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#95 in our series by Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

THE SECRET WHICH GUY DARRELL DID NOT CONFIDE TO ALBAN MORLEY.

It was a serene noonday in that melancholy interlude of the seasons when autumn has really ceased--winter not yet visibly begun. The same hired vehicle which had borne Lionel to Fawley more than five years ago, stopped at the gate of the wild umbrageous grass-land that surrounded the antique Manor-house. It had been engaged, from the nearest railway-station on the London road, by a lady, with a female companion who seemed her servant. The driver dismounted, opened the door of the vehicle, and the lady bidding him wait there till her return, and saying a few words to her companion, descended, and, drawing her cloak round her, walked on alone towards the Manor-house. At first her step was firm, and her pace quick. She was still under the excitement of the resolve in which the journey from her home had been suddenly conceived and promptly accomplished. But as the path wound on through the stillness of venerable groves, her courage began to fail her. Her feet loitered, her eyes wandered round vaguely, timidly. The scene was not new to her. As she gazed, rushingly gathered over her sorrowful shrinking mind memories of sportive happy summer days, spent in childhood amidst those turfs and shades--memories, more agitating, of the last visit (childhood then ripened into blooming youth) to the ancient dwelling which, yet concealed from view by the swells of the undulating ground and the yellow boughs of the giant trees, betrayed its site by the smoke rising thin and dim against the limpid atmosphere. She bent down her head, closing her eyes as if to shut out less the face of the landscape than the images that rose ghost-like up to people it, and sighed heavily, heavily. Now, hard by, roused from its bed amongst the fern, the doe that Darrell had tained into companionship had watched with curiosity this strange intruder on its solitary range. But at the sound of that heavy sigh, the creature, emboldened, left its halting-place, and stole close to the saddened woman, touching her very dress. Doubtless, as Darrell's companion in his most musing hours, the doe was familiarised to the sound of sighs, and associated the sound with its gentlest notions of humanity.

The lady, starting, raised her drooping lids, and met those soft dark eyes, dark and soft as her own. Round the animal's neck there was a simple collar, with a silver plate, fresh and new, evidently placed there recently; and as the creature thrust forward its head, as if for the caress of a wonted hand, the lady read the inscription. The words were in Italian, and may be construed thus: "Female, yet not faithless; fostered, yet not ungrateful." As she read, her heart so swelled, and her resolve so deserted her, that she turned as if she had received a sentence of dismissal, and went back some hasty paces. The doe followed her till she paused again, and then it went slowly down a narrow path to the left, which led to the banks of the little lake.

The lady had now recovered herself. "It is a duty, and it must be done," she muttered, and letting clown the veil she had raised on entering the

demesne, she hurried on, not retracing her steps in the same path, but taking that into which the doe had stricken, perhaps in the confused mistake of a mind absorbed and absent--perhaps in revived recollection of the localities, for the way thus to the house was shorter than by the weed-grown carriage-road. The lake came in view, serene and glassy; half-leafless woodlands reflected far upon its quiet waters; the doe halted, lifted its head, and sniffed the air, and, somewhat quickening its pace, vanished behind one of the hillocks clothed with brushwood, that gave so primitive and forest-like a character to the old ground. Advancing still, there now,--at her right hand, grew out of the landscape the noble turrets of the unfinished pile; and, close at her left, under a gnarled fantastic thorn-tree, the still lake at his feet reflecting his stiller shadow, reclined Guy Darrell, the doe nestled at his side.

So unexpected this sight--he, whom she came to seek yet feared to see, so close upon her way--the lady uttered a faint but sharp cry, and Darrell sprang to his feet. She stood before him, veiled, mantled, bending as a suppliant.

"Avaunt!" he faltered wildly. "Is this a spirit my own black solitude conjures up--or is it a delusion, a dream?" It is I--!--the Caroline dear to you once, if detested now! Forgive me! Not for myself I come." She flung back her veil--her eyes pleadingly sought his.

"So," said Darrell, gathering his arms round his breast in the gesture peculiar to him when seeking either to calm a more turbulent movement, or to confirm a sterner resolution of his heart--"so! Caroline, Marchioness of Montfort, we are then fated to meet face to face at last! I understand--Lionel Haughton sent, or showed to you, my letter?"

"Oh! Mr. Darrell, how could you have the heart to write in such terms of one who--"

"One who had taken the heart from my bosom and trampled it into the mire. True, fribbles will say, 'Fie! the vocabulary of fine gentlemen has no harsh terms for women.' Gallants, to whom love is pastime, leave or are left with elegant sorrow and courtly bows. Madam, I was never such airy gallant. I am but a man unhappily in earnest--a man who placed in those hands his life of life--who said to you, while yet in his prime, 'There is my future, take it, till it vanish out of earth!' You have made that life substanceless as a ghost--that future barren as the grave. And when you dare force yourself again upon my way, and would dictate laws to my very hearth--if I speak as a man what plain men must feel--'Oh! Mr. Darrell,' says your injured ladyship, 'how can you have the heart?' Woman! were you not false as the falsest? Falsehood has no dignity to awe rebuke--falsehood no privilege of sex."

"Darrell--Darrell--Darrell--spare me, spare me! I have been so punished --I am so miserable!"

"You!--punished!--What! you sold yourself to youth, and sleek looks, and grand titles, and the flattery of a world; and your rose-leaves were crumpled in the gorgeous marriage-bed. Adequate punishment!--a crumpled

rose-leaf! True, the man was a--but why should I speak ill of him? It was he who was punished, if, accepting his rank, you recognised in himself a nothingness that you could neither love nor honour. False and ungrateful alike to the man you chose--to the man you forsook! And now you have buried one, and you have schemed to degrade the other."

"Degrade!--Oh! it is that charge which has stung me to the quick. All the others I deserve. But that charge! Listen--you shall listen."

"I stand here resigned to do so. Say all you will now, for it is the last time on earth I lend my ears to your voice."

"Be it so--the last time." She paused to recover speech, collect thoughts, gain strength; and strange though it may seem to those who have never loved, amidst all her grief and humiliation there was a fearful delight in that presence from which she had been exiled since her youth --nay, delight unaccountable to herself, even in that rough, vehement, bitter tempest of reproach, for an instinct told her that there would have been no hatred in the language had no love been lingering in the soul.

"Speak," said Darrell gently, softened, despite himself, by her evident struggle to control emotion.

Twice she began--twice voice failed her. At last her words came forth audibly. She began with her plea for Lionel and Sophy, and gathered boldness by her zeal on their behalf. She proceeded to vindicate her own motives--to acquit herself of his harsh charge. She scheme for his degradation! She had been too carried away by her desire to promote his happiness--to guard him from the possibility of a self-reproach. At first he listened to her with haughty calmness; merely saying, in reference to Sophy and Lionel, "I have nothing to add or to alter in the resolution I have communicated to Lionel." But when she thus insensibly mingled their cause with her own, his impatience broke out. "My happiness? Oh! well have you proved the sincerity with which you schemed for that! Save me from self-reproach--me! Has Lady Montfort so wholly forgotten that she was once Caroline Lyndsay that she can assume the part of a warning angel against the terrors of self-reproach?"

"Ah!" she murmured faintly, "can you suppose, however fickle and thankless I may seem to you--"

"Seem!" he repeated.

