Deadham Hard eBook

Deadham Hard by Lucas Malet

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Page 1

TELLING HOW, UNDER STRESS OF CIRCUMSTANCE, A HUMANIST TURNED HERMIT

A peculiar magic resides in running water, as every student of earth-lore knows. There is high magic, too, in the marriage of rivers, so that the spot where two mingle their streams is sacred, endowed with strange properties of evocation and of purification. Such spots go to the making of history and ruling of individual lives; but whether their influence is not more often malign than beneficent may be, perhaps, open to doubt.

Certain it is, however, that no doubts of this description troubled the mind of Thomas Clarkson Verity, when, in the closing decade of the eighteenth century, he purchased the house at Deadham Hard, known as Tandy's Castle, overlooking the deep and comparatively narrow channel by which the Rivers Arne and Wilner, after crossing the tide-flats and salt-marsh of Marychurch Haven, make their swift united exit into Marychurch Bay. Neither was he troubled by the fact that Tandy's Castle—or more briefly and familiarly Tandy's—for all its commonplace outward decency of aspect did not enjoy an unblemished moral or social reputation. The house—a whitewashed, featureless erection—was planted at right angles to the deep sandy lane leading up from the shore, through the scattered village of Deadham, to the three-mile distant market town of Marychurch.

Standing on a piece of rough land—bare, save for a few stunted Weymouth pines, and a fringe of tamarisk along the broken sea-wall—Tandy's, at the date in question, boasted a couple of bowed sash-windows on either side the front and back doors; and a range of five other windows set flat in the wall on the first floor. There was no second storey. The slate roofs were mean, low-pitched, without any grace of overshadowing eaves. At either end, a tall chimney-stack rose like the long ears of some startled, vacant-faced small animal. Behind the house, a thick plantation of beech and sycamore served to make its square blank whiteness visible for a quite considerable distance out to sea. Built upon the site of some older and larger structure, it was blessed—or otherwise—with a system of vaults and cellars wholly disproportionate to its existing size. One of these, by means of a roughly ceiled and flagged passage, gave access to a heavy door in the sea-wall opening directly on to the river foreshore.

Hence the unsavoury reputation of the place. For not only did it supply a convenient receiving house for smuggled goods, but a convenient rendezvous for the more lawless characters of the neighbourhood—a back-of-beyond and No Man's Land where the devil could, with impunity, have things very much his own way. In the intervals of more serious business, the vaults and cellars of Tandy's frequently resounded to the agonies and brutal hilarities of cock-fights, dog-fights, and other repulsive sports and pastimes common to the English—both

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gentle and simple—of that virile but singularly gross and callous age. Nevertheless to Thomas Clarkson Verity, man of peace and of ideas, Tandy's represented—and continued to represent through over half a century—rescue, security, an awakening in something little short of paradise from a long-drawn nightmare of hell. He paid an extortionate price for the property at the outset, and spent a small fortune on the enlargement of the house and improvement of the grounds, yet never regretted his bargain.

For, in good truth, when, in the spring of 1794, the soft, nimble, round-bodied, very polite, learned and loquacious little gentleman first set eyes upon its mean roofs, prick ears and vacant whitewashed countenance, he had been horribly shocked, horribly scared—for all the inherited valour of his good breeding—and, above all, most horribly disappointed. History had played very dirty pranks with him, which he found it impossible as yet to forgive.

Five years earlier, fired, like many another generous spirit, by extravagant hope of the coming regeneration of mankind, he hurried off to Paris after the opening of the National Assembly and fall of the Bastille. With the overture to the millennium in full blast, must he not be there to hear and see? Associating himself with the Girondist party he assisted, busily enthusiastic, at the march of tremendous events, until the evil hour in which friend began to denounce friend, and heads, quite other than aristocratic—those of men and women but yesterday the idols and chosen leaders of the people—went daily to the filling of *la veuve* Guillotine's unspeakable market-basket. The spectacle proved too upsetting both to Mr. Verity's amiable mind and rather queasy stomach. Faith failed; while even the millennium seemed hardly worth purchasing at so detestable a cost. He stood altogether too close to the terrible drama, in its later stages, to distinguish the true import or progression of it. Too close to understand that, however blood-stained its cradle, the goodly child Democracy was veritably, here and now, in the act of being born among men. Rather did he question whether his own fat little neck was not in lively danger of being severed; and his own head—so full of ingenious thoughts and lively curiosity—of being sent flying to join those of Brissot and Verginaud, of wayward explosive Camille and sweet Lucile Desmoulins, in that same unspeakable basket.

And to what end? For could he suppose the human race would be nearer, by the veriest fraction of a millimetre, to universal liberty, equality, and prosperity, through his insignificant death? Modesty, and a natural instinct of self-preservation alike answered, "never a jot." Whereupon with pertinacious, if furtive, activity he sought means of escape. And, at length, after months of hiding and anxious flitting, found them in the shape of a doubtfully seaworthy, and undoubtedly filthy, fishing-smack bound from Le Havre to whatever port it could make on the English south coast. The two days' voyage was rough, the accommodation and company to match. Mr. Verity spent a disgusting and disgusted forty-eight hours, to be eventually put ashore, a woefully bedraggled and

depleted figure, in the primrose, carmine, and dove-grey of a tender April morning on the wet sand just below the sea-wall of Tandy's Castle.

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Never was Briton more thankful to salute his native land, or feel the solid earth of it under his weary and very shaky feet. He, an epicure, ate such coarse food, washed down by such coarse ale, as Tandy's could offer with smiling relish. Later, mounted on a forest pony—an ill-favoured animal with a wall-eye, pink muzzle, bristly upper and hanging lower lip, more accustomed to carry a keg of smuggled spirits strapped beneath its belly than a cosmopolitan savant and social reformer on its back—he rode the three miles to Marychurch, proposing there to take the coach to Southampton and, after a measure of rest and refitting, a post-chaise to Canton Magna, his elder brother's fine place lying in a fold of the chalk hills which face the Sussex border.

The pony moved slowly and sullenly; but its rider felt no impatience. His humour was of the kindliest. His heart, indeed, came near singing for joy, simply, spontaneously, even as the larks sang, climbing up and upward from salt marsh and meadow, on either side the rutted road, into the limpid purity of the spring sky. A light wind flapped the travel-stained, high-collared blue cloth cloak which he wore; and brought him both the haunting fetid-sweet reek of the mud flats—the tide being low—and the invigorating tang of the forest and moorland, uprolling there ahead, in purple and umber to the pale northern horizon. Against that sombre background, fair and stately in the tender sunlight as a church of vision or dream, Marychurch Abbey rose above the roofs and chimneys of the little town.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, not only were religious systems very much at a discount among persons of intelligence, but the Deity himself was relegated to the position of an exploded idea, becoming an object of vituperation, witty or obscene according to the humour of the individual critic. As one of the illuminated, Mr. Verity did not escape the prevailing infection, although an inborn amenity of disposition saved him from atheism in its more blatantly offensive forms. The existence of the Supreme Being might be, (probably was) so he feared, but "a fond thing vainly imagined". Yet such is the constitution of the human mind that age confers a certain prestige and authority even upon phantoms and suspected frauds. Hence it followed that Mr. Verity, in the plenitude of his courtesy, had continued to take off his hat—secretly and subjectively at all events—to this venerable theological delusion, so dear through unnumbered centuries to the aching heart and troubled conscience of humanity.

But in the present glad hour of restored security—his head no longer in danger of plopping, hideously bodiless, into *la veuve's* basket, his inner-man, moreover, so recently and rackingly evacuated by that abominable Channel passage, now comfortably relined with Tandy's meat and drink—he went further in the way of acknowledgment. A glow of very vital gratitude swept over him, so that looking at the majestic church—secular witness to the soul's faith in and need of Almighty God's protective mercy and goodness—he took off his hat, no longer metaphorically but actually, and bowed himself together over the pommel of the saddle with an irresistible movement of thanksgiving and of praise.

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Recovering himself after a minute or so—“Almost thou persuades! me to be a Christian,” he said aloud, shaking his head remonstrantly at the distant church, while tears started to his busy, politely inquisitive eyes.

Then, striving by speech to bring his spirits to their accustomed playfulness and poise, he soliloquized thus, still aloud:

“For, to be candid, what convincing argument can I advance, in the light of recent experience, to prove that Rousseau, my friends the Encyclopeadists, or even the great M. de Voltaire, were really wiser in their generation, truer lovers of the people and safer guides, than St. Benedict—of blessed memory, since patron of learning and incidentally saviour of classic literature—whose pious sons raised this most delectable edifice to God’s glory seven hundred years ago?—The tower is considerably later than the transepts and the nave—fifteenth century I take it,—Upon my soul, I am half tempted to renounce my allegiance and to doubt whether our modern standards of civilization surpass, in the intelligent application of means to ends, those of these mediaeval cenobites, and whether we are saner philanthropists, deeper philosophers, more genial humanists than they!”

But here his discourse suffered mortifying interruption. He became aware the pony stood stock-still in the middle of the road; and, turning its head, so that he beheld its pink muzzle, bristly upper and hanging lower lip in disagreeable profile, regarded him with malevolent contempt out of its one sound eye, as who should say:

“What’s the silly fellow trumpeting like this about? Doesn’t the veriest noodle contrive to keep a quiet tongue in his head out on the highway?”

Sensible of a snub, Mr. Verity jerked at the reins and clapped his heels into the creature’s sides, as smartly as fatigue and native civility permitted, sending it forward at a jog-trot. Nevertheless his soliloquy—a silent one now—continued, and that with notable consequences to others besides himself.

For his thought still dallied with the subject of the monastic life, as lived by those same pious Benedictines here in England long ago. Its reasoned rejection of mundane agitations, its calm, its leisure, its profound and ardent scholarship were vastly to his taste,—A man touching middle-age might do worse, surely, than spend his days between worship and learning, thus?—He saw, and approved, its social office in offering sanctuary to the fugitive, alms to the poor, teaching to the ignorant, consolation to the sick and safe passage heavenward to the dying. Saw, not without sympathy, its more jovial moments—its good fellowship, shrewd and witty conversation, well salted stories—whereat a man laughs slyly in his sleeve—its good cheer, too, with feasts on holy-days and high-days, rich and succulent.—And in this last connection, as he reflected, much was to be said for the geographical position of Marychurch; since if river mists and white dullness of sea fog, drifting in from the Channel, were to hand, so, also, in

their season, were fresh run salmon, snipe, wood-cock, flocks of wild duck, of plover and other savoury fowl.

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For in this thankfulness of awakening from the hellish nightmare of the Terror, Mr. Verity's facile imagination tended to run to another extreme. With all the seriousness of which he was capable he canvassed the notion of a definite retirement from the world. Public movements, political and social experiments ceased to attract him. His appetite for helping to make the wheels of history go round had been satisfied to the point of nausea. All he desired was tranquillity and repose. He was free of domestic obligations and close family ties. He proposed to remain so—philosophy his mistress, science his hand-maid, literature his pastime, books (remembering the bitter sorrows of the tumbril and scaffold in Paris) in future, his closest friends.

But, unfortunately, though the great church in all its calm grave, beauty still held the heart the fair landscape, the monastery, which might have sheltered his renunciation, had been put to secular uses or fallen into ruin long years ago. If he proposed to retire from the world, he must himself provide suitable environment. Marychurch Abbey, at the end of the eighteenth century, had very certainly nothing to offer him under that head.

And then, with a swiftness of conception and decision possible only to mercurial-minded persons, his thought darted back to Tandy's, that unkempt, morally malodorous back-of-beyond and No Man's Land. Its vacant whitewashed countenance and long-eared chimney-stacks had welcomed him, if roughly and grudgingly, to England and to peace. Was he not in some sort thereby in debt to Tandy's bound by gratitude to the place? Should he not buy it—his private fortune being considerable—and there plant his hermitage? Should he not renovate and transform it, redeeming it from questionable uses, by transporting thither, not himself only but his fine library, his famous herbarium, his cabinets of crystals, of coins, and of shells? The idea captivated him. He was weary of destruction, having seen it in full operation and practised on the gigantic scale. Henceforth he would devote all the energy he possessed to construction—on however modest and private a one—to a building up, as personal protest against much lately witnessed wanton and chaotic pulling-down.

In prosecution of which purpose, hopeful once more and elate, bobbing merrily cork-like upon the surface of surrounding circumstance—although lamentably deficient, for the moment, in raiment befitting his position and his purse—Mr. Verity spent two days at the Stag's Head, in Marychurch High Street. He made enquiries of all and sundry regarding the coveted property; and learned, after much busy investigation that the village, and indeed the whole Hundred of Deadham, formed an outlying and somewhat neglected portion of his acquaintance, Lord Bulparc's Hampshire estate.

Here was solid information to go upon. Greatly encouraged, he took the coach to Southampton, and thence up to town; where he interviewed first Lord Bulparc's lawyers and then that high-coloured, free-living nobleman himself.

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“Gad, sir,” the latter assured him, “you’re heartily welcome to the damn little hole, as far as I’m concerned, if you have the bad taste to fancy it. I suppose I ought to speak to my son Oxley about this just as a matter of form. Not that I apprehend Oxley will raise any difficulties as to entail—you need not fear that. We shall let you off easy enough—only too happy to oblige you. But I warn you, Verity, you may drop money buying the present tenant out. If half my agent tells me is true, the fellow must be a most confounded blackguard, up to the eyes in all manner of ungodly traffic. By rights we ought to have kicked him out years ago. But,” his lordship chuckled—“I scruple to be hard on any man. We’re none of us perfect, live and let live, you know. Only my dear fellow, I’m bound to put you on your guard; for he’ll stick to the place like a leech and blood-suck you like a leech too, as long as there’s a chance of getting an extra guinea out of you by fair means or foul.”

To which process of blood-sucking Mr. Verity was, in fact, rather scandalously subjected before Tandy’s Castle passed into his possession. But pass into his possession it finally did, whereupon he fell joyously to the work of reconstructive redemption.

First of all he ordered the entrance of the underground passage, leading to the river foreshore, to be securely walled up; and, with a fine disregard of possible unhealthy consequences in the shape of choke-damp, the doorways of certain ill-reputed vaults and cellars to be filled with solid masonry. Neither harborage of contraband, cruel laughter of man, or yell of tortured beast, should again defile the under-world of Tandy’s! —Next he had the roof of the main building raised, and given a less mean and meagre angle. He added a wing on the left containing pleasant bed-chambers upstairs, and good offices below; and, as crowning act of redemption, caused three large ground-floor rooms, backed by a wide corridor, to be built on the right in which to house his library and collections. This lateral extension of the house, constructed according to his own plans, was, like its designer, somewhat eccentric in character. The three rooms were semicircular, all window on the southern garden front, veritable sun-traps, with a low sloped roofing of grey-green slate to them, set fan-wise.

Such was the house at Deadham Hard when Mr. Verity’s labours were completed. And such did it remain until a good eighty years later, when it was visited by a youthful namesake and great-great nephew, under circumstances not altogether unworthy of record.

CHAPTER II

Enter A *young scholar and gentleman of* A *happy disposition and good prospects*

The four-twenty down train rumbled into Marychurch station, and Tom Verity stepped out of a rather frousty first-class carriage on to the platform. There hot still September sunshine, tempered by a freshness off the sea, met him. The effect was pleasurable,

adding delicate zest to the enjoyment of living which already possessed him. Coming from inland, the near neighbourhood of the sea, the sea with its eternal invitation, stirred his blood.

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For was not he about to accept the said invitation in its fullest and most practical expression? Witness the fact that, earlier in the day, he had deposited his heavy baggage at that house of many partings, many meetings, Radley's Hotel, Southampton; and journeyed on to Marychurch with a solitary, eminently virgin, cowhide portmanteau, upon the yellow-brown surface of which the words—"Thomas Clarkson Verity, passenger Bombay, first cabin R.M.S. *Penang*"—were inscribed in the whitest of lettering. His name stood high in the list of successful candidates at the last Indian Civil Service examination. Now he reaped the reward of past endeavour. For with that deposition of heavy baggage at Radley's the last farewell to years of tutelage seemed to him to be spoken. Nursery discipline, the restraints and prohibitions—in their respective degrees—of preparatory school, of Harchester, of Oxford; and, above all and through all, the control and admonitions of his father, the Archdeacon, fell away from him into the limbo of things done with, outworn and outpaced.

This moved him as pathetic, yet as satisfactory also, since it set him free to fix his mind, without lurking suspicion of indecorum, upon the large promise of the future. He could give rein to his eagerness, to his high sense of expectation, while remaining innocent of impiety towards persons and places holding, until now, first claim on his obedience and affection. All this fell in admirably with his natural bent. Self-reliant, agreeably egotistical, convinced of the excellence of his social and mental equipment, Tom was saved from excess of conceit by a lively desire to please, an even more lively sense of humour, and an intelligence to which at this period nothing came amiss in the way of new impressions or experiences.

And, from henceforth, he was his own master, his thoughts, actions, purposes, belonging to himself and to himself alone. Really the position was a little intoxicating! Realizing it, as he sat in the somewhat stuffy first-class carriage, on that brief hour's journey from Southampton to Marychurch, he had laughed out loud, hunching up his shoulders saucily, in a sudden outburst of irrepressible and boyish glee.

But as the line, clearing the purlieus of the great seaport, turns south-westward running through the noble oak and beech woods of Arnewood Forest, crossing its bleak moorlands—silver pink, at the present season, with fading heather—and cutting through its plantations of larch and Scotch fir, Tom Verity's mood sobered. He watched the country reeling away to right and left past the carriage windows, and felt its peculiarly English and sylvan charm. Yet he saw it all through a dazzle, as of mirage, in which floated phantom landscapes strangely different in sentiment and in suggestion.—Some extravagantly luxuriant, as setting to crowded painted cities, some desert, amazingly vacant and desolate; but, in either case, poetic, alluring, exciting, as

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scenes far removed in climate, faith and civilization from those heretofore familiar can hardly fail to be. India, and all which India stands for in English history, challenged his imagination, challenged his ambition, since in virtue of his nationality, young and inexperienced though he was, he went to her as a natural ruler, the son of a conquering race. And this last thought begot in him not only exultation but an unwonted seriousness. While, as he thus meditated, from out the dazzle as of mirage, a single figure grew into force and distinctness of outline, a figure which from his childhood had appealed to him with an attraction at once sinister and heroic—that, namely, of a certain soldier and ex-Indian official, his kinsman, to pay a politic tribute of respect to whom was the object of his present excursion.

In Catholic countries the World gives its children to the Church. In Protestant countries the process is not infrequently reversed, the Church giving its children to the World, and that with an alacrity which argues remarkable faith and courage—of a sort! Archdeacon Verity had carefully planned this visit for his son, although it obliged the young man to leave home two days earlier than he need otherwise have done. It was illuminating to note how the father brought all the resources of a fine presence, an important manner and full-toned archidiaconal voice to bear upon proving the expediency of the young man visiting this particular relation, over whose career and reputation he had so often, in the past, pursed up his lips and shaken his head for the moral benefit of the domestic circle.

For the Archdeacon, in common with the majority of the Verity family, was animated by that ineradicable distrust of anything approaching genius which distinguishes the English country, or rather county, mind. And that Sir Charles Verity had failed to conform to the family tradition of solid, unemotional, highly respectable, and usually very wealthy, mediocrity was beyond question. He had struck out a line for himself; and, as the event disclosed, an illustrious one. This the Archdeacon, being a good Conservative, disapproved. It worried him sadly, making him actually, if unconsciously, exceedingly jealous. And precisely on that account, by an ingenious inversion of reasoning, he felt he owed it to abstract justice—in other words to his much disgruntled self—to make all possible use of this offending, this renegade personage, when opportunity of so doing occurred. Now, learning on credible authority that Sir Charles's name was still one to conjure with in India, it clearly became his duty to bid his son seek out and secure whatever modicum of advantage—in the matter of advice and introductions—might be derivable from so irritating a source.

All of which, while jumping with his own desires, caused Tom much sly mirth. For might it not be counted among the satisfactory results of his deposition of heavy baggage at Radley's that, for the first time in his life, he was at liberty to regard even his father, Thomas Pontifex Verity, Archdeacon of Harchester and Rector of Canton Magna, in a true perspective? And he laughed again, though this time softly, indulgently, able in the plenitude of youthful superiority to extend a kindly tolerance towards the foibles and ingenuous hypocrisies of poor middle-age.

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But here the train, emerging from the broken hilly country on the outskirts of the forest, roared along the embankment which carries the line across the rich converging valleys of the Wilner and the Arne. Tom ceased to think either of possible advantage accruing to his own fortunes, or these defects of the family humour which had combined to dictate his present excursion, his attention being absorbed by the beauty of the immediate outlook. For on the left Marychurch came into view.

The great, grey, long-backed abbey stands on a heart-shaped peninsula of slightly rising ground. Its western tower, land-mark for the valleys and seamark for vessels making the Haven, overtops the avenue of age-old elms which shade the graveyard. Close about the church, the red brick and rough-cast houses of the little market-town—-set in a wide margin of salt-marsh and meadow intersected by blue-brown waterways —gather, as a brood of chickens gathers about a mothering hen. Beyond lie the pale glinting levels of the estuary, guarded on the west by gently upward sloping cornlands and on the south by the dark furze and heath-clad mass of Stone Horse Head. Beyond again, to the low horizon, stretches the Channel sea.

The very simplicity of the picture gives it singular dignity and repose. Classic in its clearness of outline and paucity of detail, mediaeval in sentiment, since the great Norman church dominates the whole, its appeal is at once wistful and severe. And, this afternoon, just as the nearness of the sea tempered the atmosphere lifting all oppressive weight from the brooding sunshine, so did it temper the colouring, lending it an ethereal quality, in which blue softened to silver, grey to lavender, while green seemed overspread by powdered gold. The effect was exquisite, reminding Tom of certain water-colour drawings, by Danvers and by Appleyard, hanging in the drawing-room of the big house at Canton Magna, and of certain of Shelley's lyrics—both of which, in their different medium, breathed the same enchantment of natural and spiritual loveliness, of nameless desire, nameless regret. And, his nerves being somewhat strained by the emotions of the day, that enchantment worked upon him strangely. The inherent pathos of it, indeed, took him, as squarely as unexpectedly, by the throat. He suffered a sharp recoil from the solicitation of the future, an immense tenderness towards the past.—A tenderness for those same years of tutelage and all they had brought him, not only in over-flowing animal spirits, happy intercourse and intellectual attainment; but in their limitation of private action, their security of obligation, of obedience to authority, which at the time had seemed irksome enough and upon release from which he had so recently congratulated himself.

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Love of home, of England, of his own people—of the Archdeacon, in even his most full-voiced and moralizing mood—love of things tested, accustomed and friendly, touched him to the quick. Suddenly he asked himself to what end was he leaving all these and going forth to encounter untried conditions, an unknown Nature, a moral and social order equally unknown? Looking at the peaceful, ethereally lovely landscape, set in such close proximity and notable contrast to the unrest of that historic highway of the nations, the Channel sea, he felt small and lonely, childishly diffident and weak. All the established safety and comfort of home, all the thoughtless irresponsible delights of vanished boyhood, pulled at his heart-strings. He wanted, wanted wildly, desperately, not to go forward but to go back.

Mind and body being healthy, however, the phase was a passing one, and his emotion, though sincere and poignant, of brief duration. For young blood—happily for the human story, which otherwise would read altogether too sad—defies forebodings, gaily embraces risks; and, true soldier of fortune, marches out to meet whatever fate the battlefield of manhood may hold for it, a song in its mouth and a rose behind its ear.

Tom Verity speedily came to a steadier mind, pouring honest contempt upon his momentary lapse from self-confidence. He was ashamed of it. It amounted to being silly, simply silly. He couldn't understand, couldn't account for it. What possessed him to get a regular scare like this? It was too absurd for words. Sentiment?—Yes, by all means a reasonable amount of it, well in hand and thus capable of translation—if the fancy took you—into nicely turned elegiac verse; but a scare, a scare pure and simple, wasn't to be tolerated! And he got up, standing astraddle to brace himself against the swinging of the train, while he stretched, settling himself in his clothes—pulled down the fronts of his waistcoat, buttoned the jacket of his light check suit; and, taking off his wide-awake, smoothed his soft, slightly curly russet-coloured hair with his hand. These adjustments, and the assurance they induced that his personal appearance was all which it should be, completed his moral restoration. He stepped down on to the platform, into the serene light and freshness, as engaging and hopeful a youth of three and twenty as any one need ask to see.

"For The Hard? Very good, sir. Sir Charles's trap is outside in the station yard. One portmanteau in the van? Quite so. Don't trouble yourself about it, sir. I'll send a porter to bring it along."

This from the station-master, with a degree of friendly deference far from displeasing to the recipient of it.

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Whatever the defects of the rank and file of the Verity family in respect of liberal ideas, it can safely be asserted of all its members, male and female, clerical and lay, alike, that they belonged to the equestrian order. Hence it added considerably to Tom's recovered self-complacency to find a smart two-wheel dog-cart awaiting him, drawn by a remarkably well-shaped and well-groomed black horse. The coachman was to match. Middle-aged, clean-shaven, his Napoleonic face set as a mask, his undress livery of pepper-and-salt mixture soberly immaculate. He touched his hat when our young gentleman appeared and mounted beside him; the horse, meanwhile, shivering a little and showing the red of its nostrils as the train, with strident whistlings, drew out of the station bound westward to Stourmouth and Barryport.

Later the horse broke up the abiding inertia of Marychurch High Street, by dancing as it passed the engine of a slowly ambulant thrashing machine; and only settled fairly into its stride when the three-arched, twelfth century stone bridge over the Arne was passed, and the road—leaving the last scattered houses of the little town—turned south and seaward skirting the shining expanse of The Haven and threading the semi-amphibious hamlets of Horny Cross and Lampit.

CHAPTER III

THE DOUBTFULLY HARMONIOUS PARTS OF A WHOLE

A long, low, rectangular and rather narrow room, supported across the centre—where passage walls had been cut away—by an avenue of dumpy wooden pillars, four on either side, leading to a glass door opening on to the garden. A man's room rather than a woman's, and, judging by appearances, a bachelor's at that.—Eighteenth-century furniture, not ignoble in line, but heavy, wide-seated, designed for the comfort of bulky paunched figures arrayed in long napped waistcoats and full-skirted coats. Tabaret curtains and upholsterings, originally maroon, now dulled by sea damp and bleached by sun-glare to a uniform tone in which colour and pattern were alike obliterated. Handsome copperplate engravings of Pisa and of Rome, and pastel portraits in oval frames; the rest of the whity brown panelled wall space hidden by book-cases. These surmounted by softly shining, pearl-grey Chinese godlings, monsters, philosophers and saints, the shelves below packed with neatly ranged books.

A dusky room, in spite of its rounded, outstanding sash-windows, two on either side the glass door; the air of it holding, in permanent solution, an odour of leather-bound volumes. A place, in short, which, though not inhospitable, imposed itself, its qualities and traditions, to an extent impossible for any save the most thick-skinned and thick-witted wholly to ignore or resist.

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Young Tom Verity, having no convenient armour-plating of stupidity, suffered its influence intimately as—looking about him with quick enquiring glances—he followed the man-servant across it between the dumpy pillars. He felt self-conscious and disquieted, as by a smile of silent amusement upon some watchful elderly face. So impressed, indeed, was he that, on reaching the door, he paused, letting the man pass on alone to announce him. He wanted time in which to get over this queer sensation of shyness, before presenting himself to the company assembled, there, in the garden outside.

Yet he was well aware that the prospect out of doors—its amplitude of mellow sunlight and of space, its fair windless calm in which no leaf stirred—was far more attractive than the room in the doorway of which he thus elected to linger.

For the glass-door gave directly on to an extensive lawn, set out, immediately before the house front, with scarlet and crimson geraniums in alternating square and lozenge-shaped beds. Away on the right a couple of grey-stemmed ilex trees—the largest in height and girth Tom had ever seen—cast finely vandyked and platted shadow upon the smooth turf. Beneath them, garden chairs were stationed and a tea-table spread, at which four ladies sat—one, the elder, dressed in crude purple, the other three, though of widely differing ages and aspect, in light coloured summer gowns.

To the left of the lawn, a high plastered wall—masked by hollies, bay, yew, and at the far end by masses of airy, pink-plumed tamarisk—shut off the eastward view. But straight before him all lay open, “clean away to the curve of the world” as he told himself, not without a pull of emotion remembering his impending voyage. For, about sixty yards distant, the lawn ended abruptly in a hard straight line—the land cut off sheer, as it seemed, at the outer edge of a gravelled terrace, upon which two small antiquated cannon were mounted, their rusty muzzles trained over swirling blue-green tide river and yellow-grey, high-cambered sand-bar out to sea.

Between these innocuous engines of destruction, little black cannon balls had been piled into a mimic pyramid, near to which three men stood engaged in desultory conversation. One of them, Tom observed as markedly taller, more commanding and distinguished in bearing, than his companions. Even from here, the whole length of the lawn intervening, his presence, once noted, became of arresting importance, focussing attention as the central interest, the one thing which vitally mattered in this gracious scene—his figure silhouetted, vertically, against those long horizontal lines of river, sand-bar, and far-away delicate junction of opal-tinted sea with opal-tinted sky.

Whereupon Tom became convicted of the agreeable certainty that no disappointment awaited him. His expectations were about to receive generous fulfilment. This visit would prove well worth while. So absorbed, indeed, was he in watching the man whom he supposed—and rightly—to be his host, that he failed to notice one of the ladies rise

from the tea-table and advance across the lawn, until her youthful white-clad form was close upon him, threading its way between the glowing geranium beds.

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Then—“You are my cousin, Thomas Verity?” the girl asked, with a grave air of ceremony.

“Yes—and you—you are my cousin Damaris,” he answered as he felt clumsily, being taken unaware in more respects than one, and, for all his ready adaptability, being unable to keep a note of surprise out of his voice and glance.

He had known of the existence of this little cousin, having heard—on occasion—vaguely irritated family mention of her birth at a time when the flame of the Mutiny still burned fiercely in the Punjab and in Oudh. To be born under such very accentuated circumstances could, in the eyes of every normal Verity, hardly fail to argue a certain obtrusiveness and absence of good taste. He had heard, moreover, disapproving allusions to the extravagant affection Sir Charles Verity was said to lavish upon this fruit of a somewhat obscure marriage—his only surviving child. But the said family talk, in Tom’s case, had gone in at one ear and out at the other—as the talk of the elder generation mostly does, and will, when the younger generation is solidly and wholesomely convinced of the overwhelming importance of its own personal affairs. Consequently, in coming to Deadham Hard, Tom had thought of this little cousin—in as far as it occurred to him to think of her at all—as a child in the schoolroom who, beyond a trifle of good-natured notice at odd moments, would not enter into the count or matter at all. Now, awakening to the fact of her proximity, he awoke to the further fact that, with one exception, she mattered more than anything or anybody else present.

She was, in truth, young—he had been quite right there. Yet, like the room in the doorway of which he still lingered, like the man standing on the terrace walk—to whose tall figure the serene immensities of sea and sky acted as back-cloth and setting—she imposed herself. Whether she was pretty or plain, Tom was just now incapable of judging. He only knew that her eyes were wonderful. He never remembered to have seen such eyes—clear, dark blue-grey with fine shading of eyelash on the lower as well as the upper lid. Unquestionably they surpassed all ordinary standards of prettiness. Were glorious, yet curiously embarrassing; too in their seriousness, their intent impartial scrutiny—under which last, to his lively vexation, the young man felt himself redden.

And this, considering his superiority in age, sex, and acquirements, was not only absurd but unfair somehow. For did not he, as a rule, get on charmingly well with women, gentle and simple, old and young, alike? Had he not an ingratiating, playfully flirtatious way with them in which he trusted? But flirtatiousness, even of the mildest description, would not do here. Instinctively he recognized that. It would not pay at all—in this stage of the acquaintance, at all events. He fell back on civil speeches; and these rather laboured ones, being himself rather discountenanced.

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“It is extremely kind of you and Sir Charles to take me on trust like this,” he began. “Believe me I am very grateful. Under ordinary circumstances I should never have dreamed of proposing myself. But I am going out to India for the first time—sailing in the *Penang* the day after to-morrow. And, as I should be so near here at Southampton, it was, I own, a great temptation to ask if I might come for a night. I felt—my father felt—what a privilege it would be for me, a really tremendous piece of luck, to meet Sir Charles before I started. Such a rare and memorable send off for me, you know!”

“We were very glad you should propose yourself,” Damaris answered, still with her grave air of ceremony.

“Awfully good of you, I’m sure,” the young man murmured.—No, she didn’t stare. He could not honestly call it staring. It was too calm, too impersonal, too reserved for that. She looked, with a view to arriving at conclusions regarding him. And he didn’t enjoy the process—not in the least.

“My father is still interested in everything connected with India,” she went on. “He will like to talk to you. We have people with us this afternoon whom he could not very well leave, or he would have driven into Marychurch himself to fetch you. Dr. McCabe, who we knew at Bhutpur long ago, came over unexpectedly from Stourmouth this morning; and my Aunt Harriet Cowden telegraphed that she and Uncle Augustus would bring Aunt Felicia, who is staying with them at Paulton Lacy, here to tea.—But, of course, you know them quite well—Uncle Augustus, I mean, and my aunts.”

“Do I not know them!” Tom replied with meaning; while, humour getting the upper hand thanks to certain memories, he smiled at her.

And, even at this early period in his career, it must be conceded that Tom Verity’s smile was an asset to be reckoned with. Mischievous to the verge of impudence; but confidential, too, most disarmingly friendly—a really vastly engaging smile, which, having once beheld, most persons found themselves more than ready to behold often again.

Under its persuasive influence Damaris’ gravity relaxed. She lowered her eyes, and the soft warm colour deepened in her cheeks.

Her steady gaze removed, the young man breathed more freely. He congratulated himself. Intercourse was in act of becoming normal and easy. So far it had been quite absurdly hind-leggy—and for him, *him*, to be forced into being hind-leggy by a girl of barely eighteen! Now he prepared to trot gaily, comfortably, off on all fours, when she spoke, bringing him up to the perpendicular again with a start.

“I love Aunt Felicia very dearly,” she announced, as though in protest against some implied and subtle disloyalty.

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“But don’t we all love Cousin Felicia?” he returned, promptly, eager to maintain his advantage. “Isn’t she kindness incarnate, Christian charity personified? As for me, I simply dote on her; and with reason, for ever since those remote ages in which I wore scratchy pinafores and horrid little white socks, she has systematically and pertinaciously spoiled me whenever she stayed at Canton Magna.—Oh! she is an institution. No family should be without her. When I was small she gave me chocolates, tin soldiers, pop-guns warranted to endanger my brothers’ and sisters’ eyesight. And now, in a thousand ways, conscious and unconscious,” he laughed quietly, naughtily, the words running over each other in the rapidity of his speech—“she gives me such a blessed good conceit of myself!”

And Damaris Verity, caught by the wave of his light-heartedness and inherent desire to please, softened again, her serious eyes alight for the moment with answering laughter. Whereupon Tom crossed the threshold and stood close beside her upon the grass in the brooding sunshine, the beds of scarlet and crimson geraniums ranging away on glowing perspective to left and right. He glanced at the three ladies seated beneath the giant ilexes, and back at his companion. He felt absurdly keen further to excite her friendliness and dispel her gravity.

“Only one must admit cousin Harriet is quite another story,” he went on softly, saucily. “Any conceit our dear Felicia rubs in to you, Harriet most effectually rubs out. Isn’t it so? I am as a worm, a positive worm before her—can only ‘tremble and obey’ like the historic lady in the glee. She flattens me. I haven’t an ounce of kick left in me. And then why, oh why, tell me, Damaris, does she invariably and persistently clothe herself in violet ink?”

“It is her colour,” the girl said, her eyes still laughing, her lips discreetly set.

“But why, in heaven’s name, should she have a colour?” he demanded. “For identification, as I have a red and white stripe painted on my steamer baggage? Really that isn’t necessary. Can you imagine losing cousin Harriet? Augustus Cowden mislaying her, for example; and only recovering her with joyful cries—we take those for granted in his case, of course—at sight of the violet ink? Not a bit of it. You know as well as I do identification marks can’t ever be required to secure her return, because under no conceivable circumstances could she ever be lost. She is there, dear lady, lock, stock, and barrel, right there all the time. So her raiment of violet amounts to a purely gratuitous advertisement of a permanently self-evident fact.—And such a shade too, such a positively excruciating shade!”

But here a movement upon the terrace served, indirectly, to put a term to his patter. For Sir Charles Verity, raising his voice slightly in passing emphasis, turned and moved slowly towards the little company gathered at the tea-table. His two companions followed, the shorter of them apparently making answer, the words echoing clearly in

genial richness of affirmation across the intervening space—“And so it was, General, am I not recalling the incident myself? Indeed you’re entirely right.”

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“Come,” Damaris said, with a certain brevity as of command.

“And feel a worm?”

“No—come and speak to my father.”

“Ah! I shall feel a worm there too,” the young man returned, an engaging candour in his smiling countenance; “and with far better reason, unless I am greatly mistaken.”

CHAPTER IV

WATCHERS THROUGH THE SMALL HOURS

Love, ill-health and debt being, as yet, unknown quantities to young Tom Verity, it followed that insomnia, with its thousand and one attendant miseries, was an unknown quantity likewise. Upon the eve of the stiffest competitive examination those, now outlived, years of tutelage had imposed on him, he could still tumble into bed secure of lapsing into unconsciousness as soon as his head fairly touched the pillow. Dreams might, and usually did, visit him; but as so much incidental music merely to the large content of slumber—tittering up and down, too airily light-footed and evanescent to leave any impress on mind or spirits when he woke.

This night, at Deadham Hard, marked a new departure; sleep proving a less absolute break in continuity of sensation, a less absolute barrier between day and day.

The Honourable Augustus and Mrs. Cowden, and Felicia Verity, not without last words, adjurations, commands and fussings, started on their twelve-mile drive home to Paulton Lacy about six o’clock. A little later Dr. McCabe conveyed himself, and his brogue, away in an ancient hired landau to catch the evening train from Marychurch to Stourmouth. Dinner followed, shortly after which Damaris vanished, along with her governess-companion, Miss Theresa Bilson—a plump, round-visaged, pink-nosed little person, permanently wearing gold eyeglasses, the outstanding distinction of whose artless existence consisted, as Tom gathered from her conversation, in a tour in Rhineland and residence of some months’ duration at the university town of Bonn.

Then, at last, came the harvest of the young man’s excursion, in the shape of first-hand records of war and government—of intrigue and of sedition, followed by stern retributive chastisement—from that famous soldier, autocratic and practised administrator, his host.

In the opinion of a good many persons Tom Verity’s bump of reference showed very insufficient development. Dons, head-masters, the pedagogic and professorial tribe generally, he had long taken in his stride quite unabashed. Church dignitaries, too, left him saucily cool. For—so at least he argued—was not his elder brother, Pontifex,

private chaplain to the Bishop of Harchester? And did not this fact—he knowing poor old Ponty as only brother can know brother—throw a rather lurid light upon the spiritual and intellectual limitations of the Bench? In respect of the British aristocracy, his social betters, he also kept an open mind. For had not Lord Bulparc's son and

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heir, little Oxley, acted as his fag, boot-black and bacon-frier, for the best part of a year at school? Notwithstanding which fact—Lord Oxley was of a mild, forgiving disposition—had not he, Tom, spent the cricket week several summers running at Napworth Castle; where, on one celebrated occasion, he bowled a distinguished Permanent Under-Secretary first ball, and, on another, chided a marquis and ex-Cabinet Minister for misquoting Catullus.

Yet now, sitting smoking and listening to those records of eastern rule and eastern battle, in the quiet lamp-light of the long room—with its dark book-cases, faintly gleaming Chinese images, and dumpy pillars—his native cheekiness faded into most unwonted humility. For he was increasingly conscious of being, to put it vulgarly "up against something pretty big." Conscious of a personality altogether too secure of its own power to spread itself or, in the smallest degree, bluff or brag. Sir Charles Verity struck him, indeed, as calm to the confines of cynicism. He gave, but gave of his abundance, royally indifferent to the cost. There was plenty more where all this came from, of knowledge, of initiative and of thought. Only once or twice, during the course of their long talk, did the young man detect any sign of personal feeling. Then for an instant, some veil seemed to be lifted, some curtain drawn aside; while, with dazzling effect, he became cognizant of underlying bitterness, underlying romance—of secret dealings of man with man, of man with woman, and the dealing, arbitrary, immutable, final, of Death and a Greater than Death, with both.

These revelations though of the briefest, over before he fairly grasped their import, gone like a breath, were still sufficient to discredit many preconceived ideas and enlarge his mental horizon to a somewhat anxious extent. They carried him very far from life as lived at Canton Magna Rectory; very far from all, indeed, in which the roots of his experience were set, thus producing an atmosphere of doubt, of haunting and insidious unrest.

And of that atmosphere he was particularly sensible when, standing in the hall, flat candlestick in hand, he at last bade Sir Charles Verity good night.

"It has been a wonderful evening, sir," he said, simply and modestly. "You have been awfully kind in sparing me so much of your time; but, indeed, it has not been time wasted. I begin to measure a little what India means, I hope. Certainly I begin to measure the depth of my own ignorance. I see I have nearly everything of essential importance still to learn. And that is a pretty large order—almost staggeringly large now that, thanks to you, I begin to realize the vastness of the amount."

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“The majority of men in your Service never realize it,” Charles Verity returned. “They run in blinkers from first to last.—Not that I underrate their usefulness. They are honest, painstaking, thoroughly reliable, according to their lights. They do excellent journeyman work. But there lies the heart of the whole matter.—Are you content to do journeyman work only; or do you aspire to something greater?—If the former, then you had best forget me and all I have told you this evening as fast as possible. For it will prove a hindrance rather than a help, confusing the issues.—No—no—listen a moment, my dear boy”—

This kindly, indulgently even, as Tom made a gesture of repudiation and began to speak.

“If the latter—well, the door stands open upon achievement by no means contemptible, as the opportunities of modern life go; but, it is only fair to warn you, upon possibilities of trouble, even of disaster, by no means contemptible either. For, remember, the world is so constituted that if you elect to drive, rather than be driven, you must be prepared to take heavy risks, pay heavy penalties. Understand”—

He laid his hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“I do not pose as a teacher, still less as a propagandist. I do not attempt to direct the jury. The choice rests exclusively with yourself.—And here rid your mind of any cant about moral obligations. Both ways have merit, both bring rewards—of sorts—are equally commendable, equally right. Only this—whether you choose blinkers, your barrel between the shafts and another man’s whip tickling your loins, or the reins in your own hands and the open road ahead, be faithful to your choice. Stick to it, through evil report as well as through good.”

He lifted his hand off Tom’s shoulder. And the latter, looking round at him was struck—-in mingled admiration and repulsion—by his likeness to some shapely bird of prey, with fierce hooked beak and russet-grey eyes, luminous, cruel perhaps, yet very sad.

“Above all be careful in the matter of your affections,” Sir Charles went on, his voice deepening. “As you value your career, the pride of your intellect,—yes—and the pride of your manhood itself, let nothing feminine tempt you to be unfaithful to your choice. Tempt you to be of two minds, to turn aside, to turn back. For, so surely as you do, you will find the hell of disappointment, the hell of failure and regret, waiting wide-mouthed to swallow you, and whatever span of life may remain to you, bodily up.”

He checked himself, breaking off abruptly, the veil lowered again, the curtain drawn into place.

“There,” he said, “we have talked enough, perhaps more than enough. You have a long day before you to-morrow, so my dear boy, go to bed. My quarters are down here.”

He made a gesture towards the dark corridor opening off the far side of the hall.

“You know your way? The room on the right of the landing.”

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“Yes. I know my way, thanks, sir,” Tom answered—

And, thus dismissed, went on upstairs, carrying the silver flat candlestick, while his shadow, black on the panelled wall, mounted beside him grotesquely prancing step by step.

The furnishing of his room was of a piece with all below, solid yet not uncomely. It included a four-post bed of generous proportions, hangings, curtains and covers of chintz, over which faded purple and crimson roses were flung broadcast on a honey-yellow ground. The colourings were discreetly cheerful, the atmosphere not unpleasantly warm, the quiet, save for the creaking of a board as he crossed the floor, unbroken. Outwardly all invited to peaceful slumber. And Tom felt more than ready to profit by that invitation this last night on shore, last night in England. His attention had been upon the stretch for a good many hours now, since that—after all rather upsetting—good-bye to home and family at Canton Magna, following an early and somewhat peripatetic breakfast. Notwithstanding his excellent health and youthful energy, mind and body alike were somewhat spent. He made short work of preparation, slipped in between the fine cool linen sheets, and laid his brown head upon the soft billowing pillows, impatient neither to think nor feel any more but simply to sleep.

For some two hours or so he did sleep, though not without phantasmagoria queerly disturbing. The sweep of his visions was wide, ranging from that redoubtable county lady, Harriet Cowden *nee* Verity—first cousin of his father, the Archdeacon, and half-sister to his host—in her violet-ink hued gown, to fury of internecine strife amid the mountain fastnesses of Afghanistan,—from the austere and wistful beauty of the grey, long-backed Norman Abbey rising above the roofs and chimneys of the little English market-town, to the fierce hectic splendour of Eastern cities blistering in the implacable sun-glare of the Indian plains. Days on the Harchester playing fields, days on the river at Oxford, and still earlier days in the Rectory nursery at home; bringing with them sense of small bitter sorrows, small glorious triumphs, of laughter and uproarious fun, of sentimental passages at balls, picnics, garden parties, too, with charmingly pretty maidens who, in all probability, he would never clap eyes on again—all these, and impressions even more illusive and fugitive, playing hide-and-seek among the mazelike convolutions of his all too active brain.

Then, on a sudden, he started up in bed, aware of external noise and movement which brought him instantly, almost painfully, broad awake.

For a quite appreciable length of time, while he sat upright in the warm darkness, Tom failed either to locate the noise which had thus roused him, or to interpret its meaning. It appeared to him to start at the river foreshore, pass across the garden, into and through the ground-floor suite of rooms and corridor which Sir Charles had indicated as reserved to his particular use.—What on earth could it be? What did it remind him of?—Why, surely—with a start of incredulous recognition—the sound of hoofs, though

strangely confused and muffled, such as a mob of scared, over-driven horses might make, floundering fetlock deep in loose sand.

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Alive with curiosity he sprang out of bed, groped his way across to the window and, putting up the blind, leaned out.

A coppery waning moon hung low in the south-east, and sent a pale rusty pathway across the sea to where, behind the sand-bar, rippling waves broke in soft flash and sparkle. Its light was not strong enough to quench that of the stars crowding the western and the upper sky. Tom could distinguish the black mass of the great ilex trees on the right. Could see the whole extent of the lawn, the two sentinel cannon and pyramid of ammunition set on the terrace along the top of the sea-wall. And nothing moved there, nothing whatever. The outstretch of turf was vacant, empty; bare—so Tom told himself—as the back of his own hand. The sounds seemed to have ceased now that sight denied them visible cause of existence; and he began to wonder whether his hearing had not played him false, whether the whole thing was not pure fancy, a delusion born of agitated dreams.

He pushed the sash up as far as it would go and leaned further out of the window. The luscious scent of a late flowering species of lonercera, trained against the house wall, saluted his nostrils, along with a fetid-sweet reek off the mud-flats of the Haven. Away in the village a dog yelped, and out on the salt-marshes water-fowl gave faint whistling cries. Then all settled down into stillness, save for the just audible chuckle and suck of the river as the stream met the inflowing tide.

The stillness pleased him. For so many nights to come there would be none of it; but ceaselessly the drumming of the engines, quiver of the screw, and wash of the water against the ship's side.—All the same he did not quite like the colour of the moon or that frayed flattened edge of it westward. Why is there always something a trifle menacing about a waning moon? He did not like the smell of the mud-flats either. It might not be actually unhealthy; but it suggested a certain foulness. He yawned, drew back into the room, and straightening himself up, stretched his hands above his head. He would get into bed again. He was dog-tired—yes, most distinctly bed!

Then he stopped short, listening, hastily knelt down by the window and again leaned out. For once more he heard horses coming up from the shore, across the garden, into and through the house, hustling and trampling one another as they shied away from the whip.—There were laggards too—one stumbled, rolled over in the sand, got on its feet after a nasty struggle, and tottered onward dead lame. Another fell in its tracks and lay there foundered, rattling in the throat.

The sounds were so descriptive, so explicit and the impression produced on Tom Verity's mind so vivid that, carried away by indignation, he found himself saying out loud:

"Curse them, the brutes, the cowardly brutes, mishandling their cattle like that! They"—

And he stopped confounded, as it came home to him that throughout the course of this cruel drama he had seen nothing, literally nothing, though he had heard so convincingly much. A shiver ran down his spine and he broke into a sweat, for he knew beyond question or doubt not so much as a shadow,—let alone anything material—had breasted the sea-wall, passed over the smooth level turf, or entered—how should it?—-the house.

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The garden lay outspread before him, calm, uninvaded by any alien being, man or animal. The great ilex trees were immobile, fixed as the eternal stars overhead. And he shrank in swift protest, almost in terror, being called on thus to face things apparently super-normal, forces unexplored and uncharted, defying reason, giving the lie to ordinary experience and ordinary belief. Reality and hallucination, jostled one another in his thought, a giant note of interrogation written against each. For which was the true and which the false? Of necessity he distrusted the evidence of his own senses, finding sight and hearing in direct conflict thus.

The two or three minutes that followed were among the most profoundly disagreeable Tom ever had spent. But at last, a door opened below, letting forth a shaft of mellow lamp-light. It touched the flower-beds on the left edging the lawn, giving the geraniums form and colour, laying down a delicate carpet of green, transmuting black into glowing scarlet. Tall and spare in his grey and white sleeping-suit, Sir Charles Verity sauntered out, and stood, smoking, looking out to sea.

Earlier that night, downstairs in the sitting-room, he seemed a storm centre, generating much perplexity and disquiet. But now Tom welcomed his advent with a sense of almost absurd satisfaction. To see what was solidly, incontrovertibly, human could not but be, in itself, a mighty relief.—Things began to swing into their natural relation, man, living man, the centre, the dominant factor once more. He, Tom, could now shift all responsibility, moreover. If the master of the house was on guard, he might wash his hands of these hateful ghostly goings on—if ghostly they were—leaving the whole matter to one far stronger and more competent than himself.

Whereupon he went back to bed; and slept profoundly, royally, until Hordle the man-servant, moving about the bright chintz bedecked room, preparing his bath and laying out his clothes, awoke him to the sweetness of another summer day.

CHAPTER V

BETWEEN RIVER AND SEA

“We had a grand talk last night—Sir Charles was in splendid form. I enjoyed it down to the ground.”

Tom Verity lay, at full length on the upward sloping, sun-warmed bank of sand and shingle. Only to youth is given enjoyment of perfect laziness joined with perfect physical vigour. Just because he felt equal to vaulting the moon or long-jumping an entire continent, should such prodigious feats be required of him, could he lie thus in glorious idleness letting the earth cradle and the sun soak into him. Doubts and disturbances of last night melted in daylight to an almost ludicrous nothingness and self-confidence reigned; so that he declared the world a super-excellent place, snapping his

fingers at problems and mysteries. A spark of curiosity pricked him still, it is true, concerning the origin of certain undeniably queer aural phenomena. He meant to satisfy that curiosity presently; but the subject must be approached with tact. He must wait on opportunity.

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A few paces from and above him, Damaris sat on the crown of the ridge, where the light southerly wind, coming up now and again off the sea, fanned her. A white knitted jersey, pulled on over her linen dress, moulded the curve of her back, the round of her breasts and turn of her waist, showing each movement of her gracious young body to the hips, as she leaned forward, her knees drawn up and her feet planted among the red, orange, and cream-grey flints and pebbles.

Looking up at her, Tom saw her face foreshortened in the shade of her broad brimmed garden hat, a soft clear flush on it born of health, fresh air and sunlight, her eyes shining, the blue of the open sea in their luminous depths. He received a new impression of her. She belonged to the morning, formed part of the gladness of universal Nature, an unfettered nymph-like being. To-day her mood was sprightly, bidding farewell to ceremony. Yet, he felt, she remained perplexing, because more detached than is the feminine habit, poised and complete in herself.

And this detachment, this suppression of the sentimental or social note—he being admittedly a very personable fellow—piqued Tom's male vanity, so that he rallied her with:

"But by the way, why did you vanish so early, why didn't you stay with us after dinner last night?"

"I did not want to vanish," she answered. "Nothing is more delightful than hearing my father talk. But had I stayed Miss Bilson would have supposed herself free to stay too, and that would have spoiled the evening. My father doesn't choose to talk freely before Miss Bilson, because she gets into a foolish excited state and interrupts and asks questions. She overflows with admiration and that annoys and bores him."

"'She brought him butter in a lordly dish,'" Tom quoted. "The ill-advised Bilson. Can't one just see her!"

"And it is not her place to admire out loud," Damaris continued. "Over and over again I have tried to explain that to her. But in some ways, she is not at all clever. She can't or won't understand, and only tells Aunt Felicia I am wanting in sympathy and that I hurt her feelings. She has unreasonably many feelings, I think, and they are so easily hurt. I always know when the hurting takes place because she sniffs and then plays Mendelssohn's Songs without Words on the schoolroom piano."

Tom chuckled. She had a caustic tongue on occasion, this nymph-like creature!

"Alas, poor Bilson!" he said. "For, as Sir Charles walked across the garden with us down to the ferry, didn't I hear those same sugary melodies tinkling out of some upper open window?"

“I am afraid you did. You see she had made up her mind to come with me.”

“And you were forced to intimate you found yourself quite equal to conducting the expedition unshepherded?”

“I did not mean to be unkind, but she would have been so dreadfully in the way”—

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Damaris gathered up a handful of little pebbles, and let them dribble down slowly between her outspread fingers while, turning her head, she gazed away out to sea.

“This is a day by itself,” she said. “It looks like jewels, topazes, turquoise, and pearls; and it seems full of things which half tell themselves, and then hide from or pass you by.—I wanted to watch it all and think; and, she doesn’t do it on purpose I know, but somehow Miss Bilson always interferes with my thinking.”

Both the tone and substance of this discourse proved slightly startling to its hearer. They carried the conversation into regions transcendental; and to his blissful laziness, the rarefied air of those regions was unwelcome. To breathe it demanded exertion. So he said, chaffingly:

“Do I interfere with your thinking? I hope not. But if I offend that way, speak but a word and I disappear like a shot.”

“Oh! no,” she answered. “How could you interfere? You are part of it. You started it, you see, because you are going to India.”

Whereat, failing to catch the sequence of ideas, male vanity plumed itself, tickled to the point of amusement. For was not she a child after all, transparently simple and candid, and very much a woman-child at that! Tom turning on his side raised himself on one elbow, smiling at her with easy good-nature.

“How charming of you to adopt me as a special object of thought, and care so much about my going.”

But patronage proved short-lived. The girl’s colour deepened, but her eyes dwelt on him coldly.

“I have only been thinking how fortunate you are, and seeing pictures in my mind of what you will see which will be new to you—and—and remembering.”

“Oh! of course, I am lucky, tremendously lucky,” he hastened to declare, laughing a little wryly. “Such a journey is a liberal education in itself, knocking the insularity out of a man—if he has any receptive faculty that is—and ridding him of all manner of stodgy prejudices. I don’t the least undervalue my good fortune.—But you talk of remembering. That’s stretching a point surely. You must have been a mere baby, my dear Damaris, when you left India.”

“No, I was six years old, and I remember quite well. All my caring for people, all my thinking, begins there, in the palace of the Sultan-i-bagh at Bhutpur and the great compound, when my father was Chief Commissioner.”

Her snub duly delivered, and she secure it had gone home, Damaris unbent, graciously communicative as never before.

“It was all so beautiful and safe there inside the high walls, and yet a teeny bit frightening because you knew there were other things—as there are to-day—which you felt but couldn’t quite see all about you. Sometimes they nearly pushed through—I was always expecting and I like to expect. It hurt me dreadfully to go away; but I had been very ill. They were afraid

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I should die and so Dr. McCabe—he was here when you arrived yesterday—insisted on my being sent to Europe. A lady—Mrs. Pereira—and my nurse Sarah Watson took me to Paris, to the convent school where I was to be educated. It was all very strange, but the nuns were kind. I liked their religion, and I got accustomed to the other little girls. I had rooms of my own; and French friends of my father's visited me and took me out on half-holidays. And Aunt Felicia came over to fetch me for the summer vacations and brought me here"—

Damaris pointed across the tide-way to the river frontage, including with one sweeping gesture the whole demesne of The Hard from the deep lane on the one hand, opening funnel-like upon the shore, past sea-wall—topped at the corner by pink plumed tamarisk, the small twin cannons and pyramid of ball—the lawn and irregular white house overlooking it, backed and flanked by rich growth of trees, to a strip of sandy warren and pine scrub on the other, from out which a line of some half-dozen purple stemmed, red branched Scotch firs, along with the grey stone built Inn and tarred wooden cottages on the promontory beyond, showed through a dancing shimmer of heat haze, against the land-locked, blue and silver waters of Marychurch Haven.

"I did not like being here at all at first," she told him. "I thought it a mean place only fit for quite poor people to live in. The house seemed so pinched and naked without any galleries or verandahs. And I was afraid because we had so few servants and neither door-keepers or soldiers. I could not believe that in England there is so little need for protection against disaffected persons and thieves. The sunshine was pale and thin, and the dusk made me sad. At Bhutpur the sun used to drop in flame behind the edge of the world and night leap on you. But here the day took so long dying. Aunt Felicia used to praise what she called 'the long sweet English twilight,' and try to make me stop out in the garden to enjoy it with her. But I could not bear it. The colours faded so slowly. It seemed like watching some helpless creature bleed to death silently, growing greyer minute by minute and feebler. I did not want to watch, but go indoors where the lamps were lighted and it was warm and cosy. I used to cry dreadfully, when I could get away by myself where Aunt Felicia and the maids could not see me, cry for my father—-he resigned the Commissionership, you know, when I was sent home and took service in Afghanistan under the Ameer—and for my darling friend, Mrs. Pereira, and for the Sultan-i-bagh, where I knew strangers lived now. For the lotus tank and orange grove, and all my little tame animals and my pretty play-places I should never, never see any more"—

Overcome by which intimate memories, Damaris' grave voice—which had taken on a chanting cadence, at once novel and singularly pleasing to the young man's ear—-quavered and broke.

"Poor little exiled princess!" he cried, all his facile kindness to the fore again. "Yes, it must have been cruelly hard on you. You must have suffered. No wonder you cried—-cried buckets full."

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And drawn by pity for that desolate, tropic-bred little child, Tom got on to his feet and crunched up the loose shingle to the crest of the ridge, full of a lively desire to pacify and console. But here the soft breeze met and caressed him, and the whole plain of the tranquil sea came into view—turquoise shot with pearl, as Damaris recently figured it, and fringed with topaz where waves, a few inches high and clear as glass, broke on the yellow sand at the back of the Bar just below.

“How wonderfully lovely!” he exclaimed, carried out of himself by the extreme fairness of the scene. And, his hands in his trouser pockets he stood staring, while once again the pull of home, of England, of tenderness for all that which he was about to leave, dimmed his eyes and raised a lump in his throat.

“Upon my word, you must be difficult to please if this place doesn’t please you or come up to your requirements, Damaris,” he said, presently sitting down beside her. “No Arabian Nights palace in Asia, I grant you; yet in its own humbler and—dare I say?—less showy, manner not easy to beat. Breathe this enchanting air. See the heavenly tints with which our good dirty useful old Channel has adorned itself. Can you ask for more, you insatiable person, in the way of beauty?”

Then, slightly ashamed of his outburst, Tom practised a delightful smile, at once sentimental and flirtatious.

“No, on second thoughts, my dear princess, I keep my commiseration for my wretched self—every crumb of it. For I am the lonely exile—that is, I am just about to be—not you. Be advised, don’t quarrel with the good gifts of the gods. Deadham Hard is frankly entrancing. How willingly would I put off taking ship for your vaunted India, and spend the unending cycles of eternity here—with you, well understood—in this most delectable spot instead.”

Whereupon Damaris, with mingled gravity and haste, her head bent, so that hat-crown and hat-brim were presented to the young man’s observation rather than her face, proceeded to explain she had spoken not of the present but of the past. From the time Sir Charles returned to inhabit it, The Hard was transformed; his presence conferring interest and dignity upon it, rendering it a not unworthy dwelling-place indeed—should any such happen that way—for sages, conquerors, or even kings. He cared for the little property, a fact to her all sufficient. For him it held the charm of old associations. The pleasantest days of his boyhood were spent here with Thomas Clarkson Verity, his great uncle—who eventually left him the property—nor had he ever failed later to visit it when home on leave. In pious remembrance of that distant era and of his entertaining and affectionate, if somewhat eccentric, host and friend he forbade any alteration in the house or grounds. It continued to-day just as old Mr. Verity left it. There was no break, even in details of furnishing or arrangement, with the past. This,

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to Sir Charles, added to the natural restfulness of the place. Now after the great achievements and responsibilities of his Eastern career he found retirement congenial. The soft equable climate benefited his health. Rough shooting and good fishing could be had in plenty—stag-hunting, too, in Arnewood Forest, when he inclined to such sport. The Hard was sufficiently easy of access from town for friends to come and stay with him. Convenient for crossing to the Continent too, when he took his yearly cure at Aix or at Vichy, or went south for a couple of months, as last winter for instance, to Cette, Montpelier and across, by Pau, to the Atlantic seaboard at St. Sebastian, Biarritz, and Bayonne.

“When my father travels I go with him,” Damaris said, raising her head and looking at the young man with proud, deliberate eyes. “We both suffered too much, we must never be separated again. And when we go abroad, we go alone. There is no one to give advice or interfere. We take Hordle, to pack and look after the baggage. We are always together, and I am always happy. I wish we could live like that always, with no settled home. But after a while, my father grows tired of hotels. He begins to wish for the quiet of The Hard, and all the things he is accustomed to. And then, naturally, I begin to wish for it too.”

From which statement, made as he judged with intention, Tom apprehended an attachment of no common order existing between these two persons, father and child. If, as family gossip disapprovingly hinted, the affection given appeared to trench on exaggeration, the affection returned was of kindred quality, fervid, self-realized, absorbing, and absorbed. Comparing it with his own humorously tolerant filial attitude, Tom felt at once contrite and injured. The contrast was glaring. But then, as he hastened to add—though whether in extenuation of his own, or of his father’s, shortcomings remained open to question—wasn’t the contrast between the slightly pompous, slightly bow-windowed, provincial, Tory cleric and this spare, inscrutable soldier and ruler, glaring likewise? To demand that the one should either experience or inspire the same emotions as the other was palpably absurd! Hence (comfortable conclusion!) neither he, Tom, nor the Archdeacon was really to blame.—Only, as he further argued, once the absurdity of that same demand admitted, were you not free to talk of exaggeration, or of the “grand manner,” as you chose? Were not the terms interchangeable, if you kept an open mind? His personal acquaintance with the “grand manner” in respect of the affections, with heroical love, amounted, save in literature, to practically nothing; yet instinctively he applied those high sounding phrases to the attachment existing between Damaris and her father. Both as discovery and, in some sort, as challenge to his own preconceived ideas and methods this gave him food for serious thought.

He made no attempt at comment or answer; but sat silent beside the girl, bare-headed in the soft wind and sunlight, between the flowing river and tranquil sea.

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The “grand manner”—that was how, naturally, without posing or bombast, these two persons envisaged life for good or evil—for this last, too, might be possible!—shaped their purposes and conduct. Sir Charles, he knew, had played for big stakes. Damaris, he felt intuitively, young though she was, played and would play for them likewise. He looked at her with awakened speculation, awakened curiosity. What, he wondered, would come of it. Did it make her attractive or the reverse? Really he wasn’t at all sure. Whereat he grew restive, the claims of inherent masculine superiority, let alone those of public school, university and an honourable profession, asserting themselves. He began to question whether this young lady did not take up an undue amount of room, thus cramping him and denying his powers of conversation suitable opportunity of display. Was not it about time gently to reduce her, relegate her to a more modest position? To achieve which laudable result—he acted, of course, for her good exclusively—he prepared to broach the subject of the unaccountable noises which disturbed his rest last night. He would cross-examine her as to their origin, thereby teasing and perhaps even discountenancing her somewhat.

But before Tom could put his benevolent scheme into execution, his attention was unexpectedly diverted, a quite new element projecting itself upon the scene.

For some little while an open boat, a hoary though still seaworthy tub of a thing, deep in draught and broad in the beam, loaded up with lobster-pots—the skeleton ribs of them black against the surrounding expanse of shining turquoise and pearl—had slowly neared the Bar from seaward. The bows, in which a small, withered old man bent double over the oars, cocked up on end. The stern, where a young man stood erect among the lobster-pots, was low in the water. Now, as the nose of the boat grounded, the young man clambered along the gunwale, and balancing for a minute, tall and straight, on the prow, took a flying leap across the wide intervening space of breaking wave and clear water, alighting on his feet, upon the firm sand beyond.

“Good for him! Neatly done,” Tom Verity murmured, appreciating the grace and vigour of the action.

The young man, meanwhile, turning, called to the rower: “Thank you heartily for putting me ashore, Daddy Proud. I’ll go across home by the ferry. But see here, can you manage her by yourself or shall I help shove her off for you?”

“Lord love ’ee, I can manage her sure enough,” the other called back shrilly and a trifle truculently. “I knows ’er ways and she knows her master—ought to by now the old strumpet, if years count for anythink. So don’t ’ee go wetting yer dandy shoes for the likes of her and me, Cap’en.”

And keckling with thin wheezy laughter he straightened his back, and, planting one oar in the sand, set the boat afloat again skilfully.

CHAPTER VI

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IN WHICH THE PAST LAYS AN OMINOUS HAND ON THE PRESENT

Down here on the shore, in the serene morning atmosphere, voices carried with peculiar distinctness. Every word of the brief colloquy had reached Tom Verity; and one word at least possessed an Elizabethan flavour forbidden to ears Victorian, feminine and polite. Noting it Tom reddened and glanced uneasily at his companion, all inclination to tease giving place to a laudable desire to shield her from annoyance. But Damaris, judging by her demeanour, was unaware of any cause of offence; whence, with relief he concluded that either she had not heard, or that the rank expression conveyed nothing intelligible to her mind.

Her open hand pressed down upon the rough surface of the pebbles, she leaned a little backward, her lithe body twisted sideways from the waist, while she scrutinized the man upon the sands below. And that the latter presented a gallant and even distinguished appearance, though arrayed in leather-peaked cap, blue serge reefer jacket and trousers which had evidently seen service, Tom could not but admit, as he stood just clear of the ripples of incoming tide staring idly after the receding boat with its cargo of black ribbed skeleton lobster-pots.—A spirited-looking, well-made fellow, no doubt; merchant captain or more probably mate—Tom took him to be about eight-and-twenty —but in an altogether different rank of life to themselves and therefore a quite unsuitable object for prolonged and earnest attention. His advent should be treated as an accident, not elevated thus to the importance of an event. It was not quite good taste on Damaris' part Tom felt; and he made a show of rising, saying as he did so, by way of excuse:

"It is wonderfully charming out here. I am loath to break up our little *tete-a-tete;* but time waits for no man, worse luck, and if I am to catch my train I must start directly after luncheon. Sir Charles was good enough to promise me various letters of introduction to persons in, high places. He told me to remind him about them. I don't want to be greedy but I should like those letters. Perhaps I ought to be getting back so as to see your father about them."

But before Damaris had time to collect her thoughts and reply, the man in the peaked cap had further asserted his presence. Either becoming conscious of her observation, or caught by something in Tom Verity's speech, he wheeled round and looked up at the two in swift, almost haughty, enquiry. To Tom he vouchsafed little more than a glance, but upon Damaris his eyes fastened. For a good minute he stared at her, as though in some sort holding her to ransom. Then with an upward jerk of the head and an ejaculation, half smothered oath, half sharp laughter—as of one who registers eminently ironic conclusions—he began deliberately ascending the slope.

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Tom Verity, though possessed of plentiful cheekiness towards the majority of his elders and betters, was no fire-eater. He preferred diplomacy to war; and would adroitly evade rather than invite anything approaching a scene, specially in the presence of a woman. Yet under existing circumstances retreat had become, as he perceived, not only undignified but useless. So in his best Oxford manner—a manner ornate, at that period, and quite crushingly superior—he raised his shoulders, smiled faintly, resignedly, and disposed himself in an easier attitude, saying:

“Better wait, perhaps, my dear Damaris. I would sooner risk losing those precious letters than acquire a possible escort for you—and for myself—down to the river and across the ferry.”

And he threw a meaning glance over his shoulder, indicating the obtrusive stranger.

So doing he received a disturbing impression. For seen thus, at close quarters, not only was the said stranger notably, even astonishingly good-looking, but he bore an arresting likeness in build, in carriage, in expression to—

Tom paused perplexed, racking his brains.—For who, the deuce, was it? Where had he seen, and that as he could have sworn quite recently, this same forceful countenance lit by russet-grey eyes at once dauntless and sad, deep-set, well apart, the lids of them smooth and delicately moulded? The man’s skin was tanned, by exposure, to a tint but a few shades lighter than that of his gold-brown beard—a beard scrupulously groomed, trimmed to a nicety and by no means deforming the lower part of the face since the line of jaw and chin remained clearly discernible.

Tom turned away and looked absently at The Hard in its broad reposeful frame of lawn and trees. The cool green foliage of a bank of hydrangeas—running from the great ilexes to the corner of the house—thick-set with discs of misty pink and blue blossom took his fancy, as contrast to the beds of scarlet and crimson geranium naming in the sun. But below any superficial sense of pleasure in outward things, thought of that likeness—and likeness, dash it all, to whom?—still vexed him as a riddle he failed to guess. Obligation to guess it, to find the right answer, obsessed him as of vital interest and importance, though, for the life of him, he could not tell why. His sense of proportion, his social sense, his self-complacency, grew restive under the pressure of it. He told himself it wasn’t of the smallest consequence, didn’t matter a fig, yet continued to cudgel his memory. And, all the while, the sound of deliberate footsteps crunching over the dry rattling shingle, nearer and nearer, contributed to increase his inward perturbation.

The footsteps halted close behind him—while for a sensible length of time a shadow lay across him shutting off the genial warmth—and started again, passing to the left, as the intruder traversed the crown of the ridge a few paces from where Damaris was seated, and pursued his way down to the river-shore on the other side.

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“At last—I thank you!” Tom broke out impatiently.

He felt incomprehensibly nervous; and angry with himself for so feeling.

“Commend me to our friend for taking his time about things, and incidentally wasting ours—yours and mine, I mean! What on earth did he want? He certainly treated us to a sufficiently comprehensive inspection. Well, I hope he was satisfied. By the same token, have you any conception who the fellow is?”

Damaris shook her head. She, too, appeared perturbed. Her eyebrows were drawn into a little frown and her expression was perplexed to the point of child-like distress.

“Not any,” she answered simply. “Some one staying at Faircloth’s Inn possibly. People come there from Marychurch to spend the day during the summer. Old Timothy Proud, the lobster-catcher, who brought him round in his boat, lives at one of the cottages close to the Inn. No,” she repeated, “I have no conception who he is, and yet his face seemed familiar. I had a feeling that I knew him quite well—had seen him often, oh! very often before.”

“Ah! then you were puzzled by some mysterious likeness,”—Tom began eagerly, smiling at her. And stopped short, open-mouthed, assailed by so apparently preposterous a recognition that for the minute it left him fairly speechless.

But Damaris, busy with her own sensations, her glance still following the blue-clad figure along the shore and out on to the tumble-down wooden jetty, failed to remark his embarrassment and thus gave him time to recover his scattered wits.

“Jennifer is bringing the ferry-boat across,” she said presently, “so you won’t have to wait much longer. Not that you need be at all anxious about those letters. It is not my father’s habit to forget a promise. Most likely they were written last night before he went to bed. He sleeps badly, I am sorry to say, and is glad to cheat the wakeful hours by reading and doing his correspondence until late.”

As she spoke the young girl rose to her feet, pulling the close-fitting jersey down over her hips and, stooping, dusted particles of sand off the hem of her dress.

“There—that’s better. Now I am tidy. Shall we go home, cousin Tom?” she asked.

Her eyes shone with inward excitement and she carried her head proudly, but her face was white. And he, sensible that she had suddenly hardened towards him and strove, he could not divine why, to keep him at arm’s length, turned perversely teasing again. He would not await a more convenient season. Here and now he would satisfy his curiosity—and at her expense—regarding one at least of the queer riddles Deadham Hard had sprung on him.

“I did not know your father suffered from sleeplessness,” he said. “It must be horribly trying and depressing. I am glad, in a way, you have told me, because it may account for my seeing him go out into the garden from the study last night, or rather very early this morning. It would be about two o’clock. I put down his appearance to another cause, and”—

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He smiled at her, delightfully ingratiating, assaugingly apologetic.

“Shall I own it?—one which, frankly, struck me as a little upsetting and the reverse of pleasant.”

“Weren’t you comfortable? I am so sorry,” Damaris exclaimed, instincts of hospitality instantly militant. “What was wrong? You should have called someone—rung for Hordle. What was it?”

“No—no—my dear Damaris, don’t vex yourself I entreat you. I was in clover, luxuriously comfortable. You’ve allotted me a fascinating room and perfect dream of a bed. I feel an ungrateful wretch for so much as mentioning this matter to you after the way in which you have indulged me. Only something rather extraordinary really did happen, of which I honestly confess I am still expiring to find a reasonable and not too humiliating explanation. For, though I blush to own it”—

He laughed softly, humping up his shoulders after the manner of a naughty small boy dodging a well-merited box on the ear.—

“Yes, I blush to own it, but I was frightened, downright frightened. I quailed and I quaked. The sight of Sir Charles stepping out of the study window filled me with abject rapture. Metaphorically speaking, my craven soul squirmed at his heels. He was to me as a strong tower and house of defence.—But look here, Damaris, joking apart, tell me weren’t you disturbed, didn’t you hear any strange noises last night?”

“No, none.” She hesitated, then with evident reluctance—“I sleep in the new wing of the house.”

“Which you imply, might make a difference?” Tom asked.

“The older servants would tell you that it does.”

“And you agree with them?”

Damaris had a moment of defective courage.

“I would rather not discuss the subject, cousin Tom,” she said and moved away down over the shifting shingle.

At first her progress was sober, even stately. But soon, either from the steep, insecure nature of the ground or from less obvious and material cause, her pace quickened until it became a run. She ran neatly, deftly, all of a piece as a boy runs, no trace of disarray or feminine floundering in her action. More than ever, indeed, did she appear a fine nymph-like creature; so that, watching her flight Tom Verity was touched alike with self-reproach and admiration. For he had succeeded in asserting himself beyond his

intention. Had overcome, had worsted her; yet, as it occurred to him, won a but barren victory. That she was alienated and resentful he could hardly doubt, while the riddle he had rather meanly used to procure her discomfiture remained unanswered as ever, dipped indeed only deeper in mystery. He was hoist with his own petard, in short; and stood there nonplussed, vexed alike at himself and at circumstance.

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A soft wind, meanwhile, caressed him, as hesitating, uncertain what to do next, he glanced out over the smiling sea and then back at the delicate shore line, the white house, the huge evergreen trees and brilliant flower garden. A glamour covered the scene. It was lovely, intimately, radiantly lovely as he had lately declared it. Yet just now he grew distrustful, as though its fair seeming cloaked some subtle trickery and deceit. He began to wish he had not undertaken this expedition to Deadham; but gone straight from the normal, solidly engrained philistinism of dear old Canton Magna to join his ship. In coming here he had, to put it vulgarly, bitten off more than he could chew. For the place and its inhabitants seemed to have a disintegrating effect on him. Never in all his life had he been such a prey to exterior influences, been twisted and turned to and fro, weather-cock fashion, thus. It was absurd, of course, to take things too seriously, yet he could not but fear the Archdeacon's well-intentioned bit of worldliness and his own disposition to court whatever family prejudice pronounced taboo, were in process of leading him a very questionable little dance.

Reaction, however, set in before long, as with so lively, light-hearted a temperament, it was bound to do, the healthy scepticism, healthy optimism of untried three-and-twenty rising to the surface buoyant as a cork.

Tom Verity shook himself, took off his hat, smoothed his hair, settled his tie, hitched up the waist of his trousers, stamping to get them into place, laughed a little, calling himself every sort of silly ass, and then swung away down the side of the long ridge in pursuit of Damaris. He acknowledged his treatment of her had been lacking in chivalry. He hadn't shown himself altogether considerate or even kind. But she challenged him—-perhaps unconsciously—and once or twice had come near making him feel small.—Oh! there were excuses for his behaviour! Now however he would sail on another tack. Would placate, discreetly cherish her until she couldn't but be softened and consent to make it up. After all maidens of her still tender age are not precisely adamant—such at least was his experience—where a personable youth is concerned. It only needed a trifle of refined cajolery to make everything smooth and to bring her round.

He overtook the fugitive as she reached the low wooden jetty crawling, like some giant but rather dilapidated black many-legged insect, out over the stream. Its rows of solidly driven piles were intact, but the staging they supported had suffered damage from the rush of river floods, let alone from neglect and age. Handrails were broken down, planks rotted and wrenched away leaving gaps through which the cloudy greenish blue water could be seen as it purred and chuckled beneath. Here, at the river level, it was hot to the point of sultriness, the air heavy, even stagnant, since the Bar shut off the southerly breeze.

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“Upon my word one requires to be in training to race you, my dear Damaris,” the young man said gaily, ostentatiously mopping his forehead. “And I’m disgracefully soft just now, I know. You beat me utterly and ignominiously; but then you did have a good three minutes’ start. In common honesty you can’t deny that”—

The girl made no response, but began mounting the few sand-strewn steps on to the jetty. He saw her face in profile, the delicate upward curve of her long dark eyelashes in the shade of her hat. Saw, too, that her soft lips quivered as with the effort to repress an outburst of tears. And this affected him as the wounding of some strong free creature might, stirring his blood in a fashion new to him and strange. For not only did he find it piteous; but unseemly, unpermissible somehow, yet marvellously sweet, startling him out of all preconceived light diplomatic plans, plucking shrewdly at his complacently unawakened heart.

He came close to her, and putting his hand under her elbow gently held it.

“Pray, pray be careful,” he said. “I don’t trust this crazy little pier of yours one atom. Any one of these boards looks capable of crumbling and letting one through.—And, Damaris, please don’t be cross with me or I shall be quite miserable. Forgive my having asked you stupid questions. I was a blundering idiot. Of course, what I heard last night was just some echo, some trick of wind or of the river and tide. I was half asleep and imagined the whole thing most likely, magnified sounds as one does, don’t you know, sometimes at night. Your father talked wonderfully, and I went to bed dazzled, such imagination as I possess all aflame”—

But Damaris shook her head, while her elbow rested rigid upon the palm of his hand.

“No—what you heard was real,” she answered. “I heard once myself—and the people here know about it. They say the dead smugglers still drive their ponies up from the beach, across the lawn where the old road was, and, as it sounds, through the round rooms downstairs, in which my father lives, on their way up into the forest.—You cannot help seeing—although you see nothing—how the ponies are ill-used, hounded and flogged. The last of the drove are lame and utterly worn out. They stumble along anyhow and one falls. Oh! it is cruel, wicked. And it is—was, really true, cousin Tom. It must have happened scores of times before old Mr. Verity, your namesake, put a stop to the iniquity by buying The Hard—I have only heard the ponies driven once, about this time in September last year—just before something very sad, quite of my own, happened”—

Damaris stopped, her lips quivering again and too much for speech.

“Don’t tell me any more. I can’t bear you to be distressed. Pray, pray don’t”—the young man urged incoherently while his grasp on her elbow tightened somewhat.

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For he felt curiously flurried and put about; near cursing himself moreover for having helped to break up her high serenity thus. The whole thing was manifestly impossible as he told himself, outside every recognized law of Nature and sound science. Even during the mistrustful phantasy-breeding watches of the night, when reason inclines to drag anchor setting mind and soul rather wildly adrift, he had refused credence to the apparent evidence of his own senses. Now in broad daylight, the generous sunshine flooding him, the smooth river purring and glittering at his feet, belief in grim and ghostly happenings became more than ever inadmissible, not to say quite arrantly grotesque. Yet Damaris' version of those same happenings tallied with his own in every point. And that her conviction of their reality was genuine, profound indeed to the point of pain, admitted neither of question nor of doubt.

CHAPTER VII

A CRITIC IN CORDUROY

William Jennifer, who successfully combined in his single person the varied offices of ferryman, rat-catcher, jobbing gardener, amateur barber, mender of sails and of nets, brought the heavy, flat-bottomed boat alongside the jetty. Shipping the long sweeps, he coughed behind his hand with somewhat sepulchral politeness to give warning of his presence.

"Sweethearting—lost to sight and hearing, espoused to forgetfulness," he murmured, peering up at the two cousins standing in such close proximity to one another upon the black staging above.

For William Jennifer was a born lover of words and maker of phrases, addicted to the bandying of pleasantries, nicely seasoned to their respective age, sex and rank, with all he met; and, when denied an audience, rather than keep silence holding conversation with himself.

The hot morning induced thirst, which, being allayed by a couple of pints at Faircloth's Inn, induced desire for a certain easiness of costume. His waistcoat hung open—he had laid aside his coat—displaying a broad stitched leather belt that covered the junction between buff corduroy trousers and blue-checked cotton shirt. On his head, a high thimble-crowned straw hat, the frayed brim of it pulled out into a poke in front for the better shelter of small, pale twinkling eyes set in a foxy face.

The said face, however—for all its sharp-pointed nose, long upper lip, thin gossipy mouth, tucked in at the corners and opening, redly cavernous, without any showing of teeth, a stiff sandy fringe edging cheeks and chin from ear to ear—could on occasion become utterly blank of expression. It became so now, as Tom Verity, realizing the fact

of its owner's neighbourhood, moved a step or two away from Damaris and, jumping on board himself, proceeded with rather studied courtesy to hand her down into the boat.

"Looks as there might have been a bit of a tiff betwixt 'em"—Thus Jennifer inwardly. Then aloud—"Put you straight across the ferry, sir, or take you to the breakwater at The Hard? The tide's on the turn, so we'd slip down along easy and I'm thinking that 'ud spare Miss Verity the traipse over the shore path. Wonnerful parching in the sun it is for the latter end of September."

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“Oh! to the breakwater by all means,” Tom answered with alacrity.

For reaction had set in. Not only was the young man still slightly flustered, but vexed by the liveliness of his own emotions. Everything to-day savoured of exaggeration. The most ordinary incidents distended, inflated themselves in a really unaccountable manner. So that, frankly, he fought shy of finding himself alone with Damaris again. She seemed so constantly to betray him into ill-regulated feeling, ill-considered speech and action, which tended to endanger the completeness of his self-esteem. Therefore, although admitting his attitude to be scantily heroic, he welcomed the prospect of the ferryman’s chaperonage until such time as her father or her discarded lady-in-waiting, the innocent and pink-nosed Bilson, should effect his final deliverance.

“Yes, it is uncommonly hot,” he repeated, while, with both arms extended, he worked to keep the side of the boat from bumping against the range of piles, backing it clear of the jetty into the fairway of the river. He found exertion pleasant, steadying.

“Neither Miss Verity nor I shall be sorry to be saved the walk along that basting path. That is,” he added, smiling with disarming good-temper, “if we’re not blocking business and keeping you too long away from the ferry.”

But Jennifer, mightily pleased at his company and having, moreover, certain scandalous little fishes of his own to fry—or attempt to fry—waved the objection aside.

The ferry could very well mind itself for a while, he said; and if anyone should come along they must just hold hands with patience till he got back, that was all. But passengers were few and far between this time of year and of day. The “season”—as was the new-fangled fashion to call it—being now over; trippers tripped home again to wheresoever their natural habitat might be. The activities of boys’ schools, picnic parties, ambulant scientific societies and field-clubs—out in pursuit of weeds, of stone-cracking, and the desecration of those old heathen burying barrows on Stone Horse Head quieted off for the time being. Deadham, meanwhile, in act of repossessing its soul in peace and hibernating according to time-honoured habit until the vernal equinox.

Not that he, Jennifer, as he explained, owned to any quarrel with the alien invasion. Good for trade they were, that tripper lot, though wonnerful simple, he must say, when they came to talk, blessed with an almighty wide swallow for any long-eared fairy tale you liked to put on them. Mortal full of senseless questions, too, fit to make anybody laugh!—Whereat overcome by joyous memories of human folly, he opened the red cavern of his apparently toothless mouth, barking up audible mirth, brief and husky, from the depth of a beer-slaked throat.

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He leaned forward while speaking, resting chest and elbows on the oars—only now and again dipping the blades in the water to steady the boat in its course as it moved smoothly onward borne by brimming stream and tide. From out the shadow of his thimble-crowned hat he looked up knowingly, with the freemasonry of assured good-temper at Tom, who stood before him hands in pockets, friendly and debonair, class distinctions for the moment quite forgot. For, let alone immediate convenience of chaperonage, the young man found unexpected entertainment in this typical South Saxon, relic, as it struck him, of a bygone age and social order. Might not that tough and somewhat clumsy body, that crafty, jovial, yet non-committal countenance, have transferred themselves straight from the pages of Geoffrey Chaucer into nineteenth-century life? Here, was a master of primitive knowledge and of arts not taught in modern Board (or any other) Schools; a merry fellow too, who could, as Tom divined, when company and circumstances allowed, be broadly, unprintably humorous.

So, in this last connection perhaps, it was just as well that Damaris still appeared somewhat implacable. Coming on board she had passed Jennifer—who rowed amidships—and gone right forward, putting as wide a distance as conditions permitted between her cousin and herself. Now, as she sat on a pile of red-brown seine nets in the bow of the boat, she kept her face averted, looking away down the cool liquid highway, and presenting to his observation a graceful, white-clad but eminently discouraging back. Her attitude repelled rather than invited advances, so at least Tom, watching her, certainly thought. This justified his not following her but staying where he was, and leaving her to herself. Whereupon annoyance again beset him; for it was very little to his credit to have mismanaged his dealings with her and alienated her sympathies thus. With her, it was very evident, he had not been at all a success. And it pricked his young vanity very shrewdly not to be a success.

From these unsatisfactory reflections William Jennifer's voice, prefaced by a warning cough, recalled him.

"Making any long stay in these parts, sir?" he enquired.

And when Tom explained that a few hours from now would witness the termination of his visit, and that, in all probability, many years of absence from England lay ahead—

"Indeed, indeed, to be sure. Who'd have thought it for a young gentleman of the quality-like yourself! But, there, some are born under the traveller's star, sir—created with a roving spirit. And the Lord help 'em, I say, for they're so made as to be powerless to help themselves seemingly. Rove they must and will, if they are to taste any contentment—an itch in their feet from the cradle nought but foreign lands'll serve to pacify. The sight of the ocean now, seems fairly tormenting to 'em till they can satisfy themselves of what's on the far side of it."

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But, here, the boat being unduly drawn aside by the suck of some local current, Jennifer was constrained to apply his mind to navigation. He dipped the long sweeps, and with a steady powerful pull straightened the course to midstream. Then raising the glistening blades, off which the water dripped white and pattering, he leaned forward again, resting elbows and chest on the butt-end of the oars, and once more addressed himself to polite conversation.

“Not as I’ve been greatly troubled that way myself. Had my chance of going to sea and welcome many’s the time when I was a youngster. But always a one for the land, I was. Never had any special fancy for salt water, though I do make my living of it now, as you may say, in a sense.”

During this biographical excursion Tom Verity’s attention wandered. His eyes dwelt on Damaris. She had altered her position turning half round as she scanned the strip of sandy warren with its row of sentinel Scotch firs bordering the river. Seen thus, three-quarter face, Tom realized suddenly not only how really beautiful she was—or rather could at moments be—but how strangely she resembled Sir Charles her father. There was likeness not of features alone; but, for all her youthful freshness, a reflection of his strength, his inscrutability. Whereupon rather unworthy curiosity reawoke in Tom Verity, to satisfy which he was tempted to descend to methods not entirely loyal.

Damaris, sitting to windward, must be out of earshot assuredly, yet he lowered his voice as he said:

“By the way, talking of going to sea, can you tell me anything about the young sailor whom you took across the ferry just before fetching Miss Verity and me? I am pretty sure I have met him before and yet I can’t place him somehow.”

Jennifer shot a sharply enquiring glance at the speaker; for here, at first sight, appeared rare opportunity of that same coveted and scandalous fish-frying! Yet he debated the wisdom of immediate indulgence in that merry pastime, inherent suspicion of class for class, suspicion too, of this young gentleman’s conspicuously easy, good-natured manner, preaching caution. A show of friendliness supplies fine cover for the gaining of one’s own ends.—Hadn’t he, Jennifer, practised the friendly manoeuvre freely enough himself on occasion? And he did not in the least relish the chance of walking into a trap, instead of jovially baiting one. So he dipped the oars again, and answered slowly as though the question taxed his memory sorely, his face vacant of expression as an empty plate.

“Brought him across before I started to fetch you and the young lady, sir, did I? To be sure, there, let me see. I’ve had several sea-going chaps of sorts back and forth this morning. Come and go most days, they do, come and go without my taking any particular account—the Lord forgive me, for it ain’t over civil—unless strangers should hail me, or someone out of the common

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such as Miss Verity and yourself. A passing show, sir, half the time those I carry; no more to me, bless you, than so many sand-fleas a-hopping on the beach.—Mr. Blackmore—coast-guard officer he is—I fetched him across early, with one of his men coming round from the Head. And that poor lippity-lop, Abram Sclanders' eldest.—Pity he wasn't put away quiet-like at birth!—Terrible drag he is on Abram and always will be. Anybody with an ounce of gumption might have seen he'd be a short-wit from the first. —I took him over; but that 'ud the opposite way about, as he wanted to go shrimping back of the Bar so he said."

Jennifer paused as in earnest thought.

"No, not a soul to merit your attention, to-day, sir, that I can call to mind. Unless"—with an upward look of returning intelligence—"but that ain't very likely either—unless it should be Darcy Faircloth. I'd clean forgot him, so I had. Cap'en Faircloth, as some is so busy calling 'im, now, in season and out of season till it's fairly fit to make you laugh. —Remarkable tall, Johnny-head-in-air young feller with a curly yaller beard to him."

"That's the man!" Tom exclaimed.

He had distrusted Jennifer's show of ignorance, believing he was being fenced with, played with, even royally lied to; but this merely served to heighten his curiosity and amusement. Something of moment must lie, he felt, behind so much wandering talk, something of value, purposely and cunningly withheld until time was ripe for telling disclosure.

"Darcy Faircloth—Captain Faircloth?" he could not but repeat, and with such honest puzzlement and evident desire for further enlightening as to overcome his hearer's hesitation.

"No—not a likely person for you to be in any wise acquainted with, sir," Jennifer returned, wary still, though yielding—"even if you didn't happen to be a bit new to Deadham yourself, as I may put it. For been away mostly from his natural home here, young Faircloth has, ever since he was a little shaver. Mrs. Faircloth—owns the Inn there and all the appurtenances thereof, sheds, cottages, boats, and suchlike, she does —always had wonnerful high views for him. Quite the gentleman Darcy must be, with a boarding school into Southampton and then the best of the Merchant Service—no before the mast for him, bless you. There was a snug little business to count on, regular takings in the public, week in and week out—more particularly of late years in the summer—let alone the rest of the property—he being the only son of his mother, too, and she a widow woman free to follow any whimsies as took her about the lad."

Jennifer gave some slow, strong strokes, driving the lumbering boat forward till the water fairly hissed against its sides. And Tom Verity still listened, strangely, alertly interested, convinced there was more, well worth hearing, to follow.

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“Oh! there’s always bin a tidy lot of money behind young Darcy, and is yet I reckon, Mrs. Faircloth being the first-class business woman she is. Spend she may with one hand, but save, and make, she does and no mistake, Lord love you, with the other. Singular thing though,” he added meditatively, his face growing wholly expressionless, “how little Darcy, now he’s growed up, features old Lemuel his father. Squinny, red-cheeked little old party, he was; thin as a herring, and chilly, always chilly, sitting over the fire in the bar-parlour winter and summer too—small squeaky voice he had minding any one of a penny whistle. But a warm man and a close one—oh! very secret. Anybody must breakfast overnight and hurry at that—eat with their loins girded, as you may say, to get upsides with old Lemuel.”

He ceased speaking, and glanced round over his shoulder calculating the distance to the breakwater, for the boat drew level with the sea-wall of rough-hewn pinkish-grey granite along the river frontage of The Hard gardens.

“There’s some as ’ud tell you it was the surprise of old Lemuel’s life to find himself a parent,” he added, eyeing Tom slyly as he spoke, his mouth remaining open as in preparation for coming laughter.

For those same scandalous little fishes were well into the frying-pan, now—sizzling, frizzling. And this was a vastly agreeable moment to William Jennifer, worth waiting for, worth scheming for. Unprintable humour looked out of his twinkling eyes while he watched to see how far Tom Verity caught his meaning. Then as the young man flushed, sudden distaste, even a measure of shame invading him, Jennifer, true artist in scandal, turned the conversation aside with an air of indulgent apology.

“But, lor, there, you know how people’ll talk in a little country place where there ain’t much doing!—And it ain’t for me to speak of what happened back in those times, being barely out of my teens then and away cow-keeping over Alton way for Farmer Whimsett. Regular chip of the old block, he was. Don’t breed that sort nowadays. As hearty as you like, and swallered his three pints of home-brewed every morning with his breakfast he did, till he was took off quite sudden in his four-score-and-ten twelve months ago come Michaelmas.”

Upon the terrace, by the pyramid of ball and the two little cannons, Sir Charles Verity stood, holding a packet of newly written letters in his hand and smoking, while he watched the approaching boat. Damaris rose from the pile of red-brown fishing-nets and waved to him. Jennifer, too, glanced up, steadying both oars with one hand while he raised the other to the brim of his thimble-crowned hat. A couple of minutes more and he would part company with his passenger, and so judged it safe to indulge himself with a final fish-frying.

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“Mortal fine figure of a man, Sir Charles even yet,” he said to Tom admiringly. “But anybody should have seen him as a young gentleman. When he used to visit here in old Mr. Verity’s time, none in the country-side could hold a candle to him for looks, as you may say. Turned the females’ heads he did. Might have had his pick of the lot, maids and wives alike for ’arf a word. Well, good-bye to you, sir”—and, as certain coin changed hands—“thank ye, sir, kindly. Wish you a pleasant voyage and a rare good picking up of honours and glories, and gold and silver likewise, there across the seas and oceans where you’re a-going to.”

BOOK II

THE HARD SCHOOL OF THINGS AS THEY ARE

CHAPTER I

IN MAIDEN MEDITATION

It was afternoon, about five o’clock. The fine September weather, hot and cloudless, lasted still. The air was heavy with garden scents, the aromatic sweetness of sun-baked gorse and pine-scrub on the warren, and with the reek off the mud-flats of the Haven, the tide being low. Upon the sandy skirts of the Bar, across the river just opposite, three cormorants—glossy black against the yellow—postured in extravagant angular attitudes drying their wings. Above the rim of the silver-blue sea—patched with purple stains in the middle distance—webs of steamer smoke lay along the southern sky. Occasionally a sound of voices, the creak of a wooden windlass and grind of a boat’s keel upon the pebbles as it was wound slowly up the foreshore, came from the direction of the ferry and of Faircloth’s Inn. The effect was languorous, would have been enervating to the point of mental, as well as physical, inertia had not the posturing cormorants introduced a note of absurdity and the tainted breath of the mud-flats a wholesome reminder of original sin.

Under these conditions, at once charming and insidious, Damaris Verity, resting in a wicker deck-chair in the shade of the great ilex trees, found herself alone, free to follow her own vagrant thoughts, perceptions, imaginations without human let or hindrance. Free to dream undisturbed and interrogate both Nature and her own much wondering soul.

