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SANDRA BELLONI

By George Meredith

BOOK 5

- XXXIV. INDICATES THE DEGRADATION OF BROOKFIELD, TOGETHER
WITH CERTAIN PROCEEDINGS OF THE YACHT
- XXXV. MRS. CHUMP'S EPISTLE
- XXXVI. ANOTHER PITFALL OF SENTIMENT
- XXXVII. EMILIA'S FLIGHT.
- XXXVIII. SHE CLINGS TO HER VOICE
- XXXIX. HER VOICE FAILS

CHAPTER XXXIV

Lady Charlotte was too late for Emilia, when she went forth to her to speak for Wilfrid. She found the youth Braintop resting heavily against a tree, muttering to himself that he had no notion where he was, as an excuse for his stationary posture, while the person he presumed he should have detained was being borne away. Near him a scrap of paper lay on the ground, struck out of darkness by long slips of light from the upper windows. Thinking this might be something purposely dropped, she took possession of it; but a glance subsequently showed her that the writing was too fervid for a female hand. "Or does the girl write in that way?" she thought. She soon decided that it was Wilfrid who had undone her work in the line of thirsty love-speech. "How can a little fool read them and not believe any lie that he may tell!" she cried to herself. She chose to say contemptuously: "It's like a child proclaiming he is hungry." That it was couched in bad taste she positively conceived--taking the paper up again and again to correct her memory. The termination, "Your lover," appeared to her, if not laughable, revolting. She was uncertain in her sentiments at this point.

Was it amusing? or simply execrable? Some charity for the unhappy document Lady Charlotte found when she could say: "I suppose this is the general run of the kind of again." "Was it?" she reflected; and drank at the words again. "No," she came to think; "men don't commonly write as he does, whoever wrote this." She had no doubt that it was Wilfrid. By fits her wrath was directed against him. "It's villany," she said. But more and more frequently a crouching abject longing to call the words her own--to have them poured into her heart and brain--desire for the intoxication of the naked speech of love usurped her spirit of pride, until she read with envious tears, half loathing herself, but fascinated and subdued: "Mine! my angel! You will see me to-morrow.--Your Lover."

Of jealousy she felt very little--her chief thought coming like a wave over her: "Here is a man that can love!"

She was a woman of chaste blood, which spoke to her as shyly as a girl's, now that it was in tumult: so indeed that, pressing her heart, she thought youth to have come back, and feasted on the exultation we have when, at an odd hour, we fancy we have cheated time. The sensation of youth and strength seemed to set a seal of lawfulness and naturalness, hitherto wanting, on her feeling for Wilfrid. "I can help him," she thought. "I know where he fails, and what he can do. I can give him position, and be worth as much as any woman can be to a man." Thus she

justified the direction taken by the new force in her.

Two days later Wilfrid received a letter from Lady Charlotte, saying that she, with a chaperon, had started to join her brother at the yacht-station, according to appointment. Amazed and utterly discomfited, he looked about for an escape; but his father, whose plea of sickness had kept him from pursuing Emilia, petulantly insisted that he should go down to Lady Charlotte. Adela was ready to go. There were numbers either going or now on the spot, and the net was around him. Cornelia held back, declaring that her place was by her father's side. Fine Shades were still too dominant at Brookfield for anyone to tell her why she stayed.

With anguish so deep that he could not act indifference, Wilfrid went on his miserable expedition--first setting a watch over Mr. Pericles, the which, in connection with the electric telegraph, was to enable him to join that gentleman speedily, whithersoever he might journey. He was not one to be deceived by the Greek's mask in running down daily to Brookfield. A manoeuvre like that was poor; and besides, he had seen the fallow eyes give a twinkle more than once.

Now, on the Besworth night, Georgiana Ford had studied her brother Merthyr's face when Emilia's voice called for Wilfrid. Her heart was touched; and, in the midst of some little invidious wonder at the power of a girl to throw her attraction upon such a man, she thought, as she hoped, that probably it was due to the girl's Italian blood. Merthyr was not unwilling to speak of her, and say what he feared and desired for Emilia's sake; and Georgiana read, by this mark of confidence, how sincerely she was loved and trusted by him. "One never can have more than half of a man's heart," she thought--adding, "It's our duty to deserve that, nevertheless."

She was mystified. Say that Merthyr loved a girl, whom he certainly distinguished with some visible affection, what sort of man must he be that was preferred to Merthyr? And this set Georgiana at work thinking of Wilfrid. "He has at times the air of a student. He is one who trusts his own light too exclusively. Is he godless?" She concluded: "He is a soldier, and an officer with brains--a good class:" Rare also. Altogether, though Emilia did not elevate herself in this lady's mind by choosing Wilfrid when she might have had Merthyr, the rivalry of the two men helped to dignify the one of whom she thought least. Might she have had Merthyr? Georgiana would not believe it--that is to say, she shut the doors and shot the bolts, the knocking outside went on.

Her brother had told her the whole circumstances of Emilia's life and position. When he said, "Do what you can for her," she knew that it was not the common empty phrase. Young as she was, simple in habits, clear in mind, open in all practices of daily life, she was no sooner brought into an active course than astuteness and impetuosity combined wonderfully in her. She did not tell Merthyr that she had done anything to discover Emilia, and only betrayed that she was moving at all in a little conversation they had about a meeting at the house of his friend Marini, an Italian exile.

"Possibly Belloni goes there," said Merthyr. "I wonder whether Marini knows anything of him. They have a meeting every other night."

Georgiana replied: "He went there and took his daughter the night after we were at Besworth. He took her to be sworn in."

"Still that old folly of Marini's!" cried Merthyr, almost wrathfully. He had some of the English objection to the mixing-up of women in political matters.

Georgiana instantly addressed herself to it: "He thinks that the country must be saved by its women as well as its men; and if they have not brains and steadfast devotion, he concludes that the country will not be saved. But he gives them their share of the work; and, dearest, has he had reason to repent it?"

"No," Merthyr was forced to admit--taking shelter in his antipathy to the administration of an oath to women. And consider that this is a girl!"

"The oaths of girls are sometimes more binding on them than the oaths of women."

"True, it affects their imaginations vividly; but it seems childish. Does she have to kiss a sword and a book?"

Merthyr made a gesture like a shrug, with a desponding grimace.

"You know," answered Georgiana, smiling, "that I was excused any formula, by special exemption. I have no idea of what is done. Water, salt, white thorns, and other Carbonaro mysteries may be in use or not: I think no worse of the cause, whatever is done."

"I love the cause," said Merthyr. "I dislike this sort of conspiratorial masque Marini and his Chief indulge in. I believe it sustains them, and there's its only use."

"I," said Georgiana, "love the cause only from association with it; but in my opinion Marini is right. He deals with young and fervent minds, that require a ceremony to keep them fast--yes, dear, and women more than others do. After that, they cease to have to rely upon themselves--a reliance their good instinct teaches them is frail. There, now; have I put my sex low enough?"

She slid her head against her brother's shoulder. If he had ever met a man worthy of her, Merthyr would have sighed to feel that all her precious love was his own.

"Is there any likelihood that Belloni will be there tonight?" he asked.

She shook her head. "He has not been there since. He went for that purpose."

"Perhaps Marini is right, after all," said Merthyr, smiling.

Georgiana knew what he meant, and looked at him fondly.

"But I have never bound you to an oath," he resumed, in the same tone.

"I dare say you consider me a little different from most," said Georgiana. She had as small reserve with her brother as vanity, and could even tell him what she thought of her own worth without depreciating it after the fashion of chartered hypocrites.

Mr. Powys wrote to Marini to procure him an interview with Belloni as early as possible, and then he and Georgiana went down to Lady Charlotte.

Letters from Adela kept the Brookfield public informed of the doings on board the yacht. Before leaving home, Wilfrid with Arabella's concurrence certainly--at her instigation, as he thought--had led his father to imagine, on tolerably good grounds, that Mrs. Chump had quitted Brookfield to make purchases for her excursion on lively waters, and was then awaiting him at the appointed station. One of the old man's intermittent nervous fits had frightened them into the quasi-fabrication of this little innocent tale. The doctor's words were that Mr. Pole was to be crossed in nothing--"Not even if it should appear to be of imminent necessity that I should see him, and he refuses." The man of science stated that the malady originated in some long continued pressure of secret apprehension. Both Wilfrid and Arabella conceived that persuasion alone was wanted to send Mrs. Chump flying to the yacht; so they had less compunction in saying, "She is there."

And here began a terrible trial for the children of Nine Shades. To save a father they had to lie grievously--to continue the lie from day to day--to turn it from a lie extensive and inappreciable to the lie minute and absolute. Then, to get a particle of truth out of this monstrous lie, they had to petition in utter humiliation the woman they had scorned, that she would return among them and consider their house her own. No answer came from Mrs. Chump; and as each day passed, the querulous invalid, still painfully acting the man in health, had to be fed with fresh lies; until at last, writing of one of the scenes in Brookfield, Arabella put down the word in all its unblest aboriginal bluntness, and did not ask herself whether she shrank from it. "Lies!" she wrote.

"What has happened to Bella?" thought Adela, in pure wonder. Salt-air and dazzling society kept all idea of penance from this vivacious young person. It was queer that Sit Twickenham should be at the seaside, instead of at Brookfield, wooing; but a man's physical condition should be an excuse for any intermission of attentions. "Now that I know him better," wrote Adela, "I think him the pink of chivalry; and of this I am sure I can convince you, Bella, C. will be blessed indeed; for a delicate nature in a man of the world is a treasure. He has a beautiful little vessel of his own sailing beside us."

Arabella was critic enough to smile at this last. On the whole she was passably content for the moment, in a severe fashion, save to feel herself the dreadful lying engine and fruitlessly abject person that she

had become.

We imagine that when souls have had a fall, they immediately look up and contrast their present with their preceding position. This does not occur. The lower their fall, the less, generally, their despair, for despair is a business of the Will, and when they come heavily upon their humanity, they get something of the practical seriousness of nature. If they fall very low, the shock and the sense that they are still on their feet make them singularly earnest to set about the plain plan of existence--getting air for their lungs and elbow-room. Contrast, that mother of melancholy, comes when they are some way advanced upon the upward scale. The Poles did not look up to their lost height, but merely exerted their faculties to go forward; and great as their ambition had been in them, now that it was suddenly blown to pieces, they did not sit and weep, but strove in a stunned way to work ahead. The truth is, that we rarely indulge in melancholy until we can take it as a luxury: little people never do, and they, when we have not put them on their guard, are humankind naked.

The yachting excursions were depicted vividly by Adela, and were addressed as a sort of reproach to the lugubrious letters of her sister. She said pointedly once: "Really, if we are to be miserable, I turn Catholic and go into a convent." The strange thing was that Arabella imagined her letters to be rather of a cheerful character. She related the daily events at Brookfield:--the change in her father's soups, and his remarks on them, and which he preferred; his fight with his medicine, and declaration that he was as sound as any man on shore; the health of the servants; Mr. Marter the curate's call with a Gregorian chant; doubts of his orthodoxy; Cornelia's lonely walks and singular appetite; the bills, and so forth--ending, "What is to be said further of her?"

In return, Adela's delight was to date each day from a different port, to which, catching the wind, the party had sailed, and there slept. The ladies were under the protecting wing of the Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle, a smooth woman of the world. "You think she must have sinned in her time, but are certain it will never be known," wrote Adela. "I do confess, kind as she is, she does me much harm; for when she is near me I begin to think that Society is everything. Her tact is prodigious; it is never seen--only felt. I cannot describe her influence; yet it leads to nothing. I cannot absolutely respect her; but I know I shall miss her acutely when we part. What charm does she possess? I call her the Hon. Mrs. Heathen--Captain G., the Hon. Mrs. Balm. I know you hate nicknames. Be merciful to people yachting. What are we to do? I would look through a telescope all day and calculate the number of gulls and gannets we see; but I am not so old as Sir T., and that occupation could not absorb me. I begin to understand Lady Charlotte and her liking for Mr. Powys better. He is ready to play or be serious, as you please; but in either case 'Merthyr is never a buffoon nor a parson'--Lady C. remarked this morning; and that describes him, if it were not for the detestable fling at the clergy, which she never misses. It seems in her blood to think that all priests are hypocrites. What a little boat to be in on a stormy sea, Bella! She appears to have no concern about it. Whether she adores Wilfrid or not I do not pretend to guess. She snubs him--a thing he

would bear from nobody but her. I do believe he feels flattered by it. He is chiefly attentive to Miss Ford, whom I like and do not like, and like and do not like--but do like. She is utterly cold, and has not an affection on earth. Sir T.--I have not a dictionary--calls her a fair clictic, I think. (Let even Cornelia read hard, or woe to her in their hours of privacy!--his vocabulary grows distressingly rich the more you know him. I am not uneducated, but he introduces me to words that seem monsters; I must pretend to know them intimately.) Well, whether a clictic or not--and pray, burn this letter, lest I should not have the word correct--she has the air of a pale young princess above any creature I have seen in the world. I know it has struck Wilfred also; my darling and I are ever twins in sentiment. He converses with Miss Ford a great deal. Lady C. is peculiarly civil to Captain G. We scud along, and are becalmed. 'Having no will of our own, we have no knowledge of contrary winds,' as Mr. Powys says.--The word is 'eclectic,' I find. I ventured on it, and it was repeated; and I heard that I had missed a syllable. Ask C. to look it out--I mean, to tell me they mining on a little slip of paper in your next. I would buy a pocket-dictionary at one of the ports, but you are never alone. "Aesthetic," we know. Mr. Barrett used to be of service for this sort of thing. I admit I am inferior to Mrs. Bayruffle, who, if men talk difficult words in her presence, holds her chin above the conversation, and seems to shame them. I love to learn--I love the humility of learning. And there is something divine in the idea of a teacher. I listen to Sir T. on Parliament and parties, and chide myself if my interest flags. His algebra-puzzles, or Euclid-puzzles in figures--sometimes about sheep-boys and sheep, and hurdles or geese, oxen or anything--are delicious: he quite masters the conversation with them. I disagree with Mrs. Bayruffle when she complains that they are posts in the way of speech. There is a use in all men; and though she is an acknowledged tactician materially, she cannot see she has in Sir T. a quality necessary to intellectual conversation, if she knew how to employ it."

Remarks of this nature read very oddly to Arabella, insomuch that she would question herself at times, in forced seriousness, whether she had dreamed that an evil had befallen Brookfield, or whether Adela were forgetting that it had, in a dream. One day she enclosed a letter from her father to Mrs. Chump. Adela did not forge a reply; but she had the audacity to give the words of a message from the woman (in which Mrs. Chump was supposed to say that she could not write while she was being tossed about.) "We must carry it on," Adela told her sister, with horrible bluntness. The message savoured strongly of Mrs. Chump. It was wickedly clever. Arabella resolved to put it by; but morning after morning she saw her father's anxiety for the reply mounting to a pitch of fever. She consulted with Cornelia, who said, "No; never do such a thing!" and subsequently, with a fainter firmness, repeated the negative monosyllable. Arabella, in her wretchedness, became endued with remorseless discernment. "It means that Cornelia would never do it herself," she thought; and, comforted haply by reflecting that for their common good she could do it, she did it. She repeated an Irish message. Her father calmed immediately, making her speak it over twice. He smiled, and blinked his bird's-eyes pleasurably: "Ah! that's Martha," he said, and fell into a state of comparative repose. For some hours a

sensation of bubbling hot-water remained about the sera of Arabella. Happily Mrs. Chump in person did not write.

