to

feel conversation an effort, and to realise that the girl's wonderful eyes were very observant and very critical. Yet she chose the very obvious and appropriate topic of Lady Blanchflower, her strong character, her doings in the village, her relation to the labourers and their wives.

"When she died, they really missed her. They miss her still."

"Is it good for a village to depend so much on one person?" said Delia in a detached voice.

Mrs. France looked at her curiously. Jealousy of one's grandmother is not a common trait in the young. It struck her that Miss Blanchflower was already defending herself against examples and ideals she did not mean to follow. And again amusement--and concern!--on Mark Winnington's account made themselves felt. Mrs. France was quite aware of Delia's "militant" antecedents, and of the history of the lady she had brought down to live with her. But the confidence of the doctor's wife in Winnington's powers and charm was boundless. "He'll be a match for them!" she thought gaily.

Meanwhile in reply, she smilingly defended her old friend Lady Blanchflower from the implied charge of pauperising the village.

"Not at all! She never gave money recklessly--and the do-nothings kept clear of her. But she was the people's friend--and they knew it. They're very excited about your coming!"

"I daresay I shall change some things," said Delia decidedly. "I don't approve of all Mr. Frost has been doing."

"Well, you'll have your guardian to help you," said Mrs. France quietly.

Delia flushed, straightened her shoulders, and said nothing.

This time Mrs. France was fairly taken by surprise. She knew nothing more of Sir Robert Blanchflower's will than that he had made Mr. Mark Winnington his daughter's guardian, till she reached the age of twenty-five. But that any young woman--any motherless and fatherless girl--should not think herself the most lucky of mortals to have obtained Mark Winnington as guide and defender, with first claim on his time, his brains, his kindness, seemed incredible to Mark's old friend and neighbour, accustomed to the daily signs of his immense and deserved popularity. Then it flashed upon her--"Has she ever seen him?"

The doubt led to an immediate communication of the news that Winnington had arrived from town that morning. Dr. France had seen him in the village.

"You know him, of course, already?"

"Not at all," said Delia, indifferently. "He and I are perfect

strangers." Mrs. France laughed.

"I rather envy you the pleasure of making friends with him! We are all devoted to him down here."

Delia lifted her eyebrows.

"What are his particular virtues? It's monotonous to possess them _all_." The slight note of insolence was hardly disguised.

"No two friends of his would give you the same answer. I should give you a different catalogue, for instance, from Lady Tonbridge--"

"Lady Tonbridge!" cried Delia, waking up at last. "You don't mean that Lady Tonbridge lives in this neighbourhood?"

"Certainly. You know her?"

"She came once to stay with us in the West Indies. My father knew her very well before she married. And I owe her--a great debt"--the last words were spoken with emphasis.

Mrs. France looked enquiring.

"--she recommended to us the lady who is now living with me here--my chaperon--Miss Marvell?"

There was silence for a moment. Then Mrs. France said, not without embarrassment--

"Your father desired she should live with you?"

Delia flushed again.

"No. My father did not understand her."

"He did not agree with her views?"

"Nor with mine. It was horrid--but even relations must agree to differ. Why is Lady Tonbridge here? And where is Sir Alfred? Papa had not heard of them for a long time."

"They separated last year"--said Mrs. France gravely. "But Mr. Winnington will tell you. He's a great friend of hers. She does a lot of work for him."

"Work?"

"Social work!" smiled Mrs. France--"poor-law--schools--that kind of thing. He ropes us all in."

"Oh!" said Delia, with her head in the air.

Mrs. France laughed outright.

"That seems to you so unimportant--compared to the vote."

"It is unimportant!" said Delia, impetuously. "Nothing really matters but the vote. Aren't you a Suffragist, Mrs. France?"

Mrs. France smilingly shook her head.

"I don't want to meddle with the men's business. And we're a long way yet from catching up with our own. Oh, my husband has a lot of scientific objections. But that's mine." Then her face grew serious--"anyway, we can all agree, I hope, in hating violence. That can never settle it."

She looked a little sternly at her young companion.

"That depends," said Delia. "But we mustn't argue, Mrs. France. I should only make you angry. Ah!"

She sprang up and went to the window, just as steps could be heard on the gravel outside.

"Here's someone coming." She turned to Mrs. France. "Is it Mr. Winnington?"

"It is!" said her visitor, after putting on her glasses.

Delia surveyed him, standing behind the lace curtain, and Mrs. France was relieved to see that a young person of such very decided opinions could be still girlishly curious. She herself rose to go.

"Good-bye. I won't interrupt your talk with him."

"Good-looking?" said Delia, with mischief in her eyes, and a slight gesture towards the approaching visitor.

"Don't you know what an athlete he is--or was?"

"Another perfection? Heavens!--how does he endure it?" said the girl, laughing.

Mrs. France took her leave. She was a very motherly tender-hearted woman, and she would like to have taken her old friend's grandchild in her arms and kissed her. But she wisely refrained; and indeed the instinct to shake her was perhaps equally strong. "How long will she stand gossiping on the doormat with the paragon," said Delia savagely to herself, when she was left alone. "Oh, how I hate a 'charming man'!" She moved stormily to and fro, listening to the distant sounds of talk in the hall, and resenting them. Then suddenly she paused opposite one of the large mirrors in the room. A coil of hair had loosened itself; she put it right; and still stood motionless, interrogating herself in a proud concentration.

"Well?--I am quite ready for him."

But her heart beat uncomfortably fast as the door opened, and Mark Winnington entered.

Chapter V

As Winnington advanced with outstretched hand to greet her, Delia was conscious of a striking physical presence, and of an eye fixed upon her at once kind and penetrating.

"How are you? You've been through a terrible time! Are you at all rested? I'm afraid it has been a long, long strain."

He held her hand in both his, asking gentle questions about her father's illness, interrogating her looks the while with a frank concern and sympathy.

Delia was taken by surprise. For the first time that day she was reminded of what was really, the truth. She was tired--morally and physically. But Gertrude Marvell never recognised anything of the kind; and in her presence Delia rarely confessed any such weakness even to herself.

As it was, her eyes and mouth wavered a little under Winnington's look.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I shall soon be rested."

They sat down. Delia was conscious--unwillingly conscious, of a nervous agitation she did her best to check. For Winnington also it was clearly an awkward moment. He began at once to talk of his old recollections of her parents, of her mother's beauty, of her father's reputation as the most dashing soldier on the North-West frontier, in the days when they first met in India.

"But his health was even then very poor. I suppose it was that made him leave the army?"

"Yes--and then Parliament," said Delia. "He was ordered a warm climate for the winter. But he could never have lived without working. His Governorship just suited him."

She spoke with charming softness, beguiled from her insensibly by Winnington's own manner. At the back of Winnington's mind, as they talked, ran perpetual ejaculations--ejaculations of the natural man in the presence of so much beauty. But his conversation with her flowed the while with an even gentleness which never for a moment affected intimacy, and was touched here and there with a note of deference, even

of ceremony, which disarmed his companion.

"I never came across your father down here--oddly enough," he said presently. "He had left Sandhurst before I went to Eton; and then there was Oxford, and then the bar. My little place belonged then to a cousin, and I had hardly ever seen it. But of course I knew, your grandmother--everybody did. She was a great centre--a great figure. She has left her mark here. Don't you find it so?"

"Yes. Everybody seems to remember her."

But, in a moment, the girl before him had changed and stiffened. It seemed to Winnington, as to Mrs. France, that she pulled herself up, reacting against something that threatened her. The expression in her eyes put something between them. "Perhaps you know"--she said--"that my grandmother didn't always get on with my mother?"

He wondered why she had reminded him of that old family jar, which gossip had spread abroad. Did it really rankle in her mind? Odd, that it should!

"Was that so?" he laughed. "Oh, Lady Blanchflower had her veins of unreason. One had to know where to have her."

"She took Greeks for barbarians--my father used to say," said Delia, a little grimly. "But she was very good to me--and so I was fond of her." "And she of you. But there are still tales going about--do you mind?--of the dances you led her. It took weeks and months, they say, before you and she arrived at an armed truce--after a most appalling state of war! There's an old gardener here--retired now--who remembers you quite well. He told me yesterday that you used to be very friendly with him, and you said to him once--'I like Granny!--she's the master of me!'"

The laughter in Winnington's eyes again kindled hers.

"I was a handful--I know." There was a pause. Then she added--"And I'm afraid--I've gone on being a handful!" Gesture and tone showed that she spoke deliberately.

"Most people of spirit are--till they come to handle themselves," he replied, also with a slight change of tone.

"But that's just what women are never allowed to do, Mr. Winnington!" She turned suddenly red, and fronted him. "There's always some man, who claims to manage them and their affairs. We're always in leading-strings--nobody ever admits we're grown up. Why can't we be allowed like men--to stumble along our own way? If we make mistakes, let's pay for them! But let us at some time in our lives--at least--feel ourselves free beings!"

There was no mistaking the purport of these words. They referred clearly to her father's will, and her own position. After a moment's

thought, Winnington bent forward.

"I think I understand what you mean," he said gravely. "And I sympathise with it more than you imagine."

Delia looked up impetuously--

"Then why, Mr. Winnington, did you consent to be my guardian?"

"Because--quite honestly--because I thought I could be of more use to you perhaps than the Court of Chancery; and because your father's letter to me was one very difficult to put aside."

"How could anyone in my father's state of health really judge reasonably!" cried Delia. "I daresay it sounds shocking to you, Mr. Winnington, but I can't help putting it to myself like this--Papa was always able to contrive his own life as he chose. In his Governorship he was a small king. He tried a good many experiments. Everybody deferred to him. Everybody was glad to help him. Then when his money came and the estate, nobody fettered him with conditions; nobody interfered with him. Grandpapa and he didn't agree in a lot of things. Papa was a Liberal; and Grandpapa was an awfully hot Conservative. But Grandpapa didn't appoint a trustee, or tie up the estates--or anything of that kind. It is simply and solely because I am a woman that these things are done! I am not to be allowed my opinions, in my life, though Papa was quite free to work for his in his life! This is the kind of thing we call tyranny,--this is the kind of thing that's driving women into revolt!"

Delia had risen. She stood in what Gertrude Marvell would have called her "pythian" attitude, hands behind her, her head thrown back, delivering her prophetic soul. Winnington, as he surveyed her, was equally conscious of her beauty and her absurdity. But he kept cool, or rather the natural faculty which had given him so much authority and success in life rose with a kind of zest to its new and unaccustomed task.

"May I perhaps suggest--that your father was fifty-two when he succeeded to this estate--and that you are twenty-one?"

"Nearly twenty-two," she interrupted, hastily.

"Nearly twenty-two," repeated Winnington. "And I assure you, that what with 'People's Budgets,' and prowling Chancellors, and all the new turns of the screw that the Treasury is for ever putting on, inheriting an estate nowadays is no simple matter. Your father thought of that. He wished to provide someone to help you."

"I could have found lawyers to help me."

"Of course you could. But my experience is that solicitors are good servants but bad masters. It wants a good deal of practical knowledge to direct them, so that you get what you want. I have gone a little way

into the business of the estate this morning with Mr. Masham, and in town, with the Morton Manners people. I see already some complications which will take me a deal of time and thought to straighten out. And I am a lawyer, and if you will let me say so, just double your age."

He smiled at her, but Delia's countenance did not relax. Her mouth was scornful.

"I daresay that's quite true, Mr. Winnington. But of course you know it was not on that account--or at any rate not chiefly on that account, that my father left things as he did. He wished"--she spoke clearly and slowly--"simply to prevent my helping the Suffrage movement in the way I think best."

Winnington too had risen, and was standing with one hand on the mantelpiece. His brow was slightly furrowed, not frowning exactly, but rather with the expression of one trying to bring his mind into as close touch as possible with another mind.

"I must of course agree with you. That is evidently one of the objects of the will, though by no means--I think--the only one. And as to that, should you not ask yourself--had not your father a right, even a duty, to look after the disposal of his money as he thought best? Surely it was his responsibility--especially as he was old, and you were young."

Delia had begun to feel impatient--to resent the very mildness of his tone. She felt, as though she were an insubordinate child, being gently reasoned with.

"No, I don't admit it!" she said passionately. "It was tampering with the right of the next generation!"

"Might you not say the same of the whole--or almost the whole of our system of inheritance?" he argued. "I should put it--that the old are always trying to preserve and protect something they know is more precious to them than it can be to the young--something as to which, with the experience of life behind them, they believe they are wiser than the young. Ought the young to resent it?"

"Yes," persisted Delia. "Yes! They should be left to make their own experiments."

"They have life wherewith to make them! But the dead--" He paused. But Delia felt and quivered under the unspoken appeal; and also under the quick touch of something more personal--more intimate--in his manner, expressing, it seemed, some deep feeling of his own. He, in turn, perceived that she had grown very pale; he guessed even that she was suddenly not very far from tears. He seemed to realise the weeks, perhaps months, of conflict through which the girl had just passed. He was sincerely sorry for her--sincerely drawn to her.

Delia broke the silence.

"It is no good I think discussing this any more--is it? There's the will, and the question is"--she faced him boldly--"how are you and I going to get on, Mr. Winnington?"

Winnington's seriousness broke up. He threw her a smiling look, and with his hands in his pockets began to pace the room reflectively.

"I really believe we can pull it off, if we look at it coolly," he said at last, pausing in front of her. "I am no bigot on the Suffrage question--frankly I have not yet made up my mind upon it. All that I am clear about--as your father was clear--is that outrage and violence are wrong--in any cause. I cannot believe that we shan't agree there!"

He looked at her keenly. Delia was silent. Her face betrayed nothing, though her eyes met his steadily.

"And in regard to that, there is of course one thing that troubles me"--he resumed--"one thing in which I beg you to take my advice"--

Delia breathed quick.

"Gertrude Marvell?" she said. "Of course I knew that was coming!"

"Yes. That we must settle, I think." He kept his eyes upon her. "You can hardly know that she is mentioned by name in your father's last letter--the letter to me---as the one person whose companionship he dreaded for you--the one person he hoped you would consent to part from."

Delia had turned white.

"No--I didn't know."

"For that reason, and for others, I do entreat you"--he went on, earnestly--"not to keep her here. Miss Marvell may be all that you believe her. I have nothing to say against her,--except this. I am told by those who know that she is already quite notorious in the militant movement. She has been in prison, and she has made extremely violent speeches, advocating what Miss Marvell calls war, and what plain people call--crime. That she should live with you here would not only prejudice your future, and divide you from people who should be your natural friends; it would be an open disrespect to your father's memory."

There was silence. Then Delia said, evidently mastering her excitement with difficulty.

"I can't help it. She must stay with me. Nobody need know--about my father. Her name is not mentioned in the will."

"No. That is true. But his letter to me as your guardian and trustee ought to be regarded equitably as part of the will; and I do not see how it would be possible for me to acquiesce in something so directly

contrary to his last wishes. I beg you to look at it from my point of view--"

"I do"--said Delia, flushing again. "But my letter warned you--"

"Yes--but I felt on receiving it that you could not possibly be aware of the full strength of your father's feeling. Let me read you his words."

He took an envelope from his pocket, observing her. Delia hastily interposed.

"Don't, Mr. Winnington!--I'm sure I know."

"It is really my duty to read it to you," he said, courteously but firmly.

She endured it. The only sign of agitation she shewed was the trembling of her hands on the back of the chair she leant upon. And when he returned it to his pocket, she considered for a moment or two, before she said, breathing unevenly, and stumbling a little.--

"That makes no difference, Mr. Winnington. I expect you think me a monster. All the same I loved my father in my own way. But I am not going to barter away my freedom for anything or anyone. I am not part of my father, I am myself. And he is not here to be injured or hurt by anything I do. I intend to stick to Gertrude Marvell--and she to me."

And having delivered her ultimatum, she stood like a young goddess, expectant and defiant.

Winnington's manner changed. He straightened himself, with a slight shake of his broad shoulders, and went to look out of the window at the end of the room. Delia was left to contemplate the back of a very tall man in a serge suit and to rate herself for the thrill--or the trepidation--she could not help feeling. What would he say when he spoke again? She was angry with herself that she could not quite truthfully say that she did not care.

When he returned, she divined another man. The tone was as courteous as ever, but the first relation between them had disappeared; or rather it had become a business relation, a relation of affairs.

"You will of course understand--that I cannot _acquiesce_ in that arrangement?"

Delia's uncomfortable sense of humor found vent in a laugh--as civil however as she could make it.

"I do understand. But I don't quite see what you can do, Mr. Winnington!"

He smiled--quite pleasantly.

"Nor do I--just yet. But of course Miss Marvell will not expect that your father's estate should provide her with the salary that would naturally fall to a chaperon whom your guardian could approve?"

"I shall see to that. We shall not trouble you," said Delia, rather fiercely.

"And I shall ask to see Miss Marvell before I go this morning--that I may point out to her the impropriety of remaining here against your father's express wishes."

Delia nodded.

"All right--but it won't do any good."

He made no reply, except to turn immediately to the subject of her place of residence and her allowance.

"It is I believe understood that you will live mainly here--at Maumsey."

"On the contrary!--I wish to spend a great part of the winter in London."

"With Miss Marvell?"

"Certainly."

"I cannot, I am afraid, let you expect that I shall provide the money."

"It is my own money!"

"Not legally. I hate insisting on these things; but perhaps you ought to know that the whole of your father's property--everything that he left behind him, is in trust."

"Which means"--cried Delia, quivering again--"that I am really a pauper!--that I own nothing but my clothes--barely those!"

He felt himself a brute. "Can I really keep this up!" he thought. Aloud, he said--"If you would only make it a little easy for your trustee, he would be only too thankful to follow out your wishes!"

Delia made no reply, and Winnington took another turn up and down before he paused in front of her with the words:--

"Can't we come to a compact? If I agree to London--say for six or seven weeks--is there no promise you can make me in return?"

With an inward laugh Delia remembered Gertrude's injunction to "keep something to bargain with."

"I don't know"--she said, reluctantly. "What sort of promise do you want?"

"I want one equal to the concession you ask me to make," he said gravely. "In my eyes nothing could be more unfitting than that you should be staying in London--during a time of particularly violent agitation--under the chaperonage of Miss Marvell, who is already committed to this agitation. If I agree to such a direct contradiction of your father's wishes, I must at least have your assurance that you will do nothing violent or illegal, either down here or in London, and that in this house above all you will take some pains to respect Sir Robert's wishes. That I am sure you will promise me?"

She could not deny the charm of his direct appealing look, and she hesitated.

"I was going to have a drawing-room meeting here as soon as possible"--she said, slowly.

"On behalf of the 'Daughters of Revolt'?"

She silently assented.

"I may feel sure--may I not?--that you will give it up?"

"It is a matter of conscience with us"--she said proudly--"to spread our message wherever we go."

"I don't think I can allow you a conscience all to yourself," he said smiling. "Consider how I shall be straining mine--in agreeing to the London plan!"

"Very well"--the words came out reluctantly. "If you insist--and if London is agreed upon--I will give it up."

"Thank you," he said quietly. "And you will take part in no acts of violence, either here or in London? It seems strange to use such words to you. I hate to use them. But with the news in this week's papers I can't help it. You will promise?"

There was a short silence.

"I will join in nothing militant down here," said Delia at last. "I have already told Miss Marvell so."

"Or in London?"

She straightened herself.

"I promise nothing about London."

Guardian and ward looked straight into each other's faces for a few moments. Delia's resistance had stirred a passion--a tremor--in her

pulses, she had never known in her struggle with her father. Winnington was clearly debating with himself, and Delia seemed to see the thoughts coursing through the grey eyes that looked at her, seriously indeed, yet not without suggesting a man's humorous spirit behind them.

"Very well"--he said--"we will talk of London later.--Now may we just sit down and run through the household arrangements and expenses here--before I see Miss Marvell. I want to know exactly what you want doing to this house, and how we can fix you up comfortably."

Delia assented. Winnington produced a note-book and pencil. Through his companion's mind was running meanwhile an animated debate.

"I'm not bound to tell him of those other meetings I have promised? 'Yes, you are!' No,--I'm not. They're not to be here--and if I once begin asking his leave for things--there'll be no end to it. I mean to shew him--once for all--that I am of age, and my own mistress. He can't starve me--or beat me!"

Her face broke into suppressed laughter as she bent it over the figures that Winnington was presenting to her.

* * * * *

"Well, I am rather disappointed that you don't want to do more to the house," said Winnington, as he rose and put up his note-book. "I thought it might have been an occupation for the autumn and winter. But at least we can decide on the essential things, and the work can be done while you are in town. I am glad you like the servants Mrs. Bird has found for you. Now I am going off to the Bank to settle everything about the opening of your account, and the quarterly cheque we have agreed on shall be paid in to-morrow."

"Very well." But instantly through the girl's mind there shot up the qualifying thought. "_He_ may say how it is to be spent--but _I_ have made no promise!"

He approached her to take his leave.

"My sister comes home to-night. Will you try the new car and have tea with us on Thursday?" Delia assented. "And before I go I should like to say a word about some of the neighbours."

He tried to give her a survey of the land. Lady Tonbridge, of course, would be calling upon her directly. She was actually in the village--in the tiniest bandbox of a house. Her husband's brutality had at last--two years before this date--forced her to leave him, with her girl of fifteen. "A miserable story--better taken for granted. She is the pluckiest woman alive!" Then the Amberleys--the Rector, his wife and daughter Susy were pleasant people--"Susy is a particular friend of mine. It'll be jolly if you like her."

"Oh, no, she won't take to me!" said Delia with decision.

"Why not?"

But Delia only shook her head, a little contemptuously.

"We shall see," said Winnington. "Well, good night. Remember, anything I can do for you--here I am."

His eyes smiled, but Delia was perfectly conscious that the eager cordiality, the touch of something like tenderness, which had entered into his earlier manner, had disappeared. She realised, and with a moment's soreness, that she had offended his sense of right--of what a daughter's feeling should be towards a dead father, at any rate, in the first hours of bereavement, when the recollections of death and suffering are still fresh.

"I can't help it," she thought stubbornly. "It's all part of the price one pays."

But when he was gone, she stood a long time by the window without moving, thinking about the hour which had just passed. The impression left upon her by Winnington's personality was uncomfortably strong. She knew now that, in spite of her bravado, she had dreaded to find it so, and the reality had more than confirmed the anticipation. She was committed to a struggle with a man whom she must respect, and could not help liking; whose only wish was to help and protect her. And beside the man's energetic and fruitful maturity, she became, as it were, the spectator of her own youth and stumbling inexperience.

But these misgivings did not last long. A passionate conviction, a fanatical affection, came to her aid, and her doubts were impatiently dismissed.

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Winnington found Miss Blanchflower's chaperon in a little sitting-room on the ground floor already appropriated to her, surrounded with a vast litter of letters and newspapers which she hastily pushed aside as he entered. He had a long interview with her, and as he afterwards confessed to Lady Tonbridge, he had rarely put his best powers forward to so little purpose. Miss Marvell did not attempt to deny that she was coming to live at Maumsey in defiance of the wishes of Delia's father and guardian, and of the public opinion of those who were to be henceforward Delia's friends and neighbours.

"But Delia has asked me to live with her. She is twenty-one, and women are not now the mere chattels they once were. Both she and I have wills of our own. You will of course give me no salary. I require none. But I don't see how you're going to turn me out of Delia's house, if Delia wishes me to stay."

And Winnington must needs acknowledge, at least to himself, that he did not see either.

He put the lady however through a cross-examination as to her connection with militancy which would have embarrassed or intimidated most women; but Gertrude Marvell, a slight and graceful figure, sitting erect on the edge of her chair, bore it with perfect equanimity, apparently frank, and quite unashamed. Certainly she belonged to the "Daughters of Revolt," the record of her imprisonment was there to shew it; and so did Delia. The aim of both their lives was to obtain the parliamentary vote for women, and in her opinion and that of many others, the time for constitutional action--"for that nonsense"--as she scornfully put it, had long gone by. As to what she intended to do, or advise Delia to do, that was her own affair. One did not give away one's plans to the enemy. But she realised, of course, that it would be unkind to Delia to plunge her into possible trouble, or to run the risk herself of arrest or imprisonment during the early days of Delia's mourning; and of her own accord she graciously offered the assurance that neither she nor Delia would commit any illegality during the two months or so that they might be settled at Maumsey. As to what might happen later, she, like Delia, declined to give any assurances. The parliamentary situation was becoming desperate, and any action whatever on the part of women which might serve to prod the sluggish mind of England before another general election, was in her view not only legitimate but essential.

"Of course I know what your conscience says on the matter," she said, with her steady eyes on Winnington. "But--excuse me for saying so--your conscience is not my affair."

Winnington rose, and prepared to take his leave. If he felt nonplussed, he managed not to shew it.

"Very well. For the present I acquiesce. But you will scarcely wonder, Miss Marvell, after this interview between us, if you find yourself henceforward under observation. You are here in defiance of Miss Blanchflower's legal guardian. I protest against your influence over her; and I disapprove of your presence here. I shall do my best to protect her from you."

She nodded.

"There of course, you will be in your right."

And rising, she turned to the open window and the bright garden outside, with a smiling remark on the decorative value of begonias, as though nothing had happened.

Winnington's temperament did not allow him to answer a woman uncivilly under any circumstances. But they parted as duellists part before the fray. Miss Marvell acknowledged his "Good afternoon," with a pleasant bow, keeping her hands the while in the pockets of her serge jacket, and she remained standing till Winnington had left the room.

"Now for Lady Tonbridge!" thought Winnington, as he rode away. "If she

don't help me out, I'm done!"

At the gate of Maumsey he stopped to speak to the lodge-keeper, and as he did so, a man opened the gate, and came in. With a careless nod to Winnington he took his way up the drive. Winnington looked after him in some astonishment.

"What on earth can that fellow be doing here?"

He scented mischief; little suspecting however that a note from Gertrude Marvell lay in the pocket of the man's shabby overcoat, together with that copy of the *_Tocsin_* which Delia's sharp eyes had detected the week before in the hands of its owner.

Meanwhile as he drove homeward, instead of the details of county business, the position of Delia Blanchflower, her personality, her loveliness, her defiance of him, absorbed his mind completely. He began to foresee the realities of the struggle before him, and the sheer dramatic interest of it held him, as though someone presented the case, and bade him watch how it worked out.

Chapter VI

The village or rather small town of Great Maumsey took its origin in a clearing of that royal forest which had now receded from it a couple of miles to the south. But it was still a rural and woodland spot. The trees in the fields round it had still a look of wildness, as survivors from the primeval chase, and were grouped more freely and romantically than in other places; while from the hill north of the church, one could see the New Forest stretching away, blue beyond blue, purple beyond purple, till it met the shining of the sea.

Great Maumsey had a vast belief in itself, and was reckoned exclusive and clannish by other places. It was proud of its old Georgian houses, with their white fronts, their pillared porches, and the pediment gables in their low roofs. The owners of these houses, of which there were many, charmingly varied, in the long main street, were well aware that they had once been old-fashioned, and were now as much admired in their degree, as the pictures of the great English artists, Hogarth, Reynolds, Romney, with which they were contemporary. There were earlier houses too, of brick and timber, with overhanging top stories and moss-grown roofs. There was a green surrounded with post and rails, on which a veritable stocks still survived, kept in careful repair as a memento of our barbarous forbears, by the parish Council. The church, dating from that wonderful fourteenth century when all the world must have gone mad for church-building, stood back from the main street, with the rectory beside it, in a modest seclusion of their own.

It was all very English, very spick and span, and apparently very well

to do. That the youth of the village was steadily leaving it for the Colonies, that the constant marrying in and in which had gone on for generations had produced an ugly crop of mental deficiency, and physical deformity among the inhabitants--that the standard of morals was too low, and the standard of drink too high--were matters well known to the Rector and the Doctor. But there were no insanitary cottages, and no obvious scandals of any sort. The Maumsey estate had always been well managed; there were a good many small gentlefolk who lived in the Georgian houses, and owing to the competition of the railways, agricultural wages were rather better than elsewhere.

About a mile from the eastern end of the village was the small modernised manor-house of Bridge End, which belonged to Mark Winnington, and where his sister Alice, Mrs. Matheson, kept him company for the greater part of the year. The gates leading to Maumsey lay a little west of the village, while on the hill to the north rose, conspicuous against its background of wood, the famous old house of Monk Lawrence. It looked down upon Maumsey on the one hand and Bridge End on the other. It was generally believed that the owner of it, Sir Wilfrid Lang, had exhausted his resources in restoring it, and that it was the pressure of debt rather than his wife's health which had led to its being shut up so long.

The dwellers in the village regarded it as the jewel in their landscape, their common heritage and pride. Lady Tonbridge, whose little drawing-room and garden to the back looked out on the hill and the old house, was specially envied because she possessed so good a view of it. She herself inhabited one of the very smallest of the Georgian houses, in the main street of Maumsey. She paid a rent of no more than £40 a year for it, and Maumsey people who liked her, felt affectionately concerned that a duke's grand-daughter should be reduced to a rent and quarters so insignificant.

Lady Tonbridge however was not at all concerned for the smallness of her house. She regarded it as the outward and visible sign of the most creditable action of her life--the action which would--or should--bring her most marks when the recording angel came to make up her account. Every time she surveyed its modest proportions the spirit of freedom danced within her, and she envied none of the noble halls in which she had formerly lived, and to some of which she still paid occasional Visits.

At tea-time, on the day following Winnington's first interview with his ward, Madeleine Tonbridge came into her little drawing-room, in her outdoor things, and carrying a bundle of books under the arm.

As far as such words could ever apply to her she was tired and dusty. But her little figure was so alert and trim, her grey linen dress and its appointments so dainty, and the apple-red in her small cheeks so bright, that one might have conceived her as just fresh from a maid's hands, and stepping out to amuse herself, instead of as just returning from a tedious afternoon's work, by which she had earned the large sum of five shillings. A woman of forty-five, she looked her age, and she

had never possessed any positive beauty, unless it were the beauty of delicate and harmonious proportion. Yet she had been pestered with suitors as a girl, and unfortunately had married the least desirable of them all. And now in middle life, no one had more devoted men-friends; and that without exciting a breath of scandal, even in a situation where one might have thought it inevitable.

She looked round her as she entered.

"Nora!--where are you?"

A girl, apparently about seventeen, put her head in through the French window that opened to the garden.

"Ready for tea, Mummy?"

"Rather!"--said Lady Tonbridge, with energy, as she put a match to the little spirit kettle on the tea-table where everything stood ready.

"Come in, darling."

And throwing off her hat and jacket, she sank into a comfortable arm-chair with a sigh of fatigue. Her daughter quietly loosened her mother's walking-shoes and took them away. Then they kissed each other, and Nora went to look after the tea. She was a slim, pale-faced school-girl, with yellow-brown eyes, and yellow-brown hair, not as yet very attractive in looks, but her mother was convinced that it was only the plainness of the cygnet, and that the swan was only a few years off. Nora, who at seventeen had no illusions, was grateful to her mother for the belief but did not share it in the least.

"I'm sure you gave that girl half an hour over time," she said reprovingly, as she handed Lady Tonbridge her cup of tea--"I can't think why you do it." She referred to the solicitor's daughter whom Lady Tonbridge had been that afternoon instructing in the uses of the French participle.

"Nor can I. A kind of ridiculous *_esprit de mØtier_* I suppose. I undertook to teach her French, and when after all these weeks she don't seem to know a thing more than when she began, I feel as if I were picking her dear papa's pockets."

"Which is absurd," said Nora, buttering her mother's toast, "and I can't let you do it. Half a crown an hour is silly enough already, and for you to throw in half an hour extra for nothing, can't be stood."

"I wish I could get it up to four hours a day," sighed the mother, munching happily at her toast, while she held out her small stockinged feet to the fire which Nora had just lit. "Just think. Ten shillings a day--six days a week--ten months in the year. Why it would pay the rent, we could have another servant, and I could give you twenty pounds a year more for your clothes."

"Much obliged--but I prefer a live Mummy--and no clothes--to a dead

one. More tea?"

"Thanks. No chance, of course. Where could one find four persons a day, in Maumsey, or near Maumsey, who want to learn French? The notion's absurd. I shouldn't get the lessons I do, if it weren't for the 'Honourable.'"

"Snobs!"

"Not at all! Not a single family out of the people I go to deserve to be called snobs. It's the natural dramatic instinct in us all. You don't expect an 'Honourable' to be giving French lessons at half a crown an hour, and when she does, you say--'Hullo! Some screw loose, somewhere!'--and you at once feel a new interest in the French tongue, and ask her to come along. I don't mind it a bit. I sit and spin yarns about Drawing-rooms and Court balls, and it all helps.--When did you get home?"

For Nora attended a High School in a neighbouring town, some five miles away, journeying there and back by train.

"Half-past four. I met Mr. Winnington in his car, and he said he'd be here about six."

"Good. I'm dying to talk to him. I have written to the Abbey to say we will call to-morrow. Of course, I ought to be her nursing mother in these parts"--said Lady Tonbridge reflectively--"I knew Sir Robert in frocks, and we were always pals. But my dear, it was I who hatched the cockatrice!"

Nora nodded gravely.

"It was I," pursued Lady Tonbridge, penitentially,--"who saddled him with that woman--and I know he never forgave me. He as good as told me so when we last met--for those few hours--at Basle. But how could I tell? How could anybody tell--she would turn out such a creature? I only knew that she had taken all kinds of honours. I thought I was sending him a treasure."

"All the same you did it, Mummy. And it won't do to give yourself airs now! That's what Mr. Winnington says. You've got to help him out."

"I say, don't talk secrets!" said a voice just outside the room. "For I can't help hearing 'em. May I come in?"

And, pushing the half-open door, Mark Winnington stood smiling on the threshold.

"I apologise. But your little maid let me in--and then vanished somewhere, like greased lightning--after a dog."

"Oh, come in," said Lady Tonbridge, with resignation, extending at the same time a hand of welcome--"the little maid, as you call her, only

came from your workhouse yesterday, and I haven't yet discovered a grain of sense in her. But she gets plenty of exercise. If she isn't chasing dogs, it's cats."

"Don't you attack my schools," said Winnington seating himself at the tea-table. "They're A1, and you're very lucky to get one of my girls."

Madeleine Tonbridge replied tartly, that if he was a poor-law guardian, and responsible for a barrack school it was no cause for boasting. She had not long parted with another of his girls, who had tried on her blouses, and gone out in her boots. She thought of offering the new girl a free and open choice of her wardrobe to begin with, so as to avoid unpleasantness.

"We all know that every mistress has the maid she deserves," said Winnington, deep in gingerbread cake. "I leave it there--"

"Yes, jolly well do!" cried Nora, who had come to sit on a stool in front of her mother and Winnington, her eager eyes glancing from one to the other--"Don't start Mummy on servants, Mr. Winnington. If you do, I shall go to bed. There's only one thing worth talking about--and that's--"

"Maumsey!" he said, laughing at her.

"Have you accomplished anything?" asked Lady Tonbridge. "Don't tell me you've dislodged the Fury?"

Winnington shook his head.

"_J'y suis--j'y reste_!"

"I thought so. There is no civilised way by which men can eject a woman. Tell me all about it."

Winnington, however, instead of expatiating on the Maumsey household, turned the conversation to something else--especially to Nora's first attempts at golf, in which he had been her teacher. Nora, whose reasonableness was abnormal, very soon took the hint, and after five minutes' "chaff" with Winnington, to whom she was devoted, she took up her work and went back to the garden.

"Nobody ever snubs me so efficiently as Nora," said Madeleine Tonbridge, with resignation, "though you come a good second. Discreet I shall never be. Don't tell me anything if you don't want to."

"But of course I want to! And there is nobody in the world so absolutely bound to help me as you."

"I knew you'd say that. Don't pile it on. Give me the kitten--and describe your proceedings."

Winnington handed her the grey Persian kitten reposing on a distant

chair, and Lady Tonbridge, who always found the process conducive to clear thinking, stroked and combed the creature's beautiful fur, while the man talked,--with entire freedom now that they were _tCete-àtCete._

She was his good friend indeed, and she had also been the good friend of Sir Robert Blanchflower. It was natural that to her he should lay his perplexities bare.

* * * * *

But after she had heard his story and given her best mind to his position, she could not refrain from expressing the wonder she had felt from the beginning that he should ever have accepted it at all.

"What on earth made you do it? Bobby Blanchflower had no more real claim on you than this kitten!"

Winnington's grey eyes fixed on the trees outside shewed a man trying to retrace his own course.

"He wrote me a very touching letter. And I have always thought that men--and women--ought to be ready to do this kind of service for each other. I should have felt a beast if I had said No, at once. But I confess now that I have seen Miss Delia, I don't know whether I can do the slightest good."

"Hold on!" said Lady Tonbridge, sharply,--"You can't give it up--now."

Winnington laughed.

"I have no intention of giving it up. Only I warn you that I shall probably make a mess of it."

"Well"--the tone was coolly reflective--"that may do _you_ good--whatever happens to the girl. You have never made a mess of anything yet in your life. It will be a new experience."

Winnington protested hotly that her remark only shewed how little even intimate friends know of each other's messes, and that his were already legion. Lady Tonbridge threw him an incredulous look. As he sat there in his bronzed and vigorous manhood, the first crowsfeet just beginning to shew round the eyes, and the first streaks of grey in the brown curls, she said to herself that none of her young men acquaintance possessed half the physical attractiveness of Mark Winnington; while none--old or young--could rival him at all in the humane and winning spell he carried about with him. To see Mark Winnington _aux prises_ with an adventure in which not even his tact, his knowledge of men and women, his candour, or his sweetness, might be sufficient to win success, piqued her curiosity; perhaps even flattered that slight inevitable malice, wherewith ordinary mortals protect themselves against the favourites of the gods.

She was determined however to help him if she could, and she put him through a number of questions. The girl then was as handsome as she promised to be? A beauty, said Winnington--and of the heroic or poetic type. And the Fury? Winnington described the neat, little lady, fashionably Pressed and quiet mannered, who had embittered the last years of Sir Robert Blanchflower, and firmly possessed herself of his daughter.

"You will see her to-morrow, at my house, when you come to tea. I carefully didn't ask her, but I am certain she will come, and Alice and I shall of course have to receive her."

"She is not thin-skinned then?"

"What fanatic is? It is one of the secrets of their strength."

"She probably regards us all as the dust under her feet," said Lady Tonbridge. "I wonder what game she will be up to here. Have you seen the Times this morning?"

Winnington nodded. It contained three serious cases of arson, in which Suffragette literature and messages had been discovered among the ruins, besides a number of minor outrages. An energetic leading article breathed the exasperation of the public, and pointed out the spread of the campaign of violence.

By this time Lady Tonbridge had carried her visitor into the garden, and they were walking up and down among the late September flowers. Beyond the garden lay green fields and hedgerows; beyond the fields rose the line of wooded hill, and, embedded in trees, the grey and gabled front of Monk Lawrence.

Winnington reported the very meagre promise he had been able to get out of his ward and her companion.

"The comfort is," said Lady Tonbridge, "that this is a sane neighbourhood--comparatively. They won't get much support. Oh, I don't know though--" she added quickly. "There's that man--Mr. Lathrop, Paul Lathrop--who took Wood Cottage last year--a queer fish, by all accounts. I'm told he's written the most violent things backing up the militants generally. However, his own story has put him out of Court."

"His own story?" said Winnington, with a puzzled look.

"Don't be so innocent!" laughed Lady Tonbridge, rather impatiently. "I always tell you you don't give half place enough in life to gossip--human nature's daily food.' I knew all about him a week after he arrived. However, I don't propose to save you trouble, Mr. Guardian! Go and look up a certain divorce case, with Mr. Lathrop's name in it, some time last year--if you want to know. That's enough for that."

But Winnington interrupted her, with a disturbed look. "I happened to

meet that very man you are speaking of--yesterday--in the Abbey drive, going to call."

Lady Tonbridge shrugged her shoulders.

"There you see their freemasonry. I don't suppose they approve his morals--but he supports their politics. You won't be able to banish him!--Well, so the child is lovely? and interesting?"

Winnington assented warmly.

"But determined to make herself a nuisance to you? Hm! Mr. Mark--dear Mr. Mark--don't fall in love with her!"

Winnington's expression altered. He did not answer for a moment. Then he said, looking away--

"Do you think you need have said that?"

"No!"--cried Madeleine Tonbridge remorsefully. "I am a wretch. But don't--_don't_!"

This time he smiled at her, though not without vexation.

"Do you forget that I am nearly old enough to be her father?"

"Oh that's nonsense!" she said hastily. "However--I'm not going to flatter you--or tease you. Forgive me. I put it out of my head. I wonder if there is anybody in the field already?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Of course you know this kind of thing spoils a girl's prospects of marriage enormously. Men won't run the risk."

Winnington laughed.

"And all the time, you're a Suffragist yourself!"

"Yes, indeed I am," was the stout reply. "Here am I, with a house and a daughter, a house-parlourmaid, a boot-boy, and rates to pay. Why shouldn't I vote as well as you? But the difference between me and the Fury is that she wants the vote this year--this month--_this minute_--and I don't care whether it comes in my time--or Nora's time--or my grandchildren's time. I say we ought to have it--that it is our right--and you men are dolts not to give it us. But I sit and wait peaceably till you do--till the apple is ripe and drops. And meanwhile these wild women prevent its ripening at all. So long as they rage, there it hangs--out of our reach. So that I'm not only ashamed of them as a woman--but out of all patience with them as a Suffragist! However for heaven's sake don't let's discuss the horrid subject. I'll do all I can for Delia--both for your sake and Bob's--I'll keep my best eye on the Fury--I feel myself of course most abominably responsible for

her--and I hope for the best. Who's coming to your tea-party?"

Winnington enumerated. At the name of Susy Amberley, his hostess threw him a sudden look, but said nothing.

"The Andrews'--Captain, Mrs. and Miss--," Lady Tonbridge exclaimed.

"Why did you ask that horrid woman?"

"We didn't! Alice indiscreetly mentioned that Miss Blanchflower was coming to tea, and she asked herself."

"She's enough to make any one militant! If I hear her quote 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' once more, I shall have to smite her. The girl's _down-trodden_ I tell you! Well, well--if you gossip too little, I gossip too much. Heavens!--what a light!"

Winnington turned to see the glow of a lovely afternoon fusing all the hill-side in a glory of gold and amethyst, and the windows in the long front of Monk Lawrence taking fire under the last rays of a fast-dropping sun.

"Do you know--I sometimes feel anxious about that house!" said Madeleine Tonbridge, abruptly. "It's empty--it's famous--it belongs to a member of the Government. What is to prevent the women from attacking it?"

"In the first place, it isn't empty. The Keeper, Daunt, from the South Lodge, has now moved into the house. I know, because Susy Amberley told me. She goes up there to teach one of my cripples--Daunt's second girl. In the next, the police are on the alert. And last--who on earth would dare to attack Monk Lawrence? The odium of it would be too great. A house bound up with English history and English poetry--No! They are not such fools!"

Lady Tonbridge shook her head.

"Don't be so sure. Anyway you as a magistrate can keep the police up to the mark."

Winnington departed, and his old friend was left to meditate on his predicament. It was strange to see Mark Winnington, with his traditional, English ways and feelings--carried, as she always felt, to their highest--thus face to face with the new feminist forces--as embodied in Delia Blanchflower. He had resented, clearly resented, the introduction--by her, Madeleine--of the sex element into the problem. But how difficult to keep it out! "He will see her constantly--he will have to exercise his will against hers--he will get his way--and then hate himself for conquering--he will disapprove, and yet admire,--will offend her, yet want to please her--a creature all fire, and beauty, and heroisms out of place! And she--could she, could I, could any woman I know, fight Mark Winnington--and not love him all the time? Men are men, and women are women--in spite of all these 'isms,' and 'causes.' I

bet--but I don't know what I bet!--" Then her thoughts gradually veered away from Mark to quite another person.

How would Susan Amberley be affected by this new interest in Mark Winnington's life? Madeleine's thoughts recalled a gentle face, a pair of honest eyes, a bearing timid and yet dignified. So she was teaching one of Mark's crippled children? And Mark thought no doubt she would have done the like for anyone else with a charitable hobby? Perhaps she would, for her heart was a fount of pity. All the same, the man--blind but!--understood nothing. No fault of his perhaps; but Lady Tonbridge felt a woman's angry sympathy with a form of waste so common and so costly.

And now the modest worshipper must see her hero absorbed day by day, and hour by hour, in the doings of a dazzling and magnificent creature like Delia Blanchflower. What food for torment, even in the meekest spirit!

So that the last word the vivacious woman said to herself was a soft "Poor Susy!" dropped into the heart of a September rose as she stooped to gather it.

Chapter VII

A small expectant party were gathered for afternoon tea in the book-lined sitting-room--the house possessed no proper drawing-room--of Bridge End. Mrs. Matheson indeed, Mark's widowed sister, would have resented it had anyone used the word "party" in its social sense. Miss Blanchflower's father had been dead scarcely a month; and Mrs. Matheson in her quiet way, held strongly by all the decencies of life. It was merely a small gathering of some of the oldest friends and neighbours of Miss Blanchflower's family--those who had stood nearest to her grandparents--to welcome the orphan girl among them. Lady Tonbridge--of whom it was commonly believed, though no one exactly knew why, that Bob Blanchflower, as a youth had been in love with her, before ever he met his Greek wife; Dr. France, who had attended both the old people till their deaths, and had been much beloved by them; his wife; the Rector, Mrs. Amberley, and Susy:--Mrs. Matheson had not intended to ask anyone else. But the Andrews' had asked themselves, and she had not had the moral courage to tell them that the occasion was not for them. She was always getting Mark into difficulties, she penitently reflected, by her inability to say No, at the right time, and with the proper force, Mark could always say it, and stick to it smiling--without giving offence.

Mrs. Matheson was at the tea-table. She was tall and thin, with something of her brother's good looks, but none of his over-flowing vitality. Her iron-grey hair was rolled back from her forehead; she wore a black dress with a high collar of white lawn, and long white cuffs. Little Mrs. Amberley, the Rector's wife, sitting beside her,

envied her hostess her figure, and her long slender neck. She herself had long since parted with any semblance of a waist, and the boned collars of the day were a perpetual torment to one whose neck, from the dressmaker's point of view, scarcely existed. But Mrs. Amberley endured them, because they were the fashion; and to be moderately in the fashion meant simply keeping up to the mark--not falling behind. It was like going to church--an acceptance of that "general will," which according to the philosophers, is the guardian of all religion and all morality.

The Rector too, who was now handing the tea-cake, believed in fashion--ecclesiastical fashion. Like his wife, he was gentle and ineffective. His clerical dress expressed a moderate Anglicanism, and his opinions were those of his class and neighbourhood, put for him day by day in his favourite newspaper, with a cogency at which he marvelled. Yet he was no more a hypocrite than his wife, and below his common-places both of manner and thought there lay warm feelings and a quick conscience. He was just now much troubled about his daughter Susy. The night before she had told her mother and him that she wished to go to London, to train for nursing. It had been an upheaval in their quiet household. Why should she dream of such a thing? How could they ever get on without her? Who would copy out his sermons, or help with the schools? And her mother--so dependent on her only daughter! The Rector's mind was much disturbed, and he was accordingly more absent and more ineffective than usual.

Susy herself, in a white frock, with touches of blue at her waist, and in her shady hat, was moving about with cups of tea, taking that place of Mrs. Matthews's lieutenant, which was always tacitly given her by Winnington and his sister on festal occasions at Bridge End. As she passed Winnington, who had been captured by Mrs. Andrews, he turned with alacrity--

"My dear Miss Susy! What are you doing? Give me that cup!"

"No--please! I like doing it!" And she passed on, smiling, towards Lady Tonbridge, whose sharp eyes had seen the trivial contact between Winnington and the girl. How the mere sound of his voice had changed the aspect of the young face! Poor child--poor child!

"How well you look Susy! Such a pretty dress!" said Madeleine tenderly in the girl's ear.

Susy flushed.

"You really think so? Mother gave it me for a birthday present." She looked up with her soft, brown eyes, which always seemed to have in them, even when they smiled, a look of pleading--as of someone at a disadvantage. At the same moment Winnington passed her.

"_ Could_ you go and talk to Miss Andrews?" he said, over his shoulder, so that only she heard.

Susy went obediently across the room to where a silent, dark-haired girl sat by herself, quite apart from the rest of the circle. Marion Andrews was plain, with large features and thick wiry hair. Maumsey society in general declared her "impossible." She rarely talked; she seemed to have no tastes; and the world believed her both stupid and disagreeable. And by contrast with the effusive amiabilities of her mother, she could appear nothing else. Mrs. Andrews indeed had a way of using her daughter as a foil to her own qualities, which must have paralysed the most self-confident, and Marion had never possessed any belief in herself at all.

As Susy Amberley timidly approached her, and began to make conversation, she looked up coldly, and hardly answered. Meanwhile Mrs. Andrews was pouring out a flood of talk under which the uncomfortable Winnington--for it always fell to him as host to entertain her--sat practising endurance. She was a selfish, egotistical woman, with a vast command of sloppy phrases, which did duty for all that real feeling or sympathy of which she possessed uncommonly little. On this occasion she was elaborately dressed,--overdressed--in a black satin gown, which seemed to Winnington, an ugly miracle of trimming and tortured "bits." Her large hat was thick with nodding plumes, and beside her spotless white gloves and showy lace scarf, her daughter's slovenly coat and skirt, of the cheapest ready-made kind, her soiled gloves, and clumsy shoes, struck even a man uncomfortably. That poor girl seemed to grow plainer and more silent every year.

He was just shaking himself free from the mother, when Dr. and Mrs. France were announced. The doctor came in with a furrowed brow, and a preoccupied look. After greeting Mrs. Matheson, and the other guests, he caught a glance of enquiry from Winnington and went up to him.

"The evening paper is full of the most shocking news!" he said, with evident agitation. "There has been an attempt on Hampton Court--and two girls who were caught breaking windows in Piccadilly have been badly hurt by the crowd. A bomb too has been found in the entrance of one of the tube stations. It was discovered in time, or the results might have been frightful."

"Good Heavens--those women again!" cried Mrs. Andrews, lifting hands and eyes.

No one else spoke. But in everyone's mind the same thought emerged. At any moment the door might open, and Delia Blanchflower and her chaperon might come in.

The doctor drew Winnington aside into a bow-window.

"Did you know that the lady living with Miss Blanchflower was a member of this League of Revolt?"

"Yes. You mean they are implicated in these things?"

"Certainly! I am told Miss Marvell was once an official--probably is

still. My dear Winnington--you can't possibly allow it!" He spoke with the freedom of an intimate friend.

"How can I stop it," said Winnington, frowning. "My ward is of age. If Miss Marvell does anything overt--But she has promised to do nothing violent down here--they both have."