For Sir Charles was away, staying with an old friend and former brother-in-arms, Colonel Carteret, for a week’s partridge shooting over the Norfolk stubble-fields. Sport promised to be good, and Damaris had great faith in Colonel Carteret. With him her father was always amused, contented, safe. Hordle was in attendance, too, so she knew his comfort in small material matters to be secure. She could think of him without

any shadow of anxiety, her mind for once at rest. And this she enjoyed. For it is possible to miss a person badly, long for their return ardently, yet feel by no means averse to a holiday from more active expenditure of love on their account.

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And Theresa Bilson—pleasing thought!—was, for the moment, absent also, having gone to tea with the Miss Minetts. Two maiden ladies, these, of uncertain age, modest fortune and unimpeachable refinement, once like Theresa herself, members of the scholastic profession; but now, thanks to the timely death of a relative—with consequent annuities and life interest in a ten-roomed, stone-built house of rather mournful aspect in Deadham village—able to rest from their ineffectual labours, support the Church, patronize their poorer and adulate their richer neighbours to their guileless hearts' content.

Gentility exuded from the Miss Minetts, and—if it is permissible slightly to labour the simile—their pores were permanently open. Owing both to her antecedent and existing situation, it may be added, Theresa Bilson was precious in their sight. For had she not in the past, like themselves, sounded the many mortifications of a governess' lot; and was she not now called up higher, promoted indeed to familiar, almost hourly, intercourse with the great? Miss Felicia Verity was known to treat her with affection. Mrs. Augustus Cowden, that true blue of county dames and local aristocrats, openly approved her. She sat daily at Sir Charles Verity's table and helped to order his household. What more genuine patents of gentility could be asked? So they listened with a pleasure, deep almost to agitation, to her performances upon the piano, her reminiscences of Bonn and the Rhine Provinces, and, above all, to her anecdotes of life at The Hard and of its distinguished owner's habits and speech. Thus, by operation of the fundamental irony resident in things, did Theresa Bilson, of all improbable and inadequate little people, become to the Miss Minetts as a messenger of the gods; exciting in them not only dim fluttering apprehensions of the glories of art and delights of foreign travel, but—though in their determined gentility they knew it not—of the primitive allurements and mysteries of sex.

The moral effect of this friendship upon Theresa herself was not, however, of the happiest. Fired by their interest in her recitals she was tempted to spread herself. At first almost unconsciously, for by instinct she was truthful, she embroidered fact, magnifying her office not only in respect of her ex-pupil Damaris but of Damaris' father also. She represented herself as indispensable to both parent and child, until she more than half believed that flattering fiction. She began to reckon herself an essential element in the establishment at The Hard, the pivot indeed upon which it turned. Whereupon a rather morbid craving for the Miss Minetts' society developed in her. For, with those two credulous ladies as audience, she could fortify herself in delusion by recounting all manner of episodes and incidents not as they actually had, but as she so ardently desired they might have, taken place.—A pathetic form of lying this, though far from uncommon to feminine and—more especially—spinster practice and habit!

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Still Theresa was not so besotted but that lucid intervals now and again afflicted her. One seized her this afternoon, as she prepared to bid Damaris good-bye. Either conscience pricked with unusual sharpness, or the young girl's smiling and unruffled acquiescence in her departure aroused latent alarms. She began to excuse her action in leaving her charge thus solitary, to protest her devotion; becoming, it may be added, red and agitated in the process. Her thick, short little fingers worked nervously on the crook handle of her white cotton umbrella. Her round light-coloured eyes grew humid to the point of fogging the lenses of her gold-rimmed glasses.

"But why should you worry so now, just as you are starting, Billy?" Damaris reasoned, with the rather cruel logic of cool eighteen in face of hot and flustered nine-and-thirty. "Only at luncheon you were telling me how much you always enjoy spending an afternoon at the Grey House. I thought you looked forward so much to going. What has happened to turn you all different, like this, at the last minute?"

"Nothing has happened exactly; but I have scruples about visiting my own friends and letting you remain alone when Sir Charles is from home. It might appear a dereliction of duty—as though I took advantage of his absence."

"Nobody would think anything so foolish," Damaris declared. "And then you knew he would be away this week when you made the engagement."

Theresa gulped and prevaricated.

"No, surely not—I must have mistaken the date."

"But you were quite happy at luncheon, and you couldn't have mistaken the date then," Damaris persisted.

Whereupon poor Theresa lost herself, the worthy and unworthy elements in her nature alike conspiring to her undoing. In her distraction she sniffed audibly. A tear ran down either side of her pink shiny nose and dropped on the folds of shepherd's-plaid silk veiling her plump bosom. For, with some obscure purpose of living up to her self-imposed indispensability, Miss Bilson was distinctly dressy at this period, wearing her best summer gown on every possible occasion and tucking a bunch of roses or carnations archly in her waist-belt.

"Do you think it kind to insist so much on my passing forgetfulness?" she quavered. "The habit of criticizing and cavilling at whatever I say grows on you, Damaris, and it so increases the difficulties of my position. I know I am sensitive, but that is the result of my affection for you. I care so deeply, and you are not responsive. You chill me. As I have told dear Miss Felicia—for I must sometimes unburden myself"—

This hastily, as Damaris' eyes darkened with displeasure.

—“For the last year, ever since you have nominally been out of the schoolroom, I have seen my influence over you lessen, and especially since poor Mrs. Watson’s death”—

“We will not talk about Nannie, please,” Damaris said quietly.

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“Yes, but—as I told your Aunt Felicia—since then I have tried more than ever to win your entire confidence, to make up to you for the loss of poor Watson and fill her place with you.”

“No one else can ever fill the place of the person one has loved,” Damaris returned indignantly. “It isn’t possible. I should be ashamed to let it be possible. Nannie was Nannie—she had cared for me all my life and I had cared for her. She belongs to things about which you”—

And there the girl checked herself, aware of something almost ludicrously pitiful in the smug tearful countenance and stumpy would-be fashionable figure. Hit a man your own size, or bigger, by all means if you are game to take the consequences. But to smite a creature conspicuously your inferior in fortune—past, present, and prospective—is unchivalrous, not to say downright mean-spirited. So Damaris, swiftly repentant, put her arm round the heaving shoulders, bent her handsome young head and kissed the uninvitingly dabby cheek—a caress surely counting to her for righteousness.

“Don’t find fault with me any more, Billy,” she said. “Indeed I never hurt you on purpose. But there are such loads of things to think about, that I get absorbed in them and can’t attend sometimes directly on the minute.”

“Absent-mindedness should be corrected rather than encouraged,” Miss Bilson announced, sententious even amid her tears.

“Oh! it amounts to more than absent-mindedness I’m afraid—a sort of absent-every-thingedness when it overtakes me. For the whole of me seems to go away and away, hand in hand and all together,” Damaris said, her eyes alight with questions and with dreams. “But don’t let us discuss that now,” she added. “It would waste time, and it is you who must go away and away, Billy, if you are not to put the poor Miss Minetts into a frantic fuss by being late for tea. They will think some accident has happened to you. Don’t beep them in suspense, it is simply barbarous.—Good-bye, and don’t hurry back. I have heaps to amuse me. I’ll not expect you till dinner-time.”

Thus did it come about that Damaris reposed in a deck chair, under the shade of the great ilex trees, gazing idly at the webs of steamer smoke hanging low in the southern sky, at the long yellow-grey ridge of the Bar between river and sea, and at the cormorants posturing in the hot afternoon sunshine upon the sand.

Truly she was free to send forth her soul upon whatever far fantastic journey she pleased. But souls are perverse, not to be driven at will, choosing their own times and seasons for travel. And hers, just now, proved obstinately home-staying—had no wings wherewith to fly, but must needs crawl a-fourfoot, around all manner of inglorious personal matters. For that skirmish with her ex-governess, though she successfully bridled her tongue and conquered by kindness rather than by smiting, had clouded her

inward serenity, not only by its inherent uselessness, but by reminding her indirectly of an occurrence which it was her earnest desire to forget.

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Indirectly, mention of her beloved nurse, Sarah Watson—who journeying back from a visit to her native Lancashire, just this time last year, had met death swift and hideous in a railway collision—recalled to Damaris the little scene, of a week ago, with Tom Verity when ho had asked her, in the noonday sunshine out on the Bar, for some explanation of his strange nocturnal experience. She went hot all over now, with exaggerated childish shame, thinking of it. For had not she, Damaris Verity, though nurtured in the creed that courage is the source and mother of all virtues, shown the white feather, incontinently turned tail and run away? Remembrance of that running scorched her, so that more than once, awakening suddenly in the night, her fair young body was dyed rose-red with the disgrace of it literally from head to heel. She was bitterly humiliated by her own poltroonery, ingenuously doubtful as to whether she could ever quite recover her self-respect; glad that every day put two hundred miles and more of sea between her and Tom Verity, since he had witnessed that contemptible fall from grace.

Nevertheless, after her first consternation—in which, to avoid further speech with him she had sought refuge among the unsavoury seine nets in the fore-part of Jennifer's ferry-boat—Tom Verity's probable opinion of her undignified action troubled her far less than the cause of the said action itself. For exactly what, after all, had so upset her, begetting imperative necessity of escape? Not the apparent confirmation of that ugly legend concerning ghostly ponies driven up across The Hard garden from the shore. From childhood, owing both to temperament and local influences, her apprehension of things unseen and super-normal had been remarkably acute. From the dawn of conscious intelligence these had formed an integral element in the atmosphere of her life; and that without functional disturbance, moral or physical, of a neurotic sort. She felt no morbid curiosity about such matters, did not care to dwell upon or talk of them.—-Few persons do who, being sane in mind and body, are yet endowed with the rather questionable blessing of the Seer's sixth sense.—For while, in never doubting their existence her reason acquiesced, her heart turned away, oppressed and disquieted, as from other mysterious actualities common enough to human observation, such as illness, disease, deformity, old age, the pains of birth and of death. Such matters might perplex and sadden, or arouse her indignant pity; but, being strong with the confidence of untouched youth and innocence, they were powerless, in and by themselves, to terrify her to the contemptible extremity of headlong flight.

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This she recognized, though less by reasoning than by instinct; and so found herself compelled to search deeper for the cause of her recent disgrace. Not that she willingly prosecuted that search; but that the subject pursued her, simply refusing to leave her alone. Continually it presented itself to her mind, and always with the same call for escape, the same foreboding of some danger against which she must provide. Always, too, it seemed to hinge upon Tom Verity's visit, and something in her relation to the young man himself which she could not define. She revolved the question now—-Theresa being safely packed off to her tea-party—in shade of the ilex trees, with solemn eyes and finely serious face.

There was not anything unusual in receiving visitors at The Hard. Men came often to see her father, and she took her share in entertaining all such comers as a matter of course. Some she "didn't much care about," some she liked. But, with the exception of Colonel Carteret from childhood her trusted friend and confidant, their coming and going was just part of the accustomed routine, a survival from the life at the Indian summer palace of long ago, and made no difference. Yet, though she was still uncertain whether she did like Tom Verity or not, his coming and going had indisputably made a difference. It marked, indeed, a new departure in her attitude and thought. Her world, before his advent, was other than that in which she now dwelt.

For one thing, Tom was much younger than the majority of her father's guests—a man not made but still early in the making, the glamour of promise rather than the stark light of finality upon him. This affected her; for at eighteen, a career, be it never so distinguished, which has reached its zenith, in other words reached the end of its tether, must needs have a touch of melancholy about it. With the heat of going on in your own veins, the sight of one who has no further go strikes chill to the heart. And so, while uncertain whether she quite trusted him or not, Damaris—until the unlucky running away episode—had taken increasing pleasure in this new cousin's company. It both interested and diverted her. She had not only felt ready to talk to him; but,—surprising inclination!—once the ice of her natural reserve broken, to talk to him about herself.

Half-shyly she dwelt upon his personal appearance.—A fine head and clever face, the nose astute, slightly Jewish in type, so she thought. His eyes were disappointing, too thickly brown in colour, too opaque. They told you nothing, were indeed curiously meaningless; and, though well set under an ample brow, were wanting in depth and softness owing to scantiness of eyelash. But his chin satisfied her demands. It was square, forcible, slightly cleft; and his mouth, below the fly-away reddish moustache, was frankly delightful.—Damaris flushed, smiling to herself now as she recalled his smile. Whereupon the humiliation of that thrice

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wretched running away took a sharper edge. For she realized, poor child, how much—notwithstanding her proud little snubbing of him—she coveted his good opinion, wished him to admire and to like her; wanted, even while she disapproved his self-complacency and slightly doubted his truthfulness, to have him carry with him a happy impression of her—carry it with him to that enchanted far Eastern land in which all the poetry of her childhood had its root. For, if remembrance of her remained with him, and that agreeably, she herself also found "Passage to India" in a sense. And this idea, recondite though it was, touched and charmed her fancy—or would have done so but for the recollection of her deplorable flight.—Oh! what—what made her run away? From what had she thus run? If she could only find out! And find, moreover, the cause sufficient to palliate, to some extent at least, the woefulness of her cowardice.

But at this point her meditation suffered interruption. The three cormorants, having finished their sun-bath, rose from the sand and flapped off, flying low and sullenly in single file over the sea parallel with the eastward-trending coast-line.

With the departure of the great birds her surroundings seemed to lose their only element of active and conscious life. The brooding sunlit evening became oppressive, so that in the space of a moment Damaris passed from solitude, which is stimulating, to loneliness, which is only sad. Meanwhile the shadow cast by the ilex trees had grown sensibly longer, softer in outline, more transparent and finely intangible in tone, and the reek of the mud-flats more potent, according to its habit at sundown and low tide.

It quenched the garden scents with a fetid sweetness, symbolic perhaps of the languorous sheltered character of the scene and of much which had or might yet happen there—the life breath of the *genius loci*, an at once seductive and, as Tom Verity had rightly divined, a doubtfully wholesome spirit! Over Damaris it exercised an unwilling fascination, as of some haunting refrain ending each verse of her personal experience. Even when, as a little girl of eight, fresh from the gentle restraints and rare religious and social amenities of an aristocratic convent school in Paris, she had first encountered it, it struck her as strangely familiar—a thing given back rather than newly discovered, making her mind and innocent body alike eager with absorbed yet half-shuddering recognition. A good ten years had elapsed since then, but her early impression still persisted, producing in her a certain spiritual and emotional unrest.

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And at that, by natural transition, her thought turned from Tom Verity to fix itself upon the one other possible witness of her ignominy—namely, the young master mariner who, coming ashore in Proud, the lobster-catcher's cranky boat, had walked up the shifting shingle to the crown of the ridge and stood watching her, in silence, for a quite measurable period, before passing on his way down to the ferry. For, from her first sight of him, had he not seemed to evoke that same sense of remembrance, to be, like the reek off the mud-flats, already well-known, something given back to her rather than newly discovered? She was still ignorant as to who ho was or where he came from, having been far too engrossed by mortification to pay any attention to the conversation between her cousin and Jennifer during their little voyage down the tide-river, and having disdained to make subsequent enquiries.—She had a rooted dislike to appear curious or ask questions.—But now, reviewing the whole episode, it broke in on her that the necessity for escape and foreboding of danger, which culminated in her flight, actually dated from the advent of this stranger rather than from Tom's request for enlightenment concerning unaccountable noises heard in the small hours.

Damaris slipped her feet down off the leg-rest, and sat upright, tense with the effort to grasp and disentangle the bearings of this revelation. Was her search ended? Had she indeed detected the cause of her discomfiture; or only pushed her enquiry back a step further, thus widening rather than limiting the field of speculation? For what conceivable connection, as she reflected, could the old lobster-catcher's passenger have with any matter even remotely affecting herself!

Then she started, suddenly sensible of a comfortable, though warmly protesting, human voice and presence at her elbow.

"Yes, you may well look astonished, Miss Damaris. I know how late it is, and have been going on like anything to Lizzie over her carelessness. Mrs. Cooper's walked up the village with Laura about some extra meat that's wanted, and when I came through for your tea if that girl hadn't let the kitchen fire right out!—Amusing herself down in the stable-yard, I expect, Mrs. Cooper being gone.—And the business I've had to get a kettle to boil!"

Verging on forty, tall, dark, deep-bosomed and comely, a rich flush on her cheeks under the clear brown skin thanks to a kitchen fire which didn't burn and righteous anger which did, Mary Fisher, the upper housemaid, set a tea-tray upon the garden table beside Damaris' chair.

"That's what comes of taking servants out of trades-peoples' houses," she went on, as she marshalled silver tea-pot and cream-jug—embossed with flamboyant many-armed Hindu deities—hot cakes, ginger snaps and saffron-sprinkled buns. "You can't put any real dependence on them, doing their work as suits themselves just anyhow and anywhen. Mrs. Cooper and I knew how it would be well enough when Miss Bilson engaged Lizzie Trant and Mr. Hordle said the same. But it wasn't one atom of use for

us to speak. The Miss Minetts recommended the girl—so there was the finish of it. And that's at the bottom of your being kept waiting the best part of a hour for your tea like this, Miss."

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Notwithstanding the exactions of a somewhat tyrannous brain and her conviction of high responsibilities, the child, which delights to be petted, told stories and made much of, was strong in Damaris still. This explosion of domestic wrath on her behalf proved eminently soothing. It directed her brooding thought into nice, amusing, everyday little channels; and assured her of protective solicitude, actively on the watch, by which exaggerated shames and alarms were withered and loneliness effectually dispersed. She felt smoothed, contented. Fell, indeed, into something of the humour which climbs on to a friendly lap and thrones it there blissfully careless of the thousand and one ills, known and unknown, which infant flesh is heir to. She engaged the comely comfortable woman to stay and minister further to her.

“Pour out my tea for me, Mary, please,” she said, “if you’re not busy. But isn’t this your afternoon off, by rights?”

And Mary, while serving her, acknowledged that not only was it “by rights” her “afternoon off;” but that Mr. Patch, the coachman, had volunteered to drive her into Marychurch to see her parents when he exercised the carriage horses. But, while thanking him very kindly, she had refused. Was it likely, she said, she would leave the house with Sir Charles and Mr. Hordle away, and Miss Bilson taking herself off to visit friends, too?

From which Damaris gathered that, in the opinion of the servants’ hall, Theresa’s offence was rank, it stank to heaven. She therefore, being covetous of continued contentment, turned the conversation to less controversial subjects; and, after passing notice of the fair weather, the brightness of the geraniums and kindred trivialities, successfully incited Mary to talk of Brockhurst, Sir Richard Calmady’s famous place in the north of the county, where—prior to his retirement to his native town of Marychurch, upon a generous pension—her father, Lomas Fisher, had for many years occupied the post of second gardener. Here was material for story-telling to the child Damaris’ heart’s content! For Brockhurst is rich in strange records of wealth, calamity, heroism, and sport, the inherent romance of which Mary’s artless narrative was calculated to enhance rather than dissipate.

So young mistress listened and maid recounted, until, the former fortified by cakes and tea, the two sauntered, side by side—a tall stalwart black figure, white capped and aproned and an equally tall but slender pale pink one—down across the lawn to the battery where the small obsolete cannon so boldly defied danger of piracy or invasion by sea.

The sun, a crimson disc, enormous in the earth-mist, sank slowly, south of west, behind the dark mass of Stone Horse Head. The upper branches of the line of Scotch firs in the warren and, beyond them, the upper windows of the cottages and Inn caught the fiery light. Presently a little wind, thin, perceptibly chill, drew up the river with the turning of the tide. It fluttered Mary Fisher’s long white muslin apron strings and lifted her cap,

so that she raised her hand to keep it in place upon her smooth black hair. The romance of Brockhurst failed upon her tongue. She grew sharply practical.

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“The dew’s beginning to rise, Miss Damaris,” she said, “and you’ve only got your house shoes on. You ought to go indoors at once.”

But—“Listen,” Damaris replied, and lingered.

The whistling of a tune, shrill, but true and sweet, and a rattle of loose shingle, while a young man climbed the seaward slope of the Bar. The whistling ceased as he stopped, on the crest of the ridge, and stood, bare-headed, contemplating the sunset. For a few seconds the fiery light stained his hands, his throat, his hair, his handsome bearded face; then swiftly faded, leaving him like a giant leaden image set up against a vast pallor of sea and sky.

Mary Fisher choked down a hasty exclamation.

“Come, do come, Miss Damaris, before the grass gets too wet,” she said almost sharply. “It’s going to be a drenching dew to-night.”

“Yes—directly—in a minute—but, Mary, tell me who that is?”

The woman hesitated.

“Out on the Bar, do you mean? No one I am acquainted with, Miss.”

“I did not intend to ask if he was a friend of yours,” Damaris returned, with a touch of grandeur, “but merely whether you could tell me his name.”

“Oh! it’s Mrs. Faircloth’s son I suppose—the person who keeps the Inn. I heard he’d been home for a few days waiting for a ship”—and she turned resolutely towards the house. “It’s quite time that silver was taken indoors and the library windows closed. But you must excuse me, Miss Damaris, I can’t have you stay out here in that thin gown in the damp. You really must come with me, Miss.”

And the child in Damaris obeyed. Dutifully it went, though the soul of the eighteen-year-old Damaris was far away, started once more on an anxious quest.

She heard the loose shingle shift and rattle under Faircloth’s feet as he swung down the near slope to the jetty. The sound pursued her, and again she was overtaken—-overwhelmed by foreboding and desire of flight.

CHAPTER II

WHICH CANTERS ROUND A PARISH PUMP

Not until the second bell was about to cease ringing did Theresa Bilson—fussily consequential—reappear at The Hard.

During the absence of the master of the house she would have much preferred high tea in the schoolroom, combined with a certain laxity as to hours and to dress; but Damaris, in whom the sense of style was innate, stood out for the regulation dignities of late dinner and evening gowns. To-night, however, thanks to her own unpunctuality, Miss Bilson found ample excuse for dispensing with ceremonial garments.

“No—no—we will not wait,” she said, addressing Mary and her attendant satellite, Laura, the under-housemaid, as—agreeably ignorant of the sentiment of a servants’ hall which thirsted for her blood—she passed the two standing at attention by the open door of the dining-room. “I am not going to change. I will leave my hat and things down here —Laura can take them to my room later—and have dinner as I am.”

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During the course of that meal she explained how she had really quite failed to observe the hour when she left the Grey House. Commander and Mrs. Battye were at tea there; and the vicar—Dr. Horniblow—looked in afterwards. There was quite a little meeting, in fact, to arrange the details of the day after to-morrow's choir treat. A number of upper-class parishioners, she found, were anxious to embrace this opportunity of visiting Harchester, and inspecting the Cathedral and other sights of that historic city, under learned escort. It promised to be a most interesting and instructive expedition, involving moreover but moderate cost.—And every one present—Theresa bridled over her salmon cutlet and oyster sauce—everyone seemed so anxious for her assistance and advice. The vicar deferred to her opinion in a quite pointed manner; and spoke, which was so nice of him, of her known gift of organization. "So we claim not only your sympathy, Miss Bilson, but your active co-operation," he had said. "We feel The Hard should be officially represented."

Here the speaker became increasingly self-conscious and blushed.

"What could I do, therefore, but remain even at the risk of being a trifle late for dinner?" she asked. "It would have been so extremely uncivil to the Miss Minetts to break up the gathering by leaving before full agreement as to the arrangements had been reached. I felt I must regard it as a public duty, under the circumstances. I really owed it to my position here, you know, Damaris, to stay to the last."

It may be observed, in passing, that Miss Bilson was fond of food and made a good deal of noise in eating, particularly when, as on the present occasion, she combined that operation with continuous speech. This may account for Damaris bestowing greater attention on the manner than the matter of her ex-governess' communications. She was sensible that the latter showed to small advantage being rather foolishly excited and elate, and felt vexed the maids should hear and see her behaving thus. It could hardly fail to lower her in their estimation.

As to the impending parochial invasion of Harchester—during the earlier stages of dinner Damaris hardly gave it a second thought, being still under the empire of impressions very far removed from anything in the nature of choir treats. She still beheld the fiery glare of an expiring sunset, and against the ensuing pallor of sea and sky a leaden-hued human, figure strangely, almost portentously evident. That it appeared noble in pose and in outline, even beautiful, she could not deny. But that somehow it frightened her, she could equally little deny. So it came about that once again, as Mary and her satellite Laura silently waited at table, and as Theresa very audibly gobbled food in and words out, Damaris shrank within herself seeming to hear a shrill sweet whistling and the shatter of loose pebbles and shifting shingle under Faircloth's pursuing feet.

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The young man's name aroused her interest, not to say her curiosity, the more deeply because of its association, with a locality exploration of which had always been denied her—a Naboth's vineyard of the imagination, near at hand, daily in sight, yet personal acquaintance with which she failed to possess even yet. The idea of an island, especially a quite little island, a miniature and separate world, shut off all by itself, is dreadfully enticing to the infant mind—at once a geographical entity and a cunning sort of toy. And Faircloth's Inn, with the tarred wooden houses adjacent, was situated upon what, to all intents and purposes, might pass as an island since accessible only by boat or by an ancient paved causeway daily submerged at high tide.

Skirting the further edge of the warren, a wide rutted side lane leads down to the landward end of the said causeway from the village green, just opposite Deadham post office and Mrs. Doubleday's general shop.—A neglected somewhat desolate strip of road this, between broken earthbanks topped by ragged firs, yet very paintable and dear to the sketch-book of the amateur. In summer overgrown with grass and rushes, bordered by cow-parsley, meadowsweet, pink codlings-and-cream, and purple flowered peppermint, in winter a marsh of sodden brown and vivid green; but at all seasons a telling perspective, closed by the lonely black and grey island hamlet set in the gleaming tide.

Small wonder the place stirred Damaris' spirit of enquiry and adventure! She wanted to go there, to examine, to learn how people lived cut off from the mainland for hours twice every day and night. But her early attempts at investigation met with prompt discouragement from both her nurse and her aunt, Felicia Verity. And Damaris was not of the disposition which plots, wheedles, and teases to obtain what it wants; still less screams for the desired object until for very weariness resistance yields. Either she submitted without murmuring or fearlessly defied authority. In the present case she relinquished hope and purpose obediently, while inwardly longing for exploration, of her "darling little island" all the more.

But authority was not perhaps altogether unjustified of its decision, for the inhabitants of the spot so engaging to Damaris' imagination were a close corporation, a race of sailors and fishermen and, so said rumour, somewhat rough customers at that. They lived according to their own traditions and unwritten laws, entertained a lordly contempt for wage-earning labourers and landsmen, and, save when money was likely to pass, were grudging of hospitality even to persons of quality setting foot within their coasts.

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To their reprehensible tendencies in this last respect the Miss Minetts could bear painful witness, as—with hushed voices and entreaties the sorry tale might “go no further”—they more than once confided to Theresa Bilson. For one Saturday afternoon—unknown to the vicar—being zealous in the admonishing of recalcitrant church-goers and rounding up of possible Sunday-school recruits, they crossed to the island at low tide; and in their best district visitor manner—too often a sparkling blend of condescension and familiarity, warranted to irritate—severally demanded entrance to the first two of the black cottages.—The Inn they avoided. Refined gentlewomen can hardly be expected, even in the interests of religion, to risk pollution by visiting a common tavern, more particularly when a company of half-grown lads and blue jerseyed men—who may, of course, have been carousing within—hangs about its morally malodorous door.

Of precisely what followed their attempted violation of the privacy of those two cottages, even the Miss Minetts themselves could subsequently give no very coherent account. They only knew that some half-hour later, with petticoats raised to a height gravely imperilling decency, they splashed landward across the causeway—now ankle-deep in water—while the lads congregated before the Inn laughed boisterously, the men turned away with a guffaw, dogs of disgracefully mixed parentage yelped, and the elder female members of the Proud and Sclanders families flung phrases lamentably subversive of gentility after their retreating figures from the foreshore.

Modesty and mortification alike forbade the outraged ladies reporting the episode to Dr. Horniblow in extenso. But they succeeded in giving Miss Bilson a sufficiently lurid account of it to make “the darling little island,” in as far as her charge, Damaris, was concerned, more than ever taboo. Their request that the story might “go no further” she interpreted with the elasticity usually accorded to such requests; and proceeded, at the first opportunity, to retail the whole shocking occurrence to her pupil as an example of the ingratitude and insubordination of the common people. For Theresa was nothing if not conservative and aristocratic. From such august anachronisms as the divine right of kings and the Stuart succession, down to humble bobbing of curtseys and pulling of forelocks in to-day’s village street, she held a permanent brief for the classes as against the masses. Unluckily the Miss Minetts’ hasty and watery withdrawal, with upgathered skirts, across the causeway had appealed to Damaris’ sense of comedy rather than of tragedy.—She didn’t want to be unkind, but you shouldn’t interfere; and if you insisted on interfering you must accept whatever followed. The two ladies in question were richly addicted to interfering she had reason to think.—And then they must have looked so wonderfully funny scuttling thus!

The picture remained by her as a thing of permanent mirth. So it was hardly surprising, in face of the dominant direction of her thoughts to-night, that, when the Miss Minetts’ name punctuated Theresa’s discourse recurrent as a cuckoo-cry, remembrance of their merrily inglorious retirement from the region of Faircloth’s Inn should present itself.

Whereupon Damaris’ serious mood was lightened as by sudden sunshine, and she laughed.

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Hearing which infectiously gay but quite unexpected sound, Miss Bilson stopped dead in the middle both of a nectarine and a sentence.

“What is the matter, Damaris?” she exclaimed. “I was explaining our difficulty in securing sufficient conveyances for some of our party to and from Marychurch station. I really do not see any cause for amusement in what I said.”

“There wasn’t anything amusing, dear Billy, I’m sure there wasn’t,” Damaris returned, the corners of her mouth still quivering and her eyes very bright. “I beg your pardon. I’m afraid I wasn’t quite attending. I was thinking of something else. You were speaking about the carriage horses, weren’t you? Yes.”

But Theresa turned sulky. She had been posing, planing in mid-air around the fair castles hope and ambition are reported to build there. Her fat little feet were well off the floor, and that outbreak of laughter let her down with a bump. She lost her head, lost her temper and her opportunity along with it, and fell into useless scolding.

“You are extremely inconsequent and childish sometimes, Damaris,” she said. “I find it most trying when I attempt to talk to you upon practical subjects, really pressing subjects, and you either cannot or will not concentrate. What can you expect in the future when you are thrown more on your own resources, and have not me—for instance—always to depend upon, if you moon through life like this? It must lead to great discomfort not only for yourself but for others. Pray be warned in time.”

Damaris turned in her chair at the head of the table. A station not unconnected, in Theresa’s mind, with the internal ordering of those same air-built castles, and consistently if furtively coveted by her. To Sir Charles’s chair at the bottom of the table, she dared not aspire, so during his absence reluctantly retained her accustomed place at the side.

“You need not wait any longer, Mary,” Damaris said, over her shoulder.

“Why?” Theresa began fussily, as the two maids left the room.

“Why?” Damaris took her up. “Because I prefer our being alone during the remainder of this conversation. I understand that you want to ask me about something to do with this excursion to Harchester. What is it, please?”

“My dear Damaris,” the other protested, startled and scenting unexpected danger, “really your manner”—

“And yours.—Both perhaps would bear improvement. But that is by the way. What is it, please, you want?”

“Really you assert yourself”—

“And you forget yourself—before the servants, too, I do not like it at all. You should be more careful.”

“Damaris,” she cried aghast, confounded to the verge of tears—“Damaris!”

“Yes—I am giving you my full attention. Pray let us be practical,” the young girl said, sitting up tall and straight in the shaded lamp-light, the white dinner-table spread with gleaming glass and silver, fine china, fruit and flowers before her, the soft gloom of the long low room behind, all tender hint of childhood banished from her countenance, and her eyes bright now not with laughter but with battle. “Pray let us finish with the subject of the choir treat. Then we shall be free to talk about more interesting things.”

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Miss Bilson waved her hands hysterically.

“No—no—I never wish to mention it again. I am too deeply hurt by your behaviour to me, Damaris—your sarcasm.—Of course,” she added, “I see I must withdraw my offer. It will cause the greatest inconvenience and disappointment; but for that I cannot hold myself responsible, though it will be most painful and embarrassing to me after the kind appreciation I have received. Still I must withdraw it”—

“Withdraw what offer?”

“Why the offer I was explaining to you just now, when you ordered the maids out of the room. You really cannot deny that you heard what I said, Damaris, because you mentioned the carriage horses yourself.”

Theresa sipped some water. She was recovering if not her temper, yet her grasp on the main issue. She wanted, so desperately, to achieve her purpose and, incidentally, to continue to play, both for her own benefit and that of the parish, her self-elected role of Lady Bountiful, of “official representative of The Hard”—as Dr. Horniblow by a quite innocent if ill-timed flourish of speech had unfortunately put it.

“The conveyances in the village are insufficient to take the whole party to the station,” she continued. “An extra brake can be had at the Stag’s Head in Mary church; but a pair of horses must be sent in to-morrow afternoon to bring it over here. I saw”—she hesitated a moment—“I really could see no objection to Patch taking our horses in to fetch the brake, and driving a contingent to the station in it next morning.”

“And meeting the train at night, I suppose?” Damaris said calmly.

“Of course,” Theresa answered, thus unconsciously declaring herself a rank outsider, and rushing blindly upon her fate.

For what thoroughbred member of the equestrian order does not know that next—and even that not always—to the ladies of his family and, possibly, the key of his cellar, an Englishman’s stable is sacrosanct? Dispose of anything he owns rather than his horses. To attempt touching them is, indeed, to stretch out your hand against the Ark of the Covenant and risk prompt withering of that impious limb. Yet poor Theresa blundered on.

“I told the vicar that, Sir Charles being from home, I felt I might make the offer myself, seeing how much it would simplify the arrangements and how very little work Patch has when you and I are alone here. It is a pity there is not time to obtain Sir Charles’s sanction. That would be more proper, of course, more satisfactory. But under the circumstances it need not, I think, be regarded as an insuperable objection. I told the Miss Minetts and the vicar”—

Here Miss Bilson blushed, applying fork and spoon, in coy confusion, to the remains of the nectarine upon her plate.

“I told them,” she repeated, “knowing Sir Charles as well as I do, I felt I might safely assure them of that.”

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In Damaris, meanwhile, anger gradually gave place to far more complex emotions. She sat well back in her chair, and clasped her hands firmly in her flowered Pompadour-muslin lap. Her eyes looked enormous as she kept them fixed gravely and steadily upon the speaker. For extraordinary ideas and perceptions concerning the said speaker crowded into her young head. She did not like them at all. She shrank from dwelling upon or following them put. They, indeed, made her hot and uncomfortable all over. Had Theresa Bilson taken leave of her senses, or was she, Damaris, herself in fault—a harbourer of nasty thoughts? Consciously she felt to grow older, to grow up. And she did not like that either; for the grown-up world, to which Theresa acted just now as doorkeeper, struck her as an ugly and vulgar-minded place. She saw her ex-governess from a new angle—a more illuminating than agreeable one, at which she no longer figured as pitiful, her little assumptions and sillinesses calling for the chivalrous forbearance of persons more happily placed; but as actively impertinent, an usurper of authority and privileges altogether outside her office and her scope. She was greedy—-not a pretty word yet a true one, covering both her manner of eating and her speech. Registering which facts Damaris was sensible of almost physical repulsion, as from something obscurely gross. Hence it followed that Theresa must, somehow, be stopped, made to see her own present unpleasantness, saved from herself in short—to which end it became Damaris' duty to unfurl the flag of revolt.

The young girl arrived at this conclusion in a spirit of rather pathetic seriousness. It is far from easy, at eighteen, to control tongue and temper to the extent of joining battle with your elders in calm and dignified sort. To lay about you in a rage is easy enough. But rage is tiresomely liable to defeat its own object and make you make a fool of yourself. Any unfurling of the flag would be useless, and worse than useless, unless it heralded victory sure and complete—Damaris realized this. So she kept a brave front, although her pulse quickened and she had a bad little empty feeling around her heart.

Fortunately, however, for her side of the campaign, Theresa—emboldened by recapitulation of her late boastings at the Miss Minetts' tea-table—hastened to put a gilded dome to her own indiscretion and offence. For nothing would do but Damaris must accompany her on this choir treat! She declared herself really compelled to press the point. It offered such an excellent opportunity of acquiring archaeological knowledge—had not the Dean most kindly promised to conduct the party round the Cathedral himself and deliver a short lecture *en route*?—and of friendly social intercourse, both of which would be very advantageous to Damaris. As she was without any engagement for the day clearly neither should be missed. Of course, everyone understood how unsuitable it would be to ask Sir Charles to patronize

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parish excursions and events.—Here Miss Bilson became lyrical, speaking with gasping breath and glowing face, of “a call to exalted spheres of action, of great Proconsuls, Empire Builders, Pillars of the State.”—Naturally you hesitated to intrude on the time and attention of such a distinguished person—that in point of fact was her main reason for disposing of the matter of the carriage horses herself. How could she trouble Sir Charles with such a homely detail?—But Damaris’ case, needless to remark, was very different. At her age it was invidious to be too exclusive. Miss Felicia Verity felt—so she, Theresa, was certain—that it was a pity Damaris did not make more friends in the village now she was out of the schoolroom. May and Doris Horniblow were sweet girls and highly educated. They, of course, were going. And Captain Taylor, she understood would bring his daughter, Louisa—who was home for a few days before the opening of term at the Tillingworth High School where she was second mistress.

“It is always well to realize the attainments of young people of your own age, even if they are not in quite the same social grade as yourself. Your going would give pleasure too. It will be taken as a compliment to the vicar and the Church—may really, in a sense, be called patriotic since an acknowledgment of the duty we owe, individually, to the local community of which we form part. And then,” she added, naively giving herself away at the last, “of course, if you go over to the station in the brake Patch cannot make any difficulties about driving it.”

Here Theresa stayed the torrent of her eloquence and looked up, to find Damaris’ eyes fixed upon her in incredulous wonder.

“Have you nothing to say, dear, in answer to my proposition?” she enquired, with a suddenly anxious, edgy little laugh.

“I am afraid I have a lot to say, some of which you won’t like.”

“How so?” Theresa cried, still playfully. “You must see how natural and reasonable my suggestion is.” Then becoming admonitory. “You should learn to think a little more of others.—It is a bad habit to offer opposition simply for opposition’s sake.”

“I do not oppose you for the mere pleasure of opposing,” Damaris began, determined her voice should not shake. “But I’m sorry to say, I can’t agree to the horses being used to draw a loaded brake. I could not ask Patch. He would refuse and be quite right in refusing. It’s not their work—nor his work either.”

She leaned forward, trying to speak civilly and gently.

“There are some things you don’t quite understand about the stables, or about the servants—the things which can’t be done, which it’s impossible to ask.—No,—wait, please—please let me finish”—

For between astonishment, chagrin, and an inarticulate struggle to protest, Miss Bilson’s complexion was becoming almost apoplectic and her poor fat little cheeks positively convulsed.

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“I dislike saying such disagreeable things to you, but it can’t be avoided. It would be cowardly of me not to tell you the truth.—You shall have the brougham the day after to-morrow, and I’ll write to Miss Minett in the morning, and tell her you will call for her and her sister, on your way to Marychurch, and that you will bring them back at night. I will give Patch his orders myself, so that there may be no confusion. And I will subscribe a pound to the expenses of the choir treat. That is all I can promise in the way of help.”

“But—but—Damaris, think of the position in which you place me! I cannot be thrust aside thus. I will not submit. It is so humiliating, so—so—I offered the horses. I told the vicar he might consider it settled about the extra brake”—

“I know. That was a mistake. You had no right to make such an offer.”

For justice must take its course. Theresa must be saved from herself. Still her implacable young saviour, in proportion as victory appeared assured, began to feel sad. For it grew increasingly plain that Theresa was not of the stuff of which warriors, any more than saints, are made. Stand up to her and she collapsed like a pricked bubble. —So little was left, a scum of colourless soap suds, in which very certainly there is no fight. Again she showed a pitiful being, inviting chivalrous forbearance.

“You are very hard,” she lamented, “and you are always inclined to side with the servants against me. You seem to take pleasure in undermining my influence, while I am so ready and anxious to devote myself to you. You know there is nothing, nothing I would not do for you and—and for Sir Charles.”

Theresa choked, coughed, holding her handkerchief to her eyes.

“And what reward do I meet with?” she asked brokenly. “At every turn I am thwarted. But you must give way in this case, Damaris. Positively you must. I cannot allow myself to be publicly discredited through your self-will. I promised the horses for the extra brake. The offer was made and accepted—accepted, you understand, actually accepted. What will the vicar say if the arrangement is upset? What will every one think?”

Damaris pushed her chair back from the table and rose to her feet.—Forbearance wore threadbare under accusation and complaint. No, Theresa was not only a little too abject, but a little too disingenuous, thereby putting herself beyond the pale of rightful sympathy. Even while she protested devotion, self looked out seeking personal advantage. And that devotion, in itself, shocked Damaris’ sense of fitness where it involved her father. It wasn’t Theresa’s place to talk of devotion towards him!

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Moreover the young girl began to feel profoundly impatient of all this to do and bother. For wasn't the whole affair, very much of a storm in a teacup, petty, paltry, quite unworthy of prolonged discussion such as this? She certainly thought so, in her youthful fervour and inexperience; while—the push of awakening womanhood giving new colour and richness to her conception of life—nature cried out for a certain extravagance in heroism, in largeness of action of aspiration. She was athirst for noble horizons, in love with beauty, with the magnificence of things, seen and unseen alike. In love with superb objectives even if only to be reached through a measure of suffering, and—searching, arresting, though the thought was to her—possibly through peril of death.

In such moods there is small room for a Bilson regime and outlook. A flavour of scorn marked her tone as she answered at last:

"Oh, you can lay the blame on me—or rather tell the truth, which amounts to the same thing. Say that, my father being away, I refused my consent to the horses being taken out. Say you appealed to me but I was hopelessly obstinate. It is very simple."

CHAPTER III

A SAMPLING OF FREEDOM

When two persons, living under the same roof, have the misfortune to fall out a hundred and one small ways are ready to hand for the infliction of moral torment. The weak, it may be added, are not only far more addicted to such inflictings than the strong, but far more resourceful in their execution. Theresa Bilson's conduct may furnish a pertinent example.

From the moment of emerging from her bed-chamber, next morning, she adopted an attitude which she maintained until she regained the chaste seclusion of that apartment at night. During no instant of the intervening hours did she lapse from studied speechlessness unless directly addressed, nor depart from an air of virtuous resignation to injustice and injury—quite exquisitely provoking to the onlooker. Twice during the morning Damaris, upon entering the schoolroom, discovered her in tears, which she proceeded to wipe away, furtively, with the greatest ostentation.—Dramatic effect, on the second occasion was, however, marred by the fact that she was engaged in retrimming a white chip hat, encircled by a garland of artificial dog-roses, blue glass grapes and assorted foliage—an occupation somewhat ill-adapted to tragedy. In addition to making her ex-pupil—against whom they were mainly directed—first miserable and then naughtily defiant by these manoeuvres, she alienated any sympathy which her red-rimmed eyelids and dolorous aspect might otherwise have engendered in the younger and less critical members of the establishment, by sending Alfred, the hall-boy, up to the vicarage with a note and instructions to wait for an answer, at the very

moment when every domestic ordinance demanded his absorption in the cleaning of knives and of boots.

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Being but human, Alfred naturally embraced the heaven-sent chance of dawdling, passing the time of day with various cronies, and rapturously assisting to hound a couple of wild, sweating and snorting steers along the dusty lane, behind the churchyard, to Butcher Cleave's slaughter-house: with the consequence that his menial duties devolved upon Laura and Lizzie, who, supported by the heads of their respective departments, combined to "give him the what for," in no measured terms upon his eventual and very tardy return.

It is not too much to say that, by luncheon time Theresa—whether wilfully or not—had succeeded in setting the entire household by the ears; while any inclinations towards peace-making, with which Damaris might have begun the day, were effectively dissipated, leaving her strengthened and confirmed in revolt. Around the stables, and the proposed indignity put upon Patch and the horses, this wretched quarrel centred so—as at once a vote of confidence and declaration of independence—to the stables Damaris finally went and ordered the dog-cart at three o'clock. For she would drive, and drive, throughout the course of this gilded September afternoon. Drive far away from foolishly officious and disingenuous Theresa, far from Deadham, so tiresome just now in its irruption of tea-parties and treats. She would behold peaceful inland horizons, taste the freedom of spirit and the content which the long, smooth buff-coloured roads, leading to unknown towns and unvisited country-side, so deliciously give.

She stood at the front door, in blue linen gown, white knitted jersey and white sailor hat, buttoning her tan doeskin driving-gloves, a gallant, gravely valiant young creature, beautifully unbroken as yet by any real assent to the manifold foulness of life—her faith in the nobility of human nature and human destiny still finely intact. And that was just where her revolt against poor Theresa Bilson came in. For Theresa broke the accepted law, being ignoble; and thereby spoiled the fair pattern, showed as a blot.—Not that she meant to trouble any more about Theresa just now. She was out simply to enjoy, to see and feel, rather than reason, analyse or think. So she settled herself on the sloping high-cushioned seat, bracing her feet against the driving iron, while Mary, reaching up, tucked the dust-rug neatly about her skirts. Patch—whose looks and figure unmistakably declared his calling—short-legged and stocky, inclining to corpulence yet nimble on his feet, clean shaven, Napoleonic of countenance, passed reins and whip into her hands as Tolling, the groom, let go the horse's head.

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The girl squared her shoulders a little, and the soft colour deepened in her cheeks, as she swung the dog-cart down the drive and out of the entrance gate into the road—here a green-roofed tunnel, branches meeting overhead, thickly carpeted with dry sand blown inward from the beach—and on past the whitewashed cottages, red brick and grey stone houses of Deadham village, their gardens pleasant with flowers, and with apple and pear trees weighted down by fruit. Past the vicarage and church, standing apart on a little grass-grown monticule, backed by a row of elms, which amid their dark foliage showed here and there a single bough of verdigris-green or lemon-yellow—first harbingers of autumn. Into the open now, small rough fields dotted with thorn bushes and bramble-brakes on the one side; and on the other the shining waters of the Haven. Through the hamlet of Lampit, the rear of whose dilapidated sheds and dwellings abut on reed-beds and stretches of unsightly slime and ooze. A desolate spot, bleak and wind-swept in winter, and even under blue skies, as to-day basking in sunshine, degraded by poverty and dirt.

Some half-mile further is Horny Cross where, as the name indicates, four roads meet. That from Deadham to the edge of the forest runs north; the other, from Beaupres-on-Sea to Marychurch, Stourmouth and Barryport, due west. Damaris, having a fancy to keep the coast-line out of sight, chose the former, following the valley of the Arne, between great flat meadows where herds of dairy cows, of red Devons and black Welsh runts, feed in the rich deep grass. In one place a curve of the river brings it, for three hundred yards or more, close under the hanging woods, only the width of the roadway between the broad stream and living wall of trees. Here transparent bluish shadow haunted the undergrowth, and the air grew delicately chill, charged with the scent of fern, of moist earth, leaf mould, and moss.

Such traffic as held the road was leisurely, native to the scene and therefore pleasing to the sight.—For the age of self-moving machines on land had barely dawned yet; while the sky was still wholly inviolate.—A white tilted miller’s wagon, a brewer’s dray, each drawn by well-favoured teams with jingling bells and brass-mounted harness, rumbling farm carts, a gypsy van painted in crude yellow, blue, and red and its accompanying rabble of children, donkeys and dogs, a farmer’s high-hung, curtseying gig, were in turn met or passed. For the black horse, Damaris driving it, gave place to none, covering the mounting tale of miles handsomely at an even, swinging trot.

At Lady’s Oak, a noble tree marking some ancient forest boundary and consequently spared when the needs of the British Navy, during the French wars of the early years of the century, condemned so many of its fellows to the axe—the flattened burnished dome of which glinted back the sunlight above a maze of spreading branches and massive powder-grey trunk—the main road forks. Damaris turned to the left, across the single-arch stone bridge spanning the Arne, and drove on up the long winding ascent from the valley to the moorland and fir plantations which range inland behind Stourmouth. This constituted the goal of her journey, for once the high-lying plateau

reached, leagues of country open out far as the eye carries to the fine, bare outline of the Wiltshire downs.

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She checked the horse, letting it walk, while she took stock of her surroundings.

It may be asserted that there are two ways of holding converse with Nature. The one is egotistic and sentimental, an imposing of personal tastes and emotions which betrays the latent categoric belief that the existence of external things is limited to man's apprehension of them—a vilely conceited if not actually blasphemous doctrine! The other is that of the seeker and the seer, who, approaching in all reverence, asks no more than leave to listen to the voice of external things—recognizing their independent existence, knowing them to be as real as he is, as wonderful, in their own order as permanent, possibly as potent even for good and evil as himself. And it was, happily, according to this latter reading of the position, instinctively, by the natural bent of her mind, that Damaris attempted converse with the world without.

The glory of the heather had passed, the bloom now showing only as silver-pink froth upon an ocean of warm brown. But the colouring was restful, the air here on the dry gravel soil light and eager, and the sense of height and space exhilarating. A fringe of harebells, of orange hawkweed and dwarf red sorrel bordered the road. Every small oasis of turf, amongst the heath and by the wayside, carried its pretty crop of centaury and wild thyme, of bed-straw, milkwort, and birdsfoot trefoil. Furzechats tipped about the gorse bushes, uttering a sharp, gay, warning note. A big flight of rooks, blue-black against the ethereal blue of the distance, winged their way slowly homeward to the long avenue of dark trees leading to a farm in the valley. The charm of the place was clear and sane, its beauty simple almost to austerity. This the young girl welcomed. It washed her imagination free of the curious questionings, involuntary doubts and suspicions, which the house and garden at The Hard, steeped in tradition, thick with past happenings, past passions, were prone to breed in her. No reek off the mud-flats, any more than over luscious garden scents, tainted the atmosphere. It was virgin as the soil of the moorland—a soil as yet untamed and unfertilized by the labour of man. And this effect of virginity, even though a trifle *farouche*, harsh, and barren in the perfection of its purity, appealed to Damaris' present mood. Her spirit leapt to meet it in proud fellowship. For it routed forebodings. Discounted introspective broodings. Discounted even the apparently inevitable—since nobody and nothing, so the young girl told herself with a rush of gladly resolute conviction, is really inevitable unless you permit or choose to have them so.—Gallant this, and the mother of brave doings; though—as Damaris was to discover later, to the increase both of wisdom and of sorrow—a half-truth only. For man is never actually master of people or of things; but master, at most, of his own attitude towards them. In this alone can he claim or exercise free-will.

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Then—because general ideas, however inspiriting, are rather heavy diet for the young, immature minds growing quickly tired in the efforts to digest them—Damaris, having reached this happy, if partially erroneous, climax of emancipation, ceased to philosophize either consciously or unconsciously. The russet moorland and spacious landscape shut the door on her, had no more to tell her, no more to say. Or, to be strictly accurate, was it not rather perhaps that her power of response, power to interpret their speech and assimilate their message had reached its term? All her life the maturity of her brain had inclined—rather fatiguingly—to outrun the maturity of her body, so that she failed “to continue in one stay” and trivial hours trod close on the heels of hours of exaltation and of insight.

With a sigh and a sense of loss—as though noble companions had withdrawn themselves from her—she gathered up the reins and sent the horse forward. She fell into comfortable friendly conversation with the Napoleonic-countenanced Patch, moreover, consulting him as to the shortest way, through the purlieus of Stourmouth, into the Marychurch high road and so home to Deadham Hard. For, to tell the truth, she became aware she was hungry and very badly in want of her tea.

Theresa Bilson, setting out the next morning in solitary state, contrived to maintain the adopted attitude until the front gates were safely passed. Then she relaxed and looked out of the brougham windows with a fussy brightness more consonant to the joys of impending union with the Miss Minetts and the day’s impending trip. She made no further effort to secure Damaris’ participation in the social and educational advantages which it promised. On the contrary she left the young lady severely alone and at home, as one administering well-merited punishment. Thus effectively demonstrating, as she wished to believe, her personal authority; and suiting, as she would have stoutly denied, her personal convenience. For Damaris on a string, plus the extra brake and carriage horses, was one story; Damaris on her own, minus those animals and much-debated vehicle, quite another. Unless the presence of her ex-pupil could be made to redound to her own glory, Theresa much preferred reserving representation of The Hard and its distinguished proprietor wholly and solely to herself. So in the spirit of pretence and of make-believe did she go forth; to find, on her return, that spirit prove but a lying and treacherous ally—and for more reasons than one.

It happened thus. Supported by the two brindled tabby house cats, Geraldine and Mustapha—descendants of the numerous tribe honoured, during the last half-century of his long life, by Thomas Clarkson Verity’s politely affectionate patronage—Damaris spent the greater part of the morning in the long writing room.

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She had judged and condemned Theresa pretty roundly it is true, nevertheless she felt a little hurt and sore at the latter's treatment of her. Theresa need not have kept up the quarrel till the very last so acridly. After all, as she was going out purely for own pleasure and amusement, she might have found something nice and civil to say at parting. And then the mere fact of being left behind, of being out of it, however limited the charms of a party, has a certain small stab to it somehow—as most persons, probing youthful experiences, can testify. It is never quite pleasant to be the one who doesn't go!—The house, moreover, when her father was absent, always reminded Damaris of an empty shrine, a place which had lost its meaning and purpose. To-day, though windows and doors were wide open letting in a wealth of sunshine, it appeared startlingly lifeless and void. The maids seemed unusually quiet. She heard no movement on the staircase or in the rooms above. Neither gardener nor garden-boy was visible. She would have hailed the whirr of the mowing machine or swish of a broom on the lawn.—Oh! if only her poor dear Nannie were still alive, safe upstairs, there in the old nursery!

And at that the child Damaris felt a lump rise in her throat. But the girl, the soon-to-be woman, Damaris choked it down bravely. For nobody, nothing—so she assured herself, going back to the lesson learned yesterday upon the open moorland—is really inevitable unless you suffer or will it so to be. Wherefore she stiffened herself against recognition of loneliness, stiffened herself against inclination to mourning, refused to acquiesce in or be subjugated by either and, to the better forgetting of them, sought consolation among her great-great uncle's books.

For at this period Damaris was an omnivorous reader, eager for every form of literature and every description of knowledge—whether clearly comprehended or not—which the beloved printed page has to give. An eagerness, it may be noted, not infrequently productive of collisions with Theresa, and at this particular juncture all the more agreeable to gratify on that very account. For Theresa would have had her walk only in the narrow, sheltered, neatly bordered paths of history and fiction designed, for the greater preservation of female innocence, by such authors as Miss Sewell, Miss Strickland, and Miss Yonge. Upon Damaris, however, perambulation of those paths palled too soon. Her intellect and heart alike demanded wider fields of drama, of religion and of science, above all wider and less conventional converse with average human nature, than this triumvirate of Victorian sibyls was willing or capable to supply. It is undeniable that, although words and phrases, whole episodes indeed, were obscure even unintelligible to her, she found the memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini and Saint Simon more interesting than the "Lives of the Queens of England; Vathek," more to her taste than "Amy Herbert"; and, if the

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truth must be told, “The Decameron,” and “Tristram Shandy” more satisfying to her imagination than “The Heir of Redcliffe” or “The Daisy Chain.” To Damaris it seemed, just now, that a book the meaning of which was quite clear to her and could be grasped at sight, hardly repaid the trouble of reading, since it afforded no sense of adventure, no excitement of challenge or of pursuit, no mirage of wonder, no delightful provocation of matters outside her experience and not understood. About these latter she abstained from asking questions, having much faith in the illuminating power of the future. Given patience, all in good time she would understand everything worth understanding.—That there are things in life best not understood, or understood only at your peril, she already in some sort divined.—Hence her reading although of the order obnoxious to pedants, as lacking in method and accurate scholarship, went to produce a mental atmosphere in which honest love of letters and of art, along with generous instincts of humanity quicken and thrive.

On this particular morning Damaris elected to explore to the Near East, in the vehicle of Eoethen’s virile and luminous prose. She sat in one of the solid wide seated arm-chairs at the fire-place end of a long room, near a rounded window, the lower sash, of which she raised to its full height. Outside the row of geranium beds glowed scarlet and crimson in the calm light. Beyond them the turf of the lawn was overspread by trailing gossamers, and delicate cart-wheel spider’s webs upon which the dew still glittered. In the shrubberies robins sang; and above the river great companies of swallows swept to and fro, with sharp twitterings, restlessly gathering for their final southern flight.

No sooner had Damaris fairly settled down with her book, than Mustapha jumped upon her knees; and after, preliminary buttings and tramplings, curled himself round in gross comfort, his soft lithe body growing warmer and heavier, on her lap, as his sleep deepened. Where a bar of sunshine crossed the leather inset of the writing-table, just beside her in the window, Geraldine—his counterpart as to markings and colouring, but finer made, more slender of barrel and of limb—fitted herself into the narrow space between a silver inkstand and a stack of folded newspapers, her fore-paws tucked neatly under her chest, furry elbows outward. Her muzzle showed black, as did the rims of her eyelids which enhanced the brightness and size of her clear, yellow-green eyes. Her alert, observant little head was raised, as, with gently lashing tail, she watched an imprisoned honey-bee buzzing angrily up and down between the window-sashes.

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An elfin creature, Geraldine,—repaying liberal study. Scornfully secure of the potency of her own charms where mankind, or Tomcat-kind, might be concerned, royally devoid of morals, past-mistress in all sprightly, graceful, feline devilries, she was yet a fond mother, solicitous to the point of actual selflessness regarding the safety and well-being of her successive and frequently recurrent litters. She suckled, washed, played with and educated those of her kittens who escaped the rigours of stable-bucket and broom, until such time as they were three to four months old. After which she sent them flying, amid cuffings and spittings extraordinary, whenever they attempted to approach her; and, oblivious of their orphaned and wistful existence, yielded herself with bewitching vivacity, to fresh intrigues and amours new.

The long quiet morning indoors, with cats and books for company, at once soothed Damaris and made her restless. After luncheon she put on hat, gloves, and walking shoes, and went down across the lawn to the sea-wall. Waylaying her in the hall, Mary had essayed to learn her programme, and anchor her as to time and place by enquiring when and where tea should be served. But Damaris put the kindly woman off.—She couldn't say exactly—yet—would ring and let Mary know when she came in. If any one called, she was not at home.

In truth her active young body asked for movement and exercise, while scenes and phrases from the pages of Eoethen still filled her mind. She longed for travel. Not via Marychurch to Harchester, well understood, shepherded by Theresa Bilson, the members of the Deadham Church choir and their supporters; but for travel upon the grand scale, with all its romance and enlargement of experience, its possible dangers and certain hardships, as the author of Eoethen had known it and her father, for that matter, had known it in earlier days too. She suffered the spell of the East—always haunting the chambers of her memory and ready to be stirred in active ascendency, as by her morning's reading to-day—suffered the spell not of its mysterious cities and civilizations alone, but of its vast solitudes and silences, desert winds and desert sands.

And hence it came about that, as her mood of yesterday sent her inland to pacify her imagination by gazing at the peaceful English country-side, so her present mood sent her down to the shore to satisfy, or rather further stimulate, her nostalgia for the East by gazing out to sea.

The cause in both cases was the same, namely, the inward tumult of her awakening womanhood, and still more, perhaps, the tumult of awakening talent which had not as yet found its appointed means of expression. She was driven hither and thither by the push of her individuality to disengage itself from adventitious surroundings and circumstances, and realize its independent existence.—A somewhat perilous crisis of development, fruitful of escapades and unruly impulses which may leave their mark, and that a disfiguring one, upon the whole of a woman's subsequent career.

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Immediately, however, Damaris' disposition to defy established convention and routine took the mildest and apparently most innocuous form—merely the making, by herself, of a little expedition which, accompanied by others, she had made a hundred times before. From the terrace she went down the flight of steps, built into the width of the sea-wall, whence a tall wrought-iron gate opens direct upon the foreshore. Closing it behind her, she followed the coastguard-path, at the base of the river-bank—here a miniature sand cliff capped with gravel, from eight to ten feet high—which leads to the warren and the ferry. For she would take ship, with foxy-faced William Jennifer as captain and as crew, cross to the broken-down wooden jetty and, landing there, climb the crown of the Bar and look south-east, over the Channel highway, towards far distant countries of the desert and the dawn.

CHAPTER IV

OUT ON THE BAR

All which was duly accomplished though with a difference. For on reaching the head of the shallow sandy gully opening on the tide, where the flat-bottomed ferry-boat lay, Damaris found not Jennifer but the withered and doubtfully clean old lobster-catcher, Timothy Proud, in possession. This disconcerted her somewhat. His appearance, indeed—as he stood amongst a miscellaneous assortment of sun-bleached and weather-stained foreshore lumber, leaning the ragged elbows of his blue jersey upon the top of an empty petroleum barrel and smoking a dirty clay pipe—was so far from inviting, that the young girl felt tempted to relinquish her enterprise and go back by the way she had come.

But, as she hesitated, the old man catching sight of her and scenting custom, first spat and then called aloud.

"Might 'e be wanting the Ferry, Miss?" Thus directly challenged, Damaris could not but answer in the affirmative.

"Put 'e across to the Bar?" he took her up smartly. "Nat'rally I will—bean't I here for the very purpose?—Put 'e across I will and on the tick too."

And, after further expectoration, relinquishing the support of the oil barrel, he joined her and shambled down the sandy track at her side, talking. Damaris hastened her step; but bent back and creaking breath notwithstanding, Proud kept pace with her, his speech and movements alike animated by a certain malicious glee.

"William 'e give hisself an 'oliday," he explained, "to take the little dorgs and ferrets up to Butcher Cleave's ratting. Powerful sight of varmin there allers be round they sheds and places. Comes after the innards and trimmings they do, as bold as you please."

“Oh, yes—no doubt. I understand,” Damaris said, at once anxious to arrest the flow of his unsavoury eloquence yet to appear civil, since she was about to make use of his services.

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“’Normous great rats they be,” he however continued, with evident relish. “’Normous and fierce as tigers, the rascals, what with feasting on flesh and fatness like so many lords. So ’mind the ferry for me, will you, Daddy,’ William says, coming round where was I taking my morning pint over at the Inn. ’You’re a wonderful valorous man of your years’—and so thank the powers, Miss, I be—’can handle the old scraw as clever as I can myself,’ William says. ’There ain’t much about water, salt or fresh, nor whatsoever moves on the face of it, nor down below in the belly of it, any man can teach you.’ Which may seem putting it a bit high yet ain’t no more than truth and justice, Miss, so you needn’t fear to trust yourself across the ferry along of me.”

“I have no fear,” Damaris answered curtly and loftily, holding herself very erect, her face slightly flushed, her eyes war-like.

For he was a repulsive old man, and said repulsive things such as she had never heard put thus plainly into words before. She felt soiled by even this brief association with him. She wanted to hear no more of his ugly high-coloured talk, although of his skill as a waterman she entertained no doubt. Stepping lightly and quickly up on to the square stern of the ferry-boat, she went forward and kept her back resolutely turned upon the old fellow as he scrambled on board after her, shoved off and settled to the oars. The river was low, and sluggish from the long drought with consequently easy passage to the opposite bank. It took but a short five minutes to reach the jetty, crawling like some gigantic, damaged, many-legged insect out over the smooth gleaming water.

Instead of the legal twopence, Damaris dropped a couple of shillings into Daddy Proud’s eager hand—with a queenly little air; and, without waiting for his thanks, swung herself up on to the black planking and turned to go down the sand-strewn wooden steps.

“Pleased to fetch ’e back, Miss, any hour you like to name,” Proud called after her, standing up and fingering the shillings with one hand while with the other he steered the boat’s side away from the slippery weed-grown piles.

“Thank you, I don’t quite know when I shall be back,” she answered over her shoulder.

For her main desire was to get quit of his unpleasant neighbourhood. She would go for a long walk by the coast-guard path across the sand-hills, right out to Stone Horse Head. Would stay out till sundown, in the hope that by then Jennifer might have seen fit to exchange the manly joys of ratting for his more prosaic duties at the ferry, and so save her from further association with his displeasing deputy.

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But, the ridge of the Bar reached, other thoughts and impulses took possession of her. For the sea this afternoon showed an infinitely beguiling countenance. Not as highway of the nations, still less as violent and incalculable, holding cruelties of storm and tempest in its heart, did it present itself to her view; but rather as some gentle, softly inviting and caressing creature decked forth in the changeful colours of a dove's neck and breast. Opaline haze veiled the horizon, shutting off all unrestful sense of distance. The tide was low and little waves, as of liquid crystal, chased one another over the gleaming sands. Out to where the haze met and covered it the smooth expanse of sea was unbroken by passing boat or ship; nor was any person within sight upon the long line of the beach. Damaris found herself alone—but deliciously alone, with this enchanted dream sea for companion in the sunshine, under the vault of tender blue sky.

And, for the present at least, she asked nothing better, humanity being at a decided discount with her, thanks first to the extreme tiresomeness of Theresa Bilson and later the extreme unsavouriness of Timothy Proud. The element thus eliminated, nothing interfered, nothing jarred; so that she could yield herself to an ecstasy of contemplation, active rather than passive, in that imagination, breaking the bounds of personality, made her strangely one with all she looked on. Consciousness of self was merged in pure delight. Never could she remember to have felt so light-hearted, so happy with the spontaneous, unconditioned happiness which is sufficient to itself, unclouded by thought of what has been or what may be.

Pushed by her own radiant emotion and an instinct, deriving from it, to draw even closer to that Everlasting Beauty of Things which is uncreated by and independent of the will and work of man, she ran down the slope, and sitting on the shingle slipped off her shoes and stockings. Took off her hat, too, and leaving the lot lying there, just above high-tide mark, gathered her skirts in one hand, and, bare-headed thus and bare-footed, danced out over the wet gleaming sands a graceful flying figure, until the little waves played and purred about her ankles. Her action was symbolic, born of the gay worship welling up within her, a giving of herself to the shining infinite of Nature as just now manifest—things divine and eternal glimmering through at her—in this fair hour of solitude and brooding peace.

Till her mood softened, Damaris danced thus alone, unwitnessed on the shore. Then, as she sobered, happy still though the crisis of ecstasy had passed, smaller seeings began to charm her fancy and her eyes.—Pinkish yellow starfish, long ribbons of madder-red or emerald seaweed, their colours the more living and vivid for the clear water covering them. Presently a company of five birds—their mottled brown and olive bodies raised on stilt-like legs thin as a straw—claimed

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her notice. So bewitched was she by their quaint and pretty ways, that she could not but follow them as they chased one another in and out of the rippling waves, ran quickly and bowed catching something eatable floating upon the tide, scattered and then joined up into a joyous chorus of association with gentle twittering cries. Watching them, dreaming, standing now and again looking out over the sweet wonder of the placid sea, sometimes wading ankle deep, sometimes walking on the firm floor of uncovered sand, Damaris passed onward losing count of time.

The birds led her eastward, up channel, to the half-mile distant nose of the Bar, round which the rivers, released at last from their narrow channel, sweep out into Marychurch Bay. Here, on a sudden, they took wing, and Damaris looking after them, bade them an unwilling farewell, for their innocent society had been sweet. And with that she became aware she was really quite tired and would be glad to rest awhile, the afternoon being young yet, before turning homeward. The longer she stayed the more hope there was of finding Jennifer at the ferry; and more than ever, the glamour of her wild hour of Nature worship still upon her, did she recoil from any sort of association with foul old Timothy Proud.

Therefore she went up across the moist gleaming levels to the tide-line, and picking her way carefully among the black jumble of seaweed and sea-litter which marked it, sat down in a fan-shaped depression in the dry, clean, blown sand some few paces above. The sunshine covered it making it warm to her bare feet. The feel and blond colour of it brought to mind her reading of this morning—a passage in Eoethen telling of the striking of camp at dawn, the desert waiting to claim its own again and obliterate, with a single gesture, all sign or token of the passing sojourn of man. Clasping her hands behind her head, Damaris lay back, the warm sand all around her, giving beneath her weight, fitted itself into the curves of her body and limbs—only it visible and the soft blue of the sky above. For a little while she rested open-eyed in the bright silent stillness, and then, unknowing of the exact moment of surrender, she stretched with a fluttering sigh, turned on her side and dreamlessly slept.

And, while she thus slept, two events took place eminently germane to the further unfolding of this history.—The weather changed, and the local degenerate, Abram Sclanders' half-idiot son—the poor "lippity-lop" who, according to Jennifer, had far better been "put away quiet-like at birth"—committed theft.

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Of the first event, Damaris gradually became sensible, before her actual awakening. She grew restless, her bed of sand seeming robbed of comfort, bleak and uneasy, so that she started up, presently, into a sitting position, rubbing her eyes with her fists baby-fashion, unable for the minute to imagine how or why she came to be lying like this out on the Bar, hatless, shoe and stockingless. Looking about her, still in questioning bewilderment, she observed that in the south-west a great bank of cloud had risen. It blotted out the sun, deadening all colour. The opaline haze, turned to a dull falling mist, closed down and in, covering the sand-hills and the dark mass of Stone Horse Head and even blurring the long straight lines of the sandbank and nearer shingle. The sea had risen, but noiselessly, creeping up and up towards her, no line of white marking the edge of its slothful oncoming.

Damaris stood up, pulling her white jersey—the surface of it already furred with moisture—low over her hips. For she felt shivery, and the air was thick and chill to breathe causing a tightness in her throat.

“The glory has departed, very much departed, so I had best make haste to depart also,” she told herself; but told herself gallantly, smiling at her own strange plight in a spirit of adventure, discovering in it the excitement of novel experience.

She picked her way over the shingle and black sea litter of high-water mark, and started to run along the narrow strip between it and the advancing tide. To run would circulate her blood, warm her through and keep her gallant humour up; still she had to own she found this heavy going, for her feet were numb and the sand seemed to pluck at and weigh them down. Her run slackened to a walk. Then she ventured a yard or two out into the shallow water, hoping there to meet with firmer foothold; but here it proved altogether too cold. She had the misfortune, moreover, to tread on the top end of a razor shell, buried upright, which cut the skin making her limp from pain and sharpness of smarting. So perforce, she took to the deep blown sand again above high-water mark, and ploughed along slowly enough in growing weariness and discomfort.

Never, surely, was any half-mile so long as this between the place of her farewell to the mottled stilt-legged birds and subsequent sleeping, and the place where she left her hat and shoes and stockings! In the dimness and chill of the falling mist, it seemed to lengthen and lengthen to an altogether incomprehensible extent. Time and again she stopped and scanned the ground immediately before her, certain she should see there those so lightly discarded and now so earnestly desired items of clothing. Once in possession of them she would simply scurry home. For visions of warm, dry pretty garments, of Mary’s, comely ministering presence, of tea, of lamp-light and—yes, she would allow herself that culminating luxury—of a fine log fire in the long sitting-room, presented themselves to her imagination in most alluring sequence—the spirit of adventure, meanwhile, as must be owned, beginning to sing small and hang a diminished head.

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But on a sudden, raising her eyes from their persistent search, Damaris realized she must have missed and already passed the spot. For she was close upon the tract of sand-hills—a picture of desolation in the sullen murk, the winding hollows between their pale formless elevations bearing a harsh growth of neutral tinted sword-like grasses.

She had come too far by a quarter of a mile at least, so she judged, and must turn her face eastward again and laboriously plough her way back. But the return journey was crowned with no better success than the outward one. Carefully, methodically she quartered the beach; but simply her things weren't there, had vanished, leaving neither token or trace.

She was confronted moreover by the unpleasant fact that it grew late. Soon the dusk would fall, its coming hastened by the mist, now settling into a steady drizzle of rain precursor of a dark and early night. To hunt any longer would be useless. She must give it up. Yet her maidenly pride, her sense of what is seemly and becoming, revolted from exposing herself to Timothy Proud's coarse leering glances or even—should he by luck be her waterman—to Jennifer's more respectful curiosity, dishevelled and but half-dressed as she was. And then the actual distance to be traversed appeared to her dishearteningly great. For she was weary—quite abominably weary now she came to think of it. Her feet were bruised and blistered. They ached. Her throat ached too, and she shivered. Cold, though it was, she must wait a minute or two and rest before attempting the ascent of the slope.

Damaris sat down, pulling her skirts as low as they would come over her bare legs, and clasping her hands round her knees, bowed, huddled together to gain, if it might be, some sensation of warmth. For a little she thought of that only—warmth—her mind otherwise a blank. But soon the consuming sadness of the place in the waning light penetrated her imagination, penetrated, indeed, her whole being. Only a few hours ago she had danced here, in ecstasy born of the sunshine, the colour, the apparently inexhaustible beauty of things uncreated by, and independent of, the will and work of man. Contrast that scene, and the radiant emotion evoked by it, with this? Which was real, the enduring revelation? Was this truth; the other no more than mirage—an exquisite dissembling and lovely lie?

Such thoughts are hardly wholesome at eighteen—hardly wholesome perhaps at any age, if life is to be lived sweetly, with honest profit to one's own soul and to the souls of others. Yet remembering back, down the dim avenues of childhood, Damaris knew she did not formulate the question, entertain the suspicion, for the first time. Only, until now, it had stayed in the vague, a shapeless nightmare horror, past which she could force herself to run with shut eyes. It didn't jump out of the vague, thank goodness, and bar her passage. But now no running or shutting

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of eyes availed. It had jumped out. She stared at it, and, in all its undermining power of discouragement, it stared back.—What if the deepest thing, the thing which alone lasted, the thing which, therefore, you were bound in the end to accept, to submit to, was just darkness, sorrow, loneliness of worn body and shrinking spirit, by the shore of a cold, dumb, and tenantless, limitless sea—what then?

From which undesirable abyss of speculation she was aroused by the sound of her own name—“Damaris Verity, hey—Damaris Verity”—shouted, not roughly though in tones of urgent command, from above and behind her on the crest of the Bar. Along with it came the rattle of shifting shingle under a strong active tread.

Hearing which the young girl’s senses and faculties alike sprang to attention. She rose from her dejected attitude, stood up and faced round, forgetful of aches and weariness and of woeful ultimate questionings, while in glad surprise her heart went out to meet and welcome the—to her—best beloved being in this, no longer, sorry world.

For even thus, at some fifty yards distant through the blur of falling rain, the figure presented to her gaze, in height, build, and fashion of moving, was delightfully familiar, as were the tones of the voice which had hailed her—if in not quite equal degree the manner of that hail. Some change in his plans must have taken place, or some letter miscarried advising her of her father’s earlier return. Finding her out he had come to look for her.—This was perfectly as it should be. Had Colonel Carteret come home with him, she wondered. And then there flashed through her, with a singular vividness, recollection of another, long, long ago escapade—when as a still almost baby child she had stepped off alone, in daring experiment, and fallen asleep, in the open as to-day. But in surroundings how amazingly different!—A place of fountains, cypresses and palms, she curled up in a black marble chair, set throne fashion, upon a platform of blood red sandstone, an age-old Oriental garden outstretched below. Colonel Carteret —“the man with the blue eyes” as she always had called him—awakened her, bringing an adorable and, as it proved in the sequel, a tragic birthday gift.—Tragic because to it might, actually if indirectly, be traced the breaking up of her childhood’s home in the stately Indian pleasure palace of the Sultan-i-bagh at Bhutpur, her separation from her father and exile—as she had counted it—to Europe.

It is among the doubtful privileges of highly sensitized natures, such as Damaris’, that, in hours of crisis, vision and pre-vision go hand in hand. As there flashed through her remembrance of that earlier sleep in the open, there flashed through her also conviction that history would still further repeat itself. Now, as then, the incident of sleep preluded the receipt of a gift, adorable perhaps, yet freighted with far-reaching consequences to herself and her

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future. Of just what that gift might consist she had no idea; but of its approach she felt as certain as of the approach of the man swinging down through the rain over the rattling pebbles. And her gladness of welcome declined somewhat. She could have cried off, begged for postponement. For she was very tired, after all. She didn't want anything now, anything which—however delightful in itself—demanded effort, demanded even the exertion of being very pleased. She shied away, in short. And then commendably rallied her forces, resolute not to be found unworthy or ungrateful.

"Yes—come. I am here," she called in response to that lately heard calling of her name, desiring to make an act of faith whereby to assure herself she was indeed ready, and assure her hearer of her readiness to accept the impending gift.

"I am here," she began again to affirm, but stopped abruptly, the words choking in her throat.

For, as with decreasing distance the figure grew distinct, she saw, to her blank amazement, not Sir Charles Verity, her father, as she expected, but the blue reefer jacket, peaked cap, and handsome bearded face of Darcy Faircloth, the young merchant sea-captain, emerge from the blur of the wet. And the revulsion of feeling was so sharp, the shock at once so staggering and intimate—as summing up all the last ten days confused experience—that Damaris could not control herself. She turned away with a wail of distress, threw out her hands, and then, covering her eyes with them, bowed her head.

The young man came forward and stood near her; but an appreciable time elapsed before he spoke. When he presently did so, his voice reached her as again singularly familiar in tone, though strange in diction and in accent.

"I'm sorry if I startled you," he began, "but I hailed you just now, and you told me to come.—I concluded you meant what you said. Not, I'm afraid, that your giving your permission or withholding it would have made much difference in the upshot. Timothy Proud let on, in my hearing, that he set you across the river soon after two o'clock, and that there'd been no call for the ferry since. So I took one of my own boats and just came over to look for you—in case you might have met with some mishap or strayed among the sand-hills and couldn't find your"—

Thus far he spoke with studied calm and restraint. But here, as though struck by a fresh and very objectionable idea, he broke out:

"Nothing has happened has it? No cowardly brute has interfered with you or upset you? Dear God alive, don't tell me I'm too late, don't tell me that."

Upon Damaris this sudden, though to her unaccountable, violence and heat acted as a cordial. She raised her head, pushing back the damp hair from her forehead, and displaying a proud if strained and weary face.

“No,” she said, “of course not. Who would venture to be rude to me? I have not seen anyone all the afternoon—until now, when you came. And,” she added by way of further explanation—she didn’t want to be ungracious or unkind, but she did want, in justice to herself, to have this understood—“in the distance I didn’t recognize you. I mistook you for someone else”—

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“Who else?” he took her up, and with a queer flicker—if of a smile, then one with a keenish edge to it—in his eyes and about his mouth.

“For my father,” Damaris answered. “It was a stupid mistake, because he is away staying in Norfolk for partridge shooting, and I have not any real reason to expect him home for several days yet.”

“But in this deceptive light,” Faircloth took her up again, while—as she could not help observing—that flicker became more pronounced. It seemed silently to laugh and to mock.—“Oh! to be sure that accounts for your mistake as to my identity. One sees how it might very well come about.”

He took off his cap, and threw back his head looking up into the low wet sky.

“At night all cats are grey, aren’t they,” he went on, “little ones as well as big? And it’s close on night now, thanks to this dirty weather. So close on it, that—though personally I’m in no hurry—I ought to get you back to The Hard, or there’ll be a regular hue and cry after you—rightly and probably too, if your servants and people have any notion of their duty.”

“I am quite ready,” Damaris said.

She strove to show a brave front, to keep up appearances; but she felt helpless and weak, curiously confused by and unequal to dealing with this masterful stranger—who yet, somehow did not seem like a stranger. Precisely in this was the root of her confusion, of her inability to deal with him.

“But hardly as you are,” he commented, on her announcement she was ready. “Let me help to put on your shoes and stockings for you first.” And this he said so gently and courteously, that Damaris’ lips began to quiver, very feminine and youthful shame at the indignity of her present plight laying hold on her.

“I can’t find them,” she pitifully declared. “I have looked and looked, but I can’t find them anywhere. I left my things just here. Can anyone have stolen them while I was out at the end of the Bar? It is so mysterious and so dreadfully tiresome. I should have gone home long ago, before the rain began, if I could have found them.”

And with that, the whole little story—childish or idyllic as you please—of sunshine and colour, of beguiling birds beguiling sea, of sleep, and uneasy awakening when the cloud-bank rising westward devoured the fair face of heaven, of mist and fruitless seeking, even some word of the fear which forever sits behind and peeps over the shoulder of all wonder and all beauty, got itself—not without eloquent passages—-quickly yet gravely told. For the young man appeared to derive considerable pleasure

from listening, from watching her and from questioning her too—still, gently and courteously though closely, as if each detail were of interest and of value.

“And now you know all about it, Captain Faircloth,” Damaris said in conclusion, essaying to laugh at her own discomfiture. “And I am very tired, so if you will be kind enough to row me across the ferry, I shall be grateful to you, and glad, please, to go home at once.”

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“By all means,” he answered. “Only, you know, I can’t very well let you cut your feet to pieces on these cruel stones, so I am just going to carry you up over the Bar”—

“No—no—I can perfectly well walk. I mean to walk—see,” she cried.

And started courageously up the rough ascent, only to slip, after a few paces, and to stagger. For as soon as she attempted to move, she felt herself not only weak, but oddly faint and giddy. She lurched forward, and to avoid falling instinctively clutched at her companion’s outstretched hand. Exactly what passed between the young man and young girl in that hand-clasp—the first contact they had had of one another—it might seem far-reached and fantastic to affirm; yet that it steadied not only Damaris’ trembling limbs, but her trembling and over-wrought spirit, is beyond question. For it was kind and more than kind—tender, and that with the tenderness of right and usage rather than of sentimental response to a passing sentimental appeal.

“There, there,” he said, “what’s the use of working to keep up this little farce any longer? Just give in—you can’t put off doing so in the end. Why not at once, then, accept defeat and spare both yourself and me pain? You are no more fit to walk, than you are fit to fly—to fly away from me!—That’s what you want, isn’t it? Ah! that flight will come, no doubt, all in good time.—But meanwhile, be sensible. Put your left arm round my neck—like this, yes. Then—just a little hoist, and, if you’ll not worry but keep still, nothing’s easier.”

As he spoke, Faircloth stooped, lightly and with no apparent exertion lifting her high, so that—she clasping his neck as instructed—the main weight of her body rested upon his shoulder. With his right arm he held her just above the waist, his left arm below her knees cradling her.

“Now rest quiet,” he said. “Know you are safe and think only of comfortable things—-among them this one, if you care to, that for once in my life I am content.”

Yet over such yielding and treacherous ground, upward to the crown of the ridge and downward to the river, progress could not be otherwise than slow. Twilight, and that of the dreariest and least penetrable, overtook them before Faircloth, still carrying the white-clothed figure, reached the jetty. Here, at the bottom of the wooden steps he set Damaris down, led her up them and handed her into the boat—tied up to, and the tide being at the flood, now little below the level of the staging.

CHAPTER V

WHEREIN DAMARIS MAKES SOME ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE HIDDEN WAYS OF MEN

Throughout their singular journey—save for briefest question and answer about her well-being at the commencement of it—the two had kept silence, as though conscious Faircloth's assertion of contentment struck a chord any resolution of which might imperil the simplicity of their relation. Thus far that relation showed a noble freedom from embarrassment. It might have continued to do so but for a hazardous assumption on his part.

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When first placing Damaris in the stern of the boat, the young man stripped off his jacket and, regardless of her vaguely expressed protest, wrapped it round her feet. It held the living warmth of his body; and, chilled, dazed, and spent, as Damaris was, that warmth curiously soothed her, until the ink-black boat floating upon the brimming, hardly less inky, water faded from her knowledge and sight. She drooped together, passing into a state more comparable to coma than to natural slumber, her will in abeyance, thought and imagination borne under by the immensity of her fatigue.

As Faircloth, meanwhile, pulled clear of the outstanding piles of the jetty, he heard voices and saw lights moving down by the ferry on the opposite shore. But these, and any invitation they might imply, he ignored. If the hue and cry after Damaris, which he had prophesied, were already afoot, he intended to keep clear of it, studiously to give it the slip. To this end, once in the fairway of the river he headed the boat downstream, rowing strongly though cautiously for some minutes, careful to avoid all plunge of the oars, all swish of them or drip. Then, the lights now hidden by the higher level and scrub of the warren, he sat motionless letting the boat drift on the seaward setting current.

The fine rain fell without sound. It shut out either bank creating a singular impression of solitude and isolation, and of endlessness too. There seemed no reason why it should ever cease. And this delusion of permanence, the enclosing soft-clinging darkness served to heighten. The passage of time itself seemed arrested—to-morrow becoming an abstraction, remote and improbable, which could, with impunity, be left out of the count. With this fantastic state of things, Faircloth had no quarrel. Though impatient of inaction, as a rule definite and autocratic enough, he really wasn't aware of having any particular use for to-morrow. Content still held sway. He was satisfied, profoundly, yet dreamingly, satisfied by an achievement long proposed, long waited for, the door upon which had opened to-day by the merest accident—if anything can justly be called accident, which he inclined to believe it could not.

He had appointed, it should be added, a limit in respect of that achievement, which he forbade himself to pass; and it was his habit very rigidly to obey his own orders, however little disposed he might be to obey those of other people. He had received, as he owned, more than he could reasonably have expected, good measure pressed down and running over. The limit was now reached. He should practise restraint—leave the whole, affair where it stood. But the effect of this darkness, and of drifting, drifting, over the black water in the fine soundless rain, with its illusion of permanence, and of the extinction of to-morrow—and the retributions and adjustments in which to-morrow is so frequently and inconveniently fertile—enervated him, rendering him a comparatively easy prey to impulse, should impulse chance to be stirred by some adventitious circumstance. The Devil, it may be presumed, is very much on the watch for such weakenings of moral fibre, ready to pounce, at the very shortest notice, and make unholy play with them!

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To Faircloth's ruminative eyes, the paleness in the stern of the boat, indicating Damaris Verity's drooping figure, altered slightly in outline. Whereupon he shipped the oars skillfully and quietly, and going aft knelt down in front of her. Her feet were stretched out as, bowed together, she sat on the low seat. His jacket had slipped away exposing them to the weather, and the young man laying his hands on them felt them cold as in death. He held them, chafed them, trying to restore some degree of circulation. Finally, moved by a great upwelling of tenderness and of pity, and reckoning her, since she gave no sign, to be asleep, he bent down and put his lips to them.

But immediately the girl's hands were upon his shoulders.

"What are you doing, oh! what are you doing?" she cried.

"Kissing your feet."

Then the Devil, no doubt, flicking him, he let go restraint, disobeyed his own orders, raised his head, and looking at her as in the enfolding obscurity she leaned over him, said:

"And, if it comes to that, who in all the round world has a better right than I, your brother, to kiss your feet?"

For some, to him, intolerable and interminable seconds, Faircloth waited after he had shot his bolt. The water whispered and chuckled against the boat's sides in lazy undertones, as it floated down the sluggish stream. Beyond this there was neither sound nor movement. More than ever might time be figured to stand still. His companion's hands continued to rest upon his shoulders. Her ghostly, dimly discerned face was so near his own that he could feel, now and again, her breath upon his forehead; but she was silent. As yet he did not repent of his cruelty. The impulse which dictated it had not spent itself. Nevertheless this suspense tried him. He grew impatient.

"Damaris," he said, at last, "speak to me."

"How can I speak to you when I don't understand," she answered gravely. "Either you lie—which I should be sorry to accuse you of doing—or you tell me a very terrible thing, if, that is, I at all comprehend what you say.—Are you not the son of Mrs. Faircloth, who lives at the inn out by the black cottages?"

"Yes, Lesbia Faircloth is my mother. And I ask for no better. She has squandered love upon me—squandered money, upon me too; but wisely and cleverly, with results. Still —" he paused—"well, it takes two, doesn't it, to make a man? One isn't one's mother's son only."

“But Mrs. Faircloth is a widow,” Damaris reasoned, in wondering directness. “I have heard people speak of her husband. She was married.”

“But not to my father. Do you ask for proofs—just think a minute. Whom did you mistake me for when I called you and came down over the Bar in the dusk?”

“No—no—” she protested trembling exceedingly. “That is not possible. How could such a thing happen?”

“As such things mostly do happen. It is not the first case, nor will it by a long way, I reckon, be the last. They were young, and—mayn’t we allow—they were beautiful. That’s often a good deal to do with these accidents. They met and, God help them, they loved.”

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“No—no—” Damaris cried again.

Yet she kept her hands on Faircloth’s shoulders, clinging to him in the excessive travail of her innocent spirit—though he racked her—for sympathy and for help.

“For whom, after all, did you take me?” he repeated. “If there wasn’t considerable cause it would be incredible you should make such a mistake. Can you deny that I am hall-marked, that the fact of my parentage is written large in my flesh?”

He felt her eyes fixed on him, painfully straining to see him through the rain and darkness; and, when she spoke again, he knew she knew that he did not lie.

“But wasn’t it wrong” she said.

“I suppose so. Only as it gave me life and as I love life I’m hardly the person to deliver an unbiased opinion on that point.”

“Then you are not sad, you are not angry?” Damaris presently and rather unexpectedly asked.

“Yes—at times both, but not often or for long together. As I tell you I love life—love it too well to torment myself much about the manner of my coming by it. It might show more refinement of feeling perhaps to hang my head and let a certain ugly word blast my prospects. But I don’t happen to see the business that way. On the contrary I hope to get every ounce of advantage out of it I can—use it as a spur rather than a hobble. And I love my profession too. It gives you room and opportunity. I am waiting now for my first ship, my first command. That’s a fine thing and a strong one. For your first ship is as a bride to you, and your first command makes you as a king among men. Oh! on a small scale I grant; but, as far as it reaches, your authority is absolute. On board your own ship you are master with a vengeance—if you like. And I do like.”

Faircloth said the last few words softly, but with a weight of meaning not to be misunderstood. He bent down, once more, chafed Damaris’ feet and wrapped his jacket carefully round them.

“And, while you and I are alone together, there is something—as we’ve spoken so freely—which I want to tell you, so that there may be no misconception about me or about what I want.—As men in my rank of life go, I am well off. Rich—again on a small scale; but with means sufficient to meet all my needs. I’m not a spend-thrift by nature, luckily. And I have amply enough not only to hold my own in my profession and win through, but to procure myself the pleasures and amusements I happen to fancy. I want you to remember that, please. Tell me is it quite clear to you?”

“Yes,” Damaris said, “you have made it quite clear.”

Yet for the first time he jarred on her, as with a more than superficial difference of breeding and of class. This mention of money offended her taste, seeming to lower the level upon which their extraordinary and—to her—terrible conversation had thus far moved. It hurt her with another kind of hurting—not magnificent, not absorbing, but just common. That in speaking of money he was protecting himself, proudly self-guarding his own honour and that of his mother, Lesbia Faircloth, never, in her innocence of what is mean and mercenary, occurred to Damaris.

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So she took her hands off his shoulders and clasped them in her lap. Clasped them with all her poor strength, striving even in this extreme, to maintain some measure of calm and of dignity. She must hold out, she told herself, just simply by force of will hold out, till she was away from him. After that, chaos—for thoughts, discoveries, apprehensions of possibilities in human intercourse hitherto undreamed of, were marshalled round her in close formation shoulder to shoulder. They only waited. An instant's yielding on her part, and they would be on to her, crushing down and in, making her brain reel, her mind stagger under their stifling crowded assault.

"Go back and row," she said, at once imploring and imperious. "Row quickly. I am very tired. I am cold. I want to be at home—to be in my own place."

CHAPTER VI

RECOUNTING AN ASTONISHING DEPOSITION

Theresa Bilson bustled upstairs. Barring the absence of the extra brake, which had caused—and for this she could not be sorry since didn't it justify her "attitude" towards her recalcitrant ex-pupil?—some inconvenient overcrowding in transit to and from the station, and barring the rain, which set in between five and six o'clock, the expedition to Harchester passed off with considerable *eclat*. Such, in any case, was Theresa's opinion, she herself having figured conspicuously in the foreground. During the inspection of the Cathedral the Dean paid her quite marked attention; thanks, in part, to her historical and archaeological knowledge—of which she made the most, and to her connection with the Verity family—of which she made the most also. In precisely what that connection might consist, the learned and timid old gentleman, being very deaf and rather near-sighted, failed to gather. He determined, however, to be on the safe side.

"Our genial Archdeacon," he said, "and his distinguished kinsman, Sir Charles? Ah! yes—yes—indeed—to be sure—with the greatest pleasure."

And he motioned the blushing Theresa to fall into step with him, and with Dr. Horniblow, at the head of the Deadham procession.

The afterglow of that triumphal progress irradiated her consciousness still, when—after depositing the Miss Minetts upon their own doorstep, with playful last words recalling the day's mild jokes and rallyings—she drove on to The Hard to find the household there in a state of sombre and most admired confusion.

Thus to arrive home in possession of a fine bag of news, only to discover an opposition and far finer bag ready awaiting you may well prove trying to the most high-souled and amiable of temper. By this time, between success and fatigue, Theresa could not be justly described as either high-souled or sweet tempered. She was at once inflated and

on edge, and consequently hotly indignant, as though the unfairest march possible had been stolen upon her.

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She bustled upstairs, and crossing the landing turned into the schoolroom passage—a long, lamp-lit vista, hung with old Chinese wall-paper, the running pattern of buds and flowers, large out of all proportion to the bridges, palms, pagodas and groups of little purple and blue-clad men and women disposed, in dwindling perspective, upon its once white surface. Half-way along the passage, their backs towards her, Mary and Mrs. Cooper, the cook—a fair, mild middle-aged, and cow-like person, of ample proportions—stood conversing in smothered tones.

“And it’s my belief he’s been and told her, or anyhow that she guesses, pore dear young lady,” the latter, with upraised hands, lamented.

Theresa just caught these strange words. Caught too, Mary’s hurried rejoinder—“For mercy’s sake, Mrs. Cooper, not a hint of that to any living soul”—before the two women, sensible of the swish and patter of her self-important entry, turned and moved forward to meet, or—could it be?—to intercept her. Their faces bore a singular expression, in Mrs. Cooper’s case of sloppy, in Mary’s of stern yet vivid alarm. Deeply engaged though she was with her private grievance, Miss Bilson could not but observe this. It made her nervous.

“What is the meaning,” she began, her voice shrill with agitation, “of the extraordinary story about Miss Damaris which Laura reports to me? Someone is evidently very much in fault.”

“Please don’t speak quite so loud, Miss,” Mary firmly admonished her. “I’ve just got Miss Damaris quieted off to sleep, and if she’s roused up again, I won’t answer for what mayn’t happen.”

“But what has happened? I insist upon knowing,” Theresa declared, in growing offence and agitation.

“Ah! that’s just what we should be thankful enough to have you tell us, Miss,” Mrs. Cooper chimed in with heavy and reproachful emphasis upon the pronouns.

To even the mild and cow-like revenge is sweet. Though honestly distressed and scared, the speaker entertained a most consoling conviction she was at this moment getting even with Theresa Bilson and cleverly paying off old scores.

“The pore dear young lady’s caught her death as likely as not, out there across the river in the wet, let alone some sneaking rascal making off with her stockings and shoes. When I saw her little naked feet, all blue with the cold, it made my heart bleed, regularly bleed, it did. I could only give thanks her Nanna, pore Mrs. Watson, who worshipped the very ground Miss Damaris trod on, was spared living to see that afflicting sight.”

Then with a change of tone exasperating—as it was designed to be—to one, at least, of her hearers, she added:

“I’ll have that soup ready against Miss Damaris wakes, Mary, in case she should fancy it. Just touch the bell, will you, and I’ll bring it up myself. It’s not suitable to give either of the girls a chance for prying. They’re a deal too curious as it is. And I’m only too pleased to watch with you, turn and turn about, as I told you, whenever you feel to require a rest. Lizzie will have to see to the cooking anyhow—except what’s wanted for Miss Damaris. I couldn’t put my mind into kitchen work to-night, not if you paid me ever so.”

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And on large flat feet she moved away towards the back-staircase, leading down to the offices from the far end of the passage, leaving an odour of pastry behind her and of cloves.

“To think of what to-morrow may bring, ah! dear me,” she murmured as she went.

During the ten minutes or so which immediately followed Theresa Bilson boxed the compass in respect of sensations, the needle, as may be noted, invariably quivering back to the same point—namely, righteous anger against Damaris. For was not that high-spirited maiden’s imperviousness to influence and defiance of authority—her, Theresa’s, influence and authority—the mainspring of all this disastrous complication? Theresa found it convenient to believe so, and whip herself up to almost frantic determination in that belief. It was so perfectly clear. All the more clear because her informant, Mary, evidently did not share her belief. Mary’s account of to-day’s most vexatious transactions betrayed partizanship and prejudice, such as might be expected from an uneducated person, offering—as Theresa assured herself—a pertinent example of the workings of “the servant mind.” Nevertheless uneasy suspicion dogged her, a haunting though unformulated dread that other persons—one person above all others—might endorse Mary’s prejudices rather than her own, so reasonably based, conviction.

