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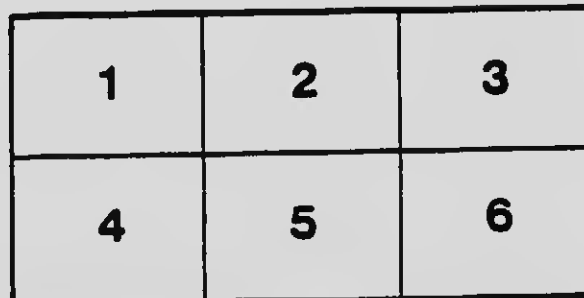
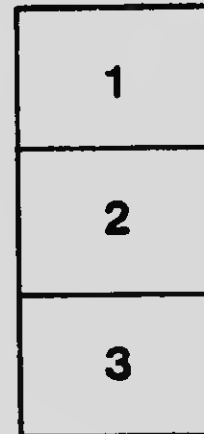
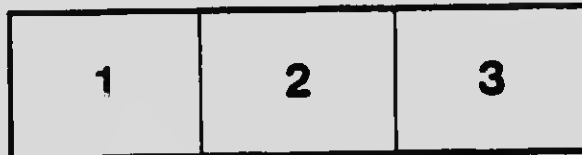
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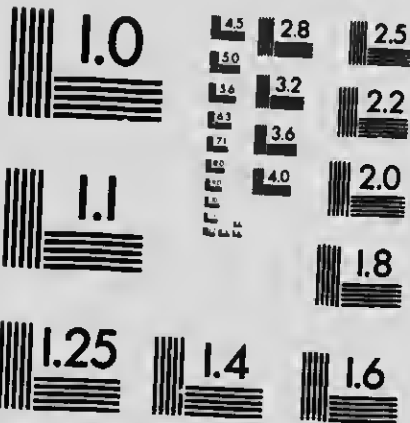
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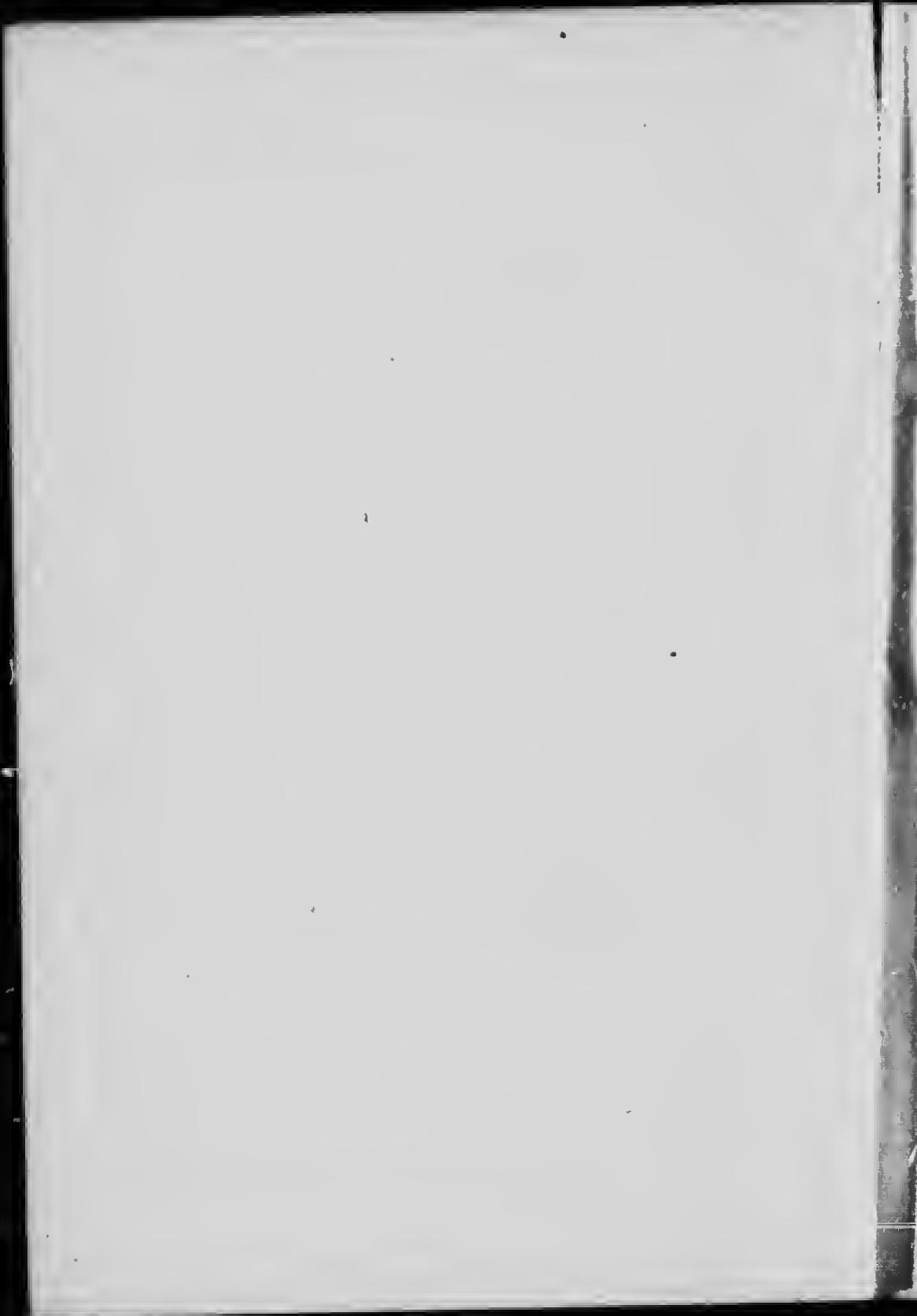
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THE DREAM AND THE BUSINESS

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# THE DREAM AND THE BUSINESS

BY

JOHN OLIVER HOBBS

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*"For a dream cometh through the multitude of business"*



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# THE DREAM AND THE BUSINESS



## BOOK I

### FIRST LOVES



#### CHAPTER I

"FIRMALDEN! Do listen! I have asked you three times—Who is that very beautiful person?"

"I am trying to find her."

"Can't you see her? She has a Madonna's face. People always forget that the famous Madonnas are mostly portraits of sinners. She's over there—the fifth from the pillar."

"Do you mean that girl in brown silk?" asked Firmalden.

"Yes."

"With brown hair and eyes?"

"Yes."

"With a long feather in her hat?"

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"Yes."

"Reading her hymn-book?"

"Pretending to read her hymn-book."

"It's Sophy," said Firmalden, flushing; "it's my sister."

His companion turned pale and murmured, "I'm awfully sorry. I'm a fool."

Then he thought, "Now I have made matters worse. I am really an idiot."

The two young men were sitting in the front row of the side gallery of a large Congregational chapel in Bayswater. It was a Wednesday evening half-hour service especially given by the pastor during the winter months for young people of both sexes. After each service a concert was held in the schoolroom under the church, and, as members of the congregation invariably assisted at these entertainments, they had become perhaps the most successful feature of Dr. Firmalden's ministry. He was an Oxford man—one who loved books, early hours, great ideas, and epics. His neighbours he loved on principle, and such was his disposition that those he liked the least he considered the most. For this reason he was respected and friendless, and his influence carried weight but no emotion. In his youth he had been an enthusiast—time and London soon made him conscientious only. But he was always sincere, and he moved, it was said, with the spirit of the times. Thus he came to be called a man's preacher, and therefore women went in crowds

to hear him. On this particular evening the church was well filled, and he had delivered a short lecture on the absence of patience in modern ambition—"No one will wait till the day after to-morrow. We must have all this day."

While the last hymn was being sung, young Firmalden and his friend made their way by a private staircase to an apartment known as the committee-room, where seven or eight individuals had already collected. The men were in evening dress; the young women wore summer gowns and flowers in their hair. They all carried rolls or cases of music. One man protested, without contradiction from his associates, that his voice had gone; a girl said that as she had never even tried the piano no one need be surprised if she broke down. "I'll get no thanks, all the same, for putting up with makeshifts. The public blames the artist," she insisted.

"Come on," said Lessard. That was the name of Firmalden's friend. "Come on; let us see the hall."

Firmalden led him out into the schoolroom, which was still empty, for the service upstairs had not yet been brought to a conclusion.

"What sort of a place for sound?" asked Lessard. He threw back his shoulders, expanded his chest, and sang superbly—

"Hear, O Israel!"

"That will do," said he, smiling; and he returned, followed by his companion, to the committee-room.

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But the company, who had regarded him at first with dislike as a new-comer who would probably give himself airs, were now scared by the echo which had reached them of his magnificent notes.

"He wants the Albert Hall!" observed the wit of the party; and the remark was received with encouraging titters. Lessard, unconscious of the vindictive feelings he had inspired, studied the programme.

Meanwhile the congregation from the chapel was filing into the schoolroom. Dr. Firmalden and his daughter and the deacons had taken their arm-chairs in the front row. Greetings were being exchanged; everyone was polite, cheerful, and well dressed.

Lessard peeped through the door.

"A splendid house!" said he.

The proceedings opened with a quintette, composed by the organist for male voices, from members of the choir. By an unalterable rule no encores were allowed, and the applause was, in consequence, frequently enormous. A lady of robust appearance sang "O Death, where is thy sting?" and a weak girl followed with "Cherry ripe."

"Who is that?" asked Lessard, as a young person who had arrived late hurried on to the platform.

"She's a Miss Cloots," said Firmalden, and he coloured to the roots of his hair.

Miss Cloots was slight but not thin. It was at the period of the æsthetic craze in burgh society, and she was curiously attired in a green velveteen gown made after some Italian design of the sixteenth century. She did not seem more than sixteen, and her fine brown hair fell in waves to her waist and was cut in a fringe on her forehead. Very beautiful dark eyes with heavy lashes gave a tragic intensity to her small colourless face, red pouting lips, and dollish nose. Her prettiness, almost excessive, was neither aristocratic nor vulgar, because aristocracy and vulgarity come from the soul, and this young creature had, so far as her countenance gave any indications of a spiritual element, no soul at all. She had, instead, an iron constitution and possibilities in the way of impudence. But charming masks, even without souls behind them, are still rare. So Miss Cloots created a sensation among all the males in the audience, and everybody called her lovely. By means of a small, cleverly managed voice she gave much delight by speaking, rather than singing, to a skilful accompaniment, "Absent, yet present." The sense of the words seemed as far beyond her experience as her intelligence, but the wistfulness of her glance, combined with the evident earthiness of her nature, possessed a fascination more immediately effective than any verse.

"A personality," murmured Lessard, considering her gifts with professional interest.

"She sings in the choir," said Firmalden, who



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was secretly engaged to Miss Cloots; "her portrait has been painted by several Academicians."

He was still young enough to feel a certain awe for artists who obtained official recognition, and the attractive Miss Cloots seemed to him all the more marvellous for having been the "Hebe" of Sir Lambert Dykes, R.A., and the "Phœbe" of Hildebrand Woodruffe, R.A., and the "Juliet" of Harold Sidgreaves, A.R.A. Jim, in his romantic way, compared her with Botticelli's "Simonetta" and the "Mona Lisa" of Leonardo da Vinci.

When Miss Cloots had finished her song and taken two calls from the rapturous audience, she did not return to the committee-room. An aged relative of female sex and ostentatious gentility bore her away in a four-wheeler which had been kept waiting at the side entrance for the precious charge.

"She is most carefully brought up," explained Jim, "and she always has the same cab."

Miss Cloots's performance was followed by the popular and honorary secretary of the Concert Association; but his rendering of "I'll sing thee songs of Araby" was a polite success only, because he usually sang "Drink to me only with thine eyes." He had warned his admirers that anything new was always dangerous, and he bore the comparative coldness of his reception with all the fortitude of a man inured to the trials of public life.

It was now Lessard's turn. His contribution to the evening's amusement was described simply as—

A SONG.

*Words paraphrased from Scripture by Richard Steele.*

*Music by Anon.*

Sophy Firmalden, holding her breath, watched him sit down at the piano. She had never heard such a prelude or such a touch. People stirred uneasily, and, as there is always something unfamiliar in real physical beauty, or, indeed, in beauty of any kind, no one knew at first what to think of the stranger. Tall, well-made, and dark, with hair verging to auburn, with a clean-shaven, boyish face, with hazel eyes made sombre by black lashes, with simplicity of expression and buoyancy of bearing, he resembled a young naval officer of the heroic type. As a lad he had been trained for the sea, and his father, before he perished of some strange malady in Calcutta, had been a good-for-nothing, handsome lieutenant in her late Majesty's Navy.

After Lessard had played his prelude, he looked at the audience and sang out, in a full, emotional, amorous baritone—

Hark ! the birds melodious sing,  
And sweetly usher in the spring.  
Close by his fellow sits the dove,  
And billing whispers her his love.  
The spreading vines with blossoms swell  
Diffusing round a grateful smell.

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Arise, my fair one, and receive  
All the blessings love can give.  
For love admits of no delay,  
Arise, my fair, and come away.

As all of me, my love, is thine,  
Let all of thee be ever mine  
Among the lilies we will play,  
Fairer, my love, thou art than they;  
Till the purple morn arise,  
And balmy sleep forsake thine eyes;  
Till the glad some beams of day  
Remove the shades of night away;

Then when soft sleep shall from thine eyes depart,  
Rise like the bounding roe or lusty hart,  
Glad to behold the light again  
From Bether's mountains darting o'er the plain!

Each woman present thought that Lessard was making love to her, and each man felt that he himself was making love with perfect success. Lessard's face symbolised and his vibrating notes expressed all that other, sought yet could not find, and thought yet could not utter, in romance. The girls, looking at their men companions, saw them transfigured into Lessards, and the men, looking at their sweethearts, seemed to be gazing at Lessard's unknown fair.

"That isn't the voice of one crying in the wilderness," said Dr. Firmalden drily, "but the voice of the serenader in the garden!"

The applause was overwhelming—for the people were not applauding Lessard or the song. They were applauding themselves and their own youth and their own illusions and their own passions and

their own dreams. When Dr. Firmalden rose to remind them that encores were forbidden, he had to sit down silenced and defied. Still, after one bow of acknowledgment, Lessard did not reappear. The audience stamped with their feet, with their umbrellas, and with the legs of their wooden chairs—rocking to and fro in the violence of their delight.

"This will kill the rest of the programme," said the organist to his now embittered assistants. He went on to the platform and tried to explain that M. Lessard had left the building. His words were lost in cheers. Then, an old favourite of admitted influence volunteered to go forward out of her turn. She was assisted up the stairs, and, probably because the shrewd sense of the crowd saw at once that she was too stout to go down again quickly, they allowed her to draw her breath in order to repeat the announcement of Lessard's departure—

"Ladies and gentlemen, he has really gone."

During the oppressive stillness which followed, she declaimed the Trial Scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. But it seemed tiresome after the love song from the Scriptures. Men yawned; all the women looked sorrowful; Dr. Firmalden himself was conscious that, although Lessard had left the building, the spell of his singing still remained as a disquieting influence among the people.

## CHAPTER II

YOUNG Firmalden and Lessard had left the hall together, and they were walking down the Bayswater Road toward Dr. Firmalden's residence, one of the few old villas still left in the neighbourhood of Holland Park.

"Are you going to be a minister too?" asked Lessard, moving his fine head backwards in the direction of the chapel.

"No," said Firmalden; "I'm going into my uncle's business when I leave Oxford. He's a merchant in London."

"What kind?"

"Silk. That is why my sister wore such a pretty dress. She wears a new silk dress every time I see her."

"You'll get dog-sick of the City. The hours and the stuffiness, the scrappy luncheons, and the humiliation of sitting on an office-stool making entries in a ledger!"

"Commerce attracts me. Think of the merchants of old Athens, of Arabia, of Florence, of Venice! There's plenty of romance and excitement in commerce."

"Then you intend to do the thing properly. In

the beginning you'll buy pictures and read Ruskin; in the end you'll help hospitals and grow portly. No more Arabian nights! No more Moorish maidens! No more dreams of the Medicis! What a brute life is!"

Jim winced. The two youths both came of sound Nonconformist stock, and each had inherited a certain strength of moral fibre which showed itself now as sheer good sense, now as a combative instinct. Lessard was of Huguenot extraction, and he had, combined with his defiant blood, the melancholy which seems the heritage of the persecuted sect from which he sprang. To him this constitutional sorrow was an added charm, for it softened the natural boldness of his character, and saved him from the self-conceit which would have been excusable enough, if foolish, in one who had made such an early success. It was admitted, even by the envious, that he had never been carried away by his popularity.

Firmalden, whose ancestry was partly Scotch and partly Cornish, was shrewd, sanguine, secretly sentimental, and sad only when he was ill. Depression in his case was a physical malady; it did not spring from his soul or prey upon his intellect. Famous women have been celebrated, as a rule, for their eyes, while men, as a rule, have been celebrated for their noses. The characteristic of Firmalden's face was his mouth—which was so finely cut that it seemed hardly modern and hardly human till he spoke or laughed and showed

his white, even teeth. His air was reckless, but his brilliant eyes seemed to dream; his figure was athletic, but it suggested power rather than agility. "The young Bacchus—in stone," his tutor at Oxford had said of him—a description which conveyed all Firmalden's joyous love of life and pleasure controlled by a smiling yet implacable will.

"The truth is," he said, "I don't seem to have a real vocation for anything. I know what I can't do and what I won't do and what I shall probably do, but what I ought to do is, so far, past my finding out. I've been watching fellows I know. They go into the professions, Government offices, the Civil Service, and God knows what. Half the time they can't say why, and most of them would rather be anything than ask themselves a single question. It's all drifting and destiny, I suppose."

Lessard spoke of the Bar. Once called to the Bar one could try one's luck at a dozen things.

"Take my case," said Lessard. "When I was seven I was packed off to the Rev. Luke Hadley's at Wexmouth. At fourteen I entered the Navy. It wasn't all I had been led to believe from story-books, but I enjoyed the life. Besides, it knocked the nonsense out of me. No man can watch the sea and remain altogether a fool. I might have been namby-pamby if I had been trained on land. The chaps used to promise me parrots and puppies and marbles and chocolate for singing to them. At twenty-two I fell ill—simply because I couldn't squall all day to my heart's content. They called

it consumption. I knew it was a smothered voice. So I took sick-leave, and my godmother sent me to Italy. If you notice, it is always a woman who comes to the rescue when a poor devil is called a failure. You can bet, once my own master I took singing lessons. The rest has been a walk-away. My people wanted me to call myself an amateur. Just like them. But after I sang at Brussels and got the best notices of any new singer since Vandyck, they changed their tune."

Firmalden returned to the subject of his own career. The evening was cold and serene; Venus was shining brightly, and the moonlight cast a steady, silvery radiance over the long road and the houses, which seemed white against the sky.

"My father is a man of clear ideas," he said; "he speaks of sin and grace and the devil as though they were Paris, the Holy Land, and Rome. He believes that we all constantly offend God in thought, word, and deed. If I thought that seriously, I'd lock myself in a cell out of harm's way or call evil my good and have done with it. I don't see any middle course. Now, father is quite satisfied—preaching the terrors of death and everlasting damnation. But if you asked him to say a word in praise of the enjoyments of life he'd be first shy and then vindictive. He's one of the best, all the same. As for many others, they believe in hell and act as though there were none—except for the criminal classes!"

"I never once heard the word *sin* mentioned in



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my profession," said Lessard; "they know what is respectable and what is disgraceful, but apparently it affects no one's conduct. Respectability is something in the constitution. You can't acquire it, and, mercifully, if you haven't got it, you don't feel the need of it. Once I heard my agent say, 'If there's no hell, what's to keep a man from doing what he pleases?' He did as he pleased, anyhow. Was your father upset when you jibbed at the ministry?"

"He didn't show any surprise. But one day, just before I returned to Oxford, he came up to my study—a box-room I had at the top of the house. 'When I see such pictures on a wall and such books on a shelf,' said he, 'I know what to expect!' and with that he marched downstairs."

"And what were the pictures?"

"Little photographs of the Goyas at Madrid. Perfectly harmless."

"And the books?"

"Some Zolas and a pocket Byron."

By this time they had turned into a wide side-street and had reached the Manse and entered the wooden gate of the square front garden. They walked across the lawn to a verandah which ran half-way round the house. The French windows which opened on to the verandah were unlocked, and Jim, opening one of them, led his friend into a small apartment used by Dr. Firmalden as his study. Bookcases reached from the floor to the ceiling; there were two easy-chairs, a plain writing-

table, and a couple of brass reading-lamps with green china shades. A good fire burned in the grate, and a heavy pile of logs in the fender suggested the minister's habit of working far into the morning. There were some well-worn mats on the floor, some Oriental vases on the mantelshelf, an old clock in a niche of its own, and two beautiful Persian cats, a mother and her kitten, dozing near the minister's slippers on the hearthrug. The furniture of the writing-table consisted of a Greek Testament, a Bible, a large pewter inkpot, a briar-wood pipe, and a tray of stout wooden pens, all chewed at the ends.

Lessard glanced round the room. It was comfortable, but he did not feel at ease. He stooped to stroke the cats because they were alive and charming, and he murmured under his breath, "Zu was pitty ceeture" into the kitten's ear. He was not happy until Jim took him across the hall into the sitting-room, where there were a piano and a cabinet filled with little ornaments and a number of engravings on the walls—a reproduction of Holman Hunt's "Light of the World," Millais's "Black Brunswicker," "St. Bartholomew's Eve," by the same painter, Watts's "Hope," and photographs of Venice. A round, polished walnut table stood in the window, and morocco-bound volumes of Milton, Cowper, Tennyson, Longfellow, and Goldsmith were placed in symmetrical heaps upon it. All the chairs were covered by shining chintz, representing red fuchsias and green ribbons on a

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white background. It was an old, quaint design, and it gave a certain character to the whole room, which smelt sweetly of pot-pourri. The open piano was littered with music—the songs of Brahms, Schumann, Grieg, and Schubert.

“Sophy’s,” explained Jim; “she can’t sing herself, but she’s a splendid accompanist.”

Lessard felt himself flushing from the force of a kind of self-consciousness which seemed to him quite inexplicable. He sat down on one of the chairs, and in leaning back felt a book under the cushions. It proved to be Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads*.

“Sophy’s,” said Jim. “What a naughty girl she is. She stole that from my box.”

“Hullo!” exclaimed Lessard presently, as a relief to his own embarrassment, “there’s a photograph of that pretty girl Miss Cloots.” Framed in silver, it stood on the mantelpiece.

Jim had been longing to speak of the young lady, and he now gazed with adoration at the picture, which was signed “Nannie” in a splashing handwriting. It represented Miss Nannie in the dress of a Dresden shepherdess. She looked as exquisite and inexpressive as a piece of real china.

“Don’t tell anybody,” said Jim, “but we are engaged. I know she’s very young, and it would be unfair to take her openly at her word. I hardly ever see her alone, but her relatives allow us to write to each other.”

“Who are her relations?” asked Lessard, whose

mind was practical although his appearance was romantic.

Jim believed that her father was an engineer. He had never been to her home. He was to present himself there on her seventeenth birthday. She was now sixteen years and eleven months.

"How did you get to know her well enough to fix it all up?"

"We met at the church concerts. Sophy knew her long ago in the Sunday school. But I first saw her last year. In some ways it is a pity that the painters have discovered her. Alrcady she has been taken up by Lady Ledbury and these Society people."

"No good."

"Still, they haven't turned her head."

"But she'll want to lead their life. Society is run by women for women; that is why, once there, they fall easy victims to every danger."

"Are you turning moralist?"

"No; but I'd sooner see any girl I was fond of dead than in Society, unless she were born in it. The Stage is paradise in comparison — because actresses really work for their living, and work always gives a redeeming touch even to the weakest characters. Art, too, is democratic in the sense that religion is democratic — whereas fashionable Society must be plutocratic or it ceases to be fashionable."

Jim owned that he felt misgivings about Nannie's success as a professional beauty. But if a girl

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happened to be lovely in an unusual way she could not avoid an unusual career.

"And I can't think of marrying for another three years. I must first take my degree and then settle down thoroughly to the warehouse."

"Is your uncle rich?"

"He would be called wealthy."

"I suppose he'll take you into partnership?"

"Probably. You see, he has no children of his own."

Lessard whistled.

"Why didn't you tell me that before? By all means decide for silk. When you are thirty, you can go into Parliament. But in that case——" He paused. His glance went straight to the photograph of Miss Cloots. "Is it wise to marry beforehand?" he suggested.

This remark grated upon the young lover's sensibility. Prudence he abhorred; he admired the sublime and the quixotic. Nannie Cloots seemed as far above him as the crescent moon is above the struggling ship. It was almost profane to remember that she possibly required three meals a day. It would have been sheer blasphemy to consider the cost of her board and keep. To picture her as middle-aged or ill never entered into his imagination. All his thoughts about her ran into sonnets, and all his feelings about her expressed themselves in ecstatic worship. That he could ever love anyone else was unthinkable; that he could ever grow weary of her beauty was as

though a man should fly dclight. If he deferred his marriage, it was merely in order to have a better position, a richer home, and an assured future to offer the radiant girl.

"I know I am treading upon delicate ground," said Lessard.

"Frankly, you arc."

"I can't help feeling that I know life better than you do. Why, the very atmosphere of this house is religious, and blessedly domestic—like a German hymn. It rests me, and it does me good. Yet I do not forget that there is another world outside. If you could always stay here you might lose a few realitics; but you would keep many illusions."

"My dear fellow, I want humanity—not super-humanity," said Firmalden, with a certain irritation. "I'm not an exotic."

Lessard smiled at the idea of mistaking his robust companion for an exotic, and Firmalden himself, after the remark, burst out laughing. This cleared the air, but the thoughts which Lessard had conjured up took their stealthy abode in the recesses of Jim's mind.

When Dr. Firmalden and Sophy arrived, Lessard was playing some phrases from *Tristan und Isolde* on the piano, and Jim was stretched out in an arm-chair, staring at the ceiling. The pastor was a tall, spare man with aquiline features, high cheek-bones, a thin, transparent skin, and distinguished manners. He belonged to the scholarly type of Presbyterian divinc, and, although he was

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truculent in controversy and violent in politics, his theology was rather that of St. John than of St. Peter. "Both," he would say drily, "were martyrs—for whether you are a dreamer or a swordsman you must suffer."

He congratulated Lessard on his great success, and introduced him to Sophy. The wise Lessard fell in love at his first look into Sophy's eyes. It was one of those sudden natural passions which overmaster ploughmen and artists—that is to say, the primitive and the complex. But the correctly civilised who come between these extremes escape the peril of that flame: they may get a little scorched, nothing more. Heart, soul, and body, Lessard was on fire. The pale and insipid Nannie Cloots left him, as she found him, a critic. The warm Southern browns and reds of Sophy found him a gallant and transformed him into a poet. He was capable of greater madness than Jim, and Sophy called irresistibly to every one of his artistic tastes. In height she was above most women, and she had a soft graciousness of figure which made her seem rather more than twenty—which was her age. The rich silk dress which fell in heavy folds from her waist had a dignity which is not of this generation. Her countenance was of the broad, low-browed kind which Paul Veronese has made immortal in his St. Helena; her hair, parted in the Madonna fashion, was wound in a plait round her head; her colouring was fresh and brilliant; her eyes were questioning; her smile was delicious.

The little party had supper together in a dining-room which was furnished like a farm kitchen, with a German stove, an oak dresser for crockery, and a tiled wooden floor. Sophy herself made the omelette and the coffee; she also cut the bread-and-butter and brought out delicacies from the cupboard. The conversation pleased them all, although no one made astonishing remarks. Lessard could never remember what was said. It was all lost in a series of impressions. The uncovered mahogany table, with a bowl of scarlet geraniums in the centre, were they not the colour of Sophy's mouth? The green plates, the few pieces of old silver, and the copper pots and pans hanging on the walls—those he could always see again. And Sophy, in her brown silk dress, beating eggs up in a dish and showing her pretty hands to great advantage. She was silent that evening and said very little. Perhaps that is why he had no recollections ever of what passed in words. But much passed in glances—although Dr. Firmalden and Jim noticed nothing extraordinary beyond a mistake made by Sophy in sweetening her father's coffee.



### CHAPTER III

SOPHY had never met anyone so handsome as Lessard; she had never heard anything so seductive as his voice. All that night, after the concert, she dreamt of him and his song. On waking she wanted to sleep again in order to dream again. But she was always called at seven, and when Jim was at home, he and she would walk together for an hour before breakfast. When Jim was not at home, she went alone. Many were the mysteries and thoughts which travailed in her heart during these solitary wanderings up and down the Bayswater Road. This particular morning, however, Jim accompanied her; he talked of Nannie Cloots, and Sophy asked questions about Lessard.

"How long have you known him?"

"For some time, but we are only just beginning to be friends. Last night he told me more about himself than I ever heard from anybody else."

"It was very good of him to sing for us. What did he tell you about himself?"

The girl had her own little court of admirers, a train composed of young men who were members of her father's church, divinity students from the theological seminary where her father expounded

the philosophers, Jim's friends, and the brothers of the girls with whom she had been at school. The latter were destined for various pursuits—the Law, the Army, Medicine, the Civil Service, the Church of England, and the Stock Exchange. As she had been left motherless at an early age, she had been trained by two married aunts to keep house for her father, and thus by degrees she had attained a certain habit of authority, a privilege of thinking and acting for herself which few women can hope to enjoy before their marriage or even by marrying. What with her father's absorption in his work, what with her innate imperiousness, what with her restive temperament, she had already a maturity of will and an imagination beyond her years. She was not allowed to go to theatres, dances were forbidden, and no wines or cards were ever seen on the pastor's table—not because these things in themselves were wrong, but because it was her duty, as a minister's daughter, to set a strict example. But beyond these restrictions she was her own mistress; she read everything, she knew a great deal about art, she went to all the picture galleries by herself, and she played admirably on the piano. For her friendships her father made one rule—she was never to go out alone in public, in any circumstances, with any man acquaintance. Men might call at the Manse for the pleasure of conversation and tea; they might bring their violins, their flutes, their 'cellos, their poetry books, and their devotion any afternoon—except on

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Sundays—between four and six. But Sophy could not accept their invitations, their presents, or their escort. If she met any one of her young men friends in the street and he offered to walk any part of the way with her, Dr. Firmalden's orders were that she was to ask at once for a cab and thus make her escape without wounding the swain's feelings. Sophy had never felt the least temptation to disobey these rules, although she had been, as she believed, several times in love. But such were these passions that when their flattered objects attempted to offer either protestations or endearments she became stony, and discovered that, so far from wanting, she resented them. She did not pretend to understand herself, but it was certain that, while she was entranced by the idea of love, she disliked even those whom she thought charming the moment they asked her to regard them as real lovers and living men. There was that fastidious and elusive instinct in Sophy which always makes for suffering. It may accompany keen sensibilities, strong emotions, and profound affections—yet, lurking always in the depths, it is the torturing undercurrent which is so much stronger than the strongest surface tide. As persons possessing this temperament grow older they do not become less fastidious, but they learn to be more stern toward forbidding ideas and more gracious toward forbidding appearances—for few things that we see can be so repulsive as many things that live acceptably in the mind.

Sophy's whims grievously agitated her aunts, who beheld with consternation the disdain of several wealthy members of the church. There was Ledbury Hammett, jun., of Messrs. Ledbury Hammett and Sons, the great coach-builders; there was Freddie Withy, the only son of Mr. Frederick Withy, the prosperous ironmonger; there was Waldo Benham, the son of Abel Benham, of Benham and Harford, woollen merchants. These three, to name the most desirable of a precious group, were rich and ready to marry. She had been rather sweetly disposed toward one, Captain Bancock, the only son of the widow of a Government contractor. He called once at the Mansc in his uniform after a levée. The girl was a little captivated, and saw herself leading the gay regimental life as it is described in romances. He called again; he sent her a Christmas card; this was followed by his photograph. Then he sent her his favourite valse; he called a number of times to hear her play it. She thought him good-looking, and she could find no fault with his figure. All went blissfully till a faint note of condescension crept into his worship. This mortified her pride and cured her love-fit. She despised him. Then the Captain's mother made it clear to Dr. Firmalden that, in her own phrase, *she hoped higher*. Shortly afterwards she left the chapel and took a pew at a fashionable church belonging to the Establishment, where she was considered a dreadfully common person. This incident was

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Sophy's first direct encounter with the form of vulgarity known as social ambition. It made her morose for some time, and, in the family, she was thought to be fretting over a worthless lover. Captain Bancock's name was never mentioned, and whenever she looked off into the distance, lost her blush or showed signs of lassitude, these distressing symptoms were regarded as the cruel effects of Bancock's unmanly conduct. The spirit of cynicism thus touched and hurt her at the very age when all should be noble and inspiring—

Golden lads and girls all must  
As chimney-sweepers come to dust.

But it was early days to quote such lines and understand them.

"We must go to Aunt Dulcie's to-day," said Sophy, turning suddenly to her brother.

"Of course."

Dulcibella Banish, their mother's youngest sister, was the beauty of the family. Her husband, Charles Banish, Q.C., M.P., was a rising power in parliamentary circles. The Banishes, who were childless, had a charming house in Great Cumberland Place.

"And then to Aunt Gloriana's?"

"I suppose so."

Was it not a duty?

Gloriana Twomley, their mother's eldest sister (they had been the three Miss Fleetings of Northumberland), was the wife of Matthew Jonson Twomley, of the eminent builders and decorators,

Twomley and Farebrother. The Twomleys and their three children lived at Hampstead.

"And to-night," continued Sophy, "we all go to supper with Uncle Henry."

Henry Firmalden and his wife lived in Inverness Terrace. Mrs. Firmalden was an invalid. She was the granddaughter of Colonel Derbesh (pronounced Darby), of the Guards. She considered that she had married beneath her, and she had been christened Eloïse, after her father's distant cousin, Lady Ochiltree.

The aunt whom Jim and Sophy loved best was Dulcibella, but Sophy was not allowed to go often to Great Cumberland Place because her father feared she would find friends there who would make her dissatisfied with her own simple home and give her tastes wholly beyond her means. Young members of Parliament and clever struggling barristers, all seeking rich wives or wives with social influence, were not good companions for the pretty daughter of a poor man. Dulcibella herself was proud of the handsome Sophy, and she did not share Dr. Firmalden's view of the situation.

"You deliberately spoil the child's chances. Any man of sense would think himself lucky to get her without a farthing."

"Yes, any man of sense," the minister repeated, with grim emphasis; "but where is that man? I want to see him."

"Sophy is such an odd girl. She has only to

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hear that a man is rich to snap his head off. It breaks my heart to see her so foolish."

"True. She's no market-woman, and she seems to tarry the Lord's leisure in most things."

The good Doctor, nevertheless, was much attached to his frivolous sister-in-law. Her gossip amused him, and he admired her clothes, all of which came from Paris. She was not pious nor especially benevolent, but if he had a drooping fund or a deserving case on unprepossessing lines, Dulcibella would always sail in to the rescue with a ten-pound note. Game and salmon, calves' foot jellies, turtle soup, pineapples, and hothouse grapes (luxuries which to save his life the pastor would not have purchased for himself) came frequently from Dulcibella, especially when the austere man seemed to be overworked or rather depressed. Dulcibella, indisputably, understood the flesh, nor were her ministrations to the spirit empty.

About eleven o'clock Jim and Sophy called at this charmer's house in Great Cumberland Place. They were at once admitted into her bedroom, where she was sitting in front of her dressing-table having her splendid ash-coloured hair dried by a young woman from Bond Street who had been shampooing the locks in question. These were fluffy and waving and fell in ripples over her blue silk jacket. To describe the dashing Mrs. Banish were no easy task, and people in Society thought it amazing that Nonconformists could produce

such an aristocratic type of beauty, such perfect hands and feet, such a general air of high breeding—above all, such self-assurance. Mrs. Banish could stare any lady of the land out of countenance, if any such lady pushed her to a display of the very best kind of easy manners. With her nephew and niece, however, she was all simplicity and affection. One sat down on either side of her while she surveyed herself serenely in the looking-glass. All their lives they had been in the habit of watching her dress for her morning drive. She treated them as her own children, and she adored them both because they were so picturesque, so artless, and so fresh in their absurd ideas.

Jim screwed and unscrewed the many silver-topped bottles on the dressing-table, while Sophy described the concert of the night before.

"Lessard sang for us."

"Not Maurice Lessard?"

"Yes," said Sophy.

"My dear! How kind of him! He refused to sing for Lady Weambly-Coxe last week, and she's furious. Oh, he is the handsomest creature I ever saw! And his voice! They say he is in love with Mrs. Beauclerk, the actress," added clever Aunt Dulcibella, studying her own forehead in the hand-glass. Was any little line growing deeper?

"Mrs. who?" asked Sophy faintly.

"Mrs. Audley Beauclerk, of the Parnassus Theatre. But these artists are always falling in



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and out of love. I am dying to know them all myself, but Charles won't have one of them cross the threshold."

"Is this Mrs. Beauclerk nice?" asked Sophy.

"Quite charming, I believe," continued her aunt; "and she's the best actress we've got. She's half a foreigner, that's why."

"Sophy," said Jim abruptly, "you've walked too far. You are tired out."

Oh no; Sophy was not in the least tired. She begged him not to be silly. Nevertheless, when Mrs. Banish had finished her toilette, she drove them both home in her victoria, halting on the way at a hat shop in the hope that Sophy would choose a new hat. But, for some reason, Sophy did not feel inclined to look at hats.

"Don't you like the one with the cherries?"

"Not to-day, Aunt Dulcie."

Jim was thinking about Nannie Cloots, and he did not catch one of his aunt's swift glances.

## CHAPTER IV

THAT same afternoon Jim and Sophy went by railway from Uxbridge Road to Hampstead. The Jonson Twomleys occupied a large detached mansion in FitzJohn's Avenue, which was furnished with walnut wood, ebony and oak, plush, Turkey carpets and brocade; Liberty vases, engravings by Landseer, and gilt bowls from Benares, oil-paintings of waterfalls and mountains, oil-paintings of scriptural subjects, oil-paintings of cavaliers on horseback, of fighting Jacobites, of veterans playing dice, of beaux of Bath, of John Bunyan in prison, of girls in swings, and sheep by brooks, and cows on hills, of old windmills, and ships in storms, and sailors on shore. The walls, from the entrance to the conservatory off the drawing-room, were covered with these striking works in ponderous gilded frames. Jim, as a little boy, had admired them because he could tell exactly what each one represented on being asked by his nurse. Now he shuddered at them and thought them hideous.

Gloriana Jonson Twomley was a fine buxom woman, with a bright complexion, clear blue eyes, and small, pretty features. She was perhaps

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too stout, but she had a good carriage and she always dressed well—if rather over richly. Devoted to her home, of which she was the supreme and capable ruler, she cared nothing for Society, politics, art, literature, or philanthropy—18B, FitzJohn's Avenue was her universe; George Jonson Twomley, Master George Twomley, Miss Ethel Twomley, and Master Gerald Twomley were the human race; Almighty God was Almighty God; and the Reverend Luke Heathfield was the preacher of His Word. On these broad, simple lines, Mrs. Jonson Twomley conducted her comfortable establishment on an income of eight thousand pounds a year—two hundred of which were cheerfully deducted for the charities recommended by the aforesaid Reverend Luke Heathfield. Mrs. Twomley was the best of wives, a firm mother, an incomparable housekeeper, and a clever woman. Twomley was a man of most unusual ability, and his Gloriana, who adored him, made it her business to study his moods (no easy matter, inasmuch as his health was wretched) and to keep him happy (a hard task, inasmuch as he suffered from attacks of religious doubt). Although he was engaged in a large, profitable business, which he had inherited, it had been his early dream to go into the Church. His tastes were bookish, his opinions violently socialistic; he would have spent all his money, but for Gloriana's influence, in organising strikes, crushing capitalists, and building model dwellings for the working-

man. The cleverness shown by Mrs. Twomley in transforming a blithe enthusiast who would have ruined his family into a melancholy sceptic, who merely ruined his own stomach, was something which had to be known at close quarters in order to be gauged or appreciated. The triumph was less in effecting the reformation than in rendering the reformed one so entirely satisfied with her work.

"But for Gloriana," he would say, "I should have made a fool of myself."

Mrs. Twomley received her niece and nephew with every sign of love. They were her own flesh and blood, and to admire them came by nature. She was not so generous as Dulcibella, but she had a warm heart for her own people, and the motherless Firmaldens appealed strongly to her maternal instincts, which were the more intense from being so concentrated within a small circle. She kissed them both (she had soft pink cheeks, and she had been what is called "kissable" all her life). Then she rang for tea, which was an elaborate meal spread on the dining-room table and composed of five kinds of cake, jams, hot bread, fruit, sweets, tea, coffee, cocoa, and cream in large jugs. It was her pride and her duty to live, as she said, on the fat of the land. How otherwise could the Masters George and Gerald Twomley and Miss Ethel Twomley do justice to the constitutions with which, in the first place, their parents and Heaven had endowed them?

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"We went to Aunt Dulcie's this morning," began Jim, trying not to see too much all at once of a smirking "Ruth" (in yellow) parting from a wailing "Naomi" (in red), which was set precisely in the middle of the wall facing him.

"And how is Dulcie?" asked Gloriana, cutting the plum cake into thick slices. "This won't hurt you—it's all so good—made of the best groceries and cooked in my own kitchen. Dulcibella is gadding about as usual, I suppose? Luncheon here, and dinners there, and her house full of people who flatter her for what they can get out of her. A set of spongers! And has she been buying any more new clothes? I'd be ashamed to spend such vast sums on my back. Dress well—yes—in accordance with your means and your husband's wishes. But Dulcie never looks well dressed in my opinion. There's no real worth in the things she buys. They are all what she thinks is style, and the materials are not worth their linings. Fancy a cheap French cambric on a gros-grain silk foundation! How is your poor father?" In these terms she invariably referred to Dr. James Firmalden.

"He is quite well, and the collection after the concert last night was fifteen pounds," said Sophy.

"That is because Lessard sang," said Jim.

"Who is Lessard?" asked Mrs. Twomley.

"The new baritone."

"I have never heard of him."

"He's a friend of Jim's," said Sophy.

"A friend?" exclaimed Mrs. Twomley, shocked. "Surely, Jim, you are not going into that Bohemian set? They always want to borrow money or they ask you to lend them your house for a concert. I had to give them up long ago. They have no moral sense, and they never tell the same story twice in the same way. Have nothing to do with this Lessard or any one of them. Buy tickets now and again for their entertainments if you can afford it. I can enjoy a good concert at any time, but I don't want to know the singers and reciters and players. They are dreadful creatures."

"Lessard is a genius. People are proud to know him."

"I never heard his name before in my life. If he's young and really a kind of genius, persuade him to do something sensible. He can always sing in the evenings, if he wants to keep up his music. There's such a craze nowadays to turn play into business. No good will come of it. Business is business——"

"And art is life," said Jim, who wondered the next instant what on earth induced him to make such a remark to his Aunt Gloriana.

"Art is life!" repeated the astonished lady, looking by instinct at the works of art, as she understood it, on her own walls. "Anything less like life than art I never saw."

"It is Lessard's life, I should have said."

"Oh, *Lessard's* life!" she replied contemptuously. "I thought you meant real life."

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"It is as real to him, aunt, as your life is to you."

"That's impossible," said Mrs. Twomley firmly. "For example: you are here; I sit at a table you can see; I give you cake you can eat, tea you can drink, cream that is nourishing and wholesome. You see this Mr. Lessard: he sings you a pretty little song; but after he has sung it, where is it? What lasting good have you got from it? What practical purpose has it served? Why, if he went hoarse the song would be nothing even while he sang it. But if I am hoarse the table is still unchanged, the cake is still cake, the cream is still cream. That is life, my dear children. Learn to face it, and do not, like the heedless, mistake the mustard for the sandwich. The sandwich can exist perfectly well without the mustard, but the mustard would be nothing without the sandwich. Art is mustard—writ large."

Mrs. Twomley enjoyed an argument (for so she described her conversational method), and in refuting Jim she felt as though the whole University of Oxford, represented in his person, were crumbling away under the force of her logic. The young man was amused; besides, he could never lose his temper with any woman. But Sophy became restless and wistful. Mrs. Twomley's homely wisdom irritated by its very plausibility, and her honest air of triumph when she had delivered her mind on any vexed point, the finality of her judgment, the look in her keen eyes which defied contradiction, and the real ingenuity

she displayed in saying something—which, though wide from the mark, could not be denied—were exasperating to the dreamy, intellectual girl who liked the truth so illuminated by the enchanted iridescence of her own imagination that it lost its real shape.

"Sophy, you are not looking well," said her aunt abruptly. "I'm afraid you're not eating your proper food. Do you take porridge and bacon for breakfast?"

"She's almost a vegetarian lately," said Jim.

"A vegetarian!" cried Mrs. Twomley. "Why, her bones will crumble away, her flesh will get flabby, and she'll have a complexion like the skin of a raw fowl. What is your father thinking of to allow such nonsense?"

The girl fired up; spoke rather sharply, and said she was really not a child. She disliked meat; she abhorred bacon. Mrs. Twomley's good nature was imperturbable, and when the two took their departure shortly after, nothing could have been warmer than her affectionate farewell. But that evening she wrote Dr. Firmalden a letter warning him that Sophy wanted a firmer hand, a change of air, and words of admonition.

"For," added the lady, "I see trouble ahead. She will sip sorrow by the spoonful, and one of these days the sound of my voice will return to her, and she will wish she had hearkened unto it. Let her beware of the gilded shore of a most dangerous sea."



## CHAPTER V

WHEN Sophy reached home, her heart gave a bound at the sight of a letter addressed to herself lying on the hall table. She did not know Lessard's handwriting, and yet she recognised it as his. Picking up the envelope hastily, she escaped with it, unobserved by Jim, to her own room. Yes, it was from Lessard; an ordinary note asking her acceptance of two tickets for a Sarasate recital at the St. James's Hall. She paced the floor; she read it several times; then, in a whirl, she sat down and wrote a hasty note thanking him coldly and expressing her inability to make use of the tickets. She was his "very truly, Sophia Firmalden." All the time she could think of no one except the charming Mrs. Audley Beauclerk, the actress with whom, as her Aunt Dulcie had said, he was in love. Then she tore up his letter and ran out herself to post her reply in the pillar-box near their gate. But when she returned again to her room it was very quiet and grey; the gas was not yet lit, and a sad twilight only kept it from utter gloom. The table, the chest of drawers, the brass bed, and the dressing-table were darkly distinct; but, for some reason,

they no longer seemed to be hers. The walls seemed familiar, the atmosphere lonely. She had never in her life felt so unhappy or so desolate. Nobody understood her, nobody was in sympathy with her. She had no one to whom she could tell her thoughts and her feelings. She was an alien in her father's house and a strange woman to her own brother. She dreaded the visit to her Uncle Henry's that evening, for they would all have to sit in a forlorn half-circle talking about Jim's career. It was always the man's career. Nothing would ever be said about a girl's career—at least in her presence. For her future depended on her marriage, and the sort of husband—if, indeed, one presented himself—she could secure. How humiliating! Without hesitation she owned to herself that Lessard was the one whom she could obediently follow and blindly love. She knew him by all the signs as the man each woman meets who, even if he be not destined to love her in return or to be her companion, is nevertheless the master of her fate. There was fear, not joy, in her heart at this ominous encounter. What would the end be? Nothing happy, she felt sure. But this certainty was as confirmed as the other certainty—that Lessard, in coming, had brought her unknown future with him. She might write harsh notes, deny herself to him should he call, but in the end he would dominate; and nothing, to her, could ever again be as it had been.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Firmalden always dined at

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eight, but, out of consideration for Dr. Firmalden's old-fashioned way of living, they provided a high tea at seven on the rare occasions when he could be persuaded to take a meal with them. The minister and his two children drove in a four-wheeler to Inverness Terrace, where the butler, with an air of respect in spite of himself, opened the door and ushered them into the library next to the dining-room. Mrs. Firmalden, a querulous person with a high forehead, thin lips, and long ear-rings, was reclining as usual on the sofa; her husband, a plain, stout, red-faced man with white hair and side-whiskers, sat reading the evening newspaper. Both looked resigned and at the stage in unsatisfactory human relationships when the pair, having exhausted their mutual dislike, were almost attached to each other by a common bond of suffering. The greetings were formal, and the high tea which followed was meagre in a pretentious way. Thus, in careful portions, there were three cutlets and two half-pigeons, chicken for one, rissoles for four, two tartlets and three custards in cups, a minute apple-pie and a pigmy blanc-mange, one small dish of salmon mayonnaise and a smaller dish of sardines on toast, omelette for three and kidneys on toast for two, coffee for three and tea for one, and dry champagne for Mrs. Firmalden. Each member of the party had to glance furtively at his neighbours' plates before venturing to make his or her own choice of a dish. This necessary preoccupation of mind made easy conversation im-

possible, and, with a sense of hunger unappeased, they all returned after the meal to the library.

Mrs. Firmalden objected to smoking, except in the conservatory; but as she had not thought it worth while to have it heated for such a short evening (the minister always left at nine), the men had to be satisfied with her grudging permission to smoke one cigarette apiece. As she coughed piteously in giving the permission, they did not take advantage of her unselfishness.

"So you will leave Oxford for good next month, Jim," said Henry Firmalden, drawing his chair up to the fire and looking hard at his nephew.

"Yes, sir."

"And you are still set on coming down to the warehouse?"

"Yes, sir; and I'm most grateful to you for giving me such a fine start."

"There is no such thing as gratitude," said his uncle, "and never promise it, my boy, to anybody. There's a cluster of words in the English language I should like to get rid of—and gratitude is among them."

"If it exists in yourself, it exists enough for any argument," said his brother; "and so long as a man is capable of feeling love and thankfulness, he can know that such things are in the world."

Mrs. Firmalden threw longing eyes at a spiritualistic romance—*The Love Beyond*—which she had been reading before the entrance of her guests. Was she never to hear the end of these consulta-

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tions about Jim and the tiresome business? She detested trade and the City, and she did not care much about wealth. Firmalden had settled fifteen hundred a year upon her for pin-money, but most of this went to her own sisters, who had married curates, captains, and clerks in the War Office—for love. She was also a strict economist, and, unknown to Firmalden, she saved hundreds from the housekeeping allowance—which she also spent on her sisters and their respective large families. It did not occur to her that this was unfair to Firmalden, whom she would have skinned alive, with a clear conscience, for her disreputable old father, who never seemed drunk because no one had ever known him sober, or for her vain old mother, who wore a lovely golden wig and laced in her waist till it measured no more than twenty-three inches. This personage, Mrs. Raynes Derbesh, with a whitewashed face and protruding eyes, could be seen any fine afternoon driving round the Park in a handsome carriage—paid for by Mrs. Firmalden's economies. The Raynes Derbesh girls had all been brought up to regard their mamma as the most devilish fine woman who had ever dazzled a Viceroy, upset a Commander-in-chief, or cajoled the entire Indian Army Corps.

"Yet she chose me out of them all," the gallant Raynes Derbesh would say; "me, a poor subaltern, a younger son, and a wretch born to misfortune in all except his Tilly! There was a fellow wanted her, but I put a bullet through his skull!" He

did not, but Mrs. Firmalden, with such traditions in her blood, could scarcely bring herself to endure ordinary domestic talk and turmoil. Mudie's cart brought her a parcel of new novels every week. If she liked a book greatly she would sometimes read it twice, or, if the same book were brought to her after a longish period, she would remember, on reaching the middle, that she had read it before. She had too many blood relations whom she idolised to care for "in-laws," but, so far as she could like an outsider, she was fond of Sophy. The girl's beauty appealed to her languid sentimental nature; she had, too, a fancy that Sophy's "magnetism" could cure her headaches, backaches, chestaches, and shooting neuralgia. She beckoned Sophy to her side and said—

"Let your uncle talk to Jim. Come and tell me what you have been doing?" She dropped her voice. "Have you heard anything from Captain Bancock?"

Captain Bancock had considered Mrs. Henry Firmalden a lady in every sense of the word, and the one, among Sophy's people, with whom he could get on or with whom he had "ideas in common." She, on her side, had grasped all his difficulties, and, with no sense of disloyalty, introduced him to her sister Blanchie's leggy daughter, Muriel — who was extremely well connected, her papa being the son of Lord Bohun. Blanchie, as a nursing sister, had snapped him up in India, when he was recovering from a snake-bite in a

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lonely station in the hot weather. The Bohuns were furious, but clever Blanchie won the day and the soldier. "What!" said he, "shall I throw her over when she has saved my life?" Eloise now paid all their bills. Of course, Bancock was the very man for Muriel.

Sophy understood her aunt's unconscious dishonesty of mind, and bore her no malice for trying to secure Bancock for her own niece, inasmuch as he had retired ingloriously from his courtship of a Dissenting minister's daughter.

"No," said she, "I have heard nothing about him. Have you?"

Mrs. Firmalden smoothed the folds of her quilted maroon silk dressing-gown and surveyed the emerald and ruby rings which adorned her thin fingers.

"Well, dear," she said, "it seems that he and Muriel are dreadfully in love. Blanchie was here this morning and told me all about it. In many ways, dear Muriel might do better, because Captain Bancock's family really come from nothing. But he's quite gentleman-like and very well off."

"I think they are exactly suited to each other," said Sophy, with sincerity, although Mrs. Firmalden thought she was showing her mettle and saving her face. "It will be an ideal match."

"It is nice of you to say so," replied her aunt; "but Muriel has made herself miserable because she knows, of course, that he was once such a great friend of yours."

Sophy tossed her head and smiled easily.

"He is nothing to me," said she, "although I must say he is good-looking, and I can quite see why Muriel likes him."

Mrs. Firmalden was not obtuse. "Who is the new man?" she thought at once; and by skilful questions she found out that Lessard had appeared on the scene of action.

"My dear Sophy," she exclaimed, "Jim must ask him to sing for my Lifeboat concert at Ventmore. Lessard will be a tremendous draw. We can charge five shillings for the best tickets."

She had been dreading the delivery and the effect of the Bancock news, and her pleasure was so great at the turn events had taken, that, being an amiable woman when she could spare inequalities of justice without much trouble, she resolved to do everything in her power to help Sophy's latest friendship. It sounded promising and suitable.

"Is this Mr. Lessard married or single?" she asked Jim.

"A confirmed bachelor," answered Jim.

"Do you think he would help at our entertainment at Ventmore? He can stay with us. You and Sophy must come too."

Jim became thoughtful. He saw an opportunity for securing an invitation for Nannie Cloots. Why shouldn't the lovely Nannie sing also?

The Henry Firmaldens had a pleasant house—Cliffe Park—at Ventmore, in the south of England,



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where Mrs. Henry, on account of her weak heart, spent the greater part of each year. There she entertained her sisters and their children incessantly, but no kinsman or kinswoman on her husband's side was ever asked to Cliffe for more than a day and a night. Truly, Henry Firmalden, as his brother James said, married six robust families when he took the fragile Eloise Derbesh for his bride. She was the eldest, the plainest, the dowdiest, and the worst figure among the Derbesh girls—which was saying a good deal. But she spoke in a whisper and ruled them all. She said she asked only to be let alone; yet she controlled every individual life with which she came in close contact. There were hours when the stubborn Jim was aware that he had been managed, and many times the rebellious Sophy had a suspicion that she was not having her own way. No one wondered that Henry Firmalden was ruled with a rod of iron. He lifted his eyebrows at the suggestion about Lessard, but he did not venture to offer any remark. In the City he was very different—a man who could show great decision and force of will. But at home he was docile, silent, and often hungry.

“Dulcibella and Gloriana, with their magnificent health, have not the crushing power of that sickly Eloise,” Dr. Firmalden would say. “Such is moral engineering! Poor Henry!”

Eloise, however, was now in one of her best humours, and she could be most agreeable when

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she chose. She rang for lemonade, port wine, and biscuits; she sat up and played Halma with the minister while she planned the party for the concert.

"But suppose Lessard can't come?" said Jim.

"He must come. I rely on you to get him."

"But how can I spare Sophy?" asked the minister, in case Sophy had no desire to go.

"Sophy must play the accompaniments and make herself useful. How can I possibly do everything alone? Don't be selfish, dear James. Write to your friend now, Jim, and lose no time. There's paper and envelopes and stamps on your uncle's desk."