The doctor, an impetuous Ulsterman with white hair, and black eyes, shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "When women once take to this kind of thing"--he was interrupted by Mrs. Andrews' heavy voice rising above the rather nervous and disjointed conversation of the other guests--"If women only knew where their real power lies, Mrs. Matheson! Why, 'the hand that rocks the cradle'--"

A sudden crash was heard.

"Oh, dear"--cried Lady Tonbridge, who had upset a small table with a plate of cakes on it across the tail of Mrs. Andrews' dress--"how stupid I am!"

"My gown!--my gown!" cried Mrs. Andrews in an anguish, groping for the cakes.

In the midst of the confusion the drawing-room door had opened, and there on the threshold stood Delia Blanchflower, with a slightly-built lady behind her.

Winnington turned with a start and went forward to greet them. Dr. France left behind in the bow-window observed their entry with a mingling of curiosity and repulsion. It seemed to him that their entry was that of persons into a hostile camp,--the senses all alert against attack. Delia was of course in black, her face sombrely brilliant in its dark setting of a plain felt hat, like the hat of a Cavalier without its feathers. "She knows perfectly well we have been talking about her!" thought Dr. France,--"that we have seen the newspapers. She comes in ready for battle--perhaps thirsty for it! She is excited--while the woman behind her is perfectly cool. The two types!--the enthusiast--and the fanatic. But, by Jove, the girl is handsome!"

Through the sudden silence created by their entry, Delia made her way to Mrs. Matheson. Holding her head very high, she introduced "My chaperon--Miss Marvell." And Winnington's sister nervously shook hands with the quietly smiling lady who followed in Miss Blanchflower's wake. Then while Delia sat down beside the hostess, and Winnington busied himself in supplying her with tea, her companion fell to the Rector's care.

The Rector, like Winnington, was not a gossip, partly out of scruples, but mainly perhaps because of a certain deficient vitality, and he had but disjointed ideas on the subject of the two ladies who had now settled at the Abbey. He understood, however, that Delia, whom he remembered as a child, was a "Suffragette," and that Mr. Winnington,

Delia's guardian, disapproved of the lady she had brought with her, why, he could not recollect. This vague sense of something "naughty" and abnormal gave a certain tremor to his manner as he stood beside Gertrude Marvell, shifting from one foot to the other, and nervously plying her with tea-cake.

Miss Marvell's dark eyes meanwhile glanced round the room, taking in everybody. They paused a moment on the figure of the doctor, erect and spare in a closely-buttoned coat, on his spectacled face, and conspicuous brow, under waves of nearly white hair; then passed on. Dr. France watched her, following the examining eyes with his own. He saw them change, with a look--the slightest passing look--of recognition, and at the same moment he was aware of Marion Andrews, sitting in the light of a side window. What had happened to the girl? He saw her dark face, for one instant, exultant, transformed; like some forest hollow into which a sunbeam strikes. The next, she was stooping over a copy of "Punch" which lay on the table beside her. A rush of speculation ran through the doctor's mind.

"And you are settled at Maumsey?" Mrs. Matheson was saying to Delia; aware as soon as the question was uttered that it was a foolish one.

"Oh no, not settled. We shall be there a couple of months."

"The house will want some doing up, Mark thinks."

"I don't think so. Not much anyway. It does very well."

There was an entire absence of girlish softness or shyness in the speaker's manner, though it was both courteous and easy. The voice--musically deep--and the splendid black eyes, that looked so steadily at her, intimidated Mark Winnington's gentle sister.

Mrs. Andrews, whose dress, after Susy's ministrations, had been declared out of danger, bent across the tea-table, all smiles and benevolence again, the plumes in her black hat nodding--

"It's like old times to have the Abbey open again, Miss Blanchflower! Every week we used to go to your dear grandmother, for her Tuesday work-party. I'm afraid you'll hardly revive that!"

Delia brought a rather intimidating brow to bear upon the speaker.

"I'm afraid not."

Lady Tonbridge, who had already greeted Delia as a woman naturally greets the daughter of an old friend, came up as Delia spoke to ask for a second cup of tea, and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Very sorry to miss you yesterday. I won't insult you by saying you've grown. How about the singing? You used to sing I remember when I stayed with you."

"Yes--but I've given it up. I took lessons at Munich last spring. But I can't work at it enough. And if one can't work, it's no good."

"Why can't you work at it?"

Delia suddenly looked up in her questioner's face. Her gravity broke up in a broad smile.

"Because there's so much else to do."

"What else?"

The look of excited defiance in the girl's eyes sharpened.

"Do you really want to know?"

"Certainly. The Suffrage and that kind of thing?" said Madeleine Tonbridge lightly.

"The Suffrage and that kind of thing!" repeated Delia, still smiling.

Captain Andrews who was standing near, and whose martial mind was all in confusion, owing to Miss Blanchflower's beauty, put in an eager word.

"I never can understand, Miss Blanchflower, why you ladies want the vote! Why, you can twist us round your little fingers!"

Delia turned upon him.

"But I don't want to twist you round my little finger!" she said, with energy. "It wouldn't give me the smallest pleasure."

"I thought you wanted to manage us," said the Captain, unable to take his eyes from her. "But you do manage us already!"

Delia's glance showed her uncertain whether the foe was worth her steel.

"We want to manage ourselves," she said at last, smiling indifferently. "We say you do it badly."

The Captain attempted to spar with her a little longer. Winnington meanwhile stood, a silent listener, amid the group round the tea-table. He--and Dr. France--were both acutely conscious of the realities behind this empty talk; of the facts recorded in the day's newspapers; and of the connection between the quiet lady in grey who had come in with Delia Blanchflower, and the campaign of public violence, which was now in good earnest alarming and exasperating the country.

Where was the quiet lady in grey? Winnington was thinking too much about his ward to keep a constant eye upon her. But Dr. France observed her closely, and he presently saw what puzzled him anew. After a

conversation, exceedingly bland, though rather monosyllabic, on Miss Marvell's part, with the puzzled and inarticulate Rector, Delia's chaperon had gently and imperceptibly moved away from the tea-table. That she had been very coldly received by the company in general was no doubt evident to her. She was now sitting beside that strange girl Marion Andrews--to whom, as the Doctor had seen, she had been introduced--apparently--by the Rector. And as Dr. France caught sight of her, she and Marion Andrews rose and walked to a window opening on the garden, apparently to look at the blaze of autumn flowers outside.

But it was the demeanour of the girl which again drew the doctor's attention. Marion Andrews, who never talked, was talking fast and earnestly to this complete stranger, her normally sallow face one glow. It was borne in afresh upon Dr. France that the two were already acquainted; and he continued to watch them as closely as politeness allowed.

* * * * *

"Will you come and look at the house?" said Winnington to his ward. "Not that we have anything to shew--except a few portraits and old engravings that might interest you. But it's rather a dear old place, and we're very fond of it."

Delia went with him in silence. He opened the oval panelled dining-room, and shewed her the portraits of his father, the venerable head of an Oxford college, in the scarlet robes of a D.D., and others representing his forebears on both sides--quiet folk, painted by decent but not important painters. Delia looked at them and hardly spoke. Then they went into Mrs. Matheson's room, which was bright with pretty chintzes, books and water-colours, and had a bow-window looking on the garden. Still Delia said nothing, beyond an absent Yes or No, or a perfunctory word of praise. Winnington became very soon conscious of some strong tension in her, which was threatening to break down; a tension evidently of displeasure and resentment. He guessed what the subject of it might be, but as he was most unwilling to discuss it with her, if his guess were correct, he tried to soothe and evade her by such pleasant talk as the different rooms suggested. The house through which he led her was the home, evidently, of a man full of enthusiasms and affections, caring intensely for many things, for his old school, of which there were many drawings and photographs in the hall and passages, for the two great games in which he himself excelled; for poetry and literature--the house overflowed everywhere with books; for his County Council work, and all the projects connected with it; for his family and his intimate friends.

"Who is that?" asked Delia, pointing to a charcoal drawing in Mrs. Matheson's sitting-room, of a noble-faced woman of thirty, in a delicate evening dress of black and white.

"That is my mother. She died the year after it was taken."

Delia looked at it in silence a moment. There was something in its

dignity, its restfulness, its touch of austerity which challenged her. She said abruptly--"I want to speak to you please, Mr. Winnington. May we shut the door?"

Winnington shut the door of his sister's room, and returned to his guest. Delia had turned very white.

"I hear Mr. Winnington you have reversed an order I wrote to our agent about one of the cottages. May I know your reasons?"

"I was very sorry to do so," said Winnington gently; "but I felt sure you did not understand the real circumstances, and I could not come and discuss them with you."

Delia stood stormily erect, and the level light of the October afternoon streaming in through a west window magnified her height, and her prophetess air.

"I can't help shocking you, Mr. Winnington. I don't accept what you say. I don't believe that covering up horrible things makes them less horrible. I want to stand by that girl. It is cruel to separate her from her old father!"

Winnington looked at her in distress and embarrassment.

"The story is not what you think it," he said earnestly. "But it is really not fit for your ears. I have given great thought and much time to it, yesterday and to-day. The girl--who is mentally deficient--will be sent to a home and cared for. The father sees now that it is the best. Please trust it to me."

"Why mayn't I know the facts!" persisted Delia, paler than before.

A flash of some quick feeling passed through Winnington's eyes.

"Why should you? Leave us older folk, dear Miss Delia, to deal with these sorrowful things."

Indignation blazed up in her.

"It is for women to help women," she said, passionately. "It is no good treating us who are grown up--even if we are young--like children any more. We intend to _know_--that we may protect--and save."

"I assure you," said Winnington gravely, "that this poor girl shall have every care--every kindness. So there is really no need for you to know. Please spare yourself--and me!"

He had come to stand by her, looking down upon her. She lifted her eyes to his unwillingly, and as she caught his smile she was invaded by a sudden consciousness of his strong magnetic presence. The power in the grey eyes, and in the brow over-hanging them, the kind sincerity mingled with the power, and the friendliness that breathed from his

whole attitude and expression, disarmed her. She felt herself for a moment--and for the first time--young and ignorant,--and that Winnington was ready to be in the true and not merely in the legal sense, her "guardian," if she would only let him.

But the moment of weakening was soon over. Her mind chafed and twisted. Why had he undertaken it--a complete stranger to her! It was most embarrassing--detestable--for them both!

And there suddenly darted through her memory the recollection of a certain item in her father's will. Under it Mr. Winnington received a sum of £4,000 out of her father's estate, "in consideration of our old friendship, and of the trouble I am asking him to undertake in connection with my estates,"--or words to that effect.

Somehow, she had never yet paid much attention to that clause in the will. It occurred in a list of a good many other legacies, and had been passed over by the lawyers in explaining the will to her, as something entirely in the natural course of things. But the poisonous thought suggested itself--"It was that which bribed him!--he would have given it up, but for that!" He might not want it for himself--very possibly!--but for his charities, his Cripple School and the rest. Her face stiffened.

"If you have arranged with her father, of course I can't interfere," she said coldly. "But don't imagine, please, Mr. Winnington, for one moment, that I accept your view of the things I 'needn't know.' If I am to do my duty to the people on this estate--"

"I thought you weren't going to live on the estate?" he said, lifting his eyebrows.

"Not at once--not this winter." She was annoyed to feel herself stammering. "But of course I have a responsibility--"

The kindly laugh in his grey eyes faded.

"Yes--I quite admit that,--a great responsibility," he said slowly. "Do you mind if I mention another subject?"

"The meetings?" she said, quickly. "You mean that?"

"Yes--the meetings. I have just seen the placard in the village."

"Well?" Her loveliness in defiance dazzled him, but he held on stoutly.

"You said nothing to me about these meetings the other day."

"You never asked me!"

He paused a moment.

"No--but was it quite--quite fair to me--to let me suppose that the

drawing-room meeting at Maumsey, which you kindly gave up, was the only meeting you had in view?"

He saw her breath fluttering.

"I don't know what you supposed, Mr. Winnington! I said nothing."

"No. But you let me draw an inference--a mistaken inference. However--let that be. Can I not persuade you--now--to give up the Latchford meeting, and any others of the same kind you may have ahead?"

She flamed at him.

"I refuse to give them up!" she said, setting her teeth. "I have as much right to my views as you, Mr. Winnington! I am of full age, and I intend to work for them."

"Setting fire to houses--which is what your society is advocating--and doing--hardly counts as 'views,'" he said, with sudden sternness.

"Risking the lives, or spoiling the property of one's fellow countrymen, is not the same thing as political argument."

"It's our argument--" she said passionately.--"The men who are denying us the vote understand nothing else!"

The slightest humorous quiver in Winnington's strong mouth enraged her still further. But he spoke with most courteous gravity.

"Then I can't persuade you to give up these meetings? I should of course make no objection whatever, if these were ordinary Suffrage meetings. But the Society you are going to represent and collect money for is a Society that exists to break the law. And its members have--just lately--come conspicuously into collision with the law. Your father would have protested, and I am bound to protest--in his name."

"I cannot give them up."

He was silent a moment.

"If that is so"--he said at last--"I must do my best to protect you."

"I don't want any protection!"

"I am a magistrate, as well as your guardian. You must allow me to judge. There is a very bitter feeling abroad, after these--outrages--of the last few days. The village where you are going to speak has some rowdy elements--drawn from the brickfields near it. You will certainly want protection. I shall see that you get it."

He spoke with decision. Delia bit her lip.

"We prefer to risk our lives," she said at last. "I mean--there isn't any risk!--but if there were--our lives are nothing in comparison with

the cause!"

"You won't expect your friends to agree with you," he said drily; then, still holding her with an even keener look, he added--

"And there is another point in connection with these meetings which distresses me. I see that you are speaking on the same platform--with Mr. Paul Lathrop--"

"And why not?"--she flashed, the colour rushing to her cheeks.

He paused, walked away with his hands in his pockets, and came back again.

"I have been making some enquiries about him. He is not a man with whom you ought to associate--either in public, or in private."

She gave a sound--half scorn--half indignation which startled him.

"You mean--because of the divorce case?"

He looked at her amazed.

"That is what I meant. But--I certainly do not wish to discuss it with you. Will you not take it from me that Mr. Lathrop is not--cannot be--a man whom as a young unmarried woman you ought to receive in your house--or with whom you should be seen in public."

"No, indeed I won't take it from you!" she said passionately. "Miss Marvell knows--Miss Marvell told me. He ran away with some one he loved. Her husband was _vile_! But she couldn't get any help--because of the law--the abominable law--which punishes women--and lets men go free. So they went away together, and after a little she died. Alter your law, Mr. Winnington!--make it equal for men and women--and then we'll talk."

As she spoke--childishly, defiant--Winnington's mind was filled with a confusion of clashing thoughts--the ideals of his own first youth which made such a speech in the mouth of a girl of twenty-one almost intolerable to him--and the moral conditions--slowly gained--of his maturity. He agreed with what she said. And yet it was shocking to him to hear her say it.

"I don't quarrel with you as to that," he said, gravely, after a moment. "Though I confess that in my belief you are too young to have any real opinion about it. But there was much in the case which concerned Mr. Lathrop, of which you _can_ have no idea. I repeat--he is not a fit companion for you--and you do yourself harm by appearing with him--in public or private."

"Miss Marvell approves"--said Delia obstinately.

Winnington's look grew sterner.

"I appeal again to your father's memory," he said with energy.

He perceived her quickened breath, but she made no no reply.

He walked away from her, and stood looking out of the window for a little. When he came back to her, it was with a change of manner and subject.

"I should like you to understand that I have been doing all I could to carry out your wishes with regard to the cottages."

He drew a paper out of his pocket, on which he had made some notes representing his talk that morning with the agent of the Maumsey estates. But in her suppressed excitement she hardly listened to him.

"It isn't exactly business, what we've done," he said at last, as he put up the papers; "but we wanted you to have your way--about the old woman--and the family of children." He smiled at her. "And the estate can afford it."

Delia thanked him ungraciously. She felt like a child who is offered sixpence for being good at the dentist's. It was his whole position towards her--his whole control and authority--that she resented. And to be forced to be grateful to him at the same time, compelled to recognise the anxious pains he had taken to please her in nine-tenths of the things she wanted, was really odious: she could only chafe under it.

He took her back to the drawing-room. Delia walked before him in silence. She was passionately angry; and yet beneath the stormy currents of the upper mind, there were other feelings, intermittently active. It was impossible to hate him!--impossible to help liking him. His frankness and courtesy, his delicacy of feeling and touch forced themselves on her notice. "I daresay!"--she said; "--but that's the worst of it. If Papa hadn't done this fatal, foolish thing, of course we should have made friends!"

* * * * *

The Amberleys walked home together when the party dispersed. Mrs. Amberley opened the discussion on the newcomers.

"She is certainly handsome, but rather bold-looking. Didn't you think so, father?"

"I wasn't drawn to her. But she took no account of us," said the Rector, with his usual despondent candour. In truth he was not thinking about Miss Blanchflower, but only about the possible departure of his daughter, Susy.

"I thought her beautiful!--but I'm sorry for Mr. Winnington!" exclaimed Susy, a red spot of excitement or indignation in each delicate cheek.

"Mrs. Matheson told me they will only do exactly what they wish--that they won't take her brother's advice. Very wrong, very wrong." The Rector shook his grey head. "Young women were different in my youth."

Mrs. Amberley sighed, and Susy biting her lip, knew that her own conduct was perhaps more in question than Miss Blanchflower's.

They reached home in silence. Susy went to light her father's candles in his modest book-littered study. Then she put her mother on the sofa in the drawing-room, rubbed Mrs. Amberley's cold hands and feet, and blew up the fire.

Suddenly her mother threw an arm round her neck.

"Oh, Susy, must you go?"

Susy kissed her.

"I should come back"--she said after a moment in a low troubled voice. "Let me get this training, and then if you want me, darling, I'll come back."

"Can't you be happy with us, Susy?"

"I want to know something--and do something," said Susy, with intensity--evading the question. "It's such a big world, mother! I'll be better worth having afterwards."

Mrs. Amberley said nothing. But a little later she went into her husband's study.

"Frank--I think we'll have to let her," she said piteously.

The Rector looked up assentingly, and put his hand in his wife's.

"It's strange how different it all seems nowadays," said Mrs. Amberley, in her low quavering voice. "If I'd wanted to do what Susy wants, my mother would have called me a wicked girl to leave all my duties--and I shouldn't have dared. But we can't take it like that, Frank, somehow."

"No," said the Rector slowly. "In the old days it used to be only duties for the young--now it's rights too. It's God's will."

"Susy loves us, Frank. She's a good girl."

"She's a good girl--and she shall do what she thinks proper," said the Rector, rising heavily.

So they gave their consent, and Susy wrote her application to Guy's hospital. Then they all three lay awake a good deal of the night,--almost till the autumn robin began to sing in the little

rectory garden.

As for Susy, in the restless intervals of restless sleep, she was always back in the Bridge End drawing-room watching Delia Blanchflower come in, with Mark Winnington behind. How glorious she looked! And every day he would be seeing her, every day he would be thinking about her--just because she was sure to give him so much trouble.

"And what right have you to complain?" she asked herself, trampling on her own pain. Had he ever said a word of love to her, ever shewn himself anything else than the kind and sympathetic friend--sometimes the inspiring teacher in the causes he had at heart? Never! And yet--insensibly--his smile, his word of praise or thanks, the touch of his firm warm hand, the sound of his voice, the look in his eyes--it was for them she had now learned to live. Yes!--and because she could no longer trust herself, she must go. She would not fail or harass him; she was his friend. She would go away and scrub hospital floors, and polish hospital taps. That would tame the anguish in her, and some day she would be strong again--and come back--to those beloved ones who had given her up--so tenderly.

Chapter VIII

The whole of Maumsey and its neighbourhood had indeed been thrown into excitement by certain placards on the walls announcing three public meetings to be held--a fortnight later--by the "Daughters of Revolt"--at Latchford, Brownmouth, and Frimpton. Latchford was but fifteen miles from Maumsey, and frequent trains ran between them. Brownmouth and Frimpton, also, were within easy distance by rail, and the Maumseyites were accustomed to shop at either. So that a wide country-side felt itself challenged--invaded; at a moment when a series of startling outrages--destruction of some of the nation's noblest pictures, in the National Gallery and elsewhere, defacement of churches, personal attacks on Ministers--by the members of various militant societies, especially "The League of Revolt," had converted an already incensed public opinion into something none the less ugly, none the less alarming, because it had as yet found no organised expression. The police were kept hard at work protecting open-air meetings on the Brownmouth and Frimpton beaches, from an angry populace who desired to break them up; every unknown woman who approached a village or strolled into a village church, was immediately noticed, immediately reported on, by hungry eyes and tongues alert for catastrophe; and every empty house had become an anxiety to its owners.

And of course the sting of the outrage lay in the two names which blazed in the largest of black print from the centre of the placards. "The meeting will be addressed by Gertrude Marvell (D.R.), Delia Blanchflower (D.R.), and Paul Lathrop."

Within barely two months of her father's death, this young lady to be speaking on public platforms, in the district where she was still a new-comer and a stranger, and flaunting in the black and orange of this unspeakable society!--such was the thought of all quiet folk for miles round. The tide of callers which had set in towards Maumsey Abbey ceased to flow; neighbours who had been already introduced to her, old friends of her grandparents, passed Delia on the road with either the stiffest of bows or no notice at all. The labourers stared at her, and their wives, those deepest well-heads of Conservatism in the country, were loud in reprobation. Their astonishment that "them as calls theirselves ladies" should be found burning and breaking, was always, in Winnington's ears, a touching thing, and a humbling. "Violence and arson" they seemed to say, "are good enough for the likes of us--you'd expect it of us. But _you_--the glorified, the superfine--who have your meals brought you regular, more food than you can eat, and more clothes than you can wear--_you_!"

So that, underlying the country women's talk, and under the varnish of our modern life, one caught the accents and the shape of an old hierarchical world; and the man of sympathy winced anew under the perennial submission and disadvantage of the poor.

Meanwhile Delia's life was one long excitement. The more she realised the disapproval of her neighbours, the more convinced she was that she was on the right road. She straightened her girlish back; she set her firm red mouth. Every morning brought reams of letters and reports from London, for Gertrude Marvell was an important member of the "Daughters" organisation, and must be kept informed. The reading of them maintained a constant ferment in Delia. In any struggle of women against men, just as in any oppression of women by men, there is an element of fever, of madness, which poisons life. And in this element Delia's spirit lived for this brief hour of her youth. Led by the perpetual influence of the older mind and imagination at her side, she was overshadowed with the sense of women's wrongs, haunted by their grievances, burnt up by a flame of revolt against fate, against society, above all, against men, conceived as the age-long and irrational barrier in the path of women. It was irrational, and therefore no rational methods were any good. Nothing but waspishly stinging and hurting this great Man-Beast, nothing but defiance of all rules and decorums, nothing but force--of the womanish kind--answering to force, of the masculine kind, could be any use. Argument was foolish. They--the Suffragists--had already stuffed the world with argument; which only generated argument. To smash and break and burn, in more senses than one, remained the only course, witness Nottingham Castle, and the Hyde Park railings. And if a woman's life dashed itself to pieces in the process, well, what matter? The cause would only be advanced.

One evening, not long after the tea-party at Bridge End, a group of persons, coming from different quarters, converged quietly, in the autumn dusk, on Maumsey Abbey. Marion Andrews walked in front, with a Miss Foster, the daughter of one of the larger farmers in the neighbourhood; and a short limping woman, clinging to the arm of a

vigorously-built girl, the Science Mistress of the small but ancient Grammar School of the village, came behind. They talked in low voices, and any shrewd bystander would have perceived the mood of agitated expectancy in which they approached the house.

"It's wonderful!" said little Miss Toogood, the lame dressmaker, as they turned a corner of the shrubbery, and the rambling south front rose before them,--" _wonderful_!--when you think of the people that used to live here! Why, old Lady Blanchflower looked upon you and me, Miss Jackson, as no better than earwigs! I sent her a packet of our leaflets once by post. Well--_she_ never used to give me any work, so she couldn't take it away. But she got Mrs. David Jones at Thring Farm to take away hers, and Mrs. Willy Smith, the Vet's wife, you remember?--and two or three more. So I nearly starved one winter; but I'm a tough one, and I got through. And now there's one of _us_ sits in the old lady's place! Isn't that a sign of the times?"

"But of course!" said her companion, whose face expressed a kind of gloomy ardour. "We're winning. We must win--sometime!"

The cheerfulness of the words was oddly robbed of its effect by the tragic look of the speaker. Miss Toogood's hand pressed her arm.

"I'm always so sorry"--murmured the dressmaker--"for those others--those women--who haven't lived to see what we're going to see, aren't you?"

"Yes," assented the other, adding--with the same emotional emphasis--"But they've all helped--every woman's helped! They've all played their parts."

"Well, I don't know about Lady Blanchflower!" laughed Miss Toogood, happily.

"What did she matter? The Antis are like the bits of stick you put into a hive. All they do is to stir up the bees."

Meanwhile Marion Andrews was mostly silent, glancing restlessly however from side to side, as though she expected some spy, some enemy--her mother?--to emerge upon them from the shadows of the shrubbery. Her companion, Kitty Foster, a rather pretty girl with flaming red hair, the daughter of a substantial farmer on the further side of the village, chattered unceasingly, especially about the window-breaking raid in which she had been concerned, the figure she had cut at the police court, the things she had said to the magistrate, and the annoyance she had felt when her father paid her fine.

"They led me a life when they got me home. And mother's been so ill since, I had to promise I'd stay quiet till Christmas anyway. But then I'm off! It's fine to feel you're doing something real--something hot and strong--so that people can't help taking notice of you. That's what I say to father, when he shouts at me--'we're not going to _ask_ you now any more--we've asked long enough--we're going to _make_ you do

what we want."

And the girl threw back her head excitedly. Marion vaguely assented, and the talk beside her rambled on, now violent, now egotistical, till they reached the Maumsey door.

* * * * *

"Now that we've got women like you with us--it can't be long--it can't be long!" repeated Miss Toogood, clasping her hands, as she looked first at Delia, and then at the distant figure of Miss Marvell, who in the further drawing-room, and through an archway, could be seen talking with Marion Andrews.

Delia's brows puckered.

"I'm afraid it will be long," she said, with a kind of weary passion. "The forces against us are so strong. But we must just go on--and on--straight ahead."

She sat erect on her chair, very straight and slim, in her black dress, her hands, with their long fingers, tightly pressed together on her knee. Miss Toogood thought she had never seen anyone so handsome, or so--so splendid! All that was romantic in the little dressmaker's soul rose to appreciate Delia Blanchflower. So young and so self-sacrificing--and looking like a picture of Saint Cecilia that hung in Miss Toogood's back room! The Movement was indeed wonderful! How it broke down class barriers, and knit all women together! As her eyes fell on the picture of Lady Blanchflower, in a high cap and mittens, over the mantelpiece, Miss Toogood felt a sense of personal triumph over the barbarous and ignorant past.

"What I mind most is the apathy of people--the people down here. It's really terrible!" said the science mistress, in her melancholy voice.

"Sometimes I hardly know how to bear it. One thinks of all that's going on in London--and in the big towns up north--and here--it's like a vault. Everyone's really against us. Why the poor people--the labourers' wives--they're the worst of any!"

"Oh no!--we're getting on--we're getting on!" said Miss Toogood, hastily. "You're too despondent, Miss Jackson, if you'll excuse me--you are indeed. Now I'm never downhearted, or if I am, I say to myself--'It's all right somewhere!--somewhere that you can't see.' And I think of a poem my father was fond of--'If hopes are dupes, fears may be liars--And somewhere in yon smoke concealed--Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers--And but for you possess the field!' That's by a man called Arthur Clough--Miss Blanchflower--and it's a grand poem!"

Her pale blue eyes shone in their wrinkled sockets. Delia remembered a recent visit to Miss Toogood's tiny parlour behind the front room where she saw her few customers and tried them on. She recollected the books which the back parlour contained. Miss Toogood's father had been a bookseller--evidently a reading bookseller--in Winchester, and in the

deformed and twisted form of his daughter some of his soul, his affections and interests, survived.

"Yes, but what are you going to give us to _do_, Miss Blanchflower?" said Kitty Foster, impatiently--"I don't care what I do! And the more it makes the men mad, the better!"

She drew herself up affectedly. She was a strapping girl, with a huge vanity and a parrot's brain. A year before this date a "disappointment" had greatly embittered her, and the processions and the crowded London meetings, and the window-breaking riots into which she had been led while staying with a friend, had been the solace and relief of a personal rancour and misery she might else have found intolerable.

"_I_ can't do anything--not anything public"--said Miss Jackson, with emphasis--"or I should lose my post. Oh the slavery it is! and the pittance they pay us--compared to the men. Every man in the Boys' school get £120 and over--and we're thought lucky to get £80. And I'll be bound we work more hours in the week than they do. It's _hard_!"

"That'll soon be mended," said Miss Toogood hopefully. "Look at Norway! As soon as the women got the vote, why the women's salaries in public offices were put up at once."

The strong, honest face of the teacher refused to smile. "Well it isn't always so, Miss Toogood. I know they say that in New Zealand and Colorado--where we've got the vote--salaries aren't equal by any manner of means."

The dressmaker's withered cheek flushed red.

"_They_ say"--she repeated scornfully. "That's one of the Anti dodges--just picking out the things that suit 'em, and forgetting all the rest. Don't you look at the depressing things--I never do! Look at what helps us! There's a lot o' things said--and there's a lot of things ain't true--You've got to pick and choose--you can't take 'em as they come. No one can."

Miss Jackson looked puzzled and unconvinced; but could think of no reply.

The two persons in the distance appeared in the archway between the drawing-rooms, Gertrude Marvell leading. Everyone looked towards her; everybody listened for what she would say. She took Delia's chair, Delia instinctively yielding it, and then--her dark eyes measuring and probing them all while she talked, she gave the little group its orders.

Kitty Foster was to be one of the band of girl-sellers of the _Tocsin_, in Latchford, the day of the meeting. The town was to be sown with it from end to end, and just before the meeting, groups of sellers, in the "Daughters" black and orange, were to appear in every corner of the square where the open-air meeting was to be held.

"But we'll put you beside the speaker's waggon. You're so tall, and your hair is enough to advertise anything!" With a grim little smile, she stretched out a hand and touched Kitty Foster's arm.

"Yes, isn't it splendid!" said Delia, ardently.

Kitty flushed and bridled. Her people in the farmhouse at home thought her hair ugly, and frankly told her so. It was nice to be admired by Miss Blanchflower and her friend. Ladies who lived in a big house, with pictures and fine furniture, and everything handsome, must know better than farm-people who never saw anything but their cattle and their fields.

"And you"--the clear authoritative voice addressed Miss Toogood--"can you take round notices?"

The speaker looked doubtfully at the woman's lame foot and stick.

Miss Toogood replied that she would be at Latchford by midday, and would take round notices till she dropped.

The teacher who could do nothing public, was invited to come to Maumsey in the evening, and address envelopes. Miss Marvell had lately imported a Secretary, who had set up her quarters in the old gun room on the ground floor, and had already filled it with correspondence, and stacked it with the literature of the Daughters.

Miss Jackson eagerly promised her help.

Nothing was apportioned to Marion Andrews. She sat silent following the words and gestures of that spare figure in the grey cloth dress, in whom they all recognised their chief. There was a feverish brooding in her look, as though she was doubly conscious--both of the scene before her, and of something only present to the mind.

"You know why we are holding these meetings"--said Gertrude Marvell, presently.

No one answered. They waited for her.

"It is a meeting of denunciation," she said, sharply. "You know in the Land League days in Ireland they used to hold meetings to denounce a landlord--for evictions--and that landlord went afterwards in fear--scorned--and cursed--and boycotted. Well, that's what we're going to do with Ministers in their own localities where they live! We can't boycott yet--we haven't the power. But we can denounce--we can set people on--we can hold a man up--we can make his life a burden to him. And that's what we're going to do--with Sir Wilfrid Lang. He's one of this brutal Cabinet that keeps women in prison--one of the strongest of them. His speeches have turned votes against us in the House of Commons, time after time. We mean to be even with Sir Wilfrid Lang!"

She spoke quite quietly--almost under her breath; but her slender fingers interlocked, and a steady glow had overflowed her pale cheeks.

A tremor passed through all her listeners--a tremor of excitement.

"What can we _do_?" said Miss Toogood at last, in a low voice. Her eyes stared out of her kind old face, which had grown white. "Ah, leave that to us!" said Miss Marvell, in another voice, the dry organising voice, which was her usual one. And dropping all emotion and excitement, she began rapidly to question three out of the four women as to the neighbourhood, the opinions of individuals and classes, the strength in it of the old Suffrage societies, the presence or absence of propoganda. They answered her eagerly. They all felt themselves keyed to a higher note since she had entered the room. They had got to business; they felt themselves a power, the rank and file of an "army with banners," under direction. Even Delia, clearly, was in the same relation towards this woman whom the outer world only knew as her--presumably--paid companion. She was questioned, put right, instructed with the rest of them. Only no one noticed that Marion Andrews took little or no part in the conversation.

An autumn wind raged outside, and the first of those dead regiments of leaves which would soon be choking the lanes were pattering against the windows. Inside, the fire leapt as the daylight faded, helped by a couple of lamps, for Maumsey knew no electricity, and Delia, under Gertrude's prompting, had declared against the expense of putting it in. In the dim illumination the faces of the six women emerged, typical all of them of the forces behind the revolutionary wing of the woman's movement. Enthusiasms of youth and age--hardships of body and spirit--rancour and generous hope--sore heart and untrained mind--fanatical brain and dreaming ignorance--love unsatisfied, and energies unused--they were all there, and all hanging upon, conditioned by something called "the vote," conceived as the only means to a new heaven and a new earth.

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When Delia had herself dismissed her guests into the darkness of the October evening, she returned thoughtfully to where Gertrude Marvell was standing by the drawing-room fire, reading a letter.

"You gave them all something to do except that Miss Andrews, Gertrude? I wonder why you left her out?"

"Oh, I had a talk with her before."

The tone was absent, and the speaker went on reading her letter.

"When you took her into the back drawing-room?"

The slightest possible flicker passed through Gertrude's drooped eyelids.

"She was telling me a lot about her home-life--poor oppressed thing!"

Delia asked no more. But she felt a vague discomfort.

Presently Gertrude put down her letter, and turned towards her.

"May I have that cheque, dear--before post-time? If you really meant it?"

"Certainly." Delia went to her writing-table, opened a drawer and took out her cheque-book.

A laugh--conscious and unsteady--accompanied the dipping of her pen into the ink.

"I wonder what he'll say?"

"Who?"

"Mr. Winnington--when I send him all the bills to be paid."

"Isn't he there to pay the bills?"

Delia's face shewed a little impatience.

"You're so busy, dear, that I am afraid you forget all I tell you about my own affairs. But I _did_ tell you that my guardian had trustingly paid eight hundred pounds into the bank to last me till the New Year, for house and other expenses--without asking me to promise anything either!"

"Well, now, you are going to let us have £500. Is there any difficulty?"

"None--except that the ordinary bills I don't pay, and can't pay, will now all go in to my guardian, who will of course be curious to know what I have done with the money. Naturally there'll be a row."

"Oh, a row!" said Gertrude Marvell, indifferently. "It's your own money, Delia. Spend it as you like!"

"I intend to," said Delia. "Still--I do rather wish I'd given him notice. He may think it a mean trick."

"Do you care what he thinks?"

"Not--much," said Delia slowly. "All the same, Gertrude"--she threw her head back--"he is an awfully good sort."

Gertrude shrugged her shoulders.

"I daresay. But you and I are at war with him and his like, and can't stop to consider that kind of thing. Also your father arranged that he

should be well paid for his trouble."

Delia turned back to the writing-table, and wrote the cheque.

"Thank you, dearest," said Gertrude Marvell, giving a light kiss to the hand that offered the cheque. "It shall go to headquarters this evening--and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you've financed all the three bye-election campaigns that are coming--or nearly."

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Gertrude had gone away to her own sitting-room and Delia was left alone. She hung over the fire, in an excited reverie, her pulses rushing; and presently she took a letter from the handbag on her wrist, and read it for the second time by the light of the blaze she had kindled in the grate.

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"I will be at the Rose and Crown at least half an hour before the meeting. We have got a capital waggon for you to speak from, and chosen the place where it is to stand. I am afraid we may have some rough customers to deal with. But the police have been strongly warned--that I have found out--though I don't know by whom--and there will be plenty of them. My one regret is that I cannot be in the crowd, so as both to see and hear you. I must of course stick to the waggon. What a day for us all down here!--for our little down-trodden band! You come to us as our Joan of Arc, leading us on a holy war. You shame us into action, and to fight with you is itself victory. When I think of how you looked and how you talked the other night! Do you know that you have a face 'to launch a thousand ships?' No, I am convinced you never think of it--you never take your own beauty into consideration. And you won't imagine that I am talking in this way from any of the usual motives. Your personal charm, if I may say so, is merely an item in our balance sheet; your money--I understand you have money--is another. You bring your beauty and your money in your hand, and throw them into the great conflagration of the Cause--just as the women did in Savonarola's day. You fling them away--if need be--for an idea. And because of it, all the lovers of ideas, and all the dreamers of great dreams will be your slaves and servants. Understand!--you are going to be loved and followed, as no ordinary woman, even with your beauty, is ever loved and followed. Your footsteps may be on the rocks and flints--I promise you no easy, nor royal road. There may be blood on the path! But a cloud of witnesses will be all about you--some living and some dead; you will be carried in the hearts of innumerable men and women--women above all; and if you stand firm, if your soul rises to the height of your call, you will be worshipped, as the saints were worshipped.

"Only let nothing bar your path. Winnington is a good fellow, but a thickheaded Philistine all the same. You spoke to me about him with compunction. Have no compunctions. Go straight forward. Women have got to shew themselves ruthless, and hard, and cunning, like men--if they

are to fight men."

"Yours faithfully,
PAUL LATHROP."

Delia's thoughts danced and flamed, like the pile of blazing wood before her. What a singular being was this Paul Lathrop! He had paid them four or five visits already; and they had taken tea with him once in his queer hermitage under the southern slope of the Monk Lawrence hill--a one-storey thatched cottage, mostly built by Lathrop himself with the help of two labourers, standing amid a network of ponds, stocked with trout in all stages. Inside, the roughly-plastered walls were lined with books--chiefly modern poets, with French and Russian novels, and with unframed sketches by some of the ultra clever fellows, who often, it seemed, would come down to spend Sunday with Lathrop, and talk and smoke till dawn put out the lights.

She found him interesting--certainly interesting. His outer man--heavy mouth and lantern cheeks--dreamy blue eyes, and fair hair--together with the clumsy power in his form and gait, were not without a certain curious attraction. And his story--as Gertrude Marvell told it--would be forgiven by the romantic. All the same his letter had offended Delia greatly. She had given him no encouragement to write in such a tone--so fervid, so emotional, so intimate; and she would shew him--plainly--that it offended her.

Nevertheless the phrases of the letter ran in her mind; until her discomfort and resentment were lost in something else.

She could not quiet her conscience about that cheque! Not indeed as to giving it to the "Daughters." She would have given everything she possessed to them, keeping the merest pittance for herself, if fate and domestic tyranny had allowed. No!--but it hurt her--unreasonably, foolishly hurt her--that she must prepare herself again to face the look of troubled amazement in Mark Winnington's eyes, without being able to justify herself to herself, so convincingly as she would have liked to do.

"I am simply giving my own money to a cause I adore!" said one voice in the mind.

"It is not legally yours--it is legally his," said another. "You should have warned him. You have got hold of it under false pretences."

"Quibbles! It is mine--equitably," replied the first. "He and I are at war. And I have warned him."

"At war?" Her tiresome conscience kicked again. Why, not a day had passed since her settlement at Maumsey, without some proof, small or great, of Winnington's consideration and care for her. She knew--guiltily knew, that he was overwhelmed by the business of the executorship and the estate, and had been forced to put aside some of

his own favourite occupations to attend to it.

"Well!--my father made it worth his while!"

But her cheek reddened, with a kind of shame, as the thought passed through her mind. Even in this short time and because of the daily contact which their business relations required, she was beginning to know Winnington, to realise something of his life and character. And as for the love borne him in the neighbourhood--it was really preposterous--bad for any man! Delia pitied herself, not only because she was Winnington's ward against her will, but because of the silent force of public opinion that upheld him, and must necessarily condemn her.

So he had once been engaged? Lady Tonbridge had told her so. To a gentle, saintly person of course!--a person to suit him. Delia could not help a movement of half petulant curiosity--and then an involuntary thrill. Many women since had been in love with him. Lady Tonbridge had said as much. And he--with no one! But he had a great many women friends? No doubt!--with that manner, and that charm. Delia resented the women friends. She would have been quite ready indeed to enrol herself among them--to worship with the rest--from afar; were it not for ideas, and principles, and honesty of soul! As it was, she despised the worship of which she was told, as something blind and overdone. It was not the greatest men--not the best men--who were so easily and universally beloved.

What did he really think of her? Did he ever guess that there was something else in her than this obstinacy, this troublesomeness with which she was forced to meet him? She was sorry for herself, much more than for him; because she must so chill and mislead a man who ought to understand her.

Looking up she saw a dim reflection of her own beauty in the glass above the mantelpiece. "No, I am not either a minx, or a wild-cat!"--she thought, as though she were angrily arguing with someone. "I could be as attractive, as 'feminine,' as silly as anyone else, if I chose! I could have lovers--of course--just like other girls--if it weren't"--

For what? At that moment she hardly knew. And why were her eyes filling with tears? She dashed them indignantly away.

But for the first time, this cause, this public cause to which she was pledged presented itself to her as a sacrifice to be offered, a noble burden to be borne, rather than as something which expressed the natural and spontaneous impulse of her life.

Which meant that, already, since her recapture by this English world, since what was hearsay had begun to be experience, the value of things had slightly and imperceptibly changed.

* * * * *

The days ran on. One evening, just before the first of the "Daughters" meetings, which was to be held at Latchford, Winnington appeared in Lady Tonbridge's drawing-room to ask for a cup of tea on his way to a public dinner in Wanchester.

He seemed pre-occupied and worried; and she fed him before questioning him. But at last she said--

"You couldn't prevail on her to give up any of these performances?"

"Miss Delia? Not one. But it's only the Latchford one that matters. Have you been talking to her?"

He looked at her a little plaintively, as though he could have reminded her that she had promised him a friend's assistance.

"Of course! But I might as well talk to this table. She won't really make friends--nor will Miss Marvell allow her. It's the same, I find, with everyone else. However, I'm bound to say, the neighbourhood is just now in the mood that it doesn't much want to make friends!"

"I know," said Winnington, with a sigh--relapsing into silence.

"Is she taking an interest in the property--the cottages?"

He shook his head.

"I'm sure she meant to. But it seems to be all dropped."

"Provoking!" said Madeleine, drily--"considering how you've been slaving to please her--"

Winnington interrupted--not without annoyance--

"How can she think of anything else when she's once deep in this campaign? One must blame the people who led her into it!"

"Oh! I don't know!" said Lady Tonbridge, protesting. "She's a very clever young woman, with a strong will of her own."

"Captured just at the impressionable moment!" cried Winnington--"when a girl will do anything--believe anything--for the person she loves!"

"Well the prescription should be easy--at her age. Change the person! But then comes the question: Is she loveable? Speak the truth, Mr. Guardian!"

Winnington began a rather eager assent. Watch her with the servants, the gardeners, the animals! Then you perceived what should be the girl's natural charm and sweetness--

"Hm. Does she show any of it to you?"

Winnington laughed.

"You forget--I am always there as the obstacle in the path. But if it weren't for the sinister influence--in the background."

And again he went off at score--describing various small incidents that had touched or pleased him, as throwing light upon what he vowed was the real Delia.

Madeleine listened, watching him attentively the while. When he took his leave and she was alone, she sat thinking for some time, and then going to a cupboard in her writing-table, which held her diaries of past years, she rummaged till she found one bearing a date fifteen years old. She turned up the entry for the sixteenth of May:

"She died last night. This morning, at early service, Mark was there. We walked home together. I doubt whether he will ever marry--now. He is not one of those men who are hurried by the mere emotion and unbearableness of grief, into a fresh emotion of love. But what a lover--what a husband lost!"

She closed the book, and stood with it in her hand--pondering.

* * * * *

As he left her house, and turned towards the station Winnington passed a lady to whom he bowed, recognising her as Miss Andrews.

"Hope you've got an umbrella!" he said to her cheerily, as he passed.
"The rain's coming!"

She smiled, pleased like all the world to be addressed with that Winningtonian manner which somehow implied that the person addressed was, for the moment at any rate, his chiefest concern. Immediately after meeting him she turned from the village street, and began to mount a lane leading to the slope on which Monk Lawrence stood. Her expression as she walked along, sometimes with moving lips, had grown animated and sarcastic. Here were two men, a dead father and a live guardian, trying to coerce one simple girl--and apparently not making much of a job of it. She gloried in what she had been told or perceived of Delia Blanchflower's wilfulness, which seemed to her mother and her brother the Captain so monstrous. Only--could one entirely trust anybody like Delia Blanchflower--so prosperous--and so good-looking?

Miss Andrews mounted the hill, passed through a wood that ran along its crest, and took a footpath, leading past the edge of a railway cutting, from which the wonderful old house could be plainly seen. She paused several times to look at it, wrapped in a kind of day-dream, which gave a growing sombreness to her harsh and melancholy features. Beyond the footpath a swing gate opened into a private path leading to the house.

She opened the gate, and walked a little way up the path, in the fast

gathering darkness. But she was suddenly arrested by the appearance of a figure in the far distance, black against the pale greys of the house. It was a policeman on his beat--she caught one of the gleams of a lantern.

Instantly she turned back, groped her way again through the wood, and into a side road leading to her brother's house.

She found her mother lying on the sofa in the drawing-room, the remains of a rather luxurious tea beside her--her outdoor clothes lying untidily about the room.

"Where have you been?" said Mrs. Andrews, fretfully--"there were several letters I wanted written before post."

"I wanted a little air. That linen business took me all the morning."

For it was the rule in the Andrews' household that the house linen should be gone through every six months with a view to repairs and renewals. It was a tedious business. Mrs. Andrews' nerves did not allow her to undertake it. It fell therefore, and had always fallen to the only daughter, who was not made for housewifery tasks, and detested the half-yearly linen day accordingly.

Her tone displeased her mother.

"There you are--grumbling again, Marion! What else have you to do, I should like to know, than your home duties?"

Marion made no reply. What was the use of replying? But her black eyes, as she helped herself wearily to some very cold tea, took note of her mother's attitude. It was only the week before that Dr. France had expressed himself rather pointedly to the effect that more exercise and some fresh interests in life "would be good for Mrs. Andrews."

Mrs. Andrews returned to the ladies' paper she was reading. The fashion plates for the week were unusually attractive. Marion observed her unseen.

Suddenly the daughter said:--

"I must ask you for that five pounds, mother. Bill promised it me. My underclothing is literally in rags. I've done my best, and it's past mending. And I must have another decent dress."

"There you are,--clamouring for money again"--said her mother, bouncing up on the sofa--"when you know how hard-pressed Bill is. He's got another instalment to pay for the motor the end of this week."

"Yes--the motor you made him get!"--said Marion, as though the words burst from her.

"And why shouldn't he, pray! The money's his--and mine. It was high

time we got rid of that rattletrap. It jolted me to pieces."

"You said a little while ago it would do very well for another year. Anyway, Bill promised me something for clothes this month--and he also said that he'd pay my school of art fees, at Wanchester, and give me a third season ticket. Is that all done with too?"

The girl sat erect, her face with its sparkling eyes expressing mingled humiliation and bitterness.

"Oh, well really, I can't stand these constant disputes!" said Mrs. Andrews, rising angrily from the sofa. "You'd better go to your brother. If he likes to waste his money, he can of course. But I've got none to spare." She paused at the door--"As for your underclothing, I daresay I could find you something of mine you could make do for a bit. Now do be sensible!--and don't make a scene with Bill!"

She closed the door. Marion walked to the side window of the drawing-room, and stood looking at the wooded slope of the hill, with Monk Lawrence in the distance.

Her heart burned within her. She was thirty-four. She had never had any money of her own--she had never been allowed any education that would fit her to earn. She was absolutely dependent on her mother and brother. Bill was kind enough, though careless, and often selfish. But her mother rubbed her dependence into her at every turn--"And yet I earn my clothes and my keep--every penny of them!" she thought, fiercely.

A year before this date she had been staying in London with a cousin who sometimes took pity on her and gave her a change of scene. They had gone together for curiosity's sake to a "militant" meeting in London. A lady, slight in figure, with dark eyes and hair, had spoken on the "economic independence of women"--as the only path to the woman's goal of "equal rights" with men. She had spoken with passion, and Marion's sore heart had leapt to answer her.

That lady was Gertrude Marvell. Marion had written to her, and there had been a brief acquaintance, enough to kindle the long-repressed will and passion of the girl's stormy nature. She had returned home, to read, in secret, everything that she could find on the militant movement. The sheer violence of it appealed to her like water to the thirsty. War, war!--on a rotten state of society, and the economic slavery of women!

And now her first awakener, her appointed leader, her idol had appeared in this dead country-side, with orders to give, and tasks to impose. And she should be obeyed--to the letter!

The girl's heavy eyes kindled to a mad intensity, as she stood looking at the hill-side, now almost dark, except for that distant light, which she knew as the electric lamp still lit at sunset, even in Sir Wilfrid's absence, over the stately doorway of Monk Lawrence.

But she was not going to the Latchford meeting. "Don't give yourself away. Don't be seen with the others. Keep out of notice. There are more important things for you to do--presently. Wait!"

The words echoed in her ears. She waited; exulting in the thought that no one, not even Miss Blanchflower, knew as much as she; and that neither her mother nor her brother had as yet any idea of her connection with the "Daughters." Her "silly suffrage opinions" were laughed at by them both--good-humouredly, by Bill. Of the rest, they knew nothing.

Chapter IX

"Mark! you've done the day's work of two people already!" cried Mrs. Matheson in a tone of distress. "You don't mean to say you're going in to Latchford again?--and without waiting for some food?"

She stood under the porch of Bridge End remonstrating with her brother.

"Can't be helped, dear!" said Winnington, as he filled his pipe--"I'm certain there'll be a row to-night, and I must catch this train!"

"What, that horrid meeting! Delia Blanchflower lets you slave and slave for her, and never takes the smallest notice of your wishes or your advice! She ought to be ashamed!"

The sister's mild tone trembled with indignation.

"She isn't!" laughed Winnington. "I never knew anyone less so. But we can't have her ill treated. Expect me back when you see me!"

And kissing his hand to his sister, he went out into a dark and blustering evening. Something had just gone wrong with the little motor car he generally drove himself, and there was nothing for it but to walk the mile and a half to the railway station.

He had spent the whole day in County Council business at Wanchester, was tired out, and had now been obliged to leave home again without waiting even for a belated cup of tea. But there was no help for it. He had only just time to catch the Latchford train.

