

A GREY LIFE

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A GREY LIFE

A ROMANCE OF MODERN BATH

BY

“RITA”

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ETC. ETC.

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A GREY LIFE

I

HOW I CAME TO BATH—AND WHY

It was all grey.

The atmosphere, the sky, the houses. A grey, sombre town, surrounded by encircling hills. The very street held only grey, gloomy buildings, or so they looked to my young eyes, used hitherto to the lovely green of Ireland. Winter-time and cold, and all my impressions only of grey and gloom. Those *first* impressions of childhood, which seem to etch a picture in the brain as an acid works upon a sensitive plate.

At night, when after a weary and horrible journey I had arrived at my destination, I was too tired and shy and frightened to talk much, or observe much. But the next morning—

For its record I look back to the scrawled and blotted copy-book that represents my first diary. This is what I read.

“December 10th, 18—.

“Came to Bath, to live with my Aunt Theresa. It is a big stone house in a grey street. Opposite to it are more grey stone houses, very tall, and ugly. The sky is grey also. I do not think I shall be happy here. I wish I was back in Ireland.”

That wish was with me all through that first dreary week in which I was trying to accustom myself to new surroundings and new friends. I was very young, only twelve years of age. I had lost both my parents. I had no brothers or sisters, and Aunt Theresa had sent for me to come and live with her and her two

sisters. She kept a private boarding-house in Bath, but I was not aware of that at first. She only insinuated that, the house being larger than they needed, she occasionally accommodated a few friends who wished to come to this notable city for its renowned baths and springs.

At the time of my first acquaintance with the house and its inmates I rarely saw them, for I took my meals either in Aunt Theresa's parlour, or in the kitchen with the two Irish servants. It seemed a very large house to me, but indescribably dark and gloomy. The main staircase was of stone, and so was the hall, and the basement. The dining-room at the right of the hall door had two windows looking on the street. Through a large archway opposite one saw bare brown trees, and a glint of green grass. But at first my ideas of the house were circumscribed by kitchen, back parlour, the great stone staircase, which led on and up to a wooden one at the top floor, and my own tiny bedroom. The rest was a mystery of closed doors, or occasional voices.

As I grew more familiar with my surroundings, I discovered that my three aunts were not the best of friends. Mealtime was always signalized by bickering, fault-finding, and grumbling. Aunt Theresa, being the eldest and presumably the owner and controller of finances, was, of course, the most important. Aunt Joanna, who came next, was amiable, but undoubtedly trying. Aunt Frances, the youngest and prettiest of the trio, was to my thinking a perfect terror. Her temper was violent to a degree, and her vanity and self-importance would have been inexcusable in a Princess of the Blood. She cared for no one and nothing but herself, and what ministered to her pleasure. She seemed to take an instant dislike to me, possibly because my gaze was innocently critical of wonder at her very brilliant cheeks. "What are you staring at, Saucer-eyes?" was her first greeting. And being too abashed and shy to answer it, she proceeded to give me what her sister termed "a lash of her tongue," that wellnigh reduced me to tears. After this unpromising beginning she ignored me altogether.

My three aunts differed very much. Aunt Theresa was kindly, bustling, and energetic. She seemed to manage the whole

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household. Aunt Joanna was a curious compound of egoism, good-nature, and discontent. Aunt Frances I have already described. By some queer twist of Fortune's wheel I was thrown into this queer circle, and obliged to look upon them as my natural guardians. My father had left just enough money for my education, and Aunt Theresa was trustee of this fund. I never knew how much, or how little it was, but, judging from the sort of education it afforded, I should say it could not have been worth investing.

For the first two weeks I was left pretty much to myself, after being cautioned not to intrude into the grander apartments of the house. The kitchen was the most cheerful place I could find, and I speedily made friends with Bridget Muldooney, the cook, who, along with her nephew, Mickey Donovan, as "handy man," had followed the fortunes of the family from Dublin to Somerset. They practically "ran" the establishment, with the aid of someone called "poor Mary," a queer-looking, half-witted girl, who was for ever cleaning and scrubbing in the back kitchen, when she was not running errands or answering bells.

I believe my Aunts Joanna and Theresa performed various light duties, such as dusting rooms and making beds. Frances, or Fanny, as they usually called her, seemed to spend her time in dressmaking. When not engaged at that she read novels, and consumed unlimited sweets. If it was not raining, she dressed herself with elaborate care and went out. She never offered to take me with her, and for a full fortnight my sole idea of the fashion and style of Bath was what I have described; a grey street in a grey atmosphere.

This is not so much a story about myself as about the people with whose history I was involved. The medley of farce and tragedy that made up their lives as I knew those lives. But I begin at the beginning, partly because I am an unpractised story-writer, partly because I have the assistance of that old copy-book for dates, names, and people. The book so proudly subscribed in unformed capitals as—

"ROSALEEN'S DIRTY"

Rosaleen was my name. I believe it was my father's choice. At all events he would never have it abbreviated, and my first difference of opinion with my aunts arose from Aunt Joanna's attempt to cut it down to "Rosie." I hated "Rosie." It was a silly dolly sort of name. I refused to answer to it, so Aunt Joanna reinstated the three syllables. Aunt Fanny, finding I disliked curtailment, took a malicious pleasure henceforth in addressing me as Rose or Rosa.

I have said my first fortnight was passed in the house and in melancholy pilgrimages up and down its dreary length of staircases. Those old houses were five stories high, and it was something of a journey to go from the bottom to the top, or vice versa. I was not strong, and had to make more than one halt in those journeyings. I used to sit on the stair, and look at the various doors and wonder what sort of people lived behind them. My tiny room was at the back of the one shared by Aunts Joanna and Theresa. It had one small window looking over the garden, and showing me more grey stone walls and buildings. There was only one tree in the garden. A large black-stemmed black-boughed elm, leafless and ugly under the murky sky, growing up from sodden grass, and reigning in solitary glory over the stunted shrubs, that filled the beds. I wondered what it would look like in summer-time, and whether any birds ever came to visit it, or nest in its forbidding branches?

I think it was the 24th of December when I looked out as usual and saw my first gleam of blue sky; caught a first hint of sunshine in the narrow lane that ran behind the garden. Full of delight at the changed aspect of things I ran down to breakfast. I seized upon Aunt Theresa in the act of making tea for "upstairs."

"Oh! may I go out to-day?" I pleaded. "It's so long since I've been out of the house. And it's going to be a beautiful day. Not rainy and grey any more."

"Go out?" she said. "Why, of course you can, if you want to. I'll tell Fanny to take you, or maybe your Aunt Joanna will be going to do some shopping. There's plenty to think of

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this Christmas-time. She can take you, if you'll be good and not bother her. The shops are grand just now. It'll be a treat for you to see them; and there's the Pump Room, she might show you that. There, sit down now, and have your porridge. I'll tell her."

Then she bustled off, and I had my usual soup-plate of porridge and milk (which I thoroughly disliked) on a corner of the kitchen table, while Bridget fried rashers and made toast, for the fortunate people above-stairs. Once or twice she looked at me and the languid movements of the spoon. "Hurry now, there's a darlin'." she said. "And maybe I'll find a spare scrap o' bacon for ye, as a trate. Could ye ate it if I did?"

"I could," I said emphatically. "I hate porridge. When I was at home in Ireland papa always let me have some of his bacon."

"Did he now? And I suppose ye miss it? All the same, the stirabout is more strength'ning. Ye're sich a white-faced, skinny morsel av a creature that ye need fattenin' stuffs, an' lots av thim."

The description sounded so unflattering that I made a valiant effort to finish the porridge, and was rewarded by a rasher and a slice of toast.

"Ye'd best ate as much as ye can hould," said Bridget. "For it's not much av of a lunch I'll be cookin' to-day. Me hands is full wid all the preparations for to-morrow."

"Why to-morrow?" I asked.

"Sure, isn't it Christmas Day? Where's your wits, child, not to be rememberin' that?"

"Christmas Day!" I laid down my fork. I was suddenly conscious of something at the back of memory that brought a lump into my throat.

Christmas Day! Only a year ago, and *he* had been with me, and a full stocking had hung at the foot of my bed, and we had been so merry and happy together. This Christmas-time would bring no such joy. No cheery voice would wish me the usual wish. No surprise of presents would represent some heart's desire of my own. Only this strangeness, and hardness, and greyness. I suddenly burst into bitter weeping

—those sharp, agonized sobs of childhood that are sorrow's only eloquence.

"Whist now, what in the wurld's taken ye?" cried Bridget, coming to my side. "There, there now, have done. Sure, it's just foolishness to cry like that. What's the good at all?"

I tried to check my tears.

"It was—Christmas," I faltered. "Last Christmas I was so—so happy."

"Ah, thin, poor child, I can feel for ye, losin' thim ye loved. But, sure, that's life; the way av it. Lovin', and losin', and findin'. There, there! Ye've cried enough, an' I've no more time to waste. Dry yer eyes, child, an' be sinsible. See, 'tis a lovely day, the sun shinin' an' all. Maybe I'll get lave to take ye wid me to the town. I've lots of shoppin' to do. 'Twill be amusin' to see the folk in the High Street beyant. Hurry up now wid that breakfast, an' I'll hurry wid me work, an' we'll be off wid ourselves."

The words sounded inspiriting. I dried my red eyes and did my best to finish that cold, greasy bit of bacon, while Bridget despatched the upstairs breakfast by aid of Mickey Donovan, and then made a list of such provisions as would be required for the holiday time. Christmas fell on a Saturday, so she had three days to prepare for.

I made my way upstairs, and tidied up my little room. Then I took out the hat and paletot which formed the childish fashions of the day. I tied my thick, black hair into "door knockers," and dressed myself in the mourning garments provided for me by an Irish milliner. Then I opened my door, and left the room. As I did so I heard the hour strike from the grandfather's clock in the hall below. *Ten*. I paused. Bridget had said between ten and eleven.

I turned back to my room. There was nothing to do there to pass away the time. Once more I came out on to the landing, and took a survey of the upper regions. As yet I had not ventured to explore the top of the house. My aunts spoke of it as "the attics." I understood they were occupied by someone hinted at as "Madame Odylle," or "that mysterious creature up above."

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I cannot to this day imagine what inspired me with a sudden desire to explore this region on this particular morning, but the fact is impressed upon me—and the results.

Step by step I went up the uncarpeted stairs. I found myself on a narrow wooden landing on which four doors opened. They were all closed, and unrevealing. I stood still and listened for any sound of life or movement. But I heard nothing.

Then I ventured to open one door. It was a back room, dingy and dusty, and holding only boxes and packing-cases. I closed it and turned. As I did so I saw the door of one of the front attics open *slowly*. So slowly, and quietly did the aperture widen that I was seized with a nervous terror of what it might reveal. Fascinated and motionless, I stood and gazed, and then, as the space widened, I saw a face looking out at me.

A face! Such a face! It froze my young heart to icy fear. A fear that could not express itself by word or sound. The colour of the face was the raw bright pink of an unhealed scar, the eyes looked out of two blood-red rims. About the head and face hung a mass of tangled grey hair, escaping from a grey shawl or scarf. The door opened no further. I had no hint of the figure behind it. But whether my eyes betrayed terror and horror, I heard a voice saying, "I'll not hurt you, child. What are you doing here?"

The voice was at once so sad and so exquisite in its speaking tones that my fears vanished. Had my eyes been closed to the dreadful face I should have imagined it to be as beautiful as its speech. Even with the horrible contrast so manifest I regained some small amount of self-possession. I tried to stammer out an explanation of my presence. While I did so, I saw the strange apparition slip some glasses over her disfigured eyes. It made them less terrifying. But the face, with its horrible skin, pink, and seamed, and scarred, still left me sick and shuddering.

"You are frightened of me, I see. Everyone is. That is why I live here alone—to myself—seeing no one, asking nothing of anyone. The saddest and most solitary creature in all this town, I think."

The pathos of the voice was indescribable, and so was the

curious, half-foreign inflection of its modulated tones. In a moment my fears vanished. To be solitary and afflicted seemed even to my inexperience as at once the most awful and undeserved of fates. I went a few paces nearer.

"I am not frightened," I said. "And—do you live here all alone?"

"I do. I have these four rooms at the top of the house, all to myself, out of everyone's way. Would you like to see how it is I live?"

She drew back and set open the door. I saw a room dimly lit by its one small window. The whole atmosphere was sombre. The walls were covered with a dull grey paper. In the centre stood a table littered with papers, books, and writing materials. A wide sofa piled with cushions stood on one side of the bright fire. A low bookcase filled with books stood against the wall. On the top were bowls of quaint pottery.

"Will you come in?" said the plaintive voice. "I never have any visitors; it would be kind."

I went in, partly from curiosity, partly from the fascinated compassion the strange speaker inspired. Once in the room I yielded to the charm of its artistic beauty, for in comparison with my aunt's horsehair and "rep" furnishings, this space of soft mist and warm comfort was an agreeable contrast.

The strange owner stood revealed as a tall, slight figure, oddly garbed in a straight-cut robe of pale grey cashmere. It fell from throat to foot in long, flowing lines, unbelted, untrimmed, yet curiously becoming to the slender figure. As she moved to and fro, the cloudy draperies about her head floated round her like a mist, revealing nothing, yet leaving the consciousness of a living force behind obscurity.

She moved quickly, pointing out this and the other, giving word of explanation, and occasionally displaying a housewife's pride in her own order and contrivance. One of the cupboards beside the fireplace held china and glass; the other contained cooking appliances, of some bright, shining substance, all spotless and beautifully clean. A door led into her bedroom; that she showed me also. I had never seen such a room. The draped bedstead, the exquisite toilet-table, with all its silver and cut-glass

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and enamels; the inlaid wardrobe with its shelves and drawers; and further on again a third room which held a press of beautiful house and table linen, and a bath, and a curious little foreign stove for heating water. Everything was spotlessly clean, and everywhere floated some subtle scents of lavender and dried rose leaves. I was speechless from wonder and admiration.

"And here I work," she said quietly, as we went back to the front room.

"Work?" I echoed.

She touched the scattered sheets of paper on the table. "I am a writer."

I gazed at her with awe. This was indeed to be noteworthy, and to thrill my childish heart with wonder.

"Those books"—she pointed to a row of scarlet-bound volumes in the bookcase—"are all mine. If it were not for them, their solace and occupation, I should not be alive now. For life, mere physical existence, is nothing to me. I live in my mind. That alone consoles me for this marred and hideous body!"

"To write," I murmured. "To write—books. Oh! how wonderful!"

"You think so?"

"They *live*," I said, "and teach us. My father used to write."

"Ah, then we shall be friends!" she said quickly. "Something in your little dark face told me so. What is your name?"

"Rosaleen," I answered, "Rosaleen Le Suir."

Her hand, a very slender, very white hand it was, touched my face.

"What a pretty name. A poet used that name. 'The Dark Rosaleen.' Perhaps that is why your father called you it?"

"I don't know," I said, "why he called me it."

"How long have you been in this house?" she continued.

I told her, and why I had come, and how lonely and unhappy I was in this cold, grey town. She listened silently, but as I stopped speaking she suddenly moved to her table and wrote something down.

For a moment she remained quite still, looking at the words.

I crept nearer and looked also. This was what she had written in large letters, each word headed by a capital.

"A Grey Life."

We both stood silently gazing at the words.

Then she spoke, slowly, as one whose thoughts are far away.

"*That*," she said, "is my life—for ever now. Grey life, grey hopes, grey grief. With you, child, is the rose of promise. The joy of what may be. But for me"—she laughed wildly, a jangled, tuneless laugh that set my nerves quivering—"I am only thirty years old, child. Young enough for a woman, young enough for promises of joy, and love, and all sweet, happy things that I have lost. That I shall never know—again!"

She sank into the chair beside the table. She put her elbows on the scattered paper and bent her head down upon her hands. She neither spoke nor moved, and half fearful of disturbing her unguessed thoughts, I stole softly away, and closed the door again.

II

IN WHICH I MAKE A FRIEND, AND A DISCOVERY

I WENT down the stairs, and made my way to the kitchen. My little head was buzzing with curiosity and wonder about the strange lady in the attics.

Why was she there, of all places in the world? And what was the tragedy of her life? What horrible fate had so marred and scarred her beauty, leaving hands and figure still youthful, yet robbing womanhood of its one priceless charm? Did anyone here know? Would they tell me, or should I only be punished for my temerity in exploring those upper regions? I resolved to question Bridget Muldooney. If she retained the Irish virtue

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of curiosity, there would be no mystery in the house that she wouldn't have fathomed, or tried to fathom.

But I said nothing until we were out of the house and on our way to the High Street. It was my first walk in Bath, and as we turned from the grey street into a wide and open space, I stopped and looked around. Facing me were high, sloping hills. To the left a wide street of imposing houses, Great Pulteney Street, Bridget called it. In the bright sunshine it looked noble and impressive. To the right the road crossed a bridge under which flowed a river of whose name Bridget was ignorant. In fact, though she had lived some five years in that historical town, she could tell me little about it, save that the Abbey "did ought to be the Holy Catholic Church," and that the Pump Rooms were where, "thim as had rheumaticks did be bathin' in fresh boilin' water as sprung up from the bowels av the airth." A proceeding which seemed to her both "ondaycint an' divilish. Still folks did be comin' from all parts av the wurrld to take these baths, and drink these waters." The idea of boiling water springing up from the earth and being conveyed into pipes and conduits interested me enormously. I begged to be shown the place, and after some grumbling she took me to where the old Roman bath at the rear of the Pump Room was bubbling and steaming amidst broken stone and fragments of masonry.*

I have but a confused idea of the appearance of the building, or the streets. (I am writing of some forty years ago.) But the steam and the bubbling spring are distinct impressions, as also my amazement when I learnt that this same water had been boiling and bubbling for more than 2000 years, and written of historically for over 300.

I got these facts into my young head long before the fascination of the wonderful old city and its history of powder, patches, sedan chairs, Beau Nash, Sheridan, and Ralph Allen became familiar things. I was to learn all its lore, and grow to love its dear grey buildings with their endless associations. Its beauty and its charm were to become part of my life and its strange tragedies, and, finally, to make appeal for the central

* This has since been walled in.

setting of the story of that life when Time should be ripe for its writing. So I try to go back in memory now to that first morning of wonderment when I saw the old grey Abbey outlined against a soft blue sky, and confronting me as a first surprise. I had not known of its existence, and I begged Bridget to take me into the interior and let me see its wonders. But this she flatly refused, being too good a Catholic to put foot in a Protestant church, as she was at pains to explain.

"Ask yer aunts to bring ye," she said. "They comes to it for sarvice on Sundays. Leastways Miss Fanny does. 'Tis a good place to be showin' herself. For all the rank an' fashion av Bath goes there, so they says."

Then she hurried me off to the market, where she had to buy chickens and vegetables, and various other comestibles. The bargaining and chaffering amused me very much. It was all so novel. And the crowds of shoppers at the many stalls revealed how populous a place was this unexplored and, to me, unknown city.

When Bridget had concluded her marketing she took me down a street of gay shops and busy crowds, and then to what she termed the "quane av thim all," which was Milsom Street. It rather ousted Patrick Street of Cork from my ideals of splendour.

"Down there be Quane's Square," said Bridget, pointing to an intersecting thoroughfare. "And above ye'd come to Gay Street, though the divil only knows why 'tis called that, not bein' gay at all. An' thin there's Victory Park, which the Quane opened before she was a Quane. 'Tis adjacent to that place they calls Royal Crescent. Mighty fine houses they is, an' onst only habited by lords and ladies. But there's a sight o' places to see, if ye wants to see thim. Gardens, an' parks, an' all the ould faymous houses. An' didn't the great Sheridan himself live in one av thim, an' thim lovely ladies, the Linleys? You ax yer Aunt Joanna about thim. I wonder she hasn't tould ye. She's fond o' braggin' about all the faymous Irish folk as has lived in Bath in ancient times."

We turned homewards again, and I put that question as to the mysterious lady who rented the attics. But Bridget had little information to give. It appeared she had lived in the

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house some three or four years; seeing no one, never going out except at night, and cooking and attending on herself except for occasional aid from "poor Mary."

"But how did ye get wurr'd av her bein' up there?" she enquired suddenly.

I explained that I had wandered upstairs, and she had opened her door, and asked me in.

"An' was she all veiled in grey?" asked Bridget eagerly. "That's how I've seen her, if iver I did catch sight av her goin' or comin', an' Mary says she does be always like that."

I cannot tell why I refrained from describing the face that had so terrified me. Whether from some instinct of pity or some innate shrinking from the comments that would be made. All I can remember is that I said the lady wore a grey veil over her head, and had the most beautiful voice I had ever heard.

"Voice—is it?" said Bridget. "But she's furrin, Frinch or Italian, by the name av her."

"Why shouldn't foreigners have beautiful voices?" I demanded.

"Well, they haven't," said Bridget decidedly. "None that I've iver heard spaykin'. An' quare enough folks do be comin' to yer aunts in the sayson. Jews, an' Amerikans, an' sich-like."

"Why do they come?" I asked.

"Why? Is it why? Sure, an' it's for board an' lodgin'. We does it private so as not to hurt the naybour's feelin's. But that's what we is, a private boardin' house. An' well it pays, too. The drawin'-room flure's eight guineas a week to titles. An' the one above is six. Afther that there's *gradashuns*, so Miss Theresa says."

I was puzzled as to the exact meaning of this expression. However, I shelved it for future investigation, and returned to the engrossing subject of the attics and their occupant. Bridget waxed impatient.

"Ah, thin, have done wid yer questions, Miss Rosaleen! Sure, an' I've said I dun know how the lady came. There was writin' an writin', and thin a great van o' furniture, an' a man to paper and paint, an' fix the place up. An' one night, whin

'twas gettin' dark, a cab drives up, an' a lady gets out. Tall an' elegant lookin', but the face av her was all covered wid grey veilins. She was taken up to thim attics, an' there she's been iver since. Whin she wants anything done she sends for "poor Mary." An' if she has any orders she writes thim on a piece o' paper, an' puts it outside av the door, an' money wid it av it's things to buy. She niver ates mate; only porridge, an' bread an' tay, an' fruit. What she cooks she cooks for herself. She gives no trouble, an' what she pays for thim four rooms is a pretty slice av the rint o' the whole house. Now, don't be axin' more questions, child. 'Twas the sin o' curiosity as druv poor Mother Eve out of Paradise."

We had arrived at our own street by this time, so I went in with her. I was met by a storm of questions from Aunt Theresa. Why had I gone off like that? Why hadn't I waited for Aunt Joanna? Was it a time to be keeping Bridget from her work, and the lunch not ready, and visitors to Lady Montgomery of the drawing-room floor?

Not knowing what to say, I said nothing. But Bridget was more than a match for her mistress, and explained in rich vernacular that the poor child was "just moped to death and pining for fresh air, and what harm was done by taking her out to see the shops, and the town, and a bit of life?" Aunt Theresa said no more, and preparations for luncheon went on apace. I slipped away, and up to my own room to remove my outdoor garments. Then I wandered into my aunt's bedroom, to see if I could find a book about Bath and its history. There was a long, untidy bookshelf nailed against the dingy paper, at which I had often gazed. I surveyed it now from end to end. Gaudy, yellow-backed novels, one or two volumes of Household Medicine and Domestic Cookery. An "Enquire Within," a shabbily bound Shakespeare, and a volume of Sheridan's Plays. Nothing that I sought, apparently. As I turned to leave the room the door opened abruptly, and Aunt Joanna came in. She seemed excited, and was carrying a parcel, wrapped in brown paper.

"Why, Rosaleen, what are you doing here?" she asked, and then went up to the looking-glass, and surveyed herself and her new bonnet approvingly.

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I told her I wanted a book about Bath and its hot springs. She turned from the glass and stared at me.

"About *Bath!* Well, you're a funny child. Fairy tales, or poetry, now. But a history of *Bath!* What on earth would you be reading that sort of book for?"

I tried to explain the charm that the Abbey, and the old town, and the Pump Room had wrought. But she seemed to think me crazy. "That comes of having a scientific father," she said. "I always told Lucius that he was one half book and the other half man."

She began to unfasten her bonnet-strings, and I watched her, fascinated. For the putting on or taking off of a bonnet (she never wore hats) was a complete act of transformation as far as Aunt Joanna was concerned. When "put on" it altered her whole face, and made her quite nice-looking. When it came off one was conscious of disillusion. Her hair was always badly dressed, her forehead was narrow, her eyes small and short-sighted, and her complexion dull and colourless. Aunt Theresa was handsome enough to be independent of millinery, and Fanny was exceptionally pretty even without art. But Joanna seemed incapable of making the best of herself, and was always at a disadvantage beside her more brilliant sisters.

As she stood there, carefully rolling up the wide strings of her bonnet, I wondered why she could not dress her hair more becomingly. It was dark brown in colour, soft and silky in texture, but it looked dull and lustreless, and showed much of something called "*frisettes*," which were used for the making of chignons.

"What are you staring at, child?" she demanded at last, catching sight of my observing eyes in the mirror facing us.

"I was thinking how nice you looked in that bonnet," I said.

"That's what Captain Oliver was telling me," she answered, smiling. "He walked up to Pulteney Street with me. He's sending us tickets for the New Year's Ball at the Assembly Rooms."

"A ball!" I cried, with visions of Cinderella in my mind.

She nodded. "It's a very select affair. He's on the committee.

He can only spare two tickets. I suppose I'll have to take Fanny, or there'll be no living in the house afterwards. I wish it was Theresa."

She turned abruptly to the parcel which was lying on the bed. "That's part of the material for my dress," she said. "Would you like to see it?"

I expressed the eagerness of a novice in such matters and she, opened the parcel, revealing a length of pink silk.

"Fanny and I always make our own dresses," she said. "I chose pink. It suits me best at night. When I dance I get a colour, and I've the best neck and shoulders of the family. Now I'll show you the other material."

She went to a drawer and took out some lengths of tarlatan, explaining how it was to be made up over a "slip" of the silk, and have flounces at the bottom of the skirt, and a lace *berthe*, all of which left me as ignorant as it found me.

"I shall wear a wreath of small pink roses," she went on. "It's the next best thing to a bonnet. They say here that if I want to catch a sweetheart he'll have to meet me and court me with my bonnet on. I don't look the same without it."

"That's what I thought," I said injudiciously.

"Did you?" she snapped. "Then you can put your opinions with your manners! Neither of them's much credit to your bringing up!"

She folded up the material and put it away in a drawer. I felt snubbed and small. Seeing she had no further use for me, I retreated to the door. As I was going out she called, "It's a good boarding-school you want. I'll ask your Aunt Theresa about it."

"Oh, please, *don't!*" I entreated. "I hate boarding-schools. Papa said I was never to go to one. I am to be educated at home, and attend classes for special things."

"Oh! was that your papa's idea? Just the silly sort of thing Lucius would be suggesting. But we all went to boarding-schools, and why shouldn't you? As a family we pride ourselves on our education and accomplishments. Let me tell you there's no one in the city here in the most select circles that

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isn't proud to have a Miss Le Suir in their drawing-rooms or at their parties."

I said nothing. Only stood holding the door-handle in one hand, and wondering if it would be another sign of bad manners to complete my exit. As if to save further indecision, I was suddenly seized and pushed aside by Aunt Fanny. She was in walking attire, and looked very handsome. Her colour and eyes were more brilliant than ever.

"Oh—Jo!" she cried. "Think who I met? Captain Oliver! He turned and walked back half the way home. He's asked us to the New Year's Ball. Isn't it splendid! I must have a new dress. White, I think, and a green wreath. That'll be uncommon. I saw some wonderful silks at Ealand's. I'll go and get one this afternoon."

"And who'll pay for it?" asked Aunt Joanna sharply.

"Well, Theresa must, or I'll have it on credit. I can pay next month. It's too good a chance to waste."

She hummed a tune and began to waltz round the bedroom. I stood and watched her, wondering at her lithe, graceful movements, wishing that I could dance. I had never been taught yet. And how lovely it must be to be going to balls, and wear silk gowns and wreaths, like the beautiful ladies on the front page of songs.

I turned sadly away, and went downstairs, conscious of hunger, conscious of many new and bewildering feelings. Not the least and most bewildering being that I was a sort of Cinderella in the establishment. A humble nobody, to be ignored or scolded, or have her life's actions ordered and controlled by arbitrary authority. I—who had never heard any harsh word, whose childish will had been law, and whose environment, love. It was a change, hard to contemplate, harder to endure, for I was at heart a rebel, and only the silken string of affection had ever led me. As I sat at the kitchen table, and partook of cold mutton and stale bread, I was inwardly rebelling at the humiliation. Why could I not have my meals with the folk in the dining-room, or in my aunt's parlour overlooking the garden?

Bridget was bustling to and fro, chopping up sausage meat, while "poor Mary" was preparing the second course. The "handy

boy," usually attired in shabby livery, waited on the boarders upstairs. Bridget, true to her word, had refused to cook a hot luncheon, and the boarders' repast consisted of warmed-up soup and cold beef, with cheese to follow. "Poor Mary" being capable of "seeing to this," as her superior termed it, Bridget was able to attend to the solid preparations for the evening's dinner and the morrow's festivities. When I had finished my unpalatable repast I pushed aside my plate. A sudden idea seized me. I would go out again. I would wander up that beautiful wide street, and see where it led to. The afternoon was fine and bright; to stay in the gloomy house was impossible. I consulted Bridget. I could not ask Aunt Theresa's permission, as she was in the dining-room.

"Go out, an' why not?" she said. "You're best out av the way, child. No one will be missin' ye. Don't be gettin' lost, though, an' lettin' the blame on to me."

"I shan't go far," I said. "Only up that great wide street to the left."

"Great Pulteney Street, it is," said Bridget. "If ye goes to the top av it, ye'll come to Sydney Gardens. 'Tis a sort av a park. Ye can go in. There's no fear ye'll be lost there. I'll tell your aunt whin she comes out av the dining-room."

So off I sped and dressed myself, and slipped out of the house in a mood of excitement and temerity. There was—as Bridget had said—no fear of getting lost, for the great street led right up to the gardens. I walked along slowly, examining the houses as I passed. They seemed very grand and imposing to my young eyes. On the heights stood a beautiful white castle. It was shining in the sunlight like a fairy edifice. The blue sky and green hills made a perfect setting. I wondered who lived there. Surely some great person, I thought to myself.

At last I found myself at the entrance of the gardens. I walked up to the gates and was stopped by a demand for payment. The sum was small, but I had no money with me. Crest-fallen and abashed, I was turning back when a voice behind me exclaimed, "Who dares turn the maiden away from this historic portal? Rude churl, admit her, or dispute with me *vi et armis* the possession of a dishonoured officialdom!"

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Astonished, I turned, and gazed up at the commanding and shabbily attired figure of a tall, strange-looking man. At first glance he seemed to me compounded of red hair, red beard, and wild, stormy eyes. But a second glance showed the eyes a-twinkle with mirth, and the mouth smiling and very gentle beneath its barbaric embellishment.

"Pass in, if you so desire," he said. "This minion dare not refuse me!"

The "minion" smiled in friendly fashion, and we passed in. It did not occur to me that my new acquaintance had paid for us both. I imagined he was someone in authority, and that he could grant or refuse permission of entry as he pleased.

"There," he said, as he walked beside me, "is a lesson to you of man set in a little brief authority. You have as much right to tread these sylvan groves, to disport yourself in glade and bower, as any proud beauty of powder and patches in days of yore. Days when the exclusive character of these enchanting regions was proverbial. For liveried servants and dogs were alike refused admission. Shame to confuse the menial with the nobler applicant! But such is history. Doubtless you know some of the historic legends of Bath? Hence your desire to visit this retreat."

"No—o, sir," I stammered. "I don't know—I mean——"

"Sir me no sirs!" he cried, with a sudden dramatic gesture. "Rather let me introduce myself, and have done with it."

He stopped, took off his hat, and made me a sweeping bow.

"Fair maid, in me you behold a martyr and a patriot in one. I present them to you in the person of the Chevalier Terence Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy; Knight and erstwhile Commander of a noble and intrepid battalion raised in defence of the French Empire. Vanquished, banished, bereft of all that made life dear, the martyr weeps, yet the patriot hopes. In other words, child, I am an Irishman and a fool at your service, and the service of all troubled and unfortunate creatures in a perplexing and troubled world. Need I say more?"

He held out his hand, and I gave him mine. Then he dropped grandiloquence, and began to talk down to the level of my understanding. Before five minutes had passed I felt as if he were

a dear and personal friend. I told him briefly of how and why I had come to Bath, and he said he had come for much the same reasons. He, too, had lost someone very dear to him, and was alone and fortuneless, as well as a sufferer from such complaints as made the springs and baths of the city a temporary necessity.

"I know it well," he went on. "Every stone and street of the place. I lived here as a noted personage in days when duelling was the pastime of gentlemen and the penalty of fools. I ruffled and swaggered with the best of them. I had affairs of the heart too. But—mum! That's not for your young ears. On the South Parade. Do you know it, little one?"

Again I faltered, "No, sir."

He frowned. "I have not addressed you as 'Miss,'" he said. "But what is your name?"

"Rosaleen Le Suir."

"Rosaleen? 'The dark Rosaleen!' Has she come to earth again in your fairy form? Her smile in your wondering eyes, her beauty in your face, and the sheen of your hair? Surely you are a descendant of that wondrous lady who inspired a poet, and left her name inscribed in men's memories for sake of its own romance?"

"I don't know," I said, and wondered not a little that two people on the same day had applied my name to the same source.

"You don't know," he repeated. "Well, your years are few as yet. It is sad to think of you a lonely wanderer on the shores of Time, but something tells me we shall be friends. What say you? Do you need a friend, or are you well-provided?"

"I have come here to live with my three aunts," I said, "the Miss Le Suir's."

"I have heard of them. They add to the unpublished list of Bath Beauties. Three—the number of the Graces, and doubtless possessed of their charms. Being relatives, you share the same nationality, or I mistake you? Erin gave you birthright of that shadowy smile, and left the tear of her sorrows in your eyes' dark depths. I warmed to the sound of your tongue at its first utterance. We claim the same country, the kinship of past memories. Fate has been kind to me to-day."

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Again he swept me that fantastic bow. Again I met the laughter of his eyes, and laughed back for very joy of sympathy. He took my hand and we wandered on together, and this was how another strange destiny became interwoven with those I have already spoken of.

III

A PRESENT FROM SANTA CLAUS

KEEN as memory is, it cannot record quite accurately the medley of farce, tragedy, and fantasy which made up my companion's conversation on that first day of our acquaintance. I only remember its charm, its faculty of awakening interest and inspiring life.

I had a passion for *words*. By that I wish to convey an inexplicable delight in full, sonorous, rounded periods. Something euphonious and beautiful that made listening more of a delight than a faculty. There was, or so it seemed to me, no need of comprehension. The less I understood the more was I charmed, and my new companion evidently recognized the fact. He posed as a much-wronged and misjudged personality. A man to whom the philosophy of life was its best vintage; a draught for the gods, who yet stooped from Olympian heights to offer it to mere mortal. His bold acclaiming of himself as soldier of fortune, *preux chevalier*, martyr, poet, and I know not how many other identities, filled my young mind with an awe that his amazing appearance could not disqualify. A philosopher and a genius was surely above the petty aids of tailor and hairdresser, even though he might have been superficially the better for their services.

He seated me on a bench and then marched up and down giving me what he termed "a slight sketch of his life and antecedents." I was enchanted. He seemed to me as a magician who can create marvels from nothingness. The wave of his

hand, his flashing eyes, his wonderfully eloquent gestures led me from fact to fairyland, from prose to fantasy, as easily as a starved bird flies to scattered crumbs. I felt as if I never wanted him to stop. He had flung open doors of enchantment and I lost myself in dreams of what lay beyond those doors ; joys promised, yet only half fulfilled.

When he had talked himself out he assured me I was that rarest exception of the rule feminine—"A born listener."

"All women chatter," he said. "A few talk ; none can listen. Hence their superficiality ; for the listener gathers up the pearls which the swine trample under foot. My child, you have gathered pearls enough for a necklet for that slender throat. Now, tell me of yourself, and your ambitions ?"

I searched for words, all shyness dissipated by those laughing eyes and gracious gestures. What little of my history seemed worth the telling I recounted. Poor and feeble enough it was, by comparison with the astounding records of the Chevalier. But, eagle-like, he pounced upon one fact. My education. That threat of a boarding school still rankled in my mind, and entered into my history.

"Now the gods be thanked !" he cried in his grandiloquent fashion. "For here has Fate, or Fortune, led you to the barriers of convention. The greatest failures of life spring from an erroneous idea of education. I mean education on the strict lines of 'what *has* been is still to be.' Wrong! Absolutely wrong! In the Past lies all the worthless trash of worn-out ideas ; facts rubbed to a thread, pounded to a jelly. The New Century will prove the truth of what I say. Women will no longer be dolls, stuffed with sawdust platitudes, helpless if unsupported, but strong, self-reliant, thinking beings ! Man's companions, not his toys. And this is one of my proposed missions. I am going to the root of this matter. *Entre nous*, my little Rosaleen, always go to the *root* of a thing, if you want to understand—or get rid of it. (Another pearl.) I spoke of a mission—I have many. But the one that at present engrosses me is that of feminine education. The awakening of Feminine Faculties. A noble ambition, is it not ? Your sex will hate me first, and adore me afterwards. Woman is never too young to believe that

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she is perfect. I shall teach her she is not. Once she learns *that* she may become a useful member of society ; something worthy of man's serious attention, possibly his respect. In brief, my charming listener, I am here, in this historic *entourage*, to found a Seminary of True Knowledge, as taught by one who knows to those who need. Let me acclaim you as first student of the New Academy. May I ? ”

I have a recollection of stammering out delight at the prospect, but doubts as to being able to accept it. At the first announcement he kissed my hand, at the second he waved his own in a majestic gesture that dismissed possible opposition.

“ Your aunts are no doubt worthy women. Being Irish they will also be proud and conventional. It shall be my task to appeal to the first instinct, and confuse the second. The woman does not live, my fair—I mean my dark Rosaleen, who can conduct an argument with *me*—the Chevalier Terence Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy—for five minutes, and remain unvanquished ! ”

(I could quite believe *that*.)

I find an entry in the old copy-book, headed thus. “ *December 24th. The day before Christmas. The most Wonderful Day in my life.* ”

I have often asked myself if that entry was prophetic.

Nothing would do for my new friend but a speedy visit to my aunts in order to lay the scheme of his proposed Academy before them. He conducted me home, expounding and declaiming all the time. But at the turning from Laura Place he paused.

“ There is much in opportunity,” he announced. “ But sometimes the fitting moment is of more importance. I shall present myself to your respected relatives in more becoming garb, and at a conventional hour. We have two points in common. Our nationality ; and our interest in you. That should break the ice. But at present they are doubtless engrossed with culinary subjects. Poetry and Philosophy would not appeal. I waive opportunity and relegate the chance of what might not be to what *may* be. As long as a thing is not absolutely decided against us we can always hope it will be decided for us ! (Another pearl !) That necklet will soon be too large for your slender throat.

Happily we can add row to row, as well as pearl to pearl! Now, farewell. I go to hold converse yonder. The wisdom of all the ages lies beneath that humble roof. In other words, my child, that bookshop you see is an emporium of nigh a century's establishment. One Gibbons—not he of Roman Empire fame—but another nicknamed Duke of Argyll, from likeness or coincidence, was once installed there. It changed hands in the Thirties, again in the Forties. Hands, but not conditions. Sheridan knew of it. Captain Absolute may once have imbibed wisdom at its counter. (God wot! he needed it.) Hither came pompous Nash, and finicking Brummell, and their like. At least, they ought to have come to get some sense into their powdered and peruqued heads. But no matter. The loss was their's. In brief, child, let none who come to this historic city leave it before a visit to friend Gregory yonder. Whatever is to be learnt of Bath and its described importance may be learned there!"

I had listened eagerly.

"But that is what I want," I said. "To know about the city, and the hot springs, and the beautiful Abbey I saw to-day. Can I get books at that shop which would tell me?"

"You can," he said. "It shall be my pleasure and honour to bring you some. By the way, are you acquainted with the French language?"

I shook my head. "I have only been taught by my father," I said. "And we had not begun modern languages. I know a little Latin."

"A good enough beginning," he said. "It shall be my privilege to build on that foundation. *Adieu, ma belle.*"

He swept me one of his fantastic bows. As he replaced his hat, chance brought Aunt Fanny to the opposite corner of the street. I had not yet crossed it. Perhaps it was my companion's gesture, or his voice that roused her attention. I saw her stop, stare, then come rapidly across. Hurriedly I bade the Chevalier farewell, and turned off. I heard her quick steps following. She caught me up at the archway.

"Who was that you were with?" she demanded. "And what business have you out by yourself? Where have you been?"

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"Bridget said I might go," I answered. "I was only in the way at home."

"I daresay you were, but why were you talking to that mad-looking creature?"

"He is not mad!" I exclaimed indignantly. "He is awfully clever, and—and—he was very kind to me. He is—I mean he was an officer in the French Army; but he is Irish. He told me his name."

"A dirty, shabby, old beggar!" she said. "I'll tell Theresa not to be letting you out, if that's the sort of acquaintances you pick up!"

I smothered my indignation. I had formulated a plan of my own. I meant to tell Aunt Theresa myself, in a different fashion from that which Fanny would employ.

As we waited for the door to be opened I tried to draw her attention to herself. "Is that your dress?" I asked, nodding towards the parcel she held so carefully.

"It is." Her eyes brightened. "Such a bargain! It's the loveliest white silk, and I'm going to trim the bodice with French tulle. I got a couple of yards thrown in, being Christmas-time, and we such good customers to Ealand's."

"But can you really make a ball dress yourself?" I persisted. "It seems wonderful!"

"Oh! I've a genius for dressmaking," she said complacently. "I do it much better than Joanna, though she won't confess it. You wait and see."

"I may see you dressed for the ball? Mayn't I?" I urged. "I've never seen anyone yet, except in pictures. That one of Edith in 'Dombey and Son.' Oh! isn't she lovely, and Florence, too? Is that how you will be dressed?"

"You'll see," she answered impatiently. "What on earth's that fool of a boy about not to hear the bell!"

She gave another furious ring, but as her hand left the bell-pull Mickey opened the door. She stopped to scold him in her usual imperious fashion, and I slid away down the passage and into the parlour. It was given over to dressmaking. Aunt Joanna was cutting the pink tarlatan into lengths while Aunt Theresa held it. They both called out to me to keep out of the

way. I burst forth with my news, determined to cut the ground from under Aunt Fanny's feet.

"I've been out," I said. "Bridget told me I might walk up Pulteney Street to the Gardens. And I met——"

I hesitated. The snip-snip of the scissors emphasized the pause. "I met a—gentleman. He walked home with me."

The scissors stopped midway. Both my aunts turned and stared at the audacious speaker.

"What's that? You walking out by yourself, with strange gentlemen!" exclaimed Aunt Theresa, giving an Irish contradiction of fact to her statement, for had I been walking by myself I couldn't have been in company with a strange gentleman.

"An Irish gentleman he was," I rattled on hastily. "From county Clare. He—he knew your name quite well. He said something about the 'Beauties of Bath.'"

Joanna simpered. "Of course, it's well known who we are," she said. "There's not many can boast of better looks or better blood, and as for coming down in the world, why—that might happen to anyone!"

"Even kings have lost thrones," said Aunt Theresa. "What was the gentleman's name?" she added, resuming her work.

"The Chevalier Terence Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy."

"Plenty of it," said Joanna.

"O'Shaughnessy?" observed Aunt Theresa. "Why's he putting a French title on to it? Wasn't his own country good enough?"

"That," I interposed, "was given by the Emperor of the French for his services in the war. He has been very unfortunate. That's why he came to Bath."

"A queer idea!" said Aunt Joanna. "What does he think they'll do for him here? Not but what it's always been a hunting ground for adventurers."

"Oh! he's not *that*!" I exclaimed. "He is going to open a college, a—*a* Ladies' College. For education," was my superfluous addenda.

"Is that his idea? Well, luck be with him. But it's not wanted in a place like this where there's plenty of genteel schools—public and private; not to mention that new High School. It was

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opened just the year after we came. I'd thought of sending you there, Rosaleen, if the terms aren't too high."

"I'd rather go to the Chevalier's college," I said. "He is coming to see you about it one day next week."

"Oh—is he? Maybe we'll not decide then till I learn his plans and his terms."

"It seems funny," said Joanna, "to hear of a man founding a girl's school."

I thrust in an eager oar. "The Chevalier says that women should be taught by men, and men by women. It's the best way of equalizing the sexes!"

Aunt Theresa dropped her end of the tarlatan, and Aunt Joanna her scissors, to turn and stare at me again.

"In the name of wonder, child, what are you talking about!" exclaimed Aunt Joanna. "Who's been putting such ideas into your head?"

"Papa—for one," I said boldly. "And the Chevalier Terence Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy for another."

At which juncture Aunt Fanny swooped down upon us, and was duly informed of my precocity. The poor Chevalier did not get much *kudos* out of her. I think "shaggy old carrotty beggarman," was her designation. But with that curious spirit of divergence peculiar to the Celtic races, the other sisters immediately took up opposing sides on the subject.

Because Fanny abused my new acquaintance, Joanna and Theresa joined issue in his favour. He was Irish, and military, and unfortunate. That was enough to arouse interest. Fanny's taste in representative manhood was deplored. Unless they were hairdresser's blocks, or tailor's dummies, she could never see anything to admire in them. Presently she and Aunt Joanna fell to wordy war over Captain Oliver, for whom there existed a steady rivalry. Leaving matters at this safe juncture I retired to Biddy and the kitchen, and had my tea.

It was cosy and comfortable now. The usual dinner-hour was seven o'clock, and at four Bridget always insisted on half an hour's rest, and "poor Mary" prepared the kitchen tea. I was given toast and dripping, which my young soul loved, and weak tea, on account of nerves. I partook of this at one corner of the table,

Bridget sat at the head, and Mickey and "poor Mary" at the side. Their conversation was not interesting as a rule, being full of petty gossip and small household details. But to-night they talked of the ball. It appeared to be an annual affair given at the Assembly Rooms, and was accounted very select. Bridget wondered audibly whether "any good was to come of it *this* time?" Year followed year and the three beautiful Miss Le Suirs were still unwedded. Miss Theresa might be considered as having done with herself, but Miss Joanna and Miss Fanny had their "chances." Perhaps this ball would settle one of them. I listened without comment, but with true feminine curiosity. In my heart I agreed with Bridget that "t'would be a good thing if Miss Fanny made a match, and relieved us of her tempers and insolences." But Bridget followed up the aspiration by the aphorism that men weren't all fools, and some had sense enough to look further than a pretty face.

"Miss Joanna," she went on, "is worth twenty av Miss Fanny, though she's tryin' enough. But a good husband 'ud settle *her*. It 'ud take a bad one an' a master at that to git the better av that other Tartar!"

It was not respectful talk, but Irish servants are so often one with the family interests and idiosyncrasies that they discuss them individually with quite open criticism, meaning no harm by it. Bridget Muldooney would have been ready to say the same things to her mistress's face. Possibly she had done so. At all events her frankness had nothing ill-natured about it. She had known her young ladies from childhood. It was not surprising that she felt inclined at times to discuss their chances in life.

When I had finished my tea I again returned to the parlour. The pink tarlatan had arrived at the stage of "basting the seams." On the square table was a white cloth, and from the cloth flashed the shining lustre of Fanny's white silk. Her sisters were criticising it. Aunt Joanna said she had paid too much for it. Aunt Theresa was of opinion that the "quality" was serviceable enough for dyeing when its ball days should be over. Fanny herself sat beside her treasure, turning over the leaves of a fashion book containing the styles of the day. She had to decide upon

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one before cutting up the silk into skirt lengths. They were all so engrossed with the important subject that they took no notice of me. I sat on a corner of the sofa and listened with avid interest. The lovely shimmering silk seemed fit garb for a princess. I studied Fanny critically, and wondered how she would look in it. Discussion, advice, and comment were still raging when there came a knock at the door and Mickey put in his head. He glanced round the room, and then came up to me with a square parcel in his hand.

"For you, Miss Rosaleen," he said.

I stared incredulous. Who would be sending me a parcel, or a present? My aunts put similar questions. Who had brought it? they asked Mickey.

"A bit av a bhoy. He said the name was on it, an' I seed it was, an' tuk it in."

I looked at the address. A square of white paper on which was written, "Miss Rosaleen Le Suir."

"Open it, and see what it is," said Aunt Theresa.

I tore off the brown paper wrapping and saw a book. I glanced at the title.

"A HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF BATH.

INCLUDING THE CHRONICLES OF ITS FOUNDER, THE
KING BLADUD OF BRITAIN, WITH HISTORIC AND
LOCAL INFORMATION OF THE SAME."

At the foot of the title-page was written in fine clear handwriting:

"From Santa Claus to 'the Dark Rosaleen.'"

And then followed the date: "Christmas Eve, 18—"

To say I was astonished and delighted is to say very little. I had thought myself forgotten and forlorn this Christmas Eve, and lo! from the clouds, so to say, had dropped a friend, and a gift. The gift I had desired.

Now I should know all about my new home and its history. The index of the book assured me of interest. My three aunts took it in turns to read the inscription, and made each their own comments. Nothing mattered to me. I was radiant and

excited. He had not only remembered me, but he had signalized that remembrance in this charming manner. The book was beautifully bound and illustrated. He could not have been so poor after all, I thought to myself.

Aunt Fanny, who was the last to examine the precious volume, tossed the book back with a sneer. "What a thing to give a child! If it had been sweets now, or a doll."

I waxed indignant. For sweets I cared nothing, and dolls had been relegated to the limbo of obscurity from the age of eight. At that period my father had undertaken my education, and from thenceforth there was but one joy for me. Bookland.

"Well, I suppose the man wants to get hold of pupils, if he's opening a school," said Aunt Theresa at last. "That's why he's sent you a present. Rather presuming, considering he doesn't know us. But there—you're only a child."

"Why does he call you 'the dark Rosaleen'?" questioned Aunt Joanna. "It sounds familiar, considering you only made acquaintance in the Gardens to-day."

"I think it's part of a poem," I said, turning over the leaves of my new treasure, with a miser's gloating delight. "And I *am* dark, you know."

"That's true enough," said Fanny. "I never saw a worse skin. You've not come in for the family beauty, any way."

"Perhaps she's as well without it," snapped Aunt Joanna. "It's little good it's done those that set such store by it."

"Not meaning yourself," was the sisterly rejoinder.

"It's only skin deep, and handsome is as handsome does. If any of your *beaux* could see you at home they'd be soon disenchanted."

"At least, there'd be something worth seeing," said Fanny. "Not a broomstick with the brush end up!"

I laughed suddenly. A memory of the "Ugly Sisters" in my favourite fairy tale was with me. They both turned on me, and demanded the cause of hilarity.

"I used to pray to God once to send me a sister," I said frankly. "I'm glad He didn't."

For which honest avowal I was sent from the room, and told to go to bed, although it was only six o'clock.

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I borrowed a few candle-ends from my friend Bridget, and took myself off to my tiny cupboard of a room. I lit two of the candle-ends and seated myself on the bed, wrapped round with the blanket. Feeling perfectly warm and comfortable I took up my book, and gave myself up to the delights it promised.

IV

SHOWING THE ILLS WE FACE ARE LIGHTER THAN
THOSE WE KNOW NOT

THE candle-ends spluttered, burnt out, and were replaced until there were no more to light me on my storied journey.

No history of Bath was ever compiled that did not allude to, or record, the legend of its Founder. For me that legend held all the novelty of the unexpected, and the unknown. I had come here with a sad heart, and full of resentment at being torn from my beautiful native land. I had pictured the city as the dull, grey, lifeless place I had first beheld. But this day of sunshine and strange experiences, had been no mean preparation for the historic guide by whose aid I was to learn of association, memories and interest that at once lifted the city to a pinnacle of importance. Whether there had ever been a royal swineherd, or whether that was merely an invention of Geoffrey of Monmouth, mattered little. As little as Romulus and Remus and the she-wolf matter to Rome on her Seven Hills. What concerned me most was that such a legend should have lived and flourished, and become incorporated with these magical healing waters; the ever-bubbling hot springs which had so fascinated me, when I had first beheld them gushing from the depths of the earth.

If the springs were there, why not Bladud? Was it not only natural that his gratitude should have taken ostensible form, and that he had founded a city to commemorate his marvellous cure? The further chronicles of his destiny were somewhat

disappointing. But vaulting ambition had marked the downfall of other monarchies long anteceding that of Rome or Britain. I was disappointed though, on learning that even the founding of Lud Town at the mouth of the Thames, and the fact of benefiting the ages to come by his discovery of the thermal springs of Bath did not satisfy this ambitious monarch. The years that should have brought wisdom only brought discontent. His marvellous cure and his marvellous achievements roused in his senile brain an idea of Olympian omnipotence. Lesser mortals might be content to foot the common earth. He would essay a flight to empyreal regions. He winged himself for a bold endeavour despite all counsels. Alas! that the flight was disastrous as the prophesy. Minerva helped him not, though from her temple of wisdom he made the rash attempt.

I fell asleep that night dreaming of this strange old figure poised on the temple pinnacle of an avenging goddess; eyes on the heights, wings outspread. Confidence in his heart, and Death at his feet.

Posterity has set up a statue to his memory. It serves the purpose of commemoration and warning.

When I woke it was at Bridget's knocking, and demands as to how long she was to wait on my slumbers. I opened sleepy eyes to another day of sunshine. She pulled up the blind, and gave me my first Christmas greeting. Kind soul! The greeting was accompanied by a packet of sweets, and they and my precious book, warmed my heart to its new environment, and kept back the too ready tears that had been so near my eyes.

After all, there were sunshine, and thought and care for me, small and unimportant as I was!

I jumped out of bed, and made my simple toilet hastily. A sense of duty led me to the parlour to give Christmas greetings. Only Aunt Joanna was there. Aunt Theresa was in the kitchen as usual, and Fanny lazing in bed as her wont. Aunt Joanna kissed me, and presented me with a small work-box, fitted with all requisites.

"'Tis from us all—jointly," she announced. "I saw you hadn't got such a thing."

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Which was true, and now that the want had been supplied I was not specially grateful, for I hated sewing, and couldn't hem or run a straight seam for any trying.

"Hurry down now and get your breakfast," said Aunt Joanna. "We'll all be going to church, and it's getting on for ten o'clock."

"Am I to go?" I enquired.

"Why, of course. You're not such a heathen as to be neglecting service on Christmas Day!"

"At the Abbey?" I asked eagerly. "Is it there we go?"

"Where else? Anyone who's anybody in Bath goes there to Sunday service. Now, give over chattering and questioning, and be off with you."

Service at the Abbey! I kept saying that to myself while I hastily swallowed my porridge. I should be inside that beautiful historic edifice whose history I had glimpsed between the pages of my precious book.

We started in due time. My small sombre figure a great contrast to the fashionably gowned and bonneted Misses Le Suir. They seemed to know a great many people, judging from the bows and greetings that marked our progress. The Abbey was only some fifteen minutes' walk, but it seemed to me that all the town must be wending its way there in a procession of Bath chairs. We went in at the west door, and my first impression of the sombre interior was lessened by sight of a beautiful stained glass window facing me, and delineating the Life of Christ as shown by the Gospels. My eyes kept turning to it during the service, and I found myself trying to trace out the various subjects of which it treated.

The organ and the choristers represented my first experience of a cathedral ritual. The rolling notes, the swell of voices hymning the Nativity affected me almost painfully, they roused emotions so novel, and so vivid; added to which music always aroused memories of my father. He had possessed a beautiful voice and would accompany himself on the piano hour after hour, holding me enthralled and enchanted. He had taught me to play also, but I felt in my own small soul that my ambition was so great and my execution so feeble, there was little hope of my

ever achieving proficiency. But listening to great music was a delight, and the anthem held me spell-bound.

When the service was over I wanted to linger in the building, and examine its monuments, especially those of Bishop Montagu and Beau Nash. But my aunts would not permit this. I guessed their reason when I saw how many male friends and acquaintances were waiting in the precincts to give the season's greetings. Conspicuous amongst them was the Captain Oliver, about whom there seemed to lurk an incipient rivalry. He walked down the High Street with us, dividing his attentions between my Aunts Joanna and Fanny. Aunt Theresa walked beside a chair in which was a pleasant-looking elderly woman, whom she addressed as Lady Montgomery, and who, I found, was the tenant of our best suite of rooms. She came to Bath every year for the waters, and always stayed with my aunts. Their friendship dated back to years. I was introduced to this lady, and heard scraps of my history given to her, as I walked along by Aunt Theresa's side.

I paid little heed to them, however. My mind being occupied with a hope that somewhere, among all these faces and figures, I might chance to see that of my friend the Chevalier. I did not do so, however.

When we reached home, Aunt Theresa astonished me by the information that, being Christmas Day, I was to dine with the "party" in the dining-room at six o'clock.

"Have you any sort of an evening frock to put on?" she enquired.

I shook my head. This one "best dress" and another everyday one comprised my present wardrobe.

"Well, as you're in mourning it'll have to do," she said. "But you'll be a very dowdy figure among us all."

After a scrappy luncheon I wondered what I was to do with myself all the long afternoon. I hinted at going out, but Aunt Theresa sternly forbade it. It appeared that being Sunday as well as Christmas Day, some social code of etiquette would be transgressed by idle "stravaguing." My duty was to sit at home and read a good book, like the "Sunday at Home," and not bother anyone.

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I sat in the parlour, and did as I was bidden, until Aunt Theresa had gone to sleep on the sofa, and Joanna and Fanny had retired to do something called "crimping" to their hair. Then—how or why I cannot tell—a sudden thought of the lonely occupant of the attics flashed across me. Poor Grey Lady! How sad a day this must be for her! No friends, no presents, no letters, no kindly greetings. Instinctively I pictured her up there brooding and alone. An impulse came to me to go and see her and show she was not quite forgotten at this season. How I wished I had something to take her, even a flower. I glanced round the room, and my eyes fell on a large holly bough, hanging from the gas chandelier over the table.

I rose softly, and put down the heavy bound volume of the "Sunday at Home." I climbed up on the table, and with some difficulty managed to break off a sprig of the berries. They looked very bright and pretty against their green leaves. With this in my hand I stole quietly out of the room, and up and up the long, long stairway until I reached the attic landing. It looked very dark, though it was not more than four o'clock. No light shone from any of the rooms, and the gas above the stairs had not been lit. I tried to remember the position of the door and knocked timidly.

"Who is there?" came in the low flute-like tones I remembered.

"It is I—Rosaleen," I said.

There was a pause, then the sound of a key turning in the door. It opened and I saw that shadowy grey figure outlined against the glow of the fire. There was no other light. Over head and face fell the same misty drapery. There was nothing terrifying about her now. Her white hand touched mine and drew me in.

"Welcome," she said. "I was dreaming a dream of my childhood. Of the Child Angel who comes to poor lonely folk at Christmas-time, and eases their hearts of some portion of their sorrow. And I heard a knock, and—it was you."

"I brought you this," I said timidly, and gave her the spray of holly. "I—I wish it had been something better, but I have no money to buy presents."

She took the berries, and looked at them for a long silent

moment. "You thought of me, and brought me this? And I can't even—kiss you."

She moved towards the fire and drew up a low cushioned chair. "Sit there," she said, "for a little while, and let us talk. I can see you, but you cannot see me. So you may forget that I once frightened you, and think of me only as a poor, lonely woman to whom the Christ-Child sent a message."

I sat down, as she directed, spell-bound by the mystery of this shadowy room, the tender hues of wall and flooring thrown up by the rosy fire-light, the hundred and one things of beauty that surrounded me. Yet over all brooded that sense of an ineffable sorrow, mingling in my mind and memory with the faint perfume of rose-leaves and lavender from the great jar of *pot-pourri* on the bookcase. I should have been quite happy to sit there in the light and dream also. But she began to question me, and gradually I told her all my little history and the tragedy of loss that had left me so alone in the world. She listened, and sympathized; cheering me with the hopes of brighter days to come.

"I know little of your aunts," she said, "except through the interchange of letters. But, at least, you have a home, and all your life is before you; not behind—as mine is!"

Then, without warning, she suddenly struck the table with her open hand in a mad, angry fashion.

"God is unjust!" she cried. "He is cruel! He is more cruel than the fiends his cruelty creates! What had I done? What had I deserved that such a fate as *this* should be mine? I was young, and beautiful in all men's sight, and adored and beloved! And now—I am hideous and abnormal. No leper would be more shunned did I dare to show this face to the sunlight and the world it gladdens! Oh! I could curse fate and life, but what use? What use? Hapless tools of Destiny we walk this earth. Be we pure as snow, and wise as gods, we shall not escape the Fate that *has* to be!"

A dry, choking sob caught in her throat, and broke up the passion of her words into wild weeping. Trembling and saddened, I sat there unknowing what to do, or say, while that outburst lasted. But it was brief. She calmed herself again.

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"I am frightening you. Forgive me, child. It is not often I give way like this, but with my lost beauty went all that makes life worth living; and Death—oh, Death can tarry long enough when we crave his coming."

"How was it? I mean how did you—lose your beauty?" I stammered confusedly.

"How? It was at a fire—in Paris. I had been asked to preside at a Fête de Charité, got up for the poor soldiers—and their families. The stalls were all flimsy wooden things draped with gauze and artificial flowers. Just when the place was most crowded, something caught fire. How, or what, I shall never know. Panic ensued. The painted canvases, the flimsy stuffs, all the foolish fripperies that had lent a transient charm, were caught into one burning mass. I remember the scorch of flame, the suffocation of smoke; shrieks and yells, and fighting hands and trampling feet. Then a long, long spell of unconsciousness to life and all that meant living. I woke to—this!"

She struck her maimed, disfigured face even as she had struck the senseless wood, and the sound of the blow hurt me as if it had fallen on my own cheek. I sprang up and threw beseeching arms around her.

"Oh! don't, *don't!* Please, don't!" I sobbed. "It is terrible, but no one who knew you *before*, would cease to love you because of it."

She rose to her feet, and seized my shoulders, and I knew her eyes were on me through the enshrouding veil.

"Is that what you think?" she said. "Is that all you know of love? A man's love!" She laughed wildly. "Had I been adored ever so madly *before* I became like this, I had but to show this scarred unsightly thing that is me, and my lovers would have fled in horror. I was wiser. I let them think me dead. None who had ever known me would ever have recognized me. I told my secret to but one, and he has never seen me as I am now. But since life had to be lived and supported, I had to get means to do it. He lent me money, and got me work. I came to this country and to this town where none knew me, and I need know no one. Here I have lived and worked and tried to forget that the world ever knew me as famous and beautiful and beloved.

Yet there are times when I think I shall go mad for very loneliness of my miserable fate! I thought so to-day—before you knocked at that door, and came to me like a little angel of peace, with that holly in your hand.”

Suddenly she knelt and threw her arms round me. I felt the stormy beating of her heart, the stifled torment of her restrained sobs. I burst into incoherent entreaties. I would come to her often, every day. I would bring her news of the outside world from which she had shut herself. She should not be alone any more. I was so sorry for her. Oh! so dreadfully, dreadfully sorry! I had never thought of such suffering as this; of a fate so cruel. All loss and sorrow of which I knew anything seemed almost insignificant beside it.

She grew calm as I lost self-control. It may have occurred to her that such a scene was trying for a child's nerves; even one old-fashioned and precocious as myself. In any case, she ended the scene as abruptly as it had opened.

“Go now,” she said. “Go—and forgive me for this folly. I won't say ‘tell no one of it.’ Your face is one to trust.”

“Indeed, I will say nothing,” I promised her. “But may I come again?”

“Whenever you please,” she said, and opened the door and let me out into the cold and gloom and sombre prose of the life beyond it.

V

I PARTAKE OF LATE DINNER AND IMPROVE, AND AM IMPROVED BY THE OCCASION

I STUMBLED down, and into my own room, and lit my candle. I had no idea of the time, but I thought I would wash my face and hands and tidy my hair so as to be ready for dinner.

My toilette was certainly not festive, but that was no fault of mine. As I unloosened the two heavy plaits and brushed them out, I noticed that the ends fell into a sort of wavy curl that looked far prettier than the stiff plaits looped on either side. In

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a spirit of adventure I allowed them to remain so. Two long, thick curls on either side drawn back and tied at the nape of the neck with a broad black ribbon. The effect pleased me, and I wondered if my aunts would approve? Possibly they would not. However, this new mode of *coiffure* was the only contribution I could make to the occasion.

Feeling cold and chilled I went downstairs. I peeped into the dining-room and held my breath with amazement at sight of the table laid out with silver candelabra, and cut-glass, and glittering plate. Bridget and Mickey were hovering round, putting finishing touches to the preparations. They exclaimed at my appearance:

"Haven't ye a 'party' frock at all? Sure, 'tis a shame to see ye in that stiff black thing," said Bridget. "An' what in the wurld's taken yer hair?" she demanded, turning me round unceremoniously.

"I didn't like it plaited so tightly," I said.

"It looks beautiful," said Mickey.

"It does that," agreed Bridget. "But there's something quare about it. I'll take me oath yer Aunt Fanny won't let ye wear it so."

I glanced at the clock. It wanted a quarter of six. "Oh, she won't see me till dinner-time," I said cheerfully. "And then it'll be too late to alter it."

On the words Aunt Theresa entered. I trembled for the verdict. However, she was too interested in the table and sideboard, and the getting out of decanters to notice me. I crept into a corner by the fire and waited the entrance of the others. Aunt Theresa was attired in a low-necked gown of stiff grey *moire antique*; very fine and imposing she looked. Aunt Joanna rustled in five minutes later. She wore a black silk dress with white lace, and many jet bugles and fringes. Fanny who came in last was attired in a light blue silk, rather the worse for wear, but lavish, in its display of the famous neck and arms for which the ladies Le Suir were renowned in family annals. Her skin was dazzlingly white and smooth, and the crimping process had softened the hair above the somewhat hard outline of her brows. She made a very effective picture, and my young eyes were not

skilled in detecting how much of the effect was due to art, and how much to nature. They were all too full of themselves to notice me, until Mickey went out to ring the dinner-bell. Then Aunt Fanny's eyes fell on me.

"Where's Rosaleen to sit?"

They all turned. There was a simultaneous cry. "Why, what in the world has the child done to herself?"

"It's her hair," said Fanny, and gave a vicious tug at one of the curls. "A nice sight you've made of yourself!"

"It doesn't look so bad," said Aunt Joanna, differing as a point of conscience from her sister.

"There's no time to plait it again!" exclaimed Aunt Theresa. "But perhaps no one will notice."

"It shows it off," said Joanna. "What a lot you've got, child. You might spare me half, and be none the worse."

Fanny tossed her crimped and elaborate chignon scornfully. "She looks a perfect fright, not that *that's* any novelty!"

"Hush—here they come!" said Aunt Theresa.

She turned in smiling welcome to her guests as they trooped in. Lady Montgomery and her husband, first. Then two quaint-looking old ladies in rustling black silks, and lace caps, and collars fastened by cameo brooches. A weak-eyed, sickly looking youth trotted in after them, and took his seat next them. A stout middle-aged gentleman, and an equally stout middle-aged lady of dark complexion, followed. Then a meek-looking ringleted young lady. I learnt later than she was companion to the stout dark dowager, whose husband had recently retired from the Indian Civil Service, with an enlarged liver and a pension. My place being beside the "ringlets," we drifted into conversation.

I noted that Aunt Theresa took the head of the table, with the General at her right hand. Aunt Joanna was at the foot, and Aunt Fanny was beside the sickly looking youth. I learnt that the two old ladies were his maiden aunts, and that he had been brought to Bath for the waters. He was a victim to indigestion and rheumatism. When we were all seated the General pronounced Grace much as if he were giving a cavalry order to the Almighty. That done, the soup was handed round by

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Mickey with considerable clattering of plates, and a very evident display of nervousness on the part of the ladies as he hovered near their shoulders.

When he came to me he whispered—"Ye'll have some, miss? It's foine an' flavoursome to-night."

Then he flopped down the plate, and retreated to arm himself with the decanters.

"Sherry wine, sor? Sherry wine, ma'am?" went round the board, as rapidly as himself. Again familiarity induced a caution to me. "Don't ye be havin' iny; 'tis a bad habit, but moighty helpful to rheumatiz; brings it out, so they sez."

I should like to have laughed, but a sense of being in grown-up company restrained me.

It was then that the young lady with the ringlets addressed me. "You are a stranger, I think? I have not seen you here before."

I assumed an air of polite condescension. "I arrived a few days ago—from Ireland. I am a niece of the Miss Le Suir's."

"Oh—indeed. Are you making a long stay in Bath?"

"I hardly know—yet. It will depend on whether it agrees with me."

She gave me a quick surprised glance.

"I trust you are not an invalid?" she said. "Or a victim to one of those distressing complaints that bring people here?"

"Do people only come to Bath when they have distressing complaints?" I asked. "Wouldn't they come on account of itself?"

"Well," she simpered, "it is not the centre of fashion any longer. We have no dear Beau Nash to give lustre to the Assemblies. No Sheridan and Linleys, and Quins and Fieldings. Royalty honours Bath no longer. Our last Royal visitor was Princess Victoria, when she opened the Park that bears her name. 1830. Dear, dear, quite a long time ago!"

"Before *our* time," I said gravely. I thought it was due to my first appearance in public to assume "grown-up" manners.

"You are a very quaint child," she answered, shaking back her ringlets in an engaging fashion. "Of course, it was before our time! Bath—to us—must have been non-existent."