## CHAPTER VI

THE next afternoon Lessard called at the Manse. Sophy entered the drawing-room holding her head proudly erect and wearing the brown silk dress in which she had made her first startling impression on the young man.

"Why did you write me that cold letter?" he asked at once, not releasing her hand as he should have done the moment he had shaken it.

"Was it a cold letter?"

"You know it was. And so I could not answer Jim until I had seen you. Are you angry with me?"

"Why should I be angry with you?"

"There is no reason why; but you are a woman."

"I am not allowed to accept tickets or anything else," she said in a low voice and almost reproachfully. It seemed strange that he did not know all about her, for there was no other sense of strangeness between them.

"Am I to sing for your aunt's concert?" he asked, after a pause.

"If you will."

"The decision rests with you. Do you wish me to sing at Ventmore?"

"I think the charity is most deserving."

"That is enough—I'll sing."

He looked at her with love in his eyes.

"Do you believe in fate?" he asked. "I used not to believe in it. But I am changing my opinions. I thought at one time that chance and mischance ruled the world. It was a lazy, stupefying idea; it made enthusiasm ridiculous and work pitiful. To sit, getting shrewder and leaner and more grasping, watching for one's chance, as it is called, did not seem to me worth while. Fate is better. It comes—it is not to be snatched as it passes by. You may be asleep—when you wake up you find it waiting there by your side. You may be half-dead—it touches you, and you live. And it is not a fate stolen from some other; it is your very own, for you yourself, and for no one else."

She knew that in speaking of fate he meant her.

"You will let me come and see you often," he continued. "I want to ask you all kinds of things. I think you can answer every one of the questions I have been asking ever since I could think."

"I know nothing. I want to ask questions myself."

"I will answer all your questions if you will answer all mine."

In the course of their conversation, which went on for more than an hour, he told Sophy that he was a materialist, but not a man of the world. What he could not see he did not understand;

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he was influenced wholly by his senses, and what he did not feel through his emotions he could not think or imagine. As he talked, Sophy fully realised that, in spite of her youth, her sex, and her inexperience, she had far more common sense than Lessard, and far less simplicity of spirit. His freshness made her feel ashamed of her instinctive feminine duplicity, which impelled her to think twice before she spoke, and then say only a part of what she really meant. Any awe which she might have felt of his great talents vanished in her wonder at his transparent egoism -- which was nature unrestrained, unabashed, and unalloyed. His old professor at Milan had warned him that if he civilised his nature he would kill his music for ever. "The day you become sophisticated, your art will perish. It can spring from misery, but it will die of comfort; it can live with folly, but it can only sneer with cynicism."

Lessard would have been sophisticated in a measure if he could have understood the warning fully. But he took it to mean that he would do well to follow his impulses, and his impulse urged him to accept the advice. He had now fallen swiftly, completely, and deeply in love, and, with the ingenuousness which is inseparable from a real passion, he wanted Sophy to know that in her he recognised the mistress of his wayward heart. He had no doubt of this, and he took such pleasure in her beauty, that the delight of watching it seemed then the only privilege he asked

for. All men are sensible to physical charms, but it may be wondered whether artists, more than any other class of human beings, do not fall utterly and slavishly under the spell of an appearance which inspires them. Beauty is to all artists as vital as the air they breathe, and more necessary, for, lacking the sight of it in one form or another, they lose all will to live. The soul's beauty and moral beauty and beauty of intellect may interest them, but bodily beauty and the beauties of nature or of man's handicraft are the visible gods of their idolatry. The artist may be capricious, and he is rarely constant except to a type, but while the frenzy of devotion is upon him, there is no lover so absorbed in his illusion or so desperate in his selfishness. And the cause of this lies in the fact that, while the fairest of women is to ordinary men no more than the fairest of women, she is, as well, to an artist, the essence of his art; and, while the natural beauties of the world are to an ordinary man no more than the natural beauties of the world, delightful in their way and proper place, they are, to the artist, the things on which his happiness and his very existence depend. If no true artist could ever be moved to take the so-called practical view of life (which means the mercenary view) either in his marriage, or in his loves, or in his work, it is because the practical view would be to such an one so far from advantageous that it would mean actual destruction. Men of artistic genius

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cannot marry for position or for money or for convenience; they cannot love as they ought or even as they might be expected by reasonable persons to love; they cannot work with an eye on the market-place. And again, what may seem desirable and beautiful to others may not seem either to an artist; and what an artist may find overwhelming in its loveliness may easily leave normal beings cold—if not depressed.

Sophy had never met any men or women who were not rather conventional in their ideas. Her father, a most thoughtful and religious man, was reserved and not willingly imaginative. Of Jim she knew little, but she found him cautious in speech and not disposed to quarrel with the established order of things. He admired books by daring writers, yet he showed no independence of action beyond his refusal to join the ministry. But that, too, was conventional enough—given a youth who wanted to make money and enjoy himself. Sophy, however, had read the romances of George Sand and of Goethe; she had studied the published letters of the famous and biographies of the extraordinary; she understood the unpremeditated, spontaneous Lessard, whereas she could never understand the wary Captain Bancock, her other acquaintances, and the acquaintances of her acquaintances. She was never at ease with any of them.

“Sophy,” said Maurice, “we loved each other in another world before we came to this one. I

know your face perfectly well. I know what you are going to say next."

"If it amuses you to think so——"

"It doesn't *amuse* me to think so. It enchants me."

"If people could hear us talking in this way they would say we were mad."

"You're a prim child! When I first knew you—a thousand years ago—you were a Pagan and you were not prim. Then about three hundred years ago you were a devout Venetian; still you were not prim. And now, when I meet you after all this time, you are neither a Pagan nor devout, but you are exceedingly demure, and much wiser, of course, than you ever were before. Just think—it has taken one thousand years to give you that Sphinx-like expression."

"I can explain the Sphinx's expression," said Sophy; "she herself didn't know the answer to the riddle! She doesn't know it to this day."

"We must meet often, but where and when?"

"Here—always," said Sophy firmly.

"Oh no—we must take walks together. We can go to all sorts of places."

"My father would never allow it."

"Then don't ask him. Darling Sophy, you look shocked."

"How can you ask me to deceive my father?"

"Because you were born to come with me wherever I go, and although you know it and I know it, your father probably does not know it."



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"That is a bad principle, all the same. And I mustn't listen to you. Besides, he might not forbid it. There is no harm in going for a walk."

"You admit you want to come. It's splendid to get out into the country."

She laughed.

"I'll see what I can do."

"You'd do anything to make me happy and help me with my work, wouldn't you, dearest?"

"I don't know that I should, or why I should."

"Because you're divinely kind, and a true woman."

"But there are such crowds of true women who want to be divinely kind to somebody! You must know many of them."

"I'll never say one word against women, Sophy, and I don't even like to hear you cynical about them."

"Oh, Sir Hypocrite!"

"Of course, I'm a hypocrite, yet not quite in the way you mean. And for your sake, too, I shall think more highly of women than ever. A man's idea of women depends on the women friends he has had. But you know that it is not your friendship that I ask for—I cannot think of our being apart from each other."

"Isn't this what is called flirting?" she asked cautiously.

They were sitting with the little tea-table between them. Sophy faced him with her hands

folded peacefully on her lap; he was leaning forward, with his hands clasped, gazing with profound wonder into her eyes.

"Flirting!" said he contemptuously; "would anything so senseless satisfy either of us?"

## CHAPTER VII

JIM, meanwhile, had received the answer to his letter to Nannie Cloots.

“THE ELMS, HIGH BARNET.

“MY DEAR JIM,—Mamma would not like me to visit any lady unless she had previously called upon us. If your aunt will leave cards upon mamma I might be permitted to avail myself of Mrs. Henry Firmalden’s invitation to Ventmore. Mamma must hear more particulars of the concert and the names of the other celebrities who are kindly giving their services. Some are glad to sing anywhere just for the advertisement, and it would never do for me to appear with any of that set, as mamma says it would injure me among high-class artistes. Perhaps you will come over and see mamma yourself. She desires me to say that it would be convenient for her to receive you shortly after six this afternoon. She has social engagements the rest of the week which she cannot break without giving offence, and in consequence of papa’s position as a churchwarden and a retired professional man, a good deal is expected of her.  
—Your affectionate friend,

“ANNETTE DE VERNEY CLOOTS.”

Jim never doubted that this composition had been dictated by the girl's parents, but he was so entranced at the prospect of calling—for the first time—on the exquisite Nannie, that any criticism of her letter would have seemed to him almost blasphemous. Nevertheless, it gave him a secret jar which he tried his utmost to ignore. He had heard that Mr. Cloots was now an inebriate jobmaster in a small way, although he had once been a veterinary surgeon. Nannie referred, at times, to her papa's misfortunes. Of Mrs. Cloots less was said, but she had been a beauty in her youth, and, so the report ran, an ornament of the ballet till she attracted the notice of some member of the aristocracy whose rumoured rank became more important as the years rolled by. As a matter of fact, she received a small yearly pension from the executors of the late Sir Guy Wallop—a gentleman of whom more was known than could conveniently be written down. For Jim these dim legends added romance, and these plain facts added pathos, to Nannie's history. He started forth for The Elms, High Barnet, as Allan-a-Dale to his wooing of the Baron of Ravensworth's daughter. It was not a fine day. The wind was in the east; the sky was grey and overcast, and clouds of dust came whirling down the old High Street as Jim came out of the railway station. By inquiries at the post office, he learnt that Mr. Cloots called his house The Elms, but it was in reality No. 5, Rudder's Street

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—a neighbourhood where a police-sergeant and other respectable persons lived and let lodgings. Rudder's Street consisted of a block of ugly semi-detached cottages set in an unfinished road facing a turnip field. Number Five seemed the dreariest of them all, and Jim, fetching a deep sigh, thought, "Poor Nannie! How she must suffer in these surroundings!"

A slatternly servant with an insolent stare opened the door, and, following her from the narrow hall which smelt of dust and boiled cabbages, he was shown into a darkened room which smelt of dust and soot. The window had not been opened for weeks. He heard overhead the hasty footsteps of a vigorous lady dressing, with some temper, in a hurry: doors were banged; shoes were thrown on the floor; a female voice uttered loud complaints of impertinence, carelessness, and thieving. Presently the servant sauntered in, drew up the blinds, and informed him that Mrs. Cloots would be down directly. Ten minutes later that personage made her appearance.

"Pray be seated," said she to Jim.

She was not more than forty, but as she tried to look younger than her own daughter, and believed herself to be the girl's superior in beauty, she dressed in a manner highly unbecoming to her age and figure. She wore a kind of Kate Greenaway frock—rather low in the neck and very short in the waist. Her bleached, frizzled hair was arranged in curls all over her head, and her face, once notori-

ous for its wild innocence, had now a genteel shrewdness—or, rather, the gentility of virtue restored combined with the shrewdness of a commercialism never shaken.

“Mr. Firmalden, I believe,” she continued, surveying him thoroughly. “I am very glad to have this opportunity of a serious chat. My daughter has no secrets from me, and I need not tell you that, what with her looks and her prospects, I feel I cannot err on the side of carefulness. She must be kept back. Not yet ‘out,’ she is already the hit of the season, and London is at her feet. She is not the sort of young lady to whom one pays marked attentions with impunity just for the sake of amusement. I must know more, Mr. Firmalden.”

Jim felt that Mrs. Cloots was quite right, and, while insisting on his unworthiness, he presented the best account he could give of his love, his ambitions, and his prospects. The matron listened not unkindly, and asked questions which were not idle.

“I have no high-flown ideas, Mr. Firmalden,” said she. “The number of rich noblemen who can afford to marry the girls of their hearts” (here she sighed) “is limited; and the number of rich commoners who do not want to buy a place with their money in titled families is limited also. But the number of poor unknown young men who are anxious to marry pretty girls for love is not so limited. I may remark, indeed, that the woods are full of them.”

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She had a slight but intimate Cockney accent, and it gained in vivacity as she improved in eloquence.

"I am not at liberty to mention all I know of the world and the upper ten," she continued, "but I may say, that if my daughter can secure the love of some wealthy gentleman, who can make such provision for her as her great gifts of beauty and character deserve, I, for one, am not as other mothers, desirous to see my child on a glittering pinnacle weighed down by a coronet which may be a hollow mockery. Trade I never admired, but an M.P. with ten thousand per annum is a solid match, and I should never try to belittle it."

Jim's heart sank. He had referred to Parliament among the far-off possibilities of a career inspired by Nannie and assisted by unflagging personal efforts on his own part.

"I could not marry for another two or three years at least," he said, "and I shall begin on a salary of four hundred a year in my uncle's warehouse."

But Mrs. Cloots had already made inquiries about the childless Henry Firmalden, and, while she did not regard Jim as a prize, she was too keen a judge of character and of affairs to let him slip through her fingers.

"I cannot give my consent to any formal engagement between you and Annette, Mr. Firmalden, but I will permit you to correspond within reasonable limits, and you may call here

to see her occasionally if you give me your word of honour to treat her as you would wish your own sister to be treated by any gentleman who was not yet in a financial position to announce his engagement in the *Morning Post*."

Jim wrung her hand, and, although his grip was painful, she liked the young fellow's straightforwardness.

"I have taken quite a fancy to you," she said. "Although Dissenters are not much in Society, they are often quite refined, and many superior persons can be found among them. Our vicar, Mr. Battersby, only the other day was saying that he respected your father, and he had even heard him preach."

Miss Cloots, as a little girl, had attended the Sunday schools of five different religious sects—in the first place, for the sake of the five separate annual "treats"; and, in the second place, to work up an initial "following" for her public career. When this system was discovered, it was forgiven because she was so pretty and a great favourite with the teachers. Mrs. Cloots, on being reproached for latitudinarianism, declared that there was "good in all."

"Mrs. Cloots," said Jim, "may I see Nannie to-day?"

Mrs. Cloots asked if she might trouble him to touch the bell. He rang it, and when the servant answered the summons, her mistress, in a new sort of voice, issued the following command:—



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"Let Miss Cloots be informed that her presence is desired in the drawing-room at her convenience."

"I can never thank you enough," exclaimed Jim, after the maid had left the room, "and I don't know what to say."

"I have been young myself," said poor Mrs. Cloots, and for an instant tears welled up in her hard glassy eyes.

Nannie kept them waiting for ten minutes, but Jim told himself that she was worth waiting for. She stole in almost on tiptoe, wearing a new green velveteen dress with a broad Liberty silk sash. Her hair was flowing over her shoulders, as usual; her eyes shone like stars, and the marvellous long thick lashes fluttered almost like butterflies' wings upon her cheeks.

"My pet," said Mrs. Cloots, looking fondly at the girl, of whom she was passionately proud, "I like your friend very much. He has behaved like a gentleman, and expressed himself in terms which admit of no misconstruction. I trust I have not hurt his feelings by acknowledging my regret that his means are not, at present, quite up to our standard. You may now talk together on social topics, and, as he knows my wishes, I feel that I can leave you."

## CHAPTER VIII

CONVERSATION was not Nannie's strong point. She could sit still for hours, because it gave her a gentle pleasure to be watched. But she could seldom talk except about herself, and then she was sometimes communicative.

"Your mother has been most kind to me," said the enraptured Jim; "no one could have been kinder."

"She feels poor papa's misfortunes," said Nannie. "This is not at all the sort of residence she was always accustomed to. She had a house in Park Lane once, and kept her own carriage, and had a staff of trained domestics who obeyed her lightest wish. Her education was extremely expensive, and you can see that she has moved in the most select circles. Oh, Jim, I wish to God that I were smart!"

The cry came from her tiny heart, and Jim was as startled as though a real china shepherdess had suddenly given vent to some violent emotion. Her whole speech had affected him—he would not say disagreeably. From Nannie, he called it, for want of a better word, quaint. And her mamma, for want of a better word, was droll.

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"You are divinely beautiful. A divinely beautiful being could never be smart."

"Why not? She can certainly be common. They call that Mrs. Waybell, who sits for Watts, divinely beautiful, and I'm sure she's common enough. When I told mamma that she was at Lady Ledbury's 'At Home,' mamma said, 'Well, what *is* the world coming to?' I should like to be smart, and give parties on *me* own hook."

Was there a note, a faint, a plaintive, an almost musical note, of Cockney in Nannie's voice? Was there a hint, a slight film of vulgarity in Nannie's dream?

"Let me look at you, darling. Don't talk," said Jim; "don't worry about the world and Mrs. Waybell."

"Good gracious! I've got *me* way to make." (Miss Cloots never said *my*.) "If I had been born a smart girl with lots of money, I could loll back in *me* carriage and pair, and go to balls every night, and get *me* frocks from Paris, and be called 'your ladyship.' I should be surrounded by all the smart men."

"Nannie!"

He had never heard her say so much, and some alien soul seemed to be speaking behind the lovely image he worshipped.

"Don't call me *Nannie*. I hate the name. I am to be billed in future as Rosanette de Verney."

"I was wondering what the *De Verney* meant in your letter this morning," said poor Jim.

"It is a family name," she said hastily. "Mamma thinks now that she was wrong to drop it. She dropped it for economical reasons. Tradesmen treble your bills if they know you are connected with the aristocracy. But mamma says what you lose in one way you gain in another. Poor mamma, in marrying papa, married beneath her—although he was a fine handsome man. She is paying for her mistake, and it is visited upon me. I have to work for *me* living, and look upon *me* face as *me* fortune. I'm tired to death of hearing about *me* beauty. It is *me* beauty here, there, and everywhere. But men are all for self, self, self. They paint *me* head, *me* throat, *me* eyes, *me* hair, and make names for themselves by inventing *me* type, as they call it. But while they go into Society as grand as you please, as though they were lords or gentlemen of independent means, they are quite annoyed because I have been taken up by Lady Ledbury. If I were smart I'd treat them as though they were dirt under *me* feet!"

Jim was bewildered. The social problems and difficulties underlying Nannie's grievance had never presented themselves to him, and if they had been pressed upon his notice, he would have thought them base. He thought them base now, and he was too inexperienced to make the smallest allowance for the effects of such a training as Nannie had fatally received upon such a weak character as Nannie by nature possessed. The

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girl had been brought up with a fanatical regard—not for principles, but for appearances—for what was “ladylike,” for what was “refined,” for what was “correct”—according to the gospel of Mrs. Cloots. Mrs. Cloots and Nannie would go without a meal in order to keep up their subscriptions for all the best “Society” journals and fashion papers. They lived on jam, and bloater paste, and cheap tea in order to pay for velveteen dresses and picture hats. They never spoke to a neighbour—if they could help it—for fear of losing the “tone” they had caught from Lady Ledbury. No devotee of religion ever suffered as Mrs. Cloots and Nannie suffered in their hopeless worship of “the smart set.” It is always terrible to see human beings martyred by the pain which they themselves have invented for their own torment. But whereas some invent at least noble or awful forms of misery, the Cloots invention was peculiarly foolish. Jim, with his head full of heroic designs and his heart throbbing with romantic passion (inventions also, probably), lost his patience.

“I hate all this,” he blurted out; “it’s dreadful!”

“You hate *all what?*” said the girl slowly. “Do you refer to *me* home, and *me* want of fortune, and *me* parents’ troubles?”

“No, Nannie, no,” he said, blushing to think that she could so misunderstand him. “I mean this talk about smartness and smart men.”

She gave a hard, bitter laugh.

“You need not be jealous of *me* smart friends.

They may admire *me* beauty, but they never consider *me* feelings."

He begged her to forgive him for speaking roughly. Perhaps he was jealous. He was certainly a beast.

"Yes," she said, "I should call you uncouth."

When he left her, the wind had shifted to the north-east. It lashed the bare trees; it came with cutting fury round sharp corners; it carried dead leaves and fragments of stone; it was blinding and it was merciless. He walked to the station, trying to believe that he had not irrevocably lost an illusion. A piercing chill struck through his soul as he remembered all the letters he had sent to Nannie from Oxford—absurd letters about life, and philosophy, and his worship; letters full of quotations from Byron and Browning; letters full of verses to her beauty and her soul; letters inspired by ideas of work, self-sacrifice, and devotion; the letters, in fact, of a passionate youth who had a backbone and a heart and too much imagination. And Nannie had not understood one line, one word, of the stuff he had written. She was as beautiful as ever, but—

As for his career—would it not be merely decent on his part to make more adequate provision for Mrs. Cloots? Dreams of old Venice and new Parliaments, where were ye now? The Cloots family were already on his shoulders.

## CHAPTER IX

"I DON'T believe that Miss Cloots would be a draw," said Mrs. Henry Firmalden, "and I think it absurd to expect me to call on anyone at Barnet. I haven't the strength."

But it was represented to her that Miss Cloots's photographs were in all the shop-windows; that they sold better than those of Miss Maud Branscombe; that, although her fame had not yet spread beyond London, it would be possible to present her with excellent effect in Ventmore.

Mrs. Henry Firmalden, thus prevailed on, drove in a carriage full of air-cushions, hot-water bottles, rugs, and mantles, to Rudder's Street, Barnet. Twice she was on the point of fainting, and she certainly caught a severe cold. But she paid the call, and left her husband's cards. Mrs. Cloots was not at home; Miss Cloots had not yet returned from an afternoon party at Lady Ledbury's.

"In all my life," said Mrs. Henry Firmalden to Sophy, who accompanied her on the expedition, "I have never seen such a one-eyed place. What will Jevons think?" (Jevons was the coachman.) "He knows I am not district-visiting. He will

tell the other servants, and it will be hard to make them respectful to Miss Cloots if they know that she lives in a place of this kind. It's really low. Jim can't be thinking seriously——”

“I am afraid he is,” said Sophy, sighing.

Mrs. Henry nearly screamed.

“If his uncle hears a whisper of such madness, he'll cut him off with a shilling and have nothing to do with him. But it is probably a passing fancy. Young men like to be in the train of notorieties. I saw so much of that kind of thing in papa's regiment. The mistake is to pay too much attention to it. But what a house! What an awful slavey answered the door! What shockingly vulgar persons they must be! I think it mistaken kindness on Lady Ledbury's part to take up with people of this class. Let them keep in their own set.”

“But what is poor Nannie's set? She is very beautiful; the greatest artists have painted her pertrait. You could not expect her to marry a policeman, a railway guard, or even a head gardener. Yet these would be her equals socially, if I may judge by her stepfather, who is less educated than many workmen and as coarse as a stable-hand.”

“All this beauty in a person of humble circumstances is simply a curse,” said Mrs. Firmalden, “and I can't pretend to understand why Providence allows such positive cruelties. But I do know that an unequal match is hell upon earth.”



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With this she sank back on her cushions, closed her eyes, and compressed her lips.

Sophy, who carried in her bosom a letter from Lessard, was tenderly disposed toward the whole human race. She stroked her wretched aunt; she pitied Nannie; she felt for Jim; she forgave Captain Hancock; she excused Muriel. And, being generous, she was afraid of her own happiness. She had done nothing to deserve it, and, even had she deserved it, she had been educated to realise the inconstancy of joy. Lessard had begged her to meet him just for ten minutes in Kensington Gardens. She had not promised to go, yet she knew she was going. She could leave her aunt at Inverness Terrace, start to walk home, and then, on the way, pause at the gate near Queen's Road. If Lessard should happen to be in sight, then how foolish it would be not to speak to him. If he should not be in sight, how easy to pass quickly on.

The horses seemed intolerably slow on their way back to London from Barnet. Sophy feared she would be late; the gathering dusk seemed to creep like a fog over the land; it was a dull evening, and the distant lights of the city seemed miles away. Would he think she had failed him? Would he get tired of waiting?

Mrs. Henry Firmalden returned to the subject of Jim.

"With his looks and his figure and his brains, he ought to make an excellent marriage later on.

A man is a fool not to do well for himself. An entanglement with Miss Cloots would be too awful. A woman of good position can make people accept her vulgar husband—if he is rich. But no man is powerful enough to make people receive his vulgar wife—whether rich or poor.”

“It is, I suppose, a great mistake when a man has an unsuitable wife.”

“He is done for,” said Mrs. Firmalden, with emphasis; “and his children, if they have any, are done for; and everybody concerned is done for. I won’t have this girl come to Ventmore; I won’t have it said that I encouraged her.”

“But how can you put her off?”

“I’ll put off the whole thing,” said Mrs. Firmalden, who was now in a panic. “That dreadful house was enough for me! I won’t have the concert at all. Your uncle can send a cheque to the charity. Let us stop at the first post office and wire to Mr. Lessard that the affair is postponed. I’m ill. I’m exhausted.”

“Poor Nannie is not really the daughter of that Mr. Cloots,” said Sophy; “I have heard that her father was a gentleman——”

“It is more than likely,” replied Mrs. Firmalden; “but the sins of the fathers must be paid for. What is the use of all this religion unless people take it sensibly and apply it to life? One rattles off the Commandments as though they were not scientific truths.”

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"It makes me so unhappy when religion sounds cruel," said Sophy.

"It *is* cruel, and it was meant to make us unhappy," replied Mrs. Firmalden. "I would give it up to-morrow if science did not sound even crueller, and if it did not make one even more wretched."

But the girl was too agitated by her love to feel much interest in these grim questions. They were driving toward the sunset; the mist was lifting, and the clocks were striking five. She would not be so very late, after all. Would he wait?

He had been waiting for nearly an hour when he saw the tall, graceful figure hurrying from Inverness Terrace up the Bayswater Road. She wore a green silk dress this time, and a hat trimmed with violets.

"My beautiful, darling Sophy!" he thought.

At first she believed she saw him in the distance. Then she knew she saw him. What a figure! What a handsome man! She had felt sure that he would wait.

"They are closing the gates. Where can we walk?" he asked.

"How can I walk with you? I never walk with anybody."

They walked slowly toward Kensington Palace Gardens.

"Let us go up and down here," said Lessard; "it is quiet here."

It was almost dark, and he drew her arm through his.

"We can walk better this way."

He told her about his youth and his struggles. She told him about her moods.

"Sophy, have you ever loved anyone else?"

"No one else—ever. I have been fond of several—up to a certain point. And how many have you loved?"

He tried to be frank, and he confessed to several early, foolish caprices.

"They were all charming women, but they were not like you."

They both trembled, and they often stopped as they walked, without knowing it, to gaze and wonder at each other. It grew darker and later.

"They will wonder why I don't come home," said Sophy.

"You can't go yet. You mustn't go yet. I have so many things to say."

She was so lost in happiness, and so sure that Lessard was her destiny, that she thought she could easily tell her father where she had been and why she had been tempted to remain out—against all rules and the custom of her whole life.

"There is one thing I swore to tell you, no matter what else I did not tell you."

"What is that?" she asked.

He put his arm round her; he kissed her once.

"You are my true wife, Sophy; nothing can

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ever separate us; no one must try to separate us."

"If I were your wife no one would wish to separate us."

"I said *true* wife. This world was set in motion to keep true wives and true husbands apart."

"I don't understand."

The lamp from a passing carriage threw its light on Lessard's face, and she noticed that he was ghastly.

"I've got to tell you," he said; "I must find the courage somehow. People think me an unmarried man. I was married eight years ago."

She sprang away from him; her heart seemed to have received a mortal and piercing stab. One would have to be twenty, romantic, in love for the first time, and trained in a severe school to realise the anguish of Sophy's mind. Lessard, who had always lived easily among light souls, had been prepared for difficulties of a kind—not for stony, inarticulate despair and remorse. Sophy, but for her shivering, might have been a dead creature. She did not ask a question; she did not speak. She stood quite still, and he told his story—at first in faltering words, gradually with exactness and force. He wound up—

"The marriage was a tragedy for us both. I was not the man for her; she was not the woman for me. We separated at the end of the first year. That was seven years ago. All this time I have tried not to think about it. Isn't it even worse for

her than it is for me? She's a young, pretty, agreeable woman; she's alone, and yet she's not free. It's a hellish position. There's no way out—thanks to our sensible laws. Am I to beat her—strike her with my fist, or kick her? Keep all your blame for me, Sophy, but pity us both."

"Oh yes," said Sophy at last, blankly; "I can pity you both. I can do that."

"You'll let me see you sometimes—you'll let me write to you?"

"I don't know—I must think about it. I must go home."

She turned and walked toward the public street. How loud the traffic seemed! How stifling the air had grown! She noticed the shapes of the houses in Kensington Palace Gardens—all different. She noticed small frozen ruts in the road, which was hard under her feet.

"Why don't you keep on the pavement?" asked Lessard.

"Isn't this the pavement?—I have thought—I don't want to see you again."

"You mustn't decide now."

"I must! I must! It won't make me happy to see you."

"Leave happiness out. Only believe that you have it in your power to save me from utter despair. Think of the case that way."

"No, it's wrong. No good can come of it."

"Perhaps no good ever comes of kindness or mercy or love shown to any prisoner. I'm a

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prisoner—tied and bound by my own mistakes. I won't whine to you, and deceive you, and say that you can make me happy. You cannot. But you can help me to believe a little in my own dreams—the dreams which come sometimes when I can forget, for a little while, what a wretched fool I am!"

Although any woman's vanity may mislead her, the feminine instinct for what is real in grief is infallibly sound. Lessard had many troubles on his mind besides a disastrous marriage. Sophy's discerning spirit saw that he liked her, that he needed her, that she was not strong enough to give her compassion in a way which would ever seem right to her conscience.

"You mustn't ask me to help you," she said. "If you love me at all, don't ask it. I shall keep saying 'No' for ever and ever. I'd cut off my hand—I'd blind myself—I'd die—I should *have* to keep saying 'No,' because it wouldn't be right to say 'Ycs.' I can't! I can't!"

"Not *right* to be friends?" he asked. "What a notion! My God! is this the way good people help bad people?"

"You don't understand!" said Sophy. "I'm not good *enough*. I get confused if I think too much about right and wrong. I feel quite mad sometimes."

"Then there's some hope for you," he said, "and perhaps for me."

They had now reached the Bayswater Road, and it was past seven o'clock. Lessard called a hansom, and they drove together, without exchanging a further word, to the Manse. It was absurd to be obliged to climb, with a consuming soul, into a cab. Why does nothing seem incongruous or humiliating to the happy? To happy people—bent on pleasure or interesting business—omnibuses, cabs, and trains are accepted gaily. But misery renders the mind sensitive and critical; it fears to be made grotesque, and the first pang of discontent is also the first yearning for pomp—which is a disguise—or, failing that, invisibility. Sophy longed to fade away as a spirit into the night. The cab horse trotted on till the cabman pulled him up at the wrong house.

"Two doors farther on," said Lessard.

At last they arrived.

"You'll write to me, Sophy?"

"No."

"Then I'll write."

She tried to say "No."

He sprang out and helped her to jump down. Then he waited till she had gone into the house, and he saw the light which had been burning by her bedroom window swiftly put out.

"She's crying," he thought, and he got back into the cab.

"Drive anywhere you like," he said; "round the squares—anywhere—anywhere!"

The man flicked the horse, and Sophy, sobbing





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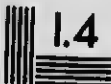
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face downward on the floor of her room, felt the moving wheels and the weary hoofs grinding and beating into her heart.

It had all been sudden and irresistible, while the pain of it was eternal and merciless.

## CHAPTER X

JIM returned to Oxford on the morrow, but he did not take one of Nannie's photographs with him. They seemed to bear no resemblance to her, and he found himself gazing at them as one gazes at the name, the dates, and the epitaph on the tombstone of some dead one whom we have never known in life. He wrote letters to her, but judgment had taken the place of his illusion. It was no longer possible to say things which he knew she would never understand. He told her nothing about himself; he tried to fill the pages with questions about her doings and commendations of her beauty. It was heartless work, which chafed his pride, and every letter he sent away added a rivet to the chains he felt, but could not see, fretting into his liberty. No man wants what he almost wants. Jim knew that Nannie was still pretty, still very young, still a woman, and still, crudely considered as mere flesh and blood, desirable. It was easy and possible to praise her and make love to her. But his feelings toward her were now skin-deep only; he could more readily have loved a bird of paradise in a cage than Nannie as a wife and a companion. How should

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he make her happy? Again and again he returned to this thought; but he continued writing letters, and he regarded himself as an engaged man. Desperation and the desire to escape from a crushing dread made him sink into his books as the agonised inhale an anæsthetic. He took a brilliant degree, and it was thought a pity that such a youth should not be consecrated to one of the learned professions. But Jim was in the mood to keep his word at any cost. He had given his word to his uncle, and no persuasion or arguments could induce him to change his plans.

"Whatever it may be, I'll see it through. If I once humour myself in these whims I shall accomplish nothing and arrive nowhere. It is time to set my teeth."

His own father was astonished at this display of will, which pleased him. He did not know that Jim had already sought the refuge of the discontented—obstinacy. The young man dared not yield in one direction for fear he might lose his courage in another. He told himself that he was doomed to Nannie and Commerce, the Cloots family and the City warehouse.

"I'll make the best of it. I'll not whine and snivel."

Henry Firmalden wished to establish a branch of his business with one of the French firms, and Jim, on leaving Oxford, was offered a post at Lyons. This was something far better than he had expected; France held out fresh scenes, in-

fluences, promises, and adventures. As he sat talking over the prospect with Sophy on the night of his departure, she noticed that his cheeks glowed with excitement and his fine eyes sparkled with hope.

"I may not have such a bad time, after all!" he said, and he was able to forget Nannie. "But you look rather pale and washed-out, Sophy," said he; "you need a change."

She had altered sadly since their last meeting. She seemed absent-minded and far too quiet. What was the matter?

"Have you seen anything of Lessard?" he asked.

"No."

"Someone told me the other day that he had been married for years. At first I wouldn't believe it."

"It's true. He told me the whole story."

"I had a fancy that you rather liked him."

"I did."

"Then what happened?"

She tightened her lips. "I could put my hand in the fire and burn it off if necessary. I told him I would never see him again."

"And have you stuck to that?"

"Of course."

He looked at her with admiration, and said—

"We two are alike. Where is Lessard now?"

"In Paris, composing an opera. Men always have their work; it is their anodyne."

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Jim strolled about the drawing-room and stared at the familiar engravings on the wall as though he had never seen them before.

"Lessard is a peculiar man," said he; "he's fascinating because he's so natural. He won't pretend, and he is not afraid of being inconsistent. Such men spoil one for the usual stupid persons—without imagination—who take this world as they find it. Dreamers like Lessard make another kind of a world, which is full of disappointments and vain shapes and things that fly away. I'm glad you have broken with him, Sophy. Our own tendency is to dream. Let us both swear to be practical."

"It wouldn't make any difference," said Sophy, stifling a sigh. "If you once begin wandering in the dream-world, you may forswear it, but you can never forget it."

"All the same," protested Jim, "you can put it away from you."

"Sometimes," said the girl, "I wonder whether we were meant to put it away."

"People always say that when they want to be foolish," replied Jim. "They say old people do the thinking. That's nonsense. Young people think and think till they become old and forget what the questions were which troubled them so much. Time answers questions by deadening all our faculties and sensations. I have been watching elderly men and women; they try to believe that they have gained wisdom. They have only

lost the power of wondering. They're drugged; they're stupefied with fatigue."

"That is my idea of them too," said Sophy eagerly; "and don't you dread the time when you and I will look back at this, and say what a fuss we made then about nothing! It isn't nothing, Jim—it's killing me."

"Youth is very tough," said Jim; "it can stand a lot."

Then he went to Nannie's picture on the mantel-piece. There she was—a smiling shepherdess, with panniers and a crook and little shoes with high heels. She did not seem pretty any more; she did not seem real any more. And yet he felt as though some iron hand were pinching his heart and some strident voice were uttering threats in his ear.

"Don't you care for Nannie as you once cared?" asked Sophy.

He braced himself for the loyal lie—

"I am devoted to her."

Sophy was not deceived.



## CHAPTER XI

JIM spent a year in France--mastering the language and his own character. Once a week he wrote to Nannie. Every Saturday morning he found her reply by his coffee-cup. Her parents moved from Barnet, and, under the name of De Verney, they took a flat in West Kensington. Nannie, as Miss Rosanette de Verney, obtained an engagement at five pounds a week in a fashionable theatre. She was more admired than ever, and Mrs. de Verney's First and Third Tuesdays were constantly mentioned in the ladies' newspapers.

"As mamma says, crack people will go anywhere to hear good music for nothing and catch celebrities, while they are fresh, for their own parties. But mamma is one too many for most of them, and she never remembers addresses when she is asked to forward invitations, and she is awfully clever at not introducing. I am on the go from morning till night, and called the beautiful Miss de Verney wherever I appear. I wonder my head isn't turned, but it is screwed on the right way, as mamma says. What would I not give to

be an heiress? Such hopes are vain. But I am free to confess that it should not seem an unwarrantable ambition on my part to yearn for that sphere from which our poverty alone excludes us. I feel confident that you bear this in mind. Mamma has had her full measure of misfortunes, and it is her one desire to bear them with dignity. After all, they may yet be retrieved by some stroke of fate."

From time to time references would be made to the young lords and wealthy gentlemen whom she met in Society.

"Lord Bembridge offered me the box-seat of his four-in-hand for the Derby, but mamma, on hearing the invitation, drew herself up to her full height and begged to be informed whether Lord Bembridge knew whom he was addressing. I draw a veil over the distressing interview, but I may say that his apologies were profuse, and his present to mamma, sent later, was of the most costly and elaborate description. Motives of delicacy precluded the possibility of declining a gift offered in a spirit of conciliation. Mamma saw her way to receive it without any loss of prestige or abatement of her first very natural annoyance. The episode was appropriately described as a misunderstanding, and it is now regarded by us all as closed. Lord Bembridge is once more among our most welcome and constant visitors. This will serve to show

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you, however, mamma's determination not to submit to anything which would derogate from her social status. As she says, you cannot be too particular—especially if you are admired as I am. Our rule is never to give the old cats a handle."

Then the letters grew shorter. One week, in consequence of severe pressure of work, Jim did not write as usual. He received the following reprimand:—

"I leave you to imagine my feelings at the insult. Our house-parlour-maid quite smiled when the letter did not come this morning. She is now under notice to leave, and I quivered with pain to think that she should be the witness of such a slight offered to me without the smallest justification. I told mamma, in my agony of mind, that I feared I could not bear it or overlook it. I await your explanations, and further comment is superfluous."

Clearly, the girl wished to quarrel with him. Hot-headed and unhappy, he wrote back with all the tragic earnestness of youth, asking her if she wished to break off the engagement. The answer was from Mrs. Cloots.

"It is the best for all parties concerned that you should part. All along, Rosanette has been too young to know her own mind. I am returning

your letters per parcel post, and shall be obliged if you will send off Rosanette's communications to you duly registered to her at the above address."

Three days later, when he entered his lodgings, he noticed, in the dusk, on the table a large parcel covered with brown paper. He cut the string, and many hundred envelopes, containing all the dreams, the illusions, the raptures, the melancholy, the hopes, the ideals, the enthusiasms, and the romance of his youth, fell upon the table and down on to the floor. Gathering them together, he set fire to the whole collection with one match. But they smouldered in the grate for nearly twenty minutes. Jim flung himself on the horsehair sofa and felt the sense of liberty, as a relief almost too great to bear steal through his being. The period of bondage had not been long enough in his case to make freedom seem either bewildering or painful. He knew that he had been in chains, and that now, hurt but not permanently scarred, he was released. Presently he went out for a long walk, and in the evening he went to the theatre, where he laughed till his sides ached at every small joke. Others, who found the jokes feeble, laughed because Firmalden laughed. Such gaiety as his was irresistible.



BOOK II  
SECOND THOUGHTS

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CHAPTER I

JIM had spent nearly two years in France when he received an urgent summons home. Henry Firmalden was ill, and wished to see him. The young man started for England at once, but he was met in Paris by Charles Banish (now Sir Charles Banish, a Judge of the Queen's Bench Division), with the news that Henry Firmalden was already dead, and that he had bequeathed the greater part of his excellent fortune to Jim.

"With five thousand a year, the future, humanly speaking, is in your own hands," said Banish, after he had described, with concern and a certain grief, the last hours of his brother-in-law.

Jim, however, had been too deeply attached to his uncle to find any consolation for his loss in the benefits he was receiving through his death. Leaving Banish, he rushed out into the street and walked at a desperate pace toward the Avenue Malesherbes—for no reason beyond the blind

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instinct to find a wide, quiet place unfrequented by pleasure-seekers. He did not rejoin Sir Charles for nearly two hours, but the judge had been so touched, surprised, and reassured in his sentiments to see an heir who was also a genuine mourner, that he forgave the impetuosity which had at first seemed a little odd, ungracious, not to say eccentric. Sir Charles, moreover, had eaten his very necessary luncheon during Jim's absence, and he had been able to enjoy it without the awkward misgiving that it showed bad taste to be hungry during the first twenty-four hours of a family bereavement.

"It is truly distressing," said Sir Charles, at the sight of Jim's strained features; "it is really a sad blow to you all. Henry needed knowing, but he had sterling qualities."

Jim set his lips, swallowed hard, and became speechless.

"I'll now read you," said Banish, "the terms of the will. They are most important, and most peculiar. You must give them your full attention."

As he spoke he put on his gold-rimmed pince-nez and drew out his letter-case, from which, with deliberation, he extracted a small document.

"This is a copy—not the original," he explained, and then, in persuasive tones, he proceeded to read aloud the following:—

"It has been the wish of my heart to see a consistent Christian who was also a good man

of business. My brother, the most conscientious individual of my large acquaintance, is handicapped socially by small means—which he will not allow me to augment—and commercially by a repugnance for the market-place which is as much inherent in his nature as it is a part of his religion. For this reason, therefore, I am leaving a political minister's salary—five thousand a year—for life to my nephew, James Firmalden, jun., on condition that he becomes, and remains, a Congregational minister in London. He may not spend more than a tenth of his income in charities, as I wish to demonstrate that a Nonconformist clergyman, given a proper education and sufficient money, can hold his own and cut as good a figure as any other gentleman in public life. The disgusting indignities to which the Dissenting clergy of England have to submit should rouse the indignation of all Nonconformists. My nephew is honourably born; he was educated at St. Paul's School and at Balliol College, Oxford; and he has proved his business capacity to my full satisfaction. At one time I thought I should like to see him in the House of Commons. But the great days of Parliament are at an end; it can no longer excite enthusiasm as an institution because our admiration is reserved exclusively for its ingenuity as a machine. I am convinced that no young man can be happy unless he starts with illusions. To have illusions about a political career is no longer



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possible to the observant; it is still possible to keep a few illusions about religion—because that is itself a matter of illusions and the evidence of things not seen—hence its strength. What we see we often learn to despise. Religion, therefore, can only be beaten by an illusion as powerful. And where can that come from? And when will men be as much disappointed in God as they are in each other? HENRY FIRMALDEN.’”

“And the worst of it is,” added Banish, “that Henry was perfectly sane when he wrote this.”

Jim asked to be allowed to study the communication for himself. It had presented so many interesting thoughts to his mind that he forgot at the instant the momentous changes it was intended to produce in his own life. But its full meaning soon pierced him.

“I can’t decide all at once,” he said. “I decided, at Oxford, not to enter the ministry.”

“And a good thing, too,” said Banish. “A man should not go into any Church professionally until he has knocked a little about the world and been treated as an ordinary young man by his fellow-creatures. It is a cruel thing to train boys as though they were hothouse plants and shield them from all experience of rough weather.”

Jim had often heard Sir Charles express a contrary opinion, but he had always qualified it by adding that it was well to keep fanatics and milksops under a system of organised imbecility.

Sir Charles could always get on well with bishops; priests, curates, and pastors—as a class—he despised. In Rome, however, he appreciated introductions to eminent ecclesiastics, and he freely owned that they were cultured, polite, and, “apart from their superstitions, as able a body of men as one could wish to meet.”

“I must think it out,” said Jim. Secretly, he was more religious, by temperament, than any member of his family could have believed or imagined—for, as a family, they were orthodox rather than devout. Jim was devout rather than orthodox. He could understand the others; but the others could not understand him.

“No one nowadays,” said Banish, “is expected to preach the Garden of Eden, and Jonah, and the Ark, and the miracles—beyond their symbolic significance. The Christian philosophy is one of admitted beauty and value. No man, I’m sure, need feel either a humbug or a hypocrite for expounding it, or, for the matter of that, endeavouring to live up to it.”

Banish himself had, beyond question, high principles, and although he found it difficult to accept a creed, he was strictly honourable in all his dealings, benevolent to an uncommon degree, and kind far beyond the received definition of that word even among the notoriously pious.

“Henry, I admit, has made a queer will,” he continued; “but the more I consider it the more I feel that there is a great deal to be said

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for his ideas. Politics are not what they were. They're a constant expense and worry; no one can say where he is or how he stands, for everything is unsettled; the prizes are few, and one holds them precariously. For my part, I'm too thankful I chose the Law."

"But religion comes into every act and thought of life—or it is not religion," said Jim. "I can't have a religion for special occasions."

Banish glanced kindly at the young man.

"One is often tormented between the beauty of an ideal and its failure as a working principle," said he; "but there is time enough for you to discover that."

"Oh, I have had my disillusiones," replied Jim, flushing; "and that is precisely why I want to see well where I am going."

"Men who look before they leap—leap, nevertheless! The choice of a career and the choice of a wife—the most important steps in a man's life—are accidents always. You may pride yourself on thinking both questions out, but your thinking will be gratuitous—so far as your fate is concerned."

At that inopportune moment Jim was much struck by the appearance of a lady who crossed the courtyard. She chose a chair close by a table and an orange tree (it was at the Hôtel de France et de Choiseul, near the Rue de la Paix); she gazed up at the green wooden shutters of all the windows overlooking the quadrangle, and she herself was studied by the various occupants of

the pretty dining-room on the ground floor. Sir Charles had his back to the light, and was, therefore, at a loss to understand Jim's sudden air of abstraction. The lady wore a black lace gown, a necklace of pearls, and a hat of blue plumes which drooped over her auburn hair. She could not have been more than twenty-three—she would have seemed still younger but for her air of fashion and self-command. She suggested "music and moonlight and feeling," and the world also; yet, somehow, tranquillity of soul. Although the immediate charm of her countenance depended on its brilliant candour, there was something at once resolute and passionate underlying the languid grace of her large hazel eyes. The aquiline nose, the thin lips, the frail small body—she was rather below the average height—betokened a nervous, vivacious temperament which could bear agitation and stress far better than calm and monotony. She was neither beautiful nor pretty in the usual sense of either term; Jim thought her peculiar, but the word he meant to use was fascinating.

Banish felt impelled to follow the direction of his nephew's gaze, and he turned to look out of the window.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "that is Lady Marlesford. Isn't she quite lovely? In Rome they are all mad about her. She is one of five beautiful sisters—and she is called the least good-looking of the lot."

Jim moved nervously, and asked—

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"Do you know her?"

"We met at the English Embassy, and also at Princess Varese's. I should like to present you to her—she might interest herself in your career."

"I was forgetting that," replied Jim, sighing. He longed to ask more questions about Lady Marlesford, but he dared not. Sir Charles decided to order their coffee to be served in the courtyard.

"I hope she will remember me," he said, "she is so very agreeable."

Jim followed him out, and, to his delight, Lady Marlesford recognised Sir Charles immediately. She nodded, smiled, and motioned to a table near her. As she motioned, a small chain fell off her bracelet; Jim picked it up. Their eyes met; and when she had thanked him for recovering her trinket she expressed an anxiety to know the exact time. What a curious voice! Did he like it? Perhaps she would soon say something else.

"It is five minutes to one," he said.

"Then I'm five minutes too early for my engagement," she answered; "it is my own fault if I have to wait."

"That is clear," said Sir Charles gallantly; "no one would ever keep you waiting."

"Why not?"

"As a voluntary act, it would be impossible," he continued, still in his most gallant vein.

She became thoughtful; but she observed, after a pause—

"Now I think of it, I believe I have come to the

wrong hotel. I promised to take luncheon with my cousin, Mrs. Ebrington, at the Hôtel du Rhin. I was once there, but this place does not seem familiar."

Sir Charles explained that the Hôtel du Rhin was in the Place Vendôme—three minutes' walk from where they were then talking. Might he and his nephew escort her there? Certainly. But she seemed embarrassed by her mistake, although she laughed.

## CHAPTER II

MRS. EBRINGTON was waiting in a small low room on the *entresol* for Lady Marlesford. When her ladyship—flushed, animated, and absent-minded—at last arrived, Mrs. Ebrington asked—

“What is the excitement, my dear Tessa? You are all on edge.”

Tessa told her little adventure, and added—

“The nephew is a good-looking wretch. I admired him so much that I quite hate him. I have asked him to call on me in London.”

“I never knew a woman more susceptible than yourself to a handsome face! You cannot resist beauty in man, woman, child, or chattel!”

“You’re right,” said Tessa; “I am mad on the subject. I seem to be an artist without an art.”

Mrs. Ebrington, hungry at the moment and unimaginative always, ordered luncheon to be served immediately, while she wondered how much Tessa had paid for her frock. Tessa was extravagant. One of five poor sisters, she had married, obediently, the rich and amiable Lord Marlesford. She came of an old Roman Catholic family; he, a Protestant, had succeeded his father, the first baron, who, having made a large fortune by brewing excellent

beer, proved himself a good patriot by subscribing vast sums to his political party—the Tories, of course. Marlesford, at forty, decided to choose a young, aristocratic, beautiful, and inexperienced wife. He met Tessa Navenby at her first ball, and he proposed to her at their fifth meeting—which took place at the Eton and Harrow match. To his astonishment, she spoke of the difference between their religious creeds; she feared that his people would dislike a Roman Catholic, and she knew that her own held strong opinions on the subject of Protestantism. A courtship which had promised to be insipid if successful thus assumed an exciting aspect. The element of opposition and the thought that prejudices would have to be overcome gave a new interest to Marlesford's life. That the girl loved him he never doubted. That, on principle, she might renounce him struck him as a possibility which at once deepened his admiration for her character and his determination to secure her at any cost. While the two families grieved and Marlesford fumed, the girl, as she was bid, retired to a convent, where she offered prayers for his conversion. He begged to be allowed to see her. This, they told him, was out of the question. They could not permit him, or anyone, to make painful scenes which might tax her heart but never break her resolution. He started for Norway, but he broke the journey at Paris, which he found insufferably tedious and a story too old for words. He abandoned the Norway expedition



and went instead to Venice. In Venice it seemed almost vulgar to be a Protestant; he hurried on to Florence. To be a Protestant in Florence is to be a tourist at best! He went to Rome. To be a Protestant in Rome was to be uncivilised, illiterate, and a shade ridiculous—so it struck him! Two months later he was received into the Roman Church, and his marriage with Miss Navenby at the Brompton Oratory was the sensation of an Easter week in London. None of his relatives attended the ceremony, but they came in numbers to the reception afterwards—if only to confirm their opinion that the girl was not worth such an enormous fuss either on the score of her looks or her social influence.

“The Navenbys are well enough, but when so many doubt the existence of the Ark, what are they thinking about the old Catholic families?” This profane remark, which could not be traced to any conceivable source, passed, nevertheless, with great success from mouth to mouth in the drawing-rooms of Navenby House—lent for the occasion by the bride’s great-aunt, the Dowager Duchess of Cheshire.

The Marlesfords had now been married for three years, and Society had ceased to wonder whether they were happy. They were certainly on good terms with each other, and, so far as manners were concerned, they were a model couple.

“Where is Basil?” asked Mrs. Ebrington, referring to his lordship.

"At the Jockey Club, where he will be bored to death," replied Tessa.

"My dear, why do you always assume that he must be bored, no matter where he is?"

"Because that is his temperament. You could only relieve his boredom by killing him outright."

"But you can always amuse him."

"You should say that my particular way of boring him amuses him."

"If that's the case, you're more patient than I should be."

"I'm not in the least patient. We just say to each other, 'What a dreadful bore everything is!' Then we laugh."

She laughed as she spoke, and the laughter satisfied the unhearing ears of Mrs. Ebrington. They discussed family gossip until coffee was served, when Tessa, who was too highly strung to take stimulants of any kind, said good-bye and walked to the Bristol, where she and Marlesford were staying.

She entered her sitting-room wearily, saw a pile of letters and telegrams on her table, a large box from the dressmaker's, a parcel of novels from Galignani's, and a bunch of pink roses with an envelope attached to it by lilac ribbons. The envelope contained a card; it bore the name of the First Secretary of the American Embassy in Paris. She flushed a little—for she liked Americans; they had the art of being gallant without becoming adventurous. What were her engagements for that

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afternoon? Two receptions and several calls; in the evening, she had to attend a dinner-party and a ball. How tiresome! She would meet the American at the ball; he danced perfectly. Nevertheless, she had no heart this day for any of the distractions which were the business of her life.

"My life!" she thought as she took off her hat; "what does it mean and what is it all about?"

Such questions occurred to her from time to time—especially when she had a vacant hour or an attack of fatigue. A strict Roman Catholic education had supplied her with sublime replies to the ordinary problems of existence; but she could not waste sublimity, she declared, on mere bewilderment at the trivial. The trivial things were the inexplicable wearisome things which assailed her daily. She wanted to move on a larger stage and take part in some heroic drama. Lord Marlesford was not ambitious. He had for books and pictures a great taste, which, while it did not amount to an absorbing love, filled his time most agreeably and gave his mind its purest delight. As a county nobleman he did his share of hunting, horse-racing, stock-farming, and politics, and, being intelligent, he carried out in a satisfactory manner whatever he undertook—whether under the guise of duty or of recreation. But enthusiasm he could not give to the national sports or to public affairs. He was, in his heart, a sentimentalist. Few guessed this; he was unconscious of it himself; his wife never knew it. At moments he suffered from a kind of

melancholy which he was too proud to acknowledge and too sensitive to question. If a doctor of souls had told him that he was secretly longing to be better understood, he would have thought him a prig or impertinent, or both. Nevertheless the doctor of souls would have been right. Lady Marlesford, on the other hand, was vehement, practical, clever, and unromantic. She cared nothing about literature or art—except as manifestations of the world-spirit; she read books for their humanity and general information; she admired works of art for their decorative beauty. Music she disliked. Her gifts were for a political career, and she ought to have married a Cabinet Minister or the editor of a powerful newspaper or the leader of some revolutionary party. The life of rich idle persons bent on mere amusement or consecrated to elegant responsibilities was not for her. She wanted power, and, in order to obtain it, she was perfectly willing to endure persecution, hardships, poignant disillusion, and ultimate ingratitude.

“But to live as Basil likes to live!—one might as well be a squirrel in a cage!”

The thought was in her heart when the door opened and Marlesford himself came in. Handsome, amiable, tall, well-built, and rich, he was rightly considered an exceptionally charming man, while Tessa was rightly considered among the luckiest of women. His features were refined and clear-cut; he had grey eyes, brown hair, a lighter

moustache, and a square chin which indicated more decision of character than he often troubled to exert. The type was virile, but he was kind rather than passionate, reasonable rather than zealous, and keener to appreciate the humour than the tragedy of events. His sense of humour was even extraordinary, inasmuch as he was also full of sentimental ideas and fancies, which, while they remained nearly always unuttered, ruled his conduct. Of all his sentiments the one he entertained for his wife was the most peculiar. He loved her, but they had not a feeling in common. They were close friends and talked together for hours at a time, yet each was a perplexing mystery to the other.

"Basil and I seem to be relations, but never husband and wife," said Tessa to her confessor; "it is absurd to pretend that we are one! We are distinctly two!"

They did not drift apart. They were always sufficiently contented with each other's company; they were both too sensible and too pleasant to quarrel painfully on any point. Neither was exacting because neither was in love. If they were not altogether joyous, they were at least outwardly serene. They were invariably philosophical and sometimes affectionate as well. Could such a state be maintained? Let any partner in any alliance ask herself, or himself, this question, and the state, by that very question, is changed.

"I wish we had not promised to dine with the Wrexforths," said Tessa, as though she had already

been conversing with her husband for some time. "I should like to take a fiacre and drive to some restaurant in the Latin Quarter and see the students."

"The Latin Quarter is most ordinary now," replied Marlesford; "the real students won't play up. The rest are tramps and amateurs."

"You have seen all these things long ago," said Tessa, "but it is all fresh to me."

He glanced at her; he tried not to feel surprised.