“If only Mr. Patch had been in there’d have been somebody to depend on,” the woman told her, recounting the anxious search after vanished Damaris. “But he’d driven into Marychurch of course, starting ever so early because of the parcels he had your orders to call for at the several shops, before meeting the train. And the gardeners had left work on account of the wet; so we’d nobody to send to make enquiries anywhere except Tolling, and that feather-head Alfred, who you can’t trust half a minute out of your sight.” Here she paused in her narrative and made a move, adroitly driving Theresa Bilson before her out on to the landing, thus putting a greater distance between that tormented spinster and the neighbourhood of Damaris’ bed-chamber. Her handsome brown eyes held the light of battle and her colour was high. She straightened a chair, standing against the wall at the stair-head, with a neatly professional hand in passing.

“Mrs. Cooper and I were fairly wild waiting down on the sea-wall with the lantern, thinking of drowning and—worse,—when”—she glanced sharply at her companion and, lowering her eyes altered the position of the chair by a couple of inches—“when Captain Faircloth’s boat came up beside the breakwater and he carried Miss Damaris ashore and across the garden.”

“Stop”—Theresa broke in—“I do not follow you. Faircloth, Captain Faircloth? You are not, I earnestly hope, speaking of the owner of that low public-house on the island?”

“Yes—him,” Mary returned grimly, her eyes still lowered.

“And do you mean me to understand that this young man carried Miss Damaris—-actually carried her”—Miss Bilson choked and cleared her throat with a foolish little crowing sound—“carried her all the way into the house—in his arms?”

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“Yes, in his arms, Miss. How else would you have had him carry her?—And, as gentle and careful as any woman could, too—into the house and right upstairs here”—pointing along the passage as if veritably beholding the scene once more—“and into her own bedroom.”

“How shocking. How extremely improper!”

Theresa beat her fat little hands hysterically together. She credited herself with emotions of the most praiseworthy and purest; ignorant that the picture conjured up before her provoked obscure physical jealousies, obscure stirrings of latent unsatisfied passion. More than ever, surely, did the needle quiver back to that fixed point of most righteous anger.

“Such—such a proceeding cannot have been necessary. It ought not to have been permitted. Why did not Miss Damaris walk?”

“Because she was in a dead faint, and we’d all the trouble in life to bring her round.”

“Indeed,” she said, and that rather nastily. “I am sorry, but I cannot but believe Miss Damaris might have made an effort to walk—with your assistance and that of Cooper, had you offered it. As I remarked at first, someone is evidently very much to blame. The whole matter must be thoroughly sifted out, of course. I am disappointed, for I had great confidence in you and Cooper—two old servants who might really have been expected to possess some idea of the—the respect due to their master’s daughter. What will Sir Charles say when he hears of this objectionable incident?”

“That’s just what Mrs. Cooper and I are wondering, Miss,” Mary took her up with so much meaning that Miss Bilson inwardly quailed, sensible of having committed a rather egregious blunder. This she made efforts to repair by sheering off hurriedly on another tack.

“Not that I shall trouble Sir Charles with the matter, unless circumstances arise which compel me to do so—as a duty. My great object, of course, is at all times to spare him any domestic annoyance.”

She began pulling off her gloves, a new pair and tight. Her hands were moist and the glove-fingers stuck, rendering their removal lengthy and difficult.

“To-morrow I shall have a thorough explanation with Miss Damaris and decide what action it is my duty to take after hearing her version of the events of this afternoon. I should prefer speaking to her to-night—”

“Miss Damaris isn’t fit to talk about anything to-night.”

Theresa pulled at the right-hand glove—the kid gave with a little shriek, the thumb splitting out. She was in a state of acute indecision. Could she retire from this contest without endangering her authority, without loss of prestige, or must she insist? She had no real wish to hasten to her ex-pupil's bedside. She would be glad to put off doing so, glad to wait. She was conscious of resentment rather than affection. And she felt afraid, unformulated suspicion, unformulated dread, again dogging her. That Damaris was really ill,

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she did not believe for an instant. Damaris had excellent health. The maids exaggerated. They delighted in making mysteries. Uneducated persons are always absurdly greedy of disaster, lugubriously credulous.—Yes, on the whole she concluded to maintain her original attitude, the attitude of yesterday and this morning; concluded it would be more telling to keep up the fiction of disgrace—because—Theresa did not care to scrutinize her own motives or analyse her own thought too closely. She was afraid, and she was jealous—jealous of Damaris' beauty, of the great love borne her by her father, jealous of the fact that a young man—hadn't she, Theresa, seen the young sea-captain once or twice in the village recently and been fluttered by his notable good looks?—had rescued the girl, and carried her home, carried her up here across the landing and along the familiar schoolroom passage, with its patterned Chinese wall-paper, gently and carefully, in his arms.

And these qualifying terms—gentle and careful—rankled to the point even of physical disturbance, so that Miss Bilson again became guilty of inelegantly choking, and clearing her throat for the second time with a foolish crowing sound.

"I will postpone my interview with Miss Damaris until after breakfast to-morrow," she said, thus leaving Mary Fisher virtually, if not admittedly, master of the field.

But long before breakfast time, in the grey and mournful autumn morning, Patch rattled the dog-cart the seven miles into Stourmouth, as fast as the black horse could travel, to fetch Damaris' old friend, the retired Indian Civil surgeon, Dr. McCabe. For, coming to herself, in the intervals of distracted fever dreams, she had asked for him, going back by instinct to the comfort of his care of her in childish illnesses long ago. Since she was ill enough, so Mary said, to need a doctor, let it be him.

"Not Mr. Cripps out of the village, or Dr. Risdon from Marychurch. I won't see them. I will not see anyone from near here. Keep them away from me," she commanded. "I know Miss Bilson will try to send for one or the other. But I won't see either. Promise you'll keep them away."

When, after his visit, Theresa Bilson, considerably flustered and offended, found McCabe breakfasting in the dining-room and offered profuse apologies for the inconvenience to which he must have been put by so early and unnecessary a call, the tender-hearted and garrulous, but choleric Irishman cut her uncommonly short.

"And would you be supposing then, that if the dear blessed child should be desirous of consulting me I wouldn't have rejoiced to come to her a thousand times as early and from ten thousand times as far?" he enquired, between large mouthfuls of kidney and fried bacon. "The scheming little pudding-faced governess creature, with a cherry nose and an envious eye to her"—he commented to himself.

“But you do not apprehend anything serious?” Theresa said stiffly—“Merely a slight chill?”

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“With a temperature dancing up and down like a mad thing between a hundred and one and a hundred and three? I’m dashed if I like the looks of her at all, at all, Miss Bilson; and I am well acquainted with her constitution and her temperament. She’s as delicate a piece of feminine mechanism as it’s ever been my fortune to handle, and has been so from a child. Mind and body so finely interwoven that you can’t touch the one without affecting the other—that is where danger comes in.—And I am glad to find she has so competent a nurse as Mary Fisher—a wholesome woman and one to put faith in. I have given my full instructions to her.”

“But I”—Theresa began fussily, her face crimson.

“Oh! I don’t doubt you’re devotion itself; only my first consideration is my patient, and so I make free to use my own judgment in the selection of my assistants. No disrespect to you, my dear lady. You are at home in more intellectual spheres than that of the sick-room. And now,” he wiped his mouth with his napkin, twinkling at her over the top of it with small blue-grey eyes, at once merry, faithful, and cunning—“I’ll be bidding you good-bye till the evening. I have told Mary Fisher I’ll be glad to sleep here to-night. And I’ll despatch a telegram to Sir Charles on my way through the village.”

“Sir Charles?” Theresa cried.

“Yes,” he answered her. “I find the darling girl’s illness as serious as that.”

CHAPTER VII

A SOUL AT WAR WITH FACT

The deepest and most abiding demand of all sentient creatures, strong and weak alike, is for safety, or, that being unattainable, for a sense of safety, an illusion even of safety.

This, so universal demand, dictated, in Damaris’ case, her prayer for Dr. McCabe’s attendance. He belonged to the safeties of her childhood, to the securely guarded, and semi-regal state—as, looking back, she recalled it—of the years when her father held the appointment of Chief Commissioner at Bhutpur. Dr. McCabe was conversant with all that; the sole person available, at this juncture, who had lot or part in it. And, as she had foreseen—when drifting down the tide-river in the rain and darkness—once the supporting tension of Faircloth’s presence removed, chaos would close in on her. It only waited due opportunity. That granted, as a tempest-driven sea it would submerge her. In the welter of the present, she clutched at the high dignities and distinctions of the past as at a lifebelt. Not vulgarly, in a spirit of self-aggrandizement; but in the simple interests of self-preservation, as a means of keeping endangered sanity afloat. For the distinctions and dignities of that period were real too, just as uncontrovertible a contribution to her knowledge of men and of things, just as vital an element in her

experience, as chaos let loose on her now. The one in no degree invalidated the truth or actuality of the other.

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But to keep this in mind, to remember it all the time, while imagination galloped with fever brought on by chill and exposure, and reason wandered, losing touch with plain commonsense through the moral shock she had sustained, was difficult to the point of impossibility. She needed a witness, visible and material, to the fact of those former happier conditions; and found it, quaintly enough, in the untidy person and humorous, quarrelsome, brick-dust coloured face—as much of the said face, that is, as was discoverable under the thick stiff growth of sandy hair surrounding and invading it—of the Irish doctor, as he sat by her bed, ministered to and soothed her with reverent and whimsical delicacy.

As long as he was there, her room retained its normal, pleasant and dainty aspect. All Damaris' little personal effects and treasures adorning dressing and writing-tables, the photographs and ornaments upon the mantelshelf, her books, the prints and pictures upon the walls—even the white dimity curtains and covers, trellised with small faded pink and blue roses—seemed to smile upon her, kindly and confiding. They wanted to be nice, to console and encourage her—McCabe holding them in place and in active good-will towards her, somehow, with his large freckled, hairy-backed hands. But let him go from the room, let him leave her, and they turned wicked, behaving as they had behaved throughout the past rather dreadful night and adding to the general chaos by tormenting tricks and distortions of their own.

The beloved photographs of her father, in particular, were cruel. They grew inordinately large, stepped out of their frames, and stalked to and fro in troops and companies. The charcoal drawing of him—done last year by that fine artist, James Colthurst, as a study for the portrait he was to paint—hanging between the two western windows, at right angles to her bed where she could always see it, proved the worst offender. It did not take the floor, it is true, but remained in its frame upon the wall. Yet it too came alive, and looked full at her, compelling her attention, dominating, commanding her; while, slowly, deliberately it changed, the features slightly losing their accentuation, growing youthful, softer in outline, the long drooping moustache giving place to a close-cut beard. The eyes alone stayed the same, steady, luminous, a living silence in them at once formidable and strangely sad. Finally—and this the poor child found indescribably agitating and even horrible—their silence was broken by a question. For they asked what she, Damaris, meant to say, meant to do, when he—her father, the all-powerful Commissioner Sahib of her babyhood's faith and devotion—came home here, came back?

Yet whose eyes, after all, were they which thus asked? Was it not, rather the younger man, the bearded one, who claimed, and of right, an answer to that question? And upon Damaris it now dawned that these two, distinct yet interchangeable personalities —imprisoned, as by some evil magic in one picture—were in opposition, in violent and impious conflict, which conflict she was called upon, yet was powerless, to avert or to assuage.

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Not once but many times—since the transformation was persistently recurrent—the girl turned her face to the wall to gain relief from the sight of it and the demand it so fearfully embodied, pressing her dry lips together lest any word should escape them. For the whole matter, as she understood it was secret, sacred too as it was agonizing. No one must guess what lay at the root of her present suffering—not even comfortable devoted Mary, nor that invaluable lifebelt, Dr. McCabe. She held the honour of both those conflicting interchangeable personalities in her hands; and, whether she were strong enough to adjust their differences or not, she must in no wise betray either of them. The latent motherhood in her cried out to protect and to shield them both, to spare them both. For in this stage of the affair, while the hallucinations of deadly fever—in a sense mercifully—confused her, its grosser aspects did not present themselves to her mind. She wandered through mazes, painful enough to tread; but far removed from the ugliness of vulgar scandal. That her sacred secret, for instance, might be no more than a *secret de Polichinelle* suspected by many, did not, so far, occur to her.

Believing it to be her exclusive property, therefore, she, inspired by tender cunning, strove manfully to keep it so. To that end she made play with the purely physical miseries of her indisposition.—With shivering fits and scorching flushes, cold aching limbs and burning, aching head. With the manifold distractions of errant blood which, leaving her heart empty as a turned-down glass, drummed in her ears and throbbed behind her eyeballs. These discomforts were severely real enough, in all conscience, to excuse her for being self-occupied and a trifle selfish; to justify a blank refusal to receive Theresa Bilson, or attempt to retail and discuss the events of yesterday. All she craved was quiet, to be left alone, to lie silent in the quiet light of the covered grey day.

In the earlier hours of it, silver rain showers travelled across the sea to spend themselves, tearfully, against the panes of her bedroom windows. But towards evening the cloud lifted, revealing a watery sunset, spread in timid reds and yellows behind Stone Horse Head and the curving coast-line beyond, away to Stourmouth and Barryport. The faint tentative colours struck in long glinting shafts between the trunks and branches of the stone pines and Scotch firs in the so-called Wilderness—a strip of uncultivated land within the confines of the grounds dividing the gardens from the open Warren to the West—and gleamed in at the windows, faintly dyeing the dimity hangings and embroidered linen counterpane of Damaris' bed.

Throughout the afternoon she had been less restless. So that Mary Fisher, judging her to be fairly asleep, some five minutes earlier had folded her needlework together, and, leaving the chair where she sat sewing, went softly from the room.

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But that brightening of sunset disturbed Damaris, bringing her slowly awake. For a time she lay watching, though but half consciously the tinted radiance as—the trees now stirred by a little wind drawing out of the sunset—it shifted and flitted over the white surfaces. At first it pleased her idle fancy. But presently distressed her, as too thin, too chill, too restlessly unsubstantial, the veriest chippering ghost of colour and of light. It affected her with a desolating sadness as of failure; of great designs richly attempted but petering out into a pitiful nothingness; of love which aped and mimicked, being drained of all purpose and splendour of hot blood; of partings whose sorrow had lost its savour, yet which masqueraded in showy crape for a heart-break long grown stale and obsolete.

Her temperature rushed up; and she threw off the bedclothes, raising herself on her elbow, while the shafts of thin brightness wavered fitfully. Through them she saw the photographs of her father step out of their frames again, and growing very tall and spare, stalk to and fro. Other figures joined them—those of women. Her poor dear Nannie, in the plain quaker-grey cotton gown and black silk apron she used to wear, even through the breathless hot-weather days, at the Sultan-i-bagh long ago. And Henrietta Pereira, too, composed and delicately sprightly, arrayed in full flounced muslins and fine laces with an exquisiteness of high feminine grace and refinement which had enthralled her baby soul and senses, and, which held her captive by their charm even yet. A handsome, high-coloured full-breasted, Eurasian girl, whom she but dimly recollected, was there as well. And with these another—carrying very certainly no hint of things oriental about her—an English woman and of the people, in dull homely clothing, grave of aspect and of bearing; yet behind whose statuesque and sternly patient beauty a great flame seemed to quiver, offering sharp enough contrast to the frail glintings of the rain-washed sunset amid which she, just now, moved.

At sight of the last comer, Damaris started up, tense with wonder and excitement, since she knew—somehow—this final visitant belonged not to the past so much as to the present, that her power was unexhausted and would go forward to the shaping of the coming years. Which knowledge drew confirmation from what immediately followed. For, as by almost imperceptible degrees the brightness faded in the west, the figures, so mysteriously peopling the room, faded out also, until only the woman in homely garments was left. By her side stood the charcoal drawing of Sir Charles Verity from off the wall—or seemed to do so, for almost at once, Damaris saw that dreaded interchange of personality again take place. Saw the strongly marked features soften in outline, the face grow bearded yet younger by full thirty years.

Both the woman and the young man looked searchingly at her; and in the eyes of both she read the same question—what did she mean to do, what to say, when her father, the object of her adoration, came home to her, came back to Deadham Hard?

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“I will do right,” she cried out loud to them in answer, “Only trust me. I am so tired and it is all so difficult to believe and to understand. But I am trying to understand. I shall understand, if you will give me time and not hurry me. And, when I understand, indeed, indeed, you may trust me, whatever it costs, to do right.”

Just then Mary opened the door, entering quickly, and behind her came Dr. McCabe, to find Damaris talking, talking wildly, sitting up, parched and vivid with fever, in the disordered bed.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING HOW TWO PERSONS, OF VERY DIFFERENT MORAL CALIBRE, WERE COMPELLED TO WEAR THE FLOWER OF HUMILIATION IN THEIR RESPECTIVE BUTTONHOLES

Cross-country connections by rail were not easy to make, with the consequence that Sir Charles Verity,—Hordle, gun-cases, bags and portmanteaux, in attendance—did not reach The Hard until close upon midnight.

Hearing the brougham at last drive up, Theresa Bilson felt rapturously fluttered. Her course had been notably empty of situations and of adventure; drama, as in the case of so many ladies of her profession—the pages of fiction notwithstanding—conspicuously cold-shouldering and giving her the go-by. Now, drama, and that of richest quality might perhaps—for she admitted the existence of awkward conjunctions—be said to batter at her door. She thought of the Miss Minetts, her ever-willing audience. She thought also—as so frequently during the last, in some respects, extremely unsatisfactory twenty-four hours—of Mr. Rochester and of Jane Eyre. Not that she ranged herself with Jane socially or as to scholastic attainments. In both these, as in natural refinement, propriety and niceness of ideas, she reckoned herself easily to surpass that much canvassed heroine. The flavour of the evangelical charity-school adhered—-incontestably it adhered, and that to Jane’s disadvantage. No extravagance of Protestantism or of applied philanthropy, thank heaven, clouded Theresa’s early record. The genius of Tractarianism had rocked her cradle, and subsequently ruled her studies with a narrowly complacent pedantry all its own. Nevertheless in moments of expansion, such as the present, she felt the parallel between her own case and that of Jane did, in certain directions, romantically hold. Fortified by thought of the Miss Minetts’ agitated interest in all which might befall her, she indulged in imaginary conversations with that great proconsul, her employer—the theme of which, purged of lyrical redundancies, reduced itself to the somewhat crude announcement that “your daughter, yes, may, alas, not impossibly be taken from you; but I, Theresa, still remain.”

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When, however, a summons to the presence of the said employer actually reached her, the bounce born of imaginary conversations, showed a tendency, as is its habit, basely to desert her and soak clean away. She had promised herself a little scene, full of respectful solicitude, of sympathy discreetly offered and graciously accepted, a drawing together through the workings of mutual anxiety leading on to closer intercourse, her own breast, to put it pictorially, that on which the stricken parent should eventually and gratefully lean. But in all this she was disappointed, for Sir Charles did not linger over preliminaries. He came straight and unceremoniously to the point; and that with so cold and lofty a manner that, although flutterings remained, they parted company with all and any emotions even remotely allied to rapture.

Charles Verity stood motionless before the fire-place in the long sitting-room. He still wore a heavy frieze travelling coat, the fronts of it hanging open. His shoulders were a trifle humped up and his head bent, as he looked down at the black and buff of the tiger skin at his feet. When Theresa approached with her jerky consequential little walk—-pinkly self-conscious behind her gold-rimmed glasses—he glanced at her, revealing a fiercely careworn countenance, but made no movement to shake hands with or otherwise greet her. This omission she hardly noticed, already growing abject before his magnificence—for thus did his appearance impress her—which, while claiming her enthusiastic admiration, enjoined humility rather than the sentimental expansions in which her imaginary conversations had so conspicuously abounded.

“I have seen Dr. McCabe,” he began. “His report of Damaris’ condition is very far from reassuring. He tells me her illness presents peculiar symptoms, and is grave out of all proportion to its apparent cause. This makes me extremely uneasy. It is impossible to question her at present. She must be spared all exertion and agitation. I have not attempted to see her yet.”

He paused, while anger towards her ex-pupil waxed warm in Theresa once again. For the pause was eloquent, as his voice had been when speaking about his daughter, of a depth of underlying tenderness which filled his hearer with envy.

“I must therefore ask you, Miss Bilson,” he presently went on, “to give me a detailed account of all that took place yesterday. It is important I should know exactly what occurred.”

Whereat Theresa, perceiving pitfalls alike in statement and in suppression of fact, hesitated and gobbled to the near neighbourhood of positive incoherence, while admitting, and trying to avoid admitting, how inconveniently ignorant of precise details she herself was.

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“Perhaps I erred in not more firmly insisting upon an immediate enquiry,” she said. “But, at the time, alarm appeared so totally uncalled for. I assumed, from what was told me, and from my knowledge of the strength of Damaris’ constitution, that a night’s rest would fully restore her to her usual robust state of health, and so deferred my enquiry. The servants were excited and upset, so I felt their account might be misleading—all they said was so confused, so far from explicit. My position was most difficult, Sir Charles,” she assured him and incidentally, also, assured herself. “I encountered most trying opposition, which made me feel it would be wiser to wait until this morning. By then, I hoped, the maids would have had time to recollect themselves and recollect what is becoming towards their superiors in the way of obedience and respect.”

Charles Verity threw back his head with a movement of impatience, and looked down at her from under his eyelids—in effect weary and a little insolent.

“We seem to be at cross purposes, Miss Bilson,” he said. “You do not, I think quite follow my question. I did not ask for the servants’ account of the events of yesterday—-whatever those events may have been—but for your own.”

“Ah! it is so unfortunate, so exceedingly unfortunate,” Theresa broke out, literally wringing her hands, “but a contingency, an accident, which I could not possibly have foreseen—I cannot but blame Damaris, Sir Charles”—

“Indeed?” he said.

“No, truly I cannot but blame her for wilfulness. If she had consented—as I so affectionately urged—to join the choir treat to Harchester, this painful incident would have been spared us.”

“Am I to understand that you went to Harchester, leaving my daughter here alone?”

“Her going would have given so much pleasure in the parish,” Theresa pursued, dodging the question with the ingenuity of one who scents mortal danger. “Her refusal would, I knew, cause sincere disappointment. I could not bring myself to accentuate that disappointment. Not that I, of course, am of any importance save as coming from this house, as—as—in some degree your delegate, Sir Charles.”

“Indeed?” he said.

“Yes, indeed,” Theresa almost hysterically repeated.

For here—if anywhere—was her chance, as she recognized. Never again might she be thus near to him, alone with him—the normal routine made it wholly improbable.—And at midnight too. For the unaccustomed lateness of the hour undoubtedly added to her ferment, provoking in her obscure and novel hopes and hungers. Hence she blindly and—her action viewed from a certain angle—quite heroically precipitated herself.

Heroically, because the odds were hopelessly adverse, her equipment, whether of natural or artificial, being so conspicuously slender. Her attempt had no backing in play of feature, felicity of gesture, grace of diction. The commonest little actress that ever daubed her skin with grease-paint, would have the advantage of Theresa in the thousand and one arts by which, from everlasting, woman has limed twigs for the catching of man. Her very virtues—respectability, learning, all the proprieties of her narrowly virtuous little life—counted for so much against her in the present supreme moment of her self-invented romance.

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“You hardly, I dare say,” she pursued—“how should you after the commanding positions you have occupied?—appreciate the feelings of the inhabitants of this quiet country parish towards you. But they have a lively sense, believe me, of the honour you confer upon them, all and severally—I am speaking of the educated classes in particular, of course—by residing among them. They admire and reverence you so much, so genuinely; and they have extended great kindness to me as a member of your household. How can I be indifferent to it? I am thankful, Sir Charles, I am grateful—the more so that I have the happiness of knowing I owe the consideration with which I am treated, in Deadham, entirely to you.—Yes, yes,” she cried in rising exaltation, “I do not deny that I went to Harchester yesterday—went—Dr. Horniblow thus expressed it when inviting me—’as representing The Hard.’ I was away when Damaris made this ill-judged excursion across the river to the Bar. Had she confided her intention to me, I should have used my authority and forbade her. But recently we have not been, I grieve to say, on altogether satisfactory terms, and our parting yesterday was constrained, I am afraid.”

Theresa blushed and swallowed. Fortunately her sense of humour was limited; but, even so, she could not but be aware of a dangerous decline. Not only of bathos, but of vulgar bathos, from which gentility revolted, must she be the exponent, thanks to Damaris’ indiscretion!

“You require me to give you the details, Sir Charles,” she resumed, “and although it is both embarrassing and repugnant to me to do so, I obey. I fear Damaris so far forgot herself—forgot I mean what is due to her age and position—as to remove her shoes and stockings and paddle in the sea—a most unsuitable and childish occupation. While she was thus engaged her things—her shoes and stockings—appear to have been stolen. In any case she was unable to find them when tired of the amusement she came up on to the beach. Moreover she was caught in the rain. And I deeply regret to tell you—but I merely repeat what I learned from Mary Fisher and Mrs. Cooper when I returned—it was not till after dark, when the maids had become so alarmed that they despatched Tolling and Alfred to search for her, that Damaris landed from a boat at the breakwater, having been brought down the river—by—by”—

Throughout the earlier portion of her recital Charles Verity stood in the same place and same attitude staring down at the tiger skin. Twice or thrice only he raised his eyes, looking at the speaker with a flash of arrogant interrogation.

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Upon one, even but moderately, versed in the secular arts of twig-liming, such flashes would have acted as an effective warning and deterrent. Not so upon Theresa. She barely noticed them, as blindly heroic, she pounded along leading her piteous forlorn hope. Her chance—her unique chance, in nowise to be missed—and, still more, those obscure hungers, fed by the excitement of this midnight *tete-a-tete,* rushed her forward upon the abyss; while at every sputtering sentence, whether of adulation, misplaced prudery, or thinly veiled animosity towards Damaris, she became more tedious, more frankly intolerable and ridiculous to him whose favour she so desperately sought. Under less anxious circumstances Charles Verity might have been contemptuously amused at this exhibition of futile ardour. Now it exasperated him. Yet he waited, in rather cruel patience. Presently he would demolish her, if to do so appeared worth the trouble. Meanwhile she should have her say, since incidentally he might learn something from it bearing upon the cause of Damaris' illness.

But now, when, at the climax of her narrative, Theresa—seized by a spasm of retrospective resentment and jealousy, the picture of the young man carrying the girl tenderly in his arms across the dusky lawns arising before her—choked and her voice cracked up into a bat-like squeaking, Charles Verity's self-imposed forbearance ran dry.

"I must remind you that neither my time nor capacity of listening are inexhaustible, Miss Bilson," he said to her. "May I ask you to be so good as to come to the point. By whom was Damaris rescued and brought home last night?"

"Ah! that is what I so deeply regret," Theresa quavered, still obstinately dense and struggling with the after convulsion of her choke. "I felt so shocked and annoyed on your account, Sir Charles, when the maids told me, knowing how you would disapprove such a—such an incident in connection with Damaris.—She was brought home, carried"—she paused—"carried indoors by the owner of that objectionable public-house on the island. He holds some position in the Mercantile Marine, I believe. I have seen him recently once or twice myself in the village—his name is Faircloth."

Theresa pursed up her lips as she finished speaking. The glasses of her gold pince-nez seemed to gleam aggressively in the lamp-light. The backs of the leather-bound volumes in the many book-cases gleamed also, but unaggressively, with the mellow sheen—as might fancifully be figured—of the ripe and tolerant wisdom their pages enshrined. The pearl-grey porcelain company of Chinese monsters, saints and godlings, ranged above them placid, mysteriously smiling, gleamed as well.

For a time, silence, along with these various gleamings, sensibly, even a little uncannily, held possession of the room. Then Charles Verity moved, stiffly, and for once awkwardly, all of a piece. Backed against the mantelshelf, throwing his right arm out along it sharply and heavily—careless of the safety of clock and of ornaments—as though overtaken by sudden weakness and seeking support.

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“Faircloth? Of course, his name is Faircloth.” he repeated absently. “Yes, of course.”

But whatever the nature of the weakness assailing him, it soon, apparently, passed. He stood upright, his face, perhaps, a shade more colourless and lean, but in expression fully as arrogant and formidably calm as before.

“Very well, Miss Bilson,” he began. “You have now given me all the information I require, so I need detain you no longer—save to say this.—You will, if you please, consider your engagement as my daughter’s companion terminated, concluded from to-night. You are free to make such arrangements as may suit you; and you will, I trust, pardon my adding that I shall be obliged by your making them without undue delay.”

“You do not mean,” Theresa broke out, after an interval of speechless amazement—“Sir Charles, you cannot mean that you dismiss me—that I am to leave The Hard—to—to go away?”

“I mean that I have no further occasion for your services.”

Theresa waved her arms as though playing some eccentric game of ball.

“You forget the servants, the conduct of the house, Damaris’ need of a chaperon, her still unfinished education—All are dependent upon me.”

“Hardly dependent,” he answered. “These things, I have reason to think, can safely be trusted to other hands, or be equally safely be left to take care of themselves.”

“But why do you repudiate me?” she cried again, rushing upon her fate in the bitterness of her distraction. “What have I done to deserve such harshness and humiliation?”

“I gave the most precious of my possessions—Damaris—into your keeping, and—and—well—we see the result. Is it not written large enough, in all conscience, for the most illiterate to read?—So you must depart, my dear Miss Bilson, and for everyone’s sake, the sooner the better. There can be no further discussion of the matter. Pray accept the fact that our interview is closed.”

But Theresa, now sensible that her chance was in act of being finally ravished away from her, fell—or rose—perhaps more truly the latter—into an extraordinary sincerity and primitiveness of emotion. She cast aside nothing less than her whole personal legend, cast aside every tradition and influence hitherto so strictly governing her conduct and her thought. Unluckily the physical envelope could not so readily be got rid of. Matter retained its original mould, and that one neither seductive nor poetic.

She went down upon her fat little knees, held her fat little hands aloft as in an impassioned spontaneity of worship.

“Sir Charles,” she prayed, while tears running down her full cheeks splashed upon her protuberant bosom—“Sir Charles”—

He looked at the funny, tubby, jaunty, would-be smart, kneeling figure.

“Oh! you inconceivably foolish woman,” he said and turned away.

Did more than that—walked out into the hall and to his own rooms, opening off the corridor. In the offices a bell tinkled. Theresa scrambled on to her feet, just as Hordle, in response to its summons, arrived at the sitting-room door.

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“Did you ring, Miss?” he asked grudgingly. Less than ever was she in favour with the servants’ hall to-night.

Past intelligible utterance, Theresa merely shook her head in reply. Made a return upon herself—began to instruct him to put out the lamps in the room. Remembered that now and henceforth the right to give orders in this house was no longer hers; and broke into sobbing, the sound of which her handkerchief pressed against her mouth quite failed to stifle.

About an hour later, having bathed and changed, Sir Charles Verity made his way upstairs. Upon the landing Dr. McCabe met him.

“Better,” he said, “thank the heavenly powers, decidedly better. Temperature appreciably lower, and the pulse more even. Oh! we’re on the road very handsomely to get top dog of the devil this bout, believe me, Sir Charles.”

“Then go to bed, my dear fellow,” the other answered. “I will take over the rest of the watch for you. You need not be afraid. I can be an admirable sick-nurse on occasion. And by the way, McCabe, something has come to my knowledge which in my opinion throws considerable light upon the symptoms that have puzzled you. Probably I shall be more sure of my facts before morning. I will explain to you later, if it should seem likely to be helpful to you in your treatment of the case. Just now, as I see it, the matter lies exclusively between me”—he smiled looking at his companion full and steadily—-“between me”—he repeated, “and my only child.”

All which upon the face of it might, surely, be voted encouraging enough. Yet:

“Should there be any that doubt the veritable existence of hell fire,” the doctor told himself, as he subsequently and thankfully pulled on his night-shirt, “to recover them, and in double quick time, of their heresy let ’em but look in my friend Verity’s eyes.”—-And he rounded off the sentence with an oath.

CHAPTER IX

AN EXPERIMENT IN BRIDGE-BUILDING OF WHICH TIME ALONE CAN FIX THE VALUES

Damaris lay on her side, her face turned to the wall. When Charles Verity, quietly crossing the room, sat down in an easy chair, so placed at the head of the half-tester bed as to be screened from it by the dimity curtains, she sighed and slightly shifted her position.

Leaning back, he crossed his legs and let his chin drop on his breast. He had barely glanced at her in passing, receiving a vague impression of the outline of her cheek, of

her neck, and shoulders, of her head, dark against the dim whiteness on which it rested, and the long dark stream of her hair spread loose across the pillows. He had no wish for recognition—not yet awhile. On the contrary, it was a relief to have time in which silently to get accustomed to her presence, to steep himself in the thought of her, before speech should define the new element intruded, as he believed, into his

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and her relation. Though little enough—too little, so said some of his critics—hampered by fear in any department, he consciously dreaded the smallest modification of that relation. Among the many dissatisfactions and bitternesses of life, it shone forth with a steady light of purity and sweetness, as a thing unspoiled, unbreathed on, even, by what is ignoble or base. And not the surface of it alone was thus free from all breath of defilement. It showed clear right through, as some gem of the purest water. To keep it thus inviolate, he had made sacrifices in the past neither easy nor inconsiderable to a man of his temperament and ambitions. Hence that its perfection should be now endangered was to him the more exquisitely hateful.

Upon the altar of that hatred, promptly without scruple he sacrificed the wretched Theresa. Most of us are so constituted that, at a certain pass, pleasure—of a sort—is to be derived from witnessing the anguish of a fellow creature. In all save the grossly degenerate that pleasure, however, is short-lived. Reflection follows, in which we cut to ourselves but a sorry figure. With Charles Verity, reflection began to follow before he had spent many minutes in Damaris' sick-room. For here the atmosphere was, at once, grave and tender, beautifully honest in its innocence of the things of the flesh.—The woman had been inconceivably foolish, from every point of view. If she had known, good heavens, if she had only known! But he inclined now to the more merciful view that, veritably, she didn't know; that her practical, even her theoretic, knowledge was insufficient for her to have had any clear design. It was just a blind push of starved animal instinct. Of course she must go. Her remaining in the house was in every way unpermissible; still he need not, perhaps, have been so cold-bloodedly precipitate with her.

Anyhow the thing was done—it was done—He raised his shoulders and making with his hands a graphic gesture of dismissal, let his chin drop on to his breast again.

For the East had left its mark on his attitude towards women with one exception—that of his daughter—Charles Verity, like most men, not requiring of himself to be too rigidly consistent. Hence Theresa, and all which pertained to her, even her follies, appeared to him of contemptibly small moment compared with the developments for which those follies might be held accidentally responsible. His mind returned to that main theme painfully. He envisaged it in all its bearings, not sparing himself. Suffered, and looked on at his own suffering with a stoicism somewhat sardonic.

Meanwhile Damaris slept. His nearness had not disturbed her, indeed he might rather suppose its effect beneficent. For her breathing grew even, just sweetly and restfully audible in the intervals of other sounds reaching him from out of doors.

The wind, drawing out of the sunset, freshened during the night. Now it blew wet and gustily from south-west, sighing through the pines and Scotch firs in the Wilderness. A strand of the yellow Banksia rose, trained against the house wall, breaking loose, scratched and tapped at the window-panes with anxious appealing little noises.

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Many years had elapsed since Charles Verity spent a night upstairs in this part of the house, and by degrees those outdoor sounds attracted his attention as intimately familiar. They carried him back to his boyhood, to the spacious dreams and projects of adolescence. He could remember just such gusty wet winds swishing through the trees, such petulant fingering of errant creepers upon the windows, when he stayed here during the holidays from school at Harchester, on furlough from his regiment, and, later, on long leave from India, during his wonderful little great-uncle's lifetime.

And his thought took a lighter and friendlier vein, recalling that polished, polite, encyclopedic minded and witty gentleman, who had lived to within a few months of his full century with a maximum of interest and entertainment to himself, and a minimum of injury or offence to others. To the last he retained his freshness of intellectual outlook, his insatiable yet discreet curiosity. Taking it as a whole, should his life be judged a singularly futile or singularly enviable one? Nothing feminine, save on strictly platonic lines, was recorded to have entered it at any period. Did that argue remarkable wisdom or defective courage, or some abnormal element in a composition otherwise deliciously mundane and human?

Charles had debated this often. Even as a boy it had puzzled him. As a young man he had held his own views on the subject, not without lasting effect. For one winter he had passed at The Hard, in the fine bodily health and vigour of his early thirties, this very lack of women's society contributed, by not unnatural reaction, to force the idea of woman hauntingly upon him—thereby making possible a strange and hidden love passage off the Dead Sea fruit of which he was in process of supping here to-night.

He moved, bent forward, setting his elbows on the two chair arms, closing his eyes as he listened, and leaning his forehead upon his raised hands. For in the plaintive voice of the moist, fitful southwesterly wind how, to his bearing, the buried, half-forgotten drama re-lived and reenacted itself!

It dated far back, to a period when his career was still undetermined, hedged about by doubts and uncertainties—before the magnificent and terrible years of the Mutiny brought him, not only fame and distinction, but a power of self-expression and of plain seeing.—Before, too, his not conspicuously happy marriage. Before the Bhutpur appointment tested and confirmed his reputation as a most able if most autocratic ruler. Before, finally, his term of service under the Ameer in Afghanistan—that extraordinary experience of alternate good and evil fortune in barbaric internecine warfare, the methods and sentiments of which represented a swing back of three or four centuries, Christianity, and the attitude of mind and conduct Christianity inculcates, no longer an even nominal factor, Mahomet, sword in hand, ruthlessly outriding Christ.

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He had done largely more than the average Englishman, of his age and station, towards the making of contemporary history. Yet it occurred to him now, sitting at Damaris' bedside, those intervening years of strenuous public activity, of soldiering and of administration, along with the honours reaped in them, had procured cynically less substantial result, cynically less ostensible remainder, than the brief and hidden intrigue which preceded them. They sank away as water spilt on sand—thus in his present pain he pictured it—leaving barely a trace. While that fugitive and unlawful indulgence of the flesh not only begot flesh, but spirit,—a living soul, henceforth and eternally to be numbered among the imperishable generations of the tragic and marvellous children of men.

Then, aware something stirred close to him, Charles Verity looked up sharply, turning his head; to find Damaris—raised on one elbow planted among the pillows—holding aside the dimity curtain and gazing wonderingly yet contentedly in his face.

"Commissioner Sahib," she said, softly, "I didn't know you'd come back. I've had horrid bad dreams and seemed to see you—many of you—walking about. The room was full of you, you over and over again; but not like yourself, frightening, not loving me, busy about something or somebody else. I didn't at all enjoy that.—But I am awake now, aren't I? I needn't be frightened any more; because you do love me, don't you—and this really is you, your very ownself?"

She put up her face to be kissed. But he, in obedience to an humility heretofore unfelt by and unknown to him, leaning sideways kissed the hand holding aside the curtain rather than the proffered lips.

"Yes, my darling, very surely it is me," he said. "Any multiplication of specimens is quite superfluous—a single example of the breed is enough, conceivably more than enough."

But to his distress, while he spoke, he saw the content die out of Damaris' expression and her eyes grow distended and startled. She glanced oddly at the hand he had just kissed and then at him again.

"It seems to me something must have happened which I can't exactly remember," she anxiously told him, sitting upright and leaving go the curtain which slipped back into place shutting off the arm-chair and its occupant. "Something real, I mean, not just bad dreams. I know I had to ask you about it, and yet I didn't want to ask you."

Charles Verity rose from his place, slowly walked the length of the room; and, presently returning, stood at the foot of the bed. Damaris still sat upright, her hands clasped, her hair hanging in a cloud about her to below the waist. The light was low and the shadow cast by the bed-curtain covered her. But, through it, he could still distinguish the startled anxiety of her great eyes as she pondered, trying to seize and hold some memory which escaped her. And he felt sick at heart, assured it could be but a matter of time before

she remembered; convinced now, moreover, what she would, to his shame and sorrow, remember in the end.

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The purity in which he delighted, and to which he so frequently and almost superstitiously had turned for refreshment and the safeguarding of all the finest instincts of his own very complex nature, would, although she remembered, remain essentially intact. But, even so, the surface of it must be, as he apprehended, henceforth in some sort dimmed, and that by the breath of his own long ago misdoing. The revelation of passion and of sex, being practically and thus intimately forced home on her, the transparent innocence of childhood must inevitably pass away from her; and, through that same passing she would consciously go forward, embracing the privileges and the manifold burdens, the physical and emotional needs and aspirations of a grown woman. The woman might, would—such was his firm belief—prove a glorious creature. But it was not she whom he wanted. Her development, in proportion as it was rich and complete, led her away from and made her independent of him.—No, it wasn't she, but the child whom he wanted. And, standing at the foot of Damaris' bed, he knew, with a cruel certainty, he was there just simply to watch the child die.

Yes, it was a mere matter of time. Sooner or later she would put a leading question—-her methods being bravely candid and direct. Of course, it was open to him to meet that question with blank denial, open to him to lie—as is the practice of the world when such damnably awkward situations come along.—A solution having, in the present case, the specious argument behind it that in so doing he would spare her, save her pain, in addition to the obvious one that he would save his own skin. Moreover, if he lied he could trust Damaris' loyalty. Whether she believed it or not, she would accept his answer as final. No further question upon the subject would ever pass her lips. The temptation was definite and great. For might not the lie, if he could stomach his disgust at telling it, even serve to prolong the life of the child? Should he not sell his honour to save his honour—if it came to that?

Thus he debated, his nature battling with itself, while at that battle he stoically, for a time, looked on. But when, at last, the climax was reached, and Damaris commenced to speak, stoicism dragged anchor. For he could conquer neither his disgust nor his sorrow, could find courage neither for his denial nor for watching the child die. Leaving the foot of the bed, he went and sat down in the arm-chair, where the dimity curtain screened Damaris from his, and him from Damaris' sight.

"Commissioner Sahib," she began, her voice grave and low, "it has come back to me—-the thing I had to ask you, but it is very hard to say. If it makes you angry, please try to forgive me—because it does hurt me to ask you. It hurts me through and through. Only I can't speak of it. I oughtn't just to leave it. To leave it would be wrong—wrong by you."

"Very well, my darling, ask me then," he said, a little hoarsely.

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“You have heard about my being out on the Bar and—and all that?”

“Yes,” he said, “I have heard.”

“Captain Faircloth, who found me and brought me home, told me something.”

Damaris’ voice broke into tones of imploring tenderness.

“I love you, Commissioner Sahib, you know how I love you—but—but is what Captain Faircloth told me true?”

Whereupon temptation surged up anew, inviting, inciting Charles Verity to lie—dressing up that lie in the cloak of most excellent charity, of veritable duty towards Damaris’ fine courage and her precious innocence. And he hedged, keeping open, if only for a few minutes longer, the way of escape.

“How can I answer until I know what he did tell you?” he took her up, at last, almost coldly.

“That he is your son—is my brother,” Damaris said.

Even at this pass, Charles Verity waited before finally committing himself, thereby unwittingly giving sentiment—in the shape of the Powers of the Air—the chance to take a rather unfairly extensive hand in the game.

For while he thus waited, he could not but be aware, through the tense silence otherwise reigning in the room, of the tap and scratch of the rose-spray upon the window-panes; of the swish of the moist gusty wind sweeping from across the salt-marsh and mud-flats of the Haven—from the black cottages, too, beyond the warren, gathered, as somewhat sinister boon companions, about the bleak, grey stone-built Inn. And this served to transfix his consciousness with visions of what once had been—he knowing so exactly how it would all sound, all look out there, the wistful desolation, the penetrating appeal bred of the inherent sadness of the place on a wild autumn night such as this.

“Yes,” he said at last, and putting a great constraint upon himself he spoke calmly, without sign of emotion. “What the young man told is true, Damaris, perfectly true.”

“I—I thought so,” she answered back, gravely. “Though I didn’t understand”—And, after a moment’s pause, with a certain hopelessness of resignation—“Though I don’t understand even now.”

In her utterance Charles Verity so distinctly heard the last words of the—to him—dying child, that, smitten with raging bitterness of grief and of regret, he said:

“Nevertheless it is, in my opinion, disgraceful, abominable, that he should have made the occasion, or, to put the matter at its best, have taken advantage of the occasion, when you were alone and, in a sense, at his mercy, to tell you this most unhappy thing.”

“No, no,” Damaris cried, in her generous eagerness catching back the curtain and looking at him nobly unselfconscious, nobly zealous to defend and to set right. “You mustn’t think that. He didn’t start with any intention of telling me. He fancied I might have lost my way among the sand-hills, that I might be frightened or get some harm, and so came straight to look for me, and take care of me. He was very beautifully kind; and I felt beautifully safe with him—safe in the same way I feel safe with you, almost.”

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Her mouth was soft, her eyes alight—dangerously alight now, for her pulse had quickened. As she pleaded and protested her temperature raced up.

“It happened later,” she went on, “when we were in the boat, and it was partly my fault. He wrapped my feet up in his coat. They were very cold. And he believed I was asleep because I didn’t speak or thank him. I was so tired, and everything seemed so strange. I couldn’t rouse myself somehow to speak. And as he wrapped them in his coat, he kissed my feet, thinking I shouldn’t know. But I wasn’t asleep, and it displeased me. I felt angry, just as you felt when you condemned him just now.”

“Ah! as I felt just now!” he commented, closing his eyes and, just perceptibly, bowing his head.

“Yes, Commissioner Sahib, as you felt just now—but as, please you mustn’t go on feeling.—What he had done seemed to me treacherous; and it pained as well as displeased me. But in all that I was unjust and mistaken.—And it was then, because he saw he’d pained me, displeased and made me angry, that he told me in self-defence—told me to show he wasn’t treacherous, but had the right—a right no one else in all the world has over me except yourself.”

“And you believed this young man, you forgave his audacity, and admitted his right?” Sir Charles said.

He leaned back in the angle of the chair, away from her, smiling as he spoke—a smile which both bade farewell and mocked at the sharpness and futility of the grief which that farewell brought with it. For this was a grown woman who pleaded with him surely, acting as advocate? A child, compelled to treat such controversial, such debatable matters at all, would have done so to a different rhythm, in a different spirit.

“Forgave him? But after just the first, when, I had time to at all think of it,” Damaris answered with rather desperate bravery, “I couldn’t see there was anything for me to forgive. It was the other way about. For haven’t I so much which he might very well feel belonged, or should have belonged, to him?”

“You cut deep, my dear,” Sir Charles said quietly.

Still holding back the curtain with one hand, Damaris flung herself over upon her face. She would not give way, she would not cry, but her soul was in travail. These words, as coming from her father, were anguish to her. She could look at him no longer, and lying outstretched thus, the lines of her gracious body, moulded by the embroidered linen quilt, quivered from head to heel. Still that travail of soul should bring forth fruit. She would not give in, cost what anguish it might, till all was said.

“I only want to do what is right,” she cried, her voice half stifled by the pillows. “You know, surely you know, how I love you, Commissioner Sahib, from morning till night and round till morning again, always and above all, ever since I can first remember. But this is different to anything that has ever happened to me before, and it wouldn’t be right not to speak about it. It would be there all the time, and it would creep in between us—-between you and me—and interfere in all my thinking about you.”

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“It may very well do that in any case, my dear,” he said.

“No—no,” Damaris answered hotly, “not if I do right now—right by both. For you must not entertain wrong ideas about him—about Captain Faircloth I mean. You must not suppose he said a word about my having what might, or ought to be his. He couldn’t do so. He isn’t the least that sort of person. He took pains to make me understand—I couldn’t think why at first, it seemed a little like boasting—that he is quite well off and that he’s very proud of his profession. He doesn’t want anything from—from us. Oh! no,” she cried, “no.”

And, in her excitement, Damaris raised herself, from the small of her back, resting on her elbows, sphinx-like in posture, her hands and arms—from the elbows—stretched out in front of her across the pillows. Her face was flushed, her eyes blazed. There was storm and vehemence in her young beauty.

“No—he’s too much like you, you yourself, Commissioner Sahib, to want anything, to accept anything from other people. He means to act for himself, and make people and things obey him, just as you yourself do. And,” she went on, with a daring surely not a little magnificent under the circumstances—“he told me he loved life too well to care very much how he came by it to begin with.”

Damaris folded her arms, let her head sink on them as she finished speaking, and lay flat thus, her face hidden, while she breathed short and raspingly, struggling to control the after violence of her emotion.

The curtain hung straight. The wind took up its desolate chant again. And Sir Charles Verity sat back in the angle of the arm-chair, motionless, and, for the present, speechless.

In truth he was greatly moved, stirred to the deep places of perception, and of conscience also. For this death of childhood and birth of womanhood undoubtedly presented a rare and telling spectacle, which, even while it rent him, in some aspects enraged and mortified him, he still appreciated. He found, indeed, a strangely vital, if somewhat cruel, satisfaction in looking on at it—a satisfaction fed, on its more humane and human side, by the testimony to the worth of the unknown son by the so well-beloved daughter. Respecting himself he might have cause for shame; but respecting these two beings for whose existence—whether born in wedlock or out of it—he was responsible, he had no cause for shame. In his first knowledge of them as seen together, they showed strong, generous, sure of purpose, a glamour of high romance in their adventitious meeting and companionship.

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This was the first, the unworldly and perhaps deepest view of the matter. In it Charles Verity allowed himself to rest, inactive for a space. That there were, not one, but many other views of the said matter, very differently attuned and coloured he was perfectly well aware. Soon these would leap on him, and that with an ugly clamour which he consciously turned from in repulsion and weary disgust. For he was very tired, as he now realized. The anxiety endured during his tedious cross-country journey, the distasteful tragic-comedy of the *scene de seduction* so artlessly made him by unlucky Theresa Bilsen, followed by this prolonged vigil; lastly the very real tragedy—for such it in great measure remained and must remain—of his interview with Damaris and the re-living of long buried drama that interview entailed, left him mentally and physically spent. He fell away into meditation, mournful as it was indefinite, while the classic lament of another age and race formed itself silently upon his lips.

"*Comprehenderunt me iniquitates meae, et non potui ut viderem. Multiplicatae sunt super capillos capitis mei; et cor meum dereliquit me*," he quoted, in the plenitude of his existing discouragement.

At his time of life, he told himself, earth held no future; and in heaven—as the Churches figure it—namely, an adjustment of the balance on the other side death, his belief was of the smallest. A sea of uncertainty, vast, limitless, laps the shores of the meagre island of the present—which is all we actually have to our count. Faith is a gift.—You possess it, or you possess it not; yet without it—

But here his attention was caught, and brought home to that very present, by a movement upon the bed and Damaris' voice, asking tremulously:

"Commissioner Sahib are you angry, too angry to speak to me?"

Whereupon Charles Verity got up, gathered back the curtain stuffing it in between the head board and the wall, and stood, tall, spare, yet graceful, looking down at her. Whether from fatigue or from emotion, his expression was softer, his face less keen than usual, and the likeness between him and Darcy Faircloth proportionately and notably great.

"No, my dear," he said, "why should I be angry? What conceivable right have I to be angry? As a man sows so does he reap. I only reap to-day what I sowed eight or nine-and-twenty years ago—a crop largely composed of tares, though among those tares I do find some modicum of wheat. Upon that modest provision of wheat I must make shift to subsist with the best grace I may. No, don't cry, my darling. It is useless. Tears never yet altered facts. You will only do yourself harm, and put a crown to my self-reproach."

He sat down on the side of the bed, taking her hand, holding and coaxing it.

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“Only let there be no doubt or suspicion on your part, my dear,” he went on. “As you have travelled so far along this dolorous way, take courage and travel a little farther. To stop, to turn back, is only to leave your mind open to all manner of imaginations worse very likely than the truth. I will be quite plain with you. This episode—which I do not attempt to explain or excuse—took place, and ended, several years before I first met your mother. And it ended absolutely. Never, by either written or spoken word, have I held any communication with Lesbia Faircloth since. Never have I attempted to see her—this in the interests of her reputation every bit as much as in those of my own. For her station in life she was a woman of remarkable qualities and character. She had made an ugly, a repulsive marriage, and she was childless.—More than this it is not seemly I should tell you.”

Charles Verity waited a minute or so. He still coaxed Damaris’ hand, calmly, soothingly. And she lay very still watching him; but with half-closed eyes, striving to prevent the tears which asked so persistently to be shed. For her heart went out to him in a new and over-flowing tenderness, in an exalted pity almost maternal. Never had she felt him more attractive, more, in a sense, royally lovable than in this hour of weariness, of moral nakedness, and humiliation.

“Not until I had rejoined my regiment in India,” he presently continued, in the same low even tones, “did I hear of the birth of her son. I have never seen him—or made enquiries regarding him. I meant to let the dead bury its dead in this matter. For everyone concerned it seemed best and wisest so. Therefore all you have told me to-night comes as news to me—and in some respects as good news. For I gather I have no reason to be ashamed of this young man—which on your account, even more than on my own, is so much clear gain.—But I oughtn’t to have brought you here to live at Deadham. I ought to have taken the possibility of some accidental revelation, such as the present one, into serious account and saved you from that. To expose you, however remotely, to the risk was both callous and stupid on my part. I own I have a strong sentiment for this house. It seemed natural and restful to return to it—the only house to call a home, I have ever had. And so much has happened during the last eight or nine-and-twenty years, to occupy my mind, that I had grown indifferent and had practically forgotten the risks. This was selfish, self-indulgent, lacking in consideration and reverence towards you, towards your peace of mind, your innocence.—And for it, my darling, I beg your forgiveness.”

Damaris sat up in the bed, raised her face to be kissed.

“No—no,” she implored him, “don’t say that. I can’t bear to have you say it—to have you speak as if you had been, could ever be anything but beautiful and perfect towards me. I can’t have you, not even for a little minute, step down, from the high place, which is your own, and talk of forgiveness. It hurts me.—I begin to understand that your world, a man’s world, is different to my world—the world, I mean, in which I have been brought

up. I know what is right for myself—but it would be silly to believe mine is the only rightness”—

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“Ah!” Charles Verity murmured, under his breath, “alas! for the child that is dead.”

And leaning forward he kissed her lips.

CHAPTER X

TELLING HOW MISS FELICIA VERITY UNSUCCESSFULLY ATTEMPTED A RESCUE

With the assistance of the Miss Minetts, reinforced by a bribe of five shillings, Theresa Bilson procured a boy on a bicycle, early the following morning, to convey a note the twelve miles to Paulton Lacy—Mr. Augustus Cowden’s fine Georgian mansion, situate just within the Southern boundaries of Arnewood Forest. Miss Felicia Verity, to whom the note was addressed, still enjoyed the hospitality of her sister and brother-in-law; but this, as Mrs. Cowden gave her roundly to understand, must not be taken to include erratic demands upon the stables. If she required unexpectedly to visit her brother or her niece at Deadham Hard, she must contrive to do so by train, and by such hired conveyances as the wayside station of Paulton Halt at this end of her journey, and of Marychurch at the other, might be equal to supplying.

“In my opinion, Felicia, it is quite ridiculous you should attempt to go there at all to-day,” Mrs. Cowden, giving over for the moment her study of the *Morning Post,* commandingly told her. “If Damaris has got a cold in her head through some imprudence, and if Charles has called Miss Bilson over the coals for not being more strict with her, that really is no reason why Augustus’ and my plans for the afternoon should be set aside or why you should be out in the rain for hours with your rheumatism. I shall not even mention the subject to Augustus. We arranged to drive over to Napworth for tea, and I never let anything interfere with my engagements to the Bulparcs as you know. I encourage Augustus to see as much as possible of his own people.—I have no doubt in my own mind that the account of Damaris’ illness is absurdly exaggerated. You know how Charles spoils her! She has very much too much freedom; and little Miss Bilson, though well-meaning, is incapable of coping with a headstrong girl like Damaris. She ought—Damaris ought I mean—to have been sent to a finishing school for another year at least. She might then have found her level. If Charles had consulted me, or shown the least willingness to accept my advice, I should have insisted upon the finishing school. It would have been immensely to Damaris’ advantage. I have known all along that the haphazard methods of her education were bound to have deplorable results.—-But look here, Felicia, if you really intend to go on this wild-goose-chase notwithstanding the rain, let the boy who brought the note order Davis’ fly for you on his way back. He passes Paulton Halt. I shall not expect you before dinner to-night. Now that is settled.”

With which she returned to her interrupted study of the *Morning Post*.

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The above pronouncement while rendering Felicia Verity somewhat uneasy, in nowise turned her from her purpose. Her powers of sympathy were as unlimited as they were confused and, too often, ineffective. Forever she ran after the tribulations of her fellow creatures, pouring forth on them treasures of eager sympathy, but without discrimination as to whether the said tribulations were in fact trivial or profound, deserving or deserved. That anyone under any circumstances, should suffer, be uncomfortable or unhappy, filled her with solicitude. The loss of an eyelash, the loss of a fortune, the loss of the hope of a lifetime equally ranked. Illness and disease appealed to her in hardly less degree than unfortunate affairs of the heart. She practised the detection of extenuating circumstances as one might practise a fine art. She wallowed in sentiment, in short; but that with such native good-breeding and singleness of mind, as went far to redeem the said wallowings from morbidity or other offence. Her friends and acquaintances loved her, quite unconscionably made use of her, secretly laughed at her, grew weary of her, declared that “of such are the Kingdom of Heaven;” and, having successfully exploited her, turned with relief to the society of persons frankly belonging to the kingdoms of earth. Men petted but did not propose to her; affected to confide in her, but carefully withheld the heart of their confessions. Tall, thin, gently hurried and bird-like, she yet bore a quaint, almost mirthful, resemblance to her brother, Sir Charles Verity. Such was the lady who responded, in a spirit of liveliest charity, to Theresa’s wildly waved flag of distress.

By the time Miss Verity reached Marychurch the rain amounted to a veritable downpour. Driven by the southwesterly wind, it swept in sheets over the low-lying country, the pallid waters, drab mud-flats, dingy grey-green salt-marsh, and rusty brown reed-beds of the estuary. The dusty road, running alongside this last through the hamlets of Horny Cross and Lampit, grew hourly deeper in gritty mud. Beyond question summer and all its dear delights were departed and the chill mournfulness of autumn reigned in their stead.

With the surrounding mournfulness, Miss Verity’s simple, yet devious, mind played not ungratefully. For it seemed to her to harmonize with the true inwardness of her mission, offering a sympathetic background to the news of her niece’s indisposition and the signals of distress flown by her little *protegee*, Theresa Bilson. The note addressed to her by the latter was couched in mysterious and ambiguous phrases, the purport of which she failed to grasp. Theresa’s handwriting, usually so neat and precise, was wobbly, bearing unmistakable traces of severe agitation and haste. She hinted at nothing short of catastrophe, though whether in relation to herself, to her ex-pupil, or to Sir Charles, Miss Verity couldn’t for the life of her discover. It was clear in any case, however, that affairs at The Hard had, for cause unknown, gone quite startlingly astray, and that Theresa found herself entirely unequal to righting them—hence her outcry.

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Under these circumstances, it struck Miss Verity as only tasteful and tactful that her approach to the distracted dwelling should take place unheralded by rumble of wheels or beat of horse-hoofs, should be pitched in a, so to speak, strictly modest and minor key. On arriving at the front gate she therefore alighted and, bidding her grumpy and streaming flyman take himself and his frousty landau to the Bell and Horns in Deadham village there to await her further orders, proceeded to walk up the carriage-drive under the swaying, dripping trees.

About fifty yards from the gate the drive turns sharply to the left; and, just at the turn, Miss Verity suddenly beheld a tall figure clad in a seaman's oilskins and sou'wester, coming towards her from the direction of the house. Youth and good looks—more especially perhaps masculine ones—whatever rank of life might exhibit them, acted as a sure passport to Miss Verity's gentle heart. And the youth and good looks of the man approaching her became momentarily more incontestable. His bearing, too, notwithstanding the clumsiness of his shiny black over-garment, had a slightly ruffling, gallantly insolent air to it, eminently calculated to impress her swift and indulgent fancy.

The young man, on his part, calmly took stock of her appearance, as she beat up against the wind, her flapping waterproof cloak giving very inefficient protection to the rather girlish dove-grey cashmere dress, picked out with pink embroidery, beneath it. At first his eyes challenged hers in slightly defiant and amused enquiry. But as she smiled back at him, sweetly eager, ingenuously benignant, his glance softened and his hand went up to his sou'wester with a courteous gesture.

"What weather!" she exclaimed. "How fearfully wet!"—while her expression testified to a flattering interest and admiration.

"Yes, it's a wild day," he said, in answer. "I expect We've seen the last of the sun, anyhow for this week."

The incident, though of the most casual and briefest, gave a new direction to Miss Verity's thought. It pleased and intrigued her, bringing a pretty blush to her thin cheeks. "Who and what can he be?" she said to herself. "Where can I have seen him before?" And the blush deepened. "I must really describe him to Charles and find out who he is."

This monologue brought her as far as the front door, at which, it may be added, she—-though by no means impatient—did in point of fact ring twice before the man-servant answered it. Although Mr. Hordle had the reputation of "being fond of his joke" in private life, in his official capacity his manner offered a model of middle-aged sedateness and restraint. To-day neither humour nor reserve were in evidence, but a harassed and hunted look altogether surprising to Miss Verity. He stared at her, stared past her along the drive, before attempting to usher her into the hall and relieve her of her umbrella and her cloak.

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“Sir Charles doesn’t expect me, Hordle,” she said. “But hearing Miss Damaris was unwell I came over from Paulton Lacy at once.”

“Quite so, ma’am. Sir Charles has not left his room yet. He did not reach home till late, and he sat up with Miss Damaris the rest of the night.”

“Oh! dear—did he? Then, of course, I wouldn’t disturb him on any account, Hordle. I had better see Miss Bilson first. Will you tell her I am here?”

“I can send Laura to enquire, ma’am. But, I doubt if Miss Bilson, will care to come downstairs at present.”

“She is with Miss Damaris?”

“No, ma’am, Miss Bilson is not with Miss Damaris.”

Hordle paused impressively, sucking in his under lip.

“If I might presume to advise, ma’am, I think it would be wise you should see Miss Bilson in the schoolroom—and go up by the back staircase, ma’am, if you don’t object so as to avoid passing Miss Damaris’ bedroom door. I should not presume to suggest it, ma’am, but that our orders as to quiet are very strict.”

In this somewhat ignominious method of reaching her objective Miss Verity, although more and more mystified, amiably acquiesced—to be greeted, when Hordle throwing open the schoolroom door formally announced her, by a sound closely resembling a shriek.

Entrenched behind a couple of yawning trunks, a litter of feminine apparel and of personal effects—the accumulation of a long term of years, for she was an inveterate hoarder—encumbering every available surface, the carpet included, Theresa Bilson stood as at bay.

“My dear friend,” Miss Verity exclaimed advancing with kindly outstretched hands—-“what is the meaning of this?”—She looked at the miscellaneous turn-out of cupboards and chests of drawers, at the display of garments not usually submitted to the public gaze. “Are you preparing a rummage sale or are you—but no, surely not!—are you packing? I cannot describe how anxious I am to hear what has occurred. My sister, Mrs. Cowden, was extremely adverse to my facing the bad weather; but, I felt your note could only be answered in person. Let me hear everything.”

She drew Theresa from behind the luggage entrenchments, and, putting aside an assortment of derelict hats and artificial flowers strewn in most admired confusion on the sofa, made her sit down upon the said piece of furniture beside her.

Whereupon, in the pensive, rain-washed, mid-day light, which served to heighten rather than mitigate the prevailing, very unattractive and rather stuffy disorder obtaining in the room, Theresa Bilson, not without chokings and lamentations, gave forth the story of her —to herself quite spectacular—deposition from the command of The Hard and its household. She had sufficiently recovered her normal attitude, by this time, to pose to herself, now as a heroine of one of Charlotte Bronte's novels, now as a milder and more refined sample of injured innocence

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culled from the pages of Charlotte Yonge. A narrow, purely personal view inevitably embodies an order of logic calculated to carry conviction; and Theresa, even in defeat, retained a degree of self-opinionated astuteness. She presented her case effectively. To be discharged, and that in disgrace, to be rendered homeless, cast upon the world at a moment's notice, for that which—with but trifling, almost unconscious, manipulation of fact—could be made to appear as nothing worse than a venial error of judgment, did really sound and seem most unduly drastic punishment.

Miss Verity's first instinct was to fling herself into the breech; and, directly her brother emerged from his room, demand for her *protegee* redress and reinstatement. Her second instinct was—she didn't, in truth, quite know what—for she grew sadly perplexed as she listened.

Her sympathy, in fact, split into three inconveniently distinct and separate streams. Of these Theresa's woes still claimed the widest and deepest, since with Theresa she was in immediate and intimate contact. Yet the other two began to show a quite respectable volume and current, as she pictured Damaris marooned on the Bar and Sir Charles ravished away from the seasonable obligation of partridge shooting to take his place at his daughter's bedside.

"But this young Captain Faircloth, of whom you speak," she presently said, her mind taking one of its many inconsequent skippits—"who so providentially came to the dearest child's assistance—could he, I wonder, be the same really very interesting-looking young man I met in the drive, just now, when I came here?"

And Miss Verity described him, while a pretty stain of colour illuminated her cheek once more.

"You think quite possibly yes?—How I wish I had known that at the time. I would certainly have stopped and expressed my gratitude to him. Such a mercy he was at hand!—Poor dearest Damaris! I hope his good offices have already been acknowledged. Do you know if my brother has seen and thanked him?"

The expression of Theresa's round little face, still puffy and blotched from her last night's weeping, held a world of reproachful remindings.

"Ah! no," the other cried conscience-stricken—"no, of course not. How thoughtless of me to ask you. And"—another mental skippit—"and that you should be forbidden the sick-room too, not permitted to nurse Damaris! My poor friend, indeed I do feel for you. I so well understand that must have caused you more pain than anything."

A remark her hearer found it not altogether easy to counter with advantage to her own cause, so wisely let it pass in silence.

“I know—I know, you can hardly trust yourself to speak of it. I am so grieved—so very grieved. But one must be practical. I think you are wise to yield without further protest. I will sound my brother—just find out if he shows any signs of relenting. Of course, you can understand, I ought to hear his view of the matter too—not, that I question your account, dear friend, for one instant. Meanwhile make all your arrangements.”

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“The village!”—Theresa put in, with a note of despair this time perfectly genuine.

“Ah, yes—the village. But if I take you away, in my fly I mean, that will give you a position, a standing. It will go far to prevent unpleasant gossip!”

Miss Verity’s soul looked out of her candid eyes with a positive effulgence of charity.

“Oh! I can enter so fully into your shrinking from all that. We will treat your going as temporary, merely temporary—in speaking of it both here and at Paulton Lacy. Of course, you might stay with your friends, the good Miss Minetts; but I can’t honestly counsel your doing so. I am afraid Sir Charles might not quite like your remaining in Deadham directly after leaving his house. It might be awkward, and give rise to tiresome enquiries and comment. One has to consider those things.—No—I think it would be a far better plan that you should spend a week at Stourmouth. That would give us time to see our way more clearly. I know of some quite nice rooms kept by a former maid of Lady Bulparc’s. You would be quite comfortable there—and, as dinner at Paulton Lacy isn’t till eight, I could quite well go into Stourmouth with you myself this afternoon. And, my dear friend, you will, won’t you, forgive my speaking of this”—

Miss Verity—whose income, be it added, was anything but princely—gave an engagingly apologetic little laugh.

“Pray don’t worry yourself on the score of expense. The week in Stourmouth must cost you nothing. As I recommend the rooms I naturally am responsible—you go to them as my guest, of course.—Still I’ll sound my brother at luncheon, and just see how the land lies. But don’t build too much on any change of front. I don’t expect it—not yet. Later, who knows Meanwhile courage—do try not to fret.”

And Miss Verity descended the backstairs again.

“Poor creature—now her mind will be more at rest, I do trust. I am afraid Charles has been rather severe. I never think he does quite understand women. But how should he after only being married for three—or four years, was it?—Such a very limited experience!—It is a pity he didn’t marry again, while Damaris was still quite small—-some really nice woman who one knows about. But I suppose Charles has never cared about that side of things. His public work has absorbed him. I doubt if he has ever really been in love”—Miss Verity sighed.—“Yes, Hordle, thanks I’ll wait in the long sitting-room. Please let Sir Charles know I am there, that I came over to enquire for Miss Damaris. He is getting up?—Yes—I shall be here to luncheon, thanks.”

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But, during the course of luncheon, that afore-mentioned split in Miss Verity's sympathies was fated to declare itself with ever growing distinctness. The stream consecrated to Theresa's woes—Theresa herself being no longer materially present—-declined in volume and in force, while that commanded by Felicia's affection for her brother soon rushed down in spate. Perhaps, as she told herself, it was partly owing to the light—which, if pensive upstairs in the white-walled schoolroom, might, without exaggeration, be called quite dismally gloomy in the low-ceilinged dining-room looking out on the black mass of the ilex trees over a havoc of storm-beaten flower-beds—but Sir Charles struck her as so worn, so aged, so singularly and pathetically sad. He was still so evidently oppressed by anxiety concerning Damaris that, to hint at harsh action on his part, or plead Theresa's cause with convincing earnestness and warmth, became out of the question. Miss Verity hadn't the heart for it.

"Be true to your profession of good Samaritan, my dear Felicia," he begged her with a certain rueful humour, "and take the poor foolish woman off my hands. Plant her where you like, so long as it is well out of my neighbourhood. She has made an egregious fiasco of her position here. As you love me, just remove her from my sight—let this land have rest and enjoy its Sabbaths in respect of her at least. I'll give you a cheque for her salary, something in excess of the actual amount if you like; for, heaven forbid, you should be out of pocket yourself as a consequence of your good offices.—Now let us, please, talk of some less unprofitable subject."

Brightly, sweetly eager, Miss Verity hastened to obey, as she believed, his concluding request.

"Ah! yes," she said, "that reminds me of something about which I do so want you to enlighten me.—This young Captain Faircloth, who so opportunely appeared on the scene and rescued darling Damaris, I believe I met him this morning, as I walked up from the front gate. I wondered who he was. His appearance interested me, so did his voice. It struck me as being so quaintly like some voice I know quite well—and I stupidly cannot remember whose."

The coffee-cups chattered upon the silver tray as Hordle handed it to Miss Verity.

"You spoke to him then?" Sir Charles presently said.

"Oh! just in passing, you know, about the weather—which was phenomenally bad, raining and blowing too wildly at the moment. I supposed you had seen him. He seemed to be coming away from the house."

Charles Verity turned sideways to the table, bending down a little over the tray as he helped him. The coffee splashed over into the saucer; yet it was not the hand holding the coffee-pot, but those holding the tray that shook. Whereupon Charles Verity glanced up into the manservant's face, calmly arrogant.

“Pray be careful, Hordle,” he said. And then—“Is Miss Verity right in supposing Captain Faircloth called here this morning?”

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“I beg your pardon, Sir Charles. Yes, Sir Charles, he did.”

“What did he want?”

“He came to enquire after Miss Damaris, Sir Charles. I understood him to say he was going away to sea shortly.”

“Did he ask for me?”

“No, Sir Charles,” rather hurriedly; and later, with visible effort to recapture the perfection of well-trained nullity.—“He only asked after Miss Damaris.”

“When he calls again, let me know. Miss Damaris wishes to see him if she is sufficiently well to do so.”

“Very good, Sir Charles.”

And during this conversation, Felicia felt keenly distressed and perplexed. It made her miserable to think evil of anyone—particularly an old and trusted servant. But from the moment of her arrival Hordle’s manner had seemed so very strange. Of course it was horrid even to suspect such a thing; but was it possible that he over-indulged sometimes, that he, in plain English, drank? Poor dear Charles—if he knew it, what an additional worry! It really was too deplorable.—Anyway she could alleviate his worries to a certain extent by carrying Theresa off. She would do so at once.—Was there an evening train from Stourmouth, which stopped at Paulton Halt? Well—if there wasn’t she must get out at Marychurch, and drive from there. She only trusted she would be in time to dress for dinner. Harriet was such a stickler for etiquette.

From all which it may be deduced that the confessions, made to Miss Verity to-day, had this in common with those habitually heard by her—that the point of the story had been rather carefully left out.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH DAMARIS RECEIVES INFORMATION OF THE LOST SHOES AND STOCKINGS—ASSUMPTION OF THE GOD-HEAD

As Darcy Faircloth prophesied, the wild weather lasted throughout that week. Then, the rain having rained itself out, the wind backed and the skies cleared. But all to a different mode and rhythm. A cold white sun shone out of a cold blue sky, diapered, to the north above the indigo and umber moorland and forest, with perspectives of tenuous silken-white cloud. Land and sky were alike washed clean, to a starkness and nakedness calling for warm clothing out of doors, and well-stoked fires within.

At the beginning of the next week, invited by that thin glinting sunshine—beneath which the sea still ran high, in long, hollow-backed waves, brokenly foam-capped and swirling—Damaris came forth from her retreat, sufficiently convalescent to take up the ordinary routine of life again. But this, also, to a changed mode and rhythm, having its source in causes more recondite and subtle than any matter of fair or foul weather.

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To begin with she had, in the past week, crossed a certain bridge there is no going back over for whoso, of her sex, is handicapped or favoured—in mid-nineteenth century the handicap rather than the favour counted even more heavily than it does to-day, though even to-day, as some of us know to our cost, it still counts not a little!—by possession of rarer intelligence, more lively moral and spiritual perceptions, than those possessed by the great average of her countrymen or countrywomen. Damaris' crossing of that bridge —to carry on the figure—affected her thought of, and relation to everyone and everything with which she now came in contact. She had crossed other bridges on her eighteen years' journey from infancy upwards; but, compared with this last, they had been but airy fantastic structures, fashioned of hardly more substantial stuff than dreams are made of.—Thus, anyhow, it appeared to her as she lay resting in her pink-and-white curtained bed, watching the loose rose-sprays tremble against the rain-spattered window-panes.—For this last bridge was built of the living stones of fact, of deeds actually done; and, just because it was so built, for one of her perceptions and temperament, no recrossing of it could be possible.

So much to begin with.—To go on with, even before Dr. McCabe granted her permission to emerge from retirement, all manner of practical matters claimed her attention; and that not unwholesomely, as it proved in the sequel. For with the incontinent vanishing of Theresa Bilson into space, or,—more accurately—into the very comfortable lodgings provided for her by Miss Verity in Stourmouth, the mantle of the ex-governess-companion's domestic responsibilities automatically descended upon her ex-pupil. The said vanishing was reported to Damaris by Mary, on the day subsequent to its occurrence, not without signs of hardly repressed jubilation. For "Egypt," in this case represented by the Deadham Hard servants' hall, was unfeignedly "glad at her departing."

"A good riddance, I call it—and we all know the rest of that saying," Mrs. Cooper remarked to an audience of Hordle and Mary Fisher, reinforced by the Napoleonic Patch and his wife—who happened to have looked in from the stables after supper—some freedom of speech being permissible, thanks to the under-servants' relegation to the kitchen.

"I never could see she was any class myself. But the airs and graces she'd give herself! You'll never persuade me she wasn't sweet on the master. That was at the back of all her dressings up, and flouncings and fidgetings. The impidence of it!—You may well say so, Mrs. Patch. But the conceit of some people passes understanding. To be Lady Verity, if you please, that was what she was after. To my dying day I shall believe it. Don't tell me!"

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Mary's announcement of the event was couched in sober terms, shorn of such fine flowers of suggestion and comment. Yet it breathed an unmistakable satisfaction, which, to Damaris' contrition, found instant echo in her own heart. She ought, she knew, to feel distressed at poor Theresa's vanishing—only she didn't and couldn't. As an inherent consequence of the afore-chronicled bridge-crossing, Theresa was more than ever out of the picture. To listen to her chatterings, to evade her questionings would, under existing circumstances, amount to a daily trial from which the young girl felt thankful to escape. For Damaris entertained a conviction the circumstances in question would call for fortitude and resource of an order unknown, alike in their sternness and their liberality of idea, to Theresa's narrowly High Anglican and academic standards of thought and conduct. She therefore ascertained from her informant that Miss Verity had been as actively instrumental in the vanishing—had, to be explicit, taken "Miss Bilson, and all her luggage (such a collection!) except two disgraceful old tin boxes which were to be forwarded by the carrier, away with her in her own Marychurch fly."—And at this Damaris left the business willingly enough, secure that if tender-hearted Aunt Felicia was party to the removal, it would very surely be effected with due regard to appearances and as slight damage to "feelings" as could well be.

Later Sir Charles referred briefly to the subject, adding:

"When you require another lady-in-waiting we will choose her ourselves, I think, rather than accept a nominee of my sister Felicia's. She is certain to have some more or less unsuitable and incapable person on hand, upon whom she ardently desires to confer benefits."

"But must I have another lady-in-waiting?" Damaris meaningly and pleadingly asked.

Charles Verity drew his hand down slowly over his flowing moustache, and smiled at her in tender amusement, as she sat up in a much lace and ribbon befrilled jacket, her hair hanging down in a heavy plait on either side the white column of her warmly white throat. Her face was refined to a transparency of colouring, even as it seemed of texture, from confinement to the house and from lassitude following upon fever, which, while he recognized its loveliness, caused him a pretty sharp pang. Still she looked content, as he told himself. Her glance was frank and calm, without suggestion of lurking anxiety.

Nor was she unoccupied and brooding—witness the counterpane strewn with books, with balls of wool, a sock in leisurely process of knitting, and, in a hollow of it, Mustapha, the brindled cat, luxuriously sleeping curled round against her feet.

"Heaven knows I've no special craving your lady-in-waiting should find a speedy successor," he said. "But to do without one altogether might appear a rather daring experiment. Your aunts would be loud in protest."

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“What matters isn’t the aunts, is it, but ourselves?” Damaris quite gaily took him up.

“But wouldn’t you be lonely, my dear, and would you not find it burdensome to run the house yourself?”

“No—no,” she cried. “Not one bit. Anyway let me try, Commissioner Sahib. Let us be by ourselves together—beautifully by ourselves, for a time at least.”

“So be it then,” Charles Verity said.

And perhaps, although hardly acknowledged, in the mind of each the same consideration operated. For there remained a thing still to be done before the new order could be reckoned as fully initiated, still more fully established,—a thing which, as each knew, could be best done without witnesses; a thing which both intended should very surely be done, yet concerning which neither proposed to speak until the hour of accomplishment actually struck.

That hour, in point of fact, struck sooner than Damaris anticipated, the sound and sight of it reaching her without prelude or opportunity of preparation. For early in the afternoon of the second day she spent downstairs, as, sitting at the writing table in the long drawing-room, she raised her eyes from contemplation of the house-keeping books spread out before her, she saw her father walking slowly up from the sea-wall across the lawn. And seeing him, for the moment, her mind carried back to that miracle of interchangeable personalities so distressingly haunting her at the beginning of her illness, when James Colthurst’s charcoal sketch of her father played cruel juggler’s tricks upon her. For beside him now walked a man so strangely resembling him in height, in bearing and in build that, but for the difference of clothing and the bearded face, it might be himself had the clock of his life been set back by thirty years.

Damaris’ first instinct was of flight. Just as when, out on the Bar with her cousin, Tom Verity, now nearly a month ago, overcome by a foreboding of far-reaching danger she had—to the subsequent bitter wounding of her self-respect and pride—shown the white feather, ignominiously turned tail and run away, was she tempted to run away now.

For it seemed too much. It came too close, laying rough hands not only upon the deepest of her love and reverence for her father, but upon that still mysterious depth of her own nature, namely her apprehension of passion and of sex. A sacred shame, an awe as at the commission of some covert act of impiety, overcame her as she looked at the two men walking, side by side, across the moist vividly green carpet of turf in the chill white sunshine, the plain of an uneasy grey sea behind them. She wanted to hide herself, to close eyes and ears against further knowledge. Yes—it came too close; and at the same time made her feel, as never before, isolated and desolate—as though a great gulf yawned between her and what she had always counted pre-eminently her own, most securely her property because most beloved.

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She had spoken valiantly on Faircloth's behalf, had generously acted as his advocate; yet now, beholding him thus in open converse with her father, the wings of love were scorched by the flame of jealousy—not so much of the young man himself, as of a past which he stood for and in which she had no part. Therefore to run—yes, run and hide from further knowledge, further experience and revelation, to claim the privileges, since she was called on to endure the smart, of isolation.—Yet to run, as she almost directly began to reason, was not only cowardly but useless. Fact remains fact, and if she refused to accept it, range herself in line with it to-day, she in nowise negatived but merely postponed the event. If not to-day, then to-morrow she was bound to empty the cup. And she laughed at the specious half-truth which had appeared so splendid and exhilarating a discovery—the half-truth that nothing is really inevitable unless you yourself will it to be so. For this was inevitable, sooner or later unescapable, fight against it, fly from it as she might.

Therefore she must stay, whether she liked it or not—stay, because to do otherwise was purposeless, because she couldn't help herself, because there was nowhere to run to, in short—

She heard footsteps upon the flags outside the garden door, speech, calm and restrained, of which she could not distinguish the import. Mechanically Damaris gathered the scattered house-keeping books lying before her upon the table—baker's, butcher's, grocer's, corn-chandler's, coal-merchant's—into a tight little heap; and, folding her hands on the top of them, prayed simply, almost wordlessly, for courage to hold the balance even, to seek not her own good but the good of those two others, to do right. Then she waited.

The door opened, closed, and, after a minute's pause, one of the two men—Damaris did not know which, she could not bring herself to look—coming from between the stumpy pillars walked towards her down the half-length of the room; and bent over her, resting one hand on the back of her chair, the other on the leather inlay of the writing-table just beside the little pile of house-books.

The hand was young, sunburnt, well-shaped, the finger nails well kept. Across the back of it a small-bodied, wide-winged sea-bird, in apparent act of flight, and the letters D.V.F. were tattooed in blue and crimson. A gold bangle, the surface of it dented in places and engraved with Japanese characters, encircled the fine lean wrist. These Damaris saw, and they worked upon her strangely, awakening an emotion of almost painful tenderness, as at sight of decorations pathetically fond, playfully child-like and ingenuous. While, as he bent over her, she also became aware of a freshness, a salt sweetness as of the ocean and the great vacant spaces where all the winds of the world blow keen and free.

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“Sir Charles wrote to me,” Faircloth said a little huskily. “He told me I might come and see you again and talk to you, and bid you good-bye before I go to sea. And I should have been here sooner, but that I was away at Southampton Docks, and the letter only reached me this morning. I telegraphed and started on at once. And he—Sir Charles—walked out over the warren to meet me, and brought me up here right to the door. And on the way we talked a little,—if he chose he could make the very stones speak, I think—and he said one or two things for which—I—well—I thank first Almighty God, and next to God, you—Damaris”—

This last imperatively.

“You did ask for me? You did wish to have me come to you?”

“Yes, I did wish it,” she answered. “But I never knew how much until now, when he has brought you. For that is the right, the beautiful, safe way of having you come to me and to this house.”

Yet, as she spoke, she lightly laid her hand over the tattooed image of the flying sea-bird, concealing it, for it moved her to the point of active suffering in its quaint prettiness fixed thus indelibly up in the warm live flesh.

At the touch of her hand Faircloth drew in his breath sharply, seeming to wince. Then, at last, Damaris looked up at him, her eyes full of questioning and startled concern.

“I didn’t hurt you?” she asked, a vague idea of suffering, attached to that fanciful stigmata, troubling her.

“Hurt me—good Lord, how could you, of all people, hurt me?” he gently laughed at her. “Unless you turned me down, gave me to understand that, on second thoughts, you didn’t find me up to your requirements or some mean class devilry of that kind—of which, by the way, had I judged you capable, you may be sure I should have been uncommonly careful never to come near you again.—No, it isn’t that you hurt me; but that you delight me a little overmuch, so that it isn’t easy to keep quite level-headed. There’s so much to hear and to tell, and such scanty time to hear or tell it in, worse luck.”

“You are obliged to go so soon?”

The flames of jealousy had effectually, it may be noted, died down in Damaris.

“Yes—we’re taking on cargo for all we’re worth. We are booked to sail by noon the day after to-morrow. I stretched a point in leaving at all, which won’t put me in the best odour with my officers and crew, or—supposing they come to hear of it—with my owners either. I am giving my plain duty the slip; but, in this singular ease, it seemed to me, a greater duty stood back of and outweighed the plain obvious one—since it

mounted to a reconstruction, a peace-making, ridding the souls of four persons of an ugly burden. I wanted the affair all settled up and straightened out before this, my maiden voyage, in command of a ship of my own. For me it is a great event, a great step forward. And, perhaps I'm over-superstitious—most men of my trade are supposed to be touched that way—but I admit I rather cling to the notion of this private peace-making, this straightening out of an ancient crookedness, as a thing of good augury, a favourable omen. As such—let alone other reasons"—and he looked down at Damaris with a fine and delicate admiration—"I desired it and, out of my heart, I prize it. —Do you see?"

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“Yes—indeed a thing of good augury”—she affirmed.

Yet in speaking her lips shook. For, in truth, poor child, she was hard-pressed. This intimate intercourse, alike in its simple directness and its novelty, began to wear on her to the point of physical distress. She felt tremulous and faint. Not that Faircloth jarred upon or was distasteful to her. Far from that. His youth and health, the unspoiled vigour and force of him, captivated her imagination. Even the dash of roughness, the lapses from conventional forms of speech and manner she now and again observed in him, caught her fancy, heightening his attraction for her. Nor was she any longer tormented by a sense of isolation. For, as she recognized, he stole nothing away which heretofore belonged to her. Rather did he add his own by no means inconsiderable self to the sum of her possessions.—And in that last fact she probably touched the real crux, the real strain, of the present, to her disintegrating, situation. For in him, and in his relation to her, a wonderful and very precious gift was bestowed upon her, namely another human life to love and live for.—Bestowed on her, moreover, without asking or choice of her own, arbitrarily, through the claim of his and her common ancestry and the profound moral and spiritual obligations, the mysterious affinities, which a common ancestry creates.

Had she possessed this gift from childhood, had it taken its natural place in her experience through the linked and orderly progress of the years, it would have been wholly welcome, wholly profitable and sweet. But it was sprung upon her from the outside, quite astoundingly ready-made. It bore down on her, and at a double, foot, horse, and siege guns complete. Small discredit to her if she staggered under its onset, trembled and turned faint! For as she now perceived, it was exactly this relation of brother and sister of which she had some prescience, some dim intuition, from her first sight of Faircloth as he stood among the skeleton lobster-pots on board Timothy Proud’s old boat. It was this call of a common blood which begot in her unreasoning panic, which she had run from and so wildly tried to escape. And yet it remained a gift of great price, a crown of gold; but oh! so very heavy—just at this moment anyhow—for her poor proud young head.

Lifting her hand off Faircloth’s, she made a motion to rise. Change of attitude and place might bring her relief, serve to steady her nerves and restore her endangered composure! Brooding over the whole singular matter in the peace and security of her room upstairs, her course had appeared a comparatively easy one, granted reasonable courage and address. But the young man’s bodily presence, as now close beside her, exercised an emotional influence quite unforeseen and unreckoned with. Under it her will wavered. She ceased to see her way clearly, to be sure of herself. She grew timid, bewildered, unready both of purpose and of speech.

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Faircloth, meanwhile, being closely observant of her, was quick to detect her agitation. He drew aside her chair, and backed away, leaving her free to pass.

“I am afraid we have talked too long,” he said. “You’re tired. I ought to have been more careful of you, remembered how ill you have been—and that partly through my doing too. So now, I had better bid you good-bye, I think, and leave you to rest.”

But Damaris, contriving to smile tremulous lips notwithstanding, shook her head. For, in lifting her hand from his, she caught sight of the tattooed blue-and-crimson sea-bird and the initials below it. And again her heart contracted with a spasm of tenderness; while those three letters, more fully arresting her attention, aroused in her a fascinated, half-shrinking curiosity. What did they mean? What could they stand for? She longed intensely to know—sure they were in some sort a symbol, a token, not without special significance for herself. But shyness and a quaint disposition, dating from her childhood, to pause and hover on the threshold of discovery, thus prolonging a period of entrancing, distracting suspense, withheld her. She dared not ask—in any case dared not ask just yet; and therefore took up his words in their literal application.

“Indeed, you haven’t talked too long,” she assured him, as she went over to the tiger skin before the fire-place, and standing there looked down into the core of the burning logs. “We have only just begun to talk, so it isn’t that which has tried me. But—if you won’t misunderstand—pray don’t—the thought of—of you, and of all that which lies between us, is still very new to me. I haven’t quite found you, or myself in my relation to you, yet. Give me time, and indeed, I won’t disappoint you.”

Faircloth, who had followed her, put his elbows on the mantelshelf, and sinking his head somewhat between his shoulders, stared down at the burning logs too.

“Ah! when you take that tone, I’m a little scared lest I should turn out to be the disappointment, the failure, in this high adventure of ours,” he said under his breath.

“So stay, please,” the young girl went on, touched by, yet ignoring, his interjected comment. “Let me get as accustomed as I can now, so that I may feel settled. That is the way to prevent my being tired—the way to rest me, because it will help to get all my thinkings about you into place.—Yes, please stay.—That is,” she added with a pretty touch of ceremony—“if you have time, and don’t yourself wish to go.”

“I wish it! What, in heaven’s name, could well be further from any wish of mine?” Faircloth broke out almost roughly, without raising his eyes. “Do you suppose when a man’s gone thirsty many days, he is in haste to forego the first draught of pure water offered to him—and that after just putting his lips to the dear comfort of it?”

“Ah! you care too much,” Damaris cried, smitten by swift shrinking and dread.

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Faircloth lifted his head and looked at her, his face keen, brilliant with a far from ignoble emotion.

“It is not, and never will be possible—so I fancy”—he said, “to care too much about you.”

And he fell into contemplation of the glowing logs again.

But Damaris, seeing his transfigured countenance, hearing his rejoinder, penetrated, moreover, by the conviction of his entire sincerity, felt the weight of a certain golden crown more than ever heavy upon her devoted young head. She stepped aside, groping with outstretched hands behind her until she found and held on to the arm of the big sofa stationed at right angles to the hearth. And she waited, morally taking breath, to slip presently on to the wide low seat of it and lean thankfully against its solidly cushioned back for support.

“Neither for you, or for my ship”—Faircloth went on, speaking, as it seemed, more to himself than to his now pale companion. “I dare couple you and her together, though she is no longer in the dew of her youth. Oh! I can’t defend her looks, poor dear. She has seen service. Is only a battered, travel-weary old couple-of-thousand-ton cargo boat, which has hugged and nuzzled the foul-smelling quays of half the seaports of southern Europe and Asia. All the same—next to you—she’s the best and finest thing life, up to now, has brought me, and I love her.—My affection for her, though,” he went on, “is safe to be transitory. She is safe to have rivals and successors in plenty—-unless, of course, by some ugly turn of luck, she and I go to the bottom in company.”

Faircloth broke off. A little sound, a little gesture of protest and distress, making him straighten himself up and turn quickly, his eyes alight with enquiry and laughter.

“May I take that to mean I’m not quite alone in my caring,” he asked; “but that you, Damaris, care, perhaps, just a trifling amount too?”

He went across to the sofa, sat down sideways, laying his right arm along the back of it, and placing his left hand—inscribed with the fanciful device—over the girl’s two hands clasped in her lap. The strong, lean fingers exercised a quiet, steady pressure, for a minute. After which he leaned back, no longer attempting to touch her, studiously indeed keeping his distance, while he said:

“The other affection is stable for ever—safe from all rivals or successors. That is another reason why I jumped at the chance Sir Charles’s letter gave me of coming here to-day, and seeing you, with this room—as I hoped—in which so much of your time must be spent, for background. I wanted to stamp a picture of you upon my memory, burn it right into the very tissue of my brain, so that I shall always have it with me, wherever I go, and however rarely we meet.—Because, as I see it, we shall rarely

meet. We ought to be clear on that point—leave no frayed edges. There is a bar between us, which for the sake of others, as well as for your sake, it is only right and decent I should respect, a wall of partition through which I shouldn't attempt to break."

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“I know—but it troubles me,” Damaris murmured. “It is sad.”

“Yes, of course, it is sad. But it’s just the penalty that is bound to be paid, and which it is useless to ignore or lie to ourselves about.—So I shall never come, unless he—Sir Charles—sends for me as he did to-day, or unless you send. Only remember your picture will never leave me. I have it safe and sound”—Faircloth smiled at her.—“It will be with me just as actually and ineffaceably as this is with me.”

He patted the back of his left hand.

“Nothing, short of death, can rub either out. I have pretty thoroughly banked against that, you see. So you’ve only to send when, and if, you want me. I shall turn up—oh! never fear, I shall turn up.”

“And I shall send—we shall both send,” Damaris answered gravely, even a little brokenly.

The crown might be heavy; but she had strangely ceased to desire to be rid of it, beginning, indeed, to find its weight oddly satisfying, even, it may be asserted, trenching on the exquisite. And, with this altered attitude, a freedom of spirit, greater than she had enjoyed since the commencement of the whole astonishing episode, since before her cousin Tom Verity’s visit in fact, came upon her. It lightened her heart. It dispelled her fatigue—which throughout the afternoon had been, probably, more of the moral than bodily sort. Her soul no longer beat its wings against iron bars, fluttered in the meshes of a net; but looked forth shy yet serene, accepting the position in which it found itself. For Faircloth inspired her with deepening faith. He needed no guiding, as she told herself; but was strong enough, as his words convincingly testified, clear-sighted and quick-witted enough, to play his part in the complicated drama without prompting. Hadn’t he done just what she asked?—Stayed until, by operation of some quality in himself or—could it be?—simply through the mysterious draw of his and her brother and sisterhood, she had already grown accustomed, settled in her thought of him, untormented by the closeness of his presence and unabashed.

And having reached this vantage-point, discovering the weight of the crown dear now rather than irksome, Damaris permitted herself a closer observation of her companion than ever before. Impressions of his appearance she had received in plenty—but received them in flashes, confusing from their very vividness. Confusing, also, because each one of them was doubled by a haunting consciousness of his likeness to her father. The traits common to both men, rather than those individually characteristic of the younger, had been in evidence. And, in her present happier mood, Damaris also desired a picture to set in the storehouse of memory. But it must represent this brother of hers in and by himself, divorced, as far as might be, from that pursuing, and, to her, singularly agitating likeness.

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Her design and her scrutiny were easier of prosecution that, during the last few minutes, Faircloth had retired into silence, and an attitude of abstraction. Sitting rather forward upon the sofa, his legs crossed, nursing one blue serge trousered knee with locked hands, his glance travelled thoughtfully over the quiet, low-toned room and its varied contents. Later, sought the window opposite, and ranged across the garden and terrace walk, with its incident of small ancient cannon, to the long ridge of the Bar—rising, bleached, wind-swept, and notably deserted under the colourless sunshine, beyond the dark waters of the tide river which raced tumultuously seaward in flood.

Seen thus in repose—and repose is a terrible tell-tale,—the lines of the young man's face and figure remained firm, gracefully angular and definite. No hint of slackness or sloppiness marred their effect. The same might be said of his clothes, which though of ordinary regulation colour and cut—plus neat black tie and stiff-fronted white shirt, collar, and wristbands—possessed style, and that farthest from the cheap or flashy. Only the gold bangle challenged Damaris' taste as touching on florid; but its existence she condoned in face of its wearer's hazardous and inherently romantic calling. For the sailor may, surely, be here and there permitted a turn and a flourish, justly denied to the safe entrenched landsman.

If outward aspects were thus calculated to engage her approval and agreeably fill in her projected picture, that which glimmered through them—divined by her rather than stated, all being necessarily more an affair of intuition than of knowledge—gave her pleasure of richer quality. High-tempered she unquestionably read him, arrogant and on occasion not inconceivably remorseless; but neither mean nor ungenerous, his energy unwasted, his mind untainted by self-indulgence. If he were capable of cruelty to others, he was at least equally capable of turning the knife on himself, cutting off or plucking out an offending member. This appealed to the heroic in her. While over her vision, as she thus considered him, hung the glamour of youth which, to youth, displays such royal enchantments—untrodden fields of hope and promise inviting the tread of eager feet, the rush of glorious goings forward towards conquests, towards wonders, well assured, yet to be. The personality of this man clearly admitted no denial, as little bragged as it apologized, since his candour matched his force of will.

