said, with a faint groan; "I'm afraid I'm going to be very ill. Rather hard upon you and your husband, isn't it, and not in the bond? My friend lent me his house to get well in; he didn't bargain for my falling ill in it."

Mrs. Johns did her best to console and cheer him with assurances that his symptoms indicated nothing more than a cold and a little over-fatigue.

"A cold's a hazardous thing for a man in my condition, my good soul," said the Colonel, "and I was a fool to overdo it with those long tramps over the damp stubble. The doctor who sent me home gave me all manner of solemn warnings as to what I might and might not do, and I'm afraid I've paid very little attention to any of them. However, I'll go to bed at once, take a dose of the fellow's medicine, and wrap myself in a blanket. Perhaps I may be all right in the morning. But if I should be worse, you'd better telegraph to Plymouth for one of the best medical men there. Don't put me in the hands of a local doctor."

Mrs. Johns promised to obey these instructions, still protesting that the Colonel would be better in the morning; and then hurried off to see that there was a blazing fire made in his bedroom, and to provide one of her thickest blankets in which to envelope him.

CHAPTER III.

"Ah, homeless as the leaf that winds have blown
To earth—in this wide world I stand alone."

The Colonel's dismal prophecy was but too faithfully realised. The next morning found him in a raging fever, with a furred tongue, bloodshot eyes, a galloping pulse, and racking pains in the limbs. It was no case of infection, no village epidemic. The Colonel had simply, in his own language, overdone it.

Mrs. Johns opined that this was the beginning of a rheumatic fever; but she still kept up her cheery tone to the patient, looking anxiously all the while for the advent of the Plymouth doctor.

He did not come till sunset, by which time the Colonel was worse. After making a careful examination of his patient, and questioning Mrs. Johns closely as to the Colonel's antecedents, the physician sat down to write a prescription.

"It is not so much a question of physic as of care," he said. "You have not called in any one from the neighbourhood yet, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Colonel Benyon begged me not to call in any one of that kind, or else I should have sent at once for Mr. Borlase."

"Never mind what the Colonel says. Let your husband call for Mr. Borlase, and get this prescription made up. He can ask Mr. Borlase to come back with him and see me. Or, let me see, there'll scarcely be time for that. I can call on Borlase as I drive back to the station, and explain matters. Mr. Borlase will watch the case for me."

"But you'll come to see him again, sir?"

"Most decidedly. This is Friday. I shall come again on Monday by the same train. The case is rather a critical one."

"You don't think there's any danger, sir?"

"Not immediate danger; but the man's constitution has been undermined by hard work and illness in India, and he's not a good subject for rheumatic fever. However, I shall be able to say more on Monday. In the mean time, the grand question is good nursing. I think I had better send you a professional nurse."

Mrs. Johns protested her ability to nurse the Colonel herself; but the physician shook his head.

"My good creature, you have your house to look after," he said, "and that poor fellow will want constant watching. We must expect delirium in such a case. You and your husband must contrive to look after him to-night, and I will send you a reliable person early to-morrow morning."

Having made this promise, the doctor got into the fly from the Rose and Crown, and drove back to Penjudah, where he had a brief interview with Mr. Borlase, who came out of his trim-looking stone house and stood upon the pavement before his door, while the great man talked to him out of the fly.

"I shall send a nurse from Plymouth to-morrow morning," said the physician. "There's no one about here, I suppose, that one could depend upon for such a case?"

"I don't know about that," replied Mr. Borlase. "There's a person I've had a good deal to do with lately amongst my very poor patients, and if you could only get her, you'd find her a treasure; but whether she would attend a wealthy person as a paid servant is a question I can't answer. She has only nursed the poor hereabouts, and evidently does it as a pious duty. I fancy, from her dress and manner that she belongs to some religious community—not exactly Roman Catholic perhaps, but very near it."

"Who is she?"

"A Mrs. Chapman—a widow; poor herself, I suppose, for she occupies very humble lodgings in Bolter's-row, at the other end of the town. She never takes payment from any one; indeed she only attends a class that are quite unable to pay. She is a young woman, fragile-looking and very pretty; but she is the best nurse I ever met with."

"I don't think the Colonel will object to her youth and good looks," said the doctor, laughing. "That kind of thing is much pleasanter in a sick-room than some gorgon of the Gamp species. Have you known this Mrs. Chapman long?"

"Not long. She has only been here three months· but I have seen a great deal of her in that time; and I can answer for her patience and devotion."