"Seem!" she said again, but meekly--"seem, and seem justly;--yet can you suppose that when I became free to utter my remorse--to speak of gratitude, of reverence--I was insincere? Darrell, Darrell, you cannot think so! That letter which reached you abroad nearly a year ago, in which I laid my pride of woman at your feet, as I lay it now in coming here--that letter, in which I asked if it were impossible for you to pardon, too late for me to atone--was written on my knees. It was the outburst of my very heart. Nay, nay, hear me out. Do not imagine that I would again obtrude a hope so contemptuously crushed!" (a deep blush came

over her cheek.) "I blame you not, nor, let me say it, did your severity bring that shame which I might have justly felt had I so written to any man on earth but you--you, so revered from my infancy, that--"

"Ay," interrupted Darrell fiercely, "ay, do not fear that I should misconceive you; you would not so have addressed the young, the fair, the happy. No! you, proud beauty, with hosts, no doubt, of supplicating wooers, would have thrust that hand into the flames before it wrote to a young man, loved as the young are loved, what without shame it wrote to the old man, revered as the old are revered! But my heart is not old, and your boasted reverence was a mocking insult. Your letter, torn to pieces, was returned to you without a word--insult for insult! You felt no shame that I should so rudely reject your pity. Why should you? Rejected pity is not rejected love. The man was not less old because he was not reconciled to age."

This construction of her tender penitence--this explanation of his bitter scorn--took Caroline Montfort wholly by surprise. From what writhing agonies of lacerated self-love came that pride which was but self-depreciation? It was a glimpse into the deeper rents of his charred and desolate being which increased at once her yearning affection and her passionate despair. Vainly she tried to utter the feelings that crowded upon her!--vainly, vainly! Woman can murmur, "I have injured you--forgive!" when she cannot exclaim, "You disdain me, but love!" Vainly, vainly her bosom heaved and her lips moved under the awe of his flashing eyes and the grandeur of his indignant frown.

"Ah!" he resumed, pursuing his own thoughts with a sombre intensity of passion that rendered him almost unconscious of her presence--"Ah! I said to myself, 'Oh, she believes that she has been so mourned and missed that my soul would spring back to her false smile; that I could be so base a slave to my senses as to pardon the traitress because her face was fair enough to haunt my dreams. She dupes herself; she is no necessity to my existence--I have wrenched it from her power years, long years ago! I will show her, since again she deigns to remember me, that I am not so old as to be grateful for the leavings of a heart."

"I will love another--I will be beloved. She shall not say with secret triumph, 'The old man dotes in rejecting me'"

"Darrell, Darrel--unjust--cruel kill me rather than talk thus!"

He heeded not her cry. His words rolled on in that wonderful, varying music which, whether in tenderness or in wrath, gave to his voice a magical power--fascinating, hushing, overmastering human souls.

"But--you have the triumph; see, I am still alone! I sought the world of the young--the marriage mart of the Beautiful once more. Alas! if my eye was captured for a moment, it was by something that reminded me of you. I saw a faultless face, radiant with its virgin blush; moved to it, I drew near--sighing, turned away; it was not you! I heard the silvery laugh of a life fresh as an April morn. 'Hark!' I said, 'is not that the sweet mirth-note at which all my cares were dispelled? Listening, I

forgot my weight of years. Why? because listening, I remembered you.
'Heed not the treacherous blush and the beguiling laugh,' whispered
Prudence. 'Seek in congenial mind a calm companion to thine own.' Mind!
O frigid pedantry! Mind!--had not yours been a volume open to my eyes;
in every page, methought, some lovely poet-truth never revealed to human
sense before! No; you had killed to me all womanhood! Woo another!--wed
another! 'Hush,' I said, 'it shall be. Eighteen years since we parted--
seeing her not, she remains eternally the same! Seeing her again, the
very change that time must have brought will cure. I saw you--all the
past rushed back in that stolen moment. I fled--never more to dream that
I can shake off the curse of memory--blent with each drop of my blood--
woven with each tissue--throbbing in each nerve--bone of my bone, and flesh
of my flesh--poison-root from which every thought buds to wither--the
curse to have loved and to have trusted you!"

"Merciful Heaven! can I bear this?" cried Caroline, clasping her hands
to her bosom." And is my sin so great--is it so unpardonable? Oh, if in
a heart so noble, in a nature so great, mine was the unspeakable honour
to inspire an affection thus enduring, must it be only--only--as a curse!
Why can I not repair the past? You have not ceased to love me. Call it
hate--it is love still! And now, no barrier between our lives, can I
never, never again--never, now that I know I am less unworthy of you by
the very anguish I feel to have so stung you--can I never again be the
Caroline of old?"

"Ha, ha!" burst forth the unrelenting man, with a bitter laugh--"see the
real coarseness of a woman's nature under all its fine-spun frippery!
Behold these delicate creatures, that we scarcely dare to woo! how little
they even comprehend the idolatry they inspire! The Caroline of old!
Lo, the virgin whose hand we touched with knightly homage, whose first
bashful kiss was hallowed as the gate of paradise, deserts us--sells
herself at the altar--sanctifies there her very infidelity to us; and
when years have passed, and a death has restored her freedom, she comes
to us as if she had never pillowed her head on another's bosom, and says
'Can I not again be the Caroline of old?' We men are too rude to forgive
the faithless. Where is the Caroline I loved? YOU--are--my Lady
Montfort! Look round. On these turfs, you, then a child, played beside
my children. They are dead, but less dead to me than you. Never dreamed
I then that a creature so fair would be other than a child to my grave
and matured existence. Then, if I glanced towards your future, I felt no
pang to picture you grown to womanhood--another's bride. My hearth had
for years been widowed, I had no thought of second nuptials. My son
would live to enjoy my wealth, and realise my cherished dreams--my son
was snatched from me! Who alone had the power to comfort?--who alone had
the courage to steal into the darkened room where I sate mourning? sure
that in her voice there would be consolation, and the sight of her
sympathising tears would chide away the bitterness of mine?--who but the
Caroline of old! Ah, you are weeping now. But Lady Montfort's tears
have no talisman to me! You were then still a child--as a child, my
soothing angel. A year or so more my daughter, to whom all my pride of
House--all my hope of race, had been consigned--she whose happiness I
valued so much more than my ambition, that I had refused her hand to your
young Lord of Montfort--puppet that, stripped of the millinery of titles,

was not worthy to replace a doll!--my daughter, I folded her one night in my arms,--I implored her to confide in me if ever she nursed a hope that I could further--knew a grief that I could banish; and she promised--and she bent her forehead to my blessing--and before daybreak she had fled with a man whose very touch was dishonour and pollution, and was lost to me for ever. . . . Then, when I came hither to vent at my father's grave the indignant grief I suffered not the world to see, you and your mother (she who professed for me such loyal friendship, such ineffaceable gratitude), you two came kindly to share my solitude--and then, then you were a child no more!--and a sun that had never gilt my life brightened out of the face of the Caroline of old!" He paused a moment, heeding not her bitter weeping; he was rapt from the present hour itself by the excess of that anguish which is to woe what ecstasy is to joy--swept along by the flood of thoughts that had been pent within his breast through the solitary days and haunted nights, which had made the long transition state from his manhood's noon to its gathering eve. And in that pause there came from afar off a melodious, melancholy strain--softly, softly borne over the cold blue waters--softly, softly through the sere autumnal leaves--the music of the magic flute!