"We can drive over there on our first free evening."

"We never have any free evenings. If we want one, we must make one. Don't you think we are managing our time rather stupidly? For the last week I haven't wanted to keep any of the engagements I have forced myself to keep. It's becoming a strain."

"Shall we go home, then?"

"I don't want to be selfish. If you enjoy Paris, I'll stay."

He assured her that he was not experiencing the smallest enjoyment; that he remained in Paris because he supposed she was buying clothes and seeing her friends and finding amusement at the theatres.

"We can leave to-morrow if you like."

"You always give in, and you make me feel quite uncomfortable. Are you perfectly certain that you don't think me horrid?"

Marlesford smiled at the impossibility of such

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a notion, and the next instant he was wondering whether he had ever thought her perhaps a little capricious.

“But she would not be a woman if she had no caprices,” he remembered. On the whole, she was nearly faultless—given her sex, her youth, her temperament, and her nerves.

### CHAPTER III

THE next day Sir Charles Banish, Finnalden, and the Marlesfords met on the Dover boat. His lordship and the judge smoked together in a sheltered corner, while Jim and Lady Marlesford sat, by choice, on the weather side, because they both loved a boisterous wind, the spray, and the sight of waves breaking over the deck.

"My husband is often puzzled about me," said Tessa. "I like pretty clothes and jewels and everything else which women are supposed to like; but I also enjoy many of the things which men only are supposed to care for. I force myself to be domestic; by nature I detest what are called home interests. No man could hate them more than I hate them."

"Then you would agree with my sister, although you could scarcely imagine the monotony of her narrow life."

"Why is it narrow?"

He tried to describe it.

"But she has the excitement of watching her father's career—and yours," she added, after a pause.

Every young man takes it for granted that his



fortunes will be, if they are not, strange, just as every woman believes that love, even if it has not come, must come eventually. Men, in time, can lose their hope; but women, till they perish, wait for romance. Jim's conversation with Tessa ran on the everlasting theme of the world in the wrong about to be made perfect. The two agreed in despising the folly of most things and the blindness of all chartered wisdom. With brilliant ease Jim drew a picture of life as it should be led—and could be led if it were but rightly understood. He was just at the age when fine health is the first source of good humour and superb ideals. In mature years, or in sickly constitutions, a generous temper and beautiful illusions depend rather on the determined will than on the native impulse. But Firmalden's bodily well-being was such that his very pulse had the beat of enthusiasm; he could not believe with less than fervour, hope with less than passion, love with less than madness, or imagine with less than an entire faith in the invisible and the unproved. The impetuous young man, full of scorn for the timorous and the stupid, expressed all the feelings of Tessa, whose own intensity had been lulled by her education into a dangerous trance. Is not the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty the story of every girl who is intelligent and well-guarded? She is sent to sleep lest she should think too much and too soon. When the hour of her awakening strikes—as it must at some time—it is hoped that she may be

old enough or patient enough or sly enough or strong enough to bear the sudden sight of realities. If she cannot face them, she may turn over and feign a sleep till she dies. If she be horrified, dismayed, broken-hearted, or condemned to a desperate endurance which is accepted, by others, as her destiny, she is enjoined to remember how blessed she was to have had such a long slumber in ignorance. Marlesford would always listen with a certain amusement, but more fear, to his wife's opinions. If she ever became serious, he thought her suffering from depression; and if she became sarcastic, he grieved at her precocity. Sometimes he decided that she probably did not know how true her judgments were. But her intolerance vexed him; her astonishment at matters which he accepted without comment made him feel almost jaded, whereas he knew he was merely reasonable; to him she was always discovering the over-familiar and marvelling at the very common case. He could not forget his experience, or share, by means of sympathy, her inexperience; he condescended to it. She, detecting the condescension, soon learnt to keep many of her criticisms within her own heart, where they became unruly under suppression. The young people of her own circle were fatigued long before they entered Society; they did not seem altogether alive—a single interest (usually of some selfish nature) more than sufficed to keep them languidly animated.

At last the Dover cliffs appeared in sight.

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Passengers began to count their small luggage, and those who had been suffering from the sea opened their eyes.

"All this time," said Tessa, "you have not told me what you are going to be."

"A Nonconformist minister."

She did not conceal her dismay.

"A Nonconformist! But why not a Catholic? I should like you to be a cardinal some day. I have been thinking—ever since you began to talk—that you were a man for Rome."

"I could no more be a Catholic than you could be a Parsee," said Jim; "it is a question of temperament rather than dogma. If this truth were realised, there would be far less bitterness among religious people."

"A Nonconformist!" she repeated. It was as though he had declared himself a Mohammedan.

"But surely," said Jim, "you are not a Papist?"

"Didn't you know that?" said Tessa. It was as though she had declared herself a professing witch. An inborn and inherited antagonism to the Roman Church now stirred in his mind, and he looked at her, in spite of himself, with distrust. Each, by a glance, tried to pierce the real nature of the other. Jim had been trained to believe that the fairest souls, once under the spell of a subtle and vicious ecclesiastical system, became corrupt. That Catholicism had produced some of the best—if some of the worst—men that the Christian world has ever known, made it seem to him the

more deadly. Tessa, on her part, regarded every Dissenter as a spiritual outlaw beyond the pale of cultured Society.

Thus the friendship which had begun with a rapturous recognition of identical tastes assumed the colour of hostility. And yet they were not hostile. Again, Jim was at a loss for the right term. Had he not, at first sight, applied the word peculiar to Lady Marlesford, and found it the last one he meant, or would have chosen? Fascinating was the word he had not used, although it had been on his tongue. On this occasion, the word he would not use was the adjective *disturbing*. She troubled his spirit.

## CHAPTER IV

AT Dover the party divided. Marlesford and his wife were ushered to a carriage which had been reserved for them; Sir Charles Banish and his nephew entered a smoking compartment full of travellers. Jim had now time to realise the many turns and changes which had already been produced in his life by the question of money. Financial anxieties had never touched him. He had always intended to make a fortune, and he had desired it ardently during his courtship of Nannie Cloots. But, as he was no longer in love, his attitude toward marriage was coldly judicial. Often he found himself wondering whether the married men he knew were happy, and, when his friends of either sex became engaged, he thought them either courageous or unwise. Jim's disappointment had been just enough to make him doubt, but not enough to make him deny, his romantic longings. Still, the shock had banished love from his life and from his plans; he could not imagine himself ever loving again; it seemed as impossible for him to renew his period of poetic frenzies and visions as it is hard for a disheartened devotee to bow again with prayers before his un-

answering and therefore neglected god. Yes, that was his position. He would not deny; he would abstain from taking part in the worship.

As the train rushed along he thought a little about the Marlesfords, and he supposed that they had married for sober reasons. He had never before met any members of the Marlesford set—a set composed of rich, agreeable couples who lived to amuse themselves and each other, without scandal if possible, but at any rate with audacity. Tessa's sparkling self-assurance, which showed in the flash of her eyes and her gentle voice, conveyed a delicate notion to Jim of the great lady who was not yet great only because she was still so young. To be a *grande dame* at one-and-twenty is to play the impostor and to receive the reward of a prig. Tessa, in all her moods, was a girl and a child rather than an adolescent. Her appeal was to the sentiments—not to the passions—and her charm depended on an exquisite gift for companionship, not on any violent magnetic qualities in her physical fibre. It is not the merely cold or the merely emotional woman who can influence a man's life, but the woman with self-control, which, in its highest form, is self-abnegation. Tessa's chief study was to appear unstudied, and only after many painful years of practice in self-mastery had she learnt the secret of being natural without becoming mannered, and of being an egoist without becoming self-absorbed. A person who is not an egoist at all is either a nonentity or

a hypocrite; education and discipline are given in order that the ego may gain grace, but an utterly destroyed egoism is a body bereft of its soul. Jim thought of these things as the train sped on, and he felt a certain exhilaration in the discovery that commercial affairs had not killed his old pleasure in unprofitable imaginings so called. He remembered his talks years before with Maurice Lessard. Lessard had done well. His opera, *Daphnis and Chloe*, had just been produced at the Opéra Comique. The work had not been expected in professional circles to succeed beyond a mediocre degree, and a tolerant audience assembled to devote an evening to the exercise of its own benevolence. But the music was so gay, the singing was so good, and the libretto was so flattering to human nature, that the public, seeing itself reflected in such a transfiguring medium, became intoxicated with delight. The opera was a triumphant success, and Lessard woke up the next morning to realise that he had captured the people, surprised the critics, and given his first hostage to fortune.

"I must send him my congratulations," said Jim, half aloud; and, in a burst of eloquence partly caused by the excitement of the last forty-eight hours, he wrote with his pencil the following lines on some leaves which he tore from his notebook:—

"A false success made by the good humour of outside influences is always peaceful; a real success

made by the qualities of the thing in itself is always a declaration of war. The man whom one praises with one's tongue in one's cheek is negligible; at any moment one can cease praising, and he must collapse. The man who continues whether he be praised or blamed is a mark for violent and unreasoning animosity; not because he is hateful as an individual, but because he represents that something immortal and defiant which men fear in themselves and call their own souls. It is for artists to remind humanity of the unconquerable and to assert the eternity of ideas. Stone the idealist—no flint can reach his thoughts. Bury the dreamer—his dreams will colour the sky above his grave. Slay the cunning player—his melodies have mixed themselves with the air, and the winds which cannot be slain will sing out his music for ever from the tree-tops. Banish the prophet—his prophecies, nevertheless, will come to pass where he uttered them. Imprison the philosopher—his philosophy will wander freely in the market-place. It is natural that brute force and brute anger should be roused to do their worst—at least, against the disobedient, inaccessible, and unseen energies of the world; what is it but the larger spectacle of the strife, in each individual, between the flesh and the spirit? Men have passionate bodies; women have passionate souls; artists have passionate souls and bodies. No wonder they are misunderstood—or can it be that they are understood too well?"



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When he read this over he wondered what had made him so rhetorical.

"It is what I really do think," he reflected; "it is what I should say if I were old and celebrated and tired, and no one could laugh at me."

He did not know that if he had been old, celebrated, and tired, the eternity of ideas would have seemed of little account in comparison with the sweetness of a brief, dreamless doze. He thrust the letter into his pocket and decided to post it, strange as it was, to his friend—a man to whom one could write or talk in any strain. Nothing astonished him, because he was himself so surprising, inconsistent, uncertain.

At Victoria the first person Jim saw standing on the platform under a flaring light, was none other than Lessard. And Sophy sat on a bench by his side. Jim rubbed his eyes, and when he looked again Lessard had vanished. But Sophy had risen from her seat, and she was walking down the platform, scanning, as she went, each carriage window.

"Sophy! Sophy!" cried Jim.

She heard his voice; she caught his glance. She came running towards him with a lovely, radiant face and outstretched arms. How beautiful she had grown! She was gorgeous, although she wore deep mourning for her uncle.

After they had embraced each other, and Sir Charles had kissed her cheek affectionately, Jim had to say—

"I believe I have seen a ghost. I was thinking of a man, and suddenly I saw him."

"Who was he?" asked Sophy, quickly.

"Lessard."

"That was not his ghost. He is here—waiting to meet somebody. I spoke to him a moment ago. He is coming to call on you to-morrow."

Lord Marlesford, who had witnessed the meeting between brother and sister, wondered who the very handsome, very distinguished-looking creature could be. Tessa, following his unuttered curiosity, said—

"That's Sophy."

"Sophy?" repeated Marlesford; "Sophy who?"

"Sophy Firmalden."

"How do you know?"

"Can't you see the resemblance? Don't they both *dash*?"

## CHAPTER V

JIM found his home exactly as he had left it. Dr. Firmalden was so glad at his son's return that he looked some years younger than when Jim said good-bye to him on leaving for France. The father, Sophy, and the young man talked incessantly during supper, and, by instinct, each avoided any reference to Henry's death. After supper they all went into the minister's study, where, by degrees, the subject of the will was broached, although neither Sophy nor Dr. Firmalden asked Jim what he intended to do.

"When he knows, he will tell me," thought the Doctor.

At eleven o'clock Jim went to his bedroom, and Sophy followed him. He unpacked his boxes while she arranged their contents in various cupboards and drawers.

"I had not seen Lessard," she said suddenly, "since—one afternoon—ever so long ago. I was astonished when he came up to me on the platform. I'm glad his opera has been such a success."

"Has it been dull for you all this time?" asked Jim.

"There has been a sameness about things," she

answered, smiling. "Aunt Dulcie has given a number of parties—father allowed me to go to some of them. I have dined several times at the House of Commons, and I have been meeting political people and literary people. They may not be extraordinary, but they unsettle one for the kind of life I am supposed to find endurable. It is better, after all, to be sordid about empires and ideas than about the greengrocer's bill and the cook's beer-money."

Although two years had now passed since her despairing farewell to Lessard, and time had softened the wildness of her infatuation, the unlooked-for encounter with him had filled her with pleasure and defiance. She knew not why, but that night a reckless gaiety seemed to have entered into her spirit which, for some time, had been meditative and still. She wanted to dance from sheer excess of life, and every time she passed the mirror she glanced, conscious of her heightened beauty, at her own countenance. There were days when she could think of herself as another person. This was one of those days. Her conscience seemed to be something apart and distant, watching the Sophy in the flesh, admiring her, pitying her, warning her, and full of anxieties for her. Jim had never known his sister in such a sympathetic, caressing humour, while her appearance had gained something so splendid that she looked out of place in his humbly furnished room, and as strange among ordinary people as a Titian would

be in a common collection of portraits by the un-inspired.

"How you stare!" she exclaimed.

"You have grown up," he replied. "I must get used to you. I think you have altered."

"Lessard said the same thing. Do I look older, or plainer, or what is it?"

"You are not plainer, but—are you such a good little girl as you used to be?"

She laughed and went once more to the mirror.

"I'm a wiser little girl, and perhaps a happier little girl. I'm more selfish than ever, and I think we all make ourselves miserable for absurd reasons. Formerly I wanted to die every time I went to sleep. Life seemed so cruel. But now—I find it is not cruel if we discourage our own sensibilities. We all cultivate our feelings to an excessive pitch. I don't listen to music any more, I don't play it any more; I don't read poetry and novels any more; I don't care for art any more. I am a Philistine, and I am doing my utmost to kill every thought that occurs to me. I walk three hours every day, and I count lamp-posts and paving-stones and trees to keep myself from thinking."

Jim became grave.

"That sounds unnatural in a girl of your age. If I didn't know better, I should say you were either unhappy or afraid to let yourself go. I hope that Lessard has had nothing to do with all this. Has he been writing to you?"

"I never answered the letters," she said, after a minute or two; "what was the use?"

"Then what is the use of his calling to-morrow?"

She coloured, but her fine clear eyes met his without hesitation.

"He said he had something to tell me which would change the whole situation."

"Perhaps he has made a little money by his opera?"

"He knows that money could not make any difference—so far as I am concerned."

"He has wild ideas. He could believe anything he might choose to imagine."

Sophy shook her head.

"I am sure he was not thinking about money. Tell me now about Nannie Cloots."

Anticipating a long talk, she sat down on the hearthrug and clasped her hands in front of her knees. She loved to watch Jim, who had grown stern, she thought, and rather forbidding. But he had fine features and an air of manliness which, while it made her timid, gave her a sense of security.

"I have been mewed up in the train all day," he said; "can't we go for a walk? Would father think us mad?"

"Yes," said Sophy; "but he is quite sensible now about madness. He calls it the new spirit!"

"Then let us go."

They ran together down the stairs, and although

they went out into the street by the front door, Jim closed it softly. It was difficult to feel that he was not escaping without leave—such was the spell of home and its associations with his boyhood. Several couples were loitering along the road; the evening was close—for it was July—and other girls, besides Sophy, were hatless. She recognised a few neighbours, and nodded at those with whom she was acquainted. As the beauty of the district, she always excited interest; but she was considered too haughty for her position, and too dashing in her style for a Dissenting minister's daughter.

"When I think of Nannie Cloots," said Jim, after they had walked a good distance without speaking, "I become unjust, or else I deliberately lie to my own reason. I try to be fair to her; then I overdo the fairness, and I place myself at a sham disadvantage. That sort of thing is demoralising. It is better to own straight out that I hate her because she made a fool of me. She is still very pretty, no doubt, but I can no longer see the least prettiness in her face. To me, she is now the caricature of something I once admired. There you have the truth."

"So it has made you bitter?" said Sophy quietly.

"It has made me determined to face life as it is. Henceforth I'll have facts—not traditional ideals and fantastic illusions."

"But they, too, are facts," said Sophy. "It is just as much a fact that you once thought Nannie

divine as it is a fact that you now think her vulgar. Life as it is—is life with all these contradictions.”

Jim was more impatient, however, than Sophy. Men are the dreamers of the race. They feel, therefore, disillusion and awakenings with a vindictive or a sombre rage which is to women, materialists always, incomprehensible. This is why women are rarely satirists and never genuine cynics. Led by their emotions, they pamper them, and never, by any caprice, sincerely condemn, blame, or criticise the feelings on which they depend for all their inspiration—if for all their chagrin. A man will spend a lifetime quarrelling with his own heart, whereas a woman can never believe that her heart might be in the wrong. She has courage enough to defy the world, but before her own susceptibilities she is a slave, acquiescent and silent.

“If you had loved Nannie, you would not have been bitter. You would see her now as one sees a rainy morning after a glorious sunrise.”

“No! that’s too elegiac for me. You’ve been moping by yourself, and you are a little numb perhaps. Besides, you are a girl. I have been living among numbers of men and women, and I have learnt that people who are for ever talking about the soul are secretly gross, and that people who are for ever talking about the body—let us call it Walt Whitmanese—are generally unwholesome. We are human beings, and to set up these



distinctions in one organism between the flesh and the spirit is as though a horse made his hind legs kick his fore legs by way of showing his desire for a higher life!"

"I can see that you intend to fight every inch of the way."

"Yes, every inch if necessary," he answered.

"You're a born Nonconformist."

"Evidently. Aren't you?"

"In a manner of my own," she said.

"What is that but the most orthodox Nonconformity?" replied Jim, with a ringing laugh. "You have given the essence of the whole position."

"No, because I don't believe in missionaries."

"You strange girl! What is in your head now?"

"Christians always try to make everybody else as unhappy as they are themselves. They are resigned, or prudent, or good, or noble, or well-conducted—all kinds of things, in fact; but they are miserable, they are inconsistent, they dread death, and they are never quite natural. Why should a contented Buddhist or a sensible Mohammedan or a comfortable Jew be converted to Christianity?"

Jim halted and, turning, faced her.

"You have these ideas because something you believed in has failed you, or because you want to break away from some restraint. Don't try to deceive me, Sophy."

"You needn't be anxious. I have not lost my

religion. But I am not anxious to impose our sad creed on others."

"Everything that is good in Paganism is in Christianity, if you understand it. As for sadness, that's often a question of individual temperament."

"But more often a question of one's individual experience. Some have many causes for misery."

"You are thinking of Lessard's unfortunate marriage!" said Jim.

"Of course. When you see two ruined lives—and they must affect any number of others—you wonder, if you have any sense, why they should be ruined, and to what end?"

"From all I have observed of the married, I must say that no religious or social law attempts to make any couple live together when they are determined to live apart. But they must show the determination to get free."

"They have to give ugly reasons—and prove them—for wishing to separate. A woman need not be evil in order to destroy a man's career. Good women can make their homes intolerable—by tempers, or stupidity, or their mere ways. Many people have excellent morals but the most odious *ways*. I'll take another case if you like. Say two charming people, who are nevertheless not charming to each other, happen to marry. What then? Each is put out of tune and each life is absolutely spoilt."

Jim gave a violent start. Had he never heard of such a case? Why did the Marlesfords rise at

once before his mind? Marlesford was a fine fellow. Lady Marlesford was delightful. Possibly the pair had little in common except high principles. But could their marriage be described as inharmonious?

"Why all these speculations?" he said hurriedly. "Marriage is an incomparable relationship, and each marriage has its unique difficulties or advantages. One is sorry for unhappy people who are too weak to complain or to rebel. But if you save them from one tyranny they fall at once under the spell of some other. Often, too, they do not know how wretched they are till the preferred tyranny is in sight!"

"You have so much common sense," observed his sister, with a note of irony in her voice.

"I may have it; I can't always use it."

"You are trying to say that Lessard's position did not seem so hard until he met me."

"Well, I had the suspicion."

"An unfair one."

"I'm unfair, because I detest the subject. If you know me at all, you must know that it is the hardest thing in the world for me to be just. The truth is, I want to sympathise with Lessard, and I should like to think many of our marriage laws insane. For instance, I might have married Nannie. I should have been tied down till the death or the desperation of one of us broke the chain."

"Desperation can take so many shapes," said Sophy. "The Lessards found the courage to

separate. But perhaps she loves somebody else; perhaps she might wish to marry again. What then?"

"If the law gave neither of them any means of relief, I suppose they would become a law unto themselves."

"And a scandal to others."

"Not necessarily. The world has no imagination, but it isn't heartless. Give it good facts for its sentiment, and it won't try to wound your soul. As a rule, however, a man will say, 'I can't believe in the Resurrection, therefore I shall break as many of the Commandments as thwart my personal leanings.' That is the attitude of mind which infuriates the kind and the unkind alike, because it is insincere."

"Why insincere?"

"A belief in the Resurrection won't keep a man from drunkenness, or dishonesty, or lying, or any other vice, nor will it keep him from gout, or consumption, or death. A doubt of the Resurrection is, therefore, no excuse for being human. Let a man stand by his humanity without pretending that he would be an angel if he could but accept the Gospels!"

"Excuses are not always for other people. We want them for ourselves. You are rather scornful, Jim, and you seem to think it easy to defy opinion."

"Easy things are rarely worth doing."

She did not understand her brother's mood, but

she decided that a sharp reverse in love and two years of uncongenial work had tried his disposition more tensely than he knew.

"He is not vexed with me," she thought, "or hard on Lessard. For some reason he is furious with himself. What can it be?"

## CHAPTER VI

THE next afternoon at three o'clock Lessard drove up in a hansom. Sophy watched him from her bedroom window as he paid the cabman, entered the gate, and walked along the short gravelled path to the front door. At the sight of him her heart almost ached, and her vision was suddenly blinded by swift, large tears, which, without any warning, rose to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. And yet she was not crying, or conscious of any need to weep. Some minutes passed before she could regain her composure or venture to the meeting. She paused outside the drawing-room door, and, trembling, opened it.

But Lessard rushed towards her as though they had been parted but a day.

"Sophy!" he exclaimed; "my darling, beautiful Sophy!"

He took her in his arms; he kissed her pale face again and again; then he gazed into her eyes, and then he kissed her once more.

"You mustn't draw away," he said; "you mustn't look so afraid; you mustn't be so cold. I have come back, because I may. I'm free."

Sophy pushed the hair back from her brow, and

tried to control a sense of giddiness which made her sway to the verge of sinking on the ground. She had often experienced the sensation as a child, when, for fun, she had whirled round and round like a top till she fell.

"I'm free, Sophy," he repeated. "It's an awful thing to have one's liberty depend on a death, and, thank God, it isn't so bad as that. It's only grotesque. She herself was not free when I married her. Her husband was in prison. She has had a sad, hideous life, but——"

He hesitated. It was difficult to add that she had none of the ideals which might have made her lot exceptionally sorrowful.

"Don't be sad, Sophy. She's a born Bohemian—which I am not. Things which would shock you and your friends would be accepted as a matter of course by all hers. I'm so glad she isn't dead—that would have seemed such a terrible way out of the dilemma. She's still pretty, and she can still have many happy times."

This reasonableness, unfamiliar to Sophy, was so blithe and persuasive that she feared it was also evil. But she could find no word to urge against it. Lessard, a demonstrative lover, kissed her cheeks and her hands—sometimes as though she were a very young child, and sometimes as though she were a woman.

"Sophy, how have I lived all this time! You speak in every note of my opera. When they call my music my solace they talk nonsense. It is my

solace only when it means you. Mind, in the long-run, always feeds upon heart. I did not work till I met you, and I could do nothing now without you. You belong to me."

This she believed willingly, and waited, unresisting, to hear more in the same strain. Absorbed in her, and earnest to the tragic point, he praised her beauty, her soul, her complexion, and her ideals.

"All the same, you would not be spiritual if you were not so bodily! You are alive. If I were in the cellar and you were in the sky-loft I should feel your presence in the house. That is vitality or magnetism or whatever they call it."

He described his struggles in Paris—how he had composed his opera scribbling on tables outside cheap cafés, on the terrace at St. Cloud, in churches, in the galleries of the Louvre or the Luxembourg, in trains, and trams, and omnibuses.

"My thoughts of you threw a glamour over the most squalid surroundings. I saw you in the clouds; I saw you in the mud; I saw you in the rain; I saw you in the fog; I saw you in the spring blossoms; I saw you in the fountains at Versailles; I saw you in all the pictures at the Louvre; I saw you in every ugly old woman; I saw you in all the beggars; I saw you in all the summer flowers—you made the beautiful more beautiful and the repulsive almost divine. If this is not love, what is it? Sometimes I want to keep you in a little golden shrine, covered up and locked. Sometimes I want to take you out for a long day in the woods



or on the river—as though we were good burgesses. Sometimes I think you are too marvellous and wonderful for me. I almost want to offer you as my sacrifice to Apollo! Ther I want you for myself—just as you are, Sophy!”

“And what else?” she asked, enchanted.

“I love you so much and so completely that now I believe in marriage. You must be more than mine—you must be mysteriously, and legally, and eternally, and respectably mine. If there were no marriage service, my instinct would invent it.”

He spoke of his means, which were moderate, and his prospects, which were illimitable. But they were both too young to care about the money question. The desire was to marry, and all the rest seemed as the clothing of lilies. Was not God in His heaven? Lessard had endured an experience of poverty, but it had affected his romantic nature as little as his unhappy marriage had touched his belief in love. He was as willing to be poor again as he was eager to marry again. Sophy had never been embarrassed for money; she had very little, and it had proved sufficient. The one thing which might have tempted her to discontent was her taste for pretty gowns. These, however, were always given to her by Dulcibella Banish or Henry Firmalden. A girl who is satisfied with her wardrobe can bear many privations. Sophy's silk dresses were the source of much fortitude in her domestic philosophy.

“I must see your father and tell him we love

each other," continued Lessard. "Everything, dearest, must be *en règle* for his sake, and also for my sake."

"He will think we cannot know each other yet. And then——" She hesitated. What would her father say to Lessard's story? The minister was full of compassion for the unfortunate, but, in dealing with their circumstances, his logic was pitiless. Sentimentalising was alien to his temper and to his creed; the hosannahs of the blessed and the misereres of the damned could not, in his belief, be forced or tortured into harmony. When he heard discord he winced, and where he found wrong-doing he condemned it. Sophy's heart, thrilling with love, shrank from the bitter task of weighing evidence either for or against Lessard's character. She did not want to hear the tale; she felt that he had suffered, and that was enough to know. The maternal qualities of forgiveness and tenderness — which are inseparable from a woman's affection — were dominant in Sophy, perhaps because she herself had been unmothered and forlornly understood from her childhood. To understand richly is not a matter of wisdom or amiableness; it is the intuition of love, and it comes neither by experience nor merit. The least meritorious and the most foolish will alike display, under the influence of a true attachment, an almost divine knowledge of at least one fellow-creature's soul. But it should never be forgotten that knowledge, as all other vital things, is according to sex;

and while a woman's sympathy will show itself as an atmosphere charged with emotion, a man's sympathy is often embarrassed and always unconsciously judicial. As he himself is judged by other men, he judges men and women—distrusting any partiality, even while he yields to it, in the case of the latter. Dr. Firmalden had a subtle comprehension of his daughter, and he could never, by any possibility, denounce her actions or her words. For herself she had nothing to fear. For Lessard, a mere acquaintance to begin with, she knew that her father would keep what is called an open mind; which means a mind so keenly aware of its own prejudices that it can hold them, as it were, in leash till their exercise may be called legitimate.

Lessard, however, had the artist's longing to explain himself, and he foresaw that shadowy facts would not satisfy the inflexible Nonconformist.

"I have so much admiration for your father," said he, "that he must like me—in spite of what he will call my oddness."

"But even if he liked you he might think it his duty to thwart you; and, firmly as you might convince yourself that you were right, so firmly would he be satisfied that you were mistaken. You have no idea what duty and principles mean to father. Sometimes I believe he dare not bend one of them lest it should weaken all."

"The usual Christian is a mixture of the Hebrew

and the Mohammedan," exclaimed Lessard; "but he has neither the sense of the Jew nor the consistency of the Turk. Your father, dearest, is, of course, an unusual Christian," he added nastily, as he saw a look of pain pass over Sophy's face.

Her cheeks seemed on fire.

"You must never say anything against my father or against his religion. And I should always obey him. At any rate, I should not disobey him. Perhaps I'd give myself the benefit of a doubt if I were not absolutely certain of his wishes. But if he expressed them—that would be final."

The young man so admired her high spirit that he overlooked its danger.

"You are splendid," was his answer, and the ardour of his glance made her quiet once more.

"Between us two let there be peace always," said Sophy earnestly. She leaned forward; she put her hand on his arm; she was pale and more serious than he had ever seen her.

"Then let us go to your father now—at once. I am in the mood for him. I know your hatred of secrecy, and you feel ill at ease because he has not heard that you have promised to marry me."

"He is in his study."

She glanced around the room—as though it could never be quite the same to her again. She looked at Lessard—as though the intoxicating joy of their meeting that day could never be repeated. A sadness, intense, unforgettable, and unfathom-

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able, clouded her eyes. But, with an effort of will, she overcame her sudden mood, and, opening the door, she pointed to the study on the opposite side of the small hall.

"I'll tell him you want to see him," she said.

## CHAPTER VII

THE minister was seated at his desk composing a sermon on the following text from the Epistle of St. James:—

“Know ye not that the friendship of this world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, desireth to be a friend of the world is an enemy of God.”

He had been thinking, irrelevantly enough, that his life, in spite of his two children, was desolate. All day long he encouraged others; no one thought it necessary to encourage him. Had he asked for praise and companionship he might, no doubt, have had it. But, to reserved natures, what is purchased by prayers is dearly bought, and one secret effort of Dr. Firmalden's life was the overcoming his instinctive unwillingness to make petitions to Heaven or to his pew-holders. Some wondered why he remained a widower—for his wife had died soon after Sophy's birth. The truth was he feared the bondage of a second attachment, and he had bridled every inclination in himself toward friendships with women. He suspected a taste which, if indulged, might lead to some error in judgment. Freedom to be foolish was not

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liberty, and the unwise choice of wives—often made by the clergy—filled the prudent minister with misgivings which depressed any desire in him for further matrimonial adventures. As most scholars who love books, he was not, by disposition, what is called a marrying man. It is the tragedy of the learned that sedentary habits are confused with domestic gifts. Domesticity and family life were as irksome to Dr. Firmalden as they are to the born monk, who finds in the religious orders trials—which go by traditional rule, and obligations—which are carefully defined. The surprises, irregularities, and worries—grotesque as well as grievous—of a home circle disarranged the pastor's symmetrical ideas; he never complained, but beneath the patient surface his spirit was frequently vexed to a desperate pitch. Perhaps he was romantic—the first condition of all unhappy persons.

When Lessard found himself in the presence of this austere, fierce-eyed divine, whose God was Jehovah and whose watchword was Duty, his own rebellious spirit was instantly roused. Each studied the other with anticipatory condemnation. The minister, however, spoke a courteous welcome, and gave his visitor a chair which faced the light.

"I'll come to the point," said Lessard; "I have asked your daughter to marry me."

"And now you want my advice?" said the Doctor drily.

"Your consent."

"Has Sophy consented?"

"She has referred me to you."

"How long have you known each other?"

"Ever since I sang at your church school—more than two years ago."

"I did not know you were in correspondence."

"She has never answered my letters. I have only one note from her."

"Then how often have you met?"

"Five times—altogether."

"And she is willing to marry you?"

"So I believe."

"Sophy once told me that you had a wife already. How long has she been dead?"

"She is not dead. The marriage was illegal."

"Through any defect in the law, or any carelessness on your part, or any misrepresentation on hers?"

"It's a wretched business. She had a husband living."

"Of course, you were ignorant of his existence?"

"I thought she had divorced him."

"For the one permitted cause?"

"One?" said Lessard, lifting his eyebrows; "there are many admitted causes in America."

"There is one cause only permitted to Christians—if they believe the Bible."

"I assumed he was a brute, and that the law gave the poor girl her freedom."

"You made no inquiries?"

"I accepted her word."



"Was she respectable?"

"She's a very good little woman."

"Giddy, too, I should imagine?"

"She can't be judged by the ordinary standards."

"And what are the ordinary standards as you imagine them?"

"I mean, she is not like Sophy. She is not religious. She's moral enough according to her lights."

"And yours?"

"It is not for me to judge her."

"Where did you meet this lady?"

"We were on tour together—in *The Mikado*. She's now a 'star' in America."

"Mr. Lessard, I would ask for more particulars of this matter if I could allow my daughter to marry an operatic singer. It is absurd to hope that any true union should be between two persons while one of them remains behind the footlights and the other walks in the fresh air. They are subjects not only of two separate but of two opposite kingdoms. They act upon quite different principles; they aim at quite different ends."

"I have left the stage."

"Then what is your profession?"

"I am a composer. My opera has just been produced in Paris."

"For all I know to the contrary, you may be a man of genius—another Bizet or another Wagner. But have you considered what you are about in writing for the theatre or the opera-house?"

"I have no talent for church music. My instincts are dramatic. I must take my music as it comes to me."

"I could enjoy seeing an interesting play well acted, or hearing a fine tragic opera, but I can't defend them with a good conscience. I agree with Wesley, who regarded the theatre itself as a sink of debauchery and profaneness. I use his own words. Individuals in the profession may be excellent; many plays are admirable; the influence of the stage, however, and the atmosphere of the theatrical world cannot be elevating."

"What did Wesley know about the theatre?"

"Much that he would have been glad not to have known, I daresay! But Goethe, who was himself a writer of plays, was as scathing as Wesley. Have you read *Wilhelm Meister*? Do you remember the description of the drunkenness, uncleanness, malice, and many bad effects of which a well-intentioned poetical performance was the cause? All through that book—a Pagan book, too, in its philosophy—Goethe paints the demoralising influence of the theatres on those connected with them, and on those who frequent them habitually."

"Politicians get demoralised; any man can lose his conscience in the City! The materialised ideal must always be a caricature or a disappointment. All composers and playwrights worth their salt are bitter about theatrical life. Molière loathed it. Voltaire, Congreve, Sheridan, Fielding,

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Bizet, and Wagner would have agreed with Goethe."

"Nothing in this world was made to realise our expectations or to satisfy us. A butcher can get as weary of his meat and his shop as a poet of his troupe and their painted scenery! But even if I could reconcile my feelings with your present career, there remains the greatest question of all."

"And that?"

"Are you a Christian? From your observations I should assume that you were an Epicurean. One cannot be both."

"I was brought up as a Protestant. I should be sorry to say that I have no religion at all. But it is natural and certainly not dogmatic. If I were anything, I would be a Roman!"

"If you were *anything*! Then you're nothing?"

"Nothing bigoted."

Dr. Firmalden was now indignant, and he did not attempt to conceal his wrath.

"How dare you ask me to give you my daughter? How could she be happy with an unbeliever? I don't want to thunder hell and damnation in your ears, but to me you are no more than a heathen."

"A life of orthodox religion—as many preach it—is a life of misery," said Lessard.

"If Sophy cares for you," said Dr. Firmalden, "I consider her life is at stake; eternal life or eternal death. I would sooner see her buried than

married to a worldly-minded man. 'The friendship of this world is enmity with God.' Let her pluck out her eye and cut off her hand—at all events, keep herself pure."

"What do you mean and what are you implying, sir?"

"I imply nothing. I say plainly that you cannot have my daughter. If she would please her husband, let her first please God. And she cannot please God, or obey Him, by mating with a man of your loose opinions."

"Loose! That's a harsh expression."

"Not too harsh. Your easy account of your illegal marriage points less to magnanimity than to levity—chronic and incurable. Your senses have not been exercised to discern spiritual good and evil; your heart is past feeling the truth of the gospel. You say, 'Peace! peace!' while the devil, 'as a strong man armed,' is in full possession of your soul."

"I fear we can never hope to agree," said Lessard hotly.

"I know we cannot," replied the minister. He rose, he put one hand on the young man's shoulder and looked into his resentful eyes.

"There was not among the Children of Israel a goodlier person than Saul; nevertheless, he did not keep that which the Lord commanded him. Saul had what is now called the modern spirit. He knew better than the prophet, and he followed his own will; his gifts were great, but he neglected

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to refer them to the Lord. Saul thought to be more merciful than God, and he spared Agag, the sinner. If I obeyed my own impulse, I should often be guilty of the same presumption. I take no pleasure in rebuking and reproaching and accusing others. This you must believe."

"I believe it," said Lessard bitterly; "but that's no comfort."

"You were brought up as a Protestant. You told me so. This makes your case the worse. Still, you may change. You may repent. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.'"

"I can never see with your eyes; I can never feel as you feel. I'll never go back to that old tyranny of superstition which made my parents, who were naturally kind, crueller than devils. I will tell Sophy what you have said—and then——"

"She must have known what I would say."

## CHAPTER VIII

SOPHY had heard the raised and angry voices; her agitation became unbearable; she opened the study door, and, as she stood lingering on the threshold, met the supplicatory glance of the two men. She looked first at her father and then at Maurice.

"Sophy," said the minister, "did you understand the position as Mr. Lessard has just explained it to me?"

A flash of almost mad passion darted through his grave eyes and barred them as with a flame. The sight of the girl herself destroyed any pity or tenderness which the minister might have felt for the brilliant, if unregenerate, soul who, he foresaw, would prove his daughter's curse and her undoing.

"It is right to see both sides of a question, but one can only fight on one side," continued the minister. "You and I, Sophy, have to fight on the Lord's side. You cannot, I fear, change Mr. Lessard's character without deforming your own!"

"Father!"

"I was ready, for your sake, to make the utmost advantage of every circumstance in his favour. He says he loves you. But no doubt he loved,

for a season, the unhappy creature who deceived him. He has succeeded in his profession. I disapprove of the profession, but to succeed in a difficult art means industry, enthusiasm, courage, and powers of concentration. Would to God he could have employed such splendid natural graces to better purpose than the execution of an opera! To crown all, he informs me that he has let go his faith. God, who inhabits eternity, is too miserable and too fanatical and too hard a Judge for Mr. Lessard! It had been better he had never known the way of righteousness than, after he had known it, to turn back."

"Oh, father, you might say kinder things!" cried Sophy, who was now in tears.

"Is this a time to mince words? I have answered him according to the multitude of his idols."

Lessard, with a half-smile, which trembled on his fine lips, watched the minister as he spoke. That bigot, he told himself, would never listen to reason.

"My poor Sophy," said her father in a softer tone, "what you should do is sufficiently clear. But what *can* you do? You must cry to the strong for strength. If you love this man and he loves you, you can return love for love, but it does not follow that you should have any intimacy with him. That would be at the peril of your soul. Let your love give itself vent in constant prayer for his repentance."

"I repent of nothing!" exclaimed Lessard. "I don't wish to speak disrespectfully, and I am really trying to understand you. But your ideas are old-fashioned, sir. People are no longer terrorised by threats and curses. I reverence sincerity where I find it. I find it in you; but I also find it in Roman Catholics, in Hindoos, and in others whom you would call backsliders. One of the most sincere men I know has run away with his neighbour's wife, robbed his best friend, and drinks too much habitually! He would despise a moral person and think him mad or a hypocrite. With my knowledge of the world, it would be impossible for me to return to a religious system which is obsolete. If Wesley himself had lived in these times he would have taken a saner view of life."

He was trying to show self-possession, but he felt that Sophy was completely dominated by her father, and even fascinated by the forbidding picture of her evident duty.

"You never told me you were not a Christian," she said, turning to Maurice and speaking with a sob of reproach.

"I believe I am a Christian," answered Lessard; "but I know I am neither a Churchman nor a Nonconformist. So don't pray for me, Sophy. If you can give me up because you are afraid I shall hurt your soul, I shouldn't be proud of such a soul, and I don't think much of your love. If you tell me to go I'll go."



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"But don't you believe in the Bible—in God?" stammered Sophy.

"I don't want the Bible and God according to Wesley."

"We are not Methodists," said Sophy, eagerly; "we are Congregationalists."

Lessard laughed bitterly.

"Don't try to explain the difference!"

She sank down on the hard sofa and covered her face with her hands.

"Am I to go?" he asked again.

She gave no reply, but she made no movement to restrain him.

"This is all very hard, Dr. Firmalden," said Lessard; "she obeys you, and she doesn't realise yet that she is destroying her own happiness and mine."

"If she realised it," said the minister, "she would nevertheless persevere in the right course."

"Is it the right course to fail and disappoint me?"

"If you hoped that she would forgive blasphemy and irreligion, it is certainly right that she should disappoint you."

"Then," exclaimed Lessard, "you refuse me, Sophy? You look upon me as pitch!"

She still kept her hands over her face. She said nothing. Lessard laughed again and walked straight out of the room, leaving the door open behind him. He left the front-door open also. Sophy heard his firm, swift steps dying away on

the little path till he reached the gate. That too he left wide open, in spite of the painted notice, "*Please shut the gate!*" The wind rushed into the house with wild force, lifting the rugs, inflating the curtains like sails. Firmalden left Sophy alone in his study while he closed the gate and the two doors. When he returned she had gone upstairs to her own room.

She was sustained through the first hour of her trial by its very cruelty. She would bear it. For a woman to flinch under pain was as cowardly as a man's running from the battlefield. Once before, on principle, she had broken with Lessard; could she not do it again? True, he loved her—he had loved her in the distance and discouraged—for two years. And she had loved him. It may all have been sudden, but it had borne the tests of time and absence. He had sworn to come back, and he had come back. Fate had removed the one obstacle between them. He was free. Would prayers now restore his lost faith? Had he not lost it because of his despair? Some men became hardened through adversity. Their hopes went wrong, their efforts failed; they saw the godless successful, the devout oppressed. Lessard was an artist with ideals—sensitive, emotional, enthusiastic, high-spirited, impatient. When he looked into the world and beheld its contradictions he grew cynical. The youngest girl will always feel wiser than any lover where matters of the heart are concerned. Is it not for her to explain and to atone for the

sorrows of existence? Sophy remembered that Lessard had declared himself a believer in Christ. He was not an atheist, not an agnostic; he refused to join a religious community. But might he not change that determination—in answer to her prayer and a little for her own sake? She felt certain that he would ask to see her, and also that he would write. He was no tame suitor, to be turned from his purpose by opposition or adverse circumstances. Did he not know that she loved him? Nothing else, weighed against that fact, could matter greatly. She could sit still, fold her hands, and attend the will of God.

Meanwhile Jim had been to see his uncle's widow, whom he found surrounded by her relations, the dressmakers, her solicitor, and her clergyman. They all frowned upon young Firmalden as the chief beneficiary under the last testament of the deceased, to whom covert reference was made by the Derbesh family in a conversation dealing generally with selfishness, insanity, cold hearts, and the middle classes. More than once Jim was forced to catch the phrase—

“He was so very middle-class, poor man!”

At this the widow's tears, gathering afresh, would be caught by her handkerchief before they could course down her cheeks to the injury of her complexion.

Jim left this scene as soon as the semblance of respect for his aunt made an exit possible. He returned home, to find Sophy waiting for him

in his old study. She told him all that had happened.

"And now," she asked in conclusion, "what is to be done?"

Jim would not say that his father had showed too great severity, but he thought so. On the other hand, he could not feel that Lessard was the right husband for Sophy. He knew nothing against him; but then, he knew him very little. Moreover, his illegal marriage did not prepossess one in his favour. It was unjust, no doubt, to blame anybody for having suffered an unhappy experience; still, a story of the kind was never helpful. The idea suddenly occurred to Jim that Lady Marlesford might give him good advice on the subject. She was young herself; she would sympathise with Sophy; she would appreciate the religious difficulties; she knew the world; she knew something about love—perhaps. Jim was impulsive; he decided on the spot to call on Lady Marlesford. He had already that morning looked for her address in Grosvenor Square.

"I must think all this out," he told Sophy. "You see, it may mean a great difference of opinion between myself and father. He belongs to the old school, and if he felt it his duty to burn sinners he would burn them; he would also march to the stake himself for a principle. I might march to the stake if necessary, but——"

"You wouldn't burn others! Father's code is too grim," she exclaimed. "It's forbidding; it kills

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all the happiness in life. He is unhappy himself—although he is such an upright man.”

“He is unhappy because he reasons, not because he is upright,” said Jim. “If he were ambitious or fond of pleasure he would have no time to reason; he would call Christ, Lucretius, and Socrates philosophers all—and leave them alone. As it is, he is for ever teased by ideas.”

“But he sacrifices himself and us to his ideas,” said Sophy; “that makes them most important—to us at any rate!”

Jim thought it would be dangerous to encourage her in the spirit of criticism.

## CHAPTER IX

LADY MARLESFORD was sitting in her boudoir surrounded by lilies and blue hydrangeas from Lord Marlesford's country-seat in Surrey. She loved hydrangeas, but she was already tired of London. She wondered why she had returned; she wondered why her life suddenly seemed humdrum and too earthy. Where had the romance gone? Once she had been romantic. Why did she feel like a squirrel in a cage? Was every marriage monotonous? Why, when she looked at Marlesford, did he seem far off and dim, yet fatally familiar? Was it a sin to ask herself why there was none of that beauty in their relationship which she had once believed, or been taught to believe, was inseparable from conjugal love? What was the matter? As a girl she had never been allowed to read novels or much poetry. She was now studying the French and Italian writers of every school and the English poets since Shelley. Her imagination was on fire, and, compared with the world disclosed by the masters of literature, the world she lived in (apart from its natural beauties of scenery and artistic beauties in architecture) seemed mean. She was beginning to understand

the fascination of psychology and the analysis of character. The character which now absorbed her interest was that of her husband.

"Do I know him at all?" she asked herself.

She knew his habits, his tastes in food, the amount of sleep and exercise his health required, the uncertainties in his temper, and his numerous good qualities. His virtues were conscientiousness, generosity, and a strict sense of honour. He had no vices—although Tessa thought he often smoked too much and was over-reckless in expenditure. If he was selfish in small he was magnanimous in large things; altogether, he bore the analysis admirably. She had often been in love with Marlesford—that is to say, there had been hours when something approaching passion and fervour exalted her affection for him. But he had never been responsive at the right moment; when her mood had the sacred thrill, his mood would be for the pipe or the stables, and when his mood was tender—even ardent—her mood would be for shops and gossip. Thus, they were seldom in complete sympathy; and they were drifting by degrees into the calm friendship of those who, having no illusions about each other, never quarrel but also never blend. An undemonstrative man by temperament, it was his misfortune to appear most chilling when he was most moved. He had a horror of displaying emotion and of talking language which could be called fine. Tessa's keen sense of humour made him nervous, and thus even the self-abandonment

of which he might have been capable with a less observant woman was not indulged. On all religious matters, however, there was absolute concord between them—an unusual blessing in cases where one of the two is a born Catholic and the other is a convert. Converts are often found inconveniently enthusiastic, or even fanatical. Marlesford was neither. He was by nature pious, just as many are by nature irreverent. To Marlesford, a man who held no definite religious views would have seemed eccentric or ill-bred. He enjoyed all the public services of the Church; its stately ceremonial satisfied his secret longing for the impressive, which was shocked rather than gratified by ordinary Court functions; he said his private devotions in sturdy fashion, not doubting that Almighty God heard them, and never tired of a practice which seemed to him refreshing at the end and steadying at the beginning of the day. Marlesford and his wife were happier together at Mass than they ever felt in any other circumstances. It was, no doubt, a curious state of affairs. Tessa dared not tell herself that they were friends who, in marriage, were mismatched; domestic both, they failed to appeal to each other's particular kind of domesticity. He loved home life and the responsibilities of a large family; his boredom arose from the fact that his life lacked those cares which tax the heart and deepen earnestness. Tessa loved public life—she wanted a salon, not a hearth; children baffled her; she was at her best with men and women. Her houses



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seemed desolate when they were not filled with guests.

“Why isn't he ambitious? Why does he care nothing for a career? How can he be contented, year in and year out, to potter about his estates, arrange shooting-parties, hunt, and play whist when he is asked to make a fourth? It is deadly!”

She had been reading Nietzsche, and some of the fury of individualism had entered into her soul. To walk along the beaten track, to repeat false sentiments, were becoming impossible. At every turn now she was asking herself, “Why am I doing this?” and when any statement was made she now demanded, under her breath, “Is that true?” She saw that people were, if watched, utterly dissimilar; that each soul existed in an inaccessible solitude; that stupidity could affect the degree, but not the pain, of each creature's discontent; that, although everybody had a grievance and an opinion, few believed in or cared to hear the grievances and opinions of others. By education, systematised or otherwise, men and women softened, perfected, or concealed the qualities which nature gave them; but they of themselves could add nothing to these natural gifts. The pear tree cannot be cultivated into an oak, and genius cannot be manufactured from the uninspired. Why was not Marlesford a genius? Tessa thought of all the statesmen, the ecclesiastics, the artists who had made history. Why had it been her fate, with all her aspirations,

to marry Marlesford? When the problems of life were presented to him he would say—

"Something certainly ought to be done."

But he himself did nothing; he described all attempts at reformation, except in drainage and ventilation, as fussiness. Unending chatter, however, about animals, food, looks, books, and music almost amused him. Tessa was brooding over these vexatious thoughts when Firmalden called. As he entered the room, she felt her courage revive. Here, at last, was one who would not accept the conventions placidly. Her cheeks grew paler, her eyes brightened.

"How nice of you to come!" she exclaimed. "I was feeling depressed. The first day at home, after one has been away, is always melancholy. One comes back with new ideas to an old prison!"

"Prison!" he repeated.

"Yes; I have reached the conclusion that we are all slaves—to habits, or to notions, or to the mere design of our houses. The instant I cross the threshold I feel the length of my chain. I go from my bedroom in the morning to the dining-room, from the dining-room here or to the drawing-room, and from the drawing-room to my bedroom again at night. And there is a fixed talk and a fixed life for each room. Such tediousness is overwhelming."

"I could almost wish now that things were tedious in my own home. My sister is in trouble, and I have come to ask your advice."

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"A love affair?"

"Inevitably."

"Is the man handsome?"

"Very handsome."

"Clever?"

"Oh, most accomplished. He has composed an opera, *Daphnis and Chloe*."

Tessa clapped her hands.

"I heard it in Paris. A charming thing—in the Mozart manner. What a lucky girl your sister is!"

"She doesn't think so at this moment."

"When a genius loves her and she loves him! Can she want anything more?"

"My father won't consent to the marriage. Lessard is unsound, according to my father, in his religion. Poor Sophy stands, therefore, between two duties."

"Her duty is to follow the man she loves."

"She couldn't do that against my father's wish, although nobody would doubt her right to do it."

"She must keep her temper and show her spirit. I can't believe that Lessard is irreligious. No artist—and least of all a musician—could be an atheist."

"There is nothing crude in Lessard's unorthodoxy, but it is lawless—the one thing my father finds unpardonable."

"Isn't he himself a Nonconformist?" asked Tessa, with a subtle smile.

"Yes; but he believes that it teaches 'the way of God in truth.'"

After an awkward pause Tessa murmured—

"I try not to be a bigot. If I thought as I am expected to think, I should feel damned before the Judgment! The Church herself is not intolerant, but she is often interpreted by narrow persons. I know many horsey, doggy whisky women who become quite ethereal, even mystic, when they are invited to the condemnation of a heretic or a sinner!"

Firmalden laughed, and, while he laughed, he felt the impossibility of ever sharing his father's hard-and-fastness in doctrine. As for the muddle of calling the world's immorality or vice by the name "sin," when it was mere psychological infirmity, a fault of attention, of nerves, of understanding, not a matter of choice—that too was impossible. He accepted the modern scientific view that there were infinitely various degrees of responsibility in different persons or in the same person at different times.

"What is a heretic, and what is a sinner?" he said. "How do you recognise them when you meet them?"

"I have a warning sense that certain people are evil, in spite of all outward appearance to the contrary; and equally a warning sense that certain people are good, in spite of many evident bad signs. This is all I know."

"Exactly," said Jim. "Now I can tell you what

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I think of Lessard. He isn't wicked—he has a fine order of mind—but he is constitutionally unstable and violent. I fear he would make my sister wretched.”

“How much better to be wretched with a man of strong, fierce character than ignobly satisfied with a blameless, baptized animal! Oh, do think of that! I am utterly on your sister's side.”

Tessa spoke with intensity, and she used her beautiful, expressive hands to give point to her vehement utterances. Lady Marlesford's animation, tempered by extraordinary self-restraint, fascinated, controlled, and puzzled Firmalden. Now, after a quarter of an hour's talk, he began to notice her gown and the room they were sitting in. The charm of her spirit had made him blind at first to its accessories. She wore a dress of violet silk and a long chain of amethysts set in silver. She had pinned a rose in her belt. When they had first met, her hat was a certain disguise. To-day she had her hair arranged in the Pompadour fashion; he could observe its fine bronze and red tints, her dark arched eyebrows, and low, square forehead not doilishly smooth. She had a trick of frowning delicately when she listened; the effect was pleasant because it conveyed the impression that she was absorbed in the conversation. The room, which the young man barely glanced at, was decorated in the Louis xv. style and furnished with genuine Louis xv. furniture, ornaments, and

pictures. Firmalden assumed that Lord Marlesford had taken much pleasure in arranging on his marriage this costly apartment for his bride. It was very formal—but for the quantity of books, beautifully bound, and the flowers in all kinds of vases, English and Italian, old and modern.

“Now tell me about yourself,” said Tessa suddenly. “Will you carry out your uncle’s strange will and become—what they call—a minister?”

“In a codicil I am allowed three months’ grace before I decide irrevocably.”

“Is any decision irrevocable? People may change their minds nowadays without giving scandal.—You are not offended?”

“Offended!” he exclaimed.

“Perhaps that is not the word. But I am afraid you find me unsympathetic.”

“You are quite mistaken.”

Tessa had resolved to secure Firmalden for Rome. Should she warn him of her intentions?

“I have a design,” she said. “You’ll forgive it because I am candid—but for no other reason. I hope you’ll decide against Nonconformity and conform!”

“To what?”

“To the one Church. The more I think about you, the more I feel that you would be miserable as a Dissenter.”

To be thought about was flattering, and he coloured a little.

"I knew I could not persuade you that we are right," she went on, with a tremor in her voice; "but you might at least promise to consider our claims."

"I live on the earth—here," replied Firmalden. "I have always worked very hard, almost desperately; I have never taken any time for dreaming. My aim has been to march straight on."

"Where?"

"Till the end. I accept the world as I find it. I am almost certain that poets, reformers, and philosophers—even religions—change nothing. They merely give humanity new reasons for doing the old things, or old advice in fresh language."

"Are you discouraged so soon?" she asked. "I fancied you were an idealist. All my life has been spent waiting for the miracle which will give me happiness."

"So you are not happy yet?" said Firmalden.

"They tell me," she replied, "that I should acquire a calm, sane conception of existence. They say I read too much. They are astonished that I am not as resigned and grave as persons of forty. My husband is satisfied with life as he finds it; he thinks, therefore, that I should be satisfied. Others tell me that I am intoxicated by words—joy, beauty, art, and so on. They warn me I shall fall from disappointment to disappointment; that life is ugly, dreary, squalid; that its few sublime moments depend on the amount of suffering one

can pay for them! You know the idea—we are born to trouble and anguish, and this is a vale of tears! But need it be so terrible?"

"I hope not."

"All the same, those in this country who try to improve matters are called faddists and 'cranks,' or they are accused of working for self-interest. A martyrdom nowadays would be called an advertisement!"

"But a determined enthusiast cares nothing for criticism. The difficulty is to be enthusiastic!"

"Ah! you have had some disillusion," said Tessa, leaning toward him.

