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Sandra Belloni -- Volume 2 by George Meredith

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Sandra Belloni -- Volume 2

CHAPTER XI

At half-past nine of the clock on the evening of this memorable day, a body of five-and-twenty stout young fellows, prize-winners, wrestlers, boxers, and toppers, of the Hillford Club, set forth on a march to Ipley Common.

Now, a foreigner, hearing of their destination and the provocation they had endured, would have supposed that they were bent upon deeds of vengeance; and it requires knowledge of our countrymen to take it as a fact that the idea and aim of the expedition were simply to furnish the offending Ipley boys a little music. Such were the idea and the aim. Hillford had nothing to do with consequences: no more than our England is responsible when she sails out among the empires and hemispheres, saying, 'buy' and 'sell,' and they clamour to be eaten up entire. Foreigners pertinaciously misunderstand us. They have the barbarous habit of judging by results. Let us know ourselves better. It is melancholy to contemplate the intrigues, and vile designs, and vengeance of other nations; and still more so, after we have written so many pages of intelligible history, to see them attributed to us. Will it never be perceived that we do not sow the thing that happens? The source of the flooding stream which drinks up those rich acres of low flat land is not more innocent than we. If, as does seem possible, we are in a sort of alliance with Destiny, we have signed no compact, and accomplish our work as solidly and merrily as a wood-hatchet in the hands of the woodman. This arrangement to give Ipley a little music, was projected as a return for the favours of the morning: nor have I in my time heard anything comparable to it in charity of sentiment, when I consider the detestable outrage Hillford suffered under.

The parading of the drum, the trombone, a horn, two whistles, and a fife, in front of Hillford booth, caught the fancy of the Clubmen, who roared out parting adjurations that the music was not to be spared; and that Tom Breeks was a musical fellow, with a fine empty pate, if any one of the instruments should fail perchance. They were to give Ipley plenty of music: for Ipley wanted to be taught harmony. Harmony was Ipley's weak point. "Gie 'em," said one jolly ruddy Hillford man, "gie 'em whack fol, lol!" And he smacked himself, and set toward an invisible partner. Nor, as recent renowned historians have proved, are observations of this nature beneath the dignity of chronicle. They vindicate, as they localize, the sincerity of Hillford.

Really, to be an islander full of ale, is to be the kindest creature on or off two legs. For that very reason, it may be, his wrath at bad blood is so easily aroused. In our hot moods we would desire things like unto ourselves, and object violently to whatsoever is unlike. And also we desire that the benefits we shed be appreciated. If Ipley understands neither our music nor our intent, haply we must hold a performance on the impenetrable sconce of Ipley.

At the hour named, the expedition, with many a promise that the music should be sweet, departed hilariously: Will Burdock, the left-handed cricketer and hard-hitter, being leader; with Peter Bartholomew, potboy, John Girling, miller's man, and Ned Thewk, gardener's assistant, for lieutenants. On the march, silence was proclaimed, and partially enforced, after two fights against authority. Near the sign of King William's Head, General Burdock called a halt, and betrayed irresolution with reference to the route to be adopted; but as none of his troop could at all share such a condition of mind in the neighbourhood of an inn, he was permitted to debate peacefully with his lieutenants, while the rest burst through the doors and hailed the landlord: a proceeding he was quickly induced to imitate. Thus, when the tail shows strongest decision of purpose, the head must follow.

An accurate oinometer, or method of determining what shall be the condition of the spirit of man according to the degrees of wine or beer in him, were surely of priceless service to us. For now must we, to be certain of our sanity and dignity, abstain, which is to clip, impoverish, imprison the soul: or else, taking wings of wine, we go aloft over capes, and islands, and seas, but are even as balloons that cannot make for any line, and are at the mercy of the winds---without

a choice, save to come down by virtue of a collapse. Could we say to ourselves, in the great style, This is the point where desire to embrace humanity is merged in vindictiveness toward individuals: where radiant sweet temper culminates in tremendous wrath: where the treasures of anticipation, waxing riotous, arouse the memory of wrongs: in plain words, could we know positively, and from the hand of science, when we have had enough, we should stop. There is not a doubt that we should stop. It is so true we should stop, that, I am ready to say, ladies have no right to call us horrid names, and complain of us, till they have helped us to some such trustworthy scientific instrument as this which I have called for. In its absence, I am persuaded that the true natural oinometer is the hat. Were the hat always worn during potation; were ladies when they retire to place it on our heads, or, better still, chaplets of flowers; then, like the wise ancients, we should be able to tell to a nicety how far we had advanced in our dithyramb to the theme of fuddle and muddle. Unhappily the hat does not forewarn: it is simply indicative. I believe, nevertheless, that science might set to work upon it forthwith, and found a system. When you mark men drinking who wear their hats, and those hats are seen gradually beginning to hang on the backs of their heads, as from pegs, in the fashion of a fez, the bald projection of forehead looks jolly and frank: distrust that sign: the may-fly of the soul is then about to be gobbled up by the chub of the passions. A hat worn fez-fashion is a dangerous hat. A hat on the brows shows a man who can take more, but thinks he will go home instead, and does so, peaceably. That is his determination. He may look like Macduff, but he is a lamb. The vinous reverses the non-vinous passionate expression of the hat. If I am discredited, I appeal to history, which tells us that the hats of the Hillford five-and-twenty were all exceedingly hind-ward-set when the march was resumed. It followed that Peter Bartholomew, potboy, made irritable objections to that old joke which finished his name as though it were a cat calling, and the offence being repeated, he dealt an impartial swing of his stick at divers heads, and told them to take that, which they assured him they had done by sending him flying into a hedge. Peter, being reprimanded by his commanding officer, acknowledged a hot desire to try his mettle, and the latter responsible person had to be restrained from granting the wish he cherished by John Girling, whom he threw for his trouble and as Burdock was the soundest hitter, numbers cried out against Girling, revolting him with a sense of overwhelming injustice that could be appeased only by his prostrating two stout lads and squaring against a third, who came up from a cross-road. This one knocked him down with the gentleness of a fist that knows how Beer should be treated, and then sang out, in the voice of Wilfrid Pole: "Which is the nearest way to Ipley, you fellows?"

"Come along with us, sir, and we'll show you," said Burdock.

"Are you going there?"

"Well, that's pretty clear."

"Hillford men, are you?"

"We've left the women behind."

"I'm in a hurry, so, good night."

"And so are we in a hurry, sir. But, you're a gentleman, and we want to give them chaps at Ipley a little surprise, d'ye see, in the way of a dollop o' music: and if you won't go givin' 'em warning, you may trot; and that road'll take you."

"All right," said Wilfrid, now fairly divided between his jealousy of Gambier and anxiety for Emilia.

Could her artist nature, of which he had heard perplexing talk, excuse her and make her heart absolutely guiltless (what he called 'innocent'), in trusting herself to any man's honour? I regret to say that the dainty adorers of the sex are even thus grossly suspicious of all women when their sentiment is ever so triflingly offended.

Lights on Ipley Common were seen from a rise of the hilly road. The moon was climbing through drifts of torn black cloud. Hastening his pace, for a double reason now, Wilfrid had the booth within hearing, listened a moment; and then stood fast. His unconscious gasp of the words: "Thank God; there she is!" might have betrayed him to another.

She was sitting near one end of the booth, singing as Wilfrid had never yet heard her sing: her dark eyes flashing. Behind her stood Captain Gambier, keeping guard with all the composure of a gentleman-usher at a royal presentation. Along the tables, men and women were ranged facing her; open-mouthed, some of them but for the most part wearing a predetermined expression of applausive judgement, as who should say, "Queer, but good." They gave Emilia their faces, which was all she wanted! and silence, save for an intermingling soft snore, here and there, the elfin trumpet of silence. To tell truth, certain heads had bowed low to the majesty of beer, and were down on the table between sprawling doubled arms. No essay on the power of beer could exhibit it more convincingly than, the happy indifference with which they received admonishing blows from quart-pots, salutes from hot pipe-bowls, pricks from pipe-ends, on nose, and cheek, and pate; as if to vindicate for their beloved beverage a right to rank with that old classic drink wherewith the fairest of women vanquished human ills. The majority, however, had been snatched out of this bliss by the intrusion of their wives, who sat beside them like Consciences in petticoats; and it must be said that Emilia was in favour with the married men, for one reason, because she gave these broad-ribbed ladies a good excuse for allowing their lords to stop where they were so comfortable, a continually-extending five minutes longer.

Yet, though the words were foreign and the style of the song and the singer were strange, many of the older fellows' eyes twinkled, and their mouths pursed with a kind of half-protesting pleasure. All were reverent to the compliment paid them by Emilia's presence. The general expression was much like that seen when the popular ear is given to the national anthem. Wilfrid hung at the opening of the booth, a cynical spectator. For what on earth made her throw such energy, and glory of music, into a song before fellows like these? He laughed dolorously. "she hasn't a particle of any sense of ridicule," he said to himself. Forthwith her voice took hold of him, and led him as heroes of old were led unwillingly into enchanted woods. If she had been singing things holy, a hymn, a hallelujah, in this company, it struck him that somehow it would have seemed appropriate; not objectionable; at any rate, not ridiculous. Dr. Watts would have put a girdle about her; but a song of romance sung in this atmosphere of pipes and beer and boozy heads, chagrined Wilfrid in proportion as the softer half of him began to succumb to the deliciousness of her voice.

Emilia may have had some warning sense that admiration is only one ingredient of homage, that to make it fast and true affection must be won. Now, poor people, yokels, clods, cannot love what is incomprehensible to them. An idol must have their attributes: a king must show his face now and then: a song must appeal to their intelligence, to subdue them quite. This, as we know, is not the case in the higher circles. Emilia may have divined it: possibly from the very great respect with which her finale was greeted. Vigorous as the "Brayvos" were, they sounded abashed: they lacked abandonment. In fact, it was gratitude that applauded, and not enthusiasm. "Hillford don't hear stuff like that, do 'em?" which was the main verbal encomium passed, may be taken testificatorily as to this point.

"Dame! dame!" cried Emilia, finding her way quickly to one of the more decently-bonneted women; "am I not glad to see you here! Did I please you? And you, dear Farmer Wilson? I caught sight of you just as I was finishing. I remember the song you like, and I want to sing it. I know the tune, but the words! the words! what are the words? Humming won't do."

"Ah, now!" quoth Farmer Wilson, pointing out the end of his pipe, "that's what they'll swallow down; that's the song to make 'em kick. Sing that, miss. Furrin songs 's all right enough; but 'Ale it is my tipple, and England is my nation! Let's have something plain and flat on the surface, miss."

Dame Wilson jogged her husband's arm, to make him remember that talking was his dangerous pastime, and sent abroad a petition for a song-book; and after a space a very doggy-eared book, resembling a poodle of that genus, was handed to

her. Then uprose a shout for this song and that; but Emilia fixed upon the one she had in view, and walked back to her harp, with her head bent, perusing it attentively all the way. There, she gave the book to Captain Gambier, and begged him to hold it open before her, with a passing light of eyes likely to be rather disturbing to a jealous spectator. The Captain seized the book without wincing, and displayed a remarkable equanimity of countenance as he held it out, according to direction. No sooner had Emilia struck a prelude of the well-known air, than the interior of the booth was transfigured; legs began to move, elbows jerked upward, fingers fillipped: the whole body of them were ready to duck and bow, dance, and do her bidding she had fairly caught their hearts. For, besides the pleasure they had in their own familiar tune, it was wonderful to them that Emilia should know what they knew. This was the marvel, this the inspiration. She smiled to see how true she had struck, and seemed to swim on the pleasure she excited. Once, as her voice dropped, she looked up at Captain Gambier, so very archly, with the curving line of her bare throat, that Wilfrid was dragged down from his cynical observatory, and made to feel as a common man among them all.

At the "thrum-thrum" on the harp-strings, which wound up the song, frenzied shouts were raised for a repetition. Emilia was perfectly willing to gratify them; Captain Gambier appeared to be remonstrating with her, but she put up her joined hands, mock-petitioningly, and he with great affability held out the book anew. Wilfrid was thinking of moving to her to take her forcibly away when she recommenced.

At the same instant---but who, knowing that a house of glass is about to be shattered, can refrain from admiring its glitter in the beams?---Ipley crooned a ready accompaniment: the sleepers had been awakened: the women and the men were alive, half-dancing, half-chorusing here a baby was tossed, and there an old fellow's elbow worked mutely, expressive of the rollicking gaiety within him: the whole length of the booth was in a pleasing simmer, ready to overboil with shouts humane and cheerful, while Emilia pitched her note and led; archly, and quite one with them all, and yet in a way that critical Wilfrid could not object to, so plainly did she sing to give happiness.

I cannot delay; but I request you, that are here privileged to soar aloft with the Muse, to fix your minds upon one point in this flight. Let not the heat and dust of the ensuing fray divert your attention from the magnanimity of Beer. It will be vindicated in the end but be worthy of your seat beside the Muse, who alone of us all can take one view of the inevitable two that perplex mortal judgements.

For, if Ipley had jumped jovially up, and met the Hillford alarum with laughter,---how then? Why, then I maintain that the magnanimity of Beer would have blazed effulgent on the spot: there would have been louder laughter and fraternal greetings. As it was, the fire on the altar of Wisdom was again kindled by Folly, and the steps to the altar were broken heads, after the antique fashion.

In dismay, Ipley started. The members of the Club stared. Emilia faltered in horror.

A moment her voice swam stemming the execrable concert, but it was overwhelmed. Wilfrid pressed forward to her. They could hear nothing but the din. The booth raged like an insurgent menagerie. Outside it sounded of brazen beasts, and beasts that whistled, beasts that boomed. A whirlwind huddled them, and at last a cry, "We've got a visit from Hillford," told a tale. At once the stoutest hearts pressed to the opening. "My harp!" Emilia made her voice reach Wilfrid's ear. Unprovided with weapons, Ipley parleyed. Hillford howled in reply. The trombone brayed an interminable note, that would have driven to madness quiescent cats by steaming kettles, and quick, like the springing pulse of battle, the drum thumped and thumped. Blood could not hear it and keep from boiling. The booth shook violently. Wilfrid and Gambier threw over half-a-dozen chairs, forms, and tables, to make a barrier for the protection of the women.

"Come," Wilfrid said to Emilia, "leave the harp, I will get you another. Come."

"No, no," she cried in her nervous fright.

"For God's sake, come!" he reiterated, she, stamping her foot, as to emphasize "No! no! no!"

"But I will buy you another harp;" he made audible to her through the hubbub.

"This one!" she gasped with her hand on it. "What will he think if he finds that I forsook it?"

Wilfrid knew her to allude to the unknown person who had given it to her.

"There---there," said he. "I sent it, and I can get you another. So, come. Be good, and come."

"It was you!"

Emilia looked at him. She seemed to have no senses for the uproar about her.

But now the outer barricade was broken through, and the rout pressed on the second line. Tom Breeks, the orator, and Jim, transformed from a lurching yokel to a lithe dog of battle, kept the retreat of Ipley, challenging any two of Hillford to settle the dispute. Captain Gambier attempted an authoritative parley, in the midst of which a Hillford man made a long arm and struck Emilia's harp, till the strings jarred loose and horrid. The noise would have been enough to irritate Wilfrid beyond endurance. When he saw the fellow continuing to strike the harp-frame while Emilia clutched it, in a feeble defence, against her bosom, he caught a thick stick from a neighbouring hand and knocked that Hillford man so clean to earth that Hillford murmured at the blow. Wilfrid then joined the front array.