A correspondence now commenced between the fictitious Mrs. Chump on sea and Mr. Pole, dyspeptic, in his armchair. Arabella took the doctor aside to ask him, if in a hypothetical instance, it would really be dangerous to thwart or irritate her father. She asked the curate if he deemed it wicked to speak falsely to an invalid for the invalid's benefit. The spiritual and bodily doctors agreed that occasion altered and necessity justified certain acts. So far there was comfort. But the task of assisting in this correspondence, and yet more, the contemplation of Adela's growing delight in it (she would now use Irish words, vulgar words, words expressive of physical facts; airing her natural wit in Irish as if she had found a new weapon), became a bitter strain on Arabella's mind, and she was compelled to make Cornelia take her share of the burden. "But I cannot conceal--I cannot feign," said Cornelia. Arabella looked at her, whom she knew to be feigning, thinking, "Must I lose my high esteem of both my sisters?" Action alone saved her from denuding herself of this garment."

"That night!" was now the allusion to the scene at Besworth. It stood for all the misery they suffered; nor could they see that they had since made any of their own.

A letter with the Dover postmark brought exciting news.

A debate had been held on board the yacht. Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte gave their votes for the Devon coast. All were ready to be off, when Miss Ford received a telegram from shore, and said, "No; it must be Dover." Now, Mrs. Chump's villa was on the Devon coast. Lady Charlotte had talked to Wilfrid about her, and in the simplest language had said that she must be got on board. This was the reason of their deciding for Devon. But Georgiana stood for Dover; thither Merthyr said that he must go, whether he sailed or went on land. By a simultaneous reading of Georgiana's eyes, both Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte saw what was meant by her decision. Wilfrid at once affected to give way, half-protestingly. "And this," wrote Adela, "taught me that he was well pleased to abandon the West for the East. Lady C. favoured him with a look such as I could not have believed I should ever behold off the stage. There was a perfect dagger in her eyes. She fought against Dover: do men feel such compliments as these? They are the only true ones! She called the captain to witness that the wind was not for Dover she called the mate: she was really eloquent--yes, and handsome. I think Wilfrid thought so; or the reason for the opposition to Dover impressed my brother. I like him to be made to look foolish, for then he retrieves his character so dashing--always. His face was red, and he seemed undecided--was--until one taunt (it must have been a taunt), roused him up. They exchanged about six sentences--these two. I cannot remember them, unhappily; but for neatness and irony, never was anything so delicious heard. They came sharp as fencing-thrusts; and you could really believe, if you liked, that they were merely stating grounds for diverse opinions. Of course we sailed East, reaching Dover at ten; and the story is this--I knew Emilia was in it--Tracy Runningbrook had been stationed at Dover ten days by

Miss Ford, to intercept Emilia's father, if he should be found taking her to the Continent by that route. He waited, and met them at last on the Esplanade. He telegraphed to Miss Ford and a Signor Marini (we were wrong in not adding illustrious exiles to our list), while he invited them to dine, and detained them till the steamboat was starting; and Signor Marini came down by rail in a great hurry, and would not let Emilia be taken away. There was a quarrel; but, by some mysterious power that he possesses, this Signor Marini actually prevented the father from taking his child. Mysterious? But is anything more mysterious than Emilia's influence? I cannot forget what she was ere we trained her; and when I think that we seem to be all--all who come near her--connected with her fortunes! Explain it if you can. I know it is not her singing; I know it is not her looks. Captivations she does not deal in. Is it the magic of indifference? No; for then some one whom you know and who longs to kiss her bella Bella now would be dangerous! She is very little so, believe me!

"Emilia is (am I chronicling a princess?)--she is in London with Signor Marini; and Wilfrid has not seen her. Lady Charlotte managed to get the first boat full, and pushed off as he was about to descend. I pitied his poor trembling hand I went on shore in the second boat with him. We did not find the others for an hour, when we heard that Emilia had gone with Signor M. The next day, whom should we see but Mr. Pericles. "He (I have never seen him so civil)--he shook Wilfrid by the hand almost like an Englishman; and Wilfrid too, though he detests him, was civil to him, and even laughed when he said: 'Here it is dull; ze Continent for a week. I follow Philomela--ze nightingales.'" I was just going to say, 'Well then, you are running away from one.' Wilfrid pressed my fingers, and taught me to be still; and I did not know why till I reflected. Poor Mr. Pericles, seeing him friendly for the first time, rubbed his hands and it was most painful to me to see him shake hands with Wilfrid again and again, till he was on board the vessel chuckling. Wilfrid suddenly laughed with all his might--a cruel laugh; and Mr. Pericles tried to be as loud, but commenced coughing and tapping his chest, to explain that his intention was good. Bella! the passion of love must be judged by the person who inspires it; and I cannot even go so far as to feel pity for Wilfrid if he has stooped to the humiliation of--there is another way of regarding it, know. Let him be sincere and noble; but not his own victim. He scarcely holds up his head. We are now for Devon. Tracy is with us; and we never did a wiser thing than when we decided to patronize poets. If kept in order--under--they are the aristocracy of light conversationalists. Adieu! We speed for beautiful Devon. 'Me love to Pole, and I'm just,' etc. That will do this time; next, she will speak herself. That I should wish it! But the world is full of change, as I begin to learn. What will ensue?"

CHAPTER XXXV

When Mrs. Chump had turned her back on Brookfield, the feelings of the outcast woman were too deep for much distinctly acrimonious sensation

toward the ladies; but their letters soon lifted and revived her, until, being in a proper condition of prickly wrath, she sat down to compose a reply that should bury them under a mountain of shame. The point, however, was to transfer this mountain from her bosom, which laboured heavily beneath it, to their heads. Nothing could appear simpler. Here is the mountain; the heads are yonder. Accordingly, she prepared to commence. In a moment the difficulty yawned monstrous. For the mountain she felt was not a mountain of shame; yet that was the character of mountain she wished to cast. If she crushed them, her reputation as a forgiving soul might suffer: she could not pardon without seeing them abased. Thus shaken at starting, she found herself writing: "I know that your father has been hearing tales told of me, or he would have written, and he has not; so you shall never see me, not if you cried to me from the next world--the hot part."

Perusing this, it was too tremendous. "Oh, that's awful!" she said, getting her body a little away from the manuscript. "Ye couldn't curse much louder."

A fresh trial found her again rounding the fact that Mr. Pole had not written to her, and again flying into consequent angers. She had some dim conception of the sculpture of an offended Goddess. "I look so," she said before the glass "I'm above ye, and ye can't hurt me, and don't come anigh me: but here's a cheque--and may ye be haunted in your dreams!--but here's a cheque."

There was pain in her heart, for she had felt faith in Mr. Pole's affection for her. "And he said," she cried out in her lonely room--"he said, 'Martha, ye've onnly to come and be known to 'm, and then they'll take to the ideea.' And wasn't I a patient creature! And it's Pole that's turned--Pole!"

Varied with the frequent 'Oh!' and 'Augh!' these dramatic monologues occupied her time while the yacht was sailing for her Devon bay.

At last the thought struck her that she would send for Braintop--telegraphing that expenses would be paid, and that he must come with a good quill. "It goes faster," she whispered, suggesting the pent-up torrent, as it were, of blackest ink in her breast that there was to pour forth. A very cunning postscript to the telegram brought Braintop almost as quick to her as a return message. It was merely 'Little Belloni.'

She had forgotten this piece of artifice: but when she saw him start at the opening of the door, keeping a sheepish watch in that direction, "By'n-by," she said, with a nod; and shortly afterward unfolded her object in summoning him from his London labours: "A widde-woman ought to get marrud, Mr. Braintop, if onnly to have a husband to write letters for 'rr. Now, that's a task! But sup to-night, and mind ye say yer prayers before gettin' into bed; and no tryin' to flatter your Maker with your knees cuddled up to your chin under the counterpane. I do 't myself sometimes, and I know one prayer out of bed's worth ten of 'm in. Then I'll pray too; and mayhap we'll get permission and help to write our letter to-morrow, though Sunday, as ye say."

On the morrow Braintop's spirits were low, he having perceived that the 'Little Belloni' postscript had been but an Irish chuckle and nudge in his ribs, by way of sly insinuation or reminder. He looked out on the sea, and sighed to be under certain white sails visible in the offing. Mrs. Chump had received by the morning's post another letter from Arabella, enclosing one for Wilfrid. A dim sense of approaching mastery, and that she might soon be melted, combined with the continued silence of Mr. Pole to make her feel yet more spiteful. She displayed no commendable cunning when, to sharpen and fortify Braintop's wits, she plumped him at breakfast with all things tempting to the appetite of man. "I'll help ye to 'rr," she said from time to time, finding that no encouragement made him potent in speech.

Fronting the sea a desk was laid open. On it were the quills faithfully brought down by Braintop.

"Pole's own quills," she said, having fixed Braintop in this official seat, while she took hers at a station half-commanding the young clerk's face. The mighty breakfast had given Braintop intolerable desire to stretch his limbs by the sounding shore, and enjoy life in semi-oblivion. He cheered himself with the reflection that there was only one letter to write, so he remarked politely that he was at his hostess's disposal. Thereat Mrs. Chump questioned him closely whether Mr. Pole had spoken her name aloud; and whether he did it somehow, now and then by accident, and whether he had looked worse of late. Braintop answered the latter question first, assuring her that Mr. Pole was improving.

"Then there's no marcy from me," said Mrs. Chump; and immediately discharged an exclamatory narrative of her recent troubles, and the breach between herself and Brookfield, at Braintop's ears. This done, she told him that he was there to write the reply to the letters of the ladies, in her name. "Begin," she said. "Ye've got head enough to guess my feelin's. I'm invited, and I won't go--till I'm fetched. But don't say that. That's their guess ye know. 'And I don't care for ye enough to be angry at all, but it's pity I feel at a parcel of fine garls'--so on, Mr. Braintop."

The perplexities of epistolary correspondence were assuming the like proportions to the recruited secretary that they had worn to Mrs. Chump. Steadily watching his countenance; she jogged him thus: "As if ye couldn't help ut, ye know, ye begin. Jest like wakin' in the mornin' after dancin' all night. Ye make the garls seem to hear me seemin' to say--Oooo! I was so comfortable before your disturbin' me with your horrud voices. Ye understand, Mr. Braintop? 'I'm in bed, and you're a cold bath.' Begin like that, ye know. 'Here's clover, and you're nettles.' D'ye see? Here from my glass o' good Porrt to your tumbler of horrud acud vin'gar.' Bless the boy! he don't begin."

She stamped her foot. Braintop, in desperation, made a plunge at the paper. Looking over his shoulder in a delighted eagerness, she suddenly gave it a scornful push. "'Dear!'" she exclaimed. "You're dearin' them, absurd young man I'm not the woman to I dear 'em--not at the starrt! I'm

indignant--I'm hurrt. I come round to the 'dear' by-and-by, after I have whipped each of the proud sluts, and their brother Mr. Wilfrid, just as if by accident. Ye'll promus to forget avery secret I tell ye; but our way is always to pretend to believe the men can't help themselves. So the men look like fools, ye sly laughin' fella! and the women horrud scheming spiders. Now, away, with ye, and no dearin'."

The Sunday-bells sounded mockingly in Braintop's ears, appearing to ask him how he liked his holiday; and the white sails on the horizon line have seldom taunted prisoner more. He spread out another sheet of notepaper and wrote "My," and there he stopped.

Mrs. Chump was again at his elbow. "But, they aren't 'my,' she remonstrated, "when I've nothin' to do with 'm. And a 'my' has a 'dear' to 't always. Ye're not awake, Mr. Braintop; try again."

"Shall I begin formally, "Mrs. Chump presents her compliments,' ma'am?" said Braintop stiffly.

"And I stick myself up on a post, and talk like a parrot, sir! Don't you see, I'm familiar, and I'm woundud? Go along; try again."

Braintop's next effort was, "Ladies."

"But they don't behave to me like ladus; and it's against my conscience to call 'em!" said Mrs. Chump, with resolution.

Braintop wrote down "Women," in the very irony of disgust.

"And avery one of 'em unmarred garls!" exclaimed Mrs. Chump, throwing up her hands. "Mr. Braintop! Mr. Braintop! ye're next to an ejut!"

Braintop threw down the pen. "I really do not know what to say," he remarked, rising in distress.

"I naver had such a desire to shake anny man in all my life," said Mrs. Chump, dropping to her chair.

The posture of affairs was chimed to by the monotonous bell. After listening to it for some minutes, Mrs. Chump was struck with a notion that Braintop's sinfulness in working on a Sunday, or else the shortness of the prayer he had put up to gain absolution, was the cause of his lack of ready wit. Hearing that he had gloves, she told him to go to church, listen devoutly, and return to luncheon. Braintop departed, with a sensation of relief in the anticipation of a sermon, quite new to him. When he next made his bow to his hostess, he was greeted by a pleasant sparkle of refreshments. Mrs. Chump herself primed him with Sherry, thinking in the cunning of her heart that it might haply help the inspiration derived from his devotional exercise. After this, pen and paper were again produced.

"Well, now, Mr. Braintop, and what have ye thought of?" said Mrs. Chump, encouragingly.

Braintop thought rapidly over what he might possibly have been thinking of; and having put a file of ideas into the past, said, with the air of a man who delicately suggests a subtlety: "It has struck me, ma'am, that perhaps 'Girls' might begin very well. To be sure 'Dear girls' is the best, if you would consent to it."

"Take another glass of wine, Mr. Braintop," Mrs. Chump nodded. "Ye're nearer to ut now. 'Garls' is what they are, at all events. But don't you see, my dear your man, it isn't the real thing we want so much as a sort of a proud beginnin', shorrt of slappin' their faces. Think of dinner. Furrst soup; that prepares ye for what's comin'. Then fish, which is on the road to meat, dye see?--we pepper 'em. Then joint, Mr. Braintop--out we burrst: (Oh, and what ins'lent hussies ye've been to me, and yell naver see annything of me but my back!) Then the sweets,--But I'm a forgivin' woman, and a Christian in the bargain, ye ungrateful minxes; and if ye really are sorrowful! And there, Mr. Braintop, ye've got it all laid out as flat as a pancake."

Mrs. Chump gave the motion of a lightning scrawl of the pen. Braintop looked at the paper, which now appeared to recede from his eyes, and flourish like a descending kite. The nature of the task he had undertaken became mountainous in his imagination, till at last he fixed his forehead in his thumbs and fingers, and resolutely counted a number of meaningless words one hundred times. As this was the attitude of a severe student, Mrs. Chump remained in expectation. Aware of the fearful confidence he had excited in her, Braintop fell upon a fresh hundred, with variations.

"The truth is, I think better in church," he said, disclosing at last as ingenuous a face as he could assume. He scarcely ventured to hope for a second dismissal.

To his joy, Mrs. Chump responded with a sigh: "There, go again; and the Lord forgive ye for directin' your mind to temporal matters when ye're there! It's none of my doin', remember that; and don't be tryin' to make me a partic'pator in your wickudness."

"This is so difficult, ma'am, because you won't begin with Dear," he observed snappishly, as he was retiring.

"Of coorse it's difficult if it bothers me," retorted Mrs. Chump, divided between that view of the case and contempt of Braintop for being on her own level.

"Do you see, we are not to say 'Dear' anything, or 'Ladies,' or--in short, really, if you come to think, ma'am!"

"Is that a woman's business, Mr. Braintop?" said Mrs. Chump, as from a height; and the youth retired in humiliation.

Braintop was not destitute of the ambition of his time of life, and yearned to be what he believed himself--something better than a clerk.