As he almost ran to the station he was not conscious however of any of these small discomforts; his mind was full of Delia. He did not encourage anyone but Madeleine Tonbridge to talk to him about his ward; but he was already quite aware, before his old friend laid stress on it, of the hostile feeling towards Delia and her chaperon that was beginning to show itself in the neighbourhood. He knew that she was already pronounced heartless, odious, unprincipled, consumed with a

love of notoriety, and ready for any violence, at the bidding of a woman who was probably responsible at that very moment--as a prominent organiser in the employ of the society contriving them--for some of the worst of the militant outrages. His condemnation of Delia's actions was sharp and unhesitating; his opinion of Miss Marvell not a whit milder than that of his neighbours. Yet he had begun, as we have seen, to discover in himself a willingness, indeed an eagerness to excuse and pity the girl, which was wholly lacking in the case of the older woman. Under the influence, indeed, of his own responsive temperament, Winnington was rapidly drifting into a state of feeling where his perception of Delia's folly and unreason was almost immediately checked by some enchanting memory of her beauty, or of those rare moments in their brief acquaintance, when the horrid shadow of the "Movement" had been temporarily lifted, and he had seen her, as in his indulgent belief she truly was--or was meant to be. She flouted and crossed him perpetually; and he was beginning to discover that he only thought of her the more, and that the few occasions when he had been able to force a smile out of her,--a sudden softness in her black eyes, gone in a moment!--were constantly pleading for her in his mind. All part no doubt of his native and extreme susceptibility to the female race--the female race in general. For he could see himself, and laugh at himself, *_ab extra_*, better than most men.

At the station he came across Captain Andrews, and soon discovered from that artless warrior that he also was bound for Latchford, with a view to watching over Delia Blanchflower.

"Can't have a lot of hooligans attacking a good-looking girl like that--whatever nonsense she talks!" murmured the Captain, twisting his sandy moustache; "so I thought I'd better come along and see fair play. Of course I knew you'd be there."

The train was crowded. Winnington, separated from the Captain, plunged into a dimly-lighted third class, and found himself treading on the toes of an acquaintance. He saluted an elderly lady wearing a bonnet and mantle of primeval cut, and a dress so ample in the skirt that it still suggested the days of crinoline. She was abnormally tall, and awkwardly built; she wore cotton gloves, and her boots were those of a peasant. She carried a large bag or reticule, and her lap was piled with brown parcels. Her large thin face was crowned by a few straggling locks of what had once been auburn hair, now nearly grey, the pale spectacled eyes were deeply wrinkled, and the nose and mouth slightly but indisputably crooked.

"My dear Miss Dempsey!--what an age since we met! Where are you off to? Give me some of those parcels!"

And Winnington, seizing what he could lay hands on, transferred them to his own knees, and gave a cordial grip to the right hand cotton glove.

Miss Dempsey replied that she had been in Brownmouth for the day, and was going home. After which she smiled and said abruptly, bending across her still laden knees and his--so as to speak unheard by their

neighbours--

"Of course I know where you're going to!"

"Do you?"

The queer head nodded.

"Why can't you keep her in order?"

"Her? Who?"

"Your ward. Why don't you stop it?"

"Stop these meetings? My ward is of age, please remember, and quite aware of it."

Miss Dempsey sighed.

"Naughty young woman!" she said, yet with the gentlest of accents. "For us of the elder generation to see our work all undone by these maniacs! They have dashed the cup from our very lips."

"Ah! I forgot you were a Suffragist," said Winnington, smiling at her.

"Suffragist?" she held up her head indignantly--"I should rather think I am. My parents were friends of Mill, and I heard him speak for Woman Suffrage when I was quite a child. And now, after the years we've toiled and moiled, to see these mad women wrecking the whole thing!"

Winnington assented gravely.

"I don't wonder you feel it so. But you still want it--the vote--as much as ever?"

"Yes!" she said, at first with energy; and then on a more wavering note--"Yes,--but I admit a great many things have been done without it that I thought couldn't have been done. And these wild women give one to think. But you? Are you against us?--or has Miss Delia converted you?"

He smiled again, but without answering her question. Instead, he asked her in a guarded voice--

"You are as busy as ever?"

"I am there always--just as usual. I don't have much success. It doesn't matter."

She drew back from him, looking quietly out of window at the autumn fields. Over her wrinkled face with its crooked features, there dawned a look of strange intensity, mingled very faintly with something exquisite--a ray from a spiritual world.

Winnington looked at her with reverence. He knew all about her; so did many of the dwellers in the Maumsey neighbourhood. She had lived for half-a-century in the same little house in one of the back-streets of Latchford, a town of some ten thousand inhabitants. Through all that time her life had been given to what is called "rescue work"--though she herself rarely called it by that name. She loved those whom no one else would love--the meanest and feeblest of the outcast race. Every night her door stood on the latch, and as the years passed, thousands knew it. Scarcely a week went by, that some hand did not lift that latch, and some girl in her first trouble, or some street-walker, dying of her trade, did not step in to the tiny hall where the lamp burnt all night, and wait for the sound of the descending footsteps on the stairs, which meant shelter and pity, warmth and food. She was constantly deceived, sometimes robbed; for such things she had no memory. She only remembered the things which cannot be told--the trembling voices of hope or returning joy--the tenderness in dying eyes, the clinging of weak hands, the kindness of "her poor children." She had written--without her name--a book describing the condition of a great seaport town where she had once lived. The facts recorded in it had inspired a great reforming Act. No one knew anything of her part in it--so far as the public was concerned. Many persons indeed came to consult her; she gave all her knowledge to those who wanted it; she taught, and she counselled, always as one who felt herself the mere humble mouthpiece of things divine and compelling; and those who went away enriched did indeed forget her in her message, as she meant them to do. But in her own town as she passed along the streets, in her queer garb, blinking and absently smiling as though at her own thoughts, she was greeted often with a peculiar reverence, a homage of which her short sight told her little or nothing.

Winnington especially had applied to her in more than one difficulty connected with his public work. It was to her he had gone at once when the Blanchflower agent had come to him in dismay reporting the decision of Miss Blanchflower with regard to the half-witted girl whose third illegitimate child by a quite uncertain father had finally proved her need of protection both from men's vileness, and her own helplessness. Miss Dempsey had taken the girl first into her own house, and then, persuading and comforting the old father, had placed her in one of the Homes where such victims are sheltered.

Winnington briefly enquired after the girl. She as briefly replied. Then she added:--as other travellers got out and they were left to themselves.

"So Miss Blanchflower wanted to keep her in the village?"

Winnington nodded, adding--

"She of course had no idea of the real facts."

"No. Why should she?--_Why should she_!--" the old lips repeated with passion. "Let her keep her youth while she can! It's so strange to

me--how they will throw away their youth! Some of us must know. The black ox has trodden on us. A woman of thirty must look at it all. But a girl of twenty! Doesn't she see that she helps the world more by _not_ knowing!--that her mere unconsciousness is _our_ gain--_our_ refreshment."

The face of the man sitting opposite her, reflected her own feeling.

"You and I always agree," he said warmly. "I wish you'd make friends with her."

"Who? Miss Blanchflower? What could she make out of an old stager like me!" Miss Dempsey's face broke into amusement at the notion. "And I don't know that I could keep my temper with a militant. Well now you're going to hear her speak--and here we are."

* * * * *

Winnington and Captain Andrews left the station together. Latchford owned a rather famous market, and market day brought always a throng of country folk into the little town. A multitude of booths under flaring gas jets--for darkness had just fallen--held one side of the square, and the other was given up to the hurdles which penned the sheep and cattle, and to their attendant groups of farmers and drovers.

The market place was full of people, but the crowd which filled it was not an ordinary market-day crowd. The cattle and sheep indeed had long since gone off with their new owners or departed homeward unsold. The booths were most of them either taken down or were in process of being dismantled. For the evening was falling fast; it was spitting with rain; and business was over. But the shop windows in the market-place were still brilliantly lit, and from the windows of the Crown Inn, all tenanted by spectators, light streamed out on the crowd below. The chief illumination came however from what seemed to be a large shallow waggon drawn up not far from the Crown. Three people stood in it; a man--who was speaking--and two women. From either side, a couple of motor lamps of great brilliance concentrated upon them threw their faces and figures into harsh relief.

The crowd was steadily pressing toward the waggon, and it was evident at once to Winnington and his companion that it was not a friendly crowd.

"Looks rather ugly, to me!" said Andrews in Winnington's ear. "They've got hold of that thing which happened at Wanchester yesterday, of the burning of that house where the care-taker and his children only just escaped."

A rush of lads and young men passed them as he spoke--shouting--

"Pull 'em down--turn 'em out!"

Andrews and Winnington pursued, but were soon forced back by a

retreating movement of those in front. Winnington's height enabled him to see over the heads of the crowd.

"The police are keeping a ring," he reported to his companion--"they seem to have got it in hand! Ah! now they've seen me--they'll let us through."

Meanwhile the shouts and booing of the hostile portion of the audience--just augmented by a number of rough-looking men from the neighbouring brickfields--prevented most of the remarks delivered by the male speaker on the cart from reaching the audience.

"Cowards!" said an excited woman's voice--"that's all they can do!--howl like wild beasts--that's all they're fit for!"

Winnington turned to see a tall girl, carrying an armful of newspapers. She had flaming red hair, and she wore a black and orange scarf, with a cap of the same colours. "Foster's daughter," he thought, wondering. "What happens to them all!" For he had known Kitty Foster from her school days, and had never thought of her except as a silly simpering flirt, bent on the pursuit of man. And now he beheld a maenad, a fury.

Suddenly another woman's voice cut across the others--

"Aren't you ashamed of those colours! Go home--and take them off. Go home and behave like a decent creature!"

Heads were turned--to see a middle-aged woman of quiet dress and commanding aspect, sternly pointing to the astonished Kitty Foster. "Do you see that girl?"--the woman continued, addressing her neighbours--"she's got the 'Daughters' colours on. Do you know what the Daughters have been doing in town? You've seen about the destroying of letters in London. Well, I'll tell you what that means. I had a little servant I was very fond of. She left me to go and live near her sister in town. The sister died, and she got consumption. She went into lodgings, and there was no one to help her. She wrote to me, asking me to come to her. Her letter was destroyed in one of the pillar-boxes raided--by those women--" She pointed. "Then she broke her heart because she thought I'd given her up. She daren't write again. And now I've found her out--in hospital--dying. I've seen her to-day. If it hadn't have been for these demented creatures she might ha' lived for years."

The woman paused, her voice breaking a little. Kitty Foster tossed her head.

"What are most women in hospital for?" she said, shrilly. "By the fault of men!--one way or the other. That's what we think of."

"Yes I know--that's one of the shameless things you say--to us who have husbands and sons we thank God for!" said the elder woman, quivering. "Go and get a husband!--if you can find one to put up with you, and hold your tongue!" She turned her back.

The girl laughed affectedly.

"I can do without one, thank you. It's you happy married women that are the chief obstacle in our path. Selfish things!--never care for anybody but yourselves!"

"Hallo--Lathrop's down--that's Miss Blanchflower!" said Andrews, excitedly. "Let's go on!"

And at the same moment a mounted constable, who had been steadily making his way to them, opened a way for the two J.P.'s through the crowd, which after the tumult of hooting mingled with a small amount of applause, which had greeted Lathrop's peroration, had relapsed into sudden silence as Delia Blanchflower came forward, so that her opening words, in a rich clear voice were audible over a large area of the market-place.

* * * * *

What did she say? Certainly nothing new! Winnington knew it all by heart--had read it dozens of times in their strident newspaper, which he now perused weekly, simply that he might discover if he could, what projects his ward might be up to.

The wrongs of women, their wrongs as citizens, as wives, as the victims of men, as the "refuse of the factory system"--Winnington remembered the phrase in the Tocsin of the week before--the uselessness of constitutional agitation--the need "to shake England to make her hear"--it was all the "common form" of the Movement; and yet she was able to infuse it with passion, with conviction, with a wild and natural eloquence. Her voice stole upon him--hypnotized him. His political and economic knowledge told him that half the things she said were untrue, and the rest irrelevant. His moral sense revolted against her violence--her defence of violence. A girl of twenty-one addressing this ugly, indifferent crowd, and talking calmly of stone-throwing and arson, as though they were occupations as natural to her youth as dancing or love-making!--the whole thing was abhorrent--preposterous--to a man of order and peace. And yet he had never been more stirred, more conscious of the mad, mixed poetry of life, than he was, as he stood watching the slender figure on the waggon--the gestures of the upraised arm, and the play of the lights from the hotel, and from the side lamps, now on the deep white collar that lightened her serge jacket, and on the gesticulating hand, or the face that even in these disfiguring cross-lights could be nothing else than lovely.

She was speaking too long--a common fault of women.

He looked from her to the faces of the crowd, and saw that the spell, compounded partly of the speaker's good looks and partly of sheer gaping curiosity, was breaking. They were getting restless, beginning to heckle and laugh.

Then he heard her say.

"Of course we know--you think us fools--silly fools! You say it's a poor sort of fighting--and what do we hope to get by it? Pin-pricks you call it--all that women can do. Well, so it is--we admit it. It is a poor sort of fighting--we don't admire it any more than you. But it's all men have left to women. You have disarmed us--and fooled us--and made slaves of us. You won't allow us the constitutional weapon of the vote, so we strike as we can, and with what weapons we can--"

"Makin' bonfires of innercent people an' their property, ain't politics, Miss!" shouted a voice.

"Hear, Hear!" from the crowd.

"We haven't killed anybody--but ourselves!" The answer flashed.

"Pretty near it! Them folks at Wanchester only just got out--an' there were two children among 'em," cried a man near the waggon.

"An' they've just been up to something new at Brownmouth--"

All heads turned towards a young man who spoke from the back of the audience. "News just come to the post-office," he shouted--"as the new pier was burnt out early this morning. There's a bit o' wanton mischief for you!"

A howl of wrath rose from the audience, amid which the closing words of Delia's speech were lost. Winnington caught a glimpse of her face--pale and excited--as she retreated from the front of the waggon in order to make room for her co-speaker.

Gertrude Marvell, as Winnington soon saw, was far more skilled in street oratory than her pupil. By sheer audacity she caught her audience at once, and very soon, mingling defiance with sarcasm, she had turned the news of the burnt pier into a Suffragist parable. What was that blaze in the night, lighting up earth and sea, but an emblem of women's revolt flaming up in the face of dark injustice and oppression? Let them rage! The women mocked. All tyrannies disliked being disturbed--since the days of Nebuchadnezzar. And thereupon, without any trace of excitement, or any fraction of Delia's eloquence, she built up bit by bit, and in face of the growing hostility of the crowd, an edifice of selected statements, which could not have been more adroit. It did not touch or persuade, but it silenced; till at the end she said--each word slow and distinct--

"Now--all these things you may do to women, and nobody minds--nobody troubles at all. But if we make a bonfire of a pier, or an empty house, by way of drawing attention to your proceedings, then, you see red. Well, here we are!--do what you like--torture, imprison us!--you are only longing, I know--some of you--to pull us down now and trample on us, so that you may show us how much stronger men are than women!

All right!--but where one woman falls, another will spring up. And meanwhile the candle we are lighting will go on burning till you give us the vote. Nothing simpler--nothing easier. _Give us the vote_!--and send your canting Governments, Liberal, or Tory, packing, till we get it. But until then--windows and empty houses, and piers and such-like, are nothing--but so many opportunities of making our masters uncomfortable, till they free their slaves! Lucky for you, if the thing is no worse!"

She paused a moment, and then added with sharp and quiet emphasis--

"And why is it specially necessary that we should try to stir up this district--whether you like our methods or whether you don't? Because--you have living here among you, one of the worst of the persecutors of women! You have here a man who has backed up every cruelty of the Government--who has denied us every right, and scoffed at all our constitutional demands--your neighbour and great landlord, Sir Wilfrid Lang! I call upon every woman in this district, to avenge women on Sir Wilfrid Lang! We are not out indeed to destroy life or limb--we leave that to the men who are trying to coerce women--but we mean to sweep men like Sir Wilfrid Lang out of our way! Meanwhile we can pay special attention to his meetings--we can harass him at railway stations--we can sit on his doorstep--we can put the fear of God into him in a hundred ways--in short we can make his life a tenth part as disagreeable to him as he can make ours to us. We can, if we please, make it a _burden_ to him--and we intend to do so! And don't let men--or women either--waste their breath in preaching to us of 'law and order.' Slaves who have no part in making the law, are not bound by the law. Enforce it if you can! But while you refuse to free us, we despise both the law and the making of the law. Justice--which is a very different thing from law--Justice is our mistress!--and to her we appeal."

Folding her arms, she looked the crowd in the face. They seemed to measure each other; on one side, the lines of upturned faces, gaping youths, and smoking workmen, farmers and cattlemen, women and children; on the other, defying them, one thin, neatly-dressed woman, her face, under the lamps, a gleaming point in the dark.

Then a voice rose from a lounging group of men, smoking like chimneys--powerful fellows; smeared with the clay of the brickfields.

"Who's a-makin' slaves of you, Ma'am? There's most of us workin' for a woman!"

A woman in the middle of the crowd laughed shrilly--a queer, tall figure in a battered hat--

"Aye--and a lot yo' give 'er ov a Saturday night, don't yer?"

"Sir Wilfrid's a jolly good feller, miss," shouted another man. "Pays 'is men good money, an' no tricks. If you come meddlin' with him, in these parts, you'll catch it."

"An' we don't want no suffragettes here, thank you!" cried a sarcastic woman's voice. "We was quite 'appy till you come along, an' we're quite willin' now for to say 'Good-bye, an' God bless yer!"

The crowd laughed wildly, and suddenly a lad on the outskirts of the crowd picked up a cabbage-stalk that had fallen from one of the market-stalls, and flung it at the waggon. The hooligan element, scattered through the market-place, took up the hint at once; brutal things began to be shouted; and in a moment the air was thick with missiles of various sorts, derived from the refuse of the day's market--vegetable remains of all kinds, fragments of wood and cardboard boxes, scraps of filthy matting, and anything else that came handy.

The audience at first disapproved. There were loud cries of "Stow it!"--"Shut up!"--"Let the ladies alone!"--and there was little attempt to obstruct the police as they moved forward. But then, by ill-luck, the powerfully-built fair-haired man, who had been speaking when Winnington and Andrews entered the market place, rushed to the front of the waggon, and in a white heat of fury, began to denounce both the assailants of the speakers, and the crowd in general, as "cowardly louts"--on whom argument was thrown away--who could only be reached "through their backs, or their pockets"--with other compliments of the same sort, under which the temper of the "moderates" rapidly gave way.

"What an ass! What a damned ass!" groaned Andrews indignantly. "Look here Winnington, you take care of Miss Blanchflower--I'll answer for the other!"

And amid a general shouting and scuffling, through which some stones were beginning to fly, Winnington found himself leaping on the waggon, followed by Andrews and a couple of police.

Delia confronted him--undaunted, though breathless.

"What do you want? We're all right!"

"You must come away at once. I can get you through the hotel."

"Not at all! We must put the Resolution."

"Come Miss!--" said the tall constable behind Winnington--"no use talking! There's a lot of fellows here that mean mischief. You go with this gentleman. He'll look after you."

"Not without my friend!" cried Delia, both hands behind her on the edge of the waggon--erect and defiant. "Gertrude!--" she raised her voice--"What do you wish to do?"

But amid the din, her appeal was not heard.

Gertrude Marvell however could be clearly seen on the other side of the waggon, with Paul Lathrop beside her, listening to the remonstrances

and entreaties of Andrews, with a smile as cool, as though she were in the drawing-room of Maumsey Abbey, and the Captain were inviting her to trifle with a cup of tea.

"Take her along, Sir!" said the policeman, with a nod to Winnington.

"It's getting ugly." And as he spoke, a man jumped upon the waggon, a Latchford doctor, an acquaintance of Winnington's, who said something in his ear.

The next moment, a fragment of a bottle, flung from a distance, struck Winnington on the wrist. The blood rushed out, and Delia, suddenly white, looked from it to Winnington's face. The only notice he took of the incident was expressed in the instinctive action of rolling his handkerchief round it. But it stirred him to lay a grasp upon Delia's arm, which she could hardly have resisted. She did not, however, resist. She felt herself lifted down from the waggon, and hurried along, the police keeping back the crowd, into the open door of the hotel. Shouts of a populace half enraged, half amused, pursued her.

"Brutes--Cowards!" she gasped, between her teeth--then to Winnington--"Where are you taking me? I have the car!"

"There's a motor belonging to a doctor ready at once in the yard of the hotel. Better let me take you home in it. Andrews, I assure you, will look after Miss Marvell!"

They passed through the brilliantly-lighted inn, where landlady, chambermaids, and waiters stood grinning in rows to see, and Winnington hurried his charge into the closed motor standing at the inn's back door.

"Take the street behind the hotel, and get out by the back of the town. Be quick!" said Winnington to the chauffeur.

Booing groups had already begun to gather at the entrance of the yards, and in the side street to which it led. The motor passed slowly through them, then quickened its pace, and in what seemed an incredibly short time, they were in country lanes.

Delia leant back, drawing long breaths of fatigue and excitement. Then she perceived with disgust that her dress was bemired with scraps of dirty refuse, and that some mud was dripping from her hat. She took off the hat, shook it out of the window of the car, but could not bring herself to put it on again. Her hair, loosely magnificent, framed a face that was now all colour and passion. She hated herself, she hated the crowd; it seemed to her she hated the man at her side. Suddenly Winnington turned on the electric light--with an exclamation.

"So sorry to be a nuisance--but have you got a spare handkerchief? I'm afraid I shall spoil your dress!"

And Delia saw, to her dismay, that his own handkerchief which he had originally tied round his wound was already soaked, and the blood was

dripping from it on to the motor-rug.

"Yes--yes--I have!" And opening her little wrist-bag, she took out of it two spare handkerchiefs, and tied them, with tremulous hands, round the wrist he held out to her,--a wrist brown and spare and powerful, like the rest of him.

"Now--have you got anything you could tie round the arm, above the wound--and then twist the knot?"

She thought.

"My veil!" She slipped it off in a moment, a long motor veil of stout make. He turned towards her, pushing up his coat sleeve as high as it would go, and shewing her where to put the bandage. She helped him to turn back his shirt sleeve, and then wound the veil tightly round the arm, so as to compress the arteries. Her fingers were warm and strong. He watched them--he felt their touch--with a curious pleasure.

"Now, suppose you take this pencil, and twist it in the knot--you know how? Have you done any First Aid?"

She nodded.

"I know."

She did it well. The tourniquet acted, and the bleeding at once slackened.

"All right!" said Winnington, smiling at her. "Now if I keep it up that ought to do!" She drew down the sleeve, and he put his hand into the motor-strap hanging near him, which supported it. Then he threw his head back a moment against the cushions of the car. The sudden loss of blood on the top of a long fast, had made him feel momentarily faint.

Delia looked at him uneasily--biting her lip.

"Let us go back to Latchford, Mr. Winnington, and find a doctor."

"Oh dear no! I'm only pumped for a moment. It's going off. I'm perfectly fit. When I've taken you home, I shall go in to our Maumsey man, and get tied up."

There was silence. The hedges and fields flew by outside, under the light of the motor, stars overhead, Delia's heart was full of wrath and humiliation.

"Mr. Winnington--"

"Yes!" He sat up, apparently quite revived.

"Mr. Winnington--for Heaven's sake--do give me up!"

He looked at her with amused astonishment.

"Give you up!--How?"

"Give up being my guardian! I really can't stand it. I--I don't mind what happens to myself. But it's too bad that I should be forced to--to make myself such a nuisance to you--or desert all my principles. It's not fair to _me_--that's what I feel--it's not indeed!" she insisted stormily.

He saw her dimly as she spoke--the beautiful oval of the face, the white brow, the general graciousness of line, so feminine, in truth!--so appealing. The darkness hid away all that shewed the "female franzy." Distress of mind--distress for his trumpery wound?--had shaken her, brought her back to youth and childishness? Again he felt a rush of sympathy--of tender concern.

"Do you think you would do any better with a guardian chosen by the Court?" he asked her, smiling, after a moment's pause.

"Of course I should! I shouldn't mind fighting a stranger in the least."

"They would be very unlikely to appoint a stranger. They would probably name Lord Frederick."

"He wouldn't dream of taking it!" she said, startled. "And you know he is the laziest of men."

They both laughed. But her laugh was a sound of agitation, and in the close contact of the motor he was aware of her quick breathing.

"Well, it's true he never answers a letter," said Winnington. "But I suppose he's ill."

"He's been a _malade imaginaire_ all his life, and he isn't going to begin to put himself out for anybody now!" she said, scornfully.

"Your aunt, Miss Blanchflower?"

"I haven't spoken to her for years. She used to live with us when I was eighteen. She tried to boss me, and set father against me. But I got the best of her."

"I am sure you did," said Winnington.

She broke out--

"Oh, I know you think me a perfectly impossible creature whom nobody could ever get on with!"

He paused a moment, then said gravely--

"No, I don't think anything of the kind. But I do think that, given what you want, you are going entirely the wrong way to get it."

She drew a long and desperate breath.

"Oh, for goodness sake don't let's argue!"

He refrained. But after a moment he added, still more gravely--"And I do protest--most strongly!--against the influence upon you of the lady you have taken to live with you!"

Delia made a vehement movement.

"She is my friend!--my dearest friend!" she said, in a shaky voice.

"And I believe in her, and admire her with all my heart!"

"I know--and I am sorry. Her speech this evening--all the latter part of it--was the speech of an Anarchist. And the first half was a tissue of misstatements. I happen to know something about the facts she dealt with."

"Of course you take a different view!"

"I _know_, " he said, quietly--a little sternly. "Miss Marvell either does not know, or she wilfully misrepresents."

"You can't prove it!"

"I think I could. And as to that man--Mr. Lathrop--but you know what I think."

They both fell silent. Through all his own annoyance and disgust, Winnington was sympathetically conscious of what she too must be feeling--chafed and thwarted, at every turn, by his legal power over her actions, and by the pressure of his male will. He longed to persuade her, convince her, soothe her; but what chance for it, under the conditions she had chosen for her life?

The motor drew up at the door of the Abbey, and Winnington turned on the light.

"I am afraid I can't help you out. Can you manage?"

She stooped anxiously to look at his wrist.

"It's bleeding worse again! I am sure I could improve that bandage. Do come in. My maid's got everything."

He hesitated--then followed her into the house. The maid was summoned, and proved an excellent nurse. The wound was properly bandaged, and the arm put in a sling.

Then, as the maid withdrew, Delia and her guardian were left standing

together in the drawing-room, lit only by a dying gleam of fire, and a single lamp.

"Good-night," said Winnington, gently. "Don't be the least alarmed about Miss Marvell. The train doesn't arrive for ten minutes yet. Thank you for looking after me so kindly."

Delia laughed--but it was a sound of distress.

Suddenly he stooped, lifted her hand, and kissed it.

"What you are doing seems to me foolish--and _wrong!_ I am afraid I must tell you so plainly," he said, with emotion. "But although I feel like that--my one wish--all the time--is--forgive me if it sounds patronising!--to help you--and stand by you. To see you in that horrid business to-night--made me--very unhappy. I am old-fashioned I suppose--but I could hardly bear it. I wish I could make you trust me a little!"

"I do!" she said, choked. "I do--but I must follow my conscience."

He shook his head, but said no more. She murmured good-night, and he went. She heard the motor drive away, and remained standing where he had left her, the hand he had kissed hanging at her side. She still felt the touch of his lips upon it, and as the blood rushed into her cheeks, her heart was conscious of new and strange emotions. She longed to go to him as a sister or a daughter might, and say--"Forgive me--understand me--don't despair of me!"

The trance of feeling broke, and passed away. She caught up a cloak and went to the hall door to listen for Gertrude Marvell.

"What I _shall_ have to say to him before long, is--'I have tricked you this quarter out of £500--and I mean to do it again next quarter--if I can!' He won't want to kiss my hand again!"

Chapter X

Two men sat smoking and talking with Paul Lathrop in the hook-littered sitting-room of his cottage. One was a young journalist, Roger Blaydes, whose thin, close-shaven face wore the knowing fool's look of one to whom the world's his oyster, and all the bricks for opening it familiar. The other was a god-like creature, a poet by profession, with long lantern-jaws, grey eyes deeply set, and a mass of curly black hair, from which the face with its pallor and its distinction, shone dimly out like the portrait of a Cinquecento. Lathrop, in a kind of dressing-gown, as clumsily cut as the form it wrapped, his reddish hair and large head catching the firelight, had the look of one lazily at bay, as wrapped in a cloud of smoke, he twined from one speaker to the

other.

"So you were at another of these meetings last night?" said Blaydes, with a mouth half smiling, half contemptuous.

"Yes. A disgusting failure! They didn't even take the trouble to pelt us." The poet--Merian by name--moved angrily on his chair. Blaydes threw a sly look at him, as he knocked the ash from his cigarette.

"And what the deuce do you expect to get by it all?"

Paul Lathrop paused a moment--and at last said with a lift of the eyebrows:--

"Well!--I have no illusions!"

Merian broke out indignantly--

"I say, Lathrop--why should you try and play up to that cynic there? As if he ever had an illusion about anything!"

"Well, but one may have faith without illusions," protested Blaydes, with hard good temper.

"I doubt whether Lathrop has an ounce of either!"

Lathrop reached out for a match.

"What's the good of 'faith'--and what does anyone mean by it? Sympathies--and animosities: they're enough for me."

"And you really are in sympathy with these women?" said the other.

The tone was incredulous. Merian brought his hand violently down on the table.

"Don't you talk about them, Blaydes! I tell you, they're out of your ken."

"I daresay," said Blaydes, composedly. "I was only trying to get at what Lathrop means by going into the business."

Paul Lathrop sat up.

"I'm in sympathy with anything that harasses, and bothers and stings the governing classes of this country!" he said, with an oratorical wave of his cigarette. "What fools they are! In this particular business the Government is an ass, the public is an ass, the women, if you like, are asses. So long as they don't destroy works of art that appeal to me, I prefer to bray with them than with their enemies."

Merian rose impatiently--a slim, dark-browed St. George towering over the other two.

"After that, I'd rather hear them attacked by Blaydes, than defended by you, Lathrop!" he said with energy, as he buttoned up his coat.

Lathrop threw him a cool glance.

"So for you, they're all heroines--and saints?"

"Never mind what they are. I stand by them! I'm ready to give them what they ask."

"Ready to hand the Empire over to them--to smash like the windows in Piccadilly?" said Blaydes.

"Hang the Empire!--what does the Empire matter! Give the people in these islands what they _want_ before you begin to talk about the Empire. Well, good-bye, I must be off!"

He nodded to the other two, and opened the door of the Hermitage which led directly into the outer air. On the threshold he turned and looked back, irresolutely, as though in compunction for his loss of temper. Framed in the doorway against a background of sunset sky, his dark head and sparely-noble features were of a singular though melancholy beauty. It was evident that he was full of speech, of which he could not in the end unburden himself. The door closed behind him, and he was gone.

"Poor devil!" said Blaydes, tipping the end of his cigarette into the fire--"he's in love with a girl who's been in prison three times. He thinks she'll kill herself--and he can't influence her at all. He takes it hard. Well, now look here"--the young man's expression changed and stiffened--"I understand that you too are seeing a good deal of one of these wild women--and that she's both rich--and a beauty?"

He looked up, with a laugh.

Lathrop's aspect was undisturbed.

"Nothing to do with it!--though your silly little mind will no doubt go on thinking so."

The other laughed again--with a more emphatic mockery. Lathrop reddened--then said quietly--

"Well, I admit that was a lie. Yes, she is handsome--and if she were to stick to it--sacrifice all her life to it--in time she might make a horrible success of this thing. Will she stick to it?"

"Are you in love with her, Paul?"

"Of course! I am in love with all pretty women--especially when I daren't shew it."

"You daren't shew it?"

"The smallest advance on my part, in this quarter, brings me a rap on the knuckles. I try to pitch what I have to say in the most impersonal and romantic terms. No good at all! But all egg-dancing is amusing, so I dance--and accept all the drudgery she and Alecto give me to do."

"Alecto? Miss Marvell?"

"Naturally."

"These meetings must be pretty boring."

"Especially because I can't keep my temper. I lose it in the vulgarest way--and say the most idiotic things."

There was a pause of silence. The eyes of the journalist wandered round the room, coming back to Lathrop at last with renewed curiosity.

"How are your affairs, Paul?"

"Couldn't be worse. Everything here would have been seized long ago, if there had been anything to seize. But you can't distraint on trout--dear slithery things. And as the ponds afford my only means of sustenance, and do occasionally bring in something, my creditors have to leave me the house and a few beds and chairs so that I may look after them."

"Why don't you write another book?"

"Because at present I have nothing to say. And on that point I happen to have a conscience--some rays of probity, left."

He got up as he spoke, and went across the room, to a covered basket beside the fire.

"Mimi!" he said caressingly--"poor Mimi!"

He raised a piece of flannel, and a Persian kitten lying in the basket--a sick kitten--lifted its head languidly.

"_Tu m'aimes_, Mimi?"

The kitten looked at him with veiled eyes, already masked with death. Lathrop stooped for a saucer of warm milk standing by the fire. The kitten refused it, but when he dipped his fingers in the milk, it made a momentary effort to lick them, then subsiding, sank to sleep again.

"Poor little beast!" said Blaydes--"what's the matter?"

"Some poison--I don't know what. It'll die tonight."

"Then you'll be all alone?"

"I'm never alone," said Lathrop, with decision. And rising he went to

the door of the cottage--which opened straight on the hill-side, and set it open.

It was four o'clock on a November day. The autumn was late, and of a marvellous beauty. The month was a third gone and still there were trees here and there, isolated trees, intensely green as though they defied decay. The elder trees, the first to leaf under the Spring, were now the last to wither. The elms in twenty-four hours had turned a pale gold atop, while all below was still round and green. But the beeches were nearly gone; all that remained of them was a thin pattern of separate leaves, pale gold and faintly sparkling against the afternoon sky. Such a sky! Bands of delicate pinks, lilacs and blues scratched across an inner-heaven of light, and in the mid-heaven a blazing furnace, blood-red, wherein the sun had just plunged headlong to its death. And under the sky, an English scene of field and woodland, fading into an all-environing forest, still richly clothed. While in the foreground and middle distance, some trees already stripped and bare, winter's first spoil, stood sharply black against the scarlet of the sunset. And fusing the whole scene, hazes of blue, amethyst or purple, beyond a Turner's brush,

"What beauty!--my God!"

Blaydes came to stand beside the speaker, glancing at him with eyes half curious, half mocking.

"You get so much pleasure out of it?"

For answer, Lathrop murmured a few words as though to himself, a sudden lightening in his sleepy eyes--

L'univers--si liquide, si pur!--
Une belle eau qu'on voudrait boire.

"I don't understand French"--said Blaydes, with a shrug--"not French verse, anyway."

"That's a pity," was the dry reply--"because you can't read Madame de Noailles. Ah!--there are Lang's pheasants calling!--his tenants I suppose--for he's left the shooting."

He pointed to a mass of wood on his left hand from which the sound came.

"They say he's never here?"

"Two or three times a year,--just on business. His wife--a little painted doll--hates the place, and they've built a villa at Beaulieu."

"Rather risky leaving a big house empty in these days--with your wild women about!"

Lathrop looked round.

"Good heavens!--who would ever dream of touching Monk Lawrence! I bet even Gertrude Marvell hasn't nerve enough for that. Look here!--have you ever seen it?"

"Never."

"Come along then. There's just time--while this light lasts."

They snatched their caps, and were presently mounting the path which led ultimately through the woods of Monk Lawrence to the western front.

Blaydes frowned as he walked. He was a young man of a very practical turn of mind, who in spite of an office-boy's training possessed an irrelevant taste for literature which had made him an admirer of Lathrop's two published volumes. For some time past he had been Lathrop's chancellor of the exchequer--self-appointed, and had done his best to keep his friend out of the workhouse. From the tone of Paul's recent letters he had become aware of two things--first, that Lathrop was in sight of his last five pound note, and did not see his way to either earning or borrowing another; and secondly, that a handsome girl had appeared on the scene, providentially mad with the same kind of madness as had recently seized on Lathrop, belonging to the same anarchial association, and engaged in the same silly defiance of society; likely therefore to be thrown a good deal in his company; and last, but most important, possessed of a fortune which she would no doubt allow the "Daughters of Revolt" to squander--unless Paul cut in. The situation had begun to seem to him interesting, and having already lent Lathrop more money than he could afford, he had come down to enquire about it. He himself possessed an income of three hundred a year, plus two thousand pounds left him by an uncle. Except for the single weakness which had induced him to lend Lathrop a couple of hundred pounds, his principles with regard to money were frankly piratical. Get what you can--and how you can. Clearly it was Lathrop's game to take advantage of this queer friendship with a militant who happened to be both rich and young, which his dabbling in their "nonsense" had brought about. Why shouldn't he achieve it? Lathrop was as clever as sin; and there was the past history of the man, to shew that he could attract women.

He gripped his friend's arm as they passed into the shadow of the wood. Lathrop looked at him with surprise--

"Look here, Paul"--said the younger man in a determined voice--"You've got to pull this thing off."

"What thing?"

"You can marry this girl if you put your mind to it. You tell me you're going about the country with her speaking at meetings--that you're one of her helpers and advisers. That is--you've got an A1 chance with her. If you don't use it, you're a blithering idiot."

Paul threw back his head and laughed.

"And what about other people? What about her guardian, for instance--who is the sole trustee of the property--who has a thousand chances with her to my one--and holds, I venture to say--if he knows anything about me--the strongest views on the subject of my moral character?"

"Who is her guardian?"

"Mark Wilmington. Does that convey anything to you?"

Blaydes whistled.

"Great Scott!"

"Yes. Precisely 'Great Scott!'" said Lathrop, mocking. "I may add that everybody here has their own romance on the subject. They are convinced that Winnington will soon cure her of her preposterous notions, and restore her, tamed, to a normal existence."

Blaydes meditated,--his aspect showing a man checked.

"I saw Winnington playing in a county match last August," he said--with his eyes on the ground--"I declare no one looked at anybody else. I suppose he's forty; but the old stagers tell you that he's just as much of an Apollo now as he was in his most famous days--twenty years ago."

"Don't exaggerate. He is forty, and I'm thirty--which is one to me. I only meant to suggest to you a reasonable view of the chances."

"Look here--is she as handsome as people say?"

"Blaydes!--this is the last time I shall allow you to talk about her--you get on my nerves. Handsome? I don't know."

He walked on, muttering to himself and twitching at the trees on either hand.

"I am simply putting what is your duty to yourself--and your creditors," said Blaydes, sulkily--"You must know your affairs are in a pretty desperate state."

"And a girl like that is to be sacrificed--to my creditors! Good Lord!"

"Oh, well, if you regard yourself as such an undesirable, naturally, I've nothing to say. Of course I know--there's that case against you. But it's a good while ago; and I declare women don't look at those things as they used to do. Why don't you play the man of letters business? You know very well, Paul, you could earn a lot of money if you chose. But you're such a lazy dog!"

"Let me alone!" said Lathrop, rather fiercely. "The fact that you've lent me a couple of hundred really doesn't give you the right to talk to me like this."

"I won't lend you a farthing more unless you promise me to take this thing seriously," said Blaydes, doggedly.

Lathrop burst into a nervous shout of laughter.

"I say, do shut up! I assure you, you can't bully me. Now then--here's the house!"

And as he spoke they emerged from the green oblong, bordered by low yew edges, from which as from a flat and spacious shelf carved out of the hill, Monk Lawrence surveyed the slopes below it, the clustered village, the middle distance with its embroidery of fields and trees, with the vaporous stretches of the forest beyond, and in the far distance, a shining line of sea.

"My word!--that is a house!" cried Blaydes, stopping to survey it and get his townsman's breath, after the steep pitch of hill.

"Not bad?"

"Is it shown?"

"Used to be. It has been shut lately for fear of the militants."

"But they keep somebody in it?"

"Yes--in some room at the back. A keeper, and his three children. The wife's dead. Shall I go and see if he'll let us in? But he won't. He'll have seen my name at that meeting, in the Latchford paper."

"No, no. I shall miss my train. Let's walk round. Why, you'd think it was on fire already!" said Blaydes, with a start, gazing at the house.

For the marvellous evening now marching from the western forest, was dyeing the whole earth in crimson, and the sun just emerging from one bank of cloud, before dropping into the bank below, was flinging a fierce glare upon the wide grey front of Monk Lawrence. Every window blazed, and some fine oaks still thick with red leaf, which flanked the house on the north, flamed in concert. The air was suffused with red; every minor tone, blue or brown, green or purple, shewed through it, as through a veil.

And yet how quietly the house rose, in the heart of the flame! Peace brooding on memory seemed to breathe from its rounded oriels, its mossy roof, its legend in stone letters running round the eaves, the carved trophies and arabesques which framed the stately doorway, the sleepy fountain with its cupids, in the courtyard, the graceful loggia on the northern side. It stood, aloof and self-contained, amid the lightnings and arrows of the departing sun.

"No--they'd never dare to touch that!" said Lathrop as he led the way to the path skirting the house. "And if I caught Miss Marvell at it, I'm not sure I shouldn't hand her over myself!"

"Aren't we trespassing?" said Blaydes, as their footsteps rang on the broad flagged path which led from the front court to the terrace at the back of the house.

"Certainly. Ah, the dog's heard us."

And before they had gone more than a few steps further, a burly man appeared at the further corner of the house, holding a muzzled dog--a mastiff--on a leash.

"What might you be wanting, gentlemen?" he said gruffly.

"Why, you know me, Daunt. I brought a friend up to look at your wonderful place. We can walk through, can't we?"

"Well, as you're here, Sir, I'll let you out by the lower gate. But this is private ground, Sir, and Sir Wilfrid's orders are strict,--not to let anybody through that hasn't either business with the house or an order from himself."

"All right. Let's have a look at the back and the terrace, and then we'll be off; Sir Wilfrid coming here?"

"Not that I know of, Sir," said the keeper shortly, striding on before the two men, and quieting his dog, who was growling at their heels.

As he spoke he led the way down a stately flight of stone steps by which the famous eastern terrace at the back of the house was reached. The three men and the dog disappeared from view.

Steadily the sunset faded. An attacking host of cloud rushed upon it from the sea, and quenched it. The lights in the windows of Monk Lawrence went out. Dusk fell upon the house and all its approaches.

Suddenly, two figures--figures of women--emerged in the twilight from the thick plantation, which protected the house on the north. They reached the flagged path with noiseless feet, and then pausing, they began what an intelligent spectator would have soon seen to be a careful reconnoitering of the whole northern side of the house. They seemed to examine the windows, a garden door, the recesses in the walls, the old lead piping, the creepers and shrubs. Then one of them, keeping close to the house wall, which was in deep shadow, went quickly round to the back. The other awaited her. In the distance rose at intervals a dog's uneasy bark.

In a very few minutes the woman who had gone round the house returned and the two, slipping back into the dense belt of wood from which they had come, were instantly swallowed up by it. Their appearance and their

movements throughout had been as phantom-like and silent as the shadows which were now engulfing the house. Anyone who had seen them come and go might almost have doubted his own eyes.

* * * * *

Daunt the Keeper returned leisurely to his quarters in some back premises of Monk Lawrence, at the southeastern corner of the house. But he had but just opened his own door when he again heard the sound of footsteps in the fore-court.

"Well, what's come to the folk to-night"--he muttered, with some ill-humour, as he turned back towards the front.

A woman!--standing with her back to the house, in the middle of the forecourt as though the place belonged to her, and gazing at the piled clouds of the west, still haunted by the splendour just past away.

A veritable Masque of Women, all of the Maenad sort, had by now begun to riot through Daunt's brain by night and day. He raised his voice sharply--

"What's your business here, Ma'am? There is no public road past this house."

The lady turned, and came towards him.

"Don't you know who I am, Mr. Daunt? But I remember you when I was a child."

Daunt peered through the dusk.

"You have the advantage of me, Madam," he said, stiffly. "Kindly give me your name."

"Miss Blanchflower--from Maumsey Abbey!" said a young, conscious voice.

"I used to come here with my grandmother, Lady Blanchflower. I have been intending to come and pay you a visit for a long time--to have a look at the old house again. And just now I was passing the foot of your hill in a motor; something went wrong with the car, and while they were mending it, I ran up. But it's getting dark so quick, one can hardly see anything!"

Daunt's attitude showed no relaxation. Indeed, quick recollections assailed him of certain reports in the local papers, now some ten days old. Miss Blanchflower indeed! She was a brazen one--after all done and said.

"Pleased to see you, Miss, if you'll kindly get an order from Sir Wilfrid. But I have strict instructions from Sir Wilfrid not to admit anyone--not anyone whatsoever--to the gardens or the house, without his order."

"I should have thought, Mr. Daunt, that only applied to strangers." The tones shewed annoyance. "My father, Sir Robert Blanchflower, was an old friend of Sir Wilfrid's."

"Can't help it, Miss," said Daunt, not without the secret zest of the Radical putting down his "betters." "There are queer people about. I can't let no one in without an order."

As he spoke, a gate slammed on his left, and Daunt, with the feeling of one beset, turned in wrath to see who might be this new intruder. Since the house had been closed to visitors, and a notice to the effect had been posted in the village, scarcely a soul had penetrated through its enclosing woods, except Miss Amberley, who came to teach Daunt's crippled child. And now in one evening here were three assaults upon its privacy!

But as to the third he was soon reassured.

"Hullo, Daunt, is that you? Did I hear you telling Miss Blanchflower you can't let her in? But you know her of course?" said a man's easy voice.

Delia started. The next moment her hand was in her guardian's, and she realised that he had heard the conversation between herself and Daunt, realised also that she had committed a folly not easily to be explained, either to Winnington or herself, in obeying the impulse which--half memory, half vague anxiety--had led her to pay this sudden visit to the house. Gertrude Marvell had left Maumsey that morning, saying she should be in London for the day. Had Gertrude been with her, Delia would have let Monk Lawrence go by. For in Gertrude's company it had become an instinct with her--an instinct she scarcely confessed to herself--to avoid all reference to the house.

At sight of Winnington, however, who was clearly a privileged person in his eyes, Daunt instantly changed his tone.

"Good evening, Sir. Perhaps you'll explain to this young lady? We've got to keep a sharp lookout--you know that, Sir."

"Certainly, Daunt, certainly. I am sure Miss Blanchflower understands. But you'll let me shew her the house, I imagine?"

"Why, of course, Sir! There's nothing you can't do here. Give me a few minutes--I'll turn on some lights. Perhaps the young lady will walk in?" He pointed to his own rooms. "So you still keep the electric light going?"

"By Sir Wilfrid's wish, Sir,--so as if anything did happen these winter nights, we mightn't be left in darkness. The engine works a bit now and then."

He led the way towards his quarters. The door into his kitchen stood open, and in the glow of fire and lamp stood his three children, who

had been eagerly listening to the conversation outside. One of them, a little girl, was leaning on a crutch. She looked up happily as Winnington entered.

"Well, Lily--" he pinched her cheek--"I've got something to tell Father about you. Say 'how do you do' to this lady." The child put her hand in Delia's, looking all the while ardently at Winnington.

"Am I going to be in your school, Sir?"

"If you're good. But you'll have to be dreadfully good!"

"I am good," said Lily, confidently. "I want to be in your school, please Sir."

"But such a lot of other little girls want to come too! Must I leave them out?"

Lily shook her head perplexed. "But you promised," she lisped, very softly.

Winnington laughed. The child's hand had transferred itself to his, and nestled there.

"What school does she mean?" asked Delia.

At the sound of her voice Winnington turned to her for the first time. It was as though till then he had avoided looking at her, lest the hidden thought in each mind should be too plain to the other. He had found her--Sir Robert Blanchflower's daughter--on the point of being curtly refused admission to the house where her father had been a familiar inmate, and where she herself had gone in and out as a child. And he knew why; she knew why; Daunt knew why. She was a person under suspicion, a person on whom the community was keeping watch.

Nevertheless, Winnington entirely believed what he had overheard her say to the keeper. It was no doubt quite true that she had turned aside to see Monk Lawrence on a sudden impulse of sentiment or memory. Odd that it should be so!--but like her. That she could have any designs on the beautiful old place was indeed incredible; and it was equally incredible that she would aid or abet them in anyone else. And yet--there was that monstrous speech at Latchford, made in her hearing, by her friend and co-militant, the woman who shared her life! Was it any wonder that Daunt bristled at the sight of her?

He had, however, to answer her question.

"My county school," he explained. "The school for invalid children--'physical defectives'--that we are going to open next summer. I came to tell Daunt there'd be a place for this child. She's an old friend of mine." He smiled down upon the nestling creature--"Has Miss Amberley been to see you lately, Lily?"

At this moment Daunt returned to the kitchen, with the news that the house was ready. "The light's not quite what it ought to be, Sir, but I daresay you'll be able to see a good deal. Miss Amberley, Sir, she's taught Lily fine. I'm sure we're very much obliged to her--and to you for asking her."

"I don't know what the sick children here will do without her, Daunt. She's going away--wants to be a nurse."

"Well, I'm very sorry, Sir. She'll be badly missed."

"That she will. Shall we go in?" Winnington turned to Delia, who nodded assent, and followed him into the dim passages beyond the brightly-lighted kitchen. The children, looking after them, saw the beautiful lady disappearing, and felt vaguely awed by her height, her stiff carriage and her proud looks.

Delia, indeed, was again--and as usual--in revolt, against herself and circumstances. Why had she been such a fool as to come to Monk Lawrence at all, and then to submit to seeing it--on sufferance!--in Winnington's custody? And how he must be contrasting her with Susy Amberley!--the soft sister of charity, plying her womanly tasks, in the manner of all good women, since the world began! She saw herself as the anarchist prowling outside, tracked, spied on, held at arm's length by all decent citizens, all lovers of ancient beauty, and moral tradition; while, within, women like Susy Amberley sat Madonna-like, with the children at their knee. "Well, we stand for the children too--the children of the future!" she said to herself defiantly.

"This is the old hall--and the gallery that was put up in honour of Elizabeth's visit here in 1570--" she heard Winnington saying--"One of the finest things of its kind. But you can hardly see it."

The electric light indeed was of the feeblest. A dim line of it ran round the carved ceiling, and glimmered in the central chandelier. But the mingled illumination of sunset and moonrise from outside contended with it on more than equal terms; and everything in the hall, tapestries, armour, and old oak, the gallery above, the dais with its carved chairs below, had the dim mystery of a stage set ready for the play, before the lights are on.

Daunt apologised.

"The gardener'll be here directly, Sir. He knows how to manage it better than I."

And in spite of protests from the two visitors he ran off again to see what could be done to better the light. Delia turned impetuously on her companion.