"Hark!" he said, "do you not remember? Look to that beech-tree yonder! Summer clothed it then! Do you not remember! as under that tree we stood--that same, same note came, musical as now, undulating with rise and fall--came, as if to interpret, by a voice from fairyland, the beating of my own mysterious heart. You had been pleading for pardon to one less ungrateful--less perfidious--than my comforter proved herself. I had listened to you, wondering why anger and wrong seemed banished from the world; and I murmured, in answer, without conscious thought of myself: 'Happy the man whose faults your bright charity will admonish--whose griefs your tenderness will chase away! But when, years hence, children are born to yourself, spare me the one who shall most resemble you, to replace the daughter whom I can only sincerely pardon when something else can spring up to my desolate being--something that I can cherish without the memory of falsehood and the dread of shame.' Yes, as I ceased, came that music; and as it thrilled through the summer air, I turned and met your eyes--turned and saw you blush--turned and heard some faint faltering words drowning the music with diviner sweetness; and suddenly I knew, as by a revelation, that the Child I had fostered had grown the Woman I loved. My own soul was laid bare to me by the flash of hope. Over the universe rushed light and colour! Oh, the Caroline of old! What wonder that she became so fatally, so unspeakably beloved! As some man in ancient story, banished from his native land, is told by an oracle to seek a happier isle in undiscovered seas--freights with his all a single bark--collects on his wandering altar the last embers of his abandoned hearth--places beside it his exiled household gods; so all that my life had left to me, hallowing and hallowed, I stored in you. . . . I tore myself from the old native soil, the old hardy skies. Through time's wide ocean I saw but the promised golden isle. Fables, fables!--lying oracle!--sunken vessel!--visionary isle! And life to me had till then been so utterly without love!--had passed in such hard labours, without a holiday of romance--all the fountains of the unknown passion sealed till the spell struck the rock, and every wave, every drop sparkled fresh to a single star. Yet my boyhood, like other men's, had

dreamed of its Ideal. There at last that Ideal, come to life, bloomed before me; there, under those beech-trees--the Caroline of old. O wretched woman, now weeping at my side, well may you weep! Never can earth give you back such love as you lost in mine."

"I know it, I know it--fool that I was--miserable fool!"

"Ay, but comfort yourself--wilder and sadder folly in myself! Your mother was right. 'The vain child,' she said, 'knows not her own heart. She is new to the world--has seen none of her own years. For your sake, as for hers, I must insist on the experiment of absence. A year's ordeal--see if she is then of the same mind.' I marvelled at her coldness; proudly I submitted to her seasonings; fearlessly I confided the result to you. Ah! how radiant was your smile, when, in the parting hour, I said, 'Summer and you will return again!' In vain, on pretence that the experiment should be complete, did your mother carry you abroad, and exact from us both the solemn promise that not even a letter should pass between us--that our troth, made thus conditional, should be a secret to all--in vain, if meant to torture me with doubt. In my creed, a doubt is itself a treason. How lovely grew the stern face of Ambition!--how Fame seemed as a messenger from me to you! In the sound of applause I said 'They cannot shut out the air that will carry that sound to her ears! All that I can win from honour shall be my marriage gifts to my queenly bride.' See that arrested pile--begun at my son's birth, stopped awhile at his death, recommenced on a statelier plan when I thought of your footstep on its floors--your shadow on its walls. Stopped now forever! Architects can build a palace; can they build a home? But you --you--you, all the while--your smile on another's suit--your thoughts on another's hearth!"

"Not so!--not so! Your image never forsook me. I was giddy, thoughtless, dazzled, entangled; and I told you in the letter you returned to me--told you that I had been deceived!"

"Patience--patience! Deceived! Do you imagine that I do not see all that passed as in a magician's glass? Caroline Montfort, you never loved me; you never knew what love was. Thrown suddenly into the gay world, intoxicated by the effect of your own beauty, my sombre figure gradually faded dim--pale ghost indeed in the atmosphere of flowers and lustres, rank with the breath of flatterers. Then came my lord the Marquess--a cousin privileged to familiar intimacy to visit at will, to ride with you, dance with you, sit side by side with you in quiet corners of thronging ball-rooms, to call you 'Caroline.' Tut, tut--they are only cousins, and cousins are as brothers and sisters in the affectionate House of Vipont; and gossips talk, and young ladies envy--finest match in all England is the pretty-faced Lord of Montfort! And your mother, who had said, 'Wait a year' to Guy Darrell, must have dreamed of the cousin, and schemed for his coronet, when she said it. And I was unseen, and I must not write; and the absent are always in the wrong--when cousins are present! And I hear your mother speak of me--hear the soft sound of her damaging praises. 'Another long speech from your clever admirer! Don't fancy he frets; that kind of man thinks of nothing but blue-books and politics.' And your cousin proposes, and you say with a sigh, 'No; I am

bound to Guy Darrell'; and your mother says to my Lord, 'Wait, and still come--as a cousin!' And then, day by day, the sweet Mrs. Lyndsay drops into your ear the hints that shall poison your heart. Some fable is dressed to malign me; and you cry, 'Tis not true; prove it true, or I still keep my faith to Guy Darrell.' Then comes the kind compact--'If the story be false, my cousin must go.' 'And if it be true, you will be my own duteous child. Alas! your poor cousin is breaking his heart. A lawyer of forty has a heart made of parchuient!' Aha! you were entangled, and of course deceived! Your letter did not explain what was the tale told to you. I care not a rush what it was. It is enough for me to know that, if you had loved me, you would have loved me the more for every tale that belied me. So the tale was credited, because a relief to credit it. So the compact was kept--so the whole bargain hurried over in elegant privacy--place of barter, an ambassador's chapel. Bauble for bauble--a jilt's faith for a mannikin's coronet. Four days before the year of trial expired, 'Only four days more!' I exclaimed, drunk with rapture. The journals lie before me. Three columns to Guy Darrell's speech last night; a column more to its effect on a senate, on an empire; and two lines--two little lines--to the sentence that struck Guy Darrell out of the world of men! 'Marriage in high life.--Marquess of Montfort-Caroline Lyndsay.' And the sun did not fall from heaven! Vulgarest of ends to the tritest of romances! In the gay world these things happen every day. Young ladies are privileged to give hopes to one man--their hands to another. 'Is the sin so unpardonable?' you ask, with ingenuous simplicity. Lady Montfort, that depends! Reflect! What was my life before I put it into your keeping? Barren of happiness, I grant--saddened, solitary--to myself a thing of small value. But what was that life to others?--a thing full of warm beneficence, of active uses, of hardy powers fitted to noble ends! In paralysing that life as it was to others, there may be sin wider and darker than the mere infidelity to love. And now do you dare to ask, 'Can I again be the Caroline of old?'"

"I ask nothing--not even pardon," said the miserable woman. "I might say something to show where you misjudge me--something that might palliate; but no, let it be." Her accents were so drearily hopeless that Darrell abruptly withdrew his eyes from her face, as if fearful that the sight of her woe might weaken his resolve. She had turned mechanically back. They walked on in gloomy silence side by side, away now from the lake--back under the barbed thorn-tree--back by the moss-grown crag--back by the hollow trunks, and over the fallen leaves of trees, that had defied the storms of centuries, to drop, perhaps, brittle and sapless, some quiet day when every wind is lulled.

The flute had ceased its music; the air had grown cold and piercing; the little park was soon traversed; the gate came in sight, and the humble vehicle without it. Then, involuntarily, both stopped; and on each there came at once the consciousness that they were about to part--part, never perhaps in this world to meet again; and, with all that had been said, so much unspoken--their hearts so full of what, alas! their lips could not speak.

"Lady Montfort," at length said Darrell. At the sound of her name she

shivered.

"I have addressed you rudely--harshly--"

"No--no--"

"But that was the last exercise of a right which I now resign for ever. I spoke to her who had once been Caroline Lyndsay; some gentler words are due to the widow of Lord Montfort. Whatever the wrongs you have inflicted on me--wrongs inexpiable--I recognise no less in your general nature qualities that would render you, to one whom you really loved, and had never deceived, the blessing I had once hoped you would prove to me."

She shook her head impatiently, piteously.

"I know that in an ill-assorted union, and amidst all the temptations to which flattered beauty is exposed, your conduct has been without reproach. Forget the old man whose thoughts should now be on his grave."

"Hush, hush--have human mercy!"

"I withdraw and repent my injustice to your motives in the protection you have given to the poor girl whom Lionel would wed; I thank you for that protection,--though I refuse consent to my kinsman's prayer. Whatever her birth, I must be glad to know that she whom Lionel so loves is safe from a wretch like Losely. More--one word more--wait--it is hard for me to say it--be happy! I cannot pardon, but I can bless you. Farewell for ever!" More overpoweringly crushed by his tenderness than his wrath, before Caroline could recover the vehemence of her sobs, he had ceased--he was gone--lost in the close gloom of a neighbouring thicket, his hurried headlong path betrayed by the rustle of mournful boughs swinging back with their withered leaves.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECT.

