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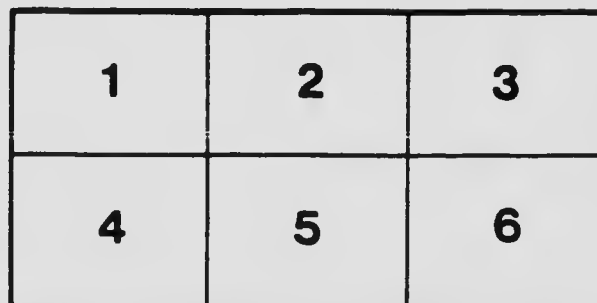
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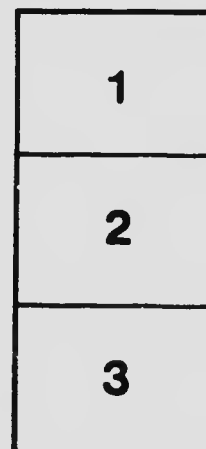
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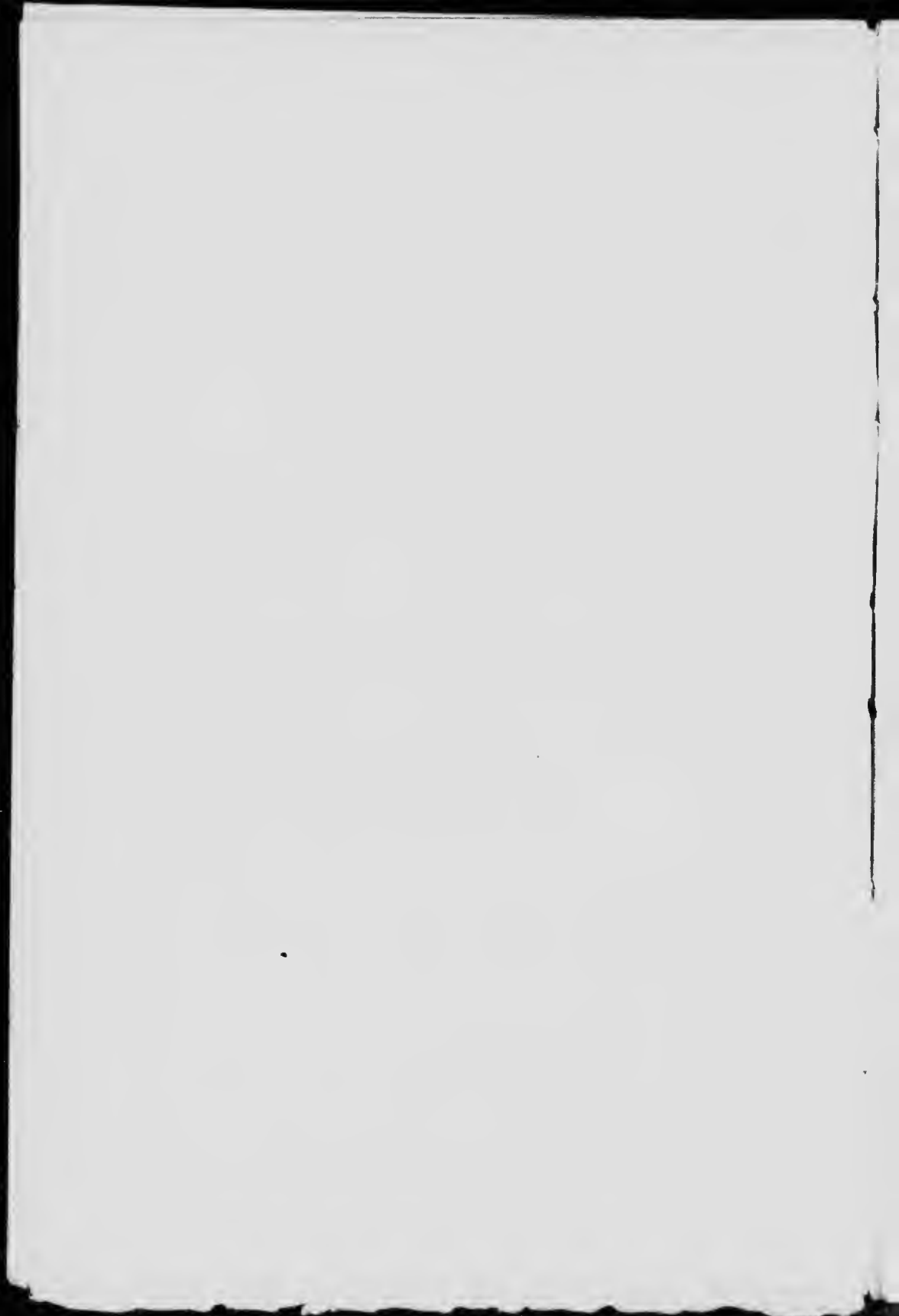
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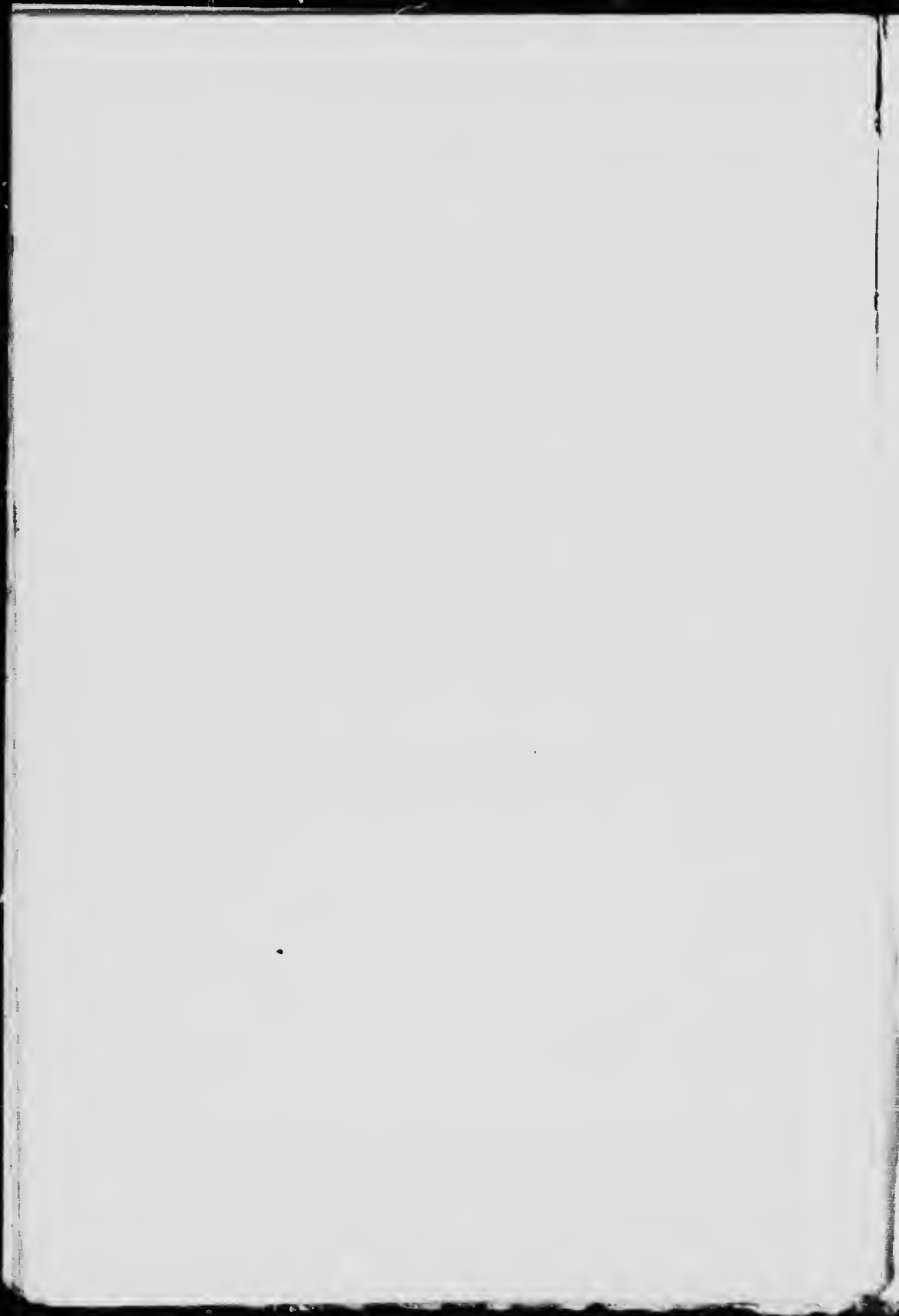
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CHAPTER I