If he had put forth no effort to compose Mrs. Chump's letter, he would not have felt that he was the partner of her stupidity; but he had thoughtlessly attempted the impossible thing, and now, contemplating his utter failure, he was in so low a state of mind that he would have taken pen and written himself down, with ordinary honesty, good-for-nothing. He returned to his task, and found the dinner spread. Mrs. Chump gave him champagne, and drank to him, requesting him to challenge her. "We won't be beaten," she said; and at least they dined.

The 'we' smote Braintop's swelling vanity. It signified an alliance, and that they were yoked to a common difficulty.

"Oh! let's finish it and have it over," he remarked, with a complacent roll in his chair.

"Naver stop a good impulse," said Mrs. Chump, herself removing the lamp to light him.

Braintop sat in the chair of torture, and wrote flowingly, while his taskmistress looked over him, "Ladies of Brookfield." He read it out: "Ladies of Brookfield."

"I'll be vary happy to represent ye at the forthcomin' 'lection," Mrs. Chump gave a continuation in his tone.

"Why, won't that do, ma'am?" Braintop asked in wonderment.

"Cap'tal for a circular, Mr. Braintop. And ye'll allow me to say that I don't think ye've been to church at all."

This accusation containing a partial truth (that is, true if it referred to the afternoon, but not as to the morning), it was necessary for Braintop's self-vindication that he should feel angry. The two were very soon recriminating, much in the manner of boy and girl shut up on a sunny afternoon; after which they, in like manner, made it up--the fact of both having a habit of consulting the glass, and the accident of their doing it at the same time, causing an encounter of glances there that could hardly fail to be succeeded by some affability. For a last effort, Mrs. Chump laid before Braintop a prospect of advancement in his office, if he so contrived as to write a letter that should land her in Brookfield among a scourged, repentant, and forgiven people. That he might understand the position, she went far modestly to reveal her weakness for Mr. Pole. She even consented to let 'Ladies' be the opening apostrophe, provided the word 'Young' went before it: "They'll feel that sting," she said. Braintop stipulated that she should not look till the letter was done; and, observing his pen travelling the lines in quick succession, Mrs. Chump became inspired by a great but uneasy hope. She was only to be restrained from peeping, by Braintop's petulant "Pray, ma'am!" which sent her bouncing back to her chair, with a face upon one occasion too solemn for Braintop's gravity. He had written himself into excellent spirits; and happening to look up as Mrs. Chump retreated from his shoulder, the woman's comic reverence for his occupation--the prim movement of her lips while she repeated mutely the words she supposed he

might be penning--touched him to laughter. At once Mrs. Chump seized on the paper. "Young ladus," she read aloud, "yours of the 2nd, the 14th, and 21st ulto. The 'ffection I bear to your onnly remaining parent."

Her enunciation waxed slower and significantly staccato toward a pause. The composition might undoubtedly have issued from a merchant's office, and would have done no discredit to the establishment. When the pause came, Braintop, half for an opinion, and to encourage progress, said, "Yes, ma'am;" and with "There, sir!" Mrs. Chump crumpled up the paper and flung it at him. "And there, sir!" she tossed a pen. Hearing Braintop mutter, "Lady-like behaviour," Mrs. Chump came out in a fiery bloom. "Ye detestable young fella! Oh, ye young deceiver! Ye cann't do the work of a man! Oh! and here's another woman dis'pointed, and when she thought she'd got a man to write her letters!"

Braintop rose and retorted.

"Ye're false, Mr. Braintop--ye're offensuv, sir!" said Mrs. Chump; and Braintop instantly retired upon an expressive bow. When he was out of the room, Mrs. Chump appealed spitefully to an audience of chairs; but when she heard the front-door shut with a report, she jumped up in terror, crying incredulously, "Is the young man pos'tively one? Oh! and me alone in a rage!--the contemplated horrors of which position set her shouting vociferously. "Mr. Braintop!" sounded over the stairs, and "Mr. Braintop!" into the street. The maid brought Mrs. Chump her bonnet. Night had fallen; and nothing but the greatest anxiety to recover Braintop would have tempted her from her house. She made half-a-dozen steps, and then stopped to mutter, "Oh! if ye'd onnly come, I'd forgive ye--indeed I would!"

"Well, here I am," was instantaneously answered; her waist was clasped, and her forehead was kissed.

The madness of Braintop's libertinism petrified her.

"Ye've taken such a liberty, sir 'deed ye've forgotten yourself!"

While she was speaking; she grew confused with the thought that Braintop had mightily altered both his voice and shape. When on the doorstep he said; "Come out of the darkness or, upon my honour, I shall behave worse," she recognized Wilfrid, and understood by his yachting costume in what manner he had come. He gave her no time to think of her dignity or her wrath. "Lady Charlotte is with me. I sleep at the hotel; but you have no objection to receive her, have you?" This set her mind upon her best bedroom, her linen, and the fitness of her roof to receive a title. Then, in a partial fit of gratitude for the honour, and immense thankfulness at being spared the task of the letter, she fell on Wilfrid's shoulder, beginning to sob--till he, in alarm at his absurd position, suggested that Lady Charlotte awaited a welcome. Mrs. Chump immediately flew to her drawing-room and rang bells, appearing presently with a lamp, which she set on a garden-pillar. Together they stood by the lamp, a spectacle to ocean: but no Lady Charlotte drew near.

CHAPTER, XXXVI

Though Mrs. Chump and Wilfrid, as they stood by the light of the lamp, saw no one, they themselves were seen. Lady Charlotte had arranged to give him a moment in advance to make his peace. She had settled it with that air of practical sense which her title made graceful to him. "I will follow; and I dare say I can complete what you leave unfinished," she said. Her humorous sense of the aristocratic prestige was conveyed to him in a very taking smile. He scarcely understood why she should have planned so decisively to bring about a reconciliation between Mrs. Chump and his family; still, as it now chimed perfectly with his own views and wishes, he acquiesced in her scheme, giving her at the same time credit for more than common wisdom.

While Lady Charlotte lingered on the beach, she became aware of a figure that hung about her; as she was moving away, a voice of one she knew well enough asked to be directed to the house inhabited by Mrs. Chump. The lady was more startled than it pleased her to admit to herself.

"Don't you know me?" she said, bluntly.

"You!" went Emilia's voice.

"Why on earth are you here? What brings you here? Are you alone?" returned the lady.

Emilia did not answer.

"What extraordinary expedition are you making? But, tell me one thing: are you here of your own accord, or at somebody else's bidding?"

Impatient at the prospect of a continuation of silences, Lady Charlotte added, "Come with me."

Emilia seemed to be refusing.

"The appointment was made at that house, I know," said the lady; "but if you come with me, you will see him just as readily."

At this instant, the lamp was placed on the pillar, showing Wilfrid, in his sailor's hat and overcoat, beside the fluttering Irishwoman.

"Come, I must speak to you first," said Lady Charlotte hurriedly, thinking that she saw Emilia's hands stretch out. "Pray, don't go into attitudes. There he is, as you perceive; and I don't use witchcraft. Come with me; I will send for him. Haven't you learnt by this time that there's nothing he detests so much as a public display of the kind you're trying to provoke?"

Emilia half comprehended her.

"He changes when he's away from me," she said, low toneless voice.

"Less than I fancied," the lady thought.

Then she told Emilia that there was really no necessity for her to whine and be miserable; she was among friends, and so forth. The simplicity of her manner of speech found its way to Emilia's reason quicker than her arguments; and, in the belief that Wilfrid was speaking to Mrs. Chump on urgent private matters (she had great awe of the word 'business'), Emilia suffered herself to be led away. She uttered twice a little exclamation, as she looked back, that sounded exceedingly comical to Lady Charlotte's ears. They were the repressions of a poignant outcry. "Doggies make that noise," thought the lady, and succeeded in feeling contemptuous.

Wilfrid, when he found that Lady Charlotte was not coming, bestowed a remark upon her sex, and went indoors for his letter. He considered it politic not to read it there, Mrs. Chump having grown so friendly, and even motherly, that she might desire, out of pure affection, to share the contents. He put it by and talked gaily, till Mrs. Chump, partly to account for the defection of the lady, observed that she knew they had a quarrel. She was confirmed in this idea on a note being brought in to him, over which, before opening it, he frowned and flushed. Aware of the treachery of his countenance, he continued doing so after his eyes had taken in the words, though there was no special ground furnished by them for any such exhibition. Mrs. Chump immediately, with a gaze of mightiest tribulation, burst out: "I'll help ye; 'pon my honour, I'll help ye. Oh! the arr'stocracy! Oh, their pride! But if I say, my dear, when I die (which it's so horrud to think of), you'll have a share, and the biggest--this vary cottage, and a good parrt o' the Bank property--she'll come down at that. And if ye marry a lady of title, I'll be 's good as my word, I will."

Wilfrid pressed her fingers. "Can you ever believe that, I have called you a 'simmering pot of Emerald broth'?"

"My dear! anything that's lots o' words, Ye may call me," returned Mrs. Chump, "as long as it's no name. Ye won't call me a name, will ye? Lots o' words--it's onnly as if ye peppered me, and I sneeze, and that's all; but a name sticks to yer back like a bit o' pinned paper. Don't call me a name," and she wriggled pathetically.

"Yes," said Wilfrid, "I shall call you Pole."

"Oh! ye sweetest of young fellas!"

Mrs. Chump threw out her arms. She was on the point of kissing him, but he fenced with the open letter; and learning that she might read it, she gave a cry of joy.

"Dear W.!" she begins; and it's twice dear from a lady of title. She's just a multiplication-table for annything she says and touches. "Dear W.!" and the shorter time a single you the better. I'll have my joke,

Mr. Wilfrud. "Dear W.!" Bless her heart now! I seem to like her next best to the Queen already.--"I have another plan." Ye'd better keep to the old; but it's two paths, I suppose, to one point.--"Another plan. Come to me at the Dolphin, where I am alone." Oh, Lord! 'Alone,' with a line under it, Mr. Wilfrud! But there--the arr'stocracy needn't matter a bit."

"It's a very singular proceeding not the less," said Wilfrid. "Why didn't she go to the hotel where the others are, if she wouldn't come here?"

"But the arr'stocracy, Mr. Wilfrud! And alone--alone! d'ye see? which couldn't be among the others; becas of sweet whisperin'. 'Alone,'" Mrs. Chump read on; "'and to-morrow I'll pay my respects to what you call your simmering pot of Emerald broth.' Oh ye hussy! I'd say, if ye weren't a borrn lady. And signs ut all, 'Your faithful Charlotte.' Mr. Wilfrud, I'd give five pounds for this letter if I didn't know ye wouldn't part with it under fifty. And 'deed I am a simmerin' pot; for she'll be a relation, my dear! Go to 'r. I'll have your bed ready for ye here at the end of an hour; and to-morrow perhaps, if Lady Charlotte can spare me, I'll condescend to see Ad'la."

Wilfrid fanned her cheek with the note, and then dropped it on her neck and left the room. He was soon hurrying on his way to the Dolphin: midway he stopped. "There may be a bad shot in Bella's letter," he thought. Shop-lights were ahead: a very luminous chemist sent a green ray into the darkness. Wilfrid fixed himself under it. "Confoundedly appropriate for a man reading that his wife has run away from him!" he muttered, and hard quickly plunged into matter quite as absorbing. When he had finished it he shivered. Thus it ran:

"My beloved brother,

"I bring myself to plain words. Happy those who can trifle with human language! Papa has at last taken us into his confidence. He has not spoken distinctly; he did us the credit to see that it was not necessary. If in our abyss of grief we loss delicacy, what is left?--what!

"The step he desired to take, Which We Opposed, he has anticipated, And Must Consummate.

"Oh, Wilfrid! you see it, do you not? You comprehend me I am surf! I should have said 'had anticipated.' How to convey to you! (but it would be unjust to him--to ourselves--were I to say emphatically what I have not yet a right to think). What I have hinted above is, after all; nothing but Cornelia's conjecture, I wish I could not say confirmed by mine. We sat with Papa two hours before any idea of his meaning dawned upon us. He first scolded us. We both saw from this that more was to come.

"I hope there are not many in this world to whom the thought of honour being tied to money ever appears possible. If it is so there is wide suffering--deep, for it, must be silent. Cornelia suggests one comfort

for them that they will think less of poverty.

"Why was Brookfield ever bought? Our old peaceful City-life--the vacant Sundays!--my ears are haunted by their bells for Evening Service. I said 'There they go, the dowdy population of heaven!' I remember it now. It should be almost punishment enough to be certain that of all those people going to church, there cannot be one more miserable than we who stood at the old window ridiculing them. They at least do not feel that everything they hope for in human life is dependent upon one human will--the will of a mortal weather-vane! It is the case, and it must be conciliated. There is no half-measure--no choice. Feel that nothing you have ever dreamed of can be a disgrace if it is undergone to forestall what positively impends, and act immediately. I shall expect to see you in three days. She is to have the South-west bedroom (mine), for which she expressed a preference. Prepare every mind for the ceremony:--an old man's infatuation--money--we submit. It will take place in town. To have the Tinleys in the church! But this is certainly my experience, that misfortune makes me feel more and more superior to those whom I despise. I have even asked myself--was I so once? And, Apropos of Laura! We hear that their evenings are occupied in performing the scene at Besworth. They are still as distant as ever from Richford. Let me add that Albert Tinley requested my hand in marriage yesterday. I agree with Cornelia that this is the first palpable sign that we have sunk. Consequent upon the natural consequences came the interview with Papa.

"Dearest, dearest Wilfrid! can you, can I, can any one of us settle--that is, involve another life in doubt while doubt exists? Papa insists; his argument is, "Now, now, and no delay." I accuse nothing but his love. Excessive love is perilous for principle!

"You have understood me, I know, and forgiven me for writing so nakedly. I dare not re-peruse it. You must satisfy him that Lady C. has fixed a date. Adela is incomprehensible. One day she sees a friend in Lady C., and again it is an enemy. Papa's immediate state of health is not alarming. Above all things, do not let the girl come near him. Papa will send the cheque you required."

"When?" Wilfrid burst out upon Arabella's affectionate signature. "When will he send it? He doesn't do me the honour to mention the time. And this is his reply to a third application!"

The truth was that Wilfrid was in dire want of tangible cash simply to provision his yacht. The light kindled in him by this unsatisfied need made him keen to comprehend all that Arabella's attempt at plain writing designed to unfold.

"Good God, my father's the woman's trustee!" shaped itself in Wilfrid's brain.

And next: "If he marries her we may all be as poor as before." That is to say, "Honour may be saved without ruin being averted."

His immediate pressing necessity struck like a pulse through all the

chords of dismal conjecture. His heart flying about for comfort, dropped at Emilia's feet.

"Bella's right," he said, reverting to the green page in his hand; "we can't involve others in our scrape, whatever it may be."

He ceased on the spot to be at war with himself, as he had been for many a day; by which he was taught to imagine that he had achieved a mental indifference to misfortune. This lightened his spirit considerably. "So there's an end of that," he emphasized, as the resolve took form to tell Lady Charlotte flatly that his father was ruined, and that the son, therefore, renounced his particular hope and aspiration.

"She will say, in the most matter-of-fact way in the world, "Oh, very well, that quite alters the case," said Wilfrid aloud, with the smallest infusion of bitterness. Then he murmured, "Poor old governor!" and wondered whether Emilia would come to this place according to his desire. Love, that had lain crushed in him for the few recent days, sprang up and gave him the thought, "She may be here now;" but, his eyes not being satiated instantly with a sight of her, the possibility of such happiness faded out.