"I know you think I have no business to be here!"

Winnington paused a moment, then said--

"I was rather astonished to see you here, certainly."

"Because of what we said at Latchford the other day?"

"_You_ didn't say it!"

"But I agreed with it--I agreed with every word of it!"

"Then indeed I _am_ astonished that you should wish to see Sir Wilfrid Lang's house!" he said, with energy.

"My recollections of it have nothing to do with Sir Wilfrid. I never saw him that I know of."

"All the same, it belongs to him."

"No!--to history--to the nation!"

"Then let the nation guard it--and every individual in the nation! But do you think Miss Marvell would take much pains to protect it?"

"Gertrude said nothing about the house." "No; but if I had been one of the excitable women you command, my one desire after that speech would have been to do some desperate damage to Sir Wilfrid, or his property. If anything does happen, I am afraid everyone in the neighbourhood will regard her as responsible."

Delia moved impatiently. "Can't we say what we think of Sir Wilfrid--because he happens to possess a beautiful house?"

"If you care for Monk Lawrence, you do so,--with this campaign on foot--only at great risk. Confess, Miss Delia!--that you were sorry for that speech!"

He turned upon her with animation.

She spoke as though under pressure, her head thrown back, her face ivory within the black frame of the veil.

"I--I shouldn't have made it."

"That's not enough. I want to hear you say you regret it!"

The light suddenly increased, and she saw him looking at her, his eyes bright and urgent, his attitude that of the strong yet mild judge, whose own moral life watches keenly for any sign of grace in the accused before him. She realised for an angry moment what his feeling must be--how deep and invincible, towards these "outrages" which she and Gertrude Marvell regarded by now as so natural and habitual--outrages that were calmly planned and organised, as she knew well, at the head offices of their society, by Gertrude Marvell among others, and acquiesced in--approved--by hundreds of persons like

herself, who either shrank from taking a direct part in them, or had no opportunity of doing so. "But I shall soon make opportunities!--" she thought, passionately; "I'm not going to be a shirker!" Aloud she said in her stiffest manner--"I stand by my friends, Mr. Winnington, especially when they are ten times better and nobler than I!"

His expression changed. He turned, like any courteous stranger, to playing the part of showman of the house. Once more a veil had fallen between them.

He led her through the great suite of rooms on the ground-floor, the drawing-room, the Red Parlour, the Chinese room, the Library. They recalled her childish visits to the house with her grandmother, and a score of recollections, touching or absurd, rushed into her mind--but not to her lips. Dumbness had fallen on her;--nothing seemed worth saying, and she hurried through. She was conscious only of a rich confused impression of old seemliness and mellowed beauty,--steeped in fragrant and famous memories, English history, English poetry, English art, breathing from every room and stone of the house. "In the Red Parlour, Sidney wrote part of the 'Arcadia.'--In the room overhead Gabriel Harvey slept.--In the Porch rooms Chatham stayed--his autograph is there.--Fox advised upon all the older portion of the Library"--and so on. She heard Winnington's voice as though through a dream. What did it matter? She felt the house an oppression--as though it accused or threatened her.

As they emerged from the library into a broad passage, Winnington noticed a garden door at the north end of the passage, and called to Daunt who was walking behind them. They went to look at it, leaving Delia in the corridor.

"Not very secure, is it?" said Winnington, pointing to the glazed upper half of the door--"anyone might get in there."

"I've told Sir Wilfrid, Sir, and sent him the measurements. There's to be an iron shutter."

"H'm--that may take time. Why not put up something temporary?--cross-bars of some sort?"

They came back towards Delia, discussing it. Unreasonably, absurdly, she held it an offence that Winnington should discuss it in her presence; her breath grew stormy.

Daunt turned to the right at the foot of a carved staircase, and down a long passage leading to the kitchens, he and Winnington still talking. Suddenly--a short flight of steps, not very visible in a dark place. Winnington descended them, and then turned to look for Delia who was just behind--

"Please take care!--"

But he was too late. Head in air--absorbed in her own passionate mood,

Delia never saw the steps, till her foot slipped on the topmost. She would have fallen headlong, had not Winnington caught her. His arms received her, held her, released her. The colour rushed into his face as into hers. "You are not hurt?" he said anxiously. "I ought to have held a light," said Daunt, full of concern. But the little incident had broken the ice. Delia laughed, and straightened her Cavalier hat, which had suffered. She was still rosy as they entered Daunt's kitchen, and the children who had seen her silent and haughty entrance, hardly recognised the creature all life and animation who returned to them.

The car stood waiting in the fore-court. Winnington put her in. As Delia descended the hill alone in the dark, she closed her eyes, that she might the more completely give herself to the conflict of thoughts which possessed her. She was bitterly ashamed and sore, torn between her passionate affection for Gertrude Marvell, and what seemed to her a weak and traitorous wish to stand better with Mark Winnington. Nor could she escape from the memory--the mere physical memory--of those strong arms round her, resent it as she might.

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As for Winnington, when he reached home in the moonlight, instead of going in to join his sister at tea, he paced a garden path till night had fallen. What was this strong insurgent feeling he could neither reason with nor silence? It seemed to have stolen upon him, amid a host of other thoughts and pre-occupations, secretly and insidiously, till there it stood--full-grown--his new phantom self--challenging the old, the normal self, face to face.

Trouble, self-scorn overwhelmed him. Recalling all his promises to himself, all his assurances to Lady Tonbridge, he stood convicted, as the sentry who has shut his eyes and let the invader pass. Monstrous!--that in his position, with this difference of age between them, he should have allowed such ideas to grow and gather head. Beautiful wayward creature!--all the more beguiling, because of the Difficulties that bristled round her. His common sense, his judgment were under no illusions at all about Delia Blanchflower. And yet--

This then was passion!--which must be held down and reasoned down. He would reason it down. She must and should marry a man of her own generation--youth with youth. And, moreover, to give way to these wild desires would be simply to alienate her, to destroy all his own power with her for good.

The ghostly presence of his life came to him. He cried out to her, made appeal to her, in sackcloth and ashes. And then, in some mysterious, heavenly way she was revealed to him afresh; not as an enemy whom he had offended, not as a lover slighted, but as his best and tenderest friend. She closed no gates against the future:--that was for himself to settle, if closed they were to be. She seemed to walk with him, hand in hand, sister with brother--in a deep converse of souls.

Chapter XI

Gertrude Marvell was sitting alone at the Maumsey breakfast-table, in the pale light of a December day. All around her were letters and newspapers, to which she was giving an attention entirely denied to her meal. She opened them one after another, with a frown or a look of satisfaction, classifying them in heaps as she read, and occasionally remembering her coffee or her toast. The parlourmaid waited on her, but knew very well--and resented the knowledge--that Miss Marvell was scarcely aware of her existence, or her presence in the room.

But presently the lady at the table asked--

"Is Miss Blanchflower getting up?"

"She will be down directly, Miss."

Gertrude's eyebrows rose, unconsciously. She herself was never late for an 8:30 breakfast, and never went to bed till long after midnight. The ways of Delia, who varied between too little sleep and the long nights of fatigue, seemed to her self-indulgent.

After her letters had been put aside and the ordinary newspapers, she took up a new number of the *Tocsin*. The first page was entirely given up to an article headed "How LONG?" She read it with care, her delicate mouth tightening a little. She herself had suggested the lines of it a few days before, to the Editor, and her hints had been partially carried out. It gave a scathing account of Sir Wilfrid's course on the suffrage question--of his earlier coquettings with the woman's cause, his defection and "treachery," the bitter and ingenious hostility with which he was now pursuing the Bill before the House of Commons. "An amiable, white-haired nonentity for the rest of the world--who only mention him to marvel that such a man was ever admitted to an English Cabinet--to us he is the 'smiler with the knife,' the assassin of the hopes of women, the reptile in the path. The Bill is weakening every day in the House, and on the night of the second reading it will receive its 'coup de grace' from the hand of Sir Wilfrid Lang. Women of England--_how long!_--"

Gertrude pushed the newspaper aside in discontent. Her critical sense was beginning to weary of the shrieking note. And the descent from the "assassin of the hopes of women" to "the reptile in the path" struck her as a silly bathos.

Suddenly, a reverie--a waking dream--fell upon her, a visionary succession of sights and sounds. A dying sunset--and a rising wind, sighing through dense trees--old walls--the light from a kitchen window--voices in the distance--the barking of a dog....

"Oh Gertrude!--how late I am!"

Delia entered hurriedly, with an anxious air.

"I should have been down long ago, but Weston had one of her attacks, and I have been looking after her."

Weston was Delia's maid who had been her constant companion for ten years. She was a delicate nervous woman, liable to occasional onsets of mysterious pain, which terrified both herself and her mistress, and had hitherto puzzled the doctor.

Gertrude received the news with a passing concern.

"Better send for France, if you are worried. But I expect it will be soon over."

"I don't know. It seems worse than usual. The man in Paris threatened an operation. And here we are--going up to London in a fortnight!"

"Well, you need only send her to the Brownmouth hospital, or leave her here with France and a good nurse."

"She has the most absurd terror of hospitals, and I certainly couldn't leave her," said Delia, with a furrowed brow.

"You certainly couldn't stay behind!" Gertrude looked up pleasantly.

"Of course I want to come--" said Delia slowly.

"Why, darling, how could we do without you? You don't know how you're wanted. Whenever I go up town, it's the same--'When's she coming?' Of course they understood you must be here for a while--but the heart of things, the things that concern _us_--is London."

"What did you hear yesterday?" asked Delia, helping herself to some very cold coffee. Nothing was ever kept warm for her, the owner of the house; everything was always kept warm for Gertrude. Yet the fact arose from no Sybaritic tendency whatever on Gertrude's part. Food, clothing, sleep--no religious ascetic could have been more sparing than she, in her demands upon them. She took them as they came--well or ill supplied; too pre-occupied to be either grateful or discontented. And what she neglected for herself, she equally neglected for other people.

"What did I hear?" repeated Gertrude. "Well, of course, everything is rushing on. There is to be a raid on Parliament as soon as the session begins--and a deputation to Downing Street. A number of new plans, and devices are being discussed. And there seemed to me to be more volunteers than ever for 'special service'?"

She looked up quietly and her eyes met Delia's;--in hers a steely ardour, in Delia's a certain trouble.

"Well, we want some cheering up," said the girl, rather wearily. "Those

two last meetings were--pretty depressing!--and so were the bye-elections."

She was thinking of the two open-air meetings at Brownmouth and Frimpton. There had been no violence offered to the speakers, as in the Latchford case; the police had seen to that. Her guardian had made no appearance at either, satisfied, no doubt, after enquiry, that she was not likely to come to harm. But the evidence of public disapproval could scarcely have been more chilling--more complete. Both her speaking, and that of Gertrude and Paul Lathrop, seemed to her to have dropped dead in exhausted air. An audience of boys and girls--an accompaniment of faint jeers, testifying rather to boredom than hostility--a sense of blank waste and futility when all was over:--her recollection had little else to shew.

Gertrude interrupted her thought.

"My dear Delia!--what you want is to get out of this backwater, and back into the main stream! Even I get stale here. But in those great London meetings--there one catches on again!--one realises again--what it all _means_! Why not come up with me next week, even if the flat's not ready? I can't have you running down like this! Let's hurry up and get to London."

The speaker had risen, and standing behind Delia, she laid her hand on the waves of the girl's beautiful hair. Delia looked up.

"Very well. Yes, I'll come. I've been getting depressed. I'll come--at least if Weston's all right."

* * * * *

"I'm afraid, Miss Blanchflower, this is a very serious business!"

Dr. France was the speaker. He stood with his back to the fire, and his hands behind him, surveying Delia with a look of absent thoughtfulness; the look of a man of science on the track of a problem.

Delia's aspect was one of pale consternation. She had just heard that the only hope of the woman, now wrestling upstairs with agonies of pain, lay in a critical and dangerous operation, for which at least a fortnight's preliminary treatment would be necessary. A nurse was to be sent for at once, and the only question to be decided was where and by whom the thing was to be done.

"We _can_ move her," said France, meditatively; "though I'd rather not. And of course a hospital is the best place."

"She won't go! Her mother died in a hospital, and Weston thinks she was neglected."

"Absurd! I assure you," said France warmly. "Nobody is neglected in hospitals."

"But one can't persuade her--and if she's forced against her will, it'll give her no chance!" said Delia in distress. "No, it must be here. You say we can get a good man from Brownmouth?"

They discussed the possibilities of an operation at Maumsey.

Insensibly the doctor's tone during the conversation grew more friendly, as it proceeded. A convinced opponent of "feminism" in all its forms, he had thought of Delia hitherto as merely a wrong-headed, foolish girl, and could hardly bring himself to be civil at all to her chaperon, who in his eyes belonged to a criminal society, and was almost certainly at that very moment engaged in criminal practices. But Delia, absorbed in the distresses of someone she cared for, all heart and eager sympathy, her loveliness lending that charm to all she said and looked which plainer women must so frequently do without was a very mollifying and ingratiating spectacle. France began to think her--mised and unbalanced of course--but sound at bottom. He ended by promising to make all arrangements himself, and to go in that very afternoon to see the great man at Brownmouth.

When Delia returned to her maid's room, the morphia which had been administered was beginning to take effect, and Weston, an elderly woman with a patient, pleasing face, lay comparatively at rest, her tremulous look expressing at once the keenness of the suffering past, and the bliss of respite. Delia bent over her, dim-eyed.

"Dear Weston--we've arranged it all--it's going to be done here. You'll be at home--and I shall look after you."

Weston put out a clammy hand and faintly pressed Delia's warm fingers--

"But you were going to London, Miss. I don't want to put you out so."

"I shan't go till you're out of the wood, so go to sleep--and don't worry."

* * * * *

"Delia!--for Heaven's sake be reasonable. Leave Weston to France, and a couple of good nurses. She'll be perfectly looked after. You'll put out all out plans--you'll risk everything!"

Gertrude Marvell had risen from her seat in front of a crowded desk. The secretary who generally worked with her in the old gun room, now become a militant office, had disappeared in obedience to a signal from her chief. Anger and annoyance were plainly visible on Gertrude's small chiselled features.

Delia shook her head.

"I can't!" she said. "I've promised. Weston has pulled _me_ through two bad illnesses--once when I had pneumonia in Paris--and once after a

fall out riding. I daresay I shouldn't be here at all, but for her. If she's going to have a fight for her life--and Doctor France doesn't promise she'll get through--I shall stand by her."

Gertrude grew a little sallow than usual as her black eyes fastened themselves on the girl before her who had hitherto seemed so ductile in her hands. It was not so much the incident itself that alarmed her as a certain new tone in Delia's voice.

"I thought we had agreed--that nothing--_nothing_--was to come before the Cause!" she said quietly, but insistently.

Delia's laugh was embarrassed.

"I never promised to desert Weston, Gertrude. I couldn't--any more than I could desert you."

"We shall want every hand--every ounce of help that can be got--through January and February. You undertook to do some office work, to help in the organisation of the processions to Parliament, to speak at a number of meetings--"

Delia interrupted.

"As soon as Weston is out of danger, I'll go--of course I'll go!--about a month from now, perhaps less. You will have the flat, Gertrude, all the same, and as much money as I can scrape together--after the operation's paid for. I don't matter a tenth part as much as you, you know I don't; I haven't been at all a success at these meetings lately!"

There was a certain young bitterness in the tone.

"Well, of course you know what people will say."

"That I'm shirking--giving in? Well, you can contradict it."

Delia turned from the window beside which she was standing to look at Gertrude. A pale December sunshine shone on the girl's half-seen face, and on the lines of her black dress. A threatening sense of change, mingled with a masterful desire to break down the resistance offered, awoke in Gertrude. But she restrained the dictatorial instinct. Instead, she sat down beside the desk again, and covered her face with her hand.

"If I couldn't contradict it--if I couldn't be sure of you--I might as well kill myself," she said with sudden and volcanic passion, though in a voice scarcely raised above its ordinary note.

Delia came to her impulsively, knelt down and put her arms round her.

"You know you can be sure of me!" she said, reproachfully.

Gertrude held her away from her. Her eyes examined the lovely face so close to her.

"On the contrary! You are being influenced against me."

Delia laughed.

"By whom, please?"

"By the man who has you in his power--under our abominable laws."

"By my guardian?--by Mark Winnington? Really! Gertrude! Considering that I had a fresh quarrel with him only last week--on your account--at Monk Lawrence--"

Gertrude released herself by a sudden movement.

"When were you at Monk Lawrence?"

"Why, that afternoon, when you were in town. I missed my train at Latchford, and took a motor home." There was some consciousness in the girl's look and tone which did not escape her companion. She was evidently aware that her silence on the incident might appear strange to Gertrude. However, she frankly described her adventure, Daunt's surliness, and Winnington's appearance.

"He arrived in the nick of time, and made Daunt let me in. Then, while we were going round, he began to talk about your speech, and wanted to make me say I was sorry for it. And I wouldn't! And then--well, he thought very poorly of me--and we parted--coolly. We've scarcely met since. And that's all."

"What speech?" Gertrude was sitting erect now with queerly bright eyes.

"The speech about Sir Wilfrid--at Latchford."

"What else does he expect?"

"I don't know. But--well, I may as well say, Gertrude--to you, though I wouldn't say it to him--that I--I didn't much admire that speech either!"

Delia was now sitting on the floor with her hands round her knees, looking up. The slight stiffening of her face shewed that it had been an effort to say what she had said.

"So you think that Lang ought to be approached with 'bated breath and whispering humbleness'--just as he is on the point of trampling us and our cause into the dirt?"

"No--certainly not! But why hasn't he as good a right to his opinion as we to ours--without being threatened with personal violence?"

Gertrude drew a long breath of amazement.

"I don't quite see, Delia, why you ever joined the 'Daughters'--or why you stay with them."

"That's not fair!"--protested Delia, the colour flooding in her cheeks. "As for burning stupid villas--that are empty and insured--or boathouses--or piers--or tea-pavilions, to keep the country in mind of us,--that's one thing. But threatening _persons_ with violence--that's--somehow--another thing. And as to villas and piers even--to be quite honest--I sometimes wonder, Gertrude!--I declare, I'm beginning to wonder! And why shouldn't one take up one's policy from time to time and look at it, all round, with a free mind? We haven't been doing particularly well lately."

Gertrude laughed--a dry, embittered sound--as she pushed the _Tocsin_ from her.

"Oh well, of course, if you're going to desert us in the worst of the fight, and to follow your guardian's lead--"

"But I'm not!" cried Delia, springing to her feet. "Try me. Haven't I promised--a hundred things? Didn't I say all you expected me to say at Latchford? And, on the whole"--her voice dragged a little--"the empty houses and the cricket pavilions--still seem to me fair game. It's only--as to the good it does. Of course--if it were Monk Lawrence--"

"Well--if it were Monk Lawrence?"

"I should think that a crime! I told you so before."

"Why?"

Delia looked at her friend with a contracted brow.

"Because--it's a national possession! Lang's only the temporary owner--the trustee. We've no right to destroy what belongs to _England_."

Gertrude laughed again--as she rose from the tea-table.

"Well, as long as women are slaves, I don't see what England matters to them. However, don't trouble yourself. Monk Lawrence is all right. And Mr. Winnington's a charmer--we all know that."

Delia flushed angrily. But Gertrude, having gathered up her papers, quietly departed, leaving her final shaft to work.

Delia went back to her own sitting-room, but was too excited, too tremulous indeed, to settle to her letters. She had never yet found herself in direct collision with Gertrude, impetuous as her own temper was. Their friendship had now lasted nearly three years. She looked back to their West Indian acquaintance, that first year of adoration,

of long-continued emotion,--mind and heart growing and blossoming together. Gertrude, during that year, had not only aroused her pupil's intelligence; she had taught a motherless girl what the love of women may be for each other. To make Gertrude happy, to be approved by her, to watch her, to sit at her feet--the girl of nineteen had asked nothing more. Gertrude's accomplishments, her coolness, her self-reliance, the delicate precision of her small features and frame, the grace of her quiet movements, her cold sincerity, the unyielding scorns, the passionate loves and hates that were gradually to be discovered below the even dryness of her manner,--by these Delia had been captured; by these indeed, she was still held. Gertrude was to her everything that she herself was not. And when her father had insisted on separating her from her friend, her wild resentment, and her girlish longing for the forbidden had only increased Gertrude's charm tenfold.

The eighteen months of their separation, too, had coincided with the rise of that violent episode in the feminist movement which was represented by the founding and organisation of the "Daughters" society. Gertrude though not one of the first contrivers and instigators of it, had been among the earliest of its converts. Its initial successes had been the subject of all her letters to Delia; Delia had walked on air to read them. At last the world was moving, was rushing--and it seemed that Gertrude was in the van. Women were at last coming to their own; forcing men to acknowledge them as equals and comrades; and able to win victory, not by the old whining and wheedling, but by their own strength. The intoxication of it filled the girl's days and nights. She thought endlessly of processions and raids, of street-preaching, or Hyde Park meetings. Gertrude went to prison for a few days as the result of a raid on Downing Street. Delia, in one dull hotel after another, wearily following her father from "cure" to "cure," dreamed hungrily and enviously of Gertrude's more heroic fate. Everything in those days was haloed for her--the Movement, its first violent acts, what Gertrude did, and what Gertrude thought--she saw it all transfigured and aflame.

And now, since her father's death, they had been four months together--she and her friend--in the closest intimacy, sharing--or so Delia supposed--every thought and every prospect. Delia for the greater part of that time _had_ been all glad submission and unquestioning response. It was quite natural--absolutely right--that Gertrude should command her house, her money, her daily life. She only waited for Gertrude's orders; it would be her pride to carry them out. Until--

What had happened? The girl, standing motionless beside her window, confessed to herself, as she had not been willing to confess to Gertrude, that something _had_ happened--some change of climate and temperature in her own life.

In the first place, the Movement was not prospering. Why deny it? Who could deny it? Its first successes were long past; its uses as advertisement were exhausted; the old violences and audacities, as they were repeated, fell dead. The cause of Woman Suffrage had certainly not advanced. Check after check had been inflicted on it. The number of its

supporters in the House of Commons had gone down and down. By-elections were only adding constantly to the number of its opponents.

"Well, what then?"--said the stalwarts of the party--"More outrages, more arson, more violence! We must win at last!" And, meanwhile, blowing through England like a steadily increasing gale, could be felt the force of public anger, public condemnation.

Delia since her return to England had felt the chill of it, for the first time, on her own nerves and conscience. For the first time she had winced--morally--even while she mocked at her own shrinking.

Was that Gertrude pacing outside? The day was dark and stormy. But Gertrude, who rarely took a walk for pleasure, scarcely ever missed the exercise which was necessary to keep her in health. Her slight figure, wrapped in a fur cape, paced a sheltered walk. Her shoulders were bent, her eyes on the ground. Suddenly it struck Delia that she had begun to stoop, that she looked older and thinner than usual.

"She is killing herself!"--thought the girl in a sudden anguish--"killing herself with work and anxiety. And yet she always says she is so strong. What can I do? There is nobody that matters to her--nobody!--but me!"

And she recalled all she knew--it was very little--of Gertrude's personal history. She had been unhappy at home. Her mother, a widow, had never been able to get on with her elder daughter, while petting and spoiling her only son and her younger girl, who was ten years Gertrude's junior. Gertrude had been left a small sum of money by a woman friend, and had spent it in going to a west-country university and taking honours in history. She never spoke now of either her mother or her sister. Her sister was married, but Gertrude held no communication with her or her children. Delia had always felt it impossible to ask questions about her, and believed, with a thrilled sense of mystery, that some tragic incident or experience had separated the two sisters. Her brother also, it seemed, was as dead to her. But on all such personal matters Gertrude's silence was insuperable, and Delia knew no more of them than on the first day of their meeting.

Indomitable figure! Worn with effort and struggle--worn above all with hating. Delia looked at it with a sob in her throat. Surely, surely, the great passion, the great uplifting faith they had felt in common, was vital, was true! Only, somehow, after the large dreams and hopes of the early days, to come down to this perpetual campaign of petty law-breaking, and futile outrage, to these odious meetings and shrieking newspapers, was to be--well, discouraged!--heart-wearied.

"Only, she is not wearied, or discouraged!" thought Delia, despairingly. "And why am I?"

Was it hatefully true--after all--that she was being influenced--drawn away?

The girl flushed, breathing quick. She must master herself!--get rid of this foolish obsession of Winnington's presence and voice--of a pair of grave, kind eyes--a look now perplexed, now sternly bright--a personality, limited no doubt, not very accessible to what Gertrude called "ideas," not quick to catch the last new thing, but honest, noble, tender, through and through.

Absurd! She was holding her own with him; she would hold her own. That very day she must grapple with him afresh. She had sent him a note that morning, and he had replied in a message that he would ride over to luncheon.

For the question of money was urgent. Delia was already overdrawn. Yet supplies were wanted for the newly rented flat, for Weston's operation, for Gertrude's expenses in London--for a hundred things.

She paced up and down, imagining the conversation, framing eloquent defences for her conduct, and again, from time to time, meanly, shamefacedly reminding herself of Winnington's benefit under the will. If she was a nuisance, she was at least a fairly profitable nuisance.

* * * * *

Winnington duly arrived at luncheon. The two ladies appeared to him as usual--Gertrude Marvell, self-possessed and quietly gay, ready to handle politics or books, on so light a note, that Winnington's acute recollection of her, as the haranguing fury on the Latchford waggon, began to seem absurd even to himself. Delia also, lovely, restless, with bursts of talk, and more significant bursts of silence, produced on him her normal effect--as of a creature made for all delightful uses, and somehow jangled and out of tune.

After luncheon, she led the way to her own sitting-room. "I am afraid I must talk business," she said abruptly as she closed the door and stood confronting him. "I am overdrawn, Mr. Winnington, and I must have some more money."

Winnington laid down his cigarette, and looked at her in open-mouthed amazement.

"Overdrawn!--but--we agreed--"

"I know. You gave me what you thought was ample. Well, I have spent it, and there is nothing left to pay house bills, or servants with, or--or anything."

Her pale defiance gave him at once a hint of the truth.

"I fear I must ask what it has been spent on," he said, after a pause.

"Certainly. I gave £500 of it in one cheque to Miss Marvell. Of course you will guess how it has been spent."

Winnington took up his cigarette again, and smoked it thoughtfully. His colour was, perhaps, a little higher than usual.

"I am sorry you have done that. It makes it rather awkward both for you and for me. Perhaps I had better explain. The lawyers have been settling the debts on your father's estate. That took a considerable sum. A mortgage has been paid off, according to directions in Sir Robert's will. And some of the death duties have been paid. For the moment there is no money at all in the Trust account. I hope to have replenished it by the New Year, when I understood you would want fresh funds."

He sat on the arm of a chair and looked at her quietly.

Delia made no attempt at explanation or argument. After a short silence, she said--

"What will you do?"

"I must, of course, lend you some of my own."

Delia flushed violently.

"That is surely absurd, Mr. Winnington! My father left a large sum!"

"As his trustee I can only repeat that until some further securities are realised--which may take a little time--I have no money. But you must have money--servants and tradesmen can't go unpaid. I will give you, therefore, a cheque on my own bank--to replace that £500."

He drew his cheque book from his breast pocket. Delia was stormily walking up and down. It struck him sharply, first that she was wholly taken by surprise; and next that shock and emotion play finely with such a face as hers. He had never seen her so splendid. His own pulses ran.

"This--this is not at all what I want, Mr. Winnington! I want my own money--my father's money! Why should I distress and inconvenience you?"

"I have tried to explain."

"Then let the lawyers find it somehow. Aren't they there to do such things?"

"I assure you this is simplest. I happen"--he smiled--"to have enough in the bank. Alice and I can manage quite well till January!"

The mention of Mrs. Matheson was quite intolerable in Delia's ears. She turned upon him--

"I can't accept it! You oughtn't to ask it."

"I think you must accept it," he said with decision. "But the important

question with me is--the further question--am I not really bound to restore this money to your father's estate?"

Delia stared at him bewildered.

"What do you mean!"

"Your father made me his trustee in order that I might protect his money--from uses of which he disapproved--and protect you, if I could, from actions and companions he dreaded. This £500 has gone--where he expressly wished it not to go. It seems to me that I am liable, and that I ought to repay."

Delia gasped.

"I never heard anything so absurd!"

"I will consider it," he said gravely. "It is a case of conscience. Meanwhile"--he began to write the cheque--"here is the money. Only, let me warn you, dear Miss Delia,--if this were repeated, I might find myself embarrassed. I am not a rich man!"

Silence. He finished writing the cheque, and handed it to her. Delia pushed it away, and it dropped on the table between them.

"It is simply tyranny--monstrous tyranny--that I should be coerced like this!" she said, choking. "You must feel it so yourself! Put yourself in my place, Mr. Winnington."

"I think--I am first bound--to try and put myself in your father's place," he said, with vivacity. "Where has that money gone, Miss Delia?"

He rose, and in his turn began to pace the little room. "It has been proved, in evidence, that a great deal of this outrage is paid outrage--that it could not be carried on without money--however madly and fanatically devoted, however personally disinterested the organisers of it may be--such as Miss Marvell. You have, therefore, taken your father's money to provide for this payment--payment for all that his soul most abhorred. His will was his last painful effort to prevent this being done. And yet--you have done it!"

He looked at her steadily.

"One may seem to do evil"--she panted--"but we have a faith, a cause, which justifies it!"

He shook his head sadly,

Delia sat very still, tormented by a score of harassing thoughts. If she could not provide money for the "Daughters" what particular use could she be to Gertrude, or Gertrude's Committee? She could speak, and walk in processions, and break up meetings. But so could hundreds of

others. It was her fortune--she knew it--that had made her so important in Gertrude's eyes. It had always been assumed between them that a little daring and a little adroitness would break through the meshes of her father's will. And how difficult it was turning out to be!

At that moment, an idea occurred to her. Her face, responsive as a wave to the wind, relaxed. Its sullenness disappeared in sudden brightness--in something like triumph. She raised her eyes. Their tremulous, half whimsical look set Winnington wondering what she could be going to say next.

"You seem to have beaten me," she said, with a little nod--"or you think you have."

"I have no thoughts that you mightn't know," was the quiet reply.

"You want me to promise not to do it again?"

"If you mean to keep it."

As he stood by the fire, looking down upon her rather sternly--she yet perceived in his grey eyes, something of that expression she had seen there at their first meeting--as though the heart of a good man tried to speak to her. The same expression--and yet different; with something added and interfused, which moved her strangely.

"Odd as it may seem, I will keep it!" she said. "Yet without giving up any earlier purpose, or promise, whatever." Each word was emphasized.

His face changed.

"I won't worry you in any such way again," she added hastily and proudly.

Some other words were on her lips, but she checked them. She held out her hand for the cheque, and the smile with which she accepted it, after her preceding passion, puzzled him.

She locked up the cheque in a drawer of her writing-table. Winnington's horse passed the window, and he rose to go. She accompanied him to the hall door and waved a light farewell. Winnington's response was ceremonious. A sure instinct told him to shew no further softness. His dilemma was getting worse and worse, and Lady Tonbridge had been no use to him whatever.

Chapter XII

One of the first days of the New year rose clear and frosty. When the young housemaid who had temporarily replaced Weston as Delia's maid

drew back her curtains at half-past seven, Delia caught a vision of an opaline sky with a sinking moon and fading stars. A strewing of snow lay on the ground, and the bare black trees rose, vividly separate, on the white stretches of grass. Her window looked to the north along the bases of the low range of hills which shut in the valley and the village. A patch of paler colour on the purple slope of the hills marked the long front of Monk Lawrence.

As she sleepily roused herself, she saw her bed littered with dark objects--two leather boxes of some size, and a number of miscellaneous cases--and when the maid had left the room, she lay still, looking at them. They were the signs and symbols of an enquiry she had lately been conducting into her possessions, which seemed to her to have yielded very satisfactory results. They represented in the main the contents of a certain cupboard in the wall of her bedroom where Lady Blanchflower had always kept her jewels, and where, in consequence, Weston had so far locked away all that Delia possessed. Here were all her own girlish ornaments--costly things which her father had given her at intervals during the three or four years since her coming out; here were her Mother's jewels, which Sir Robert had sent to his bankers after his wife's death, and had never seen again during his lifetime; and here were also a number of family jewels which had belonged to Delia's grandmother, and had remained, after Lady Blanchflower's death, in the custody of the family lawyers, till Delia, to whom they had been left by will, had appeared to claim them.

Delia had always known that she possessed a quantity of valuable things, and had hitherto felt but small interest in them. Gertrude's influence, and her own idealism had bred in her contempt for gauds. It was the worst of breeding to wear anything for its mere money value; and nothing whatever should be worn that wasn't in itself beautiful. Lady Blanchflower's taste had been, in Delia's eyes, abominable; and her diamonds,--tiaras, pendants and the rest--had absolutely nothing to recommend them but their sheer brute cost. After a few glances at them, the girl had shut them up and forgotten them.

But they were diamonds, and they must be worth some thousands.

It was this idea which had flashed upon her during her last talk with Winnington, and she had been brooding over it, and pondering it ever since. Winnington himself was away. He and his sister had been spending Christmas with some cousins in the midlands. Meanwhile Delia recognised that his relation to her had been somewhat strained. His letters to her on various points of business had been more formal than usual; and though he had sent her a pocket Keats for a Christmas present, it had arrived accompanied merely by his "kind regards" and she had felt unreasonably aggrieved, and much inclined to send it back. His cheque meanwhile for £500 had gone into Delia's bank. No help for it--considering all the Christmas bills which had been pouring in! But she panted for the time when she could return it.

As for his threat of permanently refunding the money out of his own pocket, she remembered it with soreness of spirit. Too bad!

Well, there they lay, on the counterpane all round her--the means of checkmating her guardian. For while she was rummaging in the wall-safe, the night before, suddenly the fire had gone down, and the room had sunk to freezing point. Delia, brought up in warm climates, had jumped shivering into bed, and there, heaped round with the contents of the cupboard, had examined a few more cases, till sleep and cold overpowered her.

In the grey morning light she opened some of the cases again. Vulgar and ugly, if you like--but undeniably, absurdly worth money! Her dark eyes caught the sparkle of the jewels running through her fingers. These tasteless things--mercifully--were her own--her very own. Winnington had nothing to say to them! She could wear them--or give them--or sell them, as she pleased.

She was alternately exultant, and strangely full of a fluttering anxiety. The thought of returning Winnington's cheque was sweet to her. But her disputes with him had begun to cost her more than she had ever imagined they could or would. And the particular way out, which, a few weeks before, she had so impatiently desired--that he should resign the guardianship, and leave her to battle with the Court of Chancery as best she could--was no longer so attractive to her. To be cherished and cared for by Mark Winnington--no woman yet, but had found it delightful. Insensibly Delia had grown accustomed to it--to his comings and goings, his business-ways, abrupt sometimes, even peremptory, but informed always by a kindness, a selflessness that amazed her. Everyone wanted his help or advice, and he must refuse now--as he had never refused before--because his time and thoughts were so much taken up with his ward's affairs. Delia knew that she was envied; and knew also that the neighbours thought her an ungrateful, unmanageable hoyden, totally unworthy of such devotion.

She sat up in bed, dreaming, her hands round her knees. No, she didn't want Winnington to give her up! Especially since she had found this easy way out. Why should there be any more friction between them at all? All that he gave her henceforward should be religiously spent on the normal and necessary things. She would keep accounts if he liked, like any good little girl, and shew them up. Let him do with the trust fund exactly what he pleased. For a long time at any rate, she could be independent of it. Why had she never thought of such a device before?

But how to realise the jewels? In all business affairs, Delia was the merest child. She had been brought up in the midst of large expenditure, of which she had been quite unconscious. All preoccupation with money had seemed to her mean and pettifogging. Have it!--and spend it on what you want. But wants must be governed by ideas--by ethical standards. To waste money on personal luxury, on eating, drinking, clothes, or any form of mere display, in such a world as Gertrude Marvell had unveiled to her, seemed to Delia contemptible and idiotic. One must have some nice clothes--some beauty in one's surroundings--and the means of living as one wished to live. Otherwise, to fume and fret about money, to be coveting instead of

giving, buying and bargaining, instead of thinking--or debating--was degrading. She loathed shopping. It was the drug which put women's minds to sleep.

Who would help her? She pondered. She would tell no one till it was done; not even Gertrude, whose cold, changed manner to her hurt the girl's proud sense to think of.

"I must do it properly--I won't be cheated!"

The London lawyers? No. The local solicitor, Mr. Masham? No! Her vanity was far too keenly conscious of their real opinion of her, through all their politeness.

Lady Tonbridge? No! She was Mark Winnington's intimate friend--and a constitutional Suffragist. At the notion of consulting her,--on the means of providing funds for "militancy"--Delia sprang out of bed, and went to her dressing, dissolved in laughter.

And presently--sobered again, and soft-eyed--she was stealing along the passage to Weston's door for a word with the trained nurse who was now in charge. Just a week now--to the critical day.

* * * * *

"Is Miss Marvell, in? Ask if she will see Mr. Lathrop for a few minutes?"

Paul Lathrop, left to himself, looked round Delia's drawing-room. It set his teeth on edge. What pictures--what furniture! A certain mellowness born of sheer time, no doubt--but with all its ugly ingredients still repulsively visible. Why didn't the heiress burn everything and begin again? Was all her money to be spent on burning other people's property, when her own was so desperately in need of the purging process--or on dreary meetings and unreadable newspapers? Lathrop was already tired of these delights; his essentially Hedonist temper was re-asserting itself. The "movement" had excited and interested him for a time; had provided besides easy devices for annoying stupid people. He had been eager to speak and write for it, had persuaded himself that he really cared.

But now candour--and he was generally candid with himself--made him confess that but for Delia Blanchflower he would already have cut his connection with the whole thing. He thought with a mixture of irony and discomfort of his "high-falutin" letter to her.

"And here I am--hanging round her"--he said to himself, as he strolled about the room, peering through his eye-glass at its common vases, and trivial knick-knacks--"just because Blaydes bothers me. I might as well cry for the moon. But she's worth watching, by Jove. One gets copy out of her, if nothing else! I vow I can't understand why my dithyrambs move her so little--she's dithyrambic enough herself!"

The door opened. He quickly pulled himself together. Gertrude Marvell came in, and as she gave him an absent greeting, he was vaguely struck by some change in her aspect, as Delia had long been. She had always seemed to him a cold half-human being, in all ordinary matters. But now she was paler, thinner, more remote than ever. "Nerves strained--probably sleepless--" he said to himself. "It's the pace they will live at--it kills them all."

This kind of comment ran at the back of his brain, while he plunged into the "business"--which was his pretence for calling. Gertrude, as a District Organizer of the League of Revolt, had intrusted him with the running of various meetings in small places, along the coast, for which it humiliated him to remember that he had agreed to be paid. For at his very first call upon them, Miss Marvell had divined his impecunious state, and pounced upon him as an agent,--unknown, he thought, to Miss Blanchflower. He came now to report what had been done, and to ask if the meetings should be continued.

Gertrude Marvell shook her head.

"I have had some letters about your meetings. I doubt whether they have been worth while."

Miss Marvell's manner was that of an employer to an employee. Lathrop's vanity winced.

"May I know what was wrong with them?"

Gertrude Marvell considered. Her gesture, unconsciously judicial, annoyed Lathrop still further.

"Too much argument, I hear,--and too little feeling. Our people wanted more about the women in prison. And it was thought that you apologised too much for the outrages."

The last word emerged quite simply, as the only fitting one.

Lathrop laughed,--rather angrily.

"You must be aware, Miss Marvell, that the public thinks they want defence."

"Not from us!" she said, with energy. "No one speaking for us must ever apologise for militant acts. It takes all the heart out of our people. Justify them--glory in them--as much as you like."

There was a pause.

"Then you have no more work for me?" said Lathrop at last.

"We need not, I think, trouble you again. Your cheque will of course be sent from head-quarters."

"That doesn't matter," said Lathrop, hastily.

The reflection crossed his mind that there is an insolence of women far more odious than the insolence of men.

"After all they are our inferiors! It doesn't do to let them command us," he thought, furiously.

He rose to take his leave.

"You are going up to London?"

"I am going. Miss Blanchflower stays behind, because her maid is ill."

He stood hesitating. Gertrude lifted her eyebrows as though he puzzled her. She never had liked him, and by now all her instincts were hostile to him. His clumsy figure, and slovenly dress offended her, and the touch of something grandiose in his heavy brow, and reddish-gold hair, seemed to her merely theatrical. Her information was that he had been no use as a campaigner. Why on earth did he keep her waiting?

"I suppose you have heard some of the talk going about?" he said at last, shooting out the words.

"What talk?"

"They're very anxious about Monk Lawrence--after your speech. And there are absurd stories. Women have been seen--at night--and so on."

Gertrude laughed.

"The more panic the better--for us."

"Yes--so long as it stops there. But if anything happened to that place, the whole neighbourhood would turn detective--myself included."

He looked at her steadily. She leant one thin hand on a table behind her.

"No one of course would have a better chance than you. You are so near."

Their eyes crossed. "By George!" he thought--"you're in it. I believe to God you're in it."

And at that moment he felt that he hated the willowy, intangible creature who had just treated him with contempt.

But as they coldly touched hands, the door opened again, and Delia appeared.

"Oh I didn't mean to interrupt--" she said, retreating.

"Come in, come in!" said Gertrude. "We have finished our business--and Mr. Lathrop I am sure will excuse me--I must get some letters off by post--"

And with the curtest of bows she disappeared.

"I have brought you a book, Miss Blanchflower," Lathrop nervously began, diving into a large and sagging pocket. "You said you wanted to see Madame de Noailles' second volume."

He brought out "Les Éblouissements," and laid it on the table beside her. Delia thanked him, and then, all in a moment, as she stood beside him, a thought struck her. She turned her great eyes full upon him, and he saw the colour rushing into her cheeks.

"Mr. Lathrop!"

"Yes."

"Mr. Lathrop--I--I dreadfully want some practical advice. And I don't know whom to ask."

The soreness of his wounded self-love vanished in a moment.

"What can I do for you?" he asked eagerly. And at once his own personality seemed to expand, to throw off the shadow of something ignoble it had worn in Gertrude's presence. For Delia, looking at him, was attracted by him. The shabby clothes made no impression upon her, but the blue eyes did. And the childishness which still survived in her, beneath all her intellectualisms, came impulsively to the surface.

"Mr. Lathrop, do you--do you know anything about jewelry?"

"Jewelry? Nothing!--except that I have dabbled in pretty things of that sort as I have dabbled in most things. I once did some designing for a man who set up--in Bond Street--to imitate Lalique. Why do you ask? I suppose you have heaps of jewels?"

"Too many. I want to sell some jewels."

"Sell?--But--" he looked at her in astonishment.

She reddened still more deeply; but spoke with a frank charm.

"You thought I was rich? Well, of course I ought to be. My father was rich. But at present I have nothing of my own--nothing! It is all in trust--and I can't get at it. But I must have some money! Wait here a moment!"

She ran out of the room. When she came back she was carrying a miscellaneous armful of jewellers' cases. She threw them down on the sofa.

"They are all hideous--but I am sure they're worth a great deal of money."

And she opened them with hasty fingers before his astonished eyes. In his restless existence he had accumulated various odd veins of knowledge, and he knew something of the jewelry trade of London. He had not only drawn designs, he had speculated--unluckily--in "De Beers." For a short time Diamonds had been an obsession with him, then Burmah rubies. He had made money out of neither; it was not in his horoscope to make money out of anything. However there was the result--a certain amount of desultory information.

He took up one piece after another, presently drawing a magnifying glass out of his pocket to examine them the better.

"Well, if you want money--" he said at last, putting down a riviera which had belonged to Delia's mother--"That alone will give you some thousands!"

Delia's eyes danced with satisfaction--then darkened.

"That was Mamma's. Papa bought it at Constantinople--from an old Turkish Governor--who had robbed a province--spent the loot in Paris on his wives--and then had to disgorge half his fortune--to the Sultan--who got wind of it. Papa bought it at a great bargain, and was awfully proud of it. But after Mamma died, he sent it to the Bank, and never thought of it again. I couldn't wear it, of course--I was too young."

"How much money do you want?"

"Oh, a few thousands," said Delia, vaguely. "Five hundred pounds, first of all."

"And who will sell them for you?"

She frowned in perplexity.

"I--I don't know."

"You don't wish to ask Mr. Winnington?"

"Certainly not! They have nothing to do with him. They are my own personal property," she added proudly.

"Still he might object--Ought you not to ask him?"

"I shall not tell him!" She straightened her shoulders. "He has far too much bother on my account already."

"Of course, if I could do anything for you--I should be delighted. But I don't know why you should trust me. You don't know anything about me!" He laughed uncomfortably.

Delia laughed too--in some confusion. It seemed to him she suddenly realised she had done something unusual.

"It is very kind of you to suggest it--" she said, hesitating.

"Not at all. It would amuse me. I have some threads I can pick up still--in Bond Street. Let me advise you to concentrate on that _riviĹre_. If you really feel inclined to trust me, I will take it to a man I know; he will show it to--" he named a famous firm. "In a few days--well, give me a week--and I undertake to bring you proposals. If you accept them, I will collect the money for you at once--or I will return you the necklace, if you don't."

Delia clasped her hands.

"A week! You think it might all be finished in a week?"

"Certainly--thereabouts. These things--" he touched the diamonds--"are practically money."

Delia sat ruminating, with a bright excited face. Then a serious expression returned. She looked up.

"Mr. Lathrop, this ought to be a matter of business between us--if you do me so great a service?"

"You mean I ought to take a commission?" he said, calmly. "I shall do nothing of the kind."

"It is more than I ought to accept!" she cried. "Let your kindness--include what I wish."

He shook his fair hair impatiently.

"Why should you take away all my pleasure in the little adventure?"

She looked embarrassed. He went on--

"Besides we are comrades--we have stood together in the fight. I expect this is for the Cause! If so I ought to be angry that you even suggested it!"

"Don't be angry!" she said gravely. "I meant nothing unkind. Well, I thank you very much--and there are the diamonds."

She gave him the case, with a quiet deliberate movement, as if to emphasize her trust in him. The simplicity with which it was done pricked him uncomfortably. "I'm no thief!--" he thought angrily. "She's safe enough with me. All the same, if she knew--she wouldn't speak to me--she wouldn't admit me into her house. She doesn't know--and I am a cad!"

"You can't the least understand what it means to be allowed to do you a service!" he said, with emotion.

But the tone evidently displeased her. She once more formally thanked him; then sprang up and began to put the cases on the sofa together. As she did so, steps on the gravel outside were heard through the low casement window. Delia turned with a start, and saw Mark Winnington approaching the front door.

"Don't say anything _please_!" she said urgently. "This has nothing to do with my guardian."

And opening the door of a lacquer cabinet, she hurriedly packed the jewelry inside with all the speed she could. Her flushed cheek shewed her humiliated by the action.

* * * * *

Winnington stood in the doorway, silent and waiting. After a hasty greeting to the new-comer, Delia was nervously bidding Lathrop good-bye.

"In a week!" he said, under his breath, as she gave him her hand.

"A week!" she repeated, evidently impatient for him to be gone. He exchanged a curt bow with Winnington, and the door closed on him.

There was a short silence. Winnington remained standing, hat in hand. He was in riding dress--a commanding figure, his lean face reddened, and the waves of his grizzled hair slightly loosened, by a buffeting wind. Delia, stealing a glance at him, divined a coming remonstrance, and awaited it with a strange mixture of fear and pleasure. They had not met for ten days; and she stammered out some New Year's wishes. She hoped that he and Mrs. Matheson had enjoyed their visit.

But without any reply to her politeness, he said abruptly--

"Were you arranging some business with Mr. Lathrop?"

She supposed he was thinking of the militant Campaign.

"Yes," she said, eagerly. "Yes, I was arranging some business."

Winnington's eyes examined her.

"Miss Delia, what do you know about that man?--except that story--which I understand Miss Marvell told you."

"Nothing--nothing at all! Except--except that he speaks at our meetings, and generally gets us into hot water. He has a lot of interesting books--and drawings--in his cottage; and he has lent me Madame de Noailles' poems. Won't you sit down? I hope you and Mrs. Matheson have had a good time? We have been to church--at least I

have--and given away lots of coals and plum-puddings--at least I have. Gertrude thought me a fool. We have had the choir up to sing carols in the servants' hall, and given them a sovereign--at least I did. And I don't want any more Christmas--for a long, long, time!"

And with that, she dropped into a chair opposite Winnington, who sat now twirling his hat and studying the ground.

"I agree with you," he said drily when she paused. "I felt when I was away that I had better be here. And I feel it now doubly."

"Because?"

"Because--if my absence has led to your developing any further acquaintance with the gentleman who has just left the room, when I might have prevented it, I regret it deeply."

Delia's cheeks had gone crimson again.

"You knew perfectly well Mr. Winnington, that we had made acquaintance with Mr. Lathrop! We never concealed it!"

"I knew, of course, that you were both members of the League, and that you had spoken at meetings together. I regretted it--exceedingly--and I asked you--in vain--to put an end to it. But when I find him paying a morning call here--and lending you books--that is a very different matter!"

Delia broke out--

"You really are too Early-Victorian, Mr. Winnington!--and I can't help being rude. Do you suppose you can ever turn me into a bread-and-butter miss? I have looked after myself for years--you don't understand!" She faced him indignantly.

Winnington laughed.

"All right--so long as the Early Victorians may have their say. And my say about Mr. Lathrop is--again that he is not a fit companion for you, or any young girl,--that he is a man of blemished character--both in morals and business. Ask anybody in this neighbourhood!"

He had spoken with firm emphasis, his eyes sparkling.

"Everybody in the neighbourhood believes anything bad, about him--and us!" cried Delia.

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, couple yourself, and the man--together!" said Winnington, flushing with anger. "I know nothing about him, when you first arrived here. Mr. Lathrop didn't matter twopence to me before. Now he does matter."

"Why?" Delia's eyes were held to his, fascinated.

"Simply because I care--I care a great deal--what happens to you," he said quietly, after a pause. "Naturally, I must care."

Delia looked away, and began twisting her black sash into knots.

"Bankruptcy--is not exactly a crime."

"Oh, so you knew that farther fact about him? But of course--it is the rest that matters. Since we spoke of this before, I have seen the judge who tried the case in which this man figured. I hate speaking of it in your presence, but you force me. He told me it was one of the worst he had ever known--a case for which there was no defence or excuse whatever."

"Why must I believe it?" cried Delia impetuously. "It's a man's judgment! The woman may have been--Gertrude says she was--horribly unhappy and ill-treated. Yet nothing could be proved--enough to free her. Wait till we have women judges--and women lawyers--then you'll see!"

He laughed indignantly--though not at all inclined to laugh. And what seemed to him her stubborn perversity drove him to despair.