This was better than I could do. I therefore preserved a discreet silence. I was formulating another suitable announcement.

"You know the Bladud legend, of course?" was my next venture.

"Bla——?" She looked puzzled.

"Bladud—the King. His statue is in the King's Bath. Set up in 1699."

"How interesting! You are up in Bath history, I see?"

"When one lives in a place it is as well to know something about it," was my rejoinder.

I crumbled bread with serene indifference, and watched the General taking wine with Aunt Theresa. A clatter at the door and suppressed voices indicated the arrival of the second course. Presently Mickey Donovan appeared carrying a small cod on a large dish, which he deposited before Aunt Theresa.*

The way in which he juggled with plate, sauce-boat, and potato-dish commanded my admiration. No one had to wait for adjuncts, though how Mickey served them all was a mystery. My new friend went on complacently.

"Then you are going to *live* here? I thought you were Irish."

"Is that any reason why I shouldn't live here?" I enquired.

"You *are* a quaint thing!" she giggled. "Of course not. I only meant I thought you were a visitor. Have you been to the Pump Rooms yet?"

"No," I said. "I have a great deal to see. But I am chiefly interested in the—thermal springs."

Again she stared. "Oh—yes, of course," she said vaguely. "What is your complaint?"

I searched my memory and my guide-book. What had I read about people taking the waters for? Ah—gout, and rheumatism! I made a rash choice, having had no practical experience to guide me.

"Gout," I said. "I have perennial attacks. I believe this famed Bethesda will relieve them."

* The present system of carving everything off the table was not then in vogue in Bath.

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"Gout?" she echoed. "Do you really suffer from *that*? I thought it only attacked elderly people like—the General."

Mickey deposited her portion of fish, and played his sleight-of-hand tricks with the sauce and potatoes.

"Not for you," he whispered. "Won't go round."

He vanished, and I went on crumbling bread, and inventing conversation.

"There are two forms of—of the affliction, I believe. One attacks the old, and the other the young. Mine is the latter sort, but, as Mr. Pickwick said, it's chronic."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the young lady, shaking her ringlets like a peal of soundless bells. "I never did hear such talk from a child! Why, how old *are* you?"

"Twelve—at present," I added.

"One would think you were a hundred. Have you read Dickens too, as well as—I forget the name——"

"Bladud, the royal swineherd, afterwards King of Britain," I informed her.

"Oh, yes! I must find out all about him. I'll go to Meehan's. That's the place for information about Bath. Is that where you get your's?"

"No. It was from a book. A Christmas present."

"You've not lost much time," she said. "I suppose you are fond of reading?"

"I love it beyond everything."

"How *very* strange. I like a good novel, but the dry sort—history, antiquity, geology—I can't abide!"

"I've never read a novel—yet—except 'Pickwick,'" I confessed. "Papa said there was no use in wasting mental force on the unrealities of life."

"I suppose that's why you're so—" She hesitated, then added—"Old-fashioned?"

"Is it old-fashioned to like sensible things?"

"When one is young one should *be* young. Life ages us soon enough."

She sighed and cast a sentimental glance at the youth opposite, who seemed nervously apprehensive of Fanny's blandishments.

"Who is *that*?" I asked. "Beside my aunt? The pretty one."

"Is she considered—pretty?"

"Don't you think she is?"

"Oh, my *dear*," she said, with an affected giggle. "Never ask one woman's opinion of another's beauty. We are the worst judges in the world."

"Why should we be?" I demanded. "Surely, a woman knows more about a woman than a man does?"

"That is just why she should never judge her looks."

"Because—she knows so much about them?"

"Exactly. A woman's looks are dependant upon various circumstances. Her dress, her health; her mode of hairdressing; her skill in assisting nature's deficiencies. The famous beauties of Bath owed a great deal to their period. It happened to be a very becoming one. Powder, paint, patches, hoops, and costume generally were specially charming. The advent of Beau Nash was not only a benefit to the city, but an era of taste and splendour that we cannot help envying in every production of Sheridan, or Goldsmith. If you are so fond of history, read their's. It is more convincing and I should say more authentic than your 'King Bladud.'"

The entrance of the turkey distracted my attention. I noted also that there was a brief discussion going on between Aunt Theresa and the General. It resulted in a change of seats. She declaring he must be the carver as the bird was beyond her powers.

"It came from Ireland," she informed the table generally. "There's no finer birds bred and reared than the Irish turkeys!"

"Except the pigs," said the General, sharpening his knife with jocose flourishes.

"Ah, then, now, General, you will have your joke! Well, I'll leave the ham to answer for itself."

She glanced down to the foot of the table where a noble-looking and gaily decorated ham was placed before Joanna. It appeared that she was an excellent carver, and I watched her admiringly as the pink wafer-like slices were placed upon the plates.

The turkey amply justified its birthplace, and was ungrudgingly pronounced one of the very best they had ever tasted.

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My friend of the ringlets ate her portion with keen appreciation. I was given only an infinitesimal slice, seasoned by a hint from Mickey— "Take care now, or ye'll be havin' the indyjestshun. There's another coorse to follow!"

Conversation with my neighbour was suspended until we had left our plates empty. Then I ventured to ask Miss Ringlets her name.

"It's Walcott," she answered readily. "Genevieve Walcott."

"How pretty!" I exclaimed. "And are those your mamma and papa, next you?"

"Alas, no!" she sighed. "I am an orphan. I am poor and dependant on the charity of others more fortunate. I live with a friend of my lamented mother's. She has given me a home in consideration of my performing various duties, such as reading aloud, playing on the pianoforte, and—helping to finish her Berlin woolwork when she gets tired of it." (She said this in a very low voice, so as not to be overheard by the lady in question, who was seated next her.) "We come to Bath every year. The Judge is a great sufferer. He takes all the treatment. Douche and vapour, besides having to drink a certain quantity of the water."

"And you stay—here?" I questioned.

"Yes. Mrs. Rackham-Pitts likes this street. It is so quiet and convenient for the Pump Rooms. This is the third year we have come. We all know one another," she rattled on. "Lady Montgomery and the General, and the Miss Cutlers. (Those two old ladies opposite.) They have brought their nephew this year. He is very delicate, and they thought the waters and the mild air would do him good."

I felt like one receiving a general introduction. I knew all the names and particulars of the guests now.

"And what will *you* do here?" went on my friend.

"Go to school, I suppose. Nothing is decided yet," I answered.

"There are excellent schools at Bath, and teachers too for languages, music, dancing. Can you dance?"

I shook my head. "No. I have never been taught."

"Oh, you must learn. A girl who can't dance is no use in society. Besides, you will be grown up in a few years, and have to come out. There is no better place for a first season than

Bath. The balls at the Assembly Rooms are patronized by the best county people, as well as the best London visitors."

I asked if she was going to the New Year's Ball. She sighed mournfully.

"No, my dear, I never go to balls. Mrs. Rackham-Pitts doesn't like me to be out in the evenings, and she won't accept any invitations except to a card party."

"That is hard for you," I said.

"It is the penalty of being a fortuneless orphan," she answered.

"My two aunts are going," I informed her. "I am longing for the night. I shall see them dressed in their ball dresses. I have never seen anyone dressed for a ball. Only in pictures."

"What are they going to wear?" she asked. "Do you know?" her voice was almost eager.

I told her. She looked critically at Fanny.

"White silk is very trying after one's *première jeunesse*," she said.

I wondered what that was, but did not wish to betray ignorance by asking. I contented myself by saying Fanny had a beautiful skin.

"Not bad for a brunette," was the reply. "But she powders dreadfully. And I don't admire the way she does her hair. Do advise her to let Hatt's of the Corridor do it for her. He *can* dress hair, even when it's poor and skimpy."

I was not learned enough in the art of innuendo to criticize the latter portion of this speech. To my thinking Aunt Fanny's hair looked much more luxuriant than did Miss Walcott's. But I kept silence. Her attention was now claimed by some remarks of the old Judge.

Meanwhile, Mickey was again clearing off plates and dishes, and a noise of voices outside in the hall set me wondering as to what Bridget was doing there. My curiosity was satisfied by the reappearance of Mickey bearing aloft a giant plum-pudding, all ablaze as in duty bound, and decorated with a sprig of holly. It was a noble sight, or so I thought. I had never seen such a pudding. The General rose and gave the seat of honour once again to Aunt Theresa, as it was placed upon the table amidst general hilarity. The blue flames rose and twisted, and indulged

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in all sorts of vagaries before finally permitting themselves to be extinguished. Then Aunt Theresa proceeded to dispense slices to the waiting guests. A very infinitesimal one was specially relegated to me, accompanied by another whisper from Mickey. "Says it's too rich for children, she does. Ate it slow now, an' 'twill seem more."

"Delicious!" murmured Miss Walcott. "I always *do* say that the cooking in this establishment is first class."

Establishment sounded oddly to my ears. I wondered what she meant? To conceal my ignorance I busied myself with the pudding. It deserved Miss Walcott's commendation, as did the mince pies that followed. Then came a pause while Mickey removed the cloth and placed walnuts and apples and dried fruits on the polished mahogany. Decanters in silver "runners" were then deposited at the corners of the table. The ubiquitous servitor withdrew, and general hilarity reigned.

The General rose to his gouty feet and proposed a toast. "Absent friends, wherever they be!" The wine went round. Glasses were filled, a small modicum of port being poured into mine by Aunt Joanna, who was near enough to see that I didn't drink it. In fact, I had much ado to keep back the emotion roused by the toast. All whom I most loved were indeed absent. Gone to a land too far distant for return. The thought was too bitter for such light treatment. I shrank back in my chair, and tried to keep the tears from my eyes. I thought of all inconsequent things. Mickey Donovan, "poor Mary" in her scullery, washing all those plates and dishes; the mixture of almonds and raisins in a green majolica dessert dish, and other ephemeral subjects. Fortunately no one noticed me, or spoke to me, and gradually I recovered.

It would never do, I kept saying to myself, to cry like a silly baby at my first grown-up dinner party.

The first thing that roused me was a faint explosion produced by the pulling of a "cracker." The feat was performed by Aunt Fanny and the sickly youth amidst much laughter and screaming. Others followed suit. Small fragments of paper were loosened from these explosive missiles, and seized with avidity by the ladies, who read them out, or handed them coyly to their neigh-

bours. The General and Aunt Theresa were very hilarious over their's. The sickly youth seemed in the throes of bashful agony. Miss Walcott offered one to me, but was so giggly and nervous that we only succeeded in breaking the paper cover. She pounced on sweet and motto, and giggled more than ever. The General insisted on hearing what amused her. The paper was passed round, and finally read by the General.

Oh! Thou so fair
I fain would be
Thy sweetheart, sweet.
Ah! Fly with me.

The blushes and simpers of the fair recipient of this bold declaration were a source of genial banter henceforth. The General declared it was a prophetic incident. The old Judge was of opinion that "sweets to the sweet" might as well be "fair to the fair." Could anything be fairer than those fairy ringlets of Genevieve's. Great applause greeted the witticism, and incited other attempts at even worse puns. But everybody laughed, and no one criticized. Aunt Theresa begged the General to tell his famous Irish story.

"You do the accent as if you were born to it," she added mendaciously.

As the General was English he appeared delighted with the compliment, and proceeded with an exaggeration of nationality for which the famed Sir Lucius O'Trigger might have well challenged him to single combat.

"Well, if ye wull hav it, here 'tis. Sure, an' begorra, me gran'fayther 'twas as tould it me. The ould gintleman had an Irish sarvint called Patrick Murphy, an' a quare broth av a bhoy that same. Well, one day me gran'fayther sez, sez he, 'Murphy, bhoy,' he sez, 'I'm expectin' a call from a gintleman, an' I don't want to see the gintleman.' Also, he sez, 'I don't want ye to tell a lie about it. Because I shan't be out,' he sez, 'an' I won't be in,' he sez. 'Lastewise not to *him*.' 'I see, sor, yer honour,' sez Pat. 'That's the way av it.' 'It is,' sez me gran'fayther. 'An' I want ye to be diplomatic,' he sez. 'I wull,' sez Pat. 'Yer honour may trust me.' 'But wait a bit. I'll tell ye how,' sez me gran'fayther. 'There's three things as all diplomatists

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hav to be larnin'. One is to lie purlitely ; anither is to lie evay-sively ; an' the third is not to lie at all.'

" ' Which shall I be doin', yer honour ? ' sez Pat.

" ' Wull, then,' sez me gran'fayther. ' I wud be for reckom-mendin' the second coorse. Ye'll not say I'm out, nor ye'll not say I'm in. Ye'll jist give an *evasive* answer.'

" ' Yer honour may thrust me to do that,' sez Pat, an' wint his way.

" Later on he cums up to me gran'fayther, in his study. ' The gintleman's bin,' he sez.

" ' Well ? ' sez me gran'fayther.

" ' An' he's gone,' sez Pat.

" ' That's all right,' sez me gran'fayther. ' What did ye say to him, Pat ? '

" ' I did as yer honour tould me. I jist gave him an evaysive answer.'

" ' An' what was it, Pat ? ' asks me gran'fayther.

" ' Well, yer honour, I—I jist axed him— *Was his gran'mother a monkey ?* ' "

Uproarious laughter crowned the anecdote as successful. Then Aunt Theresa rose, and the other ladies followed her example and, marshalled by Aunt Joanna, we marched upstairs to the drawing-room. At the door Aunt Theresa turned. " Don't be *too* long, General," she said.

Then she noticed me as I lingered doubtfully at the foot of the staircase. " Run along to bed, now," she said. " You're not wanted in the drawing-room."

" Mayn't I stop just ten minutes, till the gentlemen come up ? " I entreated. " I've never seen the drawing-room yet."

" Oh—well, you may," she said indulgently. " As it's Christmas night, I'll not be too strict."

So straightway we went upstairs and into a long narrow room with three windows looking on the street. A great glass chandelier hung in the centre, its light falling on chairs and settees of red damask with gilt backs, and antique cabinets of china in corners. Also a piano with a very high back, and very yellow keys, and a pile of music set atop of it.

I had heard none for long, and went up to examine the collec-

tion. "Pieces" of the florid school by Sidney Smith, and Brinley Richards. A number of songs with floral title-pages; a great deal of dance music. Fanny came to my side, and snatched them from my hand. "What are you meddling with my music for?" she demanded. "It's time you were in bed."

"Is it your music?" I asked. "I wouldn't have touched it had I known that——"

"Impudent brat!" she muttered. "I wonder Theresa let you come in here. Such a sight as you look! All that black mop hanging about you! A perfect nigger!"

"Niggers have short woolly hair," I corrected. "Mine is down to my waist. Is your's?"

She flashed a furious glance at me.

"Miss Walcott says you don't dress it becomingly," I went on. "You ought to go to Mr. Hatt—the hairdresser in the Corridor."

"Miss Walcott be d——d for her impudence!" said Aunt Fanny.

I drew back a pace—shocked. "I thought only drunken men swore?" I said. "Not ladies."

"I'll do something more than swear, if you don't give over cheeking me," she said fiercely. "Detestable little prig that you are!"

I made no response. I turned and went off to the other end of the room, where I was seized upon by the Misses Cutler. They were from London, they told me, but were wintering in Bath on account of their nephew's extreme delicacy.

"Poor darling Adolphus! He is all we have," said the eldest Miss Cutler.

"Yes, we are devoted to him," echoed the second, addressed as Eliza. (The other was Ellen.)

I politely hoped that Bath would be as beneficial to Adolphus as to Prince Bladud of ancient fame. It appeared they also knew nothing of the Royal swineherd. They had dipped into Bath history no further than Ralph Allen of Prior Park and "Sham Castle" fame.

"Sham Castle" attracted me at once. Where was it? Who lived there? Alas! Alas! for my fairy edifice seen afar on the heights surrounding the city.

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That charming structure I had noticed when I made first acquaintance with Sydney Gardens was indeed nothing but a sham. In return for the Bladud legend I was given an authentic account of Ralph Allen and his eighteenth-century exploits. But the good man fell in my estimation from the moment I learnt that vanity alone was responsible for the erection of this battlemented wall. He had built it in order to improve the view from his own town mansion in the North Parade. It was of no use, though a first-rate deception, for all new-comers to Bath took it for a real structure. My disappointment must have been self-evident for Miss Eliza patted my hand in kindly sympathy. "I felt just the same, my dear," she said. "So much so, that nothing will induce me to visit the place."

"I'm told it's a stiff climb," said Miss Ellen.

Then Aunt Theresa swept up, and said I must go to bed. I wished my new friends good night, and thus ended my first Christmas Day in Bath.

Alas! My experiences of life were to be amplified by other and worse deceptions than that of "Sham Castle."

VI

IN WHICH MY EDUCATION PROMISES TO BE A NOVEL ONE

I WAS too excited for sleep. Besides, it was only eight o'clock. I took out my precious book, and turned to "Sham Castle." It faced me in all the mediæval importance of design, looking even more solid on the page than it had done against the background of blue sky and green hill-side. I read the story of its founder, that prominent figure in the history of Bath, friend of poets and writers, entertainer of royalty and rank. The man who from a Post Office clerk rose to wealth and eminence, and amassed a fortune from those wonderful freestone quarries which did so much for the financial benefit of the town.

But I felt I could not forgive him for that sham edifice. It

seemed at once puerile and unnecessary. If his town house looked out at those green heights they were Nature's handiwork, and far superior to a make-believe castle.

I wondered if he had done it for a joke. To deceive people as it had deceived me? If so, it had stood the ravages of time as well as its designer could have wished. I made up my mind to visit it at the earliest opportunity, and then went on to read of the discovery of Roman baths and Roman villas, of hill defences and fortifications. Of the Temple of Minerva and the College of Armourers, and the deeds and doings of that ancient race to whom Britain was nothing but a land of barbarians.

My interest grew the more I read. I felt glad I had come to what seemed to me the most historically interesting city in England. The writer of these records was an enthusiast. He was so in love with his subject that he lavished on it not only erudition but poetic imagery, and romantic embellishment. He took me by storm. I went to sleep with that precious book under my pillow and dreamt of a city of Temples ruled by the Gods of old. A place so wondrous and so beautiful that nothing out of Dreamland could have rivalled it.

I woke up happier for the dream, and with a sense of interest and excitement in my new life that proved I was still young. Before my sleepy eyes were quite ready to open I heard a monotonous voice chanting at my door to this effect :

"The wran, the wran,
The king av all birds,
Saint Stephen's Day was caught in the furze.
Altho' he is little,
His family's great,
So up, Miss Rosaleen, an' give us a trate."*

"Bridget!" I called, with delight at the familiar words. How often I had heard them in my Irish home.

"It's not Bridget," said Mickey's voice. "It's me, Miss Rosaleen. I thought 'twould remind ye av the ould times."

"So it does, Mickey," I answered. "But I'm sorry I can't give you a 'trate.' I've no money."

"Arrah, now don't ye bother yer head about *that*, Miss Rosa-

* The children in Ireland used to go round to the houses singing this on St. Stephen's Day. It was their fashion of asking for Christmas-boxes.

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"Thank you," I said. "I'll be getting up now. What sort of a day?"

"Rainin' it be. Divil take it, for I was gettin' a holiday. But where'd I be goin' wid meself at all, an' the heavens nothin' but a waterspout."

"Perhaps it'll clear up by and by," I said cheerfully, for, strange to say, my own mood was almost cheerful. A sense of good things to come was lifting my young soul to hopeful anticipation. Perhaps the Santa Claus of my book would call to-day. He had said "after Christmas." I dismissed Mickey, who left a can of hot water at my door (to save his aunt the stairs, he informed me). Then I rose and made my simple toilet. As I brushed out my thick hair I remembered the opinions on its arrangement, and deemed it more prudent to go back to the "door-knocker" style.

The rain was beating dismally at my small window. The wind howled round the house. "No going out to-day," I thought. But at least I had my book, and there would be the dressmaking to watch. Fanny had talked of "machining" her seams. I wondered what that was. I had not seen a sewing machine except in newspaper advertisements. I was interested in discovering how one worked.

As soon as breakfast was over I went up to the little parlour. A bright fire burned in the grate; the table was covered with a sheet, and at one end stood the sewing machine, ready for work. I examined it curiously. It seemed extraordinary that it was capable of sewing up seams. My investigations were interrupted by Aunt Fanny. She was evidently in one of her very worst tempers. She flew at me like a fury for "daring to touch her machine."

I denied having done more than look at it, but only received a violent push, and an injunction to take myself and my ugly face out of her sight. The argument that followed was no credit to either of us, but fortunately Aunt Joanna came in, and put an end to it.

"Of course, the child can stay here. What harm does she do?"

A few sisterly compliments followed, ending in a dispute as to who had first right to the machine. Aunt Joanna it appeared had set it ready, and put in the thread. Fanny had been first in the room. The argument grew heated. I learnt that Aunt Joanna's "old rag" had been lying by in a drawer for years, and that Fanny herself had refused to have it made up over and over again. The material was unfashionable and unserviceable. Aunt Joanna was of a different opinion. The dress would look as good as Fanny's when it was finished. Thank goodness *she* wasn't extravagant!

Finally Aunt Joanna took up her place at the end of the table as her materials were ready basted to begin, and Fanny's were not. This arrangement enabled me to watch the performance as well as give some small aid in keeping the flimsy stuff from the carpet. I was also entrusted with the task of taking out the basting threads from finished seams. I was still enjoying a sense of interested importance when Mickey appeared with a card.

"There's a gintleman to see Miss Rosaleen," he announced.

I started; my face one crimson glow. Fanny seized the card and read it:

"THE CHEVALIER O'SHAUGHNESSY,
Légion d'Honneur. Paris."

"Who in the name of wonder is it!" she exclaimed.

"I know," I said proudly. "I was expecting him to call."

"Oh, were you!" she sneered. "Well, I'll send your Aunt Theresa to him. I suppose the creature wants help of some sort if he's the seedy-looking beggar I saw walking with you!"

I felt too indignant to answer. With a toss of the head I left the room, thinking of retorts I might have made, but that never occurred at the moment.

"He's in the dining-room, miss," said Mickey.

"You're sure it was *me* he asked for?" I said.

"Me wurrd on that, miss. But I'll tell yer Aunt Theresa, av it's a point of *attikette*. She's below givin' her orders. I'm not sure she's fit to be seein' visitors, this time of the mornin'. Still, there's no harm to intermate there's one to be seen. Besides, 'twould stop Miss Fanny's aspersions!"

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So I went up into the dining-room, and beheld the Chevalier.

A glorified and transformed Chevalier, shaven and shorn and resplendent of costume. A being at once picturesque and polite as became the prospective founder of an educational establishment for young ladies. He greeted me effusively. I stammered out thanks for his gift, and my delight at receiving it. Then Aunt Theresa bustled in, looking as handsome and well-garbed as if the kitchen and herself were distant acquaintances.

I should like to give a full description of this momentous interview, but at this distance of time I could not do it justice. I have only a vivid remembrance of a proposal put to my aunt, and seconded, amended, and carried by the proposer, all in a grandiloquent fantastic fashion that left me breathless, but quite convinced he was fully qualified for any position or appointment connected with learning and 'ologies, not to mention science and philosophy.

I listened to their discussion in an ecstasy of wonder, for the Chevalier's flow of language was something that might match—"How the water comes down at Lodore." The words and sentences rolled and tumbled and sparkled, "sounding and bounding and rounding, clattering, battering, and shattering," until any opposition my poor bewildered aunt had been inclined to make was swept away and buried beneath them.

The College was to all intents and purposes founded and established in perpetuity. The beautiful Miss Le Suir was at once its patroness and *alma mater*. Her charming niece its first and most promising pupil. Such an institution of instruction and accomplishments had surely never existed (and, as a fact, never *did* exist) save in the Chevalier's own brain. But he made us see it as distinctly as Ralph Allen made posterity an eye-witness to that artificial imposture of his "Sham Castle." He was at once persuasive and compelling. Before he left us that morning I was admitted to his non-existent Academy as its first pupil on specially favourable terms—payable in advance—with proviso of a quarter's notice of removal should unforeseen circumstances necessitate such a misfortune.

"But they will not prove so unkind," he said, that wonderful smile of his illumining eyes and face like sunshine. "It will be

my happy task to instruct my charming pupil in all matters appertaining to the mental and moral status of her charming sex. She shall be the first and most brilliant exponent of my new system of education. She comes to me already fitted for classic conquests, with trained mind and receptive faculties. On such a foundation what can I not build! Value and graces of sex; the true art of life as it should be lived. Madam, your niece will return to you a second Sappho. Fit to be hymned by Lyric Laureates in stanzas exquisite as Shelly's godlike muse! All the wonders of Time and Life lie at the feet of learning. Those who conquer worlds may die. Those who conquer wisdom shall live for ever!"

Aunt Theresa was undoubtedly impressed. Besides—the terms of the Chevalier's Academy were lower than those of the High School. That was a consideration. It was arranged, therefore, that I should commence my studies in a fortnight's time; the first term to be paid in advance on the opening day.

"There is also a question of school books, and small accessories," insinuated the Chevalier. "A little personal outlay that finds me—for the moment—only for the moment—what one may term short of funds. If I might suggest——"

"Oh—of course!" exclaimed Aunt Theresa cheerfully. "I quite understand. Instead of *my* buying books and slates and things——"

"Exactly, my dear, Madam. Quite a small sum—a sovereign, or two? Ample."

"I will fetch the money," she said, and left the room.

He turned to me. "Are we content?" he asked.

I expanded into smiles. "I am," I said. "You see I have always been taught by a man, ever since I could read. Naturally, I like them best."

"They will repay the compliment," he said, "in time."

"And—where is the Academy to be?" I asked ingenuously. "Because I shall want to find my way to it."

"Ah." He reflected a moment; his eyes on the door. "That, of course, has to be considered. I have thought of temporary premises until such time as—as I can secure the requisite accommodation. A site, or for the matter of that a building already

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equipped and suitable is not to be found just at once. However——”

He placed a card on the table before me. A card written and ornamented in fine penmanship. It set forth :

*Academy of Instruction
for the
Higher Arts and Accomplishments.
Lady Pupils taken. Languages by proficient Professors.
Drawing, Music, Science, and Philosophy.
Principal:
The Chevalier Terence Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy,
Légion d'Honneur.
IV Via Roma,
Akemanceaster.*

I read this wonderingly. “I thought the Academy was to be in Bath?” I said.

He smiled. “You have not dipped far into your chronicle of the city, or you would have known that Akemanceaster is the ancient name of Bath. In other words, ‘the city of the sick man.’ Compounded of *Ake* a corruption of the Roman *aquae*; *Maen*, a man, and *Ceaster* or *Castra*, a camp. Bath was once a Roman fortification and a Roman colony. The name was then *Aquae Solis*. A more fitting one than that of the barbaric Britons whose sole idea of warfare was destruction.”

“But where is the *Via Roma*?” I asked, for I had studied the map.

“I will show it you,” he said. “Topographical description is never satisfactory.”

“Show it me—when?”

“To-day, to-morrow, when you will.”

"They won't let me out in this rain to-day, I'm afraid."

"Then let it be to-morrow. I will call for you. We will commence your education by an explanation of the place where you are to be educated. Does the idea commend itself?"

I said it did. I was keen on knowing all about Bath and its historic past. Then Aunt Theresa returned with the sovereign wrapped in a sheet of note-paper, and a written receipt for it which she requested the Chevalier to sign.

He did it with many flourishes and comments; with the air of one conferring, not receiving a benefit. Then he asked permission to take me round the city in order to make me acquainted with its "objective lessons."

"To live *here* and remain ignorant of the treasure stores at your very feet is a sacrilege to the generosity of the ages! Not a street, a building, a ruin, or a record that is not enriched by such treasure," he told her. "The Goddess of Wisdom herself was once the presiding deity. My pupil must be worthy of such a tradition. Her votive tablet to *Aquae Solis* shall be a record of the True Divinity of Sex, as formulated and established by the new Academy of Learning and the Fine Arts."

He then took himself off with the promise to take me for my first *promenade d'instruction* on the morrow, if the weather was favourable.

As the door closed on his final peroration, Aunt Theresa turned and surveyed me.

"He's wonderful!" she exclaimed. "But I hope he's to be trusted. Great talkers are bad doers they say."

But I had all the faith of youth, and would not hear of criticism. The very society of this wonderful being was instruction. Surely it was a high privilege to have so superior a being condescending to educate backward youth.

"Perhaps so," said Aunt Theresa, gazing thoughtfully at the receipt in her hand. "But he's Irish. And——" Again she hesitated.

"And—what?"

"Well, I was just thinking of that twinkle in his eye, when he gave me *this*."

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Happy is youth in that the immediate moment means so much. Already the clouds were lifting from my life. Already the grey street and the grey stones of the city were eloquent of meaning. I no longer said: "I hate England!" but: "I am glad I came to Bath," and, indeed, long before I had reached the end of my book it had become a city of enchantment. So it still remains.

The dreary wet day drew on to its close. The dusk fell, and the dressmaking was put aside for tea, and my aunts fell to discussing their progress, and agreed that on the morrow they might get to the bodices.

"I'll take good care not to trust you to fit me this time," remarked Aunt Joanna. "The back of that puce silk was all wrinkles and puckers, and much too short waisted, and I cut it exactly as you pinned it."

"You've got a round back, and the worst figure I'd want to see," said the amiable Fanny. "You can't put elegance into a bolster."

"No, nor make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, so I've heard. Don't be asking me to fit *your* dress for you, for I won't do it."

"Theresa will," said Fanny.

"Theresa can't fit. She's only good for cutting out."

"Well, I'll get 'Ringlets' to help. Don't imagine I'll be under compliment to you."

"For goodness' sake stop squabbling," interposed Aunt Theresa. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. It was bad enough when you were in the nursery, but grown up and all to be going on the same way. Have sense, do!"

"It's always Fanny," said Joanna. "There's no living in peace where she is. I wish to goodness she'd get married, and go out of the place. Though I'm sorry for the man! A bad day for him with such a termagant."

"Keep your pity till it's asked for," said Fanny. "Anyway I can take your Captain Oliver if I want to. I've a mind to do it, too, just to put *your* nose out of joint!"

Aunt Joanna's face grew brick-red with anger. I expected an outburst, but she only said: "Do, and I'll tell him about Billy McMahon."

It was Fanny's turn to get scarlet. "You *dare!*" she hissed,

between set teeth. "It will be the worst day of your life, I promise you."

"Be quiet, I tell you! Before the child and all, it's a disgrace," said Aunt Theresa.

"Let her go down to the kitchen then. Who wants her here? Get out of my way, Saucers! I want that couch for my dress."

She seized my arm and ousted me from my corner. My book fell to the ground. She picked it up, and reading the title, flung it contemptuously to the other end of the room. I was trembling with indignation, as I followed and picked it up.

"How dare you! It's not your's!"

But Aunt Theresa came up to me. "Go, child," she said. "Bridget will give you your tea. No late dinner to-night, mind. Get to bed at eight o'clock."

In raging fury I took myself away. What a spitfire Aunt Fanny was and how I hated her. It might be wrong, but I couldn't help it. Between us was an undying animosity that seemed the outcome of some far-off wrong, perhaps an ancestral feud brought to light in a new generation. I only know that distrust and dislike were the main feelings in my heart. I would not have tried to hurt her, but I am sure I should not have condemned the person who did.

Looking back now from a calmer standpoint to those memories, I can still feel that old hatred and bitterness flooding my young soul. Still acknowledge that I have cause to be thankful Fanny did not stand in Aunt Theresa's place.

The thought of the long evening was not cheering, so I resolved to pay another visit to my Grey Lady, as I called her in my heart. She was as lonely as myself, and far more unhappy. My terror of her had quite gone, and in the dim room she looked but a shadow. She had told me to come whenever I pleased, so the dusk found me again creeping up the stairs to where that thread of crimson light showed under the door.

She welcomed me gladly. "I was hoping you would come. I am tired. I have been working all day."

"At your book?" I asked.

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"Yes. It ought to be in the publisher's hands next month, and there is still a great deal to do to it."

"What sort of books do you write?"

"The romances I used to act," she answered.

"Act?" Here was a new wonder.

"Yes. I was well known in Paris, Petersburg, London—before—this."

That fact gave her fresh importance, but also made her fate seem a thousand times crueller.

"I am a Russian, by birth," she went on. "That is why I speak so many languages. French and English are equally familiar. But I don't want to talk of myself. Tell me of your aunt's party, and what you have been doing with yourself all day?"

I found myself describing the dinner, and the guests; and then branching off into a vivid account of the Chevalier's visit and my educational prospects. Whether unconsciously I gave her an impression of the Chevalier's manner I cannot say, only quite suddenly her voice arrested my eloquence. It was harsh, strange, excited.

"Irish! Surely you mistake! French—is he not?"

"No," I said, surprised at her excitement. "Certainly he is Irish. But he has lived in France. He fought in the war. He has the Legion of Honour."

"The name?" she asked quickly. "His name?"

I gave it in all its full-sounding importance.

"Did you ever know anyone of that name?" I asked her.

"No—o," she said slowly. "But I once read of—someone—who was like the owner of that name."

I grew interested. "In Paris?" I asked.

"It is a story of Paris. The story of an actress, young, courted, famous. She was playing in one of the theatres. Every night when she appeared in one special act, someone used to throw her a bunch of violets. Not a bouquet; only an ordinary market bunch. They came every night. Sometimes there was a message attached; fantastic, romantic, absurd. But in some way the flowers and the message were different from any others she received. An actress, who is popular, gets so many flowers.

Rare, expensive ; florist's triumphs. But these were so simple ; they interested her."

"And did she know who sent them ?" I asked.

"The sender told her he would be in the theatre, on a particular night, in a particular seat. He begged a glance, a smile. They would be reward enough. Perhaps he had the smile. His eyes invoked it. They were so blue, so sunny, so full of mirth. But that was the last time she appeared on any stage. . . . The last time she smiled on any man's request."

"It is one of your stories !" I exclaimed excitedly.

"Yes, child. One of mine. I think it is my favourite."

"It is very sad," I said.

"All love is sad, more or less. We give too much, or not enough. We trust too little, or too blindly. But I do not call that story—sad. It is only unfinished. There was no end to spoil its beautiful beginning."

I meditated upon that point. A beginning without an end did not commend itself to me. If my little adventure in Sydney Gardens had ended there—well, I was glad it had not. I gave her the formula those fluent words had sketched for me.

"It sounds a mad scheme," she said. "But then all Irishmen are mad, more or less."

I wondered if I was destined to be always playing the champion for my much-wronged and grossly maligned Knight Errant ?

VII

IN WHICH I RECEIVE A LESSON IN SOCIAL CONDITIONS

TEN o'clock, and the sun shining warmly over the hills of Bath. Ten o'clock, and I and my new preceptor walking side by side through a city of enchantment. A place peopled by wonders and wondrous beings.

From Roman Emperors to the days of Beauties and Dandies, from King Edgar to King Nash ranged my first pilgrimage. I

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was taken up to the heights of the Lansdowne, and from there shown all the beauty of the city, and told the traditions thereof. Of the magic woven by mellifluous tongue how can I speak? If it is true that one only brings to a place what is in *oneself*, then my friend the Chevalier had brought full store of knowledge and enchantment with him. He made me see what he described as only an ardent and poetic imagination could have made me see. Not for that day only, but for all time, lingers in my mind the meaning and beauty of all that had gone to make Bath the Queen of the western counties. A place so rich in legend, record, and romance, that she stands in English history as the centre of five centuries' interest. Where else could Sheridan have written, or the lovely Linley sung, or Garrick acted, or Goldsmith lodged? To what other resort of health and fashion have princesses, statesmen, historians, dramatists, poets, actors, prelates, flocked so unanimously. The history of Bath is the history of Celebrity. Not a street but has its record; scarce a house without a history. And to one who loved the city and knew the history, there was endless charm in both. Possibly had I had only my aunt's companionship, or the mere ordinary education of the nineteenth-century Young Ladies' Seminary, I should have felt as little of the inward meaning of the place I lived in as most people seemed to feel. But with such an instructor as the Chevalier, that *inward* meaning of the apparently ordinary was my happier fate.

My strange teacher loved that fair city set amongst her encircling hills as poets and enthusiasts alone love what appeals to their inner senses. How he had drifted here, and chosen to remain were things I was to learn in time. They did not concern me so much in this early stage of acquaintanceship as the fact that he was there, and that Fate had chosen him for my instructor. But all my life I shall feel grateful for the eloquent idealism that made of this fair city a living thing once more. No word of being old-fashioned, neglected, derided, ever spoilt her meaning for me. Neither does it affect her memory.

I had loved Ireland as a home, but I grew to love Bath as an ideal. Never did she seem as a place of vicious pastimes, coarse intrigues, flaunting shamelessness. Never could I believe in her

historic Assembly Rooms as a mere cheap pleasure resort, suffered only of fools who gambled, and drunkards who quarrelled and fought for the honour they dishonoured. Idle, foolish, amorous days she had known but they were immortalized by all the graces of art, and mellowed by tender touch of Time. So I preferred to regard them. So he taught me to regard them. So I regard them still.

After that first morning came many others, equally delightful and instructive.

It did not occur to me, and apparently it did not occur to Aunt Theresa either, that these perambulations were a somewhat odd method of founding an Academy. Possibly she was relieved that someone would look after me, and see I had air and exercise without troubling anyone in the house. Possibly she took things for granted in the happy-go-lucky Irish way.

A week went by. Every day had found me with my eccentric teacher. If it rained we went into the Pump Rooms, and the lesson went on with eloquent illustrations of living subjects. The Chevalier gave away his nationality by every happy nickname that signalized a visitor's peculiarities, as much as by the humorous satire that etched them even amidst a crowd of fellow-sufferers.

Queer enough folk they were, some of them, who came to drink the waters, or rest and cool themselves after the baths. Every bit as queer I often thought as those figures in early illustrations of bathers and drinkers. I had laughed at them in old prints and old guide-books at Meehan's, where the Chevalier occasionally took me. We passed it on Pulteney Bridge each time we went citywards. "Ye olde Booke Shoppe"* was its sign, and the Chevalier seemed to have the freedom of the premises as far as examination or borrowing of the contents meant freedom. The owner and himself were alike enthusiasts on all matters concerned with the history, romance, and topography of Bath. Yet it struck me as odd that in two years the Chevalier seemed to have acquired as much information as the old man had done in a

* The old shop was at 11 Pulteney Bridge. The modern one is in Gay Street.

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lifetime. Perhaps the difference lay in a retentive memory, as well as a brilliant faculty of "giving out" generously what he "took in" avidly. I only know that a visit to that shop, or its rival, Gregory's, was a special joy to me.

Thus slipped by a happy week. At the end of it I suddenly remembered the Academy, or rather where the Academy was to establish itself. We were crossing the bridge which connected the North and South Parades with the Bathwick side of the river. I remember that fact had been impressed upon me by the Chevalier's remark that bridges had two uses. One was that water might flow under them, and the other that rapacious owners might levy tolls.

"You said you lived in the Via Roma," I observed. "But you have never shown it me."

"How remiss. But all roads lead to Rome, you know. You will find yourself there one day."

"In your Academy?" I asked.

He laughed. "Where Cæsar is, there Rome is," he said. "In other words the seat of learning is with the teacher, not the taught. You have joined my Academy ever since we met in Sydney Gardens, whether you are aware of it or not."

I looked up. "You mean that you are always teaching me something?"

"Am I not? The only true education is the art of making everything in life a factor for educating us. The blind never behold the sun. But even they can feel its warmth. Nature is prodigal enough if we choose to accept her gifts. Impressions are never valueless, save to the unimpressed. The mind is given to us for a storehouse, fitted with receptacles. Memory supplies the stores. We begin life by wondering; we continue by acquiring. We end it—by despairing."

I had never thought that laughing face could look sad. But it looked very sad at that moment. Not for long certainly. Only so long as one might glance at the sombre outlines of the hills, or the old town walls that once stood for defence. Then laughter broke the silence. He wheeled round on me, and altered our direction.

"*Nom de Dieu!* Who talks of despair when the sun is in the

heavens, and all the world lies oyster-like to one's hand, ready for the opening. You want the Via Roma? Well, I will conduct you there."

We had walked a long distance and turned and twisted several times before I received any further information. Then he named a church as St. Swithin's, and turning again, stopped and informed me I was on sacred ground. The *Via Julia* now the London Road. Then he pointed out the "Vineyards" a relic of the seventeenth century; a vineyard had stood where now were houses. Next we came to Lady Huntingdon's Chapel. This was new to me, and my companion explained briefly *why* Lady Huntingdon's Chapel, and what sort of chapel, and who had preached there. We descended into a lower road, turned again, and half way up a steep ascent, paused. He pointed to a dreary shabby-looking house. The whole neighbourhood breathed poverty and shabbiness, or so I thought.

"*This?*" I cried involuntarily. "This—the Via Roma? Oh, surely not!"

"You are disappointed? There is no outward evidence of a seat of learning! An *Academy des beaux Artes*, or even the humble *école primaire*. But this is my residence at present. I regret it is not more worthy of your inspection."

"And am I to come *here*?" I asked. Disappointment must have sounded in that qualifying adverb, for he looked perplexed.

"Only for a brief time, let us hope. If you will honour me by entering now I shall have much pleasure in introducing you to your fellow-pupil."

"You have another pupil?"

"I have. Will you make her acquaintance?"

I said I would. I felt a little wonder and perhaps, a slight stab of jealousy. An Academy of pupils would have disturbed me less than a solitary rival in its Professor's interest.

He opened the door with his own key, and led me into a dingy shabbily furnished room on the ground floor. It was a double room I discovered. Folding doors shut it from the sleeping apartment behind. There was a table in the centre, covered with books and papers. There was a shabby old sofa by the fireplace, and some chairs and that early Victorian abomination,

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a *chiffonier*, with a marked and stained marble top, on which were littered more papers, a rack of pipes, and a quaint Chinese tobacco jar.

"Welcome to my humble hearth," said the Chevalier. "Fireless at present, yet warm with the glowing ardour of intellectual sparks that will here be kindled. All things, my child, must have a beginning. Even our acquaintance was subject to that necessity. Here shall you sit at the feet of wisdom, and profit by the vanity of your fellow-creatures. For *they*, my Rosaleen, regard the external points of education as essential. We, who are wiser, can prove they are unimportant."

My glance roved doubtfully from point to point. There was nothing very academical certainly about a dingy lodging-house parlour in a remote part of a city that offered more distinctive places of residence. Yet, the Chevalier's eloquence was sufficient to invest even this humble abode with the glamour of future Collegiate importance. It glowed and sparkled with promised marvels, and I sat spell-bound as usual, listening to rolling periods and flowing speech until he suddenly checked himself by a question of time. From some region a clock had struck twelve. The sound was deep, sonorous, bell-like. He listened, then turned to me.

"I was forgetting your fellow-student," he said. "I will summon her."

He went up to the fireplace and rang the bell. It gave forth a cracked wiry note, that echoed from some back region, and was presently answered by a timid knock.

"Come in," he cried, and forthwith there entered the strangest-looking object I had ever beheld. A stunted childish figure wrapped in a coarse holland apron surmounted by a head of wiry rough hair tied at the top with a bit of faded blue ribbon. A face white and weird, and two eyes of odd colour and assuredly of crooked direction, for they looked aslant if ever eyes did; one seeming to fix me vindictively, and the other to watch him amorously.

"This young—lady," said the Chevalier, with one of his magnificent gestures, "is Miss Polyphemia O'Driscoll, daughter of the once celebrated Honoria Smithson, lost to fame

and an adoring public by an early, and somewhat disastrous marriage. In other words the lady exchanged the stage for the domesticities at the persuasions of an admiring, but unfortunately impecunious compatriot of my own. He gave her a great deal of affection multiplied by a corresponding amount of trouble, chiefly on such anniversaries as bring joy to the Irishman's heart, and—corresponding penalties to his equilibrium. Saint Patrick's Day will serve as illustration. But he was too true a patriot to be incapable of inventing other occasions for celebrating his national idiosyncrasies. Therefore the beautiful and unfortunate Honoria turned her attention to supporting the deficiencies he created. She set up an establishment for the accommodation of those of her own profession (or, for the matter o' that, of any other.) Hence, the fact of my choice of domicile. Patriotism, like nature, makes the whole world kin. Incidentally, Honoria O'Driscoll is not a patriot, except by the accident of marriage. But she is as beneficent to me as if she were. What wonder then that my gratitude should take shape in the form of proffered education to our young friend yonder. Polyphemia, stand straight! Feet out; knees together; shoulders back. No, there's no need to hug that apron. If your hands are not clean they but bespeak a helpful activity for which all in this house have cause to be grateful. Polyphemia, this is your fellow-pupil. In point of age she is your junior; in point of accomplishments you are her's. The Academy opens on the ninth of January. Be prepared to resume your studies, and in the meantime recount specifically what you have learnt."

Polyphemia looked at him, or I imagined she did, shuffled her feet, and gave a spasmodic giggle.

"Ain't 'e a caution?" she said, addressing some vague personality invisible to me. "But I could listen to 'im for hever!"

The Chevalier frowned disapprovingly.

"In spite of all my pains," he observed, "this strange outcome of art and patriotism betrays singular idiosyncrasies. The carpet might be swept of h's as of hairpins. Her aptitude for dropping both is an emblem of her habits of persistence. Polyphemia, when you address me it is not necessary to do so in asides, and

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though I appreciate the compliment of the third person I waive the royal prerogative that it implies. Put aside that engaging embarrassment for the present, and to prove that my restricted efforts have not been wasted, answer the following questions. They are only three, but I think I have been as many months dinning their meaning into your wooden head. Now, attention! Who founded Bath, and why?"

"D'you mean 'im as 'ad the pigs?" she demanded.

"Oh—that fact *has* grounded itself in the soil of your memory. Yes, I did mean the Royal Swineherd of immortal fame. Also, my gentle scholar, when you address me will you remember to say 'Master.' I have told you that before."

"Yes, master, I know you 'av," answered the "gentle scholar."

He resumed. "Passing on from Bladud the Prince to Bladud the King, we reach that point of historic importance when the dynasty of Britain became that of conquering Rome. The date of that Roman conquest, if you please?"

"Anny Dominy four hundred. I always remember them *oughts*, and this 'ouse is number four."

"You confuse the termination with the conquest. No matter. Give me the name of the King crowned at that Abbey whose pinnacles you have beheld a hundred times?"

"John," burst forth the intelligent pupil. "No, I reck'let it warn't 'im. 'E lost 'is crown in the laundry an' assigned Magnus Chartem. It was—no—I can't get it, master."

"Edgar," I said quietly.

She flashed an eye, the green one I think, on me.

"H'Edgar, it was; an' they drowned 'im for it in a tub o' mulberry wine an' so he never smiled again."

"Your facts lack something in point of erudition, Polyphemia," said the Chevalier sadly. "But you are young, and there is room for the—the sorting of facts from the dustbin of fancies. That will do for the present. In other words, you may retire, and inform your estimable mother that I lunch abroad to-day."

If the expressive countenance of the "gentle scholar" could be said to shadow forth disappointment, it did so at this announcement.

"Goin' h'out again? Seems yer always h'out now." She

slurred her words together, and threw a vindictive glance at me. She hurried on—"Mother'd got a chop speshul, an' I was goin' to fry potatoes same as you calls 'chips.' An' now it ain't no use."

"They will serve for a future occasion," said the Chevalier. "Avaunt! In other words—retire. If my Academy were not democratic I should insist upon the formality of a curtsy to this young lady. But as fellow-students you are at liberty to make your own farewells and give your own greetings."

I looked at him, and then at the uncouth figure by the door. A little spark of resentment kindled within my heart at this socialistic overthrow of conditions hitherto respected. I made no sign. Nor did she. She simply went. An unceremonious exit; thrusting her apron round bare, dirty arms, and muttering: "H'Edgar! As if I didn't know *that* without 'er a-tellin' me!"

The Chevalier turned to me. "My child," he said, "I have taught you many things, or none. It matters not. But I want to impress one fact upon you for all time. In the sight of God all men are equal. It is only fools who raise the petty barriers of pride and self-importance between soul and soul. To be human is to be weak. Life may be hard, or may be simple, but it is *life*. A gift shared in common makes all recipients equal. You wear a silk frock and a hat of feathers, and you despise that poor child of toil, that drudge of circumstances, with her bare arms and her coarse apron. But she may possess virtues that you lack, even as you imagine superiorities that she is incapable of achieving. And both of you are as far from the Heart of Life as I myself. You are climbing the years that I have already mounted. Things are to happen for you, that for me have passed into the shadows of 'Might Have Been.' But remember this, that nothing of mental or moral importance can be achieved if the stand-off attitude of Class to Class is not trampled under foot. Genius is the sole dominating force of life. All else is—pothor and plutocracy. Now—let us hence."

He took up his hat and smiled at me. That radiant, all embracing smile which worked like a spell of enchantment on all it warmed and witched. Meekly I followed him out of the dingy room, the dark, poor looking house.

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If he said it was to be the seat of learning, well it would be. Who was I to gainsay it.

I hazarded one question on our homeward way.

"Is she—Polyphemia—your only pupil, besides myself?"

"At present," he said. "I hope you will mutually improve each other."

VIII

A PEEP INTO OTHER DESTINIES

DAYS slipped by.

It was the night of the Ball. Suppressed excitement had reigned all day. From an early hour in the afternoon Aunt Joanna and Fanny had been invisible. I don't know what mysteries were perpetrated behind closed doors. No doubt crimping pins and other aids to nature were requisitioned.

At tea-time, Bridget informed me that "thim two" were not coming down to dinner. She was to send them up a tray to their bedroom.

"As for starch," she went on, "sure, a pound av *that* wint out av the cupboard this morning."

"Starch!" I exclaimed. "What on earth do they want starch for?"

"Whitenin' thimselves. Miss Fanny puts herself into a straight jacket av the stuff. Neck and shoulders and arms. Ye niver did! An' thin 'tis all rubbed off wid shammy, an' the skin looks as white an' polished as marble itself. Oh! the ways av thim! Poor men, if they did but know!"

"What a lot of trouble to take, just for vanity," I observed.

"Vanity is it? Sure, all women folks is vain, Miss Rosaleen, more or less. Preenin' an' paintin', an' smilin' an' blushin' for all the wurld as if they was the angels that men calls thim. More fools they! If they could but see their angels at home, 'twould be a different story."

I meditated over this piece of wisdom. There seemed something unfair about Woman armed for conquest, and making

pretence of being what she only *seemed*. No wonder there were disillusion, quarrels, divorces. Assuredly my brief experience of pretty Fanny Le Suir was anything but angelic. That perhaps made me all the more eager to see her armed *cap à pie* for the subjugation of poor manhood on this eventful night.

When I at last received permission to come up to the bedroom, I stared in amazement at the two radiant figures. But it was not to Fanny that my sop of flattery was administered.

"Oh! Aunt Joanna, you *do* look lovely!" I exclaimed. And, indeed, she did. The rose-coloured tarlatan was very becoming. Her hair had been beautifully dressed, and the arrangement of the wreath suited it. Then, whether from starch, or powder, her skin looked as white and polished as Fanny's, and the faintest touch of pink in her cheeks brightened and softened her expression. Bridget seconded my eulogies. Neither of us said anything to Fanny. She was effective, but had I been able to coin an expression it would have been "meretricious." Too white here; too pink there; too dark of lash; too scarlet of lip; too elaborate of *coiffure*, even though the green wreath had been replaced by a single camellia. Her dress did credit to her clever fingers, falling in graceful folds from her small rounded waist; the bodice was shrouded and softened by clouds of tulle, which enhanced without concealing her full bust and sloping shoulders. She wore a string of pearls round her neck, and another camellia nestled amidst the folds of tulle at her bosom. White gloves, and a small stiff bouquet of the camellias completed her toilette. Aunt Joanna had black velvet at her throat, and carried a bunch of rose-red camellias tied also with long ends of black velvet. The effect of that touch of black was excellent; it caught my fancy. Aunt Theresa had deserted the card tables in the drawing-room to run up and give finishing touches to the respective toilettes. She surveyed them with pardonable pride.

"Not a soul would guess them for home-made," she said, pulling out a train, "settling" a fold, gently touching a curl, or a plait of the elaborate *coiffures*. "Now I hope you'll kill for good this time, and bring home some news. You've had your fill of flirtations. It's time you came to real business."

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"Is that what balls are given for?" I asked. "I thought people went to dance and enjoy themselves!"

"Oh, get out of the way, you little fool!" exclaimed Fanny angrily.

"Where you get your ideas from goodness knows! Are we to go into the drawing-room, Theresa, and show ourselves?" she added, taking a long look in the glass.

"Yes, of course. They're all expecting you."

"It's just time to be off," said Aunt Joanna nervously. "You know how soon the programmes are filled up, Fanny."

"I've no fear of mine," answered Fanny, with a toss of her head, and telling Aunt Theresa to bring her cloak along with her, she floated out of the room followed by her elder sister's admiring eyes.

"I think *you* look much the best," I whispered to Aunt Joanna. "I never thought you were so handsome! I—I do hope Captain Oliver will propose to you."

She flushed scarlet. "Gracious, child! What on earth are you talking about! The idea! Why, he's not—I mean *you've* not—ever—seen him."

"Oh yes, I have. Christmas Day, you know."

"Well, well, you mustn't be saying such things. Men don't propose to ladies simply because they walk and talk with them now and then."

"I don't know anything about men," I said oracularly. "But if he's wise it's *you* he'd choose, not Aunt Fanny."

Then I followed her into the drawing-room, where Fanny was holding a sort of court, everyone hovering around and murmuring admiration. The sickly youth, Adolphus Cutler, was trying nervously to fasten her glove. "Ringlets" gazed with apparent envy at the prospective "Belle of the Ball," as the old General called her. Possibly the poor soul was jealous of youth and good looks and the prospective enjoyment that the evening foretold. Aunt Joanna diverted attention for a moment, but Fanny nipped that disloyalty in the bud by an immediate declaration that they couldn't waste another minute.

Then they went downstairs and put on their cloaks, and were escorted into the waiting "fly" from the livery stables. The

door was closed, and I turned in the narrow hall to find "Ringlets" beside me.

"Do you wish it was you?" I said involuntarily and ungrammatically.

"That I do," she answered. "I should love to be wearing a pretty dress, and going to a ball once more. Every year brings you nearer to enjoyment. Every year takes me further away from it."

"But perhaps balls aren't so very enjoyable," I said. "You mightn't get the partner you wanted, or look as nice in the rooms as you did at home, or meet the person you just wanted to meet. Or—oh! heaps of things might happen to spoil it."

"Yes, they might, and do," she said. "One might paint a pretty picture of 'The Departure and the Return.' I wonder no artist has thought of it."

My fancy caught the idea and followed it up the stairs in her wake. Saw it as a radiant shape fitting in aerial garments; satin shod; moving harmoniously to hymn of youth's morning time; then sombre of aspect, with torn gown, withered flowers, aching head, and aching heart, coming homewards in the grey dawn. Bereft of hope and love. Desolate in spiritual remoteness. It was all quite vivid. Nature played these tricks on me sometimes. Gave to chance words the visible impression of real things; sent me through an opening gate as it were into the actual presence of what fancy had created.

It was no radiant coquette that I beheld returning. It was a sullen, jealous, envious nature smouldering under the smiling sisterly one. It was Frances Le Suir as she knew herself, when on the way home from the ball, Joanna whispered bashfully that Captain Oliver *had* asked her to be his wife. For somehow I knew that that had happened long before the news was out.

Next morning came the announcement.

Aunt Theresa told me. She was overjoyed. The Captain was a good match, and of good family, and had been a popular officer. Also I felt sure that in her secret heart she rejoiced he had had the sense to choose Joanna despite his flutterings around Fanny. That charming person did not appear at breakfast, so

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I was unable to see how the news affected her. The day was nearly over before I saw her. She was in walking dress and going out. Very handsome she looked, but sullen and ill-tempered. I did not dare to ask how she had enjoyed herself. Besides, I was on my way to my now daily visit to Madame Odylle. I longed to tell her the news. Also on the next day I was to begin attendance at the new Academy. I had full store of conversation and excitement before me.

My friendship with the lonely lady of the attics had become firmly established. I had only spoken of it to Aunt Theresa, who had ceased to wonder about her mysterious lodger once she was settled in, and proving a satisfactory tenant. First surprise at that tenant receiving me soon evaporated. "You're the sort that queer things happen to, I think," she said. "But you're to be trusted to find your own level. That was your father and it's you. At times I could almost fancy it was Lucius back again. He and I were always the fondest of each other. But he was a strange boy, there's no denying it."

My questioning elucidated other facts. How Lucius was for ever "dreaming"; his state of mind varying from exaltation to depression. How the moods of nature affected him more than the moods or necessities of his fellow-beings. He had a "strong personality," and was a keen judge of life while all the time probing to its primitive instincts. All this expressed him as my own words could not have done, but my feelings responded so quickly to the description that they supplied actuality. He was still a living presence to me. Dreamland brought him constantly. Sometimes as in my earliest recollections, a being whose kind, strong arms carried to and fro, a restless, fretful child, who could not sleep. Sometimes a still more wonderful companion, telling beautiful stories, reciting wondrous poems in sonorous tones and an unknown language, but always associated with an atmosphere of peace and comfort, enfolding me with arms of love. Thought wove its own spells of companionship during which I told him of daily happenings, and under his guidance still recognized a universe of soul-sympathy. Of one thing I felt sure, and that was that he would have cordially approved of my new friend and instructor. For he, too, was unconventional, and had held the

same views of educational purpose ; that it should be a thing of life and use, not a superficial digest of pedantry.

I had lost some of that sense of loneliness and misery since I had made acquaintance with the wonderous Chevalier. It pleased me to think that the introduction was of set purpose, and that no casual chance had led him to this city or me to this house. My fate and his were destined to be even more closely interwoven than I imagined at the time. Even my brief disjointed records tell me of this impression, and how lasting it was.

I found my usual low chair waiting for me in the firelit room. I received the usual gentle welcome. I burst into an eager announcement of my news. The idea of a real engagement, a prospective marriage were of astonishing interest to me. Nothing of the sort, out of bookland, had come into my experience ; I sought further information. She was always called "Madame," then she must have been married. On that white hand were many rings, but the firelight was too fitful and uncertain for the discovery of a significant one.

Abruptly I put the question. "'Madame' is French for 'Mrs.' isn't it ?"

"*Mais oui, mon enfant*, why do you ask ?"

"Because you are Madame," I said.

There was a long silence. I wondered if I had offended her. I glanced at the bent head in its shrouding veil ; at the white hand on which it rested.

"I . . . I beg your pardon . . . if I ought not to have asked."

"I am not angry, child," she said quickly. "I—I was only thinking of a time long past. Yes, I have been married. I wonder what that word conveys to you ? Something wonderful, life-long, mystic ? A union of two hearts that love ; two lives that cannot exist apart ?"

She laughed—harshly, horribly. Hatred and disillusion mingled in her voice and its sudden passionate confession.

"I thought so—once. How old was I?—Sixteen, I think. But in Russia we are often wives at that age. Well, I have endured bondage, and fought for liberty. It brought a brief delirium of happiness and success. Perhaps, but for this—

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accident, I might have been fool enough to tempt fate again. However, fate would not permit it. Now, that is enough. Tell me of this aunt. It is not the pretty one? The one you dislike?"

"No. It is the second eldest. She is not—young, you know. I mean she must be thirty, almost. Aunt Fanny is twenty-two. And I know there's some seven or eight years between them."

"Then it will mean something serious. I suppose she cares for this—this Captain?"

"I think so. She seemed so very happy about it. He called this afternoon and gave her a beautiful ring. Diamonds. She showed it to me at tea-time."

"And the other, the Beauty, how does she take it?"

"I—don't know. I haven't spoken to her to-day."

Silence again. A longer silence. I gazed into the fire. She sat there at her table. When at last she spoke her voice seemed to reach me from a long distance, or was it only that my own thoughts had travelled far, and she met them on that other plane.

"I have an impression of sorrow, or disaster connected with this house. It is not far off. It is connected with two women and a man. Were he strong—but no man is strong in the hands of a vicious woman. And—it does not end there, the influence, the trouble. The two women are united by a terrible fate. And the weaker one suffers. Always, always she suffers. She can't learn her lesson and accept its meaning. So she suffers as all such blind fools must. They court their own misfortunes."

I found myself trembling and cold. For in my own fancy and in the firelight pictures I had also seemed to see disaster. But the picture had taken the horrid shape of two women fighting, so it seemed, for the possession of one man. Through mist and darkness, and then through phases of some monstrous threatening tragedy the story went on, and wrote itself in fire and blood, and unimaginable horror. The whole thing lived, acted, and died in one of those queer moments that came to me. A moment when what I thought was real became unreal, and life grew unhinged, and chaotic, until such time as normal consciousness returned and the picture would vanish as suddenly as it had come.

To hear that other voice expressing this out of the shadows that enfolded her was an added significance.

I had touched the fringe of a mystery in which she too had a part. Together we had played in a psychic drama transcending actual experience, and including two, as yet, unknown destinies.

After that we could not talk of commonplace things.

IX

MY EDUCATION BEGINS

THE opening day of the Academy was one of those cold, grey days such as signalized my first acquaintance with the city of Bath.

I had brought the date and its importance before Aunt Theresa, with the question as to that "cheque in advance" of which the Chevalier had gently reminded me, at our last meeting. It did not strike me that as my ostensible guardian she had proved somewhat remiss in acquainting herself with the whereabouts, or nature of this novel Academy. She seemed to regard the Chevalier as a sort of tutor, who had taken charge of me, and the sight of a Latin Grammar and some second-hand books on Philosophy, Travel, and History, confirmed this idea.

I described his place of residence by its modern name, and told her the going to and fro was an easy matter, as I knew almost every street in the neighbourhood by this time. This faculty for finding my way about proved to be another inheritance from my father. He need only go to a place once and it was stamped on his memory thenceforth. Aunt Theresa, did suggest that Mickey Donovan should escort me to the school, at least the first day, but I assured her it was unnecessary. She, therefore, wrote the cheque, told me not to lose myself, and saw me set forth with a firm belief that all was well. Looking back at such careless guardianship from the standpoint of present mature years, I can only wonder that her trust was verified. Had the

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Chevalier been a scoundrel, instead of merely the "unfortunate gentleman" he was, I tremble for my fate.

Sometimes, with eyes widely opened to the momentous trivialities that make life all-important, I have asked myself the reason of her blind faith. But I can find no more satisfactory answer than that she was careless of responsibility from habit. To evade issues she never questioned their possibility. Nothing really mattered until it happened. If the happening was disastrous so much the worse; but why anticipate a misfortune in advance?

So with this sort of "God-speed" I set forth for the Via Roma, as I too called it. My heart beat high with expectation. A strap held my books. The collegiate hours were nine-thirty to twelve-thirty. Thus I should be home in time for the midday lunch, which meant my dinner. Two afternoons a week, Wednesday and Saturday, the Chevalier had apportioned as those for "Experimental Peregrinations" for the training of eye, ear, and memory.

"You shall know Bath as no modern High School dullard knows, or could know it. It shall grow with your growth and inspire your views of life, until in return for what it has taught you, you shall teach others. That will be but common gratitude. I shall educate you as much through your imagination as your intellect. You shall go out to the world, my dark Rosaleen, as a nineteenth-century exponent of lost and beautiful faculties. Anyone can read and write, and multiply and divide, as factors of a given result. Not everyone—least of all every woman—can boast an intelligent knowledge of the history of her own times, and the specific city, county, or township where she resides."

It did not occur to me then to enquire the absolute use of such an unusual training. I think if he had said that standing on my head for a certain number of hours was a necessity for acquiring physiological proficiency in the matter of the circulation of the blood, I should have done it. I had the blindest, simplest faith in him. It gives me cause for self-congratulation now at this later period of time to remember that that faith was never misplaced; that I have no single reason to regret it.

But now for this First Day of Academical training.

I entered the dingy passage with some misgiving. The door was opened by the beauteous Polyphemia, resplendent in a bright blue cashmere frock, and with a face shining from soap and water. She greeted me affably. "Good mornin'. I say, h'aint it a lark?"

I answered her with another good morning. But paid no attention to the conclusion of her greeting.

She was not to be discouraged.

"You, an' h'I, scholars! Don't you go for lettin' me down afore 'im again. *H'Edgar*, it was. Bin sayin' of it to myself ever since."

The door on the right of the passage opened suddenly, and the Chevalier welcomed us in, thus cutting short further communications. My first glance showed me how faithfully our instructor had conformed to conventional ideas. A high, wooden desk stood in the centre of the room, and the table was pushed into the window. Two chairs, and some copy-books and a couple of slates gave the requisite touch of speciality to the occasion. He conducted me to one chair, and motioned Polyphemia to the other. Then he proceeded to his desk, and stood up and regarded us thoughtfully.

"There is something—incongruous," he observed. "Ah! I see. Miss Rosaleen will you deposit your hat and—outer garment, on the couch yonder. . . . Yes, that's better. Now, to business! . . . I have here a schedule of certain studies, and the respective days for their due investigation, purpose, and consideration. Each day in the week, of which five are educationally important, and two relatively—independent—I purpose to devote to one or more of these studies. The sixth day is to be observed as an opportunity for recreation. The seventh, I need hardly tell well-brought-up Christian young ladies"—(I heard Polyphemia giggle audibly) "is appointed for attendance on Holy Rites and conventional ceremonies such as make this good land so notable for hypocrisy. Of such matters you shall hear anon. Thus you have before you five days, limited to mornings, in which to note, learn, and intelligently digest such food as the gods dispense from their temple of wisdom. My system of imparting instruc-

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tion is modelled on that of the Greek philosophers. In short, I shall stand here at my desk and deliver myself of such opinions and information as seem warranted by the mental capacity of my scholars. They are at liberty to listen, and make notes, but not to interrupt. At the conclusion of each lecture I shall question them on how much they have understood—I don't say remembered. The one fact is more important than the other. At the end of the week, the fifth day, in fact, according to my academic calendar, I shall not lecture, but question them all"—(I noted the *all*)—"on what they have heard, noted, and comprehended. The higher range of intelligence will naturally receive the largest amount of commendation. The class will address me throughout our demonstrations as 'Master,' or 'Professor.' I prefer the former term. It is more academic. Derivation—*Magister* from *Magnus*—great. Now, having explained my system it remains for me to prove its efficiency. Miss O'Driscoll, you will, for the present, confine yourself to the use of the slate. I have a disastrous recollection of submerged intellectual activities in which ink was the chief factor. So, I fear, has your mother's wash-tub. Miss Le Suir, you are at liberty to exploit penmanship, an it so please you. Ladies and gentlemen—"

Up sprang Miss O'Driscoll; arm waving; face eloquent of excitement.

He stopped.

"Speak on, windmill," he said. "What has happened?"

"Oh, please, sir—Master, I mean, Jeremy Ludd couldn't come. 'Is mother says as 'ow two-an-six a week is too much to take h'off the washin' bill, with twenty-four h'owin' at present."

The Master signed to her to resume her place. "Irrelevant interruptions," he observed, "will take the form of misdemeanours, punishable by bad marks and impositions. Ladies—and *not* gentlemen—we will now formulate our studies by a few remarks on the nature, conditions, and importance of orthography. The derivation of which is *orthos* (Greek) and *grapho* (Latin), meaning the 'correct spelling and syllabication of words.'"

For the next half-hour we had "words" enough. He talked without intermission. Occasionally I made notes, but the charm of his voice and elocution oftener held me too engrossed for such

mundane interruption. As for Polyphemia, she simply put her elbows on the table and rested her chin on the palms of her red, rough hands, and gazed at the speaker in a state of ecstatic absorption. I suppose those flowing sentences and rolling periods were a joy to her as to me. When the Master had talked himself out, he sat down by the fire and lit his pipe, and smoked and read German philosophy. He told us to write what we remembered, and to look up all difficult words in "Ogilvie's Dictionary"; giving derivation and syllabication of each.

In my private opinion this was an admirable method of obtaining the exact signification and definition of meanings as apart from sound. Being left to assort my facts as I pleased, I seized upon all the "big" and uncommon words he had employed. I then ruled two columns. In one I placed the word itself. In the other its etymological root (if ascertainable) and its various meanings.

Polyphemia contented herself with watching me. But when she saw a neat column of pen-and-ink words, she gave a little gasp.

"It h'aint fair," she said. "You're a scholard as it is. I dunno what 'e means 'arf the time, 'cept it's bewtiful, an' I loves to 'ear 'im talk."

I offered to show her my system, and somewhat reluctantly she consented. I ruled her two columns on the slate, and then asked if she could remember anything the Master had said. She considered the point for a moment. Her eyes at various angles, and her tongue in her cheek. Then she seized the slate and with a vast show of energy proceeded to write. After some quarter of an hour's strenuous exertion she showed me the result. This was her contribution to the morning's curriculum :

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Anything to equal her pride and satisfaction in this achievement I have never beheld. Without waiting to consult me she dashed across the room and held up her slate to the Chevalier.

"There, Master! Look! I've done it as well as 'er! You'll give me marks to-day, won't yer?"

The Chevalier put down his book, took the slate from her hand and slowly read its contents.

"As an unaided effort," he said, "this would deserve marks. But I think you have received assistance, Polyphemia. There are signs of order and construction in this masterpiece which have been lacking in former efforts. I say nothing about facts. You have a singular faculty for mixing them up with fallacies. No matter. This is a distinct improvement on your usual slack methods. Marks you shall have. Bring me the book."

She rushed to the table and pulled open a drawer. From a mass of heterogeneous contents she extracted a small black account-book. This she took over to her teacher, and I saw him duly insert certain cryptic signs, after which he handed it back to her.