"I've half an hour to spare before my train starts. I'll go down to Bolter's row, and have a look at this paragon of yours."

"I'm sure you'll be pleased with her; but I very much doubt your being able to get her to do what we want," said Mr. Borlase.

"We'll see about that," answered the physician, who had some confidence in his own powers of persuasion. "You say the woman is poor. She'll scarcely care to decline an advantageous offer, I should think. Good-night, Borlase. Be sure you go to Trewardell the first thing to-morrow."

With this injunction the doctor drove away down the little hilly High-street to the outskirts of Penjudah, where he alighted, and groped his way along a narrow alley of queer old-fashioned cottages, so crooked that they seemed scarcely able to support themselves in a standing position.

Upon inquiring for Mrs. Chapman, he was directed to the last house in Bolter's-row, and here he was ushered into a tiny sitting-room, daintily neat, and with an air of freshness and prettiness that struck him as something beyond the common graces of poverty. The room was dimly lighted by one candle, beside which a woman sat reading; a slim, fragile creature in a black gown and a white-muslin cap of some peculiar fashion, a cap which concealed almost every vestige of her hair, and gave a nunlike aspect to her pale thin face.

The doctor felt at once that this was no vulgar sick-nurse. This was no woman to whom he could broadly offer money as an inducement to her to depart from her established round of duty.

He told her his errand, told her what he had heard from Mr. Borlase, and how anxious he was to secure her services for a gentleman lying dangerously ill.

"It is quite impossible," she said, in a sweet firm voice. "I nurse only the very poor."

"You belong to some sisterhood, I suppose?" said the physician.

"No; I belong to no sisterhood," she answered, with something that was half bitterness, half sorrow in her tone; "I stand quite alone in the world."

"I pray pardon me; I thought by your dress you might be a member of one of those communities so numerous nowadays."

"No, sir. It is a simple dress, and suits my circumstances; that is my only reason for wearing it. I have made my own line of duty, and try to follow it."

"I wonder you should have chosen so obscure a place as Penjudah as a field for your charitable work. Do you belong to this part of the country?"

"No. The place is quiet, and I can live cheaply here. Up to this time I have always found plenty of work."

"The duty you have chosen is a very noble one, and the sacrifice most admirable in so young a woman."

"It is no sacrifice for me," she answered decisively; and the doctor felt he had no right to ask any more questions.

He pressed his request very warmly, however; so much so, that at last Mrs. Chapman seemed almost inclined to yield.

"You have owned that you have no pressing duties in Penjudah just now, he said, when they had been talking together for some time; "and I do assure you that you will be performing a real act of charity in looking after this poor fellow at Trewardell."

It was the first time he had mentioned the name of the place.

"At Trewardell, did you say?" asked Mrs. Chapman.

"Yes. It's a gentleman's house, seven miles from here; a charming place. This Colonel Benyon is a friend of the owner, who has lived abroad for some years. Pray, now, consider the case, and extend your charity to this poor man, Mrs. Chapman. Remember he's not as if he were in the bosom of his family. He's quite alone, with no one at the house but servants, and a stranger in the land, as one may say. Of course I might send a nurse from Plymouth, as I intended in the first case; but after what Mr. Borlase told me, I set my heart upon having you."

"Mr. Borlase is very good. I will come."

He had expected to conquer in the end, but had not expected her to yield so suddenly.

"You will! That's capital; and allow me to say that, as far as remuneration goes, you will be quite at liberty to name your own terms."

"Pray do not mention that. I could not possibly take payment for my services. I shall come to Colonel Benyon as I should to the poorest patient in Penjudah."

"Do just what you please, only come; and the sooner the better."

"I can come immediately, to-night, if you please."

"I should be very glad if you will do so. I am just off to the station, and will send my fly to take you back to Trewardell."

"Back to Trewardell!" Mrs. Chapman repeated those three last words as if there were something strange in them.

The doctor was too hurried to notice anything peculiar in her tone. As it was, he ran some risk of losing his train. He wished her good-night, and went back to the fly.

CHAPTER IV.

"There are some things hard to understand;
O, help me, my God, to trust in Thee;
But I never shall forget her soft white hand,
And her eyes when she looked at me."