THERE IS A PLACE AT WHICH THREE ROADS MEET, SACRED TO THAT MYSTERIOUS GODDESS CALLED DIANA ON EARTH, LUNA, OR THE MOON, IN HEAVEN, OR HECATE IN THE INFERNAL REGIONS. AT THIS PLACE PAUSE THE VIRGINS PERMITTED TO TAKE THEIR CHOICE OF THE THREE ROADS. FEW GIVE THEIR PREFERENCE TO THAT WHICH IS VOWED TO THE GODDESS IN HER NAME OF DIANA: THAT ROAD, COLD AND BARREN, IS CLOTHED BY NO ROSES AND MYRTLES. ROSES AND MYRTLES VEIL THE ENTRANCE TO BOTH THE OTHERS, AND IN BOTH THE OTHERS HYMEN HAS MUCH THE SAME GAY-LOOKING TEMPLES. BUT WHICH OF THOSE TWO LEADS TO THE CELESTIAL LUNA, OR WHICH OF THEM CONDUCTS TO THE INFERNAL HECATE, NOT ONE NYMPH IN FIFTY DIVINES. IF THY HEART SHOULD MISGIVE THEE, O NYMPH!--IF, THOUGH CLOUD VEIL THE PATH TO THE MOON, AND SUNSHINE GILD THAT TO PALE HECATETHINE INSTINCT RECOILS FROM THE SUNSHINE, WHILE THOU DAREST NOT ADVENTURE

THE CLOUD--THOU HAST STILL A CHOICE LEFT--THOU HAST STILL THE SAFE
ROAD OF DIANA. HECATE, O NYMPH, IS THE GODDESS OF GHOSTS. IF THOU
TAKEST HER PATH, LOOK NOT BACK, FOR THE GHOSTS ARE BEHIND THEE. ..

When we slowly recover from the tumult and passion of some violent distress, a peculiar stillness falls upon the Mind, and the atmosphere around it becomes in that stillness appallingly clear. We knew not, while wrestling with our woe, the extent of its ravages. As a land the day after a flood, as a field the day after a battle, is the sight of our own sorrow, when we no longer have to steer its raging, but to endure the destruction it has made. Distinct before Caroline Montfort's vision stretched the waste of her misery--the Past, the Present, the Future, all seemed to blend in one single Desolation. A strange thing it is how all time will converge itself, as it were, into the burning-glass of a moment! There runs a popular superstition that it is thus, in the instant of death; that our whole existence crowds itself on the glazing eye--a panorama of all we have done on earth just as the soul restores to the earth its garment. Certes, there are hours in our being, long before the last and dreaded one, when this phenomenon comes to warn us that, if memory were always active, time would be never gone. Rose before this woman--who, whatever the justice of Darrell's bitter reproaches, had a nature lovely enough to justify his anguish at her loss--the image of herself at that turning point of life, when the morning mists are dimmed on our way, yet when a path chosen is a fate decided. Yes; she had excuses, not urged to the judge who sentenced, nor estimated to their full extent by the stern equity with which, amidst suffering and wrath, he had desired to weigh her cause.

Caroline's mother, Mrs. Lindsay, was one of those parents who acquire an extraordinary influence over their children by the union of caressing manners with obstinate resolves. She never lost control of her temper nor hold on her object. A slight, delicate, languid creature too, who would be sure to go into a consumption if unkindly crossed. With much strong common sense, much knowledge of human nature, egotistical, worldly, scheming, heartless, but withal so pleasing, so gentle, so bewitchingly despotic, that it was like living with an electrobiologist, who unnerves you by a look to knock you down with a feather. In only one great purpose of her life had Mrs. Lyndsay failed. When Darrell, rich by the rewards of his profession and the bequest of his namesake, had entered Parliament, and risen into that repute which confers solid and brilliant station, Mrs. Lyndsay conceived the idea of appropriating to herself his honours and his wealth by a second Hymen. Having so long been domesticated in his house during the life of Mrs. Darrell, an intimacy as of near relations had been established between them. Her soft manners attached to her his children; and after Mrs. Darrell's death rendered it necessary that she should find a home of her own, she had an excuse, in Matilda's affection for her and for Caroline, to be more frequently before Darrell's eyes, and consulted by him yet more frequently, than when actually a resident in his house. To her Darrell confided the proposal which had been made to him by the old Marchioness of Montfort, for an alliance between her young grandson and his sole surviving child. Wealthy as was the House of Vipont, it was amongst its traditional maxims that wealth wastes if not perpetually recruited.

Every third generation, at farthest, it was the duty of that house to marry an heiress. Darrell's daughter, just seventeen, not yet brought out, would be an heiress, if he pleased to make her so, second to none whom the research of the Marchioness had detected within the drawing-rooms and nurseries of the three kingdoms. The proposal of the venerable peeress was at first very naturally gratifying to Darrell. It was an euthanasia for the old knightly race to die into a House that was an institution in the empire, and revive phoenix-like in a line of peers, who might perpetuate the name of the heiress whose quarterings they would annex to their own, and sign themselves "Darrell Montfort." Said Darrell inly, "On the whole, such a marriage would have pleased my poor father." It did not please Mrs. Lyndsay. The bulk of Darrell's fortune thus settled away, he himself would be a very different match for Mrs. Lyndsay; nor was it to her convenience that Matilda should be thus hastily disposed of, and the strongest link of connection between Fulham and Carlton Gardens severed. Mrs. Lyndsay had one golden rule, which I respectfully point out to ladies who covet popularity and power: she never spoke ill of any one whom she wished to injure. She did not, therefore, speak ill of the Marquess to Darrell, but she so praised him that her praise alarmed. She ought to know the young peer well; she was a good deal with the Marchioness, who liked her pretty manners. Till then, Darrell had only noticed this green Head of the Viponts as a neat-looking Head, too modest to open its lips. But he now examined the Head with anxious deliberation, and finding it of the poorest possible kind of wood, with a heart to match, Guy Darrell had the audacity to reject, though with great courtesy, the idea of grafting the last plant of his line on a stem so pithless. Though, like men who are at once very affectionate and very busy, he saw few faults in his children, or indeed in any one he really loved, till the fault was forced on him, he could not but be aware that Matilda's sole chance of becoming a happy and safe wife was in uniting herself with such a husband as would at once win her confidence and command her respect. He trembled when he thought of her as the wife of a man whose rank would expose her to all fashionable temptations, and whose character would leave her without a guide or protector.