"Well, we resent disillusion because they are humiliating. Mine killed all my fantastic ideas—what some would call all the good in me. I am telling you more than I have ever told myself! I may not have what Renan has called the horrible mania for certitude, but I do feel that religion is the one thing which can give either meaning or dignity to life. If the mob insists on certitude, it is because it has no time to argue. The rank and file in any army would rather be shot than think why they are fighting. In the same spirit, my father—a scholar with a passion for metaphysics—would die ten times over for what he considers his duty. And it is the one subject he would never permit himself to question."

"In fact, it is our duty never to ask ourselves what duty means!"

"In the heroic age it meant the interests of



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religion and country, State and family; now it is often taken to mean the claims of the individual soul. We have to save our own souls."

"And how many do we each sacrifice to that particular salvation?" she asked bitterly.

He did not reply.

"Is there any earthly reason," she went on, "why a man should hold the views of his father? We should examine our beliefs from time to time. We can see whether we really do believe what we think we believe."

"Or," said Firmalden, "what we wish to believe."

He caught a penetrating glance.

"Or what we wish to believe," she repeated after him. "The fatal symptom is to be afraid of questions."

"All the same," said Firmalden, "we can never get rid of the sentiments which are born with us. A creed is not a matter of logic—it is almost wholly a *feeling*. No argument can uproot a deep feeling or produce one."

"You could have such a career—with us!" said Tessa. "Don't you, as a man, admire our marvelous system, our hierarchy, our stability?"

"I must admire it; I cannot love it. I was educated to distrust priestcraft and to despise parsoncraft; that education is in my blood."

"Even so," she replied, "I don't despair."

When he said good-bye, he looked long into her steady, brilliant eyes, through which no flash of

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coquettishness had ever shone. She seemed to him unlike all other women, and he decided, with a bounding heart, that they could be intimate friends easily. How fortunate he was to have met her!

## CHAPTER X

LESSARD had been invited to dine with the famous and musical Lady Burghwallis that evening. But having sent her a telegram to say that he was unable to keep his engagement, he went to his hotel and wrote a long letter to Sophy :—

“God forbid that I should interfere with your soul. But are you sure you have one? Are you not mistaking a deadness for the soul? I don't ask you to be sly, to be false, to lie, or to deceive. I ask you to be honest. If you cannot be honest—then I am mistaken in you, and I must bear the disappointment. You will declare that you are sincere. I say you are nothing of the kind. You have led me to think that you love me. If you loved me you could not have let me go as you did to-day—without a word or a sign. It was inhuman, and I detest more than ever the devilish religion which can make people callous, self-suffieient, and self-righteous. Let me assure you again that I am Pagan all through. If I am to keep my suspieion that the spirit of man is immortal or that there is a heaven hereafter, I must never meet Christians. The Greeks had

no written Bible for their destruction, no system of religious doctrine. And how long has Paganism lasted? The more it changes the more it is the same. Ah, Sophy! the laws whose 'life was not of to-day or yesterday' are the *unwritten* laws. They keep an eternal inflexibility—a different thing from instability. Alas! I find in you a fatal cowardice. No, I don't mean that. But it is terribly clear that you love your superstitions better than you love me. My God! how can I work unless I can keep my ideal? I thought I had found it in you. Your beautiful face and your heart seemed in harmony. Is it all true? Has it really happened? Was it you who covered your eyes rather than look at me? Is our love at an end? Finished? Yes. You have done the unforgivable—you failed me when I most trusted you. It is finished—finished—finished. Why aren't you an image or a picture—with no ideas to express and no spirit to reveal? Then I could have believed in you and adored you for ever; then I could have been happy—with no memory of an everlasting disappointment to haunt my dreams. I may in time forget you, but I can never forget this hour. It has entered—as some strange and awful dye—into the very texture of my soul, to darken, stain, and spoil any possible aspiration. Man is known to God by his aspirations—not by his lapses. Don't suppose that I shall give in weakly. But I'll have faith henceforth in the evil and folly I can

see—not in the nobility I have imagined. If you wanted to cure me of romance, you have succeeded perfectly. I don't know what I am writing to you, and I don't care. Here, at least, is as much as I can bring myself to utter in the way of a farewell. I shall always see you turning away from me. It wasn't like you, or, if it was like you, my mistake is the worse.

MAURICE."

He could not understand Sophy's conduct. His love for her was an instinct. There was nothing resembling friendship in his feeling; she had delighted and inspired him by her beauty, her grace, and her mysterious eyes. As for her character, he had imagined it as a placid depth which could hold all the caprices of his own soul: she was his other self. And now what was there but hostility between them? He would have liked that evening to hear music, to see coloured globes on every light, to dazzle by glare and to drown in wine the mental sadness which he felt. The idea of dining alone and spending the evening alone by his solitary lamp was insupportable. When the heart has a certain measure of distress, it is agitated and in revolt, but when it is full of woe and can contain no more, it is still, and its stillness passes for resignation to destiny.

Lessard posted his letter and walked, without an aim, through the streets to St. James's Park and Westminster, from there over the old Lambeth

Bridge to south London. The evening was clear, but in the tender moonlight all the squalor of details was lost; the repose of the river and the anchored ships stole over his senses, and, although he knew that in the morning all his chagrin, fiercer for the rest, would awake, he yielded to the spell of the tranquil moon and the enchantment of the distant city.

"What a contrast," he thought, "between the calm of these buildings and their harassed, feverish, exhausted, and dismayed inhabitants! They swarm like ants or bees through the thoroughfares; they toil and die and weep and laugh in rooms, but the stone, and brick, and granite, and iron, and woodwork, the ships, the bridges, the embankments, and the walls—put together by these same men, who are the puppets and fools of fate—seem all that is dignified in human existence. Man's handiwork is nobler than himself—for it is serene and irresponsible, whereas he believes he is responsible and is dissatisfied always."

Where could he fly? What should he do? His early years on the sea, and the ports he had visited before he left the Navy, came before his mind. Perhaps, after all, that was the life romantic, manly, and worth while—at sea one could believe in patriotism, in love, in beauty, and in eternity. Again and again the old, wild call of the wind and the waves, the storm and the peril, would ring through his ears; in hours of disgust or lassitude the yearning to follow it was

irresistible. To-night, as his gaze pursued the tide of the Thames, his spirit seemed to be moving with it—on and on toward the illimitable treacherous waters which he knew as a seaman and loved as an artist. His imagination, which had received its strongest influence from the Greeks, dwelt in the lovely Isles of the Ionian, and from their rocks and gardens and fastnesses, their vineyards and their temples, he had made his music and his dreams. He thought of the town of Corfu—its grey, white, and yellow houses with red roofs and green shutters, and round them cypresses and olive trees; he thought of the harbour, facing the bleak, sheer mountains of Albania—as pale and vague as clouds in the shining glare of noon, rose and soft purple in the glow of the sunset. Where else were the waves so deeply blue or the sky so luminous? Where else could a man live so close to the heroic age? He wished to feel intensely and to think simply; to have adventures, and to avoid disillusion; to extract delight, sensations, and ideas from all visible things; to take refuge from mankind in nature. Here he was modern, and here he differed from the more vigorous classic temperament which took little joy in the inanimate or in matters which were not almost wholly concerned with human life and death. No experience, however, had so far been able to destroy his love of living, and he remembered times when he had thought himself happy.

"Still," he thought, "even if one has happiness one does not wish it to continue. There is a restlessness even in joy; one's desire is for change and disturbance. Have I not wearied of halcyon seas and longed for a storm? Have I not steamed out of the fairest harbour toward the open and threatening sea with a sense of exhilaration — as though I were escaping from restraint and monotony?"

He looked again at the spires of Westminster, the dark walls of Lambeth Palace, and the lines of light along the banks of the Thames. He thought of Venice, where the pigeons perch on the golden horses of St. Mark and wheel round the column where the winged lion guards the city. He thought of the ports of Bombay, of Calcutta, of Barcelona, of New York, of Malta, of Liverpool, of Athens, of Constantinople, of Smyrna—all distinct and all vivid in his mind; the sounds on the quays, the dress and voices of the natives, the food and fruits offered for sale, the scents in the air, the clang of the bells, the sameness and the strangeness of so much, the mingled beauty and baseness of so much, the inspiration and the despair of meeting humanity variously disguised, for ever unalterable.

But Sophy——

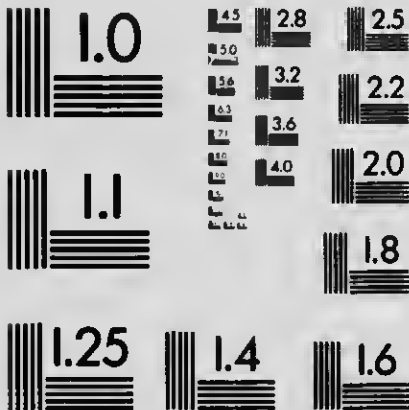
Had he not set her in the city not made with hands, and had he not seen her as the well-beloved, the fairest among women? His remembrance of her fell suddenly as a veil over his eyes, shutting out all other faces and sights; he knew he was





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supremely fascinated, that he loved her as he loved no one else, as he had never loved before, as he would never love again. Perhaps it was a madness; his senses ached and his heart failed, and a mortal physical coldness possessed him when he told himself once more that everything between them was at an end.

"I'll leave England to-morrow," he exclaimed. "I'll go to the South, and feed, like the grasshopper, on dust, songs, and the sun. After all, I have my dreams and the stars."

This is the strength of the creative mind: it has faith in faith—in the undemonstrable, the intangible, the unattainable; and, when the visible proves a deception, the artist and the idealist are but the more confirmed in their passion for the things which pass for unrealities because they cannot be grasped and thus disfigured or soiled.

## CHAPTER XI

SOPHY still remained alone brooding over her own feelings. A woman never considers love and passion as an abstract. It is associated always in her imagination with the man or with the men she has loved; with the man or with the men who have loved her. Love is the person and the ways of her lover; and the subject—its significance, its philosophy—depends wholly on the quality of her own affection and on her experience of men in the character of wooers.

“How strange it is to be kissed,” she thought. “Why should it mean so much, and why shall I never be able to forget it? Perhaps it meant hardly anything to him—he has kissed many others. He loves me; but there is now a barrier, a gulf, between us.”

As the day wore on and she received no word from him her heart grew heavy. Would he go away for ever—hard and resentful to the end? Would he accept her refusal? Was he too angry to believe that she too was suffering? When Jim returned home after his visit to Lady Marlesford, Sophy went to the top of the staircase and called him softly. He ran up to her room, half

expecting to find her in tears. But she was quiet, and a baffling smile played round her lips.

"He hasn't written," she said.

"Give him time," said Jim.

She shook her head.

"I am in no hurry now to hear from him. Whatever he sends will be harsh and bitter. He doesn't understand. He thinks I have a little, mean soul—afraid of hell-fire and the deacons. He is a Pagan—he has always said so. His god is the gods, and he thinks our religion is subtle, hypocritical, and cold. To him the sacred itself is what you and I would call profane. He sees no antagonism between the soul and the body, or between duty and pleasure. If we don't all follow our wishes, he thinks it is merely because the wishes are not strong enough, or that we are cowards. It is all going to be very grim for me."

She did not go down to supper, and she barely tasted the food which was sent up to her. During the night she slept a little, but she woke every hour and walked about the room in order to relieve the oppression which weighed upon her spirits. Lessard's handsome face, contracted with anger, disappointment, and pride, rose before her; the intense joy of their meeting seemed killed and its memory effaced by the misery of their last words in Dr. Firmalden's study.

"He does not love me. He cannot love me," she told herself. And again, "Yet why did he come back if he did not love me? He must love

mc. He is angry now, but later he will be kinder."

At eight o'clock in the morning she heard the postman's bell. She dared not rush down to the letter-box for fear of finding no letter from Lessard. The housemaid, with a tender air, brought it up to her. At the sight of the envelope Sophy felt a strange sensation of pleasure and terror—pleasure because the letter was from her lover, terror lest the contents should prove harsh reading. For some time she turned it over and over in her hands, not breaking the seal.

"If it begins coldly what shall I do?"

At last she found the resolution to open it. The first word was as cruel as a stab in her heart, and the sharpness of the pang, the pain of the wounds, accumulated with each line. Lessard went so far beyond her worst conceptions of bitterness that the anguish of the surprise seemed to break something in her very body. Scalding tears—tears made, she thought, of steel and flint—gushed from her eyes, bringing neither relief nor wisdom. It was a blind woe—animal, instinctive, unavailing, and comfortless. When the unhappy girl began to think again, she thought herself the most desolate creature in the world. She longed for death; she hated life.

"I don't want to live! I don't want to live! It's too hard," she repeated, wringing her hands and stumbling to and fro in the small room.

At last she bathed and dressed, but her face

was disfigured by violent weeping, and when she went to the looking-glass to brush her hair and arrange it she started back from her own reflection—she seemed so changed.

Dr. Firmalden, meanwhile, had sent for Dulcibella Banish, and that amiable woman replied to his summons by driving, immediately after her breakfast, to her brother-in-law's house. She found him in his study.

"This man Lessard," said she, "is a man any girl would like. He's handsome and romantic. Probably he is much taken with her, and we have all heard him sing. Too divine! Now, we won't argue with Sophy. Madness! Charles wants to go abroad for a little tour next week. He's tired. We'll take Sophy with us—she must see fresh scenes and other faces."

Sophy, when she heard of the invitation, felt excited in spite of herself. Jim gave her some pocket-money and fifty pounds for some new clothes, and her father never referred to Lessard or to love affairs. He studied maps, guide-books, and histories, and talked in his best vein, at every meal until her departure, of the places she would visit. She left London with Sir Charles and Lady Banish for Rome. She had never been farther from London than Paris. As she entered new strange lands her imagination insensibly quickened; her ideas received a new turn; she realised, with unwillingness and fear, that many of her notions about life were absurd. But her

energies were spent in absorbing the beauty and wonders of Italy: she forgot to be wretched, and her sadness, augmented by the romance of her surroundings, became a part of them also. A force in her spirit, which had always seemed dumb, inactive, and incomprehensible, now stirred and lived. Agitated and transformed, her inward life became a richer possession. She depended less, she believed, on companionship and love; she spent her ardour upon art and ideas.

"I will become a serious student," she thought, "and write history or books about pictures."

Lady Banish made no attempt to gain the girl's confidence. She noticed, however, that she ate sparingly, that she was losing her brilliant colour, that she was silent, meditative, and dreamy. One day, when they were driving together to Fiesole, Sophy said, with abruptness—

"Of course father told you about Maurice Lessard. Lessard wrote to me, and I found I had nothing to say in reply. So I never answered his letter."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"Do you care for him?"

"I don't know. I don't think I shall ever care again very much for anybody. It is all so disappointing."

"If you saw him would you be glad?"

"I should want to be invisible—I should want to go away. It would be misery to see him."



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Lady Banish looked anxious and pursed up her lips. Subtleties and contrarieties in emotion annoyed her. She compared every love with her own feelings toward Sir Charles. If she and Sir Charles had quarrelled, the sooner they could have come to an understanding the better. Why want to be invisible? Why want to run away? What nonsense!

At Venice Sir Charles, who, cut off from all male companionship, was becoming restive, returned triumphantly to dinner one evening with a young friend whom he had met on the Piazza of St. Mark's. This young friend had a good figure, passable looks, and excellent manners. He was the third son of Viscount Burghwallis. He had been told by the Headmaster of Harrow to qualify for the Bar, marry a rich solicitor's daughter, enter Parliament, and become Solicitor-General. Such were his plans. But he had ideals also. He knew he could not afford to marry a poor girl; he was determined never to marry for money alone. When Sir Charles Banish introduced him to Sophy he saw that she was beautiful, and he assumed that, as the favourite niece of a successful childless man, she had probably sound expectations. Sir Charles had it in his power to make the fortune of any junior with moderate brains and industrious habits. Burghwallis was not vain. He had gauged his own ability with an impartial mind. He was above the average, but he needed the right kind of influence to push

him forward. Banish had always been kind to him. This, therefore, was the decisive moment in which to make a permanent impression on the distinguished judge. Burghwallis soon became indispensable to the gaiety of the party. Lady Banish found him attentive and amusing; the judge congratulated himself on having found such a welcome addition to the domestic trio. Sophy's spirits rose; she moped no longer. It became evident to her aunt that Burghwallis was forming serious attentions and falling in love. Burghwallis, attracted in the first place by Sophy's appearance, and secondly by her position, felt justified in allowing himself to drift as madly as he pleased into a real passion. During the mornings they visited churches and palaces, discoursed on books, pictures, and history; in the afternoons they went to the Giardini, or in gondolas to the Lido, where they took tea on the pier and walked on the beach. Towards twilight they became gradually more tender, more confidential; they spoke in lower voices, they leaned forward and touched each other sometimes while speaking. At dinner all would be ordinary again; the judge told admirable stories; Lady Banish excelled in the rare art of retailing good-natured gossip with a witty tongue; Burghwallis and Sophy, delighted listeners, laughed, threw in remarks, and asked questions which offered their elders every opportunity to be instructive. The days passed as though the one anxiety in life was to find some new restaurant

where one could have luncheon, see interesting people, and enjoy a view. After dinner they would all sit outside Florian's, on the Piazza, and listen to the band, or go to the theatre where Duse was appearing in several famous plays. Sophy had never seen or read *La Dame aux Camélias*, or *La Princesse de Bagdad*, or *Fédora*, or *La Princesse Georges*. Sir Charles at first had considered them too violent entertainments for a young girl, but his wife overruled his objections by saying that the best cure for sentimentality was to see the excesses to which it led.

"What do you think?" she asked, turning to Burghwallis, who happened to be present.

Flattered at being drawn into the discussion, he agreed with Lady Banish, and added—

"Besides, Miss Firmalden could not possibly understand the plays. They could do her no harm."

They stirred her emotions to the depths, however; they set her thoughts flying hither and yon as frightened birds at the sound of firing; confusion, terror, and the fascination of strange doctrines stole into her soul. The spectacle of such lovers as Armand and Ipanoff and the Prince Georges de Briac made her cynical, and she despised the weakness of the heroines. Her own little story was enacted, so it seemed, in each of these dramas.

"I will never again think of Maurice! I will forget him!" she promised herself. "This wild

love is madness—it leaves nothing but regret and humiliation.”

She was thus in a mood to appreciate the companionship of the straightforward, prosaic Burghwallis. His expressed notions of duty were irreproachable; his character seemed perfectly balanced; she found him a tower of strength, and the thought that he was there by her side to steady her gave greater freedom to her imagination, while it saved her from taking its caprices too seriously. Burghwal's put no brake on his increasing affection for the very handsome and striking girl. He forgot the caution acquired by his worldly education for a successful career. Youth and nature were still stronger in him than prudence. He was already irrevocably infatuated before he approached Sir Charles on the subject of making a formal proposal to his niece.

“I suppose you know,” said the judge, “that she hasn't a penny. And she has no expectations of any kind.”

Burghwallis's demeanour under the thunderbolt was beyond praise.

“In that case, sir,” said he sturdily, “we must wait—if she will have me—before we can afford to marry. My father allows me five hundred a year, and anything beyond that I must earn for myself.”

“Quite right, too,” said Sir Charles.

“I'd wait years for her—if necessary. The question is, would she wait for me?”

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"You have my permission to ask her."

The young man, who had a peculiar rolling gait which seemed an exaggeration of the walk wrongly considered characteristic of naval officers, wheeled away from Sir Charles and started at a fierce pace from the café where they were sitting toward the Doge's Palace and the Riva Schiavoni.

"If she will have me I must manage somehow," he said to himself. "Money isn't everything. I'm sick of it. I never thought Banish was a screw, but even if he is he could put me in the way of getting work. And if he won't do that, if he got on, why shouldn't I get on—relatively, at any rate? I'm not brilliant; still, I'm above the average when it comes to seeing a thing through. All depends on Sophy. She's a lovely girl. I'll marry Sophy or nobody. My people will make a fuss at first, but they'll slow down when they find me determined." He set his jaw and the thin lips of his well-cut yet crookedly placed mouth; his blue eyes flashed, and he moved his square shoulders as though he were testing their bearing capacity. Sir Charles, who watched him till he was out of sight, wore an expression of kindness and admiration.

"A very good fellow. That is what I like to see. He doesn't expect to begin where his elders are leaving off. He's a capital fellow. Sophy is very lucky to get him. But Sophy is a charming girl. He, too, is in luck. Really, I'm delighted. It's most satisfactory."

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## CHAPTER XII

THAT afternoon Lady Banish complained of a headache. She remained on the sofa in her sitting-room, while Sir Charles, always attentive, dozed over a French novel in his arm-chair by the window, which overlooked the Lagoon and faced the Island of S. Giorgio. From time to time he would kill a mosquito, or lean out to condemn the small steamers which were gliding to anchor, to praise the gondolas, and to admire the panorama.

"It is exactly like the coloured postcards," he said; "really, they alone can give strangers who have never seen the place an impression of its effect. A fine imaginative picture might be Venice or any other spot observed by an artistic and inaccurate eye. But for actuality—the postcards cannot be beaten."

"Quite true," said Lady Banish, who was half-asleep.

Sophy had been writing long letters to her father and to Jim. She was wondering whether Burghwallis would call as usual, when, to her relief, he was announced. He wore a grey suit she had not seen before, and his appearance had suffered at the hands of an unskilful hairdresser.

"It's cut too short! The man was a fool!" he said at once, as he caught Sophy's glance.

Neither of the Banishes was inclined to go out. Could Miss Sophy come for a walk in the Gardens?

"It would do her good," said Lady Banish.

Sophy picked up her hat, which was lying on the table, pinned it on to her hair, gazed in the mirror, and coloured up to find Burghwallis's eyes meeting hers in the reflection. Her hand trembled a little, but her heart kept its tranquil beat. She liked Burghwallis, and if Lessard had been her first love the young barrister was her first friend—the one man with whom she had ever been on terms of real comradeship. There had been no comradeship, or any sense of it, with Lessard. She sighed as she realised the difference in the relation, and the next moment she reproached herself for sighing.

"That love was a bondage—I was delivered from it!"

She thought she had conquered her weakness; she forbade herself to think of the past, and she was under the illusion that her effort had been useful, that really she had almost forgotten Lessard—that she was cured.

"A friend of mine," said Burghwallis, as the two descended the stairs, "has a garden on the Giudecca. I may take you there if you would care to see it."

They called a gondola and went across the Lagoon toward the Redemptore. It was still

early in the afternoon; the water seemed as still as the air, and, under the pale, opalescent sky, it took strange tones of green. At last they came to a wall, half-way down a narrow canal, overhung with acacias, tamarisks, and willows. They went up some steps, through a gate, and into a garden. The gardener's house had green shutters and white walls covered with roses and clematis; the paths of the garden were arranged as pergolas with grape-vines overhead, and, on each side, beds of pink begonias, crimson dahlias, Michaelmas daisies, scarlet salvias, roses, bamboo, and white anemones. A few gardeners were at work, otherwise it was deserted.

"How romantic!" said Sophy.

"I thought you would like it," replied Burghwallis, in a husky voice.

They wandered up and down, looking at the flowers and plants till they found themselves under an old stone gateway which led by a path set with red ramblers to a terrace facing the Lagoon. To the left they saw the Campanile of S. Lazzaro, and boats with yellow and brown sails moving idly on the glassy water; to the right, far away, were the dark blue Euganean hills.

"I'm so thankful tourists do not come here," said Burghwallis. Sophy did not hear him. Her dreams wandered away beyond her control. The Euganean hills faded, and she saw instead the mist over London driving back from Barnet, the high trees of the Broad Walk in Kensington



Gardens; she felt again the pressure of Lessard's arm around her waist, the touch of his face against her own. She turned with a sort of agony from Burghwallis, but he supposed she had been startled by two small lizards which darted across the balustrade of the terrace. They walked down another path till they came to a square stone pond with orange trees in terra-cotta pots at each corner. The frogs, which had been croaking till the footsteps alarmed them, ceased and were silent. Farther on there was an arbour covered with wisteria, from which a swarm of sparrows, at the approach of the couple, flew, chattering and noisy, to a magnolia near by. From that particular corner the dome of the Redemptore showed plainly against the clouds. Burghwallis paused to enjoy the whole scene.

"This is really very nice," he stammered.

The garden was not large, but the paths were long and shady.

"One could spend hours here," said the young man. Then, all at once, he began to speak rapidly, as all silent persons whose words accumulate, and, once in movement, rush forth with uncontrollable vehemence. He said nothing he had hoped to say. He did not recognise a single thought he uttered. His speech fell as newly on his own ears as it did on Sophy's. Nevertheless, it came from his heart—which he had never before been indulged, except vaguely, years before, in sentimental affairs of no importance, in passing intense, inarticulate

admiration for pretty girls met at dances, at cricket matches, up the river, or abroad—girls whom he could not dream of marrying because they were either too poor or too rich for his position. But since he had heard that Sophy had no money he felt within him the cravings of the superman, the certainty of his own feelings.

"This is the real thing," he knew. "I'm hard hit and no mistake. I shall never get over it."

"I have always thought that a man ought to marry. I don't care for a bachelor's life—one gets selfish," he began, "one gets brutalised. To marry for worldly reasons is repulsive; to marry for love is not always possible. So many remain single—often enough against their wills. It will be a terrible thing for me now—after knowing you and being so much with you—if—if—all this is to end."

Sophy glanced at him quickly, and recognised for the first time the distinction of his features.

"I haven't dared ask myself how long this could go on, or whether you felt as I did. I hoped you didn't mind me. We have so much in common. I have never talked to anybody as I have talked to you. I've led a stupid, humdrum sort of life on conventional lines. My friends and my people seemed well enough till I met you. Now I know that the sympathy, and that kind of thing one reads of, is not nonsense. I should like to say that I love you, but it sounds silly after all the idiotic songs and jokes on the subject. It is too

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much like the tenor in a musical comedy. I always feel uncomfortable when couples bawl love-duets on the stage. They make too light of a feeling which I always knew was deadly serious and ought to be sacred. I can tell you that because you understand."

"Oh yes," said Sophy, sadly, "I understand. But don't you wonder why I understand?"

"No, I never wonder about you; everything seems so natural."

"Well, then, I once loved somebody very much, terribly. I don't love him any more. But I don't wish to see him or to hear his name or to speak of him. My father wouldn't consent to our marriage. That is why they brought me abroad—to help me to forget him."

Burghwallis stared at her, and his heart contracted.

"He's nothing to you now?" he said; "you don't make yourself unhappy about him?"

He wanted to add that it must all have been a girl's fancy, but he feared to wound her feelings.

"He was never such a friend as you are," answered Sophy.

Burghwallis took her hand; she allowed it to remain in his. He stepped nearer and almost timidly kissed her cheek.

"I have been wanting to do that for ever so long," said he.

His confidence increased; he drew her unresistingly; arm through his own while he still held her

hand; and he talked, without betraying his emotion, about their first meeting; how she had attracted him strongly at once, how he had felt happy the moment she spoke to him, how he had dreamt of her and thought about her incessantly.

"When I am not with you, you're always in my mind. I never believed I should fall in love. It shows how little we know ourselves."

There was quiet and determination under his words. The girl enjoyed listening, and although she remembered the more romantic protestations of Lessard, she wished not to do so. It was as though one musician were playing against another—trying to overwhelm sound by sound.

He spoke of his people and of his prospects.

"My mother can be charming when she likes. My father is the best-natured man in the world. Nothing troubles him. My two brothers are less satisfactory. The eldest is married, and he lives to amuse himself. The other is in India—on the Viceroy's staff. All he cares about is polo. When he can't play he thinks of it—so it is always in his life. None of them can make me out. I want my independence, and I like work. My brothers call any sort of ambition vulgar. They are so self-satisfied. We are all civil enough to each other when we meet, but neither of them cares for anybody who isn't rich. I'm badly off in comparison with their gang—who manage to get everything that is going whether they can afford it or not."

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"My father and I are quite out of the world," said Sophy.

"But that's a shame!" exclaimed Burghwallis; "you ought to be known and seen. There isn't a girl in London who is a patch on you—in any respect."

Presently he referred to their life after marriage. One could take a small, good house and furnish it by degrees.

"At that rate we can still be furnishing when we are quite old. How people will envy us!"

They could not marry perhaps for a year, or at most eighteen months.

"These fellows are beginning to see that I mean business, that I intend to get on."

From time to time he pressed her arm more closely against his own, and they felt in perfect agreement. At last silence fell upon them. They were contented to pace the paths together without speaking or thinking till the sun set.

## CHAPTER XIII

A FORTNIGHT later Sophy sat in the railway carriage bound from Venice to Paris, reading again and again the following announcement in the *Morning Post*:—

“A marriage has been arranged between the Hon. Francis Burghwallis, third son of Viscount Burghwallis, and Sophia, only daughter of the Rev. James Firmalden, D.D.”

These simple lines were the result of the letters, interviews, scenes, discussions, tempers, and agitation to which the engagement had given rise. Lady Burghwallis had relapsed into an illness; his lordship had fled to one of his neglected estates in an intolerable climate, unfit for women, where he went fishing and slept serenely. Dr. Firmalden had been indignant at the attitude of the Burghwallis family, who freely declared that Francis was making a terrible *mésalliance*. Francis, however, fought his relatives with fury; defied them and their friends; swore he would never forgive them; wrote superb epistles in magnificent prose, and finally shouted—

“I want nothing from any of you!”

Whereupon his mother begged him to be sensible

and come to dinner and talk things over quietly. The reconciliation was convenient if not deep.

"Of course, if you choose to go on your own, we can't complain," said her ladyship. "If you are bent on being a fool, it is at least a saving grace on your part not to expect your father to pay the bill. But I hope you realise that your career is at an end."

"That is where we differ. I think it is just beginning," said Francis.

Sophy, who had never heard bitter words on the subject of money, was saddened in a dull way by the interminable talk about Frank's income and her own small dowry. Dr. Firmalden had promised to allow her sixty pounds a year.

"It would make a cat laugh," said Lady Burghwallis.

But although the dreary quarrels seemed ignominious, Frank's manliness developed under the strain. Sophy admired his dogged will, and she was abashed by his devotion to herself. That morning she had received a telegram from Lesard:—

"Why don't you answer my letter?—Maurice."

Well, now she would answer it, because fate had already answered it for her, she believed.

Meanwhile she looked out of the window at all she was leaving—the olive trees and cypresses, the square white houses with red roofs, the campaniles,

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the snow-capped mountains, the vineyards, the hillside villages, the gay balconies, the leafy Belvederes, and grey domes; the tilled plains, the large tranquil lake of Garóa, the willow trees, the elms, and ilexes. When would she see them again?

"I must see them again. I'll come back."

Then she tried to think out her reply to Lesard's telegram:—

"Surely you see that we could never agree. I don't understand what you mean by Paganism, but it is against God, and very dangerous. I could never feel sure of you. I can't tell you how unhappy I have been. But nothing will change me now. I am determined to forget you and put you from my mind. My father was right. He is a just man, and his justice is terrible. I can't argue about it all."

She could find no more to say; her heart, lulled by the rhythm of the rolling wheels and the movement of the train, seemed to fall asleep.

The next day the air was a little colder, the sky a little less vivid. The country was France, and the train rushed through pasture land and fields of gathered wheat; the horizon seemed illimitable with high black trees far off against the pale blue light. There were low arched bridges over streams; square white houses with grey shutters; walled gardens for fruit; farms and thatched cottages. Here the spires were narrow and slate-covered;



there were low hills and long white winding roads; short apple trees and calm meadows. Jim had told her so much about France that it had become as familiar to her as her own country. The soil, chequered by cultivation into grey, green, yellow, and brown tracts, gave a curious orderliness to nature. But the peace vanished as the train approached the suburbs of Paris with their drab villas in gay gardens; the cafés and the Seine glittering in the sunlight; market carts and covered waggons on the high roads; haystacks, potato fields, factory chimneys, acres of plants under forcing glass. Then signal-stations and telegraph poles grew larger and insistent; huge advertisements of coffee, cocoa, and mineral waters obscured the outlook; squalid apartment houses and long rows of goods carriages led to the final destination.

"Here we are," exclaimed Sir Charles; "and we are only five minutes late."

The drive from the Gare de Lyon to the Place Vendôme is at first disappointing—through the Rue de Bercy and the ugly Boulevard Diderot to the Quays. But Sophy caught a glimpse of the Place de la Bastille and the dome of the Pantheon. Then, at Pont-Sully, there is a charming bend in the Seine—one can see a long way up the river, and the sombre towers of Notre Dame. The Rue de Rivoli, disfigured by huge shop-windows with monstrous lettering, was crowded by omnibuses, fiacres, carts, and men and women of every description swarming among the vehicles and on

the pavement. The bustle, noise, and vulgarity stifled every romantic sentiment, and made the recollection of any fairer scenes impossible or ridiculous.

"This is quite home-like," said Sir Charles; "we shall drink no more Paradiso for some time; already I doubt that art is the greatest thing on earth! Ruskin and the big portmanteaux must be packed away till the year after next!"

Sophy said nothing.

## CHAPTER XIV

STEVIE had been married to Burghwallis six months when his relatives, relieved that he did not ask them for money, sent the young couple invitations to Sunday luncheons—useful luncheons they were called, because the men who could attend these meals were too busy on week-days to venture into amusing society before the dinner-hour. Frank, in pride, wished to refuse these invitations, which he described as offensive patronage. Sophy, prouder than he, wished to accept them in order to show her gentle contempt for the hostility first shown toward their marriage. Little by little, peace was brought about with Lady Burghwallis, who led a family chorus to the effect that her daughter-in-law was beautiful, surpassingly well-bred, and an excellent wife. Her ladyship decided to give an evening party—ostensibly to meet the unavoidable members of a Liberal League, but in fact to proclaim her full approbation of her son's choice.

At eleven o'clock, on the evening of the entertainment, a long line of carriages filled one side of Park Lane, and another long line extended from the Burghwallis's town house in Brook Street to

Grosvenor Square. It was a spring night in early March, cold and grey, with a sharp, shrill wind and a few hard stars in the severe sky. Lady Burghwallis was one of the few Liberal hostesses of the old Whig school: she was Low Church on principle, and broad-minded because she was the daughter of a duke; she happened to be handsome; the circumstances of her birth had given her natural intelligence and amiability every opportunity of development on the most distinguished lines; she had always met clever and important persons in the best way and at the right moment. Unpopular with numbers of pretentious people she was very much admired and greatly loved by the few whom she knew intimately. Fortitude, strength of character, and loyalty were her virtues; she was considered hard by middle-class or vulgar sinners, but to members of her own immediate circle she was lenient to the point of tenderness, and the staunch ally of frailty, whether male or female, so long as it did not diverge from the unwritten rules of what is known as good taste in trespassing. Herself strictly virtuous, she could make or mar a reputation by a smile in one case or a stare in the other. To be snubbed by Minnie Burghwallis was more damning than an expulsion from a club or the cut direct from an entire county. The prejudices of a county could always be explained as provincialism; the frowns of Lady Burghwallis could only arise from the just indignation of a cosmic wisdom driven

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to resentment. She had power, and, although she was a woman, she did not abuse it or trifle with it.

"My mother certainly does these things very well," said Frank to Sophy, looking out of their four-wheeler at the landaus and chariots and broughams, the fine horses and the liveried servants, at the flashing jewels and the glimpses of fur, finery, and laces seen through the carriage windows of the several hundred guests who were on the way to Wallis House. It was Sophy's first entrance to the world of big official and semi-official gatherings; of dinners where the distinguished met the coming and the celebrated in full dress and without any sort of confidence in each other's motives; of a candidly artificial atmosphere and theatrical effect: the world, in fact, which is made by earnest dissemblers for other earnest dissemblers, and described by the newspapers for those who must have their social illusions nourished.

"As it is so early in the season—Parliament only just opened," said Frank, "everybody will play up, and the whole thing will go with a tremendous swing."

By the time their four-wheeler had reached the door and the striped awning and the blaze of light, the music of the White Hungarian Band was filling the air with infectious gaiety.

"I believe I'm going to enjoy myself after all," said the young man.

He was tired because he had been devilling since six that morning for a brilliant member of the Bar, whose parliamentary duties made the writing of speeches difficult, and professional work almost out of the question—although he secured the fees of an enormous practice. Frank was also correcting the proofs and rewriting (incidentally) the same gentleman's monumental, long-expected work on *The Development of the Idea of Equity*, which, it was said, would make the Woolsack a dead certainty for the reclining years of its learned author. Frank was getting on beyond question; he was perfectly happy—when he had time to realise his happiness (which was seldom)—but the strain of overwork was beginning to show in a certain tightness of skin on his temples, the compression of his lips, and the too vivid patch of colour on his cheek-bones.

“I will let them see that I'm not joking,” he would say. Sometimes he worked till midnight and rose at five. Sophy would get up also, and make his tea and keep the fire burning. As he crossed his father's hall, and looked at the wide marble staircase, with the portraits (by Reynolds and Lawrence) of his ancestors, and the statues of goddesses by Canova (once the talk of the town, but now condemned), at the tapestries, the gilt candelabra, the flunkeys in plush breeches and powdered hair, and, at the top of the staircase, his mother—serene, gracious, in white brocade and emeralds—he thought he must be dreaming of a

bad picture. It was all unreal, unsubstantial, formless, and, for some reason, ridiculous. His mother alone was not ridiculous; she wore a mysterious expression always—as though her thoughts were superior to most occasions, and she were under a fatal necessity to go through many a performance with a philosopher's spirit and the air of a mere woman of fashion.

“My poor mother!” he murmured involuntarily, and for the first time in his life. She pressed his hand, and a glance of kindness quelled the fire of her eyes. Sophy she patted on the arm—not spontaneously, but with deliberation. Everyone leaning over the balustrade or standing near the central door observed the pat, the affectionate suggestion in her smile of a kiss postponed till a less formal moment, the readjustment of a small diamond brooch in Sophy's bodice, the audible “Charming, dearest!”

Frank and his wife passed into the large drawing-room, where he recognised the Prime Minister talking to a pretty lady, the Lord Chancellor being bored by some vehement Leaguer with a grievance, a bishop exchanging compliments with an eminent and handsome evangelical peeress, the President of the Divorce Court smiling at a potential sinner, and the French Ambassador bowing before the conversation of a striking personage who wore, among other jewels, a string of Mexican opals each the size of a common beetle. She looked like a portrait by Sargent touched up by a hair-

dresser, and she was the beauty of that particular year. Another woman of higher rank and incalculable age, with dark red cheeks and a coal-black wig, a necklace of rubies, a diamond crown, a tight pink satin gown, and an oppressed, large body, was telling, in loud tones, an ex-Viceroy of Ireland the kind of food which invariably gave her a pain. He looked concerned, and, no doubt out of sheer friendship, felt all that interest which the importance of the sufferer must have made necessary in any case.

The next room was occupied by less remarkable but still well-known persons, who had been detached from the highly distinguished by some strange law of social gravitation as vexatious to its victims as it is agreeable to the benefited. An air of injury clouded every countenance; no one cared to waste his gifts on his neighbour, and, without appearing to be so engaged, each was endeavouring to glide unperceived out of his own into the exclusive set. Each was equally determined to oppose this nonsense on another's part. Conversation was listless, and those who spoke studied objects of art on the wall in order to avoid eyes which they preferred infinitely not to catch. Beyond this ante-chamber of the displeased, a vivacious crowd of the younger generation were flirting, plotting, laughing, chattering, and whispering.

Frank was seized by a plump girl cousin, Lady Edith Wynne, in blue tulle and poppies.



"It's dear old Frankie! Poor old chap! How thin you look!"

Sophy heard no more. All her senses were suddenly arrested by the sight of Maurice Lessard leaning against an opposite door and waiting, with scornful patience, for her approach. He moved forward, and in a moment he was at her side.

"I have come all the way from Venice in order to be here to-night!" he exclaimed.

As, on the stage, a woodland will melt and transform into a royal court or a humble lodging, the lively scene before Sophy's eyes became her father's study in Bayswater: she remembered sitting on the horsehair sofa crying bitterly while Lessard and Dr. Firmalden had their last interview; she felt once more the cold wind rush in through the open door after Lessard's departure; she heard the fall of his angry steps retreating down the garden path. It all came back unforgettably, and with the ghastliness of an apparition.

"Frank," she said, turning to her husband, "this is Mr. Lessard."

The two men bowed, and surveyed each other with swift, icy astonishment. Burghwallis saw that Lessard was handsome; Lessard thought Burghwallis nervous, delicate, and disappointing. They wished, from the depths of their souls, never to meet again, and the strength of their shared desire amounted to a fellow-feeling which reduced the simpler emotion of jealousy to an inconsid-

able pang. The plump vision in blue tulle did not relax her hold of Frank's arm.

"Now that your wife has a man," she said, "you can get me something to eat. You mustn't stick by her the whole evening. Don't be a frump!"

He glanced at Sophy, who had regained her composure. They had agreed all along that if they should ever encounter Lessard, he was to be treated as a friend. For the rest, they trusted to his tact and their own manners.

"After all," said Burghwallis to himself, "she must see him sooner or later. I daresay he is cut up. She will know what to do." He smiled his faith into her eyes, and passed on with Lady Edith toward the supper-room.

"He is incapable of a mean idea," thought Sophy, with a thrill of admiration. Lessard read the thought in her joyous face, and he knew that his old power over her was at an end. Still, much remained; she had loved him desperately; there could never be less than a painful affection, a sense of something broken between them. It would not degenerate into the pulseless sentiment which women call comradeship.

"Come into the tent and talk," he said. "I'm not going to reproach you. I see it is all over. But you might at least tell me how it all happened."

"I will," she said quietly.

The room was now so full that it was impossible

for any two to walk side by side. Lessard led the way through the throng down the staircase to a tent beyond the dining-room. Several couples were already there, but it was quiet, and there were still a few unoccupied chairs under the shaded lamps or near towering palms.

"I will tell you how it happened," said Sophy, who did not recognise the sound of her own voice. She felt that someone else was speaking for her. "You see it was a question of principle."

"Of principle!" he repeated. "Surely you are not going to begin again about my soul?"

"Why not? What is more important? That lasts for ever. I detested your letter. I couldn't answer it. I knew you were angry, and I made every allowance. But it stabbed me all over; it killed me. I buried myself: I put a large stone over the grave!"

"What expressions you use!"

"I am now another being. I'm not the Sophy you used to know. I remember her better than you do."

"You are exactly the same Sophy—word for word, notion for notion! I can see that you are fond of your husband, but you married him because he has a fine character. You are as true as steel to him. It is, however, *steel*," he added, with malicious emphasis and a bitter laugh.

"Don't say that!"

"You don't want me to say it because it is true!"

"Half the truth. I love him as I could never have loved you."

"All the same, I wouldn't give the love you once had for me in exchange for the love which you now feel for him!"

"It's a shame even to speak of the difference," she said. "I did care for you," she went on, blushing; "the things I once said to you were true; they would have been inexcusable if I had not cared. You knew I cared. And I met you in Kensington Gardens, and all that!"

"I was your fate, Sophy."

"No; people don't miss their fates. What is to be, will be. It was my fate to love you in a blind, mad way. Oh no; it wasn't mad—and it was my fate to see the hopelessness——"

"And the wickedness!" he said, with sarcasm. "I was not good enough for you. I wasn't a Methodist—or is it a Congregationalist? When girls speak of love, they mean a degree of preference—nothing more. I thought you had more in you than these others."

He turned abruptly and looked at her beautiful face.

"But you inspired me," he said; "you could have made me do something worth while. You were a woman, and yet much more than a woman to me. You don't realise what you destroyed in my life when you failed me. All my dreams went to pieces."

"And what about mine?" she asked quickly.

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"I didn't fail you," he said.

Her quiet eyes rested on his in a solemn leave-taking.

"I'm glad we met, Maurice. This way of saying good-bye is better than that dreadful parting." Her voice broke; she bit her lip and began again. "Still, it is good-bye. Of course I shall always feel that I know you and understand you better than anybody else. But I don't want to meet you often. Frank and I go out very little. I shan't ask you to come and see us. It makes me unhappy to see you."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

"It is real misery," she said. "I can't bear it—I want to go now."

Rising from her seat, she walked towards the dining-room, where Frank and Lady Edith were seated at a small table covered with silver dishes and food.

"Is there a chair for me?" said Sophy. As there was no place for Lessard, he pretended to see an acquaintance, and he went away.

"I'll have some cherries," said Sophy gaily.

"But there are no cherries," said her husband; "these are grapes."

"How stupid I am! I thought they were cherries."

The murmur of voices and the strains of the band were now so loud, the heat of the rooms was now so oppressive, that to Sophy all the women seemed to resemble caricatures and all the men

seemed like those silhouettes cut out of black paper which are made by wandering artists at country fairs. Lifeless, and without souls, without an aim, and without meaning, they all passed to and fro, smiling foolishly, and speaking empty words. Thus, at least, they appeared to Sophy, whose heart ached with a dull woe, and whose sight was dim with tears unshed.

"Dear Frank!" she thought.

She sat close by him, and, unconsciously, caught hold of his sleeve, and looked down at his hands, which she always admired.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Not when I am with you. It tires me to talk with others."

The buxom cousin dropped her eyelids, flushed, and tittered—

"Oh, you two!" she exclaimed; "I never saw anything like it. Frankie has been watching you the whole time. I couldn't get a word out of him. His neck must ache, he has been twisting it round and round. Well, now she is here again, I hope you are satisfied. Perhaps you may eat something!"

Frank laughed, and his expression, which had been anxious, became serene. He poured out some champagne, teased his cousin about her "little friend," and pressed Sophy's foot with his own under the table. Presently, a tall young man, thin and melancholy, begged the cousin for a dance. They were dancing in the room near the White Hungarian Band.

"Do you want to dance, Sophy?" asked Frank.

"Yes," she said, with sudden vivacity; "I feel as though I could dance for hours."

They followed Lady Edith and her friend up the staircase, and, as the musicians struck up the second movement of Waldteufel's *Dolores*, Burghwallis put his arm round his wife's waist, watched for a gap in the circle of whirling couples, and darted in amongst them. The pair were well matched in height, and their steps went in perfect rhythm together. He himself had taught her how to waltz. She had never danced before her marriage—except in wild inventions of her own, alone in her room to the sound of some street-organ under her sheltered window at the Manse. Lessard saw the two pass him. Sophy was smiling, her cheeks were prettily flushed, her eyes shone like strange dark jewels; while Burghwallis, proud and tender, oblivious of his hard work, of the struggle for success, steered her light, flying course through the dancers.

## CHAPTER XV

LADY BURGHWALLIS sent word to Frank by her husband's valet that she wished to see him in her bedroom after all the guests had gone. What was the matter? Frank knew his mother's habits; it was her custom to retire at the close of a party with a cup of tea and a novel to send her to sleep. On such occasions no one spoke to her, for the family understood that she was as near utter exhaustion as she could permit herself to sink. Why, then, did she want to see him? His heart grew uneasy; he scanned her features when she was not looking at him, and he thought he detected signs of distress under the smoothness of her countenance.

Her bedroom, on the second floor, was a large square apartment, soberly set out with cumbrous mahogany Early Victorian furniture, and hung with dismal maroon curtains. There were no luxuries, and the comfort was austere. Even the dressing-table seemed bare; a couple of ivory-backed hair-brushes, a cut-glass bottle half full of scent, some combs, and a pink satin pineushion were displayed on its white muslin cover. Her ladyship's red merino dressing-gown hung over a



chair, and a pair of quilted slippers were waiting for her tired feet. Frank paced the floor, staring at the sprawling roses of the Brussels carpet, counting the leaves as he had often counted them when he was a small boy, stepping from one yellow centre to another as though they were the stones of a brook.

At last the door opened and his mother appeared—just as he had seen her enter again and again—with her fine head thrown back, her nostrils slightly dilated, her eyes glittering, her lips parted in a statuesque smile, her tiara blazing about her inflexible dark curls. She had a noble figure, and she moved, in her stiff satin gown, with majestic ease.

“My dear boy,” she began, speaking in a low, pleasant voice, “I’m sorry to keep you so late. I can see you are tired to death. I am dog-beat myself.”

She sat down, and began to unfasten her heavy famous bracelets made of massive gold and large gems. On any other woman they would have looked too vulgar to be barbaric, but they suited her calm, white arms, which made any ornament, by comparison, insignificant.

“Frank,” said she, “your father has been persuaded into bad investments, and he has lost a lot of money. It’s a bore, because we must let this house—perhaps sell it. Luckily, it isn’t entailed. For some time, we shall be as poor as rats. I didn’t want to spoil your evening and the party, or I should have told you last week.”

"You kept it all to yourself?"

"Why upset everybody unnecessarily? It is bad enough for one to know it. Your father hasn't taken it in yet. I see no object in making a fuss when nothing can be done to alter the situation. I was vexed with your father; he ought to have consulted me. He is out of place in the City, and he is no match for those sharp City men."

"I can't take it in myself yet," said Frank.

Precisely, and in business terms, she explained the details of the transaction; how she had seen solicitors, the bank manager, the firm of stock-brokers, and, finally, a rich Colonial merchant who would hire Wallis House for the season—with the option of purchasing it outright if his wife found it large enough for her entertainments.

"He will pay almost anything; take all the servants, all the carriages, all the horses, all the wine, all the pictures. Such a relief!"

"A relief, mother? I'm sure you feel it dreadfully."

She had, indeed, suffered a terrible shock, but she had resolved not to betray her desolation.

"I banish it from my mind. Why dwell upon unpleasant things? What is to be, is to be. No one likes to turn out and give one's home to strangers. Still, it has to be done. Be gentle with your father. He's very sensitive, and the smallest word gets on his nerves. I'm afraid it will kill him."

"It won't," said her son; "it is far more likely to kill you."

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"I hope not. Now, good-night, dear boy. Sophy is very handsome, and I'm proud of her. I'm sorry if I seemed unkind in opposing the marriage. One couldn't assume that she was all that she is. She is altogether exceptional. Good-night. I wish I could do something for you. I had hoped to spare a couple of hundred for your house. That's impossible now."

He stooped, she kissed him, and, choking with the sympathy which she forbade him to express, he left the room.

"It will be her death-blow," he said to himself, as he went down the familiar staircase. "I'm hard hit myself. It's very odd."

Sophy, who had been waiting in the hall for him, was startled by his pallor, the darkness round his eyes, and his dazed air.

"The Duchess of Mertford's carriage stops the way."

"Lady Vanborough's carriage stops the way."

"Mrs. Leyton-Master's carriage stops the way."

The footman was calling these last names, while the ladies, complaining fiercely of the stupidity of their servants in being the last on the rank, stepped into their respective vehicles and were driven away.

A four-wheeler was found for Burghwallis and his wife.

"Why didn't you have his lordship's brougham, sir?" whispered the elderly groom of the chambers; "his lordship would have been pleased to send it

if you had asked for it. There it is in the stables half the time."

"This is all right, Marper," said the young man, helping Sophy into the cab.

"What is the matter, Frank?" she asked, after they had gone some way in silence.

He put his arm round her waist.

"My people," said he, "are in trouble. I can't get it through my head yet. I don't mind worry myself; I've been brought up to expect it. But my mother has never had——"

The rest of the sentence stuck in his dry throat. He had always been more proud than he knew of his family's fortune and wealth. These benefits had not advantaged him—for he was a younger son; he had lived rarely at home, and he had never shared the rather magnificent existence of his distinguished parents. But everyone who knew him knew also that Lord and Lady Burghwallis were powerful in what is called the fine world; they spent their money wisely; men honoured them; princes were their friends; the bitterest held no grudge against them, and, for their justice, the poorest had good words.

"My father has been speculating. They have to sell the house. They may have to go abroad," he blurted out.

The lights of a passing hansom illuminated for a second his countenance, which, in the darkness, had been distorted by the strain of self-control. It was impossible for Sophy, educated in a school

of religious obedience to the will of God, to sound the full depths of Frank's feeling. She had been taught to accept misfortune as a sign of Divine favour. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" had been her earliest lesson, and the words of Job, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" were written in her mother's hand over the list of griefs in the family Bible. That it was a hardship to leave a beautiful home, to be distressed by debts, to be obliged to live quietly after a life conducted on superb, if blameless, lines were chagrins easily realised by her vivid imagination, but that such things in themselves could kill any woman or bow any man to the earth seemed to her Puritan mind too near the worship of Mammon. The loss of riches was infinitely less serious to Sophy than the injury of an ideal.

"And while my mother stood there," he continued, "smiling at everybody, looking so well, she had all this on her mind. No one knew—no one could have guessed what she was suffering. I daresay many envied her."

"I wonder why she gave the party," said Sophy.

Astonished at Sophy's lack of comprehension, he replied—

"She gave it for us. She thought it would help us, and show these people that the family were on my side. She's a woman of the world. She should have married a Prime Minister—like Salisbury—not a weak sort of man without the least public spirit—like my poor father."

The more he considered the case, the more disastrous it became. He saw Lady Burghwallis setting her haughty lips, tossing her head, defying an inevitable doom; and the throbbing of his heart, which seemed as a series of blows from an enemy, produced in him a physical nausea.

"Of course," he said, "she will stand up to it, but it's an awful business."

Sophy murmured words of comfort and pity, but the comfort would have been helpful to a pious mind only, while the pity, subtle and reserved, was for the vanity of earthly treasures rather than for the weight of Lady Burghwallis's misfortune. Unwillingly and wretchedly Frank found himself thinking his wife a little hard. It was, between their souls, the everlasting clash of worldliness and other-worldliness; he had been trained to seek, she had been taught to despise, the prizes of life. To her, the world of spirits, though unseen, was present, and eternity was not distant because it reached to the future.

"It is eternity now—it is always eternity," she said.

Frank did not deny this; he thought that he also believed in the City of God elsewhere; but, true or false, it made no difference to the sharpness of his anxiety; it did not affect his fear for his mother's quite incurable mortification of heart.

"This will kill her," he said again.

"But she seemed so cheerful; she looked so handsome!" protested Sophy.

"Naturally," said her husband; "that is playing the game. She'll die in the same way—proud to the last. But can't you see that it is much harder for a woman with her ideas to bear trouble than it could ever be for a woman who thinks as you do? My mother goes to church regularly and all that, but she likes *realities*. She can *see* Wallis House and live in it, and receive all her friends in it; she cannot *see* heaven. What does she, or anybody else, actually know about God? If you lose the thing you know, it makes the things which you *don't* know all the more insecure and nebulous."

"Frank!"

It was now Sophy's turn to feel, as it were, the firmaments dissolving.

"Try," said Frank irritably, "do try to take an outside view of life; to see it as others see it. You have a genius for *not* seeing the obvious. You are full of dreams and ideals. My poor mother is saying, no doubt, 'It is all for the best,' but she can't possibly think so; and if she keeps saying that till she drops, no person of sense or experience could think it was a blessing to be ruined! She is losing all that is precious and dear to her. I own the same things would not be precious and dear to you."

"I have never had them," said Sophy quietly, "and I know it is less of a wrench to give up next to nothing than to give up so much as your mother has."

"Exactly. It is an immense consolation to

struggling nobodies like you and me to think of heaven and happiness hereafter. But to people like my mother, with everything to live for and everything they want, the idea of heaven is bound to be rather mournful—even when they try their best to deceive themselves in the matter. Religion helps you, Sophy, because we are having a bad time. I don't see how I can go on working at this rate."

"But why be so ambitious? Why not be satisfied with less money and a smaller house?"

"I'm not going to fall below the family standard. I'm not going to spend my days as a poor relation. This trouble of my father's is a fresh handicap. It's so depressing."

Sophy could be silent.

"Why don't you speak?" he asked presently.

"I'm praying not to say stupid things," said Sophy; "and I'm praying for your mother."

"I simply couldn't pray in a cab," said Frank. "Besides, no prayers can bring the money back from those scoundrels in that infernal company. If I pray at all, I must make sensible prayers."

He did not know what or where his jealousy was; he was so used to it that he did not call it jealousy. Still, so it was; he was jealous of his wife's religious faith. It fenced her about; it hung as an exquisite veil over her countenance, hiding her from others, and hiding from her the squalor of many appearances; it was the escape from any surroundings to something beyond; it was her



companion when she was humanly companionless ; it was a presence always.

"I won't say a word against your religion, darling," he said suddenly; "but you have a peculiar temperament. You don't need people or things."

The remembrance of all she had suffered in renouncing Lessard, the anguish of the struggle, the discouragement, the thirsty longing for death, made Frank's words sound sharply ironic.