Colonel Benyon had a hard time of it. Again, as in his Indian bungalow, grim death claimed him for his own, and was only to be kept at bay by prodigies of care and skill; again the lamp of life flickered low, and for a while the sick man lay in a land where all was darkness, knowing no one, remembering nothing, and suffering the unspeakable agonies of a mind distraught. There is no need to describe the variations of the fever, the changes from bad to worse, the faint improvement, the threatened relapse. Through all that month of September Mr. Borlase came twice a-day, and the Plymouth physician twice a week, to Trewardell. They both declared themselves proud of their victory when Herbert Benyon could be fairly pronounced out of danger. They both acknowledged that they owed that victory, under Providence, to Mrs. Chapman.

She had been indefatigable, working and watching by day and night with a quiet patience that knew no limit. No other hand than hers had ever administered the Colonel's medicine, or smoothed his pillow, since she came to Trewardell; no eyes but hers had watched him in the dead of the night. It was quite in vain that Mr. Borlase and Mrs. Johns had urged her to accept assistance, to let some one relieve her of her night-watch now and then. Upon this point she was inexorable. If she ever slept at all, she so planned her slumbers that they should not interfere with her duties. Sometimes in the dusk of the evening, when it was very nearly dark even out of doors, she would take a solitary walk in the gardens for half an hour or so. That was her only relaxation. Sweet and gentle as she was in her manners she was rather an unapproachable person, and she contrived to keep Mrs. Johns at a distance; which was somewhat galling to that worthy matron, who had never been able to beguile her into a little friendly gossip since she entered the house.

"She's as proud as Lucifer, I do believe, in spite of her meek quiet ways," Mrs. Johns declared to her husband, with an aggrieved expression of countenance. "Why, I've scarcely heard her voice half-a-dozen times since she's been here; and I can't say that I've seen her face properly yet, that black hood she wears overshadows it so. I hate such popish ways."

This hood which Mrs. Johns objected to had certainly a somewhat conventual aspect, and served to hide the nurse's pale sweet face much more than the cap in which Dr. Matson had first seen her. The physician perceived the change of headgear when he came to Trewardell, but considered it only a part of that harmless eccentricity which might be permitted to this lay sister of charity.

The time came at last when Herbert Benyon awoke from that long night of suffering and delirium to some faint interest in external things. He had not been unconscious all this time; on the contrary, for long afterwards he had a keen remembrance of every detail of his illness; but mixed up with all the realities of his life had been the dreams and delusions of fever. He knew that throughout his illness by day and night a slender black-robed figure had sat by his bed-side, or flitted lightly about his room; he knew that a woman's soft hand had administered to his comforts day after day, without change or weariness; he knew that a very sweet sad face had looked down upon him in the dim lamplight with ineffable pity; but he had cherished strange fancies about this gentle watcher. Sometimes she was a sister he had loved very dearly, and lost in his early youth; sometimes she was Lady Julia Dursay. That she resembled neither of them mattered little to his wandering mind.

But this was all over now. He knew that he was at Trewardell, and that this black-robed woman was a stranger to him.

(To be continued.)

BOIL IT DOWN.

Whatever you have to say, my friend,
Whether witty, or grave, or gay,
Condense it all you can, my friend,
And say it in the readiest way:
And whether you write of rural affairs,
Or particular things in town,
Just take a word of friendly advice—
Boil it down.

For if you go spluttering over a page,
When a couple of lines would do,
Your butter is spread so thin, you see,
That the bread looks plainly through;
So when you have a story to tell,
And would like a little renown,
To make quite sure of your wish, my friend,
Boil it down.

When writing an article for the press,
Whether prose or verse, just try
To utter your thoughts in the fewest words,
And let them be crispy and dry;
And when it is finished, and you suppose
It is done exactly brown,
Just look at it over again, and
Boil it down.

For editors do not like to print
An article lazily long,
And the busy reader does not care
For a couple of yards of song;
So gather your wits in the smallest space,
If you'd win the author's crown,
And every time you write, my friend,
Boil it down.

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TO THE BITTER END.

By Miss M. E. Braddon.

AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,' ETC.

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. HARCROSS AT HOME.