"Half-a-dozen hits like that a-piece, sir," nodded Tom Breeks.

"There goes another!" Jim shouted.

"Not quite, my lad," interposed Ned Thewk, though Peter Bartholomew was reeling in confirmation.

His blow at Jim missed, but came sharply in the swing on Wilfrid's cheek-bone.

Maddened at the immediate vision of that feature swollen, purple, even as a plum with an assiduous fly on it, certifying to ripeness:---Says the philosopher, "We are never up to the mark of any position, if we are in a position beneath our own mark;" and it is true that no hero in conflict should think of his face, but Wilfrid was all the while protesting wrathfully against the folly of his having set foot in such a place:--- Maddened, I say, Wilfrid, a keen swordman, cleared a space. John Girling fell to him: Ned Thewk fell to him, and the sconce of Will Burdock rang.

"A rascally absurd business!" said Gambier, letting his stick do the part of a damnatory verb on one of the enemy, while he added, "The drunken vagabonds!"

All the Hillford party were now in the booth. Ipley, meantime, was not sleeping. Farmer Wilson and a set of the Ipley men whom age had sagaciously instructed to prefer stratagem to force, had slipped outside, and were labouring as busily as their comrades within: stooping to the tent-pegs, sending emissaries to the tent-poles.

"Drunk!" roared Will Burdock. "Did you happen to say 'drunk?'" And looking all the while at Gambier, he, with infernal cunning, swung at Wilfrid's fated cheekbone. The latter rushed furiously into the press of them, and there was a charge from Ipley, and a lock, from which Wilfrid extricated himself to hurry off Emilia. He perceived that bad blood was

boiling up.

"Forward!" cried Will Burdock, and Hillford in turn made a tide.

As they came on in numbers too great for Ipley to stand against, an obscuration fell over all. The fight paused. Then a sensation as of some fellows smoothing their polls and their cheeks, and leaning on their shoulders with obtrusive affection, inspirited them to lash about indiscriminately. Whoops and yells arose; then peals of laughter. Homage to the cleverness of Ipley was paid in hurrahs, the moment Hillford understood the stratagem by which its men of valour were lamed and imprisoned. The truth was, that the booth was down on them, and they were struggling entangled in an enormous bag of canvas.

Wilfrid drew Emilia from under the drooping folds of the tent. He was allowed, on inspection of features, to pass. The men of Hillford were captured one by one like wild geese, as with difficulty they emerged, roaring, rolling with laughter, all.

Yea; to such an extent did they laugh that they can scarce be said to have done less than make the joke of the foe their own. And this proves the great and amazing magnanimity of Beer.

CHAPTER XII

A pillar of dim silver rain fronted the moon on the hills. Emilia walked hurriedly, with her head bent, like a penitent: now and then peeping up and breathing to the keen scent of the tender ferns. Wilfrid still grasped her hand, and led her across the common, away from the rout.

When the uproar behind them had sunk, he said "You'll get your feet wet. I'm sorry you should have to walk. How did you come here?"

She answered: "I forget."

"You must have come here in some conveyance. Did you walk?"

Again she answered: "I forget;" a little querulously; perhaps wilfully.

"Well!" he persisted: "You must have got your harp to this place by some means or other?"

"Yes, my harp!" a sob checked her voice.

Wilfrid tried to soothe her. "Never mind the harp. It's easily replaced."

"Not that one!" she moaned.

"We will get you another."

"I shall never love any but that."

"Perhaps we may hear good news of it to-morrow."

"No; for I felt it die in my hands. The third blow was the one that killed it. It's broken."

Wilfrid could not reproach her, and he had not any desire to preach. So, as no idea of having done amiss in coming to the booth to sing illumined her, and she yet knew that she was in some way guilty, she accused herself of disregard for that dear harp while it was brilliant and serviceable. "Now I remember what poor music I made of it! I touched it with cold fingers. The sound was thin, as if it had no heart. Tick-tick!--I fancy I touched it with a dead man's finger-nails."

She crossed her wrists tight at the clasp of her waist, and letting her chin fall on her throat, shook her body fretfully, much as a pettish little girl might do. Wilfrid grimaced. "Tick-tick" was not a pathetic elegy in his ears.

"The only thing is, not to think about it," said he. "It's only an instrument, after all."

"It's the second one I've seen killed like a living creature," replied Emilia.

They walked on silently, till Wilfrid remarked, that he wondered where Gambier was. She gave no heed to the name. The little quiet footing and the bowed head by his side, moved him to entreat her not to be unhappy. Her voice had another tone when she answered that she was not unhappy.

"No tears at all?" Wilfrid stooped to get a close view of her face. "I thought I saw one. If it's about the harp, look!--you shall go into that cottage where the light is, sit there, and wait for me, and I will bring you what remains of it. I dare say we can have it mended."

Emilia lifted her eyes. "I am not crying for the harp. If you go back I must go with you."

"That's out of the question. You must never be found in that sort of place again."

"Let us leave the harp," she murmured. "You cannot go without me. Let me sit here for a minute. Sit with me."

She pointed to a place beside herself on the fork of a dry log under flowering hawthorn. A pale shadowy blue centre of light among the clouds told where the moon was. Rain had ceased, and the refreshed earth smelt all of flowers, as if each breeze going by held a nosegay to their nostrils.

Wilfrid was sensible of a sudden marked change in her. His blood was quicker than his brain in feeling it. Her voice now, even in common speaking, had that vibrating richness which in her singing swept his nerves.

"If you cry, there must be a cause, you know," he said, for the sake of keeping the conversation in a safe channel.

"How brave you are!" was Emilia's sedate exclamation, in reply.

Her cheeks glowed, as if she had just uttered a great confession, but while the colour mounted to her eyes, they kept their affectionate intentness upon him without a quiver of the lids.

"Do you think me a coward?" she relieved him by asking sharply, like one whom the thought had turned into a darker path. "I am not. I hung my head while you were fighting, because, what could I do? I would not have left you. Girls can only say, "I will perish with him."

"But," Wilfrid tried to laugh, "there was no necessity for that sort of devotion. What are you thinking of? It was half in good-humour, all through. Part of their fun!"

Clearly Emilia's conception of the recent fray was unchangeable.

"And the place for girls is at home; that's certain," he added.

"I should always like to be where..." Her voice flowed on with singular gravity to that stop.

Wilfrid's hand travelled mechanically to his pricking cheek-bone.

Was it possible that a love-scene was coming on as a pendant to that monstrously ridiculous affair of half-an-hour back? To know that she had sufficient sensibility was gratifying, and flattering that it aimed at him. She was really a darling little woman: only too absurd! Had she been on the point of saying that she would always like to be where he, Wilfrid, was? An odd touch of curiosity, peculiar to the languid emotions, made him ask her this: and to her soft "Yes," he continued briskly, and in the style of condescending fellowship: "Of course we're not going to part!"

"I wonder," said Emilia.

There she sat, evidently sounding right through the future with her young brain, to hear what Destiny might have to say.

The 'I wonder' rang sweetly in his head. It was as delicate a way of confessing, "I love you with all my soul," as could be imagined. Extremely refined young ladies could hardly have improved upon it, saving with the angelic shades of sentiment familiar to them.

Convinced that he had now heard enough for his vanity, Wilfrid returned emphatically to the tone of the world's highroad.

"By the way," he said, "you mustn't have any exaggerated idea of this night's work. Remember, also, I have to share the honours with Captain Gambier."

"I did not see him," said Emilia.

"Are you not cold?" he asked, for a diversion, though he had one of her hands.

She gave him the other.

He could not quit them abruptly: nor could he hold both without being drawn to her.

"What is it you say?" Wilfrid whispered: "men kiss us when we are happy. Is that right? and are you happy?"

She lifted a clear full face, to which he bent his mouth. Over the flowering hawthorn the moon stood like a windblown white rose of the heavens. The kiss was given and taken. Strange to tell, it was he who drew away from it almost bashfully, and with new feelings.

Quite unaware that he played the feminine part, Wilfrid alluded to her flight from Richford, with the instinct to sting his heart by a revival of his jealous sensations previously experienced, and so taste the luxury of present satisfaction.

"Why did you run away from me?" he said, semi-reproachfully.

"I promised."

"Would you not break a promise to stay with me?"

"Now I would!"

"You promised Captain Gambier?"

"No: those poor people."

"You are sorry that you went?"

No: she was happy.

"You have lost your harp by it," said Wilfrid.

"What do you think of me for not guessing---not knowing who sent it?" she returned. "I feel guilty of something all those days that I touched it, not thinking of you. Wicked, filthy little creature that I was! I despise ungrateful girls."

"I detest anything that has to do with gratitude," Wilfrid appended, "pray give me none. Why did you go away with Captain Gambier?"

"I was very fond of him," she replied unhesitatingly, but speaking as it were with numbed lips. "I wanted to tell him, to thank him and hold his hand. I told him of my promise. He spoke to me a moment in the garden, you know. He said he was leaving to go to London early, and would wait for me in the carriage: then we might talk. He did not wish to talk to me in the garden."

"And you went with him in the carriage, and told him you were so grateful?"

"Yes; but men do not like us to be grateful."

"So, he said he would do all sorts of things on condition that you were not grateful?"

"He said---yes: I forget: I do forget! How can I tell what he said?" Emilia added piteously. "I feel as if I had been emptied out of a sack!"

Wilfrid was pierced with laughter; and then the plainspoken simile gave him a chilling sensation while he was rising to the jealous pitch.

"Did he talk about taking you to Italy? Put your head into the sack, and think!"

"Yes," she answered blandly, an affirmative that caused him some astonishment, for he had struck at once to the farthest end of his suspicions.

"He feels as I do about the Italian Schools," said Emilia. "He wishes me to owe my learning to him. He says it will make him happy, and I thought so too." She threw in a "then."

Wilfrid looked moodily into the opposite hedge.

"Did he name the day for your going?" he asked presently, little anticipating another "Yes": but it came: and her rather faltering manner showed her to be conscious too that the word was getting to be a black one to him.

"Did you say you would go?"

"I did."

Question and answer crossed like two rapiers.

Wilfrid jumped up.

"The smell of this tree's detestable," he said, glancing at the shadowing hawthorn.

Emilia rose quietly, plucked a flower off the tree, and put it in her bosom.

Their way was down a green lane and across long meadow-paths dim in the moonlight. A nightingale was heard on this side and on that. Overhead they had a great space of sky with broken cloud full of the glory of the moon. The meadows dipped to a brook, slenderly spanned by a plank. Then there was an ascent through a cornfield to a copse. Rounding this they had sight of Brookfield. But while they were yet at the brook, Wilfrid said, "When is it you're going to Italy?"

In return he had an eager look, so that he was half-ashamed to add, "With Captain Gambier, I mean." He was suffering, and by being brutal he expected to draw balm on himself; nor was he deceived.

Emilia just then gave him her hand to be led over, and answered, as she neared him, "I am never to leave you."

"You never shall!" Wilfrid caught her in his arms, quite conquered by her, proud of her. He reflected with a loving rapture that her manner at that moment was equal to any lady's; and the phantom of her with her hand out, and her frank look, and trustful footing, while she spoke those words, kept on advancing to him all the way to Brookfield, at the same time that the sober reality murmured at his elbow.

Love, with his accustomed cunning, managed thus to lift her out of the mire and array her in his golden dress to idealize her, as we say. Reconciled for the hour were the contesting instincts in the nature of this youth the adoration of feminine refinement and the susceptibility to sensuous impressions. But Emilia walked with a hero: the dream of all her days! one, generous and gentle, as well as brave: who had fought for her, had thought of her tenderly, was with her now, having raised her to his level with a touch! How much might they not accomplish together: he with sword, she with harp? Through shadowy alleys in the clouds, Emilia saw the bright Italian plains opening out to her: the cities of marble, such as her imagination had fashioned them, porticos of stately palaces, and towers, and statues white among cypresses; and farther, minutely-radiant in the vista as a shining star, Venice of the sea. Fancy made the flying minutes hours. Now they marched with the regiments of Italy, under the folds of her free banner; now she sang to the victorious army, waving the banner over them; and now she floated in a gondola, and turning to him, the dear home of her heart, yet pale with the bleeding of his wound for Italy, said softly, in the tone that had power with him, "Only let me please you!"

"When? Where? What with?" came the blunt response from England, with electric speed, and Emilia fell from the clouds.

"I meant my singing; I thought of how I sang to you. Oh, happy time!" she exclaimed, to cut through the mist of vision in her mind.

"To me? down at the booth?" muttered Wilfrid, perplexed.

"Oh, no! I mean, just now---" and languid with the burden of so full a heart, she did not attempt to explain herself further, though he said, invitingly, "I thought I heard you humming?"

Then he was seized with a desire to have the force of her spirit upon him, for Brookfield was in view; and with the sight of Brookfield, the natural fascination waxed a shade fainter, and he feared it might be going. This (he was happily as ignorant as any other youth of the working of his machinery) prompted him to bid her sing before they parted. Emilia checked her steps at once to do as he desired. Her throat filled, but the voice quavered down again, like a fainting creature sick unto death. She made another effort and ended with a sorrowful look at his narrowly-watching eyes.

"I can't," she said; and, in fear of his anger, took his hand to beg forgiveness, while her eyelids drooped.

Wilfrid locked her fingers in a strong pressure, and walked on, silent as a man who has faced one of the veiled mysteries of life. It struck a full human blow on his heart, dragging him out of his sentimental pastures precipitately. He felt her fainting voice to be the intensest love-cry that could be uttered. The sound of it coursed through his blood, striking a rare illumination of sparks in his not commonly brilliant brain. In truth, that little episode showed an image of nature weak with the burden of new love. I do not charge the young cavalry officer with the power of perceiving images. He saw no more than that she could not sing because of what was in her heart toward him; but such a physical revelation was a divine love-confession, coming involuntarily from one whose lips had not formed the name of love; and Wilfrid felt it so deeply, that the exquisite flattery was almost lost, in a certain awed sense of his being in the presence of an absolute fact: a thing real, though it was much talked about, and visible, though it did not wear a hat or a petticoat.

It searched him thoroughly enough to keep him from any further pledges in that direction, propitious as the moment was, while the moon slipped over banks of marble into fields of blue, and all the midnight promised silence. They passed quickly through the laurel shrubs, and round the lawn. Lights were in the sleepless ladies' bed-room windows.

"Do I love her?" thought Wilfrid, as he was about to pull at the bell, and the thought that he should feel pain at being separated from her for half-a-dozen hours, persuaded him that he did. The self-restraint which withheld him from protesting that he did, confirmed it.

"To-morrow morning," he whispered.

"I shall be down by daylight," answered Emilia.

"You are in the shade---I cannot see you," said he.

The door opened as Emilia was moving out of the line of shadow.

CHAPTER XIII

On the morrow Wilfrid was gone. No one had seen him go. Emilia, while she touched the keys of a muted piano softly in the morning quiet of the house, had heard the front-door close. At that hour one attributes every noise to the servants. She played on and waited patiently, till the housemaid expelled her into the dewy air.

The report from his bedchamber, telling the ladies of his absence, added that he had taken linen for a lengthened journey.

This curious retreat of my hero belongs to the order of things that are done 'None know why;' a curtain which drops conveniently upon either the bewilderment of the showman or the infirmities of the puppet.