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

"It is impossible to let out another inch. She must have a new skirt, I fear, Miss Pincham."

"That she must, 'm, what I can see of it. I thought as much when you says, 'Let down a bit more.' It come over me then as I let down the last hinch and false-hemmed it, back in the winter: and Miss German's grown somethink astonishing since then."

There rose from the ground, where she had been kneeling beside her daughter, a tall, fair woman, still young, but, as it seemed, altogether faded. You saw that she had been beautiful not so long ago. She was not beautiful now. Her forehead was puckered with lines of care, and she sighed at the prospect of the new skirt.

"How much ought I to give at Hitchcock's for a tweed, Miss Pincham?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, 'm, I couldn't 'ardly say. One-and-eleven-three, or perhaps two-and-six-three, double width. Three yards ought to do it, now skirts is so narrer."

Everything sold by Hitchcock cost something-or-other-three. Germaine used to ponder over the mystic affix, and wonder why. She was always wondering why. Her mother was unfortunately a woman who had never known the answer to any problem.

Germaine, at this crisis of her existence, was standing upon a dust-sheet, spread by Mrs. Lipscombe,

the landlady, upon the carpet, in order to "save work," as she put it, when dressmaking was about. The green cover had been removed from the table, which was strewn with needles, thread, pins, snippings of stuff, and a sewing-machine.

Trying on was, to Germaine, an ordeal. The look of Miss Pincham's skinny fingers, the feel of her long nails upon her victim's neck, as she hoisted, pulled, slid the cold scissors close against the wincing, warm flesh—these things were anathema to a sensitive temperament: not to speak of the further indignity of being called "Miss German."

It was a little front parlour over a saddler's shop in the small High Street of Padlerby. It represented dining-room, drawing-room, and boudoir to Mrs. Damien and Germaine.

It was not the only home which the child could remember. There were glimpses of something different—of a young father with laughing eyes and close-cropped, black hair—hair delicious to stroke, arms that were close and loving, and a tongue to answer the ceaseless questionings which arose for ever, like bubbles, to the surface of his little daughter's mind.

That lay in a past now shadowy. The present was just Padlerby and mamma, with occasional flashes of Aunt Rosalie and the motor.

Just now life was at its blackest, for Miss Pincham and being "tried on" were perhaps the only things for which Germaine felt a definite antagonism. Moreover, the present moment, she considered, had been unfairly sprung upon her, since she had had a new frock barely a month ago. Why another? Her old blue serge was nothing like worn out yet; her two pink cottons and her four brown holland "jumpers" had all been "dropped," as Miss Pincham called it, and lay in the drawer, darned and ironed, against the coming of the hot weather.

But though to-day might be dark, Germaine was

anything but an unhappy child. She was of the fortunate little band who go through life living a story. The actual was not the real to this leggy girl, standing awkwardly to be fitted, with wide eyes fixed upon the floating clouds outside the parlour window. She was, moreover, fortunate in the companionship of Marianne Lipscombe: for, unlike mamma, Marianne was capable of "pretending."

She was as ready to be a French marquise, ascending the scaffolding of the Terror, as she was to be Kate Barlass, with her arm through the staple, guarding the life of the King of Scotland. She could also be an Indian pathfinder; this in fact was the most successful of her impersonations. Out in the woods, she and Germaine were able to forget, for hours at a time, that they belonged to the twentieth century and lived over a shop in the High Street.

A question was perturbing the mind of Germaine, as she flinched from the manipulations of Miss Pincham. Was this unexpected new frock in any way connected with a letter which had arrived for mamma a few days previously? Letters for Mrs. Damien were rare, and were usually from Aunt Rosalie. This one had borne a different postmark.

"I should jest step round, 'm, and see what Hitchcock has," said the dressmaker, and she spoke quite eagerly. To make up new stuff is so much more straightforward than endless 'lettings-down.'"

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Damien in a worried voice. "You see, it will mount up so, what with boots, and——"

"Boots, mamma! I don't want boots!"