Six o'clock on a brilliant June afternoon, and Mrs. Harcross at home. The great drawing-rooms in Mastodon-crescent are filled to the brim and running over with fluttering creatures in airy raiment; the rainbow sheen of silk and satin—the latest devices in Parisian millinery—transform the gorgeous rooms into a kind of human flower-garden; in contrast with these brilliant specimens of the human species, the very exotics in the conservatory opening out of the inner drawing-room pale their splendour. How poor and dingy a being then does the lord of creation appear, in his invisible-blue morning-coat and quaker-like drab trousers, as he is hustled hither and thither amidst this many-coloured crowd! For the last two hours Mrs. Harcross's dearest friends have been fluttering in and out, so enthusiastic in their expressions of rapture on seeing her, that a bystander might fairly conclude that they had suffered an enforced severance of years. There are a few notabilities sprinkled about the rooms, people whom other people struggle to see, although inspection generally results in disappointment. Mrs. Harcross never permits herself to be at home without this sprinkling of notabilities. They have their function, like the satellites of distinguished planets, and she would feel herself small and mean without them. There has been some music, chiefly of the classical order; and in an off room downstairs there is a perennial supply of ices, and tea and coffee, which knights-errant, in very short coats and with flowers in their buttonholes, carry upstairs with a perseverance that might almost prepare them for a course of treadmill. What with the classical music, the buzz of many tongues, sometimes in a polyglot jargon—for at least a third of Mrs. Harcross's visitors are foreigners—the heat, and the perfume of stephanotis from the conservatory, there have been a few stifled yawns, but, guilty as the delinquents feel, no one has seen them; and as the crowd begins to thin a little, the airy toilets melting away silently, like the sea foam receding from the shore, Mrs Harcross feels that this particular Wednesday afternoon has been a success. Herr Thumpanthunter has been grander than usual in his exposition of Sebastian Bach; Dr. Rorhedd, the great naturalist, has given one of his liveliest descriptions of an interesting discovery of extinct mammalia on the coast of Peru; Lord Shawm the evangelical lay-preacher, has held his own particular circle rapt and breathless in a corner of the back drawing-room, while he urged them to have their lamps ready. At a quarter-past six the two large drawing-rooms are empty, and Mrs. Harcross has flung herself wearily into a low arm-chair by one of the open windows. The wide stucco balcony is full of flowers, and slim iron pilasters, with Australian clematis and passion flowers climbing up them, break the view of the tall straight line of houses over the way.

One of her guests still lingered, the indefatigable Weston. He was standing by the low mantelpiece, glancing over his shoulder at the reflection of his faultless morning coat—the very smallest thing in coats—a mere segment of a coat, as it were.

"Trying, isn't it, this kind of afternoon?" he remarked at last, by way of commentary upon a profound sigh from Augusta.

"I don't know that I ever felt so completely worn out," replied the lady. "There were so many second-rate people, such bustle and clatter—second-rate people are always noisy."

"Do you think so?" demanded Weston with his languid air—the stereotyped languor, and quite different from Mr. Harcross's languor, which had at least the merit of originality—"do you think so? I thought your heavy swells were noisiest—royal dukes, and that kind of thing. I fancied the afternoon was a great success. Lord Shawm was in very good form: how the girls thronged round him in his corner! It was quite a blockade of the back drawing-room door. And Rorhedd was uncommonly lively. Did you see him flirting with that girl in pink, the prettiest girl in the room? I've observed that your elderly scientific party has always a correct eye for that kind of thing."

"I didn't see anybody," Augusta replied, rather peevishly; "I was tired when the thing began: and I have no one to help me. I believe Hubert makes a point of being away."

"He had a parliamentary case on at three, hadn't he?" inquired Weston, sticking his glass in his eye, and taking another backward glance at the reflection of his coat. He began to think there really was a wrinkle at the back of the left armhole.

"I'm sure I don't know; of course there's nothing easier than to say he has a parliamentary case, when I want him to be at home."

"Come, come, Augusta," said Weston, in a soothing tone, "I'm sure Harcross is quite a model husband,—in his own fashion."

Mrs. Harcross turned on him more angrily than he ever remembered her to have done in all their intercourse.

"In his own fashion!" she exclaimed; "what do you mean by that? Have you ever heard me complain of him?"

"I really imagine you were complaining of him just now."

"Not at all. If I complained of anything, it was of that herd of people. I think I never had so many that I don't care a straw about knowing."

"Ah, my dear, if we could go through life with only the people we do care about knowing, how very small a world we might live in! But I fancy I have an expansive soul: I really like everybody."

They lapsed into silence.

"A screw loose somewhere about our friend Harcross," mused Weston Vallory, "but it seems rather too soon for me to put my oar in."

He watched his cousin as she lay back in her chair, gazing absently at the flowers in the balcony. An occasional brougham rolled swiftly by, and now and then there came the slow tramp of a foot passenger. The dinner-party traffic had not yet begun, and at this time of a summer evening Mastodon-crescent was quiet as the grave.

"O, by the way," said Weston, after a long pause, "I brought you something this afternoon."