Taking stock of him thus, from the corner of the sofa, imagination, intelligence, affections alike actively in play, Damaris' colour rose, her pulse quickened, and her great eyes grew wide, finely and softly gay.

Faircloth moved. Turned his head. Met her eyes, and looking into them his face blanched perceptibly under its *couche* of sunburn.

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“Damaris,” he said, “Damaris, what has happened?—Stop though, you needn’t tell me. I know. We’ve found one another—haven’t we?—Found one another more in the silence than in the talking.—Queer, things should work that way! But it puts a seal on fact. For they couldn’t so work unless the same stuff, the same inclination, were embedded right in the very innermost substance of both of us. You look rested. You look glad—bless you.—Isn’t that so?”

“Yes,” she simply told him.

Faircloth set his elbows on his knees, his chin on his two hands, wrist against wrist, and his glance ranged out over the garden again, to the pale strip of the Bar spread between river and sea.

“Then I can go,” he said, “but not because I’ve tired you.”

“I shall never be tired any more from—from being with you.”

“I don’t fancy you will. All the same I must go, because my time’s up. My train leaves Marychurch at six, and I have to call at the Inn, to bid my mother good-bye, on my way to the station.”

Was the perfect harmony, the perfect adjustment of spirit to spirit a wee bit jarred, did a mist come up over the heavenly bright sky, Faircloth asked himself? And answered doggedly that, if it were so, he could not help it. For since, by all ruling of loyalty and dignity, the wall of partition was ordained to stand, wasn’t it safer to remind both himself and Damaris, at times, of its presence? He must keep his feet on the floor, good God—keep them very squarely on the floor—for otherwise, wasn’t it possible to conceive of their skirting the edge of unnamable abysses? In furtherance of that so necessary soberness of outlook he now went on speaking.

“But before I go, I want to hark back to a matter of quite ancient history—your lost shoes and stockings—for thereby hangs a tale.”

And he proceeded to tell her how, about a week ago, being caught by a wild flurry of rain in an outlying part of the island, behind the black cottages and Inn, he took shelter in a disused ruinous boat-house opening on the great reed-beds which here rim the shore. A melancholy, forsaken place, from which, at low tide, you can walk across the mud-flats to Lampit, with a pleasing chance of being sucked under by quicksands. Abram Sclanders’ unhappy half-witted son haunted this boat-house, it seemed, storing his shrimping nets there, any other things as well, a venerable magpie’s hoard of scraps and lumber; using it as a run-hole, too, when the other lads hunted and tormented him according to their healthy, brutal youthful way.

—A regular joss-house, he'd made of it. And set up in one corner, white and ghostly—-making you stare a minute when you first came inside—a ship's figure-head, a three-foot odd Britannia, pudding-basin bosomed and eagle-featured, with castellated headgear, clasping a trident in her hand. She, as presiding deity and—

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“In front of her,” Faircloth said, his chin still in his hands and eyes gazing away to the Bar—“earth and pebbles banked up into a flat-topped mound, upon which stood your shoes filled with sprays of hedge fruit and yellow button-chrysanthemums—stolen too, I suppose, from one of the gardens at Lampit. They grow freely there. Your silk stockings hung round her neck, a posy of flowers twisted into them.—When I came on this exhibition, I can’t quite tell you how I felt. It raised Cain in me to think of that degraded, misbegotten creature pawing over and playing about with anything which had belonged to you. I was for making Sclanders, his father, bring him over and give him the thrashing of his life, right there before the proofs of his sins.”

“But you didn’t,” Damaris cried. “You didn’t. What do my shoes and stockings matter? I oughtn’t to have left them on the shore. It was putting temptation in his way.”

Faircloth looked at her smiling.

“No I didn’t, and for two reasons. One that I knew—even then—you would find excuses, plead for mercy, as you have just now. Another, those flowers. If I had found—well—what I might have found, oh! he should have had the stick or the dog-whip without stint. But one doesn’t practise devil-worship with flowers. It seemed to me some craving after beauty was there, as if the poor germ of a soul groped out of the darkness towards what is fair and sweet. I dared not hound it back into the darkness, close down any dim aspiration after God it might have. So I left its pitiful joss-house inviolate, the moan of the wind and sighing of the great reed-beds making music for such strange rites of worship as have been, or may be, practised within. Any god is better than none—that’s my creed, at least. And to defile any man’s god—however trumpery—unless you’re amazingly sure you’ve a better one to offer him in place of it is to sin against the Holy Ghost.”

Faircloth rose to his feet.

“Time’s up”—he said. “I must go. Here is farewell to the most beautiful day of my life. —But see, Damaris”—

And he knelt down, in front of her.

“Leave your shoes and stockings cast away on the Bar and thereby open the door—for some people—on to the kingdom of heaven, if you like. But don’t, don’t, if you’ve the smallest mercy for my peace of mind ever wander about there again alone. I’ve a superstition against it. Something unhappy will come of it. It isn’t right. It isn’t safe. When—when I called you and you answered me through the mist, I had a horrible fear I was too late. You see I care—and the caring, after to-day, very certainly will not grow less. Take somebody, one of your women, always, with you. Promise me never to be out by yourself.”

Wondering, inexpressibly touched, Damaris put her hands on his shoulders. His hands sprang to cover them.

“Of course, I promise,” she said.

And, closing her eyes, put up her lips to be kissed.

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Then the rattle of the glass door on to the garden as it shut. In the room a listening stillness, a great all-invading emptiness. Finally Hordle, with the tea-tray, and—

“Mrs. Cooper, if it isn’t troubling you, Miss, would be glad to have the house-books to pay, as she’s walking up the village after tea.”

CHAPTER XII

CONCERNING A SERMON WHICH NEVER WAS PREACHED AND OTHER MATTERS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Before passing on to more dignified matters, that period of nine days demands to be noted during which the inhabitants of Deadham, all very much agog, celebrated the wonder of Miss Bilson’s indisputable disappearance and Damaris Verity’s reported adventure.

Concerning the former, Dr. Horniblow, good man, took himself seriously to task, deploring his past action and debating his present duty.

“It is no use, Jane,” he lamented to his wife. The two had retired for the night, darkness and the bedclothes covering them. “I am very much worried about my share in the matter.”

“But, my dear James, you really are overscrupulous. What share had you?”

The clerical wife does not always see eye to eye with her spouse in respect of his female parishioners, more particularly, perhaps, the unmarried ones. Mrs. Horniblow loved, honoured, and—within reasonable limits—obeyed her James; but this neither prevented her being shrewd, nor knowing her James, after all, to be human. Remembrance of Theresa, heading the Deadham procession during the inspection of Harchester Cathedral, sandwiched in between him and the Dean, still rankled in her wifely bosom.

“I overpersuaded Miss Bilson to accompany us on the choir treat. I forgot she must not be regarded as an entirely free agent. She has shown interest in parish work and really proved very useful and obliging. Her acquaintance with architecture—the technical terms, too—is unusually accurate for a member of your sex.”

“Her business is teaching,” said the lady.

“And I can’t but fear I have been instrumental in her loss of an excellent position.”

“If her learning is as remarkable as you consider it, she will doubtless soon secure another.”

“Ah! you’re prejudiced, my love. One cannot but be struck, at times, by the harshness with which even women of high principle, like yourself, judge other women.”

“Possibly the highness of my principles may be accountable for my judgments—in some cases.”

“Argument is very unrestful,” the vicar remarked, turning over on his side.

“But there would be an end of conversation if I always agreed with you.”

“Tut—tut,” he murmured. Then with renewed plaintiveness—“I cannot make up my mind whether it is not my duty, my chivalrous duty, to seek an interview with Sir Charles Verity and explain—put the aspects of the case to him as I see them.”

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“Call on him by all means. I’ll go with you. We ought, in common civility, to enquire for Damaris after this illness of hers. But don’t explain or attempt to enlarge on the case from your own point of view. Sir Charles will consider it an impertinence. It won’t advantage Miss Bilson and will embroil you with the most important of your parishioners. The wisdom of the serpent is permitted, on occasion even recommended.”

“A most dangerous doctrine, Jane, most dangerous, save under authority.”

“What authority can be superior to that under which the recommendation was originally given?”

“My love, you become slightly profane.—I implore you don’t argue—and at this hour! When a woman touches on exegesis, on theology “—

“All I know upon those subjects you, dear, have taught me.”

“Ah! well—ah! well”—the good man returned, at once mollified and suspicious. For might not the compliment be regarded as something of a back-hander? “We can defer our decision till to-morrow. Perhaps we had better, as you propose, call together. I need not go straight to the point, but watch my opportunity and slip in a word edgeways.”

He audibly yawned—the hint, like the yawn, a broad one. The lady did not take it, however. So far she had held her own; more—had nicely secured her ends. But further communications trembled upon her tongue. The word is just—literally trembled, for they might cause anger, and James’ anger—it happened rarely—she held in quite, to herself, uncomfortable respect.

“I fear there is a good deal of objectionable gossip going about the village just now,” she tentatively commenced.

“Then pray don’t repeat it to me, my love”—another yawn and an irritable one. “Gossip as you know is abhorrent to me.”

“And to me—but one needs to be forearmed with the truth if one is to rebut it conclusively. Only upon such grounds should I think of mentioning this to you.”

She made a dash.

“James, have you by chance ever heard peculiar rumours about young Darcy Faircloth’s parentage?”

“In mercy, Jane—what a question!—and from you! I am inexpressibly shocked.”

“So was I, when—I won’t mention names—when such rumours were hinted to me. I assured the person with whom I was talking that I had never heard a word on the subject. But she said, ‘One can’t help having eyes.’”

“Or, some of you, noses for carrion.”

Here he gave her the advantage. She was not slow to make play with it.

“Now it is my turn to be shocked,” she said—“and not, I think, James, without good cause.”

“Yes, I apologize,” the excellent man answered immediately. “I apologize; but to have so foul a suggestion of parochial scandal let loose on me suddenly, flung in my teeth, as I may say—and by you! I was taken off my guard and expressed myself coarsely. Yes, Jane, I apologize.”

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“Then I have you authority for contradicting these rumours?”

The Vicar of Deadham groaned in the darkness, and rustled under the bedclothes. His perplexity was great on being thus confronted by the time-honoured question as to how far, in the interests of public morality, it is justifiable for the private individual roundly to lie. Finally he banked on compromise, that permanently presiding genius of the Church of England ‘as by law established.’

“You have me on the hip, my love,” he told his wife quite meekly.

But, as she began rather eagerly to speak, he stopped her.

“Let be, my dear Jane,” he bade her, “let be. I neither deny or confirm the rumours to which I imagine you allude. Silence is most becoming for us both. Continue to assure any persons, ill-advised and evil-minded enough to approach you—I trust they may prove but few—that you have never heard a word of this subject. You will never—I can confidently promise you—hear one from me.—I shall make it my duty to preach on the iniquity of back-biting, tale-bearing, scandal-mongering next Sunday, and put some to the blush, as I trust. St. Paul will furnish me with more than one text eminently apposite. —Let me think—let me see—hum—ah! yes.”

And he fell to quoting from the Pauline epistles in Greek—to the lively annoyance of his auditor, whose education, though solid did not include a knowledge of those languages vulgarly known as “dead.” She naturally sought means to round on him.

“Might you not compromise yourself rather by such a sermon, James?” she presently said.

“Compromise myself? Certainly not.—Pray, Jane, how?”

“By laying yourself open to the suspicion of a larger acquaintance with the origin of those rumours than you are willing to admit.”

The shaft went home.

“This is a mere attempt to draw me. You are disingenuous.”

“Nothing of the sort,” the lady declared. “My one object is to protect you from criticism. And preaching upon gossip must invite rather than allay interest, thus giving this particular gossip a new lease of life. The application would be too obvious. Clearly, James, it would be wiser to wait.”

“The serpent, again the serpent—and one I’ve warmed in my bosom, too”—Then aloud —“I will think it over, my love. Possibly your view may be the right one. It is worth

consideration.—That must be sufficient. And now, Jane, I do implore you give over discussion and let us say good night."

It may be registered as among the consequences of these nocturnal exercises, that Dr. Horniblow abstained from tickling the ears of his congregation, on the following Sunday, with a homily founded upon the sin tale-bearing; and that he duly called, next day, at The Hard accompanied by his wife.

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The visit—not inconceivably to his inward thanksgiving—proved unfruitful of opportunity for excusing Miss Bilson, to her former employer, by accusing himself, Sir Charles Verity's courtesy being of an order calculated to discourage any approach to personal topics. Unfruitful, also, of enlightenment to Mrs. Horniblow respecting matters which—as the good lady ashamedly confessed to herself—although forbidden by her lord, still intrigued her while, of course, they most suitably shocked. For the life of her she could not help looking out for signs of disturbance and upheaval. But found none, unless—and that presented a conundrum difficult of solution—Damaris' pretty social readiness and grace in the reception of her guests might be, in some way, referable to lately reported events. That, and the fact the young girl was—as the saying is—"all eyes"—eyes calm, fathomless, reflective, which yet, when you happened to enter their sphere of vision, covered you with a new-born gentleness. Mrs. Horniblow caught herself growing lyrical—thinking of stars, of twin mountain lakes, the blue-purple of ocean. A girl in love is blessed with just such eyes—sometimes. Whereupon, remembering her own two girls, May and Doris—good as gold, bless them, yet, her shrewdness pronounced, when compared with Damaris, but homely pieces—the excellent woman sighed.

What did it all then amount to? Mrs. Horniblow's logic failed. "All eyes"—and very lovely ones at that—Damaris might be; yet her tranquillity and serenity appeared beyond question. Must thrilling mystery be voted no more than a mare's-nest?—Only, did not the fact remain that James had refused to commit himself either way, thereby naturally landing himself in affirmation up to the neck? She gave it up.

But, even in the giving up, could not resist probing just a little. The two gentlemen were out of earshot, standing near the glass door.—How James' black, bow-windowed figure and the fixed red in his clean-shaven, slightly pendulous cheeks, did show up to be sure, in the light!—Unprofitable gift of observation, for possession of which she so frequently had cause to reproach herself.—

"You still look a little run down and pale, my dear," she said. "It isn't for me to advise, but wouldn't a change of air and scene be good, don't you think?"

Damaris assured her not—in any case not yet. Later, after Christmas, she and her father might very likely go abroad. But till then they had a full programme of guests.

"Colonel Carteret comes to us next week; and my aunt Felicia always likes to be here in November. She enjoys that month at the seaside, finding it, she says, so poetic."

Damaris smiled, her eyes at once, and more than ever, eloquent and unfathomable.

"And I learned only this morning an old Anglo-Indian friend of ours, Mrs. Mackinder, whom I should be quite dreadfully sorry to miss, is spending the autumn at Stourmouth."

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Mrs. Horniblow permitted herself a dash.

“At Stourmouth—yes?” she ventured. “That reminds me. I hear—how far the information is correct I cannot pretend to say—that kind little person, Miss Bilson, has been there with Miss Verity this last week. I observed we had not met her in the village just lately. I hope you have good news of her. When is she expected back?”

Without hesitation or agitation came the counter-stroke.

“I don’t know,” Damaris answered. “Her plans, I believe, are uncertain at present. You and Dr. Horniblow will stay to tea with us, won’t you?”—this charmingly. “It will be here in a very few minutes—I can ring for it at once.”

And the lady laughed to herself, good-temperedly accepting the rebuff. For it was neatly delivered, and she could admire clever fencing even though she herself were pinked.—As to tea, she protested positive shame at prolonging her visit—for didn’t it already amount rather to a “visitation?”—yet retained her seat with every appearance of satisfaction.—If the truth must be told, Mrs. Cooper’s cakes were renowned throughout society at Deadham, as of the richest, the most melting in the mouth; and James—-hence not improbably the tendency to abdominal protuberance—possessed an inordinate fondness for cakes. He had shown himself so docile in respect of projected inflammatory sermons, and of morning calls personally conducted by his wife, that the latter could not find it in her heart to ravish him away from these approaching very toothsome delights. Nay—let him stay and eat—for was not such staying good policy, she further reflected, advertising the fact she bore no shadow of malice towards her youthful hostess for that neatly delivered rebuff.

After this sort, therefore, was gossip, for the time being at all events, scotched if not actually killed. Parochial excitement flagged the sooner, no doubt, because, of the four persons chiefly responsible for its creation, two were invisible and the remaining two apparently quite unconscious of its ever having existed.—Mrs. Lesbia Faircloth, at the Inn, the Vicar’s wife left out of the count.—If Sir Charles Verity and Damaris had hurried away, gossip would have run after them with liveliest yelpings. But this practise of masterly inactivity routed criticism. How far was it studied, cynical on the part of the father, or innocent upon that of the daughter, she could not tell one bit; but that practically it carried success along with it, she saw to be indubitable. “Face the music and the band stops playing”—so she put it to herself, as she walked down the drive to the front gate, her James—was he just a trifle crestfallen, good man?—strolling, umbrella in hand, beside her.

All subsequent outbreaks of gossip may be described as merely sporadic. They did not spread. As when, for instance, peppery little Dr. Cripps—still smarting under Dr. McCabe’s introduction into preserves he had reckoned exclusively his own—advised himself to throw off a nasty word or so on the subject to Commander Battye and

Captain Taylor, over strong waters and cigars in his surgery—tea, the ladies, and the card-table left to their own devices in the drawing-room meanwhile—one evening after a rubber of whist.

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“Damn bad taste, I call it, in a newcomer like Cripps,” the sailor had remarked later to the soldier. “But if a man isn’t a gentleman what can you expect?”—And with that, as among local persons of quality, the matter finally dropped.

Mrs. Doubleday and Butcher Cleave, to give an example from a lower social level, agreed, across the former’s counter in the village shop, that—

“It is the duty of every true Christian to let bygones be bygones—and a downright flying in the face of Providence, as you may say, to do otherwise, when good customers, whose money you’re sure of, are so scarce. For without The Hard and—to give everyone their due—without the Island also, where would trade have been in Deadham these ten years and more past? Mum’s the word, take it from me,”—and each did take it from the other, with rich conviction of successfully making the best of both worlds, securing eternal treasure in Heaven while cornering excellent profits on earth.

William Jennifer had many comments to make in the matter, and with praiseworthy reticence concluded to make them mainly to himself. The majority of them, it is to be feared, were humorous to the point of being unsuited to print, but the refrain may pass —

“And to think if I hadn’t happened to choose that particular day to take the little dorgs and the ferrets ratting, the ’ole bleesed howd’ye do might never have come to pass! Tidy sum, young master Darcy’s in my debt, Lord succour him, for the rest of his nat’ral life!”

BOOK III

THE WORLD BEYOND THE FOREST

CHAPTER I

AN EPISODE IN THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EYES

Thus far, for the surer basing of our argument, it has appeared advisable to proceed step by step. But the foundations being now well and truly laid, the pace of our narrative may, with advantage, quicken; a twelve month be rounded up in a page, a decade, should convenience so dictate, in a chapter.

To the furthering of which advance, let it be stated that the close of the year still in question marked the date, for Damaris, of two matters of cardinal importance. For it was then Sir Charles Verity commenced writing his history of the reign of Shere Ali, covering the eleven years following the latter’s accession to the very turbulent throne of

Afghanistan in 1863.—Colonel Carteret may be held mainly responsible for the inception of this literary enterprise, now generally acclaimed a classic. Had not Sir William Napier, so he argued, made the soldier, as historian, for ever famous? And why should not Charles Verity, with his unique knowledge of court intrigues, of the people and the country, do for the campaigns of the semi-barbarous Eastern ruler, that which Sir William had done for Wellington's campaign in the Spanish Peninsular?

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Carteret prophesied—and truly as the event richly proved—a finely fascinating book would eventually come of it. Meanwhile—though this argument, in favour of the scheme, he kept to himself—the preparation of the said book would supply occupation and interest of which his old friend appeared to him to stand rather gravely in need. For that something was, just now, amiss with Charles Verity, Carteret could not disguise from himself. He was changed, in a way a little broken—so at least the younger man's kindly, keenly observant, blue eyes regretfully judged him. He fell into long silences, seeming to sink away into some abyss of cheerless thought; while his speech had, too often, a bitter edge to it. Carteret mourned these indications of an unhappy frame of mind. Did more—sought by all means in his power to conjure them away.

"We must make your father fight his battles over again, dear witch," he told Damaris, pacing the terrace walk topping the sea-wall beside her, one evening in the early November dusk. "His record is a very brilliant one and he ought to get more comfort out of the remembrance of it. Let's conspire, you and I, to make him sun himself in the achievements and activities of those earlier years. What do you say?"

"Oh! do it, do it," she answered fervently. "He is sad—and I am so afraid that it is partly my fault."

"Your fault? Why what wicked practises have you been up to since I was here last?" he asked, teasing her.

A question evoking, in Damaris, sharp inward debate. For her father's melancholy humour weighed on her, causing her perplexity and a measure of self-reproach. She would have given immensely much to unburden herself to this wise and faithful counsellor; and confide to him the—to her—strangely moving fact of Darcy Faircloth's existence. Yet, notwithstanding her conviction of Colonel Carteret's absolute loyalty, she hesitated; restrained in part by modesty, in part by the fear of being treacherous. Would it be altogether honourable to give away the secret places of Charles Verity's life—of any man's life if it came to that—even to so honourable and trusted a friend? She felt handicapped by her own ignorance moreover, having neither standards nor precedents for guidance. She had no idea—how should she?—in what way most men regard such affairs, how far they accept and condone, how far condemn them. She could not tell whether she was dealing with a case original and extraordinary, or one of pretty frequent occurrence in the experience of those who, as the phrase has it, know their world. These considerations kept her timid and tongue-tied; though old habit, combined with Carteret's delightful personality and the soothing influence of the dusky evening quiet, inclined her to confidences.

"It's not anything I've done," she presently took him up gravely. "But, quite by chance, I learned something which I think the Commissioner Sahib would rather not have had me hear. I had to be quite truthful with him about it; but I was bewildered and ill. I blurted

things out rather I'm afraid, and hurt him more than I need have done. I was so taken by surprise, you see."

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“Yes, I see,” Carteret said, regardless of strict veracity. For he didn’t see, though he believed himself on the road to seeing and that some matter of singular moment.

“He was beautiful to me—beautiful about everything—everybody,” she asserted. “And we love one another not less, but more, he and I—of that I am sure. Only it’s different—different. We can’t either of us quite go back to the time before—and that has helped to make him sad.”

Carteret listened in increasing interest aware that he sounded unlooked-for depths, apprehensive lest those depths should harbour disastrous occurrences. He walked the length of the terrace before again speaking. Then, no longer teasing but gently and seriously, he asked her:

“Do you feel free to tell me openly about this, and let me try to help you—if it’s a case for help?”

Damaris shook her head, looking up at him through the soft enclosing murk, and smiling rather ruefully.

“I wish I knew—I do so wish I knew,” she said. “But I don’t—not yet, anyway. Help me without my telling you, please. The book is a splendid idea. And then do you think you could persuade him to let us go away abroad, for a time? Everything here must remind him—as it does me—of what happened. It was quite right,” she went on judicially—“for everyone’s sake, we should stay here just the same at first. People,” with a scornful lift of the head Carteret noted and admired—“might have mistaken our reason for going away. They had to be made to understand we were perfectly indifferent.—I knew all that, though we never discussed it. One does things, sometimes, just because it’s right they should be done, without any sort of planning—just by instinct. Still I know we can’t be quite natural here. What happened comes between us. We’re each anxious about the other and feel a constraint, though we never speak of it. That can’t be avoided, I suppose, for we both suffered a good deal at the time—but he most, much the most because”—

Damaris paused.

“Because why?”

“I suppose because I’m young; and then, once I got accustomed to the idea, I saw it meant what was very wonderful in some ways—a wonderfulness which, for me, would go on and on—a whole new country for me to explore and travel in, quite my own—and—and—which I couldn’t help loving.”

“Heigh ho! heigh ho!” Carteret put in softly. “This becomes exciting, dear witch, you know.”

“I don’t want to be tantalizing,” she answered him, still pacing in the growing dimness of land and sea.

The dead black mass of the great ilex trees looked to touch the low hanging sky. A grey gleam, here and there, lit the surface of the swirling tide-river. The boom of the slow plunging waves came from the back of the Bar, and now and again wild-fowl cried, faint and distant, out on the mud-flats of the Haven.

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“Listen,” Damaris said. “It is mournful here. It tells you the same things over and over again. It sort of insists on them. The place seems so peaceful, but it never lets you alone, really. And now, after what happened, it never leaves him—the Commissioner Sahib—alone. It repeats the same story to him over and over again. It wears him as dropping water wears away stone. And there is no longer the same reason for staying there was at first. Persuade him to go away, to take me abroad. And come with us—-couldn’t you?—for a little while at least. Is it selfish to ask you to leave your hunting and shooting so early in the season? I don’t want to be selfish. But he isn’t well. Whether he isn’t well in his body or only in his thinkings, I can’t tell. But it troubles me. He sleeps badly, I am afraid. The nights must be very long and lonely when one can’t sleep.—If you would come, it would be so lovely. I should feel so safe about him. You and the book should cure him between you. I’m perfectly sure of that. To have you would make us both so happy”—

And, in her innocent importunity, Damaris slipped her hand within Colonel Carteret’s arm sweetly coaxing him.

He started slightly. Threw back his head, standing, straight and tall, in the mysterious twilight beside her. Raised his deerstalker cap, for a moment, letting the moist chill of the November evening dwell on his hair and forehead.

Though very popular with women, Carteret had never married, making a home for his elder sister, Mrs. Dreydel—widow of a friend and fellow officer in the then famous “Guides”—and her four sturdy, good-looking boys at the Norfolk manor-house, which had witnessed his own birth and those of a long line of his ancestors. To bring up a family of his own, in addition to his sister’s, would have been too costly, and debt he abhorred. Therefore, such devoirs as he paid the great goddess Aphrodite, were but few and fugitive—he being by nature and temperament an idealist and a notably clean liver. By his abstention, however, sentiment was fine-trained rather than extinguished. His heart remained young, capable of being thrilled in instant response to any appeal of high and delicate quality. It thrilled very sensibly, now, in response to the appeal of Damaris’ hand, emphasizing her tender pleading regarding her father. She touched, she charmed him to an extent which obliged him rather sharply to call his senses to order. Hadn’t he known her ever since she was a babe a span long? Wasn’t she, according to all reason, a babe still, in as far as any decently minded male being of his mature age could be concerned? He told himself, at once humorously and sternly, he ought to feel so, think so—whether he did or not. And ought, in his case, was a word not to be played fast and loose with. Once uttered it must be obeyed.

Wherefore, thus conclusively self-admonished, he put his cap on his head again and, bending a little over Damaris, patted her hand affectionately as it rested upon his arm.

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“Very good—I’ll hold myself and my future at your disposition,” he gaily said to her. “As much hunting and shooting as I care for will very well keep. Don’t bother your pretty head about them. During the Christmas holidays, my nephews will be ready enough, in all conscience, to let fly with my guns and ride my horses, so neither will be wasted. I’ll go along with you gladly, for no man living is dearer to me than your father, and no business could be more to my taste than scotching and killing the demons which plague him. They plague all of us, in some form or other, at times, as life goes on.”

Very gently he disengaged his arm from her hand.

“Take me indoors,” he said, “and give me my tea—over which we’ll further discuss plots for kidnapping Verity and carrying him off south. The French Riviera for preference?—-Hullo—what the deuce is that?”

For, as he spoke, the two cats appearing with miraculous suddenness out of nowhere—as is the custom of their priceless tribe—rushed wildly past. Fierce, sinuous, infinitely graceful shapes, leaping high in air, making strange noises, chirrupings and squeakings, thudding of quick little paws, as they chased one another round the antiquated, seaward-trained cannon and pyramid of ball.

For a minute or so Damaris watched them, softly laughing. Then, in the content bred of Carteret’s promise and the joy of coming travel, something of their frisky spirit caught her too—a spirit which, for all young creatures, magically haunts the dusk. And, as they presently fled away up the lawn, Damaris fled after them, circling over the moist grass, darting hither and thither, alternately pursuing and pursued.

Colonel Carteret, following soberly, revolving many thoughts, did not overtake her until the garden door was reached. There, upon the threshold, the light from within covering and revealing her, she awaited him. Her bosom rose and fell, her breathing being a little hurried, her face a little flushed. Her grave eyes sparkled and danced.

“Oh! you’ve made me so glad, so dreadfully glad,” she said. “And I never properly thanked you. Forgive me. I never can resist them—I went mad with the cats.”

Her young beauty appeared to Carteret very notable; and, yes—although she might disport herself in this childishly frolic fashion—it was idle to call her, or pretend her any longer a babe. For cause to him unknown, through force of some experience of which he remained ignorant, she had undeniably come into the charm and mystery of her womanhood—a very fair and noble blossoming before which reverently, if wistfully, he bowed his head.

“It’s good to have you declare yourself glad, dear witch, in that case I’m glad too,” he answered her. “But as to forgiveness, I’m inclined to hold it over until you leave off

being tantalizing—and, upon my word, I find you uncommonly far from leaving off just now!”

“You mean until I tell you what happened?”

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Carteret nodded, searching her face with wise, fearless, smiling eyes.

“Ah! yes,” he said, “we can put it that way if you please.” Damaris hesitated detecting some undercurrent of meaning which puzzled her.

“I may never have to tell you. My father may speak of it—or you may just see for yourself. Only then, then”—she with a moving earnestness prayed him—“be kind, be lenient. Don’t judge harshly—promise me you won’t.”

And as she spoke her expression softened to a great and unconscious tenderness; for she beheld, in thought, a wide-winged sea-bird, above certain letters, tattooed in indigo and crimson upon the back of a lean shapely brown hand.

“I promise you,” Carteret said, and passed in at the door marvelling somewhat sadly.

“Is it that?” he asked himself. “If so, it comes early. Has she gone the way of all flesh and fallen in love?”

And this conversation, as shall presently be set forth, ushered in that second matter of cardinal importance, already referred to, which for Damaris marked the close of this eventful year.

CHAPTER II

TELLING HOW DAMARIS RENEWED HER ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE BELOVED LADY OF HER INFANCY

The windows of the sitting-room—upon the first floor of the long, three-storied, yellow-painted hotel—commanded a vast and glittering panorama of indented coast-line and purple sea. Here and there, in the middle distance, little towns, pale-walled and glistering, climbed upward amid gardens and olive yards from the rocky shore. Heathlands and pine groves covered the intervening headlands and steep valleys, save where meadows marked the course of some descending stream. To the north-east, above dark wooded foot-hills, the flushed whiteness of snow-summits cut delicately into the solid blue of the sky.

Stretched upon the sun-faded, once scarlet cushions of the window-seat, Damaris absorbed her fill of light, and warmth, and colour. Pleading imperative feminine mendings, she stayed at home this afternoon. She felt disposed to rest—here in the middle of her pasture, so to say—and resting, both count her blessings and dream, offering hospitality to all and any pleasant visions which might elect to visit her. And, indeed, those blessings appeared a goodly company, worthy of congratulation and of gratitude. She let the black silk stocking, the toe of which she affected to darn, slip neglected on to the floor while she added up the pleasant column of them.

The journey might be counted as a success—that to start with. For her father was certainly better, readier of speech and of interest in outside things. Oh! the dear “man with the blue eyes” had a marvellous hand on him—tactful, able, devoted, always serene, often even gay. Never could there be another so perfect, because so sane and comfortable, a friend. Her debt to him was of old standing and still for ever grew. How she could ever pay it she didn’t know! Which consideration, for an instant, clouded her content. Not that she felt the obligation irksome; but, that out of pure affection, she wanted to make him some return, some acknowledgment; wanted to give, since to her he had so lavishly given.

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Then the book—of all Carteret's clever manipulations the cleverest! For hadn't it begun to grip her father, and that quite divertingly much? He was occupied with it to the point of really being a tiny bit self-conscious and shy. Keen on it, transparently eager—-though contemptuous, in high mighty sort, of course, of his own eagerness when he remembered. Only, more than half the time he so deliciously failed to remember.—And with that Damaris' thought took another turn, a more private and personal one.

For in truth the book gripped her, too, in most intimate and novel fashion, revealing to her the enchantments of an art in process of being actively realized in living, constructive effort. Herein she found, not the amazement of a new thing, but of a thing so natural that it appeared just a part of her very self, though, until now, an undiscovered one. To read other people's books is a joyous employment, as she well knew; but to make a book all one's own self, to watch and compel its growth into coherent form and purpose is—so she began to suspect—among the rarest delights granted to mortal man.

Her own share of such making, in the present case, was of the humblest it is true, mere spade labour and hod-bearing—namely, writing from Charles Verity's dictation, verifying names and dates, checking references and quotations. Still each arresting phrase, each felicitous expression, the dramatic ring of some virile word, the broad onward sweep of stately prose in narrative or sustained description, not only charmed her ear but challenged her creative faculty. She put herself to school in respect of it all, learning day by day a lesson.—This was the way it should be done. Ambition prodded her on. —For mightn't she aspire to do it too, some day? Mightn't, granted patience and application, the writing of books prove to be her business, her vocation? The idea floated before her, vague as yet, though infinitely beguiling. Whereupon the whole world took on a new significance and splendour, as it needs must when nascent talent claims its own, asserts its dawning right to dominion and to freedom.

And there the pathos of her father's position touched her nearly. For wasn't it a little cruel this remarkable gift of his should so long have lain dormant, unsuspected by his friends, unknown to the reading public, only to disclose itself, and that by the merest hazard, as a last resource?—It did not seem fair that he had not earlier found and enjoyed his literary birthright.

Damaris propounded this view to Colonel Carteret with some heat. But he smilingly discounted her fondly indignant lament.

"Better late than never anyhow, my dear witch," he said. "And just picture the satisfaction of this brilliant rally when, as we'd reason to believe, he himself reckoned the game was up! Oh! there are points about a tardy harvest such as this, by no means to be despised. Thrice blessed the man who, like your father, finding such a harvest, also finds it to be of a sort he can without scruple reap."

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Of which cryptic utterance Damaris, at the time, could—to quote her own phrase—-“make no sense!”—Nor could she make sense of it, now, when counting her blessings, she rested, in happy idleness, upon the faded scarlet cushions of the window-seat.

She remembered the occasion quite well on which Carteret thus expressed himself one afternoon, during their stay in Paris, on the southward journey. She had worn a new myrtle-green, black-braided, fur-trimmed cloth pelisse and hat to match, as she also remembered, bought the day before at a fascinating shop in the Rue Castiglione. Agreeably conscious her clothes were not only very much “the right thing” but decidedly becoming, she had gone, with him, to pay a visit of ceremony at the convent school—-near the Church of St. Germain-les-Pres—where, as a little girl of six, fresh from India and the high dignities of the Bhutpur Sultan-i-bagh, she had been deposited by her father’s old friend, Mrs. John Pereira, who had brought her and Sarah Watson, her nurse, back to Europe.

The sojourn at the convent—once the surprise of translation from East to West, from reigning princess to little scholar was surmounted—proved fertile in gentle memories. The visit of to-day, not only revived these memories, but added to their number. For it passed off charmingly. Carteret seemed by no means out of place among the nuns—-well-bred and gracious women of hidden, consecrated lives. They, indeed, appeared instinctively drawn to him and fluttered round him in the sweetest fashion imaginable; he, meanwhile, bearing himself towards them with an exquisite and simple courtesy beyond all praise. Never had Damaris admired the “man with the blue eyes” more, never felt a more perfect trust in him, than when beholding him as *Mousquetaire au Couvent* thus!

As they emerged again into the clear atmosphere and resonance of the Paris streets, and made their way back by the Rue du Bac, the Pont Royal and the gardens of the Tuileries, to their hotel in the Rue de Rivoli, Carteret spoke reverently of the religious life, and the marvellous adaptability of the Catholic system to every need, every attitude of the human heart and conscience. He spoke further of the loss those inevitably sustain, who—from whatever cause—stand outside the creeds, unable to set their spiritual God-ward hopes and aspirations within a definite external framework of doctrine and practice hallowed by tradition.

“I could almost wish those dear holy women had gathered your little soul into the fold, when they had you in their keeping and made a good Catholic of you, dearest witch,” he told her. “It would have been a rather flagrant case of cradle-snatching, I own, but I can’t help thinking it would have simplified many difficulties for you.”

“And raised a good many, too,” Damaris gaily answered him. “For Aunt Harriet Cowden would have been furious, and Aunt Felicia distressed and distracted; and poor Nannie —though she really got quite tame with the Sisters, and came to respect them in the end—would have broken her heart at my being taught to worship images, and have

believed hell yawned to devour me. Oh! I think it was more fair to wait.—All the same I loved their religion—I love it still."

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“Go on loving it,” he bade her.—And at once turned the conversation to other themes—-that of her father, Charles Verity among them, and the book on Afghanistan, the fair copy of the opening chapters of which was just completed.

Then, the stimulating, insistent vivacity of Paris going a little to Damaris’ head—since urging, as always, to fullness of enterprise, fullness of endeavour, giving, as always, immense joy and value to the very fact of living—she lamented the late development of her father’s literary genius. A lament which called forth Carteret’s consolatory rejoinder, along with this—to her—cryptic assertion as to the thrice blessed state of the man whose harvest, when tardy, is of a description he need not scruple to reap.

“Why,” she asked herself, “should he have said that unless with reference to himself. Reference to some private harvest which he himself scrupled to reap?”

Damaris slipped her feet from the cushioned window-seat to the floor, and stooping down recovered her fallen black silk stocking. She felt disturbed, slightly conscience-stricken. For it had never occurred to her, strong, able, serene of humour and of countenance as he was, that the “man with the blue eyes” could have personal worries, things—as she put it—he wanted yet doubted whether he ought to have. Surely his unfailing helpfulness and sympathy gave him the right, in fee-simple, to anything and everything he might happen to covet. That he should covet what was wrong, what was selfish, detrimental to others, seemed incredible. And the generous pity of her youthful tenderness, her impatience of all privation, all disappointment or denial for those she held in affection, overflowed in her. She longed to do whatever would greatly please him, to procure for him whatever he wanted. Wouldn’t it be delicious to do that—if she could only find out!

But this last brought her up against a disquieting lesson lately learned.—Namely, against recognition of how very far the lives of men—even those we know most dearly and closely—and the lives of us women are really apart. She thought of her father and Darcy Faircloth and their entirely unsuspected relation. This dulled the edge of her enthusiasm. For wasn’t it only too probably the same with them all? Loyalty compelled the question. Had not every man a secret, or secrets, only penetrable, both for his peace of mind and for your own, at considerable risk?

Damaris planted her elbows on the window-sill, her chin in the hollow of her hands. Her eyes were solemn, her face grave with thought.—Verily the increase of knowledge is the increase of perplexity, if not of actual sorrow. Even the apparently safest and straightest paths are beset with “pitfall and with gin” for whoso studies to pursue truth and refuse subscription to illusion. Your charity should be wide as the world towards others. Towards yourself narrow as a hair, lest you condone your own

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weakness, greed, or error. Of temptation to any save very venial sins Damaris had, in her own person, little conception as yet.—Still to a maiden of eighteen, though she may have a generous proportion of health and beauty, sufficient fortune and by no means contemptible intelligence, noble instincts, complications and distresses, both of the practical and theoretic order, may, and do, at times occur. Damaris suffered the shock of such now; and into what further jungles of cheerless speculation she might have been projected it is impossible to say, had not persons and events close at hand claimed her attention.

The Grand Hotel at St. Augustin is situated upon a long narrow promontory, which juts out into the sea at right angles to the main trend of the coast-line. It faces east, turning its back upon the little town—built on the site of a Roman colonial city, originally named in honour of the pagan Emperor rather than the Christian Confessor and ascetic. Mediaeval piety bestowed on it the saintly prefix, along with a round-arched cathedral church, of no great size, but massive proportions and somewhat gloomy aspect.

From the terrace garden and carriage drive, immediately in front of the hotel, the ground drops sharply, beneath scattered pines with undergrowth of heather, wild lavender, gum-cistus, juniper, mastic and myrtle, to the narrow white beach a hundred feet below. Little paths traverse the rough descent. And up one of these, halting to rest now and then on a conveniently placed bench in the shade of some spreading umbrella pine, to discourse to the company of gentlemen following in her wake, or contemplate the view, came a notably graceful and telling figure.

As the lady advanced with leisurely composure, Damaris, gazing down from her point of vantage in the first floor window, received the impression of a person almost extravagantly finished and feminine, in which all irregularities and originalities of Nature had suffered obliteration by the action of art. Not art of the grosser sort, dependent on dyes, paint and cosmetics. The obliteration was not superficial merely, and must have been achieved by processes at once subtle and profound. The result obtained, however, showed unquestionably charming—if in a line slightly finical and exotic—as she picked her way through the fragrant undergrowth of the pine wood, slanting sunshine playing on her dark blue raiment, wide-brimmed white hat, and floating veil.

Coming completely into view at last, when stepping from the path on to the level carriage drive, a gold chain she wore, from which dangled a little bunch of trinkets and a long-handled lorgnette, glinted, catching the light. Damaris gave an exclamation of sudden and rapturous recognition. So far she had had eyes for the lady only; but now she took a rapid scrutiny of the latter’s attendants. With two of them she was unacquainted. The other two were her father and Carteret.

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Whereupon rapture gave place to a pang of jealous alarm and resentment. For they belonged to her, those dear two; and to see them even thus temporarily appropriated by someone else caused her surprising agitation. They had been so good, so apparently content, alone with her upon this journey. It would be too trying, too really intolerable to have outsiders interfere and break up their delightful solitude *a trois*, their delightful intercourse! Yet, almost immediately, the girl flushed, going hot all over with shame, scolding herself for even passing entertainment of such unworthy and selfish emotions.

“For it is Henrietta Pereira,” she said half aloud. “My own darling, long-ago Henrietta, who used to be so beautifully kind to me and give me presents I loved above everything.”

And, after a pause, the note of alarm sounding again though modified to wistfulness—

“Will she care for me still, and shall I still care for her—but I must care—I must—now I’m grown up?”

To set which disturbing questions finally at rest, being a valiant young creature, Damaris permitted herself no second thoughts, no vacillation or delay; but went straight downstairs and crossing the strip of terrace garden, bare-headed as she was, waited at the head of the steps leading up from the carriage drive to greet the idol of her guileless infancy.

To Colonel Carteret who, bringing up the rear of the little procession was the first to notice her advent, she made a touching and gallant picture. Her face had gone very pale and he saw, or fancied he saw, her lips tremble. But her solemn eyes shone with a steady light, and, whatever the excitement affecting her, she held it bravely in check. Noting all which he could not but speculate as to whether she had any knowledge of a certain romantic attachment—culminating on the one hand in an act of virtuous treachery, on the other in an act of renunciation—which had overshadowed and wrenched from its natural sequence so large a portion of her father’s life. He earnestly hoped she was ignorant of all that; although the act of renunciation, made for her, Damaris’ sake, represented a magnificent gesture if an exaggerated and almost fanatical one, on Charles Verity’s part. It gave the measure of the man’s fortitude, the measure of his paternal devotion. Still knowledge of it might, only too readily, prove a heavy burden to a young girl’s imaginative and tender conscience. Yes—he hoped she had been spared that knowledge.

If she had escaped it thus far—as he reflected not without amusement—the other actor in that rather tragic drama, now so unexpectedly and arrestingly present in the flesh, could be trusted not to enlighten her. He knew Henrietta Pereira of old, bless her hard little heart. Not only did she detest tragedy, but positively revelled in any situation where clever avoidance of everything even remotely approaching it was open to her. She ruled the sublime and the ridiculous alike impartially out of the social relation; and that

with so light though determined a touch, so convincing yet astute a tact and delicacy, you were constrained not only to submit to, but applaud her strategy.

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Had she not within the very last hour given a masterly example of her powers in this line? For when he, Carteret, and Charles Verity, strolling in all innocence along the shore path back from St. Augustin, had to their infinite astonishment met her and her attendant swains face to face, she hadn't turned a hair. Her nerve was invincible. After clasping the hand of each in turn with the prettiest enthusiasm, she had introduced—-"My husband, General Frayling—Mr. Marshall Wace, his cousin," with the utmost composure. Thus making over to them any awkwardness which might be going and effectually ridding herself of it.

Carteret felt his jaw drop for the moment.—He had heard of John Pereira's death two years ago, and welcomed the news on her account, since, if report said true, that dashing cavalry officer had taken to evil courses. Gambling and liquor made him a nuisance, not to say disgrace to his regiment, and how much greater a one to his wife. Poor thing, she must have had a lot to endure and that of the most sordid! It wasn't nice to think about. Clearly Pereira's removal afforded matter for thankfulness.

But of this speedy reconstruction on her part, in the shape of a third matrimonial venture, he had heard never a word. How would Verity take it?—Apparently with a composure as complete as her own.—And then the inherent humour of the position, and her immense skill and coolness in the treatment of it, came uppermost. Carteret felt bound to support her and help her out by accepting her little old General—lean-shanked and livery, with pompously outstanding chest, aggressive white moustache and mild appealing eye—as a matter of course. Bound to buck him up, and encourage him in the belief he struck a stranger as the terrible fellow he would so like to be, and so very much feared that he wasn't. Carteret's large charity came into play in respect of the superannuated warrior; who presented a pathetically inadequate effect, specially when seen, as now, alongside Charles Verity. Surely the contrast must hit the fair Henrietta rather hard? Carteret expended himself in kindly civilities, therefore, going so far as to say "sir" once or twice in addressing Frayling. Whereat the latter's timorous step grew almost jaunty and his chest more than ever inflated.

If Henrietta carried things off to admiration in the first amazement of impact, she carried them off equally to admiration in her meeting with Damaris. It was the prettiest little scene in the world.

For reaching up and placing her hands on the girl's shoulders her chiselled face—-distinct yet fragile in outline as some rare cameo—suffused for once with transparent, shell-like pink, she kissed Damaris on either cheek.

"Ah! precious child, most precious child," she fondly murmured. "What an enchanting surprise! How little I imagined such a joy was in store for me when I came out this afternoon!"

And louder, for the benefit of the assistants.

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“Yes—here are my husband, General Frayling, and Mr. Wace his cousin—he shall sing to you some day—that by the way—who is travelling with us. But they must talk to you later. I can’t spare you to them now. I am greedy after our long separation and want to have you all to myself.”

And, including the four gentlemen in a gesture of friendly farewell, she put her arm round Damaris’ waist, gently compelling her in the direction of a group of buff-painted iron chairs, placed in a semicircle in the shade of ilex and pine trees at the end of the terrace.

“I have so much to hear,” she said, “so many dropped threads to pick up, and it is impossible to talk comfortably and confidentially in a crowd. Our men must really contrive to play about by themselves for a little while and leave me to enjoy you in peace.”

“But won’t they mind?” Damaris asked, upon whom the spell of the elder woman’s personality began sensibly to work.

“Let them mind, let them mind,” she threw off airily in answer. “So much the better. It will do them good. It is excellent discipline for men to find they can’t always have exactly their own way.”

Which assertion served to dissipate any last remnant of jealous alarm Damaris’ mind may have unconsciously harboured. In its place shy curiosity blossomed, and quick intimate pleasure in so perfectly fashioned and furnished a creature. For wasn’t her childish adoration fully justified? Wasn’t her darling Henrietta a being altogether captivating and unique? Damaris loved the feeling of that arm and hand lightly clasping her waist. Loved the faint fragrance—hadn’t it intoxicated her baby senses?—-pervading Henrietta’s hair, her clothes, her whole pretty person. Loved the tinkle of the bunch of trinkets dangling from the long chain which reached below her waist. She had feared disappointment. That, as she now perceived, was altogether superfluous. Henrietta enthralled her eyes, enthralled her affection. She longed to protect, to serve her, to stand between her and every rough wind which blew, because she was so pretty, so extraordinarily and completely civilized from head to foot.

No doubt in the generosity of her youthful inexperience Damaris exaggerated the lady’s personal charm. Yet the dozen years intervening—since their last meeting—had, in truth, dealt mercifully with the latter’s good looks. A trifle pinched, a trifle faded she might be, as compared with the Henrietta of twelve years ago; but immediately such damage, such wear and tear of the fleshly garment, showed at its least conspicuous. She negotiated the double encounter, as Carteret had noted, with admirable sang-froid; but not, as to the first one in any case, without considerably greater inward commotion than he gave her credit for. She was in fact keyed up by it, excited, taken out of herself to an unprecedented extent, her native optimism and egoism in singular disarray. Yet

thereby, through that very excitement, she recaptured for the time being the physical loveliness of an earlier period. Beauty is very much a matter of circulation; and the blood cantered, not to say galloped, through Henrietta's veins.

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The sight of Charles Verity did indeed put back the clock for her in most astounding sort. Henrietta was no victim of impulse. Each of her three marriages had been dictated by convenience, carefully thought out and calculated. Over neither husband had she, for ever so brief a period, lost her head. But over Charles Verity she had come perilously near losing it—once. That, it is not too much to say, constituted the greatest sensation, the greatest emotion of her experience. As a rule the most trying and embarrassing part of encountering a former lover is that you wonder what, under Heaven, induced you to like him so well? Here the position was reversed, so that Henrietta wondered—with a sickening little contraction of the heart—what, under Heaven, had prevented her liking him much more, why, under Heaven, she ever let him go? Of course, as things turned out, it was all for the best, since her insensibility made for righteousness, or anyhow for respectability—in the opinion of the world the same, if not an even superior article. She ought to congratulate herself, ought to feel thankful. Only just now she didn't. On the contrary she was shaken—consciously and most uncomfortably shaken to the very deepest of such depths as her shallow soul could boast—sitting here, on a buff-painted chair in the shade of the pines and ilex trees, in company with Damaris, holding the girl's hand in both her own with a clinging, slightly insistent, pressure as it rested upon her lap.

"Dearest child, I believe, though you have grown so tall, I should have recognized you anywhere," she said.

"And I you," Damaris echoed. "I did, I did, after just the first little minute."

"Ah! you've a memory for faces too?"

Her glance wandered to the group of men gathered before the hotel portico—Sir Charles and General Frayling side by side, engaged in civil if not particularly animated conversation. The two voices reached her with a singular difference of timbre and of tone. Carteret spoke, apparently making some proposition, some invitation, in response to which the four passed into the house.

Henrietta settled herself in her chair with a movement of sensible relief. While they remained there she must look, and it was not quite healthy to look.—Her good, little, old General, who only asked respectfully to adore and follow in her wake—a man of few demands and quite tidy fortune—and after poor, besotted, blustering, gambling, squashily sentimental and tearful Johnnie Pereira wasn't he a haven of rest—oh, positively a haven of rest? All the same she preferred his not standing there in juxtaposition to Charles Verity. She much preferred their all going indoors—Carteret along with the rest, if it came to that.

She turned and smiled upon Damaris.

“However good your memory for faces may be, I find it very sweet you should have recognized mine after ‘just the first little minute,’” she said, with a coaxing touch of mimicry. “You haven’t quite parted company with the baby I remember so well, even yet. I used to call you my downy owl, with solemn saucer eyes and fierce little beak. You were extraordinarily, really perplexingly like your father then. A miniature edition, but so faithful to the original it used, sometimes, to give me the quaintest jump.”

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Henrietta mused, raising one hand and fingering the lace at her throat as seeking to loosen it. Damaris watched fascinated, in a way troubled, by her extreme prettiness. Every point, every detail was so engagingly complete.

“You are like Sir Charles still; but I see something which is not him—the personal equation, I suppose, developing in you, the element which is individual, exclusively your own and yourself. I should enjoy exploring that.”

She looked at Damaris very brightly for an instant, then looked down.

“I want to hear more about Sir Charles,” she said. “Of all the distinguished men I have been fortunate enough to know, who—who have let me be their friend, no one has ever interested me more than he. We have known one another ever since I was a girl and his career meant so much to me. I followed it closely, rejoiced in his promotion, his successes; felt indignant—and said so—when he met with adverse criticism. I am speaking of his Indian career. When he accepted that Afghan command, it made a break. We lost touch, which I regretted immensely. From that time onward I only knew what any and everybody might know from the newspapers—except occasionally when I happened to meet Colonel Carteret.”

The explanation was lengthy, laboured, not altogether spontaneous. Damaris vaguely mystified by it made no comment. Henrietta raised her head, glancing round from under lowered eyelids.

“You appreciate the ever-faithful Carteret?” she asked, an edge of eagerness in her voice.

“The dear ‘man with the blue eyes?’ Of course I love him, we both love him almost better than anybody in the world,” Damaris warmly declared.

“And he manifestly returns your affection. But, dearest child, why ‘almost.’ Is that reservation intentional or merely accidental?”

Then seeing the girl’s colour rise.

“Perhaps it’s hardly a fair question. Forgive me. I forgot how long it is since we met, forgot I’m not, after all, talking to the precious little downy owl, who had no more serious secrets than such as might concern her large family of dolls.”

“I am not sure the ‘almost’ was quite true.” Damaris put in hastily, her cheeks more than ever aflame.

“Yes it was, most delicious child—I protest it was. And I’m not sure I’m altogether sorry.”

Slightly, daintily, she kissed the flaming cheek.

“But I do love Colonel Carteret,” Damaris repeated, with much wide-eyed earnestness. “I trust him and depend on him as I do on nobody else.”

“‘Almost’ nobody else?”

Damaris shook her head. She felt a wee bit disappointed in Henrietta. This persistence displeased her as trivial, as lacking in perfection of breeding and taste.

“Quite nobody,” she said. And without permitting time for rejoinder launched forth into the subject of the book on the campaigns of Shere Ali, which, as she explained, had been undertaken at Carteret’s suggestion and with such encouraging result. She waxed eloquent regarding the progress of the volume and its high literary worth.

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“But I was a little nervous lest my father should lose his interest and grow slack when we were alone, and he’d only me to talk things over with and to consult, so I begged Colonel Carteret to come abroad with us.”

“Ah! I see—quite so,” Henrietta murmured. “It was at your request.”

“Yes. He was beautifully kind, as he always is. He agreed at once, gave up all his own plans and came.”

“And stays”—Henrietta said.

“Yes, for the present. But to tell the truth I’m worried about his staying.”

“Why?”—again with a just perceptible edge of eagerness.

“Because, of course, I have no right to trade on his kindness, even for my father’s sake or the sake of the book.”

“And that is your only reason?”

“Isn’t it more than reason enough? There must be other people who want him and things of his own he wants to do. It would be odiously selfish of me to interfere by keeping him tied here. I have wondered lately whether I oughtn’t to speak to him about it and urge his going home. I was worrying rather over that when you arrived this afternoon, and then the gladness of seeing you put it out of my head. But how I wish you would advise me, Henrietta, if it’s not troubling you too much. You and they have been friends so long and you must know so much better than I can what’s right. Tell me what is my duty—about his staying, I mean—to, to them both, do you think?”

Henrietta Frayling did not answer at once. Her delicate features perceptibly sharpened and hardened, her lips becoming thin as a thread.

“You’re not vexed with me? I haven’t been tiresome and asked you something I shouldn’t?” Damaris softly exclaimed, smitten with alarm of unintended and unconscious offence.

“No—no—but you put a difficult question, since I have only impressions and those of the most, fugitive to guide me. Personally, I am always inclined to leave well alone.”

“But is this well?—There’s just the point.”

“You are very anxious”—

“Yes, I am very anxious. You see I care dreadfully much.”

Henrietta bent down, giving her attention to an inch of kilted silk petticoat, showing where it should not, beneath the hem of her blue skirt.

“I hesitate to give you advice; but I can give you my impressions—for what they may be worth. Seeing Colonel Carteret this afternoon he struck me as being in excellent case—enviably young for his years and content.”

“You thought so? Yet that’s just what has worried me. Once or twice lately I have not been sure he was quite content.”

“Oh! you put it too high!” Henrietta threw off. “Can one ever be sure anyone—even one’s own poor self—is quite content?”

And she looked round, bringing the whole artillery of her still great, if waning, loveliness suddenly to bear upon Damaris, dazzling, charming, confusing her, as she said:

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“My precious child, has it never occurred to you Colonel Carteret may stay on, not against has will, but very much with it? Or occurred to you, further, not only that the pleasures of your father’s society are by no means to be despised; but that you yourself are a rather remarkable product—as quaintly engagingly clever, as you are—well—shall we say—handsome, Damaris?”

“I am deputed to enquire whether you propose to take tea indoors, Miss Verity, or have it brought to you here; and, in the latter case, whether we have leave to join you?”

The speaker, Marshall Wace—a young man of about thirty years of age—may be described as soft in make, in colouring slightly hectic, in manner a subtle cross between the theatrical and the parsonic. Which, let it be added, is by no means to condemn him wholesale, laugh him off the stage or out of the pulpit. In certain circles, indeed, these traits, this blend, won for him unstinted sympathy and approval. He possessed talents in plenty, and these of an order peculiarly attractive to the amateur because tentative rather than commanding. Among his intimates he was seen and spoken of as one cloaked with the pathos of thwarted aspirations. Better health, less meagre private means and a backing of influence, what might he not have done? His star might have flamed to the zenith! Meanwhile it was a privilege to help him, to such extent as his extreme delicacy of feeling permitted. That it really permitted a good deal, one way or another, displaying considerable docility under the infliction of benefits, would have been coarse to perceive and unpardonably brutal to mention.—Such, anyhow, was the opinion held by his cousin, General Frayling, at whose expense he now enjoyed a recuperative sojourn upon the French Riviera. Some people, in short, have a gift of imposing themselves, and Marshall Wace may be counted among that conveniently endowed band.

He imposed himself now upon one at least of his hearers. For, though the address might seem studied, the voice delivering it was agreeable, causing Damaris, for the first time, consciously to notice this member of Mrs. Frayling’s retinue. She felt amiably disposed towards him since his intrusion closed a conversation causing her no little disturbance of mind. Henrietta’s last speech, in particular, set her nerves tingling with most conflicting emotions. If Henrietta so praised her that praise must be deserved, for who could be better qualified to give judgment on such a subject than the perfectly equipped Henrietta? Yet she shrank in distaste, touched in her maiden modesty and pride, from so frank an exposition of her own charms. It made her feel unclothed, stripped in the market-place—so to speak—and shamed. Secretly she had always hoped she was pretty rather than plain. She loved beauty and therefore naturally desired to possess it. But to have the fact of that possession thus baldly stated was another matter. It made her feel unnatural,

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as though joined to a creature with whom she was insufficiently acquainted, whose ways might not be her ways or its thoughts her thoughts. Therefore the young man, Marshall Wace, coming as a seasonable diversion from these extremely personal piercings and probings, found greater favour in her eyes than he otherwise might. And this with results, for Damaris' gratitude, once engaged, disdained to criticize, invariably tending to err on the super-generous side.

Yes, they would all have tea out here, if Henrietta was willing. And, if Henrietta would for the moment excuse her, she would go and order Hordle—her father's man—to see to the preparation of it himself. Foreign waiters, whatever their ability in other departments, have no natural understanding of a tea-pot and are liable to the weirdest ideas of cutting bread and butter.

With which, conscious she was guilty of somewhat incoherent chatter, Damaris sprang up and swung away along the terrace, through the clear tonic radiance, buoyant as a caged bird set free.

"Go with her, Marshall, go with her," Mrs. Frayling imperatively bade him.

"And leave you, Cousin Henrietta?"

She rose with a petulant gesture.

"Yes, go at once or you won't overtake her. I am tired, really wretchedly tired—and am best left alone."

CHAPTER III

WHICH CONCERNS ITSELF, INCIDENTALLY, WITH THE GRIEF OF A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE AND THE RECEPTION OF A BELATED CHRISTMAS GREETING

Henrietta Frayling left the Grand Hotel, that afternoon, in a chastened frame of mind. Misgivings oppressed her. She doubted—and even more than doubted—whether she had risen to the full height of her own reputation, whether she had not allowed opportunity to elude her, whether she had not lost ground difficult to regain. The affair was so astonishingly sprung upon her. The initial impact she withstood unbroken—and from this she derived a measure of consolation. But afterwards she weakened. She had felt too much—and that proved her undoing. It is foolish, because disabling, to feel.

Her treatment of Damaris she condemned as mistaken, admitting a point of temper. It is hard to forgive the younger generation their youth, the infinite attraction of their ingenuous freshness, the fact that they have the ball at their feet. Hence she avoided the society of the young of her own sex—as a rule. Girls are trying when pretty and intelligent, hardly less trying—though for other reasons—when the reverse. Boys she

tolerated. In the eyes of young men she sunned herself taking her ease, since these are slow to criticize, swift to believe—between eighteen and eight-and-twenty, that is.—-We speak of the mid-Victorian era and then obtaining masculine strain.

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Misgivings continued to pursue her during the ensuing evening and even interfered with her slumbers during the night. This—most unusual occurrence—rendered her fretful. She reproached her tractable and distressed little General with having encouraged her to walk much too far. In future he swore to insist on the carriage, however confidently she might assert the need of active exertion. She pointed out the fallacy of rushing to extremes; which rather cruelly floored him, since "rushing," in any shape or form, had conspicuously passed out of his programme some considerable time ago.

"My wife is not at all herself," he told Marshall Wace, at breakfast next morning—"quite overdone, I am sorry to say, and upset. I blame myself. I must keep a tight hand on her and forbid over exertion."

With a small spoon, savagely, daringly he beat in the top of his boiled egg.

"I must be more watchful," he added. "Her nervous energy is deceptive. I must refuse to let it override my better judgment and take me in."

By luncheon time, however, Henrietta was altogether herself, save for a pretty pensiveness, and emerged with all her accustomed amiability from this temporary eclipse.

The Fraylings occupied a small detached villa, built in the grounds of the Hotel de la Plage—a rival and venerably senior establishment to the Grand Hotel—situate just within the confines of St. Augustin, where the town curves along the glistering shore to the western horn of the little bay. At the back of it runs the historic high road from Marseilles to the Italian frontier, passing through Cannes and Nice. Behind it, too, runs the railway with its many tunnels, following the same, though a somewhat less serpentine, course along the gracious coast.

To the ex-Anglo-Indian woman, society is as imperative a necessity as water to a fish. She must foregather or life loses all its savour; must entertain, be entertained, rub shoulders generally or she is lost. Henrietta Frayling suffered the accustomed fate, though to speak of rubbing shoulders in connection with her is to express oneself incorrectly to the verge of grossness. Her shoulders were of an order far too refined to rub or be rubbed. Nevertheless, after the shortest interval consistent with self-respect, such society as St. Augustin and its neighbourhood afforded found itself enmeshed in her dainty net. Mrs. Frayling's villa became a centre, where all English-speaking persons met. There she queened it, with her General as loyal henchman, and Marshall Wace as a professor of drawing-room talents of most varied sort.

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Discovery of the party at the Grand Hotel, took the gilt off the gingerbread of such queenings, to a marked extent, making them look make-shifty, lamentably second-rate and cheap. Hence Henrietta's fretfulness in part. For with the exception of Lady Hermione Twells—widow of a once Colonial Governor—and the Honourable Mrs. Callowgas *nee* de Brett, relict of a former Bishop of Harchester, they were but scratch pack these local guests of hers. Soon, however, a scheme of putting that discovery to use broke in on her musings. The old friendship must, she feared, be counted dead. General Frayling's existence, in the capacity of husband, rendered any resurrection of it impracticable. She recognized that. Yet exhibition of its tombstone, were such exhibition compassable, could not fail to bring her honour and respect. She would shine by a reflected light, her glory all the greater that the witnesses of it were themselves obscure—Lady Hermione and Mrs. Callowgas excepted of course. Carteret's good-nature could be counted on to bring him to the villa. And Damaris must be annexed. Assuming the role and attitude of a vicarious motherhood, Henrietta herself could hardly fail to gain distinction. It was a touching part—specially when played by a childless woman only a little—yes, really only quite a little—past her prime.

Here, indeed, was a great idea, as she came to grasp the possibilities and scope of it. As chaperon to Damaris how many desirable doors would be open to her! Delicately Henrietta hugged herself perceiving that, other things being equal, her own career was by no means ended yet. Through Damaris might she not very well enter upon a fresh and effective phase of it? How often and how ruefully had she revolved the problem of advancing age, questioning how gracefully to confront that dreaded enemy, and endure its rather terrible imposition of hands without too glaring a loss of prestige and popularity! Might not Damaris' childish infatuation offer a solution of that haunting problem, always supposing the infatuation could be revived, be recreated?

Ah! what a double-dyed idiot she had been yesterday, in permitting feeling to outrun judgment!—With the liveliest satisfaction Henrietta could have boxed her own pretty ears in punishment of her passing weakness.—Yet surely time still remained wherein to retrieve her error and restore her ascendency. Damaris might be unusually clever; but she was also finely inexperienced, malleable, open to influence as yet. Let Henrietta then see to it, and that without delay or hesitation, bringing to bear every ingenious social art, and—if necessary—artifice, in which long practice had made her proficient.

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To begin with she would humble herself by writing a sweet little letter to Damaris. In it she would both accuse and excuse her maladroitness of yesterday, pleading the shock of so unlooked-for a coming together and the host of memories evoked by it.—Would urge how deeply it affected her, overcame her in fact, rendering her incapable of saying half the affectionate things it was in her heart to say. She might touch on the subject of Damaris' personal appearance again; which, by literally taking her breath away, had contributed to her general undoing.—On second thoughts, however, she decided it would be politic to avoid that particular topic, since Damaris was evidently a little shy in respect of her own beauty.—Henrietta smiled to herself.—That is a form of shyness exceedingly juvenile, short-lived enough!

Marshall should act as her messenger, she being—as she could truthfully aver—eager her missive might reach its destination with all possible despatch. A letter, moreover, delivered by hand takes on an importance, makes a claim on the attention, greater than that of one received by post. There is a personal gesture in the former mode of transmission by no means to be despised in delicate operations such as the present—"I want to set myself right with you *at once*, dearest child, in case, as I fear, you may have a little misunderstood, me yesterday. Accident having so strangely restored us to one another, I long to hold you closely if you will let me do so."—Yes, it should run thus, the theme embroidered with high-flashing colour of Eastern reminiscence—the great subtropic garden of the Sultan-i-bagh, for example, its palms, orange grove and lotus tank, the call of the green parrots, chant of the well-coollie and creak of the primitive wooden gearing, as the yoke of cream white oxen trotted down and laboriously backed up the walled slope to the well-head.

Mrs. Frayling set herself to produce a very pretty piece of sentiment, nicely turned, decorated, worded, and succeeded to her own satisfaction. Might not she too, at this rate, claim possession of the literary gift—under stress of circumstance? The idea was a new one. It amused her.

And what if Damaris elected to show this precious effusion to her father, Sir Charles? Well, if the girl did, she did. It might just conceivably work on him also, to the restoration of past—infatuation?—Henrietta left the exact term in doubt. But her hope of such result was of the smallest. Exhibition of a tombstone was the most she could count upon.—More probably he would regard it critically, cynically, putting his finger through her specious phrases. She doubted his forgiveness of a certain act of virtuous treachery even yet; although he had, in a measure, condoned her commission of it by making use of her on one occasion since, namely, that of her bringing Damaris back twelve years ago to Europe. But whether his attitude were cynical or not, he would hold his peace. Such cogent reasons existed for silence on his part that if he did slightly distrust her, hold her a little cheap, he would hardly venture to say as much, least of all to Damaris.—Venture or condescend?—Again Mrs. Frayling left the term in doubt and went forward with her schemes, which did, unquestionably just now, add a pleasing zest to life.

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The innocent subject of these machinations received both the note and its bearer in a friendly spirit, though she was already, as it happened, rich in letters to-day. The bi-weekly packet from Deadham—addressed in Mary Fisher's careful copy-book hand—-arrived at luncheon time, and contained, among much of apparently lesser interest, a diverting chronicle of Tom Verity's impressions and experiences during the first six weeks of his Indian sojourn. The young man's gaily self-confident humour had survived his transplantation. He wrote in high feather, quite unabashed by the novelty of his surroundings, yet not forgetting to pay honour where honour was due.

"It has been 'roses, roses all the way' thanks to Sir Charles's introductions, for which I can never be sufficiently grateful," he told her. "They have procured me no end of delightful hospitality from the great ones of the local earth, and really priceless opportunities of getting into touch with questions of ruling importance over here. I am letting my people at home know how very much I owe, and always shall owe, to his kindness in using his influence on my behalf at the start."

Damaris glowed responsive to this fine flourish of a tone, and passed the letter across the small round dinner table to her father. Opened a fat packet, enclosed in an envelope of exaggerated tenuity, from Miss Felicia, only to put it aside in favour of another letter bearing an Italian stamp and directed in a, to her, unfamiliar hand.

This was modest in bulk as compared with Miss Felicia's; but while examining it, while touching it even, Damaris became aware of an inward excitement, of a movement of tenderness not to be ignored or denied.

Startled by her own prescience, and the agitation accompanying it, she looked up quickly to find Carteret watching her; whereupon, mutely, instinctively, her eyes besought him to ask no questions, make no comment. For an appreciable space he kept her in suspense, his glance holding and challenging hers in close observation. Then as though, not without a measure of struggle, granting her request, he smiled at her, and, turning his attention to the contents of his plate, quietly went on with the business of luncheon. Damaris meanwhile, conscience-stricken—she couldn't tell why—by this silent interchange of intelligence, this silent demand on his forbearance, on his connivance in her secrecy, laid the letter face downwards on the white table-cloth, unopened.

Later, Sir Charles Verity being busy with his English correspondence and Carteret having disappeared—gone for a solitary walk, as she divined, being, as she feared, not quite pleased with her—she read it in the security of her bedroom, seated, for greater ease, upon the polished parquet floor just inside an open, southward-facing French window, where the breeze coming up off the sea gently fanned her face.

The letter began without preamble:

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“We made this port—Genoa—last night. All day we have been discharging cargo. Half my crew has gone ashore, set on liquoring and wenching after the manner of unregenerate sailor-men all the world over. The other half follows their bad example to-morrow, as we shall be lying idle in honour of the Christmas festival. On board discipline is as strict as I know how to make it, but ashore my hand is lifted off them. So long as they turn up on time they are free to follow their fancy, even though it lead them to smutty places. My own fancies don’t happen to lie that way, for which I in nowise praise myself. It is an affair of absence of inclination rather than overmuch active virtue. I am really no better than they, seeing I yield to the only temptation which takes me—the temptation to write to you. I have resisted it times out of number since I bade you good-bye at The Hard. But Christmas-night turns one a bit soft and craving for sight and touch of those who belong to one. So much I dare say, though I go back on nothing I said to you then about the keeping up of decent barriers. Only being Christmas-night-soft I give myself the licence of a holiday—for once. The night is clear as glass and the city rises in a great semicircle, pierced by and outlined in twinkling lights, right up to the ring of forts crowning the hills, where the sky begins—a sky smothered in stars. I have been out, on deck, looking at it all, at the black masts and funnels of the ships ranging to right and left against the glare of the town, and at the oily, black water, thick with floating filth and garbage and with wandering reflections like jewels and precious metals on the surface of it—the rummiest mixture of fair and foul. And then, all that faded out somehow—and I saw black water again, but clean this time and with no reflections, under a close-drawn veil of falling rain; and I felt to lift you out of the boat and carry you in across the lawn and up to your room. And then I could not hold out against temptation any longer, but came here into my cabin and sat down to write to you. The picture of you, wet and limp and helpless in my arms, is always with me, stamped on the very substance of my brain, as is the other picture of you in the drawing-room lined with book-cases, where we found one another for the second time. Found one another in spirit, I mean; an almost terribly greater finding than the first one, because it can go on for ever as it belongs to the part of us which does not die. That is my faith anyhow. To-morrow morning I will go ashore and into one of those big, tawdry Genoa churches, and listen to the music, standing in some quiet corner, and think about you and renew my vows to you. It won’t be half bad to keep Christmas that way.

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“I don’t pretend to be a great letter-writer, so if this one has funny fashions to it you must forgive both them and me. I write as I feel and must leave it so. The voyage has been good, and my poor old tub has behaved herself, kept afloat and done her best, bravely if a bit wheezingly, in some rather nasty seas. When we are through here I take her across to Tripoli and back along the African coast to Algiers, then across to Marseilles. I reckon to reach there in six weeks or two months from now. You might perhaps be willing to write a line to me there—to the care of my owners, Messrs. Denniver, Holland & Co. Their office is in the Cannebiere. I don’t ask you to do this, but only tell you I should value it more than you can quite know.—Now my holiday is over and I will close down till next Christmas-night—unless miracles happen meanwhile—so good-bye.—-Here is a boatload of my lads coining alongside, roaring with song and as drunk as lords.—God bless you. In spirit I once again kiss your dear feet. Your brother till death and after.

“DARCY FAIRCLOTH.”

Dazed, enchanted, held captive by the secular magic pertaining to those who “go down to the sea in ships” and ply their calling in the great waters, held captive, too, by the mysterious prenatal sympathies which unite those who come of the same blood, Damaris stayed very still, sitting child-like upon the bare polished floor, while the wind murmured through the spreading pines, shading the terrace below, and gently fanned her throat and temples.

For Faircloth’s letter seemed to her very wonderful, alike in its vigour, its simplicity and —her lips quivered—its revelation of loving.—How he cared—and how he went on caring!—There were coarse words in it, the meaning of which she neither knew nor sought to know; but she did not resent them. The letter indeed would have lost some of its living force, its convincing reality, had they been omitted. They rang true, to her ear. And just because they rang true the rest rang blessedly true as well. She gloried in the whole therefore, breathing through it a larger air of faith and hope, and confident fortitude. The kindred qualities of her own heart and intelligence, the flush of her fine enthusiasm, sprang to meet and join with the fineness of it, its richness of promise and of good omen.

For a time mind and emotion remained thus in stable and exalted equilibrium. Then, as enchantment reached its necessary term and her apprehensions and thought began to work more normally, she badly wanted someone to speak to. She wanted to bear witness, to testify, to pour forth both the moving tale and her own sensations, into the ear of some indulgent and friendly listener. She—she—wanted to tell Colonel Carteret about it, to enlist his interest, to read him, in part at least, Darcy Faircloth’s letter, and hear his confirmation of the noble spirit she discerned in it, its poetry, its charm. For the dear man with the blue eyes would understand, of that she felt confident, understand fully—and it would set her right with him, if, as she suspected, he was not somehow quite pleased with her. She caressed the idea, while, so doing, silence and

concealment grew increasingly irksome to her. Oh! she wanted to speak—and to her father she could not speak.

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With that both Damaris' attitude and expression changed, the glory abruptly departing. She got up off the floor, left the window, and sat down very soberly, in a red-velvet covered arm-chair, placed before the flat stone hearth piled with wood ashes.

There truly was the fly in the ointment, the abiding smirch on the otherwise radiant surface—as she now hailed it—of this strangely moving fraternal relation. The fact of it did come, and, as she feared, would inevitably continue to come between her and her father, marring to an appreciable degree their mutual confidence and sympathy. At Deadham he had braced himself to deal with the subject in a spirit of rather magnificent self-abnegation. But the effort had cost him more than she quite cared to estimate, in lowered pride and moral suffering. It had told on not only his mental but his physical health. Now that he was in great measure restored, his humour no longer saturnine, he no longer remote, sunk in himself and inaccessible, it would be not only injudicious, but selfish, to the verge of active cruelty, to press the subject again upon his notice, to propose further concessions, or further recognition of its existence. She couldn't ask that of him—ten thousand times no, she couldn't ask it—though not to ask it was to let the breach in sympathy and confidence widen silently and grow.

So much was sadly clear to her. She unfolded Faircloth's letter and read it through a second time, in vain hope of discovering some middle way, some leading. Read it, feeling the first enchantment but all cross-hatched now and seamed with perplexity and regret. For decent barriers must stand, he declared, which meant concealment indefinitely prolonged, the love of brother and sister wasted, starved to the mean proportions of an occasional furtive letter; sacrificed, with all its possibilities of present joy and future comfort, to hide the passage of long-ago wrongdoing in which it had its source.

Her hesitation went a step behind this presently, arguing as to how that could be sin which produced so gracious a result. It wasn't logical an evil tree should bear such conspicuously good fruit. Yet conscience and instinct assured her the tree was indeed evil—a thing of license, of unruly passion upon which she might not look. Had it not been her first thought—when Faircloth told her, drifting down the tide-river in the chill and dark—that he must feel sad, feel angry having been wronged by the manner of his birth? He had answered "yes," thereby admitting the inherent evil of the tree of which his existence was the fruit—adding, "but not often and not for long," since he esteemed the gift of life too highly to be overnice as to the exact method by which he became possessed of it. He palliated, therefore, he excused, but he did not deny.

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By this time Damaris' mind wheeled in a vicious circle, perpetually swinging round to the original starting-point. The moral puzzle proved too complicated for her, the practical one equally hard of solution. She stood between them, her father and her brother. Their interests conflicted, as did the duty she owed each; and her heart, her judgment, her piety were torn two ways at once. Would it always be thus—or would the pull of one prove conclusively the stronger? Would she be compelled finally to choose between them? Not that either openly did or ever would strive to coerce her. Both were honourable, both magnanimous. And, out of her heart, she desired to serve both justly and equally—only—only—upon youth the pull of youth is very great.

She put her hands over her eyes, shrinking, frightened. Was it possible she loved Darcy Faircloth best?

A knocking. Damaris slipped the letter into the pocket of her dress, and rising crossed the room and opened the door.

Hordle stood in the pale spacious corridor without. He presented Marshall Wace's card. The gentleman, he said rather huffily, had called, bringing a message from Mrs. Frayling as Hordle understood, which he requested to deliver to Miss Damaris in person. He begged her to believe he was in no hurry. If she was engaged he could perfectly well wait.—He would do so in the hotel drawing-room, until it was convenient to her to allow him a few minutes' conversation.

So, for the second time, this young man's intrusion proved by no means unwelcome, as offering Damaris timely escape. She went down willingly to receive him. Yesterday he struck her as a pleasant and agreeable person—and of a type with which she was unacquainted. It would be interesting to talk to him.—She felt anxious, moreover, to learn what Henrietta, lovely if not entirely satisfactory Henrietta, could possibly want.

CHAPTER IV

BLOWING OF ONE'S OWN TRUMPET PRACTISED AS A FINE ART

The slender little Corsican horses, red-chestnut in colour and active as cats, trotted, with a tinkle of bells, through the barred sunshine and shadow of the fragrant pine and cork woods. The road, turning inland, climbed steadily, the air growing lighter and fresher as the elevation increased—a nip in it testifying that January was barely yet out. And that nip justified the wearing of certain afore-mentioned myrtle-green, fur-trimmed pelisse, upon which Damaris' minor affections were, at this period, much set. Though agreeably warm and thick, it moulded her bosom, neatly shaped her waist, and that without any defacing wrinkle. The broad fur band at the throat compelled her to carry her chin high, with a not unbecoming effect. Her cheeks bloomed, her eyes shone bright, as she sat beside Mrs. Frayling in the open victoria, relishing the fine air, the

varying prospect, her own good clothes, her companion’s extreme prettiness and lively talk.

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This drive, the prelude to Henrietta's campaign, presented that lady at her best. The advantage of being—as Henrietta—essentially artificial, is that you can never, save by forgetful lapse into sincerity, be untrue to yourself. Hence what a saving of scruples, of self-accusation, of self-torment! Her plans once fixed she proceeded to carry them out with unswerving ease and spontaneity. She refused to hurry, her only criterion of personal conduct being success; and success, so she believed, if sound, being a plant of gradual growth. Therefore she gave both herself and others time. Once fairly in the saddle, she never strained, never fussed.

Her cue to-day was to offer information rather than to require it. Curious about many things she might be; but gratification of her curiosity must wait. Damaris, on her part, listened eagerly, asking nothing better than to be kept amused, kept busy, helped to forget.—Not Faircloth's letter—very, very far from that!—but the inward conflict of opposing loves, opposing duties, which meditation upon his letter so distractingly produced. Relatively all, outside that conflict and the dear cause of it, was of small moment—mere play stuff at best. But her brain and conscience were tired. She would be so glad, for a time, only to think about play stuff.

"I want you to go on being kind to Marshall Wace," Henrietta in the course of conversation presently said. "He told me how charmingly you received him yesterday, when he called with my note. He was so pleased. He is exaggeratedly sensitive owing to unfortunate family complications in the past."

Damaris pricked up her ears, family complications having latterly acquired a rather painful interest for her.

"Poor man—I'm sorry," she said.

"His mother, a favourite cousin of my husband, General Frayling, married an impossible person—eloped with him, to tell the truth. Her people, not without reason, were dreadfully put out. The children were brought up rather anyhow. Marshall did not go to a public school, which he imagines places him at a disadvantage with other men. Perhaps it does. Men always strike me as being quaintly narrow-minded on that subject. Later he was sent to Cambridge with the idea of his taking Orders and going into the Church. My husband's elder brother, Leonard Frayling, is patron of several livings. He would have presented Marshall to the first which fell vacant, and thus his future would have been secured. But just as he was going up for deacon's orders, Marshall, rather I can't help feeling like a goose, developed theological difficulties. They were perfectly genuine, I don't doubt; but they were also singularly ill-timed—a little earlier, a little later, or not at all would have been infinitely more convenient. So there he was, poor fellow, thrown on the world at three-and-twenty with no profession and no prospects; for my brother-in-law washed his hands of him when the theological difficulties

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were announced. Marshall tried bear-leading; but people are not particularly anxious to entrust their boys to a non-public school man afflicted by religious doubts. He thought of making use of his really exquisite voice and becoming a public singer; but the training is fearfully expensive, and so somehow that plan also fell through. For a time I am afraid he was really reduced to great straits, with the consequence that he broke down in health. Through friends, my husband got to hear of Marshall's miserable circumstances—shortly after our marriage it was—and felt it incumbent upon him to go to the rescue."

Henrietta paused, thereby giving extra point to what was to follow, and pulled the fur rug up absently about her waist.

"For the last eighteen months," she said, "Marshall has practically made his home with us. The arrangement has its drawbacks, of course. For one thing the General and I are never alone, and that is a trial to us both. Two's company and three's none. When a husband and wife are really devoted they don't want always to have a third wheel to the domestic cart."

Then, as if checking further and very natural inclination to repining, she looked round at Damaris, smiling from behind her thick white net veil with most disarming sweetness.

"No—no—I'm not naughty. I don't mean to complain about it," she prettily protested. "For I do so strongly feel if one sets out to do good it shouldn't be by driblets, with your name, in full, printed in subscription lists against every small donation. You should plump for your *protege*, and that with the least ostentation possible. The General and I are careful not to let people know Marshall stays with us as a guest. It is rather a slip speaking of it even to you; but I can trust you not to repeat what I say. I am sure of that."

Damaris laid a hand fondly, impulsively upon the elder woman's knee.

"For certain you can trust me. For certain anything you say to me is just between our two selves. I should never dream of repeating it."

"There speaks the precious downy owl of long ago," Mrs. Frayling brightly cried, "bustling up in defence of its own loyalty and honour. Ah! Damaris, how very delicious it is to have you with me!"

For, her main point having been made, she now adroitly discarded pathos. Another word regarding her philanthropic harbourage of the young man, Marshall Wace, remained to be spoken—but not yet. Let it come in later, naturally and without hint of insistence.

“We must be together as much as possible during the next few weeks,” she went on—-“as often as Sir Charles can be persuaded to spare you to me. Whether the General and I shall ever make up our minds to settle down in a home of our own, where I could ask you to stay with us, I don’t know. I’m afraid we are hopelessly nomadic. Therefore I am extra anxious to make the most of the happy accident which has thrown us together, anxious

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to get every ounce possible of intercourse out of it.—We quite understand you have luncheon with me on Thursday, don't we?—and that you stay and help me through the afternoon. I am always at home on Thursdays to the neighbours. They aren't all of them conspicuously well-bred or exciting; but I have learnt to take the rough with the smooth, the boring along with the gifted and brilliant. India is a good school in which to learn hospitality. The practise of that virtue becomes a habit. And I for one quite refuse to excuse myself from further exercise of it on coming back to Europe. The General feels with me; and we have laid ourselves out to be civil to our compatriots here at St. Augustin this winter. A few people were vexatiously stiff and starched at first; but each one of them has given in, in turn. They really do, I believe, appreciate our little social efforts."

"Who wouldn't give in to you Henrietta?" Damaris murmured.

Whereupon Mrs. Frayling delicately beamed on her; and, agreeable unanimity of sentiment being thus established, conversation between the two ladies for a while fell silent.

The little chestnut horses, meantime, encouraged with "Oh he-s" and "Oh la-s" by their driver, trotted and climbed, climbed and trotted, until the woodland lay below and the Signal de la Palu was reached. A wide level space on a crest of the foot-hills—with flag staff bearing the valorous tricolor, and rustic log-built restaurant offering refreshment—-opening upon the full splendour of the Maritime Alps.

Damaris stepped out of the carriage, and, patting the near horse on the neck in passing, went forward across the sparse turf, starred with tiny clear coloured flowers, to the edge of the platform.

The Provencal coachman, from his perch on the box-seat of the victoria, his rough-caste crumpled countenance sun-baked to the solid ruddy brown of the soil of his own vineyard, followed her movements with approving glances.—For she was fresh as an opening rose the young English *Mees*, and though most elegant, how agile, how evidently strong!

Innocent of the admiration she excited, Damaris stood absorbed, awed even, by the grandeur of the scene. Many hundred feet below, the rent chasm down which it took its course steeped in violet gloom, the milk-white waters of an ice-fed river impetuously journeyed to the fertile lowlands and the sea. Opposite, across the gorge, amazingly distinct in the pellucid atmosphere, rose the high mountains, the undefiled, untrodden and eternal snows. Azure shadow, transparent, ethereal, haunted them, bringing into evidence enormous rounded shoulder, cirque, crinkled glacier, knife-edge of underlying rock.

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They belonged to the deepest the most superb of life, this rent gorge, these mountains —like Faircloth's letter. Would beautiful and noble sights, such as these, always in future give her an ache of longing for the writer of that letter, for the romance, the poetry, of the unacknowledged relation he bore to her? Tears smarted hot in Damaris' eyes, and resolutely, if rather piteously, she essayed to wink them away. For to her it just now seemed, the deepest, the most superb of life was also in great measure the forbidden. The ache must be endured, then, the longing go unsatisfied, since she could only stay the pain of them by doing violence to plain and heretofore fondly cherished, duties.

But her tears defied the primitive process of winking. Not so cheaply could she rid herself of their smart and the blurred distorted vision they occasioned. She pulled out her handkerchief petulantly and wiped them. Then schooled herself to a colder, more moderate and reasonable temper.

And, so doing, her thought turned gratefully to Mrs. Frayling. For mercifully Henrietta was here to help fill the void; to, in a manner, break her fall. Henrietta didn't belong to the depths or the heights, that she regretfully admitted. With the eternal snows she possessed little or nothing in common. But, at a lower, more everyday level, had not she a vast amount to offer, what with her personal loveliness, her social cleverness, her knowledge of the world and its ways? She might not amount to the phoenix of Damaris' childhood's adoration; but she was very friendly, very diverting, delightfully kind. Damaris honestly believed all these excellent things of her.—She had been stupidly fastidious three days ago, and failed to do Henrietta justice. What she had learned—by chance—this afternoon, of Henrietta's unselfishness and generous treatment of Marshall Wace bore effectively convincing witness to the sweetness of her disposition and kindness of her heart. Damaris felt bound to make amends for that unspoken injustice, of which she now repented. How better could she do so than by giving herself warmly, without reserve or restraint, in response to the interest and attention Henrietta lavished upon her?—At eighteen, to be wooed by so finished and popular a person was no mean compliment.—She wouldn't hold back, suspicious and grudging; but enjoy all Henrietta so delightfully offered to the uttermost.

And there, as though clenching the conclusion thus arrived at, Mrs. Frayling's voice gaily hailed her, calling:

"Damaris, Damaris, here is our tea—or rather our coffee. Come, darling child, and partake before it gets cold."

So after a brief pause, spent in determined looking, the girl bowed her head in mute farewell; and turned her back perhaps courageously, perhaps unwisely and somewhat faithlessly, upon the mountains, and the rare mysteries of their untrodden snows. She went across the sparse turf, starred with tiny clear, coloured flowers, her face stern, for all its youthful bloom and softness, her eyes meditative and profound.

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The owner of the log-built restaurant, a thick-set, grizzled veteran of the Franco-Prussian war, the breast of his rusty velveteen jacket proudly bearing a row of medals, stood talking to Mrs. Frayling, hat in hand. His right foot had suffered amputation some inches above the ankle, and he walked with the ungainly support of a crutch-topped peg-leg strapped to the flexed knee.

As Damaris approached the carriage, he swept back the fur rug in gallantly respectful invitation; and, so soon as she ensconced herself on the seat beside Henrietta, bending down he firmly and comfortably tucked it round her. He declared, further, as she thanked him, it an honour in any capacity to serve her, since had not Madame, but this moment, so gracefully informed him of the commanding military career of the Mademoiselle's father, possessor of that unique distinction the Victoria Cross—a person animated, moreover, as Madame reported, by sincere sympathy for the tragic sorrows of well-beloved and so now cruelly dismembered France.

Damaris heard, in this singing of her father's praises, a grateful reconciling strain. She found it profitable, just now, to recall the heroic deeds, the notable achievements which marked his record. Her coffee tasted the more fragrant for it, the butter the fresher, the honey the sweeter wherewith she spread the clean coarse home-baked bread. She ate, indeed, with a capital appetite, the long drive and stimulating air, making her hungry. Possibly even her recent emotion contributed to that result; for in youth heartache by no means connotes a disposition towards fasting, rather does diet, generous in quantity, materially assist to soothe its anguish.

This meal, in fact, partaken of in the open, alone with Henrietta, object of her childhood's idolatry—the first they had shared since those remote and guileless years—assumed to Damaris a sacramental character, though of the earthly and mundane rather than transcendental kind. Its communion was one of good fellowship, of agreement in cultivation of the lighter social side; which, upon our maiden's part, implied tacit consent to conform to easier standards than those until now regulating her thought and action, implied tacit acceptance of Henrietta as example and as guide.

Whether the latter would have found cause for self-congratulation, could she have fathomed the precise cause of this apparently speedy conquest and speedy surrender, is doubtful; since it, in fact, took its rise less in the fascination of devotion given, than in that of devotion denied. She happened to be here on the spot at a critical juncture, and thus to catch the young girl's heart on the rebound. That was all—that, joined with Damaris' instinctive necessity to play fair and pay in honest coin for every benefit received.

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So much must be said in extenuation of our nymph-like damsel's apparent subjection to levity—a declension which, in the sequel and in certain quarters, went neither unnoticed nor undeplored. But to labour this point is to forestall history. Immediately her change of attitude announced its existence innocently enough. For the sacramental meal once consumed, and courteous parting words bestowed upon the valiant soldier broken in his country's wars, the coachman mounted the box, and gathering up the reins, with "Ho he's" and "ho la's," swung his horses half round the level and plunged them over the hill-side, along a steep woodland track, leading by serpentine twists and curves down to join the Corniche Road—a blonde ribbon rimming the indentations of the five-mile distant coast.

Damaris steadied herself well back on the seat of the carriage as it swayed and bumped over ruts and tree-roots to the lively menace of its springs. She studiously kept her face turned towards her companion, a myrtle-green shoulder as studiously turned towards the view. For she found it wiser not even to glance in that direction, lest rebellious regrets and longings should leap on her across the violet-blotted abyss from out those shining Alpine citadels. While to strengthen herself in allegiance to Mrs. Frayling and to, what may be called, the lighter side, she pushed one hand into that lady's muff and coaxed the slender pointed-fingers hiding in the comfortable pussy-warmth within.

"Tell me stories, Henrietta, please," she entreated, "about all the people whom you've asked to your party on Thursday. Dress them up for me and put them through their paces, so that I may know who they all are when I see them and make no mistakes, but behave to them just as you would wish me to."

"Gradate your attentions and not pet the wrong ones?"

Mrs. Frayling gave gentle squeeze for squeeze in the pussy-warmth, laughing a trifle impishly.

"You sinful child," she said—"Gracious, what jolts—my spine will soon be driven through the top of my skull at this rate!—Yes, sinful in tempting me to gibbet my acquaintances for your amusement."

"But why gibbet them? Aren't they nice, don't you care for them?"

"Prodigiously, of course. Yet would you find it in the least interesting or illuminating if I indexed their modest virtues only?"

"I think the old soldier found it both interesting and illuminating when you indexed my father's virtues just now."

"Sir Charles's virtues hardly come under the head of modest ones," Mrs. Frayling threw off almost sharply. "Give me someone as well worth acclaiming and I'll shout with the

best! But you scarcely quote your father as among the average, do you?—The people whom you'll meet on Thursday compared to him, I'm afraid, are as molehills to the mountains yonder. If I described them by their amiable qualities alone they'd be as indistinguishable and as insipid as a row of

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dolls. Only through their aberrations, their unconscious perfidies, iniquities, do they develop definiteness of outline and begin to live. Oh! nothing could be unkinder than to whitewash them. Take Mrs. Callowgas, for instance, with one eye on the Church, the other on the world. The permanent inconsistency of her attitude, as I may say her permanent squint, gives her a certain *cachet* without which she'd be a positive blank.—-She is most anxious to meet you, by the way, and Sir Charles—always supposing he is self-sacrificing enough to come—because she knows connections of his and yours at Harchester, a genial pillar of the Church in the form of an Archdeacon, in whom, as I gather, her dear dead Lord Bishop very much put his trust."

"Tom Verity's father, I suppose," Damaris murmured, her colour rising, the hint of a cloud too upon her brow.

"And who may Tom Verity be?" Mrs. Frayling, noting both colour and cloud, alertly asked.

"A distant cousin. He stayed with us in the autumn just before he went out to India. He passed into the Indian Civil Service from Oxford at the top of the list."

"Praiseworthy young man."

"Oh! but you would like him, Henrietta," the girl declared. "He is very clever and very entertaining too when"—

"When?"

"Well, when he doesn't tease too much. He has an immense amount to talk about, and very good manners."

"Also, when he does not tease too much?—And you like him?"

"I don't quite know," Damaris slowly said. "He did not stay with us long enough for me to make up my mind. And then other things happened which rather put him out of my head. He was a little conceited, perhaps, I thought."

"Not unnaturally, being at the top of the pass list. But though other things put him out of your head, he writes to you?"

In the pussy-warmth within her muff, Mrs. Frayling became sensible that Damaris' hand grew unresponsive, at once curiously stiff and curiously limp.

"He has written twice. Once on the voyage out, and again soon after he arrived. The —the second letter reached me this week."

Notwithstanding sunshine, the eager air, and lively bumping of the descent, Henrietta observed the flush fade, leaving the girl white as milk. Her eyes looked positively enormous set in the pallor of her face. They were veiled, telling nothing, and thereby—-to Mrs. Frayling's thinking—betraying much. She scented a situation—some girlish attachment, budding affair of the heart.

"My father gave Tom Verity letters of introduction, and he wanted us to know how kindly he had been received in consequence."

"Most proper on his part," Mrs. Frayling said.

She debated discreet questioning, probing—the establishment of herself in the character of sympathetic confidante. But decided against that. It might be impolitic, dangerous even, to press the pace. Moreover the young man, whatever his attractions, might be held a negligible quantity in as far as any little schemes of her own were concerned at present, long leave and reappearance upon the home scene being almost certainly years distant.—And, just there, the hand within the muff became responsive once more, even urgent in its seeking and pressure, as though appealing for attention and tenderness.

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“Henrietta, I don’t want to be selfish, but won’t you go on telling me stories about your Thursday party people?—I interrupted you—but it’s all new, you see, and it interests me so much,” Damaris rather plaintively said.

Mrs. Frayling needed no further inducement to exercise her really considerable powers of verbal delineation. Charging her palette with lively colours, she sprang to the task—-and that with a sprightly composure and deftness of touch which went far to cloak malice and rob flippancy of offence.