The Marquess, who obeyed his grandmother from habit, and who had lethargically sanctioned her proposals to Darrell, evinced the liveliest emotion he had ever yet betrayed when he learned that his hand was rejected. And if it were possible for him to carry so small a sentiment *aspique* into so large a passion as hate, from that moment he aggrandised his nature into hatred. He would have given half his lands to have spited Guy Darrell. Mrs. Lyndsay took care to be at hand to console him, and the Marchioness was grateful to her for taking that trouble some task upon herself. And in the course of their conversation Mrs. Lyndsay contrived to drop into his mind the egg of a project which she took a later occasion to hatch under her plumes of down. "There is but one kind of wife, my dear Montfort, who could increase your importance: you should marry a beauty; next to royalty ranks beauty." The Head nodded, and seemed to ruminate for some moments, and then */apropos des bottes/*, it let fall this mysterious monosyllable, "Shoes." By what process of ratiocination the Head had thus arrived at the feet, it is not for me to conjecture. All I know is that, from that moment, Mrs. Lyndsay bestowed

as much thought upon Caroline's chausse as if, like Cinderella, Caroline's whole destiny in this world hung upon her slipper. With the feelings and the schemes that have been thus intimated, this sensible lady's mortification may well be conceived when she was startled by Darrell's proposal, not to herself, but to her daughter. Her egotism was profoundly shocked, her worldliness cruelly thwarted. With Guy Darrell for her own spouse, the Marquess of Montfort for her daughter's, Mrs. Lyndsay would have been indeed a considerable personage in the world. But to lose Darrell for herself, and the Marquess altogether--the idea was intolerable! Yet, since to have refused at once for her portionless daughter a man in so high a position, and to whom her own obligations were so great, was impossible, she adopted a policy, admirable for the craft of its conception and the dexterity of its execution. In exacting the condition of a year's delay, she made her motives appear so loftily disinterested, so magnanimously friendly! She could never forgive herself if he--he--the greatest, the best of men, was again rendered unhappy in marriage by her imprudence (hers, who owed to him her all!) --yes, imprudent indeed, to have thrown right in his way a pretty coquettish girl ("for Caroline is coquettish, Mr. Darrell; most girls so pretty are at that silly age"). In short, she carried her point against all the eloquence Darrell could employ, and covered her designs by the semblance of the most delicate scruples, and the sacrifice of worldly advantages to the prudence which belongs to high principle and affectionate caution.

And what were Caroline's real sentiments for Guy Darrell? She understood them--now on looking back. She saw herself as she was then--as she had stood under the beech-tree, when the heavenly pity that was at the core of her nature--when the venerating, grateful affection that had grown with her growth made her yearn to be a solace and a joy to that grand and solitary life. Love him! Oh certainly she loved him, devotedly, fondly; but it was with the love of a child. She had not awakened then to the love of woman. Removed from his presence, suddenly thrown into the great world--yes, Darrell had sketched the picture with a stern, but not altogether an untruthful hand. He had not, however, fairly estimated the inevitable influence which a mother such as Mrs. Lyndsay would exercise over a girl so wholly inexperienced--so guileless, so unsuspecting, and so filially devoted. He could not appreciate--no man can--the mightiness of female cunning. He could not see how mesh upon mesh the soft Mrs. Lyndsay (pretty woman with pretty manners) wove her web round the "cousins," until Caroline, who at first had thought of the silent fair-haired young man only as the Head of her House, pleased with attentions that kept aloof admirers of whom she thought Guy Darrell might be more reasonably jealous, was appalled to hear her mother tell her that she was either the most heartless of coquettes, or poor Montfort was the most ill-used of men. But at this time Jasper Losely, under his name of Hammond, brought his wife from the French town at which they had been residing, since their marriage, to see Mrs. Lyndsay and Caroline at Paris, and implore their influence to obtain a reconciliation with her father. Matilda soon learned from Mrs. Lyndsay, who affected the most enchanting candour, the nature of the engagement between Caroline and Darrell. She communicated the information to Jasper, who viewed it with very natural alarm. By reconciliation with Guy Darrell, Jasper

understood something solid and practical--not a mere sentimental pardon, added to that paltry stipend of L700 a-year which he had just obtained--but the restoration to all her rights and expectancies of the heiress he had supposed himself to marry. He had by no means relinquished the belief that sooner or later Darrell would listen to the Voice of Nature, and settle all his fortune on his only child. But then for the Voice of Nature to have fair play, it was clear that there should be no other child to plead for. And if Darrell were to marry again and to have sons, what a dreadful dilemma it would be for the Voice of Nature! Jasper was not long in discovering that Caroline's engagement was not less unwelcome to Mrs. Lyndsay than to himself, and that she was disposed to connive at any means by which it might be annulled. Matilda was first employed to weaken the bond it was so desirable to sever. Matilda did not reproach, but she wept. She was sure now that she should be an outcast--her children beggars. Mrs. Lyndsay worked up this complaint with adroitest skill. Was Caroline sure that it was not most dishonourable--most treacherous--to rob her own earliest friend of the patrimony that would otherwise return to Matilda with Darrell's pardon? This idea became exquisitely painful to the high-spirited Caroline, but it could not counterpoise the conviction of the greater pain she should occasion to the breast that so confided in her faith, if that faith were broken. Step by step the intrigue against the absent one proceeded. Mrs. Lyndsay thoroughly understood the art of insinuating doubts. Guy Darrell, a man of the world, a cold-blooded lawyer, a busy politician, he break his heart for a girl! No, it was only the young, and especially the young when not remarkably clever, who broke their hearts for such trifles. Montfort, indeed--there was a man whose heart could be broken!--whose happiness could be blasted! Dear Guy Darrell had been only moved, in his proposals, by generosity. "Something, my dear child, in your own artless words and manner, that made him fancy he had won your affections unknown to yourself!--an idea that he was bound as a gentleman to speak out! Just like him. He has that spirit of chivalry. But my belief is, that he is quite aware by this time how foolish such a marriage would be, and would thank you heartily if, at the year's end, he found himself free, and you happily disposed of elsewhere," &c., &c. The drama advanced. Mrs. Lyndsay evinced decided pulmonary symptoms. Her hectic cough returned; she could not sleep; her days were numbered--a secret grief. Caroline implored frankness, and, clasped to her mother's bosom, and compassionately bedewed with tears, those hints were dropped into her ear which, though so worded as to show the most indulgent forbearance to Darrell, and rather as if in compassion for his weakness than in abhorrence of his perfidy, made Caroline start with the indignation of revolted purity and outraged pride. "Were this true, all would be indeed at an end between us! But it is not true. Let it be proved."

"But, my dear, dear child, I could not stir in a matter so delicate. I could not aid in breaking off a marriage so much to your worldly advantage, unless you could promise that, in rejecting Mr. Darrell, you would accept your cousin. In my wretched state of health, the anxious thought of leaving you in the world literally penniless would kill me at once."

"Oh, if Guy Darrell be false (but that is impossible)! do with me all you

will; to obey and please you would be the only comfort left to me."

Thus was all prepared for the final denouement. Mrs. Lyndsay had not gone so far without a reliance on the means to accomplish her object, and for these means she had stooped to be indebted to the more practical villany of Matilda's husband.

Jasper, in this visit to Paris, had first formed the connection which completed the wickedness of his perverted nature, with that dark adventuress who has flitted shadow-like through part of this varying narrative. Gabrielle Desmarets was then in her youth, notorious only for the ruin she had inflicted on admiring victims, and the superb luxury with which she rioted on their plunder. Captivated by the personal advantages for which Jasper then was preeminently conspicuous, she willingly associated her fortunes with his own. Gabrielle was one of those incarnations of evil which no city but Paris can accomplish with the same epicurean refinement, and vitiate into the same cynical corruption. She was exceedingly witty, sharply astute, capable of acting any part, carrying out any plot; and when it pleased her to simulate the decorous and immaculate gentlewoman, she might have deceived the most experienced roue. Jasper presented this Artiste to his unsuspecting wife as a widow of rank, who was about to visit London, and who might be enabled to see Mr. Darrell, and intercede on their behalf. Matilda fell readily into the snare; the Frenchwoman went to London, with assumed name and title, and with servants completely in her confidence. And such (as the reader knows already) was that eloquent baroness who had pleaded to Darrell the cause of his penitent daughter! No doubt the wily Parisienne had calculated on the effect of her arts and her charms, to decoy him into at least a passing forgetfulness of his faith to another. But if she could not succeed there, it might equally achieve the object in view to obtain the credit of that success. Accordingly, she wrote to one of her friends at Paris letters stating that she had found a very rich admirer in a celebrated English statesman, to whom she was indebted for her establishment, &c.; and alluding, in very witty and satirical terms, to his matrimonial engagement with the young English beauty at Paris, who was then creating such a sensation--an engagement of which she represented her admirer to be heartily sick, and extremely repentant. Without mentioning names, her descriptions were unmistakable. Jasper, of course, presented to Mrs. Lyndsay those letters (which, he said, the person to whom they were addressed had communicated to one of her own gay friends), and suggested that their evidence against Darrell would be complete in Miss Lyndsay's eyes if some one, whose veracity Caroline could not dispute, could corroborate the assertions of the letters; it would be quite enough to do so if Mr. Darrell were even seen entering or leaving the house of a person whose mode of life was so notorious. Mrs. Lyndsay, who, with her consummate craft, saved her dignity by affected blindness to the artifices at which she connived, declared that, in a matter of inquiry which involved the private character of a man so eminent, and to whom she owed so much, she would not trust his name to the gossip of others. She herself would go to London. She knew that odious, but too fascinating, Gabrielle by sight (as every one did who went to the opera or drove in the Bois de Boulogne). Jasper undertook that the Parisienne should show herself at her balcony at a certain day