She clutched it jealously. "There h'aint goin' to be none for 'er, is there?" she exclaimed.

He glanced at me where I sat, watching them. "You hear, Rosaleen? A lesson of sex as well as of orthographical significance! Quite enough for one morning."

He rose. "The class is dismissed," he said. "Take yourself off, Polyphemia, to those regions of usefulness you so adorn. What the English language suffers at your hands is comparatively unimportant by comparison with your skill in cooking a potato. First imported into this country by—whom?"

Polyphemia gazed wildly around; seeming to ask assistance with both eyes at acute angles of helplessness. Finally she gasped—"Julyus Seesar, Master!" and focussed me triumphantly.

"Can you do better than that?" asked the Chevalier. "For our country's sake, I hope so."

"I—I think it was Sir Walter Raleigh on his return from South America," I hazarded.

Up shot Polyphemia's right arm in signification of a desire to correct me.

"Yer said *this* country, Master, not Ameriky. She don't know no more than I do!"

"Let it rest at that," he answered gravely. "*Exit.*"

He waved her to the door. She dropped a quick curtsey, and departed. Then he came to my side and looked at my contribution to the morning's studies.

"Was that your own idea?" he asked, smiling.

I nodded. "It seemed the simplest way of getting at things, and I *do* love a Dictionary."

He laughed. "You will be a credit to my Academy, Rosaleen. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*—which is trite and possibly not specially applicable to present circumstances. Nevertheless, after many wanderings and much suffering, it is pleasant to meet such quick intelligence as your's. God wot I am no true pedagogue since dulness displeases and incompetence irks me. I could break skulls sooner than open them to the calamity of explanation. Let us go hence, and take Nature as our next guide through the labyrinth of perplexing paradoxes which quicken the latent fires of imagination in your young breast. For in this queer wilderness we call Life, each man (and, as a consequence, each woman) who thinks deeply, and feels vividly, lives in a world of his own, apart from and therefore misunderstood by his fellows. No priest, or prophet, shall make such things clear, for even spiritual intelligence has its limits. I could tell you much but not prove it. Words have their uses, as your morning's lesson has taught you. But their best use is not to express thought but conceal it. How bewildered you look! I am not mad, my Irish maid, only whimsical. Come, let us go forth into the world of Realities!"

And thus ended my first experience of the Chevalier's system of education.

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The world of Realities !

That expression haunted me for long, long years, during which I was trying to argue out my own limitations.

The beautiful things, the best things, the true things, were they *real* or imaginary ? All my life I had worshipped beauty in whatever form it appeared to me. A lovely face ; the soul-story of happiness ; a line of poetry ; a picture that spoke out the artist's meaning ; a strain of music, the rolling, sonorous notes of a great organ, these were things to thrill my heart, or draw sudden tears to my eyes. They expressed feelings at once inexpressible and overwhelming. So it is that I thank the Fates in these later days for sending me such a teacher and companion as the Chevalier.

His arresting personality met me on the threshold of uncertainty : at the crucial moment when the swaddling bands of childhood are being loosened by the growing forces of the life within.

That desolate day when I came in grey mood to a Grey City was illuminated henceforth by this one memory. " How otherwise should *we* have met ? "

These are the questions one asks oneself in later days of illumination ; when surprise has given place to acceptance, and perplexity is dominated by conviction.

Terence O'Shaughnessy whom the world called Rogue and Humbug, could never have seemed anything to me but the paradoxical ardent being whose individuality lifted him clear out of the ruck of commonplace men. Of vigorous health, caring nothing for conventionality, living as he chose, and accepting life as a means to an end, but not as the end, he became the arbiter of my fortunes as easily as if he had stepped ready-made into their circle of helplessness.

The moods of nature flamed through him and were translated to me until he found the language had become intelligible. He pushed open the gateway of life's inner meanings and led me, trembling, to the threshold.

To him nothing was unimportant. Few things insignificant. Had ever woman-child so wonderful a teacher ! Could a small cramped feminine soul in that age of conventional cramping ever have expanded into fuller being but for that teacher.

Well might I call him "Master." For in the strict sense of the word, apart from whimsicality, and vagaries of mood and temperament, he was essentially masterful. A soldier of fortune, a useless citizen, as the world interprets the uses of its wealth-goaded slaves, so he swept into my circle of life, and across the small tyrannies and exactions that circumscribed it.

What I might have been but for him, I cannot say. What he made me my soul knows, and his—perhaps ?

X

IN WHICH A GIFT AND A PRESENTIMENT MAKE WAY FOR
THE UNEXPECTED . . .

DAYS, weeks, drifted by.

I lived in a world of my own, little affected by the crude happenings under my unseeing eyes. Yet impressions were vivid. Each one sharply cut; decisive; fitting into place. Thrust into store-rooms of the mind, there to lie till time, or occasion, summoned them forth. Wonderful walks, talks, experiences. Some of the student life; some of the home circle. Dull, cold evenings when I would sit for hours in the parlour, engrossed with a book, or idling with a piece of sewing. Occasions when I caught fragments of conversation. Queer words—such as *trousseau*, *lingerie*, *moirés*, *tabliers*—would strike my ears, already getting accustomed to French expressions through the medium of Madame Odylle, who was teaching me the language. Thus I would discover that Aunts Theresa and Joanna were deep in questions of wedding preparations. The Wedding, they always called it.

A woman, evidently, could not get married "decently" without this *trousseau*. It represented clothes and clothing of all sorts and conditions. It would seem as if up to that time she had possessed no wearing apparel at all, so many and so varied were her new acquisitions. Questions of ways and means entered

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largely into the matter. I also heard about the wedding breakfast, and how it must be limited to a specified sum unless, indeed, Captain Oliver himself should choose to send it in. From these discussions Fanny was generally absent. If she came into the room the subject would be dropped immediately.

I wondered why? But curiosity was not so ardent as to prevent my return to my beloved books. Bulwer Lytton had been placed at my disposal. His works standing in Aunt Theresa's opinion for good "improving" reading, besides teaching me history in an agreeable and diluted fashion.

Fanny was more than usually unamiable at this time. I never received any greeting save a scowl, or a rough push, and command to get out of her way. She gave no help in all the cutting-out, and fittings, and machining that went on, and which seemed prolific of neat piles of under-garments, put aside and counted carefully on completion.

The ceremony itself was spoken of as "summer-time." Incidentally I learnt that Captain Oliver had left the army on his father's death as he had "come into" a nice little property in Monmouthshire. He was fond of hunting and shooting, and intended to live the life of a "country gentleman."

Drifting back to "Last Days of Pompeii," I would again be arrested by the cessation of the machine, and further conversation. A question perhaps.

"He wasn't here last night, Joanna?"

"No. He was engaged, he told me."

"And what about to-night?"

"After dinner, he said he'd drop in, for some music."

"Fanny's again?"

"Well, what of it? He likes singing, and I wouldn't be playing 'The Maiden's Prayer,' or 'The Last Rose of Summer' now."

"But you can sing, too?"

"Those old Irish ballads. He doesn't care for them. German and Italian—now?"

"Fanny's Italian!" laughed Aunt Theresa scornfully.

"It's brilliant, and he accompanies her so well."

"Yes, he does that. I'm not sure, Joanna, that it's quite wise

of you to let him see so much of her. Specially evenings. She always looks her best then. Have you noticed how she's taken to dress up every night. The old blue gown was good enough for us till the Captain took to dropping in."

"Oh! what matter. She's a born flirt. He knows that. He had a sample of her before he proposed to me."

Queer talk this. It distracted me for a time. I was storing impressions of the life of womanhood. Those early days of "betrothal" (I liked that good old-fashioned word) with all their flutter of attentions, meetings, presents, love-letters. The preparations for a new existence; a wholly strange and unprecedented one. Aunt Joanna had become important to me. She represented that mystery of male conquest implied by "engagement." And she took it all with such complacency! I had even seen her go out to walk with her lover in an old bonnet, and gloves that showed her finger-tips. But I remembered with sudden uneasiness that on several occasions when I had been coming home from my Wednesday or Saturday walks, I had come across Fanny either talking to, or walking with her future brother-in-law. She was always beautifully dressed, and wearing most becoming hats. She either did not see me, or would not. That fact did not trouble me at all. But when fragments of talk reached me as distinct impressions of events that were going on around, I remembered those meetings, as well as a certain furtive air about the two. A preference for the dark side of a street; the shadowy archway of a bridge.

A born flirt! Whatever that meant it was something untrustworthy. Momentous, too, when associated with arts of beauty much adorned; with syren tricks of song, glance, participation in an accomplishment shared in common. All factors in an art in which "somebody" was well versed.

I listened with beating heart, nervously desirous of saying something that also meant warning. Yet I told myself warnings were surely not needed where affairs had advanced far enough for rings and wedding bells.

One evening during such a discussion the delinquent herself swept in. Bright of glance, flushed with air and exercise; well dressed, well gloved, smart of foot-wear.

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Essentials these. Means to an end. Something of feminine equipment which Madame Odylle had declared Englishwomen sadly lacked. She talked much of France now, and tried to make me speak the language with her, declaring it made her happy to use and hear that familiar tongue. "*Bien ganté, bien chaussée,*" expressed Mademoiselle Frances on this occasion, set off her careful toilette and imperious manner, and even held me under the spell of admiration she evoked.

Certainly by contrast poor Aunt Joanna suffered badly. She was untidy and dishevelled; her gown was old, and her collar dirty. She had been working for hours, and had postponed dressing until as near dinner-time as possible.

"George is here," said Fanny abruptly. "He wants to see you a minute. He can't wait."

"George!" Aunt Joanna sprang to her feet, crimson and confused. "Oh! why on earth did you bring him in? I'm not fit to be seen!"

"You never are fit to be seen—in the house! You'd best let him get used to it."

She turned to the door. "You've not time to dress. He's in a great hurry. He has to go away to-night, or to-morrow morning."

"Go away!" Poor Joanna turned pale. "Why, in the world? What's happened?"

Fanny tossed her head. "Better ask him—Oh, why here he is!"

She drew back, and Captain Oliver came in.

"Please, *please* forgive my disturbing you," he said in his pleasant English voice. "I've had bad news. I must leave Bath at once. My mother has been taken ill. They've sent for me."

"Oh—I'm so sorry!" Joanna forgot all about her appearance. Whether he noticed it he gave no sign. "I hope it's not serious?" she added.

"I'm afraid it is," he said. "The message says: '*come at once.*'" He glanced round at the untidy room. "I see you're all busy. I won't detain you. But I thought it better to come than to write."

"Is it to-night you're going? Can you get a train?" asked Aunt Theresa.

"Yes, there's one at ten-thirty. It means a lot of changing, but it will have to do." His eye fell on me. "Oh, Rosaleen, I wanted to see you. You're fond of dogs, you told me. I've found a queer little mongrel fellow, he followed me to my lodgings a week ago, and I don't know what to do with him. I offered him to—Fanny" (their eyes met), "but she says she can't be bothered with animals. Would you take him? He's very well behaved, and not a bit of trouble, and so intelligent and affectionate."

I jumped up from my chair. "Oh! I'd love to have a dog of my own again! I had to leave three behind me when I left Ireland. Oh, Aunt Theresa, may I?"

"I don't care for dogs myself," she said. "But if he'll stay in the garden, and not bother us——"

"He shan't bother you! I'll look after him!" I exclaimed. "When will he come?" I asked the Captain.

"He's at the front door—now. I'll call him in, if I may?"

He went back to the door. I followed. Fanny was close to him and they went out together. Aunt Joanna rushed to the glass to straighten her hair. As I neared the front door Fanny tried to open it. She fumbled a moment with the lock. I heard a hurried whisper. It was something like—"Burning my boats, you see."

Following the words came a little soft laugh, and a clasp of hands, as she drew the door wide. I wondered what they meant; "burning boats." It sounded odd. But I paid no heed to further doings, for a little shaggy animal dashed in with a yelp of welcome, and began to jump and bark round his master with every sign of delight.

"Poor little beggar! There, there, be quiet now! You must learn to behave yourself. . . . Come here! This is your new mistress. You've got to stay with her."

He led the little creature up to me. "There, Rosaleen, be good to him. He'll repay you. He's as faithful as——"

He paused. Fanny looked at him. "As few men are," he muttered, and glanced hurriedly down the hall.

"Oh! She won't come out, don't be afraid," said Fanny.

"I must go back and say good-bye."

"I suppose so. I . . . I'll slip down the street and wait. They'll think I've gone to my room."

I was on my knees caressing the little dog, but I heard them. Fanny always treated me more or less as an unintelligent block of wood. Possibly she never dreamt that I caught her words, or read any special meaning into them.

The Captain bent down and patted my head. "You'll be a good little girl and take care of him, won't you?"

"Indeed, I will," I said.

"His name is Dodger," he continued, as he walked back to the little parlour.

Aunt Theresa bade him formal farewell, with some diplomatic excuse, and made me a sign to do the same. I should have liked to linger for a few moments and witness a "real" lover's parting. However, a peremptory—"Go and have your tea, Rosaleen," sent me downstairs in company with the Dodger, who showed no disinclination to follow me.

The kitchen greeted the new-comer very kindly. Biddy loved dogs—"the craythurs," and Mickey Donovan opined there was "some sinse in the baste, seein' he could stand on his hind-legs, just like any Christian."

I petted the little creature, and gave him some scraps of meat and arranged where he was to sleep. Not till I actually possessed a small living pet of my own did I realize how I had longed for one. The Irish setters had been common property—household dogs—but the Dodger was exclusively mine. Bridget promised he should sleep in the kitchen, and Mickey produced an old wooden box and filled it with straw, and this was shown to my little mongrel as an inducement to stop below. However, as soon as I had finished my tea he decided to accompany me.

"I suppose I can take him upstairs?" I said to Mickey.

"Why not? Seein' he's your own dog."

"Don't let Miss Fanny catch sight av him," cautioned Bridget.

"She's that cruel to dumb craythurs!"

I called the Dodger by name and he came at once. I was wondering if Madame Odyllé would object to him. It was my time for the attics, and I had no mind to leave my little friend to

the risk of open doors and escape. I therefore took him in my arms and carried him off. As I passed the door of Fanny's room I saw a light burning.

"So she has returned," I thought.

I listened for a moment but heard only the opening and shutting of drawers, and a rustling of papers. I wondered what she was doing. It wanted about an hour of dinner-time. It seemed very early to be preparing for it. Treading softly and holding the little dog very close, I crept up the stairs. If she heard me and came out, I felt sure the Dodger would be banished. However, her door remained closed and I went on.

"Do you object to dogs?" I asked, as I peeped into Madame Odylle's now familiar sanctum.

She looked up. "It is you, *mon enfant!* No, I love all animals. Why do you ask?"

"I have had a present," I said, coming in and closing the door. "*Un cadeau*, is it not? A *petit chien* to be all my own. Isn't he sweet? I don't know the adjective."

"*Gentil. Mais oui, un charmant petit chien!* Would he come to me, I wonder?"

I put the Dodger down, and directed his attention to the lady he was visiting. He manifested quite a friendly interest in her, and during my lesson he lay on the rug before the fire without disturbing us at all. The lesson over, Madame enquired for the news of the day, and the progress of the Academy. That was always a subject of absorbing interest to her.

"But how came Monsieur le Capitaine to give the little dog to you, not to his fiancée?" she enquired at length.

"Perhaps he thought he would be company for me. And he's not a valuable dog; not one to make a present of."

"And he departs—to-night, you say?"

"Yes. He had bad news, his mother is ill. I hope she won't die," I added suddenly. "Because that will postpone the wedding, and I am to be bridesmaid, you know. How does one say that?"

"*Demoiselle d'honneur.* That would be a new experience. You look forward to it?"

"I'd love to see a *real* wedding. There are only to be two of us, brides—I mean *demoiselles d'honneur*. Fanny and I. I suppose she won't be very amiable on the occasion."

There was a long silence. The little dog crept up to me and laid his head on my lap. I stroked it and talked softly to him. I had learnt by now not to interrupt these long silences which so often occurred.

Presently, Madame moved. "Rosaleen—" she began; then broke off, and went on tracing lines on the paper before her.

I murmured: "*Oui, Madame.*"

"I hardly know how to speak of it," she said slowly. "It is not easy. All this week—but especially to-day—I have had a sense of evil impending. It points to someone in this house. Not myself. I could bear that with composure. One trouble more or less, what does it matter? No. It is to one of you—in the house."

"But that's *it!*" I cried eagerly. "This parting, I mean, Captain Oliver's going away. Naturally it grieves Aunt Joanna, and she is troubled."

"If it were only that!" she said. "But I feel treachery and sorrow all around."

She made a gesture of distress, and drew her veil more closely about her. "It has spoilt my work—everything. I almost dreaded your coming. Did they part as—as lovers? There was no quarrel, difference, *désaccord*, as one says? Nothing of a—separation of interests?"

I was puzzled.

"I cannot say, Madame. You see, I was out of the room."

I caught my breath. I remembered that hurried whisper. Fanny's saying that she would wait for him down the street.

"Say what it is you have? There *is* something," she said quickly.

"What does it mean, Madame, to 'burn one's boats?' It is a proverb, but what does it really *mean*?"

"Burn one's boats!" she exclaimed. "Who then has said that?"

"I thought I heard the Captain say it. It sounded so—so odd."

"But, yes. It does sound odd, taken apart from why or wherefore of the saying. It is that he casts off, cuts adrift, as it were, from some sure thing. The proverb is of Latin origin. '*Vestigia nulla retrorsum*,' 'he has burned the bridges that carried him over.' Your, your *Capitaine*, he said *this*?"

"Yes—to Fanny."

Again she seemed lost in thought. "One might think he contemplated some desperate step. Yet why should he?" she said at last. "Only—never, *never* have I trusted that young aunt, the pretty one."

"But she could do nothing now?" I questioned. "When an engagement is announced, is it not sure, like a marriage—almost?"

"Nothing is sure that is between a man and a woman," she said bitterly. "And in the case of this, there are two women."

"But would he—would she—I mean could they prevent Aunt Joanna from marrying him—now that the marriage day is fixed? Why to-night she was planning her wedding-dress. Pale grey satin and a tulle veil over a wreath of orange blossoms."

"Foolish one! Do you count so much on the outward forms? There have been marriages broken off at the very door of the church. There have been others, nullified by after conduct. What contract in the world is there to hold two human beings indissolubly one? Not even love, for that is forsworn again and again. Not human laws, nor human will. But these are not subjects for your young ears, *chérie*. Take you the little dog, and depart now. My heart is heavy with foreboding. Let us hope it is not on this house that the blow falls."

I rose. I always left at the first hint of dismissal. The little dog looked up at me, then at the shrouded figure by the table, and suddenly without rhyme or reason, so it seemed, threw back his head and gave vent to a low melancholy howl.

She started. "Ah, hush! Be tranquil, *p'tit chien!*" she cried. "What has come to thee?"

I laid my hand on his head. The brown eyes looked pathetically up to mine.

"Perhaps he is crying for his master," I said. "He must miss him. I cannot be the same, at first."

"No, it is not that," she said hurriedly. "He, too, scents

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misfortune. It is in the air. Outside us. It advances. It is not to be explained. But I know. I always know. I read my own fate, but I was not wise enough to avert it."

"Oh! Couldn't you avert—this?" I cried desperately, for the gloom of the room, and her strange words, and the little dog's plaintive cry had affected my nerves also.

"Am I God!" she cried. "To work miracles; avert a self-wrought catastrophe! Man works his own sorrows by his own actions. Let none dream of compromise when the false step is taken. Now go, child. Go! If I am a false prophet none will rejoice more than I in this humble room. But, something tells me I shall not—rejoice."

XI

. . . AND THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

I SLEPT soundly despite those warnings.

My life, as I have said, had now fallen into a groove of its own. It was fully occupied and, in a way, independent. My aunts seemed to take it for granted that I went to a school in the ordinary acceptance of the word. To Aunt Theresa alone I had confided the secret of my French lessons. The fact that there was nothing to pay for them appealed to her. She said I was indeed fortunate, and must make the most of my opportunities. My education was progressing. There were still two branches lacking. Dancing and music. But she was of opinion that there was plenty of time for these accomplishments. There had been a suggestion of Aunt Joanna superintending a daily practise of scales and Kalkbrenner's exercises, but it had fallen through as her time never suited mine, and *both* had to wait upon the vacancy of the drawing-room. I mention all this to explain a certain liberty of action at once unconventional and unopposed.

On the morning after the "Dodger's" appearance on the scene, I rose earlier than usual. But Mickey's kindness anticipated my desire. He led the little animal up to my door and

encouraged him to signify his presence by a sharp, peremptory bark. Needless to say, he was at once admitted, and made himself at home during the conclusion of my toilet. I had determined to take him to and fro to school every day, and informed him of that fact, as he sat with head held knowingly to one side, and eyes attentive to my every movement. For fear he should make a noise I carried him in my arms down the passage. As I passed Aunt Fanny's door I was surprised to see a sheet of paper pinned conspicuously upon it. Going up closer I read in large bold writing :

“DO NOT KNOCK OR DISTURB, TILL I RING.”

The notice surprised me. It was not as if she had been out at a dance, or even to a concert at the Assembly Rooms. I went downstairs for breakfast, and then consulted Bridget on the matter.

“Oh! 'tis one of her tantrums likely as not. She wint to bed early enough! Scarcely stayed tin minutes in the drawing-room! Av coorse, though, there's rayson for *that*.”

I looked up from my porridge, of which the Dodger was also partaking in a separate saucer. “What reason?”

“Niver you mind, Miss Rosaleen. Best you shouldn't know what black-hearted treachery there is in the world! Thim as has eyes can see, but the blindness of most folks—'tis surprisin'!”

I said no more. Fanny's tempers and tantrums were of such constant occurrence that I had ceased to ask their reason. Any, or none at all, would serve the purpose of “words” with her sisters or myself.

Breakfast over, I hastened off with my books and my little companion to the Academy. It remained still in its primitive condition. Two scholars; a Master, and a System. But to me it was still delightful, as were those two afternoons a week dedicated to “topographical instruction.”

I had informed the Chevalier that I was learning French, and he immediately added *that* language to his schedule, in order, as he said, that Polyphemia should have equal chances of proficiency.

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Polyphemia's efforts at mastering a foreign pronunciation were enough, he confessed, to make the gods weep, yet he tried to drive it into her. English word, then French word, then translation. It seemed to me that her whole physiognomy was concerned with the labour of expression. Eyes, nose, lips, tongue would help in the triumphant splutter of "*Wee, Mongseer, je savey.*"

Occasionally she would use the "*Mongseer*" as prefix instead of the academical "*Master.*" Then—Oh! the triumphant glance at me, or rather at the place where her actual vision focussed me. It was as much as to say, "Got the better of you *that* time!"

A memorable day when she mastered a first phrase of salutation. "*Bong jure, Mongseer. Bong jure, Mader-m'zelle.*" It signaled this present occasion. She spent the rest of the morning wreathed in complacent smiles, or gazing critically at her slate on which the words had to be written letter by letter to assure memory of their existence.

The professor talked French history that morning. He gave personal experiences of the late war. I have a distinct recollection of his saying it was a senseless and brutal thing. Wholesale murder for which the blessing of the Almighty was profanely asked, and blatantly advertised. To those who knew—

"Well, well, *mes enfants*, it is not good hearing for young and tender hearts. We will say no more."

And then followed his pipe and his chair, and my exercise book, and Polyphemia's scratching pencil. Outside, the gleam of blue in a February sky. A twitter of bird life prophetic of spring. Inside, industry and peace.

The Dodger waxed impatient on that first day of instruction. The Chevalier said he needed training. He persisted in addressing him as a new pupil. He talked so quaintly and fluently to the little animal that my pen grew idle for sheer joy of listening.

It was a Wednesday and, therefore, the day for our walk. Prior Park was to be our destination.

"Can I bring him too?" I asked the Chevalier, as he at last permitted the Dodger to resume a normal attitude. He had been sitting up to hear the lecture.

"Bring your dog? Of course. The only permissible *tertium*

quid in excursions such as ours, is a four-footed ally such as this!"

Polyphemia sniffed. She greatly disapproved of those walks. I am sure she was convinced that they gave me an unfair advantage over her, and that my greater proficiency was entirely due to that fact.

On this occasion she ventured a protest. "Yer said as I could come one of these days."

"Did I? That was rash, or possibly a bribe. 'One of these days' may mean any day in the far future. Look forward to it, Polyphemia, as an incentive; a goal to sluggish ambition; the laurel wreath of conquest crowning supreme efforts. Now, away with books and papers. We have finished our studies for to-day. You will try and remember, Polyphemia, that Henry the First did *not* conquer England at the battle of Agincourt. And that the mastery of a primitive phrase of salutation does not necessarily imply a mastery of the whole French language. Your attitude this morning would lead an unenlightened stranger to suppose it did."

"Mother says she don't see no use in my learnin' a furrin' language," observed Polyphemia, gathering up books and papers with wholesale want of discrimination. "Besides, ye've put it on as a h'extry. She says it h'aint 'er idear of balancin' up accounts."

"I think I have before suggested that I prefer messages from your esteemed mother conveyed by medium of pen and ink, not word of mouth," said the Chevalier gently. "Arithmetic is not her strong point. Otherwise she would see, as I do, that the balance of benefits accruing from our arrangement is really in *her* favour. Tell her so, my child, and also request her to keep her kitchen door shut when onions are so much in evidence as they are to-day."

He turned to me. "I will see you home, Rosaleen, and lunch at Christopher's. You can meet me at our usual place and time."

Poor Polyphemia, so crestfallen, and ignorant! And yet, I fear, I was too selfish in those days to waste a thought on you.

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I bade the Chevalier good-bye at the Bridge and went thoughtfully up to the house and rang the bell. It was not answered very quickly. I rang again. Someone came to the area door and looked up the steps. It was "poor Mary."

"Will you come down this way, miss," she called. "I'm not fit to open the door."

She never was fit. But I wondered what Mickey was about?

I ran down the steps, and then into the kitchen. Signs of unusual confusion and untidiness met my eyes on all sides. Bridget was nowhere to be seen, nor Mickey.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked.

"Matter is it? Sure, the house is upsey down. Miss Fanny's gone!"

"What?"

I stared at my informant, wondering if her small amount of wits had deserted her.

"Gone—where?"

"Nobody knows. Biddy's with Miss Joanna, and Mickey's gone out wid a tellygram. And Miss Theresa she's like mad since she found it out."

"Found out—what?"

"Sure there was no one in the room. Nor yet hadn't been, not all the night."

I stared at the girl in absolute amazement. "No one—in the room? Aunt Fanny's room?"

"Yes, miss. An' the bed niver slep in, an' that paper pinned to the door an' all!"

I remembered that paper. Why, what a cunning trick it was. Yet why had Fanny run away, and where? But Mary's addled brains could give no account of things. I sent the dog into the garden, and ran upstairs to make my own discoveries. First of all I looked into the parlour. No one was there. Only a litter of needlework, as usual, seeming to have been suddenly deserted. Upstairs I went to Aunt Theresa's bedroom. Here I was arrested by sounds of violent weeping. Sobs, moans, laments. Bridget's voice soothing, and Aunt Theresa's reprimanding.

I pushed open the door. "What on earth is the matter?" I cried.

"Shut the door for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Aunt Theresa. "We don't want the whole house coming in! Joanna, *do* try and compose yourself. What on earth is the good of going on like that!"

But she might as well have spoken to the bedpost. Joanna was lying on the big bed they shared, her face swollen and stained with crying, her hair all loosened and hanging about her neck. A pitiful distraught object!

"There, there, Miss Joanna, don't take on so," cried Bridget, who was applying eau-de-Cologne, and smelling-salts, and consolation alternately. "What's the good at all! Making yourself sick, an' upsettin' us all!"

Then she caught sight of me. "Glory be! Miss Theresa, who's goin' to get the lunch? It must be nigh on one o'clock, if Miss Rosaleen is here, an' not a purtaty skinned yet!"

"You must go—Bridget. I'll see to her. Joanna, *do* for goodness' sake try and stop crying. Terrifying the child and all! Surely you don't want the whole house to know of our disgrace."

"Disgrace! Yes, it *is* disgrace," moaned Aunt Joanna. "And didn't I always say she'd be doing us a mischief, fiend that she is! But, oh! this is worse than the worst I ever imagined."

"Sure, an' it's bad enough!" murmured Bridget, handing the smelling-salts to Aunt Theresa. "But I'd wait to larn what she raily *has* done afore I'd work meself into a fayver, which is what you're doing, Miss Joanna, dear."

"You must go and get some sort of lunch, Bridget," said Aunt Theresa. "I'll have to come down, and make excuses. I can say you're ill, Joanna."

"Oh, don't leave me alone, Theresa! I won't be left alone!" moaned the sufferer, sitting up suddenly and gazing round the room. "Ah! my heart's broken, that it is. Treachery, deceit. Oh! the villains! One as bad as the other. Oh! I'll never hold my head up again in the place! Never! Never!"

"Oh yes, you will. Your pride will help you. You wouldn't be showing any man you *care*, when he throws you aside like an old glove! That's just what he's done."

"It's not his fault. It's her's. The deceitful, tricking, lying wretch!"

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She pronounced each word viciously as she dabbed her swollen eyelids with a damp handkerchief. "He—he—was always a poor weak fool, and she got round him. She was jealous, Theresa—you know she was. Jealous that—that I was to be married first."

"Well, you needn't be envying her if she *has* taken precedence," said Aunt Theresa. "A sorry bed she's made for herself! Never yet did a bad action bring any good of itself. We know what she is. We've had twenty-two years of her. I pity George Oliver when he's had as many—weeks."

"But what good will that do *me*?" moaned Aunt Joanna. "My last chance and all! And I was fond of him, Theresa; you know that. And he—he said he'd never cared for any woman as he did for—me!"

"Oh, men's lies!" snapped Aunt Theresa. "They're all saying the same things, and meaning none of them. Now, my dear girl, *do* be sensible. Perhaps, after all, she didn't go off with him."

"Didn't? Didn't—go off? Wasn't there the letter? Oh! the vile deceitful man, writing to her, and pretending to love me. . . . No, Theresa, it's no use saying things are better than they seem. They're worse. A thousand times worse!"

A fresh burst of sobs choked her voice. I came forward, all sympathy.

"It's Aunt Fanny who's gone, isn't it? And with Captain Oliver?"

"How did you know?" snapped Aunt Theresa.

"You've been saying it, in a way, all this time. Besides, I've met them so often lately, walking and talking; and once up there by the Sydney Gardens. I wondered about it, but I did not like to tell you."

"Oh, if you only had," cried Joanna wildly. "Oh, if even yesterday I'd suspected. But I was such a blind fool! I believed all he said. His mother's illness—her message—and all the time——"

"Wasn't it true?" I faltered.

"True! Not a word of it! They'd planned to go off together, and a fine start they've had. I've telegraphed to his mother

though. I was determined she should know the shameful trick. If he dares to take her there—as his wife——”

“Are they *married*?” I questioned. “Could they be? Already?”

For to my ignorance it seemed impossible that so important and difficult a thing as the marriage ceremony could be planned and carried out in this abrupt fashion.

“By now, I expect they are,” said Aunt Theresa. “She left a letter saying so.”

“A Registrar’s office!” cried Aunt Joanna. “A nice dirty hole-and-corner affair for a Le Suir to be mixed up with! Oh, my head! It’s just distracted. What on earth I’ll do, goodness only knows!”

Thus she made her moan. Thus came to me the first revelation of human treachery and hypocrisy, such as shadow many a domestic hearth. Bit by bit the whole sordid story came out. Fanny had planned it with wonderful skill. She had gone up to her room after dinner, pretending she had a headache. Then changed into a walking-dress, packed a small handbag with a few necessaries, and slipped out of the house. She left her box packed and locked, “to be sent on” when she should forward address. This was the cool message appended as postscript to the information in her letter:

“I am going away to be married to Captain Oliver. He loved me best, after all.”

The paper lay there on the bed as poor Joanna had flung it after reading its contents. She had grown alarmed at no sign of life from Fanny’s room, and after much knocking the flimsy lock had been burst open. As “poor Mary” had told me, the bed had never been slept in. The trunk was there packed, strapped, and impudently *addressed* “Mrs. George Oliver.” On the dressing-table was that heartless letter left for Joanna. I could scarcely believe that anyone could act so basely. Least of all a sister to another sister. Much as I had disliked and distrusted Fanny my wildest imagination could not have pictured her traitress, robber of her sister’s happiness. Ruthless of scandal

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to come, only concerned with her own selfish vanity. For not for one moment did I believe she loved this man. Only she did not want her sister to have him. That was the simple truth. That was what Bridget had seen, and what I had dimly suspected. It was what Aunt Joanna herself had now to acknowledge in shame and bitterness of betrayal.

That was a terrible day. A landmark in my young memory.

I did not go out for my walk, and when the Chevalier called to know the reason I slipped downstairs to say there was illness in the house and I had not the heart to leave my aunts. He asked no questions. He only looked at my face; disturbed and tearful I know it must have been.

"Troubles come to all, my child," he said gently. "I regret they are ill-mannered enough to pay you so early a visit. I shall hope to see you to-morrow. Meantime, be of good cheer if you can. What *has* happened cannot happen again, if that is any consolation."

In a way it was. I said it to myself over and over again.

This, at all events, could not re-happen. This horrible day, this tragedy of tears and treachery and shame.

Worn and exhausted poor Aunt Joanna fell asleep at last. Tired out with excitement Aunt Theresa threw herself on the couch. No reply had come to that telegram, nor any news of the eloping couple.

"And what on earth to tell them downstairs I don't know!" cried Aunt Theresa desperately. "The news will be all over Bath to-morrow, for certain. A nice disgrace, and we—thought so much of! Surely a judgment will fall on Fanny for this! She deserves it if ever anyone did!"

I slipped away and out of the room, wondering what exactly a "judgment" was, and if it always did fall on those who deserved it.

I found my poor forgotten little dog scratching forlornly at my door. I took him up in my arms and together we went up to the attics. I felt I must tell Madame Odylle that her presentiment of evil to fall on the household had indeed been verified.

XII

IN WHICH SPRING-TIME RECALLS A ROMANCE OF VIOLETS

MADAME ODYLLE listened to my story in absolute silence.

I could but suppose she had felt too sure of her presentiment to be surprised at its truth. When at last I said, "I wonder how you knew?" she gave a long, deep sigh.

"We mortals are very dense as long as the physical side is of paramount importance. But sometimes accident kills out one function, and quickens another. It is only since I was cut off from the outer world that I have discovered there is an inner and more satisfying one. Civilization, human companionship, are not of vital necessity. The littleness of mere existence becomes more evident every day one exists."

This was a little deep for me. But she had strange moods, this strange woman. And I had learnt to wait on them, or their explanation, with the interest of an explorer in a strange land.

"It all looks so trivial to me," she went on. "This human pother over vanities, gains, success! No *true* feeling is in any way concerned with the sordid tragedies of this world. Your aunt simply accepted marriage as a means to an end. Her sister set herself to avenge wounded vanity by outwitting her. Neither of them stand out well in the matter. But—Joanna—is it not? will be the happier of the two. As for the man——"

She made a gesture of contempt. "A weak fool playing fast and loose with inclination and honour. Men of his sort only judge by externals. To them women are toys. Something to give presents to; to dress, adore, flatter. But the soul, the heart, play no part in any of these attractions. They deny responsibility though they exact it. A poor bargain this girl has made. Little she reckons of it—or he."

I wondered how she could foretell that? Did one read the future by the present, adding fact to fact, passing from what *had* been to what might? It seemed very mysterious, this faculty

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of insight, or rather it seemed so then. In the years to come I also was to learn that there were "more things in heaven and earth" than ordinary vision focussed, or material minds concerned themselves to discover. But in those early days it was all mystic, wonderful, inexplicable.

I can still go back in memory to that shadowy room, that tragic figure. I hear that low murmuring voice; follow the lead of new bewildering thoughts. And all the time I was learning; curiosity helping imagination. Building up by every thought and every theory a new fabric of dreams more beautiful than life, more ardent than art; more soul-satisfying than the fallacies of human creeds, sanctified by centuries of human error.

A long, gloomy week followed Fanny's elopement. Aunt Joanna took to her bed, and spent unprofitable hours in alternately bewailing her own fate and abusing the marplot whom she blamed for it. Suffering martyr, deeply wronged and injured woman, was her pose. I grew a little weary of those endless jeremiads, those prophesies of disaster to the sinner.

To my young ideas the house and home were well rid of Fanny. Her tempers and tantrums had been a perpetual source of disturbance. Now we were happily free of both presence and disturbance. But Joanna hugged her grievance as if she loved it. Dressed it up in many forms. Poured out Cassandra-like lamentations one moment, congratulated herself on a "happy escape" the next. It would have been amusing had it not been so tragic, for undoubtedly she suffered in pride if not in affection. And she still maintained it was her "last chance."

I, with childhood's happy faculty for ignoring what does not absolutely affect its own wellbeing, was inwardly delighted at the thought of release from the household tyrant. She was gone for ever I told myself. She could never dare show her face here again. We had got rid of her effectually, and life would settle down into a pleasanter groove.

Which only shows how supremely ignorant I was of Life, and of Woman, that factor of Fate and marplot of human destinies.

The Chevalier had respected my silence on the sensational drama played beneath our roof. But I learnt that Bath gossip was still true to its traditions, and that both Pump Room and Assembly had more or less garbled versions of the "beautiful Miss Le Suir" to narrate.

He hinted at stories, so I gave him facts. No one had forbidden my doing so. My own improved spirits helped him to read my opinions into the occurrence. To me it meant greater freedom, and the escape from a bully. It also elevated my position in the household. Fanny had decreed kitchen banishment, and for peace' sake it had been carried out. But now I was permitted to take my meals in the parlour, and even the Dodger had the run of the house.

The dining-room and late dinners were, of course, still too "grown up" for my participation. I remember, however, being waylaid by "Ringlets" one day, and entreated to tell what really *had* happened. There were so many versions of the elopement story. I evaded her curiosity as well as I could. I, too, felt that the "honour of the family" meant something to one who had Irish blood in her veins, and Irish pride to uphold it.

As briefly as possible I simply echoed Aunt Theresa's version. The engagement had been broken off by Joanna, and the younger sister had offered to console the wounded affections of the rejected suitor. They had preferred to leave Bath immediately after the marriage.

For they were married safe enough. The ceremony had taken place the very morning of the elopement at the Registrar's office in the town. Fanny had been a married woman that evening when she had flaunted her recklessness in my face.

Of course, Miss Walcott had her own opinion, and equally, of course, kept it in spite of my lame explanations. But I had done my best, and so I told the Chevalier. He laughed gaily.

"Your best stands for as bad as can be," he said. "No woman is put off the scent of another woman's delinquencies by anything short of prison walls. Even then she would try to bribe the warders for information."

"Were you ever married?" I asked bluntly.

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thousand times—no! I love all women too well and one woman not—enough, to link their fate to one so untoward as my own.”

“*One woman not—enough*” sounded strange to my ears. And his face had altered as he said it. It grew very sad, and very grave. We were walking, and the day was lovely as some of those early days of February were. Up to the heights went those laughing eyes of his; laughing no longer. Afar—on the circling hills where all was gold and green about the great Vathek monument—they seemed to see something I could not see.

At such times I had learnt to hold my peace and wait on his mood. He was back in some other life, with other interests, memories, in which I had had no part.

Side by side we walked, saying nothing; skirting field-paths green with budding hedges. The sound of water-rills was in my ears, and birds' notes, and a lark's gay song rising higher and higher to those heights where we were bound. The spring was at hand. Her promise clear as the clear skies, and sweet as the birds' notes. “No more grey days,” I told myself. “No more cold and gloom.” I looked from hedge to hedge, and noted the young buds and the young leafage with a sudden thrill of joy. I had caught sight of a clump of snowdrops, and near by, hiding in a mossy nook, violets. Those lovely, shy, sweet violets that come as heralds of the spring-time.

Down I went on my knees and began to gather them. Not many, just a few to convince myself they were the messengers of good things to come. As I rose he was standing, watching me; that far-off look gone, but not the sadness.

“Violets,” he said. “Strange you should be gathering them; they were in my thoughts.”

I offered them to him, but he shook his head.

“No, child, what should I do with flowers. They grow for women, and adorn women. Men only use them as messengers. Once—long ago—a hundred years or so, there lived a man who was foolish enough to nourish a certain romantic passion for a beautiful lady. He had never spoken to the lady. He knew her only as the world she adorned knew her. But he threw his heart at her feet, and buried it in—‘violets.’ Every night he sent that

message; carried by the sweet breath of the humblest flower that grows. Whether she heard the message, or understood, he never learnt. A day came and she—was not. That is how the story ends. That is what the violets tell him every spring they bloom afresh."

I listened breathlessly to the story. He spoke rapidly, his eyes on the flowers.

"What the violets tell him?" I said. "When the story ended, there were no more violets?"

"The story ended when there was no longer a beautiful and adored lady to send them to. It was the best thing it could do. To end. There was no other possibility. Besides, the unfinished things of life can never bore us. They have all the charm that we imagine, without the disenchantment we might realize."

"Violets," I repeated. "A story of violets . . . I heard another story, not long ago. It was also about—violets."

"There are many I have no doubt," he said. "Let us walk on. I am neglecting my duty. I should be telling you the story of a man's ambition, not his folly. Yet"—and he laughed suddenly—"I am not sure that that majestic looking tower for which we are bound is not a tribute to both. The man who built it is better remembered for the authorship of a book than for the splendour of his mode of living. When one says 'Vathek,' one forgets conventionalities, extravagance, even the folly that wrought havoc with fortune and estate. I showed you Beckford House in the Crescent yonder, but the owner of Fonthill (which is in the next county, strange to say) built this great pinnacle for the sole purpose of beholding what he no longer possessed. If one could fit in the writing of 'Vathek' with even temporary residence in that tower, it would add to its interest. Fancy immuring oneself for three days and nights in that lonely edifice, in company with the stars and the owls. Inspiration should not have been lacking, or mystery."

And then briefly he related to me that wonderful tale of Eastern imagery and mysticism, which won even Byron's praise and has owned two centuries of fame.

From those great wind-swept heights the Tower conveyed to me the magic and mystery of the tale. I think I too felt it should

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have been written there. In the lonely silences ; the stars above, the city below, and around the writer only night and inspiration.

The Chevalier's words painted something of psychic drama ; things that touched the fringe of occultism, appealing to that strange being whose genius and loneliness were understood of few. Whose restless soul drove him into follies he at once despised and glorified.

It was beautiful up on those green heights.

The city lay below us bathed in sunlight. Grey houses, church spires, the winding river, and westward a green level stretch of meadows and cornfields, unbroken save for a few scattered buildings, the beginning of those "modern villas" destined in time to mar the dignity of ancient architecture.

I had learnt to study the city and its surroundings from many points of view, but always the wide area visible from any of the hill-tops delighted me afresh, and were new object-lessons in the history of the place. Thus knowledge and admiration grew into warmer liking, and deeper interest.

The wooded escarpment of Beacon Hill, the tree-crowned coronet of Kelston, the ascent of Hampton, or Claverton, the foliaged front of Beechen Cliff, all these I knew. Coombe Down, and that strange, queer, artificial-looking "Barrow" to the west of it had been explored in our walks, as had "Little Solsbury" the citadel of "prehistoric man." From legend and fable and monkish chronicles came all the storied lore of past ages, delighting me to the exclusion of fatigue or possible weariness.

These were long tramps for young feet. Yet never too long for me. Often it seemed that I walked in a city of the past. By fields where the Roman husbandmen ploughed, and yoked oxen obeyed the goad. Past Roman villas complete in all the luxury and beauty of their day. By sites of ruined temples sacred to great deities by whom men swore, and to whom they sacrificed. A Pagan religion relived for me in the poetic imagery that peopled grove and forest with an endless procession of the gods. All moods of Nature were accounted for. The fuller meaning of her speech lent eloquence to woods and plains ; to wide horizon,

or verdant valley. Height and hill-top took up the speech of old and wise companions. So much they had seen; so much they had shown to each generation.

At such times as these I revelled in the splendour of an education beyond all conventional types. Here, in the wide spaces and on the sunlit heights were the real books, the real lessons; potently evocative of meanings various as the moods of the great earth-mother herself. Some great, full force would take possession of me, lifting my small soul to loftier heights, breathing of a mystic and enveloping personality whose magic breathed through the smallest as well as the greatest of created things.

These were the hours and occasions that went to the real making of me. The seed-sowing of a harvest yet to ripen. A period of expansion and exaltation; pioneers to the gateway of deeper life, and sadder experience. My small self was humble disciple of that other strange enveloping personality. Master and pupil we were indeed; following the footsteps of an older form of intellectuality, happily content with its modern application. Mutually enjoying our open-air Academy, and mutually wondering that the inventions of modern civilization had not evolved such simple means for youthful horticulture.

He taught me that the truest form of happiness was content. A state of mind utterly independent of surroundings, or inconveniences.

"The petty affronts of man to man are only the remains of his Simian ancestry," he said. "Never regard rudeness or vulgarity as anything but the ineradicable trace of that discarded 'tail.' The earth is very patient and her types evolve but slowly. Half of her millions are not fit for civilization. But they are cast into it as a forcing-house for new growths, or developments. The practise-hand is apparent in corresponding millions of useless citizens. The great truths are the ones men will not hear; the great beauties are the things they will not see. The world, as we count the world, is but a huge ant-heap where the crowding greedy emmets grub and build; build and grub. If here and there a type evolves, ready-winged for flight, wearied of the grubbing and the building, the grubbers set on it and drag

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it down; crush, bruise, trample it under foot. What they cannot do themselves makes no appeal to their powers of appreciation. The Wise King was never more prophetic than when he bade his dullards go to the ant and 'consider her ways.' What she teaches is what Nature tries to teach; an inward and natural understanding of the fundamental truths underlying the simple things of life. 'Be as a little child,' for the child alone enjoys what it feels, and holds the golden key of the eternal verities in its small clasp. We have discarded so much of what these ancient races knew and taught. Why every temple, stone, and buried coin, every site and situation of their cities, every enduring landmark of their roads can teach us something. We gather up fragments of the past and store it in museums, and call them 'scientific' thenceforward. And all the time the psychic links are disregarded; the wisdom cast aside as valueless. Who that came here in the falsely glorified days, the days of Nash and Sheridan, of Assembly Rooms, Pump Rooms, gaming tables, licence and larceny, ever cast a thought to the ancient glories they degraded; the splendid ambitions that have linked the world's two greatest empires in a chain of unbroken memories. Who does it—to this day? Not one in a hundred, perhaps in a thousand of those who have come and still come to the beautiful *Aquae Solis*! What care they that these same springs have flowed on and on for more than eighteen hundred years! Who remembers that the Fosse and the Via Julia were not only Roman roads but records of life's transition. For there stood the sepulchral monuments of the dead, with their appeal to the passer-by—'Siste, viator.' Who cares to pause in that space between Abbey and Pump Room, and retrace the stones of the Forum? Who excavated the old Baths with any deeper interest than an antiquarian's curiosity? Passing centuries have buried these ancient glories deep in the earth. Modern barbarism sees little use in 'digging them out.' Above them is the same heaven, and below them the same earth! Truly, my child, man is at once the greatest and the saddest spectacle ever evolved from the dust of the planet he profanes."

Thus my teaching, and thus my initiation into deeper things

than School-boards dare to exploit, or crabbed and curbed systems to explain. Is it any wonder I grew to love the *Aquae Solis* of this glorified past when she came to me white robed, golden crowned, beautiful as a dream? The old grey town glowed with the glamour of Faerie, through which no coarse or unlovely thing might breathe disenchantment. Thread by thread its stories were spun. Silver, or gold, or gossamer fancy, as the mood or the scene took that fantastic narrator. For to Terence O'Shaughnessy nothing in the world or in life was unbeautiful, or could ever be commonplace.

Was I not right to thank the gods, or what stood for them in my pagan heart, for sending me such a teacher?

XIII

IN WHICH AUNT JOANNA IS REAWAKENED TO AN INTEREST IN LIFE

As far as I can remember it was a week or ten days later that Aunt Joanna "turned her face from the wall," washed and dressed, and came back to her right mind.

Aunt Theresa had put aside the sewing machine, and the neat piles of cambric and embroidery. The little parlour was swept and garnished, and made bright with flowers, and I was told to use it for "preparing my studies," if I wished. I would be company for Aunt Joanna who still shunned the drawing-room, or the possible sympathy of the rest of the household.

She spent her time in reading novels which I, or Mickey, fetched from the circulating library, or writing pages of virulent abuse to Fanny—who had sent for her box. The unworthy lover was treated with silent contempt. Finding me a passive listener she used to enlarge upon her grievances. Relate how much she had done for the traitress who had robbed her of happiness and a prospective home. Go over days of childhood and youth; of shared pleasures, averted punishment; assistance

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in minor flirtations when to "play gooseberry" had been uninteresting, but conventional.

Sometimes these recitals bored me; sometimes they amused. At others I wondered how a sensible middle-aged woman could make such a fuss over a love affair.

She called it a last "chance." I maintained there would be others. She had only to rouse herself and pluck up courage, and go on with life as she had done before this catastrophe. I felt inclined even to suggest that she would have no rival to fear now; that there might be other Captain Oliver's to capture. It appeared, however, that the Bath "season" was drawing to a close. At least, so far as balls and gaities were concerned. Also she declared herself unable to show up at any public ceremony after the "disgrace" inflicted upon her.

I tried to argue that such a word could not possibly apply to the position she had occupied in the matter. But I was soon to find that arguments with Aunt Joanna were only capable of proving one point of view. Her own. In like manner she never asked advice unless she had no intention of taking it. However, she loved to talk, and as I was there I had to listen. Sometimes I would be rewarded by a "read of a book," whose application to her own sad case was much like that of Captain Cuttle's to his friend Bunsby's. Thus I had an early initiation into mid-Victorian romances of faithful love, and much-tried lovers. Those delightful three-volume happy-ending stories, beloved of the reader of those days. Of any likeness to life as life was, or is, or ever could be, these volumes were absolutely deficient; but they had a great vogue and were accounted "popular" fiction. I think they afforded much consolation to Aunt Joanna, and, at least, gave her some excuse for weeping, or posing as some favoured heroine. It would have been better for her to throw aside all thoughts of her unworthy swain, and take up the duties of life as her energetic sister had done.

One evening I was writing up the morning's instruction in the art of applying "the uses of Life to the Humanities thereof." The Chevalier had talked them to us for the best part of an hour, but forbidden an immediate recapitulation. "Let them simmer

down in the *pot-au-feu* of memory, *mes enfants*. I am not sure of their culinary value. If they give forth any essence of experiment you can distil it for your own satisfaction at home."

Then he advised ciphering as a relief from the prolonged strain on our critical faculties.

Polyphemia had gasped and gurgled over simple addition to surprising results. Two and two being four, one and three must be five.

I had performed feats of long division that left my slate a thing of beauty in her eyes. Those long serpentine lines were a never-ending mystery. But I had kept enough of quaint paradoxical talk in my mind to be able to write a *résumé* of it later. It was this that Aunt Joanna was curious about. I tried to explain the Master's system. She said she had never heard of girls being taught in such an extraordinary fashion. How many pupils were there?

"Two," I informed her.

"Only two! Then it can't be much of a school. Why has Theresa sent you there?"

I opined I had been sent because the Master was so wonderful, and the terms so moderate. I had learnt more than any ordinary school would have taught me. She began to manifest curiosity. This "Master" as I called him was Irish, was he not? She remembered a visit, and Theresa saying he was a most extraordinary man. That he had been in the army and retired on a pension, and was about to found an Academy for the education of daughters of gentlemen in Bath. Hadn't he founded such an Academy? I shook my head, and went on writing. These questions annoyed as well as disturbed me. But Aunt Joanna's curiosity was now set agog. Having swept her mind free of former occupants and occupations, she was able to devote some of its empty chambers to new if less interesting subjects.

She started off on the track of the Chevalier. His nationality, life, reputation and character. Was he a proper sort of teacher? What was the school like? Who was my fellow-student? Her pertinacity vexed me, besides being a disturbing influence. I wanted to get on with my essay on the Humanities, not discuss them.

Presently Aunt Theresa came into the room, and peace was over. They commenced a discussion about me. What sort of education was I receiving? Had Aunt Theresa ever visited this "Academy?" She had not. Why should she? I was getting on very well. My writing was excellent, my ciphering capacity equal to household accounts when there was a question of weekly addition. I could speak a little French with quite a decent accent, and as for history, grammar, and spelling I was notably proficient.

"Besides," added Aunt Theresa, "where would I be getting her educated so cheaply? Not at the High School any way. It's all 'extras' there, save for the things that don't matter. Where's that list of subjects you learn, Rosaleen? You showed it me, once."

I produced it. A document written on a sheet of foolscap in the beautiful calligraphy of the Chevalier. It was headed:

Schedule of studies,
appointed and directed by the Akemanceaster Academy.

President and Founder:

The Chevalier Terence Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy,
Legion of Honour.

Then followed the classification of these studies. They made a formidable list.

Aunt Joanna seemed impressed. "But Rosaleen says there's only one other student besides herself."

"Oh, it's early days," said Aunt Theresa. "And the fewer they are the more attention they'll get," she added.

The discussion was here interrupted by the appearance of Mickey Donovan.

"If ye plaze, Miss Theresa, Aunt Biddy wants ye in the kitchen a minnit. 'Poor Mary's' havin' a fit, or something. Leastways we can't do nothin' wid her."

"A fit!" Aunt Theresa and Joanna jumped up and rushed downstairs. Mickey looked at me and I at him.

"I said *that*," he remarked, "to let thim down aisy. It's a little ddrop she's aafter takin'. Not the first time either."

"A—little drop?" I was puzzled.

He made a significant gesture. At the same moment Aunt Joanna came back.

"Run for a doctor, Mickey!" she commanded. "The girl's breathing her last. Hurry, for goodness' sake!"

She pushed him towards the door, and followed him down the passage. "There's one just round the corner of Johnston street. Doctor Merivale. I've seen the plate on his door. Tell him to come at once."

I came out also. The "Humanities" seemed doomed to-night. "Is she very ill, Aunt Joanna?"

"She's gasping and breathing in the most awful way. Can't speak. No, don't go down. You might be frightened."

I went back to the parlour, but I felt work was impossible. In about five or six minutes Mickey returned with the doctor. I went to the door when I heard the bell. I saw a tall, dark, bearded man, with sleepy brown eyes, and a rather coarse mouth.

"Where's the patient?" he enquired.

"Downstairs in the kitchen, sir," answered Mickey. "I'll show ye the way."

The two disappeared round the bend of the stone stairs. After a moment's hesitation, curiosity got the better of me and I followed. I saw an agitated group, and then a sudden division of them, and a prostrate figure on the floor and the dark head of the doctor bent over it.

After a moment's examination he rose. "Bring me a jug of water," he said.

Someone—Biddy, I think—obeyed him with all haste. From where I stood I caught sight of what looked an almost brutal action. He raised "poor Mary's" head with one strong arm and dashed the contents of the jug full in her face.

There was a shriek, and a struggle. Then the girl sat up, and glared wildly round her. The doctor stood back.

"She's drunk," he said. "Get her to bed."

Biddy exclaimed. My aunts gave horrified denial. The doctor

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simply put down the jug, and turned to go. I beat a hasty retreat upstairs and into the parlour. The Dodger, roused by the commotion, rose from the hearthrug and approached me enquiringly. Voices sounded, and the doctor and Aunt Joanna came in.

"I can't believe it," she was saying. "Such a good, hard-working girl, and we give no beer."

He laughed. A cynical, somewhat unpleasant laugh.

"That's of no consequence," he said. "If they want drink they get it. Besides, it's not beer that's the matter with her. It's whisky."

Aunt Joanna gave a horrified disclaimer. "Oh, are you *sure*? I can hardly believe it!"

He glanced round for his hat. "It's in the hall," I reminded him.

"Ah, thank you." His eyes turned again to Aunt Joanna. I saw that she was very white.

He went quickly to her side. "Sit down," he said. "You're not very strong. Give me your hand."

He put her into a chair; took her hand, felt her pulse. "I thought so. Run down; nervous excitement. Some sort of shock lately."

He released the hand, and stood looking at her. The colour came back to her face and lips. A hot nervous flush.

"I'm quite well now, Doctor Merivale."

"You're not," he said emphatically. "You're living on your nerves. Exhausting vitality. You want air, life, exercise. Something to take you out of yourself. Brooding, morbid, that's your condition. What's been the matter?"

For answer she burst into a flood of hysterical tears. He said no more. Simply walked up and down the room, waiting till she should have exhausted herself. I went to the mantelpiece, took up the bottle of smelling-salts, and gave it to her. He nodded approvingly.

In a few moments Aunt Joanna recovered. She sat up, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, and tried to explain affairs. He cut her stammered excuses short. "I know, I know. Nervous shock; debilitated conditions. Too much tea, too little exercise. No proper sleep. Lassitude, depression, loss of appetite. You'd

better let me take charge of you, or you'll have a breakdown."

"Take charge of me!" Aunt Joanna was fluttered and agitated.

"Yes; look after you for a while. You want rousing. Jangled, unstrung, that's how you are. Another month of it and you'd be a chronic invalid."

She gasped. "I know I've felt ill and wretched for some time past. But I put it down to—to mental worry."

"And pray doesn't mental worry lead to corresponding physical troubles? Oh, you women! Irrational idiots, that's what you are, most of you! Leading repressed unnatural lives; atrophying muscles, nerves, heart; playing tricks with Nature, careless of her teaching. Ah, you're calmer now. Well, listen. You've got to do what I tell you unless you want to have that breakdown."

Her eyes were rather pitiful. Those weak, short-sighted eyes about which Fanny had so often teased her.

"I don't want that, doctor."

"I suppose not. You've got so much sense left. Well, when you've had your dinner, go and play cards, get up an hour's interest or excitement about something. Drink a glass of hot milk and go to bed. If you can't sleep, read some nice, prosy, abstruse book till you do. Your brain won't take it in, but it will have a soothing effect upon it. To-morrow morning take a brisk walk, uphill by choice, and come back with an appetite for luncheon. In the afternoon, shop, go to a concert, call on friends, rouse up your energies in some way. A week of this life and I guarantee you'll not look the drooping daffy-down-dilly creature you do to-night."

Her face crimsoned. She was not used to such plain speaking since Fanny had taken her departure. But the doctor only laughed.

"I don't mind if you're angry," he said. "I want to put some feeling into you. Anything's better than stagnation. Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and she gave him her's. I think she was too bewildered for speech. I went out to the hall and

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opened the front door. He gave me one of his professional looks.

"You look a sensible child. How old are you?"

"Twelve; nearly thirteen."

"Umph! Too young to be confided in. Still, if there's been any love nonsense going on here you'd know. Has there?"

"Do you mean an engagement?"

"Yes. Wasn't it here, from this house, that a young lady ran off with her sister's lover?"

"Yes. She was my aunt."

"And this lady I have been advising is also——"

"Also my aunt," I said.

"Umph!" He stood a moment at the door as if deliberating. "Well, you heard what I said. Everyone can help in a case of this sort. She requires to be roused, amused, taken out of herself. Fine-looking woman too," he added, as if to himself. "Well, I'll look in to-morrow about the same time. But get her out of the house. Don't let her mope, or brood over a broken heart that's only cracked after all."

He went away then, a brisk energetic figure of a man, who had brought a new element of excitement into the stagnant pool of our lives.

I went back to find Aunt Joanna telling Aunt Theresa all that he had said about her. She saw herself once more as a central figure of interest. Someone who was under medical care and required special attention. The disaster of "poor Mary" was quite forgotten. Joanna went in to dinner as of old that night; sat in the drawing-room afterwards, and played whist with the General and his wife. Most astonishing of all, I found her waiting for me next morning in the hall when I was starting for school.

"I shall walk part of the way with you," she said. "You remember Doctor Merivale said I was to have exercise."

I am afraid I did not welcome the prospect of her companionship, for I was afraid that the *Via Roma* of academic distinction might not present a very distinctive appearance in her eyes. But the Fates willed otherwise, for at the corner of the High Street who should we meet but the doctor striding towards us with the energy of manhood and muscles.

He stopped us, giving hearty welcome to his patient. "Don't go through the town. Come along with me. I'm bound for Bathwick Hill. That'll be a breather for you. I said *hills*, didn't I?"

And Aunt Joanna who had always declared she hated hills, went meekly away with this brusque tyrant, and relieved of fear I hastened to the Academy.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH A FIRST PARTING BECOMES MOMENTOUS

MEMORY calls a halt here. The old copy-books are very fragmentary. It seems as if life must have rolled on from day to day, and week to week, with a regularity needing no specific mention.

I know I was happy; occupied; interested.

At the beginning of April, Aunt Theresa gave me another cheque for the Chevalier, only remarking it was a pity he couldn't include music.

I told him this. His answer was characteristic. "I could include it. But who will provide the instrument?"

Of course, that settled it. There was no piano in the O'Driscoll household, and no means of hiring one under the staitened conditions of the Chevalier's finances. So that branch of my education had to wait on the future prosperity of the Academy.

Meanwhile the lovely spring brought fresh delights. Rambles, picnics, boats on the river. A wider knowledge of districts; romantic villages, queer old inns, and older churches. I began to know them all. Swainswick (which is supposed to be a corruption of Swineswick, and the place where Bladud served as a swineherd); Charlcombe, in whose church Fielding was married; Bathampton, and Claverton. Prior Park of Ralph Allen renown and various consequent vicissitudes. Midford, where once lived William Smith of geological fame. Limpley-Stoke, that loveliest of valleys; St. Catherine, with its beautiful old manor-house, and Castle Combe most exquisite of villages.

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An English village was to me a marvel after the squalor and dirt and general "go-as-you-please" effect of the Irish ones. The Chevalier took me to Castle Combe as a special introduction to the "romantic-picturesque" as he termed it. By some means, best known to himself, he procured a horse and a vehicle. In the latter he placed a picnic basket, and ourselves. Then for the best part of a long May day he tried to induce the animal between the shafts to take us where we wished to go. It seemed totally at variance with its own ideas. Nevertheless, we accomplished it. I believe we walked up all the hills, and down them also. Still the road was pleasant, the sky bright, the woods and valleys a glory of leafage. To say I loved these excursions is to say not half enough of what they meant to me, or of the importance they gave to Somerset as a county, and Bath as its centre of interest.

Looking back on those days, I ask myself how it was I never wondered at my companion's choice of companionship? Why I took it for granted that just "we two" should share walks, and talks, and explorations? That it never seemed strange for a man to devote himself to a child and make her young life at once the most delightful and romantic of memories.

But it did not seem unnatural or unusual until he made it so. As May drew on apace the city grew very hot. Possibly those boiling springs which make Bath famous as a health resort have a corresponding penalty when the summer drives her visitors to cooler retreats. Aunt Theresa's boarders had all left. Some for London houses. Some for foreign travel. Some for cooler regions and more bracing air.

She began to talk of shutting up the house and going to Wales. It appeared they generally went there for July and August. My holidays were alluded to, and I questioned the Master. We were taking one of our usual walks. I had reason to remember it.

"Of course, you must go if they wish it," he said. "You've worked well. You deserve a rest. I'll set you a course of reading for the next two months. After that——"

He looked at me somewhat sadly.

"We will come back," I said. "And school will begin again, and perhaps there'll be more pupils."

The old humorous twinkle flashed into his eyes. "The

Academy could do with them. But, I am not hopeful of reopening it, at all."

"Oh, don't say that!" I entreated. "What should I do? I could never bear to go to a regular school after—after *this!*"

"That shows what harm I've done! My child, if you ever learn anything of the true inwardness of things, you'll learn they never remain stationary. They progress, or break off. I'm afraid our Academy will not—progress."

Consternation held me dumb. I had a sense of misery and loneliness exceeding even that first week of my coming here. Tears rolled down my cheeks. I could not check them. What "passing bell" rings out so harsh and final a note to childhood's ears as that of parting? That an end should come to this companionship had seemed impossible. It would be resumed after that holiday; it would go on and on as the years went on. It did not seem as if anyone else could teach me as he taught; be companion, instructor, enchanter, all in one.

I was silent because I could find no words. The whole world had become suddenly blank. A desert stretched where roses had bloomed. For nearly six months we had been constantly together. I had been as wax in the hands of a modeller; taking all views of life from the standpoint of his philosophy. Now—

"Ah, don't weep, my dark Rosaleen," he said. "I am no stoic where a woman's tears are in question. Tell me, did you seriously consider you were getting value for your money, or rather your good aunt's money, all this time?"

"Why, of course," I stammered.

"Was all that hotch-potch of philosophy, romanticism, folly and wisdom, rant and rhodomontade an education, considered educationally? Sentences you couldn't comprehend, words you couldn't spell, philosophy you would never require, drawn from experiences you could never understand! Faith, darling, you must have possessed the innocence of an angel, and the trust of a babe in arms to let me take you in!"

Take me in! Were the heavens falling and the earth crumbling at my feet!

"What do you mean?" I cried passionately. "Why do you say such cruel things?"

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“I don’t know,” he said bitterly. And then again, “I don’t know. I don’t want to be cruel, child. But some kindness looks like that. My life is a series of drifting. Never have I worked steadily or systematically at anything. What isn’t Irish in me is French; the combination has strewn the high roads of the world with wrecked souls; both being ardent disciples of the Académie des Folles, kept by the descendants of those merry devils who chased the Gadaren swine into the sea. The illusion being Scriptural excuses strong language. Yet never in oddest vagary, or wildest dream, had I seen myself teacher of innocent youth; feminine youth of all things! That the experience was pleasant is only to say it is short-lived; only the disagreeables of life claim annuities. But it never entered my head that it would go on. Figure to yourself the impossibility. For six months I have dangled the bait of an Academy of learning before your worthy guardians. Had they been men, I should have been called to account in six days! However, I have done my best for you, Rosaleen, besides proving to myself that even as a pedagogue I have—possibilities. It was a novel experience. One more bead to string on to my rosary of recollections. A little forlorn wandering bead picked up one grey winter’s day, and added to others less innocent, less regretted. Alas! . . . of how few can I say *that*. But now—now, my child, ask yourself, ask what little common sense you possess if this sort of thing could continue? You must feel it could not. The next three years of your life demand careful training and educating; the society of youth and sex such as your own. Who am I to step between you and what is best for you. To have your beautiful eyes turn on me with reproach, instead of faith! Our acquaintanceship began oddly, continued madly, and must terminate suddenly. This is our last walk, my dear little pupil. To-morrow I return to my own land. Fortune has turned her wheel. In other words, one of my relatives has thought fit to die and leave me a legacy. It is not an important legacy. But I can pay off the worthy O’Driscoll, close the doors of my Academy, and taste the joys of civilized life once more. Visit a revived and restored Paris, whose restaurants will no longer offer me *fricassée des rats*, and *côtelettes à*

cheval! I would the Fates might send you there, Rosaleen, that I might play *courier d'instruction* to your first experiences of the Ville Lumière. Well, who knows! Such things are on the lap of the gods."

He paused. I think he had talked on to give me opportunity of regaining self-command. It was a coincidence that we should be again in Sydney Gardens, where we had first met. He had proposed resting there until the day was cooler. And to me all places were welcome so only he was there also.

As he ceased speaking I tried to consider him under new auspices. I knew he had been poor, miserably poor, but then he took it so much as a matter of course that I had not troubled to pity one who never seemed to pity himself. Yet, the fact of fortune and respectability set my fancy leaping to another hope.

"But—if you are rich, you can go where you please!" I cried eagerly. "Why shouldn't you return here; do you mean to live in Ireland always?"

He laughed. "I mean to live in no country, or place—always. I was born under a roving star, I think. I must be for ever on the move. No—I shall not stay longer in Ireland than my affairs require. Then France will see me again, as I told you. I have the nostalgia of the Boulevards and the Cafés in my soul, Rosaleen; that half of my soul which claims French heritage. If the gods made me a wanderer they also blessed me with an understanding of where and how to wander. The sweetest memories of my life are bound up with Paris. It was there a star dropped to earth for me, and—I—ever since have sought it sorrowing with the dim candle of infatuation."

"The Lady of the Violets?" I said suddenly.

"You remember that story of the Fool Errant and his heart?"

"He threw his heart at her feet and buried it in violets," I quoted softly. "And she never knew."

"Oh, she knew," he said cynically. "All women know when men are fools, and to what extent they can play on their folly."

"And are you going to Paris to look for *her*?"

"Perhaps."

We relapsed into silence. Again I thought of that other story. Of the lonely woman in the attics writing, writing, in loneliness

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and despair. Weaving always those beautiful sad fancies. She, too, must have heard of that romance of the violets. How otherwise could she have written it? But I said nothing; my thoughts were too confused. Besides, I could not disentangle them from the threatened grief of his desertion.

“And—after Paris?”

He gave me a quick, surprised look.

“After? I haven’t gone further—yet.”

“You might come back to England? Here?” I hazarded.

“If I came to England, I should certainly come here.”

My heart beat more happily. “If you would only promise? If I might have something to look forward to? A month—a year?”

“Good God, child! Would you look forward to my errant activities? What am I but a vagabond philosopher; a soldier of fortune, a wanderer on life’s high road! In a month you will have forgotten my existence. In a year you will wonder how you could ever have believed in a charlatan whose only virtue was a belief in the goodness of a child’s heart. But you are growing out of childhood—fast, fast. A year, two, three years, and a slim dark-eyed maiden, serious and sweet of aspect, will mean my dark Rosaleen. And if we meet she will be shy and stately, and I—I shall remember the lies that won her faith, and left me—unashamed.”