Listening, Damaris brightened—as the adroit performer intended she should—under the gay cascade of talk. Laughed at length, letting finer instincts of charity go by the wall, in her enjoyment of neatly turned mockeries and the sense of personal superiority they provoked. For Henrietta’s dissection of the weaknesses of absent friends, inevitably amounted to indirect flattery of the friend for whose diversion that process of dissection was carried out.

She passed the whole troop in review.—To begin with Miss Maud Callowgas, in permanent waiting upon her ex-semi-episcopal widowed mother—in age a real thirty-five though nominal twenty-eight, her muddy complexion, prominent teeth and all too long back.—Her designs, real or imagined, upon Marshall Wace. Designs foredoomed to failure, since whatever his intentions—Henrietta smiled wisely—they certainly did not include Maud Callowgas’s matrimonial future in their purview.

Herbert Binning followed next—the chaplain who served the rather staring little Anglican church at Le Vandou, a suburb of St. Augustin much patronized by the English in the winter season, and a chapel somewhere in the Bernese Oberland during the summer months. Energetic, athletic, a great talker and squire of dames—in all honesty and correctness, this last, well understood, for there wasn’t a word to be breathed against the good cleric’s morals. But just a wee bit impressionable and flirtatious, as who might not very well be with such a whiney-piney wife as Mrs. Binning, always ailing; what mind she might (by stretch of charity) be supposed to possess exclusively fixed upon the chronic irregularities of her internal organs? Recumbency was a mania with her and she had a disconcerting habit of wanting to lie down on the most inconveniently unsuitable occasions.—To mitigate his over-flowing energies, which cried aloud for work, Mr. Binning took pupils. He had two exceptionably nice boys with him this winter, in the interval between leaving Eton and going up to Oxford, namely, Peregrine Ditton, Lord Pamber’s younger son, and Harry Ellice, a nephew of Lady Hermione Twells. They were very well-bred. Their high spirits were highly infectious. They played tennis to perfection and Harry Ellice danced quite tidily into the bargain.—Damaris must make friends with them. They were her contemporaries, and delightfully fresh and ingenuous.

Lady Hermione herself—here Henrietta’s tone conveyed restraint, even comparative reverence—who never for an instant forgot she once had reigned over some microscopic court out in the far Colonial wilderness, nor allowed you to forget it either.

Her glance half demanded your curtsy. Still she was the “real thing” and, in that, eminently satisfactory—genuine *grande dame* by right both of birth and of training.

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“She won’t condescend to tell me so, being resolved to keep me very much in my proper place,” Henrietta continued; “but I learned yesterday from Mary Ellice—Harry’s sister, who lives with her—that she is intensely desirous to meet Sir Charles. She wants to talk to him about Afghanistan and North-west Frontier policy. A brother of hers it appears was at one time in the Guides; and she is under the impression your father and Colonel Carteret would have known him.—By the way, dearest child, they do mean to honour me, those two, don’t they, with their presence on Thursday?”

“Of course they will, since you asked them. Why, they love to come and see you.”

“Do they?” Mrs. Frayling said—“Anyhow, let us hope so. I can trust Carteret’s general benevolence, but I am afraid your father will be unutterably bored with my rubbishing little assembly.”

“But, of course, he’ll be nice to everybody too—as tame and gentle as possible with them all to please you, don’t you see, Henrietta.”

“Ah! no doubt, all to please me!” she repeated. And fell to musing, while the carriage, quitting at last the rough forest track, rattled out on to the metalled high road, white in dust.

Here the late afternoon sun still lay hot. The booming plunge of the tideless sea, breaking upon the rocks below, quivered in the quiet air. Henrietta Frayling withdrew her hands from her muff, unfastened the collar of her sable cape. The change from the shadowed woods to this glaring sheltered stretch of road was oppressive. She felt strangely tired and spent. She trusted Damaris would not perceive her uncomfortable state and proffer sympathy. And Damaris, in fact, did nothing of the sort, being very fully occupied with her own concerns at present.

Half a mile ahead, pastel-tinted, green-shuttered houses—a village of a single straggling street—detached themselves in broken perspective from the purple of pine-crowned cliff and headland beyond. Behind them the western sky began to grow golden with the approach of sunset. The road lead straight towards that softly golden light—to St. Augustin. It led further, deeper into the gold, deeper, as one might fancy, into the heart of the coming sunset, namely to the world-famous seaport of Marseilles.

Damaris sought to stifle remembrance of this alluring fact, as soon as it occurred to her. She must not dally with it—no she mustn’t. To in anywise encourage or dwell on it, was weak and unworthy, she having accepted the claims of clearly apprehended duty. She could not go back on her decision, her choice, since, in face of the everlasting hills, she had pledged herself.

So she let her eyes no longer rest on the high-road, but looked out to sea—where, as tormenting chance would have it, the black hull of a big cargo boat, steaming slowly

westward, cut into the vast expanse of blue, long pennons of rusty grey smoke trailing away from its twin rusty-red painted funnels.

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Hard-pressed, the girl turned to her companion, asking abruptly, inconsequently—“Is that every one whom you expect on Thursday, Henrietta?”

For some seconds Mrs. Frayling regarded her with a curious lack of intelligent interest or comprehension. Her thoughts, also, had run forward into the gold of the approaching sunset; and she had some difficulty in overtaking, or restraining them, although they went no further than the Grand Hotel; and—so to speak—sat down there all of a piece, on a buff-coloured iron chair, which commanded an uninterrupted view of four gentlemen standing talking before the front door.

“On Thursday?” she repeated—“Why Thursday?”—and her usually skilful hands fumbled with the fastening of her sable cape. Their helpless ineffectual movements served to bring her to her senses, bring her to herself.

“Really you possess an insatiable thirst for information regarding my probable guests, precious child,” she exclaimed. “All—of course not. I have only portrayed the heads of tribes as yet for your delectation. We shall number many others—male and female—of the usual self-expatriated British rank and file.—Derelicts mostly.”

Lightly and coldly, Henrietta laughed.

“Like, for example, the General and myself. Wanderers possessed of a singularly barren species of freedom, without ties, without any sheet-anchor of family or of profession to embarrass our movements, without call to live in one place rather than another. All along this sun-blessed Riviera you will find them swarming, thick as flies, displaying the trumpery spites and rivalries through which, as I started by pointing out to you, they can alone maintain a degree of individuality and persuade themselves and others they still are actually alive.”

Shocked at this sudden bitterness, touched to the quick by generous pity, regardless of possible onlookers—here in the village street, where the hoof-beats of the trotting horses echoed loud from the house-walls on either side—Damaris put her arms round Henrietta Frayling, clasping, kissing her.

“Ah! don’t, Henrietta,” she cried. “Don’t dare to say such ugly, lying things about your dear self. They aren’t true. They’re absurdly, scandalously untrue.—You who are so brilliant, so greatly admired, who have everyone at your feet! You who are so kind too,—think of all the pleasure you have given me to-day, for instance—and then think how beautifully good you’ve been, and all the time are being, to poor Mr. Wace”—

Whether Mrs. Frayling’s surprising lapse into sincerity and bald self-criticism were intentional, calculated, or not, she was undoubtedly quick to see and profit by the opening which Damaris’ concluding words afforded her.

“How sweet you are, darling child! How very dear of you to scold me thus!” she murmured, gently disengaging herself and preening her feathers, somewhat disarranged by the said darling child’s impetuous onset.

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“I know it is wrong to grumble. Yet sometimes—as one grows older—one gets a dreadful sense that the delights of life are past; and that perhaps one has been overscrupulous, over-timid and so missed the best.—That is one reason why I find it so infinitely pleasing to have you with me—yet pathetic too perhaps.—Why? Well, I don’t know that I am quite at liberty to explain exactly why.”

Henrietta smiled at her long, wistfully and oh! so sagely.

“And, indirectly, that reminds me I am most anxious you should not exaggerate, or run off with any mistaken ideas about my dealings with poor Marshall Wace. I don’t deny I did find his constantly being with us a trial at first. But I am reconciled to it. A trifle of discipline, though screamingly disagreeable, is no doubt sometimes useful—good for one’s character, I mean. And I really have grown quite attached to him. He has charming qualities. His want of self-confidence is really his worst fault—and what a trivial one if you’ve had experience of the horrid things men can do, gamble, for example, and drink.”

Henrietta paused, sighed. The yellow facade of the Grand Hotel came into sight, a pale spot amid dark trees in the distance.

“And Marshall, poor fellow,” she continued, “is more grateful to me, that I know, than words can say. So do like him and encourage him a little—it would be such a help and happiness to me as well as to him, dearest Damaris.”

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH HENRIETTA PULLS THE STRINGS

Mrs. Frayling’s afternoon party passed off to admiration. But this by no means exhausted her social activities. Rather did it stimulate them; so that, with Damaris’ amusement as their ostensible object and excuse, they multiplied exceedingly. Henrietta was in her native element. Not for years had she enjoyed herself so much. This chaperonage, this vicarious motherhood, was rich in opportunity. She flung wide her nets, even to the enmeshing of recruits from other larger centres, Cannes, Antibes and Nice. This more ambitious phase developed later. Immediately our chronicle may address itself to the initial Thursday, which, for our nymph-like maiden, saw the birth of certain illusions destined to all too lengthy a span of life.

Luncheon at the villa—or as Henrietta preferred it called, The Pavilion—set in the grounds of the Hotel de la Plage and dependent for service upon that house—was served at mid-day. This left a considerable interval before the advent of the expected guests. Mrs. Frayling refused to dedicate it to continuous conversation, as unduly tiring both for Damaris and for herself. They must reserve their energies, must keep fresh.

Marshall Wace was, therefore, bidden to provide peaceful entertainment, read aloud—-presently, perhaps, sing to them at such time as digestion—bad for the voice when in process—might be supposed complete. The young man obeyed, armed with Tennyson's *Maud* and a volume of selected lyrics.

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His performance fairly started General Frayling furtively vanished in search of a mild *siesta*. It inflated his uxorious breast with pride to have his Henrietta shine in hospitality thus. But his lean shanks wearied, keeping time to the giddy music. Wistfully he feared he must be going downhill, wasn't altogether the man he used to be, since he found the business of pleasure so exhaustingly strenuous. And that was beastly unfair to his lovely wife—wouldn't do, would not do at all, by Gad! Therefore did he vanish into a diminutive and rather stuffy smoking-room, under the stairs, unfasten his nankeen waistcoat, unfasten his collar-stud, doze and finally, a little anxiously, sleep.

Whatever Marshall Wace's diffidence in ordinary intercourse, it effectually disappeared so soon as he began to declaim or to recite. The histrionic in him declared itself, rising dominant. Given a character to impersonate, big swelling words to say, fine sentiments to enunciate, he changed to the required colour chameleon-like. You forgot—at least the feminine portion of his audience, almost without exception, forgot—that his round light-brown eyes stared uncomfortably much; that his nose, thin at the root and starting with handsome aquiline promise, ended in a foolish button-tip. Forgot that his lips were straight and compressed, wanting in generous curves and in tenderness—an actor's mouth, constructed merely for speech. Forgot the harsh quality of the triangular redness on either cheek, fixed and feverish. Ceased to remark how the angle of the jaw stood away from and beyond the sinewy, meagre neck, or note the rise and fall of Adam's apple so prominent in his throat.—No longer were annoyed by the effeminate character of the hands, their retracted nails and pink, upturned finger-tips, offering so queer a contrast to the rather inordinate size of his feet.

For the voice rarely failed to influence its hearers, to carry you indeed a little out of yourself by its variety of intonation, its fire and fervour, its languishing modulations, broken pauses, yearning melancholy of effect. The part of the neurotic hero of the—-then—Laureate's poem, that somewhat pinch-beck Victorian Hamlet, suited our young friend, moreover, down to the ground. It offered sympathetic expression to his own nature and temperament; so that he wooed, scoffed, blasphemed, orated, drowned in salt seas of envy and self-pity, with a simulation of sincerity as convincing to others as consolatory to himself.

And Damaris, being unlearned in the curious arts of the theatre, listened wide-eyed, spellbound, until flicked by the swishing skirts of fictitious emotion into genuine, yet covert, excitement. As the reading progressed Henrietta Frayling's presence increasingly sank into unimportance. More and more did the poem assume a personal character, of which, if the reader were hero, she—Damaris—became heroine. Marshall Wace seemed to read not to,

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but definitely at her; so that during more than one ardent passage, she felt herself go hot all over, as though alone with him, an acknowledged object of his adoring, despairing declarations. This she shrank from, yet—it must be owned—found stirring, strangely and not altogether unpleasantly agitating. For was not this *protege* of Henrietta's—whom the latter implored her to encourage and treat kindly—something of a genius? Capable of sudden and amazing transformation, talking to you with a modesty and deference agreeably greater than that of most young men of his age; then, on an instant, changing at will, and extraordinarily voicing the accumulated wrongs, joys and sorrows of universal humanity? Could Henrietta, who usually spoke of him in tones of commiseration, not to say of patronage, be aware how remarkable he really was? Damaris wondered; regarding him, meanwhile, with innocent respect and admiration. For how tremendously much he must have experienced, how greatly he must have suffered to be able to portray drama, express profound emotion thus! That the actor's art is but glorified make-believe, the actor himself too often hollow as a drum, though loud sounding as one, never for an instant occurred to her. How should it?

Therefore when Mrs. Frayling—recollecting certain mysteries of the toilet which required attention before the arrival of her expected guests—brought the performance to an abrupt termination, Damaris felt a little taken aback, a little put about, as though someone should be guilty of talking millinery in church.

For—"Splendid, my dear Marshall, splendid," the lady softly yet emphatically interrupted him. "To-day you really surpass yourself. I never heard you read better, and I hate to be compelled to call a halt. But time has flown—look."

And she pointed to the blue and gold Sevres clock upon the mantelpiece.

"Miss Verity is an inspiring auditor," he said, none best pleased at being thus arbitrarily arrested in midcourse. "For whatever merit my reading may have possessed, your thanks are due to her rather than to me, Cousin Henrietta."

He spoke to the elder woman. He looked at the younger. With a nervous yet ponderous movement—it was Marshall Wace's misfortune always to take up more room than by rights belonged to his height and bulk—he got on to his feet. Inattentively let drop the volume of poems upon a neighbouring table, to the lively danger of two empty coffee cups.

The cups rattled. "Pray be careful," Mrs. Frayling admonished him with some sharpness. The performance had been prolonged. Not without intention had she effaced herself. But, by both performance and effacement, she had been not a little bored, having a natural liking for the limelight. She, therefore, hit out—to regret her indiscretion the next moment.

“Nothing—nothing,” she prettily added. “I beg your pardon, Marshall, but I quite thought those cups would fall off the table—So stupid of me.”

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The fixed red widened, painfully inundating the young man's countenance. He was infuriated by his own awkwardness. Humiliated by Mrs. Frayling's warning, of which her subsequent apology failed to mitigate the disgrace. And that this should occur just in the hour of satisfied vanity, of agreeable success—and before Damaris! In her eyes he must be miserably disqualified henceforth.

But his misfortunes worked to quite other ends than he anticipated. For Damaris came nearer, her expression gravely earnest as appealing to him not to mind, not to let these things vex him.

"I have never heard anyone read so beautifully," she told him. "You make the words come alive so that one sees the whole story happening. It is wonderful. I shall always remember this afternoon because of your reading—and shall long to hear you again—often, I know, long for that."

Wace bowed. This innocent enthusiasm was extremely assuaging to his wounded self-esteem.

"You have but to ask me, Miss Verity. I shall be only too honoured, too happy to read to you whenever you have leisure and inclination to listen."

But here Mrs. Frayling put her arm round Damaris' waist, affectionately, laughingly, and drew her towards the door.

"Come, come, darling child—don't be too complimentary or Marshall will grow unbearably conceited.—You'll put on flannels, by the way, Marshall, won't you?" she added as an after-thought.

"I shall not play tennis this afternoon," he answered, his nose in the air. "There will be plenty for a change of setts without me. I am not good enough for Binning and his two young aristocrats, and I don't choose to make sport for the Philistines by an exhibition of my ineptitude. I have no pretentious to being an athlete."

"Nonsense, Marshall, nonsense," she took him up quickly, conscious his reply was not in the best taste. "You wilfully underrate yourself."

Then later, as, still entwined, she conducted Damaris upstairs to her bed-chamber.

"There you have the position in a nutshell," she said. "Still am I not right? For hasn't he charm, poor dear fellow, so very much cleverness—so really gifted isn't he?"

And as the girl warmly agreed:

"Ah! I am so very glad you appreciate him.—And you have yet to hear him sing! That takes one by storm, I confess—Unhappy Maud Callowgas!—But you see how frightfully

on edge he is—how he turns off for no valid reason, imagines himself a failure, imagines himself out of it? In point of fact he plays a quite passable game of tennis—-and you heard what he said? These fits of depression and self-depreciation amount to being tragic. One requires endless tact to manage him and save him from himself."

Henrietta paused, sighed, sitting on the stool before her toilette table, neatly placing tortoiseshell hairpins, patting and adjusting her bright brown hair.

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“I could have bitten my tongue out for making that wretched slip about the coffee cups; but I was off my guard for once. And like all artistic people Marshall is a little absent-minded—absorbed to the point of not seeing exactly what he is doing.—Poor young man, I sometimes tremble for his future. Such a highly strung, sensitive nature amounts almost to a curse. If he got into wrong hands what mightn’t the end be?—Catastrophe, for he is capable of fatal desperation. And I must own men—with the exception of my husband who is simply an angel to him—do not always understand and are not quite kind to him. He needs a wise loving woman to develop the best in him—there is so very much which is good—and to guide him.”

“Well,” Damaris said, and that without suspicion of irony, “dearest Henrietta, hasn’t he you?”

Mrs. Frayling took up the ivory hand-glass, and sitting sideways on the dressing-stool, turned her graceful head hither and thither, to obtain the fuller view of her back hair.

“Me? But you forget, I have other claims to satisfy. I can’t look after him for ever. I must find him a wife I suppose; though I really shall be rather loath to give him up. His gratitude and loneliness touch me so much,” she said, looking up and smiling, with a little twist in her mouth, as of playful and unwilling resignation, captivating to see.

By which cajoleries and expression of praiseworthy sentiment, Henrietta raised herself notably in Damaris’ estimation—as she fully intended to do. Our maiden kissed her with silent favour; and, mysteries of the toilette completed, more closely united than ever before—that is, since the date of the elder’s second advent—the two ladies, presenting the prettiest picture imaginable, went downstairs again, gaily, hand in hand.

CHAPTER VI

CARNIVAL—AND AFTER

Tall and slim, in the black and white of his evening clothes, Colonel Carteret leaned his shoulder against an iron pillar of the verandah of the Hotel de la Plage, and smoked, looking meditatively down into the moonlit garden. Through the range of brightly lighted open windows behind him came the sound of a piano and stringed instruments, a subdued babble of voices, the whisper of women’s skirts, and the sliding rush of valsing feet.

To-night marked the culmination and apex of Henrietta Frayling’s social effort. It was mid-March, mid-Lent—which last fact she made an excuse—after taking ecclesiastical opinion on the subject, namely, that of Herbert Binning, the Anglican chaplain—for issuing invitations to a Cinderella dance. Damaris Verity, it appeared, had never really, properly and ceremoniously “come out”—a neglect which Henrietta protested should be

repaired. Positively, but very charmingly, she told Sir Charles it must. She only wished the affair could be on a larger, more worthy scale. This was, after

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all, but a makeshift—the modest best she could arrange under the circumstances. But he—Sir Charles—must not refuse. It would give her such intense pleasure to have the darling child make her official *debut* under her, Henrietta's, auspices. The hours would of necessity be early, to avoid disturbance of the non-dancing residents in the hotel. But, if the entertainment were bound to end at midnight, it could begin at a proportionately unfashionable hour. For once *table d'hote* might surely be timed for six o'clock; and the dining-room—since it offered larger space than any other apartment—-be cleared, aired, and ready for dancing by a quarter-past eight.—Henrietta unquestionably had a way with her; proprietors, managers, servants alike hastening obedient to her cajoling nod.—Thanks to importations by road and rail, from other coast resorts, she reckoned to muster sixteen to twenty couples.—A rubbishing apology at best, in the matter of a "coming out" ball, for a girl of Damaris' position and deserts—no one could know that better than she, Henrietta, herself did!

"A poor thing but mine own," she quoted, when enlarging upon the scheme to Charles Verity. "But as at Easter we are fated to scatter, I suppose, and go our several roads with small promise of reunion, you must really be gracious, dear friend, and, for old sake's sake, give in to my desires. It's my last chance, for heaven knows how long—not impossibly for ever."

Carteret happened to be present during the above conversation. Had he not, it may be doubted whether it would ever have taken place—with this dash of affecting reminiscence in any case. Allusions to a common past were barred for excellent reasons, as between these two persons, save strictly in public. Even so it struck him as a humorous piece of audacity on the lady's part. Her effrontery touched on the colossal! But it succeeded, always had done so.—In his judgment of Henrietta, Carteret never failed to remember, being compact of chivalry and of truthfulness, that he had once on a time been a good half in love with her himself.—All the same he was not sure her close association with Damaris met with his approval.

That association had grown, Jonah's gourd-like, during the last six weeks, until, as he rather uneasily noted, the two were hardly ever apart. Luncheons, teas, picnics, excursions, succeeded one another. Afternoons of tennis in the hotel grounds, the athletic gregarious Binning and his two pupils, Peregrine Ditton and Harry Ellice in attendance. Sometimes the latter's sister, Mary Ellice, joined the company—when Lady Hermione condescended to spare her—or the long-backed Miss Maud Callowgas. Afternoons of reading and song, too, supplied by Marshall Wace.—Carteret felt self-reproachful, yet knew his charity too often threatened to stop short of the young man Wace—though the beggar had a voice to draw tears from a stone, plague him!—At intervals, all-day expeditions were undertaken to Monte Carlo, or shopping raids upon Cannes or Nice.

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Yes, verily—as he reflected—Henrietta Frayling did keep the ball rolling with truly Anglo-Indian frivolity and persistence, here in the heart of Europe! And was that altogether wholesome for Damaris? He delighted to have the beautiful young creature enjoy herself, spread her wings, take her place among the courted and acclaimed. But he prized her too highly not to be ambitious for her; and would have preferred her social education to be conducted on more dignified and authorized lines, in the great world of London, namely, or Paris. When all came to all, this was hardly good enough.

No one, he honestly admitted, trumpeted that last truth more loudly than Henrietta—at times. Nevertheless she went on and on, making the business of this rather second-rate pleasure-seeking daily of greater importance. How could Damaris be expected to discriminate, to retain her sense of relative values, in the perpetual scrimmage, the unceasing rush? Instinct and nobility of nature go an immensely long way as preservatives—thank God for that—still, where you have unsophistication, inexperience, a holy ignorance, to deal with, it is unwise to trust exclusively to their saving grace. Even the finest character is the safer—so he supposed—for some moulding and direction in its first contact with the world, if it is to come through the ordeal unscathed and unbesmirched. And to ask such moulding and direction of Henrietta Frayling was about as useful as asking a humming-bird to draw a water-cart.

He was still fond of Henrietta and derived much silent entertainment from witnessing her manoeuvres. But he was under no delusion regarding her. He considered her quite the most selfish woman of his acquaintance, though also one of the most superficially attractive. Hers was a cold, not a hot selfishness, refined to a sort of exquisiteness and never for an instant fleshly or gross. But that selfishness, in its singleness of purpose, made her curiously powerful, curiously capable of influencing persons of larger and finer spirit than herself—witness her ascendency over Charles Verity during a long period of years, and that without ever giving, or even seriously compromising, herself.

Into whoever she fixed her dainty little claws, she did it with an eye to some personal advantage. And here Carteret owned himself puzzled—for what advantage could she gain from this close association with Damaris? The girl's freshness went, rather mercilessly, to show up her fading.

At times, it is true, watching her pretty alacrity of manner, hearing her caressing speech, he inclined to give her the benefit of the doubt, believe her self-forgetful, her affection genuine, guiltless of design or after-thought. If so, so very much the better! He was far from grudging her redemption, specially at the hands of Damaris.—Only were things, in point of fact, working to this commendable issue? With the best will in the world to think so, he failed to rid himself of some prickings of anxiety and distrust.

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And from such prickings he sensibly suffered to-night, as he leaned his shoulder against the iron pillar of the verandah at the Hotel de la Plage, and looked down into the *claire obscure* of the moonlit gardens, while over the polished floor of the big room at his back, the rhythmical tread of the dancers' feet kept time to the music of piano and sweet wailing strings.—For that a change showed increasingly evident in Damaris he could not disguise from himself. In precisely what that change consisted it was not easy to say. He discovered it more in an attitude of mind and atmosphere than in outward action or even in words said. But she was not quite the same as the grave and steadfast young creature who had asked his help for her father, and indirectly for herself, in the moist chill of the November twilight at The Hard—and who, receiving promise of such help, had darted away over the drenched lawn in company with the wildly gambolling cats alternately pursuing and pursued. Nor was she quite the same as when he had walked with her, through the resounding Paris streets, to pay her devoirs to her former guardians and teachers at the convent school; and, later returning, had spoken to her of the safety of religion, the high worth of the doctrine and practice of a definite historic creed.

Her relation to her father appeared—and this pained Carteret—to lack its old intimacy, its intensity of consideration and tenderness. Her interest in the child of his brain, his belated literary experiment, was less sustained and spontaneous. How could it flourish in its former proportions when she was so much away, so often absent from morning till night?—Not without leave though, for she scrupulously asked permission before answering Henrietta's gay call and taking part in that lady's junketings and jaunts. Sir Charles never refused the requested permission; but, while granting it, did he not tend to retreat into his former sardonic humour, fall into long silences, become inaccessible again and remote? The book went forward; yet, more than once recently, Carteret had questioned whether his friend would ever get himself fairly delivered of the admirable volume were not he—Carteret—permanently at hand to act midwife. An unpleasant idea pursued him that Sir Charles went, in some strange fashion, in fear of Damaris, of her criticism, her judgment. Yet fear seemed a hatefully strong and ugly word to employ as between a father and daughter so straitly, heretofore, bound to one another in love.

And then—there lay the heart of the worry, proving him only too likely a graceless jealous middle-age curmudgeon, a senile sentimentalist, thus did he upbraidingly mock himself—were there not signs of Damaris developing into a rather thorough paced coquette? She accepted the homage offered her with avidity, with many small airs and graces—*a la* Henrietta—of a quite novel sort. Old General Frayling—poor pathetic old warrior—was

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her slave. Peregrine Ditton, Harry Ellice, even the cleric Binning—let alone the permanently self-conscious, attitudinizing Wace—with other newer acquaintances, English and foreign, ran at her heels. And she let them run, bless her, even encouraged their running by turns of naughty disdain and waywardness. She was fatal to boys—-that was in the natural course of things. And fatal to those considerably older than boys —perhaps—

The music flew faster and faster—stopped with a shriek and a crash. Laughing, talking, the dancers streamed out of the hot brightly lighted room into the soft peace, the delicate phantasy of the colourless moonlight.

Carteret drew back, flattening himself against the iron pillar in the shadow, as they passed down the steps into the garden below; the women's pale airy forms and the men's dark ones, pacing the shining paths in groups and couples, between the flower-beds, under the flat-headed pines, the shaggy-stemmed palms and towering eucalyptus, in and out massed banks of blossoming shrubs and dwarf hedges of monthly roses.

Midway in the light-hearted procession came Damaris, Peregrine Ditton on one side of her, Harry Ellice on the other. Leaving the main alley, the trio turned along a path, running parallel to the verandah, which opened into a circle surrounding the stone basin of a tinkling fountain, immediately below Colonel Carteret's post of solitary observation.

Damaris carried the demi-train of her white satin gown over her arm, thereby revealing a wealth of lace frilled petticoat, from beneath which the toes of her high-heeled, white satin shoes stepped with a pretty measured tread. The two boys, leaning a little towards one another, talked across her, their voices slightly raised in argument, not to say dispute.

"I call it rotten mean to bag my dance like that, I tell you.—Go away?—No I swear I won't go away, won't budge one blessed inch unless Miss Verity actually orders me to. If my dance was stolen, all the more reason I should have her to talk to now as a sort of make-up. So you just clear out, if you please, my good chap, and leave the field to your elders and betters. Remove your superfluous carcass till further notice.—Vamoose, my son, do you hear?"

This excitedly from Peregrine Ditton. They reached the fountain. Damaris stayed her measured walk, and stood gazing at the jet of water in its uprush and myriad sparkling fall. Ellice answered chaffingly yet with an underlying growl; and the dispute threatened to wax warm. But the girl heeded neither disputant, her attention rapt in watching the play of the falling water.

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Throughout the evening she had easily been chief centre of attraction, besieged by partners. And those not only her present rival attendants or Marshall Wace; but by Mrs. Frayling's various importations, plus Mr. Alban Titherage—a fat, smart and very forthcoming young London stock-broker, lately established, in company of a pretty, silly, phthisis-stricken wife, at the Grand Hotel. Very much mistress of herself, Damaris had danced straight through the programme with an air of almost defiant vivacity. Now, as it seemed, her mood had changed and sobered. For presently Colonel Carteret saw her bosom heave, while she fetched a long sigh and, raising her head, glanced upwards, her great eyes searching the shadowed space of the verandah.

The cool lunar brightness flooded her upturned face, her bare neck and arms, the glittering folds of her satin gown. She was exceedingly fair to look upon just now. For an appreciable length of time her glance met Carteret's and held it; giving him—though the least neurotic of men, calm of body and of mind—a strange sensation as of contact with an electric current which tingled through every nerve and vein. And this, although he perceived that, dazzled by the moonlight, she either did not see or quite failed to recognize him. An expression of disappointment, akin, so he read it, to hope defeated, crossed her face. She lowered her eyes, and moved slowly forward along the path, the boys on either side her. Again Peregrine Ditton took up his tale—in softened accents though still as one sorely injured and whose temper consequently inclines not unjustly to the volcanic.

"Upon my honour, I think you might have given me just a minute's law, Miss Verity," he protested. "It was no fault of mine being late. Maud Callowgas kept me toddling to the most unconscionable extent. First she wanted an ice, and then a tumbler of lemon squash; and then she lost her fan, or pretended she did, and expected me to hunt for the beastly thing. I give you my word I was as rude as sin, in hope of shaking her off; but she didn't, or wouldn't, see what I was driving at. There was no getting away from her. I tell you she sticks like a burr, that girl, once she lays hold of you. Octopuses aren't in it. Her power of adhesion is something utterly frantic "—

Here Ellice cut in with a doubtless scathing though, to Carteret, inaudible remark, at which Damaris laughed outright; and the fresh young voices trailed away in the distance alternately mocking and remonstrant.

As he listened, still conscious of contact with that surprising electric current, Carteret found himself taking stock of his own forty-nine years with swift and lively repugnance. To accept the sum of them, and the limitations and restrictions that sum is currently supposed to entail, proved just now astonishingly difficult. Damaris, as beheld in the fantastic loveliness of the moonlight, her searching, unseeing eyes meeting and dwelling upon his own, the look of disappointment and defeat crossing her sweetly serious countenance, wrought upon him begetting a dangerous madness in his blood. That it was dangerous and a madness, and therefore promptly to be mastered and

ejected, he would not permit himself an instant's doubt. Yet it very shrewdly plagued him, daring even to advance specious arguments upon its own behalf.

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For, when he came to consider matters, was he not in perfect health, more sound and fit than many a man but half his age? And were not his fortunes just now at a specially happy turn, his sister, Mrs. Dreydel, having lately been blessed with a windfall, in the shape of yearly income, which—did he so choose—relieved him of much expenditure on her account. Her eldest son had received his commission. The three younger boys had done well as to scholarships thereby materially reducing the cost of their education. Never had he, Carteret, been so free to consult his private desires; and never, as he knew too profoundly well, had his desires taken so definite and delicious a form. Nevertheless it remained a madness to be mastered, to be ejected.—His last thought, as his first, pronounced it that.

Unconsciously, pushed by this stress of rather turbulent sensations, Carteret walked the length of the verandah and drew up in the full glare of the moonlight. From here he could see the curve of the shore; and, beyond the quay and esplanade and last scattered houses of the little town, the lighthouse marking the tip of the western horn of the bay. He could hear the soft stealthy plunge and following rush of the sea up the white shelving beach. Could hear also—less soothing sound—through the open windows of the drawing-room of the Pavilion, just across the garden, Marshall Wace singing, with all the impassioned fervour of his rich and well-trained baritone, a ballad, then much in vogue, entitled “The Lost Chord.” The words, to Carteret’s thinking, were futile, meaning anything, everything, or nothing, according to your private interpretation of them. But as to the fine quality and emotional appeal of the voice there could not be two opinions, as it palpitated thus in the mild night air. Was Damaris Verity a member of the singer’s devout audience? Were her hands among those which now enthusiastically applauded the conclusion of the song? Under his breath, slowly, gently but most comprehensively, Carteret swore. And felt all the better for that impious exercise, even amused at this primitive expression of his moral and sentimental disturbance, and so on the high-road, as he fondly imagined, to capture his habitual attitude of charity and tolerance once again. But heaven had further trial of his fortitude and magnanimity, not to say his good honest horse sense, in store to-night.

For, as the clapping of hands died down, the whisper of a woman’s dress, upon the asphalt of the verandah just behind him, caught his ear, and Damaris came rapidly towards him.

“So you are here after all, dear Colonel Sahib,” she cried. “I felt you were when I was down there looking at the fountain. It sort of pulled at me with remindings of you ages and ages ago, in the gardens of the club at Bhutpur—when you brought me a present—a darling little green jade elephant in a sandalwood box, as a birthday gift from Henrietta. Later there was a terrible tragedy. An odious little boy broke my elephant, on purpose, and broke my heart along with it.”

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Carteret made a determined effort over himself, taking her up lightly.

“But not altogether past mending, dear witch—judging by existing appearances.”

“Ah! I’m none so sure of that,” Damaris answered him back with a pretty quickness—“if it hadn’t been for you. For I was very ill, when you came again to the Sultan-i-bagh—-don’t you remember?—the night of the riots and great fires in the Civil Lines and Cantonments, just at the breaking of the monsoon.”

“Yes, I remember,” he said.

And wondered to himself—thereby gaining ease and a measure of tranquillity, inasmuch as he thought of another man’s plight rather than of his own—whether Damaris had knowledge of other occurrences, not unallied to tragedy, which had marked that same night of threatened mutiny and massacre and of bellowing tempest, not least among them a vow made by her father, Charles Verity, and made for her sake.

“The whole story comes back in pictures,” she went on, “whenever I look at fountains playing, because of the water-jets in the canal in the Bhutpur club garden where you gave me Henrietta’s present. You see it all dates from then. And it came back to me specially clearly just now, partly because I felt lonely—”

“Lonely?—How lonely,” he smilingly interjected, “with a goodly youth as a protector on either hand?”

“Yes—lonely,” Damaris repeated, ignoring the allusion to her devoted if irascible escort. “Dance music always makes one rather sad—don’t you think so? It seems to ache with everything one wants and hasn’t got; and the ache goes on.—I turned homesick for—for India, and for my green jade elephant I used to love so dreadfully much.—I’ve all that is left of him, still wrapped in the same rice paper in the same sandalwood box you brought him in, put away with my best treasures in my own room at The Hard.”

She came nearer, stood beside him, bending down a little as she rested her hands on the top of the iron balustrade of the verandah, while her eyes followed the curve of the bay to where the lighthouse rose, a black column with flashing headpiece, above the soft glitter of the moonlit sea.

“And homesick, Colonel Sahib, for you,” she said.

“For me?” he exclaimed almost involuntarily, roughly startled out of his partially recovered tranquillity and ease.

“Yes”—she said, looking up at him. “Isn’t that quite natural, since you have stepped in so often to help me when things have gone rather wrong?—I knew you must be

somewhere quite close by. I sort of felt you were there. And you were there—weren't you? Why did you hide yourself away?"

Carteret could not bring himself immediately to answer. He was perplexed, infinitely charmed, distrustful, all at once—distrustful, though for very different reasons, both of himself and of her.

"Are things, then, going rather wrong now?" he asked presently.

For he judged it wise to accept her enigmatic speech according to its most simple and obvious interpretation. By so doing he stood, moreover, to gain time; and time in his existing perplexity appeared to him of cardinal importance.

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“That’s just what I’m not sure about.” Damaris spoke slowly, gravely, her glance again fixed upon the beacon light set for the safety of passing ships on the further horn of the bay. “If I could be sure, I should know what to do—know whether it is right to keep on as—as I am. Do you see?”

But what, at this juncture, Carteret did, in point of fact, most consciously see was the return of Henrietta Frayling’s scattered guests, from the Pavilion and other less fully illuminated quarters, towards the main building of the hotel. From the improvised ball-room within chords struck on the piano and answering tuning of strings invited to the renewal of united and active festivity. In the face of consequently impending interruption he hazarded a trifle of admonition.

“Dearest witch, you elect to speak in riddles,” he gently told her. “I am in the dark as to your meaning; so, if I am guilty of uttering foolishness, you must pardon me. But I own I could wish—just a bit—that, in some particulars, you wouldn’t keep on—I quote your own words—as you are, or rather have been just lately.”

“Why?” she asked, without moving.

“Because, to be quite honest with you, I am not altogether satisfied about your father. I am afraid he is getting back into the habit of mind we set out to cure him of, you and I, last November.”

Damaris sprang to attention.

“And I haven’t noticed it. I Wouldn’t stop to notice it. I have been too busy about my own concerns and have neglected him.”

Arrayed in her spotless virgin finery, her head carried proudly, though her eyes were sombre with self-reproach, self-accusation, and her lips quivered, she confronted Carteret. And his clean loyal soul went out to her in a poignant, an exquisite, agony of tenderness and of desire. He would have given his right hand to save her pain. Given his life gladly, just then, to secure her welfare and happiness; yet he had struck her—for her own good possibly—possibly just blindly, instinctively, in self-defence. He tried to shut down the emotion which threatened to betray him and steady on to the playfully affectionate tone of their customary intercourse; but it is to be feared the effort lacked convincingness of quality.

“No—no,” he said, “you take it altogether too hard. You exaggerate, dear witch, to the point of extravagance. You have been less constantly with your father than usual—-you’re the delight of his life after all, as you must very well know—and inevitably he has missed you. Nothing worse than that. The damage, such as it is, can easily be repaired.”

“Ah! but the damage, as you call it, starts behind all that in something else—something older, much deeper down, of which I doubt whether any lasting reparation is possible. I did try to repair it. All my going out with Henrietta, and this rushing about lately, began in that trying—truly it did, Colonel Sahib. And then I suppose I got above myself—as poor Nannie used to say—and came to care for the rushing about just for its own sake”—

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“My dance, I believe, Miss Verity.”

The speaker, Mr. Alban Titherage—well-groomed, rosy and self-complacent—pulled down the fronts of his white waistcoat. He inclined to distinct rotundity of person, and the garment in question, though admirable in cut, showed, what with the exertions of dancing, a damnable tendency, as he expressed it, to “ride up.”

“And my dance next afterwards, Miss Verity”—this from Peregrine Ditton, his youthful, well-bred, if somewhat choleric, countenance presenting itself over the top of the stock-broker’s smooth and not conspicuously intelligent head.

Damaris looked from one to the other of these claimants for her favour, with instant and very becoming composure.

“I’m dreadfully sorry,” she told them collectively, “but surely there is some mistake. Both those next dances—they are the last, I’m afraid, too, aren’t they?—belong to Colonel Carteret.”

“The deuce they do!” Ditton exploded, turning scarlet. With a cocked eye and a jaunty movement of the head Mr. Titherage shot out his right shirt cuff, and pointed a stout forefinger at certain hieroglyphics inscribed on its glossy surface.

“Your name, Miss Verity, and written with an indelible pencil, to the permanent embellishment of my best party-going linen and witness to your infidelity.”

“I can only repeat I am dreadfully sorry,” Damaris said, with a becoming air of concern, “if the confusion has arisen through my fault. But”—

She appealed to Carteret.

“They always were your dances, weren’t they?”

“Without doubt,” he affirmed.

Amusedly and very kindly he smiled upon the angry boy and portly young man, although the beat of his pulse was accelerated and his throat felt queerly dry.

“I am sure you understand how impossible it is for me to release Miss Verity from her promise,” he said courteously. “Would you willingly do so yourselves, were the positions reversed and either of you happy enough to stand in my shoes at this moment?”

Titherage gave a fat good-tempered laugh.

“By George, you have me there, Colonel. Under such A1 circumstances catch me making way for a stranger! Not if I know it.”

With which he attempted jovially to put his arm through that of his companion in misfortune and lead Ditton away. But the latter flung off from him with a petulant, half-smothered oath; and, his back very straight, his walk very deliberate, pushed through the cheerfully discoursing throng into the ball-room.

Damaris turned about, resting her hands on the top of the iron balustrade again and gazed out to sea. Her breath came with a catch in it.

“Colonel Sahib,” she said, proudly if just a trifle brokenly, “are you angry?”

“Angry?—good Lord!”

Then recovering control of senses and of sense—“But, dear witch,” he asked her—-“since when, if I may venture to enquire, have you become an adept in the fine art of—-well—lying?”

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Damaris looked around, her face irradiated by laughter.

“And you played up, oh! so beautifully quick! I was a teeny bit afraid you might fail me. For the idea came all of a minute, there wasn’t time to warn you. And that was fortunate perhaps—for me. You might have had scruples. And I was obliged to do it. After talking about the things which really matter, I couldn’t dance with that vulgar little man again—or with those jealous boys. They had an idiotic quarrel, actual quarrel, down in the garden. It displeased me. I told them so, and left them, and came here to find you—because of the fountain and the sort of home-sickness it gave me.”

Between laughing and crying, Damaris held out her hands, the white moonlight covering her.

“Oh! I am tired of rushing about,” she said. “Come and dance with me—it’s nonsense to tell me you can’t dance, and that you’ve forgotten how, because you have danced once this evening already—with Henrietta. I watched you and you dance better than anybody.”

“With Henrietta—that’s rather a different matter!”

“I should hope it was,” Damaris took him up naughtily. “But dance with me, and then, then please take me home. Yes,” as he tried to speak. “I know I had arranged to stay the night at the Pavilion. But I’ll find some excuse to make to Henrietta—Haven’t you just told me I’m proficient in lying?—You were going to walk back? Why shouldn’t I walk with you? I won’t be five minutes changing into my day clothes. It would be so fascinating down on the shore road at night. And I should get quiet all inside of me. I am tired of rushing about, Colonel Sahib, it hasn’t been a success.”

She stopped breathless, her hands pressed over her lace and satin swathed bosom.

“Now come and dance,—oh! so beautifully, please, come and dance.”

CHAPTER VII

TELLING HOW DAMARIS DISCOVERED THE TRUE NATURE OF A CERTAIN SECRET TO THE DEAR MAN WITH THE BLUE EYES

The beat of a tideless sea, upon the shore, is at once unrestful and monotonous; in this only too closely resembling the beat of the human heart, when the glory of youth has departed. The splendid energy of the flow and grateful easing of the ebb alike are denied it. Foul or fair, shine or storm, it pounds and pounds—as a thing chained—-without relief of advance or of recession, always at the same level, always in the same place.

Suspicion of this cheerless truth was borne in upon Carteret as—bare-headed, his overcoat upon his arm, the night being singularly mild and clement—he walked with Damaris through the streets of the silent town. The dwellers in St. Augustin, both virtuous or otherwise, had very effectually retired to their beds behind drawn curtains, closed shutters, locked doors, and gave no sign. Vacancy reigned, bringing in its train an effect of suspense and eeriness, causing

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both our friends involuntarily to listen, with slightly strained hearing, for sounds which did not come. Once a cat, nimble and thin, streaked out of a cavernous side-alley across the pallor of the pavement and cobbled roadway, to be swallowed up in a black split—knife narrow, as it seemed—between the blank house fronts opposite. And once, as they turned into the open space of the Grand Place—unreal and stark with its spidery framework of stalls, set up ready for to-morrow's market, under the budding plane trees—they encountered a tired gendarme making his round, picturesque of aspect in *kepi* and flowing cloak. His footsteps brisked up, as he met and treated them to a discreetly sympathetic and intelligent observation, only to lag again wearily as soon as they had passed.

These were the sole creatures in St. Augustin, save themselves, visibly alive and awake. Yet whether other beings, other presences, unmaterial, imponderable, intangible, did not walk the streets along with them, is open to doubt. More than once Damaris shrank close to Carteret, startled by and apprehensive of she knew not what. For who dare say in such a place what leavings-over there may not be from times pre-Christian and remote, when mighty Rome ruled, and the ancient gods bore sway over that radiant coast? On the outskirts of St. Augustin you may visit a fine amphitheatre, still perfect save for some ruin along the upper tier of seats; and in the centre of the town, within a stone's throw of the somewhat gloomy cathedral church, may trace the airy columns and portions of the sculptured architrave of a reputed temple of Venus, worked into the facade of the municipal buildings.

Turning out of the Grande Place by an avenue on the right, Damaris and Carteret gained the esplanade following the curve of the bay. Here a freshness of the sea pleasantly accosted them along with that unrestful, monotonous trample of waves upon the beach.

Not until they reached this stage of the homeward journey, and, setting their faces eastward, paced the pale level asphalt of this wide promenade, did any sustained effort of conversation arise. Thus far they had proffered fugitive remarks only, lapsing speedily into somewhat constrained silence. For a coldness, or shyness, might appear to have sprung up between them, oddly holding them asunder in thought and moral attitude after the close association of the dance—a reaction from its contact so surprisingly more intimate than any they had yet experienced, from that harmonious rhythmic unity of purpose and of movement which, in dancing, alike excites emotion quasi-physical, and so alluringly serves to soothe and allay the emotion it excites.

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These aspects of their association affected Damaris but dimly, since speaking a language of which she barely knew the alphabet. Carteret they took in a different measure. He read their direction and potency with clear understanding, the insidious provocations and satisfactions of them printed in large type. With a rush, his youth returned and troubled him. Or was it the phantom of youth merely? His heart-beats but the beat of a tideless sea. He feared as much.—Oh, these tardy harvests, these tardy harvests—are they not to most men a plague rather than a benison, since, in honour and fine feeling, so abominably perilous to reap!

For the greater promotion of calm and of sanity he welcomed the young girl's change of dress. The powder-blue walking suit, with belted jacket and kilted skirt, brought her more within the terms of their ordinary intercourse. But the impression of the fair young body, lately so close against his own, clothed in bride-like raiment, fresh as an opening flower and vaguely fragrant, could not easily be dispelled. Strive as he might to put it from him, the impression remained recurrent. Therefore it must not be held to Carteret's discredit if his senses took part with his nobler affections just now, against his considered judgment; or that he fared badly at the hands of the sea-born goddess—-worshipped hero in her temple in ancient days, with music, with dance and with nameless rites of sex, when the moon rode high heaven at the full, even as to-night.

Her influence was still abroad, and in his flesh Carteret shrewdly suffered it; yet neither basely nor bestially, being clean of life and of spirit. He whipped himself even, with rather sorry humour, seeing, in Damaris' willingness to entrust herself thus to his sole care in the midnight loneliness, a handsomer compliment to his morals than to his manhood. How little, bless her, she knew what stuff men are made of!—therein underrating her acquaintance with fact, as her conversation presently and surprisingly proved to him.

The revelation began in all apparent innocence—for:

"I'm not ungrateful to Henrietta," Damaris said, breaking silence softly yet abruptly, as speaking to herself rather than addressing him, in apology and argument. "And I'm dreadfully sorry to have vexed her—for she was vexed with me for not staying at the Pavilion to-night, as I promised. She was really quite cross."

"She will get over that—never fear," Carteret answered off the surface.

"Still it troubles me to have vexed her. I must have seemed so unreasonable, making silly sounding excuses—because I could not explain to her why I really wanted so much to go home."

"You find a limit to the dear lady's powers of comprehension or of sympathy?" he asked, again off the surface.

“I suppose I must do so, because there are things it never occurs to one to speak of to Henrietta.”

“Whole cartloads of them,” Carteret comprehensively agreed.

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“And yet I don’t know why.”

“Don’t you? Well, I think I do perhaps know why; and knowing, I must confess to being not altogether sorry your confidences are restricted, dear witch, in that particular direction.”

The use of the pet name, though involuntary—possibly on that very account—eased his fever. Clearly he must get back to their former relation. Rejoice in her beauty, in her sweet faith and dependence, love her—yes—he admitted the word,—but for God’s sake keep the physical side out of the business. Damaris’ easily-aroused loyalty, meanwhile, caught alight.

“Oh, but we’ve just been Henrietta’s guests,” she said, with a pretty mingling of appeal and rebuke—“and it seems hardly kind, does it, to find faults in her. She has been beautifully good to me all this time, ending up with this dance which she gave on purpose to please me.”

“And herself also,” Carteret returned.

—Yes decidedly he felt better, steadier, to the point of now trusting himself to look at his companion, notwithstanding the strange influences abroad in the magical moonlight, with his accustomed smiling, half-amused indulgence. The unremitting trample of the waves, there on the right, made for level-headedness actually if a little mercilessly—so he thought.

“I don’t wish to be guilty of taking Mrs. Frayling’s name in vain a second time,” he went on—“you’ve pulled me up, and quite rightly, for doing so once already—but depend upon it, she enjoyed her ball every morsel as much as you did. In respect of the minor delights of existence, she slumbers not nor sleeps, our perenially charming and skilful Henrietta.”

“You think she enjoyed it too? I am glad.”

Then after an interval of silence, her whole figure alert, her speech eager:

“See there—see there, Colonel Sahib—yes, far, far out to sea—aren’t those the lights of a ship?”

“Yes,” he answered—“creeping westward—bound for Toulon, most likely, or possibly for Marseilles.”

And he would have moved forward. But Damaris unaccountably lingered. Carteret waited a good three to four minutes to suit her convenience; but the delay told on him. The night and hour down here by the shore, on the confines of the silent town, were too full of poetry, too full of suggestion, of the fine-drawn excitement of things which had

been and might not impossibly again be. It was dangerous to loiter, and in such company, though waves might beat out a constant reminder with merciless pertinacity upon the beach.

“Come, dear witch, come,” he at last urged her. “We still have more than a mile to go and a pretty stiff hill to climb. It grows late, you will be abominably tired to-morrow. Why this fascination for a passing steamer, probably some unromantic, villainously dirty old tramp too, you would not condescend to look at by daylight.”

“Because,”—Damaris began. She came nearer to him, her expression strangely agitated.—“Oh! Colonel Sahib, if I could only be sure it wasn’t treacherous to tell you!”

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“Tell me what? One of the many things it would never occur to you to confide to Mrs. Frayling?” he said, trying to treat her evident emotion lightly, to laugh it off.

“To Henrietta? Of course not. It would be unpardonable, hateful to tell Henrietta.”

She flushed, her face looking, for the moment, dark from excess of colour.

“You are the only person I could possibly tell.”

Carteret moved aside a few steps. He too felt strangely agitated. Wild ideas, ideas of unholy aspect, presented themselves to him—ideas, again, beyond words entrancing and sweet. He fought with both alike, honestly, manfully. Returned and took Damaris’ hand quietly, gently in both his.

“Look here, dear witch,” he said, “all this evening a—to me—unknown spirit has possessed you. You haven’t been like yourself. You have made me a little anxious, a little alarmed on your account.”

“Oh! it isn’t only this evening,” she caught him up. “It has been going on for weeks.”

“So I have seen—and that is not good for you, isn’t for your happiness. So, if I am—as you say—the only person you care to acquaint with this matter, had not you better tell me here and now? Better worry yourself no more with mysteries about it, but let us, once and for all, have the thing out?”

“I should be thankful,” Damaris said simply, looking him in the eyes—“if I could be sure I wasn’t sacrificing some one else—their pride I mean—their—their honour.”

For a few seconds Carteret paused, meeting her grave and luminous glance. Then:

“I think you may risk it,” he said. “I promise you this some-one-else’s honour shall be sacred to me as my own. Without your direct request no word of what you choose to tell me will ever pass my lips.”

“Ah! I’m very sure of that,”—Her smile, her voice bore transparent testimony to a faith which went, somewhat giddily, not only to her hearer’s heart but to his head. “It isn’t a question of your repeating anything; but of your thinking differently of some one you care for very much—and who is almost as dependent on you, Colonel Sahib, as I am myself. At least I fear you might.—Oh! I am so perplexed, I’m in such a maze,” she said. “I’ve nothing to go on in all this, and I turn it over and over in my mind to no purpose till my head aches. You see I can’t make out whether this—the thing which began it all and happened oh! long ago—is extraordinary—one which you—and most people like you—in your position, I mean—would consider very wrong and disgraceful; or whether it often happens and is just accepted, taken for granted, only not talked about.”

Carteret felt cold all down his spine. For what, in God's name, could this supremely dear and—as he watched her grave and sweetly troubled countenance—supremely lovely child, be driving at?

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“And I care so dreadfully much,” she went on. “It is the story of the darling little green jade elephant over again—like its being broken and spoilt. Only now I’m grown up I don’t give in and let it make me ill. There was a time even of that—of illness, I mean—-at first just before you came to The Hard last autumn. But I wouldn’t suffer it, I would not let the illness go on. I got over that. But then a second crisis occurred soon after we came here; and I thought Henrietta’s kindness opened a way out. So I rushed about whenever and wherever she invited me to rush. But as I told you this evening—just before we had our two dances, you remember.”

“Am I likely to forget!” Carteret murmured under his breath.

“The rushing about has not proved a success. I thought it would help to stifle certain longings and keep me nearer to my father—more at one with him. But it didn’t, it made me neglect him. You see—you see”—the words were dragged from her, as by active suffering and distress of mind—“I had to choose between him and another person. One cannot serve two masters. I choose him. His claim was the strongest in duty. And I love to see him satisfied and peaceful. He always ranked first in everything I felt and did ever since I can remember; and I so want him to stay first. But I have been pulled two ways, and seem to have got all astray somehow lately. I haven’t been really true to myself any more than to him—only frivolous and busy about silly pleasures.”

“Don’t let the frivolity burden your precious conscience,” Carteret comfortably told her, touched by the pathos of her self-reproach. For her sincerity was surely, just now, unimpeachable and she a rare creature indeed! Love, he could less than ever banish; but surely he might utterly banish distrust and fear?—“As frivolity goes, dear witch, and greed of pleasure, yours have been innocent enough both in amount and in quality, heaven knows!”

“I should like to believe so—but all that’s relative, isn’t it? The real wrongness of what you do, depends upon the level of rightness you start from, I mean.”

“Insatiable casuist!” Carteret tenderly laughed at her.

And with that, by common though unspoken consent, they walked onward again.

Even while so doing, however, both were sensible that this resumption of their homeward journey marked a period in, rather than the conclusion of, their conversation. Some outside compelling force—so in any case it appeared to Carteret—encompassed them. It was useless to turn and double, indulge in gently playful digression. That force would inevitably make them face the innermost of their own thought, their own emotion, in the end. In obedience to which unwelcome conviction, Carteret presently brought himself to ask her:

“And about this other person—for we have wandered a bit from the point at issue, haven’t we?—whose interests as I gather clash, for some reason, with those of your father, and whose pride and honour you are so jealously anxious to safeguard.”

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“His pride, yes,” Damaris said quickly, her head high, a warmth in her tone. “His honour is perfectly secure, in my opinion.”

“Whose honour is in danger then?—Dear witch, forgive me, but don’t you see the implication?”

Damaris looked around at him with unfathomable eyes. Her lips parted, yet she made no answer.

After a pause Carteret spoke again, and, to his own hearing, his voice sounded hoarse as that of the tideless sea upon the beach yonder.

“Do you mean me to understand that the conflict between your father’s interests and those of this other person—this other man’s—arise from the fact that you love him?”

“Yes,” Damaris calmly declared.

“Love him,”—having gone thus far Carteret refused to spare himself. He turned the knife in the wound—“Love him to the point of marriage?”

There, the word was said. Almost unconsciously he walked onward without giving time for her reply.—He moistened his lips, weren’t they dry as a cinder? He measured the height to which hope had borne him, to-night, by the shock, the positive agony of his existing fall. At the young girl, *svelte* and graceful, beside him, he could not look; but kept his eyes fixed on the mass of the wooded promontory, dark and solid against the more luminous tones of water and of sky, some half-mile distant. Set high upon the further slope of it, from here invisible, the Grand Hotel fronted—as he knew—the eastward trending coast. Carteret wished the distance less, since he craved the shelter of that friendly yellow-washed caravanserai. He would be mortally thankful to find himself back there, and alone, the door of his bachelor quarters shut—away from the beat of the waves, away from the subtle glory of this Venus-ridden moon now drawing down to her setting. Away, above all, from Damaris—delivered from the enchantments and perturbations, both physical and moral, her delicious neighbourhood provoked.

But from that fond neighbourhood, as he suddenly became aware, he was in some sort delivered already. For she stopped dead, with a strange choking cry; and stood solitary, as it even seemed forsaken, upon the wide grey whiteness of the asphalt of the esplanade. Behind her a line of lamps—pale burning under the moonlight—curved, in perspective, with the curving of the bay right away to the lighthouse. On her left the crowded houses of the sleeping town, slashed here and there with sharp edged shadows, receded, growing indistinct among gardens and groves. The scene, as setting to this single figure, affected him profoundly, taken in conjunction with that singular cry. He retraced the few steps dividing him from her.

“Marriage?” she almost wailed, putting out her hands as though to prevent his approach. “No—no—never in life, Colonel Sahib. You quite dreadfully misunderstand.”

“Do I?” Carteret said, greatly taken aback, while, whether he would or no, unholy ideas again flitted through his mind maliciously assailing him.

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“It has nothing to do with that sort of loving. It belongs to something much more beautifully part of oneself—something of one’s very, very own, right from the very beginning.”

“Indeed!” he said, sullenly, even roughly, his habitual mansuetude giving way before this—for so he could not but take it—contemptuous flinging of his immense tenderness, his patient, unswerving devotion, back in his face. “Then very certainly I must plead guilty to not understanding, or if you prefer it—for we needn’t add to our other discomforts by quarrelling about the extra syllable—of misunderstanding. In my ignorance, I confess I imagined the love, which finds its crown and seal of sanctity in marriage, can be—and sometimes quite magnificently is—the most beautiful thing a man has to give or a woman to receive.”

Damaris stared at him, her face blank with wonder.

Set at regular intervals between the tall blue-grey painted lamp standards, for the greater enjoyment of visitors and natives, stone benches, of a fine antique pattern, adorn St. Augustin’s esplanade. Our much-perplexed maiden turned away wearily and sat down upon the nearest of these. She held up her head, bravely essaying to maintain an air of composure and dignity; but her shoulders soon not imperceptibly quivered, while, try hard as she might, setting her teeth and holding her breath, small plaintive noises threatened betrayal of her tearful state.

Carteret, quite irrespective of the prescience common to all true lovers where the beloved object’s welfare is concerned, possessed unusually quick and observant hearing. Those small plaintive noises speedily reached him and pierced him as he stood staring gloomily out to sea. Whereupon he bottled up his pain, shut down his natural and admirably infrequent anger, and came over to the stone bench.

“You’re not crying, dearest witch, are you?” he asked her.

“Yes, I am,” Damaris said. “What else is there left for me to do?—Everyone I care for I seem to make unhappy. Everything I do goes wrong. Everything I touch gets broken and spoilt somehow.”

“Endless tragedies of little green jade elephants?” he gently bantered her.

“Yes—endless. For now I have hurt you. You are trying to be good and like your usual self to me; but that doesn’t take me in. I know all through me I have hurt you—quite dreadfully badly—though I never, never meant to, and haven’t an idea how or why.”

This was hardly comforting news to Carteret. He attempted no disclaimer; while she, after fumbling rather helplessly at the breast-pocket of her jacket, at last produced a folded letter and held it out to him.

“Whether it’s treacherous or not, I am obliged to tell you,” she said, with pathetic desperation. “For I can’t bear any more. I can’t but try my best to keep you, Colonel Sahib. And now you are hurt, I can only keep you by making you understand—just everything. You may still think me wrong; but anyhow my wrongness will be towards somebody else, not towards you.—So please read this, and don’t skip, because every word helps to explain. Read it right through before you ask me any questions—that’s more fair all round.—If you go across there—under the lamp, I mean—there still is light enough, I think, for you to be able to see.”

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And Carteret, thus admonished—partly to pacify her, partly to satisfy a very vital curiosity which stirred in him to compass the length, breadth, and height of this queer business, learn the truth and so set certain vague and agitating fears at rest—did as Damaris bade him. Standing in the conflicting gaslight and moonlight, the haunted quiet of the small hours broken only by the trample and wash of the sea, he read Darcy Faircloth's letter from its unconventional opening, to its equally unconventional closing paragraph.

"Now my holiday is over and I will close down till next Christmas night—unless miracles happen meanwhile—so good-bye—Here is a boatload of my lads coming alongside, roaring with song and as drunk as lords.—God bless you. In spirit I once again kiss your dear feet"—

Carteret straightened himself up with a jerk. Looked at Damaris sitting very still, a little sunk together, as in weariness or dejection upon the stone bench. His eyes blazed fierce, for once, with questions he burned yet dreaded to ask. But on second thoughts—they arrived to him swiftly—he restrained his impatience and his tongue. Mastering his heat he looked down at the sheet of note-paper again. He would obey Damaris, absorb the contents of this extraordinary document, the facts it conveyed both explicitly and implicitly, to the last word before he spoke.

Happily the remaining words were few. "Your brother," he read, "till death and after"—-followed by a name and date.

At the name he stared fairly confounded. It meant nothing whatever to him.—That is, at first. Then, rising as a vision from out some subconscious drift of memory, he saw the cold, low-toned colouring of wide, smooth and lonely waters, of salt-marsh, of mud-flat and reed-bed in the lowering light of a late autumn afternoon—a grey, stone-built tavern, moreover, above the open door of which, painted upon a board, that same name of Faircloth figured above information concerning divers liquors obtainable within. Yes—-remembrance grew more precise and stable. He recalled the circumstances quite clearly now. He had seen it on his way back from a solitary afternoon's wild fowl shooting on Marychurch Haven; during his last visit to Deadham Hard.

So much was certain. But the name in its present connection? Carteret's imagination shied. For, to have the existence of an illegitimate son of your oldest and dearest friend thus suddenly thrust upon you, and that by a young lady of the dearest friend's family, is, to say the least of it, a considerable poser for any man. It may be noted as characteristic of Carteret that, without hesitation, he recognized the sincerity and fine spirit of Faircloth's letter. Characteristic, also, that having seized the main bearings of it, his feeling was neither of cynical acquiescence, or of covert and cynical amusement; but of vicarious humiliation, of apology and noble pitying shame.

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He came over and sat down upon the stone bench beside Damaris.

“Dear witch,” he said slowly, “this, if I apprehend it aright, is a little staggering. Forgive me—I did altogether, and I am afraid rather crassly, misunderstand. But that I could hardly help, since no remotest hint of this matter has ever reached me until now.”

Damaris let her hand drop, palm upwards, upon the cool, slightly rough, surface of the seat. Carteret placed the folded letter in it, and so doing, let his hand quietly close down over hers—not in any sense as a caress, but as assurance of a sympathy it was forbidden him, in decency and loyalty, to speak. For a while they both remained silent. Damaris was first to move. She put the letter back into the breast-pocket of her jacket.

“I am glad you know, Colonel Sahib,” she gravely said. “You see how difficult it has all been.”

“I see—yes”—

After a pause, the girl spoke again.

“I only came to know it myself at the end of last summer, quite by accident. I was frightened and tried not to believe. But there was no way of not believing. I had lost my way in the mist out on the Bar. I mistook the one for the other—my brother, I mean, for”—

Damaris broke off, her voice failing her.

“Yes,” Carteret put in gently, supportingly.

He leaned back, his arms crossed upon his breast, his head carried slightly forward, slightly bent, as he watched the softly sparkling line of surf, marking the edge of the plunging waves upon the sloping shore. Vicarious shame claimed him still. He weighed man’s knowledge, man’s freedom of action, man’s standards of the permissible and unpermissible as against those of this maiden, whose heart was at once so much and so little awake.

“For my father,” she presently went on. “But still I wanted to deny the truth. I was frightened at it. For if that was true so much else—things I had never dreamed of until then—might also be true. I wanted to get away, somehow. But later, after I had been ill, and my father let him come and say good-bye to me before he went to sea, I saw it all differently, and far from wanting to get away I only longed that we might always be together as other brothers and sisters are. But I knew that wasn’t possible. I was quite happy, especially after you came with us, Colonel Sahib, out here. Then I had this letter and the longing grew worse than ever. I did try to school myself into not wanting, not longing—did silly things—frivolous things, as I told you. But I can’t stop wanting. It all came to a head, somehow to-night, with the dancing and music, and those foolish boys

quarrelling over me—and then your showing me that—instead of being faithful to my father, I have neglected him."

"Ah, you poor sweet dear!" Carteret said, greatly moved and turning to her.

In response she leaned towards him, her face wan in the expiring moonlight, yet very lovely in its pleading and guileless affection.

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“And my brother is beautiful, Colonel Sahib,” she declared, “not only to look at but in his ideas. You would like him and be friends with him, though he doesn’t belong to the same world as you—indeed you would. And he is not afraid—you know what I mean? —not afraid of being alive and having adventures. He means to do big things—not that he has talked boastfully to me, or been showy. Please don’t imagine that. He knows where he comes in, and doesn’t pretend to be anybody or anything beyond what he is. Only it seems to me there is a streak of something original in him—almost of genius. He makes me feel sure he will never bungle any chance which comes in his way. And he has time to do so much, if chances do come”—this with a note of exultation. “His life is all before him, you see. He is so beautifully young yet.”

CHAPTER VIII

FIDUS ACHATES

In which final pronouncement of Damaris’ fond tirade, Carteret heard the death knell of his own fairest hopes. He could not mistake the set of the girl’s mind. Not only did brother call to sister, but youth called to youth. Whereat the goad of his forty-nine years pricked him shrewdly.

He must accept the disabilities of the three decades, plus one year, which divided him in age from Damaris, as final; and range himself with the elder generation—her father’s generation, in short. How, after all, could he in decency go to his old friend and say: “Give me your daughter.” The thing, viewed thus, became outrageous, offensive not only to his sense of fitness, but of the finer and more delicate moralities. For cradle-snatching is not, it must be conceded, a graceful occupation; nor is a middle-aged man with a wife still in her teens a graceful spectacle. Sentimentalists may maunder over it in pinkly blushing perversity; but the naughty world thinks otherwise, putting, if not openly its finger to its nose, at least secretly its tongue in its cheek. And rightly, as he acknowledged. The implication may be coarse, libidinous; but the instinct producing it is a sound one, both healthy and just.

Therefore he had best sit no longer upon stone benches by the sounding shore, in this thrice delicious proximity and thrice provocative magic of the serene southern night. All the more had best not do so, because Damaris proved even more rare in spirit, exquisite in moral and imaginative quality—so he perhaps over-fondly put it—than ever before. Carteret got on his feet and walked away a few paces, continuing to heckle himself with merciless honesty and rather unprintable humour—invoking even the historic name of Abishag, virgin and martyr, and generally letting himself “have it hot.”

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A self-chastisement which may be accounted salutary, since, as he administered it, his thought again turned to a case other than his own, namely, that of Charles Verity. To pronounce judgment on his friend's past relations with women, whether virtuous or otherwise, was no business of his. Whatever irregularities of conduct that friend's earlier career may have counted, had brought their own punishment—were indeed actually bringing it still, witness current events. It wasn't for him, Carteret, by the smallest fraction to add to that punishment; but rather, surely, to do all in his power to lighten the weight of it. Here he found safe foothold. Let him invite long-standing friendship, with the father, to help him endure the smart of unrequited love for the daughter. To pretend these two emotions moved on the same plane and could counter-balance one another, was manifestly absurd; but that did not affect the essence of the question. Ignoring desire, which to-night so sensibly and disconcertingly gnawed at his vitals, let him work to restore the former harmony and sweet strength of their relation. If in the process he could obtain for Damaris—without unseemly revelation or invidious comment—that on which her innocent soul was set he would have his reward.—A reward a bit chilly and meagre, it is true, as compared with—Comparisons be damned! —Carteret left his pacing and came back to the stone bench.

"Well, I have formed my own conclusions in respect of the whole matter. Now tell me what you actually want me to do, and I will see how far it can be compassed, dear witch." he said.

Damaris had risen too, but she was troubled.

"Ah! I still spoil things," she wailed. "I was so happy telling you about—about Faircloth. And yet somehow I've hurt you again. I know I have."

Carteret took her by the elbow lightly, gently, carrying her onward beside him over the wide pallor of the asphalt.

"Hurt me, you vanitatious creature? Against babes of your tender age, I long ago became hurt-proof"—he gaily lied to her. "What do you take me for?—A fledgling like the Ditton boy, or poor Harry Ellice, with whose adolescent affections you so heartlessly played chuck-farthing at our incomparable Henrietta's party to-night?—No, no—but joking apart, what exactly is it you want me to do for you? Take you to Marseilles for the day, perhaps, to meet this remarkable young sea-captain and go over his ship?"

"He is remarkable," Damaris chimed in, repeating the epithet with eager and happier emphasis.

"Unquestionably—if I'm to judge both by your account of him and by the tenor of his letter."

"And you would take me? Oh! dear Colonel Sahib, how beautifully good you are to me."

“Of course, I’ll take you—if”—

“If what?”

“If Sir Charles gives his consent.”

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He slipped Damaris' hand within his arm, still bearing her onward. The last of the long line of gas-lamps upon the esplanade, marking the curve of the bay, was now left behind. A little further and the road forked—the main one followed the shore. The other—a footpath—mounted to the left through the delicate gloom and semi-darkness of the wood clothing the promontory. Carteret did not regret that impending obscurity, apprehending it would be less embarrassing, under cover of it, to embark on certain themes which must be embarked upon were he to bring his purpose to full circle.

"Listen, my dear," he told her, "while I expound. Certain laws of friendship exist, between men, which are imperative. They must be respected. To evade them, still worse, wilfully break them is to be guilty of unpardonably bad taste and bad feeling—to put it no higher. Had your father chosen to speak to me of this matter, well and good. I should have felt honoured by his confidence, have welcomed it—for he is dearer to me than any man living and always must be.—But the initiative has to come from him. Till he speaks I am dumb. For me to approach the subject first is not possible."

"Then the whole beautiful plan falls through," she said brokenly.

"No, not at all, very far from that," he comforted her. "I gather you have already discussed it with your father. You must lay hold of your courage and discuss it again. I know that won't be easy; but you owe it to him to be straightforward, owe it to his peculiar devotion to you. Some day, perhaps, when you are older and more ripe in experience, I may tell you, in plain language of a vow he once made for your sake—-when he was in his prime, too, his life strong in him, his powers at their height. Some persons might consider his action exaggerated and fanatical. But such accusations can be brought against most actions really heroic. And that this action, specially in a man of his temperament, may claim to be heroic there can be, in my opinion, no manner of doubt."

The path climbed steeply through the pine wood. Damaris' hand grew heavy on Carteret's arm. Once she stumbled, and clung to him in recovering her footing, thereby sending an electric current tingling through his nerves again.

"He did what was painful, you mean, and for my sake?"

"Say rather gave up something very much the reverse of painful," Carteret answered, his voice not altogether under control, so that it struck away, loud and jarring, between the still ranks of the tree-trunks to right and left.

"Which is harder?"

"Which is much harder—immeasurably, incalculably harder, dearest witch."

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After a space of silence, wherein the pines, lightly stirred by some fugitive up-draught off the sea, murmured dusky secrets in the vault of interlacing branches overhead, Carteret spoke again. He had his voice under control now. Yet, to Damaris' hearing, his utterance was permeated by an urgency and gravity almost awe-inspiring, here in the loneliness and obscurity of the wood. She went in sudden questioning, incomprehensible fear of the dear man with the blue eyes. His arm was steady beneath her hand, supporting her. His care and protection sensibly encircled her, yet he seemed to her thousands of miles away, speaking from out some depth of knowledge and of reality which hopelessly transcended her experience. She felt strangely diffident, strangely ignorant. Felt, though she had no name for it, the mystical empire, mystical terror of sex as sex.

"The night of the breaking of the monsoon, of those riotings and fires at Bhutpur, your father bartered his birthright, in a certain particular, against your restoration to health. The exact nature of that renunciation I cannot explain to you. The whole transaction lies beyond the range of ordinary endeavour; and savours of the transcendental—or the superstitious, if you please to take it that way. But call it by what name you will, his extravagant gamble with the Lords of Life and Death worked, apparently. For you got well; and you have stayed well, dear witch—thanks to those same Lords of Life and Death, whose favour your father attempted to buy with this act of personal sacrifice. He was willing to pay a price most men would consider prohibitive to secure your recovery. And, with an unswerving sense of honour, he has gone on paying, until that which, at the start, must have amounted to pretty severe discipline has crystallized into habit. What you tell me of this young man, Darcy Faircloth's history, goes, indirectly, to strengthen my admiration for your father's self-denying ordinance, both in proposing and in maintaining this strange payment."

There—it was finished, his special pleading. Carteret felt unfeignedly glad. He was unaccustomed to put forth such elaborate expositions, more particularly of a delicate nature and therefore offering much to avoid as well as much to state.

"So you are bound to play a straight game with him—dear child. Believe me he deserves it, is finely worthy of it. Be open with him. Show him your letter. Ask his permission—if you have sufficient courage. Your courage is the measure of the sincerity of your desire in this business. Do you follow me?"

"Yes—but I shall distress him," Damaris mournfully argued.

She was bewildered, and in her bewilderment held to the immediate and obvious.

"Less than by shutting him out from your confidence, by keeping him at arm's length."

"Neglecting him?"

“Ah! so that rankles still, does it? Yes, neglecting him just a trifle, perhaps.”

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“But the neglect is over—indeed, it is over and utterly done with.”

And in the ardour of her disclaimer, Damaris pressed against Carteret, her face upturned and, since she too was tall, very close to his.

“Just because it is over and done with I begged you to bring me back with you to-night. I wanted to make a clean break with all the frivolities, while everything was quite clear to me. I wanted, while I still belonged to you, Colonel Sahib, through our so beautifully dancing together twice”—

“God in Heaven!” Carteret said under his breath. For what a past-master in the art of the torturer is your white souled maiden at moments!

“To go right away from all that rushing about worldliness—I don’t blame Henrietta—she has been sweet to me—but it is worldliness, rather, isn’t it?—and to be true to him again and true to myself. I wanted to return to my allegiance. You believe me, don’t you? You made me see, Colonel Sahib, you brought my foolishness home to me—Oh! yes, I owe you endless gratitude and thanks. But I was uneasy already. I needed a wholesome shove, and you gave it. And now you deliver a much-needed supplementary shove—one to my courage. I obey you, Colonel Sahib, without question or reservation—not on the chance of getting what I long for; but because you have convinced me of what is right. I will tell him—tell my father—all about everything—to-morrow.”

“It is now to-morrow—and, with the night, many dreams have packed up their traps and fled.”

“But we needn’t be sorry for that,” Damaris declared, in prettily rising confidence. “The truth is going to be better than the dreams, isn’t it?”

“For you, yes—with all my heart, I hope.”

“But for you—why not for you?” she cried, smitten by anxiety regarding him and by swift tenderness.

They had reached the end of the upward climbing path, and stepped from the semi-darkness of the wood into the greater clarity of the gravel terrace in front of the hotel. Far below unseen waves again beat upon the beach. The sound reached them faintly. The dome of the sky, thick sown with stars, appeared prodigious in expanse and in height. It dwarfed the block of hotel buildings upon the right. Dwarfed all visible things, the whole earth, indeed, which it so sensibly enclosed. Dwarfed also, and that to the point of desolation, the purposes and activities of individual human lives. How could these count, what could they matter in presence of the countless worlds swinging, there, through the illimitable fields of space?

To Carteret this thought, or rather this sensation, of human insignificance brought a measure of stoic consolation. He lifted Damaris' hand off his arm, and held it, while he said, smiling at her:

"For me—yes, of course. Why not? For me too, dearest witch, truth is assuredly the most profitable bedfellow."

Then, as she shrank, drawing away a little, startled by the crudeness of the expression:

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“I enjoyed our two dances,” he told her, “and I shall enjoy taking you to Marseilles and making Faircloth’s acquaintance, if our little scheme works out successfully—if it is sanctioned, permitted. After that—other things being equal—I think I ought to break camp and journey back to England, to look after my property and my sister’s affairs. I have gadded long enough. It is time to get into harness—such harness as claims me in these all too easy-going days. And now you must really go indoors without further delay, and go to bed. May the four angels of pious tradition stand at the four corners of it, to keep you safe in body, soul and spirit. Sleep the sleep of innocence and wake radiant and refreshed.”

“Ah! but you’re sad—you are sad,” Damaris cried, her lips quivering. “Can’t I do anything?—I would do so much, would love so much—beyond anything—to make you unsad.”

The man with the blue eyes shook his head.

“Impossible, alas! Your intervention, in this case, is finally ruled out, my sweet lamb,” he affectionately, but conclusively said.

CHAPTER IX

WHICH FEATURES VARIOUS PERSONS WITH WHOM THE READER IS ALREADY ACQUAINTED

Some are born great, some attain greatness, and some have it thrust upon them to the lively embarrassment of their humble and retiring little souls. To his own notable surprise, General Frayling, on the morning following his wife’s Cinderella dance, awoke to find himself the centre of interest in the life of the pretty pavilion situated in the grounds of the Hotel de la Plage. He owed this unaccustomed ascendency to physical rather than moral or intellectual causes, being possessed of a temperature, the complexion of the proverbial guinea, and violent pains in his loins and his back.

These anxious symptoms developed—one cannot but feel rather unjustly—as the consequence of his own politeness, his amenity of manner, and the patient attentions he paid on the previous evening to one of his wife’s guests. He had sat altogether too long for personal comfort in a draughty corner of the hotel garden, with Mrs. Callowgas. Affected by the poetic influences of moon, stars, and sea, affected also conceivably by pagan amorous influences, naughtily emanating from the neighbouring Venus Temple—whose elegant tapering columns adorn the facade of the local Mairie—Mrs. Callowgas became extensively reminiscent of her dear dead Lord Bishop. Protracted anecdotes of visitations and confirmation tours, excerpts from his sermons, speeches and charges, arch revelations of his diurnal and nocturnal conversation and habits—the latter tedious to the point of tears when not slightly immodest—poured from her

widowed lips. The good lady overflowed. She frankly babbled. General Frayling listened, outwardly interested and civil, inwardly deploring that he had omitted to put on a waistcoat back-lined with flannel—waxing

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momentarily more conscious, also, that the iron—of the hard cold slats composing the seat of his garden chair—if not entering into his soul, was actively entering a less august and more material portion of his being through the slack of his thin evening trousers. He endured both tedium and bodily suffering with the fortitude of a saint and martyr; but next morning revealed him victim of a violent chill demanding medical aid.

The native local practitioner was reported mono-lingual, and of small scientific reputation; while our General though fluent in vituperative Hindustani, and fairly articulate in Arabic, could lay no claim to proficiency in the French language. Hence probable deadlock between doctor and patient. Henrietta acted promptly, foreseeing danger of jaundice or worse; and bade Marshall Wace telegraph to Cannes for an English physician. As a nurse she was capable if somewhat unsympathetic—illness and death being foreign to her personal programme. She attended upon her small sick warrior assiduously; thereby earning the admiration of the outsiders, and abject apologies for “being such a confounded nuisance to you, my love,” from himself. Her maid, a Eurasian—by name Serafina Lousada, whom she had brought with her from Bombay a couple of years earlier, prematurely-wrinkled of skin and shrunken of figure, yet whose lustrous black eyes still held the embers of licentious fires—would readily have shared her labours. But Henrietta was at some trouble to eliminate Serafina from the sick-chamber, holding her tendencies suspect as insidiously and quite superfluously sentimental, where any male creature might be concerned.

Carteret and Sir Charles Verity, on the other hand, she encouraged with the sweetest dignity imaginable, to take turns at the bedside—and to look in upon her drawing-room, also, on their way back and forth thither. A common object and that a philanthropic one, gives unimpeachable occasions of intimacy. These Henrietta did not neglect, though touching them with a disarming pensiveness of demeanour. The invalid was, “the thing “—the thought of him wholly paramount with her. Her anxiety might be lightened, perhaps, but by no means deleted, by the attentions of these friends of former years.—-A pretty enough play throughout, as the two gentlemen silently noted, the one with kindly, the other with sardonic, humour.

Her henchman, Marshall Wace, meanwhile, Henrietta kept on the run until the triangular patch of colour, straining either prominent cheek-bone, was more than ever accentuated. There was method, we may however take it, in the direction of these apparently mad runnings, since they so incessantly landed the runner in the *salon* of the Grand Hotel crowning the wooded headland. Damaris she refused to have with her. No—she couldn’t consent to any clouding of the darling child’s bright spirit by her private worries. Trouble, heaven knows, is bound to overtake each one of us more than soon enough! She—Henrietta—could endure her allotted portion of universal tribulation best in the absence of youthful witnesses.

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But let Marshall carry Damaris news daily—twice daily, if needs be. Let him read with her, sing to her; so that she, charming child, should miss her poor Henrietta, and their happy meetings at the little pavilion, the less. Especially let him seek the young girl, and strive to entertain her, when Sir Charles and Colonel Carteret were engaged on their good Samaritan visits to General Frayling.

“This break in our cherished intercourse,” Henrietta wrote, in one of those many Wace-borne bulletins, “grieves me more than I can express. Permit Marshall to do all in his power to make up for this hospital incarceration of mine. Poor dear fellow, it is such a boon to him. I really crave to procure him any pleasure I can—above all the pleasure of being with you, which he values so very highly. All his best qualities show in this time of trial. He is only too faithful and wears himself to positive fiddle-strings in my service and that of the General. I send him to you, darling child, for a little change and recreation—-relaxation from the strain of my husband’s illness. Marshall is so sympathetic and feels for others so deeply. His is indeed a rare nature; but one which does not, alas! always quite do itself justice. I attribute this to an unfortunate upbringing rather than to any real fault in himself. So be good to him, Damaris. In being good to him—as I have said all along—you are being good to your fondly loving and, just now, sorely tried Henrietta Frayling.”

All which sounded a note designed to find an echo in Damaris’ generous heart. Which it did—this the more readily because, still penitent for her recent trifle of wild-oats sowing, our beloved maiden was particularly emulous of good works, the missionary spirit all agog in her. She was out to comfort, to sympathize and to sustain. Hence she doubly welcomed that high-coloured hybrid, Wace—actor, cleric, vocalist in one. Guilelessly she indulged and mothered him, overlooking his egoism, his touchiness and peevishness, his occasional defects of breeding and of taste. She permitted him, moreover, to talk without restraint upon his favourite subject—that of himself. To retail the despairs of an ailing and unhappy childhood; the thwarted aspirations of a romantic and sensitive boyhood; the doubts and disappointments of a young manhood conspicuously rich in promise, had the fates and his fellow creatures but shown themselves more intelligently sensible of his merits and his needs.

For this was the burden of his recurrent lament. Throughout life he had been misunderstood.

“But you, Miss Verity, do understand me,” he almost passionately declared, waving white effeminate hands. “Ah! a pure influence such as yours”—

Here, rather to Damaris’ thankfulness, words appeared to fail him. He moved to the piano and exhaled his remaining emotion in song.

Affairs had reached the above point about ten days after Henrietta’s party and Damaris’ midnight walk with Colonel Carteret by the shore of the sounding sea. General Frayling,

though mending, was still possessed of a golden complexion and a temperature slightly above the normal, while his dutiful wife, still self-immured, was in close attendance, when an event occurred which occasioned her considerable speculation and perplexity.

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It came about thus. At her request Marshall Wace walked up to the station early that morning, to secure the English papers on their arrival by the mail train from Paris. After a quite unnecessarily long interval, in Henrietta's opinion, he returned with an irritable expression and flustered manner. Such, at least, was the impression she received on his joining her in the wide airy corridor outside the General's sick-chamber.

"I thought you were never coming back," she greeted him. "What has detained you?"

"The Paris train was late," he returned. "And—wait an instant, Cousin Henrietta. I want to speak to you. Yes, I am hot and tired, and I am put out—I don't deny it."

"Why?" Henrietta asked him indifferently.

Her own temper was not at its brightest and best. The office of ministering angel had begun most woefully to pall on her. What if this illness betokened a break up of health on the part of General Frayling? Bath chairs, hot bottles, air-cushions, pap-like meals and such kindred unlovelinesses loomed large ahead! That was the worst of marrying an old, or anyhow an oldish, man. You never could tell how soon the natural order of things might be reversed, and you obliged to wait hand and foot on him, instead of his waiting hand and foot on you. Henrietta felt fretful. Her looking-glass presented a depressing reflection of fine lines and sharpened features. If she should wilt under this prolonged obligation of nursing, her years openly advertise their number, and she grow faded, *passee*, a woman who visibly has outlived her prime? She could have shaken the insufficiently dying General in his bed! Yes, insufficiently dying—for, in heaven's name, let him make up his mind and that speedily—get well and make himself useful, or veritably and finally depart before, for the preservation of her good looks, it was too late.

"I met Sir Charles Verity at the station," Wace went on. "He was coming out of the first class *salle d'attente*. He stopped and spoke to me, enquired for cousin Fred; but his manner was peculiar, autocratic to a degree. He made me feel in the way, feel that he was annoyed at my being there and wanted to get rid of me."

"Imagination, my dear Marshall. In all probability he wasn't thinking about you one way or the other, but merely about his own affairs, his own—as Carteret reports—remarkably clever book.—But why, I wonder, was he at the station so early?"

Henrietta stood turning the folded newspaper about and idly scanning the head-lines, while the wind, entering by the open casements at the end of the corridor, lifted and fluttered the light blue gauze scarf she wore round her shoulders over her white frilled morning gown.

"He didn't tell me," the large, soft, very hot young man said. "You may call it imagination, Cousin Henrietta; but I can't. I am positive his manner was intentional. He meant to snub me, by intimating of how slight account I am in his estimation. It was

exceedingly galling. I do not want to employ a vulgar expression—but he looked down his nose at me as if I was beneath contempt. You know that insolent, arrogant way of his?”

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“Oh, la-la!” Henrietta cried. “Don’t be so childish!”—Though she did in point of fact know the said way perfectly well and admired it. Once upon a time hadn’t Sir Charles, indeed, rather superbly practised it in her—Henrietta’s—defence?

She sighed; while her temper took a nasty turn towards her yellow-faced, apologetic little General, waiting patiently for sight of the English newspapers, under the veil of mosquito netting in his little bed. Even in his roaring forties—had his forties ever roared though?—she doubted it—not to save his life could he ever have looked down his nose at an offending fellow-man like that.—Ah! Charles Verity—Charles Verity!—Her heart misgave her that she had been too precipitate in this third marriage. If she had waited? —

“Of course, with my wretchedly short sight, I may have been mistaken,” Wace continued, pointedly ignoring her interruption, “but I am almost convinced I recognized Colonel Carteret and Miss Verity—Damaris—through the open door, on the other side of the *salle d’attente,* in the crowd on the platform about to take their places in the train from Cannes, which had just come in.”

Henrietta ceased to scan the head-lines or deplore her matrimonial precipitation.

“Carteret and Damaris alone and together?” she exclaimed with raised eyebrows.

“Yes, and it occurred to me that I there touched upon the explanation, in part at least, of Sir Charles Verity’s offensive manner. He had been to see them off and was, for some reason, unwilling that we—you and I, cousin Henrietta—should know of their journey.”

Even in private life, at the very head-waters and source of her intrigues and her scheming, Henrietta cleverly maintained an effect of secrecy. She showed herself an adept in the fine art of outflanking incautious intruders. Never did she wholly reveal herself or her purposes; but reserved for her own use convenient run-holes, down which she could escape from even the most intimate of her co-adjutors and employees. If masterly in advance, she showed even more masterly in retreat; and that too often at the expense of her fellow intriguers. Without scruple she deserted them, when personal safety or personal reputation suggested the wisdom of so doing. Though herself perplexed and suspicious, she now rounded on Wace, taking a high tone with him.

“But why, my dear Marshall, why?” she enquired, “should Sir Charles object to our—as you put it—*knowing*? That seems to me an entirely gratuitous assumption on your part. In all probability Mary Ellice and the boys were on the platform too, only you didn’t happen to catch sight of them. And, in any case, our friends at the Grand Hotel are not accountable to us for their comings and goings. They are free agents, and it does really strike me as just a little gossipy to keep such a very sharp eye upon their movements. —Don’t be furious with me”—

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Henrietta permitted herself to reach up and pat the young man on the shoulder, playfully, restrainingly. An extraordinarily familiar proceeding on her part, marking the strength of her determination to avoid any approach to a quarrel, since she openly denounced and detested all those demonstrations, as between friends and relations, which come under the generic title of “pawing.”

“No, pray don’t be furious with me,” she repeated. “I quite appreciate how sensitive you naturally must be upon the subject of Damaris.”

“You have given me encouragement, cousin Henrietta”—this resentfully.

“And why not? Don’t be disingenuous, my dear Marshall. I have given you something much more solid than mere encouragement, namely active help, opportunity. In the right direction, to the right person, I have repeatedly praised you. But the prize, in this case, is to him who has address and perseverance to win it. You possess signal advantages through your artistic tastes, your music, your reciting. But I have never disguised from you—now honestly, have I?—there were obstacles and even prejudices to be overcome.”

“Sir Charles despises me.”

“But his daughter gives ample proof that she does not. And—you don’t propose to marry Sir Charles, do you?”

Henrietta laughed a trifle shrilly. The tone of that laugh pierced her hearer’s armour of egoism. He stared at her in interrogative surprise—observing which she hastened to retreat down a run-hole.

“Ah!” she cried, “it is really a little too bad to tease you, Marshall. But one can’t but be tempted to do so at moments. You take everything so terribly *au grand serieux*, my young friend.”

“You mean to convey that I am ponderous?”

“Well—perhaps—just a shade,” she archly agreed. “And of ponderosity you must make an effort to cure yourself.—Mind, though a fault, I consider it one on the right side—in the connection, that is, which we have just now been discussing. When a girl has as much intelligence as—we needn’t name names, need we?—she resents perpetual chaff and piffle. They bore her—seem to her a flagrant waste of time. Her mind tends to scorn delights and live laborious days—a tendency which rectifies itself later as a rule. All the same in avoiding frivolity, one must not rush to the other extreme and be heavy in hand. A happy mien in this as in all things, my dear Marshall.”

“I cannot so far degrade myself as to be an opportunist,” he returned sententiously.

“Yet the opportunist arrives; and to arrive is the main thing, after all—at least I imagine so.—Now I really cannot stay here any longer giving you priceless advice; but must take the General his newspapers.—By the way, did Sir Charles say anything about coming to see him this afternoon?”

As she asked the question Henrietta ran her eye down over the announcements in the Court Circular. Marshall replied in the negative. She made no comment, hardly appearing to notice his answer. But, as she stepped lightly and delicately away down the airy corridor to the door of the sick-room, over her blue gauze draped shoulder she flung back at him—

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“This confinement to the house is getting quite on my nerves. I must really allow myself a little holiday.—Take a drive to-morrow if Frederic is no worse. I will call at the Grand Hotel, I think, and see darling Damaris, just for a few minutes, myself.”

Information which went far to restore her hearer’s equanimity. His affairs, as he recognized, were in actively astute safe-keeping.

Marshall Wace spent the rest of the morning in the drawing-room of the villa, at the piano, composing a by no means despicable setting of Shelley’s two marvellous stanzas, which commence:

“Rarely, rarely comest thou,
  Spirit of Delight!
Wherefore hast thou left me now
  Many a day and night?”

The rich baritone voice, vibrant with apparent passion, swept out through the open windows, across the glittering garden. Miss Maud Callowgas, walking along that portion of the esplanade immediately in front of the hotel, paused in the grilling sunshine to listen. Heaven upon earth seemed to open before her pale, white-lashed eyes. If she could only ascertain what fortune she might eventually count on possessing—but Mama was so dreadfully close about everything to do with money! The Harchester bishopric was a fat one, worth from ten to fifteen thousand a year. That she knew from the odious, impudent questions asked about it by some horrible nonconformist member, in the House of Commons, just after her father’s death. Surely Mama must have saved a considerable amount out of so princely an income? She had always kept down expenses at the Palace. The servants left so often because they declared they had not enough to eat.

Then through the open window of the villa embowered in roses, there amid the palms and pines—and in a falling cadence too:

“How shall ever one like me
  Win thee back again?”

But Maud Callowgas needed no winning, being very effectually won already, so it was superfluous thus movingly to ask the question. The mid-day sun striking through her black-and-white parasol made her feel dizzy and faint.—If only she could learn the amount of her fortune, she could let Mrs. Frayling learn the amount of it too—just casually, in the course of conversation, and then—Everyone said Mrs. Frayling was doing her best to “place” her cousin-by-marriage, to secure him a well-endowed wife.

CHAPTER X

WHICH IT IS TO BE FEARED SMELLS SOMEWHAT POWERFULLY OF BILGE WATER

Warm wind, hot sun, the confused sound and movement of a great southern port, all the traffic and trade of it, man and beast sweating in the splendid glare. Rattle of cranes, scream of winches, grind of wheels, and the bellowing of a big steamer, working her way cautiously through the packed shipping of the basin, to the blue freedom of the open sea.—Such was the scene which the boatswain and white-jacketed steward, leaning their folded arms on the bulwarks and smoking, lazily watched.

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The *Forest Queen* rode high at the quayside, having discharged much, and taken on but a moderate amount of cargo for her homeward voyage. This was already stowed. She had coaled and was bound to clear by dawn. Now she rested in idleness, most of her crew taking their pleasure ashore, a Sabbath calm pervading her amid the strident activities going forward on every hand. The ship's dog, a curly-haired black retriever, lay on the clean deck in the sunshine stretched on his side, all four legs limp, save when, pestered beyond endurance, he whisked into a sitting position to snap at the all too numerous flies.

The boatswain—a heavily built East Anglian, born within sight of Boston Stump five-and-forty years ago, his face seamed and pitted by smallpox almost to the extinction of expression and altogether to that of eyebrows, eyelashes and continuity of beard—spat deliberately and voluminously into the oily, refuse-stained water, lapping against the ship's side over twenty feet below, and resumed a desultory conversation which for the moment had fallen dead.

"So that's the reason of his giving us hell's delight, like he has all day, cleaning up?—-Got a lady coming aboard to tea has he? If she's too fine to take us as we are, a deal better let 'er stay ashore, in my opinion. Stuff a' nonsense all this set out, dressing up and dressing down. Vanity at the bottom of it—and who's it to take in?—For a tramp's a tramp, and a liner's a liner; and all the water in God's ocean, and all the rubbing and scrubbing on man's earth, won't convert the one into the other, bless you."

He pointed away, with his pipestem, to the violet-shadowed mouth of one of the narrow lanes opening between the slop-shops, wine-shops, and cheap eating-houses—their gaudy striped, flounced awnings bellying and straining in the fervid southerly breeze—-which lined the further side of the crowded quay.

"As well try to wash some gutter-bred, French trollop, off the streets in behind there, into a white-souled, white-robed heavenly angel," he grumbled on. "All this purifying of the darned old hulk's so much labour lost. Gets the men's monkey up too, putting all this extray work on 'em."

He leaned down again, folding his arms along the top of the bulwarks.

"And, angel or trollop, I find no use for her, nor any other style of woman either, on board this 'ere blasted rusty iron coffin," he said.

Whereat the stewart, a pert-eyed, dapper little cockney—amateur of the violin and noted impersonator of popular music-hall comedians—took him up in tones of amiable argument.

"Your stomach's so turned on the subject of females you can't do 'em justice. Gone sour, regularly sour, it is. And I don't hold with you there, Partington, never shall and

never do. I'm one as can always find a cosy corner in me manly bosom for the lidies—-blame me if I can't, the pore 'elpless little lovey-doveys. After all's said and done Gawd made 'em just as much as 'e made you, Partington, that 'e did."

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“And called you in, sonny, to lend ’im an ’and at the job, didn’t ’e? All I can say is you’d both have been better employed putting in your time and talents somewhere else.”