at a certain hour, and that at that hour Darrell should call and be admitted; and Mrs. Lyndsay allowed that that evidence would suffice. Sensible of the power over Caroline that she would derive if, with her habits of languor and her delicate health, she could say that she had undertaken such a journey to be convinced with her own eyes of a charge which, if true, would influence her daughter's conduct and destiny--Mrs. Lyndsay did go to London--did see Gabrielle Desmarets at her balcony--did see Darrell enter the house; and on her return to Paris did, armed with this testimony, and with the letters that led to it, so work upon her daughter's mind, that the next day the Marquess of Montfort was accepted. But the year of Darrell's probation was nearly expired; all delay would be dangerous--all explanations would be fatal, and must be forestalled. Nor could a long courtship be kept secret; Darrell might hear of it, and come over at once; and the Marquess's ambitious kinsfolk would not fail to interfere if the news of his intended marriage with a portionless cousin reached their ears. Lord Montfort, who was awed by Carr, and extremely afraid of his grandmother, was not less anxious for secrecy and expedition than Mrs. Lyndsay herself.

Thus, then, Mrs. Lyndsay triumphed, and while her daughter was still under the influence of an excitement which clouded her judgment, and stung her into rashness of action as an escape from the torment of reflection--thus were solemnised Caroline's unhappy and splendid nuptials. The Marquess hired a villa in the delightful precincts of Fontainebleau for his honeymoon; that moon was still young when the Marquess said to himself, "I don't find that it produces honey." When he had first been attracted towards Caroline, she was all life and joy--too much of a child to pine for Darrell's absence, while credulously confident of their future union--her spirits naturally wild and lively, and the world, opening at her feet, so novel and so brilliant. This fresh gaiety had amused the Marquess--he felt cheated when he found it gone. Caroline might be gentle, docile, submissive; but those virtues, though of higher quality than glad animal spirits, are not so entertaining. His own exceeding sterility of mind and feeling was not apparent till in the /tetes-a-tetes/ of conjugal life. A good-looking young man, with a thoroughbred air, who rides well, dances well, and holds his tongue, may, in all mixed societies, pass for a shy youth of sensitive genius! But when he is your companion for life, and all to yourself, and you find that, when he does talk, he has neither an idea nor a sentiment--alas! alas for you, young bride, if you have ever known the charm of intellect, or the sweetness of sympathy. But it was not for Caroline to complain; struggling against her own weight of sorrow, she had no immediate perception of her companion's vapidness. It was he, poor man, who complained. He just detected enough of her superiority of intelligence to suspect that he was humiliated, while sure that he was bored. An incident converted his growing indifference into permanent dislike not many days after their marriage.

Lord Montfort, sauntering into Caroline's room, found her insensible on the floor--an open letter by her side. Summoning her maid to her assistance, he took the marital privilege of reading the letter which had apparently caused her swoon. It was from Matilda, and written in a state of maddened excitement. Matilda had little enough of what is called

heart; but she had an intense selfishness, which, in point of suffering, supplies the place of a heart. It was not because she could not feel for the wrongs of another that she could not feel anguish for her own. Arabella was avenged. The cold-blooded snake that had stung her met the fang of the cobra-capella. Matilda had learned from some anonymous correspondent (probably a rival of Gabrielle's) of Jasper's liaison with that adventuress. But half recovered from her confinement, she had risen from her bed--hurried to Paris (for the pleasures of which her husband had left her)--seen this wretched Gabrielle--recognised in her the false baroness to whom Jasper had presented her--to whom, by Jasper's dictation, she had written such affectionate letters--whom she had employed to plead her cause to her father;--seen Gabrielle--seen her at her own luxurious apartment, Jasper at home there--burst into vehement wrath--roused up the cobra-capella; and on declaring she would separate from her husband, go back to her father, tell her wrongs, appeal to his mercy, Gabrielle calmly replied: "Do so, and I will take care that your father shall know that your plea for his pardon through Madame la Baronne was a scheme to blacken his name, and to frustrate his marriage. Do not think that he will suppose you did not connive at a project so sly; he must know you too well, pretty innocent." No match for Gabrielle Desmarets, Matilda flung from the house, leaving Jasper whistling an air from Figaro; returned alone to the French town from which she now wrote to Caroline, pouring out her wrongs, and, without seeming sensible that Caroline had been wronged too, expressing her fear that her father might believe her an accomplice in Jasper's plot, and refuse her the means to live apart from the wretch; upon whom she heaped every epithet that just indignation could suggest to a feeble mind. The latter part of the letter, blurred and blotted, was incoherent, almost raving. In fact Matilda was then seized by the mortal illness which hurried her to her grave. To the Marquess much of this letter was extremely uninteresting--much of it quite incomprehensible. He could not see why it should so overpoweringly affect his wife. Only those passages which denounced a scheme to frustrate some marriage meditated by Mr. Darrell made him somewhat uneasy, and appeared to him to demand an explanation. But Caroline, in the anguish to which she awakened, forestalled his inquiries. To her but two thoughts were present--how she had wronged Darrell--how ungrateful and faithless she must seem to him; and in the impulse of her remorse, and in the childlike candour of her soul, artlessly, ingenuously, she poured out her feelings to the husband she had taken as counsellor and guide, as if seeking to guard all her sorrow for the past from a sentiment that might render her less loyal to the responsibilities which linked her future to another's. A man of sense would have hailed in so noble a confidence (however it might have pained him for the time) a guarantee for the happiness and security of his whole existence. He would have seen how distinct from that ardent love which in Caroline's new relation of life would have bordered upon guilt and been cautious as guilt against disclosing its secrets, was the infantine, venerating affection she had felt for a man so far removed from her by years and the development of intellect--an affection which a young husband, trusted with every thought, every feeling, might reasonably hope to eclipse. A little forbearance, a little of delicate and generous tenderness, at that moment, would have secured to Lord Montfort the warm devotion of a grateful heart, in which the grief that overflowed was not

for the irreplaceable loss of an earlier lover, but the repentant shame for wrong and treachery to a confiding friend.

But it is in vain to ask from any man that which is not in him! Lord Montfort listened with sullen, stolid displeasure. That Caroline should feel the slightest pain at any cause which had cancelled her engagement to that odious Darrell, and had raised her to the rank of his Marchioness, was a crime in his eyes never to be expiated. He considered, not without reason, that Mrs. Lyndsay had shamefully deceived him; and fully believed that she had been an accomplice with Jasper in that artifice which he was quite gentleman enough to consider placed those who had planned it out of the pale of his acquaintance. And when Caroline, who had been weeping too vehemently to read her lord's countenance, came to a close, Lord Montfort took up his hat and said: "I beg never to hear again of this lawyer and his very disreputable family connections. As you say, you and your mother have behaved very ill to him; but you don't seem to understand that you have behaved much worse to me. As to condescending to write to him, and enter into explanations how you came to be Lady Montfort, it would be so lowering to me that I would never forgive it--never. I would just as soon that you run away at once;--sooner. As for Mrs. Lyndsay, I shall forbid her entering my house. When you have done crying, order your things to be packed up. I shall return to England to-morrow."