"Did you?" Mrs. Harcross inquired, without turning her head; "new music, I suppose?"

"No, a print for your portfolio; rather a rare one, I believe. A proof-engraving of a picture by Sir Thomas Lawrence; one of his latest."

"You're very good," Mrs. Harcross said, with a slight yawn; "I don't pretend to care much for that kind of engraving. I like the German school so much better. But your present shall have a place in my portfolio. Where is it?"

"I left it in the refreshment room; I'll send for it, if you'll allow me." He rang, and dispatched a servant in quest of a roll of paper, left somewhere in the cloak-room. Mrs. Harcross had not ceased from her contemplation of the ferns and geraniums in the balcony when the parcel was brought. Weston unrolled it carefully, and came to the window with it.

"Rather a good face, isn't it?" he asked, standing at his cousin's side, holding the engraving up to the light. "A great deal of character about it."

Augusta looked up with the air of being supremely bored by the whole business, but at sight of the picture started to her feet with a cry of surprise.

"Weston!" she exclaimed, "don't you know what it is?"

"A very charming portrait of a very charming woman, I've no doubt," he answered carelessly, without taking any notice of his cousin's astonishment.

"You've been in Hubert's chambers, haven't you?" she asked sharply.

"Yes, three or four times. Mr Harcross has not shown so warm an appreciation of my visits as to induce me to go there oftener."

"But you have been there, and you must know that picture!"

"Upon my honour, I cannot perceive the faintest connection with the two ideas."

"Nonsense, Weston; there is only one picture in Hubert's room, the portrait over the chimneypiece, and that print is a copy of it."

"Really, now!" said Weston, with a most natural air of surprise. "Yes, I do remember rather a striking picture in Harcross's room. I concluded it was something he picked up in Wardour-street, or at Christie's, perhaps; likely to catch a man's eye as rather a nice bit of colour. But I had quite forgotten it. Yet I had a notion, when I found this thing in a portfolio of old-fashioned engravings at Tombs's, that I had seen the face somewhere before. This is a portrait of Mrs. Mostyn, the actress, renowned in comedy before the days of Mrs. Nesbitt. You are too young even to have heard of her."

"An actress!" exclaimed Augusta, very pale.

"Yes, here's her name at the back, written in pencil: "Portrait of Mrs. Mostyn, as Viola in *Twelfth Night*, painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence." Why, my dear Augusta, how pale and scared you look! One would think you had made a most appalling discovery. Mrs. Mostyn has been dead thirty years; Tombs told me all about her; you can't possibly be jealous of her!"

"Jealous!" cried Augusta, with a look that ought to have annihilated him. "What a fool you are, Weston!" and then in quite a different tone, and to herself rather than to him, she repeated, "An actress!"

She was silent for some moments after this, and then turned to her cousin suddenly, and said:

"You heard all about this Mrs. Mostyn, you say. Was she a good woman?"

"Good is such a very wide word, Augusta. She was very charming, Tombs tells me, and extremely good-natured."

"You know what I mean, Weston," Mrs. Harcross exclaimed impatiently. "Was she a respectable woman?"

Weston shrugged his shoulders.

"I hardly think the dramatic profession went in for respectability very seriously thirty years ago," he said. "The women were handsomer than any we have now, but I believe their reputations leaned rather the other way. Of course there were a few brilliant exceptions. As for this Mrs. Mostyn, Tombs's account was rather vague. She was not very long before the public, but during her brief career was the rage. She was a married woman, I suppose, or else why the 'Mrs.'? but Mr. Mostyn appears to have been a somewhat mythical character. She had numerous admirers among the men about town of that day—men who wore straps to their pantaloons, and incredible hats, you know, Augusta, and sometimes even turned back their wristbands—and is reputed to have finished her career by running away with one of them"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and one of the worst among them, but Tombs had forgotten the man's name. He was quite clear about the main facts, however. The lady was spirited away one fine morning, during the run of a new comedy at the Coliseum Theatre, to the consternation of the manager, and was seen no more. She is supposed to have died abroad a few years later. I asked what became of Mostyn, or what Mostyn said to the elopement; but he appears not to have expressed any opinion; in point of fact, no one seems to have known Mostyn. Curious, isn't it? However, the lady may have been a widow when she made her début."