After which sally the two smoked in silence, while the ship’s dog alternately stretched himself on the hot boards, and started up with a yelp to snap at the cloud of buzzing flies again.

The steward merely bided his time, however, and enquired presently with a nice air of nonchalance:

“Never been married, Partington, ’ave you? I’ve often known that put a fellow sadly off the sex.”

“Never,” the other replied, “though I came precious near it once, when I was a youngster and greener—greener even than you with your little lovey-doveys and your manly bosom, William, which is allowing a lot. But my wife as was to ’ave been—met her down Bristol way, gone blind silly on ’er I was—got took with the smallpox the week before the ceremony was pulled off, and give me all she had to spare of the disease with her dying breath. Soft chap as I was then, I held it as a sort of a compliment. Afterwards, when the crape had worn a bit brown, I saw it was jealousy of any other female I might come to cast my eye over as made her act like that.”

“A private sore!” William commented. “To tell you gospel truth, Partington, I guessed as much. But you should learn to tike the larger view. Blimey, you should rise above that. To be marked like you are is a misfortune, I don’t pretend to the contrary, looking at it along the level so to speak. But beauty’s so much dust and ashes, if yer can just boost yerself up to tike the larger view. Think of all that pore dying woman mayn’t ’ave saved you from by making yer outward fascinations less staring to the sex? Regular honey-pot to every passing petticoat you might ’ave been.”

He broke off, springing erect and shading his eyes with one hand to obtain a better view.

“My Sammy—whoever’s the skipper a bringing ’ome ’ere with him? Dooks and duchesses and all the blamed airistorkracy?—English too, or I’m a blooming nigger.—-Tea for a lidy?—I should rather think it.—Partington, I’m off to put meself inside of a clean jacket and make sure the cockroaches ain’t holding a family sing-song on my best white table-cloth.—Say, that young ole man of ours don’t stop ’arf way up the ladder, once ’e starts climbing. Gets to the top rung ’e does stright orf, s’elp me. And tikes ’is ease there, seemingly, as to the manner born. Looks like he does any’ow, the way ’e’s behaving of hisself now.—So long, bo’sun,” he added jauntily. “I’m called from yer side to descend the companion *ong route* for higher spheres. Sounds like a contradiction that, but ain’t so.—See you again when the docks ’as quitted this fond old floating ’earse of ours and took themselves back to their ’ereditary marble ’alls to roost.”

On the other side of the quay, meanwhile, in the brave dancing breeze and the sunshine, Darcy Faircloth stepped down on to the uneven paving just opposite to where the *Forest Queen* lay. Colonel Carteret followed and stood aside, leaving him to hand Damaris out of the open carriage.

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For this was the younger man's day; and, as the elder ungrudgingly acknowledged, he played the part of host with a nice sense of taste, his hospitality erring neither in the direction of vulgar lavishness, nor of over-modesty and economy. Breeding tells, is fertile in social intuitions, as Carteret reflected, even when deformed by an ugly bar sinister. During the past hours he had been observant—even above his wont—jealous both for his friend Charles Verity and his dear charge, Damaris, in this peculiar association. The position was a far from easy one, so many slips of sorts possible; but the young merchant sea-captain had carried it off with an excellent simplicity and unconscious grace.—In respect of a conveyance, to begin with, he eschewed hiring a hack, and met his arriving guests, at the station, with the best which the stables of the *Hotel du Louvre et de la Paix* could produce. Had offered a quiet well-served luncheon at that same stately hostelry moreover, in preference to the more flashy and popular restaurants of the town. Afterwards he had driven them, in the early hours of the afternoon, up to the church of *Notre Dame de la Garde*, which, perched aloft on its eminence, godspeeds the outward bound and welcomes the homecoming voyager, while commanding so noble a prospect of port and city, of islands sacred to world-famous romance, and wide horizons of rich country and historic sea.

And now, before parting, Faircloth brought them to his ship. To this private kingdom of his and all it implied—and denied too—of social privilege, social distinction. Implied, further, of administrative and personal power—all it set forth of the somewhat rugged facts of his profession and daily environment. Of this small world he was undisputed autocrat, Grand Cham of this miniature Tartary—of this iron-walled two-thousand-ton empire, the great white Czar.

So far Carteret had lent himself to the extensive day's "outing" in a spirit of very sweet-tempered philosophy. He had been delightful, unfailing in courtesy and tactful address. Now, having analysed his host's character to his own satisfaction, he felt justified in giving himself a holiday from the office of chaperon and watch-dog. He had fulfilled his promise, royally done his duty by Damaris in that quasi-avuncular relation which he had assumed in place of a closer and—how profoundly more—coveted one; thereby earning temporary release from her somewhat over-moving neighbourhood. Not but what he had been keenly, almost painfully, interested in watching this drama of brother and sister, and gauging the impulses, the currents of action and of emotion which lay behind it. Gauging too the difficulties, even dangers, inherent in it, the glamour and the clouding of shame—whether conventional or real he did not pretend exactly to determine—which so strangely wrapped it about. To use Damaris' favourite word, they were very "beautiful" both in themselves and in their almost mystic affection, these two young creatures. And just on that very account he would be glad to get away from them, to be no longer onlooker, or—to put it vulgarly—gooseberry, fifth wheel to the cart.

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He went with them as far as the shoreward end of the up-sloping gangway.—A tall grey-clad figure, with an equally tall blue-clad figure on the other side of the young girl's, also tall, biscuit-coloured one,—a dash of pink showing in her burnt-straw hat, pink too at her throat and waist seen between the open fronts of her dust-coat.—But at the gangway he stopped.

"Dear witch," he said, "I have some telegrams I should be glad to send off, and another small matter of business to transact in the town, so here, I will leave you, if you permit, in our friend's safe-keeping"—he smiled upon Faircloth. "At the station, at five-thirty, we meet. *Au revoir*, then."

And, without waiting for any reply, he sauntered away along the sun-flooded quay between piled up bales of merchandize, wine barrels, heaps of sand, heaps too of evilly smelling hides, towering cases and crates. His shadow—clear violet upon the grey of the granite—from his feet onwards, travelled before him as he walked. And this leading by, this following of, his own shadow, casual accident of light and of direction though in all common sense he must account it, troubled the peace of the man with the blue eyes, making him feel wistful, feel past the zenith of his allotted earthly achievement, queerly out of the running, aged and consequently depressed.

Upon Damaris the suddenness of his exit reacted in a sensation of constraint. Carteret had been very exquisite to her throughout this delicate adventure, throughout these hours of restrained yet exalted emotion. Left thus to her own resources she grew anxious, consciously diffident. The, in a sense, abnormal element in her relation to Faircloth darted down on her, so that she could not but remember how slight, after all, was her actual acquaintance with him, how seldom—only thrice in point of fact—had he and she had speech of one another.

Upon Faircloth, Carteret's withdrawal also reacted, though with different effect. For an instant he watched the tall retreating form of this, as he perceived, very perfect gentleman. Then he turned to Damaris, looking her over from head to heel, in keen somewhat possessive fashion. And as, meeting his eyes, bravely if shyly, her colour deepened.

"You are happy?" he affirmed rather than asked.

"As the day is long," she answered him steadily.

"But the day's not been overlong, by chance, has it?"

"Not half long enough."

"All's well, then, still." He pressed her—"You aren't weary of me yet?"

Damaris reassuringly shook her head.

Nevertheless she was very sensible of change in the tenor of their intercourse, sensible of a just perceptible hardness in his bearing and aspect. For some cause, the nature of which she failed to divine though she registered the fact of its existence, he no longer had complete faith in her, was no longer wholly at one with her in sympathy and in belief. He needed wooing, handling. And had she the knowledge and the art successfully to handle this sun-browned, golden-bearded, rather magnificent young master mariner—out here in the open too, the shout of the great port in her ears, the dazzle of the water and the push of the warm wind upon her face?

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“Ah, why waste precious time in putting questions to which you surely already know the answer?” with a touch of reproach she took him up. “Show me rather where you live—-where you eat and sleep, where you walk up and down, walk quarter-deck, when you are far away there out at sea.”

“Does all that really interest you?”

Damaris’ lips quivered the least bit.

“Why have you turned perverse and doubting? Isn’t it because they interest me, above and beyond anything, beautifully interest me, that I am here?—It would have been very easy to stay away, if I hadn’t wanted—as I do want—to be able to fancy you from morning until night, to know where you sit, know just what you first see when in the grey of the morning you first wake.”

Faircloth continued to look at her; but his expression softened, gaining a certain spirituality.

“I have questioned more than once to-day whether I had not been foolhardy in letting you come here—whether distance wasn’t safest, and the hunger of absence sweeter than the full meal of your presence for—for both of us, things being between us as they actually are. What if the bubble burst?—I have had scares—hideous scares—lest you should be disappointed in me.”

“Or you in me?” Damaris said.

“No. Only your being disappointed in me could disappoint me in you—and hardly that, because you’d have prejudice, facts even, natural and obvious enough ones, upon your side. Faircloth’s Inn on Marychurch Haven and your Indian palace, as basis to two children’s memories and outlook, are too widely divergent, when one comes to think of it. When listening to you and Colonel Carteret talking at luncheon I caught very plain sight of that. Not that he talked of set purpose to read me a wholesome lesson in humility—never in life. He’s not that sort. But the lesson went home all the more directly for that very reason.—Patience one little minute,” he quickly admonished her as she essayed to speak—“patience. You ask, with those dear wonderful eyes of yours, what I’m driving at.—This, beloved one—you see the waiting carriage over there. Hadn’t we best get into it, turn the horses’ heads citywards again, and drink our tea, you and I, on the way up to the station somewhere very much else than on board this rough-and-tumble rather foul-breathed cargo boat?—I’m so beastly afraid you may be disgusted and shocked by the interval between what you’re accustomed to and what I am. To let you down”—

Faircloth’s handsome face worked. Whereat Damaris’ diffidence took to itself wings and flew away. Her heart grew light.

“Let me down?” she said. “You can’t let me down. Oh! really, really you’re a little slow of comprehension. We are in this—in everything that has happened since I first knew who you are, and everything which is going to happen from now onwards—in it together. What joins us goes miles, miles deeper and wider than any petty surface things. Must I tell you how much I care? Can’t you feel it for yourself?”

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And she stepped before him on to the upward sloping gangway plank.

CHAPTER XI

WHEREIN DAMARIS MEETS HERSELF UNDER A NOVEL ASPECT

Damaris threw back the bedclothes, her eyes still dim with slumber, and gathered herself into a sitting position, clasping her knees with both hands. She had a vague impression that something very pleasant awaited her attention; but, in the soft confusion of first awakening, could not remember exactly what it was.

To induce clearer consciousness she instinctively parted the mosquito curtains, slipped her feet down over the side of the bed; and, a little crouched together and fumbly—-baby-fashion—being still under the comfortable empire of sleep, crossed the room and set back the inward opening casements of the south window. Thereupon the outdoor freshness, fluttering her hair and the lace and nain-sook of her nightdress, brought her, on the instant, into full possession of her wandering wits. She remembered the nature of that charmingly pleasant something; yet paused, before yielding it attention, held captive by the spectacle of returning day.

It was early. The disc of the sun still below the horizon. But shafts of light, striking up from it, patterned the underside of a vast dapple of fleecy cloud—heliotrope upon the back-cloth of blue ether—with fringes and bosses of scarlet flame. Against this, occupying the foreground, the pine trees, which sheltered the terrace, showed up a deep greenish purple bordering upon black.

Leaning out over the polished wooden bar—which topped the ironwork of the window-guard—Damaris sought and gained sight of the sea. This, darker even than the tufted foliation of the pines—since still untouched by sunlight—spread dense and compact as molten metal, with here and there a sheen, like that of the raven's wing, upon its corrugated surface. To Damaris it appeared curiously forbidding. Seeing it thus she felt, indeed, to have taken Nature unawares, surprised her without disguise; so that for once she displayed her veritable face—a face not yet made up and camouflaged to conceal the fact of its in-dwelling terror from puny and defenceless man.

With that the girl's thoughts flew, in longing and solicitude, to Faircloth, whose business so perpetually brought him into contact with Nature thus naked and untamed.—By now, and over as sinister a sea—since westward the dawn would barely yet have broke—the *Forest Queen* must be steaming along the Andalusian coast, making for Gibraltar and the Straits upon her homeward voyage. And by some psychic alchemy, an influence more potent and tangible than that of ordinary thought, her apprehension fled out, annihilating distance, bridging intervening space. For, just as certainly as Damaris' fair body leaned from the open window, so certainly did her fair soul or—to try a closer and

more scientific definition—her living consciousness, stand in the captain's cabin of the ocean-bound tramp, making Darcy Faircloth turn smiling in his sleep, he having vision and glad sense of her—which stayed by him, tempering his humour to a peculiar serenity throughout the ensuing day.

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That their correspondence was no fictitious one, a freak of disordered nerves or imagination, but sane and actual, both brother and sister could convincingly have affirmed. And this although time—as time is usually figured—had neither lot nor part in it. Such projections of personality are best comparable, in this respect, to the dreams which seize us in the very act of waking—vivid, coherent and complete, yet ended by the selfsame sound or touch by which they are evoked.

In Damaris' case, before the scarlet, dyeing the cloud dapple, warmed to rose, or the dense metallic sea caught reflections of the sunrise, broadening incandescence, her errant consciousness was again cognizant of, subjected to, her immediate surroundings. She was aware, moreover, that the morning sharpness began to take a too unwarrantable liberty with her thinly clad person for comfort. She hastily locked the casements together; and then waited, somewhat dazed by the breathless pace of her strange and tender excursion, looking about her in happy amazement.

And, so doing, her eyes lighted upon a certain oblong parcel lying on her dressing-table. There was the charmingly pleasant something which awaited her attention! A present, and the most costly, the most enchanting one (save possibly the green jade elephant of her childish adoration) she had ever received!

She picked up, not only the precious parcel, but a hand-mirror lying near it; and, thus armed, bestowed herself, once more, in her still warm bed.

The last forty-eight hours had been fertile in experiences and in events, among which the arrival of this gift could by no means be accounted the least exciting.—Hordle had brought the packet here to her, last night, about an hour after she and her father—-standing under the portico—waved reluctant farewells to Colonel Carteret, as the hotel omnibus bore him and his baggage away to the station to catch the mail train through to Paris. This parting, when it actually came about, proved more distressing than she had by any means prefigured. She had no notion beforehand what a really dreadful business she would find it, after these months of close association, to say good-bye to the man with the blue eyes.

"We shall miss you at every turn, dear, dear Colonel Sahib," she almost tearfully assured him. "How we are going ever to live without you I don't know."

And impulsively, driven by the excess of her emotion to the point of forgetting accustomed habits and restraints, she put up her lips for a kiss. Which, thus invited, kiss Carteret, taking her face in both hands for the minute, bestowed upon her forehead rather than upon those proffered lips. Then his glance met Charles Verity's, held it in silent interchange of friendship needing no words to declare its quality or depth; and he turned away abruptly, making for the inside of the waiting omnibus—cavernous in the semi-darkness—distributing largesse to all and sundry as he went.

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Damaris was aware of her father's arm passed through hers, holding her against his side with a steadying pressure, as they went together across the hall on their way to the first floor sitting-room. Aware of poor, pretty, coughing little Mrs. Titherage's raised eyebrows and enquiring stare, as they passed her with her coffee, cigarette, and fat, florid stock-broker husband—who, by the way, had the grace to keep his eyes glued to the patience cards, ranged upon the small table before him, until father and daughter were a good half-way up the flight of stairs. Later, when outwardly mistress of herself, the inclination to tears successfully conquered and her normal half-playful gravity regained, she went to her bedroom, Hordle had brought her this beguiling packet.

Inside the silver paper wrappings she found a red leather jewel case, and a note in Carteret's singularly definite hand, character rather than script, the severe yet decorative quality of Arabic about it.

"To the dear witch," it read, "in memory of our incomparable Henrietta's dance, and of the midnight walk which followed it, and of our hours of pleasant sightseeing at Marseilles."

No signature followed, only the date.

Now, sitting up in bed, while the day came into full and joyous being, Nature's face duly decked and painted by the greatly reconciling sun, Damaris read the exquisitely written note again. The writing in itself moved her with a certain home-sickness for the East, which it seemed in some sort to embody and from which to hail. Then meanings she detected, behind the apparently light-hearted words, filled her with gratitude. They reminded her gently of duties accepted, promises made. They gathered in Faircloth, too, by implication; thus assuring her of sympathy and approval where she needed them most.

She opened the case and, taking out the string of pearls it contained, turned them about and about, examining, counting, admiring their lustre and ethereal loveliness. They were graduated from the size of a hemp-seed, so she illustrated it, on either side the diamond clasp, to that of a marrow-fat pea. Not all of them—and this charmed her fancy as giving them individuality and separate life—were faultlessly perfect; but had minute irregularities of shape, tiny dimples in which a special radiance hovered. She clasped the necklace round her throat, and, holding up the hand-mirror, turned her head from side to side—with pardonable vanity—to judge and enjoy the effect.

Damaris was unlearned in the commercial value of such treasures; nor did money seem exactly a graceful or pretty thing—in some respects our maiden was possessed of a very unworldly innocence—to think of in connection with a present. Still she found it impossible not to regard these jewels with a certain awe. What the dear Colonel Sahib must have spent on them! A small fortune she feared. In the buying of this all-too-

costly-gift, then, consisted that business transaction he had made the excuse for leaving her alone with Faircloth, upon the quay alongside which lay the *Forest Queen*.

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Oh! he surpassed himself! Was too indulgent, too munificent to her!—As on a former occasion, she totted up the sum of his good deeds. Hadn't he given up his winter's sport for her sake? Didn't she—and wouldn't an admiring English reading public presently—owe to his suggestion her father's noble book? When she had run wild for a space, and sold herself to unworthy frivolities, hadn't he led her back into the right road, and that with the lightest, courtliest, hand imaginable, making all harmonious and sweetly perfect, once more, between her father and herself? Lastly, hadn't he procured her her heart's desire in the meeting with Darcy Faircloth—and, incidentally, given her the relief of free speech, now and whenever she might desire to claim it, concerning the strange and secret relationship which dominated her imagination and so enriched the hidden places of her daily life and thought?

Damaris held up the hand-mirror contemplating his gift, this necklace of pearls; and, from that, by unconscious transition fell to contemplating her own face. It interested her. She looked at it critically, as at some face other than her own, some portrait, appraising and studying it. It was young and fresh, surely, as the morn—in its softness of contour and fine clear bloom; yet grave to the verge of austerity, owing partly to the brown hair which, parted in the middle and drawn down in a plain full sweep over the ears, hung thence in thick loose plait on either side to below her waist. She looked long and curiously into her own eyes, "dear wonderful eyes," as Faircloth, her brother, so deliciously called them. And with that her mouth curved into a smile, sight of which brought recognition, new and very moving, of her own by no means inconsiderable beauty.

She went red, and then white almost as her white nightdress and the white pillows behind her. Laid the mirror hastily down, and held her face in both hands as—as Carteret had held it last night, at the moment of parting, when he had kissed not her lips but her forehead. Yet very differently, since she now held it with strained, clinging fingers, which hurt, making marks upon the flesh.—For could it be that—the other kind of love, such as men bear the woman of their choice, which dictated Carteret's unfailing goodness to her—the love that he had bitterly and almost roughly defended when she praised the love of brother and sister as dearest, purest, and therefore above all best?

Was it conceivable this hero of a hundred almost fabulous adventures, of hair-breath escapes, and cunningly defied dangers in Oriental, semi-barbarous, wholly gorgeous, camps, Courts and cities, this philosopher of gently humorous equanimity, who appeared to weigh all things in an equal balance and whom she had regarded as belonging to an age and order superior to her own, had set his affections upon her singling her out from among all possible others? That he wanted her for his own, wanted her exclusively and as his inseparable companion, the object of—

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A sentence from the English marriage service flashed across her mind.—“With my body I thee worship,” it ran, “and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.”

“With my body I thee worship”—He, her father’s elect and beloved friend, in whom she had always so beautifully trusted, who had never failed her, the dear man with the blue eyes—and she, Damaris? Her womanhood, revealed to itself, at once shrank back bewildered, panic-stricken, and, passion-stricken, called to her aloud.

For here Carteret’s grace of bearing and of person, his clean health, physical distinction and charm, arose and confronted her. The visible, tangible attributes of the man—as man—presented themselves in fine relief, delighting her, stirring her heretofore dormant senses, begetting in her needs and desires undreamed of until now, and, even now, in substance incomprehensible. She was enchanted, fevered, triumphant; and then—also incomprehensibly—ashamed.

As the minutes passed, though the triumph continued to subsist, the shame subsisted also, so that the two jostled one another striving for the mastery. Damaris took her hands from her face, again clasped them about her drawn-up knees, and sat, looking straight in front of her with sombre, meditative eyes. To use a phrase of her childhood, she was busy with her “thinkings”; her will consciously hailing emotion to the judgment-seat of intelligence for examination and for sentence.

If this was what people commonly understand when they speak of love, if this was the love concerning which novelists write and poets sing—this riot of the blood and heady rapture, this conflict of shame and triumph in which the animal part of one has so loud a word to say—she didn’t like it. It was upsetting, to the confines of what she supposed drunkenness must be. It spoilt things heretofore exquisite, by giving them too high a colour, too violent a flavour. No—she didn’t like it. Neither did she like herself in relation to it—like this unknown, storm-swept Damaris. Nor—for he, alas! couldn’t escape inclusion—this new, unfamiliar presentment of the man with the blue eyes. Yet—and here was a puzzle difficult of solution—even while this new presentment of him, and conception of his sentiment towards her, pulled him down from his accustomed pedestal in her regard, it erected for him another pedestal, more richly sculptured and of more costly material—since had not his manifold achievements, the whole fine legend as well as the whole physical perfection of him, manifested themselves to, and worked upon her as never before?—Did this thing, love, then, as between man and woman, spring from the power of beauty while soiling and lowering beauty—bestow on it an hour of extravagant effulgence, of royal blossoming, only to degrade it in the end?—The puzzle is old as humanity, old, one may say, as sex. Little wonder if Damaris, sitting up in her maidenly bedchamber, in the unsullied brightness of the early morning hour, failed to find any satisfactory answer to it.

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Her thoughts ranged out to the other members of her little local court—to Peregrine Ditton and Harry Ellice, to Marshall Wace. Had they personal experience of this disquieting matter? Was it conceivable the boys' silly rivalries and jealousies concerning her took their rise in this? Did it inspire the fervour of Marshall Wace's singing, his flattering dependence on her sympathy?—Suspicion widened. Everywhere she seemed to find hint and suggestion of this—no, she wouldn't too distinctly define it. Let it remain nameless.—Everywhere, except in respect of her father and of her brother. There she could spend her heart in peace. She sighed with a sweetness of relief, unclasping her hands, raising her fixed, bowed head.

The hotel, meanwhile, was sensibly in act of coming awake. Doors opened, voices called. From the other side of the corridor sounded poor little Mrs. Titherage's hacking cough, increasing to a convulsive struggle before, the fit at last passing off, it sunk into temporary quiescence. Andre, the stout, middle-aged *valet de chambre*, hummed snatches of gay melody as he rubbed and polished the parquet flooring without. These noises, whether cheerful or the contrary, were at least ordinary enough. By degrees they gained Damaris' ear, drawing her mind from speculation regarding the nature, origin, prevalence and ethics of love. Soon Pauline, the chamber-maid, would bring her breakfast-tray, coffee and rolls, those pale wafer-like pats of butter which taste so good, and thin squares of beetroot sugar which are never half as sweet as one would like. Would bring hot water and her bath, too, and pay her some nicely turned little compliment as to the becoming effect of her night's sleep.—Everything would pick itself up, in short, and go on, naturally and comfortably just as before.

Before what?

Damaris straightened the hem of the sheet over the billowing edge of flowered down quilt; and, while so doing, her hand came in contact both with the mirror and the open jewel-case. She looked at this last with an expression bordering on reproach, unfastened the pearls from her throat, and laid them on the wadded, cream-coloured velvet lining. She delighted to possess them and deplored possessing them in the same breath. They spoke to her too freely and conclusively, told her too much. She would rather not have acquired this knowledge either of Carteret or of herself.—If it really were knowledge?—Again she repeated the question, arising from the increasing normality of surrounding things—Before what?

For when all was said and done, the dear man with the blue eyes had veritably and very really departed. Throughout the night his train had been rushing north-north-westward to Paris, to England, to that Norfolk manor-house of his, where his sister, his nephews, all his home interests and occupations awaited him. What proof had she that more intimate and romantic affairs did not await him there, or thereabouts, also? Had

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not she, once and for all, learned the lesson that a man's ways are different and contain many unadvertised occupations and interests? If he had wished to say something, anything, special to her, before going away, how easily—thus she saw the business—-how easily he might have said it! But he hadn't spoken, rather conspicuously, indeed, had avoided speaking. Perhaps it was all a silly, conceited mistake of her own—a delusion and one not particularly creditable either to her intelligence or her modesty.

Damaris shut up the jewel-case. The pearls were entrancing; but somehow she did not seem to think she cared to look at them any more—just now.

When her breakfast arrived she ate it in a pensive frame of mind. In a like frame of mind she went through the routine of her toilette. She felt oddly tired; oddly shy, moreover, of her looking-glass.

Miss Felicia Verity had made a tentative proposal, about a week before, of joining her niece and her brother upon the Riviera. She reported much discomfort from rheumatism during the past winter. Her doctor advised a change of climate. Damaris, while brushing and doing up her hair, discovered in herself a warm desire for Miss Felicia's company. She craved for a woman—not to confide in, but to somehow shelter behind. And Aunt Felicia was so perfect in that way. She took what you gave in a spirit of gratitude almost pathetic; and never asked for what you didn't give, never seemed even to, for an instant, imagine there was anything you withheld from her. It would be a rest—a really tremendous rest, to have Aunt Felicia. She—Damaris—would propound the plan to her father as soon as she went downstairs.

After luncheon and a walk with Sir Charles, her courage being higher, she repented in respect of the pearl necklace. Put it on—and with results. For that afternoon Henrietta Frayling—hungry for activity, hungry for prey, after her prolonged abstention from society—very effectively floated into the forefront of the local scene.

CHAPTER XII

CONCERNING ITSELF WITH A GATHERING UP OP FRAGMENTS

An unheralded invasion on the part of the physician from Cannes had delayed, by a day, Henrietta's promised descent upon, or rather ascent to, the Grand Hotel.

That gentleman, whose avaricious pale grey eye belied the extreme silkiness of his manner—having been called to minister to Lady Hermione Twells in respect of some minor ailment—elected to put in the overtime, between two trains, in a visit to General Frayling. For the date drew near of his yearly removal from the Riviera to Cotteret-les-Bains, in the Ardennes, where, during the summer season, he exploited the physical infelicities and mental credulities of his more wealthy fellow-creatures. The

etablissement at Cotteret was run by a syndicate, in which Dr. Stewart-Walker held—in the name of an obliging friend and solicitor—a

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preponderating number of shares. At this period of the spring he always became anxious to clear up, not to say clear out, his southern clienetle lest any left-over members of it should fall into the clutches of one of his numerous local rivals. And, in this connection, it may be noted as remarkable to how many of the said clientele a "cure" at Cotteret-les-Bains offered assurance of permanent restoration to health.

Among that happy band, as it now appeared, General Frayling might be counted. The dry, exciting climate of St. Augustin, and its near neighbourhood to the sea, were calculated to aggravate the gastric complications from which that polite little warrior so distressingly suffered.

"This, I fear we must recognize, my dear madam, is a critical period with your husband; and treatment, for the next six months or so, is of cardinal importance; I consider high inland air, if possible forest air, indispensable. What I should *like* you to do is to take our patient north by slow stages; and I earnestly counsel a course of waters before the return to England is attempted."

Thereupon, agreeable visions of festive toilettes and festive casinos flitting through Henrietta's mind, she named Homburg and other German spas of world-wide popularity. But at such ultra-fashionable resorts, as Dr. Stewart-Walker, with a suitable air of regret, reminded her, the season did not open until too late to meet existing requirements.

"Let me think, let me think," he repeated, head sagely bent and forefinger on lip.

He ran through a number of Latin terms, to her in the main incomprehensible; then looked up, relieved and encouraging.

"Yes, we might, I believe, safely try it. The medical properties of the springs—-particularly those of La Nonnette—meet our patient's case excellently. And I should not lose sight of him—a point, I own, with me, for your husband's condition presents features of peculiar interest. Cotteret-les-Bains, my dear madam—in his case I can confidently recommend it. Lady Hermione talks of taking the cure at Cotteret this spring. But about that we shall see—we shall see. The question demands consideration. As you know, Lady Hermione is charmingly outspoken, emphatic; but I should be false to my professional honour, were I to allow her wishes to colour my judgment.—Meanwhile I have reason to know that other agreeable people are going to Cotteret shortly. Not the rank and file. For such the place does not pretend to cater. There the lucrative stock-broker, or lucrative Jew, is still a *rara avis*. Long may he continue to be so, and Cotteret continue to pride itself on its exclusiveness!—In that particular it will admirably suit you, Mrs. Frayling."

To a compliment so nicely turned Henrietta could not remain insensible. Before the destined train bore Dr. Stewart-Walker back to his more legitimate zone of practise, she

saw herself committed to an early striking of camp, with this obscure, if select, *ville d'eaux* as her destination.

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In some respects the prospect did not smile on her. Yet as, next day, emancipated at length from monotonies of the sick-chamber, she drove behind the free-moving little chestnut horses through the streets of the town—sleepy in the hot afternoon quiet—and along the white glaring esplanade, Henrietta admitted the existence of compensations. In the brilliant setting of some world-famous German spa, though she—as she believed—would have been perfectly at her ease, what about her companions? For in such scenes of high fashion, her own good clothes are not sufficient lifebelt to keep a pretty woman quite complacently afloat. Your male associates must render you support, be capable of looking the part and playing up generally, if your enjoyment is to be complete. And for all *that* Marshall Wace, frankly, couldn't be depended on. Not only was he too unmistakably English and of the middle-class; but the clerical profession, although he had so unfortunately failed it, or it so unkindly rejected him, still seemed to soak through, somehow, when you saw him in public. A whiff of the vestry queerly clung to his coats and his trousers, thus meanly giving away his relinquished ambitions; unless, and that was worse still, essaying to be extra smart, a taint of the footlights declared itself in the over florid curl of a hat-brim or sample of "neck-wear." To head a domestic procession, in eminently cosmopolitan circles, composed of a small, elderly, very palpable invalid and a probable curate in mufti, demanded an order of courage to which Henrietta felt herself entirely unequal. Preferable the obscurity of Cotteret-les-Bains—gracious heaven, ten thousand times preferable!

Did not Dr. Stewart-Walker, moreover, hold out hopes that, by following his advice, the General's strength might be renewed, if not precisely like that of the eagle, yet in the more modest likeness of some good, biddable, burden-bearing animal—the patient ass, if one might so put it without too obvious irony? As handyman, aide-de-camp, and, on occasion, her groom of the chambers, the General had deserved very well of Henrietta. He had earned her sincere commendation. To restore him to that level of convenient activity was, naturally, her main object; and if a sojourn at some rather dull spot in the Ardennes, promised to secure this desired end, let it be accepted without hesitation. For the proverbial creaking, yet long-hanging, gate—here Henrietta had the delicacy to take refuge in hyperbole—she had no liking whatever. She could not remember the time when Darby and Joan had struck her as an otherwise than preposterous couple, offspring of a positively degraded sentimentality.

But there, since it threatened depressing conclusions, Henrietta agreed with herself to pursue the line of reflection no further.—"Sufficient unto the day"—to look beyond is, the thirties once passed, to raise superfluous spectres. And this day, in itself supplied food for reflections of a quite other character; ones which set both her curiosity and partiality for intrigue quite legitimately afire.

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The morning post had brought her a missive from Colonel Carteret announcing his “recall” to England, and deploring the imposed haste of it as preventing him from making his adieux to her in person. The letter contained a number of flattering tributes to her own charms and to old times in India, the pleasures of which—unforgettable by him—he had had the happiness of sharing with her. Yet—to her reading of it—this friendly communication remained enigmatic, its kindly sentences punctuated by more than one interjectional enquiry. Namely, what was the cause of this sudden “recall”? And what was his reason for not coming to say good-bye to her? Haste, she held an excuse of almost childish transparency. It went deeper than that. Simply he had wanted not to see her.

Since the night of the dance no opportunity had occurred for observing Carteret and Damaris when together.—Really, how General Frayling’s tiresome illness shipwrecked her private plans!—And, from the beginning, she had entertained an uneasy suspicion regarding Carteret’s attitude. Men can be so extraordinarily feeble-minded where young girls are concerned! Had anything happened during her withdrawal from society? In the light, or rather the obscurity, of Carteret’s letter, a visit to Damaris became more than ever imperative.

Her own competence to extract the truth from that guileless maiden, Henrietta in nowise questioned. “The child,” she complacently told herself, when preparing to set forth on her mission, “is like wax in my hands.”

The above conviction she repeated now, as the horses swept the victoria along the shore road, while from beneath her white umbrella she absently watched the alternate lift and plunge of the dazzling ultramarine and Tyrian purple sea upon the polished rocks and pebbles of the shelving beach.

To Henrietta Nature, save as decoration to the human drama, meant nothing. But the day was hot, for the time of year royally so, and this rejoiced her. She basked in the sunshine with a cat-like luxury of content. Her hands never grew moist in the heat, nor her hair untidy, her skin unbecomingly red, nor her general appearance in the least degree blousy. She remained enchantingly intact, unaffected, except for an added glint, an added refinement. To-day’s temperature justified the adoption of summer attire, of those thin, clear-coloured silk and muslin fabrics so deliciously to her taste. She wore a lavender dress. It was new, every pleat and frill inviolate, at their crispest and most uncrumpled. In this she found a fund of permanent satisfaction steeling her to intrepid enterprise.

Hence she scorned all ceremonies of introduction. She dared to pounce. Having ascertained the number of Sir Charles Verity’s sitting-room she refused obsequious escort, tripped straight upstairs unattended, rapped lightly, opened the door and—with swift reconnoitering of the scene within—announced her advent thus:

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“Damaris, are you there? Ah! yes. Darling child. At last!”

During that reconnoitering she inventoried impressions of the room and its contents.—-Cool, first—blue walls, blue carpet, blue upholstering of sofa and of chairs. Not worn or shabby, but so graciously faded by sun and air, that this—decoratively speaking—most perilous of colours became innocuous, in a way studious, in keeping with a large writing-table occupying the centre of the picture, laden with manuscripts and with books. The wooden outside shutters of two of the three windows were closed, which enhanced the prevailing coolness and studiousness of effect. Red cushions, also agreeably faded, upon the window-seats, alone echoed, in some degree, the hot radiance obtaining out of doors—these, and a red enamelled vase holding sprays of yellow and orange-copper roses, placed upon a smaller table before which Damaris sat, her back towards the invader.

At the sound of the latter’s voice, the girl started, raised her head and, in the act of looking round, swept together some scattered sheets of note-paper and shut her blotting-book.

“Henrietta!” she cried, and thereupon sprang up; the lady, meanwhile, advancing towards her with outstretched arms, which enclosed her in a fragrant embrace.

“Yes—nothing less than Henrietta”—imprinting light kisses on either cheek. “But I see you are busy writing letters, dearest child. I am in the way—I interrupt you?”

And, as Damaris hastily denied that such was the case:

“Ah! but I do,” she repeated. “I have no right to dart in on you thus *a l’improviste*. It is hardly treating such an impressive young person—absolutely I believe you have grown since I saw you last!—yes, you are taller, darling child—handsomer than ever, and a tiny bit alarming too—what have you been doing with, or to, or by yourself?—Treating her—-the impressive young person, I mean—with proper respect. But it was such a chance. I learnt that you were alone”—A fib, alas! on Henrietta’s part.—“And I couldn’t resist coming. I so longed to have you, like this, all to myself. What an eternity since we met!—For me a wearing, ageing eternity. The duties of a sick-room are so horribly anxious, yet so deadening in their repetition of ignoble details. I could not go through with them, honestly I could not—though I realize it is a damning admission for a woman to make—-if it wasn’t that I am rather absurdly attached to what good Dr. Stewart-Walker persists in calling ‘our patient.’ Is not that enough in itself?—To fall from all normal titles and dignities and become merely a patient? No, joking apart, only affection makes nursing in any degree endurable to me. Without its saving grace the whole business would be too unpardonably sordid.”

She pursed up her lips, and shivered her graceful shoulders with the neatest exposition of delicate distaste.

“And too gross. But one must face and accept the pathetic risk of being eventually converted in *garde malade* thus, if one chooses to marry a man considerably older than oneself. It is a mistake. I say so though I committed it with my eyes open. I was betrayed by my affection.”

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As she finished speaking Henrietta stepped across to the sofa and sat down. The airy perfection of her appearance lent point to the plaintive character of this concluding sentence. The hot day, the summer costume—possibly the shaded room also—-combined to strip away a good ten years from her record. Any hardness, any faint sense of annoyance, which Damaris experienced at the abruptness of her guest's intrusion melted. Henrietta in her existing aspect, her existing mood proved irresistible. Our tender-hearted maiden was charmed by her and coerced.

"But General Frayling is better, isn't he?" she asked, also taking her place upon the sofa. "You are not any longer in any serious anxiety about him, darling Henrietta? All danger is past?"

"Oh, yes—he is better of course, or how could I be here? But I have received a shock that makes me dread the future."

Which was true, though in a sense other than that in which her hearer comprehended it. For the studious atmosphere of the room reacted upon Henrietta, as did its many silent testimonies to Sir Charles Verity's constant habitation. This was his workshop. She felt acutely conscious of him here, nearer to him in idea and in sentiment than for many years past. The fact that he did still work, sought new fields to conquer, excited both her admiration and her regrets. He disdained to be laid on the shelf, got calmly and forcefully down off the shelf and spent his energies in fresh undertakings. Once upon a time she posed as his Egeria, fancying herself vastly in the part. During the Egerian period she lived at a higher intellectual and emotional level than ever before or since, exerting every particle of brain she possessed to maintain that level. The petty interests of her present existence, still more, perhaps, the poor odd and end of a yellow little General in his infinitely futile sick-bed, shrank to a desolating insufficiency. Surely she was worthy—had, anyway, once been worthy—of better things than that? The lavender dress, notwithstanding its still radiantly uncrumpled condition, came near losing its spell. No longer did she trust in it as in shining armour. Her humour soured. She instinctively inclined to revenge herself upon the nearest sentient object available—namely to stick pins into Damaris.

"Sweetest child," she said, "you can't imagine how much this room means to me through its association with your father's wonderful book.—Oh! yes, I know a lot about the book. Colonel Carteret has not failed to advertise his acquaintance with it. But, what have I said?"

For at mention of that gentleman's name Damaris, so she fancied, changed colour, the bloom fading upon her cheeks, while her glance became reserved, at once proud and slightly anxious.

"Is it forbidden to mention the wonderful book at this stage of its development? Though even if it were," she added, with a rather impish laugh, looking down at and fingering the

little bunch of trinkets, attached to a long gold chain, which rested in her lap—“Carteret would hardly succeed in holding his peace. Speak of everything, sooner or later, he must.”

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She felt rather than saw Damaris' figure grow rigid.

"Have you ever detected that small weakness in him? But probably not. He keeps overflowings for the elder members of his acquaintance, and in the case of the younger ones does exercise some caution. Ah! yes, I've no doubt he seems to you a model of discretion. Yet, in point of fact, when you've known him as long as I, you will have discovered he is a more than sufficiently extensive sieve."

Then, fearing she had gone rather far, since Damaris remained rigid and silent:

"Not a malicious sieve," the lady hastened to add, raising her eyes. "I don't imply that for a single instant. On the contrary I incline to believe that his attitude of universal benevolence is to blame for this inclination to gossip. It is so great, so all-enclosing, that I can't help feeling it blunts his sense of right and wrong to some extent. He is the least censorious of men and therefore—though it may sound cynical to say so—I don't entirely trust his judgment. He is too ready to make excuses for everyone.—But, my precious child, what's the matter? What makes you look so terrifically solemn and severe?"

And playfully she put her hand under the girl's chin, drawing the grave face towards her, smilingly studying, then lightly and daintily kissing it. In the course of this affectionate interlude, the string of pearls round Damaris' throat, until now hidden by the V-shaped collar of her soft lawn shirt, caught Henrietta's eye. Their size, lustre and worth came near extracting a veritable shriek of enquiry and jealous admiration from her. But with praiseworthy promptitude she stifled her astonishment and now really rampant curiosity. Damaris but half yielded to her blandishments. She must cajole more successfully before venturing to request explanation. Therefore she cried, soothingly, coaxfully:

"There—there—descend from those imposing heights of solemnity, or upon my word you will make me think my poor little visit displeases and bores you. That would be peculiarly grievous to me, since it is, in all probability, my last."

"Your last?" Damaris exclaimed.

"Yes, darling child, the fiat, alas! has gone forth. We are ordered away and start for Cotteret-les-Bains in a day or two. Dr. Stewart-Walker considers the move imperative on account of General Frayling's health. This was only settled yesterday. Marshall would have rushed here to tell you; but I forbade him. I felt I must tell you myself. I confess it is a blow to me. Our tenancy of the Pavilion expires at the end of the month; but I proposed asking for an extension, and, if that failed, taking up our abode at the hotel for a while. To me Dr. Stewart-Walker's orders come as a bitter disappointment, for I counted on remaining until Easter—remaining just as long as you and Sir Charles and Carteret remained, in fact."

Here the bloom, far from further extinction, warmed to a lovely blush. Henrietta's curiosity craned its naughty neck standing on tiptoe. But, the blush notwithstanding, Damaris looked at her with such sincerity of quickening affection and of sympathy that she again postponed cross-examination.

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For over this piece of news our maiden could—in its superficial aspects at all events—-lament in perfect good faith. She proceeded to do so, eagerly embracing the opportunity to offer thanks and praise. All Henrietta's merits sprang into convincing evidence. Had not her hospitality been unstinted—the whole English colony had cause to mourn.

"But for you they'd still be staring at one another, bristling like so many strange dogs," Damaris said. "And you smoothed them all down so divertingly. Oh! you were beautifully clever in that. It was a lesson in the art of the complete hostess. While, as for me, Henrietta, you've simply spoiled me. I can never thank you enough. Think of the amusements past counting you planned for me, the excursions you've let me share with you—our delicious drives, and above all my coming-out dance."

Whereat Mrs. Frayling disclaimingly shook her very pretty head.

"In pleasing you I have merely pleased myself, dearest, so in that there's no merit.—-Though I do plead guilty to but languid enthusiasm for girls of your age as a rule. Their conversation and opinions are liable to set my teeth a good deal on edge. I have small patience, I'm afraid, at the disposal of feminine beings at once so omniscient and so alarmingly unripe.—But you see, a certain downy owl, with saucer eyes and fierce little beak, won my heart by its beguiling ways a dozen years ago."

"Darling Henrietta!" Damaris softly murmured; and, transported by sentiment to that earlier date when the said darling Henrietta commanded her unqualified adoration, began playing with the well-remembered bunch of trinkets depending from the long gold chain the lady wore about her neck.

Watching her, Mrs. Frayling sighed.

"Ah, my child, the thought of you is inextricably joined to other thoughts upon which I should be far wiser not to dwell—far wiser to put from me and forget—only they are stronger than I am—and I can't."

There was a ring of honest human feeling in Henrietta Frayling's voice for once.

"No, no—I am more justly an object of commiseration than anyone I leave behind me at St. Augustin."

And again she laughed, not impishly, but with a hardness altogether astonishing to her auditor.

"Think," she cried, "of my sorry fate!—Not only a wretchedly ailing husband on my hands, needing attention day and night, but a wretchedly disconsolate young lover as well. For poor Marshall will be inconsolable—only too clearly do I foresee that.—Picture

what a pair for one's portion week in and week out!—Whereas you, enviable being, are sure of the most inspiring society. Everything in this quiet room"—

She indicated the laden writing-table with a quick, flitting gesture.

"So refreshingly removed from the ordinary banal hotel *salon*—is eloquent of the absorbing, far-reaching pursuits and interests amongst which you live. Who could ask a higher privilege than to share your father's work, to be his companion and amanuensis?"—She paused, as emphasising the point, and then mockingly threw off—-"Plus the smart *beau sabreur* Carteret, as devoted bodyguard and escort, whenever you are not on duty. To few women of your age, or indeed of any age, is Fortune so indulgent a fairy godmother as that!"

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Astonished and slightly resentful at the sharpness of her guest's unprovoked onslaught, Damaris had dropped the little bunch of trinkets and backed into her corner of the sofa.

"Colonel Carteret has gone," she said coldly, rather irrelevantly, the statement drawn from her by a vague instinct of self-defence.

"Gone!" Henrietta echoed, with equal irrelevance. For she was singularly discomposed.

"Yes, he started for England last night. But you must know that already, Henrietta. He wrote to you—he told me so himself."

But having once committed herself by use of a word implying ignorance, Mrs. Frayling could hardly do otherwise than continue the deception. Explanation would be too awkward a business. The chances of detection, moreover, were infinitesimal. There were things she meant to say which would sound far more unstudied and obvious could she keep up the fiction of ignorance. This, quickly realizing, she again and more flagrantly fibbed. The voluntary lie acts as a tonic giving you—for the moment at least—most comforting conceit of your own courage and perspicacity. And Henrietta just now stood in need of a tonic. She had been strangely overcome by the force of her own emotion—an accident which rarely happened to her and which she very cordially detested when it did.

"Someone must have omitted to post the letter, then," she said, with a suitable air of annoyance. "How exceedingly careless—unless it has not been sent over from the hotel to the Pavilion. I have been obliged, more than once, to complain of the hall porter's very casual delivery of my letters. I will make enquiries directly, if I don't find it on my return. But this is all by the way. Tell me, dearest child, what is the reason of Colonel Carteret's leaving so suddenly? Is it not surprisingly unexpected?"

"He was wanted at home on business of some sort," Damaris replied, as she felt a little lamely. She was displeased, worried by Henrietta. It was difficult to choose her words. "He has been away for a long time, you see. I think he has been beautifully unselfish in giving up so much of his time to us."

"Do you?" Henrietta enquired with meaning. "If I remember right we discussed that point once before. I can repeat now what I then told you, with even firmer assurance, namely, that he struck me as remarkably well pleased with himself and his surroundings and generally content."

"Of course he loves being with my father," Damaris hastened to put in, having no wish to enlarge on the topic suggested by the above speech.

“Of course. Who doesn’t, or rather who wouldn’t were they sufficiently fortunate to have the chance. But come—to be honest—*je me demande*, is it exclusively Sir Charles whom Carteret loves to be with?”

And as she spoke, Henrietta bent forward from the waist, her dainty lavender skirts spread out on the faded blue of the sofa mattress, the contours of her dainty lavender bodice in fine relief against the faded blue cushions, her whole person, in the subdued light, bright and apparently fragile as some delicate toy of spun glass. She put out her hand, and lightly, mischievously, touched the string of pearls encircling the girl’s throat.

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“And what is the meaning of these, then,” she asked, “you sweetly deceiving little puss!”

It was cleverly done, she flattered herself. She asserted nothing, implied much, putting the onus of admission or denial upon Damaris. The answer came with grave and unhesitating directness.

“Colonel Carteret gave them to me.”

“So I imagined. They are the exquisite fruit, aren’t they, of the little expedition by train of two days ago?”

Damaris’ temper rose, but so did her protective instinct. For that journey to Marseilles, connected as it was with the dear secret of Darcy Faircloth, did not admit of investigation by Henrietta.

“About where and when Colonel Carteret may have got them for me, I know nothing,” she returned. “He left them to be given to me last night after he went.”

She unclasped the necklace.

“They are very lovely pearls, aren’t they? Pray look at them if you care to, Henrietta,” she said.

Thus at once invited and repulsed—for that it amounted to a repulse she could not but acknowledge—Mrs. Frayling advised herself a temporary retreat might be advisable. She therefore discoursed brightly concerning pearls and suchlike costly frivolities. Inwardly covetousness consumed her, since she possessed no personal ornament of even approximate value.

The conversation drifted. She learned the fact of Miss Felicia’s projected arrival, and deplored her own approaching exile the less. Only once, long ago, had she encountered Miss Verity. The memory afforded her no satisfaction, for that lady’s peculiar brand of good breeding and—as she qualified it—imbecility, did not appeal to her in the least. There was matter of thankfulness, therefore, she had not elected to join Sir Charles and Damaris sooner. She would undoubtedly have proved a most tiresome and impeding element. Unless—here Henrietta’s mind darted—unless she happened to take a fancy to Marshall. Blameless spinsters, of her uncertain age and of many enthusiasms, did not infrequently very warmly take to him—in plain English, fell over head and ears in love with him, poor things, though without knowing it, their critical faculty being conspicuous by its absence where their own hearts were concerned.—By the way that was an idea!—Swiftly Henrietta reviewed the possibilities it suggested.—As an ally, an auxiliary, Miss Felicia might be well worth cultivation. Would it not be diplomatic to let Marshall stay on at the Hotel de la Plage by himself for a week or so? The conquest of Miss Felicia might facilitate another conquest on which her—-

Henrietta's—mind was set. For such mature enamoured virgins, as she reflected, are almost ludicrously selfless. To ensure the happiness of the beloved object they will even donate to him their rival.—Yes—distinctly an idea! But before attempting to reduce it to practice, she must make more sure of her ground in another direction.

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During the above meditation, Henrietta continued to talk off the surface, her mind working on two distinct planes. Damaris, off the surface, continued to answer her.

Our maiden felt tired both in body and in spirit. She felt all “rubbed up the wrong way”—disturbed, confused. The many moral turns and twists of Henrietta’s conversation had been difficult to follow. But from amid the curious maze of them, one thing stood out, arrestingly conspicuous—Henrietta believed it then also. Believed Carteret cared for her “in *that* way”—thus, with a turning aside of the eyes and shrinking, she phrased it. It wasn’t any mistaken, conceited imagination of her own since Henrietta so evidently shared it. And Henrietta must be reckoned an expert in that line, having a triad of husbands to her credit—a liberality of allowance in matrimony which had always appeared to Damaris as slightly excessive. She had avoided dwelling upon this so outstanding feature of her friend’s career; but that it gave assurance of the latter’s ability to pronounce upon “caring in *that* way” was she now admitted incontestable.

Whether she really felt glad or sorry Henrietta’s expert opinion confirmed her own suspicions, Damaris could not tell. It certainly tended to complicate the future; and for that she was sorry. She would have liked to see the road clear before her—anyhow for a time—complications having been over numerous lately. They were worrying. They made her feel unsettled, unnatural. In any case she trusted she shouldn’t suffer again from those odious yet alluring feelings which put her to such shame this morning.—But—unpleasant thought—weren’t they, perhaps, an integral part of the whole agitating business of “caring in *that* way?”

Her eyes rested in wide meditative enquiry upon Henrietta, Henrietta sitting up in all her finished elegance upon the faded blue sofa and so diligently making company conversation. Somehow, thus viewing her, it was extremely difficult to suppose Henrietta had ever experienced excited feelings. Yet—the wonder of it!—she’d actually been married three times.

Then, wearily, Damaris made a return upon herself. Yes—she was glad, although it might seem ungrateful, disloyal, the man with the blue eyes had gone away. For his going put off the necessity of knowing her own mind, excused her from making out exactly how she regarded him, thus relegating the day of fateful decision to a dim distance. Henrietta accused him of being a sieve.—Damaris grew heated in strenuous denial. That was a calumny which she didn’t and wouldn’t credit. Still you could never be quite sure about men—so she went back on the old, sad, disquieting lesson. Their way of looking at things, their angle of admitted obligation is so bewilderingly different!—Oh! how thankful she was Aunt Felicia would soon be here. Everything would grow simpler, easier to understand and to manage, more as it used to be, with dear Aunt Felicia here on the spot.

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At this point she realized that Mrs. Frayling was finishing a sentence to the beginning of which she had not paid the smallest attention. That was disgracefully rude.

“So I am to go home then, dearest child, and break it to Marshall that he stands no chance—my poor Marshall, who has no delightful presents with which to plead his cause!”

“Mr. Wace?—Plead his cause? What cause? I am so sorry, Henrietta—forgive me. It’s too dreadful, but I am afraid I wasn’t quite listening”—this with most engaging confusion.

“Yes—his cause. I should have supposed his state of mind had been transparently evident for many a long day.”

“But indeed—Henrietta, you must be mistaken. I don’t know what you mean”—the other interposed smitten by the liveliest distress and alarm.

The elder lady waved aside her outcry with admirable playfulness and determination.

“Oh! I quite realize how crazy it must appear on his part, poor dear fellow, seeing he has so little to offer from the worldly and commercial standpoint. As he himself says—-’the desire of the moth for the star, of the night for the morrow.’ Still money and position are not everything in life, are they? Talent is an asset and so, I humbly believe, is the pure devotion of a good man’s heart. These count for something, or used to do so when I was your age. But then the women of my generation were educated in a less sophisticated school. You modern young persons are wiser than we were no doubt, in that you are less romantic, less easily touched.—I have not ventured to give Marshall much encouragement. It would have been on my conscience to foster hopes which might be dashed. And yet I own, darling child, your manner not once nor twice, during our happy meetings at the Pavilion, when he read aloud to us or sang, gave me the impression you were not entirely indifferent. He, I know, has thought so too—for I have not been able to resist letting him pour out his hopes and fears to me now and then. I could not refuse either him or myself that indulgence, because”—

Mrs. Frayling rose, and, bending over our much tried and now positively flabbergasted damsel, brushed her hair with a butterfly kiss.

“Because my own hopes were also not a little engaged,” she said. “Your manner to my poor Marshall, your willingness to let him so often be with you made me—perhaps foolishly—believe not only that his sad life might be crowned by a signal blessing, but you might be given to me some day as a daughter of whom I could be intensely proud. I have grown to look upon Marshall in the light of a son, and his wife would”—

Damaris had risen also. She stood at bay, white, strained, her lips quivering.

“Do—do you mean that I have behaved badly to Mr. Wace, Henrietta? That I have flirted with him?”

Mrs. Frayling drew her mouth into a naughty little knot. There were awkward corners to be negotiated in these questions. She avoided them by boldly striking for the open.

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“Oh! it is natural, perfectly natural at your rather thoughtless time of life. Only Marshall’s admiration for you is very deep. He has the poetic temperament which makes for suffering, for despair as well as for rapture. And his disillusionments, poor boy, have been so grievously many.—But Colonel Carteret—yes—dearest child, I do quite follow. —It’s an old story. He has always had *des bonnes fortunes*.”

Since her return to Europe, Mrs. Frayling had become much addicted to embellishing her conversation with such foreign tags, not invariably, it may be added, quite correctly applied or quoted.

“Women could never resist him in former days in India. They went down before his charms like a row of ninepins before a ball. I don’t deny a passing *tendresse* for him myself, though I was married and very happily married. So I can well comprehend how he may take a girl’s fancy by storm. *Sans peur et sans reproche*, he must seem to her. —And so in the main, I dare say, he is. At worst a little easy-going, owing to his cultivation of the universally benevolent attitude. Charity has a habit of beginning at home, you know; and a man usually views his own delinquencies at least as leniently as he views those of others. But that leniency is part of his charm—which I admit is great. —Heaven forbid, I should undermine your faith in it, if there is anything settled between you and him.”

“But there isn’t, there isn’t,” Damaris broke in, distressed beyond all calmness of demeanour. “You go too fast, Henrietta. You assume too much. Nothing is settled of —of that sort. Nothing of that sort has ever been said.”

Mrs. Frayling raised her eyebrows, cast down her eyes, and fingered the bunch of trinkets hanging from her gold chain in silence for a few seconds. The ring of sincerity was unquestionable—only where did that land her? Had not she, in point of fact, very really gone too fast? In defeat Henrietta became unscrupulous.

“Merely another flirtation, Damaris?” she said. “Darling child, I am just a wee bit disappointed in you.”

Which, among her many fibs, may rank amongst her most impudent and full-fed, though by no means her last.

Here, the door opened behind her. Henrietta turned alertly, hailing any interruption which—her bolt being shot—might facilitate her retreat from a now most embarrassing situation. After all she had planted more than one seed, which might fruitfully grow, so at that she could leave matters.—The interruption, however, took a form for which she was unprepared. To her intense disgust her nerves played her false. She gave the oddest little stifled squeak as she met Charles Verity’s glance, fixed upon her in cool, slightly ironic scrutiny.

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Some persons very sensibly bring their mental atmosphere along with them. You are compelled to breathe it whether you like or not. The atmosphere Charles Verity brought with him, at this juncture, was too masculine, intellectually too abstract yet too keenly critical, for comfortable absorption by Henrietta's lungs. Her self-complacency shrivelled in it. She felt but a mean and pitiful creature, especially in her recent treatment of Damaris. It was a nasty moment, the more difficult to surmount because of that wretchedly betraying squeak. Fury against herself gingered her up to action. She must be the first to speak.

"Ah! how delightful to see you," she said, a little over-playing the part—"though only for an instant. I was in the act of bidding Damaris farewell. As it is I have scandalously outstayed my leave; but we had a thousand and one things, hadn't we, to say to one another."

She smiled upon both father and daughter with graceful deprecation.

"*Au, revoir*, darling child—we must manage to meet somehow, just once more before I take my family north"—

And still talking, new lavender dress, trinkets, faint fragrance and all, she passed out on to the corridor accompanied by Sir Charles Verity.

CHAPTER XIII

WHICH RECOUNTS A TAKING OF SANCTUARY

Left alone Damaris sat down on the window-seat, within the shelter of the wooden shutters which interposed a green barred coolness between her and the brilliant world without. That those two, her father and Henrietta Frayling, should thus step off together, the small, softly crisp, feminine figure beside the tall, fine-drawn and—in a way—magnificent masculine one, troubled her. Yet she made no attempt to accompany or to follow them. Her head ached. Her mind and soul ached too. She felt spent and giddy, as from chasing round and round in an ever-shifting circle some tormenting, cleverly lovely thing which perpetually eluded her. Which thing, finally, floated out of the door there, drawing a personage unmeasurably its superior, away with it, and leaving her—Damaris—deserted.

Leaving, moreover, every subject on which its nimble tongue had lighted, damaged by that contact—at loose ends, frayed and ravelled, its inwove pattern just slightly discoloured and defaced. The patterned fabric of Damaris' thought and inner life had not been spared, but suffered disfigurement along with the rest. She felt humiliated, felt unworthy. The ingenious torments of a false conscience gnawed her. Her better judgment pronounced that conscience veritably false; or would, as she believed, so

pronounce later when she had time to get a true perspective. But, just now, she could only lamentably, childishly, cry out against injustice. For wasn't Henrietta mainly responsible for the character of her intercourse with Marshall Wace? Hadn't Henrietta repeatedly entreated her to see much of him, be kind to him?—Wishing, even in her present rebellion to be quite fair, she acknowledged that she had enjoyed his singing and reading; that she had felt pleased at his eagerness to confide his troubles to her and talk confidentially about himself. She not unwillingly accepted a mission towards him, stimulated thereto by Henrietta's plaudits and thanks.

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And—and Colonel Carteret? For now somehow she no longer, even in thought, could call him by her old name for him, “the dear man with the blue eyes.”—Could it be true, as Henrietta intimated, that he went through life throwing the handkerchief first to one woman and then to another? That there was no real constancy or security in his affections, but all was lightly come and lightly go with him?

How her poor head ached! She held it in both hands and closed her eyes.—She would not think any more about Colonel Carteret. To do so made her temples throb and raised the lump, which is a precursor of tears, in her throat.

No—she couldn’t follow Henrietta’s statements and arguments either way. They were self-contradictory. Still, whose ever the fault, that the young man Wace should be unhappy on her account, should think she—Damaris—had behaved heartlessly to him, was quite dreadful. Humiliating too—false conscience again gnawing. Had she really contracted a debt towards him, which she—in his opinion and Henrietta’s—tried to repudiate? She seemed to hear it, the rich impassioned voice, and hear it with a new comprehension. Was “caring in *that* way” what it had striven to tell her; and had she, incomparably dense in missing its meaning, appeared to sanction the message and to draw him on? Other people understood—so at least Henrietta implied; while she, remaining deaf, had rather cruelly misled him. Ought she not to do something to make up? Yet what could she do?—It had never occurred to her that—that—

She held her head tight. Held it on, as with piteous humour she told herself, since she seemed in high danger of altogether losing it.—Must she believe herself inordinately stupid, or was she made differently to everybody else? For, as she now suspected, most people are constantly occupied, are quite immensely busy about “caring in *that* way.” And she shrank from it; actively and angrily disliked it. She felt smirched, felt all dealings as between men and women made suspect, rendered ugly, almost degraded by the fact—if fact it was—of that kind of caring and excited feelings it induces, lurking just below the surface, ready to dart out.—And this not quite honestly either. The whole matter savoured of hypocrisy, since the feelings disguised themselves in beautiful sounds, beautiful words, clothing their unseemliness with the noble panoply of poetry and art, masquerading in wholesome garments of innocent good-comradeship.

—A grind of wheels on the gravel below. Henrietta’s neat limpid accents and Charles Verity’s grave ones. The flourish and crack of a whip and scrambling start of the little chestnut horses. The rhythmical beat of their quick even trot and thin tinkle of their collar bells receding into the distance.

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These sounds to our sorrowfully perplexed maiden opened fresh fields of uneasy speculation. For those diverse accents—the speakers being unseen—heard thus in conjunction, seized on and laboured her imagination. Throughout the past months of frequent meeting, Damaris had never quite understood her father's attitude towards Henrietta Frayling. It was marked by reserve; yet a reserve based, as she somehow divined, upon an uncommon degree of former intimacy. Judging from remarks let drop now and again by Henrietta, they knew, or rather had known, one another very well indeed. This bore out Damaris' own childhood's recollections; though in these last she was aware of lacunae, of gaps, of spaces unbridged by any coherent sequence of remembered events. A dazzling and delicious image, the idol of her baby adoration—-thus did memory paint that earlier Henrietta. Surrounding circumstances remained shadowy. She could not recall them even in respect of herself, still less in respect of her father. So that question, as to the past, ruled the present. What had parted them, and how did they to-day envisage one another? She could not make out. Had never, indeed, attempted seriously to make out, shying from such investigation as disloyal and, in a way, irreverent. Now investigation was forced on her. Her mind worked independent of her will, so that she could neither prevent or arrest it. Sir Charles showed himself scrupulously attentive and courteous to General Frayling. He offered no spoken objection to her association with Henrietta. Yet an unexplained element did remain. Subtlely, but perceptibly, it permeated both her father's and Henrietta's speech and bearing. She, Damaris, was always conscious of a certain constraint beneath their calm and apparently easy talk. Was their relation one of friendship or of covert enmity? —Or did these, just perceptible, peculiarities of it betoken something deeper and closer still?

Suspicion once kindled spreads like a conflagration.—Damaris' hands dropped, a dead weight, into her lap. She sat, strained yet inert, as though listening to catch the inner significance of her own unformulated question, her eyes wide and troubled, her lips apart. For might it not be that they had once—long ago—in the princely, Eastern pleasure palace of her childhood—cared in *that* way?

Then the tears which, what with tiredness and the labour pains of her many conflicting emotions, had threatened more than once to-day, came into their own. She wept quietly, noiselessly, the tears running down her cheeks unchecked and unheeded. For there was no escape. Turn where she would, join hands with whom she would in all good faith and innocence, this thing reared its head and, evilly alluring looked at her. Now it set its claim upon her well-beloved Sultan-i-bagh—and what scene could in truth be more sympathetic to its display? She felt the breath of high romance. Imagination played strange tricks with her. She

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could feel, she could picture, a drama of rare quality with those two figures as protagonists. It dazzled while wounding her. She remembered Faircloth's words, spoken on that evening of fateful disclosure when knowledge of things as they are first raped her happy ignorance, while the boat drifted through the shrouding darkness of rain upon the inky waters of the tide-river.—"They were young," he had said, "and mayn't we allow they were beautiful? They met and, God help them, they loved."

The statement covered this case, also, to a nicety. It explained everything. But what an explanation, leaving her, Damaris, doubly orphaned and desolate! For the first case, that of which Faircloth actually had spoken, brought her royal, if secret compensation in the brotherhood and sisterhood it made known. But this second case brought nothing, save a sense of being tricked and defrauded, the victim of a conspiracy of silence. For nothing, as it now appeared, was really her own, nor had really belonged to her. "Some one," so she phrased it in the incoherence of her pain, "had always been there before her." What she supposed her exclusive property was only second-hand, had been already owned by others. They let her play at being first in the field, original and sole proprietress, because it saved them trouble by keeping her quiet and amused. But all the while they knew better and must have smiled at her possessive antics once her silly back was turned. And here Damaris lost sight of reasonable proportion and measure, exaggerating wildly, her pride and self-respect cut to the quick.

It was thus, in the full flood of mystification and resentment, Charles Verity found her when presently he returned. Sensible of something very much amiss, since she stayed within the shadow of the closed shutters, silent and motionless, he crossed the room and stood before her looking down searchingly into her upturned face. Stubborn in her misery, she met his glance with mutinous, and hard, if misty, eyes.

"Weeping, my dear? Is the occasion worth it? Has Mrs. Frayling then taken so profound a hold?" he asked, his tone mocking, chiding her yet very gently.

Damaris hedged. To expose the root of her trouble became impossible under the coercion of that gently bantering tone.

"It's not Henrietta's going; but that I no longer mind her going."

"A lost illusion—yes?" he said.

"I can't trust her. She—she isn't kind."

"Eh?" he said. "So you too have made that illuminating little discovery. I supposed it would be only a matter of time. But you read character, my dear, more quickly than I do. What it has taken you months to discover, took me years."

His frankness, the unqualified directness of his response, though startling, stimulated her daring.

“Then—then you don’t really like Henrietta?” she found audacity enough to say.

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“Ah! there you rush too headlong to conclusions,” he reasoned, still with that same frankness of tone. “She is an ingenious, unique creature, towards whom one’s sentiments are ingenious and unique in their turn. I admire her, although—for you are right there—she is neither invariably trustworthy nor invariably kind. Admire her ungrudgingly, now I no longer ask of her what she hasn’t it in her to give. Limit your demand and you limit the risks of disappointment—a piece of wisdom easier to enunciate than to apply.”

Lean, graceful, commanding under the cloak of his present gentle humour, Charles Verity sat down on the faded red cushion beside Damaris, and laid one arm along the window-ledge behind her. He did not touch her; being careful in the matter of caresses, reverent of her person, chary of claiming parental privileges unasked.

“In the making of Henrietta Frayling,” he went on, “by some accident soul was left out. She hasn’t any. She does not know it. Let us hope she never will know it, for it is too late now for the omission to be rectified.”

“Are you laughing at me?” Damaris asked, still stubborn, though his presence enclosed her with an at once assuaging and authoritative charm.

“Not in the least. I speak that which I soberly believe. Just as some ill-starred human creatures are born physically or mentally defective—deformed or idiots—so may they be born spiritually defective. Why not? My reason offers no scientific or moral objection to such a belief. In other respects she is conspicuously perfect. But, verily, she has no soul; and the qualities which—for happiness or misery—draw their life from the soul, she does not possess. Therefore she sparkles, lovely and chill as frost. Is as astute as she is cold at heart; and can, when it suits her purpose, be both false and cruel without any subsequent prickings of remorse. But this very coldness and astuteness save her from misdeeds of the coarser kind. Treacherous she has been, and, for aught I know, may on occasions still be. But, though temptation has pretty freely crossed her path, she has never been other than virtuous. She is a good woman—in the accepted, the popular sense of the word.”

Silence stole down upon the room. Damaris remained motionless, leaning forward gathered close into herself, her hands still heavy in her lap. Could she accept this statement as comfort, or must she bow under it as rebuke?

“Why,” she asked at last huskily—the tears were no longer upon her cheeks but queerly in her throat, impeding utterance, “do you tell me these things?”

“To prevent you beholding lying visions, my dear, or dreaming lying dreams of what might very well have been but—God be thanked—never has been—never was.—Think a minute—remember—look.”

And once more Damaris felt the breath of high romance and touched drama of rare quality, with those same two figures as protagonists, and that same Indian pleasure palace as their stage; but this time with a notable difference of sentiment and of result.

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For she visualized another going of Henrietta, a flight before the dawn. Saw, through a thick scent-drenched atmosphere, between the expiring lamp-light and broadening day, a deserted child beating its little hands, in the extremity of its impotent anguish, upon the pillows of a disordered unmade bed. Saw a man, too, worn and travel-stained from long riding throughout the night, lost to all decent dignities of self-control, savage with the animalism of frustrated passion, rage to and fro amidst the litter of a smart woman's hurried packing, a trail of pale blue ribbon plucking at and tripping him entangled in the rowels of his spurs.

All this she saw; and knew that her father—sitting on the cushioned window-seat beside her, his legs crossed, his chin sunk on his breast—saw it also. That he, indeed, voluntarily and of set purpose made her see, transferring the living picture from his consciousness to her own. And, as she watched, each detail growing in poignancy and significance she—not all at once, but gropingly, rebelliously and only by degrees—-comprehended that purpose, and the abounding love, both of herself and of justice, which dictated it. Divining the root of her trouble and the nature of her suspicion he took this strange means to dissipate them. Setting aside his natural pride, he caused her to look upon his hour of defeat and debasement, careless of himself if thereby he might mend her hurt and win her peace of mind.

Damaris was conquered. Her stubbornness went down before his sacrifice. All the generosity in her leapt forth to meet and to acclaim the signal generosity in him—a generosity extended not only towards herself but to Henrietta Frayling as well. This last Damaris recognized as superb.—He bade her remember. And, seeing in part through her own eyes, in part through his, she penetrated more deeply into his mind, into the rich diversity and, now mastered, violence of his character, than could otherwise have been possible. She learnt him from within as well as from without. He had been terrible—so she remembered—yet beautiful in his fallen god-head. She had greatly feared him under that aspect. Later, she more than ever loved him; and that with a provenant, protective and, baby though she was, a mothering love. He was beautiful now; but no longer terrible, no longer fallen—if not the god-head, yet the fine flower of his manhood royally and very sweetly disclosed. Her whole being yearned towards him; but humbly, a note of lowliness in her appreciation, as towards something exalted, far above her in experience, in self-knowledge and self-discipline.

She was, indeed, somewhat overwhelmed, both by realization of his distinction and of her own presumption in judging him, to the point of being unable as yet to look him in the face. So she silently laid hold of his hand, drew it down from the window-ledge and round her waist. Slipping along the cushioned seat until she rested against him, she laid her head back upon his shoulder. Testimony in words seemed superfluous after that shared consciousness, seemed impertinent even, an anti-climax from which both taste and insight recoiled.

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For a while Charles Verity let the silent communion continue. Then, lest it should grow enervating, to either or to both, he spoke of ordinary subjects—of poor little General Frayling's illness, of Miss Felicia's plans, of his own book. It was wiser for her, better also for himself, to step back into the normal thus quietly closing the door upon their dual act of retrospective clairvoyance.

Damaris, catching his intention, responded; and if rather languidly yet loyally played up. But, before the spell was wholly broken and frankness gave place to their habitual reserve, there was one further question she must ask if the gnawings of that false conscience, begotten in her by Henrietta's strictures, were wholly to cease.

"Do you mind if we go back just a little minute," she said.

"Still unsatisfied, my dear?"

"Not unsatisfied—never again that as between us two, Commissioner Sahib. You have made everything beautifully, everlastingly smooth and clear."

"Then why tempt Providence, or rather human incertitude, by going back?"

"Because—can I say it quite plainly?"

"As plainly as you will."

"Because Henrietta tells me I have—have flirted—have played fast and loose with—with more than one person."

A pause, and the question came from above her—her head still lying against his breast—with a trace of severity, or was it anxiety?

"And have you?"

"Not intentionally—not knowingly," Damaris said.

"If that is so, is it not sufficient?"

"No—because she implies that I have raised false hopes, and so entangled myself—-and that I ought to go further, that, as I understand her, I ought to be ready to marry—-that it is not quite honourable to withdraw."

Charles Verity moved slightly, yet held her close. She felt the rise and fall of his ribs as he breathed slow and deep.

"Do you want to marry?" he at last asked her.

“No,” she said, simply. “I’d much rather not, if I can keep out of it without acting unfairly by anyone—if you don’t agree with Henrietta, and don’t think I need. You don’t want me to marry do you?”

“God in heaven, no,” Charles Verity answered. He put her from him, rose and moved about the room.

“To me, the thought of giving you in marriage to any man is little short of abhorrent,” he said hoarsely.

For fear clutched him by the throat. The gift of pearls, the little scene of last night, and Damaris’ emotion in bidding Carteret farewell, confronted him. The idea had never occurred to him before. Now it glared at him, or rather he glared at it. It would be torment to say “yes”; and yet very difficult to say his best friend “nay.” Anger kindled against Henrietta Frayling. Must this be regarded as her handiwork? Yet he could hardly credit it. Or had she some other candidate—Peregrine Ditton, young Harry Ellice?—But they were mere boys.—Of Marshall Wace he never thought, the young man being altogether outside his field of vision in this connection.

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Long habit of personal chastity made Charles Verity turn, with a greater stabbing and rending of repulsion, from the thought of marriage for Damaris. She asserted she had no wish to marry, that she—bless her sweet simplicity!—would rather not. But this bare broaching of the subject threw him into so strange a tumult that, only too evidently, he was no competent observer, he laboured under too violent a prejudice. He had no right to demand from others the abstinence he chose himself to practise. Carteret, in desiring her, was within his rights. Damaris within hers, were she moved by his suit. Marriage is natural, wholesome, the God-ordained law and sanction of human increase since man first drew breath here upon earth. To condemn obedience to that law, by placing any parental embargo upon Damaris' marriage, would be both a defiance of nature and act of grossest selfishness.

He sat down on the window-seat again; and forced himself to put his arm around that fair maiden body, destined to be the prize, one day, of some man's love; the prey—for he disdained to mince matters, turning the knife in the wound rather—the prey of some man's lust. He schooled himself, while Damaris' heart beat a little tempestuously under his hand, to invite a conclusion which through every nerve and fibre he loathed.

"My dear," he said, "I spoke unadvisedly with my lips just now, letting crude male jealousy get the mastery of reason and common sense. Put my words out of your mind. They were unjustifiable, spoken in foolish heat. If you are in love with anyone"—

Damaris nestled against him.

"Only with you, dearest, I think," she said.

Charles Verity hesitated, unable to speak through the exquisite blow she delivered and his swift thankfulness.

"Let us put the question differently then—translating it into the language of ordinary social convention. Tell me, has anyone proposed to you?"

Damaris, still nestling, shook her head.

"No—no one. And I hope now, no one will. I escaped that, partly thanks to my own denseness.—It is not an easy thing, Commissioner Sahib, to explain or talk about. But I have come rather close to it lately, and"—with a hint of vehemence—"I don't like it. There is something in it which pulls at me but not at the best part of me. So that I am divided against myself. Though it does pull, I still want to push it all away with both hands. I don't understand myself and I don't understand it, I would rather be without it—forget it—if you think I am free to do so, if you are satisfied that I haven't intentionally hurt anyone or contracted a—a kind of debt of honour?"

“I am altogether satisfied,” he said. “Until the strange and ancient malady attacks you in a very much more virulent form, you are free to cast Henrietta Frayling’s insinuations to the winds, to ignore them and their existence.”

BOOK IV

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THROUGH SHADOWS TOWARDS THE DAWN

CHAPTER I

WHICH CARRIES OVER A TALE OF YEARS, AND CARRIES ON

The last sentence was written. His work finished. And, looking upon his completed creation, Charles Verity saw that it was good. Yet, as he put the pen back in the pen-tray and, laying the last page of manuscript face downwards upon the blotting-paper passed his hand over it, he was less sensible of exultation than of a pathetic emptiness. The book had come to be so much part of him that he felt a nasty wrench when he thus finally rid himself of it.

He had kept the personal pronoun out of it, strictly and austerely, desiring neither self-glorification nor self-advertisement. Yet his mind and attitude towards life seasoned and tempered the whole, giving it vitality and force. This was neither a “drum-and-trumpet history” designed to tickle the vulgar ear, nor a blank four-wall depository of dry facts, names, dates, statistics, such as pedants mustily adore; but a living thing, seen and felt. Not his subconscious, but that much finer and—as one trusts—more permanent element in our human constitution, his super-conscious self found expression in its pages and travelled freely, fruitfully, through them amid luminous and masterful ideas. At times the intellectual sweep threatened to be overdaring and overwide; so that, in the interests of symmetry and balance of construction, he had been forced to clip the wings of thought, lest they should bear him to regions too remotely high and rare. Race, religion, customs and the modifications of these, both by climate and physical conformation of the land on the face of which they operate, went to swell the interest and suggestion of his theme. In handling such varied and coloured material the intellectual exercise had been to him delicious, as he fashioned and put a fine edge to passages of admirable prose, coined the just yet startling epithet, perfected the flow of some graceful period, and ransacked the English language for fearless words in which to portray the mingled splendour and vileness of a barbaric oriental Court, the naked terrors of tribal feuds and internecine war.

The occupation had, indeed, proved at once so refreshing and so absorbing that he went leisurely, lengthening out the process of production until it came nearer covering the thirty months of elephantine gestation than the normal human nine.

With but two brief sojourns to England, for the consultation of certain authorities and of his publishers, the said near on thirty months were passed in wandering through Southern France, Central Italy, and, taking ship from Naples to Malaga, finally through Eastern and Northern Spain. Charles Verity was too practised a campaigner for his power of concentration to depend on the stability or familiarity of his surroundings. He could detach himself, go out into and be alone with

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his work, at will. But the last chapter, like the first, he elected to write in the study at The Hard. A pious offering of incense, this, to the pleasant memory of that excellent scholar and devoted amateur of letters, his great-uncle, Thomas Clarkson Verity, whose society and conversation awakened the literary sense in him as a schoolboy, on holiday from Harchester, now nearly five decades ago. He judged it a matter of good omen, moreover,—toying for the moment with kindly superstition—that the book should issue from a house redeemed by his kinsman from base and brutal uses and dedicated to the worship of knowledge and of the printed word. That fat, soft-bodied, mercurial-minded little gentleman—to whom no record of human endeavour, of human speculation, mental or moral experiment, came amiss—would surely relish the compliment, if his curious and genial ghost still, in any sort, had cognizance of this, his former, dwelling-place.

The Hard, just now, showed a remarkably engaging countenance, the year standing on the threshold of May.—Mild softly bright weather made amends for a wet and windy April, with sunshine and high forget-me-not blue skies shading to silver along the sea-line. The flower-beds, before the garden house-front, were crowded with early tulips, scarlet, golden, and shell-pink. Shrubberies glowed with rhododendrons, flamed with azaleas. At the corner of the battery and sea-wall, misty grey-green plumes of tamarisk veiled the tender background of grey-blue water and yellow-grey sand. Birds peopled the scene. Gulls, in strong fierce flight, laughed overhead. Swallows darted back and forth, ceaselessly twittering, as they built their cup-shaped mud nests beneath the eaves. Upon the lawn companies of starlings ran, flapping glossy wings, squealing, whistling; to the annoyance of a song thrush, in spotted waistcoat and neatly fitting brown *surtout*, who, now tall, now flattened to the level of the turf, its head turned sideways, peered and listened, locating the presence of the victim worm.—Three or four vigorous pecks—the starlings running elsewhere—to loosen the surrounding soil, and the moist pink living string was steadily, mercilessly, drawn upward into the uncompromising light of day, to be devoured wriggling, bit by bit, with most unlovely gusto.—The chaff-chaff sharpened his tiny saw tipping about the branches of the fir trees in the Wilderness, along with the linnets, tits, and gold-finches.

Such, out of doors, was the home world which received Damaris after those many months of continental travel, on the eve of her twenty-first birthday. To pass from the dynamic to the static mode must be always something of an embarrassment and trial, especially to the young with whom sensation is almost disconcertingly direct and lively. Damaris suffered the change of conditions not without a measure or doubt and wonder. For they made demands to which she had become unaccustomed, and to which she found it difficult to submit quite naturally and simply. A whole social and domestic order, bristling with petty obligations, closed down upon her, within the bounds of which she felt to move awkwardly, at first, conscious of constraint.

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Sympathetic Mrs. Cooper, comely and comfortable Mary, and the Napoleonic Patch, still reigned in house and stable. Laura had returned to her former allegiance on the announcement of “the family’s” arrival, and other underlings had been engaged by the upper servants in conclave. To these latter entered that Ulysses, Mr. Hordle, so rendering the establishment once again complete.

The neighbours duly called—Dr. and Mrs. Horniblow, conscious of notable preferment, since high ecclesiastical powers had seen fit to present the former to a vacant canonry at Harchester. For three months yearly he would in future be resident in the cathedral city. This would necessitate the employment of a curate at Deadham, for the spiritual life of its inhabitants must by no means suffer through its vicar’s promotion. At the moment of Sir Charles and Damaris’ return the curate excitement was at its height. It swept through the spinster-ranks of the congregation like an epidemic. They thrilled with unacknowledgeable hopes. The Miss Minetts, though mature, grew pink and quivered, confessing themselves not averse to offering board and lodging to a suitable, a well-connected, well-conducted paying guest. To outpourings on the enthralling subject of the curate, Damaris found herself condemned to listen from every feminine visitor in turn. It held the floor, to the exclusion of all other topics. Her own long absence, long journeys, let alone the affairs of the world at large, were of no moment to these very local souls. So our young lady retired within herself, deploring the existence of curates in general, and the projected, individual, Deadham curate in particular, with a heartiness she was destined later to remember. Had it been prophetic?—Not impossibly so, granted the somewhat strange prescience by which she was, at times, possessed.

For the psychic quality that, from a child, now and again had manifested itself in her—-though happily unattended by morbid or hysteric tendencies, thanks to her radiant health—grew with her growth. To her, in certain moods and under certain conditions, the barrier between things seen and unseen, material and transcendental, was pervious. It yielded before the push of her apprehension, sense of what it guards, what it withholds within an ace of breaking through.

Affairs of the heart would, so far, seem to have begun and ended with the winter spent at St. Augustin. Now and again Damaris met an Englishman, or foreigner, who stirred her slightly. But if one accident of travel brought them together, another accident of travel speedily swept them apart. The impression was fugitive, superficial, fading out and causing but momentary regret. Colonel Carteret she only saw in London, during those two brief visits to England. He had been captivating, treating her with playful indulgence, teasing a little; but far away, somehow—so she felt him—though infinitely kind. And the dear man with the blue eyes—for she could use her old name for him again now, though she couldn’t quite tell why—looked older. The sentimental passage at St. Augustin assumed improbability—a fact over which she should, in all reason, have rejoiced, yet over which she, in point of fact when safe from observation, just a little wept.

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From Henrietta some few letters reached her. One of them contained the news that Marshall Wace, surmounting his religious doubts and scruples—by precisely what process remained undeclared—had at last taken Holy Orders. Concerning this joyful consummation Henrietta waxed positively unctuous. "He had gone through so much"—the old cry!—to which now was added conviction that his own trials fitted him to minister the more successfully to his brethren among the sorely tried.

"His preaching will, I feel certain, be quite extraordinarily original and sympathetic—full of poetry. And I need hardly tell you what an immense relief it is both to the General and to myself to feel he is settled in life, and that his future is provided for—though not, alas! in the way I fondly hoped, and which—for his happiness' sake and my own—I should have chosen," she insidiously and even rather cynically wrote.

But, if in respect of the affections our maiden, during these two years, made no special progress and gained no further experimental knowledge of the perilous workings of sex, her advance in other departments was ample.

For faith now called to her with no uncertain note. The great spiritual forces laid hold of her intelligence and imagination, drawing, moulding, enlightening her. In the library of a somewhat grim hotel at Avila, in old Castile, she lighted upon an English translation of the life of St. Theresa—that woman of countless practical activities, seer and sybil, mystic and wit. The amazing biography set her within the magic circle of Christian feminine beatitude; and opened before her gaze mighty perspectives of spiritual increase, leading upward through unnumbered ranks of prophets, martyrs, saints, angelic powers, to the feet of the Virgin Mother, with the Divine Child on her arm.—He, this last, as gateway, intermediary, between the human soul and the mystery of God Almighty, by whom, and in whom, all things visible and invisible subsist. For the first time some dim and halting perception, some faintest hint and echo, reached Damaris of the awful majesty, the awful beauty of the fount of Universal Being; and, caught with a great trembling, she worshipped.

This culminating perception, in terms of time, amounted to no more than a single flash, the fraction of an instant's contact. An hour or so later, being very young and very human, the things of everyday resumed their sway. A new dress engaged her fancy, a railway journey through—to her—untrodden country excited her, a picturesque street scene held her delighted interest. Nevertheless that had taken place within her—call it conversion, evocation, the spiritual receiving of sight, as you please—upon which, for those who have once experienced it, there is no going back while life and reason last. Obscured, overlaid, buried beneath the dust of the trivial and immediate, the mark of revelation upon the forehead and the heart can never be obliterated quite. Its resurrection is not only possible but certain, if not on the near side, then surely on the farther side of death.

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And not only did faith thus call her, at this period, but art, in its many forms, called her likewise. The two, indeed, according to her present understanding of them, moved—-though at different levels—side by side, singularly conjoined, art translating faith into terms of sound, form and colour, faith consecrating and supplementing art. All of which, as she pondered, appeared to her only fitting and reasonable—the object of art being to capture beauty and touch reality, the substance of faith being nothing less than beauty and reality absolute.

With Sir Charles sometimes, but more often with her aunt, Miss Felicia—most enthusiastic, diligent and ingenuous of sightseers—she visited buildings of historic interest, galleries of statuary and of pictures. For here, too, in architecture, in marble god or hero, upon painted panel or canvas, she caught, at moments, some flickering shadow of the everlasting light, touched at moments both by its abiding terror and the ecstasy of its everlasting youth. But this appreciation of the height and grandeur of man's endeavour was new in her. To Nature she had from childhood, been curiously near. She sought expression and confirmation of it with silent ardour, her mind aflame with the joy of recognition. And, as daily, hourly background to these her many experiments and excursions, was the stable interest of her father's book. For in the pages of that, too, she caught sight of beauty and reality of no mean order, held nobly to ransom through the medium of words.

And while this high humour still possessed her, alive at every point, her thoughts—often by day, still oftener in dreams or wakeful intervals by night—rapt away beyond the stars, she was called upon, as already noted, to pass abruptly from the dynamic to the static mode. Called on to embrace domestic duties, and meet local social obligations, including polite endurance of long-drawn disquisitions regarding Canon Horniblow's impending curate. The drop proved disconcerting, or would have eminently done so had not another element—disquieting yet very dear—come into play.

Meantime the change from the stimulating continental atmosphere to the particularly soft and humid, not to say stagnant, English one, acted as a drop too. She drooped during the process of acclimatization. The fetid sweet reek off the mud-flats of the Haven oppressed and strangely pursued her, so that she asked for the horses to take her to the freshness of the high lying inland moors, for a boat to carry her across the tide-river to the less confined air and outlook of the Bar. Sight and sense of the black wooden houses, upon the forbidden island, hanging like disreputable boon companions about the grey stone-built inn, oppressed and strangely pursued her too. She could see them from her bedroom between the red trunks of the bird-haunted Scotch firs in the Wilderness. First thing, on clear mornings, the sunlight glittered on the glass of their small windows. Last thing,

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at night, the dim glow of lamp-light showed through open doorway, or flimsy curtain from within. They stood alone, but curiously united and self-sufficing, upon the treeless inhospitable piece of land, ringed by the rivers, the great whispering reed-beds and the tide. Their life was strangely apart from, defiant of, that of the mainland and the village. It yielded obedience to traditions and customs of an earlier, wilder age; and in so much was sinister, a little frightening. Yet out of precisely this rather primitive and archaic environment came Darcy Faircloth, her half-brother, the human being closest to her by every tie of blood and sentiment in the world save one—the father of them both. The situation was startling, alike in its incongruities and in its claims.

During those two years of continental wandering—following upon her meeting with him at Marseilles—the whole sweet and perplexing matter of Faircloth had fallen more or less into line, taking on a measure of simplicity and of ease. She thought of him with freedom, wrote to him when he could advise her of his next port of call.—To him at Deadham, by his request, he being very careful for her, she never wrote.—And therefore, all the more perhaps, being here at Deadham, his home and all the suggestive accessories of it so constantly before her eyes, did her relation to him suffer a painful transformation. In remembrance she had come to picture him on board his ship, governing his little floating kingdom with no feeble or hesitating sway. But here every impeding fact of class and education, every worldly obstacle to his and her intercourse, above all the hidden scandal of his birth sprang into high relief. All the dividing, alienating influences of his antecedents, his social position and her own, swung in upon her with aggravated intensity and pathos.

Away, she felt sweetly secure of him. Sure his and her bond remained inviolate. Sure his affection never wavered or paled, but stood always at the flood, a constant quantity upon which she could draw at need; or—to change the metaphor—a steady foundation upon which her heart could safely build. He would not, could not, ever fail her. This had been sufficient to stay her longing for sight and speech of him, her longing for his bodily presence. But now, in face of the very concrete facts of the island, the inn, which bore his name and where his mother lived and ruled, of the property he owned, the place and people to which—by half at least of his nature and much more than half his memory—he belonged, the comfort of this spiritual esoteric relation became but a meagre evasive thing. It was too unsubstantial. Doubts and fears encircled it. She grew heart-sick for some fresh testimony, some clear immediate assurance that time and absence had not staled or undermined the romance.

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If only she could speak of it! But that was forbidden by every obligation of filial piety. Never had her relation to her father been more tender, more happy; yet only through sudden pressure of outward circumstance could she speak to him of Faircloth. To do so, without serious necessity, would be, as she saw it, a wanton endangering of his peace.—If only the dear man with the blue eyes hadn't removed himself! She had counted upon his permanent support and counsel, on his smoothing away difficulties from the path of her dealings with Faircloth; but he appeared to have given her altogether the go-by, to have passed altogether out of her orbit. And meditating, in the softly bright May weather beneath those high forget-me-not blue skies, upon his defection, our maiden felt quite desperately experienced and grown up, thrown back upon her own resources, thrown in upon her rather solitary life.

Throughout the summer visitors came and went; but never those two desired figures, Faircloth or Carteret. Dr. McCabe, vociferous in welcome, affectionate, whimsical and choleric, trundled over from Stourmouth on a bicycle of phenomenal height.

"On the horse without wheels I'm proficient enough," he declared. "Know the anatomy of the darlin' beast as well as I do my own, inside and out. But, be dashed, if the wheels without the horse aren't beyond me quite. Lord love you, but the skittish animal's given me some ugly knocks, cast me away, it has, in the wayside ditch, covering me soul with burning shame, and me jacket with malodorous mud."

At intervals Aunt Harriet Cowden and Uncle Augustus drove over in state the twelve miles from Paulton Lacy—the lady faithful to garments dyed, according to young Tom Verity, in the horrid hues of violet ink. She expressed her opinions with ruthless frankness, criticized, domineered, put all and sundry in—what she deemed—"their place"; and departed for the big house on the confines of Arnewood Forest again, to, had she but known it, a chorus of sighings of relief from those she left behind her and on whose emotional and intellectual tastes and toes she so mercilessly trod.

Garden parties, tennis tournaments, the Napworth cricket week, claimed Damaris' attendance in turn, along with agreeable display of her foreign spoils in the matter of Paris hats and frocks. Proofs arrived in big envelopes perpetually by post; first in the long, wide-margined galley form, later in the more dignified one of quire and numbered page. The crude, sour smell of damp paper and fresh printer's ink, for the first time assailed our maiden's nostrils. It wasn't nice; yet she sniffed it with a quaint sense of pleasure. For was it not part of the whole wonderful, beautiful business of the making of books? To the artist the meanest materials of his art have a sacredness not to be denied or ignored. They go to forward the birth of the precious whole, and hence are redeemed, for him, from all charge of common or uncleanness.

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Finally Miss Felicia, arriving in mid-June, paid an unending visit, of which Damaris felt no impatience. Miss Felicia during the last two years had, indeed, become a habit. The major affairs of life it might be both useless and unwise to submit to her judgment. She lost her way in them, fluttering ineffectual, gently hurried and bird-like. But, in life's minor affairs, her innocent enthusiasm was invaluable as an encouraging asset. It lent point and interest to happenings and occupations otherwise trivial or monotonous. If silly at times, she never was stupid—distinction of meaning and moment.—A blameless creature, incapable of thinking, still more of speaking, evil of the worst or weakest, her inherent goodness washed about you like sun-warmed water, if sterile yet translucently pure.

And so the months accumulated. The clear colours of spring ripened to the hotter gamut of mid-summer, to an August splendour of ripening harvest in field, orchard and hedgerow, and thence to the purple, russet and gold of autumn. The birds, their nesting finished, ceased from song, as the active care of hungry fledglings grew on them. The swallows had gathered for their southern flight, and the water-fowl returned from their northern immigration to the waters and reed-beds of the Haven, Sir Charles Verity's book, in two handsome quarto volumes, had been duly reviewed and found a place of honour in every library, worth the name, in the United Kingdom, before anything of serious importance occurred directly affecting our maiden. Throughout spring, summer and the first weeks of autumn, she marked time merely. Her activities and emotions—in as far, that is, as outward expression of these last went—were vicarious, those of others. She glowed over and gloried in the triumph of her father's book, it is true, but it was his adventure, after all, rather than her own.

Then suddenly, as is the way with life, events crowded on one another, the drama thickened, sensation was tuned to a higher pitch. And it all began, not unludicrously, through the praiseworthy, if rather ill-timed moral indignation of Canon Horniblow's newly installed curate, Reginald Sawyer.

CHAPTER II

RECALLING, IN SOME PARTICULARS, THE EASIEST RECORDED THEFT IN HUMAN HISTORY

He was short, neat, spectacled, in manner prompt and perky, in age under thirty, a townsman by birth and education, hailing from Midlandshire. Further, a strong advocate of organization, and imbued with the deepest respect for the obligations and prerogatives of his profession upon the ethical side. He took himself very seriously; and so took, also, the decalogue as delivered to mankind amid the thunders of Sinai. Keep the Ten Commandments, according to the letter, and you may confidently expect all things, spiritual and temporal, to be added unto you—such was the basis of his teaching and of his private creed.

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He came to Deadham ardent for the reformation of that remote, benighted spot, so disgracefully, as he feared—and rather hoped—behind the times. He suspected its canon-vicar of being very much too easy-going; and its population, in respect of moral conduct, of being lamentably lax. In neither of which suppositions, it must be admitted, was he altogether incorrect. But he intended to alter all that!—Regarding himself thus, in the light of a providentially selected new broom, he applied himself diligently to sweep. A high-minded and earnest, if not conspicuously well-bred young man, he might in a suburban parish have done excellent work. But upon Deadham, with its enervating, amorous climate and queer inheritance of forest and seafaring—in other words poaching and smuggling—blood, he was wasted, out of his element and out of touch. The slow moving South Saxon cocked a shrewd sceptical eye at him, sized him up and down and sucked in its cheek refusing to be impressed. While by untoward accident, his misfortune rather than his fault, the earliest of his moral sweepings brought him into collision with the most reactionary element in the community, namely the inhabitants of the black cottages upon the Island.

The event fell out thus. The days shortened, the evenings lengthened growing misty and secret as October advanced. The roads became plashy and rutted, the sides of them silent with fallen leaves under foot. An odd sense of excitement flickers through such autumn twilights. Boys herded in little troops on wickedness intent. Whooping and whistling to disarm their elders' suspicion until the evil deed should be fairly within reach, then mum as mice, stealthily vanishing, becoming part and parcel of the earth, the hedge, the harsh dusky grasses of the sand-hills, the foreshore lumber on the beach.

Late one afternoon, the hour of a hidden sunset, Reginald Sawyer called at The Hard; and to his eminent satisfaction—for social aspirations were by no means foreign to him—was invited to remain to tea. The ladies—Damaris and Miss Felicia—were kind, the cakes and cream superlative. He left in high feather; and, at Damaris' suggestion, took a short cut through the Wilderness and by a path crossing the warren to the lane, leading up from the causeway, which joins the high-road just opposite the post office and Mrs. Doubleday's shop. By following this route he would save quite half a mile on his homeward journey; since the Grey House, where he enjoyed the Miss Minetts' assiduous and genteel hospitality, is situate at the extreme end of Deadham village on the road to Lampit.