"In this case, if there had been a woman judge, I am inclined to think it would have been a good deal worse for the people concerned. At least I hope so. Don't try to make me believe, Miss Delia, that women are going to forgive treachery and wickedness more easily than men!"

"Oh, 'treachery!'--" she murmured, protesting. His look both intimidated and drew her. Winnington came nearer to her, and suddenly he laid his hand on both of hers. Looking up she was conscious of a look that was half raillery, half tenderness.

"My dear child!--I must call you that--though you are so clever--and so--so determined to have your own way. Look here! I'm going to plead my rights. I've done a good deal for you the last three months--perhaps you hardly know all that has been done. I've been your watch-dog--put it at that. Well, now give the watch-dog, give the Early-Victorian, his bone! Promise me that you will have no more dealings with Mr. Lathrop. Send him back his books--and say 'Not at Home!'"

She was really distressed.

"I can't, Mr. Winnington!--I'm so sorry!--but I can't."

"Why can't you?" He still held her.

A score of thoughts flew hither and thither in her brain. She had asked a great favour of Lathrop--she had actually put the jewels into his hands! How could she recall her action? And when he had done her such a service, if he succeeded in doing it--how was she to turn round on him, and cut him the very next moment?

Nor could she make up her mind to confess to Winnington what she had done. She was bent on her scheme. If she disclosed it now everything might be upset.

"I really can't!" she repeated, gravely, releasing her hands.

Winnington rose, and began to pace the drawing room. Delia watched him--quivering--an exquisite vision herself, in the half lights of the room.

When he paused at last to speak, she saw a new expression in his eyes.

"I shall have to think this over, Miss Blanchflower--perhaps to reconsider my whole position."

She was startled, but she kept her composure.

"You mean--you may have--after all--to give me up?"

He forced a very chilly smile.

"You remember--you asked me to give you up. Now if it were only one subject--however important--on which we disagreed, I might still do my best, though the responsibility of all you make me connive at is certainly heavy. But if you are entirely to set at defiance not only my advice and wishes as to this illegal society to which you belong, and as to the violent action into which I understand you may be led when you go to town, but also in such a matter as we have just been discussing--then indeed, I see no place for me. I must think it over. A guardian appointed by the Court might be more effective--might influence you more."

"I told you I was a handful," said Delia, trying to laugh. But her voice sounded hollow in her own ears.

He offered no reply--merely repeating "I must think it over!"--and resolutely changing the subject, he made a little perfunctory conversation on a few matters of business--and was gone.

After his departure, Delia sat motionless for half an hour at least, staring at the fire. Then suddenly she sprang up, went to the writing-table, and sat down to write--

"Dear Mr. Mark--Don't give me up! You don't know. Trust me a little! I am not such a fiend as you think. I am grateful--I am indeed. I wish to goodness I could show it. Perhaps I shall some day. I hadn't time to tell you about poor Weston--who's to have an operation--and that I'm not going to town with Gertrude--not for some weeks at any rate. I shall be alone here, looking after Weston. So I can't disgrace or worry you for a good while any way. And you needn't fret about Mr. Lathrop--you needn't really! I can't explain--not just yet--but it's all right. Mayn't I come and help with some of your cripple children?"

or the school? or something? If Susy Amberly can do it, I suppose I can--I'd like to. May I sign myself--though I _am_ a handful--"

"Yours affectionately,
DELIA BLANCHFLOWER."

She sat staring at the paper, trembling under a stress of feeling she could not understand--the large tears in her eyes.

Chapter XIII

"Pack the papers as quickly as you can--I am going to town this afternoon. Whatever can't be packed before then, you can bring up to me tomorrow."

A tired girl lifted her head from the packing-case before which she was kneeling.

"I'll do my best, Miss Marvell--But I'm afraid it will be impossible to finish to-day." And she looked wearily round the room laden with papers--letters, pamphlets, press-cuttings--on every available table and shelf.

Gertrude gave a rather curt assent. Her reason told her the thing was impossible; but her will chafed against the delay, which her secretary threatened, of even a few hours in the resumption of her work in London, and the re-housing of all its tools and materials. She was a hard mistress; though no harder on her subordinates than she was on herself.

She began to turn her own hand to the packing, and missing a book she had left in the drawing-room the night before, she went to fetch it. It was again a morning of frosty sunshine, and the garden outside lay in dazzling light. The drawing-room windows were open, and through one of them Gertrude perceived Delia moving about outside on the whitened grass. She was looking for the earliest snowdrops which were just beginning to bulge from the green stems, pushing up through the dead leaves under the beech trees. She wore a blue soft shawl round her head and shoulders, and she was singing to herself. As she raised herself from the ground, and paused a moment looking towards the house, but evidently quite unconscious of any spectators, Gertrude could not take her eyes from the vision she made. If radiant beauty, if grace, and flawless youth can "lift a mortal to the skies," Delia stood like a young goddess under the winter sun. But there was much more than beauty in her face. There was a fluttering and dreamy joy which belongs only to the children of earth. The low singing came unconsciously from her lips, as though it were the natural expression of the heart within. Gertrude caught the old lilting tune:--

"For oh, Greensleaves was all my joy--
For oh, Greensleaves was my heart's delight--
And who but my lady Greensleaves--"

The woman observing her did so with a strange mixture of softness and repulsion. If Gertrude Marvell loved anybody, she loved Delia--the captive of her own bow and spear, and until now the most loyal, the most single-minded of disciples. But as she saw Delia walk away to a further reach of the garden, the mind of the elder woman bitterly accused the younger. Delia's refusal to join the militant forces in London, at this most critical and desperate time, on what seemed to Gertrude the trumpery excuse of Weston's illness, had made an indelible impression on a fanatical temper. If she had cared--if she had really cared--she could not have done any such thing. "What have I been wasting my time here for?" she asked herself; and reviewing the motives which had induced her to accept Delia's proposal that they should live together, she accused herself sharply of a contemptible lack of judgment and foresight.

For no mere affection for Delia Blanchflower would have influenced her, at the time when Delia, writing to tell her of the approaching death of Sir Robert, implored her to come and share her life. "You know I shall have money, dearest Gertrude,"--wrote Delia--"Come and help me to spend it--for the Cause." And for the sake of the Cause,--which was then sorely in want of money--and only for its sake, Gertrude had consented. She was at that time rapidly becoming one of the leading spirits in the London office of the "Daughters," so that to bury herself, even for a time, in a country village, some eighty miles from London, was a sacrifice. But to secure what seemed likely to be some thousands a year from a willing giver, such a temporary and modified exile had appeared to her worth while; and she had at once planned a campaign of "militant" meetings in the towns along the South Coast, by way of keeping in touch with "active work."

But, in the first place, the extraordinary terms of Sir Robert's will had proved far more baffling than she and Delia had ever been willing to believe. And, in the next place, the personality of Mark Winnington had almost immediately presented itself to Gertrude as something she had never reckoned with. A blustering and tyrannical guardian would have been comparatively easy to fight. Winnington was formidable, not because he was hostile, resolutely hostile, to their whole propaganda of violence; that might only have spurred a strong-willed girl to more passionate extremes. He was dangerous,--in spite of his forty years--because he was delightful; because, in his leisurely, old-fashioned way, he was so loveable, so handsome, so inevitably attractive, Gertrude, looking back, realised that she had soon perceived--vaguely at least--what might happen, what had now--as she dismally guessed--actually happened.

The young, impressionable creature, brought into close contact with this charming fellow--this agreeable reactionary--had fallen in love!

That was all. But it was more than enough. Delia might be still unconscious of it herself. But this new shrinking from the most characteristic feature of the violent policy--this new softness and fluidity in a personality that when they first reached Maumsey had begun already to stiffen in the fierce mould of militancy--to what could any observer with eyes in their head attribute them but the influence of Mark Winnington--the daily unseen presence of other judgments and other ideals embodied in a man to whom the girl's feelings had capitulated?

"If I could have kept her to myself for another year, he could have done nothing. But he has intervened before her opinions were anything more than the echoes of mine;--and for the future I shall have less and less chance against him. What shall we ever get out of her as a married woman? What would Mark Winnington--to whom she will give herself, body and soul,--allow us to get out of her? Better break with her now, and disentangle my own life!"

With such thoughts, a pale and brooding woman pursued the now distant figure of Delia. At the same time Gertrude Marvell had no intention whatever of provoking a premature breach which might deprive either the Cause or herself of any help they might still obtain from Delia in the desperate fight immediately ahead. She, personally, would have infinitely preferred freedom and a garret to Delia's flat, and any kind of dependence on Delia's money. "I was not born to be a parasite!" she angrily thought. But she had no right to prefer them. All that could be extracted from Delia should be extracted. She was now no more to Gertrude than a pawn in the game. Let her be used--if she could not be trusted!

But if this had fallen differently, if she had remained the true sister-in-arms, given wholly to the joy of the fight, Gertrude's stern soul would have clasped her to itself, just as passionately as it now dismissed her.

"No matter!" The hard brown eyes looked steadily into the future. "That's done with. I am alone--I shall be alone. What does it signify?--a little sooner or later?"

The vagueness of the words matched the vagueness of certain haunting premonitions in the background of the mind. Her own future always shaped itself in tragic terms. It was impossible--she knew it--that it should bring her to any kind of happiness. It was no less impossible that she should pause and submit. That active defiance of the existing order, on which she had entered, possessed her, gripped her, irrevocably. She was like the launched stone which describes its appointed curve--till it drops.

As for any interference from the side of her own personal ties and affections,--she had none.

In her pocket she carried a letter she had received that morning, from her mother. It was plaintive, as usual.

"Winnie's second child arrived last week. It was an awful confinement. The first doctor had to get another, and they only just pulled her through. The child's a misery. It would be much better if it had died. I can't think what she'll do. Her husband's a wretched creature--just manages to keep in work--but he neglects her shamefully--and if there ever is anything to spend, _he_ spends it--on his own amusement. She cried the other day, when we were talking of you. She thinks you're living with a rich lady, and have everything you want--and she and her children are often half-starved. 'She might forgive me now, I do think--' she'll say sometimes--'And as for Henry, if I did take him away from her, she may thank her stars she didn't marry him. She'd have killed him by now. She never could stand men like Henry. Only, when he was a young fellow, he took her in--her first, and then me. It was a bad job we ever saw him.'

"Why are you so set against us, Gertrude?--your own flesh and blood. I'm sure if I ever was unkind to you I'm sorry for it. You used to say I favoured Albert at your expense--Well, he's as good as dead to me now, and I've got no good out of all the spoiling I gave him. I sit at home by myself, and I'm a pretty miserable woman. I read everything I can in the papers about what you're doing--you, who were my only child, seven years before Albert came. It doesn't matter to you what I think--at least, it oughtn't. I'm an old woman, and whatever I thought I'd never quarrel with you. But it would matter to me a good deal, if you'd sometimes come in, and sit by the fire a bit, and chat. It's three years since I've even seen you. Winnie says you've forgotten us--you only care about the vote. But I don't believe it. Other people may think the vote can make up for everything--but not you. You're too clever. Hoping to see you,"

"Your lonely old mother,
JANET MARVELL."

To that letter, Gertrude had already written her reply. Sometime--in the summer, perhaps, she had said to her mother. And she had added the mental proviso--"if I am alive." For the matters in which she was engaged were no child's play, and the excitements of prison and hunger-striking might tell even on the strongest physique.

No--her family were nothing to her. Her mother's appeal, though it should not be altogether ignored, was an insincere one. She had always stood by the men of the family; and for the men of the family, Gertrude, its eldest daughter, felt nothing but loathing and contempt. Her father, a local government official in a western town, a small-minded domestic tyrant, ruined by long years of whisky-nipping between meals; her only brother, profligate and spendthrift, of whose present modes of life the less said the better; her brother-in-law, Henry Lewison, the man whom, in her callow, ignorant youth, she was once to have married, before her younger sister supplanted her--a canting hypocrite, who would spend his day in devising petty torments for his wife, and begin and end it with family prayers--these types,

in a brooding and self-centred mind, had gradually come to stand for the whole male race.

Nor had her lonely struggle for a livelihood, after she had fled from home, done anything to loosen the hold of these images upon her. She looked back upon a dismal type-writing office, run by a grasping employer; a struggle for health, warring with the struggle for bread; sick headache, sleeplessness, anaemia, yet always within, the same iron will driving on the weary body; and always the same grim perception on the dark horizon of an outer gulf into which some women fell, with no hope of resurrection. She burnt again with the old bitter sense of injustice, on the economic side; remembering fiercely her own stunted earnings, and the higher wages and larger opportunities of men, whom, intellectually, she despised. Remembering too the development of that new and ugly temper in men--men hard-pressed themselves--who must now see in women no longer playthings or sweethearts, but rivals and supplanters.

So that gradually, year by year, there had strengthened in her that strange, modern thing, a woman's hatred of men--the normal instincts of sex distorted and embittered. And when suddenly, owing to the slow working of many causes, economic and moral, a section of the Woman Suffrage movement had broken into flame and violence, she had flung her very soul to it as fuel, with the passion of one to whom life at last "gives room." In that outbreak were gathered up for her all the rancours, and all the ideals of life, all its hopes and all its despairs. Not much hope!--and few ideals. Her passion for the Cause had been a grim force, hardly mixed with illusion; but it had held and shaped her.

Meanwhile among women she has found a few kindred souls. One of them, a fellow-student, came into money, died, and left Gertrude Marvell a thousand pounds. On that sum she had educated herself, had taken her degree at a West Country University, had moved to London and begun work as a teacher and journalist. Then again, a break down in health, followed by a casual acquaintance with Lady Tonbridge--Sir Robert's offer--its acceptance--Delia!

How much had opened to her with Delia! _Pleasure_, for the first time; the sheer pleasure of travel, society, tropical beauty; the strangeness also of finding herself adored, of feeling that young loveliness, that young intelligence, all yielding softness in her own strong hands--

Well, that was done;--practically done. She cheated herself with no vain hopes. The process which had begun in Delia would go forward. One more defeat to admit and forget. One more disaster to turn one's back upon.

And no disabling lamentations! Her eyes cleared, her mouth stiffened. She went quietly back to her packing.

"Gertrude! What _are_ you doing?" The voice was Delia's. She stood on the threshold of Gertrude's den, looking with amazement, at the

littered room and the packing-cases.

"I find I must go up at once--They want help at the office." Gertrude, who was writing a letter, delivered the information over her shoulder.

"But the flat won't be ready!"

"Never mind. I can go to a hotel for a few days."

A cloud dropped over the radiance of Delia's face, fresh from the sun and frost outside.

"I can't bear your going alone!"

"Oh, you'll come later," said Gertrude indifferently.

"Did you--did you--have such urgent letters this morning?"

"Well--you know things _are_ urgent! But then, you see, you have made up your mind to stay with Weston!"

A slight mocking look accompanied the words.

"Yes--I must stay with Weston," said Delia, slowly, and then perceiving that the typist showed no signs of leaving them together, and that confidential talk was therefore impossible, she reluctantly went away.

Weston that morning was in much pain, and Delia sat beside her, learning by some new and developing instinct how to soothe her. The huntress of the Tyrolese woods had few caressing ways, and pain had always been horrible to her; a thing to be shunned, even by the spectator, lest it should weaken the wild natural energies. But Weston was very dear to her, and the maid's suffering stirred deep slumbering powers in the girl's nature. She watched the trained Nurse at her work, and copied her anxiously. And all the time she was thinking, thinking, now of Gertrude, now of her letter to Winnington. Gertrude was vexed with her, thought her a poor creature--that was plain. "But in a fortnight, I'll go to her,--and they'll see!--" thought the girl's wrestling mind. "And before that, I shall send her money. I can't help what she thinks. I'm not false!--I'm not giving in! But I must have this fortnight,--just this fortnight;--for Weston's sake, and--"

For her proud sincerity would not allow her to pretend to herself. What had happened to her? She felt the strangest lightness--as though some long restraint had broken down; a wonderful intermittent happiness, sweeping on her without reason, and setting the breath fluttering. It made her think of what an old Welsh nurse of her childhood had once told her of "conversion," in a Welsh revival, and its marvellous effects; how men and women walked on air, and the iron bands of life and custom dropped away.

Then she rose impatiently, despising herself, and went downstairs again to try and help Gertrude. But the packing was done, the pony-cart was

ordered, and in an hour more, Gertrude was gone. Delia was left standing on the threshold of the front door, listening to the sound of the receding wheels. They had parted in perfect friendliness, Gertrude with civil wishes for Weston's complete recovery, Delia with eager promises--"I shall soon come--_very_ soon!"--promises of which, as she now remembered, Gertrude had taken but little notice.

But as she went back into the house, the girl had a queer feeling of catastrophe, of radical change. She passed the old gun-room, and looked in. All its brown paper bundles, its stacks of leaflets, its books of reference were gone; only a litter of torn papers remained here and there, to shew what its uses had been. And suddenly, a swell of something like exultation, a wild sense of deliverance, rushed upon her, driving out depression. She went back to the drawing-room, with little dancing steps, singing under her breath. The flowers wanted freshening. She went out to the greenhouse, and brought in some early hyacinths and violets till the room was fragrant. Some of them she took up to Weston, chatting to the patient and her nurse as she arranged them, with such sweetness, such smiles, such an abandonment of kindness, that both looked after her amazed, when, again, she vanished. What had become of the imperious absent-minded young woman of ordinary days?

Delia lunched alone. And after lunch she grew restless.

He must have received her letter at breakfast-time. Probably he had some tiresome meetings in the morning, but soon--soon--

She tried to settle to some reading. How long it was since she had read anything for the joy of it!--anything that in some shape or other was not the mere pemmican of the Suffrage Movement; dusty arguments for, or exasperating arguments against. She plunged into poetry--a miscellaneous volume of modern verse--and the new world of feeling in which her mind had begun to move, grew rich, and deep, and many-coloured about her.

Surely--a sound at the gate! She sat up, crimson. Well?--she was going to make friends with her guardian--to bury the hatchet--for a whole fortnight at least. Only that. Nothing more--nothing--nothing!

Steps approached. She hastily unearthed a neglected work-basket, and a very ancient piece of half-done embroidery. Was there a thimble anywhere--or needles! Yes!--by good luck. Heavens!--what shamming! She bent over the dingy bit of silk, her cheeks dimpling with laughter.

Their first greetings were done, and Winnington was sitting by her--astride a chair, his arms lying along the top of it, his eyes looking down upon her, as she made random stitches in what looked like a futurist design.

"Do you know that you wrote me a very, _very_ nice letter?" and as he spoke, she heard in his voice that tone--that lost tone, which she had heard in it at their very first interview, before she had chilled and

flouted him, and made his life a burden to him. Her pulses leapt; but she did not look up.

"I wonder whether--you quite deserved it? You were angry with me--for nothing!"

"I am afraid I can't agree!" The voice now was a little dry, and a pair of very keen grey eyes examined her partially hidden face.

She pushed her work away and looked up.

"You ought!" she said vehemently. "You accused me--practically--of flirting with Mr. Lathrop. And I was doing nothing of the kind!"

He laughed.

"I never imagined that you were--or could be--flirting with Mr. Lathrop."

"Then why did you threaten to give me up if I went on seeing him?"

He hesitated--but said at last--gravely--

"Because I could not take the responsibility."

"How would it help me--to give me up? According to you--" she breathed fast--"I should only--go to perdition--the quicker!" Her eyes still laughed, but behind the laughter there was a rush of feeling which communicated itself to him.

"May I suggest that it is not necessary to go to perdition--at all--fast or slow?"

She shook her head. Silence followed; which Winnington broke.

"You said you would like to come and see some of the village people--your own people--and the school? Was that serious?"

"Certainly!" She raised an indignant countenance. "I suppose you think--like everybody--that because I want the vote, I can't care about anything else?"

"You'll admit it has a way of driving everything else out," he said, mildly. "Have you ever been into the village--for a month?--for two months? The things you wanted have been done. But you haven't been to see." She sprang to her feet.

"Shall I come now?"

"If it suits you. I've saved the afternoon."

She ran out of the room to put on her things, upsetting as she did so, the work-box with which she had been masquerading, and quite

unconscious of it. Winnington, smiling to himself, stooped to pick up the reels and skeins of silk. One, a skein of pink silk with which she had been working, he held in his hand a moment, and, suddenly, put in his pocket. After which he drifted absently to the hearthrug, and stood waiting for her, hat in hand. He was thinking of that moment in the wintry dawn when he had read her letter. The shock of emotion returned upon him. But what was he to do? What was really in her mind?--or, for the matter of that, in his own?

She re-appeared, radiant in a moleskin cap and furs, and then they both awkwardly remembered--he, that he had made no inquiry about Weston, and she, that she had said nothing of Gertrude Marvell's hurried departure.

"Your poor maid? Tell me about her. Oh, but she'll do well. We'll take care of her. France is an awfully good doctor."

Her eyes thanked him. She gave him a brief account of Weston's state; then looked away.

"Do you know--that I'm quite alone? Gertrude went up to town this morning?"

Winnington gave a low whistle of astonishment.

"She had to--" said Delia, hurriedly. "It was the office--they couldn't do without her."

"I thought she had undertaken to be your chaperon?"

The girl coloured.

"Well yes--but of course--the other claim came first."

"You don't expect me to admit that," said Winnington, with energy. "Miss Marvell has left you alone?--_alone_?--at a moment's notice--with your maid desperately ill--and without a word to me, or anybody?" His eyes sparkled.

"Don't let's quarrel!" cried Delia, as she stood opposite to him, putting on her gloves. "_Don't_! Not to-day--not this afternoon! And we're sure to quarrel if we talk about Gertrude."

His indignation broke up in laughter.

"Very well. We won't mention her. Well, but look here--" he pondered--"You _must_ have somebody. I would propose that Alice should come and keep you company, but I left her in bed with what looks like the flu. Ah!--I have it. But--am I really to advise? You are twenty-one, remember,--nearly twenty-two!"

The tender sarcasm in his voice brought a flood of colour to her cheeks.

"Go on!" she said, and stood quivering.

"Would you consider asking Lady Tonbridge to come and stay with you? Nora is away on a visit."

Delia moved quietly to the writing-table, pulled off her gloves, sat down to write a note. He watched her, standing behind her; his strained yet happy look resting on the beautiful dark head.

She rose, and held out the note, addressed to Lady Tonbridge. He took the note, and the hand together. The temptation was irresistible. He raised the hand and kissed it. Both were naturally reminded of the only previous occasion on which he had done such a thing; and as he dropped his hold, Delia saw the ugly scar which would always mark his left wrist.

"Thank you!"--he said warmly--"That'll be an immense relief to my mind."

"You mustn't think she'll convert me," said Delia, quickly.

"Why, she's a Suffragist!"

Delia shrugged her shoulders. "_Pour rire_!"

"Let's leave the horrid subject alone--shall we?"

Delia assented; and they set out, just as the winter sun of a bright and brilliant afternoon was beginning to drop towards its setting.

* * * * *

When Delia afterwards looked back on those two hours in Mark Winnington's company, she remembered them as a time enskied and glorified. First, the mere pleasure of the senses--the orange glow of the January evening, the pleasant crackling of the frosty ground, the exhilaration of exercise, and of the keen pungent air; then the beauty of the village and of the village lanes in the dusk, of the blue smoke drifting along the hill, of the dim reds and whites of the old houses, and the occasional gleams of fire and lamp through the small-paned windows; the gaiety of the children racing home from school, the dignity of the old labourers, the seemliness of the young. It was good to be alive--in England--breathing English air. It was good to be young and strong-limbed, with all one's life before one.

And next--and greater--there was the pleasure of Winnington beside her, of his changed manner, of their new comradeship. She felt even a curious joy in the difference of age between them. Now that by some queer change, she had ceased to stand on her dignity with him, to hold him arrogantly at arm's length, there emerged in her a childish confidence and sweetness, enchanting to the man on whom it played. "May I?--" "Do you think I might?--" she would say, gently, throwing out some suggestion or other, as they went in and out of the cottages, and

the humbleness in her dark eyes, as though a queen stooped, began to turn his head.

And how beautiful this common human life seemed that evening--after all the fierce imaginings in which she had lived so long! In the great towns beyond the hills, women were still starved and sweated,--still enslaved and degraded. Man no doubt was still the stupid and vicious tyrant, the Man-Beast that Gertrude Marvell believed him. But here in this large English village, how the old primal relations stood out!--sorrow-laden and sin-stained often, yet how touching, how worthy, in the main, of reverence and tenderness! As they went in and out of the cottages of her father's estate, the cottages where Winnington was at home, and she a stranger, all that "other side" of any great argument began to speak to her--without words. The world of politics and its machinery, how far away!--instead, the world of human need, and love, and suffering unveiled itself this winter evening to Delia's soul, and spoke to her in a new language. And always it was a language of sex, as between wives and husbands, mothers and sons, sisters and brothers. No isolation of one sex or the other. No possibility of thinking of them apart, as foes and rivals, with jarring rights and claims. These old couples tending each other, clinging together, after their children had left them, till their own last day should dawn; these widowed men or women, piteously lost without the old companion, like the ox left alone in the furrow; these young couples with their first babies; these dutiful or neglectful sons, these hard or tender daughters; these mothers young and old, selfish or devoted:--with Winnington beside her, Delia saw them all anew, heard them all anew. And Love, in all its kinds, everywhere the governing force, by its presence or its absence!--Love abused and degraded, or that Love, whether in the sunken eyes of the old, or on the cheeks of the young, which is but "a little lower than the angels."

And what frankly amazed her was Winnington's place in this world of labouring folk. He had given it ten years of service; not charity, but simply the service of the good citizen; moved by a secret, impelling motive, which Delia had yet to learn. And how they rewarded him! She walked beside a natural ruler, and felt her heart presently big with the pride of it.

"But the cripples?" She enquired for them, with a touch of sarcasm. "So far," she said, "the population Maumsey, appeared to be quiet exceptionally able-bodied."

"Goodness!" said Winnington--"I can't shew you more than two or three cripples to a village. Maumsey only rejoices in two. My county school will collect from the whole county. And I should never have found out the half of them, if it hadn't been for Susy Amberley."

"How did she discover them?" asked Delia, without any sort of cordiality.

"We--the County Council--put the enquiry into her hands. I showed her--a bit. But she's done it admirably. She's a wonderful little

person, Susy. What the old parents will do without her when she goes to London I can't think."

"Why is she going?"

Winnington shrugged his shoulders kindly.

"Wants a training--wants something more to do. Quite right--if it makes her happy. You women have all grown so restless nowadays." He laughed into the rather sombre face beside him. And the face lit up--amazingly.

"Because the world's so _marvellous_," said Delia, with her passionate look. "And there's so little time to explore it in. You men have always known that. Now we women know it too."

He pondered the remark--half smiling.

"Well, you'll see a good deal of it before you've done," he said at last. "Now come and look at what I've been trying to do for the women who complained to you."

And he shewed her how everything had been arranged to please her, at the cost of infinite trouble, and much expense. The woman with the eight children had been moved into a spacious new cottage made out of two old ones; the old granny alone in a house now too big for her, had been induced to take in a prim little spinster, the daughter of a small grocer just deceased; and the father of the deficient girl, for whom Miss Dempsey had made herself responsible, received Winnington with a lightening of his tired eyes, and taking him out of earshot of Delia, told him how Bessie "had got through her trouble," and was now earning money at some simple hand-work under Miss Dempsey's care.

"I didn't know you were doing all this!" said Delia, remorsefully, as they walked along the village street. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I think I did tell you--once or twice. But you had other things to think about."

"I hadn't!" said Delia, with angry energy. "I hadn't, you needn't make excuses for me!"

He smiled at her, a little gravely, but said nothing--till they reached a path leading to an isolated cottage--

"Here's a cripple at last!--Susy!--You here?"

For as the door opened to his knock, a lady rose from a low seat, and faced them.

Winnington grasped her by the hand.

"I thought you were already gone."

"No--they've put it off again for a week or two--no vacancy yet."

She shook hands formally with Delia. "I came to have another look at this boy. Isn't he splendid?"

She pointed to a grinning child of five sitting on the edge of the kitchen table, and dangling a pair of heavily ironed legs. The mother proudly shewed them. He had been three months in the Orthopaedic Hospital, she told Delia. The legs twisted with rickets had been broken and set twice, and now he was "doing fine." She set him down, and made him walk. "I never thought to see him do that!" she said, her wan face shining. "And it's all his doing--" she pointed to Winnington, "and Miss Susy's."

Meanwhile Susy and Winnington were deep in conversation--very technical much of it--about a host of subjects they seemed to have in common.

Delia silent and rather restless, watched them both, the girl's sweet, already faded, face, and Winnington's expression. When they emerged from the cottage Susy said shyly to Delia--

"Won't you come to tea with me some day next week?"

"Thank you. I should like to. But my maid is very ill. Else I should be in London."

"Oh, I'm very sorry. May I come to you?"

Delia thanked her coldly. She could have beaten herself for a rude, ungracious creature; yet for the life of her she could not command another manner. Susy drew back. She and Winnington began to talk again, ranging over persons and incidents quite unknown to Delia--the frank talk, full of matter of comrades in a public service. And again Delia watched them acutely--jealous--yet not in any ordinary sense. When Susy turned back towards the Rectory, Delia said abruptly--

"She's helped you a great deal?"

"Susy!" He went off at score, ending with--"What France and I shall do without her, I don't know. If we could only get more women--_scores more women--_to do the work! There we sit, perched up aloft on the Council, and what we want are the women to advise us, and the women's hands--_to do the little things--_which make just all the difference!"

She was silent a moment, and then said sorely--"I suppose that means, that if we did all the work we might do--we needn't bother about the vote."

He turned upon with animation--

"I vow I wasn't thinking about the vote!"

"Miss Amberley doesn't seem to bother about it."

Winnington's voice shewed amusement.

"I can't imagine Susy a suff. It simply isn't in her."

"I know plenty of suffragists just as good and useful as she is," said Delia, bristling.

Winnington did not immediately reply. They had left the village behind, and were walking up the Maumsey lane in a gathering darkness, each electrically conscious of the other. At last he said in a changed tone--

"Have I been saying anything to wound you? I didn't mean it."

She laughed unsteadily.

"You never say anything to wound me. I was only--a kind of fretful porcupine--standing up for my side."

"And the last thought in my mind to-night was to attack your 'side,'" he protested.

Her tremulous sense drank in the gentleness of his voice, the joy of his strong, enveloping presence, and the sweetness of her own surrender which had brought him back to her, the thought of it vibrating between them, unspoken. Until, suddenly, at the door of the Abbey, Winnington halted and took her by both hands.

"I must go home. Good-night. Have you got books to amuse you?"

"Plenty."

"Poor child!--all alone! But you'll have Lady Tonbridge to-morrow."

"How do you know? She mayn't come."

"I'm going there now. I'll make her. You--you won't be doing any more embroidery to-night?"

He looked at her slyly. Delia laughed out.

"There!--when one tries to be feminine, that's how you mock!"

"_'Mock_!' I admired. Good-night!--I shall be here to-morrow."

He was gone--into the darkness.

Delia entered the lonely house, in a bewilderment of feeling. As she passed Gertrude's deserted sitting-room on her way to the staircase, she saw that the parlourmaid had lit a useless lamp there. She went in

to put it out. As she did so, a torn paper among the litter on the floor attracted her notice. She stooped and took it up.

It seemed to be a fragment of a plan--a plan of a house. It shewed two series of rooms, divided by a long passage. One of the rooms was marked "Red Parlour," another, "Hall," and at the end of the passage, there were some words, clearly in Gertrude Marvell's handwriting--

"_Garden door, north_."

With terror in her heart, Delia brought the fragment to the lamp, and examined every word and line of it.

Recollections flashed into her mind, and turned her pale. That what she held was part of a general plan of the Monk Lawrence ground-floor, she was certain--dismally certain. And Gertrude had made it. Why?

Delia tore the paper into shreds and burnt the shreds. Afterwards she spent an oppressed and miserable night. Her friend reproached her, on the one side; and Winnington, on the other.

Chapter XIV

Lady Tonbridge was sitting in the window-seat of a little sitting-room adjoining her bedroom at Maumsey Abbey. That the young mistress of Maumsey had done her best to make her guest comfortable, that guest most handsomely acknowledged. Some of the few pretty things which the house contained had been gathered there. The chintz covered sofa and chairs, even though the chintz was ugly, had the pleasant country-house look, which suggests afternoon tea, and chatting friends; a bright fire, flowers and a lavish strewing of books completed the hospitable impression.

Yet Madeleine Tonbridge had by no means come to Maumsey Abbey, at Winnington's bidding, as to a Land of Cockaigne. She at all events regarded Delia as a "handful," and was on the watch day by day for things outrageous. She could not help liking the beautiful creature--almost loving her! But Delia was still a "Daughter of Revolt"--apparently unrepentant; that dangerous fanatic, her pretended chaperon, was still in constant correspondence with her; the papers teemed with news of militant outrages, north, south, east and west; and riotous doings were threatened for the meetings of Parliament by Delia's Society. On all these matters Delia shut her proud lips. Indeed her new reticence with regard to militant doings and beliefs struck Lady Tonbridge as more alarming than the young and arrogant defiance with which on her first arrival she had been wont to throw them at the world. Madeleine could not rid herself of the impression during these weeks that Delia had some secret cause of anxiety connected with the militant propaganda. She was often depressed, and there were moments

when she shewed a nervousness not easily accounted for. She scarcely ever mentioned Gertrude Marvell; and she never wrote her letters in public; while those she received, she would carry away to the gun room--which she had now made her own particular den--before she opened them.

At the same time, if Weston recovered from the operation, in three weeks or so it would be possible for Delia to leave Maumsey; and it was generally understood that she would then join her friend in London, just in time for the opening of Parliament. For the moment, it was plain she was not engaged in any violent doings. But who could answer for the future?

And meanwhile, what was Mark Winnington about? It was all very well to sit there trifling with the pages of the Quarterly Review! In her moments of solitude by night or day, during the five days she had already spent at Maumsey, Madeleine had never really given her mind to anything else but the engrossing question. "Is he in love with her--or is he not?"

Of course she had foreseen--had feared--the possibility of it, from that very first moment, almost--when Winnington had written to her describing the terms of Bob Blanchflower's will, and his own acceptance of the guardianship.

Yet why "feared"? Had she not for years desired few things so sincerely as to see Winnington happily married? As to that old tragedy, with its romantic effect upon his life, her first acquiescence in that effect, as something irrevocable, had worn away with time. It now seemed to her an intolerable thing that Agnes Clay's death should forever stand between Winnington and love. It was positively anti-social--bad citizenship--that such a man as Mark Winnington should not produce sons and daughters for the State, when all the wastrels and cheats in creation were so active in the business.

All the same she had but rarely ventured to attack him on the subject, and the results had not been encouraging. She was certain that he had entered upon the guardianship of Delia Blanchflower in complete single-mindedness--confident, disdainfully confident, in his own immunity; and after that first outburst into which friendship had betrayed her, she had not dared to return to the subject. But she had watched him--with the lynx eyes of a best friend; and that best friend, a woman to whom love affairs were the most interesting things in existence. In which, of course, she knew she was old-fashioned, and behind the mass of the sex, now racing toward what she understood was called the "economic independence of women"--_i.e._ a life without man.

But in spite of watching, she was much perplexed--as to both the persons concerned. She had now been nearly a week at Maumsey, in obedience to Delia's invitation and Winnington's urging. The opportunity indeed of getting to know Mark's beautiful--and troublesome--ward, more intimately, was extremely welcome to her curiosity. Hitherto Gertrude Marvell had served as an effective barrier

between Delia and her neighbours. The neighbours did not want to know Miss Marvell, and Miss Marvell, Madeleine Tonbridge was certain, had never intended that the neighbours should rob her of Delia.

But now Gertrude Marvell had in some strange sudden way vacated her post; and the fortress lay open to attack and capture, were anyone strong enough to seize it. Moreover Delia's visitor had not been twenty-four hours in the house before she had perceived that Delia's attitude to her guardian was new, and full of suggestion to the shrewd bystander. Winnington had clearly begun to interest the girl profoundly--both in himself, and in his relation to her. She now wished to please him, and was nervously anxious to avoid hurting or offending him. She was always conscious of his neighbourhood or his mood; she was eager--though she tried to conceal it--for information about him; and three nights already had Lady Tonbridge lingered over Delia's bedroom fire, the girl on the rug at her feet, while the elder woman poured out her recollections of Mark Winnington, from the days when she and he had been young together.

As to that vanished betrothed, Agnes Clay,--the heroine of Winnington's brief engagement--Delia's thirst for knowledge, in a restless, suppressed way, had been insatiable. Was she jealous of that poor ghost, and of all those delicate, domestic qualities with which her biographer could not but invest her? The daughter of a Dean of Wanchester--retiring, spiritual, tender,--suggesting a cloistered atmosphere, and The Christian Year--she was still sharp in Madeleine's recollection, and that lady felt a certain secret and mischievous zest in drawing her portrait, while Delia, her black brows drawn together, her full red mouth compressed, sat silent.

Then--Wilmington as a friend!--upon that theme indeed Madeleine had used her brightest colours. And to make this passive listener understand what friendship meant in Wilmington's soul, it had been necessary for the speaker to tell her own story, as much at least as it was possible for her to tell, and Delia to hear. A hasty marriage--"my own fault, my dear, as much as my parents'!"--twelve years of torment and humiliation at the hands of a bad man, descending rapidly to the pit, and quite willing to drag his wife and child with him, ending in a separation largely arranged by Winnington--and then--

"We retired, Nora and I, on a decent allowance, my own money really, only like a fool, I had let it all get into Alfred's hands. We took a house at Richmond. Nora was fifteen. For two years my husband paid the money. Then he wrote to say he was tired of doing without his daughter, and he required her to live with him for six months in the year, as a condition of continuing the allowance. I refused. We would sooner both of us have thrown ourselves into the Thames. Alfred blustered and threatened--but he could do nothing--except cut off the allowance, which he did, at once. Then Mark Winnington found me the cottage here, and made everything smooth for us. I wouldn't take any money from him, though he was abominably ready to give it us! But he got me lessons--he got me friends. He's made everybody here feel for us, and respect us. He's managed the little bits of property we've got left--he's watched

over Nora--he's been our earthly Providence--and we both adore him!"

On which the speaker, with a flickering smile and tear-dashed eyes, had taken Delia's face in her two slender hands--

"And don't be such a fool, dear, as to imagine there's been anything in it, ever, but the purest friendship and good-heartedness that ever bound three people together! My greatest joy would be to see him married--to a woman worthy of him--if there is one! And he I suppose will find his reward in marrying Nora--to some nice fellow. He begins to match-make for her already."

Delia slowly withdrew herself.

"And he himself doesn't intend to marry?" She asked the question, clasping her long arms round her knees, as she sat on the floor, her dark eyes--defiantly steady on her guest's face.

Lady Tonbridge could hear her own answer.

"L'homme propose! Let the right woman try!" Whereupon Delia, a delicious figure, in a slim white dressing-gown, a flood of curly brown hair falling about her neck and shoulders, had sprung up, and bidden her guest a hasty good-night.

One other small incident she recalled.

A propos of some anxious calculation made by Winnington's sister Alice Matheson one day in talk with Lady Tonbridge--Delia being present--as to whether Mark could possibly afford a better motor than the "ramshackle little horror" he was at present dependent on, Delia had said abruptly, on the departure of Mrs. Matheson--

"But surely the legacy my father left Mr. Winnington would get a new motor!"

"But he hasn't taken it, and never will!" Lady Tonbridge had cried, amazed at the girl's ignorance.

"Why not?" Delia had demanded, almost fiercely, looking very tall, and oddly resentful.

Why not? "Because one doesn't take payment for that sort of thing!" had been Mark's laughing explanation, and the only explanation that she, Madeleine, had been able to get out of him. She handed it on--to Delia's evident discomfort. So, all along, this very annoying--though attaching--young woman had imagined that Winnington was being handsomely paid for putting up with her?

* * * * *

And Winnington?

Here again, it was plain there was a change of attitude, though what it meant Madeleine could not satisfactorily settle with herself. In the early days of his guardianship he had been ready enough to come to her, his most intimate woman-friend, and talk about his ward, though always with that chivalrous delicacy which was his gift among men. Of late he had been much less ready to talk; a good sign! And now, since Gertrude Marvell's blessed departure, he was more at Maumsey than he had ever been before. He seemed indeed to be pitting his own influence against Miss Marvell's, and in his modest way, yet consciously, to be taking Delia in hand, and endeavouring to alter her outlook on life; clearing away, so far as he could, the atmosphere of angry, hearsay propaganda in which she had spent her recent years, and trying to bring her face to face with the deeper loves and duties and sorrows which she in her headstrong youth knew so little about, while they entered so profoundly into his own upright and humane character.

Well, but did all this mean _love_?--the desire of the man for the woman.

Madeleine Tonbridge pondered it. She recollected a number of little acts and sayings, throwing light upon his profound feeling for the girl, his sympathy with her convictions, her difficulties, her wild revolts against existing abuses and tyrannies. "I learn from her"--he had said once, in conversation,--"she teaches me many things." Madeleine could have laughed in his face--but for the passionate sincerity in his look.

One thing she perceived--that he was abundantly roused on the subject of that man Lathrop's acquaintance with his ward. Lathrop's name had not been mentioned since Lady Tonbridge's arrival, but she received the impression of a constant vigilance on Winnington's part, and a certain mystery and unhappiness on Delia's. As to the notion that such a man as Paul Lathrop could have any attraction for such a girl as Delia Blanchflower, the idea was simply preposterous,--except on the general theory that no one is really sane, and every woman "is at heart a rake." But of course there was the common interest, or what appeared to be a common interest in this militant society to which Delia was still so intolerably committed! And an unscrupulous man might easily make capital out of it.

At this stage in the rambling reverie which possessed her, Lady Tonbridge was aware of footsteps on the gravel outside. Winnington? He had proposed to take Delia for a ride that afternoon, to distract her mind from Weston's state, and from the operation which was to take place early the following morning. She drew the curtain aside.

Paul Lathrop!

Madeleine felt herself flushing with surprise and indignation. The visitor was let in immediately. It surely was her duty to go down and play watchdog.

She firmly rose. But as she did so, there was a knock at her door, and

Delia hurriedly entered.

"I--I thought I'd better say--Mr. Lathrop's just come to see me--on business. I'm so sorry, but you won't mind my coming to say so?"

Lady Tonbridge raised her eyebrows.

"You mean--you want to see him alone? All right. I'll come down presently."

Delia disappeared.

* * * * *

For more than half an hour did that "disreputable creature," as Lady Tonbridge roundly dubbed him, remain closeted with Delia, in Delia's drawing-room. Towards the end of the time the visitor overhead was walking to and fro impatiently, vowing to herself that she was bound--positively bound to Winnington--to go down and dislodge the man. But just as she was about to leave her room, she again heard the front door open and close. She ran to the window just in time to see Lathrop departing--and Winnington arriving!--on foot and alone. She watched the two men pass each other in the drive--Winnington's start of haughty surprise--and Lathrop's smiling and, as she thought, insolent greeting. It seemed to her that Winnington hesitated--was about to stop and address the intruder. But he finally passed him by with the slightest and coldest recognition. Lathrop's fair hair and slouching shoulders disappeared round a corner of the drive. Winnington hurried to the front door and entered.

Lady Tonbridge resolutely threw herself into an arm-chair and took up a novel.

"Now let them have it out! I don't interfere."

* * * * *

Meanwhile Delia, with a red spot of agitation on either cheek, was sitting at the old satin-wood bureau in the drawing-room, writing a cheque. A knock at the door disturbed her. She half rose, to see Wilmington open and close it.

A look at his face startled her. She sank back into her chair, in evident confusion. But her troubled eyes met his appealingly.

Wilmington's disturbance was plain.

"I had ventured to think--to hope--" he began, abruptly--"that although you refused to give me your promise when I asked it, yet that you would not again--or so soon again--receive Mr. Lathrop--privately."

Delia rose and came towards him.

"I told Lady Tonbridge not to come down. Was that very wrong of me?"

She looked at him, half smiling, half hanging her head.

"It was unwise--and, I think, unkind!" said Winnington, with energy.

"Unkind to you?" She lifted her beautiful eyes. There was something touching in their strained expression, and in her tone.

"Unkind to yourself, first of all," he said, firmly. "I must repeat Miss Delia, that this man is not a fit associate for you or any young girl. You do yourself harm by admitting him--by allowing him to see you alone--and you hurt your friends."

Delia paused a moment.

"Then you don't trust me at all?" she said at last, slowly.

Winnington melted. How pale she looked! He came forward and took her hand--

"Of course I trust you! But you don't know--you are too young. You confess you have some business with Mr. Lathrop that you can't tell me--your guardian; and you have no idea to what misrepresentations you expose yourself, or with what kind of a man you have to deal!"

Delia withdrew her hand, and dropped into a chair--her eyes on the carpet.

"I meant--" she said, and her tone trembled--"I did mean to have told you everything to-day."

"And now--now you can't?"

She made no reply, and in the silence he watched her closely. What could account for such an eclipse of all her young vivacity? It was clear to him that that fellow was entangling her in some monstrous way--part and parcel no doubt of this militant propaganda--and calculating on developments. Winnington's blood boiled. But while he stood uncertain, Delia rose, went to the bureau where she had been writing, brought thence a cheque, and mutely offered it.

"What is this?" he asked.

"The money you lent me."

And to his astonishment he saw that the cheque was for £500, and was signed "Delia Blanchflower."

"You will of course explain?" he said, looking at her keenly. Suddenly Delia's embarrassed smile broke through.

"It's--it's only that I've been trying to pay my debts!"

His patience gave way.

"I'm afraid I must tell you--very plainly--that unless you can account to me for this cheque, I must entirely refuse to take it!"

Delia put her hands behind her, like a scolded child.

"It is my very own," she protested, mildly. "I had some ugly jewels that my grandmother left me, and I have sold them--that's all."

Winnington's grey eyes held her.

"H'm--and--has Mr. Lathrop had anything to do with the sale?"

"Yes!" She looked up frankly, still smiling. "He has managed it for me."

"And it never occurred to you to apply to your guardian in such a matter? Or to your lawyer?"

She laughed--with what he admitted was a very natural scorn. "Ask my guardian to provide me with the means of helping the 'Daughters'--when he regards us all as criminals? On the contrary, I wanted to relieve your conscience, Mr. Winnington!"

"I can't say you have succeeded," he said, grimly, as he began to pace the drawing-room, with slow steps, his hands in his pockets.

"Why not? Now--everything you give me--can go to the right things--what you consider the right things. And what is my own--my very own--I can use as I please."

Yet neither tone nor gesture were defiant, as they would have been a few weeks before. Rather her look was wistful--appealing--as she stood there, a perplexing, but most charming figure, in her plain black dress, with its Quakerish collar of white lawn.

He turned on her impetuously.

"And Mr. Lathrop has arranged it all for you?"

"Yes. He said he knew a good deal about jewellers. I gave him some diamonds. He took them to London, and he has sold them."

"How do you know he has even treated you honestly!"

"I am certain he has done it honestly!" she cried indignantly. "There are the letters--from the jewellers--" And running to the bureau, she took thence a packet of letters and thrust them into Winnington's hands.

He looked them through in silence,--turning to her, as he put them

down.

"I see. It is of course possible that this firm of jewellers have paid Mr. Lathrop a heavy commission behind the scenes, of which you know nothing. But I don't press that. Indeed I will assume exactly the contrary. I will suppose that Mr. Lathrop has acted without any profit to himself. If so, in my eyes it only makes the matter worse--for it establishes a claim on you. Miss Delia!--" his resolute gaze held her--"I do not take a farthing of this money unless you allow me to write to Mr. Lathrop, and offer him a reasonable commission for his services!"

"No--no! Impossible!"

She turned away from him, towards the window, biting her lip--in sharp distress.

"Then I return you this cheque"--he laid it down beside her. "And I shall replace the money,--the £500--which I ought never to have allowed you to spend as you have done, out of my own private pocket."

She stood silent, looking into the garden, her chest heaving. She thought of what Lady Tonbridge had told her of his modest means--and those generous hidden uses of them, of which even his most intimate friends only got an occasional glimpse. Suddenly she went up to him--

"Will you--will you promise me to write civilly?" she said, in a wavering voice.

"Certainly."

"You won't offend--insult him?"

"I will remember that you have allowed him to come into this drawing-room, and treated him as a guest," said Winnington coldly. "But why, Miss Delia, are you so careful about this man's feelings? And is it still impossible that you should meet my wishes--and refuse to see him again?"

She shook her head--mutely.

"You intend--to see him again?"

"You forget--that we have--business together."

Winnington paused a moment, then came nearer to the chair on which she had dropped.

"This last week--we have been very good friends--haven't we, Miss Delia?"

"Call me Delia, please!"

"Delia, then!--we have come to understand each other much better--haven't we?"

She made a drooping sign of assent.

"_Can't_ I persuade you--to be guided by me--as your father wished--during these next years of your life? I don't ask you to give up your convictions--your ideals. We should all be poor creatures without them! But I do ask you to give up these violent and illegal methods--this violent and illegal Society--with which you have become entangled. It will ruin your life, and poison your whole nature!--unless you can shake yourself free. Work for the Suffrage as much as you like--but work for it honourably--and lawfully. I ask you--I beg of you!--to give up these associates--and these methods."

The tenderness and gravity of his tone touched the girl's quivering senses almost unbearably. It was like the tenderness of a woman. She felt a wild impulse to throw herself into his arms, and weep. But instead she grew very white and still.

"I can't!"--was all she said, her eyes on the ground. Winnington turned away.

Suddenly--a sound of hasty steps in the hall outside--and the door was opened by a nurse, in uniform.

"Miss Blanchflower!--can you come?"

Delia sprang up. She and the nurse disappeared together.

* * * * *

Winnington guessed what had happened. Weston who was to face a frightful operation on the morrow as the only chance of saving her life, had on the whole gone through the fortnight of preparatory treatment with wonderful courage. But during the last forty-eight hours, there had been attacks of crying and excitement, connected with the making of her will, which she had insisted on doing, being herself convinced that she would die under the knife. Medically, all such agitation was disastrous. But the only person who could calm her at these moments was Delia, whom she loved. And the girl had shewn in dealing with her a marvellous patience and strength.

Presently Madeleine Tonbridge came downstairs--with red eyes. She described the scene of which she had just been a witness in Weston's room. Delia, she said, choking again at the thought of it, had been "wonderful." Then she looked enquiringly at Winnington--

"You met that man going away?"

He sat down beside her, unable to disguise his trouble of mind, or to resist the temptation of her sympathy and their old friendship.

"I am certain there is some plot afoot--some desperate business--and they are trying to draw her into it! What can we do?"

Lady Tonbridge shook her head despondently. What indeed could they do, with a young lady of full age,--bent on her own way?

Then she noticed the cheque lying open on the table, and asked what it meant.