"Once," she said, with sudden passionate feeling, "I gave up all I wanted. If one has ever done that it makes other difficulties simple."

"Oh, I know! You mean that man. Dear child, how innocent you are! Do you compare for one instant a little girl's love affair with such a tragedy as my mother's?"

"I don't compare them. Her happiness has been taken from her against her will. I gave mine up voluntarily. I see now that it all had to be. I didn't see one ray ahead of me at the time."

"We don't wish to rake up that old story," he said.

"It doesn't matter to me now. It might be somebody else's story—I'm so far away from it. But I've been thinking that there are two kinds of men—those who were born to protect us, and those who were born to understand us."

"And to which race do I belong?"

"To those who protect us, darling," she murmured,

moving closer to him. The sense of bodily nearness eased his trouble and hers—for it was a deep though not a tumultuous joy to be together. Sophy's charming head rested against his shoulder.

"If you understood me," she said, "I shouldn't care for you so much. You always misunderstand me to my advantage!"

But she knew that she was now happy, because, in overcoming herself, she had conquered a love which had become sacred only by being foregone.



BOOK III  
THE COMPROMISES

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CHAPTER I

"I'LL wear my pearls—nothing else!"

Lady Marlesford, before the mirror in her dressing-room, was studying the simplest evening gown which she had worn since her marriage. Her social ambitions were being gratified, and she gave less thought to her raiment. She now bought ten dresses at most during the year, whereas she had once thought forty insufficient. The sensation of appearing several times in the same white velvet in the same house pleased her; she spoke openly of the good days when one flowered brocade lasted a lifetime and developed into an heirloom; her friends were astonished at her economies. But she employed the best cooks in London, and every third day gave a large dinner-party.

What did it all mean?

Lord Marlesford, who liked nothing more than peace, offered no opposition to his wife's entertainments. The parties amused him; she brought

clever people together; he heard a great deal of news of the priceless kind which passes only in conversation between the trusted, and he realised that everything was perfectly done—at enormous expense, it is true.

Three years had passed since Tessa's first meeting with young Firmalden on the Dover boat. After a course of training at New College, Hampstead, Jim had been called to the pastorate of a large Congregationalist church in Westminster. The dinner-party on this particular evening was being given in his honour, and the guests who had accepted Tessa's invitation included the Liberal Prime Minister, a Catholic bishop, the editor of a Liberal daily newspaper, some Liberal peers and their wives, a commander-in-chief, the Secretary for Ireland, and a distinguished French novelist.

"How on earth do you get to know these out-of-the-way people?" asked her husband; "and don't you get nervous at the idea of making them like each other?"

"The people who make me nervous are *in-the-way* people," replied Tessa.

"Why are you so hard on people who ain't extraordinary?" asked Marlesford; "my sort, in fact."

"Your sort are extraordinarily simple. I love them. By *in-the-way* people I mean people who are quite intelligent—even sharp, but on a mean scale. They have never become the best thing they can be. They are middle-class—not by birth,

but in their intellect. Is anyone more tiresome than a middle-class duchess? My own poor Aunt Agnes, for instance? Her family goes back to the Picts and Scots; her mind is not yet born. As for her soul, poor pet, it is not awake because it is not mentioned in the *Almanach de Gotha*! I wish we had a Burke about souls. How marvellous it would be!"

Marlesford was always afraid of his wife's humour, which had a revolutionary ring somewhat jarring to his own satisfaction in having married an aristocrat.

"It is easy for you to say these things," he said, "because you happen to have the sixteen quarterings, and all that. But people are bound to think it odd that you make fun of your own set. It is peculiar—you must admit this."

"I do not make fun of any set. All I wish to see is the spectacle of the middle-class and the gallery-class under their respective labels. To play to the gallery is considered an abject performance. Yet the gallery do not feel ashamed of themselves. To be middle-class is to be uninspired. Yet thousands are delighted to be called representatives of the middle-class. My aunt believes she is upper-class. The very belief is second-rate!"

"You get these ideas," said Marlesford slowly, "from Firmalden. He's a Radical. You like to hope that you influence him. He, however, influences you. He is clever, and I like him. But

he's a John Stuart Mill who believes in the Bible. He's not peaceful—like Mill. He is inclined to be highways-and-hedgey. One respects his convictions, of course. They suit him. My point is that they don't suit you."

"Who said that he was a John Stuart Mill with a religion?" asked Tessa, quickly. She knew that Marlesford himself had never composed this description of their friend.

"His own sister said it," replied Marlesford; "she's a clever woman."

"Yes; Sophy Burghwallis is certainly clever. I'm glad that you and she get on so well."

"We scarcely know each other. But, when we do meet, I like her."

"She's coming this evening."

"I thought she was in such deep mourning that she wouldn't dine anywhere."

"Burghwallis has been dead for eighteen months. She must really make some effort to take up her life on sane lines. I said she owed it to her brother. I daresay the party will be torture to her."

"Women give each other the strangest treats!" exclaimed Marlesford; "first you rub in the fact that Firmalden supports her, and then you drag her here against her will."

"For her own good. To me it is all one whether she mopes or whether she revives."

A galling point in Tessa's experience with Firmalden had been her uncrowned endeavour to become intimate with Sophy. Each woman was

secretly jealous of the other's influence, and the man between them sought, without success, for the cause of an estrangement which was to him inexplicable.

"The death of Frank Burghwallis was a shocking thing," said Marlesford; "there's no doubt that he worked and worried himself to death. It's plucky—marrying on nothing a year to speak of—but it seldom answers."

"He was doing splendidly when he died," said Tessa.

"He's dead all the same."

"He should have had more faith," insisted Tessa; "Firmalden himself admits that. Why didn't he have patience? Godalming suddenly resigned. Lord Burghwallis was made Governor of Australia. Lady Burghwallis enjoys the life out there, and when they return all their tiresome money affairs will be in perfect order. Frank took those troubles too much to heart."

"He was run down at the time, and he couldn't cope with them," said Marlesford. "Sophy told me a little about it."

"When did you last see her?" asked Tessa.

"A week or two ago."

"I'm glad to hear of someone who can get on with her. She's very moody."

"I don't pretend to know her well. But I'm sorry for her."

"Everybody is sorry for her. And then she's extremely good-looking."



"I suppose so," said Marlesford, not unaware that he was becoming cautious. This was a new sensation, and he disliked it.

Tessa had much on her mind. Firmalden's determination to remain a Protestant was an agonising disappointment; she had suffered under his obstinacy, his arguments, and his coldness. For these reasons she had turned latterly with gratitude toward Marlesford, who had become a Catholic in answer to her prayers, who had never reproached or rebuked or questioned her even once since their marriage. Firmalden, at times, could not be managed at all. He did not seem to regard her as a woman. He talked to her by the hour; wrote her wonderful letters about the Church and the Evangelists, the "Marseillaise" and the Rights of Man; confided his hopes and fears to her; but never, apparently, submitted to her influence under any disguise. She was young, ardent, arrogant, much indulged, and burning with zeal for her own beliefs. Firmalden's conduct seemed to her provoking, and their friendship, she told herself, was, to some extent, a failure. Nevertheless, she still hoped to colour, even if she could not direct, his mind, which she had once compared with the water moving under a half-frozen lake. Its sway, ebb, and flow went on visibly under the restrained surface.

With a sigh she descended the stairs to the library, where she always received her guests before dinner. There, against a background of

books, all so precious for their contents as they were beautiful to look at, she regained that sense of things worth doing, worth while, and worth admiration which weakens, even if it does not perish, in rooms not sanctified by the atmosphere of work or by the evidences of men's spiritual travail.

Marlesford watched his wife with pride and perplexity. He blamed himself for forgetting how young she was in years for the life she now led. Everyone told him of her cleverness; he knew her charm; her success he saw. But was it natural, at her age, to care supremely for ideas and little for amusement; so much for politics, so dispassionately for politicians? Yet this was the case. True, she liked Firmalden. He, however, had a temperament as singular as her own. He felt as others, but he did not reason as others. He had his loves, his hates, his hopes, his weaknesses, his temptations, his instincts, and his illusions with the rest of mankind; but his thoughts on his own full share of the raw material of humanity were not by any means the thoughts of the average individual.

Marlesford had discussed Jim's character with Sophy often.

## CHAPTER II

EIGHT strokes of the clock rang through the house from the hall and from every room. When one considers in how many church steeples and places the passing of time is simultaneously chimed, it is strange that the noise is not deafening. One rarely heeds it—except under the stress of watching and waiting.

At five minutes past eight, Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone were announced. The Prime Minister's manner, old-fashioned only in the sense that it was exquisitely considerate of others, made both the Marlesfords feel that the dinner was already a success. He did not seem to lead, but to enter a conversation which had already been engrossing. Mrs. Gladstone, on her side, had brought the listener's art to such perfection that, although she was ordinarily silent, she gave feeling and a sort of rhythm to the talk whenever she was present. With young people she had a winning sympathy—unuttered but profound. She smiled at Tessa, and, while neither moved, it was as though the older took the younger woman's hand as one takes a child's hand in a crowd—lest it should stray away or be frightened. The Prime Minister's

wife probably felt by intuition that Lady Marlesford was ambitious—anxious to see her husband in some position of public influence, respected by his country. It was a legitimate hope—for the young couple had between them ideas, money, sincerity, and enthusiasm. Further, the Tories wanted them, and were dismayed at Tessa's admiration of the Liberal statesman.

The next arrival was the Roman Catholic bishop, a handsome man, tall and erect for his somewhat advanced years. Educated and ordained in France, he had, with his English features, more vivacity of expression than is commonly found among Anglo-Saxons. His face bore the unmistakable ecclesiastical stamp which in the Roman Church has never changed with the centuries. Dr. Winthrop, in his sacerdotal robes, would have passed for a prelate at the time of the pre-Raphaelites. Sameness of thoughts and aspirations produce the same lines on the human countenance; the same prayers produce the same persistency in the lips; the same faith gives the same steadfastness to the eyes; the same courage, drawn from the same source, gives the same kind of self-possession.

"We were just speaking of Mr. Firmalden," said Tessa, after she had curtsied, kissed his lordship's ring, and expressed her pleasure at his arrival. "Mr. Gladstone thinks him a loss to the Church of England."

"In that he is opposed to Episcopalian

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authority," said the Prime Minister, with a persuasive voice and a flash from his magnificent eyes.

"Firmalden is rather a French Protestant than an English Dissenter in his views," said the bishop. "Other countries—especially those of Europe—may be compared, but England, with its ideas and customs, is the one place which will never be cosmopolitan. Catholicism—Protestantism itself—takes peculiar, distinctive characteristics in this nation. Its Established Church and its Nonconformity are incomprehensible to the other Protestants of Europe, and dissimilar from American Episcopacy and the like."

"I have a growing conviction," replied Mr. Gladstone, "that English Nonconformity means a robust and consistent application of the principles of the Kingdom of God to the business of public life. Firmalden seems to be preaching that doctrine to the best of his ability."

At that moment a popular Liberal peer and his wife, known to be intimate friends of the Prime Minister, were announced. Her ladyship, adroit and smiling, soon secured the great man's attention, and confided to him in a corner urgent matters relative to the proper government of the empire. Other guests, in due course, arrived; the men paired off; the women chattered vaguely about a wedding which most of them had attended that afternoon, an engagement which had not yet been authoritatively denied, and the sale of Lord

Burghwallis's famous Tanagra statuettes, which at Christie's had realised a surprising amount of money.

Americans will pay anything," observed one gentleman, and he almost resolved mentally to exchange his doubtful Vandyck for a substantial sum.

"I hear, too," murmured the Duchess of Wexborough, who was pretty and amiable and adorned with the finest pearl necklace in England—"I hear, too, that the things will all be bought back again, at the same price, when the Burghwallises return from Australia."

It was now fifteen minutes past eight. Firmalden had not arrived; Marlesford was glancing at his wife, and Mr. Gladstone was looking toward the clock; the voices had dropped, and a certain pensiveness showed on the faces of the company, when they all heard the sound of a carriage halting before the mansion.

Tessa, in her impatienc, went herself to the library door, opened it, and looked out into the hall.

"Well!" she exclaimed. She saw Sophy Burghwallis. She could not see Firmalden. Perhaps he was in the lobby removing his coat.

"Where is your brother?" added Tessa; "we are all waiting for him."

"He couldn't come. There was a man half killed in a fight. Jim had to go to him. But he is terribly disappointed."

"You mean he isn't coming?" said Tessa, blankly.

"He's wretched. All the same, he had no choice in the matter. He says he knows you will understand."

"Perfectly," replied Tessa, regaining her self-possession, although she was unable to hide her disappointment. When she gave the signal to Marlesford to lead the way with the duchess in to dinner, she seemed even gayer than she had been earlier in the evening. As for the guests, they were hungry; they neither missed Firmalden nor observed the beautiful young widow, Mrs. Burghwallis, till they had enjoyed several courses of nourishment. Then the Duke of Wexborough asked his hostess the name of the very striking girl in deep mourning.

"She is Firmalden's sister."

"Indeed!"

"She married Frank Burghwallis."

"Dear me!"

"He died about eighteen months ago."

"To be sure. I well remember thinking at the time what a lot of trouble the Burghwallises were having all at once."

"Who failed you this evening?" asked Lord Cladsworth, a nobleman with a curious resemblance to the pictures of that stout agriculturist, John Bull. He sat at Tessa's left. He, too, was now studying Sophy, who seemed conspicuous because she had the eminent French novelist on one side and a vacant chair on the other. Why had it not been removed?

"Mr. Firmalden was delayed at the last moment," said Tessa; "but I have sent for another man who had promised to come after dinner. He's a man I have never seen!"

"Too amusin'," murmured the duke. But he thought, "How very mad!"

"He is a friend of Mr. Bourget's," continued Tessa; "he is Maurice Lessard, the composer of *Daphnis and Chloe*."

Lord Cladsworth had a fear that the Marlesfords were treating him to mixed society. Still, he took people as he found them.

"While we were at soup," said Tessa, "I wrote Mr. Bourget a little note on the back of my menu."

"And I thought it was a message to your husband!" said the duke.

"Mr. Bourget at once sent a note on his menu to Mr. Lessard, who happens to be stopping with the Rothschilds—quite near, you see. The note was sent by a hansom; the hansom will bring Mr. Lessard back, I hope. By the time we reach the saddle of lamb he should be here."

"Quite like a play," said the duke. "You always manage these charming surprises. The last time we were here you had a musical-box playing *La donna è mobile* under the strawberry ice!"

As he spoke, the butler delivered some message to Lady Marlesford. She smiled at her two neighbours.

"He has arrived!" she said.



### CHAPTER III

EVERYONE at the table was astonished at the unexpected entrance of a tall, rather slight, sun-burnt and handsome man, who, with a single glance, seemed to notice each person and object in the room. He exchanged a few words with Lady Marlesford, and then took the vacant seat between the Under-Secretary's wife and Mrs. Burghwallis.

"Is that this Mr. Firmalden?" said the duchess to Marlesford.

"Oh no!" replied her host. "I don't know who he is. I have never seen him before."

He was greatly vexed with Tessa for placing him in the odd position of not knowing the name of his own guest. Why did she think of these uncalled-for things? The duchess had perceptibly, if slightly, lifted her eyebrows. Tessa was not old enough to show such independence. A middle-aged woman could entertain acquaintances whom she might have had no opportunity of presenting to her husband. But for Tessa, still in the early twenties, to ask, on the spur of the moment, a strange man, almost a foreigner (to judge by his appearance), to join a particularly select party

half-way through dinner was too outrageous for words. His lordship looked his indignant thoughts; the duchess hinted hers by crumbling, with a meditative air, the bread by the side of her plate. Nor did she observe, for a second, the servant who happened to be offering her some peas—out of season. She gave a start as she decided to taste the delicacy.

At the sight of Lessard the room, to Sophy, seemed to whirl—the floor seemed a chasm. She had not met him since the night, three years before, of Lady Burghwallis's party. He was painfully linked in her mind—not with a love affair—but with that fatal evening and the effect of its news on her husband. It was as though an ocean had absorbed a lake. Lessard, to her, was no longer a man she had once cared for beyond reason, but a sinister figure boding ill to her or to those whom she loved. With a sensation of despair she acknowledged his bow, and with defiance she met his questioning eyes.

"Oh, why did I come?" she thought. "I suppose Tessa meant this as a kindness to me. How can I bear it? What torture!"

She looked at her hostess, who happened to be laughing at some remark on the part of Cladsworth. Nevertheless, Tessa had lapses into silence and reverie from which she seemed to rouse herself by the feverish and agitated effort of a woman who is painfully acting some part.

"I'm sorry Jim isn't here," said Lessard in a

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low voice to Sophy; "but his absence is my opportunity. I wish you were not so grieved to see me."

Sophy's eyes filled with tears; she felt giddy, almost in delirium!

"It's agony to see anybody from the past. This is the first time I have been out since——"

"I understand. Don't explain. I can look at all these people."

He recognised Gladstone; he admired Lady Marlesford. He thought her less beautiful than Sophy, but she had the immense advantage of being beautiful in another way. Sorrow will either destroy or quicken what may be called the animal charm in a human countenance. Grief, for a little while, had petrified Sophy; the play and fire of her quick emotions no longer gave her face its greatest fascination, and it was like an alabaster lamp unlit.

"Sophy's magnetism, her power of inspiring others, is gone," thought Lessard, while he talked mechanically about Schubert to the dull woman on his left, his mind working, as it were, in parenthesis; "I'll be fond of her always, but it is a tranquil love. I believe we could now have a great friendship—for she has ceased to be an ideal. Domesticity and grief have made her definite—she leaves nothing to the imagination. She appeals to my good sense; alas! she can no longer drive me mad!"

Tessa, from her seat, had observed the meeting

between Lessard and the young widow; she saw Sophy's stupor; she appreciated Lessard's quick divination of Sophy's mood. She had persuaded herself that Sophy would, in the natural course of events, be glad to meet Lessard again. Tessa was never sentimental, but she had the desire, which is strong in many women, to deliver other women from loneliness, or from what she took to be that state. That there could be worse things than loneliness had not occurred, even as a suspicion, to her vivacious spirit. She thought one could bear any pang or any trouble so long as one had an agreeable companion. Her own experience of companionship was luxurious; for she had spent her days among those who lived, as she pardonably supposed, to attend her caprices.

"Can it be that Sophy is as perverse as her brother?" she thought. "She won't let me or anybody make her happy."

She would not call herself vexed with Firmalden; but, in the struggle between reason and feeling, she approved and blamed his conduct at the same time. She appreciated his ideas of duty, although she found them carried a little to excess, and she was secretly irritated against the very principles she wished to admire. As a solace to her disappointment, she composed three imaginary letters in reply to the message Sophy had brought. The first was ironic and unwise; the second was childlike and candid ("Oh, I am

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so cross! But I know it is not your fault. You could not leave the injured man"); the third was of glacial politeness. With these matters in her heart it was not astonishing that she flung in conversation at one moment and was indiscreet the next.

The duke was discussing the possibility of Mr. Gladstone's resignation.

"That," said he, "will be the moment for one or two peers I could name! These Radicals dearly love a lord."

"I think," said Tessa, "he must be a man of courage first. I don't believe the Radicals will follow any leader—for long—merely because he has a title. We shall all make bad mistakes if we expect that sort of vulgarity."

The duke began to pity Marlesford for having married an odd creature who was either an enemy to her own class or a shade off her head.

Would the dinner never end? Tessa gazed in turn at each guest, comfortably eating or chatting, till her eyes rested on Lessard. Once more she was almost startled by his irresistible good looks and his air of abounding liveliness. He stood out as a portrait by Manet in a gallery of quiet paintings in the classic manner. There were several distinguished faces round the table—faces to wonder at and study and admire either for their force of expression, or for their modelling, or for their lines; but Lessard was romantic, debonair, undisciplined, defiant—the born rebel

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who is too light in spirit to lead revolts and too enamoured of freedom to obey any captain; an aristocratic vagabond—at home under any roof or at any board; one who detected a fellow-creature in every wretch and a cousin in every prince. Tessa caught his fearless gaze and blushed deeply. Would the dinner never come to an end?

## CHAPTER IV

MARLESFORD had resolved to talk with Sophy when he went up to the drawing-room. He had formed the habit of calling on the Firmaldens at least once in ten days. Sophy, who was a skilful musician, played for him. She would read new compositions at sight; she could discuss books, poetry, and pictures with that art which can make praise seem personal and dispraise remote. Of themselves she spoke rarely, but she understood Marlesford, whose cautious sentimentality became bold under that eloquent silence which, in friendship or in love, says so much while it has the merit of never lying.

As he now entered the room, he went straight to her chair and looked at her for a second or two without speaking. The walls were covered with Chinese embroideries which hung above shelves of Chinese gods, plates, jade vases, and old lacquer boxes; all famous, coveted, beautiful, and historic things. But they had the clinging mournfulness of all works of art in exile. Sophy looked as sadly inappropriate as they.

"You are not enjoying yourself," said Marlesford abruptly; "I'm afraid you are sorry you came."

"I had to lash myself into coming."

"The right way of meeting sorrow is to get most awfully interested in it, and take a sort of poetic view of it. One can do it. Indeed, that is why self-flagellants of all sorts get a pretty good time. Shut out feeling—both for yourself and for others, and look at what is going on in your own heart and body—just as if it didn't matter a jot to you or to anybody else."

Sophy was not surprised at this speech—of which no one else of Marlesford's acquaintance—and least of all his own wife—would have thought him capable.

"I'll be candid," said Sophy; "all this makes me bitter. Everybody here seems rich and happy, even if they are not. I'm reminded of Frank's struggles. Haven't I seen moncy troubles eating into his heart? Haven't I seen all his ideals waste away under the strain of spending fifty pounds with every half-sovereign? That was what it came to. It was the five loaves without the miracle. What he went through! Just in order to attend parties like this and to know these people whom he called '*real people*'—his own lot. I had never heard of such worrics till I married. Poor, poor Frank! Duns, debts, writs, lawyers' letters, threats—and they all had to be met with a smiling face. He met them, and he paid back with full interest every penny he owed. He was getting on splendidly, but he was then too tired for success. He died of exhaustion. He said,



'I want to sleep and never wake up.' Of course I am cynical. I have seen that unselfish, courageous man perish before my eyes like some worn-out horse."

"If others heard you, at your age, talk like that, they would think it unnatural, or, at least, insincere."

"Whatever one says of life must be insincere, because life is itself insincere. But death is sincere."

"Your brother is right. You are too much alone," said Marlesford; "you are quite unstrung. You must not give way to these ideas."

"I do not give way to them; they overwhelm me—especially when I meet serene persons."

Marlesford sighed deeply.

"If you look below the surface," he suggested, "you'd find we were all mostly playing up, and hiding some disappointment."

"And it's hard," she exclaimed, "to be just when you are miserable. It is so hard not to hate the happy when you feel heartbroken. I have had my days when I could have stoned smiling girls going, all dressed up, in big carriages to theatres and balls. The worst is that I do not want to do what they are doing. And yet they exasperate me. I have greatly changed—I used not to be so odious. Jim never feels these things. He thinks it is because his religion helps him. It is because he has never felt defrauded. His life is all before him. Mine has been already ruined."

These bitter words had no sooner passed her lips than a blush swept into her cheeks and a bewitching light danced in her deep eyes.

"This is envy on my part," she said; "nothing else. I believe I wish I were very happy, very rich, and not alone. I believe I love the world now as Frank once loved it. It can be so amusing, so triumphant, so intoxicating!"

Marlesford made no reply. Leaning forward, with his chin resting on his hand and his elbow on his knee, he looked at Sophy with an intensity of which he and she were unconscious, although several others near them in the room were not so blind.

"But you have got any amount of friends," said Marlesford at last, huskily.

"You need not tell me I am ungrateful—I know it. You need not tell me I'm an egoist—I know that too. But it hurts terribly to be an egoist. I wouldn't be one if I could help it."

She stood up and, moving away from him, looked toward Tessa, who was near the piano talking gaily with Bourget and Lessard. Evidently Lessard had consented to sing.

"I'm sorry, but I must go home," said Sophy; "it's a long drive. I want to get away quietly. You'll explain to Tessa."

Still regardless of observers, she stole out of the room. Marlesford, who made no falsely polite efforts to conceal his opinion that she was right

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to leave a scene which afflicted her spirits, led the way.

"I wish that I too could get away from them all," he said, as they went down the staircase together.

She laughed, and caught the reflection of herself laughing in one of the immense mirrors they were passing.

"I hate these parties," he added.

There were no footmen in the hall, and he did not ring for one. He lifted her black cloak from the pile of mantles and furs, laces and bright brocades; he wrapped it round her; he opened the front door; he helped her into the small hired carriage which was waiting outside.

"I'm coming to see Jim to-morrow," he said, as he wished Sophy good-night.

"Do," she smiled, and the horse trotted on.

When Marlesford returned to the drawing-room Lessard was sitting at the piano, singing inagnificantly—

I can give not what men call love;  
But wilt thou accept not  
The worship the heart lifts above  
And the Heavens regret not?  
The desire of the moth for the star,  
Of the night for the morrow.  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow.

"That is *it*," thought Marlesford, and he felt comforted. But his resentment at Lessard's intrusion was not diminished; he listened to the

lovely voice of his guest, yet he did not join Tessa when, at the conclusion of the song, she crossed the room to thank the singer again and again for the delight he had given her and everybody present. Gratitude for his tribute, admiration for his beauty, and enthusiasm for his genius, made her countenance as brilliant as her congratulations. All the evening she had been suffering from depression. More than ever she had been forced to see that Marlesford could not be the chief object of her ambitious heart. As a host he was insignificant, and, after Firmalden failed her, she had been miserably conscious of being doubly taxed to entertain her guests. Marlesford would make no attempt, beyond that prescribed by common courtesy, to amuse the personages whom Tessa invited to his house. He complained that they were too clever; but, instead of deploring the possibility that he might bore them, he rebelled at the fact that they certainly bored him. He saw that they thought him *a good-looking stick*. In brief, while he regarded them as the pillars of the constitution, he welcomed them with reluctance as companions over smoke and wine. He had almost everything he wanted; he detested publicity. It was fast becoming an avowed sorrow that his wife was so excessively intelligent and remarkable.

Thus, in one evening, the grievance of Tessa and the grievance of Marlesford took determined forms. On her side there were melancholy and disappointment. On his side there were regret and

anger. He had married for love, but had it been wise love? He loved her still, but could he promise himself that he would be able to control her? Were they not drifting apart already?

Tessa, meanwhile, was talking about the Firmaldens to Lessard.

"You knew Jim and Sophy long ago," she said; "tell me what you think will become of them."

"I haven't seen Jim for ages. But he was always a materialist with great ideas. That is to say, he believes that the world was made for man, and that man was made to reform it."

"That describes him exactly. But will he be satisfied with his present opportunities? I wish he were either a Roman ecclesiastic or in the House of Commons."

"You underrate the opportunities of a preaching Nonconformist. From the pulpit he can address thousands of all classes. Each individual who hears him represents at the lowest estimate a dozen others who are either relatives or close associates. Men forget what they read; some do not read at all. They do not, however, forget what they are told by a vigorous speaker who means what he says. It has been proved ever since the first beginnings of politics that no tyranny could stand for long against the warning prophet or the preaching friar or the resolute Nonconformist. Of course, he must be in dead earnest. Newspapers, pamphlets, speeches in Parliament, and reassurances to constituents are

as nothing compared with the actual influence of the persistent Sunday sermons of a great preacher. Gladstone has the preacher's quality—religious earnestness. Hence his fascination. It fascinates even the irreligious, because anything mysterious appeals to the wonder. Jim has a religious conviction. The Pagans called it piety. This means that certain ideas are to him immortally sacred; that he has such contempt for things considered by all men reasonable that he glories in the faith which is above reason and not to be contaminated by its touch."

"How well you know him!"

"He once wrote me a letter after my first success. I keep it always with me. Nothing ever helped me so much. Circumstances interfered with our friendship in such a way that we could not well meet. But he is my best friend."

The doors of the drawing-room were thrown back, and the groom of the chambers, entering, announced, "Mr. Firmalden!"

Jim, swarthy in his sombre clerical clothes, stood on the threshold.

## CHAPTER V

IF the two men had presented a strong contrast in their youth, now that they had resolved on their vocations, the dissemblance between them was even violent.

Both were still too young to show the excesses either of pleasure or of austerity, but whereas Lessard seemed handsomer and more defiant for his adventures, Firmalden looked anxious, older than his years, and overworked. His features had gained in decision; more than ever he suggested the Bacchus in marble. But it was Bacchus in bonds also—bonds which fretted, cutting deep as the chariot wheels on the stone pavements of Eleusis.

After the first surprises of recognition, each man felt that time and absence had but served to draw their sympathies nearer. Utterly unlike, they had nevertheless fellow-feeling to an intense degree in common. Lessard knew how much Firmalden had renounced. Firmalden could appreciate all that Lessard was enjoying. It was at the crisis in their lives when the passions are strongest, the ambitions are most romantic, and the soul in its still growing strength is all audacity.

As the two greeted each other with that peculiar simplicity and understanding which men display toward their own sex, Tessa suffered a pang of jealous loneliness.

"He will never regard me," she thought, "as he would a man friend. Men have no real confidence in women."

Firmalden, however, was soon telling her why he had been detained, and how great was the violence he had done to his own wishes in breaking his engagement.

"The fact is," he said, "I ought not to accept invitations to dinner-parties. I'm not the master of my own time. In that respect I'm as much tied down as a doctor."

"We all understood that it was not your fault," said Tessa, coldly. She found it impossible to be pleasant, and she hated herself. But she put her light hand on his arm and added—

"I must introduce you to Mr. Gladstone. He is in the next room."

As they passed the several groups on their way to the Prime Minister, the talkers paused to look after them.

"That must be this Mr. Firmalden, the Dissenter," said the duchess.

"What a very interesting party! Dear Tessa has all sorts of friends! So clever of her!"

"How long will Marlesford stand it?" replied her companion, who had been a Cabinet Minister in the former Government.



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The duchess unfurled her fan and dropped her eyes.

"He was certainly annoyed when the singing gentleman arrived in the middle of dinner. Perhaps he missed his train?"

"It is all too unconventional. It did well enough for Lady Holland in the old days. But London now is too large for the Salon idea. One begins to ask, Where can one draw the line? I was at Lady Wenton's the other night. One could talk with Mr. and Mrs. Tom, the notorious Mrs. Dick, and the famous Mr. Harry!"

"Too amusing!" murmured the duchess.

"But not Society," said her friend, adjusting his eyeglass; "one couldn't be at ease. One was not with one's own lot. One couldn't say a word for fear one might read it next day in the newspapers. One might as well be living on the pavement."

"But this is not a party of that sort," said the duchess, growing alarmed.

"No, indeed. Still, there is a tendency among the younger hostesses to startle rather than to please."

The duchess agreed, but before she left she managed to invite both Mr. Bourget and Mr. Lessard to luncheon. She did not extend the invitation to her good acquaintance the ex-Cabinet Minister, who, she thought, was quite naturally acid, poor man, on the subject of new celebrities.

"Here he is," Tessa was saying to Mr. Gladstone as she introduced Firmalden; "he's a Nonconformist and a Home Ruler."

The Prime Minister smiled graciously; Firmalden blushed, and waited for the great man to speak. The question, after a brief meditative silence, came—

“Do you find that Nonconformists generally are in favour of Home Rule?”

“Numbers, sir, have not considered it. The name frightens some; others associate it with Popery. But those who believe they understand what the Irish want and what justice means are among your strongest supporters.”

“What did they think of my Manifesto on May 3?”

“It secured many who were hanging back. They saw that the establishment of a legislative body in Dublin empowered to make laws for Irish, as distinguished from Imperial affairs, was so far from revolution that it might avert a revolution.”

“Depend upon it, they have seen wisely. But is it too much to hope that the more Cromwellian among the Independents and others will share my view?”

“If I may say so, I believe that the prejudice in many quarters against Home Rule is simply another name for a religious war. It is so Cromwellian—the Bible and the Prophets, as it were, against the Vatican and the Fathers—that until Rationalists convert the whole country to toleration, we cannot expect to see Catholics and Protestants friendly.”

“You know Ireland?”

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"As a boy I was taken there almost yearly by my uncle. He went for two reasons—salmon-fishing and rent-collecting."

"Where was his property?"

"In the south. He took it for a bad debt!"

"I assume he was a Protestant?"

"A Congregationalist."

"Had he this aversion, of which you have spoken, from all Catholics?"

"To a certain extent, yes. Protestant historians have not written in vain. He distrusted them."

"But he was unable to infect you with his prejudices?"

"During the greater part of his lifetime I felt as he did. I was brought up to regard all Catholics as idolaters. Later I went to France, where I made Catholic friends."

"And you learnt to regret your former ideas of their Church?"

Mr. Gladstone glanced, as he spoke, in the direction of the Marlesfords.

"I regretted my ignorance of it. No outsider, however, ever yet understood it perfectly."

"Yours is the cast of mind to which the spirit of system is in every aspect alien?"

"I fear so."

"But you hope that men on all sides can agree, at least, in praising God?"

"Hope, sir, is too strong a word."

"I will introduce you to my wife," said the Prime Minister; "and you must dine with us."

Tessa, during this brief conversation, had fluttered about the room, speaking here, nodding there, but possessed by a strong wish to continue her interrupted dialogue with Lessard. At last she reached him.

"Now," she said, "that everybody is apparently happy, I may be selfish myself. I have never been able to care for music, but I want to understand it."

"Impossible. It is as mysterious as love."

Her languid hazel eyes shone with sudden amusement.

"How sentimental! Tell me more."

"Not if you laugh."

"I laugh so seldom! If you knew how I enjoyed it!"

"I should call you the soul of gaiety."

"But not the body of it. I get terribly depressed."

He shrugged his square, powerful shoulders.

"So do we all—if we wonder about things. I have ceased to wonder. A bull-fight gave me the one straight reply I have ever received to my questions about life. To begin with, the bull has no chance. We all know that he has to die—no matter how well he may fight, or how many men or how many horses may be killed. Then the bull himself rarely wants to fight. He sees the people; he hears the shouting; he wishes only to return to his stall and to his fodder. In conclusion, the braver he is and the less he wishes to injure his

tormentors, the more horribly he is tortured and yelled at. I said to myself, as I looked into the sickening arena, 'This is the life of man.'

Tessa shivered. She had never yet thought of life as a tragedy.

"All artistic minds are melancholic," she suggested.

"Nothing so tame as melancholic, but quite brutal. And a sensitive nature dismayed soon becomes the most brutal, because its brutality is deliberate, and, by a paradox, intellectual."

He looked at her with an admiration which, avoiding insolence or familiarity, was nevertheless the boldest glance she had ever encountered. It seemed to draw her toward adventure, toward danger, toward passion, toward the unknown; and everything feminine within her nature answered to the call. Chilled by Marlesford's unalterable reserve, disappointed in Firmalden, she had been asking herself, "If I am condemned to live without love, am I also expected to exist without friendship?"

Lessard's audacity promised the friendship which she, insensibly, craved. She was blushing and smiling under the fire of his unspoken compliments when she suddenly thought, in a panic—

"I must never see him again. He is too interesting."

She tried to control her voice and her beating heart. She tried to give him cold answers. She even invented a lie to the effect that she thought

she would be leaving London for the country almost immediately. In that one evening—so crowded with unfamiliar emotions—she seemed to have grown from immaturity to womanhood.

"May I call to-morrow?" asked Lessard, as he observed the duchess advancing from her seat to wish Tessa good-night.

"We are going away," said Tessa again, in confusion.

"But not to-morrow?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; to-morrow."

He did not believe this, and he was encouraged by her falsehood.

"Here is someone worth adoring," he thought, as he stepped back, bowed, and left the room.

When Firmalden said good-night, Tessa detained him.

"Come and see me to-morrow morning," she murmured, under her breath; "it's something really important—not," she added, with a note of mischief, "about myself!"

She had regained her good-humour.

One by one the guests departed—till Marlesford and his wife were left alone.

"I shan't give any more parties for a long time," said Tessa; "I'm tired."

Much to her vexation, Marlesford offered no remark. She went up to her bedroom while her husband watched the servants put out the lights.

## CHAPTER VI

LESSARD and Firmalden walked toward Piccadilly together. Each had his story to tell, and the former comradeship between them revived as though they had parted but the day before. Firmalden soon learned that Lessard's first opera, *Daphnis and Chloe*, had been an immense popular success.

"And no music makes money for the composer," added Lessard, "till all the barrel-organs, and the Misses at school, and the gifted amateurs shriek, pound, and howl it."

His second work, *Antigone*, had pleased the academic critics, enraged Wagnerians, and grieved his publisher, who feared it was above the heads of the Opera Syndicate.

"It has been performed three times in New York, once in Paris, five times in Germany—not yet in England."

"And what are you doing now?" asked Jim.

"I am composing a lovely thing about Circe—a symphony. In Corfu it was natural. Here it seems mad. The truth is I began it, little dreaming what the struggle would be. I swear I won't attempt another opera. The silly tenors, the vain,

bouncing prime donne, the imbecility of managers and the dishonesty of their hangers-on, the ghastly fatigue of rehearsals, the disgusting jealousies, the base tricks—things which a sane person would find almost incredible—make the musical world as unmelodious as it well can be.”

“That can be said of any world observed at close quarters,” answered Firmalden; “the proportion of men of honour to men of, say, bewildered rectitude is roughly one per cent. But if you live habitually among the one per cents. you will be at a terrible disadvantage when you encounter the queer ninety-nine! And it’s equally true the other way round.”

He did not sigh as he spoke, but Lessard noticed that the lines of his once pliant mouth had hardened and the former softness in his glance had changed to a look of undaunted perseverance.

“You are the surprise!” exclaimed the musician. “To see you in the ministry after all! How do you get on with your father?”

“Not as I could wish.”

“Could anybody modern get on with him?” suggested Lessard, who had never forgotten the interview in Dr. Firmalden’s study; “he’s so intolerant.”

“That is his strength. That is his main attraction for most of those who are quite unable to appreciate his magnificent virtues and his scholarship.”



"And what does he think of you?"

"I break his heart. He believes fiercely; I believe. But I'm in a false position all round. My uncle meant well by his will, and I was glad enough to have five thousand a year. It was also a good thing for poor Sophy—she lives with me now. But I must have my independence. That money binds me hand and foot. I have no rage against wealth as wealth. I like it. But I must either earn it or inherit it unconditionally."

"Surely you won't become a man of hesitating spirit in the bondage of scruples?" said Lessard.

"At least, I don't hesitate. This day I have told the lawyers that my uncle's experiment is not a success. He thought I could marry and bring up a family, and lead the life of a Protestant bishop without a diocese! But I shall never marry."

"What next?"

"I mean it."

"On religious grounds?"

"Good heavens, no! An unmarried man is an untested man—in most cases, a shirker of responsibilities."

"I see you're not afraid of the test. Then what do you fear?"

"My own temperament."

Lessard decided that his friend had been crossed in love. He changed the subject by asking questions about Sophy.

"She is uncomplaining," said Firmalden; "but I know what is smouldering under that silence."

"Is she as fanatical as ever? If I called, would she see me?"

"I'll find out," said Firmalden, after a pause. Lessard was anxious to hear something of the Marlesfords. He spoke of Lord Marlesford—a good-looking devil with a damnable temper, once roused.

"I have never seen him roused," said Firmalden drily.

"But she," added Lessard, "is fascinating."

Firmalden winced.

"She," continued Lessard, "is absolutely delightful—without being beautiful." He said these last words with the manner of one who expects to be contradicted. Firmalden remained silent.

"She," said Lessard, "has that strange indolence and that ironic smile which people call Eastern. The indolence can become feline energy; the ironic smile can change to a tragic sob. It is the type of Circe—she is good because she could so easily be bad. By instinct, she knows what is terribly effective. By self-command, she makes herself ineffective. Madame de Maintenon must have been just such a woman in her youth. Thus, to the vulgar, Lady Marlesford seems as cold as her husband."

Firmalden still offered no comment.

"And the humour of it is," said Lessard, "that Marlesford is not so cold. He is merely sulking. *Enfin*, they are ill-matched. It is a case of Circe with a convent education married to Lovelace

reformed! They get on each other's nerves. Circe would be happy with a virile simpleton; Lovelace seeks a wise Penelope."

"You are as pagan as ever!"

"And you are as early-Christian as ever."

"No; I am only incurably Protestant. I suspect beauty; I suspect the emotions; I suspect wit; I suspect everything I admire and everything I enjoy."

By this time, although they had chosen the longest road, they were in Piccadilly. Firmalden, parting from Lessard at the Rothschilds' door, pursued his way on foot to his house at Chelsea.

He had been forced to see that it no longer gave him joy but, on the contrary, exquisite pain to meet the Marlesfords. He now dreaded each meeting because it was a strain on his naturalness, and he found himself, with Tessa especially, artificial, ill at ease, and chilled. What did it mean? They were great friends—perhaps the divergence in their religious views made for a latent antagonism in their relationship. That he was out of favour was certain. That they could ever really understand each other was, he now told himself, hopeless. But he dismissed the subject from his mind as morbid.

The house at Chelsea was one he had hired furnished from a member of Parliament who was spending the winter abroad. It had a small, neat garden in front; it had a white door and green shutters; it was built of red bricks. As Firmalden

turned the latchkey and entered the hall, the peacefulness, comfort, and good taste of this home seemed more pleasing than ever.

As he mounted the staircase, with soft velvet under his feet and beautiful etchings on the walls; as he reached his own study—a large, handsome room with fine bookcases, bronzes, sofas, and easy-chairs—he owned how much money could, beyond argument, add to life. On the other hand, luxury was demoralising. Sophy, who had exchanged her black gown for a white wrapper, was leaning against one of the windows looking over the Thames, whose placid ripples were gleaming in the moonlight.

“Did you enjoy it?” she asked.

“I was very glad to meet Mr. Gladstone.”

“These parties unfit us for work!” exclaimed Sophy; “I can’t say why, but they do. I came home envious, and furious with myself for being discontented. And why did Tessa invite Lessard? It was all one long agony for me. I don’t care for him as I did, but I do not want to see him ever again. It was like a vivid dream of something dead and forgotten; I have been aching and shuddering ever since I got into the carriage.”

To Firmalden’s astonishment, she wept, and her whole face seemed shrouded in a mist of tears.

“And Tessa makes you unhappy too,” she added, with womanly inconsequence.

“You ought not to say so. That is inadmissible.”

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"Why not admit it? She sees nothing as we do. Her life has not, and has never had, one point in common with ours. When she pretends to agree with your Radical ideas people laugh at her. They know it is nonsense!"

"You misjudge her. It is fatal to bring women and one's relatives together."

"I tremble with a kind of temper every time I meet her. Perhaps this is because father disapproves of her."

"In what way?"

"In every way. He says this association with Catholics must weaken your hold over your own congregation. It looks as though you didn't care what people believed so long as they were agreeable. Father says that when opposing leaders are dining, smiling, and friendly with each other their armies soon wonder whether the causes of war are worth powder and shot! Should we have our liberties now if Cromwell and Charles I. had spent week-ends together or flirted with each other's wives? Father says that moderation of that kind shows loose convictions—not Christian charity. It is mere scepticism—not toleration. He might take your friendship with Tessa for charity if she were a very ugly, dull old Catholic frump—too stupid to argue!"

"Why didn't father say all this to me himself?" asked the young man quietly.

"Because he's too worried to trust himself on the subject. He might be intemperate, he says."

He has been so proud of you that it will be the death of him if you get under that woman's influence. Already two or three of the deacons have made odd remarks."

Firmalden pulled open one of the drawers in his writing-desk. It was full of documents.

"These are rebukes," he said scornfully, "mostly anonymous, from true Christians and lovers of the gospel."

He turned over the pile of letters which had come by the last post.

"I shall probably find something charming among these also," he said.

He was not mistaken. One envelope, addressed in violet ink by an inexpert hand, contained the following:—

"DEAR SIR,—I think it my duty to tell you that malicious persons are circulating the report that you take opium in large doses, that you have already mortgaged your capital up to the hilt, and that you are a Jesuit in disguise. Beware, ere it is too late. A man in your position cannot be too careful. Break off this opium habit, get rid of unlawful attachments, and turn at once to the true God before you are everlastingly damned for your sins, which cry aloud to heaven.—Your sincere  
WELL-WISHER."

"This pretty composition," said Firmalden, "is partly due to the cook, who heard Sir Henry Dale

prescribe opium when I had that abscess in my tooth; it is partly due to a man for whom I borrowed some money in order to save himself and his family from appalling disgrace; it is partly due to the fact that I would not take part in a hypocritical attack upon the Catholic missions in this district. This letter happens to be unusually vulgar. Some others are better written, but even more vindictive."

Sophy had grown pale with alarm.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"Do? Any servant I have, or have had, may spy upon me, read my letters, or tell anything true that he or she chooses. They may listen at doors till they drop. When they have told all they know or can invent, what then? I propose to act exactly as I please, spend my own money in my own way, and choose my own friends. I leave these things on purpose in an unlocked drawer."

"You are too reckless. You forget your responsibilities—your position."

"I do not. The more they can discover the happier I shall be. I have absolutely nothing to conceal. Over and over again I have told you and father that I could never become a Catholic."

"Newman thought the same!"

"But much as I admire Newman, I have not his temperament."

"Then why don't you feel, as father does, that Catholics are our enemies—treacherous, sly, in-

sidious false teachers? We are warned against them in the Bible. Why should they be so hated if they were not wicked?"

"They are powerful," said Firmalden, "and they have the centuries on their side. As an organisation, the Catholic Church is at once the most democratic and the most aristocratic in the world. The less I love it the more I admire it!"

"If you say such things to father," cried Sophy, "it will kill him. He will never understand you."

"Do you?" asked Firmalden, quickly. "For, although you don't like Tessa, you seem to get on with Marlesford!"

"He was born a Protestant. He was caught, as you may be caught if you are not careful. I'm sorry for him. He has a steady nature—he reminds me of Frank."

"That accounts for everything," said Jim, innocently, yet remembering the incomprehensibility of women; "I was wondering why you two got on so well."

"If Frank had lived," said Sophy, with confidence, "he and Marlesford would have been the greatest of friends!"

She wished her brother good-night and left him. As she lay awake during the small hours, she told herself that Tessa would ruin Firmalden's happiness as she had already ruined two careers—his and Lord Marlesford's.





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## CHAPTER VII

TESSA was disturbed when she was reading *La Nouvelle Héloïse* at ten o'clock the next morning by a caller who sent up a card which bore the following inscription:—

Mrs. de Verney.

Miss Rosanette de Verney.

At Home First and Third Wednesdays.

Verulam Mansions, S.W.

"Most important," was scrawled in pencil over the name.

Tessa consented to see the visitor, whom her maid described as "*une jeune et belle personne.*"

The *jeune et belle personne*, on being announced, launched herself, as it were, upon the room as a swan upon a pond. Her large grey hat with long floating plumes, her rustling train of claret-coloured silk, the insistence of her bodily outline under what was apparently a single frail petticoat, conveyed the effect of something scarcely real. Some have noble beauty, some have silly beauty—beauty, that is to say, of ideal silliness. Miss de Verney's attractions were of the latter kind. Her vast, soft

eyes were protected by lashes of prodigious length and thickness; the full red lips still pouted in a Cupid's bow; the dainty nose, the long, white, swelling throat, the colourless, smooth complexion, the charming small head and delicate shoulders were admirable. She was more like good Dresden china—more like a third-rate picture than ever.

"Do I address Lady Marlesford?" asked Rosanette before she accepted Tessa's outstretched hand.

"Yes."

Rosanette surveyed her kindly, and sank, with elaborate grace, into an arm-chair.

"The object of *me* visit," said she, "is one of a strictly confidential nature. May I express the hope that we shall be undisturbed?"

"How exciting!" observed Tessa.

"Would that it were no more than that!" said Miss de Verney in a low, tragic voice, which was not unpleasant although its origin was Cockney.

"Lady Marlesford," she continued, fixing Tessa with a gaze which had something childlike, something helpless, and something unrelenting also, "the full details of *me* life would fill a book. Suffice it to say that *me* pedigree is fully as proud as your own, although motives of family honour place me in such a position that all may not be told—even between lady and lady. You understand, I trust?"

"I think so."

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"Lady Marlesford, you know, I believe, the Reverend James Firmalden?"

Tessa nodded.

"Has he ever spoken of me?"

"No."

"Men are very secretive. We were once engaged. Yes," she continued, as she saw Tessa's astonishment, "you may well start! But I was a mere gell; he won my heart, and I did not weigh his poverty, or see that I was, so to speak, throwing away *me* chances."

Tessa shaded her face with one hand and leant back in her chair.

"I did not know how much I loved him," continued Miss de Verney, "till my mother, acting for the best, broke off the engagement. I have reason to know that Mr. Firmalden has never been the same since. As for me, I wore the mask of gaiety. A viscount and a large number of honourables were paying me marked attention. You know what a gell is? *Me* head was turned. London was at *me* feet. I was the beautiful Miss de Verney here, there, and everywhere. I was more admired than Mary Anderson. At Private Views I was fairly mobbed. I look a sight now, because I have cried *me* eyes out."

"Why?"

"Oh, Lady Marlesford! Jim is that unkind and unforgiving. He won't answer my letters. He won't make up, although he loves me still, I am certain. Ma says that love often turns to poison."

Her under-lip piteously quivered; dew seemed to gather on her marvellous eyelashes.

"Put in a good word for me, Lady Marlesford!" she exclaimed. "They all say that you can manage him. His stuck-up sister always interferes. Now she's the Hon. Mrs., if you please, she gives herself as many airs as a duchess."

"Really, I don't know what you mean," said Tessa at last.

With perfect good humour, and as though she had been told to go through some scene in a play for the second time, Miss de Verney repeated every word she had already said. She added, however—

"After this heart-to-heart talk, surely we understand each other now."

"I have not the smallest influence with Mr. Firmalden," said Tessa; "and he would resent any interference in his private affairs. I know nothing about them."

"Oh, come!" said Rosanette, reproachfully.

"I tell you I know nothing about them."

Miss de Verney laughed shrilly:

"Everybody knows that you are all as thick as peas. If he isn't here with you, Lord Marlesford is there with that spiteful Sophy. Perhaps I should have approached Lord Marlesford. But I prefer dealing with *me* own sex. I am fighting for *me* happiness, you must remember, and I'm no fool."

Tessa, whose nervous, impetuous nature was now roused, stood up and stamped her foot.

"You are most impertinent. You are talking nonsense. And I wish you would please go away. I don't care for talk of this kind."

"Then you must lump it—as I do. I'm sure it's no pleasure to me. What is it but loss of dignity? But come what come may, I have had *me* say. I have put you on your guard while going out of *me* way, I confess, to warn you of Mr. Firmalden's prior attachment. I did it because I pitied you for being hopelessly infatuated with a man who is dazzled by your flattery while his heart and soul belongs to me!"

Miss de Verney had not walked the boards in vain. She had not been trained by successful playwrights to no purpose. Her tones, her gestures, and her strut as she gathered up her skirt and moved toward the door for the proper delivery of the last thrilling sentence did credit to her mimetic powers. She had captured the mannerisms of three leading, but not inspired, actresses. Tessa had never seen or heard anything of the kind except in a London theatre. Its outward insincerity obscured the clear meaning under Rosanette's affectation. She could speak only the language she knew—a jargon drawn from vulgar dramas, trumpery novels, grotesque "society" comedies, and the mincing conversation which her mother had taught her to worship as refined.

Although Tessa had lost command of her temper, she did not on that account dislike Miss de Verney. Curiously enough, she was conscious

of almost affectionate feelings for the strange girl. It was impossible to regard her as anyone worse than a misguided, ill-bred child. An evil child, a heartless child, she was not. Tessa thought it likely enough that Rosanette had fallen in love unasked with Firmalden (the clergy of every denomination were constantly teased by such matters); the poor woman was now suffering from the consequences of self-deception.

"I'm sorry I spoke rudely," said Tessa, putting out her hand; "it was stupid of me. But somebody has been telling you things which are quite untrue. When you first spoke of them, they made me as angry as you must have been when you first heard them."

"So far as that goes," observed the visitor, with her back to the door and her arm outstretched towards the handle, "they are too true. But I accept your apology. Ladies must stand by each other nowadays, for men, bless you, only study themselves."

"The creature," thought Tessa, "is as stubborn as a mule. Firmalden cannot possibly like her."

"You don't know men," continued Nannie; "I could see that with half an eye. You are no match for their cunning, underhand ways. I flatter *me*-self that I am up to all their little dodges. I suppose we can't help being fond of them. But we needn't trust them."

"I'm afraid you haven't met the right men," said Tessa.



"The highest in the land—that's all!" exclaimed Nannie; "men in the crack regiments, eldest sons, tip-top swells every one of 'em—the smartest men in London. I have many a good laugh to *meself* sometimes when I see the Lady Edith This and the Honourable Ethel That half-killing themselves to catch the men who are hanging on *me* door knob! Little do they know, poor gells, that the dukes they want kneel at *me* feet till I spurn them. The love of *me* life is Firmalden. I'm sorry he's a Dissenter—that's so common. And his uncle was in trade. Still, anyone can see that Firmalden is a gentleman, and could be a bishop—if he weren't a Radical!"

"Are you sure you were engaged to him?"

"Sure? Do you imply I am uttering falsehoods? For shame, Lady Marlesford!"

"Girls sometimes fancy that men mean more than they actually say."

"I was not brought up to 'fancy'! Mamma took care that I had everything down in black and white. But now that we've broken the ice I'm sure we can come to an agreement. I'm already late for rehearsal. Such a lovely part—the chorus all turn their backs to the audience while I sing the solo."

"Do you sing too?" asked Tessa, becoming as incoherent as her visitor.

"I have consented to sing," said Miss de Verney haughtily; "it's for a very smart charity, and the Prince and Princess of Wales are coming. How could I refuse?"

After that, by no means dissatisfied with her morning's work, Miss de Verney took her leave.

Tessa, now alone and away from the confusing and insane effect of Rosanette's personality, was able to put her own thoughts in order. Training and circumstances, family traditions and the convent ideals, had so subdued Tessa's nature that she was actually ignorant of her own emotional capabilities. Her senses were sound asleep the greater part of the time. If she ever betrayed the least liveliness, she was always begged to control her excitability and to fear it as a mortal sin.

The astonishment, which had produced a shock so stupefying that it arrested for the time all reflection, died away. Tessa began to piece Miss de Verney's statements together in order. The greatest thing she had disclosed was an alleged close friendship between Lord Marlesford and Sophy. Of this a dozen striking evidences now sprang up in Tessa's memory, and her heart contracted with jealous indignation.

"How very disingenuous! Not that there is anything to mind apart from the deceit. But that is enough in all conscience. Now I know why Basil has been so quiet—so moody. He has found someone else to talk with. When he sees me he has nothing else to say. Sophy has been hearing it all! Not that he would ever flirt."

Women, and men also, judge of their lovers

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by their bearing with themselves. They never imagine that a man who is stern with one beauty might be in glad bondage to her rival, or that a woman who is winter to one man might possibly be summer with another. Tessa thought of Marlesford as she knew him—a handsome, unresponsive, bored, but conscientious husband, passionless and polite, kind and uninteresting.

What did he see in Sophy Burghwallis? Of course she was very handsome. But Marlesford was insensible to beauty,—as a rule.

## CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Firmalden called, in accordance with his promise, Tessa was standing alone in the centre of the room. She had been pacing the floor. At the sight of him she regained her composure, but he saw that she was agitated, pale, and very tired. It was one of her odd charms to think aloud in conversation; dialogue with her had neither a formal beginning nor a definite end. To-day, however, Firmalden felt she was on her guard. Her thoughts and her words were not, as usual, in unison. She asked questions about Mr. Gladstone, about the weather, about the climate of Touraine, about the journey to Australia.

"What's the matter?" asked Firmalden, bluntly.

"I want to leave London. But I promised you that I was not going to talk of myself! It is about Sophy. I wanted to be nice to her. I invited Mr. Lessard here for her sake. What happened? She hardly spoke to him."