I must own (though I need not be told what odium frowns on such a pretension to excess of cleverness) that I do know why. I know why, and, unfortunately for me, I have to tell what I know. If I do not tell, this narrative is so constituted that there will be no moral to it.

One who studies man in puppets (in which purpose lies the chief value of this amusing species), must think that we are degenerating rapidly. The puppet hero, for instance, is a changed being. We know what he was; but now he takes shelter in his wits. His organs affect his destiny. Careless of the fact that the hero's achievement is to conquer nature, he seems rather to boast of his subservience to her.

Still, up to this day, the fixture of a nose upon the puppet-hero's frontispiece has not been attempted. Some one does it at last. When the alternative came: "No nose to the hero, no moral to the tale;" could there be hesitation?

And I would warn our sentimentalists to admit the nose among the features proper to heroes, otherwise the race will become extinct. There is already an amount of dropping of the curtain that is positively wearisome, even to extremely refined persons, in order to save him from apparent misconduct. He will have to go altogether, unless we boldly figure him as other men. Manifestly the moment his career as a fairy prince was at end, he was on the high road to a nose. The beneficent Power that discriminated for him having vanished utterly, he was, like a bankrupt gentleman, obliged to do all the work for himself. This is nothing more than the tendency of the generations downward from the ideal.

The springs that moved Wilfrid upon the present occasion were simple. We will strip him of his heroic trappings for one fleeting instant, and show them.

Jumping briskly from a restless bed, his first act was to address his features to the looking-glass: and he saw surely the most glorious sight for a hero of the knightly age that could possibly have been offered. The battle of the previous night was written there in one eloquent big lump, which would have passed him current as hero from end to end of the land in the great days of old. These are the tea-table days. His preference was for the visage of Wilfrid Pole, which he saw not. At the aspect of the fearful mask, this young man stared, and then cursed; and then, by an odd transition, he was reminded, as by the force of a sudden gust, that Emilia's hair was redolent of pipe-smoke.

His remark was, "I can't be seen in this state." His thought (a dim reminiscence of poetical readings): "Ambrosial locks indeed!" A sad irony, which told that much gold-leaf had peeled away from her image in his heart.

Wilfrid was a gallant fellow, with good stuff in him. But, he was young. Ponder on that pregnant word, for you are about to see him grow. He was less a coxcomb than shamefaced and sentimental; and one may have these qualities, and be a coxcomb to boot, and yet be a gallant fellow. One may also be a gallant fellow, and harsh, exacting, double-dealing, and I know not what besides, in youth. The question asked by nature is, "Has he the heart to take and keep an impression?" For, if he has, circumstances will force him on and carve the figure of a brave man out of that mass of contradictions. In return for such benefits, he pays forfeit commonly of the dearest of the things prized by him in this terrestrial life. Whereat, albeit created man by her, he reproaches nature, and the sculptor, circumstance; forgetting that to make him man is their sole duty, and that what betrayed him was the difficulty thrown in their way by his quondam self--the pleasant boonfellow!

He forgets, in fact, that he was formerly led by his nose, and sacrificed his deeper feeling to a low disgust.

When the youth is called upon to look up, he can adore devoutly and ardently; but when it is his chance to look down on a fair head, he is, if not worse, a sentimental despot.

Wilfrid was young, and under the dominion of his senses; which can be, if the sentimentalists will believe me, as tyrannous and misleading when super-refined as when ultra-bestial. He made a good stout effort to resist the pipe-smoke. Emilia's voice, her growing beauty, her simplicity, her peculiar charms of feature, were all conjured up to combat the dismal images suggested by that fatal, dragging-down smell. It was vain. Horrible pipe-smoke pervaded the memory of her. It seemed to his offended dainty fancy that he could never dissociate her from smoking-booths and abominably bad tobacco; and, let us add (for this was part of the secret), that it never could dwell on her without the companionship of a hideous disfigured countenance, claiming to be Wilfrid Pole. He shuddered to think that he had virtually almost engaged himself to this girl. Or, had he? Was his honour bound? Distance appeared to answer the question favourably. There was safety in being distant from her. She possessed an incomprehensible attractiveness. She was at once powerful and pitiable: so that while he feared her, and was running from her spell, he said, from time to time, "Poor little thing!" and deeply hoped she would not be unhappy.

A showman once (a novice in his art, or ambitious beyond the mark), after a successful exhibition of his dolls, handed them to the company, with the observation, "satisfy yourselves, ladies and gentlemen." The latter, having satisfied themselves that the capacity of the lower limbs was extraordinary, returned them, disenchanted. That showman did ill. But I am not imitating him. I do not wait till after the performance, when it is too late to revive illusion. To avoid having to drop the curtain, I choose to explain an act on which the story hinges, while it is advancing: which is, in truth, an impulse of character. Instead of his being more of a puppet, this hero is less wooden than he was. Certainly I am much more in awe of him.

CHAPTER XIV

Mr. Pole was one of those men whose characters are read off at a glance. He was neat, insignificant, and nervously cheerful; with the eyes of a bird, that let you into no interior. His friends knew him thoroughly. His daughters were never in doubt about him. At the period of the purchase of Brookfield he had been excitable and feverish, but that was ascribed to the projected change in his habits, and the stern necessity for an occasional family intercommunication on the subject of money. He had a remarkable shyness of this theme, and reversed its general treatment; for he would pay, but would not talk of it. If it had to be discussed with the ladies, he puffed, and blinked, and looked so much like a culprit that, though they rather admired him for what seemed to them the germ of a sense delicate above his condition, they would have said of any man they had not known so perfectly, that he had painful reasons for wishing to avoid it. Now that they spoke to him of Besworth, assuring him that they were serious in their desire to change their residence, the fit of shyness was manifested, first in outrageous praise of Brookfield, which was speedily and inexplicably followed by a sort of implied assent to the proposition to depart from it. For Besworth displayed numerous advantages over Brookfield, and to contest one was to plunge headlong into the money question. He ventured to ask his daughters what good they expected from the change. They replied that it was simply this: that one might live fifty years at Brookfield and not get such a circle as in two might be established at Besworth. They were restricted. They had gathering friends, and no means of bringing them together. And the beauty of the site of Besworth made them enthusiastic.

"Well, but," said Mr. Pole: "what does it lead to? Is there nothing to come after?"

He explained: "You're girls, you know. You won't always stop with me. You may do just as well at Brookfield for yourselves, as over there."

The ladies blushed demurely.

"You forecast very kindly for us, papa," said Cornelia. "Our object is entirely different."

"I wish I could see it," he returned.

"But, you do see, papa, you do see," interposed Adela, "that a select life is preferable to that higgledy-piggledy city-square existence so many poor creatures are condemned to!"

"Select!" said Mr. Pole, thinking that he had hit upon a weakness in their argument; "how can it be select when you want to go to a place where you may have a crowd about you?"

"Selection can only be made from a crowd," remarked Arabella, with terrible placidity. "It is where we see few that we are at the mercy of kind fortune for our acquaintances."

"Don't you see, papa, that the difference between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie is, that the former choose their sets, and the latter are obliged to take what comes to them?" said Adela.

This was the first domestic discussion upon Besworth. The visit to Richford had produced the usual effect on the ladies, who were now looking to other heights from that level. The ladies said: "We have only to press it with papa, and we shall quit this place." But at the second discussion they found that they had not advanced. The only change was in the emphasis that their father added to the interrogations already uttered. "What does it lead to? What's to come after? I see your object. But, am I to go into a new house for the sake of getting you out of it, and then be left there alone? It's against your interests, too. Never mind how. Leave that to a business man. If your brother had proposed it...but he's too reasonable."

The ladies, upon this hint, wrote to Wilfrid to obtain his concurrence and assistance. He laughed when he read the simple sentence: "We hope you will not fancy that we have any peculiar personal interest in view;" and replied to them that he was sure they had none: that he looked upon Besworth with favour, "and I may inform you," he pursued, "that your taste is heartily applauded by Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, she bids me tell you." The letter was dated from Stornley, the estate of the marquis, Lady Charlotte's father. Her ladyship's brother was a member of Wilfrid's Club. "He calls Besworth the most habitable place in the county, and promises to be there as many months out of the twelve as you like to have him. I agree with him that Stornley can't hold a candle to it. There are three residences in England that might be preferred to it, and, of those, two are ducal."

The letter was a piece of that easy diplomacy which comes from habit. The "of those, two are ducal," was masterly. It affected the imagination of Brookfield. "Which two?" And could Besworth be brought to rival them? Ultimately, it might be! The neighbourhood to London, too, gave it noble advantages. Rapid relays of guests, and a metropolitan reputation for country attractions, would distinguish Besworth above most English houses. A house where all the chief celebrities might be encountered: a house under suave feminine rule; a house, a home, to a chosen set, and a refreshing fountain to a widening circle!

"We have a dispute," they wrote playfully to Wilfrid "a dispute we wish you or Lady Charlotte to settle. I, Arabella, know nothing of trout. I, Cornelia, know nothing of river-beds. I, Adela, know nothing of engineering. But, we are persuaded, the latter, that the river running for a mile through Besworth grounds may be deepened: we are persuaded, the intermediate, that the attempt will damage the channel: we are persuaded, the first, that all the fish will go."

In reply, Wilfrid appeared to have taken them in earnest. "I rode over yesterday with Lady Charlotte," he said. "We think something might be done, without at all endangering the fish or spoiling the channel. At all events, the idea of making the mile of broad water serviceable for boats is too good to give up in a hurry. How about the dining-hall? I told Lady Charlotte you were sure to insist upon a balcony for musicians. She laughed. You will like her when you know her."

Thus the ladies of Brookfield were led on to be more serious concerning Besworth than they had thought of being, and began to feel that their honour was pledged to purchase this surpassing family seat. In a household where every want is supplied, and money as a topic utterly banished, it is not surprising that they should have had imperial views.

Adela was Wilfrid's favoured correspondent. She described to him gaily the struggle with their papa. "But, if you care for Besworth, you may calculate on it.---Or is it only for our sakes, as I sometimes think?--- Besworth is won. Nothing but the cost of the place (to be considered you know!) could withhold it from us; and of that papa has not uttered a syllable, though he conjures up every possible objection to a change of abode, and will not (perhaps, poor dear, cannot) see what we intend doing in the world. Now, you know that rich men invariably make the question of the cost their first and loudest outcry. I know that to be the case. They call it their blood. Papa seems indifferent to this part of the affair. He does not even allude to it. Still, we do not progress. It is just possible that the Tinleys have an eye on beautiful Besworth. Their own place is bad enough, but good enough for them. Give them Besworth, and they will sit upon the neighbourhood. We shall be invaded by everything that is mean and low, and a great chance will be gone for us. I think I may say, for the county. The country? Our advice is, that you write to papa one of your cleverest letters. We know, darling, what you can do with the pen as well as the sword. Write word that you have written."

Wilfrid's reply stated that he considered it unadvisable that he should add his voice to the request, for the present.

The ladies submitted to this quietly until they heard from their father one evening at dinner that he had seen Wilfrid in the city.

"He doesn't waste his time like some young people I know," said Mr. Pole, with a wink.

"Papa; is it possible?" cried Adela.

"Everything's possible, my dear."

"Lady Charlotte?"

"There is a Lady Charlotte."

"Who would be Lady Charlotte still, whatever occurred!"

Mr. Pole laughed. "No, no. You get nothing out of me. All I say is, be practical. The sun isn't always shining."

He appeared to be elated with some secret good news.

"Have you been over to Besworth, the last two or three days?" he asked.

The ladies smiled radiantly, acknowledging Wilfrid's wonderful persuasive powers, in their hearts.

"No, papa; we have not been," said Adela. "We are always anxious to go, as I think you know."

The merchant chirped over his glass. "Well, well! There's a way."

"Straight?"

"Over a gate; ha, ha!"

His gaiety would have been perplexing, but for the allusion to Lady Charlotte.

The sisters, in their unfailing midnight consultation, persuaded one another that Wilfrid had become engaged to that lady. They wrote forthwith *Fine Shades* to him on the subject. His answer was Boeotian, and all about Besworth. "Press it now," he said, "if you really want it. The iron is hot. And above all things, let me beg you not to be inconsiderate to the squire, when he and I are doing all we can for you. I mean, we are bound to consider him, if there should happen to be anything he wishes us to do."

What could the word 'inconsiderate' imply? The ladies were unable to summon an idea to solve it. They were sure that no daughters could be more perfectly considerate and ready to sacrifice everything to their father. In the end, they deputed the volunteering Adela to sit with him in the library, and put the question of Besworth decisively, in the name of all. They, meantime, who had a contempt for sleep, waited aloft to hold debate over the result of the interview.

An hour after midnight, Adela came to them, looking pale and uncertain: her curls seeming to drip, and her blue eyes wandering about the room, as if she had seen a thing that kept her in a quiver between belief and doubt.

The two ladies drew near to her, expressing no verbal impatience, from which the habit of government and great views naturally saved them, but singularly curious.

Adela's first exclamation: "I wish I had not gone," alarmed them.

"Has any change come to papa?" breathed Arabella.

Cornelia smiled. "Do you not know him too well?"

An acute glance from Adela made her ask whether Besworth was to be surrendered.

"Oh, no! my dear. We may have Besworth."

"Then, surely!"

"But, there are conditions?" said Arabella.

"Yes. Wilfrid's enigma is explained. Bella, that woman has seen papa."

"What woman?"

"Mrs. Chump."

"She has our permission to see him in town, if that is any consolation to her."

"She has told him," continued Adela, "that no explanation, or whatever it may be, was received by her."

"Certainly not, if it was not sent."

"Papa," and Adela's voice trembled, "papa will not think of Besworth,--- not a word of it!-until---until we consent to welcome that woman here as our guest."

Cornelia was the first to break the silence that followed this astounding intelligence. "Then," she said, "Besworth is not to be thought of. You told him so?"

Adela's head drooped. "Oh!" she cried, "what shall we do? We shall be a laughing-stock to the neighbourhood. The house will have to be locked up. We shall live like hermits worried by a demon. Her brogue! Do you remember it? It is not simply Irish. It's Irish steeped in brine. It's pickled Irish!"

She feigned the bursting into tears of real vexation.

"You speak," said Cornelia contemptuously, "as if we had very humbly bowed our heads to the infection."

"Papa making terms with us!" murmured Arabella.

"Pray, repeat his words."

Adela tossed her curls. "I will, as well as I can. I began by speaking of Besworth cheerfully; saying, that if he really had no strong affection for Brookfield, that would make him regret quitting it, we saw innumerable advantages in the change of residence proposed. Predilection,---not affection---that was what I said. He replied that Besworth was a large place, and I pointed out that therein lay one of its principal merits. I expected what would come. He alluded to the possibility of our changing our condition. You know that idea haunts him. I told him our opinion of the folly of the thing. I noticed that he grew red in the face, and I said that of course marriage was a thing ordained, but that we objected to being submerged in matrimony until we knew who and what we were. I confess he did not make a bad reply, of its kind. 'You're like a youngster playing truant that he may gain knowledge.' What do you think of it?"

"A smart piece of City-speech," was Arabella's remark: Cornelia placidly observing, "Vulgarity never contains more than a minimum of the truth."