"Be quiet, Ermie. Uncross your feet, child, it sends one shoulder up into your ear. How can Miss Pincham possibly fit a bodice lining if you fidget?"

"Indeed, Miss German does get a dreadful fidget 'm. When I work for Lady Jane Sawyer's young

ladies, they stand as still as mice. *Their* ma wouldn't never allow no fidgeting."

"I hate Lady Jane Sawyer's children," said Germaine promptly. "I'm glad Lady Jane is not my mother. *How* I would cheek her!"

"Ermie, be quiet. At ten years old you ought to have more sense."

"Yes, indeed ma'am, and so she ought. Why, Lady Jane's heldest young lady——"

Mrs. Damien broke in here. Gentle and ineffectual as she was, she disliked the mention of the inevitable Lady Jane as fervently as her daughter did. "I think that will do, if you give it under the arm-hole a little, in the stitching," she said. "I am expecting Miss Carewe this afternoon, and Mrs. Lipcombe is kind enough to say you may work in her parlour. Ermie, put on your hat, we will go to Hitchcock's now."

"Aunt Rosalie coming this afternoon, mamma? How jolly," cried Germaine, cheering up at the good news.

Mrs. Damien hardly responded. She was wondering how best to apply to her sister for a further loan so soon after the last.

Emmeline Damien, mother of Germaine, was the younger daughter of one Matthew Carewe, a man who had become wealthy by means of his own capacity for business and tireless industry. This man had no son, and he set his heart upon a match between Emmeline and his partner, James Byles. Emmeline was a pretty girl, and, having many admirers, quite naturally did not desire to marry a young man who might be said to have no advantages except his business connection with her father.

Matthew Carewe was an ill-educated person, violent in his obstinacies. He had no breeding to moderate the harshness of his character. He went the wrong way to work with his timid daughter.

Intending to cow her into obedience, he succeeded in bringing her to the point at which the worm turns. The only time in her life when she was known to have made up her mind definitely, was when she determined to run away with Constant Damien, and carried out her intention shortly before the date fixed for her marriage with James Byles.

This was one of those marriages for which a reason is difficult to find. The only one that can be assigned is essential difference of temperament.

Emmeline was a Philistine, reared among Philistines. She had no imagination and very little intelligence. Constant Damien was the son of a French man of letters, who had been obliged to quit his native country under painful circumstances. He had been a wild revolutionary, very active during the Commune. His chief offence, however, had been a murderous assault upon a man who was his enemy. Forced to escape hurriedly, he had settled in London with his French wife; and in London his two sons, Constant and Rémy, were born. Constant followed his father's career of writing. At the time when he so incredibly fell in love with Emmeline Carewe he was a tolerably successful young journalist, though without any private means. His father had been some years dead. M. Damien had moved in a cultured circle and had many friends. His widow, at the time of Constant's imprudent elopement, was married again, to a Devonshire gentleman named Burnside.

To Constant's mother, the runaway match was even more distasteful than it was to his father-in-law. Her French ideas as to what is correct between parents and children caused her to look with horror upon such unsanctioned proceedings. She and her English husband, Mr. Burnside, were at the time passing a few weeks in London. She did not refuse to receive her son and his wife, but she showed marked dis-

pleasure, and lectured them severely upon their unfilial conduct. The visit confirmed her in her dislike of the marriage. She perceived clearly that the beautiful Emmeline was a fool. Constant was at that time so much in love that he had not discovered the fact. His mother knew well that disillusionment must come sooner or later.

Her son's demeanour was so impenitent, and, to her mind, so improper, that she felt justified in maintaining an attitude of disapproval.

During the next few years it is probable that her forebodings were justified, and that Constant did weary of his pretty piece of invertebrate folly, more especially as her continued estrangement from her father made Emmeline fretful and inclined to mourn over her disobedience. Then the young husband forgave her everything, for Germaine was born: Germaine, named after his mother—his own little daughter, with his own raven locks, his own ideality and vivacity.

His child was between four and five years old when he caught the chill which, coming after influenza, turned to pneumonia, and caused his death.