"Miss Delia wishes to repay me some money I lent her," said Winnington, after a pause. "As matters stand at present, I prefer to wait. Would you kindly take charge of the cheque for her? No need to worry her about it again, to-night."

* * * * *

Delia came down at tea-time, pale and quiet, like one from whom virtue has gone out. By tacit consent Winnington and Lady Tonbridge devoted themselves to her. It seemed as though in both minds there had arisen the same thought of her as orphaned and motherless, the same pity, the same resentment that anything so lovely should be unhappy--as she clearly was; and not only, so both were convinced, on account of her poor maid.

Winnington stayed on into the lamplight, and presently began to read aloud. The scene became intimate and domestic. Delia very silent, sat in a deep arm chair, some pretence at needlework on her knee, but in reality doing nothing but look into the fire, and listen to Winnington's voice. She had changed while upstairs into a white dress, and the brilliance of her hair, and wide, absent eyes above the delicate folds of white, seemed to burn in Winnington's consciousness as he read. Presently however, Lady Tonbridge looking up, was startled to see that the girl had imperceptibly fallen asleep. The childish sadness and sweetness of the face in its utter repose seemed to present another Delia, with another history. Madeleine hoped that Winnington had not observed the girl's sleep; and he certainly gave no sign of it. He went on reading; and presently his companion, noticing the clock, rose very quietly, and went out to give a letter to the parlour-maid for post.

As she entered the room again, however, she saw that Winnington had laid down his book. His eyes were now on Delia--his lips parted. All the weather-beaten countenance of the man, its deep lines graven by strenuous living, glowed as from an inward light--marvellously intense and pure. Madeleine's pulse leapt. She had her answer to her speculations of the afternoon.

Meanwhile through Delia's sleeping mind there swept scenes and images of fear. She grew restless, and as Lady Tonbridge slipped again into her chair by the fire, the girl woke suddenly with a long quivering sigh, a sound of pain, which provoked a quick movement of alarm in Winnington.

But she very soon recovered her usual manner; and Winnington said good-night. He went away carrying his anxieties with him through the dark, carrying also a tumult of soul that would not be stilled. Whither was he drifting? Of late he had felt sure of himself again. Her best friend and guide--it was that he was rapidly becoming--with that, day by day, he bade himself be content. And now, once more, self-control was uprooted and tottering. It was the touch of this new softness, this note of innocent appeal, even of bewildered distress, in her, which was kindling all his manhood, and breaking down his determination.

He raged at the thought of Lathrop. As to any danger of a love-affair, like Lady Tonbridge, he scouted the notion. It would be an insult to Delia to suppose such a thing. But it was simply intolerable in his eyes that she should have any dealings with the fellow--that he should have the audacity to call at her house, to put her under an obligation.

And he was persuaded there was more than appeared in it; more than Delia's devices for getting money, wherewith to feed the League of Revolt. She was clearly anxious, afraid. Some shadow was brooding over her, some terror that she could not disclose--of that Winnington was certain. And this man, whom she had already accepted as her colleague in a public campaign, was evidently in the secret; might be even the cause of her fears.

He began hotly to con the terms of his letter to Lathrop; and then had to pull himself up, remembering unwillingly what he had promised Delia.

Chapter XV

"Do you know anything more?"

The voice was Delia's; and the man who had just met her in the shelter of the wooded walk which ran along the crest of the hill above the Maumsey valley, was instantly aware of the agitation of the speaker.

"Nothing--precise. As I told you last week--you needn't be afraid of anything immediate. But my London informants assure me that elaborate preparations are certainly going on for some great _coup_ as soon as Parliament meets--against Sir Wilfrid. The police are uneasy, though puzzled. They have warned Daunt, and Sir Wilfrid is guarded."

"Then of course our people won't attempt it! It would be far too dangerous."

"Don't be too sure! You and I know Miss Marvell. If she means to burn Monk Lawrence, she'll achieve it, whatever the police may do."

The man and the girl walked on in silence. The January afternoons were lengthening a little, and even under the shadow of the wood Lathrop

could see with sufficient plainness Delia's pale beauty--strangely worn and dimmed as it seemed to him. His mind revolted. Couldn't the jealous gods spare even this physical perfection? What on earth had been happening to her? He supposed a Christian would call the face "spiritualised." If so, the Christian--in his opinion--would be a human ass.

"I have written several times to Miss Marvell--very strongly," said Delia at last. "I thought you ought to know that. But I have had no reply."

"Why don't you go--instead of writing?"

"It has been impossible. My maid has been so terribly ill."

Lathrop expressed his sympathy. Delia received it with coldness and a slight frown. She hurried on--

"I've written again--but I haven't sent it. Perhaps I oughtn't to have written by post."

"Better not. Shall I be your messenger? Miss Marvell doesn't like me--but that don't matter."

"Oh, no, thank you." The voice was hastily emphatic; so that his vanity winced. "There are several members of the League in the village. I shall send one of them."

He smiled--rather maliciously.

"Are you going to tackle Miss Andrews herself?"

"You're still--quite _certain_--that she's concerned?"

"Quite certain. Since you and I met--a fortnight ago isn't it?--I have seen her several times, in the neighbourhood of the house--after dark. She has no idea, of course, that I have been prowling round."

"What have you seen?--what can she be doing?" asked Delia. "Of course I remember what you told me--the other day."

Lathrop's belief was that a close watch was now being kept on Daunt--on his goings and comings--with a view perhaps to beguiling him away, and then getting into the house.

"But he has lately got a niece to stay with him, and help look after the children, and the house. His sister who is married in London, offered to send her down for six months. He was rather surprised, for he had quite lost sight of his sister; but he tells me it's a great relief to his mind.

"So you talk to him?"

"Certainly. Oh, he knows all about me--but he knows too that I'm on the side of the house! He thinks I'm a queer chap--but he can trust me--in _that_ business. And by the way, Miss Blanchflower, perhaps I ought to let you understand that I'm an artist and a writer, before I'm a Suffragist, and if I come across Miss Marvell--engaged in what you and I have been talking of--I shall behave just like any other member of the public, and act for the police. I don't want to sail--with you--under any false pretences!"

"I know," said Delia, quietly. "You came to warn me--and we are acting together. I understand perfectly. You--you've promised however"--she could not keep her voice quite normal--"that you'd let me know--that you'd give me notice before you took any step."

Lathrop nodded. "If there's time--I promise. But if Daunt or I come upon Miss Marvell--or any of her minions--torch in hand--there would not be time. Though, of course, if I could help her escape, consistently with saving the house--for your sake--I should do so. I am sure you believe that?"

Delia made no audible reply, but he took her silence for consent.

"And now"--he resumed--"I ought to be informed without delay, whether your messenger finds Miss Marvell and how she receives your letter."

"I will let you know at once."

"A telegram brings me here--this same spot. But you won't wire from the village?"

"Oh no, from Latchford."

"Well, then, that's settled. Regard me, please, as your henchman. Well!--have you read any Madame de Noailles?"

He fancied he saw a slight impatient movement.

"Not yet, I'm afraid. I've been living in a sick room."

Again he expressed polite sympathy, while his thoughts repeated--"What waste!--what absurdity!"

"She might distract you--especially in these winter days. Her verse is the very quintessence of summer--of hot gardens and their scents--of roses--and June twilights. It takes one out of this leafless north." He stretched a hand to the landscape.

And suddenly, while his heavy face kindled, he began to recite. His French was immaculate--even to a sensitive and well-trained ear; and his voice, which in speaking was disagreeable, took in reciting deep and beautiful notes, which easily communicated to a listener the thrill, the passion, of sensuous pleasure, which certain poetry produced in himself.

But it communicated no such thrill to Delia. She was only irritably conscious of the uncouthness of his large cadaverous face, and straggling fair hair; of his ragged ulster, his loosened tie, and all the other untidy details of his dress. "And I shall have to go on meeting him!" she thought, with repulsion. "And at the end of this walk (the gate was in sight) I shall have to shake hands with him--and he'll hold my hand."

She loathed the thought of it; but she knew very well that she was under coercion--for Gertrude's sake. The recollection of Winnington--away in Latchford on county business--smote her sharply. But how could she help it? She must--_must_ keep in touch with this man--who had Gertrude in his power.

While these thoughts were running through her mind, he stopped his recitation abruptly.

"Am I to help you any more--with the jewels?"

Delia started. Lathrop was smiling at her, and she resented the smile. She had forgotten. But there was no help for it. She must have more money. It might be, in the last resort, the means of bargaining with Gertrude. And how could she ask Mark Winnington!

So she hurriedly thanked him, naming a tiara and two pendants, that she thought must be valuable.

"All right," said Lathrop, taking out a note-book from his breast pocket, and looking at certain entries he had made on the occasion of his visit to Maumsey. "I remember--worth a couple of thousand at least. When shall I have them?"

"I will send them registered--to-morrow--from Latchford."

"_ Trés bien_! I will do my best. You know Mr. Winnington has offered me a commission?" His eyes laughed.

Delia turned upon him.

"And you ought to accept it, Mr. Lathrop! It would be kinder to all of us."

She spoke with spirit and dignity. But he laughed again and shook his head.

"My reward, you see, is just _not_ to be paid. My fee is your presence--in this wood--your little word of thanks--and the hand you give me--on the bargain!"

They had reached the gate, and he held out his hand. Delia had flushed violently, but she yielded her own. He pressed it lingeringly, as she had foreseen, then released it and opened the gate for her.

"Good-bye then. A word commands me--when you wish. We keep watch--and each informs the other--barring accidents. That is, I think, the bargain."

She murmured assent, and they parted. Half way back towards his own cottage, Lathrop paused at a spot where the trees were thin, and the slopes of the valley below could be clearly seen. He could still make out her figure nearing the first houses of the village.

"I think she hates me. Never mind! I command her, and meet me she must--when I please to summon her. There is some sweetness in that--and in teasing the stupid fellow who no doubt will own her some day."

And he thought exultantly of Winnington's letter to him, and his own insolent reply. It had been a perfectly civil letter--and a perfectly proper thing for a guardian to do. But--for the moment--

"I have the whip hand--and it amuses me to keep it,--Now then for Blaydes!"

For there, in the doorway of the cottage, stood the young journalist, waiting and smoking. He was evidently in good humour.

"Well? She came?"

"Of course she came. But it doesn't matter to you."

"Oh, doesn't it! I suppose she wants you to sell something more for her?"

Lathrop did not reply. Concerning Gertrude Marvell, he had not breathed a word to Blaydes.

They entered the hut together, and Lathrop rekindled the fire. The two men sat over it smoking. Blaydes plied his companion with eager questions, to which Lathrop returned the scantiest answers. At last he said with a sarcastic look--

"I was offered four hundred pounds this afternoon--and refused it."

"The deuce you did!" cried Blaydes, fiercely. "What about my debt--and what do you mean?"

"Ten per cent. commission," said Lathrop, drawing quietly at his cigar. "Sales up to two thou., a fortnight ago. I shall get the same money--or more--for the next batch."

"Well, that's all right! No need to get it out of the lady, if you're particular. Get it out of the other side. Any fool could manage that."

"I shall not get a farthing out of the other side. I shall not make a doit out of the whole transaction!"

"Then you're a d---d fool," said Blaydes, in a passion. "And a dishonest fool besides!"

"Easy, please! What hold should I have on this girl--this splendid creature--if I were merely to make money out of her? As it is, she's obliged to me--she treats me like a gentleman. I thought you had matrimonial ideas."

"I don't believe you've got the ghost of a chance!" grumbled Blaydes, his mind smarting under the thought of the lost four hundred pounds, out of which his debt might have been paid.

"Nor do I," said Lathrop, coolly. "But I choose to keep on equal terms with her. You can sell me up when you like."

He lounged to the window, and threw it open. The January day was closing, not in any glory of sunset, but with interwoven greys and pearls, and delicate yellow lights slipping through the clouds.

"I shall always have _this_"--he said to himself, passionately, as he drank in the air and the beauty--"whatever happens."

Recollection brought back to him Delia's proud, virginal youth, and her springing step as she walked beside him through the wood. His mind wavered again between triumph and self-disgust. His muddy past returned upon him, mingled, as always, with that invincible respect for her, and belief in something high and unstained in the depths of his own nature, to which his weakened and corrupt will was yet unable to give any effect.

"What I have done is not 'me'"--he thought. "At any rate not all 'me.' I am better than it. I suspect Winnington has told her something--measuring it chastely out. All the same--I shall see her again."

* * * * *

Meanwhile Delia was descending the hill pursued by doubts and terrors. The day was now darkening fast, and heavy snow-clouds were coming down over the valley. The wind had dropped, but the heavy air was bitter-cold and lifeless, as though the earth waited sadly for the silencing and muffling of the snow.

And in Delia's heart there was a like dumb expectancy of change. The old enthusiasms, and ideals and causes, seemed for the moment to lie veiled and frozen within her. Only two figures emerged sharply in the landscape of thought--Gertrude--and Winnington.

Since that day, the day before Weston's operation, when Paul Lathrop had brought her evidence--collected partly from small incidents and observations on the spot, partly from information supplied him by friends in London--which had sharpened all her own suspicions into

certainties, she had never known an hour free from fear. Her letters had remained wholly unanswered. She did not even know where Gertrude was; though it seemed to her that letters addressed to the head office of the League of Revolt must have been forwarded. No! Gertrude was really planning this hateful thing; the destruction of this beautiful and historic house, with all its memories and its treasures, in order to punish a Cabinet Minister for his opposition to Woman Suffrage, and so terrorise others. Moreover it meant the risking of human life--Daunt--his children, complete indifference also to Delia's feelings, Delia's pain.

What was she to do? Betray her friend?--go to Winnington for help? But he was a magistrate. If such a plot were really on foot--and Lathrop was himself convinced that petroleum and explosives were already stored somewhere in the neighbourhood of the house--Winnington could only treat such a thing as a public servant, as a guardian of the law. Any appeal to him to let private interests--even _her_ interests--interfere, would, she felt certain, be entirely fruitless. Once go to him, the police must be informed--it would be his clear duty; and if such proofs of the plot existed as Lathrop believed, Gertrude would be arrested, and her accomplices. Including Delia herself?

That possibility, instead of frightening her, gave the girl some momentary comfort. For that _might_ perhaps secure Winnington's silence?

But no!--her common sense dismissed the notion. Winnington would discover at once that she had had no connection whatever with the business. Lathrop's evidence alone would be enough. And that being so, her confession would simply hand Gertrude over to Winnington's conscience. And Mark Winnington's conscience was a thing to fear.

And yet the yearning to go to him--like the yearning of an unhappy child--was so strong.

Traitor!--yes, _traitor_!--double-dyed.

And pausing just outside the village, at a field gate, Delia leant over it, gazing into the lowering sky, and piteously crying to some power beyond--some God, "if any Zeus there be," on whom the heart in its trouble might throw itself.

Her thought ran backwards and forwards over the past months and years. The burning moments of revolt through which she had lived--the meetings of the League with their multitudes of faces, strained, fierce faces, alive, many of them, with hatreds new to English life, new perhaps to civilised history,--and the intermittent gusts of pity and fury which had swept through her own young ignorance as she listened, making a hideous thing of the future and of human fate:--she lived through them all again. Individual personalities recurred to her, the wild looks of delicate, frenzied women, who had lost health, employment, and the love of friends--suffered in body, mind and estate for this "cause" to which

she too had vowed herself. Was she alone to desert, to fail--both the cause and her friend, who had taught her everything?

"It's not my will--not my _will_--that shrinks"--she moaned to herself.
"If I _believed_--if I still believed!"

But why was the fire gone out of the old faiths, the savour from the old hopes? Was she less moved by the sufferings, the toils, the weakness of her sex? She could remember nights of weeping over the wrongs of women, after an impassioned evening with Gertrude. And now--had the heart of flesh become a heart of stone? Was she no longer worthy of the great crusade, the vast upheaval?

She could not tell. She only knew that the glamour of it all was gone--that there were many hours when the Movement lay like lead upon her life. Was it simply that her intelligence had revolted, that she had come to see the folly, the sheer, ludicrous folly of a "physical force" policy which opposed the pin-pricks of women to the strength of men? Or was it something else--something far more compelling--more convincing--more humiliating!

"I've just fallen in love!--_fallen in love!_"--the words repeated themselves brazenly, desperately, in her mind:--"and I can't think for myself--judge for myself any longer! It's abominable--but it's true!"

The very thought of Winnington's voice and look made her tremble as she walked. Eternal weakness of the eternal woman! She scorned herself, yet a bewildering joy sang through her senses.

Nevertheless she held it at bay. She had her promised word--her honour--to think of. Gertrude still expected her in London--on the scene of action.

"And I shall go," she said to herself with resolute inconsistency, "_I shall go_"

What an angel Mark Winnington had been to her, this last fortnight! She recalled the day of Weston's operation, and all the long days since. The poor gentle creature had suffered terribly; death had been just held off, from hour to hour; and was only now withdrawing. And Delia, sitting by the bed, or stealing with hushed foot about the house, was not only torn by pity for the living sufferer, she was haunted again by all the memories of her father's dying struggle--bitter and miserable days! And with what tenderness, what strength, what infinite delicacy of thought and care, had she been upheld through it all! Her heart melted within her. "There are such men in the world--there are!--and a year ago I should have simply despised anyone who told me so!"

Yet after these weeks of deepening experience, and sacred feeling, in which she had come to love Mark Winnington with all the strength of her young heart, and to realise that she loved him, the first use that she was making of a free hour was to go, unknown to him--for he was away on county business at Wanchester--and meet Paul Lathrop!

"But he would understand," she said to herself, drearily, as she moved on again. "If he knew, he would understand."

* * * * *

Now she must hurry on. She turned into the broad High Street of the village, observed by many people, and half way down, she stopped at a door on which was a brass plate, "Miss Toogood, Dressmaker."

The lame woman greeted her with delight, and there in the back parlour of the little shop she found them gathered--Kitty Foster, the science-mistress, Miss Jackson, and Miss Toogood--the three "Daughters," who were now coldly looked on in the village, and found pleasure chiefly in each other's society. Marion Andrews was not there. Delia indeed fancied she had seen her in the dusk, walking in a side lane, that led into the Monk Lawrence road, with another girl, whom Delia did not know.

It was a relief, however, not to find her--for the moment. The faces of the three women in the back parlour, were all strained and nervous; they spoke low, and they gathered round Delia with an eagerness which betrayed their own sense of isolation--of being left leaderless.

"You will be going up soon, won't you?" whispered Miss Toogood, as she stroked the sleeve of Delia's jacket. "The _Tocsin_ says there'll be great doings next week--the day Parliament meets."

"I've got my orders!"--said Kitty Foster, tossing her red hair mysteriously. "Father won't keep me down here any longer. I've made arrangements to go up to-morrow and lodge with a cousin in Battersea. She's as deep in it as I am."

"And I'm hoping they'll find room for me in the League office," said the science-mistress. "I can't stand this life here much longer. My Governors are always showing me they think us all criminals, and they'll find an excuse for getting rid of me whenever they can. I daren't even put up the 'Daughters' colours in my room now."

Her hollow, anxious eyes, with the fanatical light in them clung to Delia--to the girl's noble head, and the young face flushed with the winter wind.

"But we shall get it this session, shan't we?" said Miss Toogood eagerly, still stroking Delia's fur. "The Government will give in--they must give in."

And she began to talk with hushed enthusiasm of the last month's tale of outrages--houses burnt, windows broken, Downing Street attacked, red pepper thrown over a Minister, ballot-boxes spoiled--

Suddenly it all seemed to Delia so absurd--so pathetic--

"I don't think we shall get the Bill!" she said, sombrely. "We shall be tricked again."

"Dear, dear!" said Miss Toogood, helplessly. "Then we shall have to go on. It's war. We can't stop."

And as she stood there, sadly contemplating the "war," in which, poor soul, she had never yet joined, except by sympathy, a little bill-distributing and a modest subscription, she seemed to carry on her shoulders the whole burden of the "Movement"--herself, the little lame dressmaker, on the one side--and a truculent British Empire on the other.

"We'll make them smart anyway!" cried Kitty Foster. "See if we don't!"

Delia hurriedly opened her business. Would one of them take a letter for her to London--an important letter to Miss Marvell that she didn't want to trust to the post. Whoever took it must go to the League office and find out where Miss Marvell was, and deliver it--personally. She couldn't go herself--till after the doctors' consultation, which was to be held on Monday--if then.

Miss Jackson at once volunteered. Her face lightened eagerly.

"It's Saturday. I shall be free. And then I shall see for myself--at the office--if they can give me anything to do. When they write, they seem to put me off."

Delia gave her the letter, and stayed talking with them a little. They, it was evident, knew nothing of the anxiety which possessed her. And as to their hopes and expectations--why was it they now seemed to her so foolish and so ignorant? She had shared them all, such a little while before.

And meanwhile they made much of her. They tried to keep her with them in the little stuffy parlour, with its books which had belonged to Miss Toogood's father, and the engraving of Winchester cathedral, and the portrait of Mr. Keble. That "Miss Blanchflower" was with them, seemed to reflect a glory on their little despised coterie. They admired her and listened to her, loath to let her go.

But at last Delia said Good-bye, and stepped out again into the lights of the village street. As she walked rapidly towards Maumsey, and the village houses thinned and fell away, she suddenly noticed a dark figure in front of her. It was Marion Andrews. Delia ran to overtake her.

Marion stopped uncertainly when she heard herself called. Delia, breathless, laid a hand on her arm.

"I wanted to speak to you!"

"Yes!" The girl stood quiet. It was too dark now to see her face.

"I wanted to tell you--that there are suspicions--about Monk Lawrence. You are being watched. I want you to promise to give it up!"

There was no one on the road, above which some frosty stars had begun to come out. Marion Andrews moved on slowly.

"I don't know what you mean, Miss Blanchflower."

"Don't, please, try to deceive me!" cried Delia, with low-voiced urgency. "You have been seen at night--following Daunt about, examining the doors and windows. The person who suspects won't betray us. I've seen to that. But you must give it up--you must! I have written to Miss Marvell."

Marion Andrews laughed,--a sound of defiance.

"All right. I don't take my orders from any one but her. But you are mistaken, Miss Blanchflower, quite mistaken. Good-night."

And turning quickly to the left, she entered a field path leading to her brother's house, and was immediately out of sight.

Delia went on, smarting and bewildered. How clear it was that she was no longer trusted--no longer in the inner circle--and that Gertrude herself had given the cue! The silent and stubborn Marion Andrews was of a very different type from the three excitable or helpless women gathered in Miss Toogood's parlour. She had ability, passion, and the power to hold her tongue. Her connection with Gertrude Marvell had begun, in London, at the "Daughters" office, as Delia now knew, long before her own appearance at Maumsey. When Gertrude came to the Abbey, she and this strange, determined woman were already well acquainted, though Delia herself had not been aware of it till quite lately. "I have been a child in their hands!--they have never trusted me!" Heart and vanity were equally wounded.

As she neared the Maumsey gate, suddenly a sound--a voice--a tall figure in the twilight.

"Ah, there you are!" said Winnington. "Lady Tonbridge sent me to look for you."

"Aren't you back very early?" Delia attempted her usual voice. But the man who joined her at once detected the note of effort, of tired pre-occupation.

"Yes--our business collapsed. Our clerk's too good--leaves us nothing to do. So I've been having a talk with Lady Tonbridge."

Delia was startled; not by the words, but by the manner of them. While she seemed to Winnington to be thinking of something other than the moment--the actual moment, her impression was the precise opposite, as of a sharp, intense consciousness of the moment in him, which presently

communicated its own emotion to her.

They walked up the drive together.

"At last I have got a horse for you," said Winnington, after a pause.
"Shall I bring it to-morrow? Weston is going on so well to-night, France tells me, that he may be able to say 'out of danger' to-morrow. If so, let me take you far afield, into the Forest. We might have a jolly run."

Delia hesitated. It was very good of him. But she was out of practice. She hadn't ridden for a long time.

Winnington laughed aloud. He told--deliberately--a tale of a young lady on a black mare, whom no one else could ride--of a Valkyrie--a Brunhilde--who had exchanged a Tyrolese hotel for a forest lodge, and ranged the wide world alone--

"Oh!"--cried Delia, "where did you hear that?"

He described the talk of the little Swedish lady, and that evening on the heights when he had first heard her name.

"Next day came the lawyers' letter--and yours--both in a bundle."
"You'll agree--I did all I could--to put you off!"

"So I understood--at once. You never beat about the bush."

There was a tender laughter in his voice. But she had not the heart to spar with him. He felt rather than saw her drooping. Alarm--anxiety--rushed upon him, mingled in a tempest-driven mind with all that Madeleine Tonbridge, in the Maumsey drawing-room, had just been saying to him. That had been indeed the plain speaking of a friend!--attacking his qualms and scruples up and down, denouncing them even; asking him indignantly, who else could save this child--who else could free her from the sordid entanglement into which her life had slipped--but he? "You--you only, can do it!" The words were still thundering through his blood. Yet he had not meant to listen to his old friend. He had indeed withstood her firmly. But this sad and languid Delia began, again, to put resistance to flight--to tempt--to justify him--driving him into action that his cooler will had just refused.

Suddenly, as they walked under the overshadowing trees of the drive, her ungloved hand hanging beside her, she felt it taken, enclosed in a warm strong clasp. A thrill, a shiver ran through her. But she let it stay. Neither spoke. Only as they neared the front door with the lamp, she softly withdrew her fingers.

There was no one in the drawing-room, which was scented with early hyacinths, and pleasantly aglow with fire-light. Winnington closed the door, and they stood facing each other. Delia wanted to cry out--to prevent him from speaking--but she seemed struck dumb.

He approached her.

"Delia!"

She looked at him still helplessly silent. She had thrown off her hat and furs, and, in her short walking-dress, she looked singularly young and fragile. The change which had tempered the splendid--or insolent--exuberance of her beauty, which Lathrop had perceived, had made it in Winnington's eyes infinitely more appealing, infinitely more seductive. Love and fear, mingled, had "passed into her face," like the sculptor's last subtle touches on the clay.

"Delia!" How all life seemed to have passed into a name! "I'm not sure that I ought to speak! I'm not sure it's fair. It--it seems like taking advantage. If you think so, don't imagine I shall ever press it again. I'm twenty years older than you--I've had my youth. I thought everything was closed for me--but--" He paused a moment--then his voice broke into a low cry--"Dear! what have you done to make me love you so?"

He came nearer. His look spoke the rest.

Delia retreated.

"What have I done?" she said passionately.

"Made your life one long worry!--ever since you saw me. How can you love me?--you oughtn't!--you oughtn't!"

He laughed.

"Every quarrel we had I loved you the better. From our very first talk in this room--"

She cried out, putting up her hands, as though to protect herself against the power that breathed from his face and shining eyes.

"Don't--don't!--I can't bear it."

His expression changed.

"Delia!"

"Oh, I do thank you!" she said, piteously, "I would--if I could. I--I shall never care for any one else--but I can't--I can't."

He was silent a moment, and then said, taking her hands, and putting them to his lips--

"Won't you explain?"

"Yes, I'll try--I ought to. You see"--she looked up in anguish--"I'm not my own--to give--and I--No, no, I couldn't make you happy!"

"You mean--you're--you're too deeply pledged to this Society?"

He had dropped her hands, and stood looking at her, as if he would read her through.

"I must go up to town next week," she said hurriedly. "I must go, and I must do what Gertrude tells me. Perhaps--I can protect--save her. I don't know. I daresay I'm absurd to think so--but I might--and I'm bound. But I'm promised--promised in honour--and I can't--get free. I can't give up Gertrude--and you--you could never bear with her--or accept her. And so--you see--I should just make you miserable!"

He walked away, his hands in his pockets, and came back. Then suddenly he took her by the shoulders.

"You don't imagine I shall acquiesce in this!" he said passionately--"that I shall endure to see you tied and chained by a woman whom I know you have ceased to respect, and I believe you have ceased to love!"

"No!--no!--" she protested.

"I think it is so," he said, steadily. "That is how I read it!"

She gave a sob--quickly repressed. Then she violently mastered herself.

"If it were true--I can't marry you. I won't be treacherous--nor a coward. And I won't ruin your life. Dear Mr. Mark--it's quite, quite impossible. Let's never talk of it again."

And straightening all her slender body, she faced him with that foolish courage, that senseless heroism, which women have so terribly at command.

So far, however from obliging her, he broke into a tempest of discussion bringing to bear upon her all the arguments that love or common sense dictated. If she really cared for him at all, if she even thought it possible she might care, was she going to refuse all help--all advice--from one to whom she had grown so dear?--to whom everything she did was now of such vital, such desperate importance? He pleaded for himself--guessing it to be the more hopeful way.

"It's been a lonely life, Delia, till you came! And now you've filled it. For God's sake, listen to me! Let me protect you, dear--let me advise you--trust yourself to me. Do you imagine I should want to dictate to you--or tyrannise over you? Do you imagine I don't sympathise with your faiths, your ideals--that I don't feel for women--what they suffer--what they endure--in this hard world? Delia, we'd work together!--it mightn't be always in the same way--nor always with the same opinions--but we'd teach--we'd help each other. Your own conscience--your own mind--I see it plainly--have turned against this horrible campaign--and the woman who's led you into it. How she's

treated you! Would any friend, any real _friend_ have left you alone through this Weston business? And you've given her everything--your house, your money, yourself! It makes me _mad_. I do implore you to break with her--as gently, as generously as you like--but _free yourself_! And then!"--he drew a long breath--"what a life we'd make together!" He sat down beside her. Under the strong overhanging brows, his grey eyes still pleaded with her--silently.

But she was just strong enough, alas!--the poor child!--to resist him. She scarcely replied; but her silence held the gate--against his onslaughts. And at last she tottered to her feet.

"Mr. Mark--dear Mr. Mark!--let me go!"

Her voice, her aspect struck him dumb. And before he could rally his forces again, the door shut, and she was gone.

Chapter XVI

"So I mustn't argue any more?" said Lady Tonbridge, looking at Delia, who was seated by her guest's fire, and wore the weary aspect of one who had already been argued with a good deal.

Madeleine's tone was one of suppressed exasperation. Exasperation rather with the general nature of things than with Delia. It was difficult to be angry with one whose perversity made her so evidently wretched. But as to the "intolerable woman" who had got the girl's conscience--and Winnington's happiness--in her power, Lady Tonbridge's feelings were at a white heat. How to reason with Delia, without handling Gertrude Marvell as she deserved---there was the difficulty.

In any case, Delia was unshakeable. If Weston were really out of danger--Dr. France was to bring over the Brownmouth specialist on Monday--then that very afternoon, or the next morning, Delia must and would go to London to join Gertrude Marvell. And six days later Parliament would re-assemble under the menace of raids and stone-throwings, to which the _Tocsin_ had been for weeks past summoning "The Daughters of Revolt," throughout the country, in terms of passionate violence. In those proceedings Delia had apparently determined to take her part. As to this Lady Tonbridge had not been able to move her in the least.

The case for Winnington seemed indeed for the moment desperate. After his scene with Delia, he had left the Abbey immediately, and Lady Tonbridge, though certain that something important--and disastrous--had happened, would have known nothing, but for a sudden confession from Delia, as the two ladies sat together in the drawing-room after dinner. Delia had abruptly laid down her book, with which she was clearly only trifling--in order to say--

"I think I had better tell you at once that my guardian asked me to marry him, this afternoon, and I refused."

Since this earthquake shock, Madeleine Tonbridge could imagine nothing more unsatisfactory than the conversations between them which had begun in the drawing-room, and lingered on till, now, at nearly midnight, sheer weariness on both sides had brought them to an end. When Madeleine had at last thrown up argument as hopeless, Delia with a face of carven wax, and so handsome through it all that Lady Tonbridge could have beaten her for sheer vexation, had said a quiet goodnight and departed.

But she was in love with him, the foolish, obstinate child!--wildly, absorbingly in love with him! The fact was tragically evident, in everything she said, and everything she left unsaid.

The struggle lay then between her loyalty to her friend, the passionate loyalty of woman to woman, so newly and strangely developed by the Suffrage movement, and Winnington's advancing influence,--the influence of a man equipped surely with all the means of victory--character, strength, charm--over the girl's heart and imagination. He must conquer!

And yet Madeleine Tonbridge, staring into the ashes of a dwindling fire, had never persuaded herself--incorrigible optimist that she was--to so little purpose.

What was there at the back of the girl's mind? Something more than appeared; though what appeared was bad enough. One seemed at times to catch a glimpse of some cloaked and brooding Horror, in the dim background of the girl's consciousness, and overshadowing it. What more likely indeed, with this wild campaign sweeping through the country? She probably knew or suspected things that her moral sense condemned, to which she was nevertheless committed.

"We shall end by proving all that the enemy says of us; we shall give our chance away for a generation!"

"Do for Heaven's sake keep the young lady at home!"

The speaker was Dr. France. After seeing his patient, dismissing the specialist, and spending half an hour with Delia, he came down to see Lady Tonbridge in a state that in any one else would have been a state of agitation. In him all that appeared was a certain hawkish glitter in the eye, and a tendency to pull and pinch a scarcely existing moustache. But Madeleine, who knew him well, understood that he was just as much at feud with the radical absurdity of things as she was.

"No one can keep her at home. Delia is of age," she said, rising to meet him, with a face as serious as his own.

"If she gets into prison, and hunger-strikes, she'll injure herself! She's extraordinarily run down with this business of Weston's. I don't believe she could stand the sheer excitement of what she proposes to do."

"She's told you?"

"Quite enough. If she once goes up to town--if she once gets into that woman's clutches, no one can tell what will happen. Oh, you women--you women!" And the doctor walked tigerishly up and down the room. "That some of the cleverest and wisest of you can stoop to dabbling in a business like this! Upon my word it's an eye-opener!--it pulls one up. And you think you can drive men by such antics! The more you smash and burn, the more firmly goes down the male foot--yes, and the female too!"

And the doctor, with a glare, and a male foot as firm as he could make it, came to a stop beside Lady Tonbridge--who looked at him coolly.

"Excellent!--but no concern of mine. I'm not a militant. I want the vote just as much as Delia does!" said Lady Tonbridge, firmly. "Don't forget that."

"No, you don't--you don't! Excuse me. You are a reasonable woman."

"Half the reasonable women in England want the vote. Why shouldn't I have a vote--as well as you?"

"Because, my dear lady--" the doctor smote the table with his hand for emphasis--"because the parliamentary vote means the government _of men by men_--without which we go to pieces. And you propose now to make it include the government of men by women--which is absurd!--and if you try it, will only break up the only real government that exists, or can exist!"

"Oh!--'physical force,'" said Madeleine, contemptuously, with her nose in the air.

"Well--did I--did you--make the physical difference between men and women? Can we unmake it?" "We are governed by discussion--not by force."

"Are we? Look at South Africa--look at Ulster--look at the labour troubles that have been, and are to be. And then you women come along with your claim to the vote! What are you doing but breaking up all the social values--weakening all the foundations of the social edifice! Woe!--to you women especially--when you teach men to despise the vote--when men come to know that behind the paper currency of a vote which may be a man's or a woman's, there is nothing but an opinion--bad or good! At present, I tell you, the great conventions of democracy hold because there is reality of bone and muscle behind them! Break down that reality--and sooner or later we come back to force again--through bloodshed and anarchy!"

"Inevitable--all the same!" cried Madeleine. "Why did you ever let us taste education?--if you are to deny us for ever political equality?"

"Use your education, my dear Madam!" said the doctor, indignantly. "Are there not many roads to political equality?--many forms of government within government, that may be tried, before you insist on ruining us by doing men's work in the men's way? Hasn't it taken more than a hundred years to settle that Irish question, which began with the Union? Is it a hundred years since it was a hanging matter to steal a handkerchief off a hedge? Can't you give us a hundred years for the Woman Question? Sixty years only, since the higher education of women began! Isn't the science of government developing every day? Women have got, you say, to be fitted into government--I agree! I _agree_! But _don't rush it_! Claim everything--what you like!--except only that sovereign vote, which controls, and must control, the male force of an Empire!"

"Jove's thunder!" scoffed Lady Tonbridge. "Well--my dear old friend!--you and I shan't agree--you know that. Now what can I do for Delia?"

"Nothing," said France gloomily. "Unless some one goes up to watch over her."

"Her guardian will go," said Madeleine quietly, after a pause.

They eyed each other.

"You're sure?" said France.

"Quite sure--though I've not said a word to him--nor he to me."

"All right then--she's worth it! By George, she's got the makings of something splendid in her. I tell you she's had as much to do as any of us with saving the life of that woman upstairs. Courage?--tenderness?--'not arf.'"

The slangy term shewed the speaker's desire to get rid of his own feelings. He had, at any rate, soon smothered them, and he and Lady Tonbridge, their chairs drawn close, fell into a very confidential discussion. France was one of those country doctors, not rare fortunately in England, in whom a whole neighbourhood confides, whom a whole neighbourhood loves; all the more if a man betrays a fair allowance of those gnarls and twists of character, of strong prejudices, and harmless manias, which enable the common herd to take him to their bosoms. Dr. France was a stamp-collector, a player--indifferent--on the cornet, a rabid Tory, and a person who could never be trusted to deal faithfully and on C.O.S. principles with tramps and "undesirables." Such things temper the majesty of virtue, and make even the good human.

He had known and prescribed for Winnington since he was a boy in

knickers; he was particularly attached to Lady Tonbridge. What he and Madeleine talked about is not of great importance to this narrative; but it is certain that France left the house in much concern for a man he loved, and a girl who, in the teeth of his hottest beliefs, had managed to touch his feelings.

Delia spent the day in packing. Winnington made no sign. In the afternoon,--it was a wet Saturday afternoon--Lady Tonbridge sitting in the drawing-room, saw the science mistress of the Dame Perrott School coming up the drive. Madeleine knew her as a "Daughter," and could not help scowling at her--unseen.

She was at once admitted however, and spent a short time with Delia in the Library.

And when Miss Jackson closed the Library door behind her on her way out of the house, Delia broke the seal of a letter which had been given into her hands:--

"I am very sorry, my dear Delia, you should have taken these silly reports so much to heart. You had better dismiss them from your mind. I have given no such orders as you suppose--nor has the Central Office. The plan you found referred to something quite different--I really can't remember what. I can't of course be responsible for all the 'Daughters' in England, but I have much more important business to think of just now than the nonsense Mr. Lathrop seems to have been stuffing you with. As to W----L----, it would only be worth while to strike at him, if our affairs _go wrong_--through him. At present, I am extraordinary hopeful. We are winning every day. People see that we are in earnest, and mean to succeed--at whatever cost.

"I am glad you are coming up on Monday. You will find the flat anything but a comfortable or restful place,--but that you will be prepared for. Our people are amazing!--and we shall get into the House on Thursday, or know the reason why.

"For the money you sent, and the money you promise--best thanks. Everybody is giving. It is the spirit of the Crusader, 'Dieu le veult!'"

"Your affectionate
G. M."

Delia read and re-read it. It was the first time Gertrude had deliberately tried to deceive her, and the girl's heart was sore. Even now, she was not to be trusted--"now that I am risking everything--_everything_!" And with the letter in her lap, she sat and thought of Winnington's face, as he had turned to look at her, before leaving the drawing-room the night before.

* * * * *

The day passed drearily. The hills and trees were wrapped in a damp fog, and though the days were lengthening fast, the evening closed like November. Madeleine thought with joy of getting back to her tiny house and her Nora. Nora, who was not yet out, seemed to have been enjoying a huge success in the large cousinly party with whom she had been spending the Christmas holidays. "But it's an odd place, Mummy. In the morning we 'rag'; and the rest of the day we talk religion. Everybody is either Buddhist or 'Bahai'--if that's the right way to spell it. It sounds odd, but it seems to be a very good way of getting on with young men."

Heavens! What did it matter how you played the old game, or with what counters, so long as it was played?

And as Lady Tonbridge watched the figure of Delia gliding through the house, wrapped in an estranging silence, things ancient and traditional returned upon her in flood, and nothing in the world seemed worth having but young love and happy marriage!--if you could get them! She--and her heart knew its bitterness--had made the great throw and lost.

* * * * *

Sunday passed in the same isolation. But on Sunday afternoon Delia took the motor out alone, and gave no reason either before or after.

"If she's gone out to meet that man, it's a scandal!" thought Madeleine wrathfully, and could hardly bring herself to be civil when the girl returned--pale, wearied, and quite uncommunicative. But she was very touching in a mute, dignified way, all the evening, and Madeleine relented fast. And, as they sat in the fire-lit drawing-room, when the curtains were drawn, Delia suddenly brought a stool close to Lady Tonbridge's side, and, sitting at her feet, held up appealing arms. Madeleine, with a rush of motherliness, gathered her close; and the beautiful head lay, very quiet, on her breast. But when she would have entreated, or argued, again, Delia implored her--"Don't--don't talk!--it's no good. Just let me stay."

Late that night, all being ready for departure, Delia went in to say good-night, and good-bye to Weston.

"You'll be downstairs and as strong as a horse, when I come back," she said gaily, stroking the patient's emaciated fingers.

Weston shook her head.

"I don't think I shall ever be good for much, Miss Delia. But"--and her voice suddenly broke--"I believe I'd go through it all again--just to know--what--you could be--to a poor thing--like me."

"Weston!--" said Delia, softly--"if you talk like that--and if you dare to cry, Nurse will turn me out. You're going to get quite well, but whether you're well or ill, here you stay, Miss Rosina Weston!--and I'm

going to look after you. Polly hasn't packed my things half badly." Polly was the under-housemaid, whom Delia was taking to town. "She wouldn't be worth her salt, if she hadn't," said Weston tartly. "But she can't do your hair, Miss--and it's no good saying she can."

"Then I'll do it myself. I'll make some sort of a glorious mess of it, and set the fashion."

But her thought said--"If I go to prison, they'll cut it off. Poor Weston!"

Weston moved uneasily--

"Miss Delia?"

"Yes."

"Don't you go getting yourself into trouble. Now don't you!" And with tears in her eyes, the ghostly creature pressed the girl's hand to her lips. Delia stooped and kissed her. But she made no reply. Instead she began to talk of the new bed-rest which had just been provided for Weston, and on which the patient professed herself wonderfully comfortable.

"It's better than the one we had at Meran--for papa." Her voice dropped. She sat at the foot of Weston's bed looking absently into some scene of the past.

"Nothing ever gave him ease--your poor Papa!" said Weston, pitifully. "He did suffer! But don't you go thinking about it this time of night, Miss Delia, or you won't sleep."

Delia said goodnight, and went away. But she did think of her father--with a curious intensity. And when she fell fitfully asleep, she dreamt that she saw him standing beside her in some open foreign place, and that he looked at her in silence, steadily and coldly. And she stretched out her hands, in a rush of grief--"Kiss me, father! I was unkind--horribly--horribly unkind!"

With the pain of it, she woke suddenly and the visualising sense seemed still to perceive in the darkness the white head and soldierly form. She half rose, gasping. Then, as though a photographic shutter were let down, the image passed from the brain, and she lay with heaving breast, trying to find her way back into what we call reality. But it was a reality even more wretched than those recollections to which her dream had recalled her. For it was held and possessed by Winnington, and now by the threatening vision of Monk Lawrence, spectral amid the red ruin of fire. She had stopped the motor that day at the foot of the hill on which the house stood, and using Winnington's name, had made a call on the cripple child. Daunt had received her with a somewhat gruff civility, and was not communicative about the house and its defence. But she gathered--without herself broaching the subject--that he was scornfully confident of his power to protect it against "them creeping

women," and she had come home comforted. The cripple child had clung to her silently; and on coming away, Delia had felt a small wet kiss upon her hand. A touching creature!--with her wide blue eyes, and delicate drawn face. It was feared that another abscess might be developing in the little hip, where for a time disease had been quiescent.

* * * * *

On Monday morning the doctors came early. They gave a favourable verdict, and Delia at once decided on an afternoon train.

All the morning, Lady Tonbridge hovered round her, loth to take her own departure, and trying every now and then to re-open the subject of London, to make the girl promise to send for her--to consult Winnington, if any trouble arose.

But Delia would not allow any discussion. "I shall be with Gertrude--she'll tell me what to do," was all she would say.

Lady Tonbridge was dropped at her own door by Delia, on her way to the station. Nora was there to welcome her, but not all their joy in recovering each other, could repair Madeleine's cheerfulness. She stood, looking after the retreating car with such a face that Nora exclaimed--

"Mother, what _is_ the matter!"

"I'm watching the tumbrel out of sight," said Lady Tonbridge incoherently. "Shall we ever see her again?"

That, however, was someone else's affair.

Delia took her own and her housemaid's tickets for London, saw her companion established, and then, preferring to be alone, stepped into an empty carriage herself. She had hardly disposed her various packages, and the train was within two minutes of starting, when a tall man came quickly along the platform, inspecting the carriages as he passed. Delia did not see him till he was actually at her window. In another moment he had opened and closed the door, and had thrown down his newspapers and overcoat on the seat. The train was just starting, and Delia, crimson, found herself mechanically shaking hands with Mark Winnington.

"You're going up to town?" She stammered it. "I didn't know--"

"I shall be in town for a few days. Are you quite comfortable? A footwarmer?"

For the day was cold and frosty, with a bitter east wind.

"I'm quite warm, thank you."

The train ran out of the station, and they were soon in the open

country. Delia leant back in her seat, silent, conscious of her own hurrying pulses, but determined to control them. She would have liked to be indignant--to protest that she was being persecuted and coerced. But the recollection of their last meeting, and the sheer, inconvenient, shameful, joy of his presence there, opposite, interposed.

Winnington himself was quite cool; there were no signs whatever of any intention to renew their Friday's conversation. His manner and tone were just as usual. Some business at the Home Office, connected with his County Council work, called him to town. He should be staying at his Club in St. James's St. Alice Matheson also would be in town.

"Shall we join for a theatre, one night?" he asked her.

She felt suddenly angered. Was she never to be believed, never to be taken seriously?

"To-morrow, Mr. Mark, is the meeting of Parliament."

"That I am aware of."

"The day after, I shall probably be in prison!"

She fronted him bravely, though, as he saw, with an effort. He paused a moment, but showed no astonishment.

"I hope not. I think not," he said, quietly.

Delia took up the evening paper she had just bought at the station, opened it, and looked at the middle page.

"There are our plans," she said, defiantly, handing it to him.

"Thank you. I have already seen it."

But he again read through attentively the paragraph to which she pointed him. It was headed "Militant Plans for To-morrow." A procession of five hundred women was to march on the Houses of Parliament, at the moment of the King's Speech. "We insist"--said the Manifesto issued from the offices of the League of Revolt--"upon our right of access to the King, or failing His Majesty, to the Prime Minister. We mean business and we shall be armed."

Winnington pointed to the word "armed."

"With stones--I presume?"

"Well, not revolvers, I hope!" said Delia. "I should certainly shoot myself."

Tension broke up in slightly hysterical laughter. She was already in better spirits. There was something exciting--exhilarating even--in

the duel between herself and Winnington, which was implied in the conversation. His journey up to town, the look in his grey eyes meant--"I shall prevent you from doing what you are intending to do." But he could not prevent it. If he was the breakwater, she was the storm-wave, driven by the gale--by the wind from afar, of which she felt herself the sport, and sometimes the victim--without its changing her purpose in the least.

"Only I shall not refuse food!" she thought. "I shall spare him that. I shall serve my sentence. It won't be long."

But afterwards? Would she then be free? Free to follow Gertrude or not, according to her judgment? Would she have "purged" her promise--paid her shot--recovered the governance of herself?

Her thoughts discussed the future, when, all in a moment, Winnington, watching her from behind his Times, saw a pale startled look. It seemed to be caused by something in the landscape. He turned his eyes to the window and saw that they were passing an old manor house, with a gabled front, standing above the line, among trees. What could that have had to do with the sudden contraction of the beautiful brow, the sudden look of terror--or distress? The house had a certain resemblance to Monk Lawrence. Had it reminded her of that speech in the Latchford marketplace from which he was certain she had recoiled, no less than he?

"You'll let me take you to the flat? I've been over it once, but I should like to see it's in order."

She hesitated, but how could she refuse? He put her into a taxi, having already dispatched her maid with the luggage in another, and they started.

"I expect you'll find a lot of queer people there!" she said, trying to laugh. "At least you'll think them queer."

"I shall like to see the people you are working with," he said, gravely.

Half way to Westminster, he turned to her.

"Miss Delia!--it's my plain duty to tell you--again--and to keep on telling you, even though it makes you angry, and even though I have no power to stop you, that in taking part in these doings to-morrow, you are doing a wrong thing, a grievously wrong thing! If I were only an ordinary friend, I should try to dissuade you with all my might. But I represent your father--and you know what he would have felt."

He saw her lips tremble. But she spoke calmly, "Yes,--I know. But it can't be helped. We can't agree, Mr. Mark, and it's no good my trying to explain, any more--just yet!--" she added, in a lower tone.

"Just yet'? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that some time,--perhaps sometime soon--I shall be ready to argue the whole thing with you--what's right and what's wrong. Now I can't argue--I'm not free to. Don't you see--'Ours not to make reply,--ours but to do, or die.'" Her smile flashed out. "There's not going to be any dying about it however--you know that as well as I do." Then with a touch of mockery she bent towards him. "You won't persuade me, Mr. Mark, that you take us very seriously! But I'm not angry at that--I'm not angry--at anything!"

And her face, as he scanned it, melted--changed--became all soft sadness, and deprecating appeal. Never had she seemed to him so fascinating. Never had he felt himself so powerless. He thought, despairingly--"If I had her to myself, I could take her in my arms, and make her give way!"

But here were the first signs of arrival--a narrow Westminster street--a towering group of flats. The taxi stopped, and Winnington jumped out.

Chapter XVII

Delia's luggage was brought in by the hall porter, and she and Winnington stood waiting for the lift. Meanwhile Winnington happened to notice, through the open door of the mansions, a couple of policemen standing just outside, on the pavement, and two others on the further side of the street. It seemed to him they were keeping the house which Delia and he had just entered under observation.

The lift descended. There were in it four women, all talking eagerly in subdued tones. One was grey-haired, the others were quite young girls. The strained, excited look on all their faces struck Winnington sharply as they emerged from the lift. One of the girls looked curiously at Delia and her tall companion. The grey-haired lady's attention was caught by the policeman outside. She gave a little chuckle.

"We shall have plenty to do with those gentry to-morrow!" she said to the girl beside her, drawing her cloak round her so that it displayed a black and orange badge.

Delia approached her.

"Is Miss Marvell here?"

They all stopped and eyed her.

"Yes, she's upstairs. She's just come back from the Central. But she's very busy," said the elder lady. "She won't see you without an appointment."

One of the girls suddenly looked at Delia, and whispered to the speaker.

"Oh, I see!" said that lady, vaguely. "Are you Miss Blanchflower?"

"Yes."