"I said," Adela went on, "Think as you will, papa, we know we are right." He looked really angry. He said, that we have the absurdest ideas---you tell me to repeat his words---of any girls that ever existed; and then he put a question: listen: I give it without comment: 'I dare say, you all object to widows marrying again.' I kept myself quiet. 'Marrying again, papa! If they marry once they might as well marry a dozen times.' It was the best way to irritate him. I did not intend it; that is all I can say. He jumped from his chair, rubbed his hair, and almost ran up and down the library floor, telling me that I prevaricated. 'You object to a widow marrying at all---that's my question!' he cried out loud. Of course I contained my voice all the more. 'Distinctly, papa.' When I had spoken, I could scarcely help laughing. He went like a pony that is being broken in, crying, I don't know how many times, 'Why? What's your reason?' You may suppose, darlings, that I decline to enter upon explanation. If a person is dense upon a matter of pure sentiment, there is no ground between us: he has simply a sense wanting. 'What has all this to do with Besworth?' I asked. 'A great deal more than you fancy,' was his answer. He seemed to speak every word at me in capital letters. Then, as if a little ashamed, he sat down, and reached out his hand to mine, and I saw his eyes were moist. I drew my chair nearer to him. Now, whether I did right or wrong in this, I do not know I leave it entirely to your judgement. If you consider how I was placed, you will at all events excuse me. What I did was---you know, the very farthest suspicion one has of an extreme possibility one does not mind mentioning: I said 'Papa, if it should so happen that money is the objection to Besworth, we will not trouble you.' At this, I can only say that he behaved like an insane person. He denounced me as wilfully insulting him that I might avoid one subject."

"And what on earth can that be?" interposed Arabella.

"You may well ask. Could a genie have guessed that Mrs. Chump was at the bottom of it all? The conclusion of the dreadful discussion is this, that papa offers to take the purchase of Besworth into his consideration, if we, as I said before, will receive Mrs. Chump as our honoured guest. I am bound to say, poor dear old man, he spoke kindly, as he always does, and kissed me, and offered to give me anything I might want. I came from him stupefied. I have hardly got my senses about me yet."

The ladies caressed her, with grave looks; but neither of them showed a perturbation of spirit like that which distressed Adela.

"Wilfrid's meaning is now explained," said Cornelia. "He is in league with papa; or has given in his adhesion to papa's demands, at least. He is another example of the constant tendency in men to be what they call 'practical' at the expense of honour and sincerity."

"I hope not," said Arabella. "In any case, that need not depress you so seriously, darling."

She addressed Adela.

"Do you not see?" Adela cried, in response. "What! are you both blind to the real significance of papa's words? I could not have believed it! Or am I this time too acute? I pray to heaven it may be so!"

Both ladies desired her to be explicit; Arabella, eagerly; Cornelia with distrust.

"The question of a widow marrying! What is this woman, whom papa wishes to force on us as our guest? Why should he do that? Why should he evince anxiety with regard to our opinion of the decency of widows contemplating re-union? Remember previous words and hints when we lived in the city!"

"This at least you may spare us," said Cornelia, ruffling offended.

Adela smiled in tenderness for her beauty.

"But, it is important, if we are following a track, dear. Think over it."

"No!" cried Arabella. "It cannot be true. We might easily have guessed this, if we ever dreamed of impossibilities."

"In such cases, when appearances lean in one direction, set principles in the opposite balance," added Cornelia. "What Adela apprehends may seem to impend, but we know that papa is incapable of doing it. To know that, shuts the gates of suspicion. She has allowed herself to be troubled by a ghastly nightmare."

Adela believed in her own judgement too completely not to be sure that her sisters were, perhaps unknowingly, disguising a slowness of perception they were ashamed of, by thus partially accusing her of giddiness. She bit her lip.

"Very well; if you have no fears whatever, you need not abandon the idea of Besworth."

"I abandon nothing," said Arabella. "If I have to make a choice, I take that which is least objectionable. I am chagrined, most, at the idea that Wilfrid has been treacherous."

"Practical," Cornelia suggested. "You are not speaking of one of our sex."

Questions were then put to Adela, whether Mr. Pole had spoken in the manner of one who was prompted: whether he hesitated as he spoke: whether, in short, Wilfrid was seen behind his tongue. Adela resolved that Wilfrid should have one protectress.

"You are entirely mistaken in ascribing treachery to him," she said. "It is papa that is changed. You may suppose it to be without any reason, if you please. I would tell you to study him for yourselves, only I am convinced that these special private interviews are anything but good policy, and are strictly to be avoided, unless of course, as in the present instance, we have something directly to do."

Toward dawn the ladies had decreed that it was policy to be quite passive, and provoke no word of Mrs. Chump by making any allusion to Besworth, and by fencing with the mention of the place.

As they rarely failed to carry out any plan deliberately conceived by them, Mr. Pole was astonished to find that Besworth was altogether dropped. After certain scattered attempts to bring them upon Besworth, he shrugged, and resigned himself, but without looking happy.

Indeed he looked so dismal that the ladies began to think he had a great longing for Besworth. And yet he did not go there, or even praise it to the discredit of Brookfield! They were perplexed.

"Let me ask you how it is," said Cornelia to Mr. Barrett, "that a person whom we know---whose actions and motives are as plain to us as though discerned through a glass, should at times produce a completer mystification than any other creature? Or have you not observed it?"

"I have had better opportunities of observing it than most people," Mr. Barren replied, with one of his saddest amused smiles. "I have come to the conclusion that the person we know best is the one whom we never understand."

"You answer me with a paradox."

"Is it not the natural attendant on an assumption?"

"What assumption?"

"That you know a person thoroughly."

"May we not?"

"Do you, when you acknowledge this 'complete mystification'?"

"Yes." Cornelia smiled when she had said it. "And no."

Mr. Barrett, with his eyes on her, laughed softly. "Which is paradox at the fountain-head! But, when we say we know any one, we mean commonly that we are accustomed to his ways and habits of mind; or, that we can reckon on the predominant influence of his appetites. Sometimes we can tell which impulse is likely to be the most active, and which principle the least restraining. The only knowledge to be trusted is a grounded or scientific study of the springs that move him, side by side with his method of moving the springs. If you fail to do this, you have two classes under your eyes: you have sane and madman: and it will seem to you that the ranks of the latter are constantly being swollen in an extraordinary manner. The customary impression, as we get older, is that our friends are the maddest people in the world. You see, we have grown accustomed to them; and now, if they bewilder us, our judgement, in self-defence, is

compelled to set them down lunatic."

Cornelia bowed her stately head with gentle approving laughter.

"They must go, or they despatch us thither," she said, while her fair face dimpled into serenity. The remark was of a lower nature than an intellectual discussion ordinarily drew from her: but could Mr. Barrett have read in her heart, he might have seen that his words were beginning to rob that organ of its native sobriety. So that when he spoke a cogent phrase, she was silenced, and became aware of a strange exultation in her blood that obscured grave thought. Cornelia attributed this display of mental weakness altogether to Mr. Barrett's mental force. The interposition of a fresh agency was undreamt of by the lady.

Meanwhile, it was evident that Mr. Pole was a victim to one of his fevers of shyness. He would thrum on the table, frowning; and then, as he met the look of one of the ladies, try to disguise the thought in his head with a forced laugh. Occasionally, he would turn toward them, as if he had just caught a lost idea that was peculiarly precious. The ladies drawing up to attend to the communication, had a most trivial matter imparted to them, and away he went. Several times he said to them "You don't make friends, as you ought;" and their repudiation of the charge made him repeat: "You don't make friends---home friends."

"The house can be as full as we care to have it, papa."

"Yes, acquaintances! All very well, but I mean friends---rich friends."

"We will think of it, papa," said Adela, "when we want money."

"It isn't that," he murmured.

Adela had written to Wilfrid a full account of her interview with her father. Wilfrid's reply was laconic. "If you cannot stand a week of the brogue, give up Besworth, by all means." He made no further allusion to the place. They engaged an opera-box, for the purpose of holding a consultation with him in town. He wrote evasively, but did not appear, and the ladies, with Emilia between them, listened to every foot-fall by the box-door, and were too much preoccupied to marvel that Emilia was just as inattentive to the music as they were. When the curtain dropped they noticed her dejection.

"What ails you?" they asked.

"Let us go out of London to-night," she whispered, and it was difficult to persuade her that she would see Brookfield again.

"Remember," said Adela, "it is you that run away from us, not we from you."

Soft chidings of this description were the only reproaches for her naughty conduct. She seemed contrite very still and timid, since that night of adventure. The ladies were glad to observe it, seeing that it lent her an air of refinement, and proved her sensible to correction.

At last Mr. Pole broke the silence. He had returned from business, humming and rubbing his hands, like one newly primed with a suggestion that was the key of a knotty problem. Observant Adela said: "Have you seen Wilfrid, papa?"

"Saw him in the morning," Mr. Pole replied carelessly.

Mr. Barrett was at the table.

"By the way, what do you think of our law of primogeniture?" Mr. Pole addressed him.

He replied with the usual allusion to a basis of aristocracy.

"Well, it's the English system," said Mr. Pole. "That's always in its favour at starting. I'm Englishman enough to think that. There ought to be an entail of every decent bit of property, eh?"

It was observed that Mr. Barrett reddened as he said, "I certainly think that a young man should not be subject to his father's caprice."

"Father's caprice! That isn't common. But, if you're founding a family, you must entail."

"We agree, sir, from my point of view, and from yours."

"Knits the family bond, don't you think? I mean, makes the trunk of the tree firm. It makes the girls poor, though!"

Mr. Barrett saw that he had some confused legal ideas in his head, and that possibly there were personal considerations in the background; so he let the subject pass.

When the guest had departed, Mr. Pole grew demonstrative in his paternal caresses. He folded Adela in one arm, and framed her chin in his fingers: marks of affection dear to her before she had outgrown them.

"So!" he said, "you've given up Besworth, have you?"

At the name, Arabella and Cornelia drew nearer to his chair.

"Given up Besworth, papa? It is not we who have given it up," said Adela.

"Yes, you have; and quite right too. You say, 'What's the use of it, for that's a sort of thing that always goes to the son.'"

"You suppose, papa, that we indulge in ulterior calculations?" came from Cornelia.

"Well, you see, my love!--no, I don't suppose it at all. But to buy a place and split it up after two or three years---I dare say they wouldn't insure me for more, that's nonsense. And it seems unfair to you, as you must think---"

"Darling papa! we are not selfish!" it rejoiced Adela to exclaim.

His face expressed a transparent simple-mindedness that won the confidence of the ladies and awakened their ideal of generosity.

"I know what you mean, papa," said Arabella. "But, we love Besworth; and if we may enjoy the place for the time that we are all together, I shall think it sufficient. I do not look beyond."

Her sisters echoed the sentiment, and sincerely. They were as little sordid as creatures could be. If deeply questioned, it would have been found that their notion of the position Providence had placed them in (in other words, their father's unmentioned wealth), permitted them to be as lavish as they pleased. Mr. Pole had endowed them with a temperament

similar to his own; and he had educated it. In feminine earth it flourished wonderfully. Shy as himself, their shyness took other forms, and developed with warm youth. Not only did it shut them up from others (which is the first effect of this disease), but it tyrannized over them internally: so that there were subjects they had no power to bring their minds to consider. Money was in the list. The Besworth question, as at present considered, involved the money question. All of them felt that; father and children. It is not surprising, therefore, that they hurried over it as speedily as they could, and by a most comical exhibition of implied comprehension of meanings and motives.

"Of course, we're only in the opening stage of the business," said Mr. Pole. "There's nothing decided, you know. Lots of things got to be considered. You mean what you say, do you? Very well. And you want me to think of it? So I will. And look, my dears, you know that---" (here his voice grew husky, as was the case with it when touching a shy topic even beneath the veil; but they were above suspicion) "you know that---a--- that we must all give way a little to the other, now and then. Nothing like being kind."

"Pray, have no fear, papa dear!" rang the clear voice of Arabella.

"Well, then, you're all for Besworth, even though it isn't exactly for your own interest? All right."

The ladies kissed him.

"We'll each stretch a point," he continued. "We shall get on better if we do. Much! You're a little hard on people who're not up to the mark. There's an end to that. Even your old father will like you better."

These last remarks were unintelligible to the withdrawing ladies.

On the morning that followed, Mr. Pole expressed a hope that his daughters intended to give him a good dinner that day; and he winked humorously and kindly by which they understood him to be addressing a sort of propitiation to them for the respect he paid to his appetite.

"Papa," said Adela, "I myself will speak to Cook."

She added, with a smile thrown to her sisters, without looking at them, "I dare say, she will know who I am."

Mr. Pole went down to his wine-cellar, and was there busy with bottles till the carriage came for him. A bason was fetched that he might wash off the dust and cobwebs in the passage. Having rubbed his hands briskly with soap, he dipped his head likewise, in an oblivious fit, and then turning round to the ladies, said, "What have I forgotten?" looking woebegone with his dripping vacant face. "Oh, ah! I remember now;" and he chuckled gladly.

He had just for one moment forgotten that he was acting, and a pang of apprehension had caught him when the water covered his face, to the effect that he must forfeit the natural artistic sequence of speech and conduct which disguised him so perfectly. Away he drove, nodding and waving his hand.

"Dear, simple, innocent old man!" was the pitiful thought in the bosoms of the ladies; and if it was accompanied by the mute exclamation, "How singular that we should descend from him!" it would not have been for the first time.

They passed one of their delightful quiet days, in which they paved the future with gold, and, if I may use so bold a figure, lifted parasols against the great sun that was to shine on them. Now they listened to Emilia, and now strolled in the garden; conversed on the social skill of Lady Gosstre, who was nevertheless narrow in her range; and on the capacities of mansions, on the secret of mixing people in society, and what to do with the women! A terrible problem,

this latter one. Not terrible (to hostesses) at a mere rout or drum, or at a dance pure and simple, but terrible when you want good talk to circulate for then they are not, as a body, amused; and when they are not amused, you know, they are not inclined to be harmless; and in this state they are vipers; and where is society then? And yet you cannot do without them!--which is the revolting mystery. I need not say that I am not responsible for these critical remarks. Such tenderness to the sex comes only from its sisters.

So went a day rich in fair dreams to the ladies; and at the hour of their father's return they walked across the parvenu park, in a state of enthusiasm for Besworth, that threw some portion of its decorative light on the, donor of Besworth. When his carriage was heard on the road, they stood fast, and greeted his appearance with a display of pocket-handkerchiefs in the breeze, a proceeding that should have astonished him, being novel; but seemed not to do so, for it was immediately responded to by the vigorous waving of a pair of pocket-handkerchiefs from the carriage-window! The ladies smiled at this piece of simplicity which prompted him to use both his hands, as if one would not have been enough. Complacently they continued waving. Then Adela looked at her sisters; Cornelia's hand dropped and Arabella, the last to wave, was the first to exclaim: "That must be a woman's arm!"

The carriage stopped at the gate, and it was one in the dress of a woman at least, and of the compass of a big woman, who descended by the aid of Mr. Pole. Safely alighted, she waved her pocket-handkerchief afresh. The ladies of Brookfield did not speak to one another; nor did they move their eyes from the object approaching. A simultaneous furtive extinction of three pocket-handkerchiefs might have been noticed. There was no further sign given.