“Oh *no!*” burst from my lips, or heart was it, for suddenly his arm went round me, and I was sobbing my grief on his shoulder as many a time I had sobbed other griefs less real and tragic than this in the warm shelter of my father’s arms.

He did his best to stem the torrent. He even told me that, had he guessed at such an outburst, he would have said nothing. Just gone out of my life as unceremoniously as he had come into it.

When my sobs ceased we resumed our walk. It might have been from sympathy or a desire to offer comfort that he suggested I should write to him from time to time.

“You ought to be an excellent scribe, for your essays and your way of recapitulating my lectures show a faculty of con-

struction remarkable in one so young. You must use your powers of observation in all matters mental and material, and let me have the benefit. I don't promise to write often, but I will write. So we shan't pass out of mind, even if out of sight."

And that was the one grain of comfort I could seize upon, and take with me that evening as I went homeward in the cool dusk, the little dog trotting at my side.

The great house was quite deserted now. Only Madame Odylle and ourselves remained. There were no more late dinners, or ceremonious evenings. Sometimes we sat in the drawing-room, for coolness, the long windows open to the night, and the shadowy archway with its vista of green trees beyond. Every day Aunt Theresa said Bath was intolerable and we must leave it, and every evening found us still there.

On this special night I was going up to my room when I heard my name called, from the drawing-room. I turned in to find my two aunts hard at work covering up the furniture in holland wrappings, and putting books and music and ornaments away into cabinets, or cupboards.

"Come and help us, Rosaleen," said Aunt Theresa. "We are really going away at last. Your Aunt Joanna has had an invitation from some friends in Shropshire. And I am going to take you to Wales. To Llandudno; a dear little cottage where we often go in the summer-time. It will do us both good. This heat is very trying."

I did my best to help them. They were very busy and eager, and also, I thought, a little mysterious. From sudden odd sentences I caught a hint of this Shropshire visit being a chance of "bringing things to a point," "Very odd that *he* should be going there too."

Who was the "he," I wondered? Had Aunt Joanna caught a new admirer for assuredly she was no longer playing at "maid forlorn," or any of the pathetic broken-hearted rôles that had seemed so attractive to her after the Fanny and Oliver incident.

I heard no names. I only learnt that to-morrow was to be devoted to packing. That Bridget and Mickey would be left in charge of the house and the solitary lodger upstairs, and that it

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might be as well to get rid of "poor Mary" altogether. The hot weather had been an excuse for another of those mysterious "fits," and a quantity of beer bottles had been discovered in a corner of the cellar that had nothing to do with the family wine merchant.

It would be a good opportunity to send her off. She was little use and much trouble. Better pay up her wages and let her go.

When I had given as much assistance as possible, I asked Aunt Theresa if I might run up and see Madame Odylle.

"Do, child," she said. "And tell her she can have the run of the house for the next two months."

"Does she never go away?" I enquired.

"Never, since she's been here. How she can live in this steam-bath of a town, summer-time, I can't imagine!"

When I went up to the attic I wondered, too. It was close and hot. It had but one little window opening on a stone parapet. Little air came in, though the adjoining doors and windows were also open.

"Do you never go away?" I asked her, after giving the news of our movements.

"Where should I go?" she said sadly. "I found a refuge here, and I shall remain here for the rest of my life. I pray that mayn't be very long."

"But you never go out! And there are such beautiful places all around."

"Why should I mar their beauty? Do you think I could show myself anywhere without attracting notice? Without shocking some harmless creature, terrifying some hapless child?"

"In the dusk," I suggested. "And with your veil down?"

"A lonely walk would not add any pleasure to my lonely life. Nature either hurts or rebukes me. I am happier with my books, my work, than in the most beautiful scene. For beauty saddens me, reminding me of all I have lost. All I shall never find again. *Jamais, jamais—jamais!*"

There was something indescribably desolate in that final "*jamais*." It stirred me to fierce pity. Suddenly I knelt at her side and buried my face in the soft folds of her grey gown.

"I too am very lonely!" I cried. "He has gone! He has left! He is never going to teach me any more!"

"Who—your wonderful Chevalier? Gone?"

"Yes. He has had money, a fortune left him, and he is going back to Ireland. He only told me to-day."

"That is good news for him."

"But bad for me. Oh, Madame, I'm so miserable! No one can ever be the same as he; so wonderful, such a teacher! Oh! I do seem unfortunate! The moment I am happy some thing happens to destroy it. He made learning a delight. It wasn't like school at all, and yet everything was a lesson. Even this place, which I thought so ugly and desolate when I came to it, is full of beauty and interest now. It is the same with everything. Our walks, and talks, and drives, and picnics——"

Tears rushed to my eyes. I could say no more. I felt her hand on my head. I heard her murmured "*pauvre chérie*." I tried to choke back the rising sobs, and seem less the foolish child than my lame and stupid speech proclaimed. But I made but a poor show of self-command. One hateful fact stood out from all else. The days of that fantastic Academy were over. Its doors closed. Its wonderful President and professor had vanished out of it, and out of my life.

All his humour, his braggadocio, his whimsicalities had but endeared him the more. The ways and manner of his teaching mattered nothing. It was himself and his charm that left them glorious in one's memory. With all youth's selfishness I lamented, and with the patience of matured experience she listened.

One consolation she gave when at last my tears had ceased. "Take comfort, my child. There is more in this than just the 'passing of ships in the night.' You will see him again. Take courage. You are too young for such grief. What I have told you has been true before, has it not? Then believe me when I tell you—this."

So with one tiny grain of comfort springing in my heart I too joined in the packing and preparations necessary for our journey, and tried to believe that novelty and change might still that heartache of which I could not speak.

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XV

WHICH SHOWS A BROKEN HEART CAN BE REPAIRED

NOVELTY of travel and scene did do something to ease that heart-ache. Besides, Aunt Theresa was my favourite aunt, and in some ways so like my father that we could not but understand each other. Also, she ministered to my passion for books, and for that fact alone I should have been eternally grateful.

So it was that the first week of our arrival at Llandudno was a pleasant series of excitement. The odd names, the quaint people, our funny little cottage, the lovely bay, the great towering heads of Orme and the delicious air, all combined to make that first acquaintance with Wales a notable thing. Yet when it came to a question of walks, or excursions, I longed for that lost companionship. Aunt Theresa knew Wales only as a place where there were mountains, and from whence one got across the Irish Channel to her beloved Dublin. Llandudno stood for a health resort and bathing-place, and one of the best places to go to after ten months of a mild and relaxing climate such as Bath. Of any historic importance, or tradition, she was quite ignorant. She could answer none of my questions except by an enquiry as to *why* I put them. What on earth did it matter if little Wales was an independent principality? If its people chose to remain un-Anglicized, keeping to their habits, customs, and language?

These things were quite unimportant set beside a pier, a band, and the beautiful view procured for the trouble of climbing up to Great Orme, when it wasn't too hot. Driven back on my own resources I studied bookshops until I found a credible guide, which afforded me the information I craved. I had not forgotten that I was to write to my late Professor and give my observations of things "mental and material" in the form of letters.

Thus the first week passed, and that sharp ache of loneliness died gradually into a more passive regret. I set myself to study Wales as he had taught me to study Bath. To find out *why*

"The Men of Harlech," and *why* "The Ash Grove," and "Poor Mary Ann," meant national ditties. *Why* "Mary Jones's" sole fame should rest upon the fact of her having tramped fifty miles to buy a Bible? *Why* all that splendid dynasty of the Llewelyn Princes had died into an obscure and misty past; their deeds briefly chronicled, and none too authentic. These researches kept my mind busy, and my tongue too. I questioned our funny old servant, who still wore the Welsh dress. I questioned the queer-tongued fishermen of the bay; the drivers of the creaking, shabby, wagonettes that took folk excursioning to neighbouring places of interest such as the vale of Conway and Llanrwst, and Bettws-y-coed, or the lovely lake of Llyn Dilyn.

The second week passed, and Aunt Theresa declared I was "picking up." Getting brown and healthy-looking, and manifesting something like a "proper appetite." One day she promised to take me a trip by steamer, and I was overjoyed at the prospect. It was to be a long day's outing, weather being favourable. The Fates favoured us in that respect, and so did the tide. We seemed to be steaming through a beautiful lake above which dark mountains towered in lonely majesty. Then came the river proper, and peeps of lovely valleys, old bridges, and ancient churches; waterfalls with unpronounceable names, and then a stone pier where our journey ended.

We went into a quiet little hotel and ordered luncheon. It was early for the meal, but as we were going to explore a Castle, and possibly a mountain, Aunt Theresa decided we should need all our time. Our little table was placed in a window, and commanded a view of the estuary and the old Castle towering above. There was no one in the Coffee-room but ourselves, and I walked over to a table by a further window on which lay a pile of the usual hotel books, railway guides, and maps of the various districts.

"Is there a visitor's book there?" called out Aunt Theresa.

I searched. There was one, and I brought it to her. While she turned pages on the look out for names she might know, or opinions on the district, I studied a plan of Conway, with its harbour and Castle and ancient walls.

Suddenly a sharp cry from Aunt Theresa startled me. I turned

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and saw she had sprung to her feet, and was gazing at the book in great agitation

"Good heavens ! . . . Come here, child ! Look at this ! I'm not dreaming, am I ?"

I crossed quickly to her side. I looked at the page to which she pointed. There boldly staring me in the face were two names :

"CAPTAIN AND MRS. OLIVER."

I gave a little cry of surprise. "Aunt Fanny !"

"Yes, and he—the villain ! And staying *here* !"

She said that as if it were insult added to injury. Yet a certain sense of justice impelled me to ask *why* they should not be staying here since the principality of Wales, or even this special district of it was not our special province. One person had as much right to visit it as another.

I put down the book. "Perhaps they only came over for the day like ourselves," I suggested.

"To come here means they're in the neighbourhood. How *dared* she ! She knows we come to Llandudno every July and August."

I said nothing. It seemed very odd. But then happily Aunt Joanna wasn't with us.

The waiter came in and brought the cold meat and bread and beer that Aunt Theresa had ordered. The book still lay on the table. She resumed her seat. He took up the book as if to replace it. Then he paused, and asked if the lady would enter her name ?

"No, I'm not stopping here."

Then she asked abruptly. "Have you many visitors—just now ?"

"Not many," he informed her. "Tourists passing through ; excursionists from Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, Trefriw Wells."

"I saw a name there," she said, pointing to the book he had tucked under his arm. "Captain Oliver. Is he—are they staying here ?"

"For a few days," he answered. "The gentleman is an

invalid. They are going to the Wells—Trefriw yonder, to try the waters.”

“An invalid?” She looked at me. “Why he was strong and well enough when I last saw him,” she said.

I agreed. The waiter stood with the book still under his arm and listened.

“He has been very ill,” he said. “They were going to leave yesterday, but the doctor said it was better to wait a few days longer.”

Aunt Theresa made no reply. He walked away, and replaced the book on the table. I sat down before the plate of cold beef and salad, and commenced my luncheon.

“It has quite spoilt my appetite!” exclaimed Aunt Theresa. “What a mercy Joanna isn’t here! I heard from her this morning. She is quite enjoying her stay with the Kirbys. It appears they are distantly related to Doctor Merivale. Isn’t it odd?”

I looked up from my plate. “Why is it odd?” I enquired.

“Oh—the coincidence! The doctor has become such a friend of ours.”

“Perhaps he’ll be going to Shropshire also?”

She smiled. “Well—he might. I think he admires Joanna very much. I do wish it would come to something.”

“Are people so much happier—married?” I enquired.

“Much happier?”—She took a mouthful of the beef, and seemed meditating its quality. “I don’t know. Married, or single, we all have our troubles. But poor Joanna has lost so many chances.”

I went on with my luncheon, happily undisturbed by impending catastrophes. The waiter poured out the beer, and left us again to ourselves.

Aunt Theresa was facing the door. I had my back to it. As she took up her glass and put it to her lips, I saw her hand suddenly tremble. The liquid flowed over the side of the glass. Her face grew white, and her eyes remained staring at something opposite. Their expression terrified me. I too turned, and there, coming slowly into the room, that old insolent smile I remembered so well on her lips, was—Aunt Fanny!

Straight up the room she came ; her white dress sweeping the carpet, her eyes on her sister's face. "What a surprise! How are you, Theresa ? Are you staying here ?"

Aunt Theresa gasped. Indignation robbed her of speech. Her face grew crimson, then pale. As for me I could only gaze at my old enemy in wonder. She had grown so handsome. She was so beautifully dressed. There was such assurance and indifference in her manner. Her eyes fell on me.

"You haven't got over your old habit of staring, I see ? Where's Joanna ?"

She glanced round as if expecting to see that third familiar figure.

Aunt Theresa found voice at last.

"I wonder you *dare* to mention her name !" she said. "After your abominable deception."

"Oh, don't let us have one of our old arguments," said Fanny, drawing a chair forward, and seating herself. "If it comes to deception it was Joanna who deceived herself. George never cared twopence about her !"

"Then why did he ask her to marry him ?"

"A man isn't always responsible for what he says after a ball supper !"

"That's no excuse for you," persisted Aunt Theresa. "Your conduct to your sister was disgraceful ! It will come home to you yet—you'll see. Treachery always does. I hear your husband's ill," she added.

"Only a touch of rheumatism. He suffered in Bath. That's why he went there."

"A bad day for him, poor man !" said Aunt Theresa. Then she rose.

"If you've finished, Rosaleen, we'll go. An interview of recrimination isn't very pleasant."

I rose also, and pushed back my chair. Fanny's eyes turned to me.

"You seem to have grown—lanky." Then she laughed. "How's the old place getting on ? Did 'Ringlets' catch her dear Adolphus, and did the General congratulate Jo on a 'lucky escape, my dear ?' Oh ! what a life ! What a place ! Wasn't I thankful to get out of it !" She sprang up and faced us,

"Would you like to know what my life is now? If you could see my home, my servants, my carriage; and in the winter I shall hunt, and go to the county balls, and be fêted and admired as 'the beautiful Mrs. Oliver!' That's what they call me."

"If they knew Mrs. Oliver as she really is they'd call her something else! Well, your husband will have his work cut out if he has to look after you. You were a flirt from your cradle, and your marriage proves you've neither heart nor conscience. However——"

She stopped abruptly, for Captain Oliver himself appeared in the doorway. He was leaning on a stick. He looked ill, and worn, and very thin. Not a bit the debonair, brisk, military figure of Bath days.

As he recognized Aunt Theresa he grew very white. He hesitated as if uncertain what to do. She saved further indecision by ringing the bell for the waiter. He appeared with the bill on a plate. She glanced at it, put down some money, told him to keep the change, and then walked majestically forth, ignoring the Captain's apologetic bow, and taking no further notice of Fanny. As I followed in her wake he looked at me in the old friendly way. "How are you, Rosaleen—and the little dog?"

"He is quite well," I said. "He is here—I mean at the cottage. We are staying in Llandudno."

"Oh—not *here*? Thank goodness for that!"

He nodded, and I followed Aunt Theresa.

But the excursion was spoilt. She could talk of nothing else but this unfortunate meeting. And amidst reproaches and regrets came constant expressions of wonder at Captain Oliver's changed looks. Had I ever seen anyone so altered? Why he looked ten years older, and as if he was going into a decline. Marriage hadn't agreed with him, that was pretty evident. No doubt he was wretched. Well, he deserved it! Taking the gilt instead of the gingerbread.

And so on and on, despite the beauty of the scene, the wonders of the Castle, and the history of those Irish defenders who had been so barbarously treated and for whom patriotism demanded our interest.

Once again I was reminded of what the Chevalier had been

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went to say—"One only takes to a place what is in *oneself*." Aunt Theresa exemplified that sufficiently for this day.

We returned home in time for tea, and still that topic of conversation lasted. It was now reinforced by a series of arguments on the advisability of telling Joanna of the meeting. My answer was, "What good can it do?"

It seemed to me that Aunt Joanna had got over her "disappointment," as they called it. Why then recall it to her memory? However, Aunt Theresa doubted her powers of keeping this "King Charles' head" out of the letter which was to be written to-night.

"It would be sure to crop up somehow," she said. "Besides, if the Olivers are staying so near to us we might be always coming across them. It's as well to let Joanna know of their proximity, and she can prolong her Shrewsbury visit. It seems to be a very pleasant one. And if——"

"If Doctor Merivale goes there too?" I suggested.

"Yes, if he does, it will certainly mean something. Joanna spoke of leaving, in case it would look——"

I nodded. My wisdom was beyond my years. That was not to be wondered at!

"You see the dilemma I'm placed in?"

I saw her dilemma, but I argued that no better revenge could be taken on Fanny than the announcement of "bride elect," instead of jilted spinsterhood.

"Why write to-night?" I added. "There's no hurry. Perhaps by to-morrow something may have happened."

Aunt Theresa considered that point over a third cup of tea. "I'm not sure but you may be right, Rosaleen. I'm sure I don't know where you get your sense. You're as old as myself in some things. If she doesn't hear she won't come, and every day is of consequence in an affair like this. I really don't know what she *would* do if it turned out another failure! It's her third chance, and she's not so young as to be likely to get another."

I think Aunt Theresa was glad she had taken my advice when, two days later, there came an excited telegram from her sister. It said:

"*Congrats. Engaged to Dr. M. Writing. Joanna.*"

The wild excitement and delight of Aunt Theresa passes all description. Also her gratitude to me for advice. For Joanna might have been upset, and the "chance" might have slipped. As things were, this untoward meeting need not now be mentioned. It could wait until the happy bride-elect joined us in her new and assured position.

"I'm delighted. I really am! Nothing could be better. She's cut out for a doctor's wife, and he's got such a good practice. I do hope it won't be a long engagement. I'd like her to be married as soon as we return. She had made most of her things. The others could be got from the shops. . . . It'll be nice too, her being so near. And then, of course, we could call him in for any of the invalids. The Montgomerys have their own man. I never did care about him—old Doctor Owen. But I could persuade the Cutlers to have Doctor Merivale for Adolphus, I'm sure. They said they'd be coming back in October."

So her tongue ran on the livelong day. That evening she wrote a letter of many pages and heart-felt congratulations, and again, by my advice, said no word of Fanny or her proximity.

In spite of Aunt Theresa's fears we did not come across the Olivers again. And when, about the second week in August, Aunt Joanna joined us, the matter had been submerged by the rising tide of deeper interests. She was radiant in her new and blushing importance. Jasper Merivale was a much more ardent and impetuous wooer than had been George Oliver. He insisted on a speedy marriage. Why not? What was there to wait for? He had a fine house, a good practice, ample means, and he wanted a suitable wife. Joanna Le Suir seemed that in his eyes, and he simply swept her off her feet as seemed his way in dealing with women, whether as patients or prospective partners for life.

At all events, Joanna came to us laden with presents, assured of the kindest welcome of relatives and friends, and able once more to "hold her head up" in Bath, or anywhere else.

That was how she put it. This was the fashion in which love and matrimony and the future of woman were presented to my young mind.

A letter from the Chevalier makes a golden landmark here.

Such a letter! Pages long, and as fantastic and whimsical as himself. I seemed to hear his voice, to see his face, to join in his laughter. He begged me to write soon, and at length, and tell him everything. This was delightful employment, for I could take paper and pencil to my sea nooks at Great Orme's feet, and there revel in an "out pouring" of fancy and fact happily stored in my memory for such an opportunity. I told him of my delight in Wales as presented by this beautiful coast. Of the news of Aunt Joanna's engagement. Of how I missed him, and how I wondered as to the next stage of my erratic education.

We were to return to Bath at the end of August. My aunt would probably be married early in October. I was to be one of her bridesmaids; Aunt Theresa the other. They discussed the feasibility of "Ringlets" as a third, but nothing was decided. She was fair, and Aunt Theresa and I were dark. They seemed to think there might be a difficulty in the selection of colours. I used to hear arguments as to "wreaths and veils" or "bonnets." Aunt Joanna decided to be married in white satin and the regulation orange blossoms. There was no reason why she shouldn't have a "stylish wedding." And oh! how it would annoy Fanny! She'd know what she had lost, for no one would have loved the show and fuss, the dresses, the ceremony, the breakfast as she would have done. Now she'd never know what it was to "look like a bride." A real satin-clad, wreathed and veiled bride, led to the altar in appropriate fashion.

Here suddenly came another point of discussion. Who was to "lead" Aunt Joanna to the altar? They had no near male relative it seemed. Only someone called "doddering old great-uncle Henry," away in Tipperary. How was he to travel, or understand the duties of *in loco parentis* even if he ever arrived in Bath? Aunt Theresa suggested asking the General. The Montgomerys always came back to Bath at the end of October, but perhaps for such an occasion as this they might come a little earlier.

Thus the talk went on through pleasant days, and it seemed—happy ones. That past of disappointed hopes, treachery,

hysterics, broken-heartedness, was relegated to the background of the present. Prospective matrimony seemed to have rejuvenated Aunt Joanna. I watched and studied her, marvelling.

To my young mind it seemed a little strange that a woman could love and accept and arrange to be married to one man, and six months later be preparing quite complacently to be married to another! Were feelings so adjustable to circumstances? Did marriage represent so much that a woman could acquiesce in its obligations for the sheer satisfaction of *being* married?

These were questions I asked myself, but I felt shy of putting them to Aunt Joanna.

XVI

IN WHICH I LEARN THE THEORY OF NAMES

It seemed strange to be home again. To find the great house garnished and ready for occupation. Clean starched curtains were at the windows; a wholesome smell of soap and furniture polish pervaded the sitting-rooms. We were welcomed by Mickey and Bridget, and an apologetic vision reminiscent of "poor Mary." It appeared she had taken the pledge, and therefore been reinstated in kitchen quarters once more.

Busy and stirring preparations now began for the wedding. Aunt Joanna seemed the victim of two distinct states of feeling. One was that her "things" would never be ready in time; the other a fear that she would never be able to "go through with it."

These conditions brought about much scolding from Aunt Theresa, who alternately bullied and consoled with her. When the *trousseau* began to show signs of completion my interest grew more vivid. Such beautiful clothes, such wonderful stores of "old lace" and brocade unearthed from boxes; such charming dresses and bonnets, and sets of boots and shoes, and dozens of gloves and handkerchiefs. It seemed wonderful—just for one woman. Then the presents began to come in. Butter knives,

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salt cellars, work-boxes, toilet sets, *papier maché* blotting-books, albums, all of which were ticketed and acknowledged in due course.

Finally arrived the eventful day. A dull October morning when we had an early, uncomfortable breakfast at which Aunt Joanna did not appear. Immediately afterwards I saw the dining-room taken possession of by a host of confectioner's men, who enlarged the table, and laid it out with flowers and fruit, and a wonderful wedding cake on a plated stand. Other marvels appeared. Ruby claret glasses; wonderfully coloured jellies; snowy, trembling blancmanges; tongues and chicken; and a ham, frilled and decorated with roses cut from turnips and coloured with cochineal; sandwiches and cakes. I gazed rapturously at it all, almost forgetful of my own toilet.

The dressmaker had come to help Aunt Joanna. Bidy had promised to "hook me up," and Aunt Theresa was to adjust my wreath and veil. The bridesmaids' dresses were of white grenadine with rose-coloured sashes. The wreaths were of small pink roses; the veils, hanging at the back, were of white tulle. Aunt Theresa was to walk first, behind the Bride, and be ready to take her bouquet and gloves. I and "Ringlets" were to bring up the rear.

When I was dressed I went to look for her. We were all to meet in the drawing-room and have a view of the Bride before our departure.

There was an awning to the street, and crimson carpeting down the steps, and all the servants and errand boys in the neighbourhood seemed looking out of windows, or crowding round the railings. Weddings were early in those days. Eleven o'clock was the hour for the church, and at half-past ten I and my fellow-bridesmaid stood surveying each other, and receiving compliments on our appearance. Then carriages came up, and Mickey took out white rosettes for the coachmen and footmen. I looked out of the window and watched them pinning them on, and exchanging jokes as they did so. The Bride's carriage had two grey horses. Ours was a more sober-looking equipage drawn by two chestnuts. I think "Ringlets" was very nervous. At least, she giggled a great deal, and declared she was "all of a

tremble," and couldn't button her gloves. We were to carry bouquets of pink and white roses, sent by the bridegroom, and it was necessary to be ready gloved before taking our departure.

I think Adolphus Cutler came to her assistance. Then Aunt Theresa appeared, looking very handsome, followed by Joanna, very pale, and half hysterical, and not at all my idea of the radiant Queen of the occasion. The General insisted that she must have a glass of wine, and Mickey brought up claret and sherry. I surveyed her with keen interest. Her dress was of white satin, plainly made, with a long train. Her hair had been dressed by the hairdresser from Hatt's, in the Corridor. Her wreath of orange blossoms was coronet shaped, and very becoming, and the long soft folds of tulle that fell from head to foot gave a touch of graceful mystery to the toilette.

The claret seemed to bring a little colour and life into her face, and the old General's cheery voice and gay jests restored her composure. Then came the inexorable reminder of time. The three bridesmaids had to depart, Aunt Theresa leaving her sister with whispered injunctions not to be "foolish," and to remember it was the duty of a bride to look well at any cost.

"You really might . . . just a *touch* . . . under the veil it'll never show, and you look ghastly." I heard this as, with a final touch to the bridal train, Aunt Theresa bade farewell to the Joanna Le Suir of some thirty years' intimate and family association.

I have a dim recollection of an organ playing; a crowd of faces; someone putting footstools for us to kneel upon. Of Aunt Joanna standing beside the spruce-looking, frock-coated bridegroom. Of his voice firm and assured, of her's weak and almost inaudible. Breaks; pauses; kneeling; standing. A long dissertation, and then a word. "*Amazement.*" That struck on my ears and held me wondering. What an odd word with which to finish up the marriage ceremony.

I determined to read it over to myself when I got home, and try and fathom its mysteries.

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congratulating of the Bride. She was quite radiant now. Flushed, smiling, happy looking. More music; the rolling chords and phrases of Mendelssohn's Wedding March this time, and Aunt Joanna walking down the aisle on the arm of her *husband*. (How odd *that* seemed to me.) Behind her Aunt Theresa and the General, then "Ringlets" and Adolphus. Then myself and some unknown guest, told off as my escort.

Home again, and a crowd in the drawing-room. Gay voices; loud talk; much laughter. The breakfast. Wonderful food; foaming wine; the cutting of the cake by the Bride. Then a stir and general movement. Retirement of the Bride accompanied by Aunt Theresa. The gentlemen proposing healths and clinking glasses as the ladies slipped upstairs to the drawing-room. Out there in the street carriages reassembling. Among us in the house a certain restraint and expectancy. Then—commotion on the stairs. Way for the Bride! She is coming down for the last time. She is on her way to a new life, a new home, new destiny.

We came out, we followed her down to the hall. Boxes had been put on a waiting cab. The white horses were prancing. Bridget, and Mickey, and "poor Mary" stood at the area steps armed with old shoes to throw after the happy pair. More kissing, and embracing. Tears from Aunt Joanna; a handkerchief to her eyes. Entreaties from Aunt Theresa not to "give way." Momentary confusion. A vision of the Bridegroom who had changed his wedding attire for a travelling suit. Then shouts of "good-bye," "good luck," a rattle of wheels—and they were off!

Off on the most momentous journey two human beings can take. Off on the first stage of that strange road which leads—whither we know not.

When I had taken off my wedding finery, I went up the attic stairs to the friend I had so neglected. It was not quite my fault. I had been constantly in demand during this strenuous time. Wanted for half a hundred things during the day. To run a message, fetch something from a shop, match a skein of

silk, help to brush, fold, or pack the older portions of Aunt Joanna's wardrobe. To hold pins while she was being fitted, or undo "bastings" of machine-run seams.

But now I seemed to have called a halt. By the time guests had gone, and the waiters were clearing the tables and packing up the hired glass and china, Aunt Theresa proclaimed herself "worn out." She went off to her room, and I was free to do the same.

Whatever changes went on in the house below, or the neighbourhood around, none seemed to take place in that Grey Life above. Its routine never changed. Always the same task; the same patience; the same passive monotony. Her book was nearing completion, she told me. But no matter whether she was busied on it or not she was always ready to welcome me; always eager to go on with those French lessons, always interested in the smallest detail of the life I lived and described.

I told her all about the wedding. I could not understand why Aunt Joanna should have cried so much. Surely she wasn't *sorry* for marrying the doctor! If so why had she accepted him?

The quiet listener suggested natural emotion at parting from her sister, her home. "Besides, my child," she added, "no woman can ever enter upon marriage without a sense of apprehension. What will this stranger become to her? The ever-constant tender lover she has known, or the callous, work-a-day, unsympathetic being who stands to memory as 'other women's husbands.' If he changes will it be her fault, or his? If they cannot agree, if love's touchstone—'sympathy'—is absent, what will be the result? Bitterness, hardness, regret; the never-ceasing pricks of unsuitability, the perpetual irritation produced by variance of feeling; impossibility of agreement? Love is either nothing or everything in marriage. It is the 'everything' that shipwrecks one or other life on the rocks of disagreement. A great passion is like an earthquake; it is a magnificent force for disastrous results."

"I do not think Aunt Joanna's marriage was—quite like *that*," I hazarded.

"I imagine not. I pity her if it was."

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"Perhaps they will be happy," I observed presently. "She seemed to think she would like being a doctor's wife. And then living here so near us, it will not seem as if she had lost touch with us, will it?"

"No. As far as I can judge I should say it was a most suitable marriage. But, of course, I know nothing of your aunt's character any more than I know of this doctor—what is it; his name?"

"Merivale. Jasper Merivale."

There was a long silence. Then she said, "I wish it was not Jasper."

"Why?" I asked.

"I have such an odd feeling about names. They either attract or repel me, but always they seem to represent some characteristic of the owner. Jasper can never mean anything to me but cruelty, hardness; a coarse and sensual being, careless of wounding the feelings of others; passionately greedy of his own pleasures. I may be wrong. But that is how the name affects me. In my books I can only give my characters the names I *feel*. It has to hold for me the nature of the person it presents. It may sound foolish, but so it is. The same when I read a book. A character who does not *convey* his, or her name, seems like a misfit to the story. There is no excuse for such misfits. Names are plentiful enough. I will illustrate this by your great author, Dickens. Does he *ever* give a character a name that does not suit it as a glove fits a hand? Name any in that great gallery he has filled and to which he will add countless other portraits, and say if the person is not a synonym for the name? To pronounce the name seems to bring the character before you."

"I see what you mean."

"Your Chevalier, now. When you told me his name, I could picture him directly. Whimsical, fantastic; playing buffoon when it suited him, but tender of heart, and *true* as only rare natures are."

"Yes, he is that!" I cried eagerly. "Tender and true, and kind to all things that are helpless, and ignorant, and dumb. What he has told me——"

"I know," she said. "It doesn't need words. But such natures are born to suffer."

"Oh—I hope he will not suffer!"

"You may be sure he has done so, and will. But he will let no one see. He would press the sword to his heart and die with a laugh on his lips, and never blame the giver of the wound."

"One would think you knew him, Madame?"

"Take credit to yourself and your gift of word painting, my child. I seem to see him with your eyes, and know him through your lips. If ever I draw him, Rosaleen, as Wandering Knight, a Quixote of modern life, it will be through you I have learnt to do so. The temptation has been strong with me ever since you first spoke of him. Sometimes I wonder——"

"Yes?" I questioned.

"I wonder if I *dare*?"

"Why not?"

"If he were to read it? One never knows."

"Why should he mind, even if he did recognize the likeness?"

"That is not for me to say. People are strangely thin-skinned over their printed portraiture. Our friend Dickens has found that out already. By the way, have you seen the house where he stayed when he was writing, 'Pickwick'?"

"Yes. In St. James's Square. The Chevalier showed it me."

"He—he likes the great writer?"

"Adores him! He says England has produced no greater genius. For to the gift of humour he adds the rarer gift of human sympathy. It is not often that the same pen can draw forth laughter and tears."

"No. It is, indeed, a rare gift. Fortunate he who not only possesses it, but can enforce its recognition far and wide."

"I wish," I said, "you would let me read something of yours. I should love to know what your books are like?"

"You must get on with your French then."

"But *that* is not in French?" I pointed to the neat pile of MSS. on the table. "I can read the title."

"You gave me the title. Do you remember? I am writing in both languages, French and English."

"How wonderfully clever you must be!"

"Clever! What comfort is that to a woman? Her own

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sex dislike her ; men are afraid of her. And all the praise of the world cannot warm an empty heart."

Enough to think of now. Heart and brain active and eager in their researches. Back in the beautiful old city I missed my wonderful teacher more than ever. Its streets, its memorable houses, its circling hills, its sparkling river, were all eloquent of him.

After the wedding was over, and Aunt Theresa had time to remember my claims, we discussed what course my education must now take. There was the High School in Portland Place ; there were day schools and private seminaries ; no lack of places to select from. But I disliked the idea of school. I could not fancy myself drilled and formed into regulation pattern ; learning just cut-and-dry subjects in the conventional methods of public teaching. Then Aunt Theresa suggested a governess. Someone who would come in every morning and give me so many hours' tuition.

"For music you can go to the Conservatoire in Rivers Street. They have splendid teachers. I shall have to hire another piano. We could have it in the parlour. Now that Fanny and Joanna are gone we can do as we please here. Just you and I, my child. It will be lonesome at first, but we must get used to it."

Lonesome ? I looked at her in surprise. Fanny the termagant was no loss, and Aunt Joanna had not been a very lively companion, especially since her broken engagement. But doubtless Aunt Theresa was back in memory with the companionship and mutual interests that had bound the three sisters so closely.

"I shall not find it lonesome," I said. "But, of course, you'll miss the others very much."

"I shall miss Joanna. You'll have to try and make up for her, Rosaleen. You're growing fast ; you'll soon be a young woman."

She looked at me with kindly criticism. "I must make you my interest in life. It will be nice to see you growing up, and then coming out, and going to balls and things. Let me see—thirteen, fourteen, fifteen ; well, only another four years to wait. When you're seventeen you shall go to your first ball at the Assembly Rooms. I promise you that. You don't look very

excited at the prospect. But wait till you've learnt to dance!"

"Even then," I said, "I don't feel as if I should care about a public ball very much. It must be so horrid to have a lot of strange men putting their arms round you, whirling you about, and talking such idiotic nonsense as Aunt Fanny used to say they talked."

"What an extraordinary child you are, Rosaleen! You're just like Lucius. He never went to a ball in his life. He wouldn't learn dancing."

"I don't think I should mind if I never learnt it either."

Aunt Theresa regarded me hopelessly.

"But you must. You're a Le Suir, and you owe it to the family to take some position in Society. We were the belles of Dublin—once. And presented at the Castle, and all. I can't do *that* for you, seeing how we've come down in the world, but Bath is a very excellent place to 'come out'."

"To—'come out'?"

"Yes, be introduced; go into Society. The winters here are very gay, and half the fashionable world come down for the season. And the Theatre opens, and such good companies as we get. Oh! I've never regretted coming here. And, after all, both the girls are married, and married well."

XVII

I LEARN MORE OF WOMEN AND THEIR WAYS

THE governess plan was not very successful. I had been too well grounded by my father, and too delightfully exploited by the Chevalier to accept the petty teachings of mediocracy. I knew a great deal Miss Dunning did not know, even if I displayed corresponding ignorance upon what she considered "essentials." But her musical training was excellent, and her smattering of algebra useful. For the rest, I read voraciously such books as were scattered lavishly through the two deserted bedrooms

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of my married aunts, and which I had collected and put on the bookshelves of my own little room. Shakespeare, Scott, Byron, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Miss Braddon. One or two volumes of a modern writer called, "Ouida," who was whispered of as "dangerous," and lavishly read by library subscribers. "Vanity Fair," "Pendennis," the romances of Bulwer Lytton; all these were at my disposal, and all served as factors in my education.

Then there were letters from the Chevalier. He had grown weary of playing "squireen" to what he called "bogs and bores." The latter were only happy with a fishing-rod at one end and a salmon at the other, or riding a "finer animal than themselves to death, over a country that Satan's own self couldn't be calling fit for hunting." He shut up his "mansion," as he called it, packed his portmanteau, and started forth again on his travels.

Somehow, this was good news for me. If he was wandering again, his errant fancy might bring him back to Bath. Earnestly I prayed so. How desperately my heart longed for that companionship only I knew. Aunt Theresa spoke of him occasionally. We still kept up the fable of an "Academy" that had only just escaped academical realization for want of means.

"He was a most extraordinary man," she would say. "But clever, no doubt of that. It was wonderful how much he taught you in a short time."

I agreed with her. It was wonderful. I never took a walk through park, or streets, or country lanes, without thinking of their meaning as he had made me think. I never read a book without trying to pierce the surface of words for some hint of deeper import than just the beauty of a phrase, or the turn of a sentence. The poetry he had recited, the legends he had told me, the hundred and one treasures of facile speech and retentive memory, all these were with me.

I think they are with me to this day.

When Aunt Joanna was fairly established as mistress of her new domicile, she invited me to come and see her. The house was a tall, gloomy, stone building like our own, but with a

better drawing-room, of which she was very proud. It interested me to see how she wore her new honours. How pleased and important she was. How keen on establishing her husband's reputation; on calling on prospective "patients"; arranging dinner-parties, and card-parties, and generally playing the well-to-do matron to all and sundry of her Bath acquaintances.

Aunt Theresa declared she gave herself "airs" on the strength of professional dignity, and assured means.

"Just as if I hadn't helped to bring it about," she grumbled. "Where'd she be now if I hadn't called him in that time, and encouraged his visits all I could?"

It seemed to me that "poor Mary" was the *dea ex machina* of that little incident, but I was learning that there were times to speak and times to be silent if one wanted to live peaceably with relatives.

So the grey wintry days came again, and I could scarcely believe that a year had passed since I had first seen the grey old town and written of my dislike. That was all changed now.

Never again could it be to me ugly, dull, uninteresting. Never could I pass up Pulteney Street or see Sydney Gardens without a thrill of remembrance that brought the smart of tears. Never gaze up at the circling hills and the great wide downs without a thought of him who had lent them the magic of his own vivid fancy.

Again as on the previous Christmas Day I was to go in to late dinner. Aunt Joanna and the doctor had also been invited. She informed us she would wear her wedding dress, so Aunt Theresa suggested that I should put on my bridesmaid's frock. I mentioned this to "Ringlets" with whom I had casual and friendly chats. She grasped the significance of the idea and decided she would also wear her's. Aunt Theresa made no objection to my curls; in fact, she said my hair was so beautiful it was a shame to plait it up. She presented me with some rose-coloured velvet the colour of my sash, and suggested tying back the heavy tresses with it instead of the black ribbon I had previously worn.

I felt a childish pleasure in it all. In my increased height, my pretty frock and shoes, my assured position in the house-

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hold, all of whom were more or less my friends now. A year ago how strange and stiff and cold it had all seemed.

There was a fire in my bedroom, and the Dodger sat by it and watched my preparations with kindly interest. Aunt Theresa had promised to run up and fasten my frock for me, and tie back the curls with the rose-coloured velvet. I wondered what was delaying her, and at last took up a book and sat by the fire, quietly reading, until she should come.

The little clock on the mantelshelf pointed to six, then ten, then fifteen minutes past the hour. I wondered if she had forgotten? I put down the book, and had resolved to go to her room instead of waiting when the door opened and she came hurriedly in.

"I was reading some letters," she said. "They came late; the mail train was snowed up. What do you think I've heard? Fanny is going out to Australia; her husband is dying! The doctors say it's his only chance."

"Dying?"

"Yes, consumption, I believe. Well, God knows I wish her no harm. That's all over and done with. But as I always said—a judgment *has* fallen upon her. I do wonder what Joanna will say when I tell her? After all, she's had a lucky escape. Captain Oliver seems to have become a chronic invalid!"

She was fastening up my frock with fingers that trembled with agitation. Her tongue went on, and I listened silently.

"To Australia—of all places! I'm sure Fanny will hate it. And the long sea-voyage too! She asks if she can come and say good-bye to us. She knows, of course, of Joanna's marriage. We sent cards, but she never had the politeness to acknowledge them."

"Come here?" I exclaimed. "Oh! surely not!"

"Well, *we* couldn't be going to her, that's very plain. Indeed, I'm doubtful if Joanna will meet her, even if she comes here. I suppose she will though. Let bygones be bygones, that's what I say. No use keeping up family quarrels, although I know we Le Suirs are not accounted a very forgiving race. There's been black blood for generations over some wrong-doings. . . . There now, Rosaleen, your dress is done. Let me look at you. Yes,

you look very nice. Quite a colour. I do wonder if you'll grow up a credit to us after all? The youngest of the family too. And it seems likely you'll be so. For there's little likelihood Joanna will have any children. As for Fanny——"

"That's the dinner bell surely!" I exclaimed.

She started. "Gracious! I ought to be in the drawing-room. Come along, child! It's a mercy you're dressed."

We hurried down and were just in time to receive the Merivales. Mickey was showing them up with due ceremony. The whole party assembled in the drawing-room on this occasion. The same party as last year—with the exception of Fanny, and the addition of Dr. Merivale. He was told off to escort Lady Montgomery. The General again took Aunt Theresa. The Judge presented his arm to Aunt Joanna, and Adolphus escorted Mrs. Judge. As on a previous occasion the Miss Cutlers, "Ringlets" and I, took in each other and sat in the same places.

"Do you remember last year?" giggled my companion. "And the way you talked and went on. I thought you were the queerest child I'd ever met. Dear! Dear! What changes in such a short time! Two marriages."

"No births or deaths, though."

"Now, now! You really mustn't make me laugh. It hurts my digestion. By the way, how's the gout?"

"Gout?"

"Don't you remember? You told me you were here to take the waters because you suffered from gout."

It was my turn to laugh. "Oh, I just said anything that came into my head. I thought I must make conversation as I was at my first dinner-party."

"Mickey treats you with more respect now," she said, as that functionary deposited our soup plates without interpolating remarks. "By the way, what a handsome man Doctor Merivale is. Don't you think so?"

I looked across at the Doctor. He was almost opposite. I studied his face a moment, remembering what Madame Odylle had said his name represented. No. I did not think him handsome, and said so. She wanted to know my ideal of manly beauty? I cast my mind over heroes of fiction. Stephen Guest; Mr.

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Rochester; Rawdon Crawley; Ouida's lovely guardsmen. I could not picture any of them as a type I desired. I said I had none, and counter-questioned her ideals.

They seemed concerned with something "strong, and gentle, and devoted, and adoring; dark eyes, dark hair; very tall, and bronzed, and soldierly, with a dash of the poetic and the clerical." Rather bewildering and very unlikely to exist. But she talked on and on, weaving endless variations on the type.

"I don't believe you're listening. Your eyes are looking miles away!" she exclaimed suddenly.

I started. Truly my thoughts were with my eyes if "miles away" meant some region traversed by manly ideals. Meant looking at an eager face that laughed and jested with a hundred passing fancies. Meant listening to a voice mellowed and persuasive, that gave eloquence to the simplest word. Meant all and more than all of charmed hours and happy days.

I sighed and came back to common things of life. "I wonder if they are really happy?"

"Who?"

"My aunt and the doctor."

"Why don't you say 'Uncle'?"

"I never call him that."

"How strange! I'd love to have him for an uncle. Of course they're happy. No one could help being happy with such a husband. Besides, they've only been married two months."

I knew that. But I had heard little skirmishes, sharp speeches, that jarred upon my ideas of newly-wedded felicity. There was no doubt about Dr. Merivale being *strong*, and dark of eye and hair; tall also, and with a certain air of authority. But there I stopped. Anything gentle and devoted was quite inapplicable. I felt sure he would be master always, and on all occasions.

The dinner went gaily on. In respect of menu and appointments it was just like that of the previous Christmas. In respect of circumstances it was altogether different. The year had altered my outlook on things as much as it had altered myself. Instead of "nearly thirteen" I could say "nearly fourteen." It seemed quite a great age to me. But then, from the time I could speak intelligently I had been my father's companion, and

had learnt to think for myself. By comparison with my thoughts and myself, "Ringlets" seemed a giddy, silly child. When she threw *œillades* at Adolphus Cutler across the table, I could only think of Lydia Languish and her kind, to whom sentiment and flirtation meant all that made life worth living.

"Do you know where Sheridan's house is?" I asked her abruptly.

"Sheridan's house? No. Did he ever live here, in Bath?"

"Of course. In Terrace Walk. They say he wrote the 'Rivals' there. And you know the Linley's lived in Pierpoint Street; number Five, it is. It was Elizabeth Linley with whom he was in love. Don't you know the story?"

She shook her head. "I don't feel as interested in Bath people as you seem to be."

"But such famous people!" I exclaimed. "The beautiful Linleys, and Sheridan, whose 'School for Scandal' has held the stage for over a hundred years. It will hold it as long as anything of Shakespeare's."

I was quoting the Chevalier, but, of course, she could not know that. However, she had seen both those famous plays, "The Rivals," and "The School," so she scored over me there. But I had read them, and knew parts by heart, which again scored for me. We had an animated discussion over their respective merits. I told her I had never been to a theatre yet. In Ireland there had been none near enough to go to. In Bath no one seemed to go. The Chevalier had shown me the old Theatre Royal in Orchard Street, which John Hippisly built, and which had the honour of being the first Theatre Royal out of London. The modern one in Beaufort Square, next door to Beau Nash's house, had been destroyed by fire in '62, and reopened the year following.

The great Mrs. Siddons had won some of her greatest triumphs at this theatre, so had many notable actors and actresses who would visit Bath in the "off" season, what time Drury Lane was given up to pantomime or light comedy. In this house Marie Wilton, and Coghlan, and Rignold had won many triumphs; and here Tom Robertson and Mrs. Kendal had gained their first lessons in dramatic art.

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That I knew so much seemed to astonish my giddy friend, but eventually she said we must make up a party and go there one night; the next time a good stock company came round. The idea was entrancing. I knew it would not be difficult to persuade Aunt Theresa, for she was kindness itself; and for the rest of the dinner I gave myself up to the glorified visions of what a real, live stage play (Sheridan for choice) would mean. With scenery and actors and actresses, and the dialogue delivered in proper professional style. My blissful dream was interrupted by the usual toast to "Absent Friends," and the General's speech, and then the pulling of crackers, and the laughter and chatter these things occasioned.

We all went up to the drawing-room, and there was music and singing, and a round game at cards with counters, and general hilarity and goodwill. I wondered whether Aunt Joanna had been given the news yet? I had seen the two sisters holding a long confidential converse after we left the dining-room. If she had heard of Fanny's misfortunes they in no way damped her spirits. I found myself wondering whether there would be a reconciliation at the "parting of the ways."

Going to Australia sounded such a final note somehow! It was like crossing to the end of the world, or so it seemed to me.

However, at ten o'clock I was sent off to bed, just as a tray of hot negus and other delectable things was brought up for the guests. Aunt Joanna invited me to come to tea with her the next day as she had a present for me. Then I bade them all good night, and departed to find my faithful little dog curled up on the rug before the fire, and Biddy waiting to unfasten the mysterious hooks and eyes which always offered such difficulties to my fingers.

She was full of talk; chiefly of the newly married couple. She had had "a wurrd" with Aunt Joanna, somehow, and thought her looking "grand." The good fortune of the match she had made was again brought up. According to Biddy she had done "mighty well for herself." Such a sensible marriage, too. "The luck av 'poor Mary' goin' down wid herself that time, just as Miss Joanna wanted rousin'! Wasn't it Providence dalin' wid the situation?"

It really seemed in those days that marriage *was* the aim and end of every woman's life, and the one event in that life about which Providence was supposed to concern itself. Didn't the proverb say, "marriages were made in Heaven," and say it in more languages than one!

I asked Biddy if she had heard the news of Aunt Fanny's proposed visit? She had not, and was amazed at its reason. To be crossing the seas and going to a wild "haythin country," as she considered Australia, seemed quite punishment enough for my aunt's misdemeanours. Biddy declared she had always said no good could come of *that* match. "Decayvers" were always paid back, soon or late. But she was all agog with curiosity as to the meeting of the sisters, and wondered, even as I did myself, what sort of a "God-speed" the delinquent would receive from Aunt Joanna.

I spent the next morning writing a reminiscent letter to the Chevalier. It consisted largely of "this day last year," "this time a year ago," and "do you remember?" I felt horribly mournful and depressed after it was done and addressed to his last direction—an hotel in Paris.

I put it aside till I should be able to get to the post office and procure the requisite stamps. Then I practised diligently till luncheon time. I asked Aunt Theresa if she was coming also to her sister's? She said she was too busy, and, besides, she must write to Fanny.

"Will she come here then?" I enquired.

"Oh, she must. After all, she's flesh and blood of ours, and it doesn't do to harbour revenge for always. She's having her share of trouble, and it will be a good thing that she should see how comfortable and happy Joanna is, as a set-off against *that*."

It seemed an odd sort of reasoning to me. But I am sure Aunt Theresa only took the standpoint of justice. Not an ill-natured, but a judicial one, that was meant to show how the balance of things occasionally righted itself in this strange world.

If Aunt Theresa's reasoning was judicial, what was I to think of Aunt Joanna's. She posed no longer as the aggrieved martyr

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but as the complacent and well-satisfied matron. Of course, it was "insolent" of Fanny to intrude again after the scandal of her behaviour. Still, I could see that Aunt Joanna was in no way averse to displaying the comforts and elegancies of her establishment; or introducing the handsome doctor who had laid heart and fortune at her feet. The generally satisfactory conditions of her wedded life would surely excite the envy of the culprit.

"She can't look down on me *now*," she asserted, surveying her handsome room and her well-arranged tea equipage. All solid silver—"family" silver, from teapot to cake basket. "And, at least, I haven't to go tramping over the world from one end to the other with a poor wreck of a man like George Oliver. She'll kill him, like enough, before long. It would need a strong constitution to stand the wear and tear of Fanny's company. I wonder if he'll leave her well off? A widow with good means would suit her ideas better than that of wife to an invalid husband."

"Then you'll ask her *here*?" I said.

"I must if Theresa does it. Besides, I'd like Jasper to see her again. He only knew her by sight, coming up or down Pulteney Street."

"He knew the story," I remarked. "He told me so the first time he came to the house."

"Of course, he knew it! Every soul in Bath knew it. I really wonder at her daring to show her face here again. But then I've always said the deed was never done that Fanny would be ashamed of."

I drank my tea, and ate buttered scones, and praised everything as I knew I was expected to praise. Again Aunt Joanna reverted to the inevitable topic. Had I thought Fanny much altered when I saw her in Wales this summer? I said she had grown handsomer. Captain Oliver looked very ill, I added.

"I wonder if she'll bring him too?" said Aunt Joanna.

"Oh no! Surely not."

"Oh, I wouldn't put it past her! She's impudent enough for anything."

"I think she told Aunt Theresa she was only going to stay one night."

"Then she won't be able to dine here? But I'll ask her to tea. I shouldn't like her to go out of the place without seeing my house and my silver."

Truly, I thought, women are strange creatures!

XVIII

PROVING THAT A FEUD ONLY SMOULDERS INTO PARTIAL
EXTINCTION

FANNY arrived in due course.

A chastened and subdued Fanny. Very pretty; very beautifully dressed; not a bit the aggressive, tyrannical despot of old. I did not witness the meeting between her and Aunt Theresa, for we did not see each other till luncheon, which was partaken of in the little parlour as Fanny did not wish to meet what she called, "the old crew."

She seemed astonished that I had grown so tall but made no further remark. In fact, she was so silent and depressed that Aunt Theresa's kind heart overflowed in sympathy, and no one would have thought any "rift" had muted the music of sisterly harmony.

"Rosaleen will run round to Joanna's with you," she said. "She expects you at four o'clock."

Fanny and her husband were in London it appeared, and she had run down for the day, would sleep the night, and return next morning. The Captain's illness had been brought on by a neglected cold, ending in pneumonia, and prophetic of tubercular trouble. The sea voyage and a year in the dry, splendid climate of Australia might cure him. At least, the doctors had ordered it, and, with a man's eagerness to grasp at returning strength, George Oliver had determined to take their advice.

"We sail on the thirtieth," said Fanny. "I suppose you wouldn't come up to London and see us off?"

Aunt Theresa shook her head. "No—I hate partings.

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There's nothing more melancholy than seeing friends going away from one in a great ship, over the ocean. I really couldn't bring myself to do it."

"I didn't suppose you would," said Fanny. "But George suggested I should ask you—and Joanna."

"Joanna?"

"He seems to think he'd like to part friends with her. He wanted to write, but I said I'd ask her."

"Well, you'll see her this afternoon. You can ask her then."

"She's made a good match, you say?"

"Splendid. He's one of the most popular doctors in Bath; a fine practice and a fine position. He was called into consultation with Sir Francis Haycock over a case."

"Joanna must be in her element. She was always crazy about medicines and quackery. A perfect *malade imaginaire*."

"She is well enough now. And looks ten years younger."

Fanny dropped the subject by an enquiry as to who conducted my education? I told her of Miss Dunning. When the Christmas holidays were over I was to have dancing lessons and gymnastic exercises at the Bath High School. Her eyes were coldly scornful of such information. She made a sneering enquiry after my "vagabond professor." I told her of his good fortune, of which she seemed incredulous.

"I daresay it's all lies. The man had a perfect genius for exaggeration."

My blood boiled. I burst into furious championship. She only laughed and said I was a promising spitfire, and she didn't envy my governess.

I think that of all I had pictured in the way of greeting or reception between the wrong-doer and the wronged, nothing in any way approached the reality.

Fanny and I were ushered into the big lamp-lit drawing-room, all crimson damask and polished walnut, and there, rising from the big Chesterfield near the fire, was Aunt Joanna. A dignified figure in rustling black silk.

She looked at her sister, and all she said was, "Well—Fanny?"

Fanny gave a little harsh laugh. "Well, Joanna? Do you

expect me to beg your pardon, or are you willing to be friends again?"

Aunt Joanna's lips tightened. "It is certainly due to me that you should ask my pardon for your disgraceful and unsisterly behaviour."

"Very well, I do. But you certainly don't look heart-broken; and I think you've made the best bargain, if it comes to that."

She seated herself on one of the damask arm-chairs, and I, after greeting Aunt Joanna, retreated to another.

Fanny's eyes took in the luxurious appointments of the room with a quick, comprehensive glance. There was a stiff interlude during which the two antagonists seemed to measure swords for conflict.

"I am sorry to hear that your—husband—is such an invalid."

"Isn't it a pity that yours can't attend him," said Fanny. "It would be a nice friendly family arrangement. I hear he is so clever. I don't think I ever met him, did I?"

"No. He doesn't know you."

"Am I to have the pleasure of making his acquaintance?"

"He isn't in much before dinner. He has such a large practice, his time is fully occupied."

"You don't see much of him, then? That's the best of professional men's wives. They don't have their husbands hanging round the house from morning till night."

"I have a great many friends, and we entertain largely. Of course, we owe it to our position."

"Yes, a doctor's bound to give dinner parties, so I've always heard. He has to *make* patients, as well as *cure* them!"

"I hope you don't mean to insinuate that Doctor Merivale does such a thing? It's like your suspicious mind, Fanny, to suggest it."

"Oh, I don't want to do any cap-fitting I assure you," said Fanny. "What a fine room this is. Takes the shine out of Theresa's old shabby drawing-room, and no mistake."

Joanna was mollified. "It is a fine room. The whole house is an improvement on Theresa's. If you like I will show you over it."

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things. Besides—now we've given up our own beautiful place, I fell no interest in anyone else's."

"Given up!"

"Yes. George has let it. He wanted all the money he could scrape together. If Australia suits him, he talks of settling there."

"How will you like that?"

"Oh, I don't know yet. I believe Sydney is quite a fine city, and there's lots of gaiety and fun. We shall go to Government House, and that'll put us all right."

"But if George is such an invalid?"

"Of course, I meant if he gets better. He seems very hopeful. It's this horrible, foggy, damp, English climate that tries him."

"I sincerely hope Australia *will* benefit him," said Aunt Joanna. "Now, may I give you some tea?"

It was so delightfully formal that I could not help chuckling as I sat back in my corner. Just like two people playing a game. Both thoroughly insincere, and outwardly cordial.

"Tea? . . . Oh, you're adopting the new fashion of having it brought up. Yes, I don't mind a cup."

Aunt Joanna rang, and a neat maidservant came in. She drew forth a small low table, laid it with an embroidered linen cloth, and then brought in the Georgian silver tray and all its beautiful old appointments. The china was not the everyday china, but lovely old Worcester. A chased silver basket held cakes of various sorts, and on a brass tripod before the fire the maid placed a muffin dish.

Fanny made no comment. It was certainly a change from the old parlour teas, with the table only half cleared of needlework or patterns, and the cups more or less cracked and ill-matched. The boarders always had the best set. Aunt Theresa considered odds and ends good enough for family use.

The comedy went on.

"May I give you cream? Do you take one or two lumps?—I forget. Bread and butter, or muffins? My cook toasts them rather well. Is your tea to your liking; not too strong?"

I could have laughed aloud, but I remembered my manners, and preserved a demure silence. It was too good to spoil. Fanny

drifted on to generalities. The voyage, the necessary outfit. Her dislike of the sea, and vivid memories of "Irish crossings." She refused a second cup of tea. I felt sure she did it as an expression of indifference to its quality. Aunt Joanna took *three*, in order to show her appreciation. And then, just as conversation was becoming very stilted, the door suddenly opened, and in walked the doctor.

Aunt Joanna sprang up, all surprise and gushing welcome. "Why, Jasper, I never expected to see you this time of day!"

Then she turned to Fanny. "My husband, Doctor Merivale. This is my sister, Mrs. Oliver," she added formally.

They shook hands. Being an onlooker I could not but notice the veiled curiosity of Fanny, the penetrating and approving glance of the doctor. He gave me a careless nod.

"You'll have some tea, Jasper?" asked his wife.

"How long has it been standing?"

"Only ten minutes," said Fanny, with a smile.

"Too long. I'll have some fresh made." He rang the bell, and remained standing with his back to the fire in the true Englishman's attitude.

"I hear you are going out to Australia," he said to Fanny.

She glanced up, met his eyes, then looked down and sighed faintly.

"Unfortunately, yes. I suppose you know why?"

"I told you, Jasper," interposed Aunt Joanna.

But he took no notice of her. He seemed to be making a study of Fanny. Her face, her wonderful colouring, the long sweep of the downcast lashes; her well-fitting jacket and skirt, the sables she had thrown back on her chair.

"Yes, Mrs. Oliver—or may I call you, Fanny?—I know why. I'm very sorry for you."

She looked up again. "Of course, call me Fanny. We're relatives—*now*."

The slight emphasis on the "now" seemed to implicate some previous acquaintanceship. At that moment the door opened and the servant came in. Joanna ordered her to bring some fresh tea, and then called out to me to come nearer the fire.

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I did so, taking up a place beside her on the big Chesterfield. She questioned me of holidays and domestic affairs, and the doctor talked to Fanny till the tea came in.

"You'll have some more, won't you, just to keep me company?" he said to his new sister-in-law.

"Well, perhaps I will have another cup—now that it's fresh," she added.

"I always tell Joanna she can't make tea," said the doctor. "At least, pour it out. She lets it stand too long, and she never knows how much water to add, or notices if it's boiling, or luke-warm, when she does add it."

Aunt Joanna's face flushed. A rebuke, even if ever so mild, before her younger sister could not be agreeable, especially under the circumstances.

"We always said that at home," said Fanny. "We never let her have anything to do with the teapot unless we wanted tannin, or dish-water!"

This was more than Aunt Joanna could stand. "It's well for you to talk of tea, or pouring it out either. I'd like to know if you ever put a hand to anything in the house! Don't I remember you asking if when we made tea we put in the water *first!*"

The doctor laughed. Fanny joined in the mirth.

"Oh—I was very young then, Joanna. You oughtn't to bring up our nursery days as a specimen of my incapacity. It sounds almost spiteful; doesn't it, Doctor—Jasper?"

"It does," he agreed, as he took his cup from his wife's hand.

"But I think most sisters are spiteful—elder sisters I mean."

I began to feel sorry for Aunt Joanna. It was hard that he should be so tactless just as she had desired to impress Fanny with her good fortune in the matrimonial lottery. I had often noticed that he liked to banter his wife, or poke fun at her little oddities. But this was not an occasion on which she would be likely to appreciate his humour.

"You mean we can't help getting to know each other too well for illusions," said Fanny, taking the tea intended for him, as he offered it to her.

"That was your tea, Jasper," said Aunt Joanna sharply.

"Oh! I'm so sorry!" said Fanny, and she gave him back the

cup, but he insisted she should take it. It was a trivial incident but a disturbance ensued, for the maid had only brought up one extra cup, intended for her master. Fanny's had been used, and stood on the tray. This necessitated ringing for another cup and that was so long in appearing that the doctor declared the tea had again become "tannin."

"Why on earth don't you have extra cups brought up with the tray?" he said brusquely. "Even when I was a bachelor I never muddled things like you do!"

"I always think men are much cleverer than women in every way," observed Fanny. "I've been in bachelor chambers, and I thought it wonderful, the order and arrangements, and—and everything. I'm sure I don't know why they want to get married at all!"

"We don't," said the doctor. "Only you catch us in our weak moments, and there we are! Baited, landed, cooked—poor helpless wretches!"

Poor Aunt Joanna! It was not flattering for a two months' bride to hear the "holy estate" upon which she had entered compared to a frying-pan. The conversation went on with an undercurrent of bitterness. It reminded me of the old days. Fanny had always had a way of bringing up disagreeables; of turning a harmless phrase into harmfulness. She was able either to make or rake up a quarrel on the smallest provocation. Points of variance were never settled. They only smouldered and burst out afresh long after others had forgotten them.

On this unfortunate afternoon scenes of old were dragged forth from hiding-places in her vindictive soul. Her sister was alternately chaffed, baited, ridiculed; yet all was done in a manner impossible to lay hold of. If Joanna lost her temper, Fanny either apologized, or expressed wonderment.

After one exasperated "snap" she rose, collected her furs, and said she must be going—she had stayed too long. Besides, Joanna looked tired, and put out about something. She hadn't meant any harm by her "chaff," but, of course, she ought to have remembered that Joanna never had possessed any sense of humour.

This was bad enough, without Doctor Jasper's (as she called him) ready assent.

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"That's just what I'm always telling her."

"Well, good-bye, my dear. I'm off by the ten o'clock train to-morrow, so I shan't see you again. Unless, of course, you decide to see us off, as Oliver begs of you."

"I shall not see you off," said Joanna coldly. "Tell your husband I wish him well, and I hope the climate may restore him to health. He used to look well and strong enough when I knew him first."

"Bath never did agree with him," said Fanny, drawing the sable boa round her beautiful shoulders. "He ought never to have stayed here. Then it has to be—good-bye?"

She held out her hand and looked at her sister with well-assumed sorrow. The doctor walked to the door as if to give opportunity for affectionate farewells. It was, perhaps, as well he did not overhear the real parting speech.

"I see you are as great a cat as ever!"

"And you—as foolish a mouse! Well, *au revoir*. Take better care of Jasper Merivale than you did of George Oliver."

How they could have *kissed* each other after that passed my powers of comprehension!

Fanny went downstairs and I followed. Doctor Merivale was standing in the hall with his hat on.

"I'll see you up the street. I have to call on a patient," he said.

She acquiesced, and we walked up the street and crossed the wide square. They talked familiarly and frankly as old friends. He left us at our door after a long and lingering hand-shake.

"The ten o'clock train I think you said?" was his last remark, and putting two and two together it seemed to me not improbable that he would be at the station to see her off.

What was there about Fanny so fascinating to the other sex? I could not for the life of me understand it. Could not imagine how he had been so blind as not to detect the way she had played upon her sister's weaknesses and faults, and tried to irritate her into a display of temper only too well warranted.

If Dr. Merivale had a bad quarter of an hour when he returned home he richly deserved it. What Joanna would have said had she heard Fanny's description of the meeting I cannot imagine.

She told Aunt Theresa that they seemed a most ill-assorted couple; always on the verge of quarrelling over every trifling discussion. "But that's Joanna all over," she added. "She never did understand men, or how to treat them. And she can't bear the smallest contradiction without flying into a temper."

At which judicial summing up, Aunt Theresa took up the cudgels for the absent, and there ensued one of the old fierce battles I remembered and had so gladly missed.

Truly Fanny was the "firebrand of the family," as Bidly called her. It was perhaps, a fortunate thing that she was going to put the ocean between her sisters and herself.

I learnt long afterwards that Dr. Merivale *did* see her off at the Great Western Station the next morning. Aunt Theresa was too offended and hurt by her conduct of the previous evening to do so.

But when I heard of that attention on the part of the doctor I could not but ask myself had there been "method" in the lady's actions? She may not have desired the presence of either of her sisters at the station. She had effectually prevented such a misadventure.

XIX

IN WHICH THE FATES ARE KIND

Snow and severe cold set in shortly after Fanny's departure. The circling hills were white, the old grey town looked strange in its mottled garb. I had caught a severe cold and was obliged to keep to the house. I employed my time by a further study of my "Gift Book"—the Chevalier's first present, and more precious to me than any other I possessed.

Its author gave the city a social status only second to that of London in days when Bath had played second fiddle to the great

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metropolis. It was of as much importance to be known in Bath in the season as it was to be known in St. James's Park, and Palace, or the resorts of rank and fashion in the Capital.

True, its glories were a century old ; that the famous beaux and belles of Nash's time had become history. That even such names as Fielding, Pope, Gainsborough, Samuel Johnson, Horace Walpole and the great Chesterfield, were but names more than memories. Yet their glories haloed the streets their feet had trodden ; the houses where they had written, painted, or lived.

Scarcely a great name of the eighteenth century but is associated with "ÆT Bathum" and its ever-springing waters of healing. Not a town in England can show so proud a record of famous men, and notable and beautiful women. To those who prize memories and associations, the city and its neighbourhood speak with a tongue of perpetual eloquence. The stones of Bath are not mute—but are poets, and painters, and dramatists, and writers. Chatham represented it in Parliament. Edmund Burke came there for rest and inspiration. There the great Bishop Butler ended his last days, and there William Wilberforce lived and worked for the great purpose to which his life was dedicated. The old-fashioned novels of Hannah More, and Miss Burney, and Jane Austen found plot and character in Bath circles, even as in later years did Charles Dickens. I had discovered many of his names on old shops and in unfrequented thoroughfares. Remembering what Madame Odylle had told me of the connection between a name and its representative character, I tried to trace Quilp and Tom Pinch, and Pickwick, and little Nell's selfish grandfather through the streets of many memories which now meant my "old grey town."

I was quite happy sitting by the parlour fire with that book on my knee, and the memory of my one-time teacher in my mind. Vividly recalling his trick of word and gesture ; his wealth of rolling phrase, and power of declamation. Aunt Theresa would bustle in, an account-book to add up, a letter to write, a seam to sew. But she rarely interfered with me. I was more than ever "like Lucius," and she loved his memory and, therefore, respected my oddities. Sometimes Aunt Joanna would run in for a moment on her way to or from the town. I would catch

fragments of their talk, for they evidently considered I was too much "up in the clouds" to be paying attention.

There were many references to "she," which I understood meant Fanny. They hoped they had seen the last of her, but doubted such good fortune. She was accused of "making eyes" at the Doctor on that memorable visit.

"I assure you, Theresa, she was as bold as brass. You'd have thought 'twas me had been the guilty one. Oh! she's hard to the core, that's what she is. I pity George Oliver. I suppose there'll be nice goings on on board ship, if I know anything of the creature. Well, I've washed my hands of her for good. Remember that!"

(Had she but known how that resolve was to be but another broken straw among the many with which she strewed her life's path, I wonder if she would still have said "*Remember that!*")

Placid days; uneventful breaks; a calm, studious time. My life flowing on below that grey strange life above. My French lessons were growing more interesting. I read, and translated, and wrote to dictation, and wrestled resolutely with irregular verbs and quaint idioms.

Now and then would come a letter from the Chevalier—whimsical, delightful; telling of wanderings afoot and by train. He had left Paris. He was at St. Sebastian; he meditated a walking tour through Spain. He had never seen the Alhambra.

"As a pilgrim to the shrine of superstition I ought to go there. I am the Dragon who fights them, or rather, to reduce metaphor to common sense, they are the Dragons I love to fight. Ecclesiastical lore is at once the most bigoted and narrow of all the claims that hold this foolish world in bondage. But there you have its *raison d'être*—bondage. The desire of the tyrant for supremacy; the glorification of man who would proclaim himself but lesser God knowing good and evil. The pity is that knowing evil is very far from the ability of doing good. And both are ruling factors of human destiny. If I could wave a magic wand, my child, I think I should bring you here to tramp by my side, and applaud my eloquence. What a listener! And those big eyes always so full of reverence, even for the Fool-

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Errant at his worst. Had you only been a boy, my pupil!
But then—you wouldn't have been reverent, or admiring."

When I read words like these my heart ached with longing to be with him on those tramps he described. To leave the cold, and fog, and gloom of these Northern latitudes, and once more wander under blue skies and golden sunlight. I asked myself why it was that life so obstinately gave us only the things we did *not* desire—never those we did.