Augusta had taken the engraving from her cousin's hands, and sat looking at it in silence for some time after he had told her all he could tell about the subject of the picture. Weston strolled out upon the balcony, amused himself by some small horticultural experiments, plucking off a faded leaf or two, and coaxing the tendrils of the clematis into a more graceful twist, but he kept his eye upon his cousin nevertheless. She seemed to emerge from a profound reverie by and by, rose from her low chair, and threw the picture on to a side table with her most indifferent manner, and then joined Weston on the balcony.

"Thanks for the engraving," she said. "I have no doubt it is a very good one; I daresay Hubert picked up the original portrait very much in the manner you suggest, at a time when he was not rich enough to invest largely in pictures. Hark! isn't that his step in the *Crescent*?"

Weston peered over a stucco vase filled with scarlet geranium.

"Yes, I perceive Mr. Harcross half-a-dozen doors off. What a correct ear you have, and how I envy Harcross the faculty of inspiring such solicitude!"

"Do you?" Augusta demanded coolly. "I suppose, when you marry, your wife will know your step, unless she has the misfortune to be deaf."

"An alliance with deafness is a calamity I am very sure to escape," replied Mr. Vallory sententiously.

"Indeed!"

"Because I never mean to marry at all."

"O, I daresay you'll change your mind on that point when you meet the right person."

"My dear Augusta, it is my unhappiness to have met the right person!"

The look, the tone, were unmistakable; nor was Mrs. Harcross the kind of woman to affect unconsciousness.

"If you are going to take that sort of tone, Weston," she said, with a freezing look, "I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of shutting my doors upon my first cousin."

"O, I see. A tame cat must never show temper; his existence must be one continuous purr. Forgive me, Augusta; I promise not to offend again; but you must never talk of my wife in the potential mood. There can be no such person. I am a confirmed bachelor, and have no higher vocation, nor aspire to anything higher, than to be your slave."

This was a kind of homage to which Mrs. Harcross had no objection. She gave Weston her hand—a very cold hand on this sultry summer afternoon, and gave him a smile that was almost as cold.

"You have always been very good," she said; "I should be extremely sorry if anything were to interrupt our friendship."

She was quite sincere in this. Weston was really useful to her; fetched and carried, hunted lions for her; kept her posted up in that superficial knowledge of passing events without which conversation is impossible; supplemented her own reading, for which the claims of society left her scarcely one clear hour a day, by his much wider reading; did a hundred small things for her, in fact, which she sometimes felt ought to have been done by her husband. But Weston Vallory always seemed to have so much more leisure than Mr. Walgrave-Harcross.

Walgrave Harcross came in almost immediately upon the reconciliation of the cousins, and flung himself into a chair with a suppressed yawn.

"Not begun to dress, Augusta?" he said, in a surprised tone; "Weston must have been uncommonly interesting. Are you aware it's seven o'clock? I never yet knew you to dress under an hour; and in all my calculations I generally allow you something more like two."

"I'll say good-bye," said Weston; "I don't think I've been an obstacle to the toilet, have I, Augusta? You rarely stand on ceremony with me."

"Not at all. I don't think I shall go out to-night."

"Not to 'dear Lady Basingstoke's,' Augusta? I thought you and she adored each other."

"I would rather disappoint any one than Julia Basingstoke," replied Mrs. Harcross; "but I have an intolerable headache. Don't stand staring at me in that pitying way, Weston. I only want a little rest. You can go to the dinner without me, Hubert. I know Julia is very anxious to have you there."

Weston shook hands and departed, curious and thoughtful. "There's something queer about that picture," he said to himself, as he walked Charing-crosswards; "and I wouldn't give very much for Mr. Harcross's domestic felicity this evening. Yet it can hardly be jealousy—of a woman who died thirty years ago—unless that portrait in his chambers is an accidental likeness of some one he has cared about. Perhaps *that* is Augusta's suspicion. Yet, if that were the notion, why should she be so strangely affected at finding out the history of the picture? It's a queer business, altogether; but I'm very glad I came across that engraving at Tombs's, it may serve me as a fulcrum!"

"I'm very sorry you can't go to the dinner," said Mr. Harcross, with his eyes half-closed. He would sleep for ten minutes or so at will, and arise from such brief slumber like an intellectual giant refreshed. "Was the herd larger than usual, and more than usually oppressive?"

"I have had rather a fatiguing afternoon; and as you can never give me any assistance——"

"My dear Augusta, were I the idlest man in the world, I should shirk that kind of thing. I have not the knack of seeming enchanted to see a host of uninteresting people. I rather like a good ponderous dinner—people brighten wonderfully amidst the clatter of knives and forks and the popping of champagne corks; and if one has a good cook, as we happily