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Out on the warren, notwithstanding the hour and the mist, it was still fairly light, the zigzagging sandy path plainly visible between the heath, furze brakes, stunted firs and thorn bushes. The young clergyman, although more familiar with crowded pavements and flare of gas-lamps than open moorland in the deepening dusk, pursued his way without difficulty. What a wild region it was though! He thought of the sober luxury of the library at The Hard, the warmth, the shaded lights, the wealth of books; of the grace of Damaris' clothing and her person, and wondered how people of position and education could be content to live in so out of the way and savage a spot. It was melancholy to a degree, in his opinion.—Oh! well, he must do his best to wake it up, infuse a spirit of progress into it more in keeping with nineteenth-century ideas. Everyone would be grateful to him—

A little questioning pause—assurance in momentary eclipse. Then with renewed cheerfulness—Of course they would—the upper classes, that is. For they must feel the disadvantages of living in such a back-water. He gave them credit for the wish to advance could they but find the way. All they needed was leadership, which Canon Horniblow—evidently past his work—was powerless to supply. He, Sawyer, came as a pioneer. Once they grasped that fact they would rally to him. The good Miss Minetts were rallying hard, so to speak, already. Oh! there was excellent material in Deadham among the gentlefolk. It merely needed working, needed bringing out.

From the lower, the wage-earning class, sunk as it was in ignorance, he must, he supposed, expect but a poor response, opposition not impossibly. Opposition would not daunt him. You must be prepared to do people good, if not with, then against their will. He was here to make them rebel against and shake off the remnants of the Dark Ages amid which they so extraordinarily appeared still to live. He had no conception so low a state of civilization could exist within little over a hundred miles of the metropolis!—It was a man's work, anyhow, and he must put his back into it. Must organize—word of power—organize night classes, lectures with lantern slides, social evenings, a lads' club. Above all was there room and necessity for this last. The Deadham lads were very rowdy, very unruly. They gathered at corners in an objectionable manner; hung about the public-house. He must undersell the public-house by offering counter attractions. Amongst the men he suspected a sad amount of drinking. Their speech, too, was so reprehensibly coarse. He had heard horrible language in the village street. He reproved the offenders openly, as was his duty, and his admonitions were greeted with a laugh, an insolent, offensive, jeering laugh.

Sawyer cut at the dark straggling furzes bordering the path with his walking-stick. Recollection of that laugh made him go red about the ears; made his skin tingle and his eyes smart. It represented an insult not only to himself but to his cloth. Yet he'd not lost control of himself, he was glad to remember, though the provocation was rank—

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He cut at the furze again, being by nature combative. And—stopped short, with a start, a tremor running through him. Something rustled, scuttled away amongst the bushes, and something flapped upward behind him into the thick lowering sky above. A wailing cry—whether human, or of bird or beast, he was uncomfortably ignorant—came out of the mist ahead, to be answered by a like and nearer cry from a spot which he failed, in his agitation, to locate.

Under ordinary conditions the young cleric was neither troubled by imagination nor lacking in pluck. His habitual outlook was sensible, literal and direct. But, it must be owned, this wide indistinct landscape, over which pale vapours trailed and brooded, the immense loneliness of the felt rather than seen, expanse of water, marsh and mud-flat of the Haven—the tide being low—along with the goblin whispering chuckle of the river speeding seaward away there on his left, made him oddly jumpy and nervous. No human being was in sight, neither did any human dwelling show signs of habitation. He wished he had gone round by the road and through the length of the village. He registered a vow against short cuts—save in broad daylight—for his present surroundings inspired him with the liveliest distrust. They were to him positively nightmarish. He suffered the nastiest little fears of what might follow him, what might, even now, peer and lurk. Heretofore he had considered the earth as so much dead matter, to be usefully and profitably exploited by all-dominant man—specially by men of his own creed and race. But now the power of the earth laid hands on him. She lived, and mankind dwindled to the proportions of parasitic insects, at most irritating some small portions of her skin, her vast indifferent surface. Such ideas had never occurred to him before. He resented them—essayed to put them from him as trenching on blasphemy.

Starting on again, angry alike with himself for entertaining, and with the unknown for engendering, such subversive notions, his pace unconsciously quickened to a run. But the line of some half-dozen ragged Scotch firs, which here topped the low cliff bordering the river, to his disordered vision seemed most uncomfortably to run alongside him, stretching gaunt arms through the encircling mist to arrest his flight.

He regarded them with an emotion of the liveliest antipathy; consciously longing, meanwhile, for the humming thoroughfares of his native industrial town, for the rattle and grind of the horse-trams, the brightly lighted shop-fronts, the push all about him of human labour, of booming trade and vociferous politics. Even the glare of a gin palace, flooding out across the crowded pavement at some street corner, would have, just now, been fraught with solace, convinced prohibitionist though he was. For he would, at least, have been in no doubt how to feel towards that stronghold of Satan—righteously thanking God he was not as those reprehensible others, who passed in and out of its ever-swinging doors. While towards this earth dominance, this dwarfing of human life by the life of things he had hitherto called inanimate, he did not know how to feel at all. It attacked some unarmoured, unprotected part of him. Against its assault he was defenceless.

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With a sense of escape from actual danger, whether physical or moral he did not stay to enquire, he stumbled, a few minutes later, through a gap in the earth-bank into the wet side lane. Arrived, he gave himself a moment's breathing space. It was darker here than out upon the warren; but, anyhow, this was a lane. It had direction and meaning. Men had constructed it for the linking up of house with house, hamlet with hamlet. Like all roads, it represented the initial instinct of communal life, the basis of a reasoned social order, of civilization in short. He walked forward over the soft couch of fallen, water-soaked leaves, his boots squelching at times into inches of sucking mud, and his spirits rose. He began to enter into normal relations both with himself and with things in general. A hundred yards or so and the village green would be reached.

Then on his left, behind an ill-kept quick-set hedge that guarded a strip of garden and orchard, he became aware of movement. Among the apple trees three small figures shuffled about some dark recumbent object. For the most part they went on all fours, but at moments reared up on their hind legs. Their action was at once silent, stealthy and purposeful. Our young clergyman's shortness of sight rendered their appearance the more peculiar. His normal attitude was not so completely restored, moreover, but that they caused him another nervous tremor. Then he grasped the truth; while the detective, latent in every moralist, sprang to attention. Here were criminals to be brought to justice, criminals caught red-handed. Reginald Sawyer, having been rather badly scared himself, lusted—though honestly ignorant of any personal touch in the matter—to very badly scare others.

Standing back beside the half-open gate, screened by the hedge, here high and straggling, he awaited the psychological moment, ready to pounce. To enter the orchard and confront these sinners with their crime, if their activities did by chance happen to be legitimate, was to put himself altogether in the wrong. He would bide his time, would let them conclude their—in his belief—nefarious business and challenge them as they passed out.

Nor had he long to wait. The two smaller boys, breathing hard, hoisted the bulging, half-filled sack on to the back of their bigger companion; who, bowed beneath its weight, grunting with exertion, advanced towards the exit.

Sawyer laid aside his walking-stick, and, as the leader of the procession came abreast of him, pounced. But missed his aim. Upon which the boy cast down the sack, from the mouth of which apples, beets, turnips rolled into the road; and, with a yelp, bolted down the lane towards the causeway, leaving his accomplices to their fate. These, thrown into confusion by the suddenness of his desertion, hesitated and were lost. For, pouncing again, and that the more warily for his recent failure, Sawyer collared one with either hand.

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They were maladorous children; and the young clergyman, grasping woollen jersey-neck and shirt-band, the backs of his hands in contact with the backs of their moist, warm, dirty little necks, suffered disgust, yet held them the more firmly.

“I am convinced you have no right to that fruit or to those vegetables. You are stealing. Give an account of yourselves at once.”

And he shook them slightly to emphasize his command. One hung on his hand, limp as a rag. The other showed fight, kicking our friend liberally about the shins, with hobnailed boots which did, most confoundly, hurt.

“You lem’ me go,” he cried. “Lem’ me go, or I’ll tell father, and first time you come along by our place ’e’ll set the ratting dawgs on to you. Our ole bitch ’as got ’er teeth yet. She’ll bite. Ketch the fleshy part of your leg, she will, and just tear and bite.”

This carrying of war into the enemy’s country proved as disconcerting as unexpected, while to mention the sex of an animal was, in Reginald Sawyer’s opinion, to be guilty of unpardonable coarseness. The atmosphere of a Protestant middle-class home clung to him yet, begetting in him a squeamishness, not to say prudery, almost worthy of his hostesses, the Miss Minetts. He shook the culprits again, with a will. He also blushed.

“If you were honest you would be anxious to give an account of yourselves,” he asserted, ignoring the unpleasant matter of the dogs. “I am afraid you are very wicked boys. You have stolen these vegetables and fruits. Thieves are tried by the magistrates, you know, and sent to prison. I shall take you to the police-station. There the constable will find means to make you confess.”

Beyond provoking a fresh paroxysm of kicking, these adjurations were without result. His captives appeared equally impervious to shame, contrition or alarm. They remained obstinately mute. Whereupon it began to dawn upon their captor that his position risked becoming not a little invidious, since the practical difficulty of carrying his threats into execution was so great. How could he haul two sturdy, active children, plus a sack still containing a goodly quantity of garden produce, some quarter of a mile without help? To let them go, on the other hand, was to have them incontinently vanish into those trailing whitish vapours creeping over the face of the landscape. And, once vanished, they were lost to him, since he knew neither their names nor dwelling place; and could, with no certainty, identify them, having seen them only in the act of struggle and in this uncertain evening light. He felt himself very nastily planted on the horns of a dilemma, when on a sudden there arrived help.

A vehicle of some description turned out of the main road and headed down the lane.

Laocooen-like, flanked on either hand by a writhing youthful figure, Reginald Sawyer called aloud:

“Hi!—Stop, there—pray, stop.”

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Darcy Faircloth lighted down out of a ramshackle Marychurch station fly, and advanced towards the rather incomprehensible group.

“What’s happened? What’s the matter?” he said. “What on earth do you want with those two youngsters?”

“I want to convey them to the proper authorities,” Sawyer answered, with all the self-importance he could muster. He found his interlocutor’s somewhat abrupt and lordly manner at once annoying and impressive, as were his commanding height and rather ruffling gait. “These boys have been engaged in robbing a garden. I caught them in the act, and it is my duty to see that they pay the penalty of their breach of the law. I count on your assistance in taking them to the police-station.”

“You want to give them in charge?”

“What else?—The moral tone of this parish is, I grieve to say, very low.”

Sawyer talked loud and fast in the effort to assert himself.

“Low and coarse,” he repeated. “Both as a warning to others, and in the interests of their own future, an example must be made of these two lads.”

“Must it?” Faircloth said, towering above him in the pale bewildering mist.

The little boys, who had remained curiously and rather dangerously still since the advent of this stranger, now strained together, signalling, whispering. Sawyer shook them impatiently apart.

“Steady there, please,” Faircloth put in sharply. “It strikes me you take a good deal upon yourself. May I ask who you are?”

“I am the assistant priest,” Reginald began. But his explanation was cut short by piping voices.

“It’s Cap’en Darcy, that’s who it is. We never meant no ’arm, Cap’en. That we didn’t. The apples was rotting on the ground, s’h’lp me if they wasn’t. Grannie Staples was took to the Union last Wednesday fortnight, and anyone’s got the run of her garden since. Don’t you let the new parson get us put away, Cap’en. We belongs to the Island —I’m William Jennifer’s Tommy, please Cap’en, and ’e’s Bobby Sclanders ’e is.”

And being cunning, alike by nature and stress of circumstance, they pathetically drooped, blubbering in chorus:

“We never didn’t mean no ’arm, Cap’en. Strike me dead if we did.”

At which last implied profanity Reginald Sawyer shuddered, loosening his grasp.

Of what followed he could subsequently give no definite account. The dignities of his sacred profession and his self-respect alike reeled ignominiously into chaos. He believed he heard the person, addressed as Captain Darcy, say quietly:

“Cut it, youngsters. Now’s your chance.”

He felt that both the children violently struggled, and that the round hard head of one of them butted him in the stomach. He divined that sounds of ribald laughter, in the distance, proceeded from the driver of the Marychurch station fly. He knew two small figures raced whooping down the lane attended by squelchings of mud and clatter of heavy soled boots.

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Knew, further, that Captain Darcy, after nonchalantly picking up the sack, dropping it within the garden hedge and closing the rickety gate, stood opposite him and quite civilly said:

“I am sorry I could not give you the sort of assistance, sir, which you asked. But the plan would not have worked.”

Sawyer boiled over.

“You have compounded a felony and done all that lay in your power to undermine my authority with my parishioners. Fortunately I retain the boys’ names and can make further enquiries. This, however, by no means relieves you of the charge of having behaved with reprehensible levity both towards my office and myself.”

“No—no,” Faircloth returned, goodnaturedly. “Sleep upon it, and you will take an easier view of the transaction. I have saved you from putting unmerited disgrace upon two decent families and getting yourself into hot water up to the neck. I know these Deadham folk better than you do. I’m one of them, you see, myself. They’ve uncommonly long memories where they’re offended, though it may suit them to speak you soft. Take it from me, you’ll never hound them into righteousness. They turn as stubborn as so many mules under the whip.”

He hailed the waiting flyman.

“Good evening to you, sir,” he said. And followed by the carriage, piled with sea-chest and miscellaneous baggage, departed into the mysteriousness of deepening dusk.

Had the young clergyman been willing to leave it at that, all might yet have been well, his ministry at Deadham a prolonged and fruitful one, since his intentions, at least, were excellent. But, as ill-luck would have it, while still heated and sore, every feather on end, his natural combativeness almost passionately on top, turning out in the high-road he encountered Dr. Cripps, faring westward like himself on the way to visit a patient at Lampit. The two joined company, falling into a conversation the more confidential that the increasing darkness gave them a sense of isolation and consequent intimacy.

Of all his neighbours, the doctor—a peppery disappointed man, struggling with a wide-strewn country practice mainly prolific of bad debts, conscious of his own inefficiency and perpetually smarting under imagined injuries and slights—was the very last person to exercise a mollifying influence upon Sawyer in his existing angry humour. The latter recounted and enlarged upon the insults he had just now suffered. His hearer fanned the flame of indignation with comment and innuendo—recognized Faircloth from the description, and proceeded to wash his hands in scandalous insinuation at the young sea-captain’s expense.

For example, had not an eye to business dictated the sheltering from justice of those infant, apple-stealing reprobates? Their respective fathers were good customers! The islanders all had the reputation of hard drinkers—and an innkeeper hardly invites occasion to lower his receipts. The inn stood in old Mrs. Faircloth's name, it is true; but the son profited, at all events vicariously, by its prosperity. A swaggering fellow, with an inordinate opinion of his own ability and merits; but in that he shared a family failing. For arrogance and assumption the whole clan was difficult to beat.

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“You have heard whose son this young Faircloth is, of course?”

Startled by the question, and its peculiar implication, Reginald Sawyer hesitatingly admitted his ignorance.

The Grey House stands flush with the road, and the two gentlemen finished their conversation upon the doorstep. Above them a welcoming glow shone through the fanlight; otherwise its windows were shuttered and blank.

“This is a matter of common knowledge,” Dr. Cripps said; “but one about which, for reasons of policy, or, more truly, of snobbery, it is the fashion to keep silent. So, for goodness’ sake, don’t give me as your authority if you should ever have occasion to speak of it”—

And lowering his voice he mentioned a name.

“As like as two peas,” he added, “when you see them side by side—which, in point of fact, you never do. Oh! I promise you the whole dirty business has been remarkably well engineered—hush-money, I suppose. Sometimes I am tempted to think poverty is the only punishable sin in this world. For those who have a good balance at their bankers there is always a safe way out of even the most disgraceful imbroglios of this sort. But I must be moving on, Mr. Sawyer. I sympathize with your annoyance. You have been very offensively treated. Good night.”

The young clergyman remained planted on the doorstep, incapable of ringing the bell and presenting himself to his assiduously attentive hostesses, the Miss Minetts, for the moment.

He was, in truth, indescribably shocked. Deadham presented itself to his mind as a place accursed, a veritable sink of iniquity. High and low alike, its inhabitants were under condemnation.—And he had so enjoyed his tea with the ladies at The Hard. Had been so flattered by their civility, spreading himself in the handsome room, agreeably sensible of its books, pictures, ornaments, and air of cultured leisure.—While behind all that, as he now learned, was this glaring moral delinquency! Never had he been more cruelly deceived. He felt sick with disgust. What callousness, what hypocrisy!—He recalled his disquieting sensations in crossing the warren. Was the very soil of this place tainted, exhaling evil?

He made a return upon himself. For what, after all, was he here for save to let in light and combat evil, to bring home the sense of sin to the inhabitants of this place, convincing them of the hatefulness of the moral slough in which they so revoltingly wallowed. He must slay and spare not. He saw himself as David, squaring up to Goliath, as Christian fighting single-handed against the emissaries of Satan who essayed to defeat his pilgrimage. Yes, he would smite these lawbreakers hip and thigh,

whatever their superficial claims to his respect, whatever their worldly position. He would read them all a lesson—that King Log, Canon Horniblow, included.

He at once pitied and admired himself, not being a close critic of his own motives; telling himself he did well to be angry, while ignoring the element of personal pique which gave point and satisfaction to that anger.

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He was silent and reserved with the Miss Minetts at supper; and retired early to his own room to prepare a sermon.

CHAPTER III

BROTHER AND SISTER

Upon the Sunday morning following, Damaris went to the eleven o'clock service alone. Miss Felicia Verity attended church at an earlier hour to-day, partly in the interests of private devotion, partly in those of a person she had warmly befriended in the past, and wanted to befriend in the present—but with delicacy, with tact and due consideration for the susceptibilities of others. She wished earnestly to effect a reconciliation; but not to force it. To force it was to endanger its sincerity and permanence. It should seem to come about lightly, naturally. Therefore did she go out early to perfect her plans—of which more hereafter—as well as to perform her religious duties. Sir Charles Verity was from home, staying with Colonel Carteret for partridge shooting, over the Norfolk stubble-fields. The habit of this annual visit had, for the last two seasons, been in abeyance; but now, with his return to The Hard, was pleasantly revived, although this autumn, owing to business connected with the publication of his book, the visit took place a few weeks later than usual.

Hence did Damaris—arrayed in a russet-red serge gown, black velvet collar and cuffs to its jacket of somewhat manly cut, and a russet-red upstanding plume in her close-fitting black velvet hat—set forth alone to church. This, after redirecting such letters as had arrived for her father by the morning post. One of them bore the embossed arms of the India Office, and signature of the, then, Secretary of State for that department in the corner of the envelope. She looked at it with a measure of respect and curiosity, wondering as to the purport of its contents. She studied the envelope, turning it about in the hope of gleaning enlightenment from its external aspect. Still wondering, slightly oppressed even by a persuasion—of which she could not rid herself—that it held matters of no common moment closely affecting her father, she went out of the house, down the sheltered drive, and through the entrance gates. Here, as she turned inland, the verve of the clear autumn morning rushed on her, along with a wild flurry of falling leaves dancing to the breath of the crisp northerly breeze.

A couple of fine days, with a hint of frost in the valley by night, after a spell of soft mists and wet, sent the leaves down in fluttering multitudes, so that now all trees, save the oaks only, were bare. These—by which the road is, just here, overhung—still solidly clothed in copper, amber and—matching our maiden's gown—in russet-red, offered sturdy defiance to the weather. The sound of them, a dry crowded rustling, had a certain note of courage and faithfulness in it which caused Damaris to wait awhile and listen; yet a wistfulness also, since to her hearing a shudder stirred beneath its bravery, preluding the coming rigours of winter.

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And that wistfulness rather strangely enlarged its meaning and area, as the reiterated ting, tang, tong of Deadham's church bells recalled the object of her walk. For English church services, of the parochial variety such as awaited her, had but little, she feared, to give. Little, that is, towards the re-living of those instants of exalted spiritual perception which had been granted to her at distant Avila.

In overstrained and puritanic dread of idolatory, the English Church has gone lamentably far to forfeit its sacramental birthright. It savours too strongly of the school and class-room, basing its appeal upon words, upon spoken expositions, instructive no doubt, but cold, academic. It offers no tangible object of worship to sight or sense. Its so-called altars are empty. Upon them no sacrifice is offered, no presence abidingly dwells. In its teaching the communion of saints and forgiveness of sins are phrases rather than living agencies. Its atmosphere is self-conscious, its would-be solemnity forced.—This, in any case, was how Damaris saw the whole matter—though, let us hasten to add, she was modest enough to question whether the fault might not very well be in herself rather than in our national variant of the Christian Faith. Many sweet, good persons—dear Aunt Felicia among them—appeared to find Anglican ministrations altogether sufficient for their religious needs. But to Damaris those ministrations failed to bring any moment of vision, of complete detachment. She must be to blame, she supposed—which was discouraging, a little outcasting and consequently sad.

In a somewhat pensive spirit she therefore, pursued her way, until, where the prospect widened as she reached the village green, a larger sky disclosed itself flaked with light cirrus cloud. This glory of space, and the daring northerly breeze blowing out from it, sent her fancy flying. It beckoned to journeyings, to far coasts and unknown seas—an offshore wind, filling the sails of convoys outward bound. And, with the thought of ships upon the sea, came the thought of Darcy Faircloth, and that with sharp revolt against the many existing hindrances to his and her intercourse. Freedom seemed abroad this morning. Even the leaves declared for liberty, courting individual adventure upon the wings of that daring wind. And this sense of surrounding activity worked upon Damaris, making her doubly impatient of denials and arbitrary restraints. She sent her soul after Darcy Faircloth across the waste of waters, fondly, almost fiercely seeking him. But her soul refused to travel, curiously turning homeward again, as though aware not the prodigious fields of ocean, nor any loud-voiced foreign port of call, held knowledge of him, but rather the immediate scene, the silver-glinting levels of the Haven and lonely stone-built inn.

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Deadham church, originally a chapelry of Marychurch Abbey, crowns a green monticule in the centre of Deadham village, backed by a row of big elms.—A wide, low-roofed structure, patched throughout the course of centuries beyond all unity and precision of design; yet still showing traces of Norman work in the arch of the belfry and in the pillars supporting the rafters of the middle aisle. At the instance of a former vicar, the whole interior received a thick coat of whitewash, alike over plaster and stone. This, at the time in question, had been in places scraped off, bringing to light some mural paintings of considerable interest and antiquity.

In the chancel, upon the gospel side, is a finely-carved tomb, with recumbent figures of an armoured knight and richly-robed lady, whose slippered feet push against the effigy of a particularly alert, sharp-muzzled little hound. The two front pews, in the body of the church, at the foot of the said tomb, are allotted to the owner and household at The Hard. The slender, lively little hound and the two sculptured figures lying, peaceful in death, for ever side by side, touched and captivated Damaris from the first time she set eyes on them. She reverenced and loved them, weaving endless stories about them when, in the tedium of prayer or over-lengthy sermon, her attention, all too often, strayed.

This morning the three bells jangled altogether as she reached the churchyard gate. Then the smallest tolled alone, hurrying stragglers. She was indeed late, the bulk of the congregation already seated, the Canon at the reading-desk and Mrs. Horniblow wheezing forth a voluntary upon the harmonium, when she walked up the aisle.

But, during her brief passage, Damaris could not but observe the largeness of the assembly. An uncommon wave of piety must have swept over the parish this morning! The Battyes and Taylors were present in force. Farmers and tradespeople mustered in impressive array. Even Dr. Cripps—by no means a frequent churchgoer—and his forlorn-looking, red-eyed little wife were there. The Miss Minetts had a lady with them—a plump, short little person, dressed with attempted fashion, whose back struck Damaris as quaintly familiar, she catching a glimpse of it in passing. Most surprising of all, William Jennifer headed a contingent from the Island, crowding the men's free seats to right and left of the west door. An expectancy, moreover, seemed to animate the throng. Then she remembered, the new curate, Reginald Sawyer, had informed her and Miss Felicia two evenings ago when he had called and been bidden to stay to tea, that he would preach for the first time at the eleven o'clock service. So far he had only occupied the pulpit on Sunday afternoons, when a country congregation is liable to be both scanty and somnolent. To-day he would prove himself before the heads of tribes, before the notables. And Damaris wished him well, esteeming him a worthy young man, if somewhat provincial and superfluously pompous.

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In the servants' pew directly behind, Mary and Mrs. Cooper were duly ensconced, supported by Mr. Patch, two small male Patches, white-collared and shining with excess of cleanliness, wedged in between him and his stable sub-ordinate Conyers, the groom. The Hard thus made a commendably respectable show, as Damaris reflected with satisfaction.

She stood, she knelt, her prayer book open upon the carved margin of the tomb, the slender crossed legs and paws of the alert little marble dog serving as so often before for bookrest. Canon Horniblow boomed and droned, like some unctuous giant bumble-bee, from the reading-desk. The choir intoned responses from the gallery with liberal diversity of pitch. And presently, alas! Damaris' thoughts began to wander, making flitting excursions right and left. For half-way through the litany some belated worshipper arrived, causing movement in the men's free seats. This oddly disturbed her. Her mind flew again to Faircloth, and the strange impression of her own soul's return declaring this and no other to be his actual neighbourhood. And if it indeed were so?—Damaris thrust back the emotions begotten of that question, as unpermissibly stormy at this time and in this place.

She tried to fix her thoughts wholly upon the office. But, all too soon they sprang aside again, now circling about the enigmatic back beheld in the Miss Minetts' pew. Of whom did that round, dressy little form remind her? Why—why—of Theresa, of course. Not Theresa, genius and saint of Spanish Avila; but Theresa Bilson, her sometime governess-companion of doubtfully amiable memory. She longed to satisfy herself, but could only do so by turning round and looking squarely—a manoeuvre impossible during the prayers, but which might be accomplished later, when the congregation rose to sing the hymn before the sermon.

She must wait. And during that waiting light, rather divertingly, broke in on her. For supposing her belief as to the lady's identity correct, must not dear Aunt Felicia be party to this resurrection? Had not she known, and stolen forth this morning to perfect some innocent plot of peace-making? In furtherance of which she now cunningly remained at home, thus leaving Damaris free to offer renewal of favour or withhold it as she pleased. Was not that deliciously characteristic of Aunt Felicia and her permanent effort to serve two masters—to make everybody happy, and, regardless of conflicting interests, everybody else too?—Well, Damaris was ready to fulfil her wishes. She bore Theresa no ill-will. An inclination to grudge or resentment seemed to her unworthy. Whatever Theresa's tiresomenesses, they were over and done with, surely, quite immensely long ago.

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The hymn given out and the tune of it played through, the assembly scraped and rustled to its feet. Damaris standing, in height overtopping her neighbours, discreetly turned her head. Let her eyes rest an instant, smiling, upon the upturned polished countenances of the two small Patches—shyly watching her—and then seek a more distant goal. Yes, veritably Theresa Bilson in the flesh—very much in the flesh, full of face and plump of bosom, gold-rimmed glasses gleaming, her mouth opened wide in song. It was a little astonishing to see her so unchanged. For how much had happened since the day of that choir-treat, at Harchester, which marked her deposition, the day of Damaris' sleep in the sunshine and awakening in the driving wet out on the Bar.—The day wherein so much began, and so much ended, slashed across and across with an extravagance of lasting joy and lasting pain!—In the sense of it all Damaris lost herself a little, becoming forgetful of her existing situation. She looked past, over Theresa and beyond.

At the extreme end of the church, in the last of the free seats where the light from the west door streamed inward, a man's figure detached itself with singular distinctness from the background of whitewashed wall. He, too, overtopped his fellows, and that by several inches. And from the full length of the building, across the well-filled benches, his glance sought and met that of Damaris, and held it in fearless, high security of affection not to be gainsaid.

The nice, clean-shining little Patches, still watching shyly out of their brown, glossy, mouse-like eyes, to their extreme mystification saw the colour flood Damaris' face, saw her lips tremble and part as in prelude to happy speech. Then saw her grow very pale, and, turning away, clutch at the head of the alert little hound. Mrs. Cooper delivered herself of a quite audible whisper to the effect—"that Miss Damaris was took faint-like, as she feared." And Mary leaned forward over the front of the pew in quick anxiety. But our maiden's weakness was but passing. She straightened herself, stood tall and proudly again, looking at the knight and his lady lying so peacefully side by side upon their marble couch. She gathered them into her gladness—they somehow sympathized, she felt, in her present sweet and poignant joy. Her soul had known best, had been right in its homing—since Faircloth was here—was here.

That sweet, poignant joy flooded her, so that she wordlessly gave thanks and praise. He was in life—more, was within sight of her, hearing the same sounds, breathing the same air. Across the short dividing space, spirit had embraced spirit. He claimed her. —Had not his will, indeed, far more than any curiosity regarding the identity of poor, plump little Theresa, compelled her to look around?

She demanded nothing further, letting herself dwell in a perfection of content—without before or after—possible only to the pure in heart and to the young.

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The hymn concluded, Damaris knelt, while Reginald Sawyer, having mounted into the pulpit, read the invocation; mechanically rose from her knees with the rest, and disposed herself in the inner corner of the pew, sitting sideways so that her left hand might rest upon the carven marble margin of the tomb. She liked touch of it still, in the quietude of her great content, cherishing a pretty fancy of the knight and his lady's sympathy and that also of their sprightly little footstool dog.

Otherwise she was deaf to outward things, deliciously oblivious, wrapped away sweetly within herself. Hence she quite failed to notice how awkwardly Sawyer stumbled, treading on the fronts of his long surplice when going up the pulpit stairs. How he fumbled with his manuscript as he flattened it out on the cushioned desk. Or how husky was his voice, to the point of the opening sentences being almost inaudible. The young clergyman suffered, indeed, so it appeared, from a painfully excessive fit of nervousness. All this she missed, not awakening from her state of blissful trance until the sermon had been under way some good five to ten minutes.

Her awakening even then was gradual. It was also unpleasant. It began in vague and uneasy suspicion of something unusual and agitating toward. In consciousness of a hushed and strained attention, very foreign to the customary placid, not to say bovine, indifference of the ordinary country congregation. The preacher's voice was audible enough now, in good truth, though still under insufficient control. It roared, cracked upward, approaching a scream. Sentences trod on one another's heels, so rapid was his delivery; or bumped and jolted so overlaid was it with emphasis. He, dealt in ugly words, too—"lies, drunkenness, theft, profanity;" and worse still, "uncleanness, adultery, carnal debauchery." For not venial sins only, but mortal sins likewise were rife in Deadham, as he averred, matters of common knowledge and everyday occurrence—-tolerated if not openly encouraged, callously winked at. The public conscience could hardly be said to exist, so indurated was it, so moribund through lack of stimulation and through neglect. Yet such wickedness, sooner or later, must call down the vengeance of an offended God. It would be taken upon these lawbreakers. Here or hereafter these evil-livers would receive the chastisement their deeds invited and deserved. Let no man deceive himself. God is just. He is also very terrible in judgment. Hell yawns for the impenitent.

Breathless, he paused; and a subdued sigh, an instinctive shuffling of feet ran through the assembly.—Yet these were but generalities after all, often heard before, when you came to think, though seldom so forcibly put. Every man made liberal gift of such denunciations to his neighbours, rather than applied their lesson to himself. But Reginald Sawyer was merely gathering energy, gathering courage for more detailed assault.

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He felt nervous to the verge of collapse—a new and really horrible experience. His head was hot, his feet cold. The temptation simply and crudely to give in, bundle down the pulpit stairs and bolt, was contemptibly great. His eyesight played tricks on him. Below there, in the body of the church, the rows of faces ran together into irregular pink blots spread meaninglessly above the brown of the oaken pews, the brown, drab, and black, too, of their owners' Sunday best. Here and there a child's light frock or white hat intruded upon the prevailing neutral tints; as did, in a startling manner, Damaris Verity's russet-red plume and suit.

Time and again, since he began his sermon, had that dash of rich colour drawn his reluctant attention. He recoiled from, oddly dreaded it—now more than ever, since to him it rather mercilessly focussed the subject and impending climax of his denunciatory address.

The pause began to affect the waiting congregation, which stirred uneasily. Some one coughed. And Sawyer was a sufficiently practised speaker to know that, once you lose touch with an audience, it is next to impossible successfully to regain your ascendency over it. Unless he was prepared to accept ignominious defeat he must brace himself, or it would be too late. He abominated defeat. Therefore, summoning all his native combativeness, he took his own fear by the throat, straightened his manuscript upon the desk, and vehemently broke forth into speech.

—Did his hearers deny or doubt the truth of his assertions, suppose that he spoke at random, or without realization of the heavy responsibility he incurred in advancing such accusations? They were in error, so he told them. He advanced no accusations which he could not justify by examples chosen from among themselves, from among residents in this parish. He would be false to his duty both to them—his present audience—and to his and their Creator, were he to abstain from giving those examples out of respect of persons. Other occupants of this pulpit might have—he feared had—allowed worldly considerations to influence and silence them.

A nasty cut this, at the poor vicar-canon, increasingly a prey to distracted fidgets, sitting helpless in the chancel.

But of such pusillanimity, such time-serving, he—Reginald Sawyer—scorned to be guilty. The higher placed the sinner, the more heinous the sin.—He would deal faithfully with all, since not only was the salvation of each one in jeopardy, but his own salvation was in peril likewise, inasmuch as, at the dread Last Assize, he would be required to give account of his stewardship in respect of this sinful place.

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Thus far Damaris had listened in deepening distaste. Surely the young man very much magnified his office, was in manner exaggerated, in matter aggressive and verbose? Notwithstanding its attempted solemnity and heat, his sermon seemed to be conventional, just a “way of talking,” and a conceited one at that. But, as he proceeded to set forth his promised examples of local ill-living, distaste passed into bewilderment and finally into a sense of outrage, blank and absolute. He named no names, and wrapped his statements up in Biblical language. Yet they remained suggestive and significant enough. He spoke, surely, of those whose honour was dearest to her, whom she boundlessly loved. Under plea of rebuking vice, he laid bare the secrets, violated the sanctities of their private lives. Yet was not that incredible? All decencies of custom and usage forbade it, stamped such disclosure as unpermissible, fantastic. He must be mad, or she herself mad, mishearing, misconceiving him.

“Adulterous father, bastard son—publican sheltering youthful offenders from healthy punishment in the interests of personal gain.”—Of that last she made nothing, failed to follow it. But the rest?—

It was true, too. But not as he represented it, all its tragic beauty, all the nobleness which tempered and, in a measure at least, discounted the great wrong of it, stripped away—leaving it naked, torn from its setting, without context and so without perspective. Against this not only her tenderness, but sense of justice, passionately fought. He made it monstrous and, in that far, untrue, as caricature is untrue, crying aloud for explanation and analysis. Yet who could explain? Circumstances of time and place rendered all protest impossible. Nothing could be done, nothing said. Thus her beloved persons were exposed, judged, condemned unheard, without opportunity of defence.

And realizing this, realizing redress hopelessly barred, she cowered down, her head bowed, almost to the level of the marble couch whereon the figures of knight and lady reposed in the high serenity of love and death. Happier they than she, poor child, for her pride trailed in the dust, her darling romance of brother and sister and all the rare pieties of her heart, defiled by a shameful publicity, exposed for every Tom, Dick and Harry to paw over and sneer at!

Horror of a crowd, which watches the infliction of some signal disgrace, tormented her imagination, moreover, to the temporary breaking of her spirit. Whether that crowd was, in the main, hostile or sympathetic mattered nothing. The fact that it silently sat there, silently observed, made every member of it, for the time, her enemy. Even the trusted servants just behind, comfortable comely Mary, soft Mrs. Cooper, the devoted Patch, were hateful to her as the rest. Their very loyalty—which she for no instant doubted—went only to fill the cup of her humiliation to the brim.

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Reginald Sawyer's voice continued; but what he said now she neither heard nor cared. Her martyrdom could hardly suffer augmentation, the whole world seemed against her, she set apart, pilloried.—But not alone. Faircloth was set apart, pilloried, also. And remembering this, her courage revived. The horror of the crowd lifted. For herself she could not fight; but for him she could fight, with strength and conviction, out of the greatness of her love for him, out of her recognition that the ignominy inflicted upon him was more bitter, more cruel, than any inflicted upon her. For those who dare, in a moment the worst can turn best.—She would make play with the freedom which this breach of convention, of social reticence, of moral discretion, conferred upon her. The preacher had gone far in demolition. She would go as far, and further, in construction, in restitution. Would openly acknowledge the bond which joined Faircloth to her and to her people, by openly claiming his protection now, in this hour of her disgrace and supreme dismay. She would offer no excuse, no apology. Only there should be no more attempted concealment or evasion of the truth on her part, no furtiveness in his and her relation. Once and for all she would make her declaration, cry it from the house-top in fearless yet tender pride.

Damaris stood up, conspicuous in her red dress amid that rather drab assembly as a leaping flame. She turned about, fronting the perplexed and agitated congregation, her head carried high, her face austere for all its youthful softness, an heroic quality, something, indeed, superlative and grandiose in her bearing and expression, causing a shrinking in those who saw her and a certain sense of awe.

Her eyes sought Faircloth again. Found him, and unfalteringly spoke with him, bidding him claim her as she, claimed him, bidding him come. Which bidding he obeyed; and that at the same rather splendid level of sentiment, worthily sustaining her abounding faith in him. For a touch of the heroic and superlative was present in his bearing and expression, also, as he came up the church between the well-filled pews—these tenanted, to left and right, by some who figured in his daily life, figured in his earliest recollections, by others, newcomers, to him, even by sight, barely known; yet each and all, irrespective of age, rank, and position, affecting his outlook and mental atmosphere in some particular, as every human personality does and must, with whom one's life, ever so transiently, is thrown. Had he had time to consider them, this cloud of witnesses might have proved disturbing even to his masterful will and steady nerve. But he had not time. There was for him—so perfectly—the single object, the one searching yet lovely call to answer, the one act to be performed.

Reaching the front pew upon the gospel side, Darcy Faircloth took Damaris' outstretched hand. He looked her in the eyes, his own worshipful, ablaze at once with a great joy and a great anger; and then led her back, down the length of the aisle, through the west door into the liberty of the sunshine and the crisp northerly wind outside.

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Standing here, the houses and trees of the village lay below them. The whole glinting expanse of the Haven was visible right up to the town of Marychurch gathered about its long-backed Abbey, whose tower, tall and in effect almost spectral, showed against the purple ridges of forest and moorland beyond. Over the salt marsh in the valley, a flock of plovers dipped and wheeled, their backs and wide flapping wings black, till, in turning, their breasts and undersides flashed into snow and pearl.

And because brother and sister, notwithstanding diversities of upbringing and of station, were alike children of the open rather than of cities, born to experiment, to travel and to seafaring round this ever-spinning globe, they instinctively took note of the extensive, keen though sun-gilded prospect—before breaking silence and giving voice to the emotion which possessed them—and, in so doing, found refreshment and a brave cleansing to their souls.

Still holding Faircloth's hand, and still silent, her shoulder touching his now and again in walking, Damaris went down the sloping path, hoary lichen-stained head-and-foot stones set in the vivid churchyard grass—as yet unbleached by the cold of winter—on either side. The sense of his strength, of the fine unblemished vigour of his young manhood, here close beside her—so strangely her possession and portion of her natural inalienable heritage—filled her with confident security and with a restful, wondering calm. So that the shame publicly put on her to shed its bitterness, her horror of the watching crowd departed, fading out into unreality. Though still shaken, still quivering inwardly from the ordeal of the past hour, she already viewed that shame and horror as but accidents to be lived down and disregarded, by no means as essential elements in the adventurous and precious whole. Presently they would altogether lose their power to wound and to distress her, while this freedom and the closer union, gained by means of them, continued immutable and fixed.

It followed that, when in opening the churchyard gate and holding it back for her to pass, Faircloth perforce let go her hand and, the spell of contact severed, found himself constrained to speak at last, saying:

"You know you have done a mighty splendid, dangerous thing—no less than burned your boats—and that in the heat of generous impulse, blind, perhaps—I can't but fear so—to the heavy cost."

Damaris could interrupt him, with quick, sweet defiance:

"But there is no cost!"

And, to drive home the sincerity of her disclaimer, and further reassure him, she took his hand again and held it for an instant close against her bosom, tears and laughter together present in her eyes.

“Ah! you beautiful dear, you beautiful dear,” Faircloth cried, brokenly, as in pain, somewhat indeed beside himself. “Before God, I come near blessing that blatant young fool and pharisee of a parson since he has brought me to this.”

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Then he put her a little way from him, penetrated by fear lest the white love which—in all honour and reverence—he was bound to hold her in, should flush ever so faintly, red.

“For, after all, it is up to me,” he said, more to himself than to her, “to make very sure there isn’t, and never—by God’s mercy—shall be, any cost.”

And with that—for the avoidance of the congregation, now streaming rather tumultuously out of church—they went on across the village green, hissed at by slow waddling, hard-eyed, most conceited geese, to the lane which leads down to the causeway and warren skirting the river-bank.

CHAPTER IV

WHEREIN MISS FELICIA VERITY CONCLUSIVELY SHOWS WHAT SPIRIT SHE IS OF

Her attraction consisted in her transparency, in the eager simplicity with which she cast her home-made nets and set her innocuous springes. To-day Miss Felicia was out to wing the Angel of Peace, and crowd that celestial messenger into the arms of Damaris and Theresa Bilson collectively and severally. Such was the major interest of the hour. But, for Miss Felicia the oncoming of middle-age by no means condemned the lesser pleasures of life to nullity. Hence the minor interest of the hour centred in debate as to whether or not the thermometer justified her wearing a coat of dark blue silk and cloth, heavily trimmed with ruchings and passementerie, reaching to her feet. A somewhat sumptuous garment this, given her by Sir Charles and Damaris last winter in Madrid. She fancied herself in it greatly, both for the sake of the dear donors, and because the cut of it was clever, disguising the over-narrowness of her maypole-like figure and giving her a becoming breadth and fulness.

She decided in favour of the coveted splendour; and at about a quarter-past twelve strolled along the carriage-drive on her way to the goose green and the village street. There, or thereabouts, unless her plot lamentably miscarried, she expected to meet her niece and that niece’s ex-governess-companion, herded in amicable converse by the pinioned Angel of Peace. Her devious and discursive mind fluttered to and fro, meanwhile, over a number of but loosely connected subjects.

Of precisely what, upon a certain memorable occasion, had taken place between her brother, Sir Charles, and poor Theresa—causing the latter to send up urgent signals of distress to which she, Miss Felicia, instantly responded—she still was ignorant. Theresa had, she feared, been just a wee bit flighty, leaving Damaris unattended while herself mildly gadding. But such dereliction of duty was insufficient to account for the arbitrary fashion in which she had been sent about her business, literally—the word wasn’t pretty—chucked out! Miss Felicia always suspected there must be *something*,

she would say *worse*—it sounded harsh—but something *more* than merely that. Her interpretations of peculiar

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conduct were liable to run in terms of the heart. Had Theresa, poor thing, by chance formed a hopeless attachment?—Hopeless, of course, almost ludicrously so; yet what more natural, more comprehensible, Charles being who and what he was? Not that he would, in the faintest degree, lend himself to such misplaced affection. Of that he was incapable. The bare idea was grotesque. He, of course, was guiltless. But, assuming there *was* a feeling on Theresa's side, wasn't she equally guiltless? She could not help being fascinated.—Thus Miss Felicia was bound to acquit both. Alike they left the court without a stain on their respective characters.

Not for worlds would she ever dream of worrying Charles by attempting to reintroduce poor Theresa to his notice. But with Damaris it was different. The idea that any persons of her acquaintance were at sixes and sevens, on bad terms, when, with a little good will on their part and tactful effort upon hers, they might be on pleasant ones was to her actively afflicting. To drop an old friend, or even one not conspicuously friendly if bound to you by associations and habit, appeared to her an offence against corporate humanity, an actual however fractional lowering of the temperature of universal charity. The loss to one was a loss to all—in some sort. Therefore did she run to adjust, to smooth, to palliate.

Charles was away—it so neatly happened—and Theresa Bilson here, not, it must be owned, altogether without Miss Felicia's connivance. If darling Damaris still was possessed of a hatchet she must clearly be given, this opportunity to bury it. To have that weapon safe underground would be, from every point of view, so very much nicer.

At this point in her meditations beneath the trees bordering the carriage drive, their bare tops swaying in the breeze and bright sunshine, Miss Felicia fell to contrasting the present exhilarating morning with that dismally rainy one, just over three years ago, when—regardless of her sister, Mrs. Cowden's remonstrances—she had come here from Paulton Lacy in response to Theresa's signals of distress. Just at the elbow of the drive, so she remembered, she had met a quite astonishingly good-looking young man, brown-gold bearded, his sou'wester and oilskins shining with wet. She vaguely recalled some talk about him with her brother, Sir Charles, afterwards during luncheon.—What was it?—Oh! yes, of course, it was he who had rescued Damaris when she was lost out on the Bar, and brought her home down the tide-river by boat. She had often wanted to know more about him, for he struck her at the time as quite out of the common, quite remarkably attractive. But on the only occasion since when she had mentioned the subject, Damaris drew in her horns and became curiously uncommunicative. It was all connected, of course, with the dear girl's illness and the disagreeable episode of Theresa's dismissal.—How all the more satisfactory, then, that the Theresa business, in any case, was at this very hour in process of being set right! Miss Felicia had advised Theresa how to act—to speak to Damaris quite naturally and affectionately, taking her good-will for granted. Damaris would be charming to her, she felt convinced.

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Felicia Verity held the fronts of her long blue coat together, since the wind sported with them rather roughly, and went forward with her quick, wavering gait.

It was a pity Damaris did not marry she sometimes felt. Of course, Charles would miss her quite terribly. Their love for one another was so delightful, so really unique. On his account she was glad.—And yet—with a sigh, while the colour in her thin cheeks heightened a little—lacking marriage a woman's life is rather incomplete. Not that she herself had reason for complaint, with all the affection showered upon her! The last two years, in particular, had been abundantly blessed thanks to Charles and Damaris. She admired them, dear people, with all her warm heart and felt very grateful to them.

Here it should be registered, in passing, that the resilience of Felicia Verity's inherent good-breeding saved her gratitude from any charge of grovelling, as it saved her many enthusiasms from any charge of sloppiness. Both, if exaggerated, still stood squarely, even gallantly upon their feet.

Her mind switched back to the ever fertile question of the married and the single state. She often wondered why Charles never espoused a second wife. He would have liked a son surely? But then, were it possible to find a fault in him, it would be that of a little coldness, a little loftiness in his attitude towards women. He was too far above them in intellect and experience, she supposed, and through all the remarkable military commands he had held, administrative posts he had occupied, quite to come down to their level. In some ways Damaris was very like him—clever, lofty too at moments. Possibly this accounted for her apparent indifference to affairs of the heart and to lovers. Anyhow, she had ample time before her still in relation to all that.

Miss Felicia passed into the road. About fifty yards distant she saw the servants—Mary, Mrs. Cooper and Patch—standing close together in a quaint, solemn, little bunch. The two small Patches circled round the said bunch, patiently expectant, not being admitted evidently to whatever deliberations their elders and betters had in hand.

Felicia Verity's relations with the servants were invariably excellent. Yet, finding them in mufti, outside the boundaries of her brother's demesne thus, she was conscious of a certain modesty, hesitating alike to intrude upon their confabulations and to pass onward without a trifle amiable of talk. She advanced, smiling, nodded to the two women, then—

"A delicious day, isn't it, Patch?" she said, adding, for lack of a more pertinent remark—-"What kind of sermon did the new curate, Mr. Sawyer, give you?—A good one, I hope?"

A pause followed this guileless question, during which Mary looked on the ground, Mrs. Cooper murmured: "Oh! dear, oh, dear!" under her breath, and Patch swallowed visibly before finding voice to reply:

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“One, I regret to say, ma’am, he never ought to have preached.”

“Poor young man!” she laughed it off. “You’re a terribly severe critic, I’m afraid, Patch. Probably he was nervous.”

“And reason enough. You might think Satan himself stood at his elbow, the wicked things he said.”

This statement, coming from the mild and cow-like Mrs. Cooper, caused Felicia Verity the liveliest surprise. She glanced enquiringly from one to the other of the little group, reading constraint and hardly repressed excitement in the countenance of each. Their aspect and behaviour struck her, in fact, as singular to the point of alarm.

“Mary,” she asked, a trifle breathlessly, “has anything happened? Where is Miss Damaris?”

“Hadn’t she got back to The Hard, ma’am, before you came out?”

“No—why should she? You and the other servants always reach home first.”

“Miss Damaris went out before the rest,” Mrs. Cooper broke forth in dolorous widowed accents. “And no wonder, pore dear young lady, was it, Mr. Patch? My heart bled for her, ma’am, that it did.”

Miss Felicia, gentle and eager, so pathetically resembling yet not resembling her famous brother, grew autocratic, stern as him almost, for once.

“And you allowed Miss Damaris to leave church alone—she felt unwell, I suppose—-none of you accompanied her? I don’t understand it at all,” she said.

“Young Captain Faircloth went out with Miss Damaris. She wished it, ma’am,” Mary declared, heated and resentful at the unmerited rebuke. “She as good as called to him to come and take her out of church. It wasn’t for us to interfere, so we held back.”

“Captain Faircloth? But this becomes more and more extraordinary! Who is Captain Faircloth?”

“Ah! there you touch it, you must excuse my saying, ma’am.” Mrs. Cooper gasped.

But at this juncture, Patch, rising to the height of masculine responsibility, flung himself gallantly—and how unwillingly—into the breach. He was wounded in his respect and respectability alike, wounded for the honour of the family whom he had so long and faithfully served. He was fairly cut to the quick—while these three females merely darkened judgment by talking all at cross purposes and all at once. Never had the solid, honest coachman found himself in a tighter or, for that matter, in anything like so

tight a place. But, looking in the direction of the village, black of clothing, heavy of walk and figure, he espied, as he trusted, approaching help.

“If you please, ma’am,” he said, touching his black bowler as he spoke, “I see Canon Horniblow coming along the road. I think it would be more suitable for him to give you an account of what has passed. He’ll know how to put it with—with the least unpleasantness to all parties. It isn’t our place—Mrs. Cooper’s, Mary’s, or mine—if you’ll pardon my making so free with my opinion, to mention any more of what’s took place.”

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Felicia Verity, now thoroughly frightened, darted forward. The fronts of her blue coat again flew apart, and that rich garment stood out in a prodigious frill around and behind her from the waist, as she leaned on the wind, almost running in her agitation and haste.

“My dear Canon,” she cried, “I am in such anxiety. I learn something has happened to my niece, who I had come to meet. Our good servants are so distractingly mysterious. They refer me to you. Pray relieve my uncertainty and suspense.”

But, even while she spoke, Miss Felicia’s anxiety deepened, for the kindly, easy-going clergyman appeared to suffer, like the servants, from some uncommon shock. His large fleshy nose and somewhat pendulous cheeks were a mottled, purplish red. Anger and deprecation struggled in his glance.

“I was on my way to The Hard,” he began, “to express my regrets—offer my apologies would hardly be too strong a phrase—to your niece, Miss Verity, and to yourself. For I felt compelled, without any delay, to dissociate myself from the intemperate procedure of my colleague—of my curate. He has used, or rather misused, his official position, has grievously misused the privileges of the pulpit—the pulpit of our parish church—to attack the reputation of private individuals and resuscitate long-buried scandals.”

The speaker was, unquestionably, greatly distressed. Miss Felicia, though more than ever bewildered, felt for him warmly. It pained her excessively to observe how his large hands clasped and unclasped, how his loose lips worked.

“Let me assure you,” he went on, “though I trust that is superfluous—”

“I am certain it is, dear Dr. Horniblow,” she feelingly declared.

“Thanks,” he replied. “You are most kind, most indulgent to me, Miss Verity.—-Superfluous, I would say, to assure you that my colleague adopted this deplorable course without my knowledge or sanction. He sprang it on me like a bomb-shell. As a Christian my conscience, as a gentleman my sense of fair play, condemns his action.”

“Yes—yes—I sympathize.—I am convinced you are incapable of any indiscretion, any unkindness, in the pulpit or out of it. But why, my dear Canon, apologize to us? How can this unfortunate sermon affect me or my niece? How can the scandal you hint at in any respect concern us?”

“Because,” he began, that mottling of purple increasingly deforming his amiable face.—-And there words failed him, incontinently he stuck. He detested strong language, but—-heavens and earth—how could he put it to her, as she gazed at him with startled, candid eyes, innocent of guile as those of a babe? Only too certainly no word had reached her of the truth. The good man groaned in spirit for, like Patch, he found

himself in a place of quite unexampled tightness, and with no hope of shunting the immense discomfort of it on to alien shoulders such as had been granted the happier Patch.

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“Because,” he began again, only to suffer renewed agony of wordlessness. In desperation he shifted his ground.

“You have heard, perhaps, that your niece, Miss Damaris, left the church before the conclusion of the sermon? I do not blame her”—

He waved a fatherly hand. Miss Verity acquiesced.

“Or rather was led out by—by Captain Faircloth—a young officer in the mercantile marine, whose abilities and successful advance in his profession this village has every reason to respect.”

He broke off.

“Let us walk on towards The Hard. Pray let us walk on.—Has no rumour ever reached you, Miss Verity, regarding this young man?”

The wildest ideas flitted through Miss Felicia’s brain.

—The figure in shiny oilskins—yet preposterous, surely?—After all, an affair of the heart—misplaced affection—Damaris?—Did this account for the apparent indifference?

—How intensely interesting; yet how unwise.—How—but she must keep her own counsel. The wind, now at her back, glued the blue coat inconveniently against and even between her legs, unceremoniously whisking her forward.

“Rumours—oh, none,” she protested.

“None?” he echoed despairingly. “Pray let us walk on.”

A foolish urgency on his part this, she felt, since she was already almost on the run.

“None that, by birth, Captain Faircloth is somewhat nearly related to your family—to your—your brother, Sir Charles, in fact?”

There, the incubus was off his straining chest at last! He felt easier, capable of manipulating the situation to some extent, smoothing down its rather terrible ascerbities.

“Such connections do,” he hastened to add, “as we must regretfully admit, exist even in the highest, the most exalted circles. Irregularities of youth, doubtlessly deeply repented of. I repeat sins of youth, at which only the sinless—and they, alas! to the shame of my sex are lamentably few—can be qualified to cast a stone.—You, you follow me?”

“You mean me to understand”—

“Yes, yes—exactly so—to understand that this young man is reputed to be”—

“Thank you, my dear Canon—thank you,” Felicia Verity here interposed quickly, yet with much simple dignity, for on a sudden she became singularly unflurried and composed.

“I do, I believe, follow you,” she continued.—“You have discharged your difficult mission with a delicacy and consideration for which I am grateful; but I am unequal to discussing the subject in further detail just now.—To me, you know, my brother is above criticism. Whatever incidents may—may belong to former years, I accept without cavil or question, in silence—dear Dr. Horniblow—in silence. His wishes upon this matter—-should he care to confide them to me—and those of my niece, will dictate my conduct to—towards my nephew, Captain Faircloth.—Believe me, in all sincerity, I thank you. I am very much indebted to you for the information you have communicated to me. It simplifies my position. And now,” she gave him her hand, “will you pardon my asking you to leave me?”

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Walking slowly—for he felt played out, pretty thoroughly done for, as he put it, and beat—back to the vicarage and his belated Sunday dinner:—

“And of such are the Kingdom of Heaven,” James Horniblow said to himself—perhaps truly.

He also said other things, distinctly other things, in which occurred the name of Reginald Sawyer whose days as curate of Deadham were numbered. If he did not resign voluntarily, well then, pressure must, very certainly, be employed to make him resign.

Meanwhile that blue-coated, virginal member of the Kingdom of Heaven sped homeward at the top of her speed. She was conscious of immense upheaval. Never had she felt so alive, so on the spot. The portals of highest drama swung wide before her. She hastened to enter and pour forth the abounding treasures of her sympathy at the feet of the actors in this most marvellous piece. That her own part in it must be insignificant, probably not even a speaking one, troubled her not the least. She was out for them, not for herself. It was, also, characteristic of Miss Felicia that she felt in nowise shocked. Not the ethical, still less the social aspects of the drama affected her, but only its human ones. These dear people had suffered, and she hadn’t known it. They suffered still. She enclosed them in arms of compassion.—If to the pure all things are pure, Felicia Verity’s purity at this juncture radiantly stood the test. And that, not through puritanical shutting of the eyes or juggling with fact. As she declared to Canon Horniblow, she accepted the incident without question or cavil—for her brother. For herself, any possibility of stepping off the narrow path of virtue, and exploring the alluring, fragrant thickets disposed to left of it and to right, had never, ever so distantly, occurred to her.

She arrived at The Hard with a bright colour and beating heart. Crossed the hall and waited at the drawing-room door. A man’s voice was audible within, low-toned and grave, but very pleasant. It reminded her curiously of Charles—Charles long ago on leave from India, lightening the heavy conventionalities of Canton Magna with his brilliant, enigmatic, and—to her—all too fugitive presence. Harriet had never really appreciated Charles—though she was dazzled by his fame at intervals—didn’t really appreciate him to this day. Well, the loss was hers and the gain indubitably Felicia’s, since the elder sister’s obtuseness had left the younger sister a free field.—At thought of which Felicia softly laughed.

Again she listened to the man’s voice—her brother Charles’s delightful young voice. It brought back the glamour of her girlhood, of other voices which had mingled with his, of dances, picnics, cricket matches, days with the hounds. She felt strangely moved, transported; also strangely shy—so that she debated retirement. Did not, of course, retire, but went into the drawing-room with a gentle rush, a dart between the stumpy pillars.

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“I hoped that I should find you both,” she said. “Yes,” to Damaris’ solemn and enquiring eyes—“I happened to meet our good, kind Canon and have a little conversation with him. I hope”—to Faircloth—“you and I may come to know one another better, know one another as friends. You are not going?—No, indeed, you must stay to luncheon. It would grieve me—and I think would grieve my brother Charles also, if you refused to break bread in this house.”

CHAPTER V

DEALING WITH EMBLEMS, OMENS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Deadham resembled most country parishes in this, that, while revelling in internal dissensions, when attacked from without its inhabitants promptly scrapped every vendetta and, for the time being, stood back to back against the world.

As one consequence of such parochial solidarity, the village gentry set in a steady stream towards The Hard on the Monday afternoon following the historic Sunday already chronicled. Commander and Mrs. Battye called. Captain and Mrs. Taylor called, bringing with them their daughter Louisa, a tight-lipped, well instructed High School mistress, of whom her parents stood—one couldn’t but notice it—most wholesomely in awe. As is the youthful cuckoo in the nest of the hedge sparrow, so was Louisa Taylor to the authors of her being.—Mrs. Horniblow called also, flanked by her two girls, May and Doris—plain, thick-set, energetic, well-meaning young persons, whom their shrewd mother loved, sheltered, rallied, and cherished, while perfectly aware of their limitations as to beauty and to brains. Immediately behind her slipped in Mrs. Cripps. The doctor abstained, conscious of having put a match to the fuse which had exploded yesterday’s astounding homiletic torpedo. The whole affair irritated him to the point of detestable ill-temper. Still, if only to throw dust in the public eye, the house of Cripps must be represented. He therefore deputed the job—like so many another ungrateful one—to his forlorn-looking and red-eyed spouse. This vote of confidence, if somewhat crudely proposed and seconded, was still so evidently sincere and kindly meant that Damaris and Miss Felicia felt constrained to accept it in good part.

Conversation ran upon the weather, the crops, the migratory wild fowl now peopling the Haven, the Royal Family—invariably a favourite topic this, in genteel circles furthest removed from the throne—in anecdotes of servants and of pets interspersed with protests against the rise in butcher Cleave’s prices, the dullness of the newspapers and the surprising scarcity of eggs.—Ran on any and every subject, in short, save that of sermons preached by curates enamoured of the Decalogue.

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Alone—saving and excepting Dr. Cripps—did the Miss Minetts fail to put in an appearance. This of necessity, since had not they, figuratively speaking, warmed the viper in their bosoms, cradled the assassin upon their hearth? They were further handicapped, in respect of any demonstration, by the fact of Theresa Bilson's presence in their midst. Owing to the general combustion, Miss Felicia and the Peace Angel's joint mission had gone by the wall. Theresa was still an exile from The Hard, and doomed to remain so as the event proved. With that remarkable power—not uncommon in her sex—of transmuting fact, granted the healing hand of time, from defeat to personal advantage, she had converted her repulse by Sir Charles Verity into a legend of quite flattering quality. She had left The Hard because—But—

"She must not be asked to give chapter and verse. The position had been *extremely* delicate. Even now she could barely speak of it—she had gone through too much. To be more explicit"—she bridled—"would trench upon the immodest, almost. But just *this* she *could* say—she withdrew from The Hard three years ago, because she saw withdrawal would be best for *others*. Their peace of mind had been her object."

The above guarded confidences the Miss Minetts, hanging upon her lips, received with devout admiration and fully believed. And, the best of it was, Theresa had come by now, thanks to frequent rehearsal, fully to believe this version herself. At the present juncture it had its convenience, since she could declare her allegiance to her former employer unimpaired. Thereby was she at liberty to join in the local condemnation of Reginald Sawyer and his sermon. She did so with an assumption of elegant, if slightly hysterical, omniscience. This was not without its practical side. She regretted her inability to meet him at meals. In consequence the Miss Minetts proposed he should be served in his own sitting-room, until such time as it suited him to find another place of residence than the Grey House. For their allegiance went on all fours with Theresa's. It was also unimpaired. Propriety had been outraged on every hand; matters, heretofore deemed unmentionable, rushed into the forefront of knowledge and conversation; yet never had they actually enjoyed themselves so greatly. The sense of being a storm centre—inasmuch as they harboured the viper assassin—produced in them an unexampled militancy. Latent sex-antagonism revealed itself. The man, by common consent was down; and, being down, the Miss Minetts jumped on him, pounded him, if terms so vulgar are permissible in respect for ladies so refined. For every sin of omission, committed against their womanhood by the members of his sex, they made him scapegoat—unconsciously it is true, but effectively none the less. From being his slaves they became his tormentors. Never was young fellow more taken aback. Such revulsions of human feeling are instructive—deplorable or diverting according as you view it.

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Meanwhile that portion of the local gentry aforesaid, whom awkward personal predicament—as in the case of Dr. Cripps and the Miss Minetts—did not preclude from visiting The Hard, having called early on Monday afternoon also left early, being anxious to prove their civility of purest water, untainted by self-seeking, by ulterior greed of tea and cakes. It followed that Damaris found herself relieved of their somewhat embarrassed, though kindly and well-intentioned, presence before sunset. And of this she was glad, since the afternoon had been fruitful of interests far more intimate and vital in character.

While Captain and Mrs. Taylor, with their highly superior offspring Louisa, still held the floor, Damaris received a telegram from her father announcing a change of plans involving his immediate return.

“Send to meet the seven-thirty at Marychurch,” so the pink paper instructed her. “Carteret comes with me. When we arrive will explain.”

On reception of the above, her first thought was of the letter forwarded yesterday from the India Office, bearing the signature of the Secretary of State. And close on the heels of that thought, looking over its shoulder, indeed, in the effort—which she resisted—to claim priority, was the thought of the dear man with the blue eyes about to be a guest, once again, under this roof. This gave her a little thrill, a little gasp, wrapping her away to the borders of sad inattention to Louisa Taylor’s somewhat academic discourse.—-The girl’s English was altogether too grammatical for entire good-breeding. In that how very far away from Carteret’s!—Damaris tried to range herself with present company. But the man with the blue eyes indubitably held the centre of the stage. She wore the pearls to-day he gave her at St. Augustin. In what spirit did he come?—She hoped in the earlier one, that of the time when she so completely trusted him. For his counsel, dared she claim it in that earlier spirit, would be of inestimable value just now. She so badly needed someone in authority to advise with as to the events of yesterday, both in their malign and their beneficent aspects. Aunt Felicia had risen to the height of her capacity—dear thing, had been exquisite; but she would obey orders rather than issue them. Her office was not to lead, but rather to be led. And that the events of yesterday opened a new phase of her own and Faircloth’s relation to one another appeared beyond dispute. Where exactly did the curve of duty towards her father touch that relation, run parallel with or intersect it? She felt perplexed.

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After tea, Miss Felicia having vanished on some affair of her own—Damaris asked no question, but supposed it not unconnected with the now, since Sir Charles was about to return, permanently exiled Theresa—our maiden went upstairs, in the tender evening light, on domestic cares intent. She wished to assure herself that the chintz bedroom, opening off the main landing and overlooking the lawn and front garden, had been duly made ready for Colonel Carteret. She took a somewhat wistful pleasure in silently ministering to his possible small needs in the matter of sufficient wealth of towels, candles and soap. She lengthened out the process. Lingered, rearranged the ornaments upon the mantelpiece, the bunch of sweet-leafed geranium—as yet unshrivelled by frost—and belated roses, placed in a vase upon the toilet-table.

In so doing she caught sight of her reflection in the mirror, and paused, studying it. Her looks were not at their best. She was wan.—That might, in part, be owing to the waning light. Around her eyes were dark circles, making them appear unnaturally large and solemn. So yesterday's emotions had left their mark! The nervous strain had been considerable and she showed it. One cannot drink the cup of shame, however undeserved, with physical any more than with mental impunity. She still felt a little shattered, but hoped neither her father nor Carteret would remark her plight. If the whole affair of yesterday could, in its objectionable aspects, be kept from Sir Charles's knowledge she would be infinitely glad. And why shouldn't it be? Without permission, Aunt Felicia certainly would not tell. Neither would the servants. The parish had given testimony, this afternoon, both of its good faith and its discretion.

So much for the objectionable side of the matter. But there was another side, far from objectionable, beautiful in sentiment and in promise. And, still viewing her reflection in the glass, she saw her eyes lose their solemnity, lighten with a smile her lips repeated. This was where Carteret's advice would be of so great value. How much ought she to tell her father of all that?

For, from amidst the shame, the anger, the strain and effort, Faircloth showed, to her thinking, triumphant, satisfying alike to her affection and her taste. In no respect would she have asked him other than he was.

She moved across to the window, and sat down there, looking out over the garden and battery, with its little cannons, to the Bar, and sea beyond which melted into the dim primrose and silver of the horizon. Such colour as existed was soft, soothing, the colour of a world of dreams, of subdued and voiceless fancies. It was harmonious, restful as an accompaniment to vision.—Damaris let it lap against her consciousness, encircling, supporting this, as water laps, also encircling and supporting—while caressing, mysteriously whispering against a boat's side—a boat lying at its moorings, swinging gently upon an even keel.—And her vision was of Faircloth, exclusively of him, just now.

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For he had stayed to luncheon yesterday. A meal, to him in a sense sacred, as being the first eaten by him in his father's house. So graciously invited, how, indeed, could he do otherwise than stay? And, the initial strangeness, the inherent wonder of that sacred character wearing off, he found voice and talked not without eloquence. Talked of his proper element, the sea, gaining ease and self-possession from the magnitude and manifold enchantments of his theme.

To him, as to all true-born sailor-men—so Damaris divined—the world is made of water, with but accident of land. Impeding, inconvenient accident at that, too often blocking the passage across or through, and constraining you to steer a foolishly, really quite inordinately divergent course. Under this obstructive head the two Americas offend direfully, sprawling their united strength wellnigh from pole to pole. The piercing of their central isthmus promised some mitigation of this impertinence of emergent matter; though whether in his, the speaker's lifetime, remained—so he took it—open to doubt. The "roaring forties," and grim blizzard-ridden Fuegian Straits would long continue, as he feared, to bar the way to the Pacific. Not that his personal fancy favoured West so much as East. Not into the sunset but into the sunrising did he love to sail some goodly black-hulled ship.—And as he talked, more especially at his mention of this eastward voyaging, those manifold enchantments of his calling stirred Damaris' imagination, making her eyes bright as the fabled eyes of danger, and fathomless as well.

But the best came later. For, Mary having served coffee, Miss Felicia, making an excuse of letters to be written, with pretty tact left them to themselves. And Faircloth, returning after closing the door behind her fluttering, gently eager figure, paused behind Damaris' chair.—Jacobean, cane-panelled, with high-carved back and arms to it. Thomas Clarkson Verity had unquestionably a nice taste in furniture.—The young sea-captain rested his right hand on the dark terminal scroll-work, and bending down, laid his left hand upon Damaris' hand, covering it as it lay on the white damask table-cloth.

"Have I done what I should, and left undone what I shouldn't do, my dear and lovely sister?" he asked her, half-laughing and half-abashed. "It's a tricky business being here, you know—to put it no higher than that. And it might, with truth, be put far higher. I get so horribly fearful of letting you down in any way—however trivial—before other people. I balance on a knife-edge all the while."

"Have no silly fears of that sort," Damaris said quickly, a trifle distressed.

For it plucked at her sisterly pride in him that he should, even by implication, debase himself, noting inequality of station between himself and her. She held the worldly aspects of the matter in contempt. They angered her, so that she impulsively banished reserve. Leaning forward, she bent her head, putting her lips to the image of the flying sea-bird—which so intrigued her loving curiosity—and those three letters tattooed in blue and crimson upon the back of his hand.

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“There—there”—she murmured, as soothing a child—“does this convince you?”

But here broke off, her heart contracting with a spasm of wondering tenderness. For under that pressure of her lips she felt his flesh quiver and start. She looked up at the handsome bearded face, so close above her, in swift enquiry, the potion—as once before—troubling her that, in touching this quaint stigmata, she inflicted bodily suffering. And, as on that earlier occasion, asked the question:

“Ah! but have I hurt you?”

Faircloth shook his head, smiling. Words failed him just then and he went pale beneath the overlay of clear brown sunburn.

“Then tell me what this stands for?” she said, being herself strangely moved, and desirous to lower the temperature of her own emotion—possibly of his as well. “Tell me what it means.”

“Just a boy’s fear and a boy’s superstition—a bit morbid, both of them, perhaps—that is as I see things now. For I hold one should leave one’s body as it pleased the Almighty to make it, unblemished by semi-savage decorations which won’t wash off.”

Faircloth moved away, drew his chair up nearer the head of the table, the corner between them, so that his hand could if desire prompted again find hers.

“By the way, I’m so glad you don’t wear ear-rings, Damaris,” he said. “They belong to the semi-savage order of decoration. I hate them. You never will wear them? Promise me that.”

And she had promised, somewhat diverted by his tone of authority and of insistence.

“But about this?” she asked him, indicating the blue and crimson symbol.

“As I say, fruit of fear and superstition—a pretty pair in which to put one’s faith! All the same, they went far to save my life, I fancy—for which I thank them mightily being here, with you, to-day.”

And he told her—softening the uglier details, as unfit for a gently-nurtured woman’s hearing—a brutal story of the sea. Of a sailing ship becalmed in tropic waters, waiting, through long blistering days and breathless sweltering nights, for the breeze which wouldn’t come—a floating hell, between glaring skies and glaring ocean—and of bullyings, indignities and torments devised by a brain diseased by drink.

“But was there no one to interfere, no one to protect you?” Damaris cried, aghast.

“A man’s master in his own ship,” Faircloth answered. “And short of mutiny there’s no redress. Neither officers nor men had a stomach for mutiny. They were a poor, cowed lot. Till this drunken madness came on him he had been easy going enough. They supposed, when it passed, he’d be so again. And then as he reserved his special attentions for me, they were willing to grin and bear it—or rather let me bear it, just stupidly letting things go. It was my first long voyage. I’d been lucky in my skippers so far, and was a bit soft still. A bit conceited, I don’t doubt, as well. He swore he’d break my spirit—for my own good, of course—and he came near succeeding.—But Damaris, Damaris, dear, don’t take it to heart so. What does it matter? It did me no lasting harm, and was all over and done with—would have been forgotten too, but for the rather silly sign of it—years and years ago. Let us talk no more about it.”

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“Oh, no!—go on—please, go on,” she brokenly prayed him.

So he told her, further, how at Singapore, the outward voyage at last ended, he was tempted to desert; or, better still, put an end, once and for all, to the whole black business of living. And how, meditating on the methods of such drastic deliverance—-sitting in the palm-shaded verandah of a fly-blown little eating-house, kept by a monkey-faced, squint-eyed Japanese—he happened to pick up a Calcutta newspaper. He read its columns mechanically, without interest or understanding, his mind still working on methods of death, when a name leapt at him weighted with personal meaning.

“It hit me,” Faircloth said, “full between the eyes, knocking the cry-baby stuff out of me, and knocking stuff of very different order in. For I wanted something stronger than mother-love—precious though that is—to brace me up and put some spunk into me just then.—Sir Charles was campaigning in Afghanistan, and this Calcutta paper sang his praises to a rousing tune. Lamented the loss of him to the Indian Government, and the lack of appreciation and support of him at home which induced him to take foreign service. Can’t you imagine how all this about a great soldier, whose blood after all ran in my veins, pulled me clean up out of the slime, where suicide tempted the soft side of me, into another world?—A sane world, in which a man can make good, if only he’s pluck to hold on.—Yes, he saved me; or at all events roused the spirit in me which makes for salvation, and which that drunken brute had almost killed. But, because I was only a boy as yet, with a boy’s queer instincts and extravagancies, I made the monkey-faced, Japanese eating-house keeper—who added artistic tattooing to other and less reputable ways of piling up a fortune—fix the sea-bird, for faith in my profession—and those three initials of my own name and a name not altogether my own, right here.—Fix them for remembrance and for a warning of which I could never get free. Always I should be forced to see it. And others must see it too. Through it my identity—short of mutilation—was indestructibly established. From that identity, henceforward, there wasn’t any possible running away.”

Faircloth had ended on a note of exultation, calmly sounded yet profound.

And upon that final note Damaris dwelt now, sitting on the chintz-covered window-seat of the room which Carteret would to-night inhabit. She went through the cruel story again, while the transparent twilight drew its elfin veil over all things, outdoor and in.

The crescent moon, a slender, upright wisp of a thing, climbed the southern sky. And Damaris’ soul was strangely satisfied, for the story, if cruel, was one of restitution and the healing of a wrong. To her father—his father—the boy had turned in that bad hour, which very perfectly made for peace between them. The curve of her duty to the one, as she now apprehended, in nowise

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cut across or deflected the curve of her duty towards the other. The two were the same, were one. And this, somehow, some day, when time and sentiment offered opportunity for such disclosure, she must let her father know. She must repeat to him the story of the eating-house and its monkey-faced proprietor—of questionable reputation—away in tropic Singapore. It could hardly fail to appeal to him if rightly told. About the events and vulgar publicity of yesterday nothing need be said. About this, within careful limits, much; and that, with, as she believed, happiest result. She had succeeded in bringing father and son together in the first instance. Now, with this pathetic story as lever, might she not hope to bring them into closer, more permanent union? Why should not Faircloth, in future, come and go, if not as an acknowledged son, yet as acknowledged and welcome friend, of the house? A consummation this, to her, delightful and reasonable as just. For had not the young man passed muster, and that triumphantly—-she again told herself—in small things as well as great, in things of social usage and habit, those “little foxes” which, as between class and class, do so deplorably and disastrously “spoil the grapes?”

Therefore she began to invent ingenious speeches to Carteret and to her father. Hatch ingenious schemes and pretty plots—in the style of dear Aunt Felicia almost!—Was that lady’s peace-making passion infectious, by chance? And supposing it were, hadn’t it very charming and praiseworthy turns to it—witness Felicia’s rather noble gathering in and acceptance of Faircloth yesterday.

Arriving at which engaging conclusion, Damaris felt minded to commune for a space with the restful loveliness of the twilight, before going downstairs again and seeking more definite employment of books or needlework. She raised the window-sash and, kneeling on the chintz-covered cushioned window-seat, leaned out.

The gardeners to-day had rooted up the geraniums and dug over the empty flower beds, just below, preparatory to planting them with bulbs for spring blossoming. The keen, pungent scent of the newly-turned earth hung in the humid air, as, mingling with it—a less agreeable incense—did the reek of the mud-flats. On the right the twin ilex trees formed a mass of soft imponderable gloom. Above and behind them the sky was like smoked crystal. The lawn lay open and vacant. Upon it nothing hopped or crept. The garden birds had eaten their suppers long since, and sought snug bosky perching places for the night. Even the unsleeping sea was silent, the tide low and waveless, no more than a languid ripple far out upon the shelving sands. All dwelt in calm, in a brooding tranquillity which might be felt.

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Damaris listened to the silence, until her ears began to suspect its sincerity. Sounds were there in plenty, she believed, were her hearing sharp enough to detect them. They naughtily played hide-and-seek with her, striking a chord too deep or too thinly acute for human sense. Sights were there too, had her eyes but a cat's or an owl's keener faculty of seeing. Behind the tranquillity she apprehended movement and action employing a medium, obeying impulses, to us unknown. Restfulness fled away, but, in place of it, interest grew. If she concentrated her attention and listened more carefully, she should hear; looked more steadily, she should see.

Just because she was tired, a little shattered still and spent, did this predominance of outward nature draw her, imposing itself. It beckoned her; and, through passing deficiency of will, she followed its beckoning, making no serious effort to resist. With the consequence she presently did hear sounds, but sounds surely real and recognizable enough.

Coming from the shore eastwards, below the sea-wall along the river frontage, ponies walked, or rather floundered, fetlock deep in blown sand—a whole drove of them to judge by the confused and muffled trampling of their many hoofs. The drop from the top of the sea-wall to the beach was too great, and the space between the foot of the wall and the river-bank and breakwater too confined, for her to see the animals, even had not oncoming darkness rendered all objects increasingly ill-defined.

But the confused trampling instead of keeping along the foreshore, as in all reason it should, now came up and over the sea-wall, on to the battery, into the garden, heading towards the house, Damaris strained her eyes through the tranquil obscurity, seeking visible cause of this advancing commotion, but without effect. Yet all the while, as her hearing clearly testified, the unseen ponies hustled one another, plunging, shying away from the swish and crack of a long-thonged whip. One stumbled and rolled over in the sand.—For although the mob was half-way up the lawn by now, the shuffling, sliding sand stayed always with them.—After a nasty struggle it got on to its feet, tottering forward under savage blows, dead lame. Another, a laggard, fell into its tracks, and lay there foundered, rattling in the throat.

By this time the foremost of the drove came abreast the house front, where Sir Charles Verity's three ground-floor rooms, with the corridor behind them, ranged out from the main building. The many-paned semicircular windows of these rooms dimly glistened, below their fan-shaped, slated roofs. The crowding scurry of scared, over-driven animals was so indisputable that Damaris expected a universal smashing of glass. But the sound of many hoofs, still muted by sliding sand, passed straight on into and through the house as though no obstacle intervened barring progress.

The many-paned windows remained intact, undemolished, dimly glistening beneath their slated roofs. The garden stretched vacant, as before, right away to the battery, in the elusive twilight, a sky of smoked crystal—through which stars began to show faintly,

points of cold blurred light—above the gloom of the ilex trees to the west, and in the south, above the indistinguishable sea, the slender moon hanging upright, silver and sickle-shaped.

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Thus far Damaris' entire consciousness had resided in and been limited to her auditory sense; concentration being too absorbed and intense to allow room for reasoning, still less for scepticism or even astonishment. She had watched with her ears—as the blind watch—desperate to interpret, instant by instant, inch by inch, this reconstructed tragedy of long-dead man and long-dead beast. There had been no thinking round the central interest, no attempted reading of its bearing upon normal events. Mind and imagination were fascinated by it to the exclusion of all else. It acted as an extravagant dream acts, abrogating all known laws of cause and effect, giving logic and science the lie, negativing probability, making the untrue true, the impossible convincingly manifest.

Not, indeed, until she beheld Mary Fisher, deep-bosomed and comely, in black gown, white apron and cap, moving within those rooms downstairs—still echoing, as they surely must, to that tumultuous and rather ghastly equine transit—did the extraordinary character of the occurrence flash into fullness of relief.

Mary, meanwhile, set down her flat candlestick upon the big writing-table in Sir Charles's study, lighted lamps and drew blinds and curtains. Went into the bedroom next door and dressing-room beyond, methodically performing the evening ritual of "shutting up." Her shadow marched with her, as though mockingly assisting in her operations, now crouching, now leaping ahead, blotting a ceiling, extending itself upon a wall space. Other shadows, thrown by the furniture, came forth and leapt also, pranced, skipping back into hiding as the candle-light shifted and passed. But save this indirect admission of the immaterial and grotesque, everything showed reassuringly ordinary, the woman herself unconcerned, ignorant of disturbance.

Damaris rose from her kneeling posture upon the window-seat and, standing, lowered the sash. Once was enough. It was no longer incumbent upon her to listen or to look. If these ghostly phenomena were repeated they could convey nothing more to her, nothing fresh. They had delivered their message—one addressed wholly and solely to herself, so she judged, since Mary had so conspicuously no suspicion of it.

Our maiden's lips were dry. Her heart beat in her ears. Yet she was in no degree unnerved. Seldom indeed had she been more mistress of her powers, self-realized and vigilant. Nor did she feel tired any more, infirm of will and spent. Rather was she consciously resolute to encounter and withstand events—of what order she did not know as yet but events of moment and far-reaching result, already on the road, journeying toward her hotfoot. They were designed to test and try her. Would do their utmost to overwhelm, to submerge her, were she weak. But she didn't intend them to submerge her. She bade weakness quit, all her young courage rising in arms.

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The marvellous things she just now heard, so nearly saw—for it had come very near to seeing, hadn't?—were *avant couriers* of these same journeying events, their appointed prelude. She could explain neither how nor why—but, very certainly, somehow. Nor could she explain the relation—if any—coupling together the said marvels heard and the events. Nevertheless, she knew the former rode ahead, whether in malignity or mercy, to forewarn her. This place, The Hard, in virtue of its numerous vicissitudes of office and of ownership, of the memories and traditions which it harboured, both sinister, amiable, erudite, passionate, was singularly sentient, replete with influences. In times of strain and stress the normal wears thin, and such lurking influences are released. They break bounds, shouting—to such as have the psychic genius—convincing testimony of their existence.

All this Damaris perceived, standing in the middle of the room while the silver crescent moon looked in at her. The stillness once again was absolute. The dusk, save where the windows made pale squares upon the carpet, thick. The four-post bed, gay enough by day with hangings and valences patterned in roses on a yellow ground, looked cavernous. Carteret would lie under its black canopy to-night if—

"If all goes well."

Damaris said the words aloud, her thought becoming personal and articulate.

Once before she had heard the smugglers' ponies, waiting in this same room. Waiting at the open window to catch the first rumble of the wheels of a returning carriage. Her poor dear Nannie, Sarah Watson, was returning home after a summer holiday spent with her own people in the north. And Damaris, younger then by nearly five years, had listened impatiently, ready to skirmish down into the front hall—directly the carriage turned the elbow of the drive—and enclose her faithful nurse and foster-mother in arms of child-like love. But destiny ruled otherwise. In vain she waited. Sarah Watson returned no more, death having elected to take her rather horribly to himself some hours previously amid the flaming wreckage of a derailed express.

What did this second hearing presage? A like vain waiting and disclosure of death-dealing accident? Notwithstanding her attitude of high resolution, the question challenged Damaris in sardonic fashion from beneath the black canopy of the great bed. Her hand went up to the string of pearls which, on a sudden, grew heavy about her throat.

"But not—not—pray God, the dear man with the blue eyes," she cried.

She was glad to be alone, in the encompassing semi-dark, for a warm wave of emotion swept over her, an ardour hardly of the spiritual sort. Had she deceived herself? Was she, in truth, desirous Carteret should approach her solely according to that earlier

manner, in which she so simply trusted him? Did she hail his coming as that of a wise counsellor merely—or—

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But here Mary—still pursuing the time-honoured ritual of shutting up—entered candle in hand, the landing showing brightly lit behind her.

“Dear heart alive!” she exclaimed, “whoever’s that? You, Miss Damaris? Alone here in the dark. You did make me jump. But there,” she added, repentant of her unceremonious exclamation, “I don’t know what possesses us all to-night. The least thing seems to make you jump. Mrs. Cooper’s all of a twitter, and Laura—silly girl—is almost as bad. I suppose it’s the weather being so quiet after yesterday’s gale. For my own part I always do like a wind about. It seems company, particularly these long evenings if you’re called on to go round the house by yourself.”

All of which amounted to an admission, as Damaris was not slow to detect. She was still under the empire of emotion. The abrupt intrusion affected her. She, too, needed to carry off the situation.

“Poor Mary,” she said, “you have been frightened—by what? Did you hear anything you could not account for when you were down in the library just now?”

The answer came after a pause, as though the speaker were suspicious, slightly unwilling to commit herself.

“No, Miss Damaris, not in Sir Charles’s rooms or in the west wing either. Whatever unaccountable noises there ever is belong to this old part of the house.”

She set her candlestick on the dressing-table, and went to each window in turn, drawing blinds down and curtains across. So doing she continued to talk, moving to and fro meanwhile with a firm, light tread.

“Not that I pay much attention to such things myself. I don’t hold it’s right. It’s my opinion there’s no sort of nonsense you can’t drive yourself into believing once you let ideas get a root in you. I’ve seen too much of Mrs. Cooper giving away like that. The two winters you and Sir Charles was abroad I’d a proper upset with her—though we are good friends—more than once. After sundown she was enough to terrify you out of your life—wouldn’t go here and wouldn’t go there for fear of she didn’t know what. Tempting Providence, I call it, and spoke to her quite sharp. If ever I wanted to go over to spend an hour or two with father and mother in Marychurch, I was bound to ask Mrs. Patch and the children to come in and keep her company. There’s no sense in putting yourself into such a state. It makes you a trouble to yourself and everybody else. And in the end, a thousand to one if anything comes of all the turmoil and fuss—Mrs. Cooper, to be only fair to her, when she’s in a reasonable humour, allows as much.”

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Mary stepped across to the bed and doubled back the quilt, preparatory to turning down the fine linen sheet. She felt she had extracted herself from a somewhat invidious position with flying colours; and, in the process, had administered timely advice. For it wasn't suitable Miss Damaris should be moping alone upstairs at odd times like this. It all came of yesterday's upset.—Her righteous anger blazed against the clerical culprit. In that connection there was other matter of which she craved to deliver herself—-refreshing items of local gossip, sweet as honey to the mouth did she but dare retail them. She balanced the question this way and that. Would satisfaction outweigh offence, or offence satisfaction, on the part of Miss Damaris? You could not be sure how she'd take things—quite. And yet she ought to know, for the affair certainly placed Captain Faircloth in a pleasant light. Only one who was every inch a gentleman would behave so handsomely as he had.

She stretched across the bed to smooth the slightly wrinkled surface of the sheet. This gymnastic feat necessitated the averting of her face and turning of her back.

"There's a fine tale going round of how the Island lads—wild young fellows ready for any pranks—served Mr. Sawyer, the curate," she began. "They say William Jennifer put them up to it, having a grudge against him for trying to get his youngest boy taken up for stealing apples last week. They planned to give him a ducking in the pool just above the ferry, where the water's so deep under the bank. And if Captain Faircloth hadn't happened to come along, for certain they'd have made Mr. Sawyer swim for it. Mr. Patch hears they handled him ever so rough, tore his coat, and were on the very tick of pitching him in. But Captain Faircloth would not suffer it. He took a very high line with them, it is said. And not content with getting Mr. Sawyer away, walked with him as far as the Grey House to protect him from any further interference."

She gave the pillows sundry judicious strokings and pats.

"I hope Mr. Sawyer's properly thankful, for it isn't many that would have shown him so much leniency as that."

She would have enjoyed labouring the point. But comment appeared to her, under the circumstances, to trench on impertinence. Facts spoke for themselves. She restrained herself, fetched her candlestick from the dressing-table, and stood by the open door, thereby enjoining her young lady's exit.

Thus far Damaris maintained silence, but in passing out on to the landing, she said—-"Thank you. I am glad to know what has happened."

Encouraged by which acknowledgment, the excellent woman ventured further advice.

"And now, miss, you must please just lie down on the schoolroom sofa and get a little sleep before the gentlemen and Mr. Hordle arrive back. There is a good two hours to

wait yet, and I'll call you in plenty of time for you to dress. You don't look altogether yourself, miss. Too much talking with all that host of callers. You are properly fagged out. I'll get Mrs. Cooper to beat up an egg for you in a tumbler of hot milk, with a tablespoonful of sherry and just a pinch of sugar in it. That will get your circulation right."

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CHAPTER VI

SHOWING HOW SIR CHARLES VERITY WAS JUSTIFIED OF HIS LABOURS

Which homely programme being duly executed, worked restorative wonders. Matter, in the sublimated form of egg-flip, acted upon mind beneficially through the functions of a healthy, if weary, young body. Our maiden slept, to dream not of ghostly ponies or other uncomfortably discarnate creatures; but of Darcy Faircloth in his pretty piece of Quixotism, rescuing a minister of the Church of England “as by law established” from heretical baptismal rites of total immersion. The picture had a rough side to it, and also a merry one; but, beyond these, generous dealing wholly delightful to her feeling. She awoke soothed and restored, ready to confront the oncoming of events—whatever their character—in a spirit of high confidence as well as of resolution.

With the purpose of advertising this brave humour she dressed herself in her best. I do not deny a love of fine clothes in Damaris. Yet in her own home, and for delectation of the men belonging to her, a woman is surely free to deck herself as handsomely as her purse allows. “Beauty unadorned” ceased to be practicable, in self-respecting circles, with the expulsion of our first parents from the paradisaic state; while beauty merely dowdy, is a pouring of contempt on one of God’s best gifts to the human race. Therefore I find no fault with Damaris, upon this rather fateful evening, in that she clothed herself in a maize-coloured silk gown flowered in faint amber and faint pink. Cut in the piece from shoulder to hem, according to a then prevailing fashion, it moulded bosom, waist and haunches, spreading away into a demi-train behind. The high Medici collar of old lace, at the back of the square decolletage, conferred dignity; the hanging lace of the elbow sleeves a lightness. Her hair, in two wide plaits, bound her head smoothly, save where soft disobedient little curls, refusing restriction, shaded her forehead and the nape of her neck.

After a few seconds of silent debate she clasped Carteret’s pearls about her throat again; and so fared away, a creature of radiant aspect, amid sombre setting of low ceilings and dark carpeted floors, to await the advent of the travellers.

These arrived some little while before their time, so that the girl, in her gleaming dress, had gone but half-way down the staircase when they came side by side into the hall.—-Two very proper gentlemen, the moist freshness of the night attending them, a certain nobility in their bearing which moved her to enthusiasm, momentarily even bringing a mist before her eyes. For they were safe and well both of them, so she joyously registered, serene of countenance, moreover, as bearers of glad tidings are. Whatever the ghostly ponies foretold could be no evil shadowing them—for which she gave God thanks.

Meanwhile, there without, the light of the carriage lamps pierced the enclosing gloom, played on the silver plating of harness, on the shining coats of the horses, whose nostrils sent out jets of pale steam. Played over the faces of the servants, too, Mary and Laura just within the open door, Hordle and Conyers outside loading down the baggage from the back of the mail-phaeton, and on Patch, exalted high above them on the driving-seat.

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As Damaris paused, irradiated by the joy of welcome and of forebodings falsified, upon the lowest step of the staircase, Sir Charles turned aside and tenderly kissed her.

“My darling,” he said.

And Carteret, following him an instant later, took her by both hands and, from arm’s length, surveyed her in smiling admiration he made no effort to repress.

“Dear witch, this is unexpected good fortune. I had little thought of seeing you so soon —resplendent being that you are, veritably clothed with sunshine.”

“And with your pearls,” she gaily said.

“Ah! my poor pearls,” he took her up lightly. “I am pleased they still find favour in your sight. But aren’t you curious to learn what has made us desert our partridge shooting at an hour’s notice, granting the pretty little beggars unlooked-for length of life?”

His blue eyes laughed into hers. There was a delightful atmosphere about him. Something had happened to him surely—for wasn’t he, after all, a young man even yet?

“Yes—what—what has brought you, Colonel Sahib?” Damaris laughed back at him, bubbling over with happy excitement.

“Miracles,” he answered. “A purblind Government at last admits the error of its ways and proposes to make reparation for its neglect of a notable public-servant.”

“You?” she cried.

Carteret shook his head, still surveying her but with a soberer glance.

“No—no—not me. In any case there isn’t any indebtedness to acknowledge—no arrears to pay off. I have my deserts.—To a man immensely my superior. Look nearer home, dear witch.”

He made a gesture in the direction of his host.

“My Commissioner Sahib?”

“Yes—your Commissioner Sahib, who comes post haste to request your dear little permission, before accepting this tardy recognition of his services to the British Empire.”

“Ah! but that’s too much!” the girl said softly, glancing from one to the other, enchanted and abashed by the greatness of their loyalty to and prominent thought of her.

“Has this made him happy?” she asked Carteret, under her breath. “He looks so, I think. How good that this has come in time—that it hasn’t come too late.”

For, in the midst of her joyful excitement, a shadow crossed Damaris’ mind oddly obscuring the light. She suffered a perception things might so easily have turned out otherwise; a suspicion that, had the reparation of which Carteret spoke been delayed, even by a little, its beloved recipient would no longer have found use for or profit in it. Damaris fought the black thought, as ungrateful and faithless. To fear disaster is too often to invite it.

Just at this juncture Miss Felicia made hurried and gently eager irruption into the hall; and with that irruption the tone of prevailing sentiment declined upon the somewhat trivial, even though warmly affectionate. For she fluttered round Sir Charles, as Mary Fisher helped divest him of his overcoat, in sympathetic overflowings of the simplest sort.—“She had been reading and failed to hear the carriage, hence her tardy appearance. Let him come into the drawing-room at once, out of these draughts. There was a delightful wood fire and he must be chilled. The drive down the valley was always so cold at night—particularly where the road runs through the marsh lands by Lampit.”

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In her zeal of welcome Miss Verity was voluble to the point of inconsequence, not to say incoherence. Questions poured from her. She appeared agitated, quaintly self-conscious, so at least it occurred to Damaris. Finally she addressed Carteret.

“And you too must be frozen,” she declared. “How long it is since we met! I have always been so unlucky in just missing you here! Really I believe I have only seen you once since you and Charles stayed with us at Canton Magna.—You were both on leave from India. I dare not think how many years ago that is—before this child”—her candid eyes appealingly sought those of Damaris—“before this child existed. And you are so wonderfully unaltered.”

Colour dyed her thin face and rather scraggy neck. Only the young should blush. After forty such involuntary exhibitions of emotion are unattractive, questionably even pathetic.

“Really time has stood still with you—it seems to me, Colonel Carteret.”

“Time has done better than stand still,” Damaris broke in, with a rather surprising imperiousness. “It has beautifully run backwards—lately.”

And our maiden, in her whispering gleaming dress, swept down from the step, swept past the sadly taken aback Miss Felicia, and joined her father. She put her hand within his arm.

“Come and warm yourself—come, dearest,” she said, gently drawing him onward into the long room, where from above the range of dark bookshelves, goggle-eyed, pearl-grey Chinese goblins and monsters, and oblique-eyed Chinese philosophers and saints looked mysteriously down through the warm mellow light.

Damaris was conscious of a singular inward turmoil. For Miss Felicia’s speeches found small favour in her ears. She resented this open claiming of Carteret as a member of the elder generation. Still more resented her own relegation to the nullity of the prenatal state. Reminiscences, in which she had neither lot nor part, left her cold. Or, to be accurate, bred in her an intemperate heat, putting a match to jealousies which, till this instant, she had no knowledge of. Touched by that match they flared to the confusion of charity and reverence. Hence, impulsively, unscrupulously, yet with ingenious unkindness, she struck—her tongue a sword—to the wounding of poor Miss Felicia. And she felt no necessity for apology. She liked to be unkind. She liked to strike. Aunt Felicia should not have been so self-assertive, so tactless. She had brought chastisement upon herself. It wasn’t like her to behave thus. Her enthusiasms abounded; but she possessed a delicate appreciation of relative positions. She never poached. This came perilously near poaching.—And everything had danced to so inspiring a tune, the movement of it so delicious! Now the evening was spoilt. The first

fine alacrity of it could not be recaptured—which was all Aunt Felicia's fault.—No, for her unkindness Damaris felt no regret.