CHAPTER XV

A letter from Brookfield apprised Wilfrid that Mr. Pole had brought Mrs. Chump to the place as a visitor, and that she was now in the house. Formal as a circular, the idea of it appeared to be that the bare fact would tell him enough and inspire him with proper designs. No reply being sent, a second letter arrived, formal too, but pointing out his duty to succour his afflicted family, and furnishing a few tragic particulars. Thus he learnt, that while Mr. Pole was advancing toward the three grouped ladies, on the day of Mrs. Chump's arrival, he called Arabella by name, and Arabella went forward alone, and was engaged in conversation by Mrs. Chump. Mr. Pole left them to make his way to Adela and Cornelia. "Now, mind, I expect you to keep to your agreement," he said. Gradually they were led on to perceive that this simple-minded man had understood their recent talk of Besworth to signify a consent to the stipulation he had previously mentioned to Adela. "Perfect simplicity is as deceiving as the depth of cunning," Adela despairingly wrote, much to Wilfrid's amusement.

A third letter followed. It was of another tenor, and ran thus, in Adela's handwriting:

"My Darling Wilfrid,

"We have always known that some peculiar assistance would never be wanting in our extremity---aid, or comfort, or whatever you please to call it. At all events, something to show we are not neglected. That old notion of ours must be true. I shall say nothing of our sufferings in the house. They continue. Yesterday, papa came from town, looking important. He had up some of his best wine for dinner. All through the service his eyes were sparkling on Cornelia. I spare you a family picture, while there is this huge blot on it. Naughty brother! But, listen! your place is here, for many reasons, as you will be quick enough to see. After dinner, papa took Cornelia into the library alone, and they were together for ten minutes. She came out very pale. She had been proposed for by Sir Twickenham Pryme, our Member for the borough. I have always been sure that Cornelia was born for Parliament, and he will be lucky if he wins her. We know not yet, of course, what her decision will be. The incident is chiefly remarkable to us as a relief to what I need not recount to you. But I wish to say one thing, dear Wilfrid. You are gazetted to a lieutenantancy, and we congratulate you: but what I have to say is apparently much more trifling, and it is, that---will you take it to heart?---it would do Arabella

and myself infinite good if we saw a little more of our brother, and just a little less of a very gentlemanly organ-player phenomenon, who talks so exceedingly well. He is a very pleasant man, and appreciates our ideas, and so forth; but it is our duty to love our brother best, and think of him foremost, and we wish him to come and remind us of our duty.

"At our Cornelia's request, with our concurrence, papa is silent in the house as to the purport of the communication made by Sir T.P.

"By the way, are you at all conscious of a sound-like absurdity in a Christian name of three syllables preceding a surname of one? Sir Twickenham Pryme! Cornelia's pronunciation of the name first gave me the feeling. The 'Twickenham' seems to perform a sort of educated monkey kind of ridiculously decorous pirouette and entrechat before the 'Pryme.' I think that Cornelia feels it also. You seem to fancy elastic limbs bending to the measure of a solemn church-organ. Sir Timothy? But Sir Timothy does not jump with the same grave agility as Sir Twickenham! If she rejects him, it will be half attributable to this.

"My own brother! I expect no confidences, but a whisper warns me that you have not been to Stornley twice without experiencing the truth of our old discovery, that the Poles are magnetic? Why should we conceal it from ourselves, if it be so? I think it a folly, and fraught with danger, for people not to know their characteristics. If they attract, they should keep in a circle where they will have no reason to revolt at, or say, repent of what they attract. My argumentative sister does not coincide. If she did, she would lose her argument.

"Adieu! Such is my dulness, I doubt whether I have made my meaning clear.

"Your thrice affectionate

"Adela.

"P.S.---Lady Gosstre has just taken Emilia to Richford for a week. Papa starts for Bidport to-morrow."

This short and rather blunt exercise in *Fine Shades* was read impatiently by Wilfrid. "Why doesn't she write plain to the sense?" he asked, with the usual injustice of men, who demand a statement of facts, forgetting how few there are to feed the post; and that indication and suggestion are the only language for the multitude of facts unborn and possible. Twilight best shows to the eye what may be.

"I suppose I must go down there," he said to himself, keeping a meditative watch on the postscript, as if it possessed the capability of slipping away and deceiving him. "Does she mean that Cornelia sees too much of this man Barrett? or, what does she mean?" And now he saw meanings in the simple passages, and none at all in the intricate ones; and the double-meanings were monsters that ate one another up till nothing remained of them. In the end, however, he made a wrathful guess and came to a resolution, which brought him to the door of the house next day at noon. He took some pains in noting the exact spot where he had last seen Emilia half in moonlight, and then dismissed her image peremptorily. The house was apparently empty. Gainsford, the footman, gave information that he thought the ladies were upstairs, but did not volunteer to send a maid to them. He stood in deferential footman's attitude, with the aspect of a dog who would laugh if he could, but being a footman out of his natural element, cannot.

"Here's a specimen of the new plan of treating servants!" thought Wilfrid, turning away. "To act a farce for their benefit! That fellow will explode when he gets downstairs. I see how it is. This woman, Chump, is making them behave like schoolgirls."

He conceived the idea sharply, and forthwith, without any preparation, he was ready to treat these high-aspiring ladies like schoolgirls. Nor was there a lack of justification; for when they came down to his shouts in the passage, they hushed, and held a finger aloft, and looked altogether so unlike what they aimed at being, that Wilfrid's sense of mastery became almost contempt.

"I know perfectly what you have to tell me," he said. "Mrs. Chump is here, you have quarrelled with her, and she has shut her door, and you have shut yours. It's quite intelligible and full of dignity. I really can't smother my voice in consequence."

He laughed with unnecessary abandonment. The sensitive young women wanted no other schooling to recover themselves. In a moment they were seen leaning back and contemplating him amusedly, as if he had been the comic spectacle, and were laughing for a wager. There are few things so sour as the swallowing of one's own forced laugh. Wilfrid got it down, and commenced a lecture to fill the awkward pause. His sisters maintained the opera-stall posture of languid attention, contesting his phrases simply with their eyebrows, and smiling. He was no match for them while they chose to be silent: and indeed if the business of life were conducted in dumb show, women would beat men hollow. They posture admirably. In dumb show they are equally good for attack and defence. But this is not the case in speech. So, when Arabella explained that their hope was to see Mrs. Chump go that day, owing to the rigorous exclusion of all amusement and the outer world from the house, Wilfrid regained his superior footing and made his lecture tell. In the middle of it, there rang a cry from the doorway that astonished even him, it was so powerfully Irish.

"The lady you have called down is here," said Arabella's cold glance, in answer to his.

They sat with folded hands while Wilfrid turned to Mrs. Chump, who advanced, a shock of blue satin to the eye, crying, on a jump: "Is ut Mr. Wilfrud?"

"It's I, ma'am." Wilfrid bowed, and the censorious ladies could not deny that, his style was good, if his object was to be familiar. And if that was his object, he was paid for it. A great thick kiss was planted on his cheek, with the motto: "Harm to them that thinks ut."

Wilfrid bore the salute like a man who presumes that he is flattered.

"And it's you!" said Mrs. Chump. "I was just off. I'm packed, and bonnuttet, and ready for a start; becas, my dear, where there's none but women, I don't think it natural to stop. You're splendud! How a little fella like Pole could go and be father to such a mighty big son, with your bit of moustache and your blue eyes! Are they blue or a bit of grey in 'em?" Mrs. Chump peered closely. "They're kill'n', let their colour be annyhow. And I that knew ye when ye were no bigger than my garter! Oh, sir! don't talk of ut; I'll be thinkin', of my coffin. Ye're glad to see me? Say, yes. Do!"

"Very glad," quoth Wilfrid.

"Upon your honour, now?"

"Upon my honour!"

"My dears" (Mrs. Chump turned to the ladies), "I'll stop; and just thank your brother for't, though you can't help being garls."

Reduced once more to demonstrate like schoolgirls by this woman, the ladies rose together, and were retiring, when Mrs. Chump swung round and caught Arabella's hand. "See heer," she motioned to Wilfrid. Arabella made a bitter effort to

disengage herself. "See, now! It's jeal'sy of me, Mr. Wilfrud, becas I'm a widde and just an abom'nation to garls, poor darlin's! And twenty shindies per dime we've been havin', and me such a placable body, if ye'll onnly let m' explode. I'm all powder, avery bit! and might ha' been christened Saltpetre, if born a boy. She hasn't so much as a shot to kill a goose, says Chump, poor fella! But he went, anyway. I must kiss somebody when I talk of 'm. Mr. Wilfrud, I'll take the girls, and entitle myself to you."

Arabella was the first victim. Her remonstrance was inarticulate. Cornelia's "Madam!" was smothered. Adela behaved better, being more consciously under Wilfrid's eye; she prepared her pocket-handkerchief, received the salute, and deliberately effaced it.

"There!" said Mrs. Chump; "duty to begin with. And now for you, Mr. Wilfrud."

The ladies escaped. Their misery could not be conveyed to the mind. The woman was like a demon come among them. They felt chiefly degraded, not by her vulgarity, but by their inability to cope with it, and by the consequent sickening sense of animal inefficiency---the block that was put to all imaginative delight in the golden hazy future they figured for themselves, and which was their wine of life. An intellectual adversary they could have combated; this huge brogue-burring engine quite overwhelmed them. Wilfrid's worse than shameful behaviour was a common rallying-point; and yet, so absolutely critical were they by nature, their blame of him was held mentally in restraint by the superior ease of his manner as contrasted with their own lamentably silly awkwardness. Highly civilized natures do sometimes, and keen wits must always, feel dissatisfied when they are not on the laughing side: their dread of laughter is an instinctive respect for it.

Dinner brought them all together again. Wilfrid took his father's seat, facing his Aunt Lupin, and increased the distress of his sisters by his observance of every duty of a host to the dreadful intruder, whom he thus established among them. He was incomprehensible. His visit to Stornley had wrought in him a total change. He used to like being petted, and would regard everything as right that his sisters did, before he went there; and was a languid, long-legged, indifferent cavalier, representing men to them: things made to be managed, snubbed, admired, but always virtually subservient and in the background. Now, without perceptible gradation, his superiority was suddenly manifest; so that, irritated and apprehensive as they were, they could not, by the aid of any of their intricate mental machinery, look down on him. They tried to; they tried hard to think him despicable as well as treacherous. His style was too good. When he informed Mrs. Chump that he had hired a yacht for the season, and added, after enlarging on the merits of the vessel, "I am under your orders," his sisters were as creatures cut in twain---one half abominating his conduct, the other approving his style. The bow, the smile, were perfect. The ladies had to make an effort to recover their condemnatory judgement.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Chump; "and if you've got a yacht, Mr. Wilfrud, won't ye have a great parcel o' the arr'stocracy on board?"

"You may spy a title by the aid of a telescope," said Wilfrid.

"And I'm to come, I am?"

"Are you not elected captain?"

"Oh, if ye've got lords and real ladies on board, I'll come, be sure of ut! I'll be as sick as a cat, I will. But, I'll come, if it's the rroon of my stomach. I'd say to Chump, "Oh, if ye'd only been born a lord, or would just get yourself struck a knight on one o' your shoulders,---oh, Chump!" I'd say, 'it wouldn't be necessary to be rememberin' always the words of the cerr'mony about lovin' and honourin' and obeyin' of a little whistle of a fella like you." Poor lad! he couldn't stop for his luck! Did ye ask me to take wine, Mr. Wilfrud? I'll be cryin', else, as a widde should, ye know!"

Frequent administrations of wine arrested the tears of Mrs. Chump, until it is possible that the fulness of many a checked flow caused her to redden and talk slightly at random. At the first mention of their father's name, the ladies went out from the room. It was foolish, for they might have watched the effect of certain vinous innuendoes addressed to Wilfrid's apprehensiveness; but they were weakened and humbled, and everything they did was foolish. From the fact that they offended their keen critical taste, moreover, they were targets to the shaft that wounds more fatally than all. No ridicule knocks the strength out of us so thoroughly as our own.

Whether or not he guessed their condition favourable for his plans, Wilfrid did not give them time to call back their scattered powers. At the hour of eleven he sent for Arabella to come to him in the library. The council upstairs permitted Arabella to go, on the understanding that she was prepared for hostilities, and ready to tear the mask from Wilfrid's face.

He commenced, without a shadow of circumlocution, and in a matter-of-fact way, as if all respect for the peculiar genius of the house of Pole had vanished: "I sent for you to talk a word or two about this woman, who, I see, troubles you a little. I'm sorry she's in the house."

"Indeed!" said Arabella.

"I'm sorry she's in the house, not for my sake, but for yours, since the proximity does not seem to... I needn't explain. It comes of your eternal consultations. You are the eldest. Why not act according to your judgement, which is generally sound? You listen to Adela, young as she is; or a look of Cornelia's leads you. The result is the sort of scene I saw this afternoon. I confess it has changed my opinion of you; it has, I grieve to say it. This woman is your father's guest; you can't hurt her so much as you hurt him, if you misbehave to her. You can't openly object to her and not cast a slur upon him. There is the whole case. He has insisted, and you must submit. You should have fought the battle before she came."

"She is here, owing to a miserable misconception," said Arabella.

"Ah! she is here, however. That is the essential, as your old governess Madame Timpan would have said."

"Nor can a protest against coarseness be sweepingly interpreted as a piece of unfilial behaviour," said Arabella.

"She is coarse," Wilfrid nodded his head. "There are some forms of coarseness which dowagers would call it coarseness to notice.

"Not if you find it locked up in the house with you---not if you suffer under a constant repulsion. Pray, do not use these phrases to me, Wilfrid. An accusation of coarseness cannot touch us."

"No, certainly," assented Wilfrid. "And you have a right to protest. I disapprove the form of your protest nothing more. A schoolgirl's...but you complain of the use of comparisons."

"I complain, Wilfrid, of your want of sympathy."

"That for two or three weeks you must hear a brogue at your elbow? The poor creature is not so bad; she is good-hearted. It's hard that you should have to bear with her for that time and receive nothing better than Besworth as your reward."

"Very; seeing that we endure the evil and decline the sop with it."

"How?"

"We have renounced Besworth."

"Have you! And did this renunciation make you all sit on the edge of your chairs, this afternoon, as if Edward Buxley had arranged you? You give up Besworth? I'm afraid it's too late."

"Oh, Wilfrid! can you be ignorant that something more is involved in the purchase of Besworth?"

Arabella gazed at him with distressful eagerness, as one who believes in the lingering of a vestige of candour.

"Do you mean that my father may wish to give this woman his name?" said Wilfrid coolly. "You have sense enough to know that if you make his home disagreeable, you are taking the right method to drive him into such a course. Ha! I don't think it's to be feared, unless you pursue these consultations. And let me say, for my part, we have gone too far about Besworth, and can't recede."

"I have given out everywhere that the place is ours. I did so almost at your instigation. Besworth was nothing to me till you cried it up. And now I won't detain you. I know I can rely on your sense, if you will rely on it. Good night, Bella."

As she was going a faint spark of courage revived Arabella's wits. Seeing that she was now ready to speak, he opened the door wide, and she kissed him and went forth, feeling driven.

But while Arabella was attempting to give a definite version of the interview to her sisters, a message came requesting Adela to descend. The ladies did not allow her to depart until two or three ingenuous exclamations from her made them share her curiosity.

"Ah?" Wilfrid caught her hand as she came in. "No, I don't intend to let it go. You may be a fine lady, but you're a rogue, you know, and a charming one, as I hear a friend of mine has been saying. Shall I call him out? Shall I fight him with pistols, or swords, and leave him bleeding on the ground, because he thinks you a pretty rogue?"