That was perhaps the longest speech Lord Montfort ever addressed to his wife; perhaps it was also the rudest. From that time he regarded her as some Spaniard of ancient days might regard a guest on whom he was compelled to bestow the rights of hospitality--to whom he gave a seat at his board, a chair at his hearth, but for whom he entertained a profound aversion, and kept at invincible distance, with all the ceremony of dignified dislike. Once only during her wedded life Caroline again saw Darrell. It was immediately on her return to England, and little more than a month after her marriage. It was the day on which Parliament had been prorogued preparatory to its dissolution--the last Parliament of which Guy Darrell was a member. Lady Montfort's carriage was detained in the throng with which the ceremonial had filled the streets, and Darrell passed it on horseback. It was but one look in that one moment; and the look never ceased to haunt her--a look of such stern disdain, but also of such deep despair. No language can exaggerate the eloquence which there is in a human countenance, when a great and tortured spirit speaks out from it accusingly to a soul that comprehends. The crushed heart, the ravaged existence, were bared before her in that glance, as clearly as to a wanderer through the night are the rents of the precipice in the flash of the lightning. So they encountered--so, without a word, they parted. To him that moment decided the flight from active life to which his hopeless thoughts had of late been wooing the jaded, weary man. In safety to his very conscience, he would not risk the certainty thus to encounter one whom it convulsed his whole being to remember was another's wife. In that highest and narrowest sphere of the great London world to which Guy Darrell's political distinction condemned his social life, it was impossible but that he should be brought frequently into collision with Lord Montfort, the Head of a House with which Darrell himself was connected--the most powerful patrician of the party of which Darrell was

so conspicuous a chief. Could he escape Lady Montfort's presence, her name at least would be continually in his ears. From that fatal beauty he could no more hide than from the sun.

This thought, and the terror it occasioned him, completed his resolve on the instant. The next day he was in the groves of Fawley, and amazed the world by dating from that retreat a farewell address to his constituents. A few days after, the news of his daughter's death reached him; and as that event became known it accounted to many for his retirement for a while from public life.

But to Caroline Montfort, and to her alone, the secret of a career blasted, a fame renounced, was unmistakably revealed. For a time she was tortured, in every society she entered, by speculation and gossip which brought before her the memory of his genius, the accusing sound of his name. But him who withdraws from the world, the world soon forgets; and by degrees Darrell became as little spoken of as the dead.

Mrs. Lyndsay had never, during her schemes on Lord Montfort, abandoned her own original design on Darrell. And when, to her infinite amaze and mortification, Lord Montfort, before the first month of his marriage expired, took care, in the fewest possible words, to dispel her dream of governing the House, and residing in the houses of Vipont, as the lawful agent during the life-long minority to which she had condemned both the submissive Caroline and the lethargic Marquess, she hastened by letter to exculpate herself to Darrell--laid, of course, all the blame on Caroline. Alas! had not she always warned him that Caroline was not worthy of him? --him, the greatest, the best of men, &c., &c. Darrell replied by a single cut of his trenchant sarcasm--sarcasm which shore through her cushion of down and her veil of gauze like the sword of Saladin. The old Marchioness turned her back upon Mrs. Lyndsay. Lady Selina was crushingly civil. The pretty woman with pretty manners, no better off for all the misery she had occasioned, went to Rome, caught cold, and having no one to nurse her as Caroline had done, fell at last into a real consumption, and faded out of the world elegantly and spitefully, as fades a rose that still leaves its thorns behind it.

Caroline's nature grew developed and exalted by the responsibilities she had accepted, and by the purity of her grief. She submitted, as a just retribution, to the solitude and humiliation of her wedded lot; she earnestly, virtuously strove to banish from her heart every sentiment that could recall to her more of Darrell than the remorse of having darkened a life that had been to her childhood so benignant, and to her youth so confiding. As we have seen her, at the mention of Darrell's name--at the allusion to his griefs--fly to the side of her ungenial lord, though he was to her but as the owner of the name she bore,--so it was the saving impulse of a delicate, watchful conscience that kept her as honest in thought as she was irreproachable in conduct. But vainly, in summoning her intellect to the relief of her heart--vainly had she sought to find in the world friendships, companionships, that might eclipse the memory of the mind so lofty in its antique mould--so tender in its depths of unsuspected sweetness--which had been withdrawn from her existence before she could fully comprehend its rarity, or appreciate its

worth.

At last she became free once more; and then she had dared thoroughly to examine into her own heart, and into the nature of that hold which the image of Darrell still retained on its remembrances. And precisely because she was convinced that she had succeeded in preserving her old childish affection for him free from the growth into that warm love which would have been guilt if so encouraged, she felt the more free to volunteer the atonement which might permit her to dedicate herself to his remaining years. Thus, one day, after a conversation with Alban Morley, in which Alban had spoken of Darrell as the friend, almost the virtual guardian, of her infancy; and, alluding to a few lines just received from him, brought vividly before Caroline the picture of Darrell's melancholy wanderings and blighted life,--thus had she, on the impulse of the moment, written the letter which had reached Darrell at Malta. In it she referred but indirectly to the deceit that had been practised on herself --far too delicate to retail a scandal which she felt to be an insult to his dignity, in which, too, the deceiving parties were his daughter's husband and her own mother. No doubt every true woman can understand why she thus wrote to Darrell, and every true man can equally comprehend why that letter failed in its object, and was returned to her in scorn. Hers was the yearning of meek, passionless affection, and his the rebuke of sensitive, embittered indignant love.

But now, as all her past, with its interior life, glided before her, by a grief the most intolerable she had yet known, the woman became aware that it was no longer penitence for the injured friend--it was despair for the lover she had lost. In that stormy interview, out of all the confused and struggling elements of her life--long self-reproach, LOVE--the love of woman--had flashed suddenly, luminously, as the love of youth at first sight. Strange--but the very disparity of years seemed gone! She, the matured, sorrowful woman, was so much nearer to the man, still young in heart and little changed in person, than the gay girl of seventeen had been to the grave friend of forty! Strange, but those vehement reproaches had wakened emotions deeper in the core of the wild mortal breast than all that early chivalrous homage which had exalted her into the ideal of dreaming poets. Strange, strange, strange! But where there is nothing strange, THERE--is there ever love?

And with this revelation of her own altered heart, came the clearer and fresher insight into the nature and character of the man she loved. Hitherto she had recognised but his virtues--now she beheld his failings! beholding them as if virtues, loved him more; and, loving him, more despaired. She recognised that all-pervading indomitable pride, which, interwoven with his sense of honour, became relentless as it was unrevengeful. She comprehended now that, the more he loved her, the less he would forgive; and, recalling the unexpected gentleness of his farewell words, she felt that in his promised blessing lay the sentence that annihilated every hope.

CHAPTER III.

WHATEVER THE NUMBER OF A MAN'S FRIENDS, THERE WILL BE TIMES IN HIS LIFE WHEN HE HAS ONE TOO FEW; BUT IF HE HAS ONLY ONE ENEMY, HE IS LUCKY INDEED IF HE HAS NOT ONE TOO MANY.

A cold night; sharp frost; winter set in. The shutters are closed, the curtains drawn, the fire burns clear, and the lights are softly shaded in Alban Morley's drawing-room.

The old bachelor is at home again. He had returned that day; sent to Lionel to come to him; and Lionel had already told him what had transpired in his absence--from the identification of Waife with William Losely, to Lady Montfort's visit to Fawley, which had taken place two days before, and of which she had informed Lionel by a few hasty lines, stating her inability to soften Mr. Darrell's objections to the alliance between Lionel and Sophy; severely blaming herself that those objections had not more forcibly presented themselves to her own mind, and concluding with expressions of sympathy, and appeals to fortitude, in which, however brief, the exquisite kindness of her nature so diffused its charm, that the soft words soothed insensibly, like those sounds which in Nature itself do soothe us we know not why.