"Blessed little woman!" he cried openly, ashamed to translate in tenderer terms the soft fresh blossom of love that his fancy conjured forth at the recollection of her. He pictured to himself hopefully, moreover, that she would be shy when they met. A contradictory vision of her eyes lifted hungry for his first words, or the pressure of his arm displeased him slightly. It occurred to him that they would be characterized as a singular couple. To combat this he drew around him all the mysteries of sentiment that had issued from her voice and her eyes. She had made Earth lovely to him and heaven human. She--what a grief for ever that her origin should be what it was! For this reason--lovers must live like ordinary people outwardly; and say, ye Fates, how had she been educated to direct a gentlemen's household?

"I can't exist on potatoes," he pronounced humorously.

But when his thoughts began to dwell with fitting seriousness on the woman-of-the-world tone to be expected from Lady Charlotte, he folded the mental image of Emilia closely to his breast, and framed a misty idea of a little lighted cottage wherein she sat singing to herself while he was campaigning. "Two or three fellows--Lumley and Fredericks--shall see her," he thought. The rest of his brother officers were not even to know that he was married.

His yacht was lying in a strip of moonlight near Sir Twickenham's companion yawl. He gave one glance at it as at a history finished, and sent up his name to Lady Charlotte.

"Ah! you haven't brought the good old dame with you?" she said, rising to meet him. "I thought it better not to see her to-night."

He acquiesced, mentioning the lateness of the hour, and adding, "You are

alone?"

She stared, and let fall "Certainly," and then laughed. "I had forgotten your regard for the proprieties. I have just sent my maid for Georgiana; she will sleep here. I preferred to come here, because those people at the hotel tire me; and, besides, I said I should sleep at the villa, and I never go back to people who don't expect me."

Wilfrid looked about the room perplexed, and almost suspicious because of his unexplained perplexity. Her (as he deemed it--not much above the level of Mrs. Chump in that respect) aristocratic indifference to opinion and conventional social observances would have pleased him by daylight, but it fretted him now.

Lady Charlotte's maid came in to say that Miss Ford would join her. The maid was dismissed to her bed. "There's nothing to do there," said her mistress, as she was moving to the folding-doors. The window facing seaward was open. He went straight to it and closed it. Next, in an apparent distraction, he went to the folding-doors. He was about to press the handle, when Lady Charlotte's quiet remark, "My bedroom," brought him back to his seat, crying pardon.

"Have you had news?" she inquired. "You thought that a letter might be there. Bad, is it?"

"It is not good," he replied, briefly.

"I am sorry."

"That is--it tells me--" (Wilfrid disciplined his tongue) "that I--we are--a lieutenant on half-pay may say that he is ruined, I suppose, when his other supplies are cut off!..."

"I can excuse him for thinking it," said Lady Charlotte. She exhibited no sign of eagerness for his statement of facts.

Her outward composure and a hard animation of countenance (which, having ceased the talking within himself, he had now leisure to notice) humiliated him. The sting helped him to progress.

"I may try to doubt it as much as I please, to avoid seeing what must follow.... I may shut my eyes in the dark, but when the light stares me in the face...I give you my word that I have not been justified even in imagining such a catastrophe."

"The preamble is awful," said Lady Charlotte, rising from her recumbent posture.

"Pardon me; I have no right to intrude my feelings. I learn to-day, for the first time, that we are--are ruined."

She did not lift her eyebrows, or look fixedly; but without any change at all, said, "Is there no doubt about it?"

"None whatever." This was given emphatically. Resentment at the perfect realization of her anticipated worldly indifference lent him force.

"Ruined?" she said.

"Yes."

"You I'll be more so than you were a month ago. I mean, you tell me nothing new, I have known it."

Amid the crush and hurry in his brain, caused by this strange communication, pressed the necessity to vindicate his honour.

"I give you the word of a gentleman, Lady Charlotte, that I came to you the first moment it has been made known to me. I never suspected it before this day."

"Nothing would prompt me to disbelieve that." She reached him her hand.

"You have known it!" he broke from a short silence.

"Yes--never mind how. I could not allude to it. Of course I had to wait till you took the initiative."

The impulse to think the best of what we are on the point of renouncing is spontaneous. If at the same time this object shall exhibit itself in altogether new, undreamt-of, glorious colours, others besides a sentimentalist might waver, and be in some danger of clutching it a little tenderly ere it is cast off.

"My duty was to tell you the very instant it came to my knowledge," he said, fascinated in his heart by the display of greatness of mind which he now half divined to be approaching, and wished to avoid.

"Well, I suppose that is a duty between friends?" said she.

"Between friends! Shall we still--always be friends?"

"I think I have said more than once that it won't be my fault if we are not."

"Because, the greater and happier ambition to which I aspired..." This was what he designed to say, sentimentally propelled, by way of graceful exit, and what was almost printed on a scroll in his head for the tongue to read off fluently. He stopped at 'the greater,' beginning to stumble --to flounder; and fearing that he said less than was due as a compliment to the occasion, he said more.

By no means a quick reader of character, Lady Charlotte nevertheless perceived that the man who spoke in this fashion, after what she had confessed, must be sentimentally, if not actually, playing double.

Thus she came to his assistance: "Are you begging permission to break our engagement?"

"At least, whatever I do get I must beg for now!" He took refuge adroitly in a foolish reply, and it served him. That he had in all probability lost his chance by the method he had adopted, and by sentimentalizing at the wrong moment, was becoming evident, notwithstanding. In a sort of despair he attempted comfort by critically examining her features, and trying to suit them to one or other of the numerous models of Love that a young man carries about with him. Her eyes met his, and even as he was deciding against her on almost every point, the force of their frankness held his judgement in suspense.

"The world is rather harsh upon women in these cases," she said, turning her head a lithe, with a conscious droop of the eyelids. "I will act as if we had an equal burden between us. On my side, what you have to tell me does not alter me. I have known it.... You see that I am just the same to you. For your part, you are free, if you please. That is fair dealing, is it not?"

The gentleman's mechanical assent provoked the lady's smile.

But Wilfrid was torn between a profound admiration of her and the galling reflection that until she had named the engagement, none had virtually existed which diplomacy, aided by time and accident, might not have stopped.

"You must be aware that I am portionless," she continued. "I have--let me name the sum--a thousand pounds. It is some credit to me that I have had it five years and not spent it. Some men would think that a quality worth double the amount. Well, you will make up your mind to my bringing you no money;--I have a few jewels. En revanche, my habits are not expensive. I like a horse, but I can do without one. I like a large house, and can live in a small one. I like a French cook, and can dine comfortably off a single dish. Society is very much to my taste; I shall indulge it when I am whipped at home."

Wilfrid took her hand and pressed his lips to the fingers, keeping his face ponderingly down. He was again so divided that the effort to find himself absorbed all his thinking faculties.

At last he muttered: "A lieutenant's pay!"--expecting her to reply, "We can wait," as girls do that find it pleasant to be adored by curates, Then might follow a meditative pause--a short gaze at her, from which she could have the option of reflecting that to wait is not the privilege of those who have lived to acquire patience. The track he marked out was clever in a poor way; perhaps it was not positively unkind to instigate her to look at her age: but though he read character shrewdly, and knew hers pretty accurately, he was himself too much of a straw at the moment to be capable of leading-moves.

"We can make up our minds, without great difficulty, to regard the lieutenant's pay as nothing at all," was Lady Charlotte's answer. "You

will enter the Diplomatic Service. My interest alone could do that. If we are married, there would be plenty to see the necessity for pushing us. I don't know whether you could keep the lieutenancy; you might. I should not like you to quit the Army: an opening might come in it. There's the Indian Staff--the Persian Mission: they like soldiers for those Eastern posts. But we must take what we can get. We should, anyhow, live abroad, where in the matter of money society is more sensible. We should be able to choose our own, and advertize tea, brioche, and conversation in return for the delicacies of the season."

"But you, Charlotte--you could never live that life!" Wilfrid broke in, the contemplation of her plain sincerity diminishing him to himself. "It would drag you down too horribly!"

"Remorse at giving tea in return for dinners and balls?"

"Ah! there are other things to consider."

She blushed unwontedly.

Something, lighted by the blush, struck him as very feminine and noble.

"Then I may flatter myself that you love me?" he whispered.

"Do you not see?" she rejoined. "My project is nothing but a whim--a whim."

The divided man saw himself whole, if not happy in the ranks of Diplomacy, with a resolute, frank, faithful woman (a lady of title) loving him, to back him. Fortune shone ahead, and on the road he saw where his deficiencies would be filled up by her. She was firm and open --he irresolute and self-involved. Animal courage both possessed. Their differences were so extreme that they met where they differed. It struck him specially now that she would be like Day to his spirit in continued intercourse. Young as he was he had wisdom to know the right meaning of the word "helpmate." It was as if the head had dealt the heart a blow, saying, "See here the lady thou art to serve." But the heart was a surly rebel. Lady Charlotte was fully justified in retorting upon his last question: "I think I also should ask, do you love me? It is not absolutely imperative for the occasion or for the catastrophe, I merely ask for what is called information."

And yet, despite her flippancy, which was partly designed to relieve his embarrassment, her hand was moist and her eyes were singularly watchful.

"You who sneer at love!" He gave a musical murmur.

"Not at all. I think it a very useful part of the capital to begin the married business upon."

"You unsay your own words."

"Not 'absolutely imperative,' I think I said, if I remember rightly."

"But I take the other view, Charlotte."

"You imagine that there must be a little bit of love."

"There should be no marriage without it."

"On both sides?"

"At least, if not on both sides, one should bring such a love."

"Enough for two! So, then, we are not to examine your basket?"

Touched by the pretty thing herein implied, he squeezed her hand.

"This is the answer?" said she.

"Can you doubt me?"

She rose from her seat. "Oh! if you talk in that style, I really am tempted to say that I do. Are there men--women and women--men? My dear Wilfrid, have we changed parts to-night?"

His quickness in retrieving a false position, outwardly, came to his aid. He rose likewise, and, while perfecting the minor details of an easy attitude against the mantelpiece, said: "I am so constituted, Charlotte, that I can't talk of my feelings in a business tone; and I avoid that subject unless... You spoke of a basket just now. Well, I confess I can't bring mine into the market and bawl out that I have so many pounds' weight of the required material. Would a man go to the market at all if he had nothing to dispose of? In plain words--since my fault appears to be, according to your reading, in the opposite direction--should I be here if my sentiments could not reply eloquently to your question?"

This very common masterpiece of cunning from a man in a corner, which suggests with so persuasive an air that he has ruled his actions up to the very moment when he faces you, and had almost preconceived the present occasion, rather won Lady Charlotte; or it seemed to, or the scene had been too long for her vigilance.

"In the affirmative?" she whispered, coming nearer to him.

She knew that she had only to let her right shoulder slip under his left arm, and he would very soon proclaim himself her lover as ardently as might be wished. Why did she hesitate to touch the blood of the man? It was her fate never to have her great heart read aright. Wilfrid could not know that generosity rather than iciness restrained her from yielding that one unknown kiss which would have given the final spring to passion in his breast. He wanted the justification of his senses, and to run headlong blindly. Had she nothing of a woman's instinct?

"In the affirmative!" was his serene reply.

"That means "Yes." Her tone had become pleasantly soft.

"Yes, that means 'Yes,'" said he.

She shut her eyes, murmuring, "How happy are those who hear that they are loved!" and opening them, all her face being red, "Say it!" she pleaded. Her fingers fell upon his wrist. "I have this weakness, Wilfrid; I wish to hear you say it."

The flush of her face, and tremour of her fingers, told of an unimagined agitation hardly to be believed, though seen and felt. Yet, still some sign, some shade of a repulsion in her figure, kept him as far from her as any rigid rival might have stipulated for.

The interrogation to the attentive heavens was partially framed in his mind, "How can I tell this woman I love her, without..." without putting his arm about her waist, and demonstrating it satisfactorily to himself as well as to her? In other words, not so framed, "How, without that frenzy which shall make me forget whether it be so or not?"

He remained in his attitude, incapable of moving or speaking, but fancying, that possibly he was again to catch a glimpse of the vanished mountain nymph, sweet Liberty. Her woman's instinct warmed more and more, until, if she did not quite apprehend his condition, she at least understood that the pause was one preliminary to a man's feeling himself a fool.

"Dear Wilfrid," she whispered, "you think you are doubted. I want to be certain that you think you have met the right woman to help you, in me."

He passed through the loophole here indicated, and breathed.

"Yes, Charlotte, I am sure of that. If I could be only half as worthy! You are full of courage and unselfishness, and, I could swear, faithful as steel."

"Thank you--not dogs," she laughed. "I like steel. I hope to be a good sword in your hand, my knight--or shield, or whatever purpose you put me to."

She went on smiling, and seeming to draw closer to him and throw down defences.

"After all, Wilfrid, the task of loving your good piece of steel won't be less thoroughly accomplished because you find it difficult. Sir, I do not admit any protestation. Handsome faces, musical voices, sly manners, and methods that I choose not to employ, make the business easy to men."

"Who discover that the lady is not steel," said Wilfrid. "Need she, in any case, wear so much there?"

He pointed, flittingly as it were, with his little finger to the slope of her neck.

She turned her wrist, touching the spot: "Here? You have seen, then, that it is something worn?"

There followed a delicious interplay of eyes. Who would have thought that hers could be sweet and mean so much?

"It is something worn, then? And thrown aside for me only, Charlotte?"

"For him who loves me," she said.

"For me!"

"For him who loves me," she repeated.

"Then it is for me!"

She had moved back, showing a harder figure, or the "I love you, love you!" would have sounded with force. It came, though not so vehemently as might have been, to the appeal of a soft fixed look.

"Yes, I love you, Charlotte; you know that I do."

"You love me?"

"Yes."

"Say it."

"I love you! Dead, inanimate Charlotte, I love you!"

She threw out her hand as one would throw a bone to a dog.

"My living, breathing, noble Charlotte," he cried, a little bewitched, "I love you with all my heart!"

It surprised him that her features should be gradually expressing less delight.

"With all your heart?"

"Could I give you a part?"

"It is done, sometimes," she said, mock-sadly. Then, in her original voice: "Good. I never credited that story of you and the girl Emilia. I suppose what people say is a lie?"

Her eyes, in perfect accordance with the tone she had adopted, set a quiet watch on him.

"Who says it?" he thundered, just as she anticipated.

"It's not true?"

"Not true!--how can it be true?"

"You never loved Emilia Belloni?--don't love her now?--do not love her now? If you have ever said that you love Emilia Belloni, recant, and you are forgiven; and then go, for I think I hear Georgiana below. Quick! I am not acting. It's earnest. The word, if you please, as you are a gentleman. Tell me, because I have heard tales. I have been perplexed about you. I am sure you're a manly fellow, who would never have played tricks with a girl you were bound to protect; but you might have--pardon the slang--spooned,--who knows? You might have been in love with her downright. No harm, even if a trifle foolish; but in the present case, set my mind at rest. Quick! There are both my hands. Take them, press them, and speak."

The two hands were taken, but his voice was not so much at command. No image of Emilia rose in his mind to reproach him with the casting over of his heart's dear mistress, but a blind struggle went on. It seemed that he could do what he dared not utter. The folly of lips more loyal than the spirit touched his lively perception; and as the hot inward struggle, masked behind his softly-playing eyes, had reduced his personal consciousness so that if he spoke from his feeling there was a chance of his figuring feebly, he put on his ever-ready other self:--

"Categorically I reply: Have I loved Miss Emilia Belloni?--No. Do I?--No. Do I love Charlotte Chillingworth?--Yes, ten thousand times! And now let Britomart disarm."