Adela struggled against the blandishment of this old familiar style of converse---part fun, part flattery---dismissed since the great idea had governed Brookfield.

"Please tell me what you called me down for, dear?"

"To give you a lesson in sitting on chairs. 'Adela, or the Puritan sister,' thus: you sit on the extremest edge, and your eyes peruse the ceiling; and..."

"Oh! will you ever forget that perfectly ridiculous scene?" Adela cried in anguish.

She was led by easy stages to talk of Besworth.

"Understand," said Wilfrid, "that I am indifferent about it. The idea sprang from you---I mean from my pretty sister Adela, who is President of the Council of Three. I hold that young woman responsible for all that they do. Am I wrong? Oh, very well. You suggested Besworth, at all events. And---if we quarrel, I shall cut off one of your curls."

"We never will quarrel, my darling," quoth Adela softly. "Unless---" she added.

Wilfrid kissed her forehead.

"Unless what?"

"Well, then, you must tell me who it is that talks of me in that objectionable manner; I do not like it."

"Shall I convey that intimation?"

"I choose to ask, simply that I may defend myself."

"I choose to keep him buried, then, simply to save his life."

Adela made a mouth, and Wilfrid went on: "By the way, I want you to know Lady Charlotte; you will take to one another. She likes you, already--- says you want dash; but on that point there may be two opinions."

"If dash," said Adela, quite beguiled, "---that is, dash!---what does it mean? But, if Lady Charlotte means by dash---am I really wanting in it? I should define it, the quality of being openly natural without vulgarity; and surely...!"

"Then you two differ a little, and must meet and settle your dispute. You don't differ about Besworth: or, didn't. I never saw a woman so much in love with a place as she is."

"A place?" emphasized Adela.

"Don't be too arch. I comprehend. She won't take me minus Besworth, you may be sure."

"Did you, Wilfrid!---but you did not---offer yourself as owner of Besworth?"

Wilfrid kept his eyes slanting on the floor.

"Now I see why you should still wish it," continued Adela. "Perhaps you don't know the reason which makes it impossible, or I would say---Bacchus! it must be compassed. You remember your old schoolboy oath which you taught me? We used to swear always, by Bacchus!"

Adela laughed and blushed, like one who petitions pardon for this her utmost sin, that is not regretted as it should be.

"Mrs. Chump again, isn't it?" said Wilfrid. "Pole would be a preferable name. If she has the ambition, it elevates her. And it would be rather amusing to see the dear old boy in love."

Adela gave her under-lip a distressful bite.

"Why do you, Wilfrid!---why treat such matters with levity?"

"Levity? I am the last to treat ninety thousand pounds with levity."

"Has she so much?" Adela glanced at him.

"She will be snapped up by some poor nobleman. If I take her down to the yacht, one of Lady Charlotte's brothers or uncles will bite; to a certainty."

"It would be an excellent idea to take her!" cried Adela.

"Excellent! and I'll do it, if you like."

"Could you bear the reflex of the woman?"

"Don't you know that I am not in the habit of sitting on the extreme edge...?"

Adela started, breathing piteously: "Wilfrid, dear! you want something of me---what is it?"

"Simply that you should behave civilly to your father's guest."

"I had a fear, dear; but I think too well of you to entertain it for a moment. If civility is to win Besworth for you, there is my hand."

"Be civil---that's all," said Wilfrid, pressing the hand given. "These consultations of yours and acting in concert---one tongue for three women--are a sort of missish, unripe nonsense, that one sees only in bourgeoisie girls---eh? Give it up. Lady Charlotte hit on it at a glance."

"And I, my chameleon brother, will return her the compliment, some day," Adela said to herself, as she hurried back to her sisters, bearing a message for Cornelia. This lady required strong persuasion. A word from Adela: "He will think you have some good reason to deny him a private interview," sent her straight to the stairs.

Wilfrid was walking up and down, with his arms folded and his brows bent. Cornelia stood in the doorway.

"You desire to speak to me, Wilfrid? And in private?"

"I didn't wish to congratulate you publicly, that's all. I know it's rather against your taste. We'll shut the door, and sit down, if you don't mind. Yes, I congratulate you with all my heart," he said, placing a chair for Cornelia.

"May I ask, wherefore?"

"You don't think marriage a matter for congratulation?"

"Sometimes: as the case may be."

"Well, it's not marriage yet. I congratulate you on your offer."

"I thank you."

"You accept it, of course."

"I reject it, certainly."

After this preliminary passage, Wilfrid remained silent long enough for Cornelia to feel uneasy.

"I want you to congratulate me also," he recommenced. "We poor fellows don't have offers, you know. To be frank, I think Lady Charlotte Chillingworth will have me, if---She's awfully fond of Besworth, and I need not tell you that as she

has position in the world, I ought to show something in return. When you wrote about Besworth, I knew it was as good as decided. I told her so and--Well, I fancy there's that sort of understanding between us. She will have me when... You know how the poorer members of the aristocracy are situated. Her father's a peer, and has a little influence. He might push me; but she is one of a large family; she has nothing. I am certain you will not judge of her as common people might. She does me a particular honour."

"Is she not much older than you, Wilfrid?" said Cornelia.

"Or, in other words," he added, "is she not a very mercenary person?"

"That, I did not even imply."

"Honestly, was it not in your head?"

"Now you put it so plainly, I do say, it strikes me disagreeably; I have heard of nothing like it."

"Do you think it unreasonable that I should marry into a noble family?"

"That is, assuredly, not my meaning."

"Nevertheless, you are, on the whole, in favour of beggarly alliances."

"No, Wilfrid."

"Why do you reject this offer that has been made to you?"

Cornelia flushed and trembled; the traitorous feint had thrown her off her guard. She said, faltering:

"Would you have me marry one I do not love?"

"Well, well!" He drew back. "You are going to do your best to stop the purchase of Besworth?"

"No; I am quiescent."

"Though I tell you how deeply it concerns me!"

"Wilfrid, my own brother!" (Cornelia flung herself before him, catching his hand,) "I wish you to be loved, first of all. Think of the horror of a loveless marriage, however gilded! Does a woman make stipulations ere she gives her hand? Does not love seek to give, to bestow? I wish you to marry well, but chiefly that you should be loved."

Wilfrid pressed her head in both his hands.

"I never saw you look so handsome," he said. "You've got back your old trick of blushing, too! Why do you tremble? By the way, you seem to have been learning a great deal about that business, lately?"

"What business?"

"Love."

A river of blood overflowed her fair cheeks.

"How long has this been?" his voice came to her.

There was no escape. She was at his knees, and must look up, or confess guilt.

"This?"

"Come, my dearest girl!" Wilfrid soothed her. "I can help you, and will, if you'll take advice. I've always known your heart was generous and tender, under that ice you wear so well. How long has this been going on?"

"Wilfrid!"

"You want plain speech?"

She wanted that still less.

"We'll call it 'this,'" he said. "I have heard of it, guessed it, and now see it. How far have you pledged yourself in 'this?'"

"How far?"

Wilfrid held silent. Finding that her echo was not accepted as an answer, she moaned his name lovingly. It touched his heart, where a great susceptibility to passion lay. As if the ghost of Emilia were about him, he kissed his sister's hand, and could not go on with his cruel interrogations.

His next question was dew of relief to her.

"Has your Emilia been quite happy, of late?"

"Oh, quite, dear! very. And sings with more fire."

"She's cheerful?"

"She does not romp. Her eyes are full and bright."

"She's satisfied with everything here?"

"How could she be otherwise?"

"Yes, yes! You weren't severe on her for that escapade---I mean, when she ran away from Lady Gosstre's?"

"We scarcely alluded to the subject, or permitted her to."

"Or permitted her to!" Wilfrid echoed, with a grimace. "And she's cheerful now?"

"Quite."

"I mean, she doesn't mope?"

"Why should she?"

Cornelia had been too hard-pressed to have suspicion the questions were an immense relief.

Wilfrid mused gloomily. Cornelia spoke further of Emilia, and her delight in the visits of Mr. Powys, who spent hours with her, like a man fascinated. She flowed on, little aware that she was fast restoring to Wilfrid all his judicial severity.

He said, at last: "I suppose there's no engagement existing?"

"Engagement?"

"You have not, what they call, plighted your troth to the man?"

Cornelia struggled for evasion. She recognized the fruitlessness of the effort, and abandoning it stood up.

"I am engaged to no one."

"Well, I should hope not," said Wilfrid. "An engagement might be broken."

"Not by me."

"It might, is all that I say. A romantic sentiment is tougher. Now, I have been straightforward with you: will you be with me? I shall not hurt the man, or wound his feelings."

He paused; but it was to find that no admission of the truth, save what oozed out in absence of speech, was to be expected. She seemed, after the fashion of women, to have got accustomed to the new atmosphere into which he had dragged her, without any conception of a forward movement.

"I see I must explain to you how we are situated," said Wilfrid. "We are in a serious plight. You should be civil to this woman for several reasons---for your father's sake and your own. She is very rich."

"Oh, Wilfrid!"

"Well, I find money well thought of everywhere."

"Has your late school been good for you?"

"This woman, I repeat, is rich, and we want money. Oh! not the ordinary notion of wanting money, but the more we have the more power we have. Our position depends on it."

"Yes, if we can be tempted to think so," flashed Cornelia.

"Our position depends on it. If you posture, and are poor, you provoke ridicule: and to think of scorning money, is a piece of folly no girls of condition are guilty of. Now, you know I am fond of you; so I'll tell you this: you have a chance; don't miss it. Something unpleasant is threatening; but you may escape it. It would be madness to throw such a chance away, and it is your duty to take advantage of it. What is there plainer? You are engaged to no one."

Cornelia came timidly close to him. "Pray, be explicit!"

"Well!----this offer."

"Yes; but what---there is something to escape from."

Wilfrid deliberately replied: "There is no doubt of the Pater's intentions with regard to Mrs. Chump."

"He means...?"

"He means to marry her."

"And you, Wilfrid?"

"Well, of course, he cuts me out. There---there! forgive me: but what can I do?"

"Do you conspire---Wilfrid, is it possible?---are you an accomplice in the degradation of our house?"

Cornelia had regained her courage, perforce of wrath. Wilfrid's singular grey eyes shot an odd look at her. He is to be excused for not perceiving the grandeur of the structure menaced; for it was invisible to all the world, though a real fabric.

"If Mrs. Chump were poor, I should think the Pater demented," he said. "As it is--! well, as it is, there's grist to the mill, wind to the organ. You must be aware" (and he leaned over to her with his most suspicious gentleness of tone) "you are aware that all organs must be fed; but you will make a terrible mistake if you suppose for a moment that the human organ requires the same sort of feeding as the one in Hillford Church."

"Good-night," said Cornelia, closing her lips, as if for good.

Wilfrid pressed her hand. As she was going, the springs of kindness in his heart caused him to say "Forgive me, if I seemed rough."

"Yes, dear Wilfrid; even brutality, rather than your exultation over the wreck of what was noble in you."

With which phrase Cornelia swept from the room.

CHAPTER XVI

"Seen Wilfrid?" was Mr. Pole's first cheery call to his daughters, on his return. An answer on that head did not seem to be required by him, for he went on: "Ah the boy's improved. That place over there, Stornley, does him as much good as the Army did, as to setting him up, you know; common sense, and a ready way of speaking and thinking. He sees a thing now. Well, Martha, what do you,---eh? what's your opinion?"

Mrs. Chump was addressed. "Pole," she said, fanning her cheek with vehement languor, "don't ask me! my heart's gone to the young fella."

In pursuance of a determination to which the ladies of Brookfield had come, Adela, following her sprightly fancy, now gave the lead in affability toward Mrs. Chump.

"Has the conqueror run away with it to bury it?" she laughed.

"Och! won't he know what it is to be a widde!" cried Mrs. Chump. "A widde's heart takes aim and flies straight as a bullet; and the hearts o' you garls, they're like whiffs o' tobacco, curlin' and wrigglin' and not knowin' where they're goin'. Marry 'em, Pole! marry 'em!" Mrs. Chump gesticulated, with two dangling hands. "They're nice garls; but, lord! they naver see a man, and they're stuptly contented, and want to remain garls; and, don't ye see, it was naver meant to be? Says I to Mr. Wilfrud (and he agreed with me), ye might say, nice sour grapes, as well as nice garls, if the creatures think o' stoppin' where they are, and what they are. It's horrud; and, upon my honour, my heart aches for 'm!"

Mr. Pole threw an uneasy side-glance of inquisition at his daughters, to mark how they bore this unaccustomed language, and haply intercede between the unworthy woman and their judgement of her. But the ladies merely smiled. Placidly triumphant in its endurance, the smile said: "We decline even to feel such a martyrdom as this."

"Well, you know, Martha; I," he said, "I---no father could wish---eh? if you could manage to persuade them not to be so fond of me. They must think of their future, of course. They won't always have a home---a father, a father, I mean. God grant they may never want!--eh? the dinner; boh! let's in to dinner. Ma'am!"

He bowed an arm to Mrs. Chump, who took it, with a scared look at him: "Why, if ye haven't got a tear in your eye, Pole?"

"Nonsense, nonsense," quoth he, bowing another arm to Adela.

"Papa, I'm not to be winked at," said she, accepting convoy; and there was some laughter, all about nothing, as they went in to dinner.

The ladies were studiously forbearing in their treatment of Mrs. Chump. Women are wonderfully quick scholars under ridicule, though it half-kills them. Wilfrid's theory had impressed the superior grace of civility upon their minds, and, now that they practised it, they were pleased with the contrast they presented. Not the less were they maturing a serious resolve. The suspicion that their father had secret vile designs in relation to Mrs. Chump, they kept in the background. It was enough for them that she was to be a visitor, and would thus destroy the great circle they had projected. To accept her in the circle, they felt, was out of the question. Wilfrid's plain-speaking broke up the air-bubble, which they had so carefully blown, and in which they had embarked all their young hopes. They had as much as given one another a pledge that their home likewise should be broken up.

"Are you not almost too severe a student?" Mr. Barrett happened to say to Cornelia, the day after Wilfrid had worried her.

"Do I show the signs?" she replied.

"By no means. But last night, was it not your light that was not extinguished till morning?"

"We soon have morning now," said Cornelia; and her face was pale as the first hour of the dawn. "Are you not a late foot-farer, I may ask in return?"

"Mere restlessness. I have no appetite for study. I took the liberty to cross the park from the wood, and saw you---at least I guessed it your light, and then I met your brother."

"Yes? you met him?"

Mr. Barrett gestured an affirmative.

"And he---did he speak?"

"He nodded. He was in some haste."

"But, then, you did not go to bed at all that night? It is almost my turn to be lecturer, if I might expect to be listened to."

"Do you not know---or am I constitutionally different from others?" Mr. Barrett resumed: "I can't be alone in feeling that there are certain times and periods when what I would like to call poisonous influences are abroad, that touch my fate in the days to come. I know I am helpless. I can only wander up and down."

"That sounds like a creed of fatalism."

"It is not a creed; it is a matter of nerves. A creed has its 'kismet.' The nerves are wild horses."

"It is something to be fought against," said Cornelia admonishingly.

"Is it something to be distrusted?"

"I should say, yes."

"Then I was wrong?"