Surely the one was as easy as the other, unless indeed Fate had only the cross-grained meaning of an opposing as well as a controlling force. The longing to see him again grew with every letter I received or wrote. Possibly it leaked through the word-guard of phrases, or set itself before him as a boon that I desired. At least, all I know is that early in February, when the snow had vanished from the hills, and downs and cliff were once more green above the grey, I had a letter; brief, but—oh! with one sentence that for me was worth countless pages of his fantastic rhodomontades.

"With the spring and the violets I am coming to Bath again. As I have wisely said in other days, 'One only takes to a place what is in oneself.' So, my charming pupil, I am growing a little tired of my own *ego* as a contribution to the '*joie de vivre*.' I pine for sympathy and comprehension. I am coming to our quaint and beloved Akemanceaster to find them. It is a city beloved of my nation, who have left distinctive marks upon its history. I don't say that the Legend of the Pigs has any special connection with its attraction for us. But the fact is undisputable.

"Therefore, look up at the hill-tops as they glow to emerald and amaranth, and into the hedgerows where shy violets nestle to their earth-mother's breast, and meadow-woods where the trees break into leafage and the sun flings golden spears. In simple words and plain diction, my dark Rosaleen, when the spring buds burst their sheaths I shall be at your side once more!"

How my heart sang! How light of foot and joyous of tongue was I, dancing from floor to floor of the great stone house, telling my news to attic and kitchen. Caring little who sympathized

with, or who laughed at my excitement. The very birds in our garden sang a gayer song. The very sun above the great circling crest of Camden, seemed a more glorious thing since it held so splendid a promise.

He would be here again. I should revel in that charmed companionship. There was no other like it in all the world! So I thought then. So I think still.

At Easter he arrived.

Bath was very full of visitors, and very gay with entertainments. The theatre was to open with a wonderful London Company, and on Easter Monday I was to see a play for the first time in my life. How it came about I cannot remember, but I have an idea of a row of six dress-circle seats taken by the General, to which Aunt Theresa and myself were invited. As if Fate had determined to lavish joy with both hands, the Chevalier arrived on the Sunday, or rather he came to call in proper form on that day, having reached Bath the previous night.

Mickey showed him into the parlour where I was sitting, reading. Aunt Theresa was enjoying a Sunday "nap" upstairs. There was no need to disturb her. She would be down at tea-time, and he gaily informed me that his time was his own, and there was enough and to spare of it, seeing we had met again.

How he talked! Or had I forgotten how he could talk when the mood was upon him.

Oh! it was good to have him back again. To sit and gaze with adoring eyes and listen with beating heart to the wild picturesque, rollicking words that poured on and on in a Pactolean flood, whirling me along with its vivid force until I was as breathless as himself.

"*Dieu!* that was fine!" he said at last, wiping tears of emotion and beads of perspiration with one gesture of arm and cambric. "How badly I must have wanted a listener all these months."

"Twelve?" I said.

"Twelve, is it? I imagined a hundred. How is Polyphemia?" I said I had no knowledge of that enchanting scholar. I had

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been once to see her, but she told me she hadn't time to waste on visitors, so I never repeated the call.

"You're not going there again?" I asked him.

"To the *Via Roma*? No, I am located at Christopher's at present. I shall look out for lodgings by and by."

"Then you are going to stay here; stay a long time!"

"As long as the Fates permit."

"You always talk of the Fates."

"The man who is wise knows better than to ignore them. Besides, this is one of their favourite playgrounds for experiments. I am not sure the Romans did not build them a Temple. There must have been some homage paid to the dread *Parcæ*. That was their Latin designation. From *Pars*—a part; apportioning to each individual his destiny. I expect you learnt that in the old Academy days."

I nodded. "I learnt more there than any school or governess has taught me."

"I had an admirable system of instruction," he said complacently. "I was sorry to give it up."

"Not half so sorry as I—dear Master."

He smiled radiantly. "Ah! I love to hear you say that. Well, we shall resume our rambles at all events. The good aunts, they are domiciled elsewhere, are they not?"

"One has gone to Australia, one has married a doctor and lives close by—in Johnson Street. Aunt Theresa is still here."

"And the French lady? The poor invalid who lived in the attics?"

"Oh yes. She lives there still. She says I am improving greatly in my French."

"Let me hear?"

Somewhat confused I murmured a phrase or two. He laughed. "Thank God you haven't the atrocious British accent, although you have the British *mauvaise honte*. The idea that to speak a foreign language is something to be ashamed of. We must alter that. In our walks we will speak French!"

"Oh, please *not*," I entreated.

"For the first—half-hour," he said. "The way to Mount Parnassus is steep, my child. You must climb as well as walk."

You get no such idea of the beauty of Bath as you get from Beechen Cliff, but it's a stiff pull, as you know. Which reminds me you will have to pass an examination on the history of *Akemanceaster*—local, topographical, and historical—before I relate to you any more of my adventures."

I smiled. "Look what I was reading when you came."

I pushed my gift-book across the table. He opened it, and glanced at the inscription.

"What did you think of it?" he asked, as he closed the page.

"It made me very happy. It was the message of a friend when I was feeling horribly lonely and friendless."

"I must have seemed a queer sort of friend. A shaggy ragamuffin, if ever there was one! But how quick you were, my little Rosaleen, to detect the *gentilhomme* beneath the *farceur*."

"It was—you," I said; and then the door opened, and Aunt Theresa came in and our *tête-à-tête* was over.

He stayed to tea, and devoted himself to Aunt Theresa. He told her about his Irish estate. The impossibility of convincing Irish peasants that the land which supports one family cannot be made to support half a dozen. They never alluded to the Academy, which surprised me, until riper years had taught lessons of diplomacy, and I remembered the wild exaggeration of their first interview.

Before he left she had asked him to join our theatre party and return with us to supper. He accepted at once. The play was to be "The Rivals," and he told her gravely that Sir Lucius O'Trigger had been drawn from *his* characteristics, which seemed a bewildering statement until he further explained that certain traits of human nature are born and reborn until they become types. He illustrated this by the arts and philosophies, and religious fanaticisms of the world until she seemed convinced. That was his way. What he saw himself he sledge-hammered into other brains until perplexity drove them to agree with him.

In my malleable and youthful condition such arguments were as convincing as he desired. Nothing was too impossible or too extraordinary to believe if only he declared it was so. Thus it

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came to pass that my long-desired expectations were to be rendered more memorable by the delight of his presence. It was another coincidence that the play should be Sheridan's, and that the wild exaggerations of Sir Lucius O'Trigger bore out to the full the Chevalier's theory of incarnated types.

The evening was one of unmixed joy to me. Not only for the sake of the play and its associations, but for the sake of the after discussions at supper, where he was the life and soul of the party. So whimsical, so full of brilliant absurdity, that one and all, from the General down to my adoring self, hung on his words, laughed at his humour, and listened in rapt bewilderment to his extraordinary declamations on the philosophies and follies of life.

The General questioned him once on his own martial experiences, but he would say very little. That awful war had been a blunder and a butchery. The blood-stained record of a forged telegram; and a despotic ambition. He loved the French and was none too lenient to their blatant conquerors. The General agreed with him as to the results but disputed the cause. I think he regretted that fact when an avalanche of proofs, explanations, and revelations were dashed upon him without mercy.

"I was there, sir, and I know. I was in Paris all through that year of unrest and turmoil, when the Empire's fate hung in the balance. When the crash came I unsheathed my sword and fought for a Cause that I knew spelt Failure! I guessed the hand that pulled the wires, for I know the hearts of men; the greed of Power; the strength of Ambition. What I say now the world will echo one day. But truth comes too late to serve any purpose of Justice!"

Then he checked himself, and changed the subject to the safer one of Bath and its history, which he painted more or less whimsically and fascinatingly for us all. The glories had gone, but they had left so much for us to trace and remember, that the one unpardonable sin of the English-speaking race was their indifference to, or ignorance of, a city so important.

Thus he rode his hobby at his wildest pace, alternately astonishing his hearers by the accuracy of his facts and the romance of his exaggerations.

"What a delightful, wonderful creature," murmured "Ringlets" to me. We were sitting next each other at the table.

"He is a genius," I answered her proudly.

"Do you know if he's married?" she returned.

Disgust held me silent. Would women *never* get away from that one point in any argument or association with the opposite sex!

In reality I knew nothing of his private life. Whether he was married or not. Circumstances had led me to regard him as a free agent, but I was unable to answer the question decidedly.

"I don't know. I never asked him."

Her pale blue eyes rested musingly on that animated face.

"Is he going to stay long in Bath?"

I said I believed so.

"And he is a friend of your aunt's?"

"Of mine," I answered. "She would never have known him but for me."

"Oh—but a man so clever and accomplished, and—and brilliant, will surely go into society. He would be welcome anywhere. There's the Literary Institution, and the County Club, besides our concerts and balls, and the Archery Meetings. I belong to the Club. I am quite an expert now. You must come to one of our shooting matches. It was quite a favour that I was admitted; only residents are supposed to belong to it. But as we are here so much, and I happened to be a very good markswoman, they acclaimed my membership unanimously."

"It seems a silly thing—shooting arrows at a target," I said.

"It is a most enjoyable recreation," she retorted. "Besides being an English military art. The Saxon and Norman conquests would have fared badly but for the skill of the archer."

Fortunately the supper-party broke up at this juncture and we all left the table. The Chevalier bade them farewell with polite thanks for an enjoyable evening. He spoke to me last.

"When shall we have one of our rambles, Rosaleen?" he asked. "What about the governess?"

"I have a fortnight's holiday," I said eagerly.

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" Blessings on our Prelatical Feasts! I shall come here for you to-morrow. We will have a long day together to make up for lost time."

I sighed my content. Truly the Fates were kind. And how foolish of " Ringlets" to ask that question. Was ever anyone more unlike " Benedick—the married man" than my *preux Chevalier*.

XX

IN WHICH THE THREADS OF DESTINY CROSS EACH OTHER

To be happy is to say little and feel much.

From the time of the Chevalier's return he did not lose touch with my life again for four years. True there were gaps and separations of long or short periods. But he always returned to Bath, and always found me eager to welcome him.

In those four years my home was still in the old grey house. I could see little change in it, or my surroundings. Aunt Theresa and I were excellent friends. Aunt Joanna still came and went, and grumbled at imaginary grievances concerned with her husband, her household, or her health. Of Fanny we had heard no word since she went to Australia, and her name was rarely spoken.

Thus affairs were when I arrived at the importance of my seventeenth birthday. I was free from governesses and classes. My education was supposed to be finished. There was to be a special dinner in honour of the event. Aunt Joanna and the doctor were coming, so were " Ringlets" and her Adolphus. They had married the year previously, and, to my thinking, were the silliest and most uninteresting specimens of husband and wife it had as yet been my lot to discover.

I had a new dress for the occasion, and was to " put my hair up." The dress owned a train, and I was enormously vain of the dignity it afforded. The time of year was February, and the weather was cold and unpleasant. But that made little im-

pression on me in comparison with the presents I received, and the glorious sense of emancipation to which I awakened. Everyone in the house from "poor Mary" to the Miss Cutler's had sent me some gift or message of goodwill. Even Dr. Merivale and Aunt Joanna and Miss Dunning were represented on the breakfast-table. And the Chevalier? He had promised to come over from Ireland for the occasion, and my eyes glanced from packet to packet and letter to letter in hopes of seeing that familiar handwriting. But it was not evident, and my heart sank.

Aunt Theresa and I were breakfasting in the parlour as usual. Her present had been the dress. A lovely white silk trimmed with one of her precious pieces of Irish lace. She commented on the various gifts. A gold brooch from Aunt Joanna. A gold watch and chain from the Doctor. A string of pearls from the old General and his wife. An album from "Ringlets" and Adolphus. (I felt sure it had been one of her own wedding presents.) A volume of Shakespeare's Plays from the Judge. A large lovely bouquet of narcissus and daffodils, tied with white and yellow ribbons from Madame Odylle.

"How lovely! I wonder how she managed to get them?" exclaimed Aunt Theresa.

"She must have ordered them from the florist's, specially," I said, drinking in their fragrance with greedy appreciation.

The door was flung wide, and there entered—the Chevalier! He was carrying a large bouquet in his hand, wrapped in white paper. He bent low and kissed my hand, murmuring a formula of his own.

"To the Dark Maiden of Dreams and of Dignities—felicitations! I lay my offering at her feet."

He tore off the paper and I saw a magnificent bunch of Neapolitan violets. They, too, were tied with broad ribbon of their own colour, and held all the perfume of a southern spring in their hearts.

My stammered thanks mingled with my wonder at his unexpected advent, and yet somewhere, deep down in my heart, something seemed whispering, "*And every night I threw at her feet—violets.*"

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That history should repeat itself is natural, but that the homage paid to one shrine is repeated at another is not so satisfactory to the presiding deity.

If they had been anything but—violets.

Aunt Theresa welcomed him eagerly. He must have breakfast. It was delightful to give us such a surprise. And as I placed his chair and cleared the space before him of my gift packages, I echoed her words.

He had come by the night train from London, he told us. The violets were from Covent Garden Market.

"But not done up like *that!*" exclaimed Aunt Theresa.

"No. That was my own tribute."

He smiled radiantly.

"It is good to see a prophesy fulfilled. What did I say? 'A slim grave maiden, dark eyed and serious.' Do you feel the weight of an added year already, Rosaleen? Surely not. Stay a little longer by the brook-side—'Where womanhood and childhood meet.' Don't hold out too ready a greeting to the Maturities. I was seventeen once. *Once . . .* My child, it is not good to live a hundred years and look back on failure and regret."

"A hundred years!" I echoed stupidly.

"They have been lived in experience if not in fact. I am but a grey-beard loon, a resuscitated Rip van Winkle, when I look at your radiant youth. Surely, there is silver in my locks, and lines on my brow?"

"You will never be old, Chevalier," said Aunt Theresa. "You have a young heart."

"Surely, gracious lady, that is the gift of our glorious race!" he said. "I love them all. Never so much as when I have just got away from them." He laughed heartily. "What a time! *Nom de Dieu!* I have never been so near my end!"

"Why, what happened?" asked Aunt Theresa.

"A great deal *might* have happened. I was so ill-judged as to ask for my rent. Fortunately I discovered the error of my ways and escaped with a whole skin."

"Things are going from bad to worse over there," said Aunt Theresa, handing him his coffee.

"They're clamouring for Home Rule like the madmen they

are," he said. "Sure, haven't they had lessons enough of self-government in the years that are gone. A colony of apes, or a nursery of children might be trusted to rule themselves as wisely as the independent Irish nation!"

"I quite agree with you. But they'll never get the independence. Gladstone's ministry isn't strong enough. Besides, the Queen——"

"The Queen's a mere figurehead. We all know that. But there, my dear lady, don't let us talk politics on Miss Rosaleen's birthmorn. It's a poor way of celebrating such an occasion. This coffee is delicious, and if the bacon isn't Irish, sure, it ought to be. That's one thing they *can* do in the distressful Isle. Grow a pig, and cure him when he's done growing."

So the meal went merrily on, and he unfolded a plan for the day. It would clear up presently. It was bound to do that in honour of me. He had ordered a carriage. We would drive to Lacock, lunch in the old inn in the village, visit the Abbey, and be back in good time for tea, and the toilet for the dinner party.

I was delighted. He had often talked of Lacock village as the one pure unadulterated bit of mediæval life in the district.

I ran up to the attic to thank Madame Odylle for her gift. I told her I should wear the daffodils with my white dress to-night. She gave me "a thousand good wishes" in her favourite language. Then I mentioned the Chevalier's surprise visit. "He burst on us with the suddenness of a rainbow, and he brought me a great lovely bunch of Neapolitan violets."

"He gave you flowers also? And—violets?"

"Yes, violets. Somehow they made me think of a story you once told me. Do you remember?"

"I remember. But why should you?"

"It was such a pretty story, Madame. But so sad. It seemed to want an ending."

"It will never find one, my child. Tell me, how does he look, this wild Knight of your's, who rushes from one end of the world to the other for sake of your company?"

"Of—mine? Oh, no! He comes for many reasons. Because he loves Bath. Because he quarrels with his Irish tenants, or grows weary of a place after a few months."

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"He does not get weary of Bath, it would seem?"
I could think of no reply.

Some three miles from Lacock village we left the carriage to walk to the Abbey. The day had cleared to brighter sunshine, and both of us preferred walking to driving.

We went through one of the quaintest villages I had ever seen. The old houses looked as if they had known no change from the hour of their building. The thick beams and gables, and latticed windows, and deep doorways, were representative twelfth century, and the streets were cobblestoned. Such an old quaint sleepy place it was! Monarchies had changed, the whole face of the world had altered, wars had raged and empires fallen, yet the sleep of enchantment seemed still to hold this silent village; scarce a sign of life was evident.

We went to the Abbey, and were shown the cloisters and chapter-house and refectory. We wandered through the grass-grown walks of the old garden. The Chevalier told me that an original copy of the Magna Charta of Henry III was one of the treasures the Abbey contained, but it was not shown to visitors save by special favour. Having seen all there was to see we made a frugal meal at the inn, in a small low-ceilinged room all black oak, and polished copper, and wall cupboards of beautiful old china, about which the Chevalier knew more than the possessors.

"It is strange, my child," he said, "that the best things belong to those who don't value them, and certainly don't need them. The art treasures of Italy and Spain and France are shut up in glass cases, or hung on palace walls. Those who would most love and best appreciate their beauties have often no means to travel, or no 'tips' to bestow on greedy custodians. You've never been to London, Rosaleen?"

"No," I said, wondering why he should ask.

"Ah, I wonder what you would think of its art treasures? The National Gallery, *par exemple*, and the British Museum—a holy of holies, dark and gloomy, and inexpressibly uninteresting. Americans visit it, God knows why, and uninspired journalists, or writers who want to crib from past ages what they turn into the slop basin of modern literature."

"But hasn't it Egyptian sculptures, mummy-cases, all sorts of wonderful records?"

"True. But they are so arranged, classified, and guarded, that they have as much interest for the true student as a box of wooden soldiers would have for a fishmonger!"

I laughed. "All the same I hope to go to London one day. And then I shall pay my respects to the Gallery and the Museum."

"They are better read of than viewed," he said. "Unless you desire a lesson in the extraordinary unintelligence of the British sight-seer."

"Perhaps you will be there when I go?" I said.

He gave me a quick look. We were walking back along the broad high road leading to Corsham. "Does it occur to you, Rosaleen, that a time must come—it may come soon—when I shall be unable to play 'guide, philosopher, and friend' to you?"

I gave a little gasp. "You are going to be married!"

"*Nom de Dieu!* How your sex trade on that resource of hapless imbecility. Married? Never! I love my freedom too well. Find me a woman that would be companion and friend, leaving me to do as I will, just as I should leave her. Knowing me too well to misunderstand, yet well enough to love; caring nothing for what I *seemed*, only for what I was. Ready to pardon what had gone before, just for sake of what came *after*. I talk in parables, my child. Such women don't exist. The world wasn't made for them. Heaven had need of angels or there would have been no celestial hierarchy to hymn the praises of Creation."

"But, Master," I said, dropping into the old familiar term by reason of the old familiar harangue. "You described no angel."

"Did I not? At least, I described the 'Impossible She' of whom we dream in youth, and shun in age."

I laughed. Somehow I was not sorry that he should declare his ideal impossible. It was only another result of his random pursuit after the Eternal Verities.

"Why do you laugh, my child? I am deeply serious. Let us return to our starting-point. The parting of our ways. Which, after all, is a very usual starting-point for man and woman. You are almost a woman, my little Rosaleen. Other men will find

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that out, and be ready enough to tell you so. And though I have been teacher and friend to you for—four years—is it not? I find myself asking to-day if the privilege is to go on much longer? Have you put that question to yourself—yet?”

“No,” I said. “There seems no need to put it.”

“You would rather leave the matter to settle itself, find its own issues, drift to its own development? That is true philosophy, but also it is not the sort that the world of the verities allows of. It is an air balloon too unsubstantial not to be pricked by some needle of mischance. You are a maiden of those charming years sacred to Cupid’s arts, and discreet guardian’s ambitions. Your days and weeks will now be under the supervision of the Proprieties. Hateful cats they are, Rosaleen! But, nevertheless, appointed as the protectors of demure, dark-eyed maidenhood on its progress through the vale of social pleasures. You will try your prentice hand to-night. That is why I pleaded for admission to the festal board. The reception afterwards may boast of goodly youth or sighing swain for aught I know. It would only be right and proper that it should.”

Again I laughed gaily. “The reception is to be a whist party for some half-dozen old fogies of the neighbourhood, mutual friends of my aunts.”

“There is a nephew, or grand-nephew of the General’s, your aunt mentioned him. Major Hayes from India. Invalided home.”

“That doesn’t sound interesting. I never heard of him.”

“But don’t you really feel as if changes were at hand, my dear?” he asked, dropping his banter.

“No,” I said. “Why should I? I don’t see why life can’t go on this year as it went on last, or the year before, and before, and before. They were all happy and—uneventful. The only one I hated was that year you went quite out of them!”

“You really did miss me then?”

“It was horrid! Like a great emptiness. And nothing filled it. Nothing could.”

“But I came back?”

“Yes, you came back.”

“Well?” he said, with his odd whimsical smile.

“There’s no more to add to that.”

"You would like that return to mean the continuance of our two lives, my child?"

"It doesn't seem possible to me that you should ever go quite out of mine."

"I wonder if I shall—one day?" he said, with sudden gravity. "We can't help ourselves you know, Rosaleen. Our Fates are not in our own hands. Sometimes we learn that it is a good thing they are not. What we wish is not always what is best to have."

I was silent. That sentence gave one "indeed to think" as the French say.

After a few moments he began to talk again in the old random way. There was never lack of subjects, or lack of food for conversation with the Chevalier. Yet I cannot tell how we drifted to violets and his gift of the morning, or what made me suddenly tell him of the story Madame Odylle had written and once told to me.

He stopped quite suddenly as I reached the end of it. Stopped and stared at my face in a blank bewildered way.

"*Nom de Dieu!* But that is strange! She writes what I enacted. Tell me, child, what is she like, this lonely wanderer, who lives so strange a life?"

"I think she must have been beautiful—once," I said. "Before that horrible accident. In a fire it was; and it disfigured her for life. Her skin, her eyes, are dreadful to look at. But her voice—oh! that is lovely!"

"And she is a writer you say?"

"Yes. She writes in French and English. Her manuscripts are sent to someone in Paris. I often post them. But for ever so long she has been writing a book that never seems to get finished. She always says I gave her the title, the first time I went to see her."

And I told him of that Christmas Eve, and how I had found her so lonely and wretched in her gloomy room. He listened without interruption. His face was very grave. His eyes seemed looking far, far away, into the memories of days long past. When I finished he made no remark save to echo my concluding words, "*A Grey Life.*"

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XXI

SHOWING HOW SHADOWS FOLLOW SUNSHINE

A GIRL may be excused for some excitement as to her first evening-dress appearance. I surveyed myself in Aunt Theresa's long cheval glass with great interest.

I had hailed the abolition of the crinoline with deep joy, though a few devotees clung to, at least, *one* hoop in the under skirt, or the odious "half-bustle" which had succeeded that early Victorian abomination. But, with my first *real* party frock I had achieved an effect of "lines" at once graceful and becoming. The soft, white silk hung in folds. The square-cut neck was edged with lovely Limerick lace, and the same fell from the elbow sleeves. I wore no jewellery save that string of pearls, the old General's gift. A knot of daffodils was the only touch of colour in the purity of effect.

Aunt Theresa declared herself satisfied. The Le Suir skin had triumphed over youthful sallowness, and I had rejected the use of starch or violet powder indignantly. My cheeks had colour enough to shame such artificial roses as I had seen Aunt Joanna and Fanny assume, and my hair was pronounced "a credit" to my own skill at coiffuring. Gathered and twisted in soft coils save for one long curl, it asked no aid from "frisettes," or chignon pads.

I had promised to run up and show myself to Madame Odylle before dinner, and after the inspection of Bidy and "poor Mary" and Aunt Theresa, I threw a light woollen shawl over my shoulders and ran up to the attics.

Her room was so dark that I suggested a light.

"No, no. I can see perfectly," she said. "Just stand there in the glow of the firelight. Don't look at me."

I felt, rather than saw, that she had withdrawn the veil and that her poor tortured eyes were gazing at me. I resolutely kept my own on the opposite wall, waiting for her to speak.

She had drawn the filmy folds about her head again before she said a word.

"Ah! that beauty of youth; the pure mind, and the untroubled heart. How sweet it is—and brief."

I moved then. I felt as if I had been posing for a photograph.

"You like my dress, Madame?"

"But, yes, of course. It suits you as you suit it. I thought the scheme sounded hard when you described it; but—no. It is what one would say *radiant*. There is only one thing—those flowers?"

"But they are your's, Madame! And so lovely!"

"You had other flowers. Why do you not wear them?" she spoke in French.

"The violets of the Chevalier?" I answered in the same language. "But why?"

"It would please him. And they would go better with your dress."

"I wanted to please you, dear Madame. And I received your's first. They were my first birthday greeting."

"I desired they should be set by your plate. I am glad they were your first greeting. But having fulfilled their mission——"

"Ah—no! They are going to be with me to-night. They breathe spring, and hope, and your kindly thoughts. I will not lay them aside."

"As you will," she said gently. "But your other friend had thoughts as kindly, and he brought you his message *himself*. I cannot help thinking he may be hurt."

I laughed gaily. "*Chère Madame*, but no! He is not like that. Not sentimental, foolish, *exigèant*. And though his violets are very lovely, I do not think they go so well with a white *toilette* as your golden daffodils!"

"Perhaps you are right."

Her head drooped. I could not see her face. There was a long pause. Then, suddenly, I cannot tell why, I blurted out a question. "Are you *sure* you never knew him, Madame? My Chevalier?"

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She started, and clutched the filmy folds with one pale hand.

"How can you think it possible?"

"There is some link in both your lives that a chain of violets holds. He has a story of them, and you once wrote it."

"He may have read my story?"

"I do not think so. He told it me first, four—yes, four years ago."

"It had been published then."

"But he told it as an actual occurrence. Something that might have happened to himself."

"It is impossible. Or else—a coincidence of imagination. He is all imagination and fantasy, your friend."

"Yes. But he has sane moments. It was in one of them he told me that story. Your story, Madame; written by yourself. Is it not a little more than—coincidence?"

She shivered suddenly, and drew her gauzy wrappings closer.

"You must run away now, *chérie*. It is close upon seven. They will be looking for you."

"Why do you shiver so? Are you cold?"

"Yes; cold with a chill not of earth. Some foreboding of destiny."

"Ah! don't prophesy evil to-night!" I entreated. "When I am so happy."

"No, no, I will not!" she cried hurriedly. "But run away, my child. Haste thyself! I do not desire to see more."

"More—of me?" My tone was hurt and half indignant.

"More of the shadows and troubles that will fall. They have been coming nearer, nearer. . . . No, not on you. But on those connected with you."

A memory of previously fulfilled prophesy swept back to my mind.

"On my aunts—again? Oh! I hope not! If you see the danger can't you see a way to avoid it?"

"No, my child. That is not shown me."

Her head sank on her hands. The shadows of the shadowy room crept out and closed round her like ghostly emblems of her thoughts. With a sudden sense of terror and ill-omen, I

rushed away, and into the light and warmth of the room below.

I caught up Aunt Joanna on the point of entry. She said the doctor had been called away, and would come in later. She viewed me with the guarded approbation so characteristic of her general opinions. I think I never remember her giving any praise that was not qualified, nor expressing any approval with enthusiasm. The habit was growing upon her. It seemed as if her married life no longer held crumpled rose-leaves, but sharp-set thorns. Never was anyone so worried by servants, so victimized by tradespeople, so misunderstood by friends, so tyrannized over by a husband as was Aunt Joanna! At least, such was the burden of her song whenever the came to us. I saw the usual "grievance" writ large upon her clouded brow as I greeted her. I felt glad there was no time for explanations.

We went into the drawing-room to find the Chevalier holding forth to an admiring audience on certain modern improvements in Bath and its Abbey, which he declared spoilt the ancient glories of the place. At our entrance he stopped, and then made us one of his sweeping bows.

Aunt Joanna was never very cordial to him, though I could assign no other reason for the fact than Aunt Theresa and I adored him in our respective fashions. I found he had been right in prophesying the advent of a stranger, for Aunt Theresa introduced me to a thin, dyspeptic-looking individual as Major Hayes, the nephew of the General. He was to take me in to dinner, much to my disgust. I had hoped it would be the Chevalier.

As Dr. Merivale's arrival was uncertain we went down to dinner without further delay. Bridget had excelled herself, and Aunt Theresa had ordered special entrées and jellies from Fortt's of Milsom Street. The General opened a magnum of champagne, and insisted on drinking my health. He made a very charming speech which left me in blushing embarrassment, and to which the Chevalier replied for me, so wittily and gracefully, that he was applauded to the echo. Then *his* health was drunk also.

Aunt Joanna said it was a ridiculous fuss to make about me.

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Had it been my coming of age as an heiress, she would have understood it. But to be seventeen—what was that ?

At which juncture Dr. Merivale appeared, and took the vacant place beside Lady Montgomery.

He looked across the table at Aunt Theresa. "Are you expecting anybody else?" he said. "A cab laden with luggage drove up just as the door opened to me."

"With luggage? It must be a mistake. I'm expecting a few friends to cards; but not till nine o'clock."

He said no more; refused the offer of dinner, and helped himself to champagne. I could see that both my aunts were on the *qui vive* at his information. Presently there was a sound of voices in the hall. Mickey came to the door and put in his head mysteriously.

"Miss Theresa, ma'am, you're wanted!"

Aunt Theresa sprang up and went out, closing the door behind her. The rest of the party tried to go on conversing as if nothing had happened. Five, then ten minutes passed, and Aunt Theresa did not return. Aunt Joanna began to fidget. She asked the doctor if he had seen anyone *in* the cab. He answered that it was too dark for that. Besides, he supposed it meant the arrival of some annual "visitor" of Aunt Theresa's.

After another five minutes I could see that Aunt Joanna was on tenter hooks. One ear on the door and one on the conversation, which seemed to be flagging and forced despite the Chevalier's efforts.

"I think we'd better leave the gentlemen to their wine," she said, with a meaning glance at Lady Montgomery, who rose obediently, as did "Ringlets" and the other ladies. We passed out in the usual order. The door closed behind us.

There were two boxes in the hall. Great, strong trunks unlike our ordinary passenger luggage. Aunt Joanna had too much of mother Eve in her to pass by anything so unusual. She bent over one of the trunks to read the name. She gave a faint shriek. I rushed to her side, and caught her arm. Her face was livid. She pointed to the name on the white card, tintacked carefully on the lid.

"Fanny! It's Fanny! She's back again!"

The others crowded round her eagerly.

"Your sister?" cried Lady Montgomery. "Did you expect her?"

"Expect her? No! We haven't heard a word from her since she went out to Australia!"

The others exchanged glances, and murmured astonishment. Then they turned back to the staircase and went on their way to the drawing-room.

Joanna remained staring at the boxes as if they could tell her anything of their erratic owner.

I had echoed her astonished utterance of that ominous name. "Fanny!" Fanny back *here*, and landing on us without a word of warning or explanation. It seemed incredible. But even as I thought of that incredibility, I remembered the warning of ill that had sounded in my ears before I left the attics.

Had that strange seecress been right again? Trouble was never far removed from Fanny's proximity. She was the stormy petrel of the family, and after leaving us in peace for four years she had seen fit to descend upon us again.

"But where is she? I must see her!" exclaimed Aunt Joanna suddenly.

And she rushed off upstairs and to the drawing-room.

I followed her. And there standing calmly in the midst of an excited group was the unexpected visitor. Tall, distinguished looking, calmly indifferent to the consternation she had occasioned.

Fanny Oliver—*dressed in widow's mourning!* Her insolent gaze sweeping the excited faces, rested on mine as I stood in the doorway.

Black from head to foot, the snowy cap of her little bonnet, the only relief to the heavy folds of crape that hung about her—so she stood; and so we met again.

I watched Aunt Joanna's impetuous approach. Any greeting that the surprise might naturally have occasioned was possible. But again as on a similar tragic advent all she expressed herself of, was, "Well—Fanny? So here you are again!"

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"I'm sorry to see——"

Aunt Theresa interrupted—"Poor Oliver is dead, Joanra. Died a year ago. Fanny has been very ill. The doctors ordered her home."

"But why didn't you write and tell us?"

Fanny's eyes flashed round the circle of curious faces.

"Do you want a public explanation of my reasons? I'm afraid it will spoil the gaiety of your evening. You're having a party?"

"It is in honour of Rosaleen's birthday," said Aunt Theresa. "She is seventeen to-day."

I came forward as she turned towards me. I had remained a spectator up to that moment. I held out a hand and she took it, and kissed me in the old perfunctory manner, with about as much warmth of feeling as if we had been two wooden dolls automatically moved to a show of affection.

"So you're still here?" she said, and glanced at my tall figure and "grown up" toilette with supreme disfavour.

"Where else should I be?" I asked.

"At a boarding school, of course. You can't be finished yet."

"But I am," I answered quietly.

"Won't you come upstairs, Fanny?" interrupted Aunt Theresa. "And take off your things. You must be tired after so much travelling."

"Yes. I am tired," she said, and followed her sister to the door.

The curious group around dispersed, and settled into easy chairs. Aunt Theresa had asked Lady Montgomery to act as hostess till she returned. Then the three sisters went away, and conversation became general.

Card tables were set out; the piano, a new Collard recently purchased on the instalment system, was opened. The room looked bright and cheerful with the glow of firelight, and under the shaded globes of the glass chandelier. But it seemed to me as if a strange gloom had fallen on myself and on everything

connected with the evening. Fanny, of all people, to have come here to-night of all nights! To be once more reinstated in the house she had so scandalized. To assume that air of belonging to us, and simply taking up life where she had dropped it—these were disturbing thoughts.

I tried to get away from them. To hope that Fanny's visit would only be a temporary one. That she had only come to see us, and would soon be going away to live on her husband's property in Monmouthshire. Surely he had left it to her as his widow?

The guests invited for cards came drifting in. Pump Room invalids to whom the annual visit to Bath was essential; cranky old dowagers to whom their "rubber" was a necessary part of the day's duties. The room looked full even before the gentlemen came up from the dining-room, and Aunt Theresa returned. Then the different tables were assigned, chairs drawn up, partners cut for, and they settled down for the business of the evening. Four tables meant sixteen players. But the Chevalier, I, Dr. Merivale, and "Ringlets" were not devotees of the game, and sat out in corners to talk and amuse ourselves.

I told the doctor of Fanny's arrival, and he seemed as astonished as we had been. He asked for particulars of Captain Oliver's death, but I could give him none. She had said so little, and there had been no time for questions.

"Is she much altered? She was such a handsome girl."

I said she looked much older. But possibly that was owing to the widow's dress. Otherwise, I added, there was very little change in her.

It seemed an odd coincidence that as we were talking about her she should come into the room. She—and Aunt Joanna—in quite friendly fashion. That was destined to be a night of surprises.

Fanny had taken off her bonnet and cloak. She wore a high black dress with narrow collar and cuffs of fine lawn. Her hair was dressed in a new and most becoming fashion. Her colour was brilliant; the expression of her face subdued and chastened. Whatever the young widow had meant to a circle of women, she

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meant something very different and far more fascinating to a circle of men. At least, I could only suppose so judging from the immediate sensation her entrance occasioned. She moved about talking to old friends, as she called them; the General, Adolphus Cutler—his wife—then Dr. Merivale. She approached him last. They shook hands almost silently. Then she sank down on the chair where I had been sitting. I had vacated it at a sign from Aunt Theresa which I translated from long experience as, "go and play something."

I went over to the piano. The Chevalier followed me. I smiled up at him. "I don't use notes, so there are no pages to turn."

"I will sit beside you and converse of Shakespeare, and the musical glasses, and the queer happenings of this topsy-turvy world," he said. "I am all curiosity. It is, of course, the heroine of the Great Elopement who has arrived once more?"

"Yes; widowed now. I do hope she is not going to settle down here again."

"Why? You are no longer a child. You have risen above the caprices of female tyranny."

I sounded a few chords softly before I answered him, through the leading phrases of a Chopin nocturne.

"A man knows nothing of the *sort* of tyranny that a woman like Aunt Fanny is capable of. It's something cold, tenacious, horrible . . . it spreads through every action; it alters one's outlook on all the simple, natural things of life. . . . It's impossible to describe . . . so is a mist. A cold, clammy, horrible thing penetrating to your very bones."

"But there are heights to ascend. Regions apart where the mist does not follow one."

"If you lived here you would know," I said. "I feel different already. Her very glance, her first words spoil all my enjoyment of the evening. My pretty frock—the delight of being seventeen—the feeling of freedom. . . . What do you think she said? That I ought to be at a boarding school!"

"Well, what of that? You're not at one, neither are you going to one. Neither shall *Madame la Veuve* have part or parcel in your destiny, if I can help it. . . . You play very charmingly, my child. I have never heard you before."

"I seldom play except at the card parties, as an accompaniment to 'whist solemnity.' No one listens."

I drifted into a melody of Stephen Heller's. I could see that Fanny and the doctor and Aunt Joanna were holding an animated conversation.

"Ringlets" hovered near by her Adolphus to watch his play, or inspire it. The piano in its far corner of the long, narrow room was quite apart from the other occupants.

"How long can you go on from theme to theme, and piece to piece?" asked the Chevalier.

"As long as I remember them."

"Your memory is very good."

"You trained it, *mon maître*. You told me that the best way of remembering a thing was to try to forget it."

"That was and is true; but more true of the hurts and trials of life than its superficialities."

"You don't call music superficial? It is one of the arts."

A fragment of the lovely Rigoletto Quartette emphasized my meaning.

"Art!" he scoffed. "What is Art? The perception of a beauty that is non-existent to superficial senses. The failure to express it to those senses with anything approaching conviction. A thing so limited that ordinary intelligence can't grasp it. No one appreciates what they can't understand or can't do themselves."

"Oh—h!"

He laughed. "You would say that it doesn't need a poet to appreciate Dante? A sculptor to comprehend Michael Angelo? A painter to grasp the technical beauties of Raffael, and Fra Angelico, and Turner? But it does. Unless their meaning had been translated to the Lower Intelligences, the world would have been in ignorance of their value. Of course that value is largely fictitious. The world's only estimate of a work of art is its price; or the impossibility of obtaining it. If the old masters hadn't ceased to exist they would command no better market than the new daubers."

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"Hasn't it? Ask the artist, or the musician, or the man of letters. Then—for contrast—put the same question to the inventor of a patent needle."

I ceased playing out of sheer astonishment.

He went on flamboyantly. "The art of words takes highest rank of all. With the Greeks the test of excellence lay in the spoken word. Who has excelled their tragedies? Their successors are at best copyists. And our own language, the best and most beautiful part of it, is derived from their's. Words are only sound, you know, unless they possess form and harmony. The British savage exhibited little sense of either. Fortunately we have eliminated what we have not improved!"

"The first thing that impressed me about you," I said, "was your marvellous command of words."

"I am glad of that," he said. "I *do* possess the art of expression. Words are to me what light and shade are to the painter, or form is to the sculptor."

"I always wonder you don't write? Books—of course?"

He laughed. "Too much trouble, my child. I am a lazy devil at best. To compensate for my other gifts Dame Nature rendered me incapable of expressing myself apart *from* myself. If it were not for that—Ah, Rosaleen, the things I might have achieved; the man I might have been! Play on, my child. Play a dirge for the burial of wasted talents, and profitless hours. The funeral march of a jester who loved life and yet misused it—to the end!"

I played something. Minor chords that sounded hard and weird; a little mocking undercurrent for the theme.

He listened silently till I ceased.

"It sounded right. What was it, Rosaleen?"

"The Funeral March of a Marionette," I said.

XXII

IN WHICH A THEORY DEVELOPS INTO CERTAINTY

LITTLE by little I gathered Aunt Fanny's story from fragments into a whole.

It set its heroine as a longsuffering and deeply wronged woman. After exemplary devotion to an invalid husband, after the hardships and discomforts of Colonial life, Mrs. Oliver found herself almost penniless, and had to throw herself once more on the charity of her elder sister. The estate of George Oliver went to a younger brother, as he had no direct heir. His life insurance was all he left his widow. "A paltry fifty pounds a year," she called it. "Quite insufficient to live upon!" She also said her husband had been extravagant. He had lived up to every penny of his income, and the expenses of his illness ran away with any savings. On the whole she deemed it best to come home. Living in the Colonies was expensive, and she felt sure Aunt Theresa would take her as a boarder, "on special terms."

"Of course," said Aunt Theresa, "if you'll make yourself of use, and not upset the house and everyone in it as of old."

"I never could agree with Joanna, you know that. But now she is married and settled it will be quite different. If you'll let me have my old room I'll not be any trouble, and you know I can help make your dresses and do the mending of the linen, and all that."

So it was settled she was to remain, and the little parlour became once more a hornet's nest for me. It didn't matter what I did or said, or looked or wore, it was always wrong. Besides, she took an inveterate dislike to the Chevalier.

"How can you let her go wandering all over the place with that old scallywag!" was the polite way she phrased her objections to my rambles with him.

When I retorted as angrily as I felt, she told me to remember

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my place. She was my aunt, and had a right to control my actions. If I had no sense of what was proper and befitting my position as a Le Suir, the rest of my family had, and would take care I learnt it. She worried Aunt Theresa dreadfully on the subject, but did it with such an air of "acting for my good" that it was hard to believe she meant otherwise.

"He is old enough to be her father," said Aunt Theresa.

"Old men are always the worst."

"He has known her and taught her ever since she came to Bath."

"All the more reason he should be kept in his place. Besides, he is half mad. Everyone says so."

"Because he is so clever."

"Clever? Oh, my *dear* Theresa, the man is a perfect mountebank! He has the Irish 'gift of the gab,' if you call *that* clever. Such rubbish as he talks I've never heard in my life."

I had listened patiently until that assertion. "I fancy *you* would find it difficult to understand the Chevalier! For one thing, he never flatters you. But if you imagine I am going to give up my walks just because you object to them, you're very much mistaken! I am going out with him *now*." I added, significantly, "Not to Victoria Park."

Aunt Theresa looked quickly up. "Victoria Park? Why did you say that, Rosaleen?"

"It seems to be a favourite rendezvous of Aunt Fanny's," I answered. "That was all."

It had been a parting shot, and I left them to wrangle over it. On two occasions, coming from Weston, or Kelston Round Hill, and walking through the Park to Queen's Square, I had caught sight of her and Dr. Merivale. Once they seemed to have just met, and were standing with clasped hands; on the second occasion they were seated on one of the benches near the Botanic Garden. I had said nothing of the coincidence until to-day. Her heightened colour and astonished glance seemed to suggest that the random shot had gone home.

I had hated sending it. Petty squabbles always seemed to me the most undignified of feminine resources. They had been incessant when I first came to the house, but four years of compara-

tive immunity had left me ill-prepared for their resumption. I went out with an indignant heart, and a sense of irritation that the Chevalier was quick to detect. We were walking by the Canal banks to Bathampton. I wanted to see the churchyard where the unfortunate Viscount du Barre lay at rest after his adventurous life had ended in that duel fought on Claverton Downs with Colonel Rice.

It was a mild, sunless day, for February was kind in its hints of spring, though experience had taught me the vagaries of the climate. I had left home directly after luncheon, so as to have the whole afternoon at my disposal. But in my ruffled and indignant state the first hour was spoilt for me. I could not tell him what Fanny had said, and for once his jests at feminine weaknesses annoyed instead of amusing me. He soon noted this (what was there of foolishness or pettiness he did not notice, or excuse?), and changed the subject from personal to general things. I tried to get back to my usual frame of mind, but it was not so easy as on other occasions. Perhaps one or two of those random speeches had hurt instead of merely stinging my sensitiveness.

We stood looking at the gravestone commemorating the French Count, whose end had resulted in a murder trial that effectually checked the duelling mania for a time.

"Rice was an Irishman," I said suddenly.

"He was," answered the Chevalier. "That's why he wouldn't allow he was beaten. And the jury acquitted him, you know."

"Yes. But it was horrid to discharge that second shot—straight at the Frenchman's heart too; I don't call that honourable."

"A queer thing—honour. You know the story in connection with that duel, Rosaleen?"

"About the Play; that same evening, wasn't it?"

"No, the Saturday *after* the duel. Henderson was acting in Falstaff, when he had to say, 'What is honour?' 'A word.' 'Who hath it?' '*He that died on Wednesday.*' The whole house was moved to painful emotion. On the Wednesday that famous meeting had taken place. One of the combatants was dead. The other on trial for murder."

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"It ought to have stopped duelling altogether."

"Nash did his best. But he was not successful. . . . How far away those times look now. The gambling, roystering, duelling, intriguing days when the Assembly Rooms were in their glory, and not to be at Bath in the season proclaimed the Beaux and Belles of the eighteenth century to be out of the fashion."

"I should like to have lived then," I said suddenly.

"I can't fancy you in those artificial times of powder, paint, arts of coquetry. The only thing a woman existed for was the conquest of a male booby, whose dress, or grace in the dance, or success with the most virtuous of her sex gave him the *prestige* of notability where everyone strove to be notorious. . . . Shall we move on?"

I turned aside from the grave. The sky was suddenly clouded. It looked as if a shower was at hand. We had meant to walk to Batheaston, and back by Swanswick.

"Do you think it will rain?" I asked him.

"It would be a fitting tribute to the occasion," he said. "It must be our last walk for a time, Rosaleen. I have to leave Bath to-morrow."

My heart sank. "Why—you only came back the other day!"

"I know. But I have to start off on a quest that is never very far from my life, and yet that never rewards my pains. You don't know what it is to pursue a dream, my child. A foolish, fantastic, impossible thing that never promises anything, but to which a mad vow gives reality even as it exacts fidelity."

"It sounds romantic," I said.

"It is the romance of a Gil Blas, a Don Quixote. The romance of a vagabond knight who rashly swore a life's service to one who as rashly accepted it. And then, vanished into—space, or nothingness."

"What—really do you mean?"

"I find it hard to explain, my child. If I could find one special unit in this world of solid human creatures I should know also whether my vow was accepted, or of no account. But like other deities, she has deserted her shrine, vanished; been translated into purer ether for aught I know."

"A woman?" I said. "All these wanderings in search of a woman."

"The woman. There is but one, you know, Rosaleen, who really holds a man's soul in bondage."

"And this—this woman holds yours?" I asked jealously.

"She did. Whether it accompanied her flight or not, I am often in doubt."

"The Woman of the Violets?" I said. "I wish——"

"What do you wish, my child?"

I felt my cheeks flame. I had been going to say I wished he had given me any other flower as my birthday gift. But something checked the words.

"Never mind . . . it was a stupid thought. But you remember what I told you of my Grey Lady?"

"Of course."

"I cannot help thinking that she once knew you."

He laughed gaily. "My child, half a hundred women once knew me—in the days of my unreason. Ah! *Les beaux jours quand nous sommes malheureux!* But why this special object of your sweet compassion?"

"I was thinking of—violets."

He turned quickly. "Violets?"

"Are they not your favourite flower?"

"They are modest, and sweet, and innocent. That was why I brought them to you, Rosaleen."

"You have brought them to others. I remember that story so well. Has it not something to do with this quest?"

"Everything. It would end it—for good or ill."

"Then, she was something to you. There was more than you told me?"

"I don't know what I told you. My tongue runs away with my discretion more often than it serves it."

He was silent for some moments.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "where woman gets—her intuition?"

"Ah—then I'm right!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Let us walk on, or it will be dark before you get home, and I shall fall into fresh disgrace."

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"You are as disconnected as—as a dictionary," I said ill-temperedly. "And I think it unkind to hurry our last walk. For how long, this time?"

"Goodness knows! I am only going to Paris. You ought to come there one day, Rosaleen. It would finish your education. Try and persuade your Aunt Theresa."

"I might as well ask Beckford's monument to take a walk with me!"

"Curious—the aversion of the British mind to travel."

"Curious—the way you evade a question, master."

"Feminine curiosity does not deserve to be satisfied unless there is a purpose to be served. I can see none in confessing a pardonable folly to your young ears."

"If it is about the lady at whose feet you threw those violets, I can supply the story for myself."

He stopped a moment and looked down at my face. "No, Rosaleen, you cannot," he said. "For you would know more than I do."

"But," I persisted, "is it not strange that your story which is *real* and another story which is a romance should be so alike?"

"It is strange enough to be true. It is only in fiction we face inconsistencies. Real life is more artistic."

I was silent. I could not get away from that obsessing idea. His Lady of the Violets; my Grey Lady of the attics. And about them romance and tragedy at once terrible and fateful.

We were both very silent as we neared the town. The sight of the now familiar streets and buildings touched me with that sense of desolation apart from our companionship which made each fresh parting hateful.

Suddenly I put my thoughts into words. "If it is strange enough to be true, why might it *not* be true? What was your lady's name?"

"I never knew it—her real name."

"Her stage one?"

"Mademoiselle Odylle Gautier, of the Renaissance Theatre. She had a brief *vogue* in Paris, and then—disappeared."

I looked at him. "My Grey Lady's name is Odylle. Madame Odylle."

He stopped, and we faced each other in the fading light of Pulteney Street.

"Is that so, Rosaleen? And—you say, *she* wrote that story of the violets?"

"Yes."

"If I could see her. If I could know? Rosaleen, tell me—this—this disfigurement you spoke of—is it——" He hesitated.

"It is awful," I said. "Only once have I seen her face. She lets no one see it."

"The Odylle I knew was lovely as a dream," he muttered. "Oh! Fate couldn't be so cruel! I can see her now. The white face, the radiant eyes, the passion and genius of her acting, her sweet vibrant voice."

"Madame Odylle has a beautiful voice," I said doggedly. Every word of praise hurt me, yet I could not be unjust. His eyes held depths of sadness such as I had never credited them with possessing. He seemed to forget that we were standing still in a misty twilight, cold drops of rain falling on our heads.

"When I next see her shall I ask her if she acted at the Renaissance Theatre? If her name is—Odylle Gautier?"

"She may deny. In any case she would want to know your reasons for asking. Have you ever spoken to her of me?"

"Often," I said.

"Did she seem to recognize the portrait?"

"I thought so—once. But it is hard to tell. I never see her face, and she did not *say* she recognized it."

"Perhaps you flattered me, Rosaleen. The lazy vagabond of the Boulevards had less in common with charming pupils, or lovely ladies, than you would pretend—*now*."

"I spoke of you as you are—to me," I added softly. "There was no pretending."

"But she did not recognize the portrait?" he repeated.

"Would she say so, even if she had, unless she wished you to know of her existence?"

"As she took that existence into banishment, why should I pursue it?"

"I thought it was a life's quest?" I said.

"Yes. Until the search was rewarded with success. I am

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afraid to—to continue it, Rosaleen. Better the unknown than to face such a certainty. Should I not be of ‘all men the most miserable’?”

“Would the change in her alter you—your love?” I asked, very low.

He shook himself in a queer dog-like fashion he had. “The question is too cruel to answer. Come, let us get on. I do believe it is raining. Are you wet, my child? *Dieu!* what a scolding I shall get!”

“Are you coming in?” I asked in surprise.

“I am. I shall put my fate to the test once for all. Rosaleen, you will go up to that lonely room you have so well described, and you will tell your Grey Lady that someone who once vowed his knightly faith to her service is here to keep his vow. In other words, you will take her my card and the message it bears, and say, ‘The Chevalier O’Shaughnessy awaits your good pleasure.’”

XXIII

IN WHICH LIFE PROCLAIMS ITSELF A TYRANT OF SORTS

THERE was no one in the parlour when I showed the Chevalier in. The fire was low, and the gas unlit. I rang for Mickey, and learnt that Fanny was out, and Aunt Theresa had “run round to Miss Joanna’s.”

I left the Chevalier to himself, and slowly mounted the stairs, with his card in my hand. Up and up; my heart growing heavier with each terminated flight. The landing was in pitch darkness. I had to grope my way to the door. As I searched for the handle I nearly fell over the coal-scuttle. Evidently it had been filled and left there as usual, but not taken in. I pushed it aside and opened the door. The room was all in darkness. No faintest glimmer of firelight, no shaded lamp.

I stood quite still. A sudden chilling sense of fear oppressed me. I called her name softly. There was no reply.

I groped my way to the mantelshelf and tried to find some matches. I discovered a box and lit one of the candles in the candlesticks. I took it in my hand and threw its light around, dreading the sight of some possible "something" in the shadowy corners.

The room was untenanted.

On the table lay a parcel wrapped in brown paper. The furniture was piled together as if for removal. And beside the packet I caught the gleam of a white envelope. I took it up and saw it was addressed to me. As I opened it an enclosure fell out, inscribed with Aunt Theresa's name. I put it on the table and read my own letter. It was in French and very brief.

She had left us. The pleasant intimacy was "*tout à fait fini*." It had served its purpose, and was over.

Always would she love me with all tenderness, but—there would be no more meetings, talks, confidences. She was going to another country, another life. The instructions to Aunt Theresa would show her that her furniture and belongings would be called for. She enclosed a note for £50 in lieu of notice. She bade me a fond and sad adieu, and was always mine—the unfortunate and heart-broken—Odylle.

I put the letter back into its envelope, and gazed sadly around. Then I went into the bedroom and noted the trunks packed, and with her name on the labels, and only "To be called for," as direction.

She had not said *where* she was going, nor why. But she had gone. Possibly stolen out of the house before the lights were lit, and while the servants were at tea. I opened one of the cupboards in which I had seen a long travelling cloak. That was gone. It occurred to me then that for two days I had not seen her. Once when I knocked for admission she had said she was too busy to be disturbed. To-day when I came—it was too late to disturb her!

I returned to the sitting-room and took up Aunt Theresa's letter, and then with the candle to light me down the dark staircase, I closed the door on that mystery which she had always represented.

The Chevalier looked up eagerly as I entered. Something in

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my face must have answered the question in his eyes, for he said, "She has gone?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Your face; and you still hold my card."

I put it down. Then I told him of the vacant room; the waiting trunks. I gave him my letter.

He read it quickly, studying the signature for a moment with grave attention.

"Do you know the writing?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "No. I never had a letter from my—wandering star."

"I wonder why she left so suddenly?" I exclaimed. "Two days ago she was writing as usual, and we had our usual French conversation lesson. She never hinted at leaving us."

He turned the letter over in his hands. "I am sorry! If things had been as you suggested the quest might have terminated. As it is——"

I felt my heart beat with apprehension. "You will go away, also?"

"My child, I must. I am driven by a spirit of unrest that refuses to be chained to one spot of *terra firma*."

A sense of black hopelessness swept over me. She had gone, and *he* would go. And I should be again friendless, and at the mercy of our household tyrant whose ingenious methods were at once so sure and so impossible of avoidance.

"What is it?" he asked, for I threw myself into a chair and gave a despairing sigh.

"What is it? Everything! She; you; this dull, horrid life! I think I shall run away next."

"What a thousand pities you weren't a boy, Rosaleen. We could have run away together. Seen life, other countries, other scenes!"

I echoed that wish from the bottom of my heart. How I hated this unfortunate sex which kept me in bondage to all sorts of foolish conventions! Which said, "Ladies don't do this or that." "Ladies mustn't go here, or there," in every mid-Victorian code of quoted propriety!

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he said softly. "But this is a strange turn

of the wheel! Shall I play amateur detective and get on the track of your Grey Lady, child? It would not be difficult. She must have gone to the station to get away, and anyone so mysterious-looking would have attracted notice."

I looked up eagerly. "Yes. It would not be difficult, and once you knew, you would not be rushing from place to place as you do now."

"I can't be sure of that, Rosaleen. I am a born wanderer. The world is my oyster, and I have to make practical use of the art of opening it. Now and then it has surprised me with a pearl. There was a certain afternoon in Sydney Gardens——"

"Ah, *don't!*" I cried, my face aflame, and tears dangerously near my eyes. I sprang up from my chair and seized the letter. "I think I hear my aunts in the hall," I said.

They entered almost on my words, having met on the doorstep. The Chevalier greeted them gravely, without his usual exaggeration of polite arts.

"I have come to say farewell," he said. "I am leaving for Paris to-morrow."

"Not for long, I hope?" said Aunt Theresa.

"So the call of the Boulevards is stronger than the attractions of Bath," sneered Fanny, as she drew off her gloves.

His eyes swept over her face. He said nothing. I handed Aunt Theresa the letter I had found.

"Madame Odylle has left," I said. "I went up to see her as usual, and there was no one in her rooms. Her boxes are packed and waiting, and this letter was on the table."

"Gracious! . . . *Left?* Why, I thought she was here for good and all!"

She tore open her letter. It contained the note for rent in lieu of notice, and a few brief words. She read them out: "Obliged to leave. Trunks and goods will be called for and packed by my agents. With regrets."

She threw the letter on the table.

"Most extraordinary conduct! But she was a mystery altogether. Tiresome about those rooms! I suppose you don't want any?" she asked the Chevalier.

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"I regret—not at present," he said. "As I told you, I am also taking flight. I cannot say when I shall return."

"It never rains but it pours!" muttered Aunt Theresa. "The Judge and his wife gave up their rooms; now these. And in June everyone leaves."

"But Madame Odylle has paid the rent for a year," I said. "You won't suffer any loss."

"Wouldn't it be as well to call in the town-crier and advertise your private affairs?" said Fanny sarcastically to Aunt Theresa.

The Chevalier took up his hat, and once more proclaimed his departure. I handed him back his card. I saw Fanny's sharp eyes rest on it as he put it in his pocket.

They both shook hands with him, and I went out to the front door.

"Don't look so distressed, my little Rosaleen," he said. "I think—I am almost *sure*—we shall meet again. You will soon be going to Wales. You shall study the doings of the noble Cymric, and I will give you news of the Quest."

"Not for five months!" I cried dismally. "From to-morrow."

"From to-night. I am prompt and unpractical. I act on what one calls the inspiration of the moment! I shall catch the boat-train at Victoria and be in Paris to-morrow."

"In Paris? But I thought you were going to make enquiries——"

"I can do that *en route*. I have a sudden idea of where she has fled, and *why*. I will write to you, Rosaleen, and tell you if your presentiment was correct."

"Mine?" I gasped.

"That your Lady and mine are one and the same! A secret between ourselves. You will say nothing of why I came here to-night."

The parlour door opened suddenly. Fanny came out into the hall and called to me.

"For goodness' sake shut that door, Rosa! Are you going to stand there all night?"

He took my hand, lifted it to his lips, and went away. *Rosa*. How I hated Fanny!

With lagging steps I returned to the parlour. Aunt Theresa was still standing there. The letter lay on the table. She regarded it thoughtfully as she untied her bonnet-strings and rolled them up in her careful old-maidish fashion.

"The house is getting quite deserted," she said. "It is most unfortunate just now. For those Railway shares have gone down to nothing. It's the worst time of year, too, to advertise for boarders."

"Do you do that?" I asked.

"Not in the local papers, of course. But in the London ones, and the 'Irish Times.' I got the Montgomerys and the Judge that way. Fanny promised to pay for her board, but she doesn't. At least, she only forks out a guinea now and then. The expenses of this house are very heavy. I don't see how I can afford a holiday this year if things don't improve."

"Not go to Llandudno!"

"Well, it doesn't look very likely at present. You see Mr. Cutler and 'Ringlets' are gone, and the Judge and his wife, and now Madame Odylle——"

"But you forget she's paid just the same!"

"Oh—I know that!" she grumbled. "But I always looked upon the attics as a permanent let. They paid the taxes and rates and servant's wages. I'll never get anyone like her. Such a good tenant, and no trouble."

"We must hope someone else will turn up," I said.

"So mysterious, going off like that," she went on. "Did she never give you the slightest hint, Rosaleen?"

"Never. I was absolutely amazed when I went up to her rooms and found them empty."

"Did no one see her go?" exclaimed Aunt Theresa.

"I don't know. I never asked Mickey."

She rang the bell impetuously, and put the question.

No. Mickey had seen no one go, nor heard any sign of departure since Miss Theresa herself went out. He seemed surprised to hear of the French lady's exodus. It turned out that Bidy had sent up coals as usual that morning by "poor Mary," and been surprised at receiving no orders. Usually they were written on a sheet of paper and left at the door. Still no notice was

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taken of the omission. The kitchen had supposed the attics a permanency as surely as Aunt Theresa herself.

"Come up with me, child, and we'll have a look round," she said, after Mickey's cross-examination was finished.

Accordingly we went up, and lit candles, and searched the desolate rooms to the tune of further grumblings. "Such colours! Such queer taste! Who on earth would take a grey-papered room? The paint, too! Why, they'd all have to be redone! A further expense!"

Then she looked at the brown paper parcel on the table.

"I wonder what that is?"

"Her book, I am sure. The one she was writing."

"Why on earth didn't she take it with her, I wonder?"

"Perhaps whoever calls for the trunks and furniture will have instructions," I suggested.

I looked at the label on the parcel. It was not directed to that firm in Paris to whom I had already posted other tales.

"Of all the gloomy, awful places!" said Aunt Theresa suddenly. She went into the bedroom, and the third room, then returned. I was still standing by the table. It seemed impossible she had gone. Really gone. Acted with such method and decision. She had always seemed a dreamer; a mystic. A creature whose whole life interests were with the past. Her presence seemed to hover about the room in some ghostly fashion. Her floating draperies, the faint, sensuous atmosphere, the stillness, and loneliness, all affected me with a sense of terror. I felt as if I never wished to come into these rooms again, and yet I felt also that in them lurked the key of a mystery I longed to solve. The frail links of a chain that bound two lives.

"We'll say nothing about it to anyone," said Aunt Theresa, and I gladly acquiesced. Of what use to discuss an unexplained mystery that only concerned ourselves. So at dinner we talked of anything and everything except the diminished household.

Very diminished it looked that evening. Our three selves and the General and Lady Montgomery. The Misses Cutler were dining with the newly married couple, and the Judge and his wife had not come to Bath this year.

"My sister and her husband will be coming in for cards," said Aunt Theresa, as we went up to the drawing-room.

Involuntarily I glanced at Fanny. It seemed to me that the Merivale's were always "dropping in for cards" of late. Also very often Joanna was at one card table, and Fanny and the doctor at another. If lookers-on see most of the game, I, from the vantage-point of my piano-stool, had seen many looks, signs, what-not of confidences, or implied meanings, between Fanny and her brother-in-law. Possibly being her brother-in-law would have rendered the fact unimportant save for those two occurrences in Victoria Park. Still, I told myself, this was Aunt Joanna's affair, not mine.

I played on and on; keenly reminiscent of that charmed companionship which had made these card evenings a delight. They seemed gloomy and dull enough as I looked forward to five months of them. How was my life going to drift on, I wondered? Seventeen and a half. Eighteen. Eighteen would soon be twenty. I should be *old*. And things would go on here just the same. The invalids, and hypochondriacs; the coming and going of the seasons; the dinners, and card parties; the wranglings and bickerings of the sisters. Aunt Theresa growing older, Aunt Joanna more discontented, and Fanny—

I could not speculate about *her*. Anything was possible. A second marriage, even a second elopement. And my dear Chevalier—what of him? Would he still be the whimsical, roving, enchanting being my childish years had idolized? And half unconsciously my fingers drifted into the "Funeral March of a Marionette."

The whist party broke up. A summons had come for Dr. Merivale. He must go at once.

Joanna hovered about with wifely anxiety. "Shall you be late? Shall I leave out anything? Shall I sit up?"

"Sit up? How ridiculous you are! What do I want anyone to sit up for me for? Leave the keys, and go to bed as soon as you like."

He bade Aunt Theresa good night. He took no formal farewell of his wife, who was sipping a glass of negus by the fireplace.

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"I'll see you off," said Fanny. "No, Mickey, don't you trouble. I'll fetch the doctor's coat and hat."

They left the room.

Involuntarily I glanced at Aunt Joanna. She was talking to the old General, and apparently had not noticed Fanny's kind attentions to her husband. The conversation became general. Mickey left the room after handing round refreshments.

It took Fanny ten minutes to find the doctor's coat and hat.

The General and his wife retired soon afterwards, and we went down to the parlour. Aunt Joanna came in also and seated herself on the sofa. Her cloak and the woollen "cloud" she had thrown over her head were there, had she needed excuse for further gossip.

"There's no use hurrying home," she remarked, "unless you think I'm keeping Mickey up, Theresa?"

For Aunt Joanna was still mid-Victorian enough to consider male escort at night essential, even to the crossing of a street.

"A quarter of an hour, more or less, is no matter," said Aunt Theresa.

"Now, tell me all about this extraordinary affair? I don't half like it. Why should that queer French woman have run off in such an extraordinary manner? Really this house will get a bad name, if that sort of thing is to be repeated." She glanced meaningly at Fanny. "People running off in the dead of night, and leaving their baggage behind them!"

"Madame Odylle did not run off in the dead of night!" I interposed. "She explained everything in her letter, and left the house just before dark this evening. As we were all out, she couldn't say good-bye."

"Her letter gives no reason," said Aunt Theresa. "Only says she is leaving, and will send for her things."

"Very queer all the same. What shall you do about the rooms, Theresa?"

"Let them if I can. They'd suit an old literary gentleman; or an artist."

"The light's not good enough for an artist," I said.

"I'm afraid you won't get a tenant this time of year," continued Joanna. "It is a pity losing her. She gave no trouble,

and paid so well too. That's always the way. When anything suits you it's sure to change. There's that housemaid of mine. I thought she was a perfect treasure, and she gives me notice this morning, because I wanted to change her evening out from Tuesday to Wednesday."

"If she's such a treasure why not let her have the day she prefers?" said Fanny, drawing up a low easy chair to the fire, and then turning up her skirts so that the crape should not be too near the flame.

"That's not the way to manage a house," said Joanna. "I never give in to a servant on principle; they always expect it if you once begin. I told Dickson that if she couldn't suit *my* convenience I was not going to study *her's*."

"Then, of course, she gave you notice," said Fanny. "That's the third housemaid since Christmas! No wonder the doctor says the house is a perpetual discord."

"It's he who makes the discord!" exclaimed Joanna. "He rows at them over the least thing. He has the vilest temper a man could possess."

"Some people have a way of rousing one's temper," observed Fanny.

"Yes, they have. Don't think I forget my life here. But thank goodness I'm not like *you*!"

"I wonder if you've cause to be as thankful as you seem?" said Fanny.

"There, there, give over wrangling. It's so tiresome that you two can never agree," exclaimed Aunt Theresa. "And really, Joanna, it is funny you can't keep your servants. They're perfect angels at first, and then before a month's out you've no word bad enough for them. Look at the years I've kept Bridget and Mickey."

"I could keep mine for years if I put up with dirt and let them have their own way in everything," snapped Joanna.

"There must be a certain amount of give and take, or where would we be," said I. "No one is perfect, even a mistress."

"No one asked your opinion," said Joanna sharply. "Time enough to speak when you've got a house of your own. Then you'll know what servants are."

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Aunt Theresa sighed. "Wherever we start we always seem to come upon some grievance of yours, Joanna. I think you have a very discontented nature."

"Think?" said Fanny, and smiled satirically.

"I—discontented? There's no one easier to please. I ask little enough, goodness knows. My food can't be too plain, and as for dress—why, I haven't cost Jasper twenty pounds since we were married. This silk"—she looked down on her gown—"has been turned twice."

"It looks it," said Aunt Theresa. "And really, my dear, considering your position, I wonder you don't dress better. I thought you looked downright shabby to-night."

"Dress *better!* I'd like you to dress on what I'm allowed! Jasper's as mean as can be. And when I run up a bill he gets perfectly furious. But there—it's just what I expected. I told you when you were trying so hard to make a match with him that people whose brows meet have always a violent temper!"

Aunt Theresa gave her a look of sheer hopelessness. She was learning the futility of argument. The Prophet Jeremiah chanted hymns of praise in comparison with Joanna's lamentations.

"Well, you're married, and you must put up with it," she said. "And you've every cause to be thankful, for you've a good position, and a fine house, and lots of friends. Not like me who have to look at every penny, and fill my house up with crotchety old invalids just to make both ends meet."

"You shouldn't find that difficult. You've two less on your hands. But you were always one to cry the poor mouth!"

Joanna rose after that charming speech, and began to cloak and wrap herself up. "I shan't get a wink of sleep!" she grumbled. "Listening and waiting to hear his key. And even when he comes in he'll stay ever so long in his consulting-room, smoking and reading the 'Lancet.' If I'd had the least idea what it would be like to be a doctor's wife, I'd never have married one!"

"I hope you tell him that?" said Fanny.

"You surely wouldn't be such a fool, Joanna!" exclaimed Aunt Theresa. "There's such a thing as decency and common

sense even in married life. No need to run your head against a stone wall when you've a clear road if you choose to take it."

"There are people so purblind they can't see the clear road," said Fanny.

"Meaning me, I suppose? I'll thank you to look at your own road, before you find fault with mine. A fine crooked one it was, and where did it land you!"

"Ah—stop it, do! Would you be throwing a gravestone at the poor girl's head?" exclaimed Aunt Theresa. "Have shame on yourselves, bickering and squabbling like this! Such an example, too, to Rosaleen!"

I wished them good night, and went away.

Very sad and depressed I felt as I turned into my room. The Dodger sprang up from the rug and rushed to meet me. I sat down and took him in my arms.

"You're my best friend now, Dodgie," I told him. "You never say cruel, spiteful things, or turn every family occasion into a wrangle, or make life look so hopeless and depressing, that one doesn't seem to care whether it goes on or comes to a full-stop."