"I beg your pardon. Miss Marvell's expecting you of course. Do make her rest a bit if you can. She's simply _splendid_! She's going to be one of our great leaders. I'm glad you won't miss it after all. You've been delayed, haven't you?--by somebody's illness. Well, it's going magnificently! We shall make Parliament listen--at last. Though they'll protect themselves no doubt with any number of police--cowards!"

The eyes of the speaker, as her face came into the light of the hall lamp, sparkled maliciously. She seemed to direct her words especially to Winnington, who stood impassive. Delia turned to the lift, and they ascended.

They were admitted, after much ringing. A bewildered maid looked at Delia, and the luggage behind her, as though she had never heard of her before. And the whole flat in the background seemed alive with voices and bustle. Winnington lost patience.

"Tell this man, please, where to take Miss Blanchflower's luggage at once. And where is the drawing-room?"

"Are you going to stay, Miss?" said the girl. "There's only the small bedroom vacant."

Delia burst out laughing--especially at the sight of Winnington's irate countenance.

"All right. It'll do quite well. Now tell me where Miss Marvell is."

"I mustn't interrupt her, Miss."

"This is my flat," said Delia, good-humouredly--"so I think you must. And please shew Mr. Winnington the drawing-room."

The girl, with an astonished face, opened a door for Winnington, into a room filled with people, and then--unwillingly--led Delia along the passage.

Winnington looked round him in bewilderment. He had entered, it seemed, upon a busy hive of women. The room was full, and everybody in it seemed to be working at high pressure. A young lady at a central table was writing telegrams as fast as possible, and handing them to a telegraph clerk who was waiting. Two typewriters were busy in the further corners. A woman, with a sharply clever face, was writing near by, holding her pad on her knee, while a printer's boy, cap in hand, was sitting by her waiting for her "copy." Two other women were undoing

and sorting rolls of posters. Winnington caught the head-lines--"Women of England, strike for your liberties!" "Remember our martyrs in prison!"--"Destroy property--and save lives!" "If violence won freedom for men, why not for women!" And in the distance of the room were groups in eager discussion. A few had maps in their hands, and others note-books, in which they took down the arrangements made. So far as their talk reached Winnington's ears, it seemed to relate to the converging routes of processions making for Parliament Square.

"How do you do, Mr. Winnington," said a laughing voice, as a daintily-dressed woman, with fair fluffy hair came towards him.

He recognised the sister of a well-known member of Parliament, a lady who had already been imprisoned twice for window-breaking in Downing Street.

"Who would have thought to see you here!" she said, gaily, as they shook hands.

"Surprising--I admit! I came to see Miss Blanchflower settled in her flat. But I seem to have stumbled into an office."

"The Central Office simply couldn't hold the work. We were all in each other's way. So yesterday, by Miss Marvell's instructions, some of us migrated here. We are only two streets from the central."

"Excellent!" said Winnington. "But it might perhaps have been well to inform Miss Blanchflower."

The flushed babyish face under the fashionable hat looked at him askance. Lady Fanny's tone changed--took a sharpened edge.

"Miss Blanchflower--you may be quite sure--will be as ready as anyone else to make sacrifices for the cause. But we don't expect you to understand that!"

"Nobody can doubt your zeal, Lady Fanny."

"Only my discretion? Oh, I've long left that to take care of itself. What are you here for?"

"To look after my ward."

Lady Fanny eyed him again.

"Of course! I had forgotten. Well, she'll be all right."

"What are you really preparing to do to-morrow?"

"Force our way into the House of Commons!"

"Which means--get into an ugly scrimmage with the police, and put your cause back another few years?"

"Ah! I can't talk to you, if you talk like that! There isn't time," she threw back, with laughing affectation, and nodding to him, she fluttered off to a distant table where a group of girls were busy making black and orange badges. But her encounter with him seemed to have affected the hive. Its buzz sank, almost ceased.

Winnington indeed suddenly discovered that all eyes were fixed upon him--that he was being closely and angrily observed. He was conscious, quickly and strangely conscious, of an atmosphere of passionate hostility, as though a pulse of madness ran through the twenty or thirty women present. Meredithian lines flashed into memory--

"Thousand eyeballs under hoods
Have you by the hair--"

and a shock of inward laughter mingled in his mind with irritation for Delia--who was to have no place apparently in her own flat for either rest or food--and the natural wish of a courteous man not to give offense. At the same moment, he perceived on one of the tables a heap of new and bright objects; and saw at once that they were light hammers, fresh from the ironmongers. Near them lay a pile of stones, and two women were busily casing the stones in a printed leaflet. But he had no sooner become aware of these things than several persons in the room moved so as to stand between him and them.

He went back into the passage, closing the door behind him.

The little parlour-maid came hurriedly from the back regions carrying a tray on which was tea and bread and butter.

"Are you taking that to Miss Blanchflower?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Shew me the way, please."

Winnington followed her, and she, after a scared look, did not attempt to stop him.

She paused outside a door, and instantly made way for him. He knocked, and at the "Come in" he entered, the maid slipping in after him with the tea.

Two persons rose startled from their seats--Delia and Gertrude Marvell. He had chanced upon the dining-room, which no less than the drawing-room had been transformed into an office and a store-room. Masses of militant literature, copies of the *Tocsin*, books and Stationery covered the tables, while, on the wall opposite the door, a large scale map of the streets in the neighbourhood of the Houses of Parliament had been hung over a picture.

It seemed to him that Delia looked ill and agitated. He walked up to

her companion, and spoke with vivacity--

"Miss Marvell!--I protest altogether against your proceedings in this house! I protest against Miss Blanchflower's being drawn into what is clearly intended to be an organised riot, which may end in physical injury, even in loss of life--which will certainly entail imprisonment on the ringleaders. If you have any affection for Delia you will advise her to let me take her to my sister, who is in town to-night, at Smith's Hotel, and will of course most gladly look after her."

Gertrude, who seemed to him somehow to have dwindled and withered into an elderly woman since he had last seen her, looked him over from head to foot with a touch of smiling insolence, and then turned quietly to Delia.

"Will you go, Delia?"

"No!" said Delia, throwing back her beautiful head. "No! This is my place, Mr. Mark. I'm very sorry--but you must leave me here. Give my love to Mrs. Matheson."

"Delia!" He turned to her imploringly. But the softness she had shewn on the journey had died out of her face. She stood resolved, and some cold dividing force seemed to have rolled between them.

"I don't see what you can do, Mr. Winnington," said Gertrude, still smiling. "I have pointed that out to you before. As a matter of fact Delia will not even be living here on money provided by you at all. She has other resources. You have no hold on her--no power--that I can see. And she wishes to stay with me. I think we must bid you good night. We are very busy."

He stood a moment, looking keenly from one to the other, at Gertrude's triumphant eyes blazing from her emaciated face, at Delia's exalted, tragic air. Then, with a bow, and in silence, he left the room, and the house.

* * * * *

It was quite dark when he emerged on Milbank Street. All the neighbourhood of the Houses of Parliament and the Abbey seemed to be alive with business and traffic. But Palace Yard was still empty save for a few passing figures, and there was no light on the Clock Tower. A placard on the railings of the Square caught his notice--"Threatened Raid on the House of Commons. Police precautions." At the same moment he was conscious that a policeman standing at the corner of the House of Commons had touched his hat to him, grinning broadly. Winnington recognised a Maumsey man, whom he had befriended in various ways, who owed his place indeed in the Metropolitan force to Winnington's good word.

"Hullo, Hewson--how are you? Flourishing?"

The man's face beamed again. He was thinking of a cricket match the year before under Winnington's captaincy. Like every member of the eleven, he would have faced "death and damnation" for the captain.

They walked along the man's beat together. A thought struck Winnington.

"You seem likely to have some disturbance here tomorrow?" he said, as they neared Westminster Bridge.

"It's the ladies, Sir. They do give a lot of trouble!" Winnington laughed--paused--then looked straight at the fine young man who was evidently so glad to see him.

"Look here, Hewson--I'll tell you something--keep it to yourself! There'll be a lady in that procession to-morrow whom I don't want knocked about. I shall be here. Is there anything you can do to help me? I shall try and get her out of the crowd. Of course I shall have a motor here."

Hewson looked puzzled, but eager. He described where he was likely to be stationed, and where Winnington would probably find him. If Mr. Winnington would allow him, he would tip a wink to a couple of mates, who could be trusted--and if he could do anything to help, why, he would be "rare pleased" to do it.

"But I'm afraid it'll be a bad row, Sir. There's a lot of men coming--from Whitechapel--they say."

Winnington nodded and walked on. He went to his club, and dined there, refusing a friend's invitation to go and dine with him at home. And after dinner, as the best means of solitude, he went out again into the crowded streets, walking aimlessly. The thought of Delia arrested--refused bail--in a police cell--or in prison--tormented him. All the traditional, fastidious instincts of his class and type were strong in him. He loathed the notion of any hand laid upon her, of any rough contact between her clean youth, and the brutalities of a London crowd. His blood rushed at the thought of it. The mere idea of any insult offered her made him murderous.

He turned down Whitehall, and at a corner near Dover House he presently perceived a small crowd which was being addressed by a woman. She had brought a stool with her, and was standing on it. A thin slip of a girl, with a childish, open face and shrill voice. He went up to listen to her, and stood amazed at the ignorant passion, the reckless violence of what she was saying. It seemed indeed to have but little effect upon her hearers. Men joined the crowd for a few minutes, listened with upturned impassive faces, and went their way. A few lads attempted horse-play, but stopped as a policeman approached; and some women carrying bundles propped them against a railing near, and waited, lifting tired eyes, and occasionally making comments to each other. Presently, it appeared to Winnington that the speaker was no more affected by her own statements--appalling as some of them were--than her hearers. She appeared to be speaking from a book--to have just

learnt a lesson. She was then a paid speaker? And yet he thought not. Every now and then phrases stood out--fiercely sincere--about the low wages of women, their exclusion from the skilled trades, the marriage laws, the exploiting and "selling" of women, and the like. And always, in the background of the girl's picture, the hungry and sensual appetites of men, lying in wait for the economic and physical weakness of the woman.

He waited until she had finished. Then he helped her down from her perch, and made a way for her through the crowd. She looked at him in astonishment. "Thank you, Sir,--don't trouble! Last night I was pelted with filth. Are you one of us?"

He shook his head, smiling.

"I didn't agree with you. I advise you to look up some of those things you said. But you speak very well. Good-night."

She looked at him angrily, gathered up her skirt with a rattle, in a small hand, and disappeared.

He presently turned back towards Buckingham Gate, and in a narrow Westminster street, as he passed the side of a high factory building, suddenly there emerged from a door-way a number of women and girls, who had evidently been working over-time. Some of them broke at once into loud talk and laughter, as though in reaction from the confinement and tension of their work, some--quite silent--turned their tired faces to him as they passed him; and some looked boldly, provocatively at the handsome man, who on his side was clearly observing them. They were of all types, but the majority of the quite young girls were pale and stunted, shewing the effect of long hours, and poor food. The coarse or vicious faces were few; many indeed were marked by a modest or patient gentleness. The thin line of hurrying forms disappeared into darkness and distance, some one way, some another; and Winnington was left to feel that in what he had seen--this everyday incident of a London street--he had been aptly reminded of what a man who has his occupation and dwelling amid rural scenes and occupations too readily forgets--that toiling host of women, married and unmarried, which modern industry is every day using, or devouring, or wasting. The stream of lives rushes day by day through the industrial rapids; some of it passing on to quiet and fruitful channels beyond the roar, and some lost and churned for ever in the main tumult of the river.

This new claim upon women, on the part of society, in addition to the old claims of home and motherhood--this vast industrial claim--must it not change and modify everything in time?--depress old values, create new? "The vote!--give us the vote! and all will be well. More wages, more food, more joy, more share in this glorious world!--that's what the vote means--give us the vote!" Such, in effect, had been the cry of that half-mad speaker in Whitehall, herself marked and injured by the economic struggle.

The appeal echoed in Winnington's heart. And Delia seemed to be at his

side, raising her eager eyes to his, pressing him for admission. Had he, indeed, thought enough of these things?--taken enough to heart this new and fierce struggle of women with life and circumstance, that is really involved in the industrial organisation of the modern world?

He passed on--up Buckingham Gate, towards the Palace. Turning to the left, he was soon aware of two contrasted things--an evening party going on at a well-known Embassy, cars driving up and putting down figures in flashing dresses, and gold-encrusted uniforms, emerging, and disappearing within its open doors--and only twenty yards away, a group of women huddled together in the cold, outside a closed fish-shop, waiting to buy for a few pence the broken or spoiled fish of the day. But a little further on he suddenly plunged into a crowd coming down Grosvenor Place. He stopped to watch it, and saw that it accompanied a long procession of men tramping back from Hyde Park. A banner held by the leaders bore the words--"Unemployed and starving! Give us work or bread." And Winnington remembered there was a docker's strike going on in Limehouse, passionately backed and defended by the whole body of the local clergy.

His eyes examined the faces and forms in the procession. Young and old, sickly and robust, they passed him by, all of them marked and branded by their tyrant, Labour; rolled like the women amid the rocks and whirlpools of the industrial stream; marred and worn like them, only more deeply, more tragically. The hollow eyes accused him as they passed--him, with his ease of honoured life. "What have you made of us, your brethren?--you who have had the lead and the start!--you who have had till now the fashioning of this world in which we suffer! What is wrong with the world? We know no more than you. But it is your business to know! For God's sake, you who have intelligence and education, and time to use them, think for us!--think with us!--find a way out! More wages--more food--more leisure--more joy!--By G--d! we'll have them, or bring down your world and ours in one ruin together!"

And then far back, from the middle of the last century, there came to Winnington's listening mind the cry of the founders of English democracy. "The vote!--give us the vote!--and bring in the reign of plenty and of peace." And the vote was given. Sixty years--and still this gaunt procession!--and all through Industrial England, the same unrest, the same bitterness!

The vote? What is it actually going to mean, in struggle for life and happiness that lies before every modern Community? How many other methods and forces have already emerged, and must yet emerge, beside it! The men know it. And meanwhile, the women--a section of women--have seized with the old faith, on the confident cries of sixty years ago?--with the same disillusion waiting in the path?

He passed on, drawn again down Constitution Hill, and the Mall, back to the Houses of Parliament and the River.... The night was clear and frosty. He paused on Westminster Bridge, and leant over the parapet, feasting his eyes on that incomparable scene which age cannot wither nor custom stale for the heart of an Englishman. The long front of the

Houses of Parliament rose darkly over the faintly moonlit river; the wharves and houses beyond, a medley of strong or delicate line, of black shadow and pale lights, ran far into a vaporous distance powdered with lamps. On the other side St. Thomas's Hospital, and an answering chain of lamps, far-flung towards Battersea. Between, the river, heaving under a full tide, with the dim barges and tugs passing up and down. "The Mississippi, Sir, is dirty water--the St. Lawrence is cold, dirty water--but the Thames, Sir, is liquid 'istory!" That famous _mot_ of a Labour Minister delighted Mark's dreaming sense. The river indeed as it flowed by, between buildings new and old, seemed to be bearing the nation on its breast, to symbolise the ever-renewed life of a great people. What tasks that life had seen!--what vaster issues it had still to see!--

And in that dark building, like a coiled and secret spring ready to act when touched, the Idea which ruled that life, as all life, in the end, is ruled. On the morrow, a few hundred men would flock to that building, as the representatives and servants of the Idea--of that England which lives "while we believe."

And the vote behind them?--the political act which chose and sent them there? Its social power, and all its ordinary associations, noble or ignoble, seemed suddenly to vanish, for Winnington, engulfed in something infinitely greater, something vital and primitive, on which all else depended.

He hung, absorbed, over the sliding water, giving the rein to reverie. He seemed to see the English Spirit, hovering, proudly watchful, above that high roof beside the dark water-way, looking out to sea, and across the world. What indomitable force, what ichor gleaming fire, through the dark veins of that weary Titan, sustained him there?--amid the clash of alien antagonisms, and the mysterious currents of things? What but the lavished blood and brain of England's sons?--that rude primal power that men alone can bring to their country?

Let others solve their own problems! But can women share the male tasks that make and keep _us_ a Nation, amid a jarring and environing host of Nations?--an Empire, with the guardianship of half the world on its shoulders? And if not, how can men rightly share with women the act which controls those tasks, and chooses the men to execute them?

And yet!--all his knowledge of human life, all his tenderness for human suffering, rushed in to protest that the great question was only half answered, when it was answered so. He seemed to see the Spirit of England, Janus-like, two-faced, with one aspect looking out to sea, the other, brooding over the great city at its feet, and turned inland towards the green country and studded towns beyond. And as to that other, that home-face of England, his dreaming sense scarcely knew whether it was man or woman. There was in it male power, but also virgin strength, and mother love. Men and women might turn to it equally--for help.

No need for women in the home tasks--the national house-keeping of this

our England? He laughed--like France--at the mere suggestion of the doubt. Why, that teeming England, north and south, was crying out for the work of women, the help of women! Who knew it better than he? But call in thought!--call in intelligence! Find out the best way to fit the work to the organism, the organism to the work. What soil so rich as England in the seed of political ideas? What nation could so easily as we evolve new forms out of the old to fit new needs?

But what need for patience in the process--for tolerance--for clear thinking! And while England ponders, bewildered by the very weight of her own load, and its responsibilities, comes, suddenly, this train of Maenads rushing through the land, shrieking and destroying.

He groaned in spirit, as he thought of Delia's look that day--of the tragic-comic crowd around her. Again his thoughts flew hither and thither, seeking to excuse, to understand her, and always, as it seemed, with her dear voice in his ears--trembling--rushing--with the passionate note he knew.

"Mr. Winnington!"

He looked up. An elderly woman, plain-featured, ill-dressed, stood beside him, her kind eyes blinking under the lamp overhead. He recognised Miss Dempsey, and grasped her by the hand.

"My dear lady, where have you sprung from?"

She hesitated, and then said, supporting herself on the parapet of the bridge, as though thankful for the momentary rest.

"I had to go in search of someone."

He knew very well what she meant.

"You've found her?"

"Yes."

"Can anyone help?"

"No. The poor thing's safe--with good people who understand."

He asked no more about her errand. He knew very well that day after day, and week after week, her tired feet carried her on the same endless quest--seeking "that which was lost." But the stress of thought in his own mind found expression in a question which surprised her.

"Would the vote help you? Is that why you want it?"

She smiled.

"Oh, no! Oh, dear no!" she said, with emphasis; after a moment, adding in a lower tone, scarcely addressed to her companion--" _It cost

more--to redeem their souls_!" And again--"Dear Mr. Mark, men are what their mothers make them!--that is the bottom truth. And when women are what God intended them to be, they will have killed the ape and the tiger in men. But law can't do it. Only the Spirit." Her face shone a little. Then, in her ordinary voice--"Oh, no--I want the vote for quite other reasons. It is our right--and it is monstrous we shouldn't have it!" Her cheeks flushed.

He turned his friendly smile upon her, without attempting to argue. They walked back over the bridge together.

* * * * *

The following day rose in wind and shower. But the February rain cleared away towards noon, and the high scudding clouds, with bright spaces between, suddenly began to prophesy Spring. From Hyde Park, down the Mall, and along Whitehall, the troops gathered and the usual crowd sprang up in their rear, pressing towards Parliament Square, or lining the route. Winnington had sent a note early to Delia by messenger; but he expected no reply, and got none. All he could do was to hide a motor in Dean's Yard, to hold a conference or two with the friendly bobby in Parliament Square, and then to wander about the streets looking restlessly at the show. It duly passed him by, the Cinderella-coach, with the King and Queen of fairy-tale, the splendid Embassy carriages, the Generals on their gleaming horses, the Guards, in their red cloaks--and all the rest. The Royalties disappeared up the carpeted stairs into the House of Lords, and after half an hour, while the bells of St. Margaret's filled all the air with tumult, came out, again; and again the ermined Queen, and the glistening King passed bowing along the crowd. Winnington caught hold of a Hampshire member in the crowd.

"When does the House meet?"

"Everything adjourned till four. They'll move the Address about five. But everyone expects a row."

Nothing for it but to wait and stroll, to spend half an hour in the Abbey, and take a turn along the Embankment.... And gradually, steadily the Square filled up, no one knew how. The soldiers disappeared, but policemen quietly took their places. All the entrances to the House of Commons were carefully guarded, groups as they gathered were dispersed, and the approaches to the House, in Old and New Palace Yards, were rigorously kept free. But still the crowd in Parliament Square grew and thickened. Girls, with smiling excited faces, still moved to and fro in it, selling the _Tocsin_. Everybody waited expectant.

Then the chimes of the Abbey struck four. And as they died away, from a Westminster street, from Whitehall, and from Milbank, there arose a simultaneous stir and shouting. And presently, from each quarter appeared processions of women, carrying black and orange banners making their way slowly through the throng. The crowd cheered and booed them as they passed, swaying to this side and that. And as each procession

neared the outer line of police, it was firmly but courteously stopped, and the leaders of it must needs parley with the mounted constables who sat ready to meet them.

Winnington, jumping on the motor which he had placed opposite St. Margaret's, drew out some field-glasses, and scanned the advancing lines of women. The detachment coming from Whitehall seemed to be headed by the chiefs of the whole organisation, to judge from the glistening banner which floated above its foremost group. Winnington examined it closely. Gertrude Marvell was not there, nor Delia. Then he turned westwards. Ah, now he saw her! That surely was she!--in the front ranks of the lines coming from Milbank. For a moment, he saw the whole scene in orderly and picturesque array, the cordons of police, the mounted constables, the banners of the processions, the swaying crowds, Westminster Hall, the clock tower, with its light:--the next, everything was tossed in wild confusion. Some savage impelling movement in the crowd behind had broken the lines of police. The women were through! He could see the scurrying forms running across the open spaces, pursued, grappled with.

He threw himself into the crowd, which had rapidly hemmed him in, buffeting it from side to side like a swimmer into troubled waters. His height, his strength, served him well, and by the time he had reached the southern corner of St. Margaret's, a friendly hand gripped him.

"Do you see her, Sir?"

"Near the front!--coming from Milbank."

"All right! Follow me, Sir. This way!"

And with Hewson, and apparently two other police, Winnington battled his way towards the tumult in front of St. Stephen's entrance. The mounted police were pressing the crowd back with their horses, and as Winnington emerged into clear ground, he saw a melee of women and police,--some women on the ground, some held between police on either side, and one group still intact. In it he recognised Gertrude Marvell. He saw her deliberately strike a constable in the face. Then he lost sight of her. All he saw were the steps of St. Stephen's entrance behind, crowded with Members of Parliament. Suddenly another woman fell, a grey-haired woman, and almost immediately a girl who was struggling with two policemen, disengaged herself and ran to help. She bent over the woman, and lifted her up. The police at once made way for them, but another wild rush from behind seemed to part them--sweep them from view--

"Now, Sir!" said Hewson, on tiptoe--"Hold on! They've got the old lady safe. I think the young one's hurt."

They pressed their way through. Winnington caught sight of Delia again, deadly white, supported by a policeman on one side, and a gentleman on the other. Andrews!--by George! Winnington cursed his own ill-luck in not having been the first to reach her; but the gallant Captain was an

ally worth having, all the same.

Mark was at her side. She lifted a face, all pain and bitter indignation. "Cowards--Cowards!--to treat an old woman so!--Let me go--let me go back! I must find her!"

"She's all safe, Miss--she's all safe--you go home," said a friendly policeman. "These gentlemen will look after you! Stand back there!" And he tried to open a passage for them.

Winnington touched her arm. But an involuntary moan startled him. "She's hurt her arm"--said Andrews in his ear--"twisted it somehow. Go to the other side of her--put your arm round her, and I'll clear the way."

Delia struggled--"No--no!--let me go!"

But she was powerless. Winnington nearly carried her through the crowd, while her faintness increased. By the time they reached the motor, she was barely conscious. The two men lifted her in. Andrews stood looking at her a moment, as she sank back with Winnington beside her, his ruddy countenance expressing perhaps the most acute emotion of which its possessor had ever yet been capable.

"Good-night. You'll take her home," he said gruffly, and lifted his hat. But the next moment he ran back to say--"I'll go back and find out what's happened. She'll want to know. Where are you taking her?"

"Smith's Hotel," said Winnington--"to my sister." And he gave the order to the chauffeur.

They set out. Mark passed his arm round her again, to support her, and she drooped unconsciously upon his shoulder. A fierce joy--mingled with his wrath and disgust. This must be--this should be the _end_! Was such a form made for sordid violence and strife? Her life just breathed against his--he could have borne her so for ever.

But as soon as they had revived her, and she opened her eyes in Mrs. Matheson's sitting-room at the hotel, she burst into a cry of misery.

"Where's Gertrude!--let me go to her! Where am I?"

As they wrestled with and soothed her, a servant knocked.

"A gentleman to see you, Sir, downstairs."

Winnington descended, and found Andrews--breathless with news.

Eighty women arrested--Miss Marvell among the ringleaders, for all of whom bail has been refused? While the riot had been going on in Parliament Square, another detachment of women had passed along Whitehall, smashing windows as they went. And at the same moment, a number of shop-windows had been broken in Piccadilly. The Prime

Minister had been questioned in the Commons, and Sir Wilfrid Lang had denounced the "Daughters" organisation, and the mad campaign of violence to which they were committed, in an indignant speech much cheered by the House.

* * * * *

The days that followed were days of nightmare both for Delia and those who watched over her.

Gertrude Marvell and ten others went to prison, without the option of a fine. About forty of the rank and file who refused to pay their fines, or give surety for good behaviour, accompanied their leaders into duress. The country rang with the scandal of what had happened, and with angry debate as to how to stop the scandal in the future. The Daughters issued defiant broadsheets, and filled the *Tocsin* with brave words. And the Constitutionals who had pinned their hopes on the Suffrage Bill before the House, wrung their hands, and wailed to heaven and earth to keep these mad women in order.

Delia sat waiting--waiting--all these intolerable hours. She scarcely spoke to Winnington, except to ask him for news, or to thank him, when every evening, owing to a personal knowledge of the Home Secretary, he was able to bring her the very latest news of what was happening in prison. Gertrude had refused food; forcible feeding would very soon have to be abandoned; and her release, on the ground of danger to life, might have to be granted. But in view of the hot indignation of the public, the Government were not going to release any of the prisoners before they absolutely must.

Delia herself was maimed and powerless. How the wrenching of her arm had come about--whether in the struggle with the two constables who had separated her from Gertrude, or in the attempt to raise her companion from the ground--she could not now remember. But a muscle had been badly torn; she wore a sling and suffered constant and often severe pain. Neither Alice Matheson, nor Lady Tonbridge--who had rushed up to town--ever heard her complain, except involuntarily, of this pain. Madeleine indeed believed that there was some atoning satisfaction in it, for Delia's wounded spirit. If she was not with Gertrude in prison, at least she too was suffering--if only a fraction of what Gertrude was enduring.

The arm however was not the most serious matter. As France had long since perceived, she had been overstrained in nursing Weston, and the events since she left Maumsey had naturally increased the mischief. She had become sleepless and neurasthenic. And Winnington watched day by day the eclipse of her radiant youth, with a dumb wrath almost as Pagan as that which a similar impression had roused in Lathrop.

The nights were her worst time. She lived then, in prison, with Gertrude, vividly recalling all that she had ever heard from the Daughters who had endured it, of the miseries and indignities of prison life. But she also lived again through the events which had preceded

and followed the riot; her quick intelligence pondered the comments of the newspapers, the attitude of the public, the measured words and looks of these friends who surrounded her. And there were many times when sitting up in bed alone, suffering and sleepless, she asked herself bitterly--"were we just fools!--just fools?"

But whatever the mind replied, the heart and its loyalty stood firm. She was no more free now than before--that was the horrible part of it! It was this which divided her from Winnington. The thought of how he had carried her off from the ugly or ridiculous scenes which the newspapers described--scenes of which she had scarcely any personal memory, alternately thrilled and shamed her. But the aching expectation of Gertrude's return--the doubt in what temper of mind and what plight of body she would return--dominated everything else.

At last came the expected message. "In consequence of a report from the prison doctors and his own medical advisers, the Home Secretary has ordered the immediate release of Miss Gertrude Marvell." Winnington was privately notified of the time of release, information which was refused to what remained of the Daughters' organisation, lest there should be further disturbance. He took a motor to the prison gate, and put a terribly enfeebled woman and her nurse into it. Gertrude did not even recognise him, and he followed the motor to the Westminster flat, distracted by the gloomiest forebodings.

Delia was already at the flat to receive her friend, having quietly--but passionately--insisted, against all the entreaties of Mrs. Matheson and Lady Tonbridge. Winnington helped the nurse and the porter to carry Gertrude Marvell upstairs. They laid her on the bed, and the doctor who had been summoned took her in charge. As he was leaving the room, Winnington turned back--to look at his enemy. How far more formidable to him in her weakness than in her strength! The keen eyes were closed, the thin mouth relaxed and bloodless shewing the teeth, the hands mere skin and bone. She lay helpless and only half-conscious on her pillows, with nurse and doctor hovering round her, and Delia kneeling beside her. Yet, as he closed the door, Winnington realised her power through every vein! It rested entirely with her whether or no she would destroy Delia, as she must in the end destroy herself.

He waited in the drawing-room for Delia. She came at last, with a cold and alien face. "Don't come again, please! Leave us to ourselves. I shall have doctors--and nurses. We'll let you know."

He took her hands tenderly. But she drew them away--shivering a little.

"You don't know--you can't know--what it means to me--to us--to see what she has suffered. There must be no one here but those--who sympathise--who won't reproach--" Her voice failed her.

There was nothing for it but to go.

Chapter XVIII

Great is the power of martyrdom!--of the false no less than the true--and whether the mind consent or no.

During the first week of Gertrude Marvell's recovery--or partial recovery--from her prison ordeal, both Winnington and Delia realised the truth of this commonplace to the full. Winnington was excluded from the flat. Delia, imprisoned within it, was dragged, day by day, through deep waters of emotion and pity. She envied the heroism of her friend and leader; despised herself for not having been able to share it; and could not do enough to soothe the nervous suffering which Gertrude's struggle with law and order had left behind it.

But with the beginning of the second week some strange facts emerged. Gertrude was then sufficiently convalescent to be moved into the drawing-room, to see a few visitors, and to exchange experiences. All who came belonged to the League, and had been concerned in the Parliamentary raid. Most of them had been a few days or a week in prison. Two had been hunger-strikers. And as they gathered round Gertrude in half-articulate worship, Delia, passing from one revealing moment to another, suddenly felt herself superfluous--thrust away! She could not join in their talk except perfunctorily; the violence of it often left her cold and weary; and she soon recognised half in laughter, half bitterly, that, as one who had been carried out of the fray, like a naughty child, by her guardian, she stood in the opinion of Gertrude's visitors, on a level altogether inferior to that of persons who had "fought it out."

This, however, would not have troubled her--she was so entirely of the same opinion herself. But what began to wound her to the quick was Gertrude's own attitude towards her. She had been accustomed for so long to be Gertrude's most intimate friend, to be recognised and envied as such, that to be made to feel day by day how small a hold--for some mysterious reason--she now retained on that fierce spirit, was galling indeed. Meanwhile she had placed all the money realised by the sale of her jewels,--more than three thousand pounds--in Gertrude's hands for League purposes; her house was practically Gertrude's, and had Gertrude willed, her time and her thoughts would have been Gertrude's also. She would not let herself even think of Winnington. One glance at the emaciated face and frame beside her was enough to recall her from what had otherwise been a heavenly wandering.

But she was naturally quick and shrewd, and she soon made herself face the fact that she was supplanted. Supplanted by many--but especially by one. Marion Andrews had not been in the raid--Delia often uneasily pondered the why and wherefore. She came up to town a week after it, and was then constantly in Gertrude's room. Between Delia, and this iron-faced, dark-browed woman, with her clumsy dress and brusque ways, there was but little conversation. Delia never forgot their last meeting at Maumsey; she was often filled with dire forebodings and

suspicious; and as the relation between Gertrude and Miss Andrews became closer, they grew and multiplied.

At last one morning Gertrude turned her back on invalid ways. She got up at her usual time; she dismissed her nurse; and in the middle of the morning she came in upon Delia, who, in the desultory temper born of physical strain, was alternately trying to read Marshall's "Economics of Industry," and writing to Lady Tonbridge about anything and everything, except the topics that really occupied her mind.

Delia sprang up to get her a shawl, to settle her on the sofa. But Gertrude said impatiently--

"Please don't fuss. I want to be treated now as though I were well--I soon shall be. And anyway I am tired of illness." And she took a plain chair, as though to emphasize what she had said.

"I came to talk to you about plans. You're not busy!"

"Busy!" The scornful tone was a trifle bitter also, as Gertrude perceived. Delia put aside her book, and her writing-board, and descended to her favourite place on the hearth rug. The two friends surveyed each other.

"Gertrude, it's absurd to talk as though you were well!" cried Delia. "You look a perfect wreck!"

But there was more in what she saw--in what she felt--than physical wreck. There was a moral and spiritual change, subtler than any physical injury, and probably more permanent. Gertrude Marvell had never possessed any "charm," in the sense in which other leaders of the militant movement possessed it. A clear and narrowly logical brain, the diamond sharpness of an astonishing will, and certain passions of hate, rather than passions of love, had made the strength of her personality, and given her an increasing ascendancy. But these qualities had been mated with a slender physique--trim, balanced, composed--suggesting a fastidious taste, and nerves perfectly under control; a physique which had given special accent and emphasis to her rare outbreaks of spoken violence. Refinement, seemliness, "ladylikeness,"--even Sir Robert Blanchflower in his sorest moments would scarcely have denied her these.

In a measure they were there still, but coupled with pathetic signs of some disintegrating and poisonous influence. The face which once, in its pallid austerity, had not been without beauty, had now coarsened, even in emaciation. The features stood out disproportionately; the hair had receded from the temples; something ugly and feverish had been, as it were, laid bare. And composure had been long undermined. The nurse who had just left had been glad to go.

Gertrude received Delia's remark with impatience.

"Do please let my looks alone! As if you could boast!" The speaker's

smile softened as she looked at the girl's still bandaged arm, and pale cheeks. "That in fact is what I wanted to say, Delia. You ought to be going home. You want the country and the garden. And I, it seems--so this tiresome Doctor says--ought to have a fortnight's sea."

"Oh--" said Delia, with a sudden flush. "So you think we ought to give up the flat? Why can't I come with you to the sea?"

"I thought you had begun to do various things--cripples--and cottages--and schools--for Mr. Winnington," said Gertrude, drily.

"I wanted to--but Weston's illness stopped it--and then I came here."

"Well, you 'wanted to.' And why shouldn't you?"

There was a silence. Then Delia looked up--very pale now--her head thrown back.

"So you mean you wish to get rid of me, Gertrude!"

"Nothing of the sort. I want you to do--what you clearly wish to do."

"When have I ever shown you that I wished to desert you--or--the League?"

"Perhaps I read you better than you do yourself," said Gertrude, slightly reddening too. "Of course you have been goodness--generosity--itself. But--this cause wants more than gifts--more than money--it wants a woman's _self_!"

"Well?" Delia waited.

Gertrude moved impatiently.

"Why should we play the hypocrite with each other!" she said at last. "You won't deny that what Mr. Winnington thinks--what Mr. Winnington feels--is infinitely more important to you now than what anybody else in the world thinks or feels?"

"Which I shewed by coming up here against his express wishes?--and joining in the raid, after he had said all that a man could say against it, both to you and to me?"

"Oh, I admit you did your best--you did your best," said Gertrude sombrely. "But I know you, Delia!--I know you! Your heart's not in it--any more."

Delia rose, and began slowly to pace the room. There was a wonderful virginal dignity--a suppressed passion--in her attitude, as though she wrestled with inward wound. But she said nothing, except to ask--as she paused in front of Gertrude--

"Where are you going--and who is going with you?"

"I shall go to the sea, somewhere--perhaps to the Isle of Wight. I daresay Marion Andrews will come with me. She wants to escape her mother for a time."

"Marion Andrews?" repeated Delia thoughtfully. Then, after a moment--"So you're not coming down to Maumsey any more?"

"Ask yourself what there is for me to do there, my dear child! Frankly, I should find the society of Mr. Winnington and Lady Tonbridge rather difficult! And as for their feelings about me!"

"Do you remember--you promised to live with me for a year?"

"Under mental reservation," said Gertrude, quietly. "You know very well, I didn't accept it as an ordinary post."

"And now there's nothing more to be got out of me? Oh, I didn't mean anything cruel!" added the girl hastily. "I know you must put the cause first."

"And you see where the cause is," said Gertrude grimly. "In ten days from now Sir Wilfrid Lang will have crushed the bill."

"And everybody seems to be clamouring that we've given them the excuse!"

Fierce colour overspread Gertrude's thin temples and cheeks.

"They'll take it, anyway; and we've got to do all we can--meetings, processions, way-laying Ministers--the usual things--and any new torment we can devise."

"But I thought you were going to Southsea!"

"Afterwards--afterwards!" said Gertrude, with visible temper. "I shall run down to Brighton tomorrow, and come back fresh on Monday."

"To this flat?"

"Oh no--I've found a lodging."

Delia turned away--her breath fluttering.

"So we part to-morrow!" Then suddenly she faced round on Gertrude. "But I don't go, Gertrude--till I have your promise!"

"What promise?"

"To let--Monk Lawrence _alone_!" said the girl with sudden intensity, and laying her uninjured hand on a table near, she stooped and looked Gertrude in the eyes.

Gertrude broke into a laugh.

"You little goose! Do you think I look the kind of person for nocturnal adventures?--a cripple--on a stick? Yes, I know you have been talking to Marion Andrews. She told me."

"I warned you," said Delia, with determination--"which was more to the point. Everything Mr. Lathrop told me, I handed on to you."

There was an instant's silence. Then Gertrude laid a skeleton hand upon the girl's hand--gripping it painfully.

"And do you suppose--that anything Mr. Lathrop could say, or you could say, could prevent my carrying out plans that seemed to me necessary--in this war!"

Delia gasped.

"Gertrude!--you mean to do it!"

Gertrude released her--almost threw her hand away.

"I have told you why you are a fool to think so. But if you do think so, go and tell Mr. Winnington! Tell him everything!--make him enquire. I shall be in town--ready for the warrant."

The two faced each other.

"And now," said Gertrude--"though I am convalescent--we have had enough of this." She rose tottering--and felt for her stick. Delia gave it her.

"Gertrude!" It was a bitter cry of crushed affection and wounded trust. It arrested Gertrude for a moment on her way to the door. She turned in indecision--then shook her head--muttered something inarticulate, and went.

* * * * *

That afternoon Delia sent a telegram to Lady Tonbridge who had returned to Maumsey--"Can you and Nora come and stay with me for three months. I shall be quite alone." She also despatched a note to Winnington's club, simply to say that she was going home tomorrow. She had no recent news of Winnington's whereabouts, but something told her that he was still in town--still near her.

Then she turned with energy to practical affairs--arrangements for giving up the flat, dismissing some servants, despatching others to Maumsey. She had something of a gift for housekeeping, and on this evening of all others she blessed its tasks. When they met at dinner, Gertrude was perfectly placid and amiable. She went to bed early, and Delia spent the hours after dinner in packing, with her maid. In the middle of it came a line from Winnington--"Good news indeed! I go down

to Maumsey early, to see that the Abbey is ready for you. Don't bother about the flat. I have spoken to the Agents. They will do everything.

“Au revoir!”

The commonplace words somehow broke down her self-control. She sent away her maid, put out the glaring electric light, and sat crouched over the fire, in the darkness, thinking her heart out. Once she sprang up suddenly, her hands at her breast--“Oh Mark, Mark--I'm coming back to you, Mark,--I'm coming back--I'm _free!_”--in an ecstasy.

But only to feel herself the next moment, quenched--coerced--her happiness dashed from her. If she gave herself to Mark, her knowledge, her suspicions, her practical certainty must go with the gift. She could not keep from him her growing belief that Monk Lawrence was vitally threatened, and that Gertrude, in spite of audacious denials, was still madly bent upon the plot. And to tell him would mean instant action on his part: arrest--prison--perhaps death--for this woman she had adored, whom she still loved with a sore, disillusioned tenderness. She could not tell him!--and therefore she could not engage herself to him. Had Gertrude realised that?--counted upon it?

No. She must work in other ways--through Mr. Lathrop--through various members of the “Daughters” Executive who were personally known to her. Gertrude must be restrained--somehow--by those who still had influence with her.

The loneliness of that hour sank deep into Delia's soul. Never had she felt herself so motherless, so forlorn. Her passion for this elder woman during three years of fast-developing youth had divided her from all her natural friends. As for her relations, her father's sister, Elizabeth Blanchflower, a selfish, eccentric old maid, had just acknowledged her existence in two chilly notes since she returned to England; while Lord Frederick, Winnington's co-executor, had in the same period written her one letter of half-scolding, half-patronising advice, and sent a present of game to Maumsey. Since then she understood he had been pursuing his enemy the gout from “cure” to “cure,” and “Mr. Mark” certainly had done all the executor's work that had not been mere formality.

She had no friends, no one who cared for her!--except Winnington--her chilled heart glowed to the name!--Lady Tonbridge, and poor Weston. Among the Daughters she had acquaintances, but no intimates. Gertrude had absorbed her; she had lived for Gertrude and Gertrude's ideas.

And now she was despised--cast out. She tried to revive in herself the old crusading flame--the hot unquestioning belief in Women's Rights and Women's Wrongs--the angry contempt for men as a race of coarse and hypocritical oppressors, which Gertrude had taught her. In vain. She sat there, with these altruistic loves and hates--premature, artificial things!--drooping away; conscious only, nakedly conscious, of the thirst for individual happiness, personal joy--ashamed of it too, in her bewildered youth!--not knowing that she was thereby best serving her sex and her race in the fore-ordained ways of destiny. And the

wickedness of men? But to have watched a good man, day by day, had changed all the values of the human scene. Her time would come again--with fuller knowledge--for bitter loathing of the tyrannies of sex and lust. But this, in the natural order, was her hour for hope--for faith. As the night grew deeper, the tides of both rose and rose within her--washing her at last from the shores of Desolation. She was going home. Winnington would be there--her friend. Somehow, she would save Gertrude. Somehow--surely--she would find herself in Mark's arms again. She went to sleep with a face all tears, but whether for joy or sorrow, she could hardly have told.

Next morning Marion arrived early, and carried Gertrude off to Victoria, en route for Brighton. Gertrude and Delia kissed each other, and said Good-bye, without visible emotion.

"Of course I shall come down to plague you in the summer," said Gertrude, and Delia laughed assent--with Miss Andrews standing by. The girl went through a spasm of solitary weeping when Gertrude was finally gone; but she soon mastered it, and an hour later she herself was in the train.

Oh, the freshness of the February day--of the spring breathing everywhere!--of the pairing birds and the springing wheat--and the bright patches of crocuses and snowdrop in the gardens along the line. A rush of pleasure in the mere return to the country and her home, in the mere welling back of health, the escape from daily friction, and ugly, violent thoughts, overflowed all her young senses. She was a child on a holiday. The nightmare of the Raid--of those groups of fighting, dishevelled women, ignominiously overpowered, of the grinning crowd, the agonising pain of her arm, and the policeman's rough grip upon it--began to vanish "in black from the skies."

Until--the train ran into the long cutting half way between Latchford and Maumsey, above which climbed the steep woods of Monk Lawrence. Delia knew it well. And she had no sooner recognised it than her gaiety fell--headlong--like a shot bird. She waited in a kind of terror for the moment when the train should leave the cutting, and the house come into view, on its broad terrace carved out of the hill. Yes, there it was, far away, the incomparable front, with its beautiful irregularities, and its equally beautiful symmetries, with its oriel windows flashing in the sun, the golden grey of its stone work, the delicate tracery on its tall twisted chimneys, and the dim purples of its spreading roofs. It lay so gently in the bosom of the woods which clasped it round--as though they said--"See how we have guarded and kept it through the centuries for you, the children of to-day."

The train sped on, and looking back Delia could just make out a whitish patch on the lower edge of the woods. That was Mr. Lathrop's cottage. It seemed to her vaguely that she had seen his face in the front rank of the crowd in Parliament Square; but she had heard nothing of him, or from him since their last talk. She had indeed written him a short veiled note as she had promised to do, after Gertrude's first denials, repeating them--though she herself disbelieved them--and there had been

no reply. Was he at home? Had he perhaps discovered anything more?

When she alighted at Maumsey, with her hand in Winnington's, the fresh colour in her cheeks had disappeared again, and he was dismayed anew at her appearance, though he kept it to himself. But when she was once more in the familiar drawing-room, sitting in her grandmother's chair, obliged to rest while Lady Tonbridge poured out tea--Nora was improving her French in Paris--and Winnington, with his hands in his pockets, talked gossip and gardening, without a word of anything that had happened since they three had last met in that room; when Weston, ghostly but convalescent, came in to show herself; when Delia's black spitz careered all over his recovered mistress, and even the cats came to rub themselves against her skirts, it was impossible not to feel for the moment, tremulously happy, and strangely delivered--in this house whence Gertrude Marvell had departed.

How vivid was the impression of this latter fact on the other two may be imagined. When Delia had gone upstairs to chat with Weston, Lady Tonbridge looked at Winnington--

"To what do we owe this crowning mercy? Who dislodged her?"
Winnington's glance was thoughtful.

"I guess it has been her own doing entirely. But I know nothing."

"Hm.--Well, if I may advise, dear Mr. Mark, ask no questions. And"--his old friend put a hand on his arm--"May I go on?" A smile, not very gay, permitted her.

"Let her be!" she said softly, with a world of sympathy in her clear brown eyes. "She's suffered--and she's on edge." He laid his hand on hers, but said nothing.

* * * * *

The days passed by. Winnington did as he had been told; and Madeleine Tonbridge seemed to see that Delia was dumbly grateful to him. Meanwhile in the eyes of her two friends she made little or no advance towards recapturing her former health and strength. The truth, of course, was that she was consumed by devouring and helpless anxiety. She wrote to Lathrop, posting the letter at a distant village; and received no answer. Then she ascertained that he was not at the cottage, and a casual line in the Tocsin informed her that he had been in town taking part in the foundation of an "outspoken" newspaper--outspoken on "the fundamental questions of sex, liberty, and morals involved in the suffrage movement."

But a letter addressed "To be forwarded" to the Tocsin office produced no more result than her first. Meanwhile she had written imploringly to various prominent members of the organisation in London pointing out the effect on public opinion that must be produced all through Southern England by any attack on Monk Lawrence. She received two cold and cautious replies. It seemed to her that the writers of

them were even more in the dark than she.

The days ran on. The newspapers were full of the coming Woman Suffrage Bill, and its certain defeat in the Commons. Sir Wilfrid Lang was leading the forces hostile to the Suffrage, and making speech after speech in the country to cheering audiences, denouncing the Bill, and the mad women who had tried to promote it by a campaign of outrage, "as ridiculous as it was criminal." He was to move the rejection of it on the second reading, and was reported to be triumphantly confident of the result.

Winnington meanwhile became more and more conscious of an abnormal state of nerve and brain in this pale Delia, the shadow of her proper self, and as the hours went on, he was presently for throwing all Madeleine's counsels aside, and somehow breaking through the girl's silence, in the hope of getting at--and healing--the cause of it. He guessed of course at a hundred things to account for it--at a final breach between her and Gertrude--at the disappointment of cherished hopes and illusions--at a profound travail of mind, partly moral, partly intellectual, going back over the past, and bewildered as to the future. But at the first sign of a change of action, of any attempt to probe her, on his part, she was off--in flight; throwing back at him often a look at once so full of pain and so resolute that he dared not pursue her. She possessed at all times a great personal dignity, and it held him at bay.

He himself--unconsciously--enabled her to hold him at bay. Naturally, he connected some of the haunting anxiety he perceived with Monk Lawrence, and with Gertrude Marvell's outrageous speech in Latchford market-place. But he himself, on the other hand, was not greatly concerned for Monk Lawrence. Not only he---the whole neighbourhood was on the alert, in defence of the famous treasure-house. The outside of the building and the gardens were patrolled at night by two detectives; and according to Daunt's own emphatic assurance to Winnington, the house was never left without either the Keeper himself or his niece in it, to mount guard. They had set up a dog, with a bark which was alone worth a policeman. And finally, Sir Wilfrid himself had been down to see the precautions taken, had especially ordered the strengthening of the side door, and the provision of iron bars for all the ground floor windows. As to the niece, Eliza Daunt, she had not made herself popular with the neighbours or in the village; but she seemed an efficient and managing woman, and that she "kept herself to herself" was far best for the safety of Monk Lawrence.

Whenever during these days Winnington's business took him in the Latchford direction, so that going or coming he passed Monk Lawrence, he would walk up to the Abbey in the evening, and in the course of the gossip of the day, all the reassuring news he had to give would be sure to drop out; while Delia sat listening, her eyes fixed on him. And then, for a time, the shadow almost lifted, and she would be her young and natural self.

In this way, without knowing it, he helped her to keep her secret, and,

intermittently, to fight down her fears.

On one of these afternoons, in the February twilight, he had been talking to both the ladies, describing _inter alia_ a brief call at Monk Lawrence and a chat with Daunt, when Madeleine Tonbridge went away to change her walking dress, and he and Delia were left alone. Winnington was standing in the favourite male attitude--his hands in his pockets, and his back to the fire; Delia was on a sofa near. The firelight flickered on the black and white of her dress, and on the face which in losing something of its dark bloom had gained infinitely in other magic for the eyes of the man looking down upon her.

Suddenly she said--

"Do you remember when you wanted me to say--I was sorry for Gertrude's speech--and I wouldn't?"

He started.

"Perfectly."

"Well, I am sorry now. I see--I know--it has been all a mistake."

She lifted her eyes to his, very quietly--but the hands on her lap shook.

His passionate impulse was to throw himself at her feet, and silence any further humbleness with kisses. But he controlled himself.

"You mean--that violence--has been a mistake?"

"Yes--just that. Oh, of course!"--she flushed again--"I am just as much for _women_--I am just as rebellious against their wrongs--as I ever was. I shall be a Suffragist always. But I see now--what we've stirred up in England. I see now--that we can't win that way--and that we oughtn't to win that way."

He was silent a moment, and then said in a rather muffled voice--

"I don't know who else would have confessed it--so bravely!" His emotion seemed to quiet her. She smiled radiantly.

"Does it make you feel triumphant?"

"Not in the least!"

She held out both hands, and he grasped them, smiling back--understanding that she wished him to take it lightly.

Her eyes indeed now were full of gaiety--light swimming on depths.

"You won't be always saying 'I told you so?'"

"Is it my way?"

"No. But perhaps it's cunning on your part. You know it pays better to be generous."

They both laughed, and she drew her hands away. In another minute, she had asked him to go on with some reading aloud while she worked. He took up the book. The blood raced in his veins. "Soon, soon!"--he said to himself, only to be checked by the divining instinct which added--"but not yet!"