He sought to get his reward by gentle muscular persuasion. Her arms alone yielded: and he judged from the angle of the neck, ultra-sharp though it was, that her averted face might be her form of exhibiting maidenly reluctance, feminine modesty. Suddenly the fingers in his grasp twisted, and not being at once released, she turned round to him.

"For God's sake, spare the girl!"

Emilia stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A knock at Merthyr's chamber called him out while he sat writing to Marini on the national business. He heard Georgiana's voice begging him to come to her quickly. When he saw her face the stain of tears was there.

"Anything the matter with Charlotte?" was his first question.

"No. But, come: I will tell you on the way. Do not look at me."

"No personal matter of any kind?"

"Oh, no! I can have none;" and she took his hand for a moment.

They passed into the dark windy street smelling of the sea.

"Emilia is here," said Georgiana. "I want you to persuade her--you will have influence with her. Oh, Merthyr! my darling brother! I thank God I love my brother with all my love! What a dreadful thing it is for a woman to love a man:"

"I suppose it is, while she has nothing else to do," said Merthyr. "How did she come?--why?"

"If you had seen Emilia to-night, you would have felt that the difference is absolute." Georgiana dealt first with the general case. "she came, I think, by some appointment."

"Also just as absolute between her and her sex," he rejoined, controlling himself, not to be less cool. "What has happened?"

Georgiana pointed to the hotel whither their steps were bent. "That is where Charlotte sleeps. Her going there was not a freak; she had an object. She wished to cure Emilia of her love for Mr. Wilfrid Pole. Emilia had come down to see him. Charlotte put her in an adjoining room to hear him say--what I presume they do say when the fit is on them! Was it not singular folly?"

It was a folly that Merthyr could not understand in his friend Charlotte. He said so, and then he gave a kindly sad exclamation of Emilia's name.

"You do pity her still!" cried Georgiana, her heart leaping to hear it expressed so simply.

"Why, what other feeling can I have?" said he unsuspectingly.

"No, dear Merthyr," she replied; and only by her tone he read the guilty little rejoicing in her heart, marvelling at jealousy that could twist so straight a stem as his sister's spirit. This had taught her, who knew nothing of love, that a man loving does not pity in such a ease."

"I hope you will find her here:" Georgiana hurried her steps. "Say anything to comfort her. I will have her with me, and try and teach her what self-control means, and how it is to be won. If ever she can act on the stage as she spoke to-night, she will be a great dramatic genius. She was transformed. She uses strange forcible expressions that one does not hear in every-day life. She crushed Charlotte as if she had taken her up in one hand, and without any display at all: no gesture, or spasm. I noticed, as they stood together, that there is such a contrast between animal courage and imaginative fire."

"Charlotte could meet a great occasion, I should think," said Merthyr; and, taking his sister by the elbow: "You speak as if you had observed very coolly. Did Emilia leave you so cold? Did she seem to speak from

head, not from heart?"

"No; she moved me--poor child! Only, how humiliating to hear her beg for love!--before us."

Merthyr smiled: "I thought it must be the woman's feeling that would interfere to stop a natural emotion. Is it true--or did I not see that certain eyes were red just now?"

"That was for him," said Georgiana, hastily. "I am sure that no man has stood in such a position as he did. To see a man made publicly ashamed, and bearing it. I have never had to endure so painful a sight."

"To stand between two women, claimed by both, like Solomon's babe! A man might as well at once have Solomon's judgement put into execution upon him. You wept for him! Do you know, Georgey, that charity of your sex, which makes you cry at any 'affecting situation,' must have been designed to compensate to us for the severities of Providence."

"No, Merthyr;" she arrested his raillery. "Do I ever cry? But I thought--if it had been my brother! and almost at the thought I felt the tears rush at my eyelids, as if the shame had been mine."

"The probability of its not being your brother seemed distant at the moment," said Merthyr, with his half-melancholy smile. "Tell me--I can conjure up the scene: but tell me whether you saw more passions than one in her face?"

"Emilia's? No. Her face reminded me of the sombre--that dull glow of a fire that you leave burning in the grate late on winter nights. Was that natural? It struck me that her dramatic instinct was as much alive as her passion."

"Had she been clumsy, would you not have been less suspicious of her? And if she had only shown the accustomed northern reticence, and merely looked all that she had to say 'preserved her dignity'--our womanly critic would have been completely satisfied."

"But, Merthyr, to parade her feelings, and then to go on appealing!"

"On the principle that she ought to be ashamed of them, she was wrong."

"If you had heard her utter abandonment!"

"I can believe that she did not blush."

"It seems to me to belong to those excesses that prompt--that are in themselves a species of suicide."

"Love is said to be the death of self."

"No; but I must use cant words, Merthyr; I do wish to see modesty. Yes, I know I must be right."

"There is very little of it to be had in a tropical storm."

"You admit, then, that this sort of love is a storm that passes?"

"It passes, I hope."

"But where is your defence of her now?"

"Have I defended her? I need not try. A man has deceived her, and she doesn't think it possible; and has said so, I presume. When she sees it, she will be quieter than most. She will not reproach him subsequently. Here is the hotel, and that must be Charlotte's room, if I may judge by the lights. What pranks will she always be playing! We seem to have brought new elements into the little town. Do you remember Bergamo the rainy night the Austrian trooped out of Milan?--one light that was a thousand in the twinkling of an eye!"

Having arrived, he ran hastily up to the room, expecting to find the three; but Lady Charlotte was alone, sitting in her chair with knotted arms. "Ah, Merthyr!" she said, "I'm sorry you should have been disturbed. I perceive what Georgey's leaving the room meant. I suppose the hotel people are used to yachting-parties." And then, not seeing any friendly demonstration on his part, she folded her arms in another knot. Georgiana asked where Emilia was. Lady Charlotte replied that Emilia had gone, and then Wilfrid had followed her, one minute later, to get her into shelter somewhere. Or put penknives out of her way. "I am rather fatigued with a scene, Merthyr. I never had an idea before of what your Southern women were. One plays decidedly second to them while the fit lasts. Of course, you have a notion that I planned the whole of the absurd business. This is the case:--I found the girl on the beach: she follows him everywhere, which is bad for her reputation, because in this climate people suspect, positive reasons for that kind of female devotedness. So, to put an end to it--really for her own sake, quite as much as anything else--am I a monster of insensibility, Merthyr?--I made her swear an oath: one must be a point above wild animals to feel that to be binding, however! I made her swear to listen and remain there silent till I opened the door to set her at liberty. She consented--gave her word solemnly. I calculated that she might faint, and fixed her in an arm-chair. Was that cruel? Merthyr, you have called me Austrian more than once; but, upon my honour, I wanted her to get over her delusion comfortably. I thought she would have kept the oath, I confess; she looked up like a child when she was making it. You have heard the rest from Georgey. I must say the situation was rather hard on Wilfrid. If he blames me it will be excuseable, though what I did plan was to save him from a situation somewhat worse. So now you know the whole, Merthyr. Commence your lecture. Make me a martyr to the sorrows of Italy once more."

Merthyr took her wrist, feeling the quick pulse, and dropped it. She was effectually humbled by this direct method of dealing with her secret heart. After some commonplace remarks had passed, she herself urged him to send out men in search for Emilia. Before he went, she murmured a

soft "Forgive me." The pressure of her fingers was replied to, but the words were not spoken.

"There," she cried to Georgiana, "I have offended the only man for whose esteem I care one particle! Devote yourself to your friends!"

"How? 'devote yourself!'" murmured Georgiana, astonished.

"Do you think I should have got into this hobble if I hadn't wished to serve some one else? You must have seen that Merthyr has a sentimental sort of fondness--call it passion--for this girl. She's his Italy in the flesh. Is there a more civilized man in the world than Merthyr? So he becomes fascinated by a savage. We all play the game of opposites--or like to, and no woman in his class will ever catch him. I couldn't have believed that he was touched by a girl, but for two or three recent indications. You must have noticed that he has given up reading others, and he objected the other day to a responsible office which would have thrown him into her neighbourhood alone. These are unmistakeable signs in Merthyr, though he has never been in love, and doesn't understand his case a bit. Tell me, do you think it impossible?"

Georgiana answered dryly, "You have fallen into a fresh mistake."

Exactly. Then let me rescue you from a similar fatality, Georgey. If your eyes are bandaged now..."

"Are you going to be devoted to me also, Charlotte?"

"I believe I'm a miracle of devotion," said the lady, retiring into indifferent topics upon that phrase. She had at any rate partially covered the figure of ridicule presented to her feminine imagination by the aspect of her fair self exposed in public contention with one of her sex--and for a man. It was enough to make her pulse and her brain lively. On second thoughts, too, it had struck her that she might be serving Merthyr in disengaging Emilia; and undoubtedly she served Georgiana by giving her a warning. Through this silliness went the current of a clear mind, nevertheless. The lady's heart was justified in crying out: "What would I not abandon for my friend in his need?" Meantime her battle in her own behalf looked less pleasing by the light of new advantages. The question recurred: "Shall I care to win at all?" She had to force the idea of a violent love to excuse her proceedings. To get up any flame whatsoever, an occasional blast of jealousy had to be called for. Jealousy was a quality she could not admit as possible to her. So she acted on herself by an agent she repudiated, and there was no help for it. Had Wilfrid loved her the woman's heart was ready. It was ready with a trembling tenderness, softer and deeper than a girl's. For Charlotte would have felt: "With this love that I have craved for, you give me life." And she would have thanked him for both, exultingly, to feel: "I can repay you as no girl could do;" though she had none of the rage of love to give; as it was, she thought conscientiously that she could help him. She liked him: his peculiar suppleness of a growing mind, his shrouded sensibility, in conjunction with his reputation for an evidently quite reliable prompt courage, and the mask he wore, which was

to her transparent, pleased her and touched her fancy.

Nor was he so vain of his person as to make him seem like a boy to her. He affected maturity. He could pass a mirror on his right or his left without an abstracted look over either shoulder;--a poor example, but worth something to a judge of young men. Indeed, had she chosen from a crowd, the choice would have been one of his age. She was too set for an older man; but a youth aspiring to be older than he was; whose faults she saw and forgave; whose merits supplied two or three of her own deficiencies; whom her station might help to elevate; to whom she might come as a benefactress; feeling so while she accomplished her own desire;--such a youth was everything to her, as she awoke to discover after having played with him a season. If she lost him, what became of her? Even if she had rejoiced in a mother to plot and play,--to bait and snare for her, her time was slipping, and the choosers among her class were wary. Her spirit, besides, was high and elective. It was gradually stooping to nature, but would never have bowed to a fool, or, save under protest, to one who gave all. On Wilfrid she had fixed her mind: so, therefore, she bore the remembrance of the recent scene without much fretting at her burdens;--the more, that Wilfrid had in no way shamed her; and the more, that the heat of Emilia's love played round him and illumined him. This borrowing of the passion of another is not uncommon.

At daybreak Mrs. Chump was abroad. She had sat up for Wilfrid almost through the night. "Oh! the arr'stocracy!" she breathed exclamations, as she swept along the esplanade. "I'll be killed and murdered if I tell a word." Meeting Captain Gambier, she fell into a great agitation, and explained it as an anxiety she entertained for Wilfrid; when, becoming entangled in the mesh of questions, she told all she knew, and nearly as much as she suspected: which fatal step to retrieve, she entreated his secrecy. Adela was now seen fluttering hastily up the walk, fresh as a creature of the sea-wave. Before Mrs. Chump could summon her old wrath of yesterday, she was kissed, and to the arch interrogation as to what she had done with this young lady's brother, replied by telling the tale of the night again. Mrs. Chump was ostentatiously caressed into a more comfortable opinion of the world's morality, for the nonce. Invited by them to breakfast at the hotel, she hurried back to her villa for a flounced dress and a lace cap of some pretensions, while they paced the shore.

"See what may be said!" Adela's countenance changed as she muttered it. "Thought, would be enough," she added, shuddering.

"Yes; if one is off guard--careless," the captain assented, flowingly.

"Can one in earnest be other than careless? I shall walk on that line up to the end. Who makes me deviate is my enemy!"

The playful little person balanced herself to make one foot follow the other along a piece of washed grey rope on the shingle. Soon she had to stretch out her hand for help, and the captain at full arm's length conducted her to the final knot.

"Arrived safe!" she said, smiling.

"But not disengaged," he rejoined, in similar style.

"Please!" She doubled her elbow to give a little tug for her fingers.

"No." He pressed them tighter.

"Pray?"

"No."

"Must I speak to somebody else to get me released?"

"Would you?"

"Must I?"

"Thank heaven, he is not yet in existence!"

'Husband' being implied. Games of this sweet sort are warranted to carry little people as far as they may go swifter than any other invention of lively Satan.

The yachting party, including Mrs. Chump, were at the breakfast-table, and that dumb guest had done all the blushing for Lady Charlotte, when Wilfrid entered, neat, carefully brushed, and with ready answers, though his face could put on no fresh colours. To Mrs. Chump he bent, passing, and was pushed away and drawn back. "Your eyes!" she whispered.

"My--yeyes!" went Wilfrid, in schoolboy style; and she, who rarely laughed, was struck by his humorous skill, saying to Sir Twickenham, beside her: "He's as cunnin' as a lord!"

Sir Twickenham expressed his ignorance of lords having usurped priority in that department. Frightened by his portentous parliamentary phraseology, she remained tolerably demure till the sitting was over: now sidling in her heart to the sins of the great, whom anon she angrily reproached. Her principal idea was, that as the world was discovered to be so wicked, they were all in a boat going to perdition, and it would be as well to jump out immediately: but while so resolving, she hung upon Lady Charlotte's looks and little speeches, altogether seduced by so fresh and frank a sinner. If safe from temptation, here was the soul of a woman in great danger of corruption.

"Among the aristocracy," thought Mrs. Chump, "it's just the male that hangs his head, and the female struts and is sprightly." The contrast between Lady Charlotte and Wilfrid (who when he ceased to set outrageously, sat like a man stricken by a bolt), produced this reflection: and in spite of her disastrous vision of the fate of the boat they were in, Mrs. Chump owned to the intoxication of gliding smoothly--gliding on the rapids.

The breakfast was coming to an end, when Braintop's name was sent in to Mrs. Chump. She gave a cry of motherly compassion for Braintop, and began to relate the little deficiencies of his temper, while, as it were, simmering on her seat to go to him. Wilfrid sent out word for him to appear, which he did, unluckily for himself, even as Mrs. Chump wound up the public description of his character by remarking: "He's just the opposite of a lord, now, in everything." Braintop stood bowing like the most faithful confirmation of an opinion ever seen. He looked the victim of fatigue, in the bargain. A light broke on Mrs. Chump.

"I'll never forgive myself, ye poor gentle heart, to throw pens and pen-wipers at ye, that did your best, poor boy! What have ye been doin'? and why didn't ye return, and not go hoppin' about about all night like a young kangaroo, as they say they do? Have ye read the 'Arcana of Nature and Science,' ma'am?"

The Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle, thus abruptly addressed, observed that she had not, and was it an amusing book?

"Becas it'll open your mind," pursued Mrs. Chump; "and there, he's eatin'! and when a man takes to eatin', ye'll never have any fear about his abouts. And if ye read the 'Arcana of Nature and Science,' ma'am, ye'll first feel that ye've gone half mad. For it contains averything in the world; and ye'll read ut ten times all through, and not remember five lines runnin'! Oh, it's a dreadful book: and that's the book to read to your husband when he's got a fit o' the gout. He's got nothin' to do but swallow knolludge then. Now, Mr. Braintop, don't stop, but tell me as ye go on what ye did with yourself all night."