As I stroked and petted him, my hand touched something on his collar. I looked closer and saw a thin wisp of paper twisted between the leather strap and his rough coat. I drew it out, and spread it open on my knee. A thin little scrap of foreign paper. On it a few blotted lines:

"Chérie,—Don't think me heartless to do this. It had to be. We shall never meet again, but think of me kindly. You—who would have healed my broken heart if love or pity could heal it. God bless your young life and save you from the 'grey years' before
"ODYLLE."

She had sent the message so that it should come to me by the one messenger who was faithful and devoted enough to carry with it the consolation of faithfulness and devotion.

How I cried over those blotted words, and over her sad banishment. What a cruel tyrant life seemed.

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XXIV

SHOWING THE OBSTINATE PESSIMISM OF A FEMININE
NATURE

Two days after this I received a letter from the Chevalier.

"I traced her to Paddington Station. She was met there by an elderly man. They took a cab, and went to Victoria. Caught the night mail to Dover. I have lost the trial in Paris."

I read and re-read the brief lines. It was quite unlike one of his usual letters. Just that curt information—no more. With a heavy heart I put it aside, and went about my daily duties. They were light enough. The arranging of flowers, the dusting of china, the making of my own bed to save Biddy's time. And even then there was a long morning to get through. Unless Fanny went out I could not practise. She hated the noise, and my *repertoire* was, according to her, only fit for "an asylum of deaf idiots."

I was debating whether to dress and go out when Aunt Theresa bustled in. "I wish you'd run round to Joanna's," she said. "I've had a message saying she's ill. I expect it's only a cold. But you might see her, and let me know. By the by, the van has just come for Madame Odylle's furniture. I suppose I can trust the men to remove it. It's funny she gives no address. The people are Allen's, in Southgate Street. They are to store the things, so they say."

I suddenly remembered that parcel, addressed to the Paris publishers. Surely that was not to be stored? Yet it was odd that she had left no directions respecting it. I wondered if she had meant me to send it off as I had done before? I suggested it to Aunt Theresa.

"Well, you know best. You were the only one who ever saw her. If the manuscript is valuable it oughtn't to go with the furniture and boxes. It might be lost. You had better keep it. She may write to you."

So I went up with the foreman, and showed him the rooms and what he was to remove. The parcel was still on the table. I took it up and examined the address. Then I noted a few words *underlined* at the top of the label. "*Not to be sent till directed.*"

Did this mean she would write to me? Had she left the MSS. in my care? I wondered greatly; but I took the parcel and put it in my own room. At least, it would be safe there until I received an intimation as to its destiny. Then I put on my hat and went off to Aunt Joanna's. The nice-looking housemaid, who had refused to change her evening out, answered the door.

The mistress was in bed. "Would I go up?" I said I would. The girl closed the door and asked if she should announce me. "Oh no," I said. "By the way, I'm sorry you're going to leave, Dickson?"

"Yes, miss. I've given notice. I couldn't put up with things here. Nagging and worritting from morning till night. The master's all right, though he's got a temper, and no wonder. But the missis——"

She made an expressive gesture.

I thought it best not to pursue the subject, and went up the Brussel's carpeted staircase thoughtfully. I knocked at the bedroom door. A peevish voice asked who was there. "Oh, you, Rosaleen? Why didn't Theresa come round?"

"She is very busy this morning," I said.

I came up to the bed. Joanna was sitting up, propped by pillows. Her face was extraordinarily yellow, her hair untidy, her eyes clouded and bilious-looking. She wore a nightdress of coloured flannel, and looked altogether a very displeasing object.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "A cold?"

"A cold! As if I should stay in bed for *that*. I feel horribly ill. Look at the colour I am. I believe it's jaundice. That beast of a husband of mine wouldn't say. Just told me to take a liver pill and stay in bed. So much for being a doctor's wife. Don't they say a shoemaker's child is always the worst shod?"

She certainly looked ill. I thought Dr. Merivale must be a very callous sort of doctor not to see it.

"Have you taken the pill?" I asked.

"Not I! I'm not going to have any of *his* medicine. It might

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kill me. I'm sure he'd be glad if it did. Then he'd be free to marry again. Only it's a mercy he'll never be able to marry Fanny!"

"Why?"

"It's against the law. A man mayn't marry his wife's sister."

"Then why trouble about anything so improbable?" I asked.

"Let me put your bed straight, and get you something. Tea, soda-water, what would you like?"

"I'm dying with thirst. I'm sure it's a bilious fever I've got. I caught a chill the other night sitting up in the cold to hear what time the doctor came in."

"Good gracious, Aunt Joanna, what good was that?"

"When you've got a husband of your own you'll know what men are. There's no trusting them. Half the time I don't believe Jasper is with patients. There's a widow over in Camden Crescent—well, I've my own opinion of *her*. Always sending for him, or writing. I found one of her notes. 'My dear Doctor.' *Her* dear Doctor! Did you ever hear such impertinence? And he told me it was a treat to see how *she* looked in bed! There! One of those French madams all dressed up in cambric and lace and ribbons! I know the sort. It isn't decent to wear things like that, and then send for a doctor. But there—I've always said widows were the most shameless creatures where a man is concerned."

I thought that a man wasn't to be blamed for preferring lace and cambric and ribbons to grey, dirty-looking flannel, but I refrained from saying so.

"And that fiend of a housemaid," she went on. "She's never been near me. The cook brought me some tea, and here I've been ever since. I suppose the rooms aren't done, or the breakfast things washed! I told Jasper to order his own dinner. It makes me sick to think of food! I don't know if he has. He's sure to leave it to cook, and she's so wasteful. Oh, dear! I really think I am a most unfortunate woman to be plagued as I am by everybody."

"But you're only imagining all this! It hasn't really happened!"

"I *feel* that it will happen. They can't throw dust in *my* eyes. Even if I'm ill I know what's going on."

"Well, can I do anything for you? You'd be more comfortable if you washed your face; and I'll brush your hair, and make the bed."

"Make the bed! Do you suppose I can get up for that! You're as heartless as the rest of them, Rosaleen! Just feel my pulse. It's galloping."

I felt it, after some difficulty in locating its position. Certainly it was very rapid.

"When will Dr. Merivale be back?" I enquired.

"Goodness knows!"

"Why not send for Dr. Owen? He lives in Pulteney Street. A nice fatherly old man. I've seen him getting into his brougham."

The word "brougham" sent her off at a tangent. "Of course. He's one of the crack men. He can afford a brougham. So could Jasper if only he'd knock down household expenses. The wages he pays are ridiculous, and as for the wine bills, and the cigars he smokes——"

I began to feel desperate. I moved over to the dressing-table and tried to tidy it. Aunt Joanna's clothes lay in a heap on a chair, just as she had thrown them off. A pair of old worn bedroom slippers looked as if they had been kicked to east and west of the room. The table—not being set out for visitors—was littered with hairpins, pads, crimping pins, a powder box, a soiled collar and cuffs, a neck ribbon, and other indescribable articles.

"Leave those alone," she called out. "I may be wanting them."

"You can't, if you're staying in bed. And the table is so untidy."

"I'll thank you to mind your own business, Rosaleen. The table is *not* untidy. It has only got the things I use on it, and if I get up I'll want them."

I left them alone.

"This room is very close. May I open the window?"

"Open—the window!" she screamed. "Do you want to kill me outright!"

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"Air doesn't hurt anyone," I said. "And it wouldn't kill you, only the germs."

"What do you know about germs?"

"The doctor explained them the other night. Don't you remember?"

"Remember his rubbish? Not likely!"

I lost patience. "Really, Aunt Joanna, you are very trying. You'll neither do anything, nor trust anyone. What on earth is to be done with you!"

She burst into a flood of tears. "That's right. Insult me, though I *am* your aunt, and old enough to be respected. It's always the way. Everyone turns on me and abuses me. I'm always . . . wrong. Oh yes, of course——"

I regarded her hopelessly. Such a miserable, piteous-looking object in that great four-poster, yet so obstinately bent on achieving every possible discomfort.

"I sent for Theresa," she went on. "It's her duty to come and look after me. If my own family don't interest themselves in my health is it any wonder I'm heart-broken and upset. Perhaps when I'm dead and gone you'll all know what I've suffered. I'm not the first doctor's wife to be slowly murdered before the eyes of everyone. Look at that case in Ireland the other day——"

"Oh, Aunt Joanna! You shouldn't say such things. It's horrible! Do you know you're accusing Dr. Merivale?"

"Well, I know what he'd *like* to do! What he *might* do! I know he hates me, and curses the day he married me. He's said it often enough. Not but what I return the compliment. It was poor Oliver I loved. I'd have been happy with him. As it is——there's Fanny free and flaunting herself everywhere, and I——tied to this miserable existence, and not a soul to pity me!"

"I thought you and Dr. Merivale were quite happy," I said.

"For a year, or two, we were." She dried her eyes which now looked worse by reason of inflamed lids around a yellow orifice. "Then——everything changed. I found he wasn't the sort of man I had imagined. Not a bit. He is hard, and cruel, and mean. Also—but no I mustn't be saying such things before a young girl. Anyway, we're quite unsuited, and I'm horribly unhappy, and now I know I'm going to be ill, and he won't

treat me properly, and I distrust his medicines, and what in the world am I to do ? ”

I couldn't say. I was rather shocked to hear of the disasters of her married life. I had no great liking for Dr. Merivale, yet I had never pictured him as domestic tyrant, or “gay Lothario,” as she had hinted. This was no case for my interference. I thought it would be best to go home and send Aunt Theresa in my place. I suggested it. “If you won't let me do anything for you,” I added.

“What can you do ? I'm too ill to be bothered with washing, and hairdressing, and rubbish. I only want to be left alone.”

“Very well,” I said. “Have you a bell ? ”

I looked around. It was near the fireplace, as usual in those days. “If you want anything you can't get up and ring,” I said.

“Oh, I shan't want anything ! I can lie here neglected and heart-broken, and die ! That'll be best for everyone.”

I said no more. It was hopeless. I took up some long strips of flannel (I believe they were her garters !) joined them together and tied one end to the bell-handle, and brought the other to her bed.

“Now,” I said, “if you keep hold of this you can ring the bell without getting up. I'll tell Dickson to be sure and come at once.”

“You'll do nothing of the sort ! I won't have that stuck-up hussy making remarks on my appearance. If anyone is to come, and look after me, it's to be cook. At least, she's Irish, and has a heart, and may understand that sick people don't want to be dressed up like French dolls ! ”

I went away then. I saw the cook, and told her that her mistress ought to have some soup, or jelly, for her luncheon, and to take up a bottle of soda-water at once. Being Irish, she was all sympathy, as Aunt Joanna had said. Then I returned home and informed Aunt Theresa how things were. She seemed very much distressed.

“I'll run round at once. I know what Joanna is. But why hasn't the doctor prescribed for her ? ”

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"He has. But she won't take any medicine he orders. And she looks awfully bad. Such a dreadful colour. All yellow."

"I hope it isn't jaundice. Well, Rosaleen, if she's really bad I'll stay till I see the doctor. You and Fanny mustn't wait luncheon. You can tell Lady Montgomery about Joanna if she comes down for it."

"Perhaps Fanny will want to see Aunt Joanna?"

"For goodness' sake keep her out of that house, or there'll be ructions! You know what those two are!"

I did know. And with the morning's experience fresh in my mind, I thought it would be as well they didn't meet.

At luncheon I told Fanny of her sister's illness. She only said, "Oh—creaking doors! I know Joanna. There's not a disease or complaint in the world that she hasn't imagined is her own, one time or another."

"Well, she's really ill now. You see Aunt Theresa hasn't come back."

But Fanny only turned to the General, and directed his attention to something special in the way of curry, which she said she had made expressly for him.

It was particularly good, and so well made, that I was at pains to discover her share in the manufacture. It had gone no further than the ordering of it from a shop in London, famous for Indian delicacies. Bridget had done the actual cooking.

I wondered why all Fanny's statements were so slipshod. I was always discovering her in as near an approach to falsity as was safe.

When luncheon was over I slipped upstairs and dressed, and then called up the Dodger. I wanted a walk. I wanted to get away from these petty worries. I wanted to think. I turned into Milsom Street and the upper end of Gay Street, and went through the Circus. Then into the Park by way of Royal Crescent. The Chevalier had shown me the house where Dickens had made Mr. Pickwick and his friends find accommodation, and I used to picture the Winkle episode whenever I passed. There were still plenty of Bath chairs bringing people from the great stately row of houses to Assembly, and Pump Rooms. I went into the Park, and took a side path through it to the Weston

Road, and so on to Weston itself. I had often gone there with the Chevalier. Often in academical days been told of those fortified works thrown up in order to intercept Prince Rupert's march from Bristol.

Was there a walk, or a district that did not bring back some memory of that companion? I found myself wondering if my life was fixed here? If year after year I should be treading the same streets, looking at the unchanging hills, watching the march of improvement as it took away old landmarks, restored ancient buildings, turned the city of my childish memories into one altogether different.

Already there were signs of such changes in the Abbey. From 1860 to 1875, the alterations had been going steadily on. Now it looked a handsome and imposing structure inside as well as out. It was as near as possible the church of Bishop King's design when he had commenced to build it 370 years before. It had seen stirring times and gone through many vicissitudes during those three centuries. The Chevalier had said once, that architecture was the only art by which the world need write its history. We had learnt more from the Pyramids of Egypt, the Colossi of Memnon, the cathedrals and palaces of Greece and Rome, the ruined cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, than all the written records of papyrus and missal. Perhaps it was my odd education that made me think of such things instead of simply shop-gazing, or haunting the more fashionable neighbourhoods of the town, as did my aunts. None of them knew anything about the outskirts of Bath. The beautiful Downs, the canal banks, the meadows through which the Avon wandered so erratically, the lovely heights of Prior Park; all that region of quarry, valley, and wood beyond the Borough Walls the shady lanes and steeps that led to Claverton. Had I depended on companionship for my rambles, none of my aunts would have given it. They considered Victoria Park a "journey," and the Lansdowne a mountain height of inaccessibility.

My father had first taught me to love walking as an exercise; the Chevalier had made me look forward to it as an essential part of my education.

Old-fashioned! Yes, no doubt I was old-fashioned. Who

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but an "old-fashioned" child would have confided her thoughts, and hopes, and reflections to old copy-books? And who but an old-fashioned girl would have thought them worth confiding to her diaries later on? The Chevalier had taught me to train my thoughts, so that they should be companions. "Speak to yourself, or speak out to the woods and meadows, but *speak*," he had said. "It gives you confidence in opinions you form, and reflections you make. True, that words may conceal thoughts, but they should—occasionally—express them."

So it was that places and things meant a great deal more to me than the fact of seeing them, or passing them in my wanderings. Faces had histories. Histories of lives lived in suffering, or loneliness; in happiness, or need. The earth's beauty, or desolation, spoke of the passage of the seasons that beautified, or desolated it. One could not look on blue sky, or purple hill, or green valley without learning something of Nature's craftsmanship. That old, old Life-Force which is ever new; that for ever builds and creates; and rebuilds and recreates. That one inexplicable Wonder whose miracles are a daily happening.

I stood awhile on Sion Hill, and looked at the sheltered city and the sheltering heights. As usual I tried to picture it when the virtues of its healing springs first became known. When Solsbury was a national stronghold and when the poetic name of "Waters of the Sun" gave the place an almost sacred importance. I had seen old prints of the Roman temples, standing in massive and solitary grandeur, at a time when the slopes of Solsbury were steep enough for defence, and its curious flat top might have made a camping ground for an army.

The dawn of the history of *Aquae Solis* is the prehistoric history of its Wonderful Hill. Whether temple, or fortress, or camping ground, it was at once the key to the conquest of the place, and leads naturally to the theory that there was a place to be protected from conquest.

But lost in dreams as I was, the sudden fading of daylight aroused me. With an effort I came back from Roman temples and Roman legions to the prose of the eighteenth century. To the fact of the grey stone house in Henrietta Street, and the three aunts, and my own dependant and somewhat helpless

position. With a sigh I turned homewards. In my heart I echoed those words of the Chevalier, "What a thousand pities you weren't a boy, Rosaleen! We could have run away together. Seen life; other countries, other scenes."

Seen life? Then he, too, recognized what I so keenly felt. This was not life that I lived. Only a dull monotony of days and weeks that led to months, and then to years. Grey years—perhaps? How could I tell!

XXV

PROVING THE WAY A WOMAN REGARDS HER OWN POINT
OF VIEW

"OF all the impossible creatures in the world commend me to Joanna!"

So Aunt Theresa, standing by the tea-table as I entered, still in her outdoor garments. Fanny also wore her bonnet, as if she had just come in.

"Has it taken you all these years to discover that?" she asked sarcastically.

"Is she really ill?" I enquired.

"Ill—of course, she's ill! She's the colour of a new sovereign. Awful. And in a high fever! And yet when the doctor ordered her a special medicine, she wouldn't touch it! I suggested calling in Dr. Owen. Of course, Jasper didn't like that. It seems so absurd. As if her own husband couldn't treat her! However, I went across and told Dr. Owen how difficult she was to manage, and he said he would look round at once. I came here for some tea, and to say I may not be able to get back for dinner, so you must manage by yourselves. I'm sure Joanna's got an attack of jaundice."

"I'll come round and see her after dinner," said Fanny. "It may be only a bilious attack."

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"Oh no, it's worse than that. And she does worry so—the house, the servants, everything. And she was quite angry when I suggested making up a bed in the dressing-room for Jasper. I told her if he had a disturbed night, his patients would suffer to-morrow."

"Oh, of course, she thinks they should all go to the wall when *she* is concerned!" said Fanny. "Is there anyone to nurse her?"

"Well, the housemaid's leaving, and the cook has her own work to do. I thought, perhaps, we could take it in turns to look after her."

"Thank you for nothing! I'm not going to sick-nurse Joanna. She's bad enough when she's well. But when she's ill——"

Aunt Theresa looked at me. "You're too young and inexperienced, Rosaleen, to be much good."

"Why not have a nurse?" said Fanny. "There must be some in the town."

"She won't hear of it!"

"Now isn't that just like Joanna. She'd keep us all dancing attendance on her night and day, regardless of our health or comfort, and then call herself unselfish! Jasper's a fool to give in to her. He ought to send in a nurse, and insist on Joanna doing what she is told. I suppose she's in and out of bed, and wants roast beef and potatoes as invalid nourishment?"

"She's too ill for that," said Aunt Theresa. "And, of course, she'll be worse. Jaundice isn't a thing of a day, or even a few days. If she won't have a nurse I'll have to look after her. I can't let her lie there alone and uncared for."

So they argued and talked until tea was over. Then Aunt Theresa went to her own room to lie down for a couple of hours. She seemed to have made up her mind to spend the night with the invalid.

Fanny flatly refused to do so, or to believe it was necessary. As for me I took up "The Mill on the Floss" and tried to read. In my own mind I could not but agree with Mr. Glegg that it was "beyond everything as God Almighty could have made women *so!*"

Truly—it was.

There seems no need to spin the thread of daily life for every day that followed. Aunt Joanna's illness lasted a month or more. And even then her colour was not restored. She looked very yellow still, and was ordered change of air. Aunt Theresa suggested that she should go to the cottage at Llandudno, and I with her. She must not be left alone, although she was convalescent, and there was nothing serious to fear. The getting back of her normal colour was only a work of time.

I cannot say I entered very heartily into the scheme, but Aunt Theresa told me privately that the old Welsh woman would look after the invalid such times as I wanted liberty and fresh air on my own account.

"I know what a one you are for walks," she said.

The matter was thus decided. It was the latter end of March when we set out. Bright cold weather in Bath, but I did not know what we might experience in Wales.

However, the bracing sea air seemed to revive the invalid at once, and with improved health she grew less trying. The cottage was very comfortable, and the good old Welshwoman proved a devoted attendant. This pleased Joanna, who loved being *persona grata* wherever she was. Also it gave me more liberty, and left me free for those long tramps and rambles I and the Dodger so dearly loved.

In summer I had thought the lack of shade a drawback, but at this time of year the sun was not fierce, and the dry, bracing air was a delightful change from the humidity of Bath. Every day I used to tell Joanna her face was resuming its normal tints. She had never possessed such a good complexion as her sisters, but that did not prevent her enquiring, "Doesn't my skin look every bit as fair as Fanny's?"

In truth I could not say it did, although she assured me that it was only because Fanny powdered that she had the advantage.

I think we had been about three weeks at Llandudno when Aunt Joanna was thrown into a terrible state of mind by a letter from the doctor. She gasped out the news to me, at breakfast-time. Apart from her interpolations, it seemed that he was going out to Australia.

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the opportunity of a free passage by accepting the post of ship's doctor on board one of the fine clipper boats of the A.S.N. Co. Before deciding on the Sydney practice he wanted to be on the ground and see for himself what sort of place, and to what sort of climate he was committing himself. He would not give up the house in Bath, but place a *locum tenens* there until he had decided. Meanwhile, Joanna could keep on the house, but do with one servant less. He would run up to Wales next week to say good-bye, for he would be obliged to leave by the 30th of April.

I really thought Aunt Joanna would take leave of her senses on reading this epistle. She gasped and choked, and stormed and cried. She insisted we should pack up and go home at once. She wrote out frantic telegrams that no post office could have translated. In fact, she did and said every irrational thing that might mean an excited thwarted woman. "Was he *mad*?" "Did he suppose *she* would go to Sydney?" "Cut herself off from relatives and friends, and trust herself in a savage (?) land with such an unfeeling monster as this husband of her's had proved?"

What had possessed him to take up such a mad idea? She supposed Fanny had put it into his head. It would be just like her to plot a separation of this sort, which, for all anyone knew, might mean a permanent one. For go out to Australia she would *not*. No. Not for twice the two thousand a year which was what this new appointment promised! And so on, and on, and on until my brain got dizzy, and in sheer despair I begged her to decide upon, at least, *one* of the hundred plans, projects, messages, and letters that were whirling around from point to point of her mental compass.

In the end she wrote a telegram whose frantic indignation I toned down to:

"*Much surprised. Returning first train to-day.*"

We packed, or rather threw our clothes into the boxes. The station fly came for our luggage and ourselves, and we left Mrs. Ap Morgan in charge of the cottage. But the result of mental turbulence and excitement was that Aunt Joanna could neither eat, drink, nor sleep. She looked a perfect wreck by the time we

reached Bath. Exhaustion had produced a deep pervading melancholy. She could scarcely speak.

I drove with her to Johnson Street and went in, telling the flyman to take my small trunk to the other house.

The Irish cook opened the door, and exclaimed at her mistress's appearance.

Joanna staggered into the dining-room, and sank into the nearest chair.

"Where's Dr. Merivale?" she asked.

"Sure, ma'am, an' he's out since ten o'clock this mornin'."

"Out? Didn't he know I would be here this evening. I sent a telegram!"

"It's there beyant," said Norah. "On the table wid the letters an' messages. But he'll be back for dinner, ma'am. Don't you be worrittin' yerself. Jist rest there in the aisy chair, won't ye, an' I'll bring ye a cup o' tay. It'll put some life into ye."

"Yes, do, Aunt Joanna," I pleaded. "You'll only knock yourself up again. And what good will that do?"

She gave in so far as to take the easy chair, and allow me to remove her bonnet. The dining-room had no fire, and looked very dreary and comfortless. Joanna's eyes roved from point to point.

"Just what I expected! Look at the dust on that sideboard! And the colour of the fire irons. And that centre blind is pulled up all crooked! The moment my back is turned everything goes wrong!"

I crossed to the window and straightened the venetian blind. As I did so, I caught sight of Dr. Merivale crossing the road.

"Here is the doctor," I said. Joanna immediately sat bolt upright; an expression of martyred sufferer on her face.

Dr. Merivale opened the door with his key, and after a moment's hesitation, caused no doubt, by sight of the travelling trunk and rugs in the hall, he came into the dining-room.

Aunt Joanna's face was a study in the expression of "injured wife."

"Well, Jasper? Here I am!"

"Here you are! What the devil does it mean? What on earth did you come rushing back from Wales for like this?"

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"It was my duty to return the moment I heard of your ridiculous project! *I'm* not going to cross the ocean and live in savage countries to please *you!*"

"I never asked you," he said. "Ah, Rosaleen, so there you are!" We shook hands. "If you're not specially anxious to hear a matrimonial squabble you'd better go home," he continued.

"I want to unpack Aunt Joanna's box, and she ought to have something to eat. She's not touched a thing all day!"

At this moment Norah came in with the tea, and lit the gas. I poured out a cup and brought it to Joanna, with some bread and butter. She drank the tea, but refused to eat anything. I poured out another cup for the doctor.

"No," he said curtly. "I don't want any. Take it yourself."

He was evidently dreadfully annoyed, but he was holding himself back for the time. He paced up and down the room; his hands in his pockets, his eyes bent on the carpet. Aunt Joanna had seated herself in the chair again. She opened fire without loss of time.

"You never asked me? No. But it's a wife's duty to go where her husband goes."

"It's a wife's duty to hang like a damned millstone round his neck, according to you!" he said. "But you may take it straight from me, Joanna, that you're not coming out in the 'Polynesia.' I've booked the only passage left for one thing. As a ship's doctor, I'm not supposed to take my wife with me, for another!"

"Do you mean to say you've done all this without a word to *me?*"

"There's no use in consulting you about anything. You always take the opposite point of view from my own. And I'm deucedly sick of arguing. An Irish pig and an Irish woman are two animals that can only see one point of view about anything. That's their own."

"I'll thank you not to insult me before my niece, Jasper!"

"She can go home. I told her so."

"I think it would be best," I said, putting down my cup.

"No, stop where you are! I want a witness of my husband's

cruelty and insolence. If it's to be followed by desertion, I shall know how to seek redress!"

"God Almighty give me patience with you, woman!" cried the doctor. "If ever nagging and worrying sent a man to the devil you've gone the right way to do it."

"That's right—insult me again! Weak and ill as I am I've dragged myself home in order to remonstrate with you on this mad scheme, and I'm—I'm sworn at and abused—as if I'd committed a crime!"

"A nagging woman is a crime in herself, and the cause of half the hangings than Newgate Calendar chronicles!"

"A nagging woman!" sobbed Joanna. "That I should be accused of *nagging*, and have my nationality thrown in my face! It's the last straw. I can bear no more. What I've put up with no one but myself can tell. But it's gone beyond bearing. If you choose to go to the end of the world, Jasper, well, you can. I—won't put up a finger to stop you."

"Thank you for nothing!" said the doctor grimly.

"You may go and ruin yourself if you please; throwing up a fine practice, in a place where you're known and respected, for a wild-goose-chase over the seas to goodness knows where!"

"You appear to forget that Sydney is a highly civilized city. Worth a hundred of this sleepy old place. Besides—I want a change of life and outlook. I'm smothered here between doddering cripples, and silly, painted, dyed, old women!"

"Say you're tired of *me*, and you'll say the truth!" said Joanna, dabbing her eyes with a none too clean handkerchief. "Change of life indeed? When a man is married and settled—especially a professional man—he's no business to talk of a 'change of life.' Someone's been putting ideas in your head, Jasper, that's what it is. There was no talk of change of life and crossing the ocean a month ago!"

"Do you suppose I wanted scenes and tantrums a month before they were necessary? Not such a fool! You're a liberal education to any man, Joanna, in the way of exasperation. However, I don't see why we should go hammer-and-tongs over this. You go to bed and sleep over it, and to-morrow morning I'll tell you my plans. Perhaps you'll be calmer then."

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"Calmer—*sleep* over it!" Aunt Joanna rose from her chair. "Do you really suppose I shall sleep, or rest, or have a moment's peace until I find out *who's* been poisoning your mind against me? Who's put this idea of Australia and sea voyages, and change of life into your head? I *have* my suspicions. I had them long ago—before I was ill. But now——"

I was looking at Dr. Merivale's face as she spoke. I saw a curious white line come round his mouth. His jaw set itself almost savagely.

"Don't make a bigger fool of yourself than you are," he said. "There's such a thing as washing one's dirty linen between one's own four walls. I advise you to remember that."

He turned on his heel, and walked out of the room. I heard the front door slam behind him. Aunt Joanna sank back in her chair. She was trembling violently.

"*There*, Rosaleen! Now you see what I've to put up with. Abuse, and villainy, and ill-temper the moment I say a word in my own right. But I'm not such a fool as he thinks. I can see the hand that's been pulling the wires here. Fanny! I could swear it was Fanny! Her influence; her malicious tongue. You go straight home now, Rosaleen, and tell her she's to come over and see me. I can't rest, or sleep, until I've had this matter out——"

"Dear Aunt Joanna——" I implored.

"It's no use you're saying anything, Rosaleen. My mind's made up. I may be wrong; but I'm sure I'm not. It's a husband's place to stay with his wife, not forsake her, and there never was a word of Jasper forsaking me, whatever his faults, until that fiend of a sister came between us!"

I simply looked at her. Words were beyond me.

"Why don't you go?" she asked.

"Very well. Aunt Joanna, I'll go."

XXVI

IN WHICH I COME FACE TO FACE WITH TREACHERY

FANNY was out when I reached the house. I found Aunt Theresa in the parlour, wondering at the arrival of my box. I had omitted to telegraph to her.

"Goodness, child, what's happened?" she cried.

Half laughing, half crying, I sat down on the sofa and told her the story of our return. It was news to her that Jasper Merivale intended to go to Australia.

"Didn't Fanny tell you?" I asked.

"No; not a word. She can be as close as an oyster when it suits her."

"I've been sent to tell her that she must go and see Aunt Joanna at once."

"Oh! well, she can't. She's run round to Milsom Street for some trimming, or frilling, or something. She's leaving to-morrow on a visit to some friends of Oliver's in Monmouthshire."

I breathed relief. "Well, as soon as she comes in she'll have to go round, or else Aunt Joanna will be rushing over here. And she's not really strong yet."

"It's unfortunate this happening, Rosaleen. She'll worry herself to death about it. She is most unhappy with Jasper, and yet she can't bear the idea of his leaving her. If only she'd keep her worries to herself; but no, we've all got to bear the burden also. The older she gets, the more trying she is."

I said nothing. I knew Aunt Joanna was trying, but I knew also how impossible it was to make her believe so. Her gift of taking offence at imaginary grievances was as remarkable as her inability to exist *without* a grievance. That had been so even in her life here. It seemed a necessity of existence now.

"Perhaps I'd better go and see her?" said Aunt Theresa presently. "My dear child, you look very tired, and your room

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isn't ready, or anything. Go and lie down in mine. I'll get Bridget to see to your's. Your box was taken up. I was so puzzled when it came. I thought you had sent it on in advance."

"Oh—I'm not so tired as all that. I had some tea at Aunt Joanna's. Yes, I really think you'd better go. She pays no attention to anything I say. And she's quite full of this idea about Fanny being the cause of Dr. Merivale's going to Australia!"

"Rubbish, and nonsense!" said Aunt Theresa. "I don't suppose she's seen him half a dozen times. He hardly ever comes here. And then she's been busy getting dresses and things ready for this visit."

"Dresses?" I said.

"Oh, just a black lace for evenings, and one or two of those striped muslins. Very pretty they are."

I felt a sudden misgiving. Black lace and striped muslins sounded like preparations for warmer climes than Monmouthshire. But I said no more. I did feel tired, and as soon as Aunt Theresa had left I took off my hat and coat, turned off the gas, and lay down on the couch with a rug thrown over me. It seemed but a moment before I was asleep.

Suddenly I felt wide awake. A confused sound of voices, mixed with a dream of sliding down Great Orme's Head to the beach below, and finding the Chevalier's arms outstretched to receive me. What I heard was a man's voice, very low. "You're sure you won't forget, darling? You wrote it down?"

"Of course."

"If anyone *does* see you off, you'll have to change at Bristol, and wait for the express there."

I sat up, and threw the rug aside. It was Dr. Merivale's voice. He was talking to Fanny.

The room was quite dark, save for a faint gleam of light from the hall. I sprang to my feet. Fanny asked who was there? I said nothing. Only walked to the mantelshelf and groped for matches. I struck a light and then lit the gaselier over the table.

Fanny was standing just within the doorway. *There was no one else.*

"What—you ?" she cried. "What on earth has brought you back ?"

"Surely you know ?" I said.

"I—how should I ? I've been out since tea."

"I thought Dr. Merivale would have told you," I said.

"Does he know ?"

"Certainly. I saw him at his own house, scarcely an hour ago."

"Oh, well, he hasn't been over here with the joyful news ! What's the reason of this sudden return ?"

"You'd better ask Aunt Joanna."

"Ask *her* ? Why ? Is she worse ?"

"No, she's better. But she is very anxious to see you."

Was it only my fancy, or did a sudden pallor show around her lips, just as I had noticed with Jasper Merivale. Her brilliant colour emphasized that curious whiteness. My eyes rested calmly on her face, meeting a glance that was boldly defiant.

"What on earth can she want to see me for ? I don't know if I can go there to-night. I've my packing to finish. I'm going away to-morrow on—a visit."

"To London ?" I asked innocently.

"London ! what on earth put such an idea into your head ! No, Monmouthshire. Some relatives of George Oliver's."

I was silent.

"Why do you stand staring like that with those great goggle eyes ! And what on earth were you doing *here* ? All in the dark like an owl."

"I was asleep. I was very tired. We left Llandudno early this morning, and have been changing trains—or missing them—ever since !"

"But what made Joanna come back so suddenly ?"

"I think—that—is what she wants to tell you."

"Has Theresa gone there ?"

"Yes."

"You're very communicative ! Well, I'll see if I've time after dinner. I must go up to my room now, and finish my packing."

She turned, and went quickly up the stairs. The little dog

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who had been curled up on the rug, gave a sudden low growl.

I bent down, and patted his head. "Ah—you don't trust her either, Dodger! I wonder what it all means? I couldn't have *dreamt* that Jasper Merivale was here? That I heard him call her—'darling'?"

Biddy bustled in on the top of my perturbed and anxious thoughts.

"Ah, sure, me dear Miss Rosaleen, it's yourself is welcome home! Yer room's all sthraight an' ready for ye, an' a bit of fire while ye're unpackin'. What brought ye back so unexpected, darlin'?"

"Oh, Aunt Joanna would come home, and, of course, I had to come also. How are you all, Biddy? Mickey, and you, and 'poor Mary'?"

"We're well enough, Miss Rosaleen, thank the Lord! The house has bin terrible lonesome these times, but praise the pigs ye're back agin, an' there'll be some life in it."

That I brought or put any life into the house was a novel idea. It had not occurred to me that I made any special difference. However, I went upstairs to my little room and began to unpack. The fact of doing so, reminded me of my promise to Aunt Joanna. That, again, brought me on the track of Fanny. I could not forget those words, that soft ardent whisper.

Was Aunt Joanna right, and was there something between Fanny and the doctor? A flirtation; a secret understanding? Why was he telling her about trains—"If anyone sees you off, you'll have to change at Bristol." . . . *Change at Bristol?*

Distinctly I remembered that sentence. It wanted a week of the date fixed for his own departure, and Fanny was supposed to be going on a visit to Monmouthshire. Yet he had said *town*. He must have meant London. I felt puzzled; and the more I thought of it the more puzzled I felt. I tried to say these affairs of my aunts were no business of mine. I was but a child in wordly experience compared to them. Yet all the time the consciousness of a secret understanding between those two whisperers forced itself upon my mind.

I finished unpacking, and left my modest little box on the landing outside to be taken to the attics by Mickey. Then I went back and sat down by the fire, and tried to think out this perplexing question. I had forgotten the necessity of dressing for dinner, and was still in my serge travelling dress when the bell rang. I jumped up and smoothed my hair, and then went to Aunt Theresa's room to see if she had returned. The same idea must have occurred to Fanny, for we met at the door.

"Theresa's not in," she said. "Why aren't you dressed?"

"Hadn't time," I said curtly.

She herself was in black silk, open at the neck, and with elbow sleeves. Round her white throat was a slender chain, from which hung a lovely diamond locket. I had not seen her wear such an ornament before, but I made no remark upon it.

"Hadn't time? What nonsense! I suppose you've got into Joanna's slack ways, since you've been together!"

I made no reply, only walked down to the dining-room. I asked Mickey if Aunt Theresa had sent any message? He said she had not. It therefore remained for Fanny to take the head of the table. There was some surprise at my unexpected appearance, and I had to answer many questions, but dinner came in and that changed the subject for a time. Now and then I caught Fanny eyeing me with evident suspicion. The old General was lamenting her approaching departure on the morrow.

"Our pleasant family party is getting small by degrees, and—unbeautifully—less," he said jocosely. "But we can ill spare you, my dear Mrs. Oliver."

"How long do you expect to be away?" asked Lady Montgomery.

"Only a month, or six weeks."

Involuntarily I looked at her. She gave no sign of perceiving it, but I felt sure she knew. Then the old General questioned me about Llandudno, and the various districts round about. He was thinking of going to Wales in the summer. What hotel should I advise?

It was hard work making conversation with my mind still in a fever of unrest. I was thankful when the meal ended and

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we could leave the table. At the drawing-room door, Fanny apologized to Lady Montgomery for running away.

"I must go and see my sister," she said.

"Why, of course, my dear," said the old lady. "You'll want to say good-bye, won't you? I do hope you'll find her better." She looked at me. "But you're not going, Rosaleen. Come in and play to us. We quite missed the piano."

So I went in, though sorely disinclined to play. I wondered if Fanny was really going to say good-bye to Aunt Joanna, and whether she had grown calmer and more rational? It irked me to think of a long evening to get through before I should know. I felt something serious must have detained Aunt Theresa all this time.

"How dreadfully grave you look, Rosaleen?" said Lady Montgomery.

"Yes, doesn't she?" exclaimed the eldest Miss Cutler.

"Perhaps she's left her heart behind her at Llandudno?" said the youngest sister facetiously.

"It will be your turn next, you know, Rosaleen," said Lady Montgomery. "You'll be going to the balls next year and keeping up the prestige of the beautiful Miss Le Suir's."

"I!" I could not help smiling. "Indeed, there won't be much keeping up of that sort where I am concerned. I don't know what Aunt Theresa would say if she heard their reputation depended on me!"

"Oh—well," said the old lady, "You won't do it so badly, my dear. And you must begin to have a little gaiety and enjoyment. We can only be young once, and it's so soon over. And then come the lonely years, unless——"

I began to play. I wanted to hear no more discussions about myself. The sort of life my aunts had led, the balls and parties, the meetings with "favoured swains," the flirtations, and discussions on the subject of "chances" had rather disgusted me.

Besides, the two "chances" of which I had been a witness had proved most disastrous. It occurred to me that the very last way of getting to know a man—really—was the sort of way my aunts had gone about the business of catching husbands. To be flattered by compliments, beset by attentions, then have to face

the problem of accepting the person who had proffered them as the future arbiter of one's fate, this made no sort of appeal to me. On the other hand lay the grey loneliness of life such as the Miss Cutlers represented it. Days without purpose; the terrible *loneliness* of middle age; seeing one's years drift by to greater age and greater loneliness, and all the time missing the one companionship that might mean true union.

I played on, and the knitting-needles clicked, and the three old capped heads nodded over the daily gossip of Bath, and the advent of new visitors to the Pump Room, or the Grand Hotel. Then the General came up and they sat down to whist, and so the evening went on as so many, many evenings had gone on. As so many evenings would go on, unless——

Unless what Lady Montgomery meant was something that I should also mean. Something that would take me away from the old, grey house, and the dull prosaic days, and teach me the fuller meaning of womanhood.

I saw no more of Fanny that night. Aunt Theresa looked in at the drawing-room about half-past nine, and apologized for her absence at dinner.

"My sister was quite knocked up by the journey. I had to stay with her."

When she left the room I followed her. I was burning with curiosity to know what had happened. Aunt Theresa went into the parlour, rang for Mickey, and ordered sandwiches and negus to be brought to her.

"I'm quite exhausted," she told me. "Such scenes! Really Joanna will kill herself if she goes on as she is doing!"

"Don't tell me anything till you've had some food," I entreated. "Where is Fanny? Has she come home?"

"Oh, yes, long ago! She didn't stay. I'm not surprised. Joanna said such dreadful things!"

I put a chair for her, and removed her bonnet, and rolled up the strings as she had shown me, and then came the tray of refreshments, and she ate and drank, and talked between whiles.

It appeared that Dr. Merivale had kept his plans as much a secret from her as from his wife. But having made these plans,

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he was not to be deterred from carrying them out by any question of Joanna's consent, or disapprobation. The only point now to be considered was, whether she would give in, or whether she would persist in this useless opposition, and so open up an irreparable breach between them.

"Her jealousy is beyond all sense," continued Aunt Theresa. "I'm sorry to have to say it to you, Rosaleen, but you're older than your years, and you've lived long enough with us to understand how things are."

"Did you see Dr. Merivale?" I asked.

"Yes, for a short time. He came in to dinner. Joanna went to bed, but I got her to take some soup, and a glass of port. It was very bad for her, but it was the only wine she would have. I talked very seriously to Jasper. But he said he was sick of Bath, and this was too good an offer to refuse. In six months' time Joanna could come out, if she wished. He also said, Rosaleen, that you might like to go with her. Colonial life would be novel, and more interesting for you than this sleepy dull old place."

"I—go out to Sydney?"

The colour rushed to my face. The thought came to me with all the sense of novelty and excitement such a change would mean. Then I looked at Aunt Theresa. She was my guardian. What would she say to such a scheme?

"It might bear thinking of," she went on. "But, of course, there's some risk about it. You'd have to put up with Joanna, and you know what she is. Also, I very much fear that she and her husband will never agree very well, judging from to-night, and what went on."

She shook her head. "And *that* would be a very disastrous experience for you, my dear. Of course, I may be wrong. He is eloquent in praise of Sydney, and he will have plenty of money. Well, we must just wait and see how things are going to turn out. You've seen Fanny I suppose?"

"Yes," I said.

My heart began to beat quickly. Should I tell her of that scene, and what I had overheard? Would it be any use?

Somehow I felt it would not.

Bare suspicion meant so little, except fresh unrest and dis-

turbance, and poor Aunt Theresa looked as if she had had more than her share of both this evening. So I let her talk on and listened, and wondered. Wondered if that had been Dr. Merivale's whispered "*darling*"? If Fanny was really going on that visit to Monmouthshire? If it would be worth while to go to the Station next morning, and see her off, considering that we had no certain proof of what she intended to do, nor any means of preventing her doing it? Asking myself also if a brother-in-law might not use terms of endearment to his sister by marriage? The doctor said "my dear" to Aunt Theresa and to me. Was it wrong to go a step further and say, "*darling*" to Fanny?

The argument being very one-sided I gave it up and went to bed, and to sleep.

In due course Fanny left. The fly came round, and her box (a very large one) was put upon it, and various rugs and handboxes, and a dressing-bag accompanied her and filled up the interior. She was nervously anxious no one should go to the Station, and the early hour of her departure made it inconvenient for Aunt Theresa. As for me I knew better than to offer my services. She seemed very flurried and hurried at the last, but finally set off, waving farewell to us with her black-edged handkerchief.

I breathed a sigh of relief. I cared little what she did, or where she went, as long as her presence did not disturb the house.

Aunt Theresa gave the orders for the day, and then ran over to Joanna to see how she was. She would not let me come.

"You can do no good, my dear, and it's not healthy or decent for a young girl to hear such disputes between husband and wife."

So, nothing loth, I remained behind to dust china, and arrange flowers for the dinner-table.

I was in the dining-room when the front door bell rang. I thought it might be the post, and went on with my task of snipping stalks and inducing somewhat dispirited daffodils to look fresh by aid of what Aunt Theresa called "plenty of green."

The door suddenly opened, and there entered the Chevalier!

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XXVII

IN WHICH ASPHODELS REPLACE VIOLETS

"I'm rather like the mythological personage in the Book of Job," he said. "I come from 'going to and fro the earth.' If beauty draws us by a single hair, you, my dark Rosaleen, drew me by everyone of those dark tresses that surely sweep your knees. In other words, my child, one of my restless fits came upon me, and I thought of *Aquae Solis* as a remedy. Like the magic Fountain of *Trevi*, to drink once is to drink again and yet again yet never quench one's thirst. Go on with those flowers and I will discourse to you of my travels. How well you look, by the way."

"I've just come back from Wales, and the sea I feel well. But didn't you get my last letter?"

He shook his head. "No. My letters are waiting for me to claim them in Paris."

"But I thought you were staying in Paris?"

"I stayed long enough to prove myself a fool. I was on a wrong scent, Rosaleen."

"The scent of the violets," I murmured.

"It was elusive and misleading. It led nowhere." He bent forward, and took up one of the faded flowers. "Do you know, Rosaleen, I sometimes think she never left Bath at all."

"Who—Madame Odylle. Never left?"

"Even so. The Veiled Lady I followed was not your veiled lady."

"But you said——"

"My child, the wisest member of the police force is often misled by the ingenious pretext of a child. I am not a member of that well-organized and short-sighted body of officials, but I, too, have been misled."

I stood looking at him in perplexity.

"So I came back on my tracks, and here I am once more."

"I can't be sorry for that," I said.

"Your eyes gave me the most charming of welcomes. Are you alone, by the way? Where are the presiding deities?"

Briefly I told him of Aunt Joanna's illness, our stay at Llandudno, and Dr. Merivale's project.

"All these changes in so short a time! Truly, Rosaleen, the Fates are waking up and bestirring themselves in your interest."

"My interest?"

"Well, you are one of the family."

"I suppose you have never been to Australia?" I said.

"Not so far as yet. Why do you ask?"

I told him that if Aunt Joanna went out to join her husband there had been a suggestion that I—

He sprang up excitedly. "Splendid! The very thing! We will all go! We will leave this old country to its conventions and shibboleths, and peradventure forth on new quests and to new delights. I know all about that Land of Promise. It is a place of Wonder and of Hope. Gold grows in the soil as grass in less favoured countries. The fruits of the earth are man's for the asking! There is space and air; wide-rolling lands of grain and verdure. The labour of one's hands is the blessed privilege of industry, and its best reward. Where is Aunt Joanna? Let me talk to her. I will teach her to make practical use of the virtues of civilization. We shall revel in sunshine, and lose ourselves in primeval forests. The sapphire of great oceans, the surf of sounding seas, the carolling of gay birds——"

He stopped abruptly. "No. My fancy misleads me. I think it's locusts. You don't know what a locust is, my child. You've never seen one. The Romans didn't import them.

'Saxon and Norman and Dane are we,
But devil a locust there's to see.'

"A poor thing, but mine own. What was I talking about, Rosaleen?"

"Dear Master—" I said, laughing.

"Ah—I love to hear you say that; I believe, Rosaleen, I crossed that heaving, misbehaving Channel for no other reason!

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I will tell you a story. No, on second thoughts, I won't. It was the story of a tired Wanderer. But he is no longer tired and he would be glad to wander afresh and further afield, if you are willing? And Aunt—Joanna, is it? I'd rather it was Theresa. You take me?"

I laughed. Who could help it. His absurdity was only equalled by his inconsequence.

"Listen," I said. "Nothing is decided yet. Dr. Merivale is going out to Sydney, but not Aunt Joanna. She is to follow later. In six months' time."

"Capital!" he said. "I can set my house in order (which means collecting my Irish rents), prepare an outfit suitable to 90° Fahrenheit in the shade, and be ready to accompany Aunt Joanna and yourself (*that is essential*) as *courier d'occasion* when you say the word."

"You are off at a tangent. Nothing is arranged. Last evening nothing was further from my aunt's intention than to take a voyage to the Antipodes. She thinks Australia is peopled by savages and ravaged by wild beasts. You can't persuade her differently."

"Let me talk to her. We are good friends you know."

"At present she is ill in bed."

"Ah—is that so? I'm sorry. I could speak well of the project to-day. It fires me to enthusiasm. Have you finished arranging those inglorious asphodels? If so, let us go forth. Only the heights will suit my mood. I want to look down on the small world of our environment and out to the wide space beyond the rolling hills. If only I had one of those new wonderful vehicles they are making in Paris. They will fly over the ground like the winged monsters of the Apocrypha, needing neither horse, nor steam. Only the motive power of petrol. It is a secret that will revolutionize the world ere another ten years are over our heads. I could take you over the Mendips and to the Vale of Cheddar, and show you giant cliffs, and mammoth caves, the home of prehistoric man. We should speed from county to county as easily as we now walk from street to street. When may I pay my respects to your good aunt?"

"She has gone to the Merivale's this morning," I

said. "I really don't know when she will be in. Perhaps tea-time."

"And Mrs. Oliver has left?"

"Yes, thank goodness!"

"I'm not sure that I don't echo that outburst of gratitude. Can't you come out, child? We'd have time to ascend the Lansdowne by taking the short cut through Hay Hill. I want to breathe the air of the heights, as I told you."

I glanced at the clock. "No, I'm afraid I wouldn't have time. But after luncheon I could come. I'm going over to Aunt Joanna's now to enquire how she is, and ascertain whether Aunt Theresa comes back for luncheon. One of us must be at the table, you know."

"I don't know, and I don't see the necessity. But I will return at—two o'clock?"

"About half-past. I shall be ready."

He took my hands, and stood for a moment looking down at my face.

"You *were* glad to see me, Rosaleen?"

"Oh—*how* glad!" I said softly.

He touched my hand lightly with his lips, in that half foreign fashion of his.

"There's something about *locusts* still running in my head. Ah—I know. 'The years that the locusts have eaten.' Well, if mine are devoured and digested they exist no more. Isn't that clear logic, Rosaleen?"

I laughed for sheer joy of hearing him talk again.

"It is logic if you say so."

"Was ever pupil so appreciative and commendable," he said.

A contrast from this breezy philosophy met me on the threshold of Aunt Joanna's drawing-room. She had put on a dressing-gown and come downstairs. Not that she felt better, but to show she could still make an effort to assert herself.

Aunt Theresa had told her of Fanny's departure, and spent the rest of the time in arguing the *pros* and *cons* of the Australian project. I dropped in as it was going on.

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"I think it perfectly delightful," I said. "Why shouldn't we all go? You too, Aunt Theresa. You're always complaining of the worry and bother of a boarding house, and the expense. Out there living is cheap, the climate divine, and the locusts——"

"The *what!*" screamed Aunt Joanna.

"I meant—mosquitoes," I said confusedly.

"Well, *they're* not much inducement to cross the ocean and put up with the discomfort of a foreign land!"

"It's one of our Colonies. It isn't foreign."

"Oh! do stop argufying, Rosaleen! You're as bad as your father for that. Whoever's going to Australia, it's not *me*. That I'm determined on. If Jasper chooses to wreck our lives and make a scandal, that's his look out. I was perfectly contented *here*. No one ever heard me say I wasn't, in spite of being kept short of money, and the tiresomeness of servants. I don't see why I should be pulled up by the roots and condemned to a strange life, and black servants, and—reptiles of all sorts, besides things that were in the Plagues of Egypt. What were they, Rosaleen?"

"Locusts."

"Yes, locusts; horned things with wings that eat up every green leaf in the country. And snakes inside one's rooms. I've heard of them coiled up in your boots, and when you go to put them on they dart out and twine round your leg and then you're poisoned and die. No, thank you, England may have a trying climate, and Bath be a stupid dull place, (I always said it was madness of you to settle yourself here, Theresa!) but, at least, one can live without daily peril, to say nothing of thunderstorms, and earthquakes, and dust storms!"

"You're confusing Sydney with India," said Aunt Theresa.

"Oh no! I'm not. Jasper had a lot of books about it in his consulting-room. I've read one or two. Nothing, I repeat, would induce me to go out there. So that ends it!"

If it *had* only ended it. But experience of Aunt Joanna told me that the subject would come up again and again for discussion. Would be argued with a persistent dreariness of outlook, varied by vituperations of Fanny in the first place, and Jasper Merivale in the second.

Poor Aunt Joanna! Always, to the end of her days, her own worst enemy. Quite unable to see herself as determined foe to the better things within her soul, or about her life.

But my heart sang aloud. Even she could not depress me. Aunt Theresa came back to luncheon and made no objection to my going for a walk with the Chevalier. "And bring him back to tea," she said. "It's a treat to meet someone bright and cheerful after two days of Joanna!"

So off I went, and as the Lansdowne was not high enough we must needs go southwards and toil up the steep ascent of Beechen Cliff, in order to breathe that air of space and freedom for which the Chevalier craved. If it was steep I did not care. We were as happy, as ridiculous, and as inconsequent as two children escaped from school. The sky was an April one of tender blue and fleecy cloud; the sun warmed the grey old town, and lit up the green belt of its protecting hills. Scents of spring, song of birds, and the one companion in the world that could make such things a joy complete—what more could one ask of Fate?

"You look radiant, Rosaleen."

"I feel radiant."

"After all, each life has to live itself," said he. "Why should you burden your's with these aunts, and their petty inanities? They are responsible for what they have done, or left undone; but you, Rosaleen, have yet to live."

"But—'no man liveth for himself,' dear Master."

"True, as most proverbs are. And so the Antipodes has fallen to the ground? Would my eloquence prevail, do you think?"

"You know Aunt Joanna?"

We looked at each other and laughed.

"She can't be dragged up to our plane, Rosaleen, however hard we try. What is the kink, or crank, in her brain that so determinates the 'worst possible' of everything? God knows! Yet I suppose she couldn't understand why we should pity her?"

"No. But she would appreciate the pity as sympathy with her self-conceived misfortunes."

He laughed. "I have taught you something, my child."

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"Everything I care to remember *as* teaching."

"Again I say—had you only been a boy. Yet some man would be the poorer for that."

My face grew hot. "Don't!" I entreated.

"Don't—what?"

"Say things like that. I hate it."

"You are a child still in many ways. You will like to hear things like that—someday. Ah—here we are! Another step, and the wonders of a world hollowed out of a morning's smile are before us."

"Who said that?" I asked breathlessly. Four hundred feet is a good climb even for youth and a light heart.

"Said what? About the 'morning's smile'? No one in particular unless it was myself. I always think of a breaking dawn when I stand here. The sun bursts forth, the morning smiles on the nest-like hollow below, and *Aquae Solis* arises crowned and queenly from out her mantle of green. Behold her, and say, 'It is good for us to be here!'"

I thought it was good to be anywhere—with him. The buoyancy and laughter of life were so much a part of himself, that whether one shared or enjoyed them, life was bound to take on the rose tints of his creative powers.

As we stood side by side and gazed on that panorama of winding river, nest-like valley, grey town, I was conscious once again of deep content. We were silent for some moments. Then he said abruptly, "There is a line of a poem I cannot get out of my head. "*I shall never again be friends with roses—*"

"Swinburne!" I said quickly.

"You have read those Poems and Ballads, have you?"

"Some. I found the book among Aunt Fanny's, when she went away. I think his poetry is wonderful."

"Dangerous," he said. "Too strong and passionate, and exciting for young maidens such as you, Rosaleen."

"It is beautiful," I said again. "You quoted that from 'The Triumph of Time.'"

"I shall never again be friends with roses,
I shall loathe sweet tunes when a note grown strong
Relents and recoils, and climbs and closes
As a wave of the sea turned back by song."

"That symbol is so wonderful. 'As a wave of the sea turned back by song.' What a magical marvellous thing is the brain of a poet. Taking the simplest things that live and turning them into a phrase so exquisite that it haunts one's memory ever after."

"But why will you never again be friends with roses?" I asked him.

"I meant—violets," he said.

"You mean——?"

"I mean—nothing. Only that I stood one night in Paris, looking out on the crowded boulevards; watching the passing faces. And I seemed to recognize that chasing a mirage is not a very satisfying pursuit. It occurred to me, Rosaleen, that I had grown old, and let the years go by, and yet had found no single satisfying thing. I was haunted by a host of 'might have beens.' Horrible things, my child, that mocked, and smiled, and gibed. I faced the Fool Errant and had it out with him, or tried to have it out. 'After all,' said he, 'your vow was not accepted.' 'I swore it on my faith as a gentleman,' said I. 'She never took you at your word.' 'But that did not absolve me.' And so on, and so on. Then an idea took hold of me. Supposing *she had never left here?*"

"Not left!" I echoed. "Oh, but I'm sure she did. Why her furniture—everything was taken away."

"Do you know where it went?"

"Yes, at least, I know the place where it is stored. Over there, in Southgate Street."

"Stored? You are sure?"

"I saw the foreman who came to remove it. Those were his instructions; to keep it until it was sent for."

"I wonder—" he said, "if she ever sent for it?"

"That, I cannot say. I never asked. Besides, you wrote that you had traced her to Paris."

"A false scent. Sometimes I wonder if it was done on purpose? Yet she could not have known that I was coming to see her that night."

"Ah!" I cried impulsively.

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"I have just thought of something. Madame Odylle had a most uncanny gift of foreseeing things that were to happen. Twice she told me of misfortunes that afterwards occurred. Perhaps she knew by this power that you were about to come into her life, and tried to prevent it?"

"Clairvoyance," he said musingly. "A sense many of us possess, or misuse. But living as she did, alone and on hermit's fare, the life of a recluse, it is no wonder such a faculty should develop."

"Then you think she avoided you on purpose?"

"You have told me about that disfigurement. She would be sensitive on that point, if indeed, she is the lovely Odylle Gautier at whose feet all Paris once flung itself and its adoration."

I was silent. I was thinking of how he had been among those who thus adored. A vague jealousy of that time darkened the sunshine, and shut out the beautiful scene from my unseeing eyes.

He went on speaking. "If she is that Odylle Gautier, she has deliberately chosen to take herself out of our lives. For if I could trace her identity by your description, Rosaleen, she could as surely have traced mine by what you told her of me. And somehow—when I was in Paris—this is what I thought. 'She does not wish to see you again. Therefore—why pursue your phantom of the violets any longer?' And so—I came back——"

My heart gave a sudden quick throb. He had come back to me. The quest was over. No phantom lady was to draw him hither and thither any more. Our lives would go on and on from day to day, as I had so longed they might go on. No shadow betwixt me and the sun. No grey days, grey life, where he should be. He, whose gay fantastic, yet most tender companionship had been the one treasured possession of my childish years.

"I came back," he repeated softly, "and you said you were—glad."

"So I was; and am. And now, perhaps, you will stay?"

"Just as long as you want me, my dark Rosaleen."

From the valley below, that "nest-like hollow" where the city lay, came the deep full sound of bells. Above us spread a sky blue and tender as the hyacinths among the grass. A sense

of beauty so beautiful that it *hurt*, being only of earth and short-lived and ever dogged by sorrow or regret, swept over me and held me dumb. I was only a child still; thinking the joy of the immediate moment meant all the joy that life could hold.

It held enough. The thought that he was here, and would remain here, and therefore I could not be very lonely, or very sad ever again.

XXVIII

AN OLD FRIEND REAPPEARS

THE rest of our walk was more silent than usual. His gay mood had changed to one more serious. But whatever his mood, it was enough for me that he should be beside me.

"You are to come in and have some tea," I said, as we came back along the Wells Road. "Aunt Theresa expects you. After two days of Aunt Joanna, she said it would be a treat to have some cheerful companionship."

"She is an admirable person, your Aunt Theresa. I wish we had only her to deal with. There might be hope of that trip to the Antipodes we discussed this morning."

"You seem keen on it," I said.

"My child, I was born a wanderer, and such I shall remain. The place to which my vagrant fancy takes me, matters less than that the fancy should and *does* take me."

"But you stayed here two years, did you not, before the Academy days?"

He laughed. "Stayed—I was to and fro, and here and there, but the interest of the place held me. Also a wound; also an empty purse. I should hardly like to say how empty it was when Fate led me one day to Sydney Gardens and enabled me to come to the assistance of another wandering spirit. How forlorn and startled you looked, Rosaleen! A Peri at the gate which an unfriendly hand refused to open."

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I remembered it so well, and as I remembered I thought how like him it was to empty that purse still further by paying my entrance fee.

"You opened another gate that day," I said softly. "I shall never forget how you talked; what light you seemed to let in on life, on the future that had looked so dreary, on the old grey town I had told myself I should *hate!*"

"And you have learnt to love it?"

"Who could help it? But it was you who rubbed the magic oil on my eyelids, so that I could see it by the light of other days."

"Dear old grey town, I love it too! Sometimes when I am in the whirl of a great city, when the scorch of foreign suns, and the stench and noise and confusion of foreign streets are with me, I feel a longing beyond all words for this peaceful spot. For the cool, grey streets, and the old, grey houses, and the tender green of the hills, and the silver winding Avon. Perhaps one would be wise to rest here and wander no more. It would be hard to find a more fitting votive altar for the good the gods have given. Even our friends the Romans knew that. '*Votum solvit libens merito.*' That meant gratitude for the healing waters. My gratitude would be expressed for the healing of a heart."

"I wonder," I said suddenly, "what has become of Polyphemia?"

"Oh, she still resides in the O'Driscoll household, and manifests the superiority given by an academical education. Poor Polyphemia! Her votive offerings were, to say the least of it, unwelcome. The last time I saw her she asked after you, Rosaleen. At least, she gave me to understand that she was anxious as to whether your 'hair was up yet,' and how tall you had grown? I suggested she might satisfy herself on these points without much personal trouble. But she only sniffed."

"She would," I said.

"Sniffed, and said, 'not likely. I've no time to waste over 'er!'"

"She had a great dislike of me, I think."

"It was possibly jealousy. You were no doubt the more brilliant of my two pupils."

"I have often wondered whether you ever really intended to open a school—I mean an Academy?"

"I did, most seriously. But funds were not forthcoming when the idea held me. With the ability to put it into force it vanished. There never was a lazier beggar on the face of the earth than I, Rosaleen."

"And you are so clever! It seems to me you could do anything; anything you really cared about doing."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Facile talent is as bad as none. I can do so many things *well*, that I care little for doing one single thing superlatively. In that I differ from the generality of geniuses. I don't specialize. It would narrow my force of application. To play eternally on one special instrument, to be at the mercy of dishonest agents, and grasping managers—to paint one style of picture because an obtuse public believes only in the *repetition* of art, not its variation—to write one style of book for like reason! No, my child, it likes me not. I can do nothing that would tie down soaring wings by weight of men's opinions, or their money-bags."

"Parliament?" I suggested timidly.

His laugh was the very essence of derision. "Parliament! To be the tool of a party who revel in blatant dishonesty. Who sell their conscience to the highest bidder; who in the name of the people they profess to serve, commit every crime that disloyalty and ambition and selfish aggrandizement is capable of committing! Parliament! Home of false oratory, and false policy, and every crime that unchecked lawmakers can commit in the name of law! The chattel of a party is no free-born citizen, and the man honest enough to speak for right and try to maintain it is always in the wrong. Therefore he is unpopular; therefore he is thrust aside, cast down and trampled under foot of the swine who know only that pearls are not nuts for their devouring snouts to grovel amidst. Parliament! Never name it to me who come from the land of O'Connell, and of Burke, and have seen the peace and honour of my country dragged through the mire of England's ambition, and cursed by the fell tyranny of Rome!"

He went on at this rate for the rest of the way, caring nothing

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for the stares of the passers-by, or the exigencies of street crossings. He was wellnigh breathless when we reached the top of Pulteney Street, and then told me I was, as ever, the most patient and tolerant of listeners.

But I mentally registered a vow never to touch upon so delicate a subject as politics again.

Aunt Theresa welcomed him warmly, and before his second cup of tea was finished he had launched forth upon the idea of our joint pilgrimage to Australia. The glorified picture of that land of promise was painted with his usual lavish expenditure of colour. I think even the locusts became birds of Paradise. Aunt Theresa listened doubtfully, and with less enthusiasm than I expected.

"There's such a thing as flying from 'ills we know,' Chevalier. At least, I know my situation at present. I can't face total uprooting without going thoroughly into the matter. If my sister would agree——"

"Let me talk to her," he said.

"I wish you would. For I really think it would be a very good thing for her to go out to the Colonies. She has got into a groove. Not a very healthful one either, and really if she does go out, I am much inclined to send Rosaleen also. But as for myself——" She filled up her cup and shook her head. "I'm too old to care for transplanting. I feel I ought to stay on here and keep a home for the others, if they should ever need it."

"The—others? But both your sisters are married."

"One is a widow."

"But perhaps she will not always remain so? As for Mrs. Merivale, may I be excused for saying that if anyone ever needed rousing and—transplanting—it is she!"

"I quite agree with you; but it's impossible to make her see it."

"And, meanwhile, Dr. Merivale leaves next week?"

"Yes."

"I saw your sister, Mrs. Oliver, in the London train this morning," he said casually.

"What!" Aunt Theresa's cup crashed down into her saucer,

"The London train—impossible! She's gone to Monmouthshire!"

"Perhaps she has run up to town *en route*," he said. "But I certainly saw her. I could not easily mistake her, you know."

I felt the colour rise hotly to my cheeks as Aunt Theresa looked at me. Then it was true what I had heard. Some arrangements about trains—about a meeting. And she had not gone to Monmouthshire at all.

"Are you sure you saw her?" asked Aunt Theresa. "I really cannot believe it. Or—but no, surely she couldn't have got into a wrong train?"

"There's a difference between the up and the down line," he said.

"I can't understand it."

"Why worry? She may have changed her mind, and thought she'd go to London first. Ladies are privileged to do that, you know."

She dropped the subject, but I could see she was much perturbed. I think none of us trusted Fanny, having had frequent experience of her duplicity. That curious "crookedness" of mind which played fast and loose with one's preconceived ideas of truth and honour. The Chevalier noted that his news had been disconcerting, so he kept off the danger path and talked generalities during the rest of his visit.

At last he rose. "There is a deficit to make up in the sum total of Rosaleen's education," he said. "I should like to read philosophy and literature with her two evenings a week. Do you mind?"

"Mind? Of course, not. I have been wondering if we should consider her finished. Girls have such a more elaborate education nowadays than in my time."

"It is nothing to what they will have when this century closes its doors upon 'potatoes, prunes, and prisms.' The Universities will open to them; the professions will embrace them. The surgery, the bench, and the rostrum will sway to their influence. Man, poor wretch, will be elbowed aside for their ambitions. That is why I wish Rosaleen to have a little instruction in the art of holding her own. Knowing what Carlyle,

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and John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer have to say for her sex, and on social matters that concern them, will help her."

"But why the evenings?" asked Aunt Theresa.

"Ah, my dear lady, don't ask us to waste the sunny hours of spring and summer over dry-as-dust subjects such as these! Your niece does not yet attend the social festivities of Bath; Besides, this is not the season for them. Eight to ten, twice a week shall we say?"

I—said it gladly enough. I would have learnt anything, taken up any study if he desired it, or thought it necessary. But literature, under his tuition, opened out a field of fascination such as beggared description.

"Why are you so good to me?" I asked, as I went to the door to show him out.

"Good? To offer to read with you now and then? My child, it is only a salve to my conscience for those two quarters of academical fooling for which I received your good aunt's money. I have a conviction that she was not quite satisfied."

"I learnt more than the High School could have taught me!" I exclaimed.

"You think so? Well, I am satisfied if you are. At least, you learnt enough to prove my theory that education has to do with objective as well as subjective things. I hate rules, and disdain methods. On those points we were agreed. Well—what about to-morrow?"

"It depends on my aunts. Oh—are you *sure* it was Fanny—Mrs. Oliver, you know, that you saw in the London train this morning?"

"Absolutely certain. I saw more too. Your—uncle, isn't he—Dr. Merivale was seeing her off. He was on the platform talking to her at the carriage window."

"Where were you? Did they see you?"

"I think not. I was at the opposite side of the station enquiring for some strayed baggage. How grave you look! Is there anything very surprising in her going up to London?"

"Yes; when she told us she was setting out for a totally different place, on a visit to friends."

"She was always inclined to act on her own impulse. I shouldn't worry, Rosaleen."

"I don't. It is of Aunt Joanna I was thinking."

"How does it concern her?"

"That remains to be seen," I said gravely.

"I applaud your discretion, my child. But my interest is on account of yourself. It is not curiosity. You are always happier when this special aunt is out of the house, are you not?"

"I am. That is one reason why I hoped you were mistaken. London seems so near. Monmouthshire was such a safe distance."

"Distance is only what we choose to make it, my child. There is one that our thoughts can bridge, though seas and continents stretch between. There is another which the length of a room renders impassable."

After the door closed I went slowly back to the parlour. Aunt Theresa was still sitting by the tea-tray, looking very grave and worried.

"I can't make this out, Rosaleen. How could Fanny be in the London train? I do wish you had gone to see her off, then I should be sure."

"She distinctly said she would not have me see her off. And I heard her tell you the same thing."

"Well, we shall soon know. I have the address of those people in Monmouthshire, and if we don't get a letter to-morrow, or next day, I shall write. Of course, you won't say a word to Joanna."

"No, there's no necessity. By the way, how is she? More reconciled to the idea?"

"Not a bit. I've put in a wretched day. Sometimes I wonder how she could possibly have changed so much. She was cheerful and contented enough before she married."

"She had Fanny to work it off on," I said. "But even in those days, if you remember, she always had a grievance."

Aunt Theresa rose and rang for Mickey to remove the tea-things.

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He began to do so in an absorbed manner. Something seemed weighing on his mind.

"I think, Miss Theresa, ye ought to know. 'Poor Mary's' gone off wid herself at last."

"Gone off—where?"

"Back home, she *said*. I wouldn't be sure av that, only she's talked of her people an' their cottage an' the 'farm sthock' for the last six months. She said her heart was growin' lonesomer an' lonesomer. Whin she borrowed half a crown from me an' five shillings from Aunt Biddy I thought somethin' was up. Well, that's it, miss. She's gone."

"But her box?"