He stooped eagerly, in his temperate way, to catch sight of her answering face. Cornelia's quick cheeks took fire. She fenced with a question of two, and stood in a tremble, marvelling at his intuition. For possibly, at that moment when he stood watching her window-light (ah, poor heart!) she was half-pledging her word to her sisters (in a whirl of wrath at Wilfrid, herself, and the world), that she would take the lead in breaking up Brookfield.

An event occurred that hurried them on. They received a visit from their mother's brother, John Pierson, a Colonel of Uhlans, in the Imperial-Royal service. He had rarely been in communication with them; his visit was unexpected. His leave of absence from his quarters in Italy was not longer than a month, and he was on his way to Ireland, to settle family business; but he called, as he said, to make acquaintance with his nieces. The ladies soon discovered, in spite of his foreign-cut chin and pronounced military habit of speech and bearing, that he was at heart fervidly British. His age was about fifty: a man of great force of shoulder and potent length of arm, courteous and well-bred in manner, he was altogether what is called a model of a cavalry officer. Colonel Pierson paid very little attention to his brother-in-law, but the ladies were evidently much to his taste; and when he kissed Cornelia's hand, his eyes grew soft, as at a recollection.

"You are what your mother once promised to be," he said. To her he gave that mother's portrait, taking it solemnly from his breast-pocket, and attentively contemplating it before it left his hands. The ladies pressed him for a thousand details of their mama's youthful life; they found it a strange consolation to talk of her and image her like Cornelia. The foreign halo about the Colonel had an effect on them that was almost like what nobility produces; and by degrees they heated their minds to conceive that they were consenting to an outrage on that mother's memory, in countenancing Mrs. Chump's transparent ambition to take her place, as they did by staying in the house with the woman. The colonel's few expressive glances at Mrs. Chump, and Mrs. Chump's behaviour before the colonel, touched them with intense distaste for their present surly aspect of life. Civilized little people are moved to fulfil their destinies and to write their histories as much by distaste as by appetite. This fresh sentimental emotion, which led them to glorify their mother's image in their hearts, heightened and gave an acid edge to their distaste for the think they saw. Nor was it wonderful that Cornelia, said to be so like that mother, should think herself bound to accept the office of taking the initiative in a practical protest against the desecration of the name her mother had borne. At times, I see that sentiment approaches too

near the Holy of earthly Holies for us to laugh at it; it has too much truth in it to be denounced---nay, if we are not alert and quick of wit, we shall be deceived by it, and wonder in the end, as the fool does, why heaven struck that final blow; concluding that it was but another whimsy of the Gods. The ladies prayed to their mother. They were indeed suffering vile torture. Ethereal eyes might pardon the unconscious jugglery which made their hearts cry out to her that the step they were about to take was to save her children from seeming to acquiesce in a dishonour to her memory. Some such words Adela's tongue did not shrink from; and as it is a common habit for us to give to the objects we mentally address just as much brain as is wanted for the occasion, she is not to be held singular.

Colonel Pierson promised to stay a week on his return from Ireland. "Will that person be here?" he designated Mrs. Chump; who, among other things, had reproached him for fighting with foreign steel and wearing any uniform but the red.

The ladies and Colonel Pierson were soon of one mind in relation to Mrs. Chump. Certain salient quiet remarks dropped by him were cherished after his departure; they were half-willing to think that he had been directed to come to them, bearer of a message from a heavenly world to urge them to action. They had need of a spiritual exaltation, to relieve them from the palpable depression caused by the weight of Mrs. Chump. They encouraged one another with exclamations on the oddness of a visit from their mother's brother, at such a time of tribulation, indecision, and general darkness.

Mrs. Chump remained on the field. When Adela begged her papa to tell her how long the lady was to stay, he replied: "Eh? By the way, I haven't asked her;" and retreated from this almost too obvious piece of simplicity, with, "I want you to know her: I want you to like her---want you to get to understand her. Won't talk about her going just yet."

If they could have seen a limit to that wholesale slaughter of the Nice Feelings, they might have summoned patience to avoid the desperate step to immediate relief: but they saw none. Their father's quaint kindness and Wilfrid's treachery had fixed her there, perhaps for good. The choice was, to let London come and see them dragged through the mire by the monstrous woman, or to seek new homes. London, they contended, could not further be put off, and would come, especially now that the season was dying. After all, their parting from one another was the bitterest thing to bear, and as each seemed content to endure it for the good of all, and as, properly considered, they did not bury their ambition by separating, they said farewell to the young delicious dawn of it. By means of *Fine Shades* it was understood that Brookfield was to be abandoned. Not one direct word was uttered. There were expressions of regret that the village children of Ipley would miss the supervizing eyes that had watched over them---perchance! at any rate, would lose them. All went on in the household as before, and would have continued so, but that they had a chief among them. This was Adela Pole, who found her powers with the occasion.

Adela thought decisively: "People never move unless they are pushed." And when you have got them to move ever so little, then propel; but by no means expect that a movement on their part means progression. Without propulsion nothing results. Adela saw what Cornelia meant to do. It was not to fly to Sir Twickenham, but to dismiss Mr. Barrett. Arabella consented to write to Edward Buxley, but would not speak of old days, and barely alluded to a misunderstanding; though if she loved one man, this was he. Adela was disengaged. She had moreover to do penance, for a wrong committed; and just as children will pinch themselves, pleased up to the verge of unendurable pain, so do sentimentalists find a keen relish in performing secret penance for self-accused offences. Thus they become righteous to their own hearts, and evade, as they hope, the public scourge. The wrong committed was (translated out of *Fine Shades*), that she had made love to her sister's lover. In the original tongue---she had innocently played with the sacred fire of a strange affection; a child in the temple!---Our penitent child took a keen pinching pleasure in dictating words for Arabella to employ toward Edward.

And then, recurring to her interview with Wilfrid, it struck her: "Suppose that, after all, Money!..." Yes, Mammon has acted Hymen before now. Nothing else explained Mrs. Chump; so she thought, in one clear glimpse. Inveterate sentimental habit smeared the picture with two exclamations---"Impossible!" and "Papa!" I desire it to be credited that these simple interjections absolutely obscured her judgement. Little people think either what they are made to think, or what they choose to think; and the education of girls is to make them believe that facts are their enemies-a naughty spying race, upon whom the dogs of Pudeur are to be loosed, if they surprise them without note of warning. Adela silenced her suspicion, easily enough; but this did not prevent her taking a measure to satisfy it. Petting her papa one evening, she suddenly asked him for ninety pounds.

"Ninety!" said Mr. Pole, taking a sharp breath. He was as composed as possible.

"Is that too much, papa, darling?"

"Not if you want it---not if you want it, of course not."

"You seemed astonished."

"The sum! it's an odd sum for a girl to want. Ten, twenty, fifty---a hundred; but you never hear of ninety, never! unless it's to pay a debt; and I have all the bills, or your aunt has them."

"Well, papa, if it excites you, I will do without it. It is for a charity, chiefly."

Mr. Pole fumbled in his pocket, muttering, "No money here---cheque-book in town. I'll give it you," he said aloud, "to-morrow morning---morrow morning, early."

"That will do, papa;" and Adela relieved him immediately by shooting far away from the topic.

The ladies retired early to their hall of council in the bedchamber of Arabella, and some time after midnight Cornelia went to her room; but she could not sleep. She affected, in her restlessness, to think that her spirits required an intellectual sedative, so she went down to the library for a book; where she skimmed many---a fashion that may be recommended, for assisting us to a sense of sovereign superiority to authors, and also of serene contempt for all mental difficulties. Fortified in this way, Cornelia took a Plutarch and an Encyclopaedia under her arm, to return to her room. But one volume fell, and as she stooped to recover it, her candle shared its fate. She had to find her way back in the dark. On the landing of the stairs, she fancied that she heard a step and a breath. The lady was of unshaken nerves. She moved on steadily, her hand stretched out a little before her. What it touched was long in travelling to her brain; but when her paralyzed heart beat again, she knew that her hand clasped another hand. Her nervous horror calmed as the feeling came to her of the palpable weakness of the hand.

"Who are you?" she asked. Some hoarse answer struck her ear. She asked again, making her voice distincter. The hand now returned her pressure with force. She could feel that the person, whoever it was, stood collecting strength to speak. Then the words came---

"What do you mean by imitating that woman's brogue?"

"Papa!" said Cornelia.

"Why do you talk Irish in the dark? There, goodnight. I've just come up from the library; my candle dropped. I shouldn't have been frightened, but you talked with such a twang."

"But I have just come from the library myself," said Cornelia.

"I mean from the dining-room," her father corrected himself hastily.

"I can't sit in the library; shall have it altered---full of draughts.

Don't you think so, my dear? Good-night. What's this in your arm?

Books! Ah, you study! I can get a light for myself."

The dialogue was sustained in the hard-whispered tones prescribed by darkness. Cornelia kissed her father's forehead, and they parted.

At breakfast in the morning it was the habit of all the ladies to assemble, partly to countenance the decency of matin-prayers, and also to give the head of the household their dutiful society till business called him away. Adela, in earlier days, had maintained that early rising was not fashionable; but she soon grasped the idea that a great rivalry with Fashion, in minor matters (where the support of the satirist might be counted on), was the proper policy of Brookfield. Mrs. Chump was given to be extremely fashionable in her hours, and began her Brookfield career by coming downstairs at ten and eleven o'clock, when she found a desolate table, well stocked indeed, but without any of the exuberant smiles of nourishment which a morning repast should wear.

"You are a Protestant, ma'am, are you not?" Adela mildly questioned, after informing her that she missed family prayer by her late descent. Mrs. Chump assured her that she was a firm Protestant, and liked to see faces at the breakfast-table. The poor woman was reduced to submit to the rigour of the hour, coming down flustered, and endeavouring to look devout, while many uncertainties as to the condition of the hooks of her attire distracted her mind and fingers. On one occasion, Gainsford, the footman, had been seen with his eye on her; and while Mr. Pole read of sacred things, at a pace composed of slow march and amble, this unhappy man was heard struggling to keep under and extinguish a devil of laughter, by which his human weakness was shaken: He retired from the room with the speed of a voyager about to pay tribute on high seas. Mr. Pole cast a pregnant look at the servants' row as he closed the book; but the expression of his daughters' faces positively signified that no remark was to be made, and he contained himself. Later, the ladies told him that Gainsford had done no worse than any uneducated man would have been guilty of doing. Mrs. Chump had, it appeared, a mother's feeling for one flat curl on her rugged forehead, which was often fondly caressed by her, for the sake of ascertaining its fixity. Doubts of the precision of outline and general welfare of this curl, apparently, caused her to straighten her back and furtively raise her head, with an easy upward motion, as of a cork alighted in water, above the level of the looking-glass on her left hand---an action she repeated, with a solemn aspect, four times; at which point Gainsford gave way. The ladies accorded him every extenuation for the offence. They themselves, but for the heroism of exalted natures, must have succumbed to the gross temptation. "It is difficult, dear papa, to bring one's mind to religious thoughts in her company, even when she is quiescent," they said. Thus, by the prettiest exercise of charity that can be conceived, they pleaded for the man Gainsford, while they struck a blow at Mrs. Chump; and in performing one of the virtues laid down by religion, proved their enemy to be hostile to its influences.

Mrs. Chump was this morning very late. The office of morning reader was new to Mr. Pole, who had undertaken it, when first Squire of Brookfield, at the dictate of the ladies his daughters; so that, waiting with the book before him and his audience expectant, he lacked composure, spoke irritably in an under-breath of 'that woman,' and asked twice whether she was coming or not. At last the clump of her feet was heard approaching. Mr. Pole commenced reading the instant she opened the door. She stood there, with a face like a petrified Irish outcry. An imploring sound of "Pole! Pole!" issued from her. Then she caught up one hand to her mouth, and rolled her head, in evident anguish at the necessitated silence. A convulsion passed along the row of maids, two of whom dipped to their aprons; but the ladies gazed with a sad consciousness of wicked glee at the disgust she was exciting in the bosom of their father.

"Will you shut the door?" Mr. Pole sternly addressed Mrs. Chump, at the conclusion of the first prayer.

"Pole! ye know that money ye gave me in notes? I must speak, Pole!"

"Shut the door."

Mrs. Chump let go the door-handle with a moan. The door was closed by Gainsford, now one of the gravest of footmen. A chair was placed for her, and she sat down, desperately watching the reader for the fall of his voice. The period was singularly protracted. The ladies turned to one another, to question with an eyelid why it was that extra allowance was given that morning. Mr. Pole was in a third prayer, stumbling on and picking himself up, apparently unaware that he had passed the limit. This continued until the series of ejaculations which accompanied him waxed hotter---little muffled shrieks of: "Oh!--Deer!--Oh, Lard!--When will he stop? Oh, mercy! Och! And me burrstin' to speak!--Oh! what'll I do? I can't keep 't in!--Pole! ye're kill'n me!--Oh, deer! I'll be sayin' somethin' to vex the prophets presently. Pole!"

If it was a race that he ran with Mrs. Chump, Mr. Pole was beaten. He came to a sudden stop.

Mrs. Chump had become too deeply absorbed in her impatience to notice the change in his tone; and when he said, "Now then, to breakfast, quick!" she was pursuing her lamentable interjections. At sight of the servants trooping forth, she jumped up and ran to the door.

"Ye don't go.---Pole, they're all here. And I've been robbed, I have. Avery note I had from ye, Pole, all gone. And my purse left behind, like the skin of a thing. Lord forbid I accuse annybody; but when I get up, my first rush is to feel in my pocket. And, ask 'em!--If ye didn't keep me so poor, Pole, they'd know I'm a generous woman, but I cann't bear to be robbed. And pinmoney 's for spendin;' annybody'll tell you that. And I ask ye t' examine 'em, Pole; for last night I counted my notes, wantin' change, and I thought of a salmon I bought on the banks of the Suir to make a present to Chump, which was our onnly visit to Waterford together: for he naver went t' Ireland before or after---dyin' as he did! and it's not his ingrat'tude, with his talk of a Severrn salmon-to the deuce with 'm! that makes me soft-poor fella!--I didn't mean to the deuce;---but since he's gone, his widde's just unfit to bargain for a salmon at all, and averybody robs her, and she's kept poor, and hatud!--D'ye heer, Pole? I've lost my money, my money! and I will speak, and ye shann't interrupt me!"

During the delivery of this charge against the household, Mr. Pole had several times waved to the servants to begone; but as they had always the option to misunderstand authoritative gestures, they preferred remaining, and possibly he perceived that they might claim to do so under accusation.

"How can you bring this charge against the inmates of my house---eh? I guarantee the honesty of all who serve me. Martha! you must be mad, mad!--Money? why, you never have money; you waste it if you do."

"Not money, Pole? Oh! and why? Becas ye keep me low o' purpose, till I cringe like a slut o' the scullery, and cry out for halfpence. But, oh! that seventy-five pounds in notes!"

Mr. Pole shook his head, as one who deals with a gross delusion: "I remember nothing about it."

"Not about--?" Mrs. Chump dropped her chin. "Ye don't remember the givin' of me just that sum of seventy-five, in eight notes, Pole?"

"Eh? I daresay I have given you the amount, one time or other. Now, let's be quiet about it."

"Yesterday mornin', Pole! And the night I go to bed I count my money, and, says I, I'll not lock ut up, for I'll onnly be unlockin' again to-morrow; and doin' a thing and undoin' ut's a sign of a brain that's addled---like yours, Pole, if ye say

ye didn't go to give me the notes."

Mr. Pole frowned at her sagaciously. "Must change your diet, Martha!"