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It may be remarked that our angry maiden's mind dwelt rather upon the snub she had inflicted on Miss Verity, than upon the extensive compliment she had paid, and the challenge she had delivered, to Carteret. Hearing her flattering declaration, his mind not unnaturally dwelt more upon the latter. It took him like a blow, so that from bending courteously over the elder lady's hand, he straightened himself with a jerk. His eyes followed the imperious, sun-clad young figure, questioning and keenly alert. To-day he had liberally enjoyed the pleasures of friendship, for Charles Verity had been largely and generously elate. But Damaris' outburst switched feeling and sentiment onto other lines. They became personal. Were her words thrown off in mere lightness of heart, or had she spoken deliberately, with intention? It were wiser, perhaps, not to ask. He steadied his attention on to Miss Felicia once more, but not without effort.

"You always said kind and charming things, I remember," so he told her. "You are good enough to say them still."

Damaris stood by her father, upon the tiger skin before the hearth.

"Tell me, dearest?" she prayed him.

Charles Verity put his hand under her chin, turned up her face and looked searchingly at her. Her beauty to-night was conspicuous and of noble quality. It satisfied his pride. Public life invited him, offering him place and power. Ranklings of disappointment, of detraction and slight, were extinguished. His soul was delivered from the haunting vexations of them. He was in the saddle again, and this radiant woman-child, whom he so profoundly loved, should ride forth with him for all the world to see—if she pleased. That she would please he had no doubt. Pomp and circumstance would suit her well. She was, moreover, no slight or frothy piece of femininity; but could be trusted, amid the glamour of new and brilliant conditions, to use her judgment and to keep her head. Increasingly he respected her character as well as her intelligence. He found in her unswerving sense of right and wrong, sense of honour likewise. Impetuous she might be, swift to feel and to revolt; but of tender conscience and, on occasion, royally compassionate. Now he could give her fuller opportunity. Could place her in circumstances admittedly enviable and prominent. From a comparative back-water, she should gain the full stream—and that stream, in a sense, at the flood.

Rarely, if ever, had Charles Verity experienced purer pleasure, touched a finer level of purpose and of hope than to-day, when thinking of and now when looking upon Damaris. He thankfully appraised her worth, and in spirit bowed before it, not doatingly or weakly but with reasoned conviction. Weighed in the balances she would not be found wanting, such was his firm belief. For himself he accepted this recall to active participation in affairs, active service to the State, with a lofty content. But that his daughter, in the flower of her young womanhood, would profit by this larger and more distinguished way of life, gave the said recall its deeper values and its zest.

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Still he put her off awhile as to the exact announcement, smiling upon her in fond, yet stately approval.

“Let the telling keep until after dinner, my dear,” he bade her. “Pacify the cravings of the natural man for food and drink. The day has been fertile in demands—strenuous indeed to the point of fatigue. So let us comfort ourselves inwardly and materially before we affront weighty decisions.”

He kissed her cheek.

“By the way, though, does it ever occur to you to think of the Bhutpur Sultan-i-bagh and wish to go East again?”

And Damaris, with still uplifted chin, surveyed him gravely and with a certain wistfulness, Miss Felicia’s attempted poaching forgotten and an impression of Faircloth vividly overtaking her. For they were so intimately, disturbingly alike, the father and the son, in voice as well as in build and feature.

“Go East?” she said, Faircloth’s declared preference for sailing into the sunrise present to her. “Why, I go East in my dreams nearly every night. I love it—love it more rather than less as I grow older. Of course I wish to go—some day. But that’s by the way, Commissioner Sahib. All that I really want, now, at once, is to go wherever you go, stay wherever you stay. You won’t ask me to agree to any plan which parts us, will you?—-which takes you away from me?”

“Ruth to a strange Naomi, my dear,” he answered. “But so be it. I desire nothing better than to have you always with me.—But I will not keep you on tenter-hooks as to your and my projected destination. Let them bring in dinner in half an hour. Carteret and I shall be ready. Meanwhile, read this—agreeing to relegate discussion of it to a less hungry season.”

And taking the letter she had forwarded to him yesterday, bearing the imprint of the Indian Office, from the breast pocket of his shooting coat, he put it into her hand.

The appointment—namely, that of Lieutenant-Governor of an Indian presidency famous in modern history, a cradle of great reputations and great men, of English names to conjure with while our Eastern Empire endures—was offered, in terms complimentary above those common to official communications. Sir Charles Verity’s expert knowledge, not only of the said mighty province but of the turbulent kingdom lying beyond its frontiers, marked him as peculiarly fitted for the post. A campaign against that same turbulent kingdom had but recently been brought to a victorious conclusion. His influence, it was felt, might be of supreme value at this juncture in the maintenance of good relations, and consolidation of permanent peace.

Damaris' heart glowed within her as she read the courteous praiseful sentences. Even more than through the well-merited success of his book, did her father thus obtain and come into the fullness of his own at last. Her imagination glowed, too, calling up pictures of the half-remembered, half-fabulous oriental scene. The romance of English rule in India, the romance of India itself, its variety, its complexity, the multitude of its gods, the multitude of its peoples, hung before her as a mirage, prodigal in marvels, reaching back and linking up through the centuries with the hidden wisdom, the hidden terror of the Ancient of Days.

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To this land of alien faiths and secular wonders, she found herself summoned, not as casual sightseer or tourist, but as among the handful of elect persons who count in its social, political and administrative life. In virtue of her father's position, her own would be both conspicuous and assured. An intoxicating prospect this for a girl of one-and-twenty! Intoxicating, yet, as she envisaged it, disquieting likewise. She balanced on the thought of all it demanded as well as all it offered, of all it required from her—dazed by the largeness of the purview, volition in suspense.

Carteret was the first to reappear, habited in the prescribed black and white of evening male attire. In the last six months he had, perhaps, put on flesh; but this without detriment to the admirable proportions of his figure. It retained its effect of perfect response to the will within, and all its natural grace. His fair hair and moustache were still almost untouched with grey. His physical attraction, in short, remained unimpaired. And of this Damaris was actually, if unconsciously, sensible as he closed the door and, passing between the stumpy pillars, walked up the long narrow room and stood, his hands behind him, his back to the pleasantly hissing and crackling fire of driftwood.

"Alone, dear witch?" he said, and, seeing the open letter in her hand—"Well, what do you make of this proposition?" And yet again, as she raised serious pondering eyes—-"You find it an extensive order?"

"I find it magnificent for him—beautifully as it should be, adequate and right."

"And for yourself?" Carteret asked, aware of a carefulness in her language and intrigued by it.

"Magnificent for me, too—though it takes away my breath."

"You must learn to breathe deeper, that's all," he returned, gently teasing her.

"And who is to teach me to breathe deeper, dear Colonel Sahib," she quickly, and rather embarrassingly, asked. "Not my father. He'll have innumerable big things to do and to do them without waste of energy he must be saved at every point. He must not fritter away strength in coaching me in my odds and ends of duties, still less in covering up my silly mistakes."

"Oh! you exaggerate difficulties," he said, looking not at her but at the fierce yellow and black striped tiger skin at his feet.—Bless the lovely child, what was she driving at?

Carteret started for Deadham under the impression he had himself thoroughly in hand, and that all danger of certain inconvenient emotions was passed. He had lived them down, cast them out. For over two years now he had given himself to the superintendence of his estate, to county business, to the regulation of his sister's—-happily more prosperous—affairs, to the shepherding of his two elder nephews in their

respective professions and securing the two younger ones royally good times during their holidays at home. Throughout the hunting season, moreover, he rode to hounds on an average of three days a week. Such healthy sport helps notably to deliver a man from vain desires, by sending his body cleanly weary to bed and to sleep o' nights.

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By such varied activities had Carteret systematically essayed to rid himself of his somewhat exquisite distemper, and, when coming to Deadham, honestly believed himself immune, sane and safe. He was proportionately disturbed by finding the cure of this autumn love-madness less complete than, fool-like, he had supposed. For it showed disquieting signs of resurrection even when Damaris, arrayed in the sheen of silken sunlight, greeted him at the staircase foot, and an alarming disposition finally to fling away head-cloth and winding-sheet when she petulantly broke in upon Miss Verity's faded memories of Canton Magna with the flattering assertion that time had run backward with him of late.

Now alone with her, confident, moreover, of her maidenly doubts and pretty self-distrust, he felt at a decided disadvantage. The detached, affectionately friendly, the avuncular —not to say grandfatherly—attitude escaped him. He could not play that part.

"Oh! you exaggerate difficulties," he therefore told her, with a singular absence of his habitual mansuetude, his tone trenching on impatience. "Instinct and common sense will teach you-mother-wit, too-of which, you may take it from me, you have enough and to spare.-Let alone that there will be a host of people emulous of guiding your steps aright, if your steps should stand in need of guidance which I venture to doubt. Don't underrate your own cleverness." Hearing him, sensible of his apparent impatience and misconceiving the cause of it, Damaris' temper stirred. She felt vexed. She also felt injured.

"What has happened to you, Colonel Sahib?" she asked him squarely. "I see nothing foolish in what I have said. You wouldn't have me so conceited that I rushed into this immense business without a qualm, without any thought whether I can carry it out creditably—with credit to him, I mean?"

Thus astonishingly attacked, Carteret hedged.

"Miss Verity, of course, will be"—he began.

Damaris cut him short.

"Aunt Felicia is an angel, a darling," she declared, "but—but"—

And there stopped, pricked by a guilty conscience. For to expose Miss Felicia's inadequacies and enlarge on her ineligibility for the position of feminine Chief of the Staff, struck her as unworthy, a meanness to which, under existing circumstances, she could not condescend to stoop.

Carteret looked up, to be entranced not only by the fair spectacle of her youth but by her delicious little air of shame and self-reproach. Evidently she had caught herself out in some small naughtiness—was both penitent and defiant, at once admitting her fault and

pleading for indulgence. He suspected some thought at the back of her mind which he could neither exactly seize nor place. She baffled him with her changes of mood and of direction—coming close and then slipping from under his hand. This humour was surely new in her. She would not

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leave him alone, would not let him rest. Had she developed, since last he had converse with her, into a practised coquette?

“Look here, dear witch,” he said, making a return upon himself, and manfully withstanding the sweet provocation of her near neighbourhood. “We seem to be queerly at cross purposes. I can’t pretend to follow the turnings and doublings of your ingenious mind. I gather there is something you want of me. To be plain, then, what is it?”

“That—that you shouldn’t desert me—desert us—in this crisis. You have never deserted me before—never since I can first remember.”

“I desert you—good Lord!” Carteret exclaimed, his hands dropping at his sides with an odd sort of helplessness.

“Ah! that’s asking too much, I suppose,” she said. “I’m selfish even to think of it. Yet how can I do otherwise? Don’t you understand how all difficulties would vanish, and how beautifully simple and easy everything would be if you coached me—if you, dear Colonel Sahib, went with us?”

The man with the blue eyes looked down at the tiger skin again, his countenance strained and blanched.

More than ever did he find her humour baffling. Not once nor twice had he, putting force upon himself, resisted the temptation to woo her—witness his retirement from St. Augustin and his determined abstinence from intercourse with her since. But now, so it might veritably appear, the positions were reversed and she wooed him. Though whether pushed to that length merely by wayward fancy, by some transient skittish influence or frolic in the blood, or by realized design he had no means of judging.—Well, he had bidden her be plain, and she, in some sort at least, obeyed him. It behooved him, therefore, to be plain in return, in as far as a straightforward reading of her meaning would carry.

“So you think all would be simple and easy were I to go with you and your father?” he said, both speech and manner tempered to gentleness. “I am glad to have you think so—should be still more glad could I share your belief. But I know better, dearest witch—-know that you are mistaken. This is no case of desertion—put that out of your precious mind once and for all—but of discretion. My being in attendance, far from simplifying, would embroil and distort your position. An elderly gentleman perpetually trotting”—

“Don’t,” Damaris cried, holding up both hands in hot repudiation. “Don’t say that. There’s distortion if you like! It’s ugly—I won’t have it, for it is not true.”

In the obvious sincerity of which denunciation Carteret found balm; yet adhered to his purpose.

“But it is true, alas; and I therefore repeat it both for your admonition and my own. For an elderly gentleman trotting at a young girl’s heels is a most unedifying spectacle—-giving occasion, and reasonably, to the enemy to blaspheme—bad for her in numberless ways; and, if he’s any remnant of self-respect left in him, is anything better than a fatuous dotard, damnably bad for him as well. Do you understand?”

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Damaris presented a mutinous countenance. She would have had much ado to explain her own motives during this ten minutes' conference. If her mental—or were they not rather mainly emotional?—turnings and doublings proved baffling to her companion, they proved baffling to herself in an almost greater degree. Things in general seemed to have gone into the melting-pot. So many events had taken place, so many more been preshadowed, so many strains of feeling excited! And these were confusingly unrelated, or appeared to be so as yet. Amongst the confusion of them she found no sure foothold, still less any highway along which to travel in confidence and security. Her thought ran wild. Her intentions ran with it, changing their colour chameleon-like from minute to minute. Now she was tempted to make an equivocal rejoinder.

"To understand," she said, "is not always, Colonel Sahib, necessarily to agree."

"I am satisfied with understanding and don't press for agreement," he answered, and on an easier note—"since to me it is glaringly evident you should take this fine flight unhandicapped. My duty is to stand aside and leave you absolutely free—not because I enjoy standing aside, but"—he would allow sentiment such meagre indulgence—"just exactly because I do not."

Here for the second time, at the crucial moment, Felicia Verity made irruption upon the scene. But though her entrance was hurried, it differed fundamentally from that earlier one; so that both the man and the girl, standing in the proximity of their intimate colloquy before the fire, were sensible of and arrested by it. She was self-forgetful, self-possessed, the exalted touch of a pure devotion upon her.

"I have been with my brother Charles," she began, addressing them both. "I happened to see Hordle coming from the library—and I put off dinner. I thought, darling"—this to Damaris, with a becoming hint of deference—"I might do so. I gathered that Charles—-that your father—wished it. He has not been feeling well."

And as Damaris anxiously exclaimed—

"Yes"—Miss Felicia went on—"not at all well. Hordle told me. That was why I went to the library. He hoped, if he waited and rested for a little while, the uncomfortable sensations might subside and it would be needless to mention them. He did not want any fuss made. We gave him restoratives, and he recovered from the faintness. But he won't be equal, he admits, to coming in to dinner. Colonel Carteret must be hungry—-your father begs us to wait no longer, I assured him we would not. Hordle is with him. He should not be alone, I think, while any pain continues."

"Pain—pain?" Damaris cried, her imagination rather horribly caught by the word. "But is he hurt, has he had some accident?"

While Carteret asked tersely: "Pain—and where?"

“Here,” Felicia answered, laying her hand upon her left side over the heart. She looked earnestly at Carteret as she spoke, conveying to him an alarm she sought to spare Damaris.

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“He tries to make little of it, and assures me it was only the heat of the house which caused him discomfort after the cold air out of doors. It may be only that, but I think we ought to make sure.”

Again, and with that same becoming hint of deference, she turned to her niece.

“So I sent orders that Patch should drive at once to Stourmouth and fetch Dr. McCabe. I did not stop to consult you because it seemed best he should take out the horses before they were washed down and stabled.”

“Yes—but I can go to him?” Damaris asked.

“Darling—of course. But I would try to follow his lead, if I were you—treat it all lightly, since he so wishes. Your father knows best in most things—and may know best in this. Please God it is so.”

Left alone with Carteret.

“I am anxious—most cruelly anxious about my brother,” she said.

While Damaris, sweeping across the hall and down the corridor in her sunshine silken dress, repeated:

“The ponies—the smugglers’ ponies,” a sob in her throat.

CHAPTER VII

TELLING HOW CHARLES VERITY LOOKED ON THE MOTHER OF HIS SON

“Which is equivalent to saying, ’Hear the conclusion of the whole matter,’ isn’t it, McCabe?”

Dr. McCabe’s square, hairy-backed hands fumbled with the stethoscope as he pushed it into his breast pocket, and, in replying, his advertised cheerfulness rang somewhat false.

“Not so fast, Sir Charles—in the good Lord’s name, not so fast. While there’s life there’s hope, it’s me settled opinion. I’m never for signing a patient’s death-warrant before the blessed soul of him’s entirely parted company with its mortal tenement of clay. The normal human being takes a mighty lot of killing in my experience, where the will to live is still intact. Let alone that you can never be quite upsides with Nature. Ah! she’s an astonishing box of tricks to draw on where final dissolution’s concerned. She glories to turn round on your pathological and biological high science; and, while you’re measuring a man for his coffin, to help him give death the slip.”

Charles Verity slightly shifted his position—and that with singular carefulness—against the pillows in the deep red-covered chair. His hands, inert and bluish about the finger-tips, lay along the padded arms of it. The jacket of his grey-and-white striped flannel sleeping-suit was unfastened at the throat, showing the irregular lift and fall of his chest with each laboured breath. His features were accentuated, his face drawn and of a surprising pallor.

The chair, in which he sat, had been brought forward into the wide arc of the great window forming the front of the room. Two bays of this stood open down to the ground. Looking out, beyond the rich brown of the newly-turned earth in the flower-beds, the lawn stretched away—a dim greyish green, under the long shadows cast by the hollies masking the wall on the left, and glittering, powdered by myriads of scintillating dewdrops, where the early sunshine slanted down on it from between their stiff pinnacles and sharply serrated crests.

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In the shrubberies robins sang, shrilly sweet. A murmur of waves, breaking at the back of the Bar, hung in the chill, moist, windless air. Presently a handbarrow rumbled and creaked, as West—the head gardener, last surviving relic of Thomas Clarkson Verity's reign—wheeled it from beneath the ilex trees towards the battery, leaving dark smudgy tracks upon the spangled turf.

Arrived at his objective, the old gardener, with most admired deliberation, loaded down long-handled birch-broom, rake and hoe; and applied himself to mysterious peckings and sweeping of the gravel around the wooden carriages of the little cannon and black pyramid of ball.—Man, tools, and barrow were outlined against the pensive brightness of autumn sea and autumn sky, which last, to southward, still carried remembrance of sunrise in a broad band of faint yellowish pink, fading upward into misty azure and barred with horizontal pencillings of tarnished silver cloud.

Thus far Charles Verity had watched the progress of the bowed, slow-moving figure musingly. But now, as the iron of the hoe clinked against the gravel flints, he came back, so to say, to himself and back to the supreme question at issue. He looked up, his eyes and the soundless ironic laughter resident in them, meeting McCabe's twinkling, cunning yet faithful and merry little eyes, with a flash.

"The work of the world is not arrested," he said. "See, that octogenarian, old West. He wheeled ill-oiled, squeaking barrows and hacked at the garden paths when I was a Harchester boy. He wheels the one and hacks at the other even yet—a fact nicely lowering to one's private egotism, when you come to consider it. Why, then, my good friend, perjure yourself or strive to mince matters? The work of the world will be done whether I'm here to direct the doing of it or not.—Granted I am tough and in personal knowledge of ill-health a neophyte. My luck throughout has been almost uncanny. Neither in soldiering nor in sport, from man or from beast, have I ever suffered so much as a scratch. I have borne a charmed life—established a record for invulnerability, which served me well in the East where the gods still walk in the semblance of man and miracle is still persistently prevalent. Accident has passed me by—save for being laid up once, nearly thirty years ago, with a broken ankle in the house of some friends at Poonah."

He ceased speaking, checking, as it seemed, disposition to further disclosure; while the soundless laughter in his eyes found answering expression upon his lips, curving them, to a somewhat bitter smile beneath the flowing moustache.

"In to-day's enforced idleness how persistently cancelled episodes and emotions rap, ghostly, on the door demanding and gaining entrance!" he presently said. "Must we take it, Doctor, that oblivion is a fiction, merciful forgetfulness an illusion; and that every action, every desire—whether fulfilled or not—is printed indelibly upon one's memory, merely waiting the hour of weakness and physical defeat to show up?"

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“The Lord only knows!” McCabe threw off, a little hopelessly. This was the first utterance approaching complaint; and he deplored it for his patient’s sake. He didn’t like that word defeat.

Then, to his hearer’s relief with a softened accent, Charles Verity took up his former theme.

“Save for a trifling go of fever now and again, illness has given me the go-by equally with accident. But, for all my ignorance of such afflictions I know, beyond all shadow of doubt, that a few repetitions of the experience of last night must close any man’s account. Experiment is more enlightening than argument. There is no shaking the knowledge you arrive at through it.”

McCabe, standing at ease by the open window, untidy, hirsute, unkempt, rammed his hands down into his gaping trouser pockets and nodded unwilling agreement.

“The attack was bad,” he said. “I’m not denying it was murderously bad. And all the harder on you because, but for the one defaulting organ, your heart, you’re as sound as a bell. You’re a well enough man to put up a good fight; and that, you see, cuts both ways, be danged to it.”

“A chain is no stronger than its weakest link.—You know as well as I do the Indian appointment will never be gazetted.”

“There you have me, Sir Charles, loath though I am to admit as much. I’d be a liar if I denied it would not.”

“How long do you give me then? Months, or only weeks?”

“That depends in the main on yourself, in as far as I can presume to pronounce. With care”—

“Which means sitting still here”—

“It does.”

Charles Verity raised his shoulders the least bit.

“Not good enough, McCabe,” he declared, “not good enough. There are rites to be duly performed, words to be said, which I refuse to neglect. Oh, no, don’t misunderstand me. I don’t need professional help to accomplish my dying. Were I a member of your communion it might be different, but I require no much-married parsonic intermediary to make my peace with God. I am but little troubled regarding that. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?—Nevertheless, there remain rites to be decently performed. I must make my peace with man—and still more with woman—before I go hence and am

no more seen. But, look here, I have no wish to commit myself too soon, and risk the bathos of an anti-climax by having to perform them twice, repeat them at a later date.—-So how long do you give me—weeks? Too generous an estimate? A week, then or—-well—less?"

"You want it straight?"

"I want it straight."

"More likely days. God grant I am mistaken. With your fine constitution, as I tell you, you are booked to put up a good fight. All the same, to be honest, Sir Charles, it was touch and go more than once last night."

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In the room an interval of silence, and without song of the robins and murmur of the sea, nearer now and louder as the rising tide lapped up the sands at the back of the Bar. The faint yellow-pink after-thought of sunrise and pencillings of tarnished cloud alike had vanished into the all-obtaining misty blue of the upper sky. Heading for the French coast, a skein of wild geese passed in wedge-shaped formation with honking cries and the beat of strong-winged flight. The barrow creaked again, wheeled some few yards further along the battery walk.

“Thanks—so I supposed,” Sir Charles Verity calmly said.

He stretched himself, falling into a less constrained and careful posture. Leaned his elbow on the chair-arm, his chin in the hollow of his hand, crossed the right leg over the left.

“Twenty-four hours will give me time for all which is of vital importance. The rest must, and no doubt perfectly will, arrange itself.—Oh! I’ll obey you within reasonable limits, McCabe. I have no craving to hurry the inevitable conclusion. These last hours possess considerable significance and charm—an impressiveness even, which it would be folly to thrust aside or waste.”

Once more he looked up, his tone and expression devoid now of all bitterness.

“I propose to savour their pleasant qualities to the full. So make yourself easy, my good fellow,” he continued with an admirable friendliness. “Go and get your breakfast. Heaven knows you’ve most thoroughly earned it, and a morning pipe of peace afterwards.—The bell upon the small table?—Yes—oh, yes—and Hordle within earshot. I’ve everything I require; and, at the risk of seeming ungrateful, shall be glad enough of a respite from this course of food and drink, potions and poultices—remedial to the delinquent flesh no doubt, but a notable weariness to the-spirit.—And, see here, report to the two ladies, my sister and—and Damaris, that you leave me in excellent case, free of discomfort, resting for a time before girding up my loins to meet the labours of the day.”

Charles Verity closed his eyes in intimation of dismissal, anxious to be alone the better to reckon with that deeper, final loneliness which confronted him just now in all its relentless logic.

For, though his mind remained lucid, self-realized and observant, his control of its action and direction was incomplete owing to bodily fatigue. Hence it lay open to assault, at the mercy of a thousand and one crowding thoughts and perceptions. And over these he desired to gain ascendency—to drive, rather than be driven by them. The epic of his three-score years, from its dim, illusive start to this dramatic and inexorable finish—but instantly disclosed to him in the reluctant admissions of the good-hearted Irish doctor—-

flung by at a double, in coloured yet incoherent progression, so to speak, now marching to triumphant blare of trumpet, now to roll of muffled drum. Which incoherence

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came in great measure of the inalienable duality of his own nature—passion and austerity, arrogance and self-doubt, love—surpassing most men's capacity of loving—-and a defacing strain of cruelty, delivering stroke and counter-stroke. From all such tumult he earnestly sought to be delivered; since not the thing accomplished—whether for fame, for praise or for remorse—not, in short, what has been, but what was, and still more what must soon be, did he need, at this juncture, dispassionately to contemplate.

That sharp-toothed disappointment gnawed him, is undeniable, when he thought of the culminating gift of happy fortune, royally satisfying to ambition, as unexpectedly offered him as, through his own unlooked-for and tragic disability, it was unexpectedly withdrawn. But disappointment failed to vex him long. A more wonderful journey than any possible earthly one, a more majestic adventure than that of any oriental proconsulship, awaited him. For no less a person than Death issued the order—an order there is no disobeying. He must saddle up therefore, bid farewell, and ride away.

Nor did he flinch from that ride with Death, the black captain, as escort, any more than, during the past night, he had flinched under the grip of mortal pain. For some persons the call to endurance brings actual pleasure—of a grim heroic kind. It did so to Charles Verity. And not only this conscious exercise of fortitude, this pride of bearing bodily anguish, but a strange curiosity worked to sustain him. The novelty of the experience, in both cases, excited and held his interest, continued to exercise it and to hold.

Now, as in solitude his mental atmosphere acquired serenity and poise—the authority of the past declining—this matter of death increasingly engrossed him. For it trenches on paradox, surely, that the one absolutely certain event in every human career is also the most unexplored and practically incredible.—An everyday occurrence, a commonplace, concerning which there remains nothing new, nothing original, to be written, sung or said; yet a mystery still inviolate, aching with the alarm of the undiscovered, the unpenetrated, to each individual, summoned to accept its empire! He had sent others to their death. Now his own turn came and he found it, however calmly considered, a rather astounding business. An ending or a beginning?—Useless, after all, to speculate. The worst feature of it, not improbably, this same preliminary loneliness, this stripping naked, no smallest comfort left you of human companionship, or even of humble material keepsake from out the multitude of your familiar possessions here in the dear accustomed human scene.

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The gates of death open. You pass them. They close behind you. And what then?—-The whole hierarchy of heaven, the whole company of your forerunners thither—-beloved and honoured on earth—may be gathered to hail the homing soul within those amazing portals; or it may drop, as a stone into a well, down the blank nothingness of the abyss.—Of all gambles invented by God, man or devil—so he told himself—this daily, hourly gamble of individual dissolution is the biggest. Man's heart refuses the horror of extinction, while his intellect holds the question in suspense. We hope. We believe. From of old fair promises have been made us; and, granted the gift of faith, hope and belief neighbour upon assurance. But certainty is denied. No mortal, still clothed in flesh, has known, nor—the accumulated science of the ages notwithstanding—does know, actually and exactly, that which awaits it.

Thus, anyhow, in the still, tender brightness of the autumn morning, while Nature and men alike pursued their normal activities and occupations, did this singular matter appear to Charles Verity—he, himself, arbitrarily cut off from all such activities and occupations in the very moment of high fruition. Had death been a less eminent affair, or less imminent, the sarcasm of his position might have seemed gross to the point of insult. But, the longer he envisaged it, the more did the enduring enigma and its accompanying uncertainty allure. Not as victim, but rather as conqueror of the final terror, did he begin to regard himself.

Meanwhile, though reason continued to hold the balance even between things positively known and things imagined only and hoped for, the god-ward impulse strengthened in him. Not by conscious or convincing argument from within, but by all-powerful compulsion from without, was his thought borne onward and upward to increasing confidence. So that he asked himself—as so many another, still unwearied, still enamoured of attainment, has asked in like case—whether impending divorce of soul and body may not confer freedom of a wider range and nobler quality, powers more varied and august than the mind, circumscribed by conditions of time and sense, has yet conception of?

To him such development seemed possible—certainly. Probable?—Ah, well, perhaps—perhaps. Which brought him back to his former contention, that its inherent loneliness constitutes the bitterest sting of death. Smiling, he quoted the ancient, divinely tender saying: "There is a child in each one of us which cries at the dark."

While, in swift reaction, he yearned towards battle where amid the fierce and bloody glory of the fight, souls of heroes troop forth together, shouting, into everlasting day or—sceptical reason shaking a sadly sage head once again—into everlasting night.

He stretched out his hand instinctively for the bell on the little table at his elbow. Hordle answered his summons, grey of countenance from alarm, anxiety, and broken rest.

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“Let Miss Damaris know I shall be glad to see her when she is free to come to me,” he said.

And here, although our damsel’s reputation for courage and resource may, thereby, sustain some damage, I am constrained to state that while in the sick-room Miss Felicia shone, Damaris gave off but a vacillating and ineffective light.

Imagination is by no means invariably beneficent. The very liveliness of the perceptions which it engenders may intimidate and incapacitate. Upon Damaris imagination practised this mischief. Becoming, for the time, that upon which she looked, sharing every pang and even embroidering the context, she weakened, in some sort, to the level of the actual sufferer, helpless almost as he through the drench of overwhelming sympathy. She had been taken, poor child, at so villainous a disadvantage. Without preparation or warning—save of the most casual and inadequate—her humour wayward, she a trifle piqued, fancying her pretty clothes, her pretty looks, excited, both by the brilliant prospect presented by the Indian appointment and by her delicate passage of arms with Carteret, she was compelled of a sudden to witness the bodily torment of a human being, not only by her beloved beyond all others, but reverenced also. The impression she received was of outrage, almost of blasphemy. The cruelty of life lay uncovered, naked and open to her appalled and revolted consciousness. She received a moral, in addition to a physical shock, utterly confounding in its crudity, its primitive violence.

The ravage of pain can be, in great measure, surmounted and concealed; but that baser thing, functional disturbance—in this case present as heart spasm, threatening suffocation, with consequent agonized and uncontrollable struggle for breath—defies concealment. This manifestation horrified Damaris. The more so that, being unacquainted with the sorry spectacle of disease, her father, under the deforming stress of it, appeared to her as a stranger almost—inaccessible to affection, hideously removed from her and remote. His person and character, to her distracted observation, were altered beyond recognition except during intervals, poignant to the verge of heart-break, when passing ease restored his habitual dignity and grace.

Thus, while Miss Felicia and Carteret—with Hordle and Mary Fisher as assistants—-ministered to his needs in as far as ministration was possible, she stood aside, consumed by misery, voluntarily effacing herself. Backed away even against the wall, out of range of the lamp-light, stricken, shuddering, and mute. Upon Dr. McCabe’s arrival and assumption of command, Carteret, finding himself at liberty to note her piteous state, led her out into the passage and then to the long drawing-room, with gentle authority. There for a half-hour or more—to him sadly and strangely sweet—he sat beside her, while the tears silently coursed down her cheeks, letting her poor proud head rest against his shoulder, his arm supporting her gracious young body still clothed in all the bravery of her flowered silken sunshine dress.

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Later, Mary bringing more favourable news of Sir Charles—pain and suffocation having yielded for the time being to McCabe's treatment—Carteret persuaded her to go upstairs and let the said Mary put her to bed. Once there she slept the sleep of exhaustion, fatigue and sorrow mercifully acting as a soporific, her capacity for further thought or feeling literally worn out.

During that session in the drawing-room Damaris, to his thankfulness, had asked no questions of him. All she demanded child-like, in her extremity, had been the comfort and security of human contact. And this he gave her simply, ungrudgingly, with a high purity of understanding, guiltless of any shadow of embarrassment or any after-thought. Their lighter, somewhat enigmatic relation of the earlier evening was extinguished, swamped by the catastrophe of Charles Verity's illness. Exactly in how far she gauged the gravity of that illness and its only too likely result, or merely wept, unnerved by the distressing outward aspect of it, Carteret could not determine. But he divined, and rightly, that she was in process of ranging herself, at least subconsciously, with a new and terrible experience which, could she learn the lesson of it aright would temper her nature to worthy issues.

Hence, with a peculiar and tender interest, he watched her when, coming down in the morning, he found her already in the dining-room, the pleasant amenities of a well-ordered, hospitable house and household abundantly evident.

Whatever the tragic occurrences of the last twelve hours, domestic discipline was in no respect relaxed. The atmosphere of the room distilled a morning freshness. Furniture and flooring shone with polish, a log fire, tipped by dancing flames, burned in the low wide grate. Upon the side-table, between the westward facing windows, a row of silver chafing-dishes gave agreeable promise of varied meats; as did the tea and coffee service, arrayed before Damaris, of grateful beverage. While she herself looked trim, and finished in white silk shirt and russet-red suit, her toilet bearing no sign of indifference or of haste.

That her complexion matched her shirt in colour—or rather in all absence of it—that her face was thin, its contours hardened, her eyebrows drawn into a little frown, her eyes enormous, sombre and clouded as with meditative thought, increased, in Carteret's estimation, assurance of her regained self-mastery and composure. Nor did a reticence in her manner displease him.

"I have persuaded Aunt Felicia to breakfast upstairs," she told him. "Dr. McCabe sends me word he—my father—wishes to rest for the present, so I engaged Aunt Felicia to rest too. She was wonderful."

Damaris' voice shook slightly, as did her hand lifting the coffee-pot.

"She stayed up all night. So did you, I'm afraid, didn't you, Colonel Sahib?"

“Oh, for me that was nothing. A bath, a change, and ten minutes out there on the battery watching the sun come up over the sea,” Carteret said. “So don’t waste compassion on me. I’m as fit as a fiddle and in no wise deserve it.”

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“Ah! but you and Aunt Felicia did stay,” she repeated, her hands still rather tremulously busy with coffee-pot and milk jug. “You were faithful and I no better than a shirker. I fell through, miserably lost myself, which was selfish, contemptible. I am ashamed. Only I was so startled. I never really knew before such—such things could be.—Forgive me, Colonel Sahib. I have been to Aunt Felicia and asked her forgiveness already.—And don’t think too meanly of me, please. The shirking is over and done with for always. You may trust me it never will happen again—my losing myself as I did last night, I mean.”

In making this appeal for leniency, her eyes met Carteret’s fairly for the first time; and he read in them, not without admiration and a twinge of pain, both the height of her new-born, determined valour and the depth of her established distress.

“You needn’t tell me that, you needn’t tell me that, dear witch,” he answered quickly. “I was sure of it all along. I knew it was just a phase which would have no second edition. So put any question of shame or need of forgiveness out of your precious head. You were rushed up against circumstances, against a revelation, calculated to stagger the most seasoned campaigner. You did not shirk; but it took you a little time to get your bearings. That was all. Don’t vex your sweet soul with quite superfluous reproaches. —Sugar? Yes, and plenty of it I am afraid.—But you, too, must eat.”

And on her making some show of repugnance—

“See here, we can’t afford to despise the day of small things, of minor aids to efficiency, dearest witch,” he wisely admonished her.

Whereupon, emulous to please him, bending her will to his, Damaris humbled herself to consumption of a portion of the contents of the chafing-dishes aforesaid. To discover that, granted a healthy subject, sorrow queerly breeds hunger, the initial distaste for food—in the main a sentimental one—once surmounted.

Later McCabe joined them. Recognized Damaris’ attitude of valour, and inwardly applauded it, although himself in woeful state. For he was hard hit, badly upset. Conscious of waste of tissue, he set about to restore it without apology or hesitation, trouble putting an edge to appetite in his case also, and that of formidable keenness. Bitterly he grieved, since bearing the patient, he feared very certainly to lose, an uncommon affection. He loved Charles Verity; while, from the worldly standpoint, his dealings with The Hard meant very much to him—made for glory, a feather in his cap visible to all and envied by many. Minus the fine flourish of it his position sank to obscurity. As a whist-playing, golf-playing, club-haunting, Anglo-Indian ex-civil surgeon —and Irishman at that—living in lodgings at Stourmouth, he commanded meagre consideration. But as chosen medical-attendant and, in some sort, retainer of Sir Charles Verity he ranked. The county came within his purview. Thanks to this connection with The Hard he, on occasion, rubbed shoulders with the locally great.

Hence genuine grief for his friend was black-bordered by the prospect of impending social and mundane loss. The future frowned on him, view it in what terms he might. To use his own unspoken phrase, he felt “in hellishly low water.”

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One point in particular just now worried him. Thus, as fish, eggs, porridge, hot cakes, honey, and jam disappeared in succession, he opened himself to Damaris and Carteret. A difficult subject, namely that of a second opinion.—Let no thought of any wounding of his susceptibilities operate against the calling in of such. He was ready and willing to meet any fellow practitioner they might select—a Harley Street big-wig, or Dr. Maskall, of Harchester, whose advice in respect of cardiac trouble was wide sought.

He had, however, but just launched the question when Hordle entered and, walking to the head of the table, addressed Damaris.

“Sir Charles desires me to say he will be glad to see you, miss, when you are at liberty,” he told her in muffled accents.

She sprang up, to pause an instant, irresolute, glancing wide-eyed at Carteret.

He had risen too. Coming round the corner of the table, he drew back her chair, put his hand under her elbow, went with her to the door.

“There is nothing to dread, dearest witch,” he gently and quietly said. “Have confidence in yourself. God keep you—and him.—Now you are quite ready? That’s right.—Well, then go.”

Carteret waited, looking after her until, crossing the hall followed by Hordle, she passed along the corridor out of sight. Silent, preoccupied, he closed the door and took a turn the length of the room before resuming his place at the opposite side of the table to McCabe, facing the light.

The doctor, who had ceased eating and half risen to his feet at the commencement of this little scene, watched it throughout; at first indifferent, a prey to his own worries, but soon in quickening interest, shrewd enquiry and finally in dawning comprehension.

“Holy Mother of Mercy, so that’s the lay of the land, is it?” and his loose lips shaped themselves to a whistle, yet emitted no sound. To obliterate all signs of which tendency to vulgar expression of enlightenment he rubbed moustache, mouth and chin with his napkin, studying Carteret closely meanwhile.

“In the pink of condition, by Gad—good for a liberal twenty years yet, and more—bar accident. Indefinite postponement of the grand climacteric in this case.—All the same a leetle, lee-tie bit dangerous, I’m thinking, for both, if she tumbles to it.”

Then aloud—“Has the poor darling girl grasped the meaning of her father’s illness do you make out, Colonel grasped the ugly eventualities of it?”

Carteret slowly brought his glance to bear on the speaker.

“I believe so, though she has not actually told me as much,” he said—“And now about this question of a second opinion, McCabe?”

The easily huffed Irishman accepted the reproof in the best spirit possible, as confirming his own perspicacity.

“Quite so. Flicked him neatly on the raw, and he winced. All the same he’s a white man, a real jewel of a fellow, worthy of good fortune if the ball’s thrown his way. I wonder how long, by-the-by, this handsome game’s been a-playing?”

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With which, as requested, he returned to the rival claims of Harley Street and Harchester in respect of a consulting physician.

Carteret proved a faithful prophet, for in truth there was nothing to dread the beloved presence once entered, as Damaris thankfully registered.

The sun by now topped the hollies and shone into the study, flinging a bright slanting pathway across the dim crimson, scarlet and blue of the Turkey carpet. Charles Verity stood, in an open bay of the great window, looking out over the garden. Seen thus, in the still sunlight, the tall grey-clad figure possessed all its accustomed, slightly arrogant repose. Damaris thrilled with exalted hope. For the young are slow to admit even the verdict of fact as final. His attitude was so natural, so unstrained and unstudied, that the message of ghostly warning yesterday evening was surely discounted; while the subsequent terror of the night, that hideous battle with pain and suffocation, became to her incredible, an evil dream from which, in grateful ecstasy, she now awoke.

Her joy found expression.

“Dearest, dearest, you sent for me.—Is it to let me see you are really better, more beautifully recovered than they told me or I ventured to suppose?”

Her voice broke under a gladness midway between tears and laughter.

“The envious blades of Atropos’ scissors have not cut the mortal thread yet anyhow,” he answered, smiling, permitting himself the classic conceit as a screen to possible emotion. “But we won’t build too much on the clemency of Fate. How long she proposes to wait before closing her scissors it is idle to attempt to say.”

He laid his hands on Damaris’ shoulders. Bent his head and kissed her upward pouted lips—thereby hushing the loving disclaimer which rose to them.

“So we will keep on the safe side of the event, my wise child,” he continued. “Make all our preparations and thus deny the enemy any satisfaction of taking us unawares.—-Can you write a business letter for me?”

“A dozen, dearest, if you wish,” Damaris assented eagerly. Yet that image of the scissors stayed by her. Already her joy was sensibly upon the wane.

“Oh! one will be sufficient, I think—quite sufficient for this morning.”

Charles Verity turned his head, looking seaward through the tranquil sunshine.

“That Indian appointment has to be suitably thanked for and—declined.”

Damaris drew back a step so as to gain a clearer view of him. The hands resting on her shoulders were oddly inert, so she fancied, forceless and in temperature cold. Even through the thickness of cloth jacket and silk shirt she was aware of their lifelessness and chill. This roused rebellion in her. Her instinct was for fight. She made a return on McCabe's suggestion regarding further advice. She would demand a consultation, call in expert opinion. The dear man with the blue eyes—here her white face flushed rosy—would manage all that for her, and compel help in the form of the last word of medical science and skill.

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“Might not your letter be put off for just a few days?” she pleaded, “in case—until”—

But Charles Verity broke in before she could finish her tender protest, a sadness, even hint of bitterness in his tone.

“You covet this thing so much,” he said. “Your heart is so set on it?”

She made haste to reassure him.—No, no not that way, not for her. How could it signify, save on his account? She only cared because greedy of his advancement, greedy to have him exalted—placed where he belonged, on the summit, the apex, so that all must perceive and acknowledge his greatness. As to herself—and the flush deepened, making her in aspect deliciously youthful and ingenious—she confessed misgivings. Reported her talk with Carteret concerning the subject, and the scolding received from him thereupon.

“One more reason for writing in the sense I propose, then,” her father declared, “since it sets your over-modest doubts and qualms at rest, my dear. That is settled.”

His hands weighed on her shoulders as though he suddenly needed and sought support.

“I will sit down,” he said. “There are other matters to be discussed, and I can, perhaps, talk more easily so.”

He went the few steps across to the red chair. Sank into it. Leaned against the pillows, bending backward, his hand pressed to his left side. His features contracted, and his breath caught as of one spent with running. And Damaris, watching him, again received that desolating impression of change, of his being in spirit far removed, inaccessible to her sympathy, a stranger. He had gone away and rather terribly left her alone.

“Are you in pain?” she asked, agonized.

“Discomfort,” he replied. “We will not dignify this by the name of pain. But I must wait for a time before dictating the letter. There’s something I will ask you to do for me, my dear, meanwhile.”

“Yes”—He paused, shifted his position, closed his eyes.

“Have you held any communication with—”

He stopped, for the question irked him. Even at this pass it went against the grain with him to ask of his daughter news of his son.

But in that pause our maiden’s scattered wits very effectually returned to her.

“With Darcy Faircloth?” she said. And as Charles Verity bowed his head in assent—-“Yes, I should have told you already but—but for all which has happened. He was here the day before yesterday. He came home from church with me.—That was my doing, not his, to begin with. You mustn’t think he put himself forward—took advantage, I mean, of your being away. If there is any blame it is mine.”

“Mine, rather—and of long standing. God forgive me!”

But Damaris, fairly launched now upon a wholly welcome topic, would have none of this. To maintain her own courage, and, if it might be, combat that dreaded withdrawal of his spirit into regions where she could not follow, she braced herself to reason with him.

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“No—there indeed you are mistaken, dearest,” she gently yet confidently asserted. “You take the whole business topsy-turvy fashion, quite wrong way round. I won’t weary you with explanations of exactly what led to Darcy Faircloth coming here with me on Sunday. But you ought to know that he and Aunt Felicia met. I hadn’t planned that. It just happened. And she was lovely to him—lovely to us both. She made him stay to luncheon—inviting him in your name.”

“I seem to possess a singular gift for saddling my relations with the payment of my bad debts,” Charles Verity remarked.

“But there isn’t any bad debt—that’s what I so dearly want you to believe, what I’m trying so hard, Commissioner Sahib, to tell you,” Damaris cried. “Afterwards, when he and I were alone by ourselves, the ice broke somehow, he gave himself away and said beautiful things—things about you which made me delightfully happy, and showed how he has felt towards you all along.”

Simply, without picking of her words, hesitation or artifice, Damaris repeated that somewhat sinister tale of the sea. Of a sailing ship, becalmed through burning days and stifling nights in tropic waters. Of the ill-doings of a brutal, drunken captain. Of a fly-blown eating-house in Singapore. Of the spiritual deliverance there achieved through sight of Charles Verity’s name and successful record in the columns of a Calcutta newspaper; and the boy’s resultant demand for the infliction of some outward and visible sign, some inalienable stigmata, which should bear perpetual witness to the fact of his parentage.

“So you see”—

Damaris kindled, standing before him, flamed indeed to a rare carelessness of convention, of enjoined pruderies and secrecies.—

“You gave him the beautiful gift of life to begin with; and saved his life later when he was so miserably tempted to end it. As he loves life, where then is the debt?—Not on your side certainly, dearest.”

Listening to which fondly exalted sophistries—for sophistries from worldly and moral standpoint alike must he not surely pronounce them?—Charles Verity still received comfort to his soul. They ought to be reckoned mistaken, of course, transparently in error, yet neither son nor daughter condemned him. Neither did his sister, in the pathetic innocence and purity of her middle-age maidenhood.

This moved him to thankfulness, none the less genuine because shot with self-mockery. For he was curious to observe how, as the last urgings of ambition and thirst of power fell away from him,—he riding under escort of Death, the black captain—all tributes of human tenderness and approval gained in value.—Not the approval of

notable personages, of those high in office, nor even that of sympathetic critics and readers; but of persons in his own immediate voisinage, bound to him by friendship, by association, or the tie of blood.—Their good-will was precious to him as never before. He craved to

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be in perfect amity with every member of that restricted circle. Hence it vexed and fretted him to know the circle incomplete, through the exclusion of one rather flagrantly intimate example. Yet to draw the said member, the said example, within the circle, yielding it the place which it might rightfully aspire to occupy, amounted—after half a lifetime of abstention and avoidance—to a rather tremendous demonstration, one which might well be hailed as extravagant, as a courting of offence possible only to a sentimental egoist of most aggravated kind.

And he was tired—had no smallest inclination towards demonstrations. For the threatening of heart spasm, to which he lately denied the title of pain, though of short duration, affected him adversely, sapping his strength. His mind, it is true, remained clear, even vividly receptive; but, just as earlier this morning, his will proved insufficient for its direction or control. He mused, his chin sunk on his breast, his left hand travelling down over the long soft moustache, his eyes half closed. Thought and vision followed their own impulse, wandering back and forth between the low-caste eating-house in the sweltering heat and perfumed stenches of the oriental, tropic seaport; and the stone-built English inn—here on Marychurch Haven—overlooking the desolate waste of sand-hills, the dark reed-beds and chill gleaming tides.

For love of Damaris, his daughter, while still in the heat of his prime, he had foresworn all traffic with women. Yet now, along with the tacitly admitted claims of the son, arose the claim of the mistress, mother of that son—in no sensual sort, but with a certain wildness of bygone romance, wind and rain-swept, unsubstantial, dim and grey. Ever since conviction of the extreme gravity of his physical condition dawned on him, the idea of penetrating the courts of that deserted sanctuary had been recurrent. In the summing up of his human, his earthly, experience, romance deserved, surely, a word of farewell? Damaris' story served to give the idea a fuller appeal and consistency.

But he was tired—tired. He longed simply to drift. It was infinitely distasteful to him definitely to plan, or to decide respecting anything.

Meanwhile his continued silence and abstraction wore badly upon Damaris. She had steeled herself; had flamed, greatly daring. Now reaction set in. Her effort proved vain. She had failed. For once more she recognized that an unknown influence, a power dark and incalculably strong—so she figured it—regained ascendency over her father, working to the insidious changing of his nature, strangely winning him away. Waiting for some response, some speech or comment on his part, fear and the sense of helplessness assailed, and would have submerged her, had she not clung to Carteret's parting "God bless you" and avowed faith in her stability, as to a wonder-working charm. Nor did the charm fail in efficacy.—Oh! really he was a wonderful sheet-anchor, "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," that dear man with the blue eyes! Consciously she blessed him.—And, thanks to remembrance of him, presently found voice and purpose once again.

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“You aren’t displeased with me, dearest?” she asked.

“Displeased?” Charles Verity repeated, at first absently. “Displeased, my dear, no—-why?”

“We didn’t do wrong?”—labouring the point, the more fully to recall and retain him—-“Didn’t take too much upon ourselves—Aunt Felicia, I mean, and I—by persuading Darcy Faircloth to stay on Sunday, by entertaining him when you were away? Or—or have I been stupid, dearest, and thoughtlessly wearied you by talking too much and too long?”

“Neither,” he said. “On the contrary, all you have told me goes to lessen certain difficulties, make the crooked, in some degree, straight and rough places plain.”

For, if Faircloth had been here so recently, broken bread too in the house, so he argued, it became the easier to bid him return. And Charles Verity needed to see him, see him this morning—since purpose of farewells, to be spoken in those long-deserted courts of romance, stiffened, becoming a thing not merely to be turned hither and thither in thought, but to be plainly and directly done.—“Send for him in your own name,” he said. “Explain to him how matters stand, and ask him to talk with me.”

And, as Damaris agreed, rejoiced by the success of her adventurous diplomacy, making to go at once and give the required instructions—

“Stay—stay a moment,” her father said, and drew her down to sit on the chair-arm, keeping her hand in his, and with his other hand stroking it wistfully. For though certain difficulties might be sensibly lessened, they were not altogether removed; and he smiled inwardly, aware that not even in the crack of doom are feminine rights over a man other than conflicting and uncommonly ticklish to adjust.

“Before we commit ourselves to further enterprises, my darling, let us quite understand one another upon one or two practical points—bearing in mind the blades of Atropos’ envious scissors. My affairs are in order”—Damaris shrank, piteously expostulated.

“Oh! but must we, are we obliged to speak of those things? They grate on me—-Commissioner Sahib, they are ugly. They hurt.”

“Yes—distinctly we are obliged to speak of them. To do so can neither hasten nor retard the event. All the more obliged to speak of them, because I have never greatly cared about money, except for what I could do with it.—As a means, of vast importance. As an end, uninteresting.—So it has been lightly come and lightly go, I am afraid. All the same I’ve not been culpably improvident. A portion of my income dies with me; but enough remains to secure you against any anxiety regarding ways and means, if not to make you a rich woman. I have left an annuity to your Aunt Felicia. Her means are

slender, dear creature, and her benevolence outruns them, so that she balances a little anxiously, I gather, on the edge of debt. The capital sum will return to you eventually. Carteret and McCabe consented,

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some years ago, to act as my executors. Their probity and honour are above reproach. —Now as to this place—if you should ever wish to part with it, let Faircloth take it over. I have made arrangements to that effect, about which I will talk with him when he comes. —Have no fear lest I should say that which might wound him. I shall be as careful, my dear, of his proper pride as of my own.—Understand I have no desire to circumscribe either your or his liberty of action unduly. But this house, all it contains, the garden, the very trees I see from these windows, are so knitted into the fabric of my past life that I shrink—with a queer sense of homelessness—from any thought of their passing into the occupation of strangers.—Childish, pitifully weak-minded no doubt, and therefore the more natural that one should crave a voice, thus in the disposition of what one has learned through long usage so very falsely to call one's own!"

"We will do exactly what you wish, even to the littlest particular, I promise you—both for Faircloth and for myself," Damaris answered, forcing herself to calmness and restraint of tears.

He petted her hands silently until, as the minutes passed, she began once more to grow fearful of that dreadful unknown influence insidiously possessing him and winning him away. And he may have grown fearful of it too, for he made a sharp movement, raising his shoulders as though striving to throw off some weight, some encumbrance.

"There is an end, then, of business," he said, "and of such worldly considerations. I need worry you with them no more. Only one thing remains, of which, before I speak to others, it is only seemly, my darling, I should speak to you."

Charles Verity lifted his eyes to hers, and she perceived his spirit as now in nowise remote; but close, evident almost to the point of alarm. It looked out from the wasted face, at once—to her seeing—exquisite and austere, reaching forward, keenly curious of all death should reveal, unmoved, yet instinct with the brilliance, the mirthfulness even, of impending portentous adventure.

"You know, Damaris, how greatly I love and have loved you—how dear you have been to me, dearer than the satisfaction of my own flesh?"

Speech was beyond her. She looked back, dazzled and for the moment broken.

"Therefore it goes hard with me to ask anything which might, ever so distantly, cause you offence or distress. Only time presses. We are within sight of the end."

"Ah! no—no," she exclaimed, wrenching away her hands and beating them together, passion of affection, of revolt and sorrow no more to be controlled. "How can I bear it, how can I part with you? I will not, I will not have you die.—McCabe isn't infallible. We must call in other doctors. They may be cleverer, may suggest new treatment, new

remedies. They must cure you—or if they can't cure, at least keep you alive for me. I won't have you die!"

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“Call in whom you like, as many as you like, my darling, the whole medical faculty if it serves to pacify or to content you,” he said, smiling at her.

Damaris repented. Took poor passion by the throat, stifling its useless cries.

“I tire you. I waste your strength. I think only of myself, of my own grief, most beloved, my own consuming grief and desolation.—See—I will be good—I am good. What else is there you want to have me do?”

“This—but recollect you are free to say me nay, without scruple or hesitation. I shall not require you to give your reasons, but shall bow, unreservedly, to your wishes. For you possess a touchstone in such questions as the one now troubling me, which, did I ever possess it, I lost, as do most men, rather lamentably early in my career. If you suffer me to do so, I will ask Darcy Faircloth to bring his mother here to me, this evening at dusk, when her coming will not challenge impertinent observation—so that I may be satisfied no bitterness colours her thought of me and that we part in peace, she and I.”

Damaris got up from her seat on the arm of the red-covered chair. She stood rigid, her expression reserved to blankness, but her head carried high.

“Of course,” she said, a little hoarsely, and waited. “Of course. How could I object? Wasn’t it superfluous even to ask me? Your word, dearest, is law.”

“But in the present case hardly gospel?”

“Yes—gospel too—since it is your word. Gospel, that is, for me. Let Darcy Faircloth bring his mother here by all means. Only I think, perhaps, this is all a little outside my province. It would be better you should make the—the appointment with him yourself. I will send to him directly. Patch can take a note over to the island. I would prefer to have Patch go as messenger than either of the other men.”

She walked towards the door. Stopped half-way and turned, hearing her father move. And as she turned—her eyes quick with enquiry as to his case, but inscrutable as to her own—Charles Verity rose too and held out his arms in supreme invitation. She came swiftly forward and kissed him, while with all the poor measure of force left him, he strained her to his breast.

“Have I asked too much from you, Damaris, and, in the desire to make sure of peace elsewhere, endangered the perfection of my far dearer peace with you?”

She leaned back from the waist, holding her head away from him and laid her hand on his lips.

“Don’t blaspheme, most beloved,” she said, “I have no will but yours.”

Again she kissed him, disengaged herself very gently, and went.

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH WHICH IS ALSO CHAPTER THE LAST

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At Lady's Oak—an ancient forest boundary—where the main road forks, Damaris swung the dog-cart to the left, across the single-arch stone bridge spanning the Arne; and on, up the long winding ascent from the valley-bottom to the moorlands patched with dark fir plantations, which range inland from behind Stourmouth. This constituted the goal of her journey; for, the high-lying plateau reached, leagues of open country are disclosed north and west, far as the eye carries, to the fine bare outline of the Wiltshire Downs. She asked for wide prospects, for air and ample space; but as floored by stable earth rather than by the eternal unrest and "fruitless, sonorous furrows" of the sea.

Ever since the day of the funeral, now nearly a fortnight ago, Damaris had kept within the sheltering privacy of the house and grounds. That day, one of soft drizzling rain and clinging ground fog, had also been to her one of hardly endurable distraction. Beneath assumption of respectful silence, it jarred, boomed, took notes, debated, questioned. Beneath assumption of solemnity, it peeped and stared. Her flayed nerves and desolated heart plagued her with suspicions of insincerity.

In as far as Colonel Carteret controlled proceedings all had been marked by reverent simplicity. But where the carcass is, the eagles, proverbially, gather. And unfeathered fowl, in their own estimation eminently representative of that regal species, flocked to Deadham church and to The Hard.

If—to vary our metaphor—some, in the past, inclined to stone the living prophet, these now outvied one another in their alacrity to bedeck his tomb. Dr. Cripps, for example, hurried to offer himself as pall-bearer—a request the more readily disposed of that there was no pall. While Archdeacon Verity, to cite a second example and from a higher social level, supported by his elder son Pontifex—domestic chaplain to the Bishop of Harchester—insisted on sharing with Canon Horniblow the melancholy honour of reading the burial service.

For the rest, the head, and lesser members of the family, from the big house at Canton Magna, were solidly, not to say rather aggressively in evidence. With them Mrs. Cowden and her husband-satellite, the Honourable Augustus joined forces on arriving from Paulton Lacy.—Lord Bulparc drove over from Napworth Castle. The country, indeed, showed up with commendable indifference to depressing atmospheric conditions. Marychurch sent a contingent. Stourmouth followed suit in the shape of General Frayling—attended by Marshall Wace in full clerical raiment—bearing a wreath of palm, violets, and myrtle wholly disproportionate in bulk and circumference to his own shrivelled and rather tottery form.—Of this unlooked for advent more hereafter.—Other distinguished soldiers came from Aldershot and down from town. A permanent Under Secretary, correct but visibly bored, represented the India Office.

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The parish, neglecting its accustomed industries and occupations, mustered in strength; incited thereto, not only by the draw of recently resurrected scandal, but by news of the appointment recently offered Sir Charles Verity, which had somehow got noised abroad. The irony of his illness and death occurring precisely when he was invited to mount nothing less—according to local report—than an oriental throne, sufficed to stir the most lethargic imagination. Moralists of the Reginald Sawyer school might read in this the direct judgment of an offended deity. Deadham, however, being reprehensibly clannish, viewed the incident otherwise; and questioned—thanks to an ingeniously inverted system of reasoning—whether the said Reginald Sawyer hadn't laid himself open to a charge of manslaughter or of an even graver breach of the Decalogue.

Theresa Bilson—in whose hat artificial buttercups and daisies hastily made room for bows of crape—lurked in the humble obscurity of the free seats near the west door. To right and left she was flanked by a guardian Miss Minett; but these ladies to-day were but broken reeds on which to lean. They still laboured under a sense of having been compromised, and of resultant social ostracism. This, although their former parsonic lodger had vanished from the scene on the day following his threatened immersion—a half-hearted proposition on his part of "facing out the undeserved obloquy, living down the coarse persecution" meeting with as scant encouragement from his ecclesiastical superior, the vicar, as from themselves. Theresa—it really was hard on her—shared their eclipse. Hence the humble obscurity of the free seats, where she sniffed, dabbed her eyes and gurgled, unheeded and unseen.

Finally young Tom Verity—home on his first long leave—having accompanied the family party from Canton Magna and feeling his sense of humour unequal to the continued strain of their sublime insularity, benevolently herded two stately, though shivering, turbanned native gentlemen, who reached Deadham during the early stages of the ceremony no one quite knew whence or when. In the intervals of his self-imposed duties, he found time to admire the rich unction of his father, the Archdeacon's manner and voice.

"*Plus ca change, plus la meme chose*," he quoted gleefully. "What a consummate fraud the dear old governor is; and how deliciously innocent of the fact, that he imposes upon no one half so successfully as he does upon himself!"

Our young man also found time, from afar, to admire Damaris; but, let it be added, to a very different tune. Her beauty came as surprise to him as having much more than fulfilled its early promise. He found it impressive beyond that of any one of the many ladies, mature or callow, with whom it was his habit largely to flirt. So far he could congratulate himself on having successfully withstood the wiles of matrimony—but by how near a shave, at

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times by how narrow a squeak! If that fine parental fraud, the Archdeacon, had but known!—Tom, undeterred by the solemnity of the occasion, hunched up his shoulders like a naughty boy expecting his ears boxed.—But then—thank the powers, the Archdeacon so blessedly and refreshingly didn't, and, what was more, didn't in the very least want to know. He never asked for trouble; but, like the priest and Levite of sacred parable, carefully passed by on the other side when trouble was about.

Our young friend looked again at Damaris. Yes—she had beauty and in the grand manner, standing there at the foot of the open brick-lined grave, calm, immobile, black-clad, white-faced, in the encircling melancholy of the drizzling mist. With the family grouped about her, large-boned, pompous, well-fed persons, impervious to general ideas as they were imperviously prosperous, he compared her to a strayed deer amongst a herd of store cattle. Really, with the exception of his cousin Felicia and—naturally—of himself, the Verity breed was almost indecently true to type. Prize animals, most of them, he granted, still cattle—for didn't he detect an underlying trace of obstinate bovine ferocity in their collective aspect?

Damaris' calm and immobility exceeded theirs. But in quality and source how far removed, how sensitive and intelligent! Her mourning was in the grand manner, too, her grief sincere and absolute to the extent of a splendid self-forgetfulness. She didn't need to pose; for that forgotten self could be trusted—in another acceptation of the phrase—never to forget itself.

And here Tom Verity's agreeable frivolity, the astute and witty shiftiness of mind and—in a degree—of practice, for which he so readily found excuses and forgave himself, made place for nobler apprehensions. Not merely Damaris', just now, rather tragic beauty moved and impressed him; but some quality inherent in her upon which he felt disposed to confer the title of genius. That was going far.—Mentally he pulled himself up short.—For wasn't it going altogether too far—absurdly so? What the dickens did this excessive admiration portend? Could he have received the *coup de foudre*?—He had to-day a fancy for French tags, in reaction from the family's over-powering Englishness.—That wouldn't suit his book in the very least. For in the matters of the affections he held it thriftless, to the confines of sheer lunacy, to put all your eggs into one basket. He, therefore, politicly abstained from further observation of Damaris; and, with engaging assiduity, reapplied himself to herding the two native gentlemen through the remainder of the ceremony and, at the conclusion of it, into the mildewed luxury of a Marychurch landau.

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Deadham parish went home to its tea that evening damp, not to say dripping, but well pleased with the figure it had cut in the public eye. For it had contributed its quota to contemporary history; and what parish can, after all, do more! Reporters pervaded it armed with note-books and pencils. They put questions, politely requested a naming of names. The information furnished in answer would reach the unassailable authority of print, giving Deadham opportunity to read the complimentary truth about itself. Still better, giving others opportunity to read the complimentary truth about Deadham. Hence trade and traffic of sorts, with much incidental replenishing of purses. Great are the uses of a dead prophet to the keepers of his tomb! Not within the memory of the oldest inhabitant had any funeral been so largely or honourably attended. Truly it spelled excellent advertisement—and this although two persons, calculated mightily to have heightened interest and brought up dramatic and emotional values, were absent from the scene.

For Lesbia Faircloth, giving her barman and two women servants a holiday, closed the inn at noon. Alone within the empty house, she locked the outer doors. Drew the blinds, reducing the interior to uniform, shadow-peopled obscurity, with the exception of her own bed-chamber. There she left one small square window—set deep in the stone work of the wall—open and uncurtained.

It faced the causeway and perspective of lane skirting the warren and leading to the high road and village. Looking out thence, in winter when the trees were bare, she could see Deadham church, crowning its monticule, part of the sloping graveyard and, below these in the middle distance, the roofs and gables of the village street.

To-day the view was obliterated. For here, at the river level, mist and drizzle took the form of fog. Opaque, chill and dank, it drifted in continuous, just perceptible, undulations past and in at the open casement. Soon the air of the room grew thick and whitish, the dark oak furniture and the floor boards furred with moisture. Yet, her methodical closure of the house complete, Lesbia Faircloth elected to sit in full inward sweep of it, drawing a straight-backed chair, mounted on roughly carpentered rockers, close to the window.

A handsome woman still, though in her late fifties, erect and of commanding presence, her figure well-proportioned if somewhat massive. Her dark hair showed no grey. Her rather brown skin was clear, smooth and soft in texture. Her eyes clear, too, watchful and reticent; on occasion—such as the driving of a business bargain say, or of a drunken client—hard as flint. Her mouth, a wholesome red, inclined to fullness; but had been governed to straightness of line—will dominant, not only in her every movement, but in repose as she now sat, the chair rockers at a backward tilt, her capable and well-shaped hands folded on her black apron in the hollow of her lap.

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Putting aside all work for once, and permitting herself a space of undisturbed leisure, she proceeded to cast up her account with love and life in as clear-headed, accurate a fashion as she would have cast up the columns of cash-book or ledger—and found the balance on the credit side. So finding it, she turned her head and looked across the room at the wide half-tester wooden bed, set against the inner wall—the white crochet counterpane of which, an affair of intricate fancy patterns and innumerable stitches, loomed up somewhat ghostly and pallid through the gloom. A flicker of retrospective victory passed across her face, attesting old scores as paid. For there, through sleepless nights, nursing the ardours and disgust of her young womanhood, she lay barren beside her apple-cheeked, piping-voiced spouse, his wife in name only. There later, times having, as by miracle, changed for her, she gave birth to her son.

If somewhat pre-christian in instinct and in nature, the child of a more ancient and a simpler world, she was in no sort slow of intelligence or wanton. What had been, sufficed her. She cried out neither for further indulgence of passion, nor against barriers imposed by circumstance and class. That which she had done, she had done open-eyed, counting and accepting the cost. Since then wooers were not lacking; but she turned a deaf ear to all and each. A frank materialist in some ways, she proved an idealist in this. No subsequent love passage could rival, in wonder or beauty, that first one; since, compared with Charles Verity, the men who subsequently aspired to her favours—whether in wedlock or out—were, to her taste, at best dull, loutish fellows, at worst no more than human jackasses or human swine.

And, through it all, she possessed the boy on whom to spend her heart, in whose interests to employ her foresight and singular capacity of money-making. For love's sake therefore, and for his sake also, she had lived without reproach, a woman chary even of friendship, chary, too, of laughter, chary above all of purposeless gaddings and of gossip. Business, and the boy's sea-going or returning, might take her as far as Southampton, Plymouth, Cardiff, more rarely London or some northern port. But Deadham village rarely beheld her, and never, it is to be feared, did the inside of Deadham church.

Yet Deadham church bell plaintively, insistently tolling, the sound reaching her muted by the thickness of the fog, kept her attention on the stretch for the ensuing hour. Startling as it was poignant, Charles Verity's demand to see her, six days ago, brought the story of her love to full circle. Their meeting had been of the briefest, for he was exhausted by pain. But that he had sent, and she had gone, was unlocked for largesse on the part of fortune, sufficient to give her deep-seated and abiding sense of healing and of gain. And this stayed by her now, rather than any active call for mourning.

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She inhaled the dank chillness of the fog gratefully. It suited the occasion better far than sunshine and bright skies. For winter, darkness, sullen flowing waters and desolate crying winds furnished the accompaniment of those earlier meetings. Hearing the tolling bell she strove to relive them, and found she did so with singularly mounting wealth and precision of detail. Not only vision but sense pushed backward and inward, revitalizing what had been; until she ached with suspense and yearning, shrewdly evaded dangers, surmounted obstructions by action at once bold and wary and tasted the transfiguring rapture of the end attained.

In the soberness of her middle years, occupied as she was with the rough, exacting business of the inn, and with the management of accumulating landed and other property—anxiety born of her son's perilous calling never absent from her thought—-Lesbia Faircloth inclined to live exclusively in the present. Hence the colours of her solitary passion had somewhat faded, becoming clouded and dim. Recent events—led by the ugly publicity of Reginald Sawyer's sermon—served to revive those colours. To-day they glowed rich and splendid, a robing of sombre glory to her inward and backward searching sight.

The bell tolled quicker, announcing the immediate approach of the dead. Lesbia listened, her head raised, her face, turned to open window, felt over by the clammy, impalpable fingers of the fog.

Now they bore the coffin up the churchyard path, as she timed it. She wondered who the bearers might be, and whether they carried it shoulder high? The path was steep; and Charles Verity, though spare and lean, broad of chest and notably tall. Bone tells. They would feel the weight, would breathe hard, stagger a little even and sweat.

And with this visualizing of grim particulars, love, bodily love and desire of that which rested stark and for ever cold within the narrow darkness of the coffin—shut away from all comfort of human contact and the dear joys of a woman's embrace—rushed on her like a storm, buffeted and shook her, so that she looked to right and to left as asking help, while her hands worked one upon the other in the hollow of her lap.

Nor did Darcy Faircloth figure in Deadham's record funeral gathering. Upon the day preceding it, having watched by Charles Verity's corpse during the previous night, he judged it well to take his new command—a fine, five-thousand-ton steamer, carrying limited number of passengers as well as cargo, and trading from Tilbury to the far East and to Japan, via the Cape.

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In his withdrawal, at this particular date, Miss Felicia hailed a counsel of perfection which commanded, and continued to command, alike her enthusiastic approval and unfeigned regret. For that he should so seasonably efface himself, argued—in her opinion—so delightful a nature, such nice thought for others, such chivalrous instincts and excellent good taste!—All the more lamentable, then, effacement should be, from social, moral or other seasons, required.—Yet for the family to gain knowledge of certain facts without due preparation—how utterly disastrous! Think of her half-sister, Harriet Cowden, for instance, with a full-grown and, alas! wrong-way-about, step-nephew bounced on her out of a clear sky, and on such an occasion too.—The bare notion of what that formidable lady, not only might, but quite certainly would look and say turned Miss Felicia positively faint.—No—no, clearly it had to be—it had to be—or rather—she became incoherent—had not to be, if only for dearest Charles's sake. Yet what a ten thousand pities; for notwithstanding the plebeian origin on the mother's side, didn't Faircloth—these reflections came later—really surpass every male Verity present, young Tom included, though she confessed to a very soft spot in her heart for young Tom?—Surpass them, just as her brother Charles had always surpassed them in good looks and charm as in inches, above all in his air of singular good-breeding? And how extraordinarily he had transmitted this last to Faircloth, notwithstanding the—well, the drawback, the obstacle to—Miss Felicia did not finish the sentence, though in sentiment becoming sweetly abandoned. For how she would have revelled, other things being equal—which they so deplorably weren't—in shaking this singularly attractive nephew in the family's collective face, just to show them what dearest Charles—who they never had quite understood or appreciated—could do in the matter of sons, when he once set about it, even against admittedly heavy odds!

As it was, she had to pacify her gentle extravagance by subjecting the said nephew's hand to a long tremulous pressure at parting.—He, worn, blanched, a little strange from the night's lonely and very searching vigil; she patchily pink as to complexion, fluttered, her candid eyes red-lidded.—Pacify herself by assuring him she could never express how deeply she had felt his unselfish devotion during this time of trouble—felt his—his perfect attitude towards her dearest brother—his father—or the consideration he had shown towards Damaris and herself.

"You can count on my unswerving affection, my dear Darcy," she had said. Adding with, to him, very touching humility—"And any affection you have to give me in return I shall cherish most gratefully, be very sure of that."

All which, as shall presently be shown, brings our narrative, though by devious courses, back to Damaris sweeping the dog-cart to the left across the bridge spanning the Arne, and on up the long winding ascent, from the woods and rich meadows in the valley to the wide prospects and keener air of the moorland above.

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Until now, as already chronicled, she had remained in house or garden, prey to an apathy which, while not amounting to definite ill-health, refused interest and exertion. She could not shake it off. To her all things were empty, blank, immensely purposeless. Religion failed to touch her state—religion, that is, in the only form accessible. The interior of some frowning Gothic church of old Castile, or, from another angle, of some mellow Latin basilica, might have found the required mystic word to say to her. But Protestantism, even in its mild Anglican form, shuts the door on its dead children with a heavy hand.—And she suffered this religious coldness, although any idea that death of the body implies extinction of the spirit, extinction of personality, never occurred to her. Damaris' sense of the unseen was too ingrained, her commerce with it too actual for that. No—the spirit lived on. He, her most beloved, lived on, himself, his very self; but far away from her. In just this consisted the emptiness, the unspeakable and blank bitterness—he was somewhere and she could not reach him. The dreadful going away of his spirit, against which she had fought during the thirty-six hours of his illness, had reached its ordained consummation—that was all.

The body which had contained and by that beloved spirit been so nobly animated, in its present awful peace, its blind dumb majesty, meant scarcely more to her than some alabaster or waxen effigy of her dead. It was so like, yet so terrifyingly unlike Charles Verity in life!—She had visited it morning and evening, since to leave it in solitude appeared wanting in reverence. Throughout each night she thankfully knew that either Carteret, McCabe or Faircloth watched by it. Yet to her it hardly retained as much of her father's natural presence as the clothes he had worn, the books and papers littering his writing-table, the chair he preferred to sit in, his guns and swords upon the wall, or the collection of fishing-rods, walking-sticks and his spud stacked in a corner.

After the strain and publicity of the funeral her apathy deepened, perplexing and saddening Carteret and bringing Miss Felicia near to veritable wailing. For while thanking them both she, in fact, put them both aside. This in no sour or irritable humour; but with a listlessness and apartness hopeless to overcome. She prayed them to give her time. Soon she would begin again; but not just yet. She "couldn't begin again to order—couldn't make herself begin again. They must not trouble, only be patient with her, please, a little longer—she wasn't, indeed she wasn't, pretending"—a statement which, in its simplicity, cut Carteret to the quick—for "she meant to begin again directly she could."

To-day the weather took an encouraging turn for the better. Following the spell of fog and wet a northerly wind at last arose. It swept the sky clear of clouds, the land of melancholy vapours, begetting a brilliance of atmosphere which wooed our maiden to come forth and once more affront the open. She therefore ordered the dog-cart at two o'clock. Would herself drive; and, "if Aunt Felicia didn't mind and think her unsociable, would take Patch for sole company, because then"—renewed apologies—"she needn't talk and she felt disinclined to do so."

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During the first half mile or so, as must be confessed, each prick of the black horse's ears and change in his pace sent a quake through her, as did the sight of every vehicle upon the road she passed or met. Her nerve was nowhere, her self-confidence in tatters. But, since this parlous state was, in the main, physical, air and movement, along with the direct call on her attention, steadied the one and knit up the ravelled edges of the other. By the time the plateau was reached and the hill lay behind her, she could afford to walk the horse, tentatively invite her soul, and attempt to hold communion with Nature. Sorrow—as well as the Napoleonic Patch—still sat very squarely beside her; but the nightmare of mortality, with consequent blankness and emptiness, was no longer omnipresent. Interest again stirred in her, the healthy instinct of going on.

Except in the foreground, where foxy browns of withered bracken and pink-shot browns of withered heather gave richness of tone, the colouring of the great view was somewhat cold. It dealt in thin, uncertain green, the buff of stubble, in sharp slate-like blues blended in places with indigo, the black purple of hawthorn hedges and grey-brown filigree of leafless trees.—This did her good, she asking to be strengthened and stimulated rather than merely soothed. To feel the harsh, untainted wind break against her, hear it shrill through the dry, shivering grasses of the roadside and sturdy spires of heath, to see it toss the dark crests and tufted branches of the outstanding firs at the edge of the plantation, brought up her morale. Brought her resignation, moreover—not of the self-indulgent order, of bowed head and languidly folded hands; but of the sort which acknowledges loss and sorrow as common to the sum of human experience, places it in its just relation to the rest, and, though more heavily weighted than before, takes up the onward march, sobered perhaps yet undismayed.

Sins of omission began to prick her. The domestic establishment ran on wheels, even during the recent stress and agitation, though she had ceased to exercise control over it. Now it must be reorganized—and probably on a less liberal footing.—But these were minor questions, comparatively simple to cope with. Her life had been full, it must find fresh purpose, fresh interest and occupation, in a word, be refilled.

Literature allured her. She dreamed of wonderful tellings, dreamed of the engrossing joys of the written word. But in what form—poetry, essay, history, novel?—The extreme limitation of her own knowledge, or rather the immensity of her own ignorance, confronted her. And that partly through her own fault, for she had been exclusive, fastidious, disposed to ignore both truths and people who offended her taste or failed to strike her fancy. Hitherto she had been led by fancy and feeling rather than by reasoned principle. She must at once simplify, broaden and democratize her outlook. Must force herself to remember that respect is, in some sort, due to everything—-however unbeautiful, however even vile or repugnant—which is a constant quantity in human affairs and human character, due to everything in the realm of Nature also, however repellent, if it *is* really so, actually exists.

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In this connection the mysterious and haunting question of sex obtruded itself. And, along with it, the thought of two eminently diverse persons, namely Lesbia Faircloth and the dear, the more than ever dear, man with the blue eyes. That, in his agony, her father should have desired the visit of the former, once his mistress, had been very bitter to bear, provoking in Damaris a profound though silent jealousy. This had even come in some degree between her and Faircloth. For, in proportion as that visit more effectually united father and son, it abolished her position as intermediary between the two.

Recalling the incident jealousy moved her now, so that she gathered up the reins hastily and touched the horse with the whip. It sprang forward, danced and behaved, before settling down to the swinging trot which, in so handsome a fashion, ate up the blond road crossing the brown expanse of moor.

Damaris was surprised and distressed by the vehemence of her own emotion. That her jealousy was retrospective, and belonged to a past now over and done with, she admitted. Yet, thinking of her father's demand to see Lesbia, how amazingly deep it went, how profound, and lasting is the empire of "feeling in *that* way"—so she put it, falling back on her phrase of nearly three years ago, first coined at St. Augustin.

And this was where Carteret came in.—For he alone, of all men, had made her, Damaris, ever consciously "feel in *that* way."—A fact of immense significance surely, could she but grasp the full, the inner meaning of it—and one which entered vitally into the matter of "beginning again." Therefore, so she argued, the proposed simplifying, broadening, democratizing of her outlook must cover—amongst how much else!—the whole astonishing business of "feeling in *that* way."

She shrank from the conclusion as unwelcome. The question of sex was still distasteful to her. But she bade herself, sternly, not to shrink. For without some reasoned comprehension of it—as now dawned on her—the ways of human beings, of animals, of plants and, so some say, even of minerals, are unintelligible, arbitrary, and nonsensical. It is the push of life itself, essential, fundamental, which makes us "feel in *that* way"—the push of spirit yearning to be clothed upon with flesh, made visible and given its chance to enter the earthly arena, to play an individual part in the beautiful, terrible earthly scene. Therefore she must neglect it, reject it no longer. It had to be met and understood, if she would graduate in the school of reality; and in what other possible school is it worth while to graduate?

Reaching which climax in her argument, the selfishness of her recent behaviour became humiliatingly patent to her. From the whole household, but especially from Carteret and Aunt Felicia, she had taken all and given nothing in return. She had added to their grief, their anxieties, by her silence, her apathy, her whimsies.

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“Patch,” she asked suddenly, “which is the shortest way home, without going through Stourmouth and Marychurch? “—And, under his instructions, turned the dog-cart down a grassy side-track, heading south-east—her back now to the wind and inland country, her face to the larger horizon, the larger if more hazardous freedom of the sea.

Conversation, started thus by her enquiry, flourished in friendly, desultory fashion until, about three-quarters of an hour later, the front gates of The Hard came in sight. By then afternoon merged itself in early evening. Lights twinkled in the windows of the black cottages, upon the Island, and in those of Faircloth’s inn. The sky flamed orange and crimson behind the sand-hills and Stone Horse Head. The air carried the tang of coming frost. Upon the hard gravel of the drive, the wheels of the dog-cart grated and the horse’s hoofs rang loud.

Another Damaris came home to the Damaris who had set forth—a Damaris rested, refreshed, invigorated, no longer a passive but an active agent. Nevertheless, our poor maiden suffered some reaction on re-entering the house. For, so entering, her loss again confronted her as an actual entity. It sat throned in the lamp-lit hall. It demanded payment of tribute before permitting her to pass. Its attitude amounted, in her too fertile imagination, to a menace. Here, within the walls which had witnessed not only her own major acquaintance with sorrow, but so many events and episodes of strange and, sometimes, cruel import—super-normal manifestations, too, of which last she feared to think—she grew undone and weak, disposed to let tears flow, and yield once more to depression and apathy. The house was stronger than she. But—but—only stronger, surely, if she consented to turn craven and give way to it?—Whereupon she consciously, of set purpose, defied the house, denied its right to browbeat thus and enslave her. For had not she this afternoon, up on the moorland, found a finer manner of mourning than it imposed, a manner at once more noble and so more consonant with the temper and achievements of her beloved dead? She believed that she had.

On the hall table lay a little flight of visiting cards. Her mind occupied in silent battle with the house, Damaris glanced at them absently and would have passed on. But something in the half-deciphered printed names caught her attention. She bent lower, doubting if she could have read aright.

“Brig.-General and Mrs. Frayling.”—Two smaller cards, also bearing the General’s name, ranged with two others bearing that of “The Rev. Marshall Wace.” A written inscription, in the corner of each, notified a leading hotel in Stourmouth as the habitat of their respective owners.

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This little discovery affected Damaris to a singular extent. She had small enough wish for Henrietta Frayling's society at this juncture; still less for that of her attendant singer-reciter-parson. Yet their names, and the train of recollections evoked by these, made for the normal, the average, and, in so far, had on her a wholesome effect. For Henrietta, of once adored and now somewhat tarnished memory—soulless, finished, and exquisitely artificial to her finger-tips, beguiling others yet never herself beguiled beyond the limits of a flawless respectability—was wonderfully at odds with high tragedies of dissolution. How had the house received such a guest? How put up with her intrusion? But wasn't the house, perhaps, itself at a disadvantage, its sting drawn in presence of such invincible materialism? For how impress a creature at once so light and so pachydermatous? The position lent itself to rather mordant comedy.

In this sense, though not precisely in these phrases, did Damaris apprehend matters as, still holding Henrietta Frayling's visiting card in her hand, she crossed the hall and went into the drawing-room.

There, from upon the sofa behind the tea-table, through the warm soft radiance of shaded lamps and glowing fire, Felicia Verity uplifted her voice in somewhat agitated greeting. She made no preliminary affectionate enquiries—such as might have been expected—regarding her niece's outing or general well-being, but darted, not to say exploded, into the declaration:

"Darling, I am so exceedingly glad you weren't at home!—Mrs. Frayling's card?"

This, as the girl sat down on the sofa beside her.

"Then you know who's been here. I didn't intend to see anyone—unless poor little Theresa—But no, truly no one. Both Hordle and Mary were off duty—I ought not to have let them be away at the same time, perhaps, but I did feel they both needed a holiday, don't you know.—And either they had forgotten to give Laura my orders, or she lost her head, or was talked over. I daresay Mrs. Frayling insisted."

"Henrietta is not easily turned from her purpose," Damaris said.

"Exactly.—A very few minutes' conversation with her convinced me of that. And so I felt it would be unfair to blame Laura too severely. I should suppose Mrs. Frayling excessively clever in getting her own way. Poor Laura—even if she did know my orders, she hadn't a chance."

"Not a chance," Damaris repeated.

Once convalescence initiated, youth speedily regains its elasticity; and Aunt Felicia with her feathers ruffled, Aunt Felicia upon the warpath thus, presented a novel spectacle meriting observation. Evidently she and Henrietta had badly clashed!—A nice little

demon of diversion stirred within Damaris. For the first time for many days she felt amused.

“Excessively clever,” Miss Felicia continued.

—Without doubt the dear thing was finely worked up!—

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“And, though I hardly like to make such accusation, none too scrupulous in her methods. She leads you on with a number of irrelevant comments and questions, until you find she’s extracted from you a whole host of things you never meant to say. She is far too inquisitive—too possessive.”

Miss Felicia ended on an almost violent note.

“Yes, Henrietta has a tiresome little habit of having been there first,” Damaris said, a touch of weariness in her tone remembering past encounters.

Miss Felicia, caught by that warning tone, patted her niece’s rather undiscoverable knee —undiscoverable because still covered by a heavy fur-lined driving coat—lovingly, excitedly.

“If you choose to believe her, darling,” she cried, “which I, for one, emphatically don’t.”

Following which ardent profession of faith, or rather of scepticism, Miss Felicia attempted to treat the subject broadly. She soared to mountain-tops of social and psychological astuteness; but only to make hasty return upon her gentler self, deny her strictures, and snatch at the skirts of vanishing Christian charity.

“Men aren’t so easily led away,” she hopefully declared. “Nor can I think Mrs. Frayling so irresistible to each and all as she wishes one to imagine. She must magnify the number and, still more, the permanence of her conquests. No doubt she has been very much admired. I know she was lovely. I saw her once ages ago, at Tullingworth. Dearest Charles,” the words came softly, as though her lips hesitated to pronounce them in so trivial a connection—“asked me to call on her as I was staying in the neighbourhood. She had a different surname then, by the way, I remember.”

“Henrietta has had four in all—counting in her maiden name, I mean.”

“Exactly,” Miss Felicia argued, “and that, no doubt, does prejudice me a little against her. I suppose it is wrong, but when a woman marries so often one can’t help feeling as if she ended by not being married at all—a mere change of partners, don’t you know, which does seem rather shocking. It suggests such an absence of deep feeling.—Poor thing, I dare say that is just her nature; still it doesn’t attract me. In fact it gives me a creep.—But I quite own she is pretty still, and extraordinarily well dressed—only too well dressed, don’t you know, that is for the country.—More tea, darling. Yes, Mrs. Cooper’s scones are particularly good this afternoon.—I wish I liked her better, Mrs. Frayling, I mean, because she evidently intends to be here a lot in future. She expressed the warmest affection for you. She was very possessive about you, more I felt than she’d any real right to be. That, I’m afraid, put my back up—that and one or two other things. She and General Frayling think of settling in Stourmouth for good, if Mr. Wace is appointed to the Deadham curacy.”

“The curacy here?” Damaris echoed, a rather lurid light breaking in on her.

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Miss Felicia's glance was of timid, slightly distressed, enquiry.

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Wace has applied for the curacy. He and General Frayling were to have an interview with Canon Horniblow this afternoon. They dropped Mrs. Frayling here on their way to the vicarage, and sent the fly back for her. She talked a great deal about Mr. Wace and his immense wish to come here. She gave me to understand it was his one object to"—

The speaker broke off, raised her thin, long-fingered hands to her forehead.

"I don't know," she said, "but really I feel perhaps, darling, it is better to warn you. She implied—oh! she did it very cleverly, really, in a way charmingly—but she implied that things had gone very hard with Mr. Wace that winter at St. Augustin, and that all he went through has remarkably developed and strengthened his character—that it, in fact, was what determined him to take Holy Orders. His difficulties melted before his real need for the support of religion. It would have all been most touching if one had heard a story of such devotion from anyone but—but her, about anyone but him—under the circumstances, poor young man—because—darling—well, because of you."

"Of me?" Damaris stiffened.

"Yes—that is just the point. Mrs. Frayling left me in no doubt. She was determined to make me understand just what Mr. Wace's attitude had been towards you—and that it is still unchanged."

Damaris got up. Pulled off her driving coat, gloves and hat. Threw them upon the seat of a chair. The act was symbolic. She felt suffocated, impelled to rid herself of every impediment. For wasn't she confronted with another battle—a worse one than that with the house, namely, a battle with her long-ago baby-love, and her father's love too—-Henrietta.—Henrietta, so strangely powerful, so amazingly persistent—Henrietta who enclosed you in arms, apparently so soft but furnished with suckers, octopus arms adhering, never letting you go? She had played with the idea of this intrusion of Henrietta's and its effect upon Miss Felicia, at first as something amusing. It ceased to be amusing. It frightened her.

"And my attitude is unchanged, too," she said presently, gravely proud. "I didn't want to marry Marshall Wace then. I was dreadfully sorry when Henrietta told me he cared for me. I don't want to marry him or have him care for me one bit more now. I think it very interfering of Henrietta to trouble you with this. It is not the moment. She might at least have waited."

"So I felt," Miss Felicia put in. She watched her niece anxiously, as the latter went across to the fire-place and stood, her back to the room, looking down into the glowing logs.

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For she had—or rather ought she not to have?—another communication to make which involved the fighting of a battle on her own account, not against Henrietta Frayling, still less against Damaris, but against herself. It trembled on the tip of her tongue. She felt impelled, yet sorrowed to utter it. Hence her wishes and purposes jostled one another, being tenderly, bravely, heroically even, contradictory. In speaking she invited the shattering of a dream of personal election to happiness—a late blossoming happiness and hence the more entrancing, the more pathetic. That any hope of the dream's fulfilment was fragile as glass, lighter than gossamer, the veriest shadow of a shade, her natural diffidence and sane sense, alike, convinced her. For this very cause, the dream being of the sweetest and most intimate, how gladly would she have cherished the enchanting foolishness of it a trifle longer!—Her act of heroism would earn no applause, moreover, would pass practically unnoticed. No one would be aware of her sacrifice. She would only gain the satisfaction of knowing she had done the perfectly right and generous thing by two persons who would never share that knowledge.—She blushed. —Heaven forbid they ever should share it—and thank her.

"Mrs. Frayling—I don't want"—

Miss Felicia stopped.

"What don't you want?"—This from Damaris over her shoulder, the pause being prolonged.

"To set you against her, darling"—

"I think," Damaris said, "I know all about Henrietta."

"She insinuates so much," Miss Felicia lamented.—"Or seems to do so. One grows wretchedly suspicious of her meaning. Perhaps I exaggerate and misjudge her.—She is quite confusingly adroit; but I extremely disliked the way in which she spoke of Colonel Carteret."

Damaris bent a little forward, holding her skirt back from the scorch of the fire, her eyes still downcast.

"How did she speak of him?"

"Oh! all she said was very indirect—but as though he had not played quite fair with her on some occasion. And—it's odious to repeat!—as if that was his habit with women, and with unmarried girls as well—as if he was liable to behave in a way which placed them in a rather invidious position while he just shuffled out of all responsibility himself. She hinted his staying on with us here was a case in point—that it might give people a wrong idea altogether. That, in short—at least thinking it over I feel sure this is the

impression she meant to convey to me—that he is indulging his chronic love of philandering at your expense."

"And thereby standing in the light of serious lovers such as Marshall Wace?"

After a moment Damaris added:

"Is that your idea of Colonel Carteret, Aunt Felicia?"

"Ah! No, indeed no," the poor lady cried, with rather anguished sincerity. Then making a fine effort over herself:

"Least of all where you are concerned, my darling."

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And she drifted hastily on to her feet. The curtains were still undrawn; and, through the window opposite, she caught sight of a tall figure coming up across the lawn in the frosty twilight.

“Pardon me if I run away. I’ve forgotten a note I meant to send to poor little Theresa Bilson.—I must let Laura have it at once, or she mayn’t catch the postman,” she said with equal rapidity and apparent inconsequence.

As Felicia Verity passed out into the hall, at one end of the avenue of stumpy pillars, Carteret came in at the other end through the garden door. He halted a moment, dazzled by the warmth and light within after the clair-obscure of the frosty dusk without, and looked round the room before recognizing the identity of its remaining occupant. Then:

“Ah! you—dear witch,” he said. “So you’re home. And what of your drive?”

Damaris turned round, all of a piece. Her hands, white against the black, the fingers slightly apart, still pressed back the skirt of her dress as though saving it from the fire scorch, in quaintly careful childish fashion. Her complexion was that of a child too, in its soft brightness. And the wonder of her great eyes fairly challenged Carteret’s wits.

“A babe of a thousand years,” he quoted to himself. “Does that look grow out of a root of divine innocence, or of quite incalculable wisdom?”

“I told you if you would be patient with me I should begin again. I have begun again, dear Colonel Sahib.”

“So I perceive,” he answered her.

“Is it written so large?” she asked curiously.

“Very large,” he said, falling in with her humour. “And where does the beginning lead to?”

“I wish you’d tell me.—Henrietta has begun again too.”

“I know it,” he said. “Our incomparable Henrietta overtook me on her way from here to the Vicarage, and bestowed her society on me for the better part of half an hour. She was in astonishing form.”

Carteret came forward and stood on the tiger skin beside Damaris. Mrs. Frayling’s conversation had given him very furiously to think, and his thoughts had not proved by any means exhilarating.

“Does this recrudescence of our Henrietta, her beginning again, affect the scope and direction of your own beginning again, dearest witch?” he presently enquired, in singularly restrained and colourless accents.

“That depends a good deal upon you—doesn’t it, Colonel Sahib?” our maiden gravely answered.

Carteret felt as though she dealt him a blow. The pain was numbing. He could neither see, nor could he think clearly. But he traced Mrs. Frayling’s hand in this, and could have cursed her elaborately—had it been worth while. But was anything worth while, just now? He inclined to believe not—so called himself a doating fool. And then, though tormented, shaken, turned his mind to making things easy for Damaris.

“Oh! I see that,” he told her. “And now you have got hold of your precious little self again and made a start, it’s easy enough to manage your affairs—in as far as they need any management of mine—from a distance. This beginning again is triumphant. I congratulate you! You’re your own best physician. You know how to treat your case to a marvel. So I abdicate.”

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“But why? Why abdicate? Do you mean go away? Then Henrietta was right. What she said was true. I never believed her. I”—

Damaris grew tall in her shame and anger. The solemn eyes blazed.

“Yes—pray go,” she said. “It’s unwarrantable the way I kept you here—the way I’ve made use of you. But, indeed, indeed, I am very grateful, Colonel Sahib. I ought to have known better. But I didn’t. I have been so accustomed all my life to your help that I took it all for granted. I never thought how much I taxed your forbearance or encroached on your time.—That isn’t quite true though. I did have scruples; but little things you said and did put my scruples to sleep. I liked having them put to sleep.—-Now you must not let me or my business interfere any more.—Oh! you’ve treated me, given to me, like a prince,” she declared, rising superior to anger and to shame, her eyes shining—“like a king. Nobody can ever take your place or be to me what you’ve been. I shall always love to think of your goodness to—to him—my father—and to me—always—all my life.”

Damaris held out her hands.

“And that’s all.—Now let us say no more about this. It’s difficult. It hurts us both, I fancy, a little.”

But Carteret did not take her proffered hands.

“Dear witch,” he said, “we’ve spoken so freely that I am afraid we must speak more freely still—even though it pains you a little perhaps, and myself, almost certainly very much more. I love you—not as a friend, not as an amiable elderly person should love a girl of your age.—This isn’t an affair of yesterday or the day before yesterday. You crept into my heart on your sixth birthday—wasn’t it?—when I brought you a certain little green jade elephant from our incomparable Henrietta, and found you asleep in a black marble chair, set on a blood-red sandstone platform, overlooking the gardens of the club at Bhutpur. And you have never crept out of it again—won’t do so as long as body and mind hang together, or after. It has been a song of degrees.—For years you were to me a delicious plaything; but a plaything with a mysterious soul, after which I felt, every now and again, in worship and awe. The plaything stage came to an end when I was here with you before we went to Paris, four years ago. For I found then, beyond all question of doubt, that I loved you as a man only loves once, and as most men never love at all. I have tried to keep this from you because I have no right to burden your youth with my middle-age.”

Carteret smiled at her.

“It has not been altogether easy to hold my peace, dearest witch,” he said. “The seven devils of desire—of which you knew nothing, bless you”—“I’m not sure that I do know

nothing," Damaris put in quietly. She looked him over from head to heel, and the wonder of her great eyes deepened.

"It isn't wrong?" she said, brokenly, hoarsely. "I don't think it can be wrong?"

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Then, “You will be good to my brother, to Darcy Faircloth, and let me see him quite, quite often!”

And lastly, her lips trembling:

“It is beautiful, more beautiful than I ever knew about, to have you for quite my own, Colonel Sahib.”