The poor Colonel found himself in the midst of painful subjects. Though he had no very keen sympathy for the sorrows of lovers, and no credulous faith in everlasting attachments, Lionel's portraiture of the young girl, who formed so mysterious a link between the two men who, in varying ways, had touched the finest springs in his own heart, compelled a compassionate and chivalrous interest, and he was deeply impressed by the quiet of Lionel's dejection. The young man uttered no complaints of the inflexibility with which Darrell had destroyed his elysium. He bowed to the will with which it was in vain to argue, and which it would have been a criminal ingratitude to defy. But his youth seemed withered up; down-eyed and listless, he sank into that stupor of despondency which so drearily simulates the calm of resignation.

"I have but one wish now," said he, "and that is to change at once into some regiment on active service. I do not talk of courting danger and seeking death. That would be either a senseless commonplace, or a threat, as it were, to Heaven! But I need some vehemence of action--some positive and irresistible call upon honour or duty that may force me to contend against this strange heaviness that settles down on my whole life. Therefore, I entreat you so to arrange for me, and break it to Mr. Darrell in such terms as may not needlessly pain him by the obtrusion of my sufferings. For, while I know him well enough to be convinced that nothing could move him from resolves in which he had entrenched, as in a citadel, his pride or his creed of honour, I am sure that he would take into his own heart all the grief which those resolves occasioned to another's."

"You do him justice there," cried Alban; "you are a noble fellow to understand him so well! Sir, you have in you the stuff that makes English gentlemen such generous soldiers."

"Action, action, action," exclaimed Lionel. "Strife, strife! No other chance of cure. Rest is so crushing, solitude so dismal."

Lo! how contrasted the effect of a similar cause of grief at different stages of life! Chase the first day-dreams of our youth, and we cry, "Action--Strife!" In that cry, unconsciously to ourselves, HOPE speaks and proffers worlds of emotion not yet exhausted. Disperse the last golden illusion in which the image of happiness cheats our experienced manhood, and HOPE is silent; she has no more worlds to offer--unless, indeed, she drop her earthly attributes, change her less solemn name, and float far out of sight as "FAITH!"

Alban made no immediate reply to Lionel; but, seating himself more comfortably in his chair--planting his feet still more at ease upon his fender--the kindly Man of the World silently revolved all the possible means by which Darrell might yet be softened and Lionel rendered happy. His reflections dismayed him. "Was there ever such untoward luck," he said at last, and peevishly, "that out of the whole world you should fall in love with the very girl against whom Darrell's feelings (prejudices if you please) must be mailed in adamant! Convinced, and apparently with every reason, that she is not his daughter's child, but, however innocently, an impostor, how can he receive her as his young kinsman's bride? How can we expect it?"

"But," said Lionel, "if, on farther investigation, she prove to be his daughter's child--the sole surviving representative of his line and name?"

"His name! No! Of the name of Losely--the name of that turbulent sharper, who may yet die on the gibbet--of that poor, dear, lovable rascal Willy, who was goose enough to get himself transported for robbery!--a felon's grandchild the representative of Darrell's line! But how on earth came Lady Montfort to favour so wild a project, and encourage you to share in it?--she who ought to have known Darrell better?"

"Alas! she saw but Sophy's exquisite, simple virtues, and inborn grace; and, believing her claim to Darrell's lineage, Lady Montfort thought but of the joy and blessing one so good and so loving might bring to his joyless hearth. She was not thinking of morbid pride and mouldering ancestors, but of soothing charities and loving ties. And Lady Montfort, I now suspect, in her scheme for our happiness--for Darrell's--had an interest which involved her own!"

"Her own!"

"Yes; I see it all now."

"See what? you puzzle me."

"I told you that Darrell, in his letter to me, wrote with great bitterness of Lady Montfort."

"Very natural that he should. Who would not resent such interference?"

"Listen. I told you that, at his own command, I sent to her that letter; that she, on receiving it, went herself to Fawley, to plead our cause. I was sanguine of the result."

"Why?"

"Because he who is in love has a wondrous intuition into all the mysteries of love in others; and when I read Darrell's letter I felt sure that he had once loved--loved still, perhaps--the woman he so vehemently reproached."

"Ha!" said the Man of the World, intimate with Guy Darrell from his school-days--"Ha! is it possible! And they say that I know everything! You were sanguine,--I understand. Yes, if your belief were true--if there were some old attachment that could be revived--some old misunderstanding explained away--stop; let me think. True, true--it was just after her marriage that he fled from the world. Ah, my dear Lionel; light, light! light dawns on me! Not without reason were you sanguine. Your hand, my dear boy; I see hope for you at last. For if the sole reason that prevented Darrell contracting a second marriage was the unconquered memory of a woman like Lady Montfort (where, indeed, her equal in beauty, in disposition so akin to his own ideal of womanly excellence?)--and if she too has some correspondent sentiment for him, why then, indeed, you might lose all chance of being Darrell's sole heir; your Sophy might forfeit the hateful claim to be the sole scion on his ancient tree; but it is precisely by those losses that Lionel Haughton might gain the bride he covets; and if this girl prove to be what these Loselys affirm, that very marriage, which is now so repugnant to Darrell, ought to insure his blessing. Were he himself to marry again--had he rightful representatives and heirs in his own sons--he should rejoice in the nuptials that secured to his daughter's child so honourable a name and so tender a protector. And as for inheritance, you have not been reared to expect it; you have never counted on it. You would receive a fortune sufficiently ample to restore your ancestral station; your career will add honours to fortune. Yes, yes; that is the sole way out of all these difficulties. Darrell must marry again; Lady Montfort must be his wife. Lionel shall be free to choose her whom Lady Montfort approves--be friends--no matter what her birth; and I--I--Alban Morley--shall have an arm-chair by two smiling hearths."

At this moment there was heard a violent ring at the bell, a loud knock at the street door; and presently, following close on the servant, and pushing him aside as he asked what name to announce, a woman, severely dressed in iron-grey, with a strongly-marked and haggard countenance, hurried into the room, and, striding right up to Alban Morley, as he rose from his seat, grasped his arm, and whispered into his ear, "Lose not a minute--come with me instantly--as you value the safety, perhaps the life of Guy Darrell!"

"Guy Darrell!" exclaimed Lionel, overhearing her, despite the undertones

of her voice.

"Who are you?" she said, turning fiercely; "are you one of his family?"

"His kinsman--almost his adopted son--Mr. Lionel Haughton," said the Colonel. "But pardon me, madam--who are you?"

"Do you not remember me? Yet you were so often in Darrell's house that you must have seen my face, as you have learned from your friend how little cause I have to care for him or his. Look again; I am that Arabella Fossett who--"

"Ah, I remember now; but--"

"But I tell you that Darrell is in danger, and this night. Take money; to be in time you must hire a special train. Take arms, though to be used only in self-defence. Take your servant if he is brave. This young kinsman--let him come too. There is only one man to resist; but that man," she said, with a wild kind of pride, "would have the strength and courage of ten were his cause not that which may make the strong man weak, and the bold man craven. It is not a matter for the officers of justice, for law, for scandal; the service is to be done in secret, by friends, by kinsmen; for the danger that threatens Darrell--stoop--stoop, Colonel Morley--close in your ear"; and into his ear she hissed, "for the danger that threatens Darrell in his house this night is from the man whose name his daughter bore. That is why I come to you. To you I need not say, 'Spare his life--Jasper Losely's life.' Jasper Losely's death as a midnight robber would be Darrell's intolerable shame. Quick, quick, quick!--come, come!"

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