"My dite? And what's my dite to do with my money?"

"Who went into Mrs. Chump's bedchamber this morning?" asked Mr. Pole generally.

A pretty little housemaid replied, with an indignant flush, that she was the person. Mrs. Chump acknowledged to being awake when the shutters were opened, and agreed that it was not possible her pockets could have been rifled then.

"So, you see, Martha, you're talking nonsense," said Mr. Pole. "Do you know the numbers of those notes?"

"The numbers at the sides, ye mean, Pole?"

"Ay, the numbers at the sides, if you like; the 21593, and so on?"

"The 21593! Oh! I can't remember such a lot as that, if ever I leave off repeatin' it."

"There! you see, you're not fit to have money in your possession, Martha. Everybody who has bank-notes looks at the numbers. You have a trick of fancying all sorts of sums in your pocket; and when you don't find them there, of course they're lost! Now, let's have some breakfast."

Arabella told the maids to go out. Mr. Pole turned to the breakfast-table, rubbing his hands. Seeing herself and her case abandoned, Mrs. Chump gave a deplorable shout. "Ye're crool! and young women that look on at a fellow-woman's mis'ry. Oh! how can ye do ut! But soft hearts can be the hardest. And all my seventy-five gone, gone! and no law out of anybody. And no frightenin' of 'em off from doin' the like another time! Oh, I will, I will have my money!"

"Tush! Come to breakfast, Martha," said Mr. Pole. "You shall have money, if you want it; you have only to ask. Now, will you promise to be quiet? and I'll give you this money---the amount you've been dreaming about last night. I'll fetch it. Now, let us have no scenes. Dry your eyes."

Mr. Pole went to his private room, and returned just as Mrs. Chump had got upon a succession of quieter sobs with each one of which she addressed a pathetic roll of her eyes to the utterly unsympathetic ladies respectively.

"There, Martha; there's exactly the sum for you---free gift. Say thank you, and eat a good breakfast to show your gratitude. Mind, you take this money on condition that you let the servants know you made a mistake."

Mrs. Chump sighed heavily, crumpling the notes, that the crisp sweet sound might solace her for the hard condition.

"And don't dream any more---not about money, I mean," said Mr. Pole.

"Oh! if I dream like that I'll be living double." Mrs. Chump put her hand to the notes, and called him kind, and pitied him for being the loser. The sight of a fresh sum in her possession intoxicated her. It was but feebly that she regretted the loss to her Samuel Bolton Pole. "Your memory's worth more than that!" she said as she filled her purse with the notes. "Anyhow, now I can treat somebody," and she threw a wink of promise at Adela. Adela's eyes took refuge with her papa, who leaned over to her, and said: "You won't mind waiting till you see me again? She's taken all I had." Adela nodded blankly, and the next moment, with an angry glance toward Mrs. Chump, "Papa," said she, "if you wish to

see servants in the house on your return, you must yourself speak to them, and tell them that we, their master and mistresses, do not regard them as thieves." Out of this there came a quarrel as furious as the ladies would permit it to be. For Mrs. Chump, though willing to condone the offence for the sum she had received, stuck infamy upon the whole list of them. "The Celtic nature," murmured Cornelia. And the ladies maintained that their servants should be respected, at any cost. "You, ma'am," said Arabella, with a clear look peculiar to her when vindictive---"you may have a stain on your character, and you are not ruined by it. But these poor creatures..."

"Ye dare to compar' me--!"

"Contrast you, ma'am."

"It's just as imp'dent."

"I say, our servants, ma'am..."

"Oh! to the deuce with your 'ma'am;' I hate the word. It's like fittin' a cap on me. Ye want to make one a turbaned dow'ger, ye malicious young woman!"

"Those are personages that are, I believe, accepted in society!"

So the contest raged, Mrs. Chump being run clean through the soul twenty times, without touching the consciousness of that sensitive essence. Mr. Pole appeared to take the part of his daughters, and by-and-by Mrs. Chump, having failed to arouse Mrs. Lupin's involuntary laugh (which always consoled her in such cases), huffed out of the room. Then Mr. Pole, in an abruptly serious way, bashfully entreated the ladies to be civil to Martha, who had the best heart in the world. It sounded as if he were going to say more. After a pause, he added emphatically, "Do!" and went. He was many days absent: nor did he speak to Adela of the money she had asked for when he returned. Adela had not the courage to allude to it.

CHAPTER XVII

Emilia sat in her old place under the dwarf pine. Mr. Powys had brought her back to Brookfield, where she heard that Wilfrid had been seen; and now her heart was in contest with an inexplicable puzzle: "He was here, and did not come to me!" Since that night when they had walked home from Ipley Green, she had not suffered a moment of longing. Her senses had lain as under a charm, with heart at anchor and a mind free to work. No one could have guessed that any human spell was on the girl. "Wherever he is, he thinks of me. I find him everywhere. He is safe, for I pray for him and have my arms about him. He will come." So she waited, as some grey lake lies, full and smooth, awaiting the star below the twilight. If she let her thoughts run on to the hour of their meeting, she had to shut her eyes and press at her heart; but as yet she was not out of tune for daily life, and she could imagine how that hour was to be strewn with new songs and hushed surprises. And 'thus' he would look: and 'thus.' "My hero!" breathed Emilia, shuddering a little. But now she was perplexed. Now that he had come and gone, she began to hunger bitterly for the sight of his face, and that which had hitherto nourished her grew a sickly phantom of delight. She wondered how she had forced herself to be patient, and what it was that she had found pleasure in.

None of the ladies were at home when Emilia returned. She went out to the woods, and sat, shadowed by the long bent branch; watching mechanically the slow rounding and yellowing of the beam of sunlight over the thick floor of moss, up against the fir-stems. The chaffinch and the linnet flitted off the grey orchard twigs, singing from new stations; and the bee seemed to come questioning the silence of the woods and droning disappointed away. The first excess of any sad feeling is half voluntary. Emilia could not help smiling, when she lifted her head out of a musing fit, to find that she had

composed part of a minuet for the languid dancing notes in the shaft of golden light at her feet. "Can I remember it?" she thought, and forgot the incident with the effort.

Down at her right hand, bordering a water, stood a willow, a dead tree, channelled inside with the brown trail of a goat-moth. Looking in this direction, she saw Cornelia advancing to the tree. When the lady had reached it, she drew a little book from her bosom, kissed it, and dropped it in the hollow. This done, she passed among the firs. Emilia had perceived that she was agitated: and with that strange instinct of hearts beginning to stir, which makes them divine at once where they will come upon the secret of their own sensations, she ran down to the tree and peered on tiptoe at the embedded volume. On a blank page stood pencilled: "This is the last fruit of the tree. Come not to gather more." There was no meaning for her in that sentimental chord but she must have got some glimpse of a meaning; for now, as in an agony, her lips fashioned the words: "If I forget his face I may as well die;" and she wandered on, striving more and more vainly to call up his features. The---"Does he think of me?" and---"What am I to him?"---such timorous little feather-play of feminine emotion she knew nothing of: in her heart was the strong flood of a passion.

She met Edward Buxley and Freshfield Sumner at a cross-path, on their way to Brookfield; and then Adela joined the party, which soon embraced Mr. Barrett, and subsequently Cornelia. All moved on in a humming leisure, chattering by fits. Mr. Sumner was delicately prepared to encounter Mrs. Chump, "whom," said Adela, "Edward himself finds it impossible to caricature;" and she affected to laugh at the woman.

"Happy the pencil that can reproduce!" Mr. Barrett exclaimed; and, meeting his smile, Cornelia said: "Do you know, my feeling is, and I cannot at all account for it, that if she were a Catholic she would not seem so gross?"

"Some of the poetry of that religion would descend upon her, possibly," returned Mr. Barrett.

"Do you mean," Freshfield said quickly, "that she would stand a fair chance of being sainted?"

Out of this arose some polite fencing between the two. Freshfield might have argued to advantage in a Court of law; but he was no match, on such topics and before such an audience, for a refined sentimentalist. More than once he betrayed a disposition to take refuge in his class (he being son to one of the puisne Judges). Cornelia speedily punished him, and to any correction from her he bowed his head.

Adela was this day gifted with an extraordinary insight. Emilia alone of the party was as a blot to her; but the others she saw through, as if they had been walking transparencies. She divined that Edward and Freshfield had both come, in concert, upon amorous business---that it was Freshfield's object to help Edward to a private interview with her, and, in return, Edward was to perform the same service for him with Cornelia. So that Mr. Barrett was shockingly in the way of both; and the perplexity of these stupid fellows---who would insist upon wondering why the man Barrett and the girl Emilia (musicians both: both as it were, vagrants) did not walk together and talk of quavers and minims---was extremely comic. Passing the withered tree, Mr. Barrett deserved thanks from Freshfield, if he did not obtain them; for he lingered, surrendering his place. And then Adela knew that the weight of Edward Buxley's remonstrative wrath had fallen on silent Emilia, to whom she clung fondly.

"I have had a letter," Edward murmured, in the voice that propitiates secrecy.

"A letter?" she cried loud; and off flew the man like a rabbit into his hole, the mask of him remaining.

Emilia presently found Mr. Barrett at her elbow. His hand clasped the book Cornelia had placed in the tree.

"It is hers," said Emilia.

He opened it and pointed to his initials. She looked in his face.

"Are you very ill?"

Adela turned round from Edward's neighbouring head. "Who is ill?"

Cornelia brought Freshfield to a stop: "Ill?"

Before them all, book in hand, Mr. Barrett had to give assurance that he was hearty, and to appear to think that his words were accepted, in spite of blanched jowl and reddened under-lid. Cornelia threw him one glance: his eyes closed under it. Adela found it necessary to address some such comforting exclamation as 'Goodness gracious!' to her observant spirit.

In the park-path, leading to the wood, Arabella was seen as they came out the young branches that fringed the firs. She hurried up.

"I have been looking for you. Papa has arrived with Sir Twickenham Pryme, who dines with us."

Adela unhesitatingly struck a blow.

"Lady Pryme, we make place for you."

And she crossed to Cornelia. Cornelia kept her eyes fixed on Adela's mouth, as one looks at a place whence a venomous reptile has darted out. Her eyelids shut, and she stood a white sculpture of pain, pitiable to see. Emilia took her hand, encouraging the tightening fingers with a responsive pressure. The group shuffled awkwardly together, though Adela did her best. She was very angry with Mr. Barrett for wearing that absurdly pale aspect. She was even angry with his miserable bankrupt face for mounting a muscular edition of the smile Cornelia had shown. "His feelings!" she cried internally; and the fact presented itself to her, that feelings were a luxury utterly unfit for poor men, who were to be accused of presumption for indulging in them.

"Now, I suppose you are happy?" she spoke low between Arabella and Edward.

The effect of these words was to colour violently two pair of cheeks. Arabella's behaviour did not quite satisfy the fair critic. Edward Buxley was simply caught in a trap: He had the folly to imagine that by laughing he released himself.

"Is not that the laugh of an engaged?" said Adela to Freshfield.

He replied: "That would have been my idea under other conditions," and looked meaningly.

She met the look with: "There are harsh conditions in life, are there not?" and left him sufficiently occupied by his own sensations.

"Mr. Barrett," she inquired (partly to assist the wretch out of his compromising depression, and also that the question represented a real matter of debate in her mind), "I want your opinion; will you give it me? Apropos of slang, why does it sit well on some people? It certainly does not vulgarize them. After all, in many cases, it is what they call 'racy idiom.' Perhaps our delicacy is strained?"

Now, it was Mr. Barrett's established manner to speak in a deliberately ready fashion upon the introduction of a new topic. Habit made him, on this occasion, respond instantly; but the opening of the gates displayed the confusion of ideas

within and the raging tumult.

He said: "In many cases. There are two sorts. If you could call it the language of nature! which anything...I beg your pardon, Slang! Polite society rightly excludes it, because..."

"Yes, yes," returned Adela; "but do we do rightly in submitting to the absolute tyranny?---I mean, I think, originality flies from us in consequence."

The pitiable mortal became a trifle more luminous: "The objection is to the repetition of risked phrases. A happy audacity of expression may pass. It is bad taste to repeat it, that is all. Then there is the slang of heavy boorishness, and the slang of impatient wit..."

"Is there any fine distinction between the extremes?" said Cornelia, in as clear a tone as she could summon.

"I think," observed Arabella, "that whatever shows staleness speedily is self-condemned; and that is the case with slang."

"And yet it's to avoid some feeling of the sort that people employ it," was Adela's remark; and the discussion of this theme dropped lifelessly, and they walked on as before.

Coming to a halt near the garden gate, Adela tapped Emilia's cheek, addressing her: "How demure she has become!"

"Ah!" went Arabella, "does she know papa has had a letter from Mr. Pericles, who wrote from Milan to say that he has made arrangements for her to enter the Academy there, and will come to fetch her in a few days?"

Emilia's wrists crossed below her neck, while she gave ear.

"To take me away?" she said.

The tragic attitude and outcry, with the mournful flash of her eyes, might have told Emilia's tale.

Adela unwillingly shielded her by interpreting the scene. "See! she must be a born actress. They always exaggerate in that style, so that you would really think she had a mighty passion for Brookfield."

"Or in it," suggested Freshfield.

"Or in it!" she laughed assentingly.

Mr. Pole was perceived entering the garden, rubbing his hands a little too obsequiously to some remark of the baronet's, as the critical ladies imagined. Sir Twickenham's arm spread out in a sweep; Mr. Pole's head nodded. After the ceremony of the salute, the ladies were informed of Sir Twickenham's observation: Sir Twickenham Pryme, a statistical member of Parliament, a well-preserved half-century in age, a gentleman in bearing, passably grey-headed, his whiskers brushed out neatly, as if he knew them individually and had the exact amount of them collectively at his fingers' ends: Sir Twickenham had said of Mr. Pole's infant park that if devoted to mangold-wurzel it would be productive and would pay: whereas now it was not ornamental and was waste.

"Sir Twickenham calculates," said Mr. Pole, "that we should have a crop of---eh?"

"The average?" Sir Twickenham asked, on the evident upward mounting of a sum in his brain. And then, with a relaxing look upon Cornelia: "Perhaps you might have fifteen, sixteen, perhaps for the first year; or, say---you see, the exact acreage is unknown to me. Say roughly, ten thousand sacks the first year."

"Of what?" inquired Cornelia.

"Mangold-wurzel," said the baronet.

She gazed about her. Mr. Barrett was gone.

"But, no doubt, you take no interest in such reckonings?" Sir Twickenham added.

"On the contrary, I take every interest in practical details."

Practical men believe this when they hear it from the lips of gentlewomen, and without philosophically analyzing the fact that it is because the practical quality possesses simply the fascination of a form of strength. Sir Twickenham pursued his details. Day closed on Brookfield blankly. Nevertheless, the ladies felt that the situation was now dignified by tragic feeling, and remembering keenly how they had been degraded of late, they had a sad enjoyment of the situation.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Emilia alone of the party was as a blot to her
I cannot delay; but I request you, that are here privileged
I detest anything that has to do with gratitude
Love, with his accustomed cunning
No nose to the hero, no moral to the tale
Nor can a protest against coarseness be sweepingly interpreted
One of those men whose characters are read off at a glance
The majority, however, had been snatched out of this bliss
Their way was down a green lane and across long meadow-paths
They, meantime, who had a contempt for sleep
Women are wonderfully quick scholars under ridicule