"That needn't surprise you. They were once in love, and now they are not."

"You mean it is all over? I can't believe that. Not that I understand love in the least. I realise

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more plainly each hour how little I know about the things which puzzle nobody else—which even my kitchen-maid has known ever since she was born!”

She felt humiliated, at a disadvantage, and almost jealous of the vulgar wisdom, convincing if detestable, of Nannie Cloots.

“You take the troubles of other people too much to heart,” said Firmalden.

“I have no heart. I don’t want to discover it.”

As she spoke, she put her hand to her side, where she felt a sharp distress. When the emotions awake, they set about their business of destroying the body; they bite and rend.

“I know nothing—nothing,” she repeated. “Things I don’t wish to believe are true; things I love are mostly untrue. I am sorry I ever left the convent. It may have been a simpleton’s paradise. They told me I should find baseness and deception in the world. I laughed at them. But I was a fool, and they were right.”

“All eager natures suffer in this way,” said Firmalden; “you’ll have to stand it. You must see life by the light of your own lamp. Nobody can help you much.”

“I never felt this temper before. I’d rather be bored again. I have never prayed, as some people, for my purgatory in this world. I hate suffering.”

† “Does anyone like it? But you’d be a rag of

a woman if you couldn't bear it. A woman who hasn't suffered soon becomes very cruel."

"Not so cruel," she said, sarcastically, "as a pious man who is quite perverted by a harsh creed! Tell me this—what am I to do?"

She seemed almost sexless and ageless from the violence of her mental pain. Firmalden could not believe that all this was due to her concern for Sophy.

"I feel half-mad," she went on. "I shall have to begin at the beginning of all my ideas. I am not what I used to be in any respect. I don't know myself at all. I seem to have come to the end of a sheltered life—and I hear devils, and jackals, and mocking things waiting for me."

"I know that many a man has to spend his life with his back to the wall—fighting for the right to suffer in his own way. I hoped that wasn't the case with women."

"Every creature one meets is in the great conspiracy to deceive us," she exclaimed. She locked and unlocked her hands; she walked to the window; she came back to the chair in which Rosanette had sat, and she stared at it as though it were still occupied by that scented, insolent, sophisticated, dreadfully human being.

"You know how it hurts when your foot has fallen asleep and you wake it up?" said Tessa; "my mind is pricking in that way now."

Firmalden's mere presence gave her a certain sense of security, and she wished he would say

something. But he remained silent. Women like display of feeling—not its depths. That he had a profound pity for her evident anguish did not satisfy her nature, which had already endured more from her own restraints and others' reserves than was safely bearable. Some uncontrollable new force within her was crying out for more liberty, more experience, and more response. She was as the solitary songbird in a cage who sees, for the first time, other birds, free and companioned, flying through the garden.

When Firmalden spoke at last, his voice was husky.

"You are a child in many respects—although you are married. People have encouraged you to think that you are heartless and therefore you are good."

"And I want to be heartless," she said; "what should I do with a heart? Would any of my friends satisfy a woman who asked for much from anybody? Would Basil be the man for a woman who expected romance from life?"

This was the first time she had ever allowed herself to complain of her husband.

"I daresay he is more fond of me than he is of anybody else. Is that much to boast of? As for me, it is assumed that I must love him because it is my duty. I say, there is no duty in the matter. Our marriage is misery to both of us. We don't suit each other. We make the best of each other, because we are so sorry for

each other. When we are a little bit affectionate, it is because we are both so lonely, so wretched, so tired of our own coldness."

Firmalden remembered Lessard's conversation of the preceding night. How right he had been after all. The musician, at a glance, had divined the tragedy of the Marlesford household.

"If I were to say all this to Father Vernon, he would say, 'Tut! tut! my child. Almighty God has blessed you with an admirable husband, who is all that a Christian gentleman should be.' Father Vernon thinks any woman is lucky if she can secure any husband at all who can support her. As if Almighty God ever intended two human beings to make each other hopeless for life!"

"None of us can know what He intended," said Firmalden.

"Then it is a martyrdom. Don't call it a marriage; call it an Act of Faith!"

"By all means!"

"I could be a happier woman," she said naively, "if I didn't see Basil's side of the story."

"The people who suffer most are always those who have a sense of justice."

"But what is going to happen?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? You can't suppose that we can continue in this way. It is insupportable. I should go mad."

"You won't go mad. You will have these attacks



of impatience and these revulsions of feeling. But in time you'll get to see that they belong to the day's work."

"You don't know me. I never complain till I see that something must be done. I am not foolish enough to find fault with the unalterable. This is a crisis."

The lines, half sad, half sensuous, about the corners of her mouth had deepened strangely during the year. Firmalden also noticed that her eyes seemed larger and darker in colour than they had been. These changes had taken place by degrees, unobserved.

"I must have more reality in my life," she said; "everything begins to seem affected and sentimental. I am tired, worn out. I can't endure this inane bustle about *nothing*. It has ceased to seem true. If Basil had a serious interest in life—that would be a certain relief. But he's an idler. That is why he becomes morose when he finds that I like clever friends. His own friends are stupid—so stupid that I die of them! If I spend half an hour with any one of them, I wonder how on earth anybody ever accomplished anything, or helped a soul, or had an ideal. Deadly, deadly, deadly!"

Then she went once more to the window, where the sunshine streamed in on her hair, making it shine, and wept.

The young man looked at her, and, as she had covered her face and her eyes with her hands, he

showed his own despair. What did she care about the eternal verities which he tried to regard as his own consolation? Of what use to her were the prayers which he uttered in solitude and disillusion? For the first time he felt afraid of life; for the first time he realised that when the moment comes for the rack there is no sudden awakening as from a bad dream. The torture has to be endured, and no miraculous release turns the agony into peace. He, on his part, could not know that she was suffering from blind jealousy. The strain of the silence became too great, and Firmalden was assailed by wild, unutterable thoughts which rang so loudly in his ears that he feared lest Tessa should be hearing them also. Nothing but the powerful self-discipline of many years kept the tumult in his soul from finding speech to be eternally repented of.

"I must go," he said awkwardly; "but I'll think about this. Don't spend your strength kicking against the pricks."

"If they are unnecessary pricks," said Tessa, drying her eyes, "I'll resent them as long as I live. Submission to the will of God docs not mean submission to the will of a few selfish, odious persons!"

She threw him a look of reproach, and, resuming her forlorn attitude, gazed into the twilight of the next room.

"Whatever you do, don't be tempted to call yourself unhappy," he said.

"No," she replied ironically; "I'll content myself by feeling so!"

Thus, she had the last word.

On leaving the house, Firmalden saw, when he took his hat from the hall-table, a roll of music and a letter addressed to Lady Marlesford in Lessard's handwriting.

## CHAPTER IX

TESSA now began to wonder seriously about Sophy.

"She has spoilt my friendship with Firmalden. She is now gaining a sort of influence over Basil. How very much interested they seemed as they talked together last night! She was once engaged to Lessard. What do they all see in her—apart from her looks?"

Tessa studied her own appearance in one of the mirrors.

"Why should we clash?" she thought. "We are utterly unlike. But she understands men—and I do not. That is the whole secret."

Just as Sophy had convinced herself that Marlesford must be won back by some means to the Protestants, Tessa was as fiercely determined never to abandon the hope of winning Firmalden for Rome. In this fight for the souls of two men, the two women were ready to be broken, if necessary, upon wheels or consumed by flames at the stake. Urged by the strongest of all passions—religion—and stimulated by the bitterest of all instincts—jealousy—it was now nothing less than war to the death between them. What was worse,

neither thought for an instant that the other was interested in the soul only of any man. It so happened that Firmalden and Marlesford were both young, both handsome, and both uncommon.

Half an hour later, Tessa was walking towards the Church of the Jesuits in Farm Street. The exercise relieved her nerves; the thought of the quiet altars soothed her spirit. Her piety had a vehement rather than a tender cast; heretofore, she had found most of her troubles too small for God's notice. She saw Him as the Supreme Judge and Ruler of mankind, and no admonition had ever availed to persuade her that one should cry to Heaven daily in the belief that incessant entreaties for special favours were a sign of faith. There was something approaching fatalism in her philosophy, and it bordered, as Firmalden warned her, on that of the unprofitable servant whose service was one of dread: "*Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man . . . and I was afraid.*" In immature women the spirit develops but the body lags; hence, painful and mysterious contradictions of mood. Tessa was now in such a state of rebellion that the wild idea entered her head of running away, of pretending to be dead, of starting a new life under a false name in some strange country. When she should have turned towards Mount Street, she struck out instead for Oxford Street, and, following an impulse, hailed an omnibus bound for Acton. It was the first she saw. There were but four other passengers, and they did not pay

much attention to the small, graceful woman whose pearls seemed too good to be real, and whose gown was too plainly made to excite envy. When she paid her fare, she asked to go as far as the omnibus went. Then she stared at the advertisements on the interior of the vehicle, while the noise of the traffic and the rumbling of the wheels overpowered the pain in her heart. Many passengers climbed in and out during the journey. She was glad of their presence, and she wondered whether any one of them was, or had ever been, as wretched as herself. They all looked dull till a girl with red shining cheeks, accompanied by a young man with spectacles, joined the party. The girl giggled from time to time, and the young man from time to time nudged her with his elbow while he assumed an innocent expression for the benefit of the on-lookers. This, to his companion, seemed irresistibly humorous; indeed, it amused everybody in the omnibus. When the pair alighted at Uxbridge Road, mournfulness once more re-established itself on the faces of the travellers.

At Acton Tessa found herself alone.

"I'll wait for your return journey," she said timidly to the conductor.

Was it destiny?—was it chance? At that moment she saw Lessard coming, at full speed, down the road. In less than three minutes he was standing with one foot on the omnibus step, about to climb up on to the roof. But his quick eyes detected an unusually attractive figure in the

corner. She wore no veil, and to pretend that he did not recognise her was impossible.

"Yes; it is I," she exclaimed, with a deep blush. "I came here for fun."

As he was an artist, and in agreement with what are called caprices, he believed her, rightly, at once.

"I came here to see a friend who is dying," he added, after a moment's hesitation. He entered the omnibus; he sat down by Tessa's side, shook hands, and seemed to take their meeting in such peculiar circumstances as the most natural event.

"May I tell you about my friend?" he went on. "It is a terrible story. I can't think of anything else. If I were to talk of anything else, I should fail."

The driver and the conductor had gone within the public-house for drinks; the jaded horses were being led by the ostler into the stables. Tessa was afraid she was only dreaming; that she would wake presently and find herself perched up alone in the Marlesford chariot rolling, as it were, past the painfulness, squalor, and intensity of life.

"To begin with," said the musician, "this poor friend was my wife!"

"Are you married?" Why did her heart sink?

"I thought I was. But the marriage was illegal. She had a husband already."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Tessa, chilled.

"Don't expect a pretty story. I believe that I myself was not sober when I married her."

"Not sober?"

"I was in an opera company at the time. If you eat heavily, your voice goes; you lose your magnetism. So you drink. Disgusting, isn't it? Well, Alice and I went before the Mayor—it happened in Philadelphia after a supper-party. I remember him saying to me, 'You had better think it over!' I felt insulted at his suggestion. So did Alice, who was the prettiest thing I had ever seen, then. Still, the old man was right."

"But—but——" stammered Tessa.

"Listen," he said, earnestly. "Surely you can bear to hear what others have had to suffer! Think of this—the revolting things in the newspapers don't always concern utter strangers and common people only. Sometimes they strike home. I have learnt that there is nothing too seemingly cruel and frightful for God to let happen; that He mocks our deepest prayers and hopes and desires; that those who trust in Him are always disappointed as to the particular object of their trust."

"Oh, don't say such things! Such ghastly, almost true, things!"

"Then I'll go on with quite true things! Alice and I were miserable together. She tried to shoot me; I tried to shoot myself. Sometimes I almost liked her—she had a freshness which amused me. Sometimes I loathed her. It was hell on earth till we made up our minds to part for ever."

"How long ago was that?"



"Many years ago. All this time she has been leading her own life."

"And you?"

"I have been leading a life I hate. And that, I suppose, would be called my own too. The last—friend she had has deserted her."

"And she is dying?"

"There is no hope. She recognises no one. That is a mercy. For she liked comforts and the state suites at hotels! If she could be moved, I'd take her away to a better place."

"And you forgive her everything?"

He seemed astonished at the question.

"Most people as little mean to make each other happy as to make each other unhappy. She did not try to spoil my life. That was an accident."

"Perhaps I ought to tell you that I know you were once engaged to Sophy Burghwallis. I never heard all the facts. She is handsome and"—she paused—"and very interesting."

Thus she struck delicately but firmly the note of hope. All the same, she was not disappointed to see his countenance cloud.

"Of all things that ever happened to me," said Lessard, "that made me the most bitter. I can't think of it to this day without feeling wretched."

"Then you still love her?" said Tessa, in a low voice.

"No. But to have recovered at all—is the worst of it. Things of the kind ought to kill one straight out. They don't. They are like some violent

illness which leaves you cured but with an everlasting tendency to the same failing! When I saw Sophy last night I recognised perfectly that one could be proud of having loved her. I had made no mistake."

Tessa grew pale.

"Yes," she murmured quickly; "she is romantic. And then she has spent her life with clever men—her father, her brother, and her husband. She is better educated than most women."

"Her fanaticism spoils her. She may have deep feelings, but such forbidding depths make one long for shallows that are clear and sunny!"

"I may be wrong," said Tessa, "but my idea is that if one really loves—in a hopeless way—one must die. If one can live somehow without it, it is a half-love—not an essential love."

The omnibus started, and the jerk roused them both to a sense of the strangeness of their encounter and of their conversation.

"When we reach civilised regions we can take a hansom," said Lessard.

Tessa was still for some minutes. But she stole glances at Lessard's profile, and owned to herself that Sophy had shown great strength of principle in renouncing such a lover.

"I'm glad you have told me all this," she said; "my other friends sometimes tell me what they read and what they think, but they never tell me what they feel."

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"I could tell you anything," said Lessard; "you have the artist's temperament."

"Not in the least. Art leaves me cold. I hate music. Do let me be frank. I care for individuals—for their souls!"

"I knew you hated music," he said. "That is why I like you so much. Of the music-lovers one meets, half of them are merely animals hypnotised by a noise; a third abhor it, but have not the courage to say so. It rests me to forget music absolutely—in favour of something more marvellous."

"Something more marvellous?"

"The Arts are but drugs for the disappointed imagination. When I meet someone who can be natural without becoming a revelation of human brutality or imbecility, I ask nothing from the Arts."

She did not know how to reply. But the flattery was pleasant. Of all the men she had ever met, he seemed the most straightforward. The charm of the unabashed and the unscrupulous, when accompanied by fine looks, is especially dangerous to highly disciplined minds. Tessa had been dulled into a falsely ascetic condition which was at variance with her vivacious temperament, and, accordingly, depressing to her spirits. Lessard, who was passionate and reckless, came into her life as the favouring gale to the ship becalmed.

"Do let me tell you what I think of you," he said; "it is so interesting! You remind me of

the enchantresses in Homer, and also of all the nymphs who were transformed to echoes, to reeds, to laurel trees. Also you remind me of the delicate Court beauties of Fragonard. And again of the Tanagra *figurines*. I'm trying to say that you would not have made a good saint! Your period is unmistakably B.C. and pagan—as Greek as anything! If one describes a woman as Greek, fools think at once of some colossal goddess, or of the Elgin Marbles. You are not like the Elgin Marbles."

When they reached the Uxbridge Road Station, he hailed a hansom and they rode along chatting gaily or sadly—as the subjects varied—till they came to the Marble Arch. Tessa looked at the Lodge clock and saw it was nearly four o'clock.

"But I have had no luncheon."

Then she realised that she had broken far more serious traditions than the orthodox luncheon hour. She asked him to drop her at the church in Farm Street. This he did, and drove on to a money-lender of his acquaintance to get two hundred pounds for a number of pressing creditors and the expenses of the dying woman at Acton.

## CHAPTER X

MARLESFORD meanwhile had returned, as usual, from one of his clubs for luncheon; but, what was surprising, he found that Tessa had gone out and left no message. He assumed that she had been detained at the dressmaker's, and he thought, with a smile, that it was fully time now for a recurrence of her extravagant craving for clothes. Still, he had rather see her absorbed in the purchase of new gowns than in the cultivation of overpowering celebrities.

He left Grosvenor Square before three and drove in his private hansom to Firmalden's house on the Embankment.

Sophy was expecting him. She sat in a pretty drawing-room, with pale blue pleated silk walls, which made her own vivid colouring the more splendid and the blackness of her dress the more intense. Marlesford was once more startled by her beauty, her grace of movement, and the depth of her dark, tragic eyes.

"You were very good to me last night," he said, choosing a seat where he could watch her face and some eighteenth-century engravings behind her

at the same time. "I am sure it bored you. All the same, the political set are better than the Bohemians. Did I tell you about our week-end with the Etons? Such a crowd! A prima donna, a man who plays strange hymns, a host of weird women, a Russian violinist, a fellow who writes for the stage, and an actress, with a scallywag of a husband, who swears she's a cousin of Tessa's! She played the fool all day and danced the tarantella in an English way all night. They were a rum crew—called each other 'darling dear' and 'dear darling,' and even kissed each other out of sheer good humour about things that were happening. Why, in the middle of dinner the hymn-man kissed the prima donna's hand with all his might because she agreed with one of his remarks about immortality!"

"I can't imagine you among them," said Sophy, smiling.

"I considered them all very second-rate indeed."

"Did they amuse Tessa?"

"After my own dull self," he said, "I suppose they were a change. Oh, I know I'm du'l company."

"I don't think so."

"That is because you have had trouble and it has made you patient. I was awake till two this morning thinking over the things you said last night. They won't do. You are too young to be so tired of life."

"I'm not tired of life. But there is no secure delight in it, and I never feel that

Two paradises 'twere in one  
To live in paradise alone.

You are far too rich. Your troubles make me laugh when they do not make me rude—which is the case at present!"

"My money gives me no pleasure, I assure you."

"The fault I find is that it blinds your imagination. To be discontented on your income is a considerable form of comfort."

Marlesford moved impatiently.

"Comfort! I know as well as you do that I waste my time. But I do no earthly good at the brewery—we have a capital manager. As for sport, I own one shouldn't make amusement one's main occupation. As for politics, I agree with Taine—both political parties disgust me. When I see two legions of vulgar fanatics fighting, I find it a war between those who want to keep everything for themselves and those who try to rob others of what they have got. The arguments they fling at each other are empty declarations, and all the benefits which they describe on platforms they forget in the jealousies and schemes of mere party interest. Then, so far as I am concerned, there is a feeling against Roman Catholics—especially when they are converts."

"Of course."

"Converts are keener than the old set, and they

know their religion better. The old set live and grow languid on the memory of what their ancestors suffered for the Faith! You should hear Tessa laugh at them. But converts, in most cases, have made great personal sacrifices for the Church."

"I never knew God address any call that didn't involve a loss to any human soul! In your case, however, you gained Tessa."

"That is true. But although she first set my thoughts in the Roman direction, I should not have gone far if Rome had not proved a strong case."

Sophy shook her head. His conversion seemed to her a deplorable weakness.

"All the same," he went on, "to be a Roman Catholic in a Protestant country requires more tact than I possess. At every instant something is said or done which affects the question of Faith or sentiments which I hold. Whether one speaks of art, or politics, or science, or literature, the embarrassment is the same because the Catholic religion affects the whole of life. I am more at home, therefore, with a bad Catholic than with the best Protestant that ever walked! My wife was brought up to a piety rather tinged by Puritan formalism—all her people are devout in an excessive and angular way. She disagrees with them and they grieve her. But——"

"So many 'buts'!" exclaimed Sophy.

"It is difficult to keep one's ideals in Society."



"Frank used to say that often! Then why waste one's time hearing ten times a day in ten different drawing-rooms the same jargon, the same empty, feverish talk, the same phrases—repeated till they lose all significance—the same judgments, with nothing spontaneous, nothing natural, nothing genuine to relieve the artificiality. As you have quoted Taine, I'll quote him too. 'Go to the dissecting-table, if only to revive your slumbering faculties!' That sounds violent. He means that nothing less than a shock to their supposed refinement can make some people live at all. They are like smooth, panting animals at a cattle show—almost dead from excess of well-being!"

"You are too bitter," he repeated, "too bitter."

"I know that," she said, more gently, "but I seem to have spent my life watching idealists fight and go under. The ideals remain; their defenders either perish or lose heart, make compromises, and despise themselves. I saw it long ago among my father's theology students when I was a girl. I saw it after my marriage. I am watching Jim's struggles now. I find it in every true biography I read. Three-fourths of the world think too little and the other fourth think too much. They all have to suffer, however, and if one is in the least sensitive, it is, so far from recreation, a severe miscry to mix with people who dare not be so natural as the poor and obscure, and cannot be so simple as men of genius."

"At your age and with your looks you ought

not to be so melancholy," said Marlesford, still obstinate.

The servant came in carrying a note on a salver. Sophy opened the note and read it, while Marlesford saw the colour in her cheeks grow faint.

"It is from my father," she said; "he isn't very well. He wants to see me."

"I'll take you in my hansom. It is at the door."

"Then I'll get ready. Father seems depressed. I daresay he is lonely."

While she went upstairs to put on her hat and cloak his lordship walked, somewhat agitated and annoyed, about the room. He was becoming very fond of Sophy beyond a doubt. Days when he did not see her were blank days. Things he read, or thought, or heard, or saw, seemed valueless until he told her about them. His friendship with her made him doubly kind toward Tessa and less exacting perhaps. That is to say, he no longer felt so wretched when Tessa failed to understand him. Sophy understood him, and she could interpret his perplexing moods to himself. Nevertheless, it alarmed him to find any woman indispensable to his peace of mind. He was selfish in the sense that he feared to surrender his will on small points, and it was misery to acknowledge any craving in himself for the flattering solicitude which women alone can show. Before his marriage a need of friendship—not the need of romantic love—tormented him without ceasing; women as friends

were too jealous, too monopolising, too destructive. They did their utmost to trouble the heart and nothing to make it reasonable. Their social training made them—when they were at all enlightened—frivolous, or immoral, or both; when they were brought up strictly they had, too often, nothing intellectually in common with an educated man. A pedantic woman was a horror; a downright silly woman was better than a blue-stocking; a woman who wanted to direct the careers of men was a curse. How many of his political friends had been ruined by their clever fools of wives, or, worse, by the wives of other men? He despised men who were unduly influenced by women. He knew his own susceptibility to their graces. Tessa he had chosen because she had vivacity and good sense. So he told himself. But he had really loved her; she amused him; her lightest touch sent a thrill through his nerves; there was something in her which was his, which completed his nature, and which was as essential to him as his own qualities. Still, he was now as uneasy with her as a single soul divided against itself can be. When he thought of his men friends—friends on whom he had counted and with whom in early days he had shared every thought, he found that the stress of politics, of ambition, of differences in religion, in fortunes, and in destinies had estranged him from them all. Not one was left. Of robust and cheerful acquaintances, more than willing to be civil to a wealthy peer who

entertained large parties, he had many, yet he knew that they regarded him as a bore, and thought his houses admirable hotels but for their host. Sentimentality alone will not make the abstinence from coarse pleasures a law of anyone's life. But Marlesford was reserved and fastidious; a man who, capable of an intemperate passion, felt repugnance only for those squalid adventures and joys in which the imagination cannot even pretend to take part. He owned a fine yacht; his horses won races; he collected snuff-boxes and first editions; he thought of buying a Tory weekly review, *The Official*. It was his intention to direct its policy; and, as he had read a great deal and lived very much of his spiritual life in books, he promised himself many hours of serene happiness in editing articles written at leisure by authors of culture for a leisurely class. On one point he was determined. Tessa should have no say in the management and tone of the periodical in question. It was to express his own notions.

Sophy now returned to the room. She wore her small widow's bonnet, with the veil thrown back, and a cloak made of crape.

"How I hate mourning!" he exclaimed. "Do forgive me, but I must say so."

"No one could like it," she replied; "yet if I wore colours they would hurt me. If you and Jim will bear with me a little longer I'll get sane in time. No doubt I seem morbid to everybody."

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The day was pleasant. There was a breeze blowing on the Embankment; the cab bowled along at a rapid pace; the sunshine on the Thames, the fresh air, the blue sky, and the carriages full of gaily attired persons made Sophy more disposed to forget her grudge against fate. Marlesford talked in his best vein: he was trying to amuse his companion, for whom he felt a more unselfish sympathy than he had ever known. It came to this—he was exceedingly fond of her, and he was always at ease with her. Although she was handsome and fascinating, she had a wholesome manner and none of the tricks for which many women will imperil at any moment a lasting regard. The two were in high spirits—even laughing—when, as they drove up the Bayswater Road toward Holland Park, Marlesford recognised, beyond a shadow of doubt, Tessa and Lessard in the cab which they had taken from the Uxbridge Road. They, too, were laughing, but they did not see Marlesford. For him it was a deathly moment. He lost the thread of the story he was telling; he broke off suddenly; he became preoccupied. Sophy saw his sudden pallor followed by a deep flush.

“Do you ever have any trouble with your heart?” she asked presently.

“No,” said he; “but I’m such a fool when I’m surprised. I just saw—someone I didn’t expect to meet.”

Sophy asked no more. She was anxious about Dr. Firmalden, and she became preoccupied.

When they reached the Manse, Marlesford jumped out and helped her to do the same.

"Shall I wait for you?" he said.

"No. I may be here for hours. Good-bye, and thank you so much for bringing me."

"I can do nothing for you?"

"Nothing. I am already most grateful."

She shook his hand warmly and frankly. She longed to ask him why he was downcast, for she knew by instinct that his thoughts had flown far away from her and from the occasion. The passion of her youth had been exhausted and wasted upon Lessard; all she could ever feel now for any man was a quiet, dependent affection. Her dependence upon affection saved her from the dreadful hardness which so often takes the place of disappointed love, and she was learning to depend on Marlesford to a far greater degree than she realised. Too human to be self-sufficient, the very simplicity of her attachment made it spiritually, if not physically, egoistic, and what it lacked in coarser elements it atoned for excessively in a strange mental eagerness to share his moods and to know his thoughts.

As she went through the familiar gate and up the pathway of the Manse garden, she wondered whether she could be of any help to Marlesford. At the front door she looked back to smile at him before he drove away. Yes, he was charming; and Tessa was a lucky woman.

## CHAPTER XI

DR. FIRMALDEN was in his study, where the cats, a little greyer and a little fatter, still dozed on the hearth-rug; but the minister had aged and grown thin. His fine countenance, of the seventeenth-century severity and courage, had gained too much in sadness; he had been overworking as a relief from loneliness, and he had taken two uncongenial students into his house for the same cause. As Sophy entered, his deep-set eyes lit up. She kissed him, removed her cloak, and sat down in her old place on a large hassock by the fender.

"I have seen Jim this morning," said Dr. Firmalden. "He is full of new ideas. He is giving up his money, and a serious change, I think, is coming over his mind. He is too much with the Marlesfords. They won't convert him to their religion, but they will make him discontented with mine. We both spoke plainly, and it was painful. Now I have to tell you something which has been on my conscience for months. I hear you met Maurice Lessard last night."

"Yes."

"Well, I daresay the friendship will revive, whether I approve of it or not."

"Oh no. That is a dead-and-gone matter."

"So you think. Well, you must know that I have six letters in this drawer"—he pointed to one in his desk—"which he sent to you long ago, when you went to Italy with Dulcibella and Charles. I thought it my duty to keep them. Here they are—unopened, of course. But I knew they were godless, that they would only add to your disappointment in that man."

Sophy got up from the hassock and took the little packet—six letters held together by an elastic ring—which her father held out to her.

"I wonder whether you ought to have kept them?" she asked, with a catch in her breath. "I regret nothing, yet——" She did not finish the sentence.

Dr. Firmalden fingered his old worn copy of the Greek Testament and stared out of the window. She returned to the hassock and opened the letters as they were numbered, in the minister's small hand, with red ink. She read two quietly enough, but as she broke the third seal a terrible flood of tears seemed to rise from her heart. Her instinct told her that Lessard no longer felt as he had felt when he wrote those burning words of love and reproach and grief. She tore up the remaining letters unread—a slow, difficult business—and, striking match after match, she burned the fragments to a heap of black leaves in the grate. Not a word passed between her father and herself during this time. The cats stirred and purred at the sight of



the match-light; the clock ticked as usual; but Sophy was tingling from head to foot with anguish.

"No doubt," said Dr. Firmalden at length, "that there is much in those letters which the writer must regret. If you see him, you can tell him what has been done. He will probably be glad."

"Most probably. He saw me as I was not, and he loved someone who did not and does not exist. Now he sees more plainly. I assure you there can never again be anything between us."

"What a lesson in the deceitfulness of strong emotion!" exclaimed her father. "You have recovered, my poor child; and so, you say and I believe, has he."

"We have changed one set of emotions for another—that is all," she answered. "I have had a constant mental pain ever since I knew him. He is not a bad man. He is a man with great gifts and more religion than most orthodox persons really possess. I wouldn't marry a man whose religion was vague and not binding. I obeyed you there, and I am glad every day that I obeyed you."

"Then," said the father, gaining courage, "why have friends whose religion is in utter antagonism to your own? I don't approve of this intimacy with the Marlesfords. It is wrong. You remember what Robertson of Brighton said in one of his sermons: 'There are two rocks in this world of ours on which the soul must either anchor or be

wrecked. 'The one is God; the other is the sex opposite to itself.' With an unbelieving husband or friend you will have your heart and soul degraded by perpetually recurring sources of disagreement."

"No! no! I must have some friends," she said. "I gave up Lessard. I won't—I cannot give up my friends. Lord Marlesford is very kind to me. He was a Protestant before his marriage. I must have someone to talk to."

Here was rebellion. The minister had seen it in his son that morning, and it now seemed to him that obedience had lost all meaning for the minds of his children. They had become, unconsciously and therefore the more dangerously, bewitched by their Catholic friends; they felt, without knowing it, that all religions had rushed into one, and that the mysterious cults and mythologies of the Jews, the Eastern races, the Romans, and the Greeks had thronged to St. Peter's, there to be called Christianity and to defy the gospel and all the prophets.

"Sophy," he said, solemnly, "I fear for you and for Jim. The attractiveness of these rich, luxurious people is stealing over your souls. You are drunk with that wine of prosperity which first drugs and then destroys your finer instincts. When you think you want 'more life and fuller,' you want more excitement, more pleasure. Call things by their true names; you are both losing your old hold of Bible truths and Bible commandments.

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You can no longer make the Cross of Christ the measure of all things."

"You must not preach to me, father. Indeed, I cannot bear it. I have been through as much as I can stand. I cut off my right hand; my left hand has been taken from me. I try to find all my happiness in thinking about God and death. But I cannot exist without human elements in my life."

"What human friends have I?" asked her father.

"I have not your strength of character. I have not your self-reliance. Besides, you do not care intensely for human beings. All I know is that my heart aches from morning till night. I never give in. I am getting outwardly harder and colder, inwardly more bitter and more miserable."

"All this is wrong. All this shows that you have wandered away from the peace of God."

"It is not always peace—it is a sword," she said.

"Better shut out that gloomy thought," said Dr. Firmalden, shuddering.

"No! no! You ask me to face things. I am facing them. I was never in touch with many of your congregation. They disliked me, and I suppose I was unfair to them. Frank's friends were more agreeable, I confess. They had broader minds."

"And finer houses and lower standards!" replied the minister. "I tell you that this so-called toleration is nothing but scepticism. I abhor the Roman Church and I abhor all Romanists because I take Romanism seriously. If I am too vehement in

my wrath, God will forgive me. It is certain that on this earth there can be no rest for man. Let your restlessness, therefore, be rather for the cause of God than for the contemptible rivalries of Society life. These large dinner-parties, these fashionable friends, this constant association with persons of wealth, and idleness, and influence must dwarf the great eternal questions which have to be answered somehow hourly and daily by the poor and the toilers."

"The rich people suffer far more than you believe," said Sophy. "As I know more of their lives, I envy them less. At times I still get angry with them, and I wonder why some should have apparently so many delights and resources while others should have only worry and drudgery. You will completely misunderstand me when I say that Lord Marlesford—more than Frank, more than anybody I ever met—is helping me to keep sane. Most persons go mad when they attempt to discuss successful, or popular, or conspicuous people."

"The sanity which depends on a married man's friendship is somewhat precarious!" observed Dr. Firmalden, drily.

Sophy's sense of humour was so intimately allied with her father's that she laughed at his remark.

"It *is* a funny idea," she owned; "but so long as you know that I am struggling to keep my reason I don't mind your seeing the absurd side of it all."

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"Where are your girl friends?"

"They are married and they have interests of their own. Then there are dozens of women in Jim's congregation. I don't get on with them."

"Why doesn't Jim marry?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You'll tell me next," said the minister, "that Lady Marlesford is keeping him from madness! Frankly, these spiritual flirtations are beyond my comprehension."

"Flirtation isn't the word."

"Yes, it is. A concocted, undignified word best describes an unnatural state of affairs. I see danger—not gross danger. God forbid! But danger to Jim's duty, his happiness, his future. It is a perilous thing to separate feeling from acting. In the end Jim will come to make believe that he is satisfied to play Dante to this young woman's Beatrice. But Dante was a man of easy morals—to say the least. Such men can have ideal loves among others."

"If you say a word to Jim on the subject he will never forgive it."

"Worse and worse. All things are out of course. No man liveth to himself. His life runs into other lives. It will be a lifelong grief to me if Jim, through any transient infatuation, loses his grip of principles. If he finds his life tedious and his hearth desolate and his work disheartening, let him pray God to bend him to His will and to

make him contented with the advantages Providence has placed within his reach!"

"Father, you are too hard on him. You look upon every inquiry as fatal to faith. You think every ambition is worldly. You have the most old-fashioned ideas about men and women!"

"Because there is nothing new about them," he answered. "I repeat, I do not think well of these sentimental attachments."

But Sophy was now obstinate.

"We must have somebody to talk to," she repeated.

"But what do you talk about?"

"Everything on earth."

She asked about the cook, the gas-bill, the oven which had been mended, and whether the butcher still attempted to sell him New Zealand for English mutton. Thus the conversation winged down to a normal domestic level. Presently she kissed him good-bye and went away. All the way home she was pursued by his question—

"What friends have I?"

But wasn't he used to his loneliness? Didn't he like it? Surely he was happy—in his own fashion. There were the cats, the pipe, the old Greek Testament, the nibbled pen-holders, and all the books.

"Father loves his books. He has always loved books far better than company. He need not be lonely. He could have married again. But Jim and I like company. We must have it."

## CHAPTER XII

TESSA, meanwhile, having prayed a short time in the church, called on Father Vernon in Mount Street. The priest was at home, and she was shown into one of the small parlours overlooking a balcony. On the walls there were photographs of eminent ecclesiastics; on the mantelpiece there was a small coloured statuette of the Blessed Virgin; on the table there were pens and an ink-stand, a blotting-pad, and a college magazine, a circular giving some particulars of a Retreat to be given for ladies at Brighton. Tessa seemed to have been staring at these objects for an hour—in reality she waited but five minutes—when the door opened, and the tall, austere figure of the Jesuit, in his impressive habit, gave vital significance to a room which, until his entrance, was as empty as a frame without a picture. He advanced smiling, but his keen, experienced eyes met hers with the acuity of a surgeon's probe. His sympathies, she believed, were with the members of her family—not with herself. She had been irregular in coming to Confession; she preferred Protestant society, before the brightest ornaments of the Catholic circle in which she had been

brought up; her clothes, her jewels, and her gaieties had been a source of incessant gossip among the devout, and her growing reputation for being clever had given rise, in many cautious hearts, to the gravest doubts about her orthodoxy. For an English Catholic, as opposed to all other Catholics, she was too cosmopolitan; she was curiously at home in Rome; she did not find Irish Catholics odd; and in Spain she might have been Spanish—she took religion so much for granted. In other words, she was a Catholic first and an Englishwoman afterwards; this, to the patriotic circle of which her mother and her relatives were the essence, the power, and the glory, was a scandal and a grief. They apologised for her on every occasion, and unconsciously assured important Anglicans that her Ultramontanism was by no means typical of her co-religionists.

Father Vernon, a scholar of philosophic mind, understood Tessa far better than she supposed, and was more in agreement with her than she was at all aware. Of the many hundred girls and women who had consulted him professionally in the course of his fifteen years' work in London, Lady Marlesford shone out as the least malicious and the most straightforward. Pious, in the usual acceptance of the word, she was not; obedience seemed a state of mind beyond her comprehension; she was wilful, capricious, careless, egoistic, and anxious to enjoy herself. But, with delightful manners, she had a candour exceedingly refreshing



to a man who was anxious to discover all the universal truths in psychology.

"Well, my child, what is the trouble now? You don't look very bright. You are riding for a fall."

"You are quite right, Father. I am tired out. But not because I am ill. My health was never better. It is my mind which is out of order."

"And what is wrong with it?"

"I resent my inbecile education."

"Tut! tut!"

"I have been trying to improve my brains lately, but my spirit jumps about like a wild cat. It has never been taught how to learn or how to think. What do I know about life? Nothing."

"You must give yourself time!"

"What do I know about the poor? About actual things? As a girl, I was taken by mamma to the hospitals to see nice clean patients especially prepared for visitors—sitting up in bed reading holy books or lying down with the rosary in their hands. I was never told what was the matter with them, and whenever I asked if they were in pain, the nurses would say cheerfully, 'Oh no!' and mamma would say 'Hush!' as though pain were something one shouldn't speak of unless one had it one's self. Then we went district-visiting. We were given the names and addresses of respectable deserving cases who would cringe to us and talk about Almighty God

as though He were a duke who opened bazaars, and would do almost anything for mamma because she was His cousin!"

"Tut! tut!"

"I assure you that was their tone. When I told Cardinal Bordese all this, he shed tears of laughter, and said, 'How very English!' Once I went by myself to a real slum to see a real woman who was in real disgrace and very dirty, very blasphemous, and very disreputable; all my family prayed for me; they feared I was losing my faith and turning into a Radical. I have led the sheltered life. What is the result? I bore my husband because I am such a fool."

"So you bore your husband?" said Father Vernon.

"I bore him. He begins to know it. I have known it for some time."

"Yet he is kind to you?"

"Insufferably kind. Every time I bore him, he buys me another pearl! The string is getting longer and longer. But he has an expression on his face as though he might have had a more amusing wife. I can always make him laugh. He doesn't care so much for laughter. Men like women who prattle in an experienced way about hearts, and souls, and that sort of thing!"

Father Vernon succeeded in conquering a smile.

"I have no knowledge of any heart or of any soul except my own," she went on, "and they are both in confusion. Sometimes I have the

sensation of being a prisoner—certainly a spoilt prisoner. But I was not made for the existence I lead. It is so comfortable that it is degrading.”

“Have no fear! Your share of troubles and suffering will come. With regard to your husband, a man so loyal and chivalrous as Lord Marlesford gives his affection, when he gives it, for all time. At a crisis you would find him——”

“All that a husband should be! But don't you see that if I am criticising him, he is also criticising me? We are husband and wife only; we are not friends. It seems to me that friendship is far superior to the conventional and instinctive love which seems to have nothing to do with ideas, with happiness, with understanding, or with companionship.”

“This is morbid, my child.”

“Call it anything you please, Father. I don't doubt I am morbid.”

“But it is a sin to give way, without a single effort, to these cravings for a sympathy which no human being can bestow. God alone can calm all the desires of the heart. Everybody has moments of supreme desolation. That is God's way of calling you to Him. Go to Him when you are misunderstood or in want of a companion.”

“I have tried that, and it unfits me absolutely for general society afterwards. I get in such a

mood of aloofness from other people that they seem gross and grotesque — too material — like monsters in masks!"

"What want of charity and what extraordinary fancies!"

"I am telling you exactly how I feel. I could become so fond of solitude and sitting alone in empty churches that I should hate any creature who disturbed me! You mustn't encourage me to get out of touch with my fellow-creatures. I must see them often or not at all. What I want is some human being to talk to, to read with, to go out with, to go to the theatre with, to see pictures with, to travel with, to whom I can say, in perfect peace, every mortal thing that occurs to me! I am tired of shocked and pained people, and argumentative people, and people who are going to heaven because they endure each other as crosses!"

"Have you made any new friends lately?" asked the Jesuit.

She flushed.

"I try not to make friends. They might interest me too much. I told you I was in a state of absolute bewilderment."

"What about Mr. Firmalden and his sister?"

"I don't care for the sister. Firmalden is a very able man, but, as I have often told you, he has limitations."

Father Vernon drew a sigh of relief.

"I have no hope now of ever seeing him a

Catholic," she went on. "Basil lent him some volumes of Bossuet, and Firmalden has been quarrelsome ever since."

"I could suggest some writers more modern than Bossuet," said Father Vernon; "the Church does not stand or fall by Bossuet."

"But Basil likes Bossuet," replied Tessa; "he reads his *Méditations sur l'Évangile* every day, and he knows the *Traité de la Concupiscence* by heart. In a way, too, it keeps up his French, although it is old-fashioned."

By this time she was weary of her own discontent, so she ended her conversation as abruptly as she had begun it. Father Vernon walked with her to the front door and wished her good-bye with many forebodings. He knew that, in her present mood, it was waste of eloquence, time, and energy to offer any solution of her difficulties. In the crude daylight of the street she looked thoroughly overspent and ill. The corners of her mouth drooped; she seemed on the verge of tears. Clearly something was wrong. A normal cause for such depression occurred to the priest's mind, and he thanked God for it.

"Then she will be happy, poor child. Then everything will look different. She will have new thoughts and new duties."

She walked home, where she went at once to her bedroom and fell sobbing on the bed—which had belonged to Madame de Maintenon. This thought but added to Tessa's woe. She seemed

to be shut up in a museum—a living creature among the monuments and ghosts of antiquity.

“Oh, how I hate this horrid room! How I loathe these creaking, worm-eaten things! How I detest Louis Quatorze! How I wish that there were no memoirs, and no history, and no collectors of furniture, and no old furniture to buy. If I hear another thing about the seventeenth century or the eighteenth century, I'll jump out of my skin!”

Lord Marlesford reached the house about ten minutes later. Her ladyship, he was informed, had a bad headache. Alarmed, but more annoyed, he went straight up the stairs, knocked at Tessa's locked door, and waited angrily till she opened it. Her appearance was piteous. Her pretty hair was in disorder; her eyelids were swollen from violent weeping; she wore a look of mingled reproach and defiance which he had never before seen.

“Good God! what is the matter?” he exclaimed, startled out of his habitual composure.

“I have been to Acton in an omnibus—for fun!” she said.

“In an omnibus? By yourself?” He could not repress his indignation.

“Yes. Luckily, I met Mr. Lessard there, who brought me back in a hansom from the Uxbridge Road. I have had no luncheon, and my head seems made of tissue paper with springs in it. If you say one word to me, something will snap. I am sorry you have married anybody so ridiculous and

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so unsatisfactory. I wish you could get rid of me."

"This is simply terrible."

"It is indeed."

"I don't know what to think."

"Neither do I. That is the whole trouble."

"You are over-tired and you are not yourself."

"I was never quite so much myself in my whole life!"

"But don't cry! Don't cry! I wish you wouldn't cry! Darling, do not cry!"

"I will. I want to. I must. You ask me not to cry because you hate to realise that I am human. You all want to treat me as though I had no feelings. What selfish, awful, cruel people I live with!"

"I am sorry if I have been selfish. I reproach myself very much if I have made you in the least unhappy. You may not think so, but I have always tried to study you in every way."

"I don't ask to be studied! I ask to be treated as though I were alive. If you really loved me, you would not find it necessary to study me."

"Yes, I should," he said, stung into a quick retort; "because the ordinary rules which govern conduct do not apply to you."

"I believe I am a changeling—or bewitched," she said. "When I cry, I don't cry wholly on my own account. I think of your happiness, which I have ruined! You ought to have married somebody utterly different."

This was a dangerous speculation—a very adder in the form of a thought.

"What is the good of saying such things?" he asked; "do they help either of us?"

"They clear the air."

"But I was perfectly contented."

"You were not. I have seen little changes in you—gradual yet certain."

"I swear I have not changed. My manner may have changed, but that is probably as much your fault as mine. I'll take all the blame if you like. I know I can be odious."

"No, you are never odious. But you haven't one atom of response."

He was mortally hurt by this accusation, and his immediate bitter thought was that he would never forgive or forget it.

"I'm sorry I'm such a failure," he said; "it is perhaps better to know it, after all. I have been unutterably fond of you——"

"I'm tired of this everlasting unutterable! It is really too profound—too far away from the surface! We live on the surface; we don't live in these marvellous depths of which we hear so much and know so little."

He looked at her once more. She had thrown herself on the *chaise-longue* (another historical treasure). She was lying with her eyes wide open, looking beyond him, and she held one of her hands pressed to her forehead. Her dress was partly loosened at her throat, and he could see not only



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the famous pearls, but the gleam of a little steel crucifix which she wore on a ribbon round her neck. Strange, incongruous woman! The wedding-ring on her finger was now too large. She had grown much slighter during the last month or two.

He told himself that if she spoke, or gave even a sign, he would try not to remember her words. But she neither spoke nor moved. She was telling herself that if he wanted to prove that he had any tenderness, any perceptions in him, this was his moment. She felt so helpless, so deathly, and so afraid of death.

But, setting his lips, he walked out of the room. Could he stay any longer where he was not wanted?

"I'll never willingly cross that threshold again. Never, never again!" he determined in his wrath.

BOOK IV

THE CONFLICT



CHAPTER I

TWO months had passed. Firmalden, having renounced his uncle's money, had left the charming house on the Embankment and taken another in Rokeby Street, Southwark, where Sophy, while her brother wrote sermons, spent the time which she liked to reserve for speculative wonder on the nice adaptation of butcher's meat. Her own vivacity and Firmalden's views attracted a number of intelligent friends; theologians with new dogmata for old, politicians not yet disillusioned by responsibility, journalists consumed by enthusiasm, artists who loved art better than themselves, went to No. 7 Rokeby Street, for wild conversation and good coffee. The circle was Radical on academic lines, and Protestant on aristocratic lines. Firmalden, as Jean Rabout de St. Etienne, would have perished in the cause of liberty at the hands of those who preached it. His years in France,

where the philosophy, even when it is agnostic, is full of animation, of movement, of spirit, helped him to conquer those moods of revolt and discouragement which assail from time to time every man who passes behind the scenes of the religious life. The undeniable pessimism of the Gospels and of St. Paul with regard to this world, and what it can give and the powers that govern it, was a fact which he kept steadily before his eyes; and, as he had never promised himself a happiness which does not exist, he was not dismayed when the truths of Christian philosophy met with incessant illustration in domestic and national affairs. But this robust attitude of mind has never been, and can never be, popular. He displeased his deacons—excellent men who went to church for words of commendation and adroit flattery. He disappointed ordinary, unimaginative hearers, because, as he beheld the present world, he could not doubt the existence of another elsewhere as formidable at least—whether it was called hell or a state of mind. People who wished to regard Divine Providence as an English gentleman of large fortune, perfect morals, an anxiety to frustrate the foreigner, and a wish to feed, rather than to meet, the poor, were disturbed by Firmalden's fear of God, which to some seemed superstition and to others ill advised. Numbers doubted his sincerity. Did the fellow, a Balliol man, a man of most considerable learning, really believe the stuff he reeled off in the pulpit?

Where was his science? Where was his history?  
Where, in fact, was his reason?

This, then, was the difficulty of the deacons—how to get rid of a minister who was out of touch with the best class of pcw-holders. How, in plain words, could they make it so hot for him that he would have to resign? They overlooked, or they had never suspected, his natural sensitiveness. Greatly to their chagrin, he resigned gladly of his own accord, in order to accept a barely articulate call from an obscure little chapel of which he happened to know the senior deacon—his plumber. Sophy thought this admirable. Her father thought it unwise. "He will have less active work, and more time for study. Who knows what the end will be? In my time I have had to lose a great deal of what I took for enthusiasm. It was only impatience."

Sophy now wrote special articles on books and pictures for Lord Marlesford's weekly paper, *The Official*. From six till eight every morning she worked at Greek—because it was a beautiful language; she kept up her pianoforte playing; she read (under Lord Marlesford's direction) a great deal of French, Italian, and German literature, and she could discourse of Browning and Descartes, of de Musset and Verlaine, of Ibsen and Euripides, of Madame de Guyon and Madame de Pompadour, of Plato and Schopenhauer, of Homer and St. Thomas Aquinas, of Aristophanes and Goethe, with much confidence and more gaiety. She

enjoyed writing the reviews for Lord Marlesford, who thought them brilliant because they voiced, in an emotional contralto, his conscientious bass, which was too deep for utterance. Firmalden also enjoyed her articles, because he discovered in them all his own thoughts which were too light for sermons and serious addresses. The two men thus came to regard her as a kind of wonder-child, who said invariably the right thing—as they had declared it—in a perfect manner—as they had taught her. At the least sign of independent thought, however, or of interference with their notions, they grew cold; they told her nothing; they frowned; they sighed.

“I am very tired of being the only person who tells Jim the truth about himself,” she confessed, after a week of bleak isolation, to Lord Marlesford. “I shan’t do it any more. I believe now in leaving men to God.”

His lordship was enchanted, and, whereas she had been shelved as a Muse, she was once more eyed as a woman, and commended as a dilettante.

These were happy days for Sophy. But one afternoon Lord Marlesford called in order to explain a passage in Montaigne. Montaigne was not mentioned; they spoke instead of Tessa. Tessa, it seems, had gone with her mother, Lady Navenby, to Florence, where, by the doctor’s orders, she was enjoying a complete rest. Marlesford was expected to join the family party at Easter. He had no intention of doing so. Tessa

had outraged his feelings, and he was capable of sulking over a wrong for any number of months. He grieved, but he had found what he called a *modus vivendi*, an idiomatic expression which may sometimes be translated, with poetic truth, if linguistic inaccuracy—a mind in sympathy with one's own. All was bearable. On this particular morning, however, he had received a letter from his mother-in-law, a letter composed in a temper but posted only after prayer. It ran thus:—

“GRAND HOTEL, FLORENCE,  
“March 18.

“MY DEAR BASIL,—The weather is bitter, and I have never cared for Florence. I saw all the galleries thoroughly years ago, and there is nothing to occupy my time. The nicest people have left, and there is not a soul to speak to. Dreadful American and German tourists abound. Tessa is better in many ways, but still far too excitable. The contents of her book-box would account for almost anything. She has Schopenhauer, some highly immoral plays by Ibsen and Dumas, some quite shocking (to judge by the illustrations) Greek poetry translated by Frenchmen who have made it ten times more horrible, I am sure, and I must implore you to exercise your authority and forbid any further reading of such simply appalling works.

“I am now coming to something very serious indeed. Mr. Lessard, the composer, appeared on

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the scene about three weeks ago. At first I thought nothing, because Tessa has gone in for such odd society since her marriage. All sorts of extraordinary persons leave cards upon her and write to her and call upon her. I don't pretend to like them. This Mr. Lessard is a dangerous man. He sings beautifully, and he has been taken up by the Royalties, who make the greatest fuss of him, sending him signed photographs of themselves taken by other Royalties. Excessively *intime*, and it must turn his head, no matter how well he may compose. I disapprove of his acquaintance with Tessa, although I need not add that her conduct could never be otherwise, thanks be to Almighty God, than irreproachable. But these new-fashioned friendships are unwise. I brought Tessa into the world, I have trained her, punished her when necessary, indulged her, scolded her, advised her—but in spite of all I do not understand her in the least. As the dear Cardinal says in his Lenten address, of which I am now reading portions night and morning, 'The revolt of the individual against everything that exists is the order of the day. It is war declared against the whole past, the very first principles of morality, religion, philosophy, and society.' I may not be clever, but I can always understand the Cardinal. My earnest hope is that you will read between the lines of this letter.—I am, yours affectionately,

C. A. NAVENBY.

"*P.S.*—Do not tell Tessa that I have written. She would say I was making mischief. It is a painful duty."

Lord Marlesford was beside himself with annoyance long before he reached Lady Navenby's signature. A second reading of her communication but heightened his resentment. Did that meddling, evil-minded old woman wish to wreck his happiness? These epithets, he knew, were rude and even unjust. Still, rudeness and injustice were the natural infirmities of a galled man. In a better moment he would regain, he felt certain, his equanimity and reproach himself for a lapse into human nature. Meanwhile, human nature having been roused, was making the most of an opportunity. It was almost a pleasure to feel—even anger—so intensely. He remembered the philosopher who declared that one must either be in pain or else bored. There was much in that idea. Lord Marlesford was no longer bored. As he sprang out of the hansom and up the stone steps of No. 7 Rokeby Street, Sophy, who happened to be at the window, observed a new quality which she could only define as dashing in his lordship's whole appearance.

Marlesford had almost intended to show her Lady Navenby's letter. But, remembering her misguided references to friendship—the one purely agreeable thing in life—he decided, as he sat down to tell Sophy everything, to tell her



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absolutely nothing at all. He said, instead, while Sophy made the tea—

“Tessa is getting very sick of Florence. She will be coming home shortly.”

“Then you won’t go away for Easter?”

“No; I am not in the mood for travelling, and I should be restless.”

She sang the praises of London in the spring.

“Quite true. And Tessa is always at her best in London. She can see all her friends.”

But he coloured at the word and wished he had not used it.

“I’m not really half so clever as Tessa,” said Sophy; “why don’t you ask her to write for *The Official*?”

“Her mind is already too active. She wears herself out.”

“Jim says she has genius.”

Lord Marlesford had already suffered from fears of that kind.

“A genius for what?” he asked, irritably.

“For friendship,” said Sophy.

The pause after this must have ruined any conversation. Sophy realised that she had been tactless. Marlesford saw that he would have to be careful. How could he make it clear, that, while he believed with all his soul that the genius for friendship was the greatest of all gifts, he would have preferred to know that Tessa lacked it? While he was trying to think how to say the difficult thing, he remarked—

"Lessard, it seems, is in Florence."

Sophy did not hide her surprise. But she guessed at once why Lessard was in Florence. He admired Tessa.

"What does Jim think of Lessard?" said Marlesford, who had decided now to let the genius-for-friendship topic drop. Why pursue it?

"He is fond of him. But he says he is the embodiment of Don Juan's Serenade—the song is full of pain, love, and grief, but the accompaniment is lively, joyous, and dancing, so the serenade seems a mockery. You remember De Musset's lines, *c'est qu'on trompe et qu'on aime?*"

"That's so true," said Lord Marlesford; "one deceives and one loves at the same time."

But he did not wish to speak of love either. What a strain it was to have so many forbidden subjects.

"Why is it," he suggested, "that one never seems to want one's tea abroad?"

"One has coffee or ices instead. At Venice——" She paused. Fatal recollections of afternoons at Florian's with poor Frank rose to her mind, and Lord Marlesford suddenly seemed as far off as someone observed through the wrong end of an opera-glass.

"When Tessa comes home next week you must dine with us," he said.

"I have quite made up my mind not to go to parties," replied Sophy. "They don't suit my temperament. I could never like a number of

people. I get on with very few. I haven't Tessa's genius for friendship."

This was true; he could not deny it. But how to say that he for his part was more drawn to those who had slow affections than to those who— On the other hand, why speak of affections at all?

"Tessa," observed Lord Marlesford, "is like an indisputable fact. There she is as she is. Most women will adapt themselves to circumstances or to persons. She cannot. She is persistently herself. I know what she will not do. What she will do is not even within the realm of speculation. I admire her for it," he added, hurriedly.

Sophy began to wonder how Lessard would manage Tessa, and, above all, how Tessa would deal with a man so impetuous and uncompromising as Lessard. The problem was interesting, and she forgot that she had lapsed into silence.

Marlesford also became preoccupied. But it was characteristic of their relationship that neither felt embarrassed when the other had nothing to say. Often they were both absent-minded. He would think of Tessa while she would think of Firrilden's worries—things she never mentioned to Marlesford, although they weighed heavily upon her heart.

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## CHAPTER II

WHILE Lord Marlesford was calling at Rokeby Street, Tessa, in Florence, was receiving the following letter from Firmalden:—

"7 ROKEBY STREET, SOUTHWARK.