"Ah, sure, Aunt Biddy looked into that same. 'Twas as impty as an ould herrin' cask. Her clothes, sich as they were, she'd tied in a bundle, an' thin she jist walked off wid herself. Maybe she's gone on the dhrink. I wouldn't put it beyond her. Thin cravin's as she used to have were gettin' worse an' worse."

"You never told me! Bridget said she was quite a teetotaler now."

"Sure, an' why should we be troublin' ye, Miss Theresa. Ye've yer share an' more. Aunt Biddy an' meself can make shift to do without her for a while, till she find someone else."

"Bridget can't possibly do the cooking and all the scrubbing and cleaning of this great house as well. Even as it is she does more than her share of work. I'll have to try and find someone else."

Mickey took sudden interest in fitting the teacups together in the limited space of the tray. "I happens to know av a bright handy gurl. She's wantin' a situation by rasin av quarrels wid her own family, or some sich nonsense. Would I be tellin' her to apply, miss? She might suit ye. An' she can do a bit av cooking, which is more than that ignorant hussy who's gone could iver do. She hadn't the peelin' av a praty, lave alone the boilin' av one, in *her*. As for porridge, 'twas either burnt, or lumps not fit for a dog's dinner! Sure, Aunt Biddy knew that. Help? Little help she was. We're not sheddin' any tears at the loss av *her*!"

"Well," sighed Aunt Theresa, "if I don't get another girl I must have a charwoman. And they're a bother, and eat more food in a day than an ordinary house servant in a week. Tell your friend, Mickey, to come round and see me."

"Whin shall she come round, Miss Theresa?"

"Oh—to-morrow, about this time. You're sure she can work?"

"Work! Ye'll see that, miss. She's a wonder at it, is Polly. An' steady, an' clean too. Oh, she'd suit the place mighty well, Miss Theresa."

"Polly—is that her name?" I asked.

"Sure, an' it is, Miss Rosaleen. Polly O'Driscoll entire."

O'Driscoll? Some far-off memory stirred within me. Surely the world was narrowing itself to individual interests.

I had a restless night. I spent most of its hours in going over old ground. Those queer school-days at once novel and delightful. The scorn and distance of Miss Polyphemia O'Driscoll. Her jealousy of me and her adoration of "the Master." Truly it would be odd if it was she who was the object of Mickey's devotion, and if by any chance Aunt Theresa should engage her in "poor Mary's" place. Then I thought of Fanny; Dr. Merivale; Aunt Joanna; the Australian project. Of the idea of uprooting ourselves from this dull life and peradventuring to a new world. One of enterprise, novelty, more vivid interests. In the darkness around I was conscious of a sense of my own part in these entangled lives. I seemed to see each and all of them living out its apportioned destiny, and closing about me in a network of association. It was curious how I had learnt so much of these three aunts of mine. The years had not been many, but their history had made history for me, and, in all probability, would make more.

At first solitude had meant blankness; the solitude shared with uncongenial things; but in this last year a great change had overtaken me. I no longer wandered in obscurity. Facts, incidents, and persons became not only of greater interest but of relative values. When I had said to the Chevalier, "no man liveth for himself," it had been less a truism than a recognized

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fact. I might be of small consequence here, yet I had a place ; duties, obligations. What affected the household affected me. If I loved Aunt Theresa best that was not to say I did not love Aunt Joanna, although I saw so much to pity in her, as well as to wonder at.

With regard to Fanny, she stood out in a lurid light all her own. A vivid flame against a sombre background. I could recall no action of hers that made her lovable. No word that was not sharp-set with petty feminine spites and artificialities. She gave little affection and less loyalty to her sisters. She certainly disliked me, and now by some trick of Fate it lay in my power to unmask a new piece of treachery. I wondered I had not done so in the impulse of the moment when we had heard of this change of trains. I had wondered all the evening that I could not go up to Aunt Theresa and say, " Ask Dr. Merivale why Fanny has gone to London ? *He knows.*"

The impulse had been with me more than once, and yet I had disregarded it. It wanted a week yet of the 30th of April. If in that week Aunt Joanna made up her mind to go to Australia, I felt all would be well. If she refused—there I came up against a dead wall.

It was a matter for herself and her husband. I could see no possible reason for a refusal to share his life and his fortunes. She had promised to do so ; it was part of her marriage vows. When she thought the matter over calmly she would surely see that such a course of action was the best, if indeed it was not the only one. For what could she do here alone, in that great house ? And everyone would know her husband had gone to the Colonies, and that she had refused to join him.

After much thinking and wakefulness I resolved to wait that week. If for some unexplained reason Fanny had gone to London first, she might still intend to go to Monmouthshire from there. In any case Aunt Theresa had the address. If she did not hear, she would write. On that letter and on its answer I resolved to wait, and so after much tossing and turning I fell asleep at last to dream I saw the Chevalier standing before the altar of the

Abbey Church, and coming up the aisle to meet him as his bride was a white-satinéd, orange-blossomed figure, who turned on me an eye of malignant triumph. The eye of Polyphemia O'Driscoll!

XXIX

IN WHICH INCIPENT RIVALRY REAPPEARS

THE days slipped by. One was eventful enough to be recorded; the day when Miss O'Driscoll arrived to be interviewed and inspected by Aunt Theresa. Mickey showed her into the parlour. An odd figure, dressed in shabby nondescript garments; her vivid hair frizzed and puffed out under a black straw hat; her eyes still evincing a doubt as to the object of their regard that ought to have been disconcerting to Mickey.

She must have known that I was a member of the household, or else Irish confidence was less than universal in this particular instance. It suited her, however, to treat me as a person with whose insignificance she was entirely unacquainted. For sake of old times I accepted the rebuke, and subsided into the position of a passive onlooker.

She had never been "out" as yet. Not to say. But she had worked as hard at home as anyone needed, and it had occurred to her she was entitled to the importance of wages. She demanded £10 a year, every Sunday evening to herself, and would not press for "beer money," unless the other servants did.

"They don't. I've never given such a thing," said Aunt Theresa.

"Oh, well, I've 'eard it's usual—in the best families," she added.

"Why not apply to one of them?"

A flicker of anxiety crossed Polyphemia's expressive face. She temporized. "Of course, I know I'm not h'perienced

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“ You have nothing to do with the family, or their number,” said Aunt Theresa. “ Your work is concerned only with the kitchen ; scrubbing, and cleaning, and lighting the stove. Do you understand how to do that ? I don't supply paraffin oil, or fire-lighters.”

Polyphemia had had long and practical experience of “ them rangers.”

“ You will clean the boots, and also assist the cook in any way she wishes,” continued my aunt. “ You may either share her room, or have a small one to yourself.”

“ I'd prefer *that*,” said the young lady. “ I'm used to my own company. Also being a scholard, so to say, I devotes a hour every day to keepin' up French and jology, and sich-like. There's no knowin' 'ow things may turn h'out in this topsy-turvey scheme of the universe.”

Aunt Theresa stared. Truly an odd sort of kitchen-maid ! I, with a remembrance of academic days, recognized “ infringement of copyright,” and laughed. She flashed an indignant look in my direction. I turned the laugh into a cough, and awaited issues.

“ I don't object to your reading, of course. But I'll have no candles burning after you're in bed. I don't want the house set on fire,” said Aunt Theresa.

“ I said *day*, ma'am. I suppose I'm not h'expected to slave from six in the morning till ten at night ? ”

“ Of course not. It will do if you are down at half-past six in summer, and seven in winter. No one can say I am a hard mistress. I treat my servants with all possible consideration as long as they do their several duties. I don't ask impossibilities.”

“ I don't do 'em,” said Polyphemia. “ And such bein' duly considered for the welfare of all parties concerned, I'm willin' to take the place, ma'am. When should I be h'expected to h'enter upon my duties ? ”

“ As soon as possible.”

“ I could arrange to come 'ere to-morrow h'evening. I'm aware that one isn't h'expected to work the first moment one

h'enters a place. I've friends in Pierrepont Street. I knows something about service, and 'ow domestiks is put upon."

"What an extraordinary girl! Quite a character!" said Aunt Theresa, when the door closed upon this specimen of "domesticks."

"She is—extraordinary," I said. "I wonder how Mickey chanced to come across her?"

That I learnt next day, when Miss O'Driscoll had deposited her wooden box and her peculiarly unattractive person in the area. It happened to have come downstairs to let the Dodger into the garden. Polyphemia came into the kitchen with all her "bristles out," so to say, and a rooted idea that she was to be "put upon," and must therefore lose no time in asserting her rights, and her determination to stick to them.

Bridget laughed good-humouredly. "There, child, don't be makin' a fool of yerself. Sarvice—is it? Sure, an' I've lived in sarvice more years than ye've bin out of it! Take yer hat off, an' make yourself at home. Perhaps ye'd like a cup o' tea an' a slice of toast? There's nothing for ye to do to-night. Mickey, he's the handy lad, he's peeled the potatoes, an' washed the vegetables. Why, what are ye starin' at?"

She was staring at me as I stood by the garden door.

I greeted her in friendly fashion. "How are you, Polyphemia? I hope you'll find yourself comfortable here."

She came up to me and laid her hand on my arm. "Do you know *why* I am 'ere," she said, in a hoarse whisper. "It's to 'ave a chance to see 'im."

"Him—who?"

"As if yer didn't know! The Master, of course. I know 'e comes 'ere. I found that h'out."

"The Master?"

"The place was never the same once 'e left it," she went on in the same low, strenuous key. "I got sick of it. Then when *she* come and took the rooms, and all was so mysterious, I said to mother, 'I've 'ad enough o' this. I'll go out and work, and be h'independent,' I says. And 'earing from Mickey of this place, why I just thought I'd take it—tempory, so to say."

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"Temporary? You don't mean to stay then?"

"I means to better myself. It's bin done afore, and can be done again. Anyways, mother doesn't need me. She's all right with the new lodger. Never see such a queer card as *she* is. Doesn't want no cookin' nor h'attention. Gives no trouble—and pays. My! 'twas gold mother had first week, and in advance too."

My heart stood still. "Has this—lodger—been staying with your mother long?" I asked

"Long? Since February," she answered. "Came one evening after dark. I wasn't allowed to see 'er, nor yet do nothin' for 'er. She's got the best rooms of the 'ouse. Three. And a lot o' nice furniture came in, and mother says as 'ow she wouldn't know 'er own droring-room now!"

My first suspicion became certainty. It must be Madame Odylle. Were there two women in Bath who could lead so mysterious a life? I felt aggrieved that she had left us in so unexplained a manner, only to go to another lodging in the same city. Why had she done it?

Polyphemia knew no more. Neither her name, business, nor appearance. She reverted to the "Master." It was true, was it not, that he did come here? I said it was.

"But it's not your place to answer the door," I said. "And I suppose you don't expect him to continue teaching you?"

"Of course I don't. But per'aps sometimes I may catch sight or sound of 'im. That'll be 'appiness enough for my aching 'eart. I'll feed upon it till such times as I've risen and prospered, and can be worthy to 'old out my 'and as a h'equal, and say, '*Mongsure, je suis le poore may fidaile Polyphemia; votre aylave.*'"

How she had got that sentence together was a mystery. But there was no mistaking her fidelity, or her adoration of that "*shaire maytre.*" I was silent for a moment, taking in her grotesque appearance; her scraggy figure, and red, rough hair. Yet she seemed to have found favour in Mickey's sight. He came in now, and greeted her with bashful delight. Her airs and graces to him were in distinct contrast with her humbler attitude towards the "*cher maitre.*"

I thought it time to take myself off, and went up the stairs

brooding over this new discovery. My Grey Lady was still here. The Chevalier had said he believed she had never left the town, and he was right. But that she should have gone to the *Via Roma* of his own sojourning seemed more than a coincidence.

I tried to recall what I had told her of that Academy. Had I by chance located it accurately enough for her to discover its whereabouts? I had been used to talk so freely and frankly it was more than likely I had given any information she might need. Having got so far, I asked myself should I acquaint the Chevalier with my discovery. It would be difficult to keep silent on the point, and yet a strange, jealous pang shot through my heart at the idea of awakening any interest he had declared was over; reopening a page in the book he had just closed.

To-night he would be here. He was coming for the first of those "philosophical and literary *causeries*" that were to complete my peculiar education. If I told him about Polyphemia I could not withhold that other piece of news—and then?

What then, I wondered? A renewal of the Quest, or its cessation.

I found Aunt Theresa upstairs. She had just returned from the Merivales, where she had had tea, and been entertained by the still continuing lamentations of Aunt Joanna.

"The doctor takes no notice. Just goes on with his packing and preparations. He is a curiously determined man. Once he makes up his mind to do a thing, nothing will turn him from his purpose."

"Do you think she will give in?" I asked.

"My dear child, who can answer for Joanna. She always ends in doing the very thing she has declared a hundred and ninety-nine times she will *never* do! I wish things were decided one way or other. I never got a wink of sleep last night thinking of her and Fanny. What a blessing it is, Rosaleen, that you've never given me an anxious moment. It might have been expected, too. But you seem to have an old head on your young shoulders, child. Such sense; goodness knows where you got it! Lucius was always in the clouds, and had as much idea of the responsibilities of life as a child."

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She kissed me tearfully. She seemed depressed and low-spirited as usual after a spell of Joanna. "Not a word from Fanny!" she went on, as she removed her bonnet.

"It is soon yet," I said. "She is a bad correspondent too. All those years in Australia she never wrote at all."

"I know. But there was reason for that. We had parted on bad terms. It was her place to make the *amende*, but she never did. Hard as nails, that's Fanny; will never acknowledge herself in the wrong even though she knows she is."

Again I wondered whether I ought to speak of that scene? Of the words I had overheard? Again I hesitated, and was lost.

Aunt Theresa dismissed me. She was going to lie down and rest before dressing for dinner. I left the room, still with my secret unspoken. I thought of the curious chain of coincidences linking up the happenings of life as it had suddenly become. Of the fate that had set me in the midst of this queer drama playing itself out in successive acts, each of which grew more desperately interesting. Once before I had recognized that the "looking on," the silent criticism, the half-conscious absorption of such external interests were ageing me by sure degrees. How could it be otherwise? To be young one must keep in touch with youth; sunny, trivial, pleasant things. But such things had never come my way. That the Chevalier's temperament was young, was a happy chance. It had made for me all my life had known of pure physical enjoyment. Small things and large alike interested him. The joy of the immediate moment stood for all the joy he needed. Accidents of misfortune had not been more than accidents; temporary knock-down blows from which he sprang up again with a sense of wonder, but an equal sense of energy as preparation for the next assault. Through the prosaic currents of my ordinary life his influence ran like a thread of quicksilver. Envivifying the dull substance; sparkling through the dark web. In absurdity, lightness of heart, fantasy of humour he was younger than I by countless years. Instinctively I had recognized that fact and it had been my salvation. Goodness knows what kind of brooding, solitary, dissatisfied creature I might have become but for that day in Sydney Gardens!

There is nothing so unhealthy for youth as introspection. The drawing into itself of those feelers of attachment thrust timidly forth, and as swiftly withdrawn from sheer despair of tenacity. The brooding on the why and wherefore of things that should have possessed but surface value. He had saved me from all this. It was little wonder that he had gradually become as a shining star in a night of loneliness. Teacher, comrade, friend, and wonderful as each, and complete enough in all to stifle any desire for other comrades or other friendship.

As I stood before my bookshelf, looking out the volume of Carlyle, that he had suggested I should read, I thought of those days when he had taught Polyphemia and myself, and laughed softly at the recollection. She too had fallen under the spell. There was something rather pathetic about that. About her tracing me, and discovering through that fact that it was also possible to see him again.

"The Master." Hers and mine. Poor quaint Polyphemia! I hadn't the slightest doubt that she would find some means of introducing herself to his notice. I could picture his astonishment at finding his two former pupils once more under the same roof, if not the same Academy.

My hand rested on "Sartor Resartus." An old second-hand copy he had once found on a bookstall, and given me. As yet I had only turned over the leaves, and neglected the substance. The turgid, rugged prose had made no appeal to me. As I drew it forth the action dislodged another volume by its side. The shabby, green-covered "Poems and Ballads" of Swinburne that I had taken from Fanny's room. I drew it out and turned to the "Triumph of Time."

"I wonder if he would read *this* to me?" I thought. I sat down near the window that looked out now on the great full-leaved elm, and on a world of blossoming orchards, and tender-hued foliage stretching away to that splendid curve of Camden.

I opened the volume and began to read. He had said much of it was dangerous. But the beauty of phrase and fancy held me like a spell. I read on and on.

"A Ballad of Life." What sort of life was this? How could my young mind envisage anything so fervent and splendid?

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All force and imagery of passion and wildness of love were there. Did they embody real feelings of the human heart, or was a poet's soul gifted with some second sight of glories too great and glorious for ordinary mortals' ken? "*A lady clothed with summer as sweet hours.*" Some such words had enshrined that Lady of the Violets. Had such love thrilled the senses of their sender? Had she been to him a poem, in all those empty years? And now was the passion dead; the dream ended; the quest—over?

And her mouth's sad heavy rose
Seemed sad with glad things gone.

Sad indeed was that pale mouth of my Grey Lady. Tortured beyond all power to express was that ruined life. If he had only worshipped her beauty, vowed faith and constancy at its shrine, would such worship endure the shock of a meeting that left them face to face? Surely, surely, I had best keep silence on my new discovery. Let the past sink into forgetfulness.

"*I shall never again be friends with roses,*' I mean—violets, Rosaleen."

I seemed to hear him saying those words up there on the heights of the hills, while above us the sky burned to ashes of roses behind the sacred fane of Solsbury.

XXX

HOW PHILOSOPHY PROVED A DOUBTFUL BENEFIT TO
YOUTH

DINNER was over. The whist players were at their favourite pursuit. Aunt Theresa had left the parlour duly prepared for the literature lesson, and I was awaiting the arrival of my teacher.

I heard the front door open, and then a sound of muffled voices. My heart misgave me. Polyphemia had managed to answer that

ring. No doubt Mickey had told her who was coming. I waited a moment, and then went out to the hall. It was as I expected. Polyphemia stood there, gazing rapturously at the face of the Chevalier.

I called to her. "You have no business to answer the door," I said.

She turned indignantly. "You ain't the missus. She said nothing about my answering it; on h'emergency."

"Possibly she doesn't know," I said. "At all events, you can now go back to the kitchen."

She tossed her head, and to show her independence, followed the Chevalier to the door of the parlour. Her eyes glared at the preparations. The crimson cloth; the shaded lamp; the books and papers on the table.

"Fine to be *you!*" she said. "But though I'm demeaned at present by taking to service, it's only a means to a h'end. You'll please remember that."

"Service!" echoed the Chevalier. "You said you were on a *visit* here?"

"Temporary. You told me once that things was only what they *seemed* to h'individuals. This is 'ow my comin' 'ere seems to me."

"I have much to answer for," he said gravely, glancing from her angry face to my amused one. "If curses come home to roost, assuredly random phrases do the same. Rosaleen, perhaps you can explain this mystery?"

"As far as I know, my aunt has engaged Polly O'Driscoll as kitchen-maid in place of one who has left. Her duties were explained to her. Answering the front door to visitors is not one of them."

"I understand," he said. "That being so, we must reluctantly dispense with your company, Polyphemia. I am glad, however, to see you well, and that you have not forgotten me."

"As if I h'ever *could!*" she exclaimed fervently. "I came 'ere for one h'object only, as I explained to 'er. Being turned out of 'ome so to say, and no chance of seein' you there now circumstances 'as changed for the better for you, tho' worse for me, I put my wits to work and fortune fav'ring me with

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She rattled all this off at express speed. The Chevalier tried to grasp a fuller meaning from the throbbing excitement of her diction. "But why were you 'driven from home'?" he asked.

I made a despairing effort at dignity of command. "You must go down to the kitchen, Polly. Your mistress would be very angry if she found you here."

She snapped a contemptuous finger. "Missis, indeed! I only obliged 'er, so that places us on terms of h'equality *protem*. Besides—questions h'asked is to be h'answered—by any rules of politeness that I know anything of. Why was I driven from 'ome, Mongsure? *Je voo dee*." She cast a triumphant glance at me. "Furriners and mysteries was the cause. Mother h'insinuated I was only in the way. My pride took h'owbridge. No confidence stirs bad bloods atwixt fam'lies. I asserted my h'independence along with my desire for a sight of you, Master—I mean Mongsure. And 'ere I h'am—your 'umble servant to command as always!"

"Now—will you go!" I entreated.

She had said enough for harm, yet not enough for absolute danger. If she would only rest satisfied with that. Apparently she would. She cast one more adoring glance at the Chevalier, gave a queer little sort of curtsey, and closed the door.

I breathed again. I went over to the place where my papers and books lay, and sat down. He followed, and took the other chair.

"You're not a good actress, Rosaleen," he said. "What were you afraid she would say?"

The colour surged to my temples. I could not meet his eyes, neither could I answer him evasively. He waited a moment; then he said, "I was right. *She*—is still in Bath."

I looked at him then, but I could find no words.

"I guessed that immediately," he went on. "How long have you known?"

"Only since Polyphemia came here this afternoon," I said.

"And did you intend to keep the discovery to yourself?"

"I—I hardly know."

"I think you do know, Rosaleen. You're not given to halting 'between two opinions.'"

"I thought, perhaps, it would only make you restless again. Besides, I am sure she would not see you."

"You think not? Still—I have a mind to try. It is something of a—coincidence, is it not, that she should live where I once lived? Two years I spent in that house, in the *Via Roma*."

"She has the upper rooms," I said. "According to Polly her mother hardly knows them since they have been furnished and fitted up by the new occupant."

"Has Polly—(I note we abbreviate her in private life)—seen this new occupant?"

"No. Hence, the grievance and the mystery, and her first act of independence."

"How life narrows down," he said thoughtfully. "You and I, and Sydney Gardens. The Academy and Polyphemia. The Grey Lady and the *Via Roma*, and apart from it all, and yet *with* it, the vague shapings and happenings that may mean tragedy. A sense of the Past oftens brings fear of the Future. My child, we were too happy that day on the hill heights of Claverton. We spoke of the Past as if it were buried and grave-bound when it was only out of sight. And it has met us round the corner, so to say. It is not buried after all."

"Do you mean to try to see her?" I asked faintly.

"I must; or, at least, I must assure myself that it is not Odylle Gautier I see."

"You might—write?"

"I wonder," he said, "if I might? Somehow, it seems a coward's refuge."

I was silent. I thought of the beautiful voice, and the marred, disfigured face. The hands, so pale and tender, with their scarred palms. I thought of the violets thrown at her feet night after night, and tried to think of him as the sender. What would it all mean? How could so wild a romance end, save in the way she had chosen to end it? Self-obliviation. No love it seemed to me could bear the melancholy sight of that marred face day for day, year by year. The suffering, the pity of it.

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"Oh, Master, let it alone! Don't follow the scent of the violets to the graveside of—horror. I know. You don't. I am sure, I am quite sure, she would rather die than let any man look upon her face again."

He said nothing; only stretched out his hand and took the volume of Carlyle and opened it half mechanically. As of old I drew up the sheets of paper, and took a pencil to make requisite notes. But he only turned over page after page, apparently unconscious of his action.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" he sighed. "The pity of it! All my life seems to have been spent in going round the 'corner,' and meeting what I don't want to meet. That is not Carlyle, my child, nor Teufelsdröckh the Discloser. It is I—the poor, drifting, useless weed of humanity tossed upon the waters of Fate. Choking, and struggling—I wonder why? I've asked myself that before. Have I found life so sweet that I want to prolong it? Have I done such great service to my fellow-man, or woman, that I should be missed, when the opportunity for service was over? I asked for love once, but I never won it, nor found it. Rosaleen, do you remember a shaggy vagabond who might almost have terrified a soul less brave and trusting? On the day he claimed acquaintance with you, very little stood between him and a sudden leap into the river above the weirs of Batheaston. Very little. Just a well-expended coin, and two brown trustful eyes that smiled up at him on a winter's afternoon. Give me your hand, child; the little trustful hand he held that day. You don't know from what it saved him, Rosaleen."

He took it, and held it to his lips. Hot tears dimmed my eyes. I could not look at him. He suddenly dropped the hand, and threw back his head with one of the old extravagant gestures.

"Why, what mawkish sentimentality is this? A fine Professor of Literature to be wasting scholastic hours in rhodomontades fitted for the stage, or the rostrum! Don't heed me, child. Let us turn the clock back to Academy-time, and forget that anything has stopped it. See here—" (He turned over pages with a rapid hand.) "Ah, I have it. 'Romance.' Listen, Rosaleen, for what our good friend Teufelsdröckh does not know of youth and hearts, or hearts of youth, no man on the

living earth has known. I will read to you of the Like Unlike ; the highest Mystic possibility ; the medium of Fantasy. No, you are to listen, not to write. We are no longer in an Academy of learning. We are in a garden of enchantment where stands the Tree of Knowledge, beautiful and awful. Hither come maiden and youth ; virtuous, ignorant, waiting behind celestial barriers of innocence—for——”

He broke off abruptly. “ I wonder if this is a wise choice of subject ? *Blumine* was her name. Ah——”

He sprang up, and threw the book across the table. “ Am I to be for ever haunted by floral follies ! Are there violets in the room, Rosaleen ? No. Yet their scent is with me ! What is that other volume by your hand ? Swinburne ? ”

He took it. Then began to walk up and down the room, reciting a verse here and there in his sonorous rolling tones.

“ Bad stuff. Wild, glad, mad, as the case may be. Yet I love it.”

And without a request of mine he read on and on the poem I had longed to hear him read. “ The Triumph of Time.” Not every verse. Perhaps he had reason for that. But I made no sound or movement for fear he should cease reading it at all. Twice over he read those sad regretful lines beginning :

It is not much that a man can save
On the sands of Life, in the straits of Time.

And again came that word of memory which to-night was destined to haunt us.

A broken *blossom* ; a ruined rhyme.

He sat down again. “ I think I should not have offered to read with you, Rosaleen. It was one of my impulses. Born of remorse for a trick played upon your responsible guardian. But you see how erratic I am. . . . ‘ *It is not much that a man can save.* ’ ” He laughed suddenly. “ Well, that’s true enough of better men than myself, though, indeed, he might be talking of an Irishman and a fool all the time ! ”

“ You saved *me* ! ” I cried, finding tongue at last. “ Saved me from loneliness, and heartache, and dreadful unhappiness. That is something you have done.”

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"It is a great deal to have done, if I did it. But you are tender-hearted, and like all your sex exaggerate a kindness when you like the renderer thereof. You were very young, my child. Unhappiness was merely the cloud whose silver lining was bound to break in hues of consolation. Also, as I told you then, you were a Heaven-born listener, and I had grown weary waiting for one. Therefore, we were of mutual benefit to one another. And if in this topsy-turvy world some stray weed clings to floating driftwood despite whirl of current, or splash of weir, it speaks well for the persistency of effort. In meditative hours I have questioned myself as to why I did what I did. As well demand of the beard on one's chin why it grows, or the wagging tongue why it wags. Had my deeds been as prolific as my words what might I not have done! As it is, I am stranded on the rock of middle age, having accomplished nothing. Ah—don't look like that! I can read your tender woman's heart and its eloquent belief that I am great, and have condescended to illumine your darkness by light of superior intelligence. But the sweet flattery does not *convince* me, Rosaleen. Now, I have cultivated your memory to good effect if you can remember half of what I've been ranting. And I am supposed to be reading philosophy and literature with you. Here, child, hand me over that grim Scots philosopher once more. We will have another dip into the treasury of Teufelsdröckh."

"I wish you would tell me exactly who was Teufelsdröckh?" I said.

He laughed. "That's what the world has been asking ever since he burst upon it with the turbid force of his creator's unrestrained verbosity. Was Carlyl writing of himself in thin disguise of the editorial 'We,' or was Teufelsdröckh the illuminating light which flashed its criticism upon the Age, and its aspects? Let us dip in and fish for ourselves in the deep waters of profound unintelligibility. Much as I admire the rugged Scot I do not profess to understand him. Neither did his age; nor half his readers. Hence, the reason of his place in letters. Men always crown with praise what they are incapable of comprehending. It is a mark of intelligence, if not of appreciation."

Then for the best part of an hour, he read, annotated, and moralized on the utility of "aprons," as a conventional satire on the varied uses of clothes. I confess to extreme bewilderment not unmixed with an amused delight in the novelty of thinking of a commonplace subject in a philosophical manner. We were still hard at Chapter VI. when Aunt Theresa came in.

"Do you know what the time is?" she asked.

We did not. Neither of us had thought of anything so irrelevant.

"Nearly half-past ten! You must be tired to death! Oh, Chevalier, wait a minute, there's some sandwiches and things coming up for you. I shouldn't think you'd object to some whisky and water after talking for over two hours; or was it reading? Well, no matter, one is as trying as the other. I nearly sent for you to play cards. The General was keenly anxious that I should. But I managed to convey to him that you were imparting serious instruction to Rosaleen. I suppose you were?"

She picked up "Sartor Resartus." "Good heavens! Carlyle? Do you mean to say you can understand him? I thought no one did, except Germans."

Mickey should have brought in the tray of refreshments, but it was Polyphemia who appeared in neat black gown, and spotless cap and apron. Quite a presentable parlourmaid, though how she had done it was a puzzle to me. The ambition to work up a step higher on the ladder proclaimed itself without explanation.

She hovered about as long as she possibly could, for sheer joy of gazing at the Chevalier. She would call him "Mongseer," but she wisely refrained from a personal address. Her manner was at once respectful and dignified. So much so that Aunt Theresa commented on the improvement. "I believe there's something in that girl, after all," she said. "She seems so willing to be taught, and so obliging."

I laughed involuntarily. So did the Chevalier. We did not explain why.

I wrestled with Carlyle, and indulged in Swinburne only as a reward for the next two or three days.

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No word had come from Fanny; Joanna had not yet made up her mind; and the doctor was going on relentlessly with his preparations. Only two more days, and he would be leaving for London. On the 28th Aunt Joanna took to her bed. I could not gather the nature of her illness, but of its cause she left no doubt. She was suffering from the "brutality and heartlessness of the tyrant whose wife she had the misfortune to be!" Her death would be at his door. She had told him so, and he had only laughed. Meanwhile, he packed a cabin trunk (the heavy luggage had been despatched), arranged his consulting-room for his successor, and "set his house in order" as far as lay in his power. I began to feel seriously uneasy. Should I speak, or should I hold my peace? If I had only dared ask the Chevalier? But I didn't like to give away family affairs.

The evening of our second literary *causerie* was at hand. I had not seen him since the first. I was perplexed and troubled over two subjects. That of my Grey Lady, and that of Aunt Fanny. Between them Teufelsdröckh fared ill, for it was hard to keep my mind fixed on philosophy of such a solid nature, while drawn hither and thither by undercurrents of purely personal interests. But when I saw Aunt Joanna in bed again, and looking really as ill and wretched as she described herself, my indecision became unbearable.

Timidly enough I broached the subject of her changing her mind about the Australian project; hinting that we might all go; that she would not be alone at the tender mercies of her "tyrant," as she chose to call him. But she would hear nothing. Obstinate as only a woman can be when she is obstinate, she maintained that her consent having never been asked to the project she was perfectly right in her attitude of opposition.

"But," I suggested, "supposing Dr. Merivale doesn't come back? Are you going to stay on here? He told you the surgery and lower part of the house have been taken by this new doctor. It seems so—so—" Words failed me.

She burst out impetuously. "So *indecent!* So blackguardly! So it is! A vile trick played on me to force my hand! But I shall find means to be even with him! You'll see—"

"But—it's all so unnecessary," I blurted out. "I can't help

thinking so, Aunt Joanna. If it was anyone else and you were criticizing their behaviour, what would you say ? ”

“ It couldn’t be anyone else, because no one else I’ve ever heard of has such a vile husband ! For years he has done nothing but irritate and oppose me in every possible way. This—is the climax ! ”

“ Still, he *is* your husband. Ought you to throw him off, let him drift away to a new life, and new—temptations ? ”

She sat up abruptly and stared at me. “ What on earth are you talking about ? What do *you* know about temptations ? One would think you were a hundred to hear you ! *Temptations !* He’ll get no more there than he found here. Widows—that’s his special temptation. I suppose they’re to be found everywhere ? It’s only the unhappy wives who can’t be free ! ”

“ Oh, Aunt Joanna, you surely don’t wish—that ? ”

“ Don’t I ? That’s all you know. I’m so wretched, and down-trodden, and broken up altogether, that I don’t care what happens to me ! ”

“ But, if you were left a widow, it would mean that something had happened to *him !* ”

“ Rosaleen, you get more aggravating every day ! There’s a proverb I would recommend you. It goes something like, ‘ An arguing woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men.’ You’d better lay that to heart. Of all things men dislike, it’s a girl who wants to argue with them. I suppose it’s that cracked wild Irishman who’s taught you ? I wonder he hadn’t more sense.”

I laughed. “ You didn’t say it right, Aunt Joanna. It’s ‘ a *whistling* woman.’ Now, I don’t whistle ; at least, in public.”

She lay back on her pillows.

“ Tell Theresa I’ll expect her this evening. I don’t get any decent food sent up to me if she isn’t here. There’s only Norah, and a charwoman. He’s sent off all the servants. I don’t know what’s to become of me. Truly, I don’t.”

“ Tell him you’ll come out to Australia in six months’ time, and everything will be all right.”

“ Rosaleen——”

But I closed the door, and went home.

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XXXI

IN WHICH THERE IS FOLLY AND PHILOSOPHY

I GAVE the message, and Aunt Theresa said she would go round after dinner. I could see she was as much worried over affairs as Aunt Joanna herself.

"And still no word from Fanny," she added. "I am going to send a telegram to-morrow, if no letter comes."

"I wish you would," I said impetuously. "I mean—I think it would be as well to know if she was there."

"What's confusing you, Rosaleen? You're blushing as if you were hiding some guilty secret."

Now was my opportunity. Should I take it? No, once more I temporized. "I only thought that if the Chevalier *had* seen her in the London train that day, we should know for certain."

"There was no need for her to make a mystery of it. Goodness knows she's a free agent! If she wanted to go to London what was to prevent her? Certainly not I, or anyone else."

"Exactly. That's what makes it seem so—so strange. She said she was only going to Monmouthshire."

"This is your reading night, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, you might ask the Chevalier again—about seeing her."

"But, dear, I've done that. He is quite sure."

"Now, Rosaleen, what is it you *know*?"

Again the treacherous colour betrayed me. "I don't *know*—I only fear that there is some—some—sort of understanding between her and Dr. Merivale."

"Jasper! What on earth are you saying, child?"

She sat down, and stared at me with wide-open eyes. I had plunged in too far to retreat. Besides, there was an indescribable relief in getting rid of this secret burden. So briefly I told her what I had overheard that night of my return from Wales.

She listened silently to the end of the brief recital.

"Why have you kept this to yourself?" she demanded.

"I—I hardly know. At first I thought I might have dreamt it. He was not there when I lit the gas. Only Fanny."

"He could easily have gone out and closed the door too quietly for you to hear. It looks very strange; very. And I daren't tell Joanna."

"Do you think she would go to Sydney then?" I asked.

Aunt Theresa sprang out of the chair. "Why, what an idea! It might have that effect. She would do anything to spite Fanny. If Joanna thought that *she* was going out, nothing would keep her at home. Do you know, Rosaleen, you've accidentally hit upon the very key to the situation, if we can only work it."

"Ah—if!" I said thoughtfully. "You can never answer for what Aunt Joanna will do. She might turn on the doctor and accuse him of all sorts of awful things, although she told me she was quite *safe* with regard to Fanny, for it's illegal for a man to marry his wife's sister."

"In *this* country, yes; not in the Colonies."

"Good heavens! Is *that* the reason she——"

"We must find out. Of course, it looks very bad. His neglect of his wife; his indifference to her health; and putting the ocean between them too!"

"As I've told you so much I may as well go on," I said. "The Chevalier not only saw Fanny in the London train, he saw Dr. Merivale on the platform saying good-bye to her. And I've seen them many times in the quiet parts of Victoria Park."

Her face looked graver. "I wonder what I ought to do? It's a very awkward position. I don't want to widen the breach between Joanna and her husband."

"Would it be any use to speak to him?" I suggested. "If he knew that you suspected something he might get alarmed, and give up this—I suppose it is what Fanny calls a—'flirtation'?"

"It is part of her wicked coquetry, and vanity," said Aunt Theresa angrily. "But at least she might have spared her sister another bitter experience. She did harm enough about George Oliver. To repeat her misdeeds with Joanna's husband is nothing

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short of infamous. I am sorry to say such things before you, Rosaleen. A young girl oughtn't even to guess at such depravity. But there—it can't be helped. You've found out more than I ever suspected. And it wouldn't be possible to keep you in the dark if things came to a climax."

"A climax?" I echoed in alarm.

"Yes, don't you see—but there, I'd rather not pursue the subject. I wish it were possible to find out where Fanny really is. I'd go and see her, and shame her into giving up this infamous project."

"Send that telegram *now*," I said. "Don't wait till to-morrow. I'll go round to the Post Office."

"Would you?" She sprang to her feet. "I wonder if it's too late? But even then they'd despatch it first thing in the morning. I should get an answer by twelve o'clock. It's our last chance."

"What will you do if you find she's not with these people?"

"I'll go up to London. I know the hotel where she has always stayed. I'm almost sure she'd be there. I'd not leave her till Jasper Merivale was safely off."

"Fanny's very clever, and very determined," I said.

"As if I don't know that!" She was hastily writing out a telegram, and I went away to get my hat. I went to the General Post Office, and found that the message could be sent off at once. There was hope, therefore, that an answer might come to-night, as the reply was prepaid. Of course, it depended on the local delivery the other side. Our office would send up to eight o'clock. I was just leaving when Dr. Merivale entered hurriedly. He did not seem to see me. He asked for a telegraph form, and took it and wrote busily for a few moments. I wondered if his message was concerned with mine, but I did not care to have his company home, and so hurried off.

Aunt Theresa was waiting anxiously. I told her there was a chance we might hear to-night.

"I've had another message from Joanna," she said. "The cook came round with it. She wants me to go to her at once. I do hope, Rosaleen, I'll be able to keep a silent tongue about all this. It wouldn't do to alarm her unnecessarily."

She went off, and I stayed there wondering over all the mysteries that had suddenly enveloped my life. I had thought once that it was dull and monotonous. By a reactionary impulse I wished it back in that quiet groove. I hated to think of what it would really mean to have Fanny playing this underhand game, with her sister's honour and peace of mind as the stakes. As for Dr. Merivale, I could only wonder at an infatuation likely to bring trouble and disaster in its train. And again I asked myself that old question, "What on earth did men see in Fanny to make them her slaves?" She possessed no special charm; no gifts of mind. Assuredly her ill-temper was plainly evident on the smallest provocation. Even her beauty was meretricious, and yet on two occasions I had been a witness of her powers of attraction. There might have been numerous other cases of which I had no knowledge.

But always there was a little triumph in my heart that one man had not succumbed to her influence. If it had been he—instead of Jasper Merivale—I wondered how I should have felt?

That was destined to be an eventful evening.

Aunt Theresa returned just in time for dinner, and the telegram came just as dinner was over. She opened it in the hall, while the others passed on upstairs. I turned towards the parlour to see if the gas had been lit. She followed me quickly.

"Rosaleen, she's *not* there! She's never been there!"

We stood in the little familiar room and looked at each other. I had almost expected such a reply. Now that it had really come I was at a loss what to say.

"What will you do?" I faltered.

"I must go to London," she said decidedly. "I'll go to-morrow by the first train and return in time for dinner."

"And if Joanna expects you?"

"You'll have to make some excuse, Rosaleen. I must think of one."

"Suppose Fanny is not at that hotel?" I said. "You'll have your journey for nothing. Why not wire to the manager first, and ask if she is staying there?"

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"How sensible of you, child. It would be best. If I prepay it, I'd still have time to catch an early train."

"You can't send it till the morning, can you?"

"No. I forgot. It's eight o'clock. And I don't want the servants to know either."

"I could go to the Post Office before breakfast," I said. "I'd be there as soon as it opens. If you prepay your reply you'll hear in time to catch the eleven o'clock train."

A ring at the door startled us.

"It must be the Chevalier," she said. "Of course, it's eight o'clock. Oh, dear, I wish he could help us! I do so hate travelling, and I am so nervous in London."

He entered upon her words. Polyphemia had not opened the door to him on this occasion. My first glance at his face saw fresh trouble in store. He carried his hat in his hand. There was something nervous and hurried in his manner.

"Miss Le Suir—Rosaleen—I've come to apologize. I'm obliged to run up to town on business of importance. I may be detained two or three days. You'll have to excuse our lesson to-night."

"Going to London!" cried Aunt Theresa. "Oh—I wonder if you'd do something for me?"

"Anything, if it's in my power."

"It's only to go to Morley's Hotel as early as you can to-morrow morning and ask if my sister, Mrs. Oliver, is staying there. Then I want you to telegraph to me just saying 'yes,' or 'no,' as the case may be. May I trouble you to do this?"

"Certainly—is that all?"

"Yes, except that if she is staying there I shall come up by the eleven o'clock train, if I get your telegram in time."

"I'll see you do that. Do you wish me to interview your sister by any chance?"

"No. No; on no account! I don't wish her to hear of my arrival until I do arrive."

"I promise to execute your commands. I hope there's no—no bad news, that necessitates this sudden visit?"

"That depends," she said. "I can't tell you just yet. But I shall be more than grateful if you will do this."

"Supposing Mrs. Oliver is not at this special hotel, is there no other where I might find her?"

"She always has stayed there. I can't imagine where else she would go."

His eyes turned to me. "I am sorry about Carlyle," he said. "But I must go to-night."

"You have half an hour to spare," said Aunt Theresa. "Won't you spend it here?"

He looked at the table, and the books, then again at me. "May I speak to Rosaleen?" he said suddenly. "I have something to tell her."

Aunt Theresa looked surprised. But she only said, "Why, of course. I'll leave you and run up to the drawing-room. They'll be expecting me for whist."

As soon as she was gone, he threw down his hat on the table, and took a chair.

"Roseleen, I have a message for you."

"Not from——"

"Your Grey Lady—yes?"

"You've not seen her!" I cried wonderingly.

"No. But I tried. I went there, to the old house. I saw Mrs. O'Driscoll. She was extraordinarily mysterious and uncommunicative. But I told her I was certain her new lodger was an old friend of mine, and I only wanted her to take up my card. She agreed to do that. I wrote some words in French upon it. I waited for the answer in the old schoolroom."

"Was there an—answer?"

He took a card out of his breast pocket and handed it to me. Below his own name was written, "He of the Vow, and the Violets, awaits you now, as always."

Underneath, in the fine small writing I knew so well, was this reply:

"The violets are dead. He is absolved from the Vow. Never, in this life, shall we meet again."

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"You were right, Rosaleen. She *was*—Odylle Gautier. But the gate did not open. It was only ajar; and now it has closed for ever. Is a woman's 'for ever' final? . . . I wonder?"

"Ah—it must have hurt her to say that. But, if you had met——"

I shuddered involuntarily. I remembered the shock and terror of that night when I had seen a terrible face looking out at me through an open door.

"She must wonder how you discovered her," I said. "I can't understand why she went away from here. A message was as easily conveyed, as easily answered as in the *Via Roma*."

"She did not think I should discover her. Indeed, we never would have discovered her but for Polyphemia."

He rose, and I handed him back the card. "But, why are you going to London to-night?"

"I cannot tell you *that*, Rosaleen."

A sudden passionate exclamation escaped me. "Oh! you are impossible!" I cried. "One day you say you have done with wandering, you settle upon a course of action, you put my mind at rest. The next—you throw everything to the winds, and are off to the ends of the world!"

"Not quite so far this time," he said, with a faint smile.

"Far enough," I muttered discontentedly. "And for how long?"

"No longer than I can help. Meanwhile you can read Carlyle. He is a liberal education."

"I can't understand him—without you," I added.

He was silent for a moment, looking down on the shabby old volume; his face very grave.

"Even philosophy does not bring happiness. Poor Carlyle! His life was a lesson in the everlasting No. . . . Not in any phase of circumstance is Freedom conceivable!"

The clock struck the half-hour. He started.

"I must go, Rosaleen. Forgive me—if you can. What can you expect from a Fool Errant, but—errantry."

He went. I sat on alone in a mood of misery, irritation, and impatience. There seemed no reason for his departure now

that his Quest had ended. That message was final, surely. Of course, I had known by experience that one could never count on a definite plan of action as far as he was concerned. But why on earth had he suggested a course of literature, and broken it up after one lesson ?

I felt as if I hated Carlyle ; as if I never wished to read another line of his profound absurdities. And then, the next moment I had seized the book and was searching through chapter and page for characteristics so keenly reminiscent of the Fool Errant, that he might have been founded on the Fool Philosopher ! There was a pleasing viciousness in this research which hurt and yet amused me. I set down the characteristics one against the other, and when I had filled two pages of MSS. I wrote at the end :

"Two Horrible and most Trying Types of Mankind."

The satisfaction I felt after I had done this almost atoned for a wasted evening, and the loss of that beloved companionship to which I had looked forward for three blank days.

"If this sort of thing is to go on," I said savagely, "I would rather go out to Australia with Joanna !"

Upon the words entered Aunt Theresa.

"He has gone then ? It seems providential his being in London to-morrow. I'm so upset to-night, Rosaleen, that I can settle to nothing. I revoked twice, and the General got so cross that I excused myself by a headache and came down here. Oh, child, I'm getting so tired of all this ! The keeping up appearances, the hiding of family skeletons, the putting up with tantrums and whims of boarders, and then my sisters—for whom I've slaved and worked to keep a home and marry them decently—they turn out nothing but a further worry ! I'm getting too old to put up with it. Oh, I know I don't look it, but a woman's feelings stand for more than her looks. If I don't get any fresh boarders for the winter season I don't know how I'm to pay my way. I really think it would be wiser to give up this house. Sell everything ; furniture, plate, jewellery, and put my capital together and go out to the Colonies. Of course, I'd never come back. I couldn't expect it. One doesn't close the door twice at my time of life. But still——"

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"Fanny came back," I interrupted.

"Yes. But then she's young, and it wasn't a case of uprooting for her as it would be for me. Candidly, Rosaleen, what do *you* think? I have faith in your judgment, young as you are. Wouldn't you like a change of life, scene, surroundings? And if Joanna makes up her mind to go out to Sydney, shall we go with her?"

A few moments before, this was just what I had declared I should prefer doing. Yet now that it was possible, I temporized.

"I am very fond of Bath," I said feebly.

"So am I, in a way. But one must think of the responsibilities of life as well as its sentiments. I'm not one to make mountains out of molehills, but what with a decreasing income and losses by investments, not to mention Joanna and her helplessness, it really seems as if the best thing I could do would be to join forces with her, and go out to a new land and a new life."

"You think it *will* end in Joanna going out?"

"She must."

"She certainly will if you do."

"I think so. I am going to have a serious talk with Jasper. He must be made to see that responsibilities are not to be lightly shelved. I shall hint pretty strongly that any scandal—open scandal—would seriously affect his professional outlook. The fact of his going out to a new country doesn't lessen his moral responsibilities. The one thing necessary for a medical man is a clean bill of moral health. Sydney appears to be a large and important city, with a large and wealthy and important society. If Jasper hears that his wife and his relatives are coming out shortly, he will perforce be obliged to behave himself. As for Fanny——"

"But we don't know that she is going out?" I said.

"No, ^{we} we don't *know*. But, oh, my dear—I *feel* it in my bones!"

XXXII

IN WHICH I FACE A TRAGEDY

A RESTLESS night was followed by an anxious morning. Aunt Theresa looked pale and as if she had not slept much. We could talk of little else but that expected telegram.

It came before ten o'clock.

"Not here. I wait instructions."

Not there?

Aunt Theresa handed me the message. I read it. "What shall you do? You might go tramping half over London and not find her!"

"I must go!" she said distractedly. "There's one thing I could do. Enquire at the steamship offices for the passenger list. At least I'd know if she was on the same vessel."

"Suppose we are only worrying ourselves needlessly? Suppose she has gone to London for some—quite different reason?"

"You forget what you overheard, Rosaleen."

I was silent.

"Oh! if only Aunt Joanna hadn't been so foolish!" I exclaimed. "Then she could have gone up to town with him to see him off."

"Of course. But it's too late now to suggest it. Besides, she's not well enough for a journey."

"And you daren't give her a hint?"

"I'm afraid. Of course, I might tell Jasper that I'm going up to see Fanny. I wonder what he would say?"

"There's no time, now," I said. "If you want to catch the eleven-fifteen."

She looked very determined. "Tell Mickey to fetch a fly, as quickly as possible. I'll go up and put on my bonnet."

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"I'll go to the station with you," I said.

We were driving along when I asked her what time she would be returning.

"I can't say, but I'll be back to-night."

"What on earth will Aunt Joanna think if you don't go round?"

"You must say I'm not well. If she knew I'd gone up to London she'd be frantic with curiosity."

"It might do her good to have something else to think of besides just this one thing."

"Of course it might. But I don't advise you to try the experiment."

"I wish I was going up with you. I do so long to see London."

"I will take you there some time. I promised that once before, didn't I?"

We drew up at the station with barely three minutes to get a ticket and seat. I waited till the green flag waved and fell, and the train drew its slow length away and out into the open space beyond the platform. Then I turned homewards, feeling very depressed and wretched. I did not intend to go to Aunt Joanna's till after luncheon. As well to postpone the evil day as long as possible. The General and his wife and the two Miss Cutlers were our only boarders now, and as I looked into the dining-room I noticed the diminished size of the table. I wondered whether Aunt Theresa would not be wise to get rid of this great house and its attendant expenses, and start afresh? As far as I was concerned the thought of travel and change were welcome. There was only one flaw in the scheme. If it meant that the Chevalier would throw in his fortunes with ours, well and good. But if, on the other hand, it meant putting the width of the ocean between us, it was very far from good. I must control my impatience as best I could until his return from London.

I went up to my room and took off my hat, and then sat by the window looking out at the garden. The Dodger was rolling on the grass and barking wildly at a neighbour's cat whose contempt for him was only equalled by his frenzied notice of her. I called to him on the chance of the door being open,

and he dashed in, and in a few moments was scratching for admission.

We had a brief conversation during which I tried to convey that impudence was thrown away on dignity. He tried to persuade me to come out for some necessary exercise. I explained that he must wait till the afternoon. Even then I wondered if a duty visit to Aunt Joanna would be sufficient. At all events he would be an excuse for my getting away.

Having satisfied him on these matters, I let him pursue imaginary rats or mice along the wainscot, a favourite pastime of his, easily encouraged by any scratching at the wall or cupboard door. To-day he plunged into the game with unwonted ardour, refusing to leave the cupboard, and scratching and whining so persistently that at last I opened it to convince him it harboured no vermin of any sort.

The cupboard was built into a recess of the wall by the chimney-piece. It had three shelves, on which stood a miscellaneous collection of articles stowed away in my rare fits of tidiness. The Dodger dashed at the bottom shelf, raised himself on his hind-legs, and betrayed intense excitement.

"What in the world do you see there?" I asked, coming up and glancing along the shelf. As I did so, I noticed a brown-paper parcel thrust away into the far corner.

How long it had lain there, unremembered, waiting that direction for its despatch which had never come. I drew it out, and the faint, peculiar perfume brought back a vivid memory of the writer. As I held it in my hand the little dog's excitement increased. I knew what he had scented in the cupboard. He had been fond of Madame Odylle, and had missed her so much at first.

I put the parcel down on the bed, and once again examined the label. "I wonder why she did not send it?" I thought. "I wonder why she has left it with me all this time?"

A sudden thought came into my head. At first I put it aside. Then I argued whether I should yield to its suggestion or not. Here was a good excuse. I had learnt her address. I was puzzled what to do with the parcel. Was it not only natural that I should seek to learn her wishes?

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"This afternoon," I told myself. "After I leave Aunt Joanna's. I'm sure she'll see me, in spite of that letter."

The thought was stimulating. Its very uncertainty gave it interest. Above all it would be something to do, and in the absence of Aunt Theresa and my anxiety as to the result of her mission, any object in life was a blessing. "We will both go," I told the Dodger. "She was so fond of you that perhaps she'll forgive me for your sake."

And with many whirls and squeals and pirouettes he agreed that there was no possible doubt on *that* point.

Aunt Joanna's house had an appearance of funereal gloom and silence. The Irish cook told me that her mistress was still in bed. Also that "the mather was gone."

"Gone—not left for London? He was not to go till to-night."

"He's gone, anyway. An' the poor sowl upstairs is in a great takin', an' no wonder."

I could hardly believe my ears. I ran upstairs, the little dog at my heels, and knocked at Aunt Joanna's door. As there was no answer, I turned the handle softly and went in. The blinds were drawn, and the room was in semi-darkness. I hushed the dog and stole on tiptoe to the side of the bed. I saw the outline of her figure. Her face was turned away from me to the wall. I heard her breathing deeply and evenly. She was asleep.

I was so astonished that I stepped back and gazed at her only half convinced I was right. But she gave no sign of hearing me, or being conscious of my presence in the room.

Asleep. I had expected tears, hysterics, protestations, but to be asleep and profoundly indifferent to personal grief, or personal grievance was more than a surprise. For several moments I stood there wondering whether to go away and return later, or remain here on the chance of her waking. As my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom I saw on the table by her bed a square, white envelope. I looked at it more closely; it bore her name in the large bold handwriting of Dr. Merivale.

My astonishment grew apace. Had she been asleep when he left, and was this letter his farewell? Perhaps those days of

fretting and worrying had really exhausted her and at last nature had avenged itself by bestowing unconsciousness at the critical moment, when a scene of some sort would have been inevitable. Or was the sleep—natural?

I listened with a new apprehension. I thought of drugs, and sleeping draughts, and other mysteries of the *pharmacopœia* ready to hand in a doctor's house. I wished I could see her face, but that was impossible. Then another terror rushed my mind. How often she had threatened to kill herself, to put an end to an existence so miserable! Could she have taken—poison!

The idea sent me flying to the window. I drew up the blind, and then returned to the bed. I bent over and tried to see her face, but it was pressed too far into the pillows. Again I listened to the breathing, wondering if it was quite natural. There was a curious stertorous sound about it when I drew the bedclothes down from her face.

I could stand it no longer. I rang the bell furiously, and in a moment or two Norah rushed upstairs.

"Do listen!" I cried. "Isn't there something strange about this sleep? Do people breathe like that?"

She bent over the bed, and listened.

"It does sound queer. An' why in the livin' wurld would she be slavin' this time o' day? Shall I try to waken her, miss?"

"Do," I cried; and she spoke, and shook the arm nearest her, but without effect. As well try to wake a log.

"It's a puzzle," she muttered. "Would she be takin' anything, I wonder; medicines? There be some as make one slape for hours. An' she tould me this mornin' she was wore out intirely. Whin I brought her breakfast up it was. She asked for a drop av brandy and some sody-water, instead av tay. I gave it to her. I haven't seen her since."

It was now half-past two.

We gazed and speculated as to what was best to be done. I was for sending for Dr. Owen, but Norah opposed it.

"If 'tis a slavin' draught she's had, she's bound to waken in time, an' sure, no harm could come to her now. It's badly she needs some sort av rest."

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"Does she take sleeping draughts?" I asked.

"Times she does, miss. I've seen her heavy like this in the mornin's, an' she's said 'twas because av that."

"Well, we will wait for an hour," I said. "If she doesn't wake, I will send for Dr. Owen."

"Where's Miss Le Suir? Couldn't she come round and have a look at her? She's more knowledgeable than you, Miss Rosaleen."

The question was disconcerting. It seemed an ill fate that to-day of all days Aunt Theresa should be away, and likely to be so till perhaps ten o'clock at night. Responsibility sat heavy on my young shoulders. To tell Norah would mean that Aunt Joanna would know, if she awoke. And she must not know.

I dismissed Norah to her work, and then occupied myself with tidying the usually untidy room. It was something to do at all events, and the sleeper was sleeping too heavily to be awakened by my quiet movements. The Dodger obeyed me by lying down on the rug. His intelligent eyes watched me from time to time. Once or twice he raised his head and gave utterance to an uneasy whine, and I had to quiet him. And still the sleeper showed no sign of waking, though the clock pointed to half-past three.

"I will wait another half-hour," I thought, as I stood by the bed and listened. There was no movement, no change of position. But—was it only my fancy that the breathing had changed to a deeper note? There seemed effort in it as if the lungs were labouring over their task, instead of being unconscious that there was a task to be fulfilled. And as I stood and listened the little dog crept to my feet, and gave a low, plaintive howl.

I took him out of the room, and ran downstairs and called to Norah.

"I think you must go for Dr. Owen," I said. "Her breathing is so strange. I don't like it."

She ran off at once, just as she was, and I waited in the dining-room, feeling dreadfully uneasy. I had little practical experience of illness, and we had been so used to looking upon Aunt Joanna as a *malade imaginaire* that we had never regarded her symptoms seriously. I glanced round the dining-room. It was orderly

and neat. No signs of the doctor's paraphernalia of books, tobacco, pipes. The writing-table in the window held a handsome inkstand, and a leather blotting-book. I opened it absently. There was fresh paper in it, but on the clean page lay the imprint of his large, bold writing. A square impress that reminded me of that letter upstairs. Had he written it here, and then taken it up to her? If so, she had been asleep when he left.

I closed the book and stood looking out of the window for Norah's return. I saw her soon, and almost on her heels was Dr. Owen. I went to the front door and let him in. He seemed surprised to see me. Perhaps he expected Aunt Theresa.

I told him of that long sleep, and the curious breathing. He was a placid, elderly gentleman of great repute in the town. He listened with smiling benevolence.

"It sounds as if the dear lady had taken a sleeping draught," he said. "Nothing to be alarmed at. I have prescribed them for her myself. A highly nervous, impressionable patient. Yes. But perhaps I had better see her."

I led the way upstairs. The room was partially darkened, as I had closed the venetians again. The sweet spring air stole in through the open window, and softly stirred the muslin curtains. And there in the big four-poster bed lay that motionless figure. I had smoothed the white coverlet, but the face was still turned away. Only the back of the head and the dark hair showed against the indented pillow.

Dr. Owen went quickly up to the bed, and listened. Then he drew down the bed-clothes, and lifted one arm. He felt the pulse. Then turned quickly to me, and to Norah, who was lingering at the door. The breathing was heavier now, and louder.

"Good heavens!"

He dropped the arm. It fell with a soft thud on the coverlet.

"Quick—mustard," he said. "And is there ice in the house?"

"There is not," said Norah.

"Send over to mine, and tell the cook to give you some. Bring the mustard first, and throw open the windows wide. She must have air. She must be roused."

Norah closed the windows. He stood by the door, looking at the sleeping figure. The effect was rousing her to the spin effect. She had a strange but weakening effect on me.

"Where is she?"

"He has taken her to the living."

"To the living?"

"He has taken her to the living."

"Have you seen her?"

"I have seen her."

Norah dashed downstairs for the mustard. I opened the windows. He poured out water, steeped a towel in it, and laid it on the sleeper's head. For the next half-hour we worked at rousing her from this apathetic stupor. Ice to her head, mustard to the spine, warm flannels to her feet. But nothing was of any effect. She lay there like a log. Senseless, save for those hard, strange breaths at which the lungs laboured, and for which the weakening heart was strained. The doctor stooped over her and opened one heavy eyelid. Then he stepped back, and looked at me.

"Where's Dr. Merivale?"

"He has gone up to London," I said.

"To London! I thought he wasn't leaving till to-morrow?"

"He left to-day."

"Have *you* any idea whether Mrs. Merivale took a sleeping draught last night?"

I shook my head. He questioned Norah. She was equally ignorant.

"I don't like this," he said abruptly. "I must have another opinion. Is there anyone I could send for Dr. Neaves? He lives at the other end of Great Pulteney Street."

"There's no one in the house but me," said Norah. "The woman who comes to help didn't come to-day at all. But sure, sir, I'll run like the wind an' fetch him, av ye says so."

"Yes, do go. And quick as you can!"

Norah ran off. Dr. Owen's placid, rosy face looked abnormally grave. I began to feel alarmed.

"It's so unfortunate," I said, "that my aunt, Miss Le Suir, had to go to London to-day, on business. She may not be back till late to-night."

"Most unfortunate," he said.

"Is it—is she dangerously ill?" I faltered.

"She's poisoned," he said briefly. "With morphia. Whether she took it herself, or whether it was given to her, I can't say."

A deadly sickness crept over me. He put me into a chair by the window, and gave me the smelling-salts he had been using for Aunt Joanna.

"There, sit still. Don't give way. I'm sorry I frightened you. I've done everything I can, but it's hopeless. I wish her sister was here."

So did I. It seemed an irony of circumstances that to-day of all days Aunt Theresa should be beyond our reach. For I did not know where even a telegram could find her.

Presently I revived and tried to be of some assistance again. But there seemed so little one could do. The colour of her face was now leaden-hued, and the stiff hands cold as ice. I chafed and rubbed them in vain. As I rubbed one white wrist I noted a small red mark upon it, like a prick, or an insect bite.

I don't know what made me draw the doctor's attention to it. His eyes examined it for a moment. Then he took the arm and rolled back the sleeve of her nightdress. The skin bore no other mark. He laid down the arm, and I went on with my useless efforts.

The breath came now in deeper gasps; at longer intervals. There was a strange pinched look about the nostrils. There came a twitch or flicker of the eyelids, and my self-command gave way.

"Oh! it's not *her*! It's not Aunt Joanna," I screamed, and I dropped the leaden arm and staggered to the door.

From outside there was a faint scratching noise, and then a prolonged howl.

But I was right. It was not Aunt Joanna who lay there in that great bed. Only *something* that had meant her and her grievances, and her queer yet kindly ways, for all the years I had known her.

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XXXIII

IN WHICH I TREAD THE BORDERLAND OF MYSTERY

It was ignominious to break down, but it was not inexcusable.

I only know that a revelation of death so unexpected and so tragic had sapped my reserve force of self-control. I only remember sitting there on the top of the stairs with the dog in my arms, and the tears running down my cheeks, and being found thus by Norah and the second doctor when they arrived. The kind-hearted Irishwoman took me into the adjoining dressing-room, and put me into a deep cushioned chair, and then left me, as was the best and wisest thing to do.

I could hear sounds and noises from the bedroom. It seemed as if new efforts were being made. But the sense of their uselessness was too surely mine for any revival of hope.

"Poor Aunt Joanna!" How often I had said that. How differently I said it now. With a sense of awe, a wonder as to whether she *knew* I said it? Was yet in touch with human pity, or human love?

My tears ceased, and I grew calmer. It seemed a long time before I heard that bedroom door open, but at last it did. Then the two doctors came out. They stood a moment on the landing. I heard them speaking.

"I don't think you should give a certificate. It would not be right."

"But—think of the slur, the scandal? And he has always been so highly thought of."

"I know. But this is a very mysterious occurrence. His sudden departure, too!"

Then they went downstairs. I sat on, a frozen feeling of helplessness closing around me. What new troubles were to befall us? And once again I thought of the irony of Fate that had left me alone at this most tragic moment; neither Aunt Theresa

nor the Chevalier at hand ; not a soul to whom I could speak out my fears.

A knock at the door and the entrance of Norah roused me to energy. She had been crying. Her apron was still held to her eyes.

"The saint's pity on us! What's to be done, Miss Rosaleen?"

"Is she—" I faltered over the finality of that dread word.

"She is, miss. May the Holy Mother have her in kapin'. Sure, 'tis a sad endin', an' a bad day for all of us. The masther gone, too. The doctors be sendin' him a tilligram to the ship, an' to the offices. Maybe 'twill catch him in time. A blessin' I knew the names to give thim, or maybe he'd be off an' sailin' the wide ocean, niver dramin' that his poor wife was gone to Heaven this blessed day."

"Did the doctors explain anything?" I asked.

"Sure, an' they did, miss, in a sort of a way. Misadventure, I think it was. She'd had a slapin' draught last night from Dr. Owen, an' thin she's either took another, or been give another dose this mornin'. An' the two was one too many for her, miss, an' she couldn't come round. Sure an' it was a mercy you was here, Miss Rosaleen, for I'd not have gone up till she rang her bell, an' the poor sowl would have slept herself to her grave. She would that."

I could not help thinking that such had been her fate, for all the doctor's efforts had not roused a sign of animation in that still figure. "And what's to be done now?" I said.

"There's a nurse or someone comin' to lay her out," said Norah. "Terrible it is to think of her goin' off like that. Niver a praste to say a wurrd of a prayer by her dyin' bed, nor Holy Water, nor nothin'. Sure an' the way of ye Prostestants it's blasphemious; it is that! Poor sowl, she was tryin' to live wid, but no one could say but that she'd the good heart. So maybe there'll be less time to spend in purgatory."

I grew indignant. "Purgatory! How can you believe all that rubbish!"

I rose and put down the Dodger.

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"Yes," I said. "I can do nothing."

"That's thrue for ye. As soon as the layer-out comes, I'll run round for Mrs. Brown, the charwoman. It's lonesome here in this great house. Maybe she'll stop the night wid me."

Lonesome? I looked at that closed door. How little I had thought when I opened it this afternoon that it would be closed on death. Half way down the stairs, I remembered that unopened letter lying on the little table by her bedside. I wondered if it would throw any light upon the mystery of Dr. Merivale's departure? Should it be left there, or should I take it to show Aunt Theresa on her arrival?

"Norah," I said, "there's a letter on the table. It wasn't opened. I think I ought to take it for Aunt Theresa to see. It might give us an address. I know it was in the doctor's writing."

"Shall I fetch it for ye, miss?"

"Do," I said. "I'll wait here."

I had a dread of going back to that room. Of seeing that changed face in a changed and more terrible aspect. Norah went in, however, and returned with the letter. She gave it me silently.

"I hadn't the heart to draw down the blinds," she said. "There'll be a fine sthir in the street whin it's known that she's gone."

I made no reply. I took the letter and went away from this house of tragic meanings, scarcely able to realize the suddenness of events. I went home and down to Bidy to tell her the awful news. She was deeply shocked. Like myself she seemed to think it extraordinary that it should all have happened during the one day we could not get at Aunt Theresa. Without her we were helpless. And so we must remain till ten o'clock to-night.

Polyphemia came in to listen to the tragic story. She actually showed some signs of sympathy. As for Mickey, he couldn't be got to believe it.

"Miss Joanna—dead? . . . It was impossible."

So impossible that Bidy started off at once to convince herself of the fact.

Very wearily I went up to my room and took off my hat. Then my eyes fell on that brown-paper parcel I had placed on the chest of drawers.

Like a flash all it meant, and all I had planned to do came back. I had said I was alone in the midst of tragedy, facing a new trouble. But now came the thought of sympathy I had always met; tenderness that had never failed me. And rushing headlong through it all, was a memory of what she had foretold. The dark cloud of sorrow, the ill-fortune yet to fall, the ominous name of the man who had made Joanna's life so unhappy.

As I thought of all this, the desire to go to her grew strong within me. There were hours before Aunt Theresa could return. Instead of sitting here melancholy and unemployed, why not go to my Grey Lady? True, she had said we were not to meet again, but I felt that if she knew in what sore straits I was she could not deny me comfort. I put on my hat and went softly down the stairs, and out of the house. But I had not been too quiet or too secret for the Dodger's intuition. He was after me and with me before I had taken the first of the twists and turns that meant the quickest route to the *Via Roma*. It was long since I had been there, but I had not forgotten the short cuts.

The evening was closing in. The sky wore a grey misty aspect as of rain. A pink tinge over the hills spoke of sunset. I hurried on, I reached the well-known house, and stood a moment hesitating as to whether I should ring, or just turn the handle as of old and enter. If I demanded formal admission I might be refused. I could not risk refusal. I felt I must see her.

I tried the handle. It turned. I was in the narrow passage. It was very dark, and as I stood and listened I heard a sound of singing from the kitchen. Evidently Mrs. O'Driscoll was there. Before I made another movement the little dog gave a faint whine as of recognition, and flew up the dark staircase. I had never been upstairs, but I followed him, remembering Polyphemia's directions as to the "droning-room floor." All was dark on the landing as in the hall. I faced two doors, and boldly tapped at one before which the Dodger had laid himself down. The faint tones of that remembered voice asked who was there.

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There was a long pause. So long that I could hear my heart beating; feel the agony and suspense of slowly passing moments. Then a key turned; the door opened; the old, faint scents, and the old shadowy gloom and the grey veiled figure were before me. I stepped into the silence and the shadows, and caught her hands and kissed them with a passion of gladness that must have told her how I had missed her, how glad I was to see her again.

She sat down and I threw myself beside her and the little dog whined softly for notice. She stroked and petted him, while leaning my head against her knees I poured out my soul as of old. A tale of grief, loneliness, longing, and mingling with it a reproach for her unexplained desertion. Still she never spoke.

I rose to my feet at last. "Ah—what is it? Are you angry because I found you out; because I came?"

"No," she said at last. "I always knew you would come—before the end."

"The end?" I faltered. "Ah, don't talk of an end when we have just met again. I am sad enough already."

"It had to be. I knew it."

"You are too true a prophet," I said, and shuddered involuntarily, remembering the many things foretold and fulfilled. "Never tell me any more of the future I pray you. Better not to know. A thousand times better."

"But I told *you*; not them."

"Yes, I know. Oh! don't let us talk of those dreadful happenings. Tell me you are a little glad I found you? See, how pleased he is."

For the dog leaped suddenly into her lap and tried to caress her averted face. She fondled and soothed him, and then set him down. He remained crouched obediently where she bade him lie.