A slight hesitation in Braintop caused her to cross-examine him rigidly, suggesting that he might not dare to tell, and he, exercising some self-command, adopted narrative as the less ignominious form of confession. No one save Mrs. Chump listened to him until he mentioned the name Miss Belloni; and then it was curious to see the steadiness with which certain eyes, feigning abstraction, fixed in his direction. He had met Emilia on the outskirts of the town, and unable to persuade her to take shelter anywhere, had walked on with her in dead silence through the night, to the third station of the railway for London.

"Is this a mad person?" asked the Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle.

Adela shrugged. "A genius."

"Don't eat with the tips of your teeth, like a bird, Mr. Braintop, for no company minds your eatin'," cried Mrs. Chump, angrily and encouragingly; "and this little Belloni--my belief is that she came after you; and what have ye done with her?"

It was queerly worried out of Braintop, who was trying his best all the time to be obedient to Wilfrid's direct eye, that the two wanderers by night had lost themselves in lanes, refreshed themselves with purloined apples from the tree at dawn, obtained a draught of morning milk, with a handful of damsons apiece, and that nothing would persuade Emilia to turn

back from the route to London. Braintop bit daintily at his toast, unwilling to proceed under the discouraging expression of Wilfrid's face, and the meditative silence of two or three others. The discovery was forcibly extracted that Emilia had no money;--that all she had in her possession was sevenpence and a thimble; and that he, Braintop, had but a few shillings, which she would not accept.

"And what has become of her?" was asked.

Braintop stated that she had returned to London, and, blushing, confessed that he had given her his return ticket.

Georgiana here interposed to save him from the awful encomiums of Mrs. Chump, by desiring to know whether Emilia seemed unhappy or distressed. Braintop's spirited reply, "Not at all," was corrected to: "She did not cry;" and further modified: "That is, she called out sharply when I whistled an opera tune."

Lady Charlotte put a stop to the subject by rising pointedly. Watch in hand, she questioned the ladies as to their occupations, and told them what time they had to dispose of. Then Baynes, captain of the yacht, heard to be outside, was summoned in. He pronounced doubtfully about the weather, but admitted that there was plenty of wind, and if the ladies did not mind it a little fresh, he was sure he did not. Wind was favourable for the island head-quarters of the yacht. "We'll see who gets there first," she said to Wilfrid, and the company learnt that Wilfrid was going to other head-quarters on special business, whereupon there followed chatter and exclamations. Wilfrid quickly explained that his father's condition called him away imperiously. To Adela and Mrs. Chump, demanding peculiar personal explanations, he gave reassuring reasons separately, aside. Mrs. Chump understood that this was merely his excuse to get away, that he might see her safe to Brookfield. Adela only required a look and a gesture. Merthyr and Georgiana likewise spoke expected adieux, as did Sir Twickenham, who parted company in his own little yawl. Lady Charlotte, with her head over a map, and one hand arranging an eye-glass, hastily nodded them off, scarcely looking at them. She allowed herself to be diverted from this study for an instant by the unbecoming noise made by Adela for the loss of her brother; not that she objected to the noise particularly (it was modulated and delicate in tone), but that she could not understand it. Seeing Sir Twickenham, however, in a leave-taking attitude, she uttered an easy "Oh!" to herself, and diligently recommenced spying at ports and harbours, and following the walnut thumb of Baynes on the map. All seemed to be perfectly correct in the arrangements. To go to London was Wilfrid's thought; and the rest were almost as much occupied with their own ideas. Captain Gambier received their semi-ironical congratulations and condolences incident to the man who is left alone in the charge of sweet ladies; and the Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle remarked, that she supposed ten hours not a long period of time, though her responsibility was onerous.

"Lady Gosstre is at the island," said Lady Charlotte, to show where it might end, if she pleased. Within an hour the yacht was flying for the island with a full Western breeze: and Mrs. Chump and Wilfrid were

speeding to Brookfield, as the latter permitted her to imagine. Braintop realized the fruits of the sacrifice of his return ticket by facing Mrs. Chump in the train. Merthyr had telegraphed to Marini to meet Emilia at the station in London, and instructed Braintop to deliver a letter for her at Marini's house. To Marini he wrote: "Let Giulia guard her as no one but a woman can in such a case. By this time Giulia will know her value. There is dangerous stuff in her now, and my anxiety is very great. Have you seen what a nature it is? You have not alluded to her beyond answers to instructions, but her character cannot have escaped you. I am never mistaken in my estimates of Italian and Cymric blood. Singularly, too, she is part Welsh on the mother's side, to judge by the name. Leave her mind entirely free till it craves openly for some counteraction. Her Italy and her music will not do. Let them be. My fear is that you have seen too clearly what a daughter of Italy I have found for you. But whatever you put up now to distract her, you sacrifice. My good Marini! bear that in mind. It will be a disgust in her memory, and I wish her to love her country and her Art when she recovers. So we treat the disease, dear friend. Let your Italy have no sorrows for her ears till the storm within is tranquil. I am with you speedily."

Marini's reply said: "Among all the things we have to thank our Merthyr for, this treasure, if it is not the greatest he has given to us, makes us grateful the most. We met her at the station. Ah! there was an elbow when she gave her hand. She thought to be alone, and started, and hated, till Giulia smothered her face. And there was dead fire in the eyes, which is powder when you spring it. We go with her to her new lodging, and the track is lost. This is your wish? It is pitching new camps to avoid the enemy. But so! a man takes this disease and his common work at once of a woman--she is all the disease, till it is extinct, or she! What is this disease but a silly, a senseless waste? Giulia--woman that she is!--will not call it so. See her eyes doze and her voice go a soft buzz when she speaks it! As a dove of the woods! That it almost makes it sweet to me! Yes, a daughter of Italy! So Giulia has been:--will be? I know not! So will this your Emilia be in the time that comes to the young people, she has this, as you say, malady very strong--ma, ogni male ha la sua ricetta; I can say it of persons. Of nations to think my heart is as an infidel--very heavy. Ah! till I turn to you--who revive to the thought, as you were an army of deliverance. For you are Hope. You know not Despair. You are Hope. And you love as myself a mother whose son you are not! 'Oh!' is Giulia's cry, 'will our Italy reward him with a daughter?'--the noblest that we have. Yes, for she would be Italian always through you. We pray that you may not get old too soon, before she grows for you and is found, only that you may know in her our love. See! I am brought to talk this language. The woman is in me."

Merthyr said, as he read this, "I could wish no better." His feeling for Emilia waxed toward a self-avowal as she advanced to womanhood; and the last stage of it had struck among trembling strings in the inmost chambers of his heart. That last stage of it--her passionate claiming of Wilfrid before two women, one her rival--slept like a covered furnace within him. "Can you remember none of her words?" he said more than once to Georgiana, who replied: "I would try to give you an idea of what she

said, but I might as well try to paint lightning."

"My lover?" suggested Merthyr.

"Oh, yes; that she said."

"It sounded oddly to your ears?"

"Very, indeed."

"What more?"

"--did she say, do you mean?"

"Is my poor sister ashamed to repeat it?"

"I would repeat anything that would give you pleasure to hear."

"Sometimes pain, you know, is sweet."

Little by little, and with a contest at each step, Georgiana coasted the conviction that her undivided reign was over. Then she judged Emilia by human nature's hardest standard: the measure of the qualities brought as usurper and successor. Unconsciously she placed herself in the seat of one who had fulfilled all the great things demanded of a woman for Merthyr, and it seemed to her that Emilia exercised some fatal fascination, girl though she was, to hurl her from that happy sovereignty.

But Emilia's worst crime before the arraigning lady was that Wilfrid had cast her off. Female justice, therefore, said: "You must be unworthy of my brother;" and female delicacy thought: "You have been soiled by a previous history." She had pitied Wilfrid: now she held him partially blameless: and while love was throbbing in many pulses all round her. The man she had seen besieged by passionate love, touched her cold imagination with a hue of fire, as Winter dawn lies on a frosty field. She almost conceived what this other, not sisterly, love might be; though not as its victim, by any means. She became, as she had never before been, spiritually tormented and restless. The thought framed itself that Charlotte and Wilfrid were not, by any law of selection, to match. What mattered it? Simply that it in some way seemed to increase the merits of one of the two. The task, moreover, of avoiding to tease her brother was made easier to her by flying to this new refuge of mysterious reflection. At times she poured back the whole flood of her heart upon Merthyr, and then in alarm at the host of little passions that grew cravingly alive in her, she turned her thoughts to Wilfrid again; and so, till they turned wittingly to him. That this host of little passions will invariably surround a false great one, she learnt by degrees, by having to quell them and rise out of them. She knew that now she occasionally forced her passion for Merthyr; but what nothing could teach her was, that she did so to eject another's image. On the contrary, her confession would have been: "Voluntarily I dwell upon that other, that my love for Merthyr may avoid excess." To such a state of clearness much self-questioning

brought her: but her blood was as yet unwarmed; and that is a condition fostering self-deception as much as when it rages.

Madame Marini wrote to ask whether Emilia might receive the visits of a Sir Purcell Barrett, whom they had met, and whom Emilia called her friend; adding: "The other gentleman has called at our old lodgings three times. The last time our landlady says, he wept. Is it an Englishman, really?"

Merthyr laughed at this, remarking: "Charlotte is not so vigilant, after all."

"He wept." Georgiana thought and remembered the cold self-command that his face had shown when Emilia claimed him, and his sole reply was, "I am engaged to this lady," designating Lady Charlotte. Now, too, some of Emilia's phrases took life in her memory. She studied them, thinking over them, as if a voice of nature had spoken. Less and less it seemed to her that a woman need feel shame to utter them. She interpreted this as her growth of charity for a girl so violently stricken with love. "In such a case, the more she says the more is she to be excused; for nothing but a frenzy of passion could move her to speak so," thought Georgiana. Accepting the words, and sanctioning the passion, the person of him who had inspired it stood magnified in its light. She believed that if he had played with the girl, he repented, and the idea of a man shedding tears burnt to her heart.

Merthyr and Georgiana remained in Devonshire till a letter from Madame Marini one morning told them that Emilia had disappeared.

"You delayed too long to go to her, Merthyr," said his sister, astonishing him. "I understand why; but you may trust to time and scorn chance too much. Let us go now and find her, if it is not too late."

Marini met them at the station in London, and they heard that Wilfrid had discovered Marini's new abode, and had called there that morning. "I had my eye on him. It was not a piece of love-play," said Marini: "and today she should have seen my Chief, which would have cured her of his pestilence of a love, to give her sublime thoughts. Do you love her, Miss Ford? Aha! it will be Christian names in Italy again."

"I like her very much," said Georgiana; "but I confess it mystifies me to see you all so excited about her. It must be some attraction possessed by her--what, I cannot say. I like her, certainly."

"Figlia mia! she is an element--she is fire!" said Marini. "My sought, when our Mertyr brought her, was, it is Italy he sees in her face--her voice--name--anything! And a day passed, and I could not lose her for my own sake, and felt a somesing, too! She is half man."

"A singular reason for an attraction." Georgiana smiled.

"She is not," Marini put out his fingers like claws to explain, while his eyelashes met over his eyes--"she is not what man has made of your sex;

and she is brave of heart."

"Can you possibly tell what such a child can be?" questioned Georgiana, almost irritably.

Marini did not reply to her.

"A face to find a home in!--eh, Mertyr?"

"Let's discover where that face has found a home," said Merthyr. "She is a very plain and unpretending person, if people will not insist upon her being more. This morbid admiration of heroines puts a trifle too much weight upon their shoulders, does it not?"

Georgiana knew that to call Emilia 'child' was to wound the most sensitive nerve in Merthyr's system, if he loved her, and she had determined to try harshly whether he did. Nevertheless, though the expression succeeded, and was designedly cruel, she could not forgive the insincerity of his last speech; craving in truth for confidence as her smallest claim on him now. So, at all the consultations, she acquiesced in any scheme that was proposed; the advertizings and the use of detectives; the communication with Emilia's mother and father; and the callings at suburban concert-rooms. Sir Purcell Barrett frequently called to assist in the discovery. At first he led them to suspect Mr. Pericles; but a trusty Italian playing spy upon that gentleman soon cleared him, and they were more in the dark than ever. It was only when at last Georgiana heard Merthyr, the picture of polished self-possession, giving way to a burst of disappointment in the room before them all: "Are we sure that she lives?" he cried:--then Georgiana, looking at the firelight over her joined fingers, said:--

"But, have you forgotten the serviceable brigade you have in your organ-boys, Marini? If Emilia sees one, be sure she will speak to him."

"Have I not said she is a General?" Marini pointed at Georgiana with a gleam of his dark eyes, and Merthyr squeezed his sister's hand, thanking her; by which he gave her one whole night of remorse, because she had not spoken earlier.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"My voice! I have my voice!"

Emilia had cried it out to herself almost aloud, on the journey from Devon to London. The landscape slipping under her eyes, with flashing grey pools and light silver freshets, little glades, little copses, farms, and meadows rounding away to spires of village churches under blue hills, would not let her sink, heavy as was the spirit within her, and dead to everything as she desired to be. Here, a great strange old oak spread out its arms and seemed to hold the hurrying train a minute. When

gone by, Emilia thought of it as a friend, and that there, there, was the shelter and thick darkness she had hoped she might be flying to. Or the reach of a stream was seen, and in the middle of it one fair group of clouds, showing distance beyond distance in colour. Emilia shut her sight, and tried painfully to believe that there were no distances for her. This was an easy task when the train stopped. It was surprising to her then why the people moved. The whistle of the engine and rush of the scenery set her imagination anew upon the horror of being motionless.

"My voice! I have my voice!" The exclamation recurred at intervals, as a quick fear, that bubbled up from blind sensation, of her being utterly abandoned, and a stray thing carrying no light, startled her. Darkness she still had her desire for; but not to be dark in the darkness. She looked back on the recent night as a lake of fire, through which she had plunged; and of all the faculties about her, memory had suffered most, so that it could recall no images of what had happened, but lay against its black corner a shuddering bundle of nerves. The varying fields and woods and waters offering themselves to her in the swiftness, were as wine dashed to her lips, which could not be dead to it. The wish to be of some worth began a painful quickening movement. At first she could have sobbed with the keen anguish that instantaneously beset her. For--"If I am of worth, who looks on me?" was her outcry, and the darkness she had previously coveted fell with the strength of a mace on her forehead; but the creature's heart struggled further, and by-and-by in despite of her the pulses sprang a clear outlook on hope. It struck through her like the first throb of a sword-cut. She tried to blind herself to it; the face of hope was hateful.

This conflict of the baffled spirit of youth with its forceful flood of being continued until it seemed that Emilia was lifted through the fiery circles into daylight; her last cry being as her first: "I have my voice!"

Of that which her voice was to achieve for her she never thought. She had no thought of value, but only an eagerness to feel herself possessor of something. Wilfrid had appeared to her to have taken all from her, until the recollection of her voice made her breathe suddenly quick and deep, as one recovering the taste of life.

Despair, I have said before, is a wilful business, common to corrupt blood, and to weak woeful minds: native to the sentimentalist of the better order. The only touch of it that came to Emilia was when she attempted to penetrate to Wilfrid's reason for calling her down to Devon that he might renounce and abandon her. She wanted a reason to make him in harmony with his acts, and she could get none. This made the world look black to her. But, "I have my voice!" she said, exhausted by the passion of the night, tearless, and only sensible to pain when the keen swift wind, and the flying squares of field and meadow prompted her nature mysteriously to press for healthy action.

A man opposite to her ventured a remark: "We're going at a pretty good pace now, miss."

She turned her eyes to him, and the sense of speed was reduced in her at once, she could not comprehend how. Remembering presently that she had not answered him, she said: "It is because you are going home, perhaps, that you think it fast."