"DEAR LADY MARLESFORD,—As you ask me to describe my new work, I will try to do so. The chapel itself is a small hall, with seats for about two hundred persons, a pulpit, and a communion-table in front of it. A local house decorator has, with generosity, painted the walls blue free of charge, and added gilding in the form of gold stars here and there, at cost price. To me the walls are hideous, but they represent an idea of heaven to the greater number of my congregation. I do not know each member of it yet, but those I do know are kind to me and wiser than many of the highly instructed. Few of them are very poor; the trouble is that they make too much of outward respectability, and regard success in their undertakings as a necessary reward for believing in God. At the first disappointment, misfortune, or pain

the tendency is to doubt the existence of a Deity. Many own frankly that their faith suffers a severe shock the moment things go ill with them. Nonconformity in England has been so much impressed by the Old Testament that it might almost be called the Jewish religion without the Synagogue; the materialism without the profundity; the love of the present without the vision of the future; the Commandments without Rabbinism. This is the problem I have to put before them: How to live with reference to a world conceived in the terms of the Christian creed; because there are as many worlds as there are creeds, and each man endeavours to fit the world into the particular creed or philosophy to which he subscribes. You know my views quite well. You are good enough to call my Protestantism the revival of a religion already dead for centuries—the primitive Christianity of (say) 50 A.D. Perhaps you are right. But all faith is as much an instinct and also a blindness (as the world sees) as human love. Some wish it endorsed by the authority of an infallible Church. Others wish it sustained by the authority of an infallible Bible. I don't grant an infallible Church or an infallible Bible. I see only an infallible God. This may seem to you arrogant nonsense. Don't doubt that I see the intellectual strut of the Protestant who will exercise his own judgment, who wants to reduce his religious obligations to a private understanding between

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himself and his God—Who is usually what he takes to be his own higher self. The strut is foolish, the rest arises often from mere want of education; or, in the educated, it is mere pride of intellect, known as the sin of Lucifer; or it is a real incapacity to submit one's mind to any sort of moral force from without. (Physical force has never yet changed a tendency or an opinion.) This, then, I believe to be the incurable quality in a born Protestant—whether pious or impious by temperament: he insists on the liberty to think and feel and act as he pleases, without regard to the prejudices of any other human being. You will say this quality is common enough to all vigorous natures; that it belongs to original sin. True, but whereas the Catholic is willing—frequently anxious—to conquer rebelliousness, the Protestant is proud of it, cultivates it, and calls it—so far from a fault—a manly virtue.

“The Church of Rome appeals with astonishing strength to two utterly opposite multitudes: 1. The imaginative, the tender, the romantic, the visionary, and the poor; in other words, to all those to whom the world offers little or nothing. They may not be orderly, but they are often devout. 2. The lovers of law, of security, of symmetry, of monarchical institutions, of great architecture in every manifestation, of formalism, of ceremonial. These may not be devout, but they are always orderly. To all such she must ever appeal. But to those who, better than all created things, love

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their individual liberty (which means, I grant, universal anarchy), 'the Church of Rome is utterly detestable.

"Rebels and vagabonds, however, grow old—if they are not executed, if they do not die of their excesses either in spiritual enthusiasm or in so-called crime. After middle-age they become conservative, and at last tyrannical, as the experienced madmen in an asylum—they help to keep the fresher lunatics in order. But there are rebels who are rebels in thought only; for them spiritual adventures and mental revolutions are enough. They ask only for liberty in thinking. Hence, the many Protestants who are not iconoclasts; the philosophers who could never become theologians; the professors, the politicians, the preachers, who seeing good in all things, will not condemn more than a part, and then with reluctance, of anything. Say what you will, these are the people who have worked hardest for civilisation. The dangers of amiability are evident: lack of conviction, lukewarmness, a drifting spirit. Somebody must be in earnest; somebody must be willing to risk a mistake or a false step. I see all this as clearly as you do. So I have risked, and made, any amount of mistakes. I have tried experiments which experience has long since proved hopeless. I have endeavoured to live my life as though no one had ever lived before me. When I tell you that all I have learnt so far confirms absolutely traditional prudence, you will say, 'The Church again! She

is always right!' But can't one speak of tradition without thinking of Rome—

“O Dieu de vérité, pour qui seul je soupire!

Je me lasse d'ouïr, je me lasse de lire,  
Mais non pas de te dire  
C'est toi seul que je veux.’

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES FIRMALDEN.”

Tessa thought this letter less antagonistic in tone than usual, and she answered it at once:—

“GRAND HOTEL, FLORENCE.

“DEAR MR. FIRMALDEN,— I refuse to argue any longer. Clearly Rome is to you what Mecca would be to me. My fault has been that, instead of wishing to think for myself, I wish everybody to think as I have been taught to think. This is not irony, but the simple truth. The Church has to define in set terms poetry and mysticism— which are as veritable as documents and bones, but invisible and not tangible. ‘Where there is no vision the people perish.’ I am far more reasonable than I used to be, possibly because I am very tired, and fatigue is a cause of much amiability and toleration. As for happiness, I do not see it, and I think it impious to deny that life is painful—for moral or for physical reasons—the greater part of the time.

“I have it in me to love Florence, but I do not



love it under present conditions. If Mr. Lessard had not joined us three or four weeks ago, I should have died of depression. My regret is that I am not well enough to enjoy his talk thoroughly. It is too natural for poor mamma, who is by temperament a very affected woman, in the nicest possible way, of course. She is always imitating herself—if you understand me; saying the things she is expected to say and doing the things she is famous for doing. Thus it is always observed, 'How like dear Lady Navenby!' Half the time she does the greatest violence to her feelings in order to be true to her mannerisms! As we are on the subject of character, do let us consider Lessard. As Sophy was once fond of him, and he of her, he interests me on that account—although I admit he is a study in any case. I suppose he is a Pagan without Pagan piety and Pagan religious obligations, just as you say that Non-conformists are Jews without Rabbinism and without the Synagogue. Lessard's soul is wild, no doubt; yet his passionate sincerity is so rare that one hates to discourage it. As he says, what might possibly be true sentiment in others would be a false sentiment in him. Nevertheless, if he had not a fine mind, his candour would be intolerable. Not everyone could safely indulge in such self-revelation. Did you know that the poor creature who was illegally married to him is dead? Tell Sophy or not, as you see fit. Would it matter to her now?

"I must say good-bye. My head aches, and I am stupid.—Yours sincerely,

TESSA MARLESFORD."

Tessa had another letter by the same post. It was one from Miss de Verney, who begged to inform Lady Marlesford that Lord Marlesford fairly haunted No. 7 Rokeby Street, and was completely under the thumb of the Honourable Mrs. Burghwallis. "Right is right," said the virtuous young woman in conclusion, "and such goings-on are palpably scandalous."

Tessa burnt the letter, and, telling herself it contained an abominable lie, believed it in a measure.

But Miss de Verney's industrious conscience was not eased by writing to Tessa only. In a disguised hand, she wrote to Lessard also, signing herself "*A Friend*." Her news was to the effect that Lord Marlesford, or somebody very like him, was paying marked attentions to a certain person, and that Lady Marlesford, unless the writer was grossly mistaken, was being cruelly deceived all round.

Rosanette's object in writing to Lessard was to rouse his suspicion of Sophy, and not because she thought the composer had any special interest in the Marlesfords. Miss de Verney considered that she had shown the greatest ingenuity in referring to Sophy as "a certain person." This seemed to her in some way to evade the libel law and to

invest her communication with a legal propriety. From her standpoint, the fact that Lessard and Sophy had once been in love was every reason why Lessard, now that Sophy was a widow, should renew his attentions. Sophy would expect such advances on his part. "I'll spoil that little game," said Miss de Verney, "and I'll pay her out for turning Jim against me." Nothing could dissuade Rosanette from the conviction, which she had formed for the purpose of getting advice on the subject, that Sophy had intervened.

"*Me* looks are better than they ever were," complained Rosanette; "*me* position as a leading lady is beyond dispute; why, then, this coldness? Mr. Firmalden loved me as his life. His sister, proud cat, has come between us."

Lessard, who had forgotten the very existence of Nannie Cloots, could not guess who had sent him such a note or what motives could have prompted it. That Sophy was "the certain person" referred to never entered his head. That Marlesford was amusing himself he did not doubt. Indeed, he thought it the inevitable consequence of a marriage which had brought happiness to neither party, and, as he did not admit that people should ever be, as he phrased it, gratuitously miserable, he did not blame Marlesford. He began to think, instead, how Tessa's lot might be more delightful.

### CHAPTER III

A WEEK later Firmalden was at work in his small study, which overlooked a series of cramped backyards. He was preparing a learned treatise on the Fourth Gospel, and his thoughts were far away from himself, from London, from his present life, from every human creature.

"If you please, sir, there's a poor woman in the hall who says she is in trouble and she must ask your advice."

He looked up and saw the small, clean German cook, with a shining face, who acted as his housekeeper under Sophy.

"I'll see her. Show her up."

Wilhelmina withdrew; he heard her retreating and her returning step on the staircase. With an air of profound concern and discreet curiosity, she ushered into his presence a small veiled lady whose black bonnet and beaded mantle and cashmere skirt suggested the stage gentlewoman in reduced circumstances. When the door had closed on Wilhelmina, the stranger threw back her veil and revealed the features of Nannie Cloots.

"Jim!" she exclaimed, "forgive me! All's fair in love and war. By means of *me* art, I have

fooled your servant. But I will not try to fool you. Surely you can't refuse to see me now."

Excitement at the success of her trick had given a sparkle to her eyes and something elfish to her smile. She had whitened her face because she thought pallor romantic, but she had painted her mouth scarlet because she had never read of any heroine who had not scarlet lips. The scent which she had used liberally on her clothes seemed to fill the whole house. She had also swallowed some—perhaps to overcome the effect of a glass of brandy. The mingled odours of New Mown Hay and cheap spirits were nauseating enough, but, in connection with the girl's still pretty face, still delicate characteristics, they seemed the very atmosphere of ruin.

"I'm sorry you have come in this way, Nannie," said Firmalden; "if I haven't seen you, it has been because——"

"Because you love me and are afraid I shall get round you. You think I've too much beauty for a clergyman's wife! That's you all over! You think that I wouldn't go down at mothers' meetings and missionary societies. You're all for self now that your name is in all the papers. But I'm a celebrity too."

Firmalden moved various objects on his writing-table before he could decide what to say and how to say it.

"You know, Nannie," he began, "that I loved you most intensely years ago."

She sobbed, and he closed the lid of the ink-bottle.

"But," he went on steadily, "I do not love you now. I wish you wouldn't force me to say this."

Nannie, with another sob, held out her small, thick, plump hands.

"Oh, you will break *me* heart! I'll throw *meself* into the river. When I broke off our engagement, I obeyed mamma. I have always loved you. You are so unforgiving and unkind. Oh, you *are* cruel!"

Nannie did not love Firmalden, but she had reached an unsatisfactory point in her career when she needed, as her manager had said, "a flip-up." She was playing for nothing less than the abstract which she called "her position," a mystery which materialised in the form of a weekly salary as a leading juvenile in a London theatre. Her dream had always been to marry a peer, but in any event to marry. The peer she had long since abandoned as waste of time. She had encouraged Army men, young barristers (but they were hard indeed to pin down), journalists (but they too got to hear too much), actors, dramatic authors, artists, singers, tradesmen—all in vain. It was a strange fact, in view of her vogue and her appearance, that Firmalden was the one man who had ever offered to marry her. Naturally, she thought of him whenever the gales blew too strongly. Often she beheld in her imagination on all the newspaper hoardings: "The marriage of a well-known minister

to a famous actress." Had such a thing ever happened before? What an advertisement! What a score! The struggle for success was becoming more desperate every month. Three in succession of her manager's productions had fallen flat, and although the plays themselves were wretched, she had been blamed for their failure. "I believe that girl is a Jonah," said the manager, quite openly, at a limp rehearsal with cuts after a dolorous first night. To keep up her animation she had been drinking American cock-tails until they ran to such a pretty penny (as her dresser informed her) that she decided to buy the gin in bottles for economy's sake. She was drifting, and she knew it, into a bad set. The old days at all the different Sunday schools had confused her notions of doctrine, but she believed in a God, and she wanted to be refined.

"Don't forsake me, Jim!" she said. "Oh, do not forsake me! I'll be such a good wife to you, although this house is such a very low address. I'll bear it all for your sake, dear. I'll give up *me* Society life. I'll even leave the stage. There!"

It seemed to her that refusal on his part was no longer possible. She saw herself standing at the altar in a white satin gown with a white Prayer-Book to match, and all the profession looking on in the pews—as though it were a smart benefit at Drury Lane.

"I shall never marry," said Firmalden.

"Never is a long word, dear," she faltered.

Perhaps she would be married in her going-away dress and a Gainsborough hat. Yes, she would make that sacrifice too.

"It's the fuss of marrying which puts so many men against it," she said; "it makes them quite shy! We can marry quietly. I don't want to show *meself* off. If the public find it out and come of their own accord——"

"There is no question of marriage—no question of it."

"But you said you loved me—you did, you did! And you are not one to change. Someone has poisoned your mind against me. You don't know what you are saying."

"I do, indeed."

"Then you're a mean hound. To win *me* heart and to throw me over. To say you love me, and yet you won't marry me."

"I said I did love you once."

"Once! What's that? There's another woman come between us. Men don't ever leave off loving—they love Number Three instead of Number Two. They are always Number One themselves! I know all about Number Three."

"This must end," said Firmalden, standing up.

"Not at all. This is not a case of quick curtain. You can drive me from your door, but that won't be the end! I'll haunt you to the end of your days. I'll come between you and all your hopes. I'll let people know that the Reverend James Firmalden, of Balliol College, Oxford, who has



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been a Celebrity at Home, and all that, won't marry the actress he loves because he has been taken up by a Society woman. Oh, Jim, don't look like that! You drive me mad by treating me so unkindly. I didn't mean to say such nasty things, although they are true, and you know it. They are! they are! But I'm devoted to you all the same."

She moved forward, threw her arms round his shoulders—he was much taller than she—and, leaning against him, broke into violent weeping.

"Why are you so unkind?" she sobbed. "Why do you treat me so?"

The clinging hands, the New Mown Hay, and the cheap spirits were suffocating in their effect. Firmalden used more force than he knew in wrenching himself free. She screamed out that he was a brute; that he had bruised her wrists. But she decided to leave him—because she felt her animation waning.

"As I feel quite faint and ill after this scene," she said, "perhaps you will tell your servant to give me some refreshments. Or," she added thoughtfully, "you might lend me five pounds. I'm a little behind with *me* rent."

He gave her the money, which she took with a ghastly smile. On the landing she turned and smiled in the same way again. He went down with her to the hall, opened the door, and tried his utmost to make her feel that she was merely leaving the house in the ordinary way, at the end

of an ordinary visit. But this phantom courtesy only added to the grotesque horror of their interview. Nannie laughed—

“It’s as good as a play!”

From the pavement she turned and smiled once more—the same ghastly, mirthless smile—a convulsion of the mouth, the inane repetition of a habit which had lost its motive.

## CHAPTER IV

NANNIE had quarrelled with her mother, and she now lived in a house not far from the Westminster side of the Vauxhall Bridge. She had occupied at first the drawing-room floor; now she was on the third floor, but still in apartments with plush curtains, hand-painted mirrors, gilded chairs, and similar emblems of luxury. Here she entertained her friends and spent nearly every pound she earned on wine, food, and rent. She was extravagant, but her precarious early life had given her such a terror of debt that she had few bills. Yet, because she had never asked for credit and had always been a punctual payer, the moment she fell a little into arrears, her landlady became suspicious. As a matter of fact, the Manager had reduced Nannie's salary—although, "to save her face," as he expressed it, she stood still at the same figure on the salary list. To have suffered a supposed depreciation in her market value was an agonising pain to the young actress. She wondered how soon all the others would find it out, and she had grown unsociable with the company for fear of betraying her secret, or learning, from their demeanour, that they were

fully aware of it. She had thought more than once during her fits of despair that it would be a better thing to die while she was still young and pretty, and the newspapers (she could never forget the newspapers) might announce the tragic death at an early age of the beautiful Miss de Verney. The idea of losing her looks was horrible: it acted as the one restraint upon her new craving for stimulants. She did not care for the taste of alcohol—but its effect, while it lasted, relieved the gnawing terror in her little head. It was hard to think for long about anything; but to have such few thoughts as she possessed all infected with the warning note was, in her case, getting perilously near insanity. The landlady's doctor—who was recommended to all the lodgers—thought Miss de Verney somewhat hysterical, a term which he applied to every possible condition of mind and body.

When, therefore, Nannie could not touch the dinner which Mrs. Jeppworth had prepared for her as usual, that excellent woman said—

"You are very hysterical. You had better have a brandy and soda. If that does no good, I'll give you some of my heart drops."

It was now six. Nannie was not due at the theatre till half-past eight. She accepted the brandy, and became confidential while Mrs. Jeppworth helped her to change her dress for a tea-gown.

"I've seen him again, Mrs. Jeppworth. His

words went through me like a knife. He loves me, but I don't think I can ever marry him. His disposition is so bad."

Mrs. Jeppworth, who was twice a widow, had heavy eyebrows, an ample bosom, and cashmere boots without heels. She wore perpetual mourning, and her sole ornament was a true lover's knot in jet. Something in her large white face suggested a pasty comeliness in the past; her eyes were dark and small, but they seemed enormous because of the beetling brows.

"What else did he say?" she suggested, as Nannie showed signs of dozing.

"I can't tell you all. But when I refused to marry him, he seized me by the wrists and said, 'Woman, don't trifle with me!'"

Mrs. Jeppworth looked dreamy. She did not believe one word so far, and she winked solemnly, over the drowsy girl's body, into space.

"He begged and implored," continued Nannie: "he offered to give up his career, he offered to live with me wherever I pleased—even in a little common street if I liked. He begged me not to forsake him. He finally said, 'Someone has poisoned your mind against me.' Then he worked himself up into a fearful temper. He cried! Fancy a man crying. He tried to hold me in his arms. But I tore *meself* away."

This began to sound graphic. Had Mrs. Jeppworth known French, she would have called it *vécu*. And yet she felt, from her knowledge of

men, that there was an elemental inaccuracy somewhere.

"Well, I never!" she observed.

"I tore *meself* away," repeated Nannie; "but *me* heart is broken."

"It's almost a pity," said Mrs. Jeppworth, with one more wink into the darkness, "that you ever met him. What a peculiar man he must be! I won't go so far as to say that if I ever married again, I wouldn't take a clergyman. They can be so fascinating. But that they are peculiar, no one can deny."

Nannie was half asleep. Mrs. Jeppworth withdrew and did not come back again till eight o'clock. Miss de Verney was awake and crying—

"Oh, I'm so ill! How can I act to-night? But I must not disappoint the public."

"You must try the heart drops this time," said Mrs. Jeppworth, producing a small bottle of tabloids from her pocket. She was in the act of unscrewing the stopper when she was called downstairs to the drawing-room suite by the best friend of a retired Major-General.

"There's Miss Elam. I'll be back presently," said Mrs. Jeppworth, but she left the small bottle on the table.

Nannie darted across the room, bolted the door, and read the directions on the bottle of tabloids: "One or two as the doctor shall direct." Then an idea with which she had long been familiar proved irresistible. She would take the bottle with her

to the theatre, over-dose herself the whole evening, collapse on the stage, and create a great sensation. The stuff was not poison, but it would make her terribly ill, bring her to death's door, and frighten everybody. In her pocket, they would find a farewell letter addressed to Firmalden. Here were all the advantages, without the awfulness, of suicide. As she had always enjoyed good health, she did not fear illness. She saw herself lying in bed, like Sarah Bernhardt in the last act of *La Dame aux Caméllias*; Firmalden, repentant and desperate, rushing in; a reconciliation, a recovery; a happy ending. She thrust the bottle into the bosom of her dress, and hastened out of the house to the theatre before Mrs. Jeppworth could get away from Miss Elam. Once at the theatre, Nannie felt more independent. As she climbed the stone steps past the grimy walls and flaring gas-jets to her dressing-room, she almost decided to postpone her plan for a week or two. But the dressing-room light was pitiless: she saw herself in the mirrors, and the histrionic instinct told her that, if she wished to look the part she proposed to play, the hour had struck. Haggard, dishevelled, dull-eyed, and weary, she set to work on her make-up before she wrote the letter to Firmalden. She covered her face with grease, rubbed in the rouge, blacked her eyelashes, drew dark shadows under her eyes, powdered her nose, and curled her hair. It was all done swiftly; she knew her business, and when she settled down to

it, she was never silly. The theatre, which agitates many natures, made her deliberate and calculating. She swallowed two tabloids before she began her letter, and she took one every ten minutes till her dresser, Miss Draver, came in.

"Dressed already!" said Miss Draver.

Miss Draver was stout, short-waisted, almost illiterate, and the best judge of a money-making play in the theatrical world. When Miss Draver expressed the opinion that she "had had enough" of a rehearsal, the staff knew what to expect from the press and from the libraries. Miss Draver saw that Miss de Verney was no longer the "draw" she had been, but, being a fair-minded, incorruptible power, she thought the girl had been ill-cast in the recent productions.

"Cheer up," she said, patting Nannie on the shoulder; "they're doing shocking business at the Frivolity! Something cruel. And although they're putting on extra matinées at the King's, we all know what that means. Bluff! And the papering that's going on over the way is wearing the young ladies at Blackley's to the bone. They can't keep on seeing *Boadicca* two or three times a week. It's too much to expect of anyone."

"Have we a good house to-night?"

"Pretty fair—better than last night, anyhow. Have you everything you want?"

"Everything, thank you."

"You don't look well, you know."



Nannie's eyes filled with tears.

"I'm not very well," she said.

Miss Draver patted her on the back.

"Never mind! If it is to be, it will be. If it isn't to be, it won't be."

This was her one counsel to all women who were in love, and she had observed in Nannie the symptoms of that fever which was known to Miss Draver as "man on the brain."

"Man on the brain again," she muttered to herself, as she went a flight higher to the dressing-room of the Second Juvenile and the First Old Woman.

Nannie had barely finished her letter when the call-boy cried at her door—

"Curtain's up, miss."

She swallowed another tabloid, powdered her nose afresh, and, thrusting the letter, addressed carefully to Firmalden, into her pocket, went down to the wings to wait for her cue. Her heart was light; nothing seemed to matter any more: as bits of familiar dialoguc reached her from the stage, she tittered because the audience tittered. Presently, she caught her cue—spoken by a great favourite in "society parts," in the strange tones popularly associated with a duchess: "*My niece, Lady Violet Waldfield, is very young, but she is still inexperienced.*"

At this point, Nannie had to make her entrance, in peals of laughter and showing all her teeth—which were very good.

"Oh, aunt," she had to say, "*I met such a little scarecrow of a man in the garden.*"

She then sees the very individual is talking with the duchess. He is none other than the Marquis of Bolloter, who alone can save the falling fortunes of the family. Bolloter was played by a low comedian risen from the Halls.

Nannie dashed on to the stage, laughing as she had never been able to laugh before. The scene went admirably, and the house roared. They had two curtains at the end of the act.

"Ah," cried Nannie, turning to the duchess, as they left the stage, and the carpenters began to change the scene, "when I am dead, they will know what they have killed. I can act—if they give me a part!"

All through the evening she swallowed tabloids, but she felt neither better nor worse for them. When would she collapse? Perhaps in the third act. She went, always expecting something to happen, through the whole play. Her spirits flagged: she still hoped for the ultimate collapse which would create the enormous sensation. But it was not until she found herself alone in the cab driving back to her lodgings that she had any sense of discomfort. Then she shivered violently; her temples throbbed; she thought she should drink three glasses at least of water straight off.

"Mrs. Jeppworth," she screamed, as she rang the door-bell; "Mrs. Jeppworth, I'm dying!"

"You'll have a crowd here in a minute," growled

the cabman; "there'll be windows going up all over the place. Keep your silly mouth shut!"

"I'm dying, I tell you," she screamed again; "I'm dying!"

"No more than I am," said the cabman, "and I want my fare, please."

He clambered down from his seat as Mrs. Jeppworth opened the door.

"Oh, I'm so ill," said Nannie; "here's five pounds; pay the man, and send him with this letter to Rokeby Street."

She remained still while Mrs. Jeppworth examined the bank-note, produced her own purse, and paid the cabman, who departed with the letter. Then Nannie began to scream once more—

"I'm dying! I'm dying! Put me on the sofa in the dining-room and unpin *me* hair. If I faint, for God's sake don't put a lot of water on *me* face. I haven't had time to wash off the make-up, and I shall look a sight—all smeared."

Miss Elam, hearing the disturbance in the hall, came out in her mauve silk dressing-gown to the top of the staircase.

"If this dreadful scene continues," she observed haughtily, "I must give notice first thing in the morning."

"Oh, you hard-hearted thing!" sobbed Nannie; "can't you see I'm dying?"

She rolled up her eyes in such an alarming way and stumbled forward with such a moan that Mrs. Jeppworth was terrified.

"I hate scandals," said Miss Elam severely, "and if this gets into the Police Court, I'll bring an action for damages."

Then she retired to the seclusion of her own apartments.

Nannie was certainly ill. She remembered, too, all the points of Sarah Bernhardt's most famous death scenes. Half mimetically, and half in spite of herself, she panted, gasped, and became almost unconscious. Mrs. Jeppworth sent for the doctor.

## CHAPTER V

IT so happened that Lord Marlesford and Sophy and two friends in the Rokeby Street circle had attended a concert at the St James's Hall. They all went back to Rokeby Street for supper.

"Where is Firmalden?" said Marlesford, as they sat at table.

"He's dining with Mr. Lessard, who arrived unexpectedly this afternoon," replied Sophy.

Marlesford was glad to hear that Lessard had left Florence, but he asked no more questions.

The little party at the supper-table talked and joked till they were roused by the sound of cab-wheels and a vehement ring at the bell.

"Here's Jim," exclaimed Sophy.

Marlesford, who happened to be nearest, went out into the passage and opened the front door. It was not Jim; it was a cabman with a letter, addressed, in a woman's hand, to Jim.

"A young lady in Mountjoye Place has sent this," said the cabman, with a sly leer; "she's taking on somewhat. Shall I wait for an answer, sir?"

The address, the leer, and the man's confidential tone produced a sinister impression on Marlesford's mind.

"If there's an answer," he said, "I'll send it by my own cab. Mr. Firmalden is out."

"Well, I shouldn't like to be the one to tell her that! So here goes!"

Growling, the cabman mounted his box, whipped his horse viciously, and clattered at a gallop up the street, finding, in the noise, inadequate vengeance for his disappointment.

Marlesford turned the letter over; observed the marks of rouged finger-tips and the heavier smudges of the cabman's hand. What did it all forebode? Nothing good. He reminded himself that the clergy of all denominations were frequently summoned, just as doctors and solicitors, to many strange haunts at odd hours by queer people. Still, he did not care for the incident.

"Who is it?" said Sophy, coming out.

"A note for your brother; I fancy it must be a sick-call."

She took the envelope, and, as she recognised the handwriting, Marlesford was surprised to see her grow pale.

"I'd better read it," she said; "if it is urgent, perhaps I can be of help. He has told me to open anything of the kind, always."

This is what she read :—

"You have scorned me and flouted me after you won my heart and led me on to believe that you loved me better than your life. Ever since I was sixteen this has been going on, and now you throw

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me over because you are a minister and I am an actress. An actress has a heart, and when these lines reach you I hope to be dead. But come to Five Mountjoye Place. Look at least upon my dead face, and forget if you can the girl you have so cruelly wronged. My character is every bit as good as yours. This indeed is the reward of fidelity. I am faithful unto death, for I cannot live after your unkind words this afternoon. I have taken poison.—Your ever loving,

NANNIE."

"You must ask Mr. and Mrs. Thorburn to go," said Sophy, in a strained voice, "while I put on my hat. Tell them it's a sick-call. But wait for me. You must help me."

She had never known such horror and fear as she was suffering. It was so great that it seemed unreal. If Nannie had committed suicide, and this letter were read at the inquest, Firmalden's career would be ruined. No one would believe the truth of the story in the face of that treacherous farewell. Sophy knew that Nannie had been prowling about the neighbourhood, sending letters, and calling at the house during the past month. Jim had been more distressed than he would admit by the trouble she had made. He had guessed that she was the sender of many anonymous communications to himself and to the deacons.

The Thorburns had left when Sophy came down in her hat and veil.

"You can't possibly go alone to Mountjoye Place at this hour," said Lord Marlesford. "I think you ought not to go at all."

"I must go before Jim gets back. It is a mercy and a miracle that he is not here now. But if you will drive me there, I'll try and explain everything on the way. We can't lose a minute."

The expedition seemed to Marlesford too imprudent for words. It was nearly midnight: he considered it more than unwise to drive about alone with Sophy at such a time and on a mysterious errand. He wondered what his coachman would think, what the world would think—if it knew: what he himself would think if he heard of a similar adventure on the part of any man calling himself sane. But he could not desert Sophy—who was evidently in a panic. He must see the thing through—cost what it might.

"I'll tell you," she said, as they drove along, and Marlesford scanned the pavement for any possible acquaintances who might recognise him; "this letter is from Miss de Verney, the actress. Years ago, Jim fell in love with her, and they were engaged. She broke it off herself, because he was poor. Now she wants to make friends again."

"And I," thought Marlesford, with chills running over him, "who have always heretofore kept clear of all these messes!"

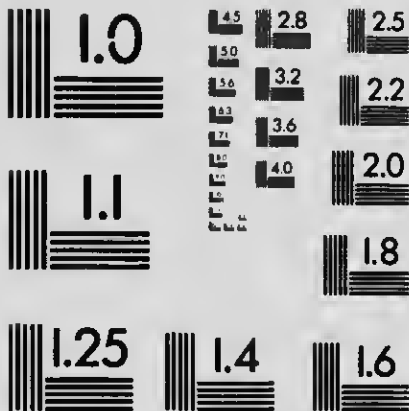
He had every confidence in Firmalden, but the whole affair was disagreeable.





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"She pesters Jim," continued Sophy; "she's utterly unscrupulous."

An instinct told her that Marlesford, in spite of his chivalry, could not bear to hear as much as she herself knew. If he caught even a whisper of the words "suicide," "inquest," and the like, he would become too disgusted, too alarmed.

"I don't see how we can do the least good," said his lordship; "we shall simply be let in for a painful scene."

"Then let me go alone."

"Impossible. I only want you to be prepared for a thankless task."

She kept the unnameable terrors to herself. If Jim were ruined, it would kill her father. Jim would become embittered for life. To whom could she turn for hope and for strength? Certainly to no one human. But, horrible as the prospect seemed, she had a presentiment that Nannie, after all, was playing some wretched trick. It was hard to believe that any girl would care to go straight to death with a lie upon her soul. Nannie, even as a child, had always seemed to her an example of cleverness ill-balanced and misdirected, but not irredeemable.

The cab stopped at Mountjoye Place. There was no one in sight. Marlesford knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by Mrs. Jeppworth.

"Here's a swell!" she thought, and her astonish-

ment was even greater when he stepped back to help Sophy out of the hansom.

"How is Miss de Verney?" asked Sophy, trying to hide her suspense.

"Very bad indeed. We are waiting for the doctor, but he seems to be taking his time."

Marlesford, pulling his moustache and profoundly annoyed, followed the two women into the dining-room. There, on the sofa, with a red-shaded lamp casting a harsh light on her strained face, gasping, moaning, and shuddering, with a hearthrug thrown over her feet and her long hair falling over her shoulders, lay Nannie.

"Is that you, Jim, after all?" she asked feebly.

"No. It is Sophy."

"You!" exclaimed Nannie, opening her eyes; "you! So he has sent you—the one who made all the mischief. Yes, you did! He'll be sending Lady Marlesford next, poor little fool! Oh, these men, Mrs. Jeppworth, these men!" Her voice grew shriller and wilder. "These men! All for self—self—self!"

"She's off her head," explained Mrs. Jeppworth, soothing, as it were, Lord Marlesford, who had retreated into the hall at Nannie's first utterance.

"You mustn't say such wicked things, Nannie," said Sophy; "if you were really dying, you would be afraid to say them."

The girl, convulsed with physical nausea and bitterness of spirit, writhed on the couch.

"What silly nonsense you talk! Oh, you do talk the silliest nonsense! Of course I'm dying."

Then some hideous misgiving seemed to pierce her.

"My God!" she screamed, "perhaps it's true. Perhaps I'm done for. Save me! save me! give me something to save me!" She sprang up; she flung herself into Sophy's arms.

"Save me! Don't stand staring at me! Save me! I've taken poison. And I feel worse and worse. Save me, you fools! Why don't you save me?"

"This, you know," said Lord Marlesford, from the hall, "is too painful for words. Why doesn't the doctor come?"

"Save me!" repeated Nannie. "Why doesn't somebody even try to save me?"

"We have been trying, Miss de Verney," said Mrs. Jeppworth. "What have you done with your hot-water bottle? Directly the doctor comes, we shall know what to do."

"He'll be too late," wailed Nannie. "Nobody cares. Nobody wants me to live. Where is my mother? Why don't you send for my mother?"

"Yes, where is her mother?" asked Lord Marlesford, still in the hall.

"They don't speak," said Mrs. Jeppworth.

Sophy was doing her best to suggest various remedies. Had they tried this? Had they tried that?

"I won't interfere without the doctor's orders,"

said Mrs. Jeppworth, firmly. "If you had seen as many cases as I have, and heard as much about inquests, you'd know the least done, soonest mended."

"Inquest!" said Nannie, becoming terribly quiet, while her eyes dilated with terror. "Inquest!"

"Don't excite yourself," observed Mrs. Jeppworth, "that's my advice! People who don't want to be post-mortemed keep a still tongue in a wise head."

Nannie's fine teeth began to chatter, and she trembled with such violence that Sophy, who had little experience of illness, feared that she was indeed dying. She took the despairing creature in her arms and hoped to give her some of her own warmth and vitality.

"Don't be frightened, Nannie. You'll get well. But say that those things in your letter about Jim were not true."

"I don't know what you are talking about," whimpered Nannie. "I'm so cold—so cold. Am I dying?"

The doctor arrived. He talked with Mrs. Jeppworth while he looked hard at Nannie.

"You'd better come out," said Lord Marlesford to Sophy.

She joined him in the hall, which he was pacing with the air of a trapped lion.

"But we must wait to hear what the doctor thinks," said Sophy, who was now in tears herself.

They waited for about five minutes; Sophy praying silently, and Marlesford fuming. Then the doctor came out of the room.

"She'll be all right," he said, "but it's a case for the hospital and," he added, looking from one to the other, "the stomach-pump."

Marlesford winced.

"Are you satisfied now?" he said, turning to Sophy.

"She isn't dying? She won't die, doctor?"

"Die! She's as strong as a horse."

Marlesford, on the journey back to Rokeby Street, barely spoke. But Sophy's imagination had been stirred. Firmalden had taught her to regard life philosophically—not as an inconsequent series of episodes and anecdotes without any relation to the universe or to each other.

"I am beginning to understand by degrees," she said, "what Nietzsche meant when he said that tragedy consists in the greatness of the individual life and the force of the universal life, which devours the very thing it has brought forth. Thus, eternal creation and destruction and creation again goes on! I saw poor Nannie in a new light. It is simply a case of Nannie against the whole world. And it has been stronger so far than she is."

"Yes, yes," said Lord Marlesford, testily; "I grant you. I'm glad, for your sake, that you are able to throw the veil of idealism over the situation! But until people in general habitually, or

even occasionally, use that veil, such conduct as Miss de Verney's will be considered inexcusable. In her own interest, she ought to be locked up. A dreadful person."

He abhorred squalor. He disliked even the nicest people when they were ill. It was all jarring, revolting, utterly against the grain. His religion did not allow him to own the full measure of his disgust. But he could safely say that he had never been in such a false position.

"I was in a false position," he told himself; "I should not have minded so much if the affair had been any business of mine. But there I had to wait—an absolute outsider—while that common little woman screamed like a mad cat, and the landlady looked at me as though I were the cause of the whole thing. I was in a false position."

He wished Sophy, rather severely, good-night, and shook hands in his stiffest manner. She was not to blame, he knew, but she had forced him to act against his better judgment.

"This," he reflected, "is always the way with women. Sooner or later, they make you play the fool exceedingly."

He was too constant to like Sophy any the less for his adventure. Besides, how magnificently handsome she was. Even in that odious tawdry room at Mountjoye Place she looked more like a superb Veronese than ever. Yes, for the future, he would have to be more careful. One was human. As his cab-horse trotted homeward, he planned a



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cruise—away from occasions of imprudence, away from the desires of the flesh and of the mind,—to Lemnos, where there was capital shooting, and so on to Smyrna—where one could get into touch with Asia.

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## CHAPTER VI

FIRMALDEN had been much astonished at Lessard's sudden appearance that evening. He had driven up to Rokeby Street about seven o'clock, with his portmanteaux on the cab, straight from Grosvenor Road Station on his arrival from Paris. He would take no refusal. Jim must dine with him at the Garrick Club.

"I have any amount of things to tell you. I want your advice. I am worried almost out of my mind."

But, as in most cases, when one proclaims a budget of news, he seemed to have nothing startling to offer—during the course of the dinner at any rate.

It had been pleasant at Florence, although Lady Navenby and her gang of frumpish Philistines had formed an incongruous element in the romantic city. Lady Marlesford was delicate; the doctors seemed puzzled by her case. But it was not serious. When she chose, she could walk for hours. Her mother, however, was fussy, and clucked about the *poverina* like an old hen after a young one.

"She follows her with eggs and port wine, with

meat-juice and tonics. Then the conversation—all on one piercing F sharp. Her favourite composer is Gounod. Her favourite artist is Raphaël. Her favourite novelist is—God forgive me! I forget. But it is someone like Feuillet. When you read him, she says, you feel in such good company! The stuff, of course, is the most vulgar melodrama about sham aristocrats, ornamented with bourgeois platitudes of the most insipid kind. Her favourite poet is Coventry Patmore. She thinks "The Angel in the House" is sweet. I called it, in an unguarded moment, rancid. This is why she regards me as a dangerous man."

"So she thinks you are dangerous?" said Firmalden.

"Yes. And all the while I am simply praying for her soul."

Firmalden saw that Lessard was in one of his irritable moods. He ate sparingly; he drank very little. It might have been that he was hard at work on his new opera. But every time he referred to Tessa he seemed to bite his tongue—as though he had not intended to mention her name if he could possibly avoid doing so.

They lingered over dinner, each man wondering what was the matter with the other. Firmalden was haunted by the scene that day with Nannie. The whole air of the entire world reeked, since she had left him, of that nauseating New Mown Hay. He still felt that clinging grasp

on his shoulder and the weight of her leaning body; he still heard the petulant, whining voice; he still saw the waning prettiness of the face which, in losing its dollishness, was growing abjectly human.

"Now we'll walk," suggested Lessard, in his usual tone of command. "I like that walk to Southwark."

It was nearly eleven. People had not yet left the theatres and other places of amusement; the streets were quiet but for the usual slow-moving stream of wastrels, strolling lovers, noisy girls, and elderly persons going to or from mysterious night work, or from public-house to public-house.

"The fact is," said Lessard, as he went along, "I'm at my wits' end."

"What about?"

"The everlasting mischief. There is a woman I like, and I know she cares for me."

Firmalden wondered if he could mean Tessa.

"She is unhappily married to a man whom she could divorce," Lessard continued.

No, thought Firmalden, he cannot by any chance mean Tessa.

"Do you think the divorced should not remarry?"

Firmalden was so relieved to find Tessa, as he believed, wholly out of the story, that he treated Lessard's question with impartial seriousness.

"It so happens," he said, "that all the Nonconformists have had to give much attention to that

very matter lately. A well-known minister—a man of the highest reputation and character—divorced his wife, who was unspeakable, and he married, afterwards, another woman—a charming, accomplished, devoted woman. The divorce revelations were more atrocious than usual, and the man owned openly, in the witness-box, that if he got his freedom, he intended to marry again. Some condemned him for his candour. I admired it. My father, who has deep prejudices, as you know, did not say a word against the justice of the divorce and the man's liberty to remarry. The Nonconformists are far harder than Catholics on the sinner, but they accept the Mosaic law for the innocent party. The Gospel text on the subject may be disputed. But, as my father says, it is, according to human ideas of fairness, clearly unjust that a man or a woman should be condemned to unwilling celibacy merely because he or she may have had the misfortune or the innocence, or both combined, to have married a person either morally or physically, or both morally and physically, corrupt. That is the Miltonic view, the Protestant view, and the rationalist view."

"But what is your own view?"

Firmalden was refilling his pipe. He looked up and smiled:

"Is divorce a subject for amateurs?"

"It is no laughing matter," said Lessard. "Men who have never really loved anybody don't under-

stand these things. They look on, as the man who stupefies himself with overwork looks on at the man who drugs himself with opium. And also, men and women who do not know what a horrible, degrading, and loathsome relationship marriage can be, are full of sickening false sentiment about divorce. The Catholic ideal of marriage is magnificent, poetical, mystic, sublime; but it is not domesticity. It is worldly-wise; but it is not domesticity. It protects men and women from the worst consequences of their passions—a public trial and a second marriage more disastrous than the first; but it is not domesticity. It warns women of the uncertainty of love, and it saves men from the obligation of marrying those whom they have disgraced or deceived; but it is not domesticity."

"But you surely are not the champion of domesticity?" said Firmalden. "I have seldom heard the Roman case put so clearly."

"The woman I like happens to be a determined Catholic."

The match which Firmalden had taken for his pipe burnt out, unused, in his hand.

"A Catholic?" he said.

"Yes. And reason is the last thing she will listen to."

"And you say that she could divorce her husband if she chose?"

"If she went the right way to work—yes. But if she persuades herself that it is her duty to

screen him, to sacrifice her own happiness and mine—no.”

“Is the man a beast?”

“He is a model of the *convenances*! He is the prudent man; the self-contained, decorous, impeccably prudent man. But, just as the imprudent man will sometimes atone for a lifetime of un wisdom by a stroke of overpowering prudence, so the prudent man, after a lifetime of unswerving carefulness, will commit an act or two of supreme, of thundering imbecility. This is nature’s justice—it is truly as wild as revenge.”

“And do you mind telling me something about the wife’s character?”

“Imagine a spirit with a woman’s heart.”

“I have no imagination,” said Firmalden, curtly, and trying not to think of Tessa. “I cannot conceive of a woman’s heart apart from a woman’s body, nerves, health, and temper.”

“You’re a materialist. I have always said so.”

“If the lady be a spirit, why marry her?”

“But, don’t be so literal, my dear fellow! Are you too among the Philistines? You did a very stupid thing when you asked me to describe the wife. I’m not the person to describe her. I see her probably as no one else sees her. I hardly know the colour of her eyes yet. My impression of her steals over me by degrees. First it touched my soul. The senses will come last. All the same,” he added, abruptly, “if you had not the qualities of a born Confessor, and were not an

*Abbé manqué*, I could no more tell you these things than I could be a Catholic."

"Well, since you yourself have called me an *Abbé manqué*, you'll understand my saying that, so far as *feeling* is concerned, I'm on the side of Rome on the marriage question. But it is only a feeling—a bit of sentimentality, perhaps. I pay no attention to it—except to crush it! My reason tells me that numbers of divorced persons have remarried and lived happily ever after. My reason also tells me that illegal unions are not always abnormally miserable. Individual contentment depends on how little you ask and how much you can bear. On the other hand, is the individual's approximate contentment to be made the aim of all legislation, and the test of every great ideal as a working principle?"

"Yes—among the sane."

"Yes, perhaps, but not without an alternative. We have days when we know that contentment is not everything. Besides, it is often another name for mere brutalisation."

"Don't branch out on far-off things! I want to talk about myself. What is to happen? What is to be done?"

"Have you discussed the matter with the lady?"

"In a dim way—as though we were speaking of other people. But she knows I mean her, and I know she means me! At present she is immovable."

"Does she dislike her husband?"



"They ought never to have been married at all."

"But does she dislike him?" insisted Firmalden.

"She's used to him. He's her husband; and a husband is always a husband—unless he happens to be an outrageous monster. This one is good-looking, amiable, generous, and, as I have said, prudence itself. But he makes her wretched, and he neglects her."

"Why did they marry, in the first place?"

"He thought he was in love; she thought she ought to be in love. What better reasons do you want for what is called a good marriage?"

Firmalden could hardly conceal his uneasiness. Was it to be believed that Marlesford—no, it was not to be believed.

As the two men walked, they had wound their way across squares and through by-roads in the direction of Vauxhall Bridge.

"By cutting through Mountjoye Place," said Lessard, "we shall gain a pleasant half-mile and avoid Radcliffe's Buildings."

Mountjoye Place had a less sombre air than many of the other streets through which they had passed. Although it was midnight, there were lights burning behind coloured blinds in most of the windows: there were two cabs loitering about. At one of the houses—the door of which was open—a man was assisting a woman into a hansom. Neither Firmalden nor Lessard had time to see the woman, but the man who sprang in beside her was, beyond a shadow of doubt, Lord Marles-

ford. And Firmalden recognised the vehicle as Marlesford's private hansom. He even knew the familiar sound of the mare's trot as she sped lightly and swiftly toward the river.

Lessard stopped short.

"Did you see him?" he said, quickly, to Firmalden.

"Yes."

"And you could swear to him?"

"Yes."

Lessard threw back his head, and, with a ringing laugh, caught hold of Firmalden's arm.

"Our prudent friend!" he exclaimed. "This beats everything! What did I tell you?"

## CHAPTER VII

WHEN Lord Marlesford reached home, he was astonished to hear that Tessa had arrived. She had left Florence two days sooner than she had at first intended, but she had not wired her change of plans lest it might interfere with any engagements his lordship might have made. This message was conveyed to him through her maid, who added that her ladyship had retired for the night and was now fast asleep. She was very tired after the long journey.

Marlesford felt altogether ill-used. He had fully meant to have met her in Paris, where they could have seen some good plays together, driven to Versailles and to the Pavillion Henri Quatre at St. Germain, and there talked quietly, away from the associations of home, about the possibility of making each other's lives less difficult, and the necessity of bearing with each other's faults. He had missed her far more than he would allow himself to own, and his iron nerves were beginning to feel the strain of so much suppressed vexation. Lady Navenby's letter and Tessa's own short notes—anything but affectionate or even conciliatory in tone—had been another

source of worry. As he stood in the hall, wondering whether he would go to his dressing-room or to the library, he saw a small leather trunk, bearing the initials M. L.

"Whose is that?" he asked.

"Mr. Lessard's, my lord. It was brought by mistake with her ladyship's luggage. Mr. Lessard travelled with her ladyship and Lady Navenby from Paris."

The grating news brought a flush of anger to his face. What was Lady Navenby thinking of? Good reason he had none for expecting consistency from his mother-in-law. What was it natural to suppose would be the discretion she would show in any difficult crisis? None: she was the typical virtuous woman without judgment. The mischief she had already done involved and secured the doing of much more. In charity to her, he did not wish to undervalue her good intentions, but the changes, whether gradual or not, which had interfered with his married happiness had been awfully silent and encompassing. They had given no token of their coming; he had been as a man asleep till he woke and found himself threatened by a hopeless struggle. Such dangers came from without, and were often due to the incaution of those whose duty it was to put up safeguards against that day. In fact, Lady Navenby was to blame for many of Tessa's vagaries.

While these bitter thoughts filled his soul, his memory was oppressed by the repulsive, dismal

images which it had formed during the scene in Nannie's rooms. He passed a sleepless night on the sofa in the library, and he crept up to his dressing-room before daybreak lest the servants should suspect that he had not been to bed. Tessa rarely came down to breakfast, and it was past eleven before he was able to see her. Then she appeared, after keeping him waiting for nearly an hour in her boudoir, where he had read the *Times* till he found himself studying the advertisements of housemaids in search of situations.

Tessa was wearing a dress he had never liked—a black crêpe de Chine embroidered with some design representing black grapes. It made her seem pale and mournful; it concealed her graceful figure. He liked to see a woman's waist defined, and draperies of any sort seemed to him untidy. Each regarded the other with a new curiosity and from a new standpoint. Each thought the other looked far less attractive than usual; each detected an iciness in the other's gaze, an enigma in the other's expression, a latent antagonism, an ominous reserve in the other's manner.

"I must say that you might have wired," said Marlesford, who was standing up.

"Why?" said Tessa, sitting down on an isolated chair. "I was with mamma and Mr. Lessard. He looked after both of us."

"I wanted to meet you in Paris."

"I don't care to be met as a matter of duty," she said, at once.

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"That's an unfair remark, and unlike you. But you have changed so much lately in every way that I can't say what is and what isn't like you."

"I am quite conscious of change in myself."

"Then I could at least have met you at the railway station."

"Why interfere with your engagements?"

He coloured, but he answered firmly—

"I had no engagement I could not have broken. I went to St. James's Hall with Thorburn, the Greek Professor, and his wife,—and—Mrs. Burghwallis."

"Oh," said Tessa, with a glacial air.

"My present idea is to get away on the yacht. I'm sick of London."

"Where do you propose to go?"

"Wherever you like."

"It is all one to me where I go. Make your plans, and if I am well enough to stand a voyage, I'll come—if you really wish me to come."

"Of course I wish you to come; but not against your will."

"Let us be sensible. Anything that pleases you, will satisfy me."

This conversation was unendurable. She had one hand on a book, which she seemed anxious to read. Her other hand was laid tenderly on the head of her pet bull-terrier, who was staring up at her with an unblinking adoration—as though he wondered why she ever wasted words on men.

"I'll see what can be arranged," said Marlesford turning on his heel.

She remained, after he had gone, still stroking the bull-terrier's head and looking for sympathy into the brute's eyes. Her own were brimming over with tears.

"Why on earth am I so tiresome?" she thought. "Perhaps I should be more reasonable if I drank stout and ate beef. But when I try stout, I am just as unhappy but in a stout-ish way. I seem beaten by sledge-hammers instead of being stabbed by knives. That's the only difference. And I know, I can see, that he likes Sophy."

She opened the book by Emerson, which she had been fingering, and at random she read the following passage:—

*"Do you love me? means, Do you see the same truth? If you do, we are happy with the same happiness; but presently one of us passes into the perception of a new truth. We are divorced, and no tension in nature can hold us to each other."*

The words—"We are divorced"—danced before her eyes. She could read no more, and she knew that it would be dangerous to think any more.

"Shall we go for a walk, Barbe-Bleu?"

The dog barked with delight, and pranced till all the bells on his collar jingled.

"We'll take a long walk, then, and if you are good I won't speak to Nini the whole morning."

Nini was his faithful little friend the cat, of whom he was desperately jealous. The refreshing re-

assurance that Nini would be snubbed made his bark still louder and more vigorous.

"I shouldn't dream of spoiling your day just for the sake of making Nini think I liked her. Nini is a conceited minx!"

"Yap, yap!"

"Nini is handsome, but she has no heart."

"Yap-yap! Yap!"

"Nini is clever, but to me she is forbidding."

Forbidding was too hard a word for Barbe-Bleu—so he allowed one ear to droop while he considered it.

"But you like Mr. Lessard, don't you, Barbe-Bleu?"

"Yap!"

"He is always kind and thoughtful. He got your dinner before he touched his own."

"Yap!" screamed Barbe-Bleu, at the ineffable syllables—*dinner*.

"He understands us, doesn't he? We almost like music, don't we, when he plays?"

Here the enthusiasm of Barbe-Bleu diminished from a bark to a shrill yawn.

Tessa laughed gaily, and while she was laughing she drew a letter, which she had received by the first post that morning, from her pocket.

"I hope you are not tired. The journey seemed very short to me. My fear is that you will miss the sunshine. All you need is the air and the sky—free elements. I noticed that you were often silent



this afternoon. Were you sorry to leave Italy? I will take my chance of finding you at home tomorrow afternoon. It is nearly two o'clock. They have just been looking up at your windows. They were dark, so I hope you were sleeping. There can be no harm in telling you that the time we were able to spend together in Florence has, of all the experiences of my life, given me some notion of what a faith in the future can be; how, in certain circumstances, it must be. I could never be satisfied now with anything that is less than infinite and eternal. St. Augustine notes how strangers in a theatre are for the moment drawn together when they see one another applauding the same thing. If such will union be pleasant between strangers, what is it when we find a will accordant with our own in almost every particular? I have spent my life meeting the will force in opposition to my own. It contracts one's spirit; it hardens one's obstinacy. No man is the better for living in a state of perpetual war against accepted ideas. He may be a saint or a prophet, a philosopher or an artist—and the truth that is in him must be uttered whether it be understood or despised; but just so far as he encounters stupidity or injustice, in that degree the finest possibilities of his character and his work must suffer. No man ever did a work in spite of persecution that he might not have done ten thousand times better if he had been encouraged. The soul which becomes feeble under sympathy is not a soul but a shadow cast by some stronger

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M. L."

## CHAPTER VIII

FIRMALDEN had to address a large meeting of Nonconformists at the City Temple that evening, and Soppy decided to tell him nothing about Nannie till he had fulfilled this engagement. He looked very haggard, she thought, and he seemed tormented by some secret care.

"Did you enjoy yourself last night?" she asked. She hoped to hear a little news of Lessard, although she did not wish to discuss him.

"Lessard is always stimulating," said her brother, "but, when I am with him, I wonder what he believes and what he cannot believe. I never met anyone with such a command of contradictory truths."

"Is he in good spirits?"

"He's strung up."

"Did he speak of Tessa?"

"A little," said Firmalden, abruptly. But he sat down at his writing-table as though he wished to work—not to talk.

Sophy left him and went to the hospital for news of Nannie. But although Firmalden bent his will to his task, the task itself seemed useless. His heart was not in it.

"I must set my own thoughts in order," he said to himself; "I must see where I am going. 'For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?'"

One quality he had inherited from his Nonconformist ancestors: an impatience with self-inspection. He thought it made for egoism, for weakness, for indecision: it led men to consider their moods of more importance than their principles. "Take care of your principles, and your moods will take care of themselves," was one of his father's axioms. To Firmalden this seemed sound doctrine. What if conscience in the individual were but the general experience conveyed to the unit by means of his education? What if conscience were no more than an acquiescence in the rough laws of cause and effect superficially observed? One could argue for ever against the intrinsic evil of being burnt even if one walked into the fire. There might, for instance, be such good to be got out of burning that what was painful in the sensation would be forgotten, ultimately, in comparison with the after benefits. And so on and so on. Any number of philosophers were always at hand to press the advantages of the apparently disadvantageous. That sophistry was creeping, as a fog, over modern thought and modern religion. It was the old temptation: "Let us do evil that good may come," all over again, now blown about in windy discourses, now concealed in the jargon of metaphysic; now bawled in

the name of patriotism, now in the name of revolt; now in defence of vice, now in condemnation of morality; now in the attacks of dogmatic religion, now in the glorification of any organised tyranny—whether on the part of the Church or of the State. No; he would never surrender to that treacherous spirit. He had adopted the Christian philosophy as it was set forth in the New Testament: "*Where no law is there is no transgression; but the law entered, that sin might abound.*" A hard saying indeed.

And now to apply all this to his own relationship with the Marlesfords and Lessard. Was Tessa in danger? His affection for Tessa was one of those few sentiments which a man will receive without question and undergo without complaint. To hold it sacred from analysis is part of the faith which he must keep with himself—if he would keep faith with others. This was Firmalden's position. But while he was too virile a man to understand women even imperfectly, he had a blind and dumb sense of Tessa's discontent: a pronounced fear of Lessard's fascination for one so easily wounded in her pride, yet so piteously, if unconsciously, dependent on human love for her happiness. As Firmalden had known her better, he had observed, by a thousand signs, her timid but profound tenderness, that capacity for passionate attachment which usually humiliates its object because there is nothing in the nature of man to support such prodigal devotion, or in his promises to warrant

such consummate trust. That a man of the least manliness would ever willingly disappoint her, Firmalden did not believe; but that he could help, at some time, failing her, he could not hope. She asked too much, because she refused to take human beings as they were. She idealised them, and as she wished them to be she saw them. Lessard—a Don Quixote among libertines—a man who would never risk the sacrifice of any woman unless her ruin meant his own—making this condition the gauge of his earnestness—Lessard was a being, both for his recklessness and his determination, whom Tessa ought never to have met. He came too near the heroic scale in lovers. Ill-omened as their encounter had been, it was now made calamitous by Lord Marlesford's conduct: above all, by Lessard's knowledge of his conduct.