"Yes, I am glad," she said at last, "now that it has happened. But I had a purpose in concealing myself. I had never meant to stay on *here*, in this town. Only I was driven back at the last moment by something stronger than my own will. I

can say no more. I don't even ask how you learnt I was here."

"You think it was through—him? Ah! I knew before that, Madame."

She was silent again. "How could you have let him come here? It was cruel!"

"I did not know. Indeed, I did not know. It all happened so strangely. Through that girl—Mrs. O'Driscoll's daughter. She told us."

"It does not matter now *how* it happened since it has happened," she said sadly. "You know that story of the violets was my story, Rosaleen?"

"I—I think I always knew that," I said.

"Mine—and his. But his was so foolish and romantic. I never thought it would last so long. Once only we met. He—he saved me from brutal insult, the insult that is permitted by right of legal bondage. And then— But why should I tell you this, Rosaleen? The ashes on that fireless hearth are not more dead than the fires of that burnt-out dream."

"But he never forgot," I said.

"He would not allow that he could forget. There is a difference."

"You refused to see him?"

"He told you? Yes, of course, I refused. You—to ask me that!"

"I did not know. Indeed, I did not know," I repeated. "And he was so sad; and now he has gone away again."

"Gone—where?"

"To London. He went last night."

"London, not Paris?"

"He said London."

"He is a strange, mad creature, Rosaleen. But if he loved, he would be so tender, and so true."

"*If?*" Tears were blinding my eyes. "Why do you say *if*? His whole life has been a pursuit and a worship of—you."

"No, child," she said brokenly. "Only for what I embodied. The ideal all men pursue, and never find. . . . But now, speak no more of this. Tell me again of this tragedy; of this poor aunt.

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For, I fear, I fear, Rosaleen, it will mean much more than it looks. A general disturbance, an uprooting. No, I will say no more. I was forgetting. The time is at hand. You will not be sorrowful and alone for very long, my Rosaleen. As for that poor woman—who knows but death was a kinder friend than life. That man had grown to hate her. A new love, or rather a mad passion had robbed him of reason; self-control. If she had been wise, tactful, but no—she aggravated matters, and widened the breach she might have bridged.”

“How can you know? You who never met, never saw them?”

“Shall I tell you how I know? By that supreme art of the novelist who works from fact to fiction. To whom nothing in life is impossible except its possibilities. If you need proof I can give it you—conclusively. What have you done with the parcel I left for you on the table of my room?”

I started. “Why, *that* is what I came about. At least, it was the excuse I had ready to make, in case, in case——”

“In case I demanded a reason for this intrusion, was it not? The parcel is still in your hands.”

“But, of course. You wrote it was to wait instructions.”

“Well, I will give you the instructions. No, not by word of mouth. I will write them, or send them. And now, my child, you must go.”

Her voice seemed suddenly very faint. Her hand as I took it was strangely cold.

“You are not well,” I said. “And you are so cold. Is there no fire set? Let me light it?”

“No,” she said. “I don’t want a fire, or a light. I seldom have them. My eyes can’t bear it.”

“Your eyes!” I exclaimed.

“I always knew it would happen.”

My self-command gave way. “Oh, but it must not! It shall not! That you should live like this, so desolate, so alone! Oh, Madame, let me come to you as I used to do! Let me do the things you need! I can’t bear to think of you—like this!”

“It is not more desolate than my life, nor darker than my soul,” she said.

I was silent. Overwhelmed by the pathos of those simple words, of the picture they painted. Beside this eternal greyness of solitary days and nights, Aunt Joanna's life looked almost enviable, and my own—almost happy. All my heart went out in longing to help this sad and solitary being, yet fell back on self-acknowledged helplessness. She who had possessed rare gifts of fortune, beauty, genius, the admiration of the world, the love of devoted men, to be left stranded in such utter loneliness! There seemed a senseless cruelty in Destiny if it could play such havoc with human happiness. It represented itself as no beneficent Deity, but a horrible bird of prey hovering over mankind and watching where beak and talons could strike most sharply and remorselessly.

She broke the long silence at last. "No, child, your thoughts are wrong. I know you pity me with all your tender heart. But I no longer want human pity, or human love. I have rejected both. Whether I shall find recompense for this life's suffering in another who shall say? To know that, is to stand on the *other side*, that borderland of mystery which sometimes seems so near. Even misery such as mine has its compensations. There are seasons, mysterious hours, when I can pass out of this hideous encasement which represents me, and which is not me. Pass out of it as one passes through the close woven folds of a mist. Then I learn much of the meanings of things. I am—in a way—taught and consoled for all I have to bear of physical ills. It is in times such as these I get glimpses of that future which encircles the fate of those I love. Am I talking incomprehensibles? Your eyes look bewildered. But in time you too will learn, even as I have learnt; know even as I know. The world is ripening for a New Teaching, Rosaleen. One that will cleave asunder its dense materialism, and show it where to find higher joys; spiritual peace. Through dark and tortuous ways of suffering I have been led to see there is Light on the Path. Such light as never was on land or sea of this dark sphere we call the earth. And when I go forward on the path, Rosaleen, you must only think that it means release; perhaps joy; in any case, freedom from what physical bonds entail. You are always picturing me as encompassed by them; held like a fettered prisoner between four

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Slowly she drew her grey shrouding veils about her face, and turned away. I saw her glide across the shadowy room to its furthest and darkest corner, and then lay herself down on the couch. She spoke no more. I felt she had no desire for my commonplace farewells. I softly opened the door, as softly closed it, and groped my way down the stairs and out of the house.

XXXIV

HOW AUNT THERESA ROSE TO AN OCCASION

It was almost dark when I reached home.

The exigencies of daily life rushed back upon me as I entered. There were other people in the house. It would soon be dinner-time. And Aunt Theresa was not here, and Aunt Joanna was—dead. The blank, horrible word seemed to spring out of the background of my mind and face me with a sense of the incredible.

"Could it be? Was it so?" Must I see these people and tell them, and hear their comments; their shocked wonderment?

I felt it was impossible. I could not do it. The day had been one of horror and strange happenings. I longed to be alone, and think them over in my own mind, not discuss them with outsiders.

I slipped down to the kitchen, and called Biddy aside. "I can't go in to dinner," I said. "And I don't want the other people to know anything. Not yet. Not till Aunt Theresa returns."

"Sure, darlin', I can understand that. Why should they? We'll just send the dinner in, and Mickey can say as Miss Theresa's detained in London, an' you're not feelin' well, an' kapin' yer room. An' indade 'tis yersel looks worn and white, Miss Rosaleen. Go away and lie down for a bit, an' I'll send Polly up wid a mouthful of dinner for ye by an' by."

"You must come to the station with me to meet the ten o'clock train," I said.

"Sure an' I will, miss. 'Tis a sorry home-comin' for the mistress, but there, 'tis God's will. We can't be settin' ourselves to say the right or the wrong av it. Poor sowl! She's in glory now, an' maybe happier. Sure she looked peaceful enough."

"You—you *saw* her, Biddy?"

"I did, miss. Why not? Norah an' meself went up whin the layin' out was done. Beautiful she looked, miss; barrin' the quare colour that's not gone out of her skin, yet."

She wiped her eyes, and muttered, "God save us all; here one day, an' gone the next."

I knew how the Irish regard death, and made no comment. Poor Bridget meant nothing disrespectful by her remarks, or her curiosity.

"I'll take your advice, Biddy," I said, "and go and lie down. I do feel most awfully tired."

And with my little dog at my heels I went away, and up to my own room. The first thing my eyes fell upon was the parcel. There it lay, momentous of the past, present, future. Mystery within its sealed and folded cover; something that was to tell me—what?

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Of her real life as it had been lived, or of the lives of those with whom Fate had so strangely thrown her? For indeed there was something uncanny in the way she had told and foretold the happenings of our household. She, living apart, in her grey mists of solitude, yet seeming to pierce the shield of division between herself and the outer world. To read of what it meant and would mean; what it should promise or fulfil.

I took the parcel and again put it aside in the cupboard. Then wearied out by the strenuous excitements of the day, I threw myself on the bed and fell fast asleep.

Biddy was merciful enough to leave me undisturbed until nine o'clock. Then she awoke me to say I must have some food before we set out for the Station.

It was dreadful that awakening. The sudden sense that something tragic had happened. The knowledge that other things as dreadful were yet to happen. And above all that feeling of lost youth, and coming responsibilities. I tried to eat, but the food seemed to choke me. I pushed the tray aside, and rose and bathed my face, and then dressed. Biddy helping me and talking to me with alternate cheerfulness and despondency.

"The news is goin' around," she said. "Goodness knows how. Errand boys and sich-like wid their tongues as ready as a bell-clapper. But no one here knows of it yet, Miss Rosaleen, barrin' ourselves in the kitchen. Not but what I was afraid of Mickey whin he was waitin' on thim all. Remarks there was, miss. The Giniral grumblin'. 'First Mrs. Oliver, thin Miss Theresa; thin you. What was comin' to the place at all?' An' Lady Montgomery soothin' him by sayin' 'tw'uld soon be May, an' they off to London or somewheres. An' the ould maids, they whisperin', an' condolin', an' wondering what in the wurld they was to do whin the sayson was over. Ah, thinks I, what'll we all be doin' thin? Glory be, the quare wurld it is!"

I sighed as I took my hat from her hand.

"It's always the way where Miss Fanny is," she went on. "Always trouble av some sort. There niver was two sisters more unlike than she an' Miss Joanna, an' niver two as disagreed worse. I'm not so blind that I couldn't see what she was drivin'

at this long time. Separatin' husband an' wife. That's what she was set on. Well, she's done it now for good and all!"

"I don't understand you, Biddy."

"No, you wouldn't, miss. Bein, young an' innocent. A mercy as you hadn't a sweetheart comin' round thim times, or there'd ha' bin bad work there too. Take my word for it, Miss Fanny is one o' thim contrary faymale craythurs as can't abide another woman to have a man carin' for her, or payin' her atten-shuns. No, she must be spoilin' sport, or she's not happy. Sorry I am to say it, but I've lived long enough wid the family to know the ways av thim; an' sure Miss Theresa was always an angel of goodness, an' Miss Joanna was always the one for a grievance, an' Miss Fanny that vain an' selfish, an' wid the timper av Satan himself. (Lord forgive me for sayin' it!) That's how it was, Miss Rosaleen. An' many's the time I've felt sorry for ye, so young and lonesome, an' havin' to put up wid it all. Sure 'twas enough to make an ould woman of ye, before iver ye was a young one!"

"Oh, I've been happy enough, Biddy," I said.

"Well, thin, ye're a wonder, if that's so. For I'd not have bin in yer place had I the choice av parlour an' kitchen. May I die if that's not a throe wurrd, Miss Rosaleen!"

It may have seemed so to her, poor good-natured, faithful Bridget. But for my own part as I looked back on those four long years I was not ungrateful for their experience.

I grew cold and nervous as the Station clock pointed to the time the train was due. How was I to tell this dreadful news?

I clutched Biddy's hand as the porters crowded forward, and the roar of the engine greeted my ears. The great train swung into the station on its way to the Midlands, and the passengers came hurrying out. I stood a little back, glancing from figure to figure of the crowd.

"Ah—there she is!" cried Biddy.

On the announcement I cried out, amazed, "And Dr. Merivale!"

It was true. Aunt Theresa and the doctor had stepped out of a carriage, and were coming quickly along the platform. She

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was holding his arm. Both were too absorbed to think of looking for anyone who had come to meet them. I ran forward, and Aunt Theresa saw me.

"You—here, Rosaleen?"

"Oh, do you *know*?" I cried anxiously.

"I know. I met Dr. Merivale at Paddington—returning."

The doctor looked at me. His face was grey. His eyes like flint.

"Is it really true?"

"Yes," I said.

Aunt Theresa's face was pale as his. But she did not cry, or make a scene. Still holding his arm, she went out of the doors and down the stairs to the street. They called a fly. I turned to Biddy. "You go home," I whispered. "I'll stay with Aunt Theresa."

Mechanically and without a word to me they entered the ramshackle old vehicle. I followed. We jolted and jerked over the streets at a good pace. The doctor had said, "Quick as you can" to the driver.

He sat back in his corner, his hat pressed over his eyes. Aunt Theresa was now crying quietly, as if the sense of what had happened was piercing that first stunning shock of incredulity. She did not address me. I think she was hardly conscious I was there. And so, mute and miserable and wondering as to what next was to happen, I found myself once more at the house in Johnston Street.

Norah opened the door. She gave a cry at sight of her master.

"Ah, sir, glory be! 'Tis yerself! I was afraid ye was on the wide says, an' so I tould the doctors."

He shut the door and walked into the dining-room.

"Now, tell me exactly what has happened?" he said. "Sit there, Theresa." He pointed to a chair into which she sank. "There's no use in facing the—in-avoidable—yet. It's all a perfect mystery to me."

"Sure, sir, Miss Rosaleen there could tell ye better than me," said Norah. "'Twas she was up wid the poor mistress, an' called me whin her breathin' got so strange. An' indade 'twas

her sinse that made me fetch the doctor. Not but it was too late, even thin."

He turned to me. "You? . . . well, speak up. Let me hear."

And as simply as I could, and with an effort at restraint sadly marred by Aunt Theresa's sobs, I told him. He did not interrupt, but when I had finished he rose and began to pace the room as if agitated.

"I can't understand it! She asked me to give her an injection of morphia as she had had no sleep. I did so; an ordinary dose. She went to sleep. I wrote my farewell instead of saying it. I knew it would save a scene. Then—I had this telegram from Dr. Owen."

He took it out of his pocket and threw it on the table. "Of course, I returned at once—I shall forfeit my passage, but that can't be helped." He turned to Norah. "Go over to Dr. Owen, and ask him to come round," he said. "I must hear all particulars."

Norah departed. Aunt Theresa lifted her white, sorrowful face and looked at him. "You are sure, Jasper, that you only gave the usual dose for a soporific?"

"I'm not in the habit of making mistakes where my patients are concerned. Besides, she was accustomed to morphia. She often had it for sleeplessness."

"She never told me that," said Aunt Theresa, "though she often complained of sleeplessness."

"I don't suppose she told you all the facts as well as all the fancies of her life, Theresa?"

He turned to me again. "You say she seemed sleeping quietly—at first? How long were you in the room before her breathing struck you as unusual?"

"About an hour, I think."

"You never thought of lifting the bed-clothes off her face? She had a habit of half suffocating herself with them."

"No. I did not like to disturb her."

"Well, I must hear what Owen says. It is a deplorable—accident—to have happened; especially just now."

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about it," said Aunt Theresa. "But let me assure you, Jasper, that this is more than a deplorable—accident—to have happened just now; considering the terms on which you and my unhappy sister were living."

His livid face flashed round on her. "What do you mean? Do you *dare* to insinuate that I—I——"

"I would rather not discuss the matter further, Jasper. Let us hear what Dr. Owen has to say."

"I will see him alone first," said the doctor. "This is a medical matter, and as such must be discussed by us in private."

"I have a right to be present. She was my sister. I left her yesterday evening comparatively well. I come home to find her—dead."

"You shall see Owen after I have had my interview with him. It is a professional matter. He had been in attendance on my wife, and he and I must talk over this—disaster—professionally."

"If Dr. Owen says so, I will leave you together," she said firmly. "I advise you to be careful, Jasper. I told you why I went up to London to-day."

He bit his lip, and resumed that angry pacing of the room. They spoke no more till Norah ushered in Dr. Owen. He came in very hurriedly. He shook hands with Aunt Theresa, but not with Jasper Merivale.

"I'm glad my wires caught you. I sent two. The cook remembered the hotel. I risked that, and the steamship offices."

"The hotel did it," he said. "I—I was staggered. I couldn't believe——"

"It was awfully sudden." He looked at Aunt Theresa. "I'm afraid, Miss Le Suir, I must ask you to leave us for a few moments. There are some professional matters to be discussed privately."

"She was my sister. I claim a right to hear all connected with this dreadful occurrence!" cried Aunt Theresa.

"She was Dr. Merivale's wife. It is for him to say."

The kindly old man glanced from one to the other; his face was very grave and distressed.

"I have already told Miss Le Suir that I wished to talk the matter over with you," said Jasper Merivale. "She seems unable to grasp the fact that medical cases are not always public property."

"I wish to hear from Dr. Owen whether a simple dose of morphia could have proved fatal in so short a time!" exclaimed Aunt Theresa.

The good old man looked more and more perturbed.

"Dear lady, you have my fullest sympathy, as of course has Dr. Merivale. But really—professionally—we must discuss this sad affair by ourselves."

"Very well," she said, rising with dignity. "But when your discussion is over, you will kindly give me your opinion of the matter, Dr. Owen. I shall wait for you upstairs."

She made a sign to me, and we left the room.

Up there in the great desolate drawing-room, the one gas-jet made a tiny oasis of light. She sat down on the familiar crimson sofa, and looked sadly at the familiar things.

"Only—yesterday," she murmured. "I can't believe it. Tell me, Rosaleen, was it very dreadful? Did she seem to suffer?"

"No, she seemed too deeply asleep," I said.

"Oh, if I hadn't gone to town! If I had come round this morning as I intended! You wasted a whole hour, Rosaleen, and she was—dying."

"I didn't know! I couldn't be expected to know!" I said passionately.

"No, no. I'm not blaming you. But—I don't intend that this man shall get off scot-free! I can't credit an accident so convenient."

"Oh, Aunt Theresa, it's as if you said that he—he——"

"Murdered her? I won't go so far as that. But he had no right to give her that morphia. However, I shall hear what Dr. Owen thinks of the affair."

We were silent for a few moments. Then I hazarded a question.

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Well, Fate has served her a trick for once. He is *here*, and she will be on the steamer. I caught him at the hotel, just as the telegram arrived. He was so upset that he showed it to me. I made him come off at once to the station. I never let him out of my sight. He tried to get to the telegraph office. I said, if he sent any message to Fanny I should openly accuse him of the murder of his wife. That threat terrified him. I never saw anyone so cowed as he was. It almost convinced me the affair was an accident as he swears it was. Oh, Rosaleen, all this is horrible and disgraceful for your young ears to listen to!"

She burst into agonized weeping. I vainly tried to soothe her. It seemed strange to me that I could not cry any more. I felt old and chilled and as if I should never be young again.

She was a little calmer by the time Dr. Owen came upstairs. He was alone. His face looked even more grave and more troubled. He sat down by the sofa, and began to speak quietly, and with evident sympathy for her present distress.

"I must beg you to be calm, my dear Miss Le Suir. A grave responsibility rests with you, and you alone can meet it."

"He has—killed—my sister!" she said.

"It was an accident. We must acquit him of any ill-intent. The whole case lies in a crux, dear lady. He was ignorant that I prescribed a sleeping draught to be taken occasionally. We think—in fact it is absolutely certain—that the unfortunate lady took a dose of it last night. It failed to give her the rest she required, because she was not in a condition of mind to be worked upon by any sedative. She called in her husband and begged him to give her an injection of morphia, which he did. Only half a grain, quite a small dose; but taken in conjunction with what she had already had, it proved fatal."

"This is Dr. Merivale's version of the matter?"

"Naturally. We can have no other."

She sat looking blankly down at her hands; clasping and unclasping them in a nervous way she had when disturbed.

"His version," she repeated. "No proof; no witness; nothing. And she is—dead."

Dr. Owen rose.

"That brings me to the point. Would you wish for an inquest? Dr. Merivale said it should be for you to decide."

"For me!"

"Yes. Of course, you know a certificate must be given, and—I and my colleague, Dr. Neaves, have not agreed upon the point. As a fact, I was in attendance, and could say with confidence the cause of death. It would be very—regrettable—to say the least of it, to have an enquiry that might throw a slur upon professional caution, and do no good to anyone concerned. The poor lady was in a measure to blame for not saying she had taken the sleeping draught. My theory is that it took effect *later* than it should have done, owing to her agitated frame of mind. The second dose was administered too soon on the fulfilling of such effect. Hence the brain congestion that followed."

"Brain congestion!" said Aunt Theresa.

"Medically considered—those were the symptoms."

"Are you *sure* of that?"

"Quite sure."

"Sure enough to be able to give a certificate?"

"I should give one—to that effect—certainly. Since I have heard the particulars from Dr. Merivale."

"There is a great objection in the medical profession to any open scandal," said Aunt Theresa bitterly. "I know that, and I know how many cases are hushed up, and covered up, and excused so that the medical *status* may be upheld. It is a little unfortunate that we have a doctor in the family, and that for sake of the family *and* the doctor I should very much dislike any scandal. If your conscience permits you to give a certificate formulating my poor sister's death, I have no more to say. A woman's intuition stands for nothing in a Court of Law. And in this sad affair there is no one to prove my sister took that sleeping draught. We have only her husband's word for it."

"And the bottle," he said. "It was marked with measured doses. It stood on the mantelshelf. I examined it myself."

"Why did her husband give an injection of morphia instead of another dose?"

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"And there is nothing to prove the quantity injected, unless there is an—inquest?"

"No," he said. "If you cannot accept the word of a medical man, who is also the husband of the deceased lady?"

Aunt Theresa rose from the couch; very pale she looked; yet there was something noble and dignified about her, such as I had never seen.

"Will you take me to my sister," she said. "I—I cannot decide this question until I have seen her."

XXXV

THE ACCIDENT OF DEATH

I DID not offer to accompany Aunt Theresa. That instinctive shrinking from death which I had first known for my father's loss, was with me again. My last sight of that changed and unconscious face was keenly present to my mind. I had no desire to see it when the change was irrevocable.

As I sat there alone, Dr. Merivale hurriedly entered.

"Where is your aunt?" he said sharply.

"Upstairs, with Dr. Owen."

He muttered something; went to the door; hesitated a moment and returned.

"Rosaleen," he said, "when you were in—in her room this morning did you see a letter lying about?"

"A letter—of your's?" I asked.

"How did you know it was mine?"

"I know your writing."

"Well—was it there on the table by the bed?"

"Yes. She had not opened it."

"Where is it now?"

"I took it home to show to Aunt Theresa. I thought you had already left the country, and that she ought to keep it."

"But I haven't left, and I want it. You must get it back for me."

"Very well," I said. "Of course, it is your letter."

"When could you bring it?" he asked somewhat anxiously.

"To-morrow morning."

"Mind you do. Don't forget. If only you or Theresa had been here at your usual time all this wouldn't have happened. She should have been roused; wakened. You, in your ignorance, sat on there and let her sleep herself to death!"

"I could hardly know she had been given a double dose of morphia," I said.

"It was—misadventure—entirely. If she had told me that she had already had some——"

"The bottle and the glass were on the mantelshelf. I saw them."

"Well, I didn't. I hadn't time to go prying about the room. Such a filthy, untidy den as it always was, too!"

"You don't seem very grieved about her death," I said.

"Grieved? Of course, I am. The shock was terrible. A man doesn't show grief like a woman, but he feels it just as keenly."

He walked to and fro in that restless, impatient fashion of his, and I remained silently watching him. There were sounds on the stairs. Dr. Owen's voice speaking. Then he came back into the room with Aunt Theresa. Dr. Merivale stood still, and I saw him glance anxiously from one face to the other. Aunt Theresa came back to the couch and sat down.

"I realize it now," she said faintly. "And like all inevitable things it has to be accepted. It can never be satisfactorily explained."

Dr. Owen turned to Jasper Merivale. "You left the decision with Miss Le Suir. She decides against an inquest."

"I think Joanna would rise from her grave to protest against such an indignity!" said Aunt Theresa.

There was a look of relief, instantaneous, and quickly gone in Jasper Merivale's eyes. The act he had committed was to be accident, or misadventure, as he chose to call it. Scandal, family disgrace, were things the pride of the Le Suir's would never

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willingly court. The matter rested between himself and Aunt Theresa, and she, to my surprise, had thrown aside the casting vote. There was a moment's silence after that last speech. Then she rose.

"I can do no more. I will go home," she said. "You can let me know the—arrangements—to-morrow, Jasper."

He opened the door, and then offered his hand. She looked quietly into his face, and made no effort to take it. With the faintest shrug of his shoulders, he let it drop. Then he turned to me. "Don't forget that letter, Rosaleen," he said, and with a curt nod I too passed out.

Once in the street she took my arm. I could feel she was trembling greatly. Slowly and silently we crossed the road, and went up the steps to our own house. Biddy opened the door.

"Come in, me dears; 'tis wore out ye must be. I've got some coffee for ye in the parlour. Come along in an' take it. Sure, don't I know what you must be feelin'."

Grateful we were for that refreshment, and the sight of the cosy fire. Biddy removed her mistress's bonnet and boots, and put on her old house slippers as deftly as a maid. For my part, I only threw aside my hat, and drank the hot fragrant coffee eagerly.

"Do they know—here?" asked Aunt Theresa, lifting her white haggard face to that sympathizing one of the faithful Irish-woman.

"They do not, ma'am. We thought 'twas time enough to be tellin' thim to-morrow. It was just an accident, wasn't it, ma'am?"

"Yes, an accident. Say as little as you possibly can, Biddy."

"Haven't I the honour of the family to bear in mind? Is it likely? The blunderin' ways o' thim docthors! Sure, it's a wonder any of us are alive at all! Thin there won't be no—no post-mortin, as they calls it, ma'am; will there?"

"Of course, not. There's no necessity. Dr. Merivale has explained the facts. It was an accident, no more, no less."

"Accident—well, they does be happenin' all times, an' all ways. I suppose he's in a great takin', ma'am? The docthor, I mane. I was that flabbergasted whin I saw the two av ye

marchin' along out av the train. There ! I couldn't belave me two eyes !”

And so on. Half credulous, wholly sympathetic, and yet brimful of curiosity as to details.

Aunt Theresa dismissed her at last, and she and I sat on by the fire talking over the sad tragedy. I could only gather from her resigned attitude that as all was ended and done, no worse thing could happen to the poor soul we mourned. As for ourselves, we had to live on, and face the world. That harsh, malicious, pitiless world which cares nothing for what the individual suffers, if the pillory or the cross are only set up in a public place.

I was half undressed when Aunt Theresa came to the door. In her hand she held that letter I had taken from her sister's bedside.

“What is this doing in my room ?” she asked, holding it out.

I explained hurriedly. I had forgotten all about it after coming home.

“Aunt Joanna had not opened it. It was lying on the table.”

“I wonder what time he put it there ?”

“If we go into that we are raking up the whole story again,”

I said. “Besides, I promised to take that letter back to him.”

“Did he ask for it ?”

“Yes. You see I only brought it here because I thought he had already left for Sydney.”

“I understand. Had he done so, I should have opened it unhesitatingly.”

She gave it to me. I felt it was done unwillingly. But I was glad she had not opened it. Whatever that letter contained it would never meet the eyes of her to whom it was written.

Tired as I was, I slept very badly. I could not get away from the feeling of horror and oppression linked with the day's events. I wondered what would become of Fanny now ? Whether she would set forth on her voyage without discovering that Dr. Merivale had missed the boat ? What she would feel when she learnt of her sister's death and its nature ?

These were points I could not question until the shock of this

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sad fatality was over. They were points, however, which kept recurring to my mind, and as I dwelt upon them I began to understand the position Aunt Theresa had taken up. As the head of the family, and as one possessing to the last degree the Irish pride of race and family honour, she would sacrifice much in their interests. Yet I felt certain she blamed Jasper Merivale for her sister's death, and would never forgive him his criminal carelessness.

On the morrow the news was everywhere. And it appeared as much a shock and surprise as we had feared. The General and his wife and the Miss Cutler's were terribly upset about it. All day came callers and enquiries, and letters and cards of sympathy.

The doctor did not come near us, and Aunt Theresa did not go out. She despatched a message to Ealand's and they sent round a variety of mourning, and a young person to fit and try on dresses which were bought ready-made, and then altered. Our house had all the blinds down in the front rooms, and seemed hardly less gloomy and dark than the one in Johnston Street itself. I asked if I might go out, but Aunt Theresa declared it wasn't "proper" for any of the family to show themselves until after the funeral. Besides, I had no mourning yet.

It seemed very conventional and absurd, but Aunt Theresa was terribly Early Victorian in her ideas, and I would not trouble her with arguments at such a time. I therefore put Dr. Merivale's letter in another envelope and sent it to him by Mickey.

The hours seemed endless; the day long beyond all count of days I had known and wearied in. I almost envied the kitchen. The servants had their work to do, and the routine of the house had to go on. But I could settle to nothing. Aunt Theresa remained in her bedroom. I did not like to disturb her. I went out into the garden once, but the Dodger's boisterous delight seemed out of place in the general gloom. I left him there, and came in again, and tried to settle down to reading.

At tea-time Aunt Theresa did come down to the parlour. Her

eyes were swollen with weeping. She seemed more upset than on the previous day.

"She seems to haunt me," she said. "Oh, Rosaleen, I wonder if I have acted rightly? If I should have insisted on an inquest?"

"Dear aunt, we settled that once for all, yesterday. What is the good of talking of it again?"

"I know, I know, Rosaleen. But I feel differently to-day."

"Oh, try not to think of it," I said. "Dr. Owen called it 'misadventure.' Why not be satisfied with his opinion? You don't suppose he would give a certificate unless he could do so conscientiously?"

"You *are* a comfort, Rosaleen. Of course, he wouldn't. It would be unprofessional and wrong. Yes, he told me he would give the certificate. I—I wonder when Jasper will have the funeral?"

"Shall you go to it?" I asked.

"Of course, I shall, and I want you to come also. It is the last time we can show the poor martyr any respect. If you prefer to remain in the carriage you can, but I shall do my duty to the last."

I looked at her, but I said nothing. There *were* some points of resemblance between Joanna and herself after all!

"I wonder," I said suddenly, "what Dr. Merivale will do—afterwards? Do you think he will still go out to Australia?"

"He will have to reckon with me if he does!" she exclaimed, roused to energy by that suggestion. "I told him I had looked up the passenger list and discovered that Fanny was going out on the same boat. That it was scandalous! A clear plan between them. He was thoroughly frightened when he found I knew. Scandal of that sort is death to a medical man, no matter where he is. I am half afraid there were rumours going around here. Perhaps that was why he was so anxious to get away?"

"Of course, Fanny does not know of this?" I said. "No news can reach her now, can it?"

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"I think not. There might have been a chance yesterday by the pilot's boat, but I took care he shouldn't send a telegram. Let her get out to Sydney, and find the news awaiting her. If she has an atom of heart she will know she is punished!"

"Do you think she will care? You know how they always quarrelled?"

"She may not *care*. But it will be a shock to her. I am writing this mail, care of the Steamship Company, so they will forward it to her. I shall not spare the details of that morphia. If, after that, she can pursue this shameful philandering with Jasper Merivale, she deserves to suffer a similar fate. I shall tell her so!"

It seemed hardly like my kind, sensible aunt to be so fierce and bitter. I wondered if erring on the side of mercy in one case had determined her to show little in the other?

When tea was over she went back to her room, and I saw her no more. Biddy brought my dinner to the parlour. She said she had sent some soup and a morsel of chicken to "the mistress." She would not come down.

The long desolate evening stretched before me. It had turned to rain; a chill wind rustled the branches of the great elm tree, and the desolate sky was an added note to the gloom of gloomy feelings. Kind-hearted Biddy lit a "bit of fire" for company, and I sat beside it with my dog on my lap, the "Bath Herald" in my hand. It gave a brief account of the "sad occurrence." It spoke of Jasper Merivale as "one of our popular and well-known medical men." The "accident" of death was ascribed to an overdose of morphia taken as a sleeping draught by the unfortunate lady. The funeral was fixed for the 2nd of May, "under the arrangement and conductorship of our esteemed local firm, Allen, of Southgate Street."

A sense of unreality was with me as I read this. It seemed impossible to associate Aunt Joanna with it all. I let the paper slide down to the floor, and went over in my own mind the events of yesterday. Already it was as if *years* had passed over my head since I had entered that room and seen her asleep as I thought.

Could anything have been done, I asked myself? Was it

that wasted hour which had made such a difference? I should never know; but the thought vexed and troubled me all the same. It seemed, too, as if I had so often been petulant and impatient with her. So ready to criticize instead of to compassionate. For, after all, her life must have been very unhappy, and she had tried to make the best of it for long before we discovered the fact.

"I've come to cheer you h'up a bit," said a voice.

I started. I had not heard the door open. Polyphemia walked in on her words, in her neat housemaid attire. She drew up a chair and sat down.

"It's h'awful in the kitchen. Biddy and Mickey there they goes talkin' of nothing but corpses and funerals, and things they call 'wakes.' Enough to make your blood run cold. I suppose it's bein' my first h'experience of bereavements as makes me wish they'd stop talkin' of it. Of course, I never knew 'er, that makes a difference, too."

She took up the paper. "Biddy said as 'ow it was h'all in print. Fancy that! . . . May I read it?"

"Yes, it's there, on that column."

She toiled laboriously over the journalist's wording of the catastrophe. (She pronounced that word as *cattustrofy*.)

"Well, I must say it's 'ard on you. Wonder 'ow 'er 'usband feels? It was 'e give 'er that ere sleepin' stuff, wasn't it?"

"No," I said. "Dr. Owen had prescribed it."

"Oh—and she took too much? Careless, wasn't it? I s'pose 'e's awful cut h'up? 'Avin to be brought back so h'unexpected. Was they 'appy, do you think?"

"As happy as most married people, I suppose."

"Most of 'em ain't 'appy at all," said Polyphemia. "You should 'ear mother talk o' married life! Fair sicken you it would. Men is all brutes once they git 'old of you. None of 'em is the same *after* as they was *afore*. Surprises me why they fix upon one woman and *will* 'ave 'er, when there's so many as 'ud suit 'em better."

She clasped her hands round her knees, and contemplated the fire.

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"Why do women fix upon one man?" I asked. "It's a law of life, that choice in marriage."

"Seems so. But that don't make it less queer. I suppose if marriage didn't tie folks up tight, they'd all want to get out of it h'after a bit. Mother did, and she'd need o' some patience. 'E was a caution; father, I mean. Drink—my, 'ow 'e'd drink! And languidge—h'awful, at times. I used to wonder 'ow she could put up with it. Of course, lodgers wouldn't stay. The Chevalyer, 'e was the only one as never seemed to mind. Two years—Ah, those 'appy, 'appy days!"

She sighed mournfully. I looked at her with a sudden thrill of sympathy.

"He was very good to you, wasn't he, Polly?"

"Good! A h'angel, that's what 'e seemed. There's not another sich man in all the world!"

I thought so, too, but I let her run on unchecked.

"'E used to laugh and joke, and tell the queerest stories. 'Is arm was bad then, after bein' wounded in that h'awful French and German war. I 'ad lots to do for 'im. I loved doin' it. I never thought 'e'd leave us. Life's very 'ard; ain't it?"

"It is," I said. "Before we understand what it means."

"I don't suppose we'll ever do that," she said. "Well, as I was sayin'—four 'appy years there 'e was, and I thought it was goin' to be for h'ever. Then *you* come. And all was changed. I did 'ate you proper, I can tell you that."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Oh, I'm gettin' h'over it now. Not that I feels we should ever be friends, proper. Though not——"

"Not enemies?" I suggested.

"I suppose so," she said gloomily. "I 'ad ambishuns—once. But it seems no use. 'Eavens knows I tried to learn, and h'improve myself so as to win 'is favour but it don't seem I'll h'ever get no nearer. I must be content to h'adore in silence."

She wiped one eye with the corner of her apron. "Where's 'e now?" she asked suddenly—"The Master?"

"In London, I think."

"'Ere to-day, an' gone to-morrow, that was always 'im! A wanderin' star."

She dropped the apron and looked at me, or seemed to look. I was never quite sure of her intentions.

"I suppose you're pretty, in a way," she said critically. "Not that I 'olds with dark 'uns; not *my* style. But 'e was always a-talkin' of you as if you was poetry. 'My dark Rosaleen.' I've 'eard 'im say it. Likewise—'H'out, greybeard loon! What folly dos't thou kontemplate!' Puttin' two and two together I should say 'e meant it was folly to be thinkin' o' you in the way of poetry. Would you say so?"

I was conscious of heightened colour as well as of amusement.

"My dear Polly, you do get such a mixture of things into your brain. The 'dark Rosaleen' is a lady in a poem. Possibly the Master was reciting it. It had nothing to do with *me*."

"'Adn't it? What a relief! To think what I've gone through on account of it! A poem; why that makes h'all the difference!"

"Of course, it does. . . . Wasn't that the bell?"

"Sounds like it. More of them h'enquiries, I suppose. What a lot o' folks the missis does know!"

She rose slowly and went away to open the front door. I heard a colloquy; a familiar voice. I sprang up in momentary excitement; then as quickly resumed my seat while the Dodger dashed into the hall, barking a welcome. Polyphemia came back aglow with delight and wonderment.

"Talk of a h'angel and 'ere 'e is! Oh, Master, what joy to see you once again. Joy even in the darkness."

I had risen; he came up and took my hands.

"I've heard," he said. "Oh, I'm so sorry for you, Rosaleen! Tell me, how did it happen?"

And, somehow, it seemed to me that even tragedy became less sad a thing now that he was there to say again, "I am so sorry for you, Rosaleen."

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XXXVI

THE OPEN DOOR

POLYPHEMIA went back to the kitchen to prepare coffee. He would take nothing else. And then I told him everything. I had never seen his face so grave. I had never known him so silent.

"I understand why your aunt has done this," he said. "There's a finality in death that makes one only desirous of leaving it sacredly alone. All the same—I could not hold that man blameless."

"She does not—either. But, as she says, proof of intent would open up a horrible scandal. She shrinks from it. It would never be forgotten *here*."

"Not for a generation perhaps. But the march of time has quickened since our good Queen was only Princess, and took offence at personal remarks upon her—understandings—and left poor Bath bereft of Royal Patronage thenceforth. Even a scandal has shorter life now; one is so quickly succeeded by another. Yet, perhaps, she is wise to run no risks. You have to be considered. There is nothing worse for youth than the tarnishing of a name, the disrepute of family honour. I suppose I cannot see her to-night?"

"I will ask," I said, and rose from my chair. He did the same.

"You did not expect me so soon, Rosaleen?"

"I never know what you will do," I said. "Polly calls you a 'wandering star.' I think she is right."

"Perhaps the star only wanders, seeking a sphere that would content it?"

"Oh!" I said quickly, "I must tell you, I have seen *her* again."

"The Grey Lady?" The smile left his lips. "She did admit you then?"

"I went there, determined to see her. But she said I was not

to come again, unless she sent for me. Oh! it made my heart ache. She seemed so changed, so fragile. She spoke of a darkness that was threatening. Her sight, I think. If that went she could not work. What would become of her?"

"Sit down a moment," he said. "Aunt Theresa can wait. Do you know why I went to London? Because of Odylle, because I learnt from Mrs. O'Driscoll of her poverty and helplessness. I knew something must be done. I had the address of that only friend with whom she has any dealings. Mrs. O'Driscoll had posted one letter for her and noted it. I went to him. An old Frenchman, once an *avocat* of Paris. He came to England at the time of the war, and settled here. From him I learnt what her life has been. She has no means of support save her writings. And for a time they have ceased. He was becoming uneasy. Together we consulted what was best to be done. As far as her past life and her brief stage life go she is dead and forgotten. The work of her pen is chiefly *feuilletons* for French papers, translated into cheaper book form for this country. This man, Monsieur Le Feuvre, managed all that, and supplied her with money. I think, Rosaleen, she took alarm at my intention of seeing her and slipped away from here in that mysterious way. She actually went to the Station, but did not leave as we imagined. Had it not been for Polyphemia coming here she would have been securely hidden from us. As it is, I find myself face to face with a difficult problem."

I looked at him silently.

"That her beauty should be destroyed is less sad than that her life should go out in utter darkness. That is what threatens. Mrs. O'Driscoll told me that she can't bear any light. She says it hurts her eyes. And there she sits behind that locked door, scarcely touching food, unable to secure the consolation of work, or of books. Relentless to any offer of help, or any service of love or pity. Think of it, Rosaleen! The long grey days; employess; bound to dead darkness of more desolate nights! Oh—the cruelty of Fate is the cruelty of Fiends! And she has done nothing to deserve it!"

"I know, I know; and I prayed her to let me come every day as I used to do. But she wouldn't. She said she must be alone."

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"*Alone*——" he echoed. "There's no hell worse."

"But, she seems to have some sort of consolation," I went on. "I cannot understand *what* it is, but it has something to do with her extraordinary gift of foretelling events. She spoke as if she could leave *herself*, and wander forth as a spirit might wander. She said the closing of earth-bound faculties opened a channel for others, greater and more satisfying. It is not comprehensible to me."

"Nor to me—yet," he said slowly. "But I think I understand what she means. There is an *inner* sight as well as an outer one. A psychic faculty independent of physical powers. If she has learnt that secret she has found consolation. Despair will not be the blank, intolerable thing it seems to us, who still stand in the light of life, and of each other."

I looked quickly into his face, as he said that. His eyes met mine, filled with vague disquietude. A sudden softness had thrilled his voice when he spoke those two words. I found nothing to reply. They seemed to sink down through the troubled waters of past scenes, past days, past memories. They seemed to fence my life round with a tender protection such as it had never known.

Each other. How much it seemed to mean in this troubled time. It swept aside those shadows which my fancy had wrought about his life, and ours. *Each other.*

He took my hands and touched them softly with his lips. First the right hand; then the left.

"Now," he said, "go and fetch Aunt Theresa."

I did not go back into the room. I knew what it would mean. We should be put upon the rack once more; describing, discussing, lamenting. And it was all—useless. Waste of emotion and mental force since nothing could alter what had been, and what was.

Life, brought face to face with Death, stands transfixed by its own helplessness. It can but stare blankly; mourn uselessly; and then take up its own burden again until the day and the hour when the same inexorable fate faces itself.

When he had left, Aunt Theresa came to my room. The interview had done her good. She was calmer and more resigned.

Here was a parting of the ways. One of those that every life must face at some time or other.

"I will leave Jasper to his conscience. I don't envy him his dark moments. He will go in fear, and in shame for the rest of his days. And his deed may be an effectual shock to Fanny. I have taken care that it shall be so. Woman have a sure instinct in some matters. She will know that I forebore to press the matter to extremes for all our sakes. Hers—especially."

"How good you have been to them—always," I said.

"I have only done my duty. I was left as the head of the family. I had to give them a home. Things went all awry. It has not been my fault. That this should have happened is just one of those things which show how useless human efforts are at safeguarding another's welfare."

I thought of that Eastern proverb which my Grey Lady had told me: "*The Fate of every man we have bound about his neck.*" If that was so, what human effort could cut asunder those strangling cords? None of us could foresee the end of Life, or alter, or affect its course.

She talked on and I listened, glad of the change in her. Glad that the frozen horror of yesterday had given place to gentler and more humane feelings.

"What did you do about that letter?" she asked, as she rose to say good night.

"I sent it back to him, as I promised."

"That ends it," she said.

We kissed each other, and she went back to her room.

Some days later we followed Aunt Joanna to her last resting-place in the beautiful cemetery at the foot of Prior Park.

There we took leave of her, and, without word of explanation, of Jasper Merivale.

Looking back from peaceful shores of Time on all these strange happenings, I am reminded of many things.

Chief among them, Aunt Theresa's determination to sell up

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everything and return to Ireland, there to end her days. Everything in Bath reminded her of that secret buried in her own heart and in her sister's grave. She told me she hated the place. She would have enough to live on in Ireland; rents were cheap there, and she longed for the old familiar tongue, and the friendly faces, and the sweet, green country of her youth.

"Biddy will come, too, and look after me. I am only troubled about you, Rosaleen. It will be so dull and quiet. I had hoped to give you your share of gaiety, and pleasure. But I could not bear to go through all that *here*. It would remind me so of them. The Pump Room concerts, the balls at the Assembly Rooms, they were all associated with Fanny and Joanna. Somehow, I don't want to see *you* going through it all."

"And I don't want to," I said. "Balls and parties and flirtations aren't in my line. You know you always said I was old-fashioned."

"You've never had a proper girl's life," she said. "But somehow I couldn't help that. And you seemed happy enough—in your way."

"That's the only way we can be happy, isn't it? Each in our own way. Mine wasn't Fanny's, or Aunt Joanna's, or yours. But being mine, it suited me perfectly well."

"Will you be sorry to leave Bath, Rosaleen?"

Sorry? Once I had said I hated it. Once I had called it old, and dingy, and lifeless, and grey. Now—sorry was a weak word to embody what I felt if it should come to parting for ever from my city of Healing.

For so it had been to me. A place where sorrow had been turned to joy, and life quickened to *living*. Where every terrace and hill and height had become a thing of beauty; and where memories and associations had been a liberal education for my young mind. What of the Magician who had re-created it for me; to whom I owed those full and happy years?

Had he counselled this change? Was it to part our lives from his? I longed to ask that question, but the familiar name would not come naturally to my lips. Why—I could not say.

"When do you think, we shall leave?"

"Oh, not for a month or so. Fortunately my lease is up in

June. The sale can't be arranged before the end of May. We ought to be able to get away as soon as that is over."

"You haven't told me what part of Ireland we are going to."

"Haven't I? The Chevalier is arranging that. A small house and lovely garden close to his own property. The very thing to suit us, he says."

"*The Chevalier!* He has suggested this?"

"Why, of course. I don't know what I should have done but for him!"

A queer jealous pang shot through my heart. I echoed her words. Did they mean more than just what they said? Had she too found what Polyphemia had found, and I had found, that to fall once under the spell of that most fascinating personality was to find all one's life flat and purposeless without it?

"You are looking pale and dispirited, Rosaleen. Take the dog and go for a walk. It is such a lovely afternoon."

She had said this on many afternoons, of late. And I had gone and wandered afar, yet always alone. Not once had I been sought or joined by the one companion who had made walking a delight, and brought to park and hill, height and valley, a new beauty.

I dressed and left the house. I thought to myself, "I will not go for a walk. I will go to my Grey Lady."

Day had followed day, and week, week, and no message had come from her. What had they held of suffering and loneliness? Why was she so obstinately bent on self-wrought martyrdom? I turned into the old road, and stood before the old house. As I stood and looked at the dingy windows closely curtained into gloom, the door opened and the Chevalier came out.

"You—at last?"

"At last," I echoed. "Why do you say that?"

"I thought you might have come sooner."

I felt bewildered. "I was waiting for a message. She told me she would send. But——"

I looked at him and the house. "Why are *you* here?"

"I am staying here, in my old rooms," he said.

"Staying here?" I felt stupid and dazed. I had never thought of *that*.

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"It was all I could do," he said simply. "Be at hand if she needed me. Monsieur Le Feuvre came to see her. She is—dying, Rosaleen. He says so. Mrs. O'Driscoll says so. But she will do nothing, or have nothing done. She does not suffer. That is all I know."

"You never told me."

"I never saw you. Once I went to the house, but you were out. I did not like to say anything about this to your aunt."

"Only once?"

"Why, child, what has come to you? You—you're crying, Rosaleen."

"Oh! let me come into the old schoolroom," I said brokenly. "I can't speak here."

It seemed so simple, and yet it was the last thing I had expected. He opened the door, and we went in. Nothing was changed. The old table, the chairs, the tobacco jar, the books scattered everywhere. It only needed Polyphemia. Quite foolishly and weakly I stumbled into a chair and began to cry. He stood waiting patiently till the fit was over.

I couldn't explain it, but then when had he wanted one to *explain* a thing. He just accepted, and excused. Besides, what would he have thought had I said that I had pictured him spending hours with Aunt Theresa, and all the time he had been here, faithful to the last to that romance of his youth.

When I was calm he told me more. Of efforts to send in medical aid, always refused. Of daily dread that something had happened behind that closed door which never admitted him, and through which Mrs. O'Driscoll only passed once a day.

When I had heard all, I rose, and said I must go up. Perhaps she would relent as she had done before.

He said, "Do, Rosaleen;" so gravely and tenderly that again I had hard work to keep back those jealous tears.

I knocked timidly, then louder. No one answered. I spoke, I implored admission. There came no sign. I went back to his room.

"It is useless," I said. "She will not admit me."

"Suppose you wait a little, and then try again?" he said.

I crossed the room and took my old chair, and sat in my old place.

"I always see you there, Rosaleen. This old room has never lacked company."

"Why do you wish us to go to Ireland?" I asked suddenly.

"To Ireland? Is it agreed? I made the suggestion because... it seemed so natural. At first, she spoke of Australia. I begged her not to go there. Rosaleen, I had a longing to see you in our Emerald Isle. A selfish one no doubt. If my roving days are over it doesn't mean that yours have not begun. But there is a house, white against green trees, wreathed in roses and jasmine, set in a wilderness of bloom, orchards and green meadows all around. Oh—to see you there, and—"

His eyes fell on the books, and he laughed softly. "And read Carlyle again," he said. "And bring the story of the Fool Errant into shape and form. Does the plan commend itself, my child?"

"I would go anywhere, you wish, with you—'Master,'" I said.

"Rosaleen!"

He sprang up in his old impulsive way. As he did so it seemed to me that the door opened softly, and through it wavered a faint, grey mist. So faint, so grey, that my eyes scarcely caught an outline, before that outline vanished.

"Oh—look!" I cried.

He turned and gazed where my hand pointed.

"What—what is it? I see nothing."

But I shivered as with sudden cold.

"It seemed that *she* looked in. But not as I have always seen her. Something shadowy, beautiful. Oh! . . . let me go! I must go!"

"We will both go," he said. "Perhaps the door is open now!"

It was open; wide; and seated at the table, her head buried on her arms, shrouded still in the mist of those enfolding veils, was the shell of that beauty and tragedy which had meant for me "A Grey Life."

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XXXVII

VENI, VIDI, VICI

FROM a calmer standpoint, and at a later stage, I look back upon the tragic happenings of that seventeenth year of my life.

Yet I know that every year when April smiles and the violets are blue in their mossy nooks, and the "sound of the singing of birds" is in my ear, I shall remember that one epoch of tragedy. I shall remember an April in which there were few smiles and many, many tears. And when I cross the rough Irish Channel, and visit my beloved *Aquæ Solis* it is to pilgrimage to two graves in that God's Acre under the circling hills. Over one is a pretentious monument with the name of Joanna Merivale (*née* Le Suir) beloved wife of Jasper A. Mervale, M.D., of this City.

The other is marked only by a simple marble cross, inscribed, "To the memory of Odylle." In a corner is carved a bunch of violets. Beneath them the words, "And every night I threw at her feet—violets."

By June we were settled in our new home. Aunt Theresa said she was glad to leave Bath. It was only associated with troubles and disasters, and when she saw that white house, "white against green trees, wreathed in roses and jasmine, set in a wilderness of bloom," she wept with joy.

"It looks like home again!" she cried. "Home in my Emerald Isle, amongst my own faithful people."

And to me also it looked like "home," though it held no associations—as yet. Nothing save some furnishings sent from Bath, and the "blue above, and the green below" typical of my native land.

The Chevalier came with us. He looked after Aunt Theresa's baggage, and arranged trains, and got some rooms prepared for us by sending Bridget and Mickey on in advance, and, in fact, did all and everything a man can do when he is inclined to be

useful to women. Polyphemia was left behind to return to the O'Driscoll household if she pleased. We parted with a certain cool friendliness, that did not disguise a grudging envy at my having the chance denied herself.

"I'll never forget 'im," she said. "'Is name is engrained on my 'eart, same as that misfortunate Queen said of Callee. But such is fate. It 'as to be."

I questioned Aunt Theresa as to the plans of Jasper Merivale. He had never come to our house after the funeral. She had not bidden him even a formal farewell.

"He has taken a London practice," she said. "Exchanged with another doctor."

"Then he will not go out to Australia?"

"Certainly not. I made it a condition for deciding against that enquiry he dreaded. I am charitable enough to *try* and believe his explanation, fortified by Dr. Owen's opinion. But I have told Fanny what it looked like. I have told him what I should do if he ever resumed that intimacy."

"So, it is all ended now?"

"I believe so. Let him justify himself to his Creator, if he can. I left it at that."

Perhaps she was wise so to leave it.

It did not take long to settle down in the new house. It was small, and compact, and comfortable. Aunt Theresa was in perpetual ecstasies over it, and over the peace and comfort of her limited household. She still expressed fears that it would be "dull" for me. Dull! I laughed at the idea. Not for nothing had I been taught to love Nature in all and any aspect. The garden and orchard were a perpetual delight after years of a city. The leisurely days and hours, the absence of all worry and anxiety were a charm in themselves after that last dark and saddened year.

Besides, almost every day brought me the beloved companionship, which seemed almost a necessity to my life. The estate (?) of Knockmacree was within easy distance of our own boundaries, even without the informality of a right of way devised by its

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owner. The house itself was some two miles distant. One of those queer rambling Irish houses of stone and plaster, and many windows, and badly kept gates, and fences that are so characteristic of inclinations to do everything to-morrow that ought to be done to-day.

Aunt Theresa and I were not severe critics, having many memories behind and about us. The picturesque old house had many fine rooms, all more or less shabby and neglected. The farms owed more to Nature's bounty than to careful husbandry; the grounds were prolific of unpruned rose trees, tangles of creepers, and self-sown mignonette and sunflowers. There was also a wide sweep of lawn under beech and lime trees, and a croquet ground, of which the owner seemed very proud, and where I was instructed in that fashionable game. The Chevalier had a queer old manservant named, Danny Macguire, and an old cook and a weird "boy," Shamus Patrick, who did all and everything that his master needed, and loved his very shadow with the devotion of another Polyphemia. I used to wonder how the two would have agreed?

The lovely month sped on in a riot of sunshine, and roses; ripening fruits glowed against the warm brick walls; the scents of syringa swept the air from the great bushes beside the garden hedge.

And, as he had said, we read Carlyle again under the green trees, and he laughed over my struggles with Teufelsdröckh, or explained Herbert Spencer, or John Stuart Mill. Then in the cool long evenings were walks by the river-side, or to where some small dark lake lay under the shelter of the hills, and where all about us held the softness and melancholy and gentle loveliness of Ireland's sensitive appeal.

It was all so different from Bath. So full of solitudes; of ruins for which no one cared; of placid streams where even the fish were too lazy to move, of stray sheep without a shepherd, grazing cattle that no one heeded. Tumble-down cottages, ill-cared fields, laziness and good humour, and general indifference. And yet it was so—Irish. I could but love it, and wonder at it, and just accept it at that.

Aunt Theresa had occasional visitors. Queer, homely, gossiping

people largely concerned with their neighbours' doings; comparatively indifferent to their own. Full of speculative interest with regard to the Chevalier O'Shaughnessy. Not a little curious as to why Miss Le Suir had thought fit to bury herself alive in this out-of-the-world spot. Our mourning excused us from festivities of the garden-party order. From all, indeed, save the useful "cup of tea," and formal return of visits.

The Chevalier was known everywhere, of course. He made gentle fun of his neighbours for my benefit, and excused himself from their hospitable functions for his own. He and I and Shamus Patrick used to do a little desultory gardening, by aid of a lawn mower and sundry watering cans. None of us knew anything about gardening except that grass should be mowed, and flowers watered in dry weather. Nature would do the rest. But it was all very pleasant in that halcyon time after the late storm and stress, and we were all very happy and merry together. Even Aunt Theresa crept out of the shadows of tragedy and sat with us in the sunshine, or in the warm dusk of the evenings under the benediction of the stars. That was the time when the Chevalier talked best, or romanced most wildly. Two more delighted and enthralled listeners he could not have desired, and as if appreciation set his fancy afire, he told us of deeds and scenes before which Don Quixote and his like might have hung diminished heads.

One warm summer night, he and I were sitting out in the garden, after a day of sultry heat that had left Aunt Theresa with a headache as legacy. The sky held shades of orange and purple where the last sun-rays lingered; a faint breeze crept up and stirred a languid bough, or closing flower. We were sitting on low, rustic chairs, our backs to the house; before us the width of lawn and garden with its high myrtle hedge, and far off against the skyline the violet darkness of the mountains.

It may have been that colour and its associations which sent both our minds back to a memory they held, for suddenly our eyes met and I said, "I have never done anything about that book she wrote. I have forgotten—all this time."

"Book?" he questioned.

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"Yes, the manuscript. She said it was to wait instructions, but I never had any. Do you think I ought to send it to the publisher in Paris where her stories were always sent? It is addressed to him."

He considered the idea for a moment. Then he said, "that is a matter for her executor to decide."

"And who is her executor?" I asked.

"I am," he said.

I started up from my chair. "You—then I must give it to you?"

"You might let me see it, if you will."

"I will fetch it now," I said, and rose from my chair. It surprised me to hear that he had any control or command of her affairs. He had given me no hint of such a thing.

I brought the brown-paper parcel to him. It had lain at the bottom of my box, placed there when we left Bath, forgotten in the stir of new interests and associations until to-night.

There was light enough to see and read the label on the cover, and he studied it long in silence. Then he looked at me. "It certainly says, 'To wait instructions,' but there is a date as well."

"A date? I never noticed it."

I bent down and read the label again. His finger pointed to a date in the corner in tiny figures. So small that they might easily have escaped my casual notice. The month named was July. The date the 29th.

"Why—" I exclaimed, "that is——"

"To-day," he said.

"Yes." I looked at him, his eyes were still bent on the parcel, so securely tied and sealed for transmission. "How strange—to-day. I had never noticed any date on that label."

"Perhaps it was not intended you should." He turned the parcel over and looked at the seal. "Why, *that* has a date also!" he exclaimed. "It is not so clear as the other, but doubtless, it is the same."

He took out a pocket-knife and with no further word severed the string, but kept the seal intact. Then he unfolded the paper wrappings and before us lay the white, neatly inscribed sheets of

manuscript, that I had seen so often in that dreary attic. They were fastened in separate numbers, each headed by Roman figures. The first number bore the title I had seen her write on that December day, when we had made first acquaintance. As I looked at it now I seemed to see the grey room, the grey figure, the slender pale hand writing so firmly and legibly :

“ A Grey Life.”

Her words as she had written it, crept back to memory.

“ *That—is my life. Grey life ; grey hopes ; grey grief.*”

A wave of pity, of remorseful regret swept over my heart ; my eyes grew dim. In my late content, in that new peaceful acceptance of life's meaning, I had given no thought to her ; the sorrow, the grief, the loneliness which had enshrouded her sad fate.

The Chevalier's voice broke on my ear. “ A grey life—a fitting title, and prophetic. Here is another date, Rosaleen, on the top of the page. December the twenty-fourth—and the year.”

“ That was the morning I went up to those attics and found her,” I said. “ Perhaps she commenced to write the story that same day.”

“ Shall we read it ? ” he said softly. “ Somehow, I think she meant us to do that. Anyhow, the date is significant.”

“ We should read it if it was published,” I said.

“ Of course. And I have powers of discrimination as well as executive.”

He turned over the title-page and looked at Chapter I. He read a few lines, turned another page, and another, in rapid succession. I waited on his decision.

Suddenly he looked at me. Then he said, “ Readers of fiction have a bad habit, Rosaleen, of looking at the *end* of a story in order to see what finally happens to the hero and heroine in whom they may possibly be interested. I—am sorely tempted to commit such an outrage on author and subject for once. God forgive my temerity, or punish me as I deserve.”

“ But why do you want to know the end ? ” I asked.

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"Possibly because I am too interested in the beginning to command my soul in patience over—intermediate chapters—even if each is prophetic."

"Prophetic?"

"The whole book is a prophesy, or rather a clear foreseeing into possibilities from the standpoint of occurring facts. In other words, my child, this is *your* story, and—but for *that* I must look at the end or—wait. Which shall it be, Rosaleen? I am not by nature patient as you know."

"Do you mean to say——"

"I mean to say, that all the four years of your life and hers, in that grey house which sheltered both, has been written here. Forewarned, foretold, just as if she had known what was to happen."

I sprang up, breathless with excitement. How often had not that strange woman foretold tragedy, or sorrow, or disaster! Was it so strange, after all, that she had woven the facts around her into a fictional counterpart?

"Do you really mean it is of *us* she has written? My aunts, myself, *you*—are—are you in it?"

"I have not looked at the end, Rosaleen."

I went back to my chair. The mystery and sweetness of the twilight were about us. A bird's note sounded clear from a neighbouring tree. Above, the evening star shone in clear depths of hyacinth and violet. All sorts of thoughts struggled within my breast, and yet remained unspoken. A chain of suspense lay heavy on my heart. So often had her forewarnings been fulfilled. Did I—could I dare—learn of one that held my own fate as issue of its prophecy?

He spoke again. "I shall turn leaf after leaf of this last number, but I will not read them. Before I come to the end I will wait for your decision. Yes, or no. Somehow, I feel that *she* is not very far off to-night. Perhaps some fate—yours or mine—is trembling in the balance."

He began to turn the leaves, not swiftly, but with something reverent and gentle in his touch as of one who approaches sacred ground. With closed eyes and quivering pulses I sat back and listened to that rhythmic motion of the paper. To and fro, and

on and on the white leaves opened, fluttered, and fell back upon each other. But no decision would come to me.

I passed in swift review those vanished years. The trivial or important incidents of each. The sad fate of Aunt Joanna, the sin of Jasper Merivale, the cruelty and heartlessness of Fanny. I remember all I had told her of the Chevalier. Our first meeting, the Academy, the humours of Polyphemia, the strange education which had been my lot and my good fortune. Then I thought of that story of the violets. Of how it had led me to a discovery and ended in a tragedy—self-foretold.

She had known how near her own end was, and had resolutely shut her door to all sympathy as to all human aid. She had passed in silence and in mystery through those grey portals of the Hereafter. She had chosen to do so in a loneliness that had meant her life. And now, from out the shadows and the mystery, she seemed to speak to me again. She had left a last message between the white leaves of that human document.

I listened breathlessly as they turned and turned. He never spoke, nor did I. As the dusk deepened below, the sky above grew brighter. The moon was at the full, and soon would hang her golden lamp above the mountain-tops.

I thought to myself, "When the moon shows, I will speak."

But what should I say?

"Yes." That would mean to know—what? Fear, perhaps; the severing of joy from hope. The pale shadow of coming years.

"No." That would only mean temporary postponement, since if the book was published I should read it just the same. Then I remembered that the option of its publication lay with that silent figure who held it now. With the hands that turned and turned those leaves of Fate.

The bird had ceased to sing. The garden lay wrapped in silence and in shadow. And still the leaves turned, and still I listened, my eyes on those dusky heights above which my signal would arise.

Suddenly the air seemed to stir as with a fragrance, sweet and half-remembered. The fragrance of flowers one hides between

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a page of some beloved book. I sat up, and looked at the figure by my side.

"Violets!" I said.

The hand paused. He looked at me. "They are here, pressed between the two last pages."

"Is it the last—now?"

"Yes, Rosaleen."

A moment longer I hesitated. Then suddenly the moon rose, golden clear above the purple heights, and indecision vanished.

"*Turn it,*" I said breathlessly, and with hands clasped I waited until he should speak.

He read the page; it was a short one. I could see where the writing ended, and the white paper below. Then he closed the whole number in a sudden impulsive fashion. I looked up at him; he sprang to his feet and threw the packet on the grass.

"Ah!" he cried, "one should not tempt Fate! Think of the tremors and indecisions that went to make up this moment! And after all——"

I too, rose. I stooped and picked up those scattered numbers, without regard to their sequence. He stayed my hand.

"Don't look at that last page, Rosaleen. It is too wild a pr'ophecy; it holds too much. It is enlightenment and—it is tragedy, too! Wildest impossibility stares from its every phrase; confronts one with glories that blind, and dreams that are mad, and hopes that were softly folded into hopelessness before—before——"

"But—I thought it was my life, my fate of which she wrote?" I said.

"Yours—and mine, Rosaleen."

"*Ours?*" I breathed rather than spoke it, bewildered by some sense of unutterable sweetness that seemed to fill the air above and around me, and swoon into happy consciousness of joy but half revealed.

"Ah, my child!" he cried passionately, "it was no act or word of mine that would have done you any wrong, or set the Fool Errant as yet greater Fool before those radiant eyes. No! A thousand times no!" And he broke off and paced the grass

with rapid restless steps. "I—who have chased a chimera of Happiness to the Land of Shadows. I—to be confronted by a vision of Delight that would bewilder saner brains, and wiser too! And yet, a prisoner let into his prison yard is glad because God's sun is in the sky, and the breath of a world beyond those walls upon his brow! I—am such a prisoner; or was. God knows! I scarce can tell."

"But—why can you not tell?" I asked.

Then he laughed, and came to me, and caught my hands and looked down into my eyes with a look that answered me, though it was a look I had never seen in his before.

"Why—" he said softly. "*Why*—and yet again why? 'He either fears his fate too much,'—you know the rest."

"I know," I said. My heart was beating tumultuously. All the world of silence and of shadow swam to and fro in dizzy circles. And still he held my hand. A new and great bewilderment was in his face.

"If one could put back the clock! If I had one single thing to offer; but I have nothing, my dark Rosaleen, nothing——"

"You have—yourself, Master," said the "Dark Rosaleen."

"Now may the gods punish my temerity by stripes as countless as the ages"—he cried. "If I risk much to win—all. This is a dream too fantastic and overwhelming for mere mortal brains. It is a dream, is it not, my adorable child? A dream in an enchanted garden where magic waters spring from out the ground, and Minerva smiles her cold wise smile on the dreamers knowing that all the wisdom and all the gain of earth are not worth one kiss of one we love!"

"I think it is a dream," I said. "But it began in a garden—for me."

"And for me! Child, do you think I ever forgot your small shrinking figure, your wondering eyes; that hair like a night bird's plume. Wherever I went they shadowed my path and haunted my hours and brought me back to your side again. And with you I was happy, and the past forgotten, and oh—but it was sweet to mould you to my will and watch your bright intelligence leap to touch of my fantastic whims. Truly, Rosaleen, life has

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been good to me, and I am truly grateful but—I can't put back that clock, my child. How old do you think I am ?”

“ I never thought about your age,” I said. “ What do years matter when one is in good accord ?”

“ And you think we are that, Rosaleen ? In good accord ? By heavens, it is a phrase that commends itself ! And it is true. We have been the best of comrades, of friends. Was ever pupil so docile ; was ever listener so patient !”

“ But I loved to be taught ; and I love to listen—to you,” I added softly.

“ My child of grace and glory !” he said. “ You are a dangerous temptation, and you are too innocent to know it. I think it would content you if this charmed pause of life could continue. If we might meet and part with hope of other meetings, and other partings, as the years drifted agewards. But though I am a fool and a philosopher, I am a man, and I have a man's heart, and that is a selfish exacting thing, my child. It cries, ‘ the little more and—how much it is.’”

He dropped my hands and turned aside, and looked at that pile of manuscript lying on his chair.

“ You have not told me what she said, and you promised you would ?”

“ Read it for yourself, Rosaleen.”

I took up the numbers, and found the last, and turned to that final page. I read this :

“ She looked at him with her child's eyes. She turned to him with her woman's heart, and gave her life into his keeping. From the first hour of their meeting there had been no one worthy to compare with him—The Master.”

I remember that the paper fell from my hands to the chair. I remember the sound of rustling pages, the scent of violets pressed and withered, but sweet with hues of life and fragrance of spring to me. I remember a rush of tears and a sob, and the clasp of an arm tender, strong, protecting. And above all I remember words, broken and sweet, and for once simple of meaning.

“ Is it true, my dark Rosaleen ? A child's love, but a woman's heart for the Fool Errant, or for the man who loves you ?”

"For both ; for all ; for *you!*" I cried. "There has been no one else—there never could be anyone else to fill my life, and content it."

"*To fill your life,*" he echoed. "My child, that is to throw a grave responsibility on my unsteady shoulders. It is to take your youth and beauty and bright years and bind them to my own. It is to waken womanhood to its uttermost, and yet perchance fail to satisfy the woman. Are you sure, sweetheart, that you love me enough to trust me for all your future ? I, the vagrant, the wanderer, and oft-times the Fool, who has marched in and out of your youth by sheer impudence of his own personality ?"

Then I laughed. Happily and joyously I laughed, thinking of so much, and caring so little for aught he said to his own discredit.

"You are mocking me, Rosaleen. That is not kind."

"Mocking ? Oh—but how foolish you are ! There is no one I reverence, and—and——"

"Ah ! say it, Rosaleen !"

"*Love,*" I faltered. "As I reverence and *love* you."

He threw himself at my feet, he kissed my hands, murmuring what I know not of passion and extravagance and folly. But what did it matter what he did, what he said.

It only meant—himself.

To us later, came Aunt Theresa.

"I heard you talking, Chevalier ; or was it reading ? Are you still struggling with *Teufelsdröckh?*"

He laughed gaily. "Yes," he said. "Our hero has found he possessed a heart. And more, has given it to the keeping of an Air Maiden incorporated into reality by the spell of a garden. 'Thou too mayst love and be loved,' says Fate, 'and good heavens ! what a volcanic earthquake, what an all-consuming fire was kindled !' You will find that, or words to that effect, in chapter five. The chapter on Romance."

"Thank you for nothing," said Aunt Theresa. "I do not intend to addle my brains with Carlyle."

"Ah, tell her," I whispered. "She will be so glad."

And in some fantastic and utterly indescribable manner he

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told her that having begun my education he intended to finish it by making me mistress of his home and heart.

To say she was astonished is to say very little. But the plan of my life unrolled before her, and representing no parting, save that of a "right of way" commended itself by degrees.

When we were alone she said gently—"It is a little rash, you know, Rosaleen. You are so young."

"But so is he," I said. And then she laughed.

"In heart, yes. I think he will never be old."

"You said that long ago," I told her. "And it is quite true."

FINIS