"No, miss," he replied, "I'm going to market. They can't put on steam too stiff for me when I'm bound on business."

Emilia found it impossible to fathom the sensations of the man, and their common desire for speed bewildered her more. She was relieved when the train was lightened of him. Soon the skirts of red vapour were visible, and when the guard took poor Braintop's return-ticket from her petulant hand, all of the journey that she bore in mind was the sight of a butcher-boy in blue, with a red cap, mounted on a white horse, who rode gallantly along a broad highroad, and for whom she had struck out some tune to suit the measure of his gallop.

She accepted her capture by the Marinis more calmly than Merthyr had been led to suppose. The butcher-boy's gallop kept her senses in motion for many hours, and that reckless equestrian embodied the idea of the vivifying pace from which she had dropped. He went slower and slower. By degrees the tune grew dull, and jarred; and then Emilia looked out on the cold grey skies of our autumn, the rain and the fogs, and roaring London filled her ears. So had ended a dream, she thought. She would stand at the window listening to street-organs, whose hideous discord and clippings and drawls did not madden her, and whose suggestion of a lovely tune rolled out no golden land to her. That treasure of her voice, to which no one in the house made allusion, became indeed a buried treasure.

In the South-western suburb where the Marinis lived, plots of foliage were to be seen, and there were lanes not so black but that they showed the hues of the season. These led to the parks and to noble gardens. Emilia daily went out to keep the dying colours of the year in view, and walked to get among the trees, where, with Madame attendant on her, she sat counting the leaves as each one curved, and slid, and spun to earth, or on a gust of air hosts went aloft; but it always ended in their coming down; Emilia verified that fact repeatedly. However high they flew, the ground awaited them. Madame entertained her with talk of Italy, and Tuscan wine, and Lombard bread, and Turin chocolate. Marini never alluded to his sufferings for the loss of these cruelly interdicted dainties, never! But Madame knew how his exile affected him. And in England the sums one paid for everything! "One fancies one pays for breath," said Madame, shivering.

One day the ex-organist of Hillford Church passed before them. Emilia let him go. The day following he passed again, but turned at the end of the alley and simulated astonishment at the appearance of Emilia, as he neared her. They shook hands and talked, while Madame zealously eyed any chance person promenading the neighbourhood. She wrote for instructions concerning this gentleman calling himself Sir Purcell Barrett, and receiving them, she permitted Emilia to invite him to their house. "He is an Englishman under a rope, ready for heaven," Madame described him to her husband, who, though more at heart with Englishmen, could not but

admit that this one wore a look that appeared as a prognostication of sadness.

Sir Purcell informed Emilia of his accession to title; and in reply to her "Are you not glad?" smiled and said that a mockery could scarcely make him glad; indicating nevertheless how feeble the note of poverty was in his grand scale of sorrow. He came to the house and met them in the gardens frequently. With some perversity he would analyze to herself Emilia's spirit of hope, partly perhaps for the sake of probing to what sort of thing it might be in its nature and defences; and, as against an accomplished disputant she made but a poor battle, he injured what was precious to her without himself gaining any good whatever.

"Why, what do you look forward to?" she said wondering, at the end of one of their arguments, as he courteously termed this play of logical foils with a baby.

"Death," answered the grave gentleman, striding on.

Emilia pitied him, thinking: "I might feel as he does, if I had not my voice." Seeing that calamity very remote, she added: "I should!"

She knew of his position toward Cornelia: that is, she knew as much as he did: for the want of a woman's heart over which to simmer his troubles was urgent within him and Emilia's, though it lacked experience, was a woman's regarding love. And moreover, she did not weep, but practically suggested his favourable chances, which it was a sad satisfaction to him to prove baseless, and to knock utterly over. The grief in which the soul of a human creature is persistently seeking (since it cannot be thrown off) to clothe itself comfortably, finds in tears an irritating expression of sympathy. Hints of a brighter future are its nourishment. Such embryos are not tenacious of existence, and when destroyed they are succulent food for a space to the moody grief I am describing.

The melancholy gentleman did Emilia this good, that, never appearing to imagine others to know misery save himself, he gave her full occupation apart from the workings of her own mind. As to her case, he might have offered the excuse that she really had nothing of the aspect of a lovesick young lady, and was not a bit sea-green to view, or lamentable in tone. He was sufficiently humane to have felt for anyone suffering, and the proof of it is, that the only creature he saw under such an influence he pitied so deplorably, as to make melancholy a habit with him. He fretted her because he would do nothing, and this spectacle of a lover beloved, but consenting to be mystified, consenting paralyzed:-- of a lover beloved!--

"Does she love you?" said Emilia, beseechingly.

"If the truth is in her, she does," he returned.

"She has told you she loves you?--that she loves no one else?"

"Of this I am certain."

"Then, why are you downcast? my goodness! I would take her by the hand 'Woman; do you know yourself? you belong to me!--I would say that; and never let go her hand. That would decide everything. She must come to you then, or you know what it is that means to separate you. My goodness! I see it so plain!"

But he declined to look thus low, and stood pitifully smiling:--This spectacle, together with some subtle spur from the talk of love, roused Emilia from her lethargy. The warmth of a new desire struck around her heart. The old belief in her power over Wilfrid joined to a distinct admission that she had for the moment lost him; and she said, "Yes; now, as I am now, he can abandon me:" but how if he should see her and hear her in that hushed hour when she was to stand as a star before men? Emilia flushed and trembled. She lived vividly though her far-projected sensations, until truly pity for Wilfrid was active in her bosom, she feeling how he would yearn for her. The vengeance seemed to her so keen that pity could not fail to come. Thus, to her contemplation, their positions became reversed: it was Wilfrid now who stood in the darkness, unselected. Her fiery fancy, unchained from the despotic heart, illumined her under the golden future.

"Come to us this evening, I will sing to you," she said, and the 'Englishman under a rope' bowed assentingly.

"Sad songs, if you like," she added.

"I have always thought sadness more musical than mirth," said he.
"Surely there is more grace in sadness!"

Poetry, sculpture, and songs, and all the Arts, were brought forward in mournful array to demonstrate the truth of his theory.

When Emilia understood him, she cited dogs and cats, and birds, and all things of nature that rejoiced and revelled, in support of the opposite view.

"Nay, if animals are to be your illustration!" he protested. He had been perhaps half under the delusion that he spoke with Cornelia, and with a sense of infinite misery, he compressed the apt distinction that he had in his mind; which was to show where humanity and simple nature drew a line, and wherein humanity claimed the loftier seat.

"But such talk must be uttered to a soul," he phrased internally, and Emilia was denied what belonged to Cornelia.

Hitherto Emilia had refused to sing, and Madame Marini, faithful to her instructions, had never allowed her to be pressed to sing. Emilia would brood over notes, thinking: "I can take that; and that; and dwell on such and such a note for any length of time;" but she would not call up her voice; she would not look at her treasure. It seemed more to her, untouched; and went on doubling its worth, until doubtless her idea of capacity greatly relieved her of the burden on her breast, and the

reflection that she held a charm for all, and held it from all, flattered one who had been cruelly robbed.

On their way homeward, among the chrysanthemums in the long garden-walk, they met Tracy Runningbrook, between whose shouts of delight and Emilia's reserve there was so marked a contrast that one would have deemed Tracy an offender in her sight. She had said to him entreatingly, "Do not come," when he volunteered to call on the Marinis in the evening; and she got away from him as quickly as she could, promising to be pleased if he called the day following. Tracy flew leaping to one of the great houses where he was tame cat. When Sir Purcell as they passed on spoke a contemptuous word of his soft habits and idleness, Emilia said: "He is one of my true friends."

"And why is he interdicted the visit this evening?"

"Because," she answered, and grew pale, "he--he does not care for music. I wish I had not met him."

She recollected how Tracy's flaming head had sprung up before her--he who had always prophesied that she would be famous for arts unknown to her, and not for song just when she was having a vision of triumph and caressing the idea of her imprisoned voice bursting its captivity, and soaring into its old heavens.

"He does not care for music!" interjected Sir Purcell, with something like a frown. "I have nothing in common with him. But that I might have known. I can have nothing in common with a man who is not to be impressed by music."

"I love him quite as well," said Emilia. "He is a quick friend. I am always certain of him."

"And I imagine also that you are quits with your quick friend," added Sir Purcell. "You do not care for verse, or he for voices!"

"Poetry?" said Emilia; "no, not much. It seems like talking on tiptoe; like animals in cages, always going to one end and back again...."

"And making the same noise when they get at the end--like the bears!" Sir Purcell slightly laughed. "You don't approve of the rhymes?"

"Yes, I like the rhymes; but when you use words--I mean, if you are in earnest--how can you count and have stops, and--no, I do not care anything for poetry."

Sir Purcell's opinion of Emilia, though he liked her, was, that if a genius, she was an incomplete one; and his positive judgement (which I set down in phrase that would have startled him) ranked both her and Tracy as a pair of partial humbugs, entertaining enough. They were both too real for him.

Haply at that moment the girl was intensely susceptible, for she chilled

by his side; and when he left her she begged Madame to walk fast. "I wonder whether I have a cold!" she said.

Madame explained all the signs of it with tragic minuteness, deciding that Emilia was free at present, and by miracle, from this English scourge; but Emilia kept her hands at her mouth. Over the hornbeam hedge of the lane that ran through the market-gardens, she could see a murky sunset spreading its deep-coloured lines, that seemed to her really like a great sorrowing over earth. It had never seemed so till now; and, entering the house, the roar of vehicles in a neighbouring road sounded like something implacable in the order of things among us, and clung about her ears pitilessly. Running upstairs, she tried a scale of notes that broke on a cough. "Did I cough purposely?" she asked herself; but she had not the courage to try the notes again. While dressing she hummed a passage, and sought stealthily to pass the barrier of her own watchfulness by dwelling on a deep note, from which she was to rise bursting with full bravura energy, and so forth on a tide of song. But her breath failed. She stared into the glass and forced the note. A panic caught at her heart when she heard the sound that issued. "Am I ill? I must be hungry!" she exclaimed. "It is a cough! But I don't cough! What is the matter with me?"

Under these auspices she forced her voice again, and subsequently loosened her dress, complaining of the dressmaker's affection for tightness. "Now," she said, having fallen upon an attempt at simple "do, re, me, fa," and laughed at herself. Was it the laugh, that stopping her at "si," made that "si" so husky, asthmatic, like the wheezing of a crooked old witch? "I am unlucky, to-night," said Emilia. Or, rather, so said her surface-self. The submerged self--self in the depths--rarely speaks to the occasions, but lies under calamity quietly apprehending all; willing that the talker overhead should deceive others, and herself likewise, if possible. Emilia found her hands acting daintily and critically in the attirement of her person; and then surprised herself murmuring: "I forgot that Tracy won't be here to-night." By which she betrayed that she had divined those arts she was to shine in, according to Tracy; and betrayed that she had a terrible fear of a loss of all else. It pained her now that Tracy should not be coming. "Can I send for him?" she thought, as she looked winningly into the glass, trying to feel what sort of a feeling it was to be in love with a face like that one fronting her, so familiar in its aspects, so strange when scrutinized studiously! She drew a chair, and laying her elbow on the toilet-table, gazed hard, until the thought: "What face did Wilfrid see last?" (meaning, "when he saw me last") drove her away.

Not only did she know herself now a face of many faces; but the life within her likewise as a soul of many souls. The one Emilia, so unquestioning, so sure, lay dead; and a dozen new spirits, with but a dim likeness to her, were fighting for possession of her frame, now occupying it alone, now in couples; and each casting grim reflections on the other. Which is only a way of telling you that the great result of mortal suffering--consciousness--had fully set in; to ripen; perhaps to debase; at any rate, to prove her.

To be of worth was still her fixed idea--all that was clear in the thickening mist. "I cannot be ugly," she said, and reproved herself for simulating a childish tone. "Why do I talk in that way? I know I am not ugly. But if a fire scorched my face? There is nothing that seems safe!" The love of friends was suggested to her as something to rely on; and the loving them. "But if I have nothing to give!" said Emilia, and opened both her empty hands. She had diverted her mind from the pressure upon it, by this colloquy with a looking-glass, and gave herself a great rapture by running up notes to this theme:--

"No, no, no, no, no!--nothing! nothing!"

Clear, full, sonant notes; the notes of her true voice. She did not attempt them a second time; nor, when Sir Purcell requested her to sing in the course of the evening, did she comply. "The Signora thinks I have a cold," she said. Madame Marini protested that she hoped not, she even thought not, though none could avoid it at this season in this climate, and she turned to Sir Purcell to petition for any receipts he might have in his possession, specifics for warding off the frightful affliction of households in England.

"I have now twenty," said Madame, and throwing up her eyes; "I have tried all! oh! so many lozenges!"

Marini and Emilia laughed. While Sir Purcell was maintaining the fact of his total ignorance of the subject against Madame's incredulity, Emilia left the room. When she came back Madame was pressing her visitor to be explicit with regard to a certain process of cure conducted by an application of cold water. The Neapolitan gave several shudders as she marked him attentively. "Water cold!" she murmured with the deepest pathos, and dropped her face in her hands with narrowed shoulders. Emilia held a letter over to Sir Purcell. He took it, first assuring himself that Marini was in complicity with them. To Marini Emilia addressed a Momus forefinger, and Marini shrugged, smiling. "Water cold!" ejaculated Madame, showing her countenance again. "In winter! Luigi, they are mad!" Marini poked the fire briskly, for his sensations entirely sided with his wife.

The letter Sir Purcell held contained these words:

"Be kind, and meet me to-morrow at ten in the morning, at that place where you first saw me sitting. I want you to take me to one who will help me. I cannot lose time any more. I must work. I have been dead for I cannot say how long. I know you will come.

"I am, for ever,
"Your thankful friend,

"Emilia."

CHAPTER XXXIX

The pride of punctuality brought Sir Purcell to that appointed seat in the gardens about a minute in advance of Emilia. She came hurrying up to him with three fingers over her lips. The morning was cold; frost edged the flat brown chestnut and beech leaves lying about on rimy grass; so at first he made no remark on her evident unwillingness to open her mouth, but a feverish look of her eyes touched him with some kindly alarm for her.

"You should not have come out, if you think you are in any danger," he said.

"Not if we walk fast," she replied, in a visibly-controlled excitement. "It will be over in an hour. This way."

She led the marvelling gentleman toward the row, and across it under the big black elms, begging him to walk faster. To accommodate her, he suggested, that if they had any distance to go, they might ride, and after a short calculating hesitation, she consented, letting him know that she would tell him on what expedition she was bound whilst they were riding. The accompaniment of the wheels, however, necessitated a higher pitch of her voice, which apparently caused her to suffer from a contraction of the throat, for she remained silent, with a discouraged aspect, her full brown eyes showing as in a sombre meditation beneath the thick brows. The direction had been given to the City. On they went with the torrent, and were presently engulfed in fog. The roar grew muffled, phantoms poured along the pavement, yellow beamless lights were in the shop-windows, all the vehicles went at a slow march.

"It looks as if Business were attending its own obsequies," said Sir Purcell, whose spirits were enlivened by an atmosphere that confirmed his impression of things.

Emilia cried twice: "Oh! what cruel weather!" Her eyelids blinked, either with anger or in misery.

They were set down a little beyond the Bank, and when they turned from the cabman, Sir Purcell was warm in his offer of his arm to her, for he had seen her wistfully touching what money she had in her pocket, and approved her natural good breeding in allowing it to pass unmentioned.

"Now," he said, "I must know what you want to do."