Suddenly, someone tapped at his door. He heard a dog barking, and a familiar voice calling his name. It was Tessa. She stood on the landing; a charming figure in her black gown and a long lace cloak, carrying the bull-terrier and looking a little astonished at her own temerity.

"You!" he exclaimed, throwing back the door.

"Yes, I drove over. Wilhelmina wished to announce me, but I said I wanted to surprise you. So this is your new house? May I sit down?"

Firmalden was so struck by the alteration in her appearance that for the first few minutes he did not know what either he or she was saying.

To his eyes, she had a pathetic attractiveness which placed her apart and aloof from everybody else. The earth seemed too hard for her feet, the wind of heaven too rough for her fragile beauty; she had the beseeching, yet deprecating and elusive, graciousness of Botticelli's "Venus"—not a goddess but a suffering woman.

"This is the first time I have ever called on you," she said. "I came here because I thought we should be uninterrupted. I want your advice—for a friend in trouble."

He felt that she was about to speak of her own case, but he hated himself for seeing through such innocent guile.

"You know," she went on, "that I can be very secretive and quiet, and I can also be outspoken and injudicious. So I don't trust my own judgment—although I have to act upon it often."

"I don't set up for an oracle," said Firmalden. "I never refuse to give advice, because that seems a mean way of shirking responsibility; but I can't guarantee my wisdom!"

He smiled, but his heart was full of apprehension.

"Well, this—friend is in great trouble. Her husband has deceived her. That is the whole matter. She—she does not blame him altogether for the deception, because she feels that, in many ways, she is not the wife for him."

"Forgive me, but do you think that one can ever know the whole story in these circumstances."

"I know it in this case—because I know my friend so very well," she said naïvely.

"And do you know the husband too?"

"It is necessary, I assure you, it is urgent, it is indispensable, that things should come right between these two!"

"Does the wife say this?"

"She must think it—although—although——"

"Although what?"

"It must be hard to think so while she is so miserable," said Tessa desperately.

"Has she said anything yet to her husband?"

"Not much. But—but they are estranged."

"Does your friend know that you are asking my advice?"

"Would I tease you in this way if I had not the gravest reasons—if I—if she—were not terribly worried?"

"Then, I'll tell you, I believe you mean yourself. If you say it is not yourself, I'll still feel more satisfied than if I had let you tell me things about yourself under the impression that I supposed you were discussing someone who was an utter stranger to me."

"Yes, it is myself. I had to begin somehow."

She sought for some better prologue to her necessary statement. She could find none: words, in so far as they were a protection, seemed to fly from her. Finally, she murmured—

"I am very miserable."

"Your last letter made me fear that you were



taking a very sombre view of life. But your health has much to do with that."

"Do not, I beseech you, say these commonplace things to me. I came to you because I hoped for something unconditional—fearless. I know that my husband deceives me. I could make up my mind to bear that—if that were all. But he hates deceit as much as I do. It sickens him to have this lie between us. It suffocates us both, and I am dying of it. The question is, Ought I to do without a protest?"

"That is not the question. You mustn't speak of death."

"Yes, indeed, I must—for even if I seem to exist, there is death in my soul. I can say this to you because you know as well as I how little I can mean to live among real Louis Seize furniture. If your heart is breaking! How little it matters to you how many thousands a year, and fine houses, and carriages and horses, if you feel that it is the price you have paid to suffer in comfort! If I must suffer, I'd sooner suffer alone. I don't want a fellow-prisoner who, unwillingly, torments me, and whom I, also unwillingly, torment by my very presence."

"You cannot think that. There may be for the moment some misunderstanding——"

"No—no! I'm not a fool. Basil is an honorable man, but to swear to love anybody for ever is madness. We don't always know what love means."

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"A man of Lord Marlesford's age knows perfectly well what it means. I don't think that young, inexperienced girls or very young men know much about it. But Marlesford knows all about it. He has had, by this time, every opportunity of learning his own character. Indeed, that must be granted of every bridegroom who is over thirty. So do not grieve over any supposed ignorance on his part of the meaning and the possibilities of human love."

"But I didn't know," she gasped.

"That is possible, as I have said."

"I thought I was in love. One had to be fond of him—he was so good-looking and so fond of me. At least, everybody told me he was passionately fond of me. And I was flattered. It was such a triumph to feel indispensable to a man whom every girl I knew was anxious to please. I make no secret, to you, of my vanity."

"But you were fond of him."

"And I could have been devoted to him. But he never gave me the chance. He keeps me at a distance, and he never seems to need what I have in me to give. There are times when I almost wish I were a man, and then he would treat me with confidence."

"If he treated you as though you were a man, you would find yourself wishing that he would not forget you were a woman. You can't enjoy, in full measure, the privileges of both sexes, nor even the privileges of two types of the same sex. You

cannot be, at the same time, Jonathan and Bathsheba, or Pallas Athene and Aphrodite, or Rahab and Sarah. The attempt to mix all these is at the root of all the spoken discontent in thinking women, and all the smouldering woe in women who are unable to think. Ask yourself what manner of woman you are: realise your type, and accept, with its advantages, its irremediable disabilities."

"Very well! I am not of the type that can live with half my nature perpetually on the rack and the other half drowsy. I must live all over in order to live at all. I cannot exist, on the present terms, with Basil. We must separate."

She spoke very quietly, but with that decision which is the outcome only of prolonged, continuous reflection.

"I do not choose to wait," she insisted, "until his life and mine are so wrecked that nothing can be made of either. He can do much with his: I can still work out mine."

"That will never do. Nothing is worse than a formal separation—except an informal one."

"Ah! Then you think that a divorce is the one course possible—in such a case as ours?"

She watched him eagerly, for, as a Nonconformist, he had once or twice been obliged to challenge the justice of the Roman Catholic marriage laws. There had been a young woman in his own congregation at Westminster married to a Roman Catholic who was drunk and unfaithful, who struck her with his fists and kicked her

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with his boots. A heated correspondence had passed between Firmalden and some of the Roman Catholic clergy on the question of the woman's remarriage after divorcing her husband. The unfortunate wife happened to be Tessa's fitter at the dressmaker's, and Tessa had heard the whole story. Her own story, she knew, had nothing in common with that sordid tragedy of vice and cruelty at its meanest, but that could not alter Firmalden's principles, which applied unconditionally to the marriage laws in general. She seemed to defy him to evade any consequence of his logic, and she sat, fixing him with her sad eyes, as much as to say, "The courage which you show in the cause of strangers, have you not got for me?"

"If you want me to defend divorce, I will defend it," he said.

"I myself am utterly opposed to it," she answered; "all I wish you to realise is this—that while I am determined to leave Basil, I am quite aware that to be legally separated but morally bound for life would be, to both of us, but to him especially, servitude in despair. Bad as it will be, it cannot be so bad as the wretchedness he must feel now in deceiving me, or my wretchedness in trying to act as though I suspected nothing. Own that I am talking reasonably."

"Too reasonably," said Firmalden. "But are you quite sure that he cares for somebody else?" He wondered how much she knew.

"I am certain," she replied, "that he no longer cares, as he once cared, for me. How much he loves—this other—I cannot say."

"Has he any idea that you have noticed any change in his manner?"

"No, he is too absorbed in himself to think about me at all!"

"But isn't it hard," he asked, "to say what a man might or might not notice in a woman? He's often a dumb dog who cannot speak."

"Then such dumb dogs should not marry. There are men who can and do understand us. But you are hostile to me," she broke out, impatiently: "ever since my first word, you have been hard and cold. You think you best show your friendship by advising me to bear meekly what other cowards bear. You and Basil are utterly unlike in character, but you have one quality in common—a relentless, chary nature when any claim to your sympathy comes home. You both make me feel as though I were breaking myself, like some poor wave, against granite rocks."

"I can't answer for Marlesford," he said, "but don't think I am so stony as you make out."

"I might have died of ennui and depression in Florence," she exclaimed, "if Mr. Lessard had not shown me a little common kindness. He is a man of genius, with hosts of amusing friends, yet he lets them all to amuse me—a dull, moping woman with a headache! He did not mind when I looked my worst and was too tired to talk. I have never

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known what it was to be understood and to be taken care of before. To give one chicken jelly every half-hour is not taking care of one! A machine could do that."

"Lessard has great personal charm."

"It is more than charm!" she said deliberately.

"One could die for such a man without feeling a sentimental fool for one's pains. Now you know what I think about him."

"Is this what you have come to tell me?"

"Yes. I had to tell somebody—somebody who would not scream at me or preach at me or warn me. I don't require any warning. I have met him too late, and I shall never forget, for an instant, that it is too late."

Firmalden was now livid, but he still maintained his self-command.

"Don't you think," he said, "that you ought to make some effort to fight against a charm and a kindness which you can only appreciate—with safety—up to a certain point?"

"I'll not admit the necessity for a fight."

"Then you don't know the man."

"What you mean is—I don't know myself. You are mistaken. You and Basil treat me as though I were a child. I'll be frank. I could never be an ordinary friend to Mr. Lessard. I must never see him very often. Any happiness I may have in being with him is spoilt by the grief—yes, the grief—of saying good-bye. And then there is the thought all the time that we met too late, and that

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we are two prisoners watching each other through everlasting bars. We can never, never say even a part of what we think, or show even a sign of what we feel. Is that any pleasure?"

"No," said Firmalden, glancing away from her.

"You admit then that the strain of such a situation is severe. It would be unendurable if I had to keep it up with deceit. I am going to Basil quietly, and I shall say, 'Our marriage has been a blunder. Don't let us lie to each other, or act lies. We must separate. I can bear unhappiness, but I won't be made an impostor as well.' He'll be thankful to have the air cleared."

"You'll find he will strongly resist such a suggestion. If disagreements between men and women could be settled so easily as that, they would never quarrel! No—there should be an absolute divorce or nothing. I won't admit any middle course. It is immoral, horrible, indefensible."

"Even if the Church granted divorce, I should not apply for one. It would mean disgracing Basil, ruining some other woman——"

"I should have no tenderness for that other woman," he said, remembering the scene of the night before in Mountjoye Place.

Tessa looked at him.

"I have a tenderness, as you call it, all the same," she said, "although I do not like her."

"Then you know her?"

"Yes."

"That makes it ten thousand times worse," he said hotly.

"It makes them both seem more treacherous. But I have learnt, through my own experience, to make a few excuses for others."

"Is she married?"

"Yes. A scandal would affect her whole family."

"I'd have no mercy in such a case. You reproach me for being unsympathetic. I am more anxious for your happiness than you are inclined to believe. I abhor the very notion of seeing you dragged through the Law Courts. But at worst that would be a nine-days' wonder, while you would have the rest of your life free and to yourself."

He was now drawn into the hard position of a man whose will has to defend a principle against his heart. Everything he had inherited from his father and from his ancestry asserted itself in his determination to uphold justice as he understood it, even though it slew him.

"I don't say that you should be vindictive toward this woman," he went on, "but I do say that, in ultimate fairness to Marlesford, to yourself, to Lessard, to the very woman herself, you must take whole measure or none."

"But in accusing her I might injure her relatives. Suppose she has children, a husband living, brothers! Suppose they are in public life. What a blow to all of them!"

"Why should a woman in a good position, with



important relatives, be spared when no one hesitates to punish an obscure one?"

"In the first case, you punish a number of innocent persons; in the other case, the punishment is hardly a punishment even for the individual."

"That is worldly morality with a vengeance. You may rebreak all the broken wings of a sparrow, but not the pet bird! I see no such distinction."

"Well, I do."

"Because you encourage yourself in insincerity. A thing is, in itself, either right or wrong. If it be right to accuse the guilty publicly of guilt, it is abominable to screen one sinner because of his or her quite fortuitous advantages, and to proclaim another because of his or her equally fortuitous disadvantages. We are judged according to what we have and not according to what we have not. The better the woman's education, standing, and influence, the more will be demanded of her—in the way of honour. This applies to Marlesford's friend. It also applies to yourself in your relations with Lessard."

"Do you compare my poor ghost of a friendship with Basil's infatuation?"

"Certainly. You have each followed what you take to be an irresistible instinct. You are a sensitive, delicate, imaginative woman in need of some companionship more subtle than the ordinary run of husbands can offer even where they love

intensely. You meet an ardent, impulsive, undisciplined man, who can express, eloquently, what he feels, and without any of the reserves which conscience or mere shyness imposes on most of us. What happens? You are caught up in a whirlwind. At first you are in the air. But by and by you will reach the earth again."

"I am there already," thought Tessa.

"Marlesford, on his part," continued Firmalden, "is a mature man who has had every opportunity of knowing the world and his own temperament. He can no longer be caught up in a whirlwind: the whirlwind bores him. So he begins where those who fly almost inevitably end!"

"If this is how you talk to Sophy," Tessa said, "I don't wonder that she is uncommunicative!"

"Sophy knows all this by experience. She too loved Lessard—as you know."

"And you think," said Tessa scornfully, "that if she ever again became too interested in any man, she would, if necessary, renounce him for ever?"

"I saw her do this very thing in Lessard's case."

"You think she would show greater strength than I would show?"

"Not greater strength, but a clearer perception of danger."

"Oh! oh!"

"She saw the peril; you will not see it."

"And what about Basil's friend?" asked Tessa, laughing ironically to herself.

"She has gone with open eyes into sin and

disaster. Spare her by all means—if you are ready to keep perpetual silence and pay the price of mercy by the uttermost farthing. But don't spare her for flimsy sentimental reasons which, before long, must place you, your husband, Lessard, and the woman at stake, in a still worse predicament than anything you seem able to imagine."

"But I am sorry for her—although she has behaved badly."

"Then prove your generosity by living up to it, and even beyond it!"

"I might sacrifice myself to a certain extent—but not altogether."

"You deceive yourself again. You want more liberty, if not absolute liberty, and so you insist on an equivocal scandal, although you would forbid an unequivocal one. That is so tortuous."

"You don't spare me, do you?"

"Haven't you asked me for advice?"

"But you might give me credit for a few unselfish motives."

"I give you credit for courage, for candour, for honesty, but, above all, for the gift of loving—the greatest of all gifts. And while you care for this man, you will be able to persuade yourself that, where he is concerned, black is white and white is black."

"You are unfair—too unfair. I am going to tell you something which I never meant to tell you. The woman you won't let me spare, the woman

you think I want to screen for paltry worldly reasons, is your own sister. It is Sophy!"

"That's a lie! They have lied to you. It isn't true!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet.

"It is perfectly true."

"I wouldn't believe it if she herself confessed it. I wouldn't believe the evidence of my eyes if they denounced her!"

"What about the whirlwind which is to destroy me? Is Sophy alone, out of the whole world of women, immune from temptation?"

"She is so little immune from it, that she would recognise it, and thus avoid something which might prove too strong for her."

"When women love exceedingly, they do not recognise it as a temptation. They think it the supreme blessing of their lives. When they renounce it, they do so for the man's sake—not for their own. This is the history of all women who have loved with any depth. It is perhaps the one sure test of their earnestness. Otherwise," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "it may all be curiosity or caprice or mere viciousness. I am willing to give Sophy credit for as many struggles as you please."

"I can swear to her innocence."

"I myself do not believe the worst. But for no other reason than this—I am willing to judge of her conduct by my own. You, when you thought her a strange woman, had no excuse for her—not one."

"I would not ask you to spare her—if she were guilty—though she were twenty times my sister."

"Every woman is some man's daughter, and often some man's sister!"

"But, unhappily, every brother cannot feel so certain of his sister's character as I can of Sophy's. She has many failings, but she is utterly incapable of dishonour."

"Then perhaps you will admit, for argument's sake, that I too am incapable of dishonour, and that not we two only, whom you happen to know, are incapable of it, but that numbers of women, whom you do not know, are incapable of it. You say you would not accept the evidence of your own eyes if they denounced her!"

"I would not."

"Well," said Tessa, giving him her hand, "have as much faith in me—no matter what happens!"

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## CHAPTER IX

AFTER Tessa had gone, Firmalden made two discoveries in his own soul. One was his jealousy of Lessard; the other was an insistent doubt of Sophy. The jealousy he held at bay—although it had made him so harsh with Tessa that he knew she would never quite forgive him. The doubt refused to be silenced. A multitude of thoughts unspeakable seemed to mock the possibility of trusting women when they were once in love.

Sophy, on her return from the hospital, found him waiting for her in the dining-room. She guessed that something was wrong, and she wondered whether he had yet heard about Nannie. But before she could waste any time in conjectures he said—

"I can't work till I tell you what is on my mind. Are not you becoming too great a friend with Marlesford? He is here four or five times a week. You will compromise each other."

"I hardly expected lectures from you!" exclaimed Sophy, colouring painfully. "How often have you said that the world is a fool, but not an utter fool; that it does not often misjudge a legitimate friendship?"

"Nor does it. But Lord Marlesford is a

married man; it is now pretty well known that the marriage is not happy. He is therefore watched and criticised."

"I cannot help that. I am quite as independent as you are when it comes to gossip and spies. No one—not even you—shall interfere with my friendships. Father has already spoken to me on this subject. I suppose you have both talked it over together. Once for all, I claim the right to make what I can of my maimed life."

"But at Marlesford's expense?"

"It costs him nothing. I am not vain, and have no illusions. He is devoted to Tessa—whom I think is a selfish, spoilt woman."

"You need not attack her."

"To tell the truth about her is not to attack her. I repeat, she is selfish and she is spoilt. But she is fascinating: she is every inch a woman, and when she has once had her share of actual mental and physical suffering—a thing which all women need—she will gain her balance. Presently, it has been fun, fun, fun—nothing but fun and excitements."

"How does all this affect Marlesford's obvious interest in you?"

"In every way. He talks to me while his wife grows up! The moment she grows up, he cares no more about me than he cares for the chair! I tell you, I have no illusions."

"But when the time comes for him to care more, as you say, you will miss him."

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"Miss him!" she said, with a break in her voice. "I shall merely feel as father does every time a student leaves him! I shall have helped him through a bad time, I shall have told him all I know, I shall have pulled him through moods, kept him out of mischief, gone part of the way with him! *Et puis, bon jour!*"

"But you will feel it more than you think. I can see by the very way you are speaking that you will suffer."

"Have no fear for me," she said.

"But that's precisely what I have—fear. In this struggle for liberty, women are going to get the worst of it. You are very accomplished, you can earn your own living at any time—while your health lasts. You can have men friends—while your youth lasts. You can count on me as long as I live, but I'll seem dull after these others—Lessard, poor Frank, and now Marlesford. You have seen enough of marriage without money, but love without marriage is still worse, and friendship without love or marriage is the bitterest of all."

"Aren't you confusing your own case with mine?" said Sopley.

He bit his lip.

"Perhaps," he answered quietly.

"I didn't mean to say anything unkind. But you must understand one thing. Although I am, as you say, earning my living, I am still a woman and I am still human. It seems strange that one should be able to work nine or ten hours daily and



remain human; still, such is the fact. I cannot spend my time wholly among women. Women should work for women and with them, and I do not believe that women can do men's work. But if I am to keep sane, I must have men as well as women friends. It is likely enough that I shall become over-interested at one time or another in some man, and I shall have to suffer for it—no doubt because sex will not allow itself to be forgotten. This, however, is certain: I can never love again as I loved Lessard. From these two experiences I have learnt—just what is profound and essential, and just what is superficial and accidental in all relationships between men and women. The skin-deep can give one much trouble: it does not kill you body and soul. You may think what you please, but I know that so far as my capacity for intense love goes I am a dead woman. I have affections—yes. But what a phantom in comparison with the other!”

“Then I'll finish what I had to say. I have reason to know that Marlesford is behaving badly. I myself saw him at one o'clock this morning—”

“Where?” asked Sophy, at once.

“In Mountjoye Place. And he was not alone.”

Her sudden flush made Firmalden pause.

“You jump too hastily to conclusions,” she said.

“I take probabilities. The hour, the place, and his companion left small scope for optimism.”

“He was there with me.”

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“With you! Good God! Why?”

“Nannie Cloots was ill, and she sent—for one of us. It was very late. Marlesford and the Thorburns were here. I told Marlesford, after the Thorburns had left, that I must go to Nannie, and when he heard where she lived, he said I could not go there by myself. He took me in his hansom, waited for me, and brought me home.”

Firmalden's pride in his own judgment was receiving a series of hard blows. He sat down, putting his elbows on the table, and hid his face in his hands.

“Nannie is now in the hospital,” said Sophy; “she is going on very well. But it was a case of attempted suicide, and it is already in the afternoon papers.”

“Why didn't you tell me this before?” he burst out. “If she asked for me, I should have been told. I'll go to the hospital now.”

Sophy moved instinctively toward the door to bar his way.

“You mustn't,” she cried; “she's half mad—she will say anything.”

“What do I care about that? The girl is ill, and she asked to see me.”

“But only to make a scandal.”

“I am going to the hospital.”

“It means ruin—absolute ruin. I have been trying to save you. If you go there, she will accuse you, at the top of her voice, of things which are false.”

"That does not matter."

"Others will say of you, what you have just said of Marlesford—the probabilities do not offer much scope for optimism!"

"Nevertheless, I must go. She came to see me yesterday morning, and I may have spoken too roughly. I don't understand women."

"Then if you go, let me go with you."

To this he agreed.

When they reached the hospital, it was not at the hour for visitors, nor was it a visitors' day. But, as Firmalden was acquainted with the Secretary, the rule was relaxed. Nannie had been placed, as a paying patient, in a small room adjoining one of the wards. As Firmalden passed down the double row of beds, each occupied by some afflicted creature, groaning, or weeping, or dry-eyed, or sleeping from exhaustion, or waiting in terror for the afternoon's operation, or stupefied by the scene, or sobbing with despair; some old, some young, some middle-aged, some mere children; some degraded, some spiritualised by anguish, some with the seal of death upon their countenances, a few with a shadowy hope, a few ignominiously cheerful because they themselves were recovering, and all bearing the marks of torture, well or ill borne, he thought—

"Yet people doubt a hell!"

Nannie was propped up in her bed on pillows, reading an old number of *The Lady's Pictorial*. When she saw Firmalden, a spasm of exultation

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convulsed her face. She stared, without speaking, and drank in, absorbed, consumed the triumph of that moment. They had brushed back her hair, but she had dragged it forward, as usual, over her brow. Her colourless, unlined countenance conveyed the effect of age without its outward signs. She seemed an old woman behind a thin flesh mask. But her lashes were as long as ever, her features as neatly cut.

"Are you better?" said Firmalden.

"Now I've seen you," she answered, with an impudent side-glance at the nurse. Then she looked at Sophy, and began to titter. "I've been a precious little fool," she said. "You should have heard the doctors this morning! I very nearly poisoned *meself*. You were very kind to me last night. I don't forget. I'm t ungrateful."

"Have you everything you want?" asked Firmalden.

"It isn't home," she answered, "it isn't like being in *me* own place, but I shall be out tomorrow. It's the loneliness I mind. I'd sooner be among the other patients, if they weren't so common! How they scream and cry and take on! It's all hysteria—so nurse says. But I screamed *meself* last night. Oh, I *did* scream!" She slid her hand along the counterpane, and tugged at Firmalden's coat.

"Stoop down. I want to whisper something."

He bent over, and she whispered—

"I've been writing a pack of lies about Sophy—not about you, dear, only about Sophy."

"To whom did you write?"

"I wrote a little hint to Mr. Lessard, not exactly mentioning names. But I wrote a lot to Lady Marlesford, giving particulars. She's a nice little woman too. Oh, it was too bad of me."

"But how did you know Lady Marlesford, and when did you write?"

"That's telling!" she said, and once more her fitful cunning darted into her eyes.

"You must let me know exactly what you have done."

"There you are—at your old game—bullying. I won't be bullied."

No persuasion could induce her to add more, but as he drew away from her, she caught him quickly, and kissed his cheek.

"Once you used to beg and pray me to kiss you," she said loudly.

This was true, but the nurse and Sophy pretended not to hear her words, and not to see his humiliation.

"Once," she went on, "you wrote to me day and night, saying how much you loved me. You used to wait for hours just to see me get into *me* cab after rehearsals. You used to tremble all over and blush—but not as you are blushing now—if I came near you. I noticed it all, although you thought I didn't. You used to write, 'Dearest, all I know about God and heaven, I owe to you.'

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That used to set poor ma off crying. She always took your part. Once you used to write me beautiful poetry: it was very nice, dear; you needn't be ashamed of it. You loved me as your life. Oh, you did make love to me, and no mistake! Who would think you had it in you? Oh, aren't men sly?"

Sophy could bear it no longer.

"You might have some honour, Nannie—some sense of loyalty," she exclaimed. "All these things happened years ago, when you and Jim were engaged. It isn't fair to bring them up now. It's mean! It's contemptible! It's unladylike!" she added, with a sudden inspiration.

"Unladylike!" repeated Nannie. "What about titled smart ladies in the Divorce Court? They can tell tales out of school, if you like! And I'm not telling tales. I'm only reminding Jim of old times."

But the word "unladylike" had chilled the girl to the marrow.

"Unladylike," she repeated. "What next? Jim wouldn't have loved anybody who wasn't a lady."

This seemed the final stroke of irony. The proud and sensitive man could have laughed aloud in the fulness of his mortification.

"Unladylike," said Nannie again, but this time with a quivering under-lip. "Unladylike! And I've almost killed *meself* for his sake. I suppose that's unladylike too."

She looked from one to the other: at Firmalden,

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who was ashamed; at Sophy, who was on the verge of indignant tears; at the nurse, who looked superciliously now at all three. She had been told to remain in the room, because the case would have to come before the magistrate. Nannie was practically under arrest.

"You did not try to kill yourself for my sake," said Firmalden; "that is absolutely untrue."

"It's God's truth," she answered. "You broke *me* heart by your cruelty. And now, if you please, I'm unladylike."

At this point she wailed loudly, and the nurse observed that the interview must end. The patient was much the worse for it already.

"She's very plausible," was her one dry comment, as she led Firmalden and Sophy back to the corridor.

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## CHAPTER X

TESSA had driven straight home after her conversation with Firmalden. She thought he had spoken with a directness which touched brutality, yet she felt relieved, even appeased, for he had helped her to understand her own heart. He had forced her to explain herself in unmistakable language. Had she, however, said too much against her husband? The more she considered this point, the more she feared that her tongue had run away with her. She wanted to drive back and tell Firmalden, that, while she had a grievance, she had described it in misleading terms. Basil had been very kind to her always—in his own way. Could he help his way? He had been very indulgent, very patient. And he was a man of the highest principles. Had she made her appreciation of that fact sufficiently clear? Had she made it evident that she was not thinking of her own peace alone in desiring a separation? Above all, had she made too much of her gratitude to Lessard? Alas, no! There, she had erred only in making an under-statement. That the gratitude was wrong, she would not allow for a second. That the attraction he exerted for her transcended anything in her personal know-



ledge could not be denied. In his company, she became another being: he seemed to reinforce her whole character; she gained in effectiveness, in the sense of living, willing, feeling, and thinking with a fuller confidence and in a richer measure. Whether it were deep calling to deep or fire calling to fire, she did not know. But this she knew to her sorrow: with Marlesford, she felt starved and frozen; with Lessard, she felt gay and as though the sun were always shining. She had not seen him for a day,—and she missed him as spring would miss the summer if it did not come.

She had not been inside the house ten minutes before she was informed that Mr. Lessard had called. Was she well enough to see him?

The longing to see him was so strong that she almost ran down the stairs then and there in a tumult of delight. But the wildness of the joy, the intoxication of it and the ecstasy, terrified her also.

"No," she told her maid. "I'm sorry. I'm not well enough to see anybody."

When the maid had gone to deliver this message, Tessa flew to the door, locked it, and flung the key across the room.

"Firmalden was right. I must never see Lessard again—never, never again. It makes me too unhappy!"

Lessard, on receiving his message, felt a presentiment that the crisis had arrived. Perhaps Tessa had found out the whole truth about her husband. Perhaps there had been a distressing scene between

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the two. She would surely write to him—if only to answer his note. But the one letter which he received that day was from Firmalden, and it was brought by a messenger:—

“DEAR MAURICE,—The Mountjoye Place encounter is explained, and, by the perversity of fate, the one person who can be compromised at all by the affair is myself. Nannie Cloots (whom you may remember) lives now in Mountjoye Place. She attempted suicide last night. I was sent for, but I was dining with you. Sophy insisted on going to Nannie (she could not well hesitate in the circumstances), but Marlesford, knowing the neighbourhood, would not allow her to go alone. I have just been to see Nannie at the hospital, and she tells me that she has been writing lies to you and to Lady Marlesford about Sophy. I cannot trust myself in this matter; I cannot speak of it; anger has already got the upper hand of me. The wretched girl is to be brought up before the magistrate to-morrow morning on a charge of attempted suicide. There will be an inquiry, a remand, and eventually I shall have to appear as a witness. But what I want to dwell on is this—there is not a shadow of foundation for Lady Marlesford's suspicions of her husband. You must realise this; so must she. I am writing to Lady Marlesford. I have to address a meeting at the City Temple to-night, or I would call.—Yours,  
JAMES FIRMALEDEN.”

Lessard read this half a dozen times. He knew Firmalden well—as much by intuition as by a long acquaintance—and he understood, from the abrupt, curt sentences, that his friend was labouring under very strong emotion when he penned that letter. But his own astonishment and chagrin had to find their vent before he could consider Firmalden's troubles. If Lady Marlesford had no serious grievance, every one of his own secret hopes fell to the ground. A piqued woman is nearly always a desperate woman; a piqued woman who feels that she has been in two dangers—one of wronging the innocent, and the other of wronging herself—will nearly always devote the rest of her life to acts of atonement.

“Why is it my fate,” asked Lessard, “to love fanatical, religious women? First, a stony Puritan and now this wayward Catholic—and both of them mad on the subject of virtue in its maddest form! They would both think *Isolde* immoral, and *l'union libre* an abomination. In the interest of a multitude of Philistines they are right, but the highest type of individual is sacrificed. This, I suppose, is the common law of life. Man is martyred for his ideals, slain for his crimes, but pampered for his hypocrisy. ‘Conform to the law in public, and we’ll give you special charters for your private freedom.’ We are ruled by Pharisees and official liars who make good women captives, most men liars, and the whole of creation miserable!”

This was what he thought; for he was a rebel

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from the beginning—a man to whom the very notion of control was abhorrent; who hated feasts no less than fasts if they were of command; who had but to hear a law to challenge it; who had but to bow to a superior to detest his rule. And his wrath and impatience were the more bitter because, while in the Navy, he had forced himself to show scrupulous obedience. In the practice of his art he was a purist, a classicist—an opponent to the modern school, chiefly because it was the school in power: his natural instincts were romantic, never coarse; generous, never vindictive. Egoism was his supreme failing and also his main charm: he saw the universe and humanity only as they affected himself, his own wishes and his own development, and, while acknowledging the indwelling Spirit of God in every man, he felt It only as an invincible conviction when It seemed to stir within his own soul. The belief that God in man is the eternal link between man's littleness and the vast scheme of the world helped Lessard to be, not submissive, but, on the contrary, vehement, unruly, and defiant. He did not wish to do evil, but he reserved to himself the right of deciding what was good.

With this temperament, he was at first infuriated by any disappointment and then contemptuous toward it. The fiercer his original pain, the stiller was the after scorn. Observers of an apparent stoicism in a self-willed and overbearing man mistake it for a cowed spirit. It is, however, but

another manifestation of the same independence which leads him, in the first place, to declare war.

Of the many women who had influenced Lessard Tessa was the most child-like. She had roused in him an unselfish tenderness which, in comparison with his former love, seemed even a little absurd. He wondered why he liked her so inordinately when she was not beautiful, rather ailing, emotional without being passionate, exacting without meaning to be so. She had danced into a disheartening moment as

"One fair form that filled with love  
The lifeless atmosphere."

It was hard indeed to let her go. But he knew even by the subtle sympathy which had drawn them together in the first place, that the slender, if penetrating, tie between them had been severed. He was as sure of this as though he had shared every one of her thoughts and been present when she made herself a voluntary prisoner in her own room—hurling the key from her sight as a symbolic act of renunciation.

"I'll go and see Firmalden. I can get hold of him after the meeting."

The City Temple was crowded. Many had taken chairs in the aisles, and men were standing in the farthest part of the gallery. When Lessard reached the hall, Firmalden was already speaking, and he stood on a baize-covered platform in front of the pulpit. Several eminent ministers—each representing a dissenting sect,—a Broad Churchman and

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a Liberal Member of Parliament, occupied seats behind the young Nonconformist, whose subject, "*Church, Chapel, and State*," had appealed to a large number of persons whose interests, as a rule, seemed mutually destructive. Firmalden was a speaker of the first rank: his voice, his delivery, his persuasive, earnest manner always commanded attention. Yet the audience had collected in an unfriendly mood. Lessard, who had a long experience of the public, felt an evil spirit in the air the moment he entered the building. The listeners were not cold or indifferent—it was not a case where the speaker, by his own force, could stir up latent enthusiasm. It was a case where the sullen majority, well set on ignoring any possible instinct of fair play within themselves, had come to deaden a man's words. They moved, they sneered silently, they looked about, they scratched their cheeks, they yawned, they did not pretend to listen. For the first fifteen minutes, Lessard wondered whether Firmalden could possibly hold his own against two thousand ill-natured and prejudiced souls. But without any visible effort, and by the power of his religious faith rather than by any common vitality, Firmalden arrested their attention. He could not win them to the justice of his views—for they lacked alike the education to understand them and the willingness to have them explained; but he asserted unforgettably the principle which teaches, that a man's power depends on the strength of his conviction, not on the number of his followers.

The meeting, which had promised to be a failure, ending in smoke, proved a decisive event. The new school of Nonconformity separated itself from the old, for it was clear that the men who agreed with Firmalden could have little in common with those who had represented English Dissent during the last fifty years. That a number of young, resolute, scholarly, ambitious men were, not in England only but in France and in America, of Firmalden's mood was a fact which their elders feared to own, and the officials of every type and class refused to believe. When, at the conclusion of the address, the minority applauded loudly, it was taken as a challenge to the malcontents. They burst forth into hisses, groans, and noisy cries of "Silence!" But, during the uproar and confusion, two camps were formed which, twenty years later, helped to change the whole spirit of English denominational religion, the whole character of the English Parliament, and all the sentiments of the labouring class.

Lessard forced his way to the vestry, where he found Firmalden with Sophy, surrounded by a number of clergy. Sophy at the sight of Lessard felt as she always felt when she saw him—a though her heart were being rolled up as a leaf by some pitiless hand. She managed to avoid his glance; she escaped from the room, and, leaving a message for her brother, went home alone.

Lessard had observed Sophy's sudden pallor and her flight. He could not be sure that she had seen

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him. If a lost passion be irreclaimable, the pain it leaves is nevertheless permanent. Lessard was glad that Sophy had gone. They had been two shades passing each other in silence, but not in peace. There could never be peace between them.



## CHAPTER XI

LORD MARLESFORD had seen his agent and given conditional instructions about his proposed cruise in the *Floralys*. He might go, and he might not. All depended on her ladyship's health and the doctor's orders. He sighed profoundly: the agent saw that all was not well. His lordship's solicitor came to the same conclusion when the peer ordered a codicil to be prepared for his signature. He had already made more than generous provision for his wife. Now he added a further gift of ten thousand pounds. When men did these things they were either remorseful, eager to make some sort of amends for a shortcoming, or they might be in some tender, over-anxious mood comprehensible enough in the husband of a young wife who was not feeling very strong. In order to assure himself that she must live, he made as though he himself would surely die first. Various schemes and ideas were construed; but no one denied that he was preoccupied, upset, and more reserved than ever.

When he went home, after the round of business calls, to dress for dinner, he asked himself how he should act toward his wife. Tessa and he had quarrelled — not as lovers quarrel, but as no-

relatives, who must bear with each other in any event, quarrel. His sensitiveness had met a withering blast. He loved her still, he told himself, but in a new painful way, full of disquietude and actual enmity at moments. His good sense warned him that it was not a case where any outward or merely emotional reconciliation could produce a lasting effect. Truth, though never so stern, so humiliating, or so dangerous, must be uttered between his wife and himself. She had called him *unresponsive*. Now the word had first cut, then burned, then stung, then seared his memory. He still winced under it, owning its justification if he were judged by his manner, its falseness if the divine instinct of love had given her some understanding of his heart. But he had not shown her much sympathy, he knew, though he had been indulgent always. Had he ever crossed the lightest of her wishes? Indulgence, however, is not the same thing as fellow-feeling. Often, he had thought her wishes foolish—even tiresome. In the very act of granting them, he had perhaps taken no pains to conceal his disapprobation. As he questioned his conscience, he remembered something which he had recently read in some new philosophy founded on some very old saying, to the effect that conscience is merely an organ which obeys a man's dominant sentiment, that it is a thing more treacherous than either reason or nature itself.

“Passion . . .  
Is highest reason in a soul sublime.”

But what if the soul were quite ordinary? Such a soul, for example, as his own? He liked to be faithful to himself, but he wanted to place Tessa in the more favourable light. Generosity was his finest virtue, and it was all the finer because he never suspected its force or its action in his mind.

"I'll go straight to her and say all I think. I'll speak out," he said to himself.

He met her on the staircase coming down to the library. She was serious, but she was dressed in a rose-coloured muslin; she wore in her bodice some fresh roses, which gave a fragrance to the air; her large hazel eyes were dewy with the tears which spring from agitation.

"I was just looking for you," she said. So he turned, and they went into the library together.

She had received Firmalden's letter with its account of Nannie Cloots and the lies she had told. But although they were lies, taken at their blackest they had a tinge of truth. And the truth was that Marlesford had a great affection for Sophy Burgwallis. It is only the woman who is herself subtle in friendship who feels any especial jealousy of her husband's women friends—so long as they are friends only and not to be even imagined as lovers. Tessa had learnt that where an attraction between two people is very strong any calm relationship is out of the question. Where there is no surrender or any possibility of it, there must be all the same an incessant exhausting struggle between fixed principles and instincts which, although they can

be conquered, do not change. To have learnt this was to have plucked a grape from a thorn: the noblest magic experience can bring to pass.

"Basill!" she said, "of all human beings you are the one who must be most to me. But, even for you, I cannot alter my nature. I have a favour to ask. It is your forgiveness for my conduct lately."

"How can I forgive when there has been no fault?"

"There has been fault—not deliberate fault, but utterly blind selfishness."

"You are not selfish, dear Tessa. You are perhaps a little self-willed, that is all."

"Don't make excuses for me. I have hundreds at hand. Even as I told you I was selfish, I thought: I am being too hard on myself, and I was half hoping that you would say exactly what you have said! I cannot be absolutely straightforward and consistent at the same time. I speak, not with two voices, but with seven. They are my seven devils!"

She sat with her rosy skirts flowing round her, and her charming head thrown back in its familiar attitude of tender, self-mocking defiance, and she was looking into Marlesford's face with eloquent, unfathomable, and combative eyes. As to her prettiness, no man could entertain a doubt. He told himself that he loved her better than all the world. There was a life about her which came home to him and stirred him to the depths, and

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a sparkle which would make the dullest hour brilliant. He had never maintained that inconsequence in a woman was abominable. Some amount of it was surely necessary to a woman's character.

"Let me tell you what is in my heart," she suggested.

"By all means."

"Unless you yourself want to talk—for a change. Do you?"

"Now you ask me—yes. They always say that if a marriage can go on happily for ten years, one can feel safe. But during those ten years there are certain to be some bad times. I think we have reached one."

She nodded, and she did not interrupt him.

"I fell in love with you at sight," he went on, "there is no question of that. I never pretended not to care for women. I like them. Some men can get on perfectly without them—at least, so they tell me. But I cannot. I enjoy their society; I admire them; they interest me. I will go so far as to say that, for me, life would be intolerable if I had to spend it wholly among men. To philander about is silly and effeminate—at least, that is my idea of effeminacy. To marry and to have my home and my wife, is simply a law of my being. Had I been a poor man, I must have married just the same. I never cared for flirtations and the like. I have had love affairs, of course, but only when I thought I was

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desperately in love. After I met you, I found the difference between the lasting thing and the transient one. All I want to make clear to you is this: I have never deceived myself or anybody else—so far as I know."

"I am sure of that."

She watched him, and thought how handsome he was: what a fine figure he had; what a graceful head; what a frank, courageous expression! Why could she not love him desperately? Why, when she had once been on the point of loving him, had her heart stopped short? One does not fall in love by trying, nor, for that matter, by trying, prevent it.

"When I feel, therefore," he went on, biting his lip to restrain his unusual emotion, "that I have utterly failed to make you happy—although I'm so devoted to you—it's hard."

Then she felt that her upbraidings had been cruel. The bleaker the rock, the more it craves and absorbs the warmth of the sun. Was he to blame for his bleak nature?

"I am not unhappy," she exclaimed; "if I ever complained, it was because I felt ill. Do believe it was illness—nothing else."

"I am not blind," he replied bitterly. "When you were ill you said things which, while you are well, you can keep to yourself. But you meant them, and there was the ring of truth running through them."

"I must learn to control my moods."

"No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of his profession or of his party—or of his religion; no woman likes to acknowledge that she has made a mistake in her marriage. But whether acknowledged or disavowed, if a mistake has been made, it works misery. I have never believed in unnecessary suffering."

He hesitated, but an expression of unwonted firmness settled over his features; he spoke gently but his eyes shone with something at once proud and shy.

"I'll go off by myself for about a month," he went on; "this will give us both a chance to sift our thoughts."

"Don't leave me alone. I should enjoy the yacht. Please let me come."

"I'm afraid you say that as a dreary sort of duty."

"No—out of sheer egoism. I really want to come. It would be a most unkind thing to leave me behind. People who are only in each other's company for amusement and happiness never really like each other so much as those who work together."

He remembered his pleasant hours with Sophy Burghwallis.

"And suffer together," added Tessa, with a break in her voice.

"I can scarcely like the idea of our suffering together," he said.

"There's where we have both been foolish," she answered; "we resented everything that bored us—everything that annoyed us. When we wanted sympathy, we went to—to friends—not to each other. We were stilted with each other: we were natural with friends."

"Yes, that is true."

"Well, unless we change all that, there'll be a shipwreck! I know that you are fond of Sophy. Now I trust you and I trust Sophy—although I never cared for her. But do you know that I find Lessard so—pleasant that I have to-day resolved never to see him willingly again?"

"You are very candid!"

"Our one hope is in candour."

"I will not believe that you really care for that man. You exaggerate your feelings. They are never so strong as you think. You use such words as *adore, idolise, worship, loathe, detest, abhor*, when you mean mere likes and dislikes."

She smiled at this further evidence of his misconception of her character.

"You make me out very tame!"

"Not tame. But there is an essential purity in you."

"Men have the strangest notions of purity and virtue. For my part, I don't recognise any purity or virtue which is based on feeble likes and dislikes only!"

Marlesford still shook his head.

"My dear child!" he exclaimed—just as Father



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Vernon might have murmured, "Tut! tut!" to any small girl who was a little naughty in an agreeable way.

Lessard, more discerning, thought her capable of anything—except deceit.

But Tessa had the swift inspiration that, even though Marlesford refused to understand her, it was well within her power to understand him—to gain and keep his confidence, to hear all he thought and felt on every subject. This, perhaps, was what men in general sought—to be studied subtly and to be managed graciously.

"And very interesting work, too," she thought, with a sigh.

"As for Mrs. Burghwallis," said Marlesford, in a huskier voice, "I do think her one of the best friends any man could have. It might be dangerous to see her too often, because——"

"Because she happens to be extremely handsome and clever," suggested his wife.

"Because she happens to be extremely handsome and clever, but womanly as well. I won't deny that I am fond of her—very fond of her. There's nothing to be ashamed of in such an affection. It has been a great help to me during these last two months. I should have been utterly wretched without her."

"I don't like to hear you say that."

"You declared just now that our one hope was in candour."

"I was right. But it hurts all the same."

"Inevitably."

"We have wounded each other."

"So it seems."

She stood up: he also stood up.

"Do you love me, Basil?"

"You know I do."

"How can you care for me? I'm an odious, ungrateful creature."

"No one is perfect."

"I'll be nicer hereafter."

As she spoke, she moved her hand timidly—neither toward him nor altogether away from him. It seemed to be stealing along the length of her lace scarf in search of some adventure. But the slight, almost imperceptible, action conquered his pride. She had never before appeared helpless; never before less than the mistress of the situation bent on some resolved plan. In his surprise, he forgot to be unresponsive. He took her hand: he kissed the slender, blue-veined wrist, then the forearm below the elbow, and then her frail white shoulder. Thus, by degrees, he was able to assure himself that he had regained a possession which he had been in the awful peril of losing irrevocably.

He liked to believe that he must have loved her in spite of any defects of complexion or of feature; but undoubtedly he found a physical delight in the fairness of her skin, in the curves of her mouth, in the play of her eyelashes, and in the ruddy shining of her auburn hair. It was anguish to face the fact that such exquisite charm could not

endure—that each day, each year was taking here a little and there a little from the flowery delicacy of her youth. He could imagine her in old age as a very sweet white rose which he had once seen pressed on the silk page of an embroidered prayer book. It was still fragrant—still a rose—still beautiful. But its life had gone. In a passion of love and fear—so great that it overpowered any consideration beyond the certitude that this is a hurrying world and the existence of women is a tragedy—he caught her in his arms as though he were snatching her from time and from death.

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## CHAPTER XII

THE Police Court investigations in the case of Miss de Verney's attempted suicide created a sensation beyond Nannie's hope. Both Firmalden and Sophy were called as witnesses, and, although the young minister was acquitted of all blame, he came out of the affair twenty years older and incurably saddened.

When he saw Nannie brought in by two warders and placed in the dock, confronting the magistrate and surrounded by the crowd of complainants, witnesses, idlers, policemen, and solicitors' clerks, he thought he would sooner see any woman lying dead by the roadside than in such a position.

The spectators were neither cruel nor flippant. Case after case had been heard: obscenity, brutality, stupidity, and treachery from witnesses and accused persons were accepted as things too common for surprise: sentences were passed and the sentenced were hurried away into the cells by a passionless but implacable method which suggested the awful action of some great engine in a foundry. Sometimes a wail, sometimes a protest, sometimes an oath would escape from the prisoners,

but they availed as little as the groans of the tormented in a hospital ward.

Nannie leant on the dock railing, and declared in reply to the magistrate's questions, that she was sick of life; that her heart was broken; that the man she loved, no longer loved her; that, as a result of an interview with him, she had taken poison to end it all. The magistrate, who had heard many similar tales from many young women of her type—if not of her appearance—had no doubt that she was a liar. There is a garment of white light peculiar to all law courts which seems to penetrate flesh and bone to the very spirit, making it visible. It may even be said that no man or woman can ever be described as truly seen till they have suffered the ordeal of the witness stand.

When Firmalden was called to give his account of the interview with Nannie, it was clear to any person of experience looking on that he was an innocent man. But neither his innocence nor his integrity could relieve the humiliation of the trial and the wretched necessity of clearing his own character by an overwhelming repudiation of Nannie's statements. His first impulse was to take all the blame, to accept the consequences. The sudden sight of his father's face in the threshold at the door reminded him that he owed a duty to his own relatives. He said that he had once been engaged to be married to Miss Cloots; that the engagement had been broken off at her own

request; that he had not seen her for years till she wrote asking for an interview on his taking up his work in London. This ghastly public dissection of his first love—for which he had been eager to make so many sacrifices, and out of which he had formed so many illusions—went on as though he had no more sensitiveness than a dead bone. With eyes no longer blinded by passion, he saw the meanness of Nannie's countenance, her restless shifting glance, and her enjoyment of his discomfiture. She simpered and she struck attitudes; she gazed piteously at the magistrate, at the policemen, and at the reporters.

At the close of the proceedings, her manager bailed her out and offered her, on the spot, an engagement at an increased salary.

Lessard, Sophy, and Dr. Firmalden waited for Jim and begged him to come with them. But he could not bear any companionship at that moment, and he went by himself into the country.

Sophy wrote to him from London and forwarded him a letter from Tessa. The letter from Sophy conveyed the news that Lady Marlesford's illness was now accounted for in the happiest domestic sense. She was about to become a mother. The doctors had been stupid, no doubt, but, in their fear of raising false hopes, they had preferred to err on the side of caution. Lord Marlesford's delight was pathetic. He had bought Tessa another string of pearls. As for Lady Navenby, she was delirious with excitement: had lost

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control of her consonants, and said "bay" for "day," and "pear" for "heir."

"I hope it will be a boy," wrote Sophy, in conclusion, "because everyone says that it is the one thing wanting to make the marriage perfect. It will be interesting to see how the event will really affect them both. Marlesford called to-day in the hope, he said, of finding you at home. He was preoccupied and nervous. When he showed me the pearls he had bought for Tessa, he exclaimed 'I wish she cared for these things as she once cared! I don't know how to prove my devotion. I have offered to build her a villa at Amalfi: she loves the sun. I begin to see that women are reassured of one's love by just the little way which a man never thinks of.' We talked about her for an hour, and I did my best to hint at things he might do which would certainly please her—even better, perhaps, than jewels and villas. He has fine qualities, and it is not his fault that he cannot understand any woman God ever made. I confess stupidity of the kind touches me, but I can see where it exasperates Tessa."

The letter from Tessa herself ran as follows. . . .

"DEAR MR. FIRMALDEN,—Do let me tell you that I felt all you suffered at the Police Court yesterday. I wish I were well enough to write my thoughts. They seem to fly like a swarm of

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birds round my head. I am told you made a fine speech at the City Temple. Alas! that you are against us and not for us. This has been one of the great disappointments of my life. You will believe that I know the meaning of a disappointment? When I am strong again, I will send you a long letter all about myself—just egoism from beginning to end. It may help you to help others—so it won't be useless.

"I am going with Basil to some place in the South where the sun never stops shining. This morning I saw three doctors. One said, 'Give her every mortal thing she wants.' Another said, 'She must be kept in cheerful society.' Another said, 'Try to realise that you are one of the most envied women in London!' This made me laugh. People have the drollest ideas of what should make one happy.—Yours very sincerely,  
TESSA MARLESFORD."





## EPILOGUE

EXACTLY one year later Tessa died at Pontresina, leaving a son five months old. Various causes were given for her death, but she had been listless, feeble, and strange before the boy was born, and she grew worse after his birth. No one ever heard her complain of anything more serious than excessive fatigue; she showed great tenderness for the child, although she was always too tired to hold him for long or to play with him. She seemed to droop and perish as a starved plant. Firmalden alone knew the secret of her invincible melancholy. Her promised letter—"all egoism from beginning to end"—reached him with the news of her last illness.

"I have done everything possible to forget Lessard. Yet our days at Florence were so happy that no effort of the will can tear their memory from my mind. We never said a word that the whole world might not have heard, but the whole world would never have understood us. In paradise

. . . will I ask of Christ the Lord  
This much for him and me—

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Only to live as once on earth  
With Love, only to be,  
As then awhile, for ever now  
Together, I and he.'

I grieve over my own ingratitude. But you may as well ask the stars to live in the sea, or the grass to grow in the air, as to expect me to continue in a world where I cannot take root. I stifle under Basil's kindness. It kills me. I know I disappoint him; I know that if I could live (which I cannot), I should spoil his life; I know that my efforts to seem happy do not deceive him. He feels that I do not and cannot love him as a wife should love her husband. I would die for him—but it is torture to be alone with him. Now, this is a dreadful state of affairs. Nothing could be more touching than his unselfishness. Yet why should he have to be unselfish? Why should he exist under such restraints and hesitations? It is all quite wrong. I think often of Sophy. She has many resources which I lack, but I am sure she has suffered extremely. I used to believe that she was too hard and cold and sensible to suffer much. That was unfair on my part. My one consolation is that the conflict must end soon. Women of my type, who are not strong enough physically to bear the strain of moral suffering, very soon, and gladly, flicker out. We are designed to be *filles de joie* (not in the sinister sense), and although we may have the courage to face hard things, and the faith that can accept hard sayings, God mercifully allows us to

die early in the fight. Do not you doubt that I have made a good little fight. My religion helps me to die, it cannot make me live. All I have ever allowed myself in the way of indulgence is an occasional wonder (I will not call it a regret) at the destiny of creatures like myself, who can crowd so much despair into so short a time.

T. M."

Of all those who mourned for Tessa, Firmalden was the one who never recovered from her loss. He worked well: he is now a commanding figure among Nonconformists; but the heart of his existence lies in the Marlesford vault.

Lessard, after wandering in the very madness of grief from East to West, immortalised his love in an opera, and eloped with an Italian princess because she admired the part of the heroine—which was the musician's portrait of Tessa.

Lord Marlesford remained a widower for five years. During that time he consulted Sophy frequently about various charming, unexceptionable girls who had every quality he could esteem in his son's stepmother. One day, however, his lordship fell from his horse on the hunting-field and broke two ribs. It was not possible to see Sophy for a month. The moment he could travel with safety and the doctor's permission, he went to see her.

"Dearest Sophy," said he, "I am not a vain man, and it never occurred to me that you could

care well enough for me to marry me. I cannot give you the love I felt for our poor Tessa, and you would not want it. The love I have for you is an absolute devotion. I cannot live without you. This is certain."

But she did not accept the offer, definitely, till the following spring.

She, too, was prudent. There were many points to consider, and the difference in their creeds was the sorriest of all. Under the fire of the most malicious criticism, she was received into the Roman Catholic Church. Few hesitated to say that she took the step in order to marry a wealthy peer who had been infatuated with her beauty and artfulness for years. Firmalden, who suffered the most at her change of opinions, described them thus in a letter to Lessard, with whom he remained a constant friend. Is he not the one mortal with whom he can ever speak of Tessa?—

"Sophy was capable of making any sacrifice; the greatest she has ever made was this repudiation of all the prejudices she had felt—far more bitterly than my father or I—against Rome. I happen to know that Marlesford never used one word of persuasion in the matter. He regarded her as indispensable to his existence; indeed, you may judge of the strength of his attachment when he overcame his own prejudices against Dissenters against singularity in any form, and asked the penniless daughter of a Radical Nonconformist

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and the sister of a man rejected by many among the Nonconformists themselves, to become Lady Marlesford. But he is now fifty-one; he has had ample opportunity to know his mind and hers. I am certain that they were destined for each other from the beginning; that although they will never know unearthly happiness, they will never know anything else, in this world, except the utmost possibility of earthly contentment. Marlesford is not Sophy's first love: grief and disappointment have softened the selfish hopes of her youth. She knows that while men are often better than their words or their actions, they are never the precise creatures of a girl's fantastic imagination. Tessa was one who had necessarily to live, move, and have her being in another; she wanted to feel with his feelings, see with his eyes, think with his thoughts. I do not mean that she had no mind of her own. Such was her constitution, that, unless that other self were nothing more or less than her own self on an infallible and masculine scale, she must have discovered her mistake too late and perished of disappointment. There was no likeness possible between her soul and the soul of any man alive. Now that I am accustomed to the idea of her death, I see that she went at the beautiful and fitting moment. Of how many can that be said with conviction? She was taken from the evil to come. It would be an easy and stupid blunder to blame her education for her tempera-

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ment. Her education was her salvation. You share my feelings about the Church of Rome, and you won't accuse me of partiality toward it. But it is the one religion for such women as Tessa. As a cloud, it protected and enveloped her in a world not ruled by the candid or inhabited by the tender. Her faults were the faults of youth; her spirit belonged to those who may meet men and women for a little while and inspire them for their whole lives.

“For the rest, you know my creed:

‘ Poor vaunt of life indeed  
Were man but formed to feed  
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast;  
Such feasting ended, then  
As sure an end to men.’

Suffering can never be suppressed by statute. It is a law of nature, but, as all other laws of nature, since it must be obeyed, let us at least submit as sons of God and co-heirs with Christ—not as beasts of burden and as those who believe that all labour is in vain. J. F.”

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