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Only a few more days now, to the Commons debate. Every morning the newspapers contained a crop of "militant" news of the kind foreshadowed by Gertrude Marvell--meetings disturbed, private parties raided, Ministers waylaid, windows smashed, and the like, though in none of the reports did Gertrude's own name appear. Only two days before the debate, a glorious Reynolds in the National Gallery was all but hopelessly defaced by a girl of eighteen. Feeling throughout the country surged at a white-heat. Delia said little or nothing, but the hollows under her eyes grew steadily darker, and her cheeks whiter. Nor could Winnington, for all his increasing anxiety, devote himself to soothing or distracting her. An ugly strike in the Latchford brickfields against nonunion labour was giving the magistrates of the country a good deal of anxiety. Some bad outrages had already occurred, and Winnington was endeavouring to get a Board of Trade arbitration,--all of which meant his being a good deal away from home.

Meanwhile Delia was making a new friend. Easily and simply, though no one knew exactly how, Susy Amberley had found her way to the heart of the young woman so much talked about and so widely condemned by the county. Her own departure for London had been once more delayed by the illness of her mother. But the worst of her own struggle was over now; and no one had guessed it. She was a little older, though it was hardly perceptible to any eye but her mother's; a little graver; in some ways sweeter, in others perhaps a trifle harder, like the dipped sword. Her dress had become less of a care to her; she minded the fashions less than her mother. And there had opened before her more and more alluringly that world of social service, which is to so many beautiful souls outside Catholicism the equivalent of the vowed and dedicated life.

But just as of old, she guessed Mark Winnington's thoughts, and by some instinct divined his troubles. He loved Delia Blanchflower; that she knew by a hundred signs; and there were rough places in his road,--that too she knew. They were clearly not engaged; but their relation was clearly, also, one of no ordinary friendship. Delia's dependence on him, her new gentleness and docility were full of meaning--for Susy. As to the causes of Delia's depression, why, she had lost her friend, or at any rate, to judge from the fact that Delia was at Maumsey, while Miss Marvell remained, so report said, in London--had ceased to agree or act with her. Susy divined and felt for the possible tragedy

involved. Delia indeed never spoke of the militant propaganda; but she often produced on Susy a strange impression as of someone listening--through darkness.

The net result of all these guessings was that the tender Susy fell suddenly in love with Delia--first for Mark's sake, then for her own; and became in a few days of frequent meetings, Delia's small worshipper and ministering spirit. Delia surrendered, wondering; and it was soon very evident that, on her side, the splendid creature, in her unrevealed distress, pined after all to be loved, and by her own sex. She told Susy no secrets, either as to Winnington, or Gertrude; but very soon, just as Susy was certain about her, so she--very pitifully and tenderly--became certain about Susy. Susy loved--or had once loved--Winnington. And Delia knew very well, whom Winnington loved. The double knowledge softened all her pride--all her incipient jealousy away. She took Susy into her heart, though not wholly into her confidence; and soon the two began to walk the lonely country roads together hand in hand. Susy's natural tasks took her often among the poor. But Delia would not go with her. She shrank during these days, with a sick distaste from the human world around her,--its possible claims upon her. Her mind was pre-engaged; and she would not pretend what she could not feel.

This applied especially to the folk on her father's estate. As to the neighbours of her own class, they apparently shrank from her. She was left coldly alone. No one called, but Susy, France and his wife, and Captain Andrews. Mrs. Andrews indeed was loud in her denunciation of Delia and all her crew. Her daughter Marion had abominably deserted all her family duties, without any notice to her family, and was now--according to a note left behind--brazenly living in town with some one or other of the "criminals" to whom Miss Blanchflower of course, had introduced her. But as she had given no address she was safe from pursuit. Mrs. Andrews' life had never been so uncomfortable. She had to maid herself, and do her own housekeeping, and the thing was Scandalous and intolerable. She filled the local air with wailing and abuse.

But her son, the gallant Captain, would not allow any abuse of Delia Blanchflower in his presence. He had begun, indeed, immediately after Delia's return, to haunt the Abbey so persistently that Madeleine Tonbridge had to make an opportunity for a few quiet words in his ear, after which he disappeared disconsolate.

But he was a good fellow at heart, and the impression Delia had made upon him, together with some plain speaking on the subject from Lady Tonbridge, in the course of a chance meeting in the village, roused a remorseful discomfort in him about his sister. He tried honestly to find out where she was, but quite in vain. Then he turned upon his Mother, and told her bluntly she was herself to blame for her daughter's flight. "Between us, we've led her a dog's life, Mother, there, that's the truth! All the same, I'm damned sorry she's taken up with this business."

However, it mattered nothing to anybody whether the Captain was "damned sorry" or not. The hours were almost numbered. The Sunday before the Tuesday fixed for the Second Reading came and went. It was a foggy February day, in which the hills faded from sight, and all the world went grey. Winnington spent the afternoon at Maumsey. But neither he nor Madeleine seemed to be able to rouse Delia during that day from a kind of waking dream--which he interpreted as a brooding sense of some catastrophe to come.

He was certain that her mind was fixed on the division ahead--the scene in the House of Commons--and on the terror of what the "Daughters"--Gertrude perhaps in the van--might be planning and plotting in revenge for it. His own feeling was one of vast relief that the strain would be so soon over, and his own tongue loosed. Monk Lawrence was safe enough! And as for any other attempt at vengeance, he dismissed the notion with impatient scorn.

But meanwhile he said not a word that could have jarred on any conviction or grief of Delia's. Sometimes indeed they touched the great subject itself--the "movement" in its broad and arguable aspects; though it seemed to him that Delia could not bear it for long. Mind and heart were too sore; and her weary reasonableness made him long for the prophetic furies of the autumn. But always she felt herself enwrapped by a tenderness, a chivalry that never failed. Only between her and it--between her and him--as she lay awake through broken nights, some barrier rose--dark and impassable. She knew it for the barrier of her own unconquered fear.

Chapter XIX

On this same Sunday night before the date fixed for the Suffrage debate, a slender woman, in a veil and a waterproof, opened the gate of a small house in the Brixton Road. It was about nine o'clock in the evening. The pavements were wet with rain, and a gusty wind was shrieking through the smutty almond and alder trees along the road which had ventured to put out their poor blossoms and leaves in the teeth of this February gale.

The woman stood and looked at the house after shutting the gate, as though uncertain whether she had found what she was looking for. But the number 453, on the dingy door, could be still made out by the light of the street opposite, and she mounted the steps.

A slatternly maid opened the door, and on being asked whether Mrs. Marvell was at home, pointed curtly to a dimly lighted staircase, and disappeared.

Gertrude Marvell groped her way upstairs. The house smelt repulsively of stale food, and gas mingled, and the wailing wind from outside

seemed to pursue the visitor with its voice as she mounted. On the second floor landing, she knocked at the door of the front room.

After an interval, some shuffling steps came to the door, and it was cautiously opened.

"What's your business, please?"

"It's me--Gertrude. Are you alone?"

A sound of astonishment. The door was opened, and a woman appeared. Her untidy, brown hair, touched with grey, fell back from a handsome peevish face of an aquiline type. A delicate mouth, relaxed and bloodless, seemed to make a fretful appeal to the spectator, and the dark circles under the eyes shewed violet on a smooth and pallid skin. She was dressed in a faded tea-gown much betrimmed, covered up with a dingy white shawl.

"Well, Gertrude--so you've come--at last!"--she said, after a moment, in a tone of resentment.

"If you can put me up for the night--I can stay. I've brought no luggage."

"That doesn't matter. There's a stretcher bed. Come in." Gertrude Marvell entered, and her mother closed the door.

"Well, mother--how are you?"

The daughter offered her cheek, which the elder woman kissed. Then Mrs. Marvell said bitterly--

"Well, I don't suppose, Gertrude, it much matters to you how I am."

Gertrude took off her wet waterproof, and hat, and sitting down by the fire, looked round her mother's bed-sitting-room. There was a tray on the table with the remains of a meal. There were also a large number of women's hats, some trimmed, some untrimmed, some in process of trimming, lying about the room, on the different articles of furniture. There was a tiny dog in a basket, which barked shrilly and feebly as Gertrude approached the fire, and there were various cheap illustrated papers and a couple of sixpenny novels to be seen emerging from the litter here and there. For the rest, the furniture was of a squalid lodging-house type. On the chimney-piece however was a bunch of daffodils, the only fresh and pleasing object in the room.

To Gertrude it was as though she had seen it all before. Behind the room, there stretched a succession of its ghostly fellows--the rooms of her childhood. In those rooms she could remember her mother as a young and comely woman, but always with the same slovenly dress, and the same untidy--though then abundant and beautiful--hair. And as she half shut her eyes she seemed also to see her younger sister coming in and out--malicious, secretive--with her small turn-up nose, pouting lips,

and under-hung chin.

She made no reply to her mother's complaining remark. But while she held her cold hands to the blaze that Mrs. Marvell stirred up, her eyes took careful note of her mother's aspect. "Much as usual," was her inward comment. "Whatever happens, she'll outlive me."

"You've been going on with the millinery?" She pointed to the hats. "I hope you've been making it pay."

"It provides me with a few shillings now and then," said Mrs. Marvell, sitting heavily down on the other side of the fire--"which Winnie generally gets out of me!" she said sharply. "I am a miserable pauper now, as I always have been."

Gertrude's look was unmoved. Her mother had, she knew, all that her father had left behind him--no great sum, but enough for a solitary woman to live on.

"Well, anyway, you must be glad of it as an occupation. I wish I could help you. But I haven't really a farthing of my own, beyond the interest on my £1000. I handle a great deal of money, but it all goes to the League, and I never let them pay me more than my bare expenses. Now then, tell me all about everybody!" And she lay back in the dilapidated basket-chair that had been offered her, and prepared herself to listen.

The family chronicle was done. It was as depressing as usual, and Gertrude made but little comment upon it. When it was finished, Mrs. Marvell rose, and put the kettle on the fire, and got out a couple of fresh cups and saucers from a cupboard. As she did so, she looked round at her visitor.

"And you're as deep in that militant business as ever."

Gertrude made a negligent sign of assent.

"Well, you'll never get any good of it." The mother's pale cheek flushed. It excited her to have this chance of speaking her mind to her clever and notorious daughter, whom in many ways she secretly envied, while heartily disapproving her acts and opinions.

Gertrude shrugged her shoulders.

"What's the good of arguing?"

"Well, it's true"--said the mother, persisting. "Every new thing you do, turns more people against you. Winnie's a Suffragist--but she says you've spoilt all their game!"

Gertrude's eyes shone; she despised her mother's opinion, and her sister's still more, and yet once again in their neighbourhood, once again in the old environment, she could not help treating them in the

old defiant brow-beating way.

"And you think, I suppose, that Winnie knows a good deal about it?"

"Well, she knows what everybody's saying--in the trams--and the trains everywhere. Hundreds of them that used to be for you have turned over."

"Let them!"

The contemptuous tone irritated Mrs. Marvell. But at the same time she could not help admiring her eldest daughter, as she sat there in the fire-light, her quiet well-cut dress, her delicate hands and feet. It was true indeed, she was a scarce-crow for thinness, and looked years older--"somehow gone to pieces"--thought the mother, vaguely, and with a queer, sudden pang.

"And you're going on with it?"

"What? Militancy? Of course we are--more than ever!"

"Why, the men laugh at you, Gertrude!"

"They won't laugh--by the time we've done," said Gertrude, with apparent indifference. Her mother had not sufficient subtlety of perception to see that the indifference was now assumed, to hide the quiver of nerves, irreparably injured by excitement and overstrain.

"Well, all I know is, it's against nature to suppose that women can fight men." Mrs. Marvell's remarks were rather like the emergence of scattered spars from a choppy sea.

"We shall fight them," said Gertrude, sourly--"And what's more, we shall beat them."

"All the same we've got to live with them!" cried her mother, suddenly flushing, as old memories swept across her.

"Yes,--on our terms--not theirs!"

"I do believe, Gertrude, you hate the very sight of a man!" Gertrude smiled again; then suddenly shivered, as though the cold wind outside had swept through the room.

"And so would you--if you knew what I do!"

"Well I do know a good bit!" protested Mrs. Marvell. "And I'm a married woman,--worse luck! and you're not. But you'll never see it any other way than your own, Gertie. You got a kink in you when you were quite a girl. Last week I was talking about you to a woman I know--and I said--'It's the girls ruined by the bad men that make Gertrude so mad'--and she said--'She don't ever think of the boys that are ruined by the bad women!--Has she ever had a son--not she!' And she just cried and cried. I suppose she was thinking of something."

Gertrude rose.

"Look here, mother. Can I go to bed? I'm awfully tired."

"Wait a bit. I'll make the bed."

Gertrude sat down by the fire again. Her exhaustion was evident, and she made no attempt to help her mother. Mrs. Marvell let down the chair-bed, drew it near the fire, and found some bed-clothes. Then she produced night-things of her own, and helped Gertrude undress. When her daughter was in bed, she made some tea, and dry toast, and Gertrude let them be forced on her. When she had finished, the mother suddenly stooped and kissed her.

"Where are you going to now, Gertrude? Are you staying on with that lady in Hampshire?"

"Can't tell you my plans just yet," said Gertrude sleepily--"but you'll know next week."

The lights were put out. Both women tried to sleep, and Gertrude was soon heavily asleep.

But as soon as it was light, Mrs. Marvell heard her moving, the splash of water, and the lighting of the fire. Presently Gertrude came to her side fully dressed--

"There, mother, I've made you a cup of tea! And now in a few minutes I shall be off."

Mrs. Marvell sat up and drank the tea.

"I didn't think you'd go in such a hurry," she said, fretfully.

"I must. My day's so full. Well, now look here, Mother, I want you to know if anything were to happen to me, my thousand pounds would come to you first, and then to Winnie and her children. And it's my wish, that neither my brother nor Henry shall touch a farthing of it. I've made a will, and that's the address of my solicitors, who're keeping it." She handed her mother an envelope.

Mrs. Marvell put down her tea, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I believe you're up to something dreadful, Gertrude,--which you won't tell me."

"Nonsense," said Gertrude, not however unkindly. "But we mayn't see each other for a good while. There!--I'll open the windows--that'll make you feel more cheerful." And she drew up the blinds to the dull February day, and opened a window.

"I'll telephone to Winnie as I go past the Post Office to come and

spend the day with you--and I'll send up the servant to do your room.
Now don't fret."

"I'm a lonely old woman, Gertrude--and I wish I was dead."

Gertrude frowned.

"You should try and read something, Mother--better than these trashy novels. When I've time, I'll send you a parcel of books--I've got a good many. And don't you let your work go--it's good for you. Now good-bye."

The two women kissed--Mrs. Marvell embracing her daughter with a sudden fierceness of emotion to which Gertrude submitted, almost for the first time in her life. Then her mother pushed her away.

"Good-bye, Gertrude--you'd better go!"

Gertrude went out noiselessly, closing the door behind her with a lingering movement, unlike her. In the tiny hall below, she found the "general" at work, and sent her up to Mrs. Marvell. Then she went out into the grey February morning, and the little girl of the landlady standing on the steps saw her enter one of the eastward-bound trams.

Monday afternoon came. Winnington had been called away to Wanchester by urgent County business; against his will, for there had been some bad rioting the day before at Latchford, and he would rather have gone to help his brother magistrates. But there was no help for it. Lady Tonbridge was at the little Georgian house, shutting it up for six months. Delia was left alone in the Abbey, consumed with a restless excitement she had done her best to hide from her companions. She suddenly made up her mind that she would go and see for herself, and by herself, what was happening at Monk Lawrence. She set out unobserved and on foot, and had soon climbed the hill and reached the wood walk along its crest where she had once met Lathrop. Half way through, she came on two persons whom she at once recognised as the science-mistress, Miss Jackson, and Miss Toogood. They were waiting slowly, and, as it seemed to Delia, sadly; the little dressmaker limping painfully, with her head thrown back and a face of fixed and tragic distress.

When they saw Delia, they stopped in agitation.

"Oh, Miss Blanchflower!--"

Delia who knew that Miss Jackson had been in town hoping for work at the Central Office of the League of Revolt, divined at once that she had been disappointed.

"They couldn't find you anything?"

The teacher shook her head.

"And the Governors have given me a month's salary here in lieu of notice. I've left the school, Miss Blanchflower! I was in the Square you know, that day--and at the Police Court afterwards. That was what did it. And I have my old mother to keep."

A pair of haggard eyes met Delia's.

"Oh, but I'll help!" cried Delia.--"You must let me help!--won't you?"

"Thank you--but I've got a few savings," said the teacher quietly. "It isn't that so much. It's--well, Miss Toogood feels it too. She was in town--she saw everything. And she knows what I mean. We're disheartened--that's what it is!"

"With the movement?" said Delia, after a moment.

"It seemed so splendid when we talked of it down here--and--it _was_--so horrible!" Her voice dropped.

"So horrible!" echoed Miss Toogood drearily. "It wasn't what we meant, somehow. And yet we'd read about it. But to see those young women beating men's faces--well, it did for me!"

"The police were rough too!" cried Miss Jackson. "But you couldn't wonder at it, Miss Blanchflower, could you?"

Delia looked into the speaker's frank, troubled face. "You and I felt the same," she said in a choked voice. "It was ugly--and it was absurd."

She walked back with them a little way, comforting them, as best she could. And her sympathy, her sweetness did--strangely--comfort them. When she left them, they walked on, talking tenderly of her, counting on _her_ good fortune, if there was none for them.

At the end of the walk, towards Monk Lawrence, another figure emerged from the distance. Delia started, then gathered all her wits; for it was Lathrop.

He hurried towards her, breathless, cutting all preliminaries--

"I was coming to find you. I arrived this morning. There is something wrong! I have just been to the house, and there is no one there."

"What do you mean?"

"No one. I went to Daunt's rooms. Everything locked. The house absolutely dark--everywhere. And I know that he has had the strictest orders!"

Without a word, she began to run, and he beside her. When she slackened, he told her that while in London he had made the most skilful enquiries he could devise as to the plot he believed to be on

foot. But--like Delia's own--they had been quite fruitless. Those persons who had shared suspicion with him in December were now convinced that the thing was dropped. All that he had ascertained was that Miss Marvell was in town, apparently recovered, and Miss Andrews with her.

"Well--and were you pleased with your raid?" he asked her, half mockingly, as he opened the gate of Monk Lawrence for her.

She resented the question, and the tone of it, remembering his first grandiloquent letter to her.

"_You_ ought to be," she said, drily. "It was the kind of thing you recommended."

"In that letter I wrote you! I ought to have apologised to you for that letter long ago. I am afraid it was an exercise. Oh, I felt it, I suppose, when I wrote it."

There was a touch of something insolent in his voice.

She made no reply. If it had not been for the necessity which yoked them, she would not have spent another minute in his company, so repellent to her had he become--both in the inner and the outer man. She tried only to think of him as an ally in a desperate campaign.

They hastened up the Monk Lawrence drive. The house stood still and peaceful in the February afternoon. The rooks from the rookery behind were swirling about and over the roofs, filling the air with monotonous sound which only emphasized the silence below. A sheet of snowdrops lay white in the courtyard, where a child's go-cart upset, held the very middle of the stately approach to the house.

Delia went to the front door, and rang the bell--repeatedly. Not a sound, except the dim echoes of the bell itself from some region far inside.

"No good!" said Lathrop. "Now come to the back." They went round to the low addition at the back of the house, where Daunt and his family had now lived for many months. Here also there was nobody. The door was locked. The blinds were drawn down. Impossible to see into the rooms, and neither calling nor knocking produced any response.

Lathrop stood thinking.

"Absolutely against orders! I know--for Daunt himself told me--that he had promised Lang never to leave the house without putting some deputy he could trust in charge. He has gone and left no deputy--or the deputy he did leave has deserted."

"What's the nearest house--or cottage?"

"The Gardeners' cottages, beyond the kitchen garden. Only one of them

occupied now, I believe. Daunt used to live there before he moved into the house. Let's go there!"

They ran on. The walled kitchen garden was locked, but they found a way round it to where three creeper-grown cottages stood in a pleasant lonely space girdled by beech-woods. One only was inhabited, but from that the smoke was going up, and a babble of children's voices emerged.

Lathrop knocked. There was a sudden sound, and then a silence within. In a minute however the door was opened, and a strapping black-eyed young woman stood on the threshold looking both sulky and astonished.

"Are you Daunt's niece?" said Lathrop.

"I am, Sir. What do you want with him?"

"Why isn't he at Monk Lawrence?" asked Lathrop roughly. "He told me himself he was not to leave the house unguarded."

"Well, Sir, I don't know I'm sure what business it is of yours!" said the woman, flushing with anger. "He got bad news of his son, whose ship arrived at Portsmouth yesterday, and the young man said to be dying, on board. So he went off this afternoon. I've only left it for ten minutes and I'm going back directly. Mrs. Cresson here had asked the children to tea, and I brought them over. And I'll thank you, Sir, not to go spying on honest people!"

And she would have slammed the door in his face, but that Delia came forward.

"We had no intention of spying upon you, Miss Daunt--indeed we hadn't. But I am Miss Blanchflower, who came here before Christmas, with Mr. Winnington, and I should have been glad to see Mr. Daunt and the children. Lily!--don't you remember me?--and she smiled at the crippled child--a delicate blue-eyed creature--whom she saw in the background.

But the child, who seemed to have been crying violently, did not come forward. And the other two, who had their fingers in their mouths, were equally silent and shrinking. In the distance an old woman sat motionless in her chair by the fire, taking no notice apparently of what was going on.

The young woman appeared for a moment confused or excited.

"Well, I'm sorry, Miss, but my Uncle won't be back till after dark. And I wouldn't advise you to come in, Miss,"--she hurriedly drew the door close behind her--"the doctor thinks two of the children have got whooping-cough--and I didn't send them to school today."

"Well, just understand, Miss Daunt, if that's your name," said Lathrop, with emphasis--"that till you return to the house, we shall stay there. We shall walk up and down there, till you come back. You know well

enough there are people about, who would gladly do an injury to the house, and that it's not safe to leave it. Monk Lawrence is not Sir Wilfrid Lang's property only. It belongs to the whole nation, and there are plenty of people that'll know the reason why, if any harm comes to it."

"Oh, very well. Have it your own way, Sir! I'll come--I'll come--fast enough," and the speaker, with a curious half-mocking look at Lathrop, flounced back into the cottage, and shut the door. They waited. There were sounds of lowered voices, and crying children. Then Miss Daunt emerged defiantly, and they all three walked back to Monk Lawrence.

The keeper's niece unlocked the door leading to Daunt's rooms. But she stood sulkily in the entry.

"Now I hope you're satisfied, Sir. I don't know, I'm sure, why you should come meddling in other people's affairs. And I daresay you'll say something against me to my uncle!"

"Well, anyway, you keep watch!" was the stern reply. "I take my rounds often this way, as your Uncle knows. I daresay I shall be by here again tonight. Can the children find their way home alone?"

"Well, they're not idiots, Sir! Good-night to you. I've got to get supper." And brusquely shutting the door in their faces, she went inside. They perceived immediately afterwards that she had lit a light in the kitchen.

"Well, so far, all right," said Lathrop, as he and Delia withdrew. "But the whole thing's rather--queer. You know that old woman, Mrs. Cresson, is not all there, and quite helpless?"

He pondered it as they walked back through the wood, his eyes on the ground. Delia shared his undefined anxiety. She suggested that he should go back to the house in an hour or so, to see if Daunt had returned, and complain of his niece's breach of rules. Lathrop agreed.

"How do we know who or what that girl is?"--he said slowly--"that she mayn't have been got hold of?"

The same terror grew in Delia. She walked on beside him absorbed in speculation and discussion, till, without noticing, she had reached the farther gate of the wood-walk. Outside the gate, ran the Wanchester road, climbing the down, amid the woods. To reach the field path leading to the Abbey, Delia must cross it.

She and Lathrop emerged from the wood still talking in low voices, and stood beside the gate. A small car, with one man driving it, was descending the long hill. But Delia had her back to it.

It came nearer. She turned, and saw Winnington approaching her--saw the look on his face. For a moment she wavered. Then with a bow and a hasty "Good Evening," she left Lathrop, and stepped into the road, holding up

her hand to stop the car.

"How lucky!" she said, clearly, and gaily,--"just as it's going to rain! Will you take me home?"

Winnington, without a word, made room for her beside him. The two men exchanged a slight greeting--and the car passed.

Lathrop walked quickly back in the direction of Monk Lawrence. His vanity was hugely pleased.

"By George!--that was one to me! It's quite evident she hasn't taken him into her confidence--doesn't want magistrates interfering--no doubt. And meanwhile she appeals to me--she depends on me. Whatever happens--she'll have to be grateful to me. That fellow with his wry face can't stop it. What a vision she made just now under the wood--'belle dame sans merci'--hating my company--and yet compelled to it. It would make a sonnet I think--I'll try it tonight."

* * * * *

Meanwhile in the dark corridors of Monk Lawrence a woman groping, met another woman. The two dim figures exchanged some whispered words. Then one of them returned to the back regions.

Lathrop, passing by, noticed smoke rising from the Daunts' chimney, and was reassured. But in an hour or so he would return to look for Daunt himself.

He had no sooner descended the hill to his own cottage, in the fast gathering dusk, than Eliza Daunt emerged. She left the light burning in the keeper's kitchen, and some cold supper on the table. Then with a laugh which was half a sob of excitement she ran down the path leading to the garden cottages.

She was met by a clamour of rebellious children, as she opened Mrs. Cresson's door. "Where's Daddy, Liza?--where's Daddy! Why can't we go home! We want our Daddy!"

"Hold your noise!" said Eliza roughly--"or it'll be the worse for you--Daddy won't be home for a couple of hours yet, and I promised Fred Cresson, I'd get Mrs. Cresson's tea for her. Lily, stop crying--and get the tray!"

The crippled child, red-eyed, unwillingly obeyed. Neither she nor her sisters could understand why they had been brought over to tea with Mrs. Cresson of whose queer half-imbecile ways they were all terrified. Their father had gone off in a great hurry--because of the telegram which had come. And Fred had bicycled down to Latchford to see somebody about a gardener's place. And now there was no one left but Liza and Mrs. Cresson--of whom, for different reasons, the three little girls were equally afraid. And Lily's heart especially was sore for her father. She knew very well they were all doing what was forbidden. But

she dared not complain. They had found Cousin 'Liza a hard woman.

After Eliza Daunt had left Daunt's kitchen, for the space of half an hour, a deep and brooding quiet settled on Monk Lawrence. The old house held that in its womb, which must soon crash to light; but for this last brief space, all was peace. The twilight of a clear February evening mellowed the grey walls, and the moss-grown roofs; the house spoke its last message--its murmured story, as the long yoke-fellow of human life--to the tranquil air; and the pigeons crooned about it, little knowing.

Presently from the same door which had seen Eliza Daunt depart, a woman cautiously emerged. She was in dark clothes, closely veiled. With noiseless step, she passed round the back of the house, pausing a moment to look at the side door on the north side which had been lately strengthened by Sir Wilfrid's orders. Then she gained the shelter of the close-grown shrubbery, and turning round she stood a few seconds motionless, gazing at the house. In spite of her quiet movements, she was trembling from head to foot--with excitement, not fear.

"It's beautiful," she was saying to herself--"and precious--and I've destroyed it." Then--with a fierce leap in the blood--"_Beauty_! And what about the beauty that men destroy? Let them _pay_!"

But as she stood there a sudden disabling storm of thought--misgiving--argument--swept through her brain. She seemed to hear on all sides voices in the air--the voices of friends and foes, of applause and execration--Delia's voice among them! And at the mere imagination of it, a shiver of anger ran through her. She thought of Delia now, only as of one who had deserted and disobeyed.

But with the illusion of the ear, there came also an illusion of vision. The months of her recent life rose before her, in one hurrying spectacle of scenes and faces, and the spectacle aroused in her but one idea--one sickening impression--of crushing and superhuman effort. What labour!--what toil! She shuddered under it. Then, suddenly, her mind ran back to the early years before, beyond, the days of "war"--sordid, unceasing war--when there had been time to love, to weep, to pity, to enjoy; before wrath breeding wrath, and violence begetting violence, had driven out the Spirits of Tenderness and Hope. She seemed to see, to feel them--the sad Exiles!--fleeing along desert ways; and her bitter heart cried out to them--for the only--the last time. For in the great names of Love and Justice, she had let Hate loose within her, and like the lion-cub nurtured in the house, it had grown to be the soul's master and gaoler; a "doom" holding the citadels of life, and working itself out to the appointed end.

But the tumult in which she stood began to unnerve her. By a last exercise of will she was able to pull herself together.

Rapidly, as one well used to them, she made her way through the shrubbery paths; round the walled garden, and behind the gardeners' cottages. She heard the children in Mrs. Cresson's cottage as she

passed, Lily still fretfully crying, and the old woman's voice scolding. Poor children!--they would be horribly frightened--but nothing worse.

The thick overgrown wood of fir and beech behind the cottages received her, swallowed up the slight insignificant form. In the wood there was still light enough to let her grope her way along the path, till at the end, against an opening to the sky, she saw the outlines of a keeper's hut. Then she knew that she was worn out, and must rest. She pushed the door ajar, and sat crouching on the threshold, while the schemes and plottings of the preceding weeks ran disjointedly through memory.

Marion was safe by now--she had had an hour's start. And Eliza too had gone. Nothing could be better than the arrangements made for those two.

But she herself was not going--not yet. Her limbs failed her; and beyond the sheltering woods, she seemed to become electrically aware of hostile persons, of nets drawn round her, cutting off escape. As to that, she felt the most supreme indifference to what might happen to her. The indifference, indeed, passed presently into a strange and stinging temptation to go back--back to the dark house--to see with her own eyes what her hands had done. She resisted it with difficulty.... Suddenly, a sound from the distance--beyond the cottages--as of a slight explosion. She started, and throwing back her veil, she sat motionless in the doorway of the hut, her face making a dim white patch upon the darkness.

Chapter XX

"Take me home!--take me home quick! I want to talk to you. Not now--not here!"

The car flew along. Mark barely looked at Delia. His face was set and pale. As for her, while they ran through the village and along the country road between it and Maumsey, her mind had time to adjust itself to that flashing resolution which had broken down a hundred scruples and swept away a hundred fears, in that moment on the hill when she had met his eyes, and the look in them. What must he think of her? An assignation with that man, on the very first afternoon when his tender watchfulness left her for an hour! No, it could not be borne that he should read her so! She must clear herself! And thought, leaping beacon-like from point to point told her, at last, that for Gertrude too, she had chosen wrongly. Thank Heaven, there was still time! What could a girl do, all alone--groping in such a darkness? Better after all lay the case before Mark's judgment, Mark's tenderness, and trust him with it all. Trust her own power too--see what a girl could do with the man who loved her!

The car stopped at the Abbey door, and Winnington, still absolutely

silent, helped her to alight. She led the way, past the drawing-room where Lady Tonbridge sat rather anxiously expecting her, to that bare room on the ground floor, the little gun-room, which Gertrude Marvell had made her office, and where many signs of her occupation still remained--a calendar on the wall marking the "glorious" dates of the League--a flashlight photograph of the first raid on Parliament some years before--a faded badge, and scattered piles of newspapers. A couple of deal tables and two chairs were all the furniture the room contained, in addition to the cupboards, painted in stone-colour, which covered the walls.

Delia closed the door, and threw off her furs. Then, with a gesture of complete abandonment, she went up to Winnington, holding out her hands--

"Oh, Mark, Mark, I want you to help me!"

He took her hands, but without pressing them. His face, frowning and flushed, with a little quivering of the nostrils, began to terrify her--

"Oh, Mark,--dear Mr. Mark--I went to see Mr. Lathrop--because--because I was in great trouble--and I thought he could help me."

He dropped the hands.

"You went to _him_--instead of to me? How long have you been with him? Did you write to him to arrange it?"

"No, no--we met by accident. Mark, it's not myself--it's a fear I have--a dreadful, dreadful fear!"

She came close to him, piteously, just murmuring--

"It's Monk Lawrence!--and Gertrude!"

He started, and looked at her keenly--

"You know something I don't know?"

"Oh yes, I do, I do!" she said, wringing her hands. "I ought to have told you long ago. But I've been afraid of what you might do--I've been afraid for Gertrude. Can't you see, Mark? I've been trying to make Mr. Lathrop keep watch--enquire--so that they wouldn't dare. I've told Gertrude that I know--I've written to people--I've done all I could. And this afternoon I felt I must go there and see for myself, what precautions had been taken--and I met Mr. Lathrop--"

She gave a rapid account of their visit to the house,--of its complete desertion--of the strange behaviour of the niece--and of the growing alarm in her own mind.

"There's something--there's some plot. Perhaps that woman's in it.

Perhaps Gertrude's got hold of her--or Miss Andrews. Anyway, if that house can be left quite alone--ever--they'll get at it--that I'm sure of. Why did she take the children away? Wasn't that strange?"

Then she put her hands on the heart that fluttered so--and tried to smile--

"But of course till the Bill's thrown out, there can be no danger, can there? There _can't_ be any!" she repeated, as though appealing to him to reassure her.

"I don't understand yet," he said gravely. "Why do you suspect Miss Marvell, or a plot at all? There was no such idea in your mind when we went over the house together?"

"No, none!--or at least not seriously--there was nothing, really, to go on"--she assured him eagerly. "But just after--you remember Mr. Lathrop's coming--that day--?--when you scolded me?"

He could not help smiling a little--rather bitterly.

"I remember you said you couldn't explain. Of course I thought it was something connected with Miss Marvell, or your Society--but--"

"I'm going to explain"--she said, trying hard for composure. "I'm going to tell it all in order."

And sitting down, her head resting on her hand, with Winnington standing before her, she told the whole story of the preceding weeks--the alternations of fear and relief--Lathrop's suspicions--Gertrude's denials--the last interview between them.

As for the man looking down upon her beautiful bowed head, his heart melted within him as he listened. The sting remained that she should have asked anyone else than he to help her--above all that she should have humbled herself to ask it of such a man as Lathrop. Anxiety remained, for Monk Lawrence itself, and still more for what might be said of her complicity. But all that was further implied in her confession, her drooping sweetness, her passionate appeal to him--the beauty of her true character, its innocence, its faith, its loyalty--began to flood him with a feeling that presently burst its bounds.

She wound up with most touching entreaties to him, to save and shield her friend--to go himself to Gertrude and warn her--to go to the police--without disclosing names, of course--and insist that the house should be constantly patrolled.

He scarcely heard a word of this. When she paused--there was silence a moment. Then she heard her name--very low--

"Delia!"

She looked up, and with a long breath she rose, as though drawn invisibly. He held out his arms, and she threw hers round his neck, hiding her face against the life that beat for her.

"Oh, forgive me!"--she murmured, after a little, childishly pressing her lips to his--"forgive me--for everything!"

The tears were in his eyes.

"You've gone through all this!--alone!" he said to her, as he bent over her. "But never again, Delia--never again!"

She was the first to release herself--putting tears away.

"Now then--what can we do?"

He resumed at once his ordinary manner and voice.

"We can do a great deal. I have the car here. I shall go straight back to Monk Lawrence, and see Daunt to-night. That woman's behaviour must be reported--and explained. An hour--an hour and a half?--since you were there?"--he took out his watch--"He's probably home by now--it's quite dark--he'd scarcely risk being away after dark. Dearest, go and rest!--I shall come back later--after dinner. Put it out of your mind."

She went towards the hall with him hand in hand. Suddenly there was a confused sound of shouting outside. Lady Tonbridge opened the drawing-room door with a scared face--

"What is it? There are people running up the drive. They're shouting something!"

Winnington rushed to the front door, Delia with him. With his first glance at the hill-side, he understood the meaning of the cries--of the crowd approaching.

"My God!--_too late_!"

For high on that wooded slope, a blaze was spreading to the skies--a blaze that grew with every second--illuminating with its flare the woods around it, the chimneys of the old house, the quiet stretches of the hill.

"Monk Lawrence is afire, Muster Winnington!" panted one of Winnington's own labourers who had outstripped the rest. "They're asking for you to come! They've telephoned to Latchford for the engines, and to Brownmouth and Wanchester too. They say it's burning like tow--there must be petrol in it, or summat. It's the women they say!--spite of Mr. Daunt and the perlice!"

Then he noticed Delia standing beside Winnington on the steps, and held his tongue, scowling.

Winnington's car was still standing at the steps. He set it going in a moment.

"My cloak!" said Delia, looking round her--"And tell them to bring the car!"

"Delia, you're not going?" cried Madeleine, throwing a restraining arm about her.

"But of course I am!" said the girl amazed. "Not with him--because I should be in his way."

Various persons ran to do her bidding. Winnington already in his place, with a labourer beside him, and two more in the seat behind him, beckoned to her.

"Why should you come, dearest! It will only break your heart. We'll do all that can be done, and I'll send back messages."

She shook her head.

"I shall come! But don't think of me. I won't run any risks."

There was no time to argue with her. The little car sped away, and with it the miscellaneous crowd who had rushed to find Winnington, as the natural head of the Maumsey community, and the only magistrate within reach.

Delia and Madeleine were left standing on the steps, amid a group of frightened and chattering servants--gazing in despairing rage at the ever-spreading horror on the slope of the down, at the sudden leaps of flame, the vast showers of sparks drifting over the woods, the red glare on the low hanging clouds. The garnered beauty of four centuries, one of England's noblest heirlooms, was going down in ruin, at the bidding of a handful of women, hurling themselves in disappointed fury on a community that would not give them their way.

Sharp-toothed remorse had hold on Delia. If she had only gone to Wilmington earlier! "My fault!--my fault!"

When the car came quickly round, she and Lady Tonbridge got into it. As they rushed through the roads, lit on their way by that blaze in the heart of the hills, of which the roaring began to reach their ears, Delia sat speechless, and death-like, reconstructing the past days and hours. Not yet two hours since she had left the house--left it untouched. At that very moment, Gertrude or Gertrude's agents must have been within it. The whole thing had been a plot--the children taken away--the house left deserted. Very likely Daunt's summons to his dying son had been also part of it. And as to the niece--what more probable than that Gertrude had laid hands on her months before, guided perhaps by the local knowledge of Marion Andrews,--and had placed her as spy and agent in the doomed house till the time should be ripe? The blind and fanatical devotions which Gertrude was able to excite when she set

herself to it, was only too well known to Delia.

Where was Gertrude herself? For Delia was certain that she had not merely done this act by deputy.

In the village, every person who had not gone rushing up the hill was standing at the doors, pale and terror-stricken, watching the glare overhead. The blinds of Miss Toogood's little house were drawn close. And as Delia passed, angry looks and mutterings pursued her.

The car mounted the hill. Suddenly a huge noise and hooting behind them. They drew into the hedge, to let the Latchford fire-engine thunder past, a fine new motor engine, just purchased and equipped.

"There'll be three or four more directly, Miss"--shouted one of her own garden lads, mounting on the step of the car. "But they say there's no hope. It was fired in three places, and there was petrol used."

At the gate, the police--looking askance especially at Miss Blanchflower--would have turned them back. But Delia asked for Winnington, and they were at last admitted into the circle outside the courtyard, where beyond reach of the sparks, and falling fragments, the crowd of spectators was gathered. People made way for her, but Lady Tonbridge noticed that nobody spoke to her, though as soon as she appeared all the angry or excited attention that the crowd could spare from the fire was given to her. Delia was not aware of it. She stood a little in front of the crowd, with her veil thrown back, her hands clasped in front of her, an image of rapt despair. Her face, like all the faces in the crowd, was made lurid--fantastic--by the glare of the flames; and every now and then, as though unconsciously, she brushed away the mist of tears from her eyes.

"Aye she's sorry now!"--said a stout farmer, bitterly, to his neighbour--"now that she's led them as is even younger than herself into trouble. My girl's in prison all along of her--and that woman as they do say is at the bottom of this business."

The speaker was Kitty Foster's father. Kitty had just been sentenced to six months' imprisonment for the burning of a cricket pavilion in the Midlands, and her relations were sitting in shame and grief for her.

"Whoever 'tis as did it 'ull have a job to get away"--said the man he addressed. "They've got a lot o' police out. Where's 'Liza Daunt, I say? They're searching for her everywhere. Daunt's just come upon the engine from Latchford--saw the fire from the train. He says he's been tricked--a put-up job he says. There wasn't nothing wrong with his son, he says, when he got to Portsmouth. If they do catch 'em, the police will have to guard 'em safe. It won't do to let the crowd get at 'em. They're fair mad. Oh, Lord!--it's caught another roof!"

And a groan rose from the fast-thickening multitude, as another wall fell amid a shower of sparks and ashes, and the flames, licking up and up, caught the high-pitched roof of the great hall, and ran along the

stone letters of the parapet, which spelt out the motto--"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." The fantastic letters themselves, which had been lifted to their places before the death of Shakespeare, seemed to dance in the flame like living and tormented things.

Meanwhile in the courtyard, and on the side lawns, scores of persons were busy removing furniture, pictures and tapestries. Winnington was leading and organising the rescue parties, now inside, now outside the house. And near him, under his orders, worked Paul Lathrop, in his shirt sleeves, superhumanly active, and superhumanly strong--grinding his teeth with rage sometimes, as the fire defeated one effort after another to check it. Daunt, also was there, pouring out incoherent confidences to the police, and distracted by the growing certainty that his niece had been one of the chief authors of the plot. His children naturally had been his first thought. But the Rector, who had just been round to enquire for them at Mrs. Cresson's cottage, came back breathless, shouting "all safe!"--and Daunt rushed off to help the firemen; while Amberley reported to Susy the pitiable misery of Lily, the little cripple, who had been shrieking for her father in wild outbursts of crying, refusing to believe that he was not in the fire. Susy, who loved the child, would have gladly gone to find her, and take her home to the Rectory for the night. But, impossible to leave her post at Delia's side, and this blazing spectacle that held the darkness! Two village women, said the Rector, were in charge of the children.

"No chance!" said Lathrop, bitterly, pausing for a moment beside Winnington, while they both took breath--the sweat pouring from their smoke-blackened faces.

"If one could get to the top of that window with the big hose--one could reach the roof better"--panted Winnington, pointing to the still intact double oriel which ran up through two stories of the building, to the east of the doorway.

"I see!" Lathrop dashed away. And in a few seconds he and a fireman could be seen climbing from a ladder upon a ledge, a carved string-course, which connected the eastern and western oriels above the main doorway. They crawled along the ledge like flies, clinging to every projection, every stem of ivy, the fireman dragging the hose.

The crowd watched, all eyes. Winnington, after a rapid look or two, turned away with the thought--"That fellow's done some rock-climbing in his day!"

But against such a doom as had now gripped Monk Lawrence, nothing availed. Lathrop and his companion had barely scaled the parapet of the window when a huge central crash sent its resounding din circling round the leafless woods, and the two climbing figures disappeared from view amid a fresh rush of smoke and flame.

The great western chimney-stack had fallen. When the cloud of smoke

drifted away, a gaping cavity of fire was seen just behind the two men; it could only be a matter of minutes before the wall and roof immediately behind them came down upon them. The firemen shouted to them from below. A long ladder was brought and run up to within twenty feet of them. Lathrop climbed down to it over the scorched face of the oriel, his life in jeopardy at every step. Then steadying himself on the ladder,--and grasping a projection in the wall, he called to the man above, to drop upon his shoulders. It was done, by a miracle--and both holding on, the man above by the projections of the wall and Lathrop by the ladder, descended, till the two were within reach of safety.

A thin roar of cheers rose from the environing throng, scarcely audible amid the greater roar of the flames. Lathrop, wearied, depressed, with bleeding hands, came back to Winnington's side. Winnington looked round. For the first time Lathrop saw through Mark's grey eyes the generous heart within--unveiled.

"Splendid! Are you hurt?"

"Only scorched and scratched. Give me another job!"

"Come along then."

And thenceforward the two worked side by side, like brothers, in the desperate attempt to save at least the Great Hall, and the beautiful rooms adjoining; the Porch Room, with its Chatham memorials; the library too, with its stores of seventeenth-century books, its busts, and its portraits. But the flames rushed on and on, with a fiendish and astounding rapidity. Fragments of news ran back to the onlookers. The main staircase had been steeped in petrol--and sacks full of shavings had been stored in the panelled spaces underneath it. Fire-lighters heaped together had been found in the Red Parlour--to be dragged out by the firemen--but again too late!--for the fire was already gnawing at the room, like a wild prowling beast. A back staircase too had been kindled with paraffin--the smell of it was everywhere. And thus urged, a very demon of fire seemed to have seized on the beautiful place. There was a will and a passion of destruction in the flames that nothing could withstand. As the diamond-paned windows fell into nothing-ness, the rooms behind shewed for a brief space; carved roofs, stately fireplaces, gleaming for a last moment, before Time knew them no more, and all that remained of them was the last vision of their antique beauty, stamped on the aching memories of those who watched.

"Why did you let her come!" said France vehemently in Lady Tonbridge's ear, with his eyes on Delia. "It's enough to kill her. She must know who's done it!"

Lady Tonbridge shook her head despairingly, and both gazed, without daring to speak to her, on the girl beside them. Madeleine had taken one cold hand. France was torn with pity for her--but what comfort was there to give! Her tears had dried. But there was something now in her uncontrollable restlessness as she moved ghost-like along the front of

the spectators, pressing as near to the house as the police would permit, scanning every patch of light or shadow, which suggested to those who followed her, possession by some torturing fear--some terror of worse still to come.

Meanwhile the police were thinking not only of the house, but still more of its destroyers. They had a large number of men on the spot, and a quick-witted inspector in charge. It was evident from many traces that the incendiaries had only left the place a very short time before the outbreak of the fire; they could not be far away. Scouts were flung out on all the roads; search parties were in all the woods; every railway station had been warned.

On the northern side, the famous Loggia, built by an Italianate owner of the house, in the first half of the sixteenth century--a series of open arches, with twisted marble pillars--ran along the house from front to rear. It was approached on the south by a beautiful staircase, of which the terra-cotta balustrading had been copied from a famous villa on Como, and a similar staircase gave access to it from the garden to the north. The fight for the Great Hall which the Loggia adjoined, was being followed with agonised anxiety by the crowds. The Red Parlour, with all its carvings and mouldings had gone, the porch room was a furnace of fire, with black spars and beams hanging in ragged ruin across it. The Great Hall seemed already tottering, and in its fall, the Loggia too must go.

Then, as every eye hung upon the work of the firemen and the play of the water, into the still empty space of the Loggia, and illumined by the glare of the flames, there emerged with quiet step, the figure of a woman. She came forward: she stood with crossed arms looking at the crowd. And at the same moment, behind her, there appeared the form of a child, a little fair-haired girl, hobbling on a crutch, in desperate haste, and wailing--"Father!"

Delia saw them, and with one wild movement she was through the cordon of police, and running for the house.

Winnington, at the head of his salvage corps, perceived her, and ran too.

"Delia!--go back!--go back!"

"Gertrude!" she said, gasping--and pointed to the Loggia. And he had hardly looked where all the world was looking, when a part of the roof of the Hall at the back, fell suddenly outwards and northwards, in a blaze of flame. Charred rafters stood out, hanging in mid air, and the flames leapt on triumphant. At the same moment, evidently startled by some sound behind her, the woman turned, and saw what the crowd saw--the child, limping on its crutch, coming towards her, calling incoherently.

Her own cry rang out, as she ran towards the cripple, waving her back. And as she did so, came another thundering fall, another upward rush of

flame, as a fresh portion of the roof fell eastwards, covering the Loggia and blotting out the figures of both woman and child.

With difficulty the police kept back the mad rush of the crowd. The firemen swarmed to the spot.

But the child was buried deep under flaming ruin, where her father, Daunt, who had rushed to save her, was only restrained by main force from plunging after her, to his death. The woman they brought out--alive. France, Delia and Winnington were beside her.

"Stand back!" shouted the mild old Rector--transformed into a prophet-figure, his white hair streaming--as the multitude swayed against the cordon of police. "Stand back! all of you--and pray--for this woman!"

In a dead silence, men, shivering, took off their hats, and women sobbed.

"Gertrude!" Delia called, in her anguish, as she knelt beside the charred frame, over which France who was kneeling on the other side had thrown his coat.

The dark eyes opened in the blackened face, the scorched lips unlocked. A shudder ran through the dying frame.

"The child!--the child!"

And with that cry to heaven,--that protesting cry of an amazed and conquered soul--Gertrude Marvell passed away.

* * * * *

Thus ended the First Act of Delia's life. When three weeks later, after a marriage at which no one was present except the persons to be married, Lady Tonbridge, and Dr. France, Winnington took his wife far from these scenes to lands of summer and of rest, he carried with him a Delia ineffaceably marked by this tragedy of her youth. Children, as they come, will sometime re-ignite the natural joy in a face so lovely. And till that time arrives Winnington's tenderness will be the master-light of all her day. But there are sounds once heard that live for ever in the mind. And in Delia's there will reverberate till death that wail of a fierce and childless woman--that last cry of nature in one who had defied nature--of womanhood in one who had renounced the ways of womanhood: "_the child--the child_!"

Not long after the destruction of Monk Lawrence and the marriage of Delia, Paul Lathrop left the Maumsey neighbourhood. His debts had been paid by some unknown friend or friends, and he fell back into London literary life, where he maintained a precarious but--to himself--not unpleasant existence.

Miss Jackson, the science-mistress, went to Vancouver, married the

owner of a lumber camp, and so tamed her soul. Miss Toogood lived on, rarely employed, and seldom going outside the tiny back parlour, with its pictures of Winchester and Mr. Keble. But Lady Tonbridge and Delia do their best to lighten the mild melancholy which grows upon her with age; and a little red-haired niece who came to live with her, keeps her old aunt's nerves alive and alert by various harmless vices--among them an incorrigible interest in the Maumsey and Latchford youth. Marion Andrews and Eliza Daunt disappeared together. They were not captured on that terrible night when Gertrude Marvell, convinced that she could not escape, and perhaps not much caring to escape, came back to look on the ruin she had so long and carefully prepared, and perished in the heart of it--not alone.

But such desperate happenings as the destruction of Monk Lawrence, to whatever particular calamities they may lead, are but a backward ripple on the vast and ceaseless tide of human efforts towards a new and nobler order. Delia must still wrestle all her life with the meaning of that imperious call to women which this century has sounded; and of those further stages, upwards and onwards, to which the human spirit, in Man or Woman, is perennially urged by the revealing forces that breathe through human destiny. Two days after the death of Gertrude Marvell, the immediate cause on which she and her fellows had wrought such havoc, went down in Parliament to long and bitter eclipse. But the end is not yet. And for that riddle of the Sphinx to which Gertrude and her fellows gave the answer of a futile violence, generations more patient and more wise, will yet find the fitting key.

THE END

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