"A quiet place! there is no quiet place in this City," said Emilia fretfully.

A gentleman passing took off his hat, saying, with City politeness, "Pardon me: you are close to a quiet place. Through that door, and the hall, you will find a garden, where you will hear London as if it sounded fifty miles off."

He bowed and retired, and the two (Emilia thankful, Sir Purcell tending

to anger), following his indication, soon found themselves in a most perfect retreat, the solitude of which they had the misfortune, however, of destroying for another, and a scared, couple.

Here Emilia said: "I have determined to go to Italy at once. Mr. Pericles has offered to pay for me. It's my father's wish. And--and I cannot wait and feel like a beggar. I must go. I shall always love England--don't fear that!"

Sir Purcell smiled at the simplicity of her pleading look.

"Now, I want to know where to find Mr. Pericles," she pursued. "And if you will come to him with me! He is sure to be very angry--I thought you might protect me from that. But when he hears that I am really going at last--at once!--he can laugh sometimes! you will see him rub his hands."

"I must enquire where his chambers are to be found," said Sir Purcell.

"Oh! anybody in the City must know him, because he is so rich." Emilia coughed. "This fog kills me. Pray make haste. Dear friend, I trouble you very much, but I want to get away from this. I can hardly breathe. I shall have no heart for my task, if I don't see him soon."

"Wait for me, then," said Sir Purcell; "you cannot wait in a better place. And I must entreat you to be careful." He half alluded to the adjustment of her shawl, and to anything else, as far as she might choose to apprehend him. Her dexterity in tossing him the letter, unseen by Madame Marini, might have frightened him and given him a dread, that albeit woman, there was germ of wickedness in her.

This pained him acutely, for he never forgot that she had been the means of his introduction to Cornelia, from whom he could not wholly dissociate her: and the idea that any prospective shred of impurity hung about one who had even looked on his beloved, was utter anguish to the keen sentimentalist. "Be very careful," he would have repeated, but that he had a warning sense of the ludicrous, and Emilia's large eyes when they fixed calmly on a face were not of a flighty cast. She stood, too, with the "dignity of sadness," as he was pleased to phrase it.

"She must be safe here," he said to himself. And yet, upon reflection, he decided not to leave her, peremptorily informing her to that effect. Emilia took his arm, and as they were passing through the hall of entrance they met the same gentleman who had directed them to the spot of quiet. Both she and Sir Purcell heard him say to a companion: "There she is." A deep glow covered Emilia's face. "Do they know you?" asked Sir Purcell. "No," she said: and then he turned, but the couple had gone on.

"That deserves chastisement," he muttered. Briefly telling her to wait, he pursued them. Emilia was standing in the gateway, not at all comprehending why she was alone. "Sandra Belloni!" struck her ear. Looking forward she perceived a hand and a head gesticulating from a cab-window. She sprang out into the street, and instantly the hand clenched and the head glared savagely. It was Mr. Pericles himself, in travelling

costume.

"I am your fool?" he began, overbearing Emilia's most irritating "How are you?" and "Are you quite well?"

"I am your fool? hein? You send me to Paris! to Geneve! I go over Lago Maggiore, and aha! it is your joke, meess! I juste return. Oh capital! At Milano I wait--I enquire--till a letter from old Belloni, and I learn I am your fool--of you all! Jomp in."

"A gentleman is coming," said Emilia, by no means intimidated, though the forehead of Mr. Pericles looked portentous. "He was bringing me to you."

"Zen, jomp in!" cried Mr. Pericles.

Here Sir Purcell came up.

Emilia said softly: "Mr. Pericles."

There was the form of a bow of moderate recognition between them, but other hats were off to Emilia. The two gentlemen who had offended Sir Purcell had insisted, on learning the nature of their offence, that they had a right to present their regrets to the lady in person, and beg an excuse from her lips. Sir Purcell stood white with a futile effort at self-control, as one of them, preludeing "Pardon me," said: "I had the misfortune to remark to my friend, as I passed you, 'There she is.' May I, indeed, ask your pardon? My friend is an artist. I met him after I had first seen you. He, at least, does not think foolish my recommendation to him that he should look on you at all hazards. Let me petition you to overlook the impertinence."

"I think, gentlemen, you have now made the most of the advantage my folly, in supposing you would regret or apologize fittingly for an impropriety, has given you," interposed Sir Purcell.

His new and superior tone (for he had previously lost his temper and spoken with a silly vehemence) caused them to hesitate. One begged the word of pardon from Emilia to cover his retreat. She gave it with an air of thorough-bred repose, saying, "I willingly pardon you," and looking at them no more, whereupon they vanished. Ten minutes later, Emilia and Sir Purcell were in the chambers of Mr. Pericles.

The Greek had done nothing but grin obnoxiously to every word spoken on the way, drawing his hand down across his jaw, to efface the hard pale wrinkles, and eyeing Emilia's cavalier with his shrewdest suspicious look.

"You will excuse,"--he pointed to the confusion of the room they were in, and the heap of unopened letters,--"I am from ze Continent; I do not expect ze pleasure. A seat?"

Mr. Pericles handed chairs to his visitors.

"It is a climate, is it not," he resumed.

Emilia said a word, and he snapped at her, immediately adding, "Hein? Ah! so!" with a charming urbanity.

"How lucky that we should meet you," exclaimed Emilia. "We were just coming to you--to find out, I mean, where you were, and call on you."

"Ough! do not tell me lies," said Mr. Pericles, clasping the hollow of his cheeks between thumb and forefinger.

"Allow me to assure you that what Miss Belloni has said is perfectly correct," Sir Purcell remarked.

Mr. Pericles gave a short bow. "It is ze same; I am much obliged."

"And you have just come from Italy?" said Emilia.

"Where you did me ze favour to send me, it is true. Sanks!"

"Oh, what a difference between Italy and this!" Emilia turned her face to the mottled yellow windows.

"Many sankes," repeated Mr. Pericles, after which the three continued silent for a time.

At last Emilia said, bluntly, "I have come to ask you to take me to Italy."

Mr. Pericles made no sign, but Sir Purcell leaned forward to her with a gaze of astonishment, almost of horror.

"Will you take me?" persisted Emilia.

Still the sullen Greek refused either to look at her or to answer.

"Because I am ready to go," she went on. "I want to go at once; to-day, if you like. I am getting too old to waste an hour."

Mr. Pericles uncrossed his legs, ejaculating, "What a fog! Ah!" and that was all. He rose, and went to a cupboard.

Sir Purcell murmured hurriedly in Emilia's ear, "Have you considered what you've been saying?"

"Yes, yes. It is only a journey," Emilia replied, in a like tone.

"A journey!"

"My father wishes it."

"Your mother?"

"Hush! I intend to make him take the Madre with me."

She designated Mr. Pericles, who had poured into a small liqueur glass some green Chartreuse, smelling strong of pines. His visitors declined to eject the London fog by this aid of the mountain monks, and Mr. Pericles warmed himself alone.

"You are wiz old Belloni," he called out.

"I am not staying with my father," said Emilia.

"Where?" Mr. Pericles shed a baleful glance on Sir Purcell.

"I am staying with Signor Marini."

"Servente!" Mr. Pericles ducked his head quite low, while his hand swept the floor with an imaginary cap. Malice had lighted up his features, and finding, after the first burst of sarcasm, that it was vain to indulge it toward an absent person, he altered his style. "Look," he cried to Emilia, "it is Marini stops you and old Belloni--a conspirator, aha! Is it for an artist to conspire, and be carbonaro, and kiss books, and, mon Dieu! bon! it is Marini plays me zis trick. I mark him. I mark him, I say! He is paid by young Pole. I hold zat family in my hand, I say! So I go to be met by you, and on I go to Italy. I get a letter at Milano,-- "Marini stop me at Dover," signed "Giuseppe Belloni." Ze letter have been spied into by ze Austrians. I am watched--I am dogged--I am imprisoned--I am examined. 'You know zis Giuseppe Belloni? 'Meine Herrn! he was to come. I leave word at Paris for him, at Geneve, at Stresa, to bring his daughter to ze Conservatoire, for which I pay. She has a voice--or she had."

"Has!" exclaimed Emilia.

"Had!" Mr. Pericles repeated.

"She has!"

"Zen sing!" with which thunder of command, Mr. Pericles gave up his vindictive narration of the points of his injuries sustained, and, pitching into a chair, pressed his fingers to his temples, frowning attention. His eyes were on the floor. Presently he glanced up, and saw Emilia's chest rising quickly. No voice issued.

"It is to commence," cried Mr. Pericles. "Hein! now sing."

Emilia laid her hand under her throat. "Not now! Oh, not now! When you have told me what those Austrians did to you. I want to hear; I am very anxious to hear. And what they said of my father. How could he have come to Milan without a passport? He had only a passport to Paris."

"And at Paris I leave instructions for ze procuration of a passport over Lombardy. Am I not Antonio Pericles Agriolopoulos? Sing, I say!"

"Ah, but what voices you must have heard in Italy," said Emilia softly.
"I am afraid to sing after them. Si: I dare not."

She panted, little in keeping with the cajolery of her tones, but she had got Mr. Pericles upon a theme serious to his mind.

"Not a voice! not one!" he cried, stamping his foot. "All is French. I go twice wizin six monz, and if I go to a goose-yard I hear better. Oh, yes! it is tune--"ta-ta-ta--ti-ti--to!" and of ze heart--where is zat? Mon Dieu! I despair. I see music go dead. Let me hear you, Sandra."

His enthusiasm had always affected Emilia, and painfully since her love had given her a consciousness of infidelity to her Art, but now the pathetic appeal to her took away her strength, and tears rose in her eyes at the thought of his faith in her. His repetition of her name--the 'Sandra' being uttered with unwonted softness--plunged her into a fit of weeping.

"Ah!" Mr. Pericles shouted. "See what she has come to!" and he walked two or three paces off to turn upon her spitefully. "she will be vapeurs, nerfs, I know not! when it wants a physique of a saint! Sandra Belloni," he added, gravely, "lift up ze head! Sing, 'Sempre al tuo santo nome.'"

Emilia checked her tears. His hand being raised to beat time, she could not withstand the signal. "Sempre;"--there came two struggling notes, to which another clung, shuddering like two creatures on the deeps.

She stopped; herself oddly calling out "Stop."

"Stop who, donc?" Mr. Pericles postured an indignant interrogation.

"I mean, I must stop," Emilia faltered. "It's the fog. I cannot sing in this fog. It chokes me."

Apparently Mr. Pericles was about to say something frightfully savage, which was restrained by the presence of Sir Purcell. He went to the door in answer to a knock, while Emilia drew breath as calmly as she might; her head moving a little backward with her breathing, in a sad mechanical way painful to witness. Sir Purcell stretched his hand out to her, but she did not take it. She was listening to voices at the door. Was it really Mr. Pole who was there? Quite unaware of the effect the sight of her would produce on him, Emilia rose and walked to the doorway. She heard Mr. Pole abusing Mr. Pericles half banteringly for his absence while business was urgent, saying that they must lay their heads together and consult, otherwise--a significant indication appeared to close the sentence.

"But if you've just come off your journey, and have got a lady in there, we must postpone, I suppose. Say, this afternoon. I'll keep up to the mark, if nothing happens...."

Emilia pushed the door from the hand of Mr. Pericles, and was advancing

toward the old man on the landing; but no sooner did the latter verify to his startled understanding that he had seen her, than with an exclamation of "All right! good-bye!" he began a rapid descent, of the stairs. A distance below, he bade Mr. Pericles take care of her, and as an excuse for his abrupt retreat, the word "busy" sounded up.

"Does my face frighten him?" Emilia thought. It made her look on herself with a foreign eye. This is a dreadful but instructive piece of contemplation; acting as if the rich warm blood of self should have ceased to hug about us, and we stand forth to be dissected unresistingly. All Emilia's vital strength now seemed to vanish. At the renewal of Mr. Pericles' peremptory mandate for her to sing, she could neither appeal to him, nor resist; but, raising her chest, she made her best effort, and then covered her face. This was done less for concealment of her shame-stricken features than to avoid sight of the stupefaction imprinted upon Mr. Pericles.

"Again, zat A flat!" he called sternly.

She tried it.

"Again!"

Again she did her utmost to accomplish the task. If you have seen a girl in a fit of sobs elevate her head, with hard-shut eyelids, while her nostrils convulsively take in a long breath, as if for speech, but it is expended in one quick vacant sigh, you know how Emilia looked. And it requires a humane nature to pardon such an aspect in a person from whom we have expected triumphing glances and strong thrilling tones.

"What is zis?" Mr. Pericles came nearer to her.

He would listen to no charges against the atmosphere. Commanding her to give one simple run of notes, a contralto octave, he stood over her with keenly watchful eyes. Sir Purcell bade him observe her distress.

"I am much obliged," Mr. Pericles bowed. "she is ruined. I have suspected. Ha! But I ask for a note! One!"

This imperious signal drew her to another attempt. The deplorable sound that came sent Emilia sinking down with a groan.

"Basta, basta! So, it is zis tale," said Mr. Pericles, after an observation of her huddled shape. "Did I not say--"

His voice was so menacingly loud and harsh that Sir Purcell remarked: "This is not the time to repeat it--pardon me--whatever you said."

"Ze fool--she play ze fool! Sir, I forget ze Christian--ah! Purcell!--I say she play ze fool, and look at her! Why is it she comes to me now? A dozen times I warn her. To Italy! to Italy! all is ready: you will have a place at ze Conservatorio. No: she refuse. I say 'Go, and you are a queen. You are a Prima at twenty, and Europe is beneas you.' No: she

refuse, and she is ruined. 'What,' I say, 'what zat dam silly smile mean?' Oh, no! I am not lazy!' 'But you area fool!' 'Oh, no!' 'And what are you, zen? And what shall you do?' Nussing! nussing! nussing! And, dam! zere is an end."

Emilia had caught blindly at Sir Purcell's hand, by which she raised herself, and then uncovering her face, looked furtively at the malign furnace-white face of Mr. Pericles.

"It cannot have gone,"--she spoke, as if mentally balancing the possibility.

"It has gone, I say; and you know why, Mademoiselle ze Fool!" Mr. Pericles retorted.

"No, no; it can't be gone. Gone? voices never go!"

The reiteration of the "You know why," from Mr. Pericles, and all the wretchedness of loss it suggested, robbed her of the little spark of nervous fire by which she felt half-reviving in courage and confidence.

"Let me try once more," she appealed to him, in a frenzy.

Mr. Pericles, though fully believing in his heart that it might only be a temporary deprivation of voice, affected to scout the notion of another trial, but finally extended his forefinger: "Well, now; start! 'Sempre al tuo Santo!' Commence: Sem--" and Mr. Pericles hummed the opening bar, not as an unhopeful man would do. The next moment he was laughing horribly. Emilia, to make sure of the thing she dreaded, forced the note, and would not be denied. What voice there was in her came to the summons. It issued, if I may so express it, ragged, as if it had torn through a briar-hedge: then there was a whimper of tones, and the effect was like the lamentation of a hardly-used urchin, lacking a certain music that there is in his undoubted heartfelt earnestness. No single note poised firmly for the instant, but swayed, trembling on its neighbour to right and to left when pressed for articulate sound, it went into a ghastly whisper. The laughter of Mr. Pericles was pleasing discord in comparison.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Am I ill? I must be hungry!

Depreciating it after the fashion of chartered hypocrites.

Fine Shades were still too dominant at Brookfield

He thinks that the country must be saved by its women as well

I know that your father has been hearing tales told of me

My voice! I have my voice! Emilia had cried it out to herself

She had great awe of the word 'business'

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