Emmeline Damien possessed a hundred a year of her own, inherited from her mother. When she became a widow, she sold her little house on Barnes Common, and came to Padlerby, the dull quiet town which lies about twenty miles from Carford, the city in which Matthew Carewe had amassed his fortune, and not much more than fifteen miles from Gray Ashtead, his country seat. At Padlerby she would be within reach of her sister; and she hoped that the extreme poverty into which she had fallen might soften her father's heart. Whether or no he received her letters, she could not tell. She only knew that he never answered them.

Rosalie, her unmarried sister, who lived at home, did once infringe the paternal command by bringing

Emmeline's name before him. She never repeated the experiment.

James Byles, within a year of Emmeline's elopement, had married a certain Miss Willis, a niece of Matthew's dead wife. They had one son, Pereivale, who, at the time when Germaine was standing on the dust-sheet in Mrs. Lipcombe's parlour, was a boy of fourteen, just leaving his preparatory school for Harrow.

Rosalie Carewe supplemented her sister's meagre means as best she could, assuming in return the right to bully a little, and to offer advice which Emmeline resented. It was Miss Carewe's opinion that Emmeline ought to do something for herself. She herself was convinced that no reconciliation was possible, and she could do but very little in the way of financial help, for her own allowance was not lavish. She thought her sister should face the situation. Emmeline was, however, obstinate with the unreasoning obstinacy of the weak.

Germaine, who in some uncanny fashion knew everything, knew that her mother was afraid of Aunt Rosalie. She herself had no such feeling. She liked her aunt, with a cool dispassionate liking, and welcomed the visits of the snorting car which seldom made the journey from Gray Ashted empty. Various delicacies, according to the time of year, were wont to be found in its recesses, and as they left Hitchcock's and walked on down the village to "Lacey's," Germaine was wondering if it would be fowls to-day.

Lacey's was the place of all others which Germaine loved to visit. It was the minute shop of the village shoemaker, who, like many of his calling, held advanced political opinions. He also, as it happened, cherished a strong fancy for Marianne Lipcombe. Thus, Germaine was often in his society. He talked to the two girls as he talked to none others of their sex. He would fire off at them the speech with

which he was to enliven the local Radical Club that evening. He had often heard tell of Constant Damien as a brilliant journalist upon the Radical side, and he looked upon his daughter as a martyr to a great cause, since her father contracted the chill of which he died, standing in Hyde Park, in rain and wind, to carry away a full report of some great speech of a party leader.

This morning, Mrs. Damien being present, only a wordless smile was exchanged between the friends, as Lacey arose from his bench and went to his shelves.

"I've got a pair of misfits here," he remarked, "as will suit Miss Ermie, or I am much mistaken. I made 'em for one of Lady Jane Sawyer's young ladies, but they've got no insteps, nor no shape to their feet, so I had 'em thrown back on my hands. Now then, missie, how's that? Pretty, ain't it? Fit her as if they was made for her, and half price to you, ma'am."

Mrs. Damien was the only person in the village whom Lacey addressed as "ma'am." It may have been compassion for her fallen fortunes, it may have been affection for Germaine, it may have been their connection with his Marianne. Whatever the cause, the result is certain. He said "ma'am" to the widow who lived in two rooms "over Lipscombe's," and left out all form of address when conversing with the vicar's wife or the redoubtable Lady Jane Sawyer.

As Germaine walked home, wearing the well-made little pair of boots, her mind was busy. She longed to stay behind and pour out to Lacey the mysterious circumstances of the day, with the desire of hearing his opinion. She knew, for her mother had told her, that her own grandfather lived in a house far larger than and with grounds ten times as extensive as Colonel Sawyer's. Now she was wearing boots actually made for one of the Sawyer children. Was it possible that she was going to see her grandfather? If so, what

would Lacey advise ? What attitude would he consider proper towards one so rich that manifestly he must be unjust and tyrannical ? He had often counselled her as to her bearing when in the society of the wealthy.

"Don't you mince matters," he was wont to say. "When you come face to face with wrong-doing, you up and testify. No matter if they jeer at you, silence you, punish you. You will have sown the seed, and one day, or more likely one night, the words will come home to 'em and grip 'em, and won't let go."

Far indeed was Mrs. Damien from guessing at the thoughts of the silent daughter at her side. One of her complaints respecting Germaine was that she was such a silent child.

"Ernie dear, I want you to go for a run with Marianne after lunch. You may come in at half-past three ; but I must see Aunt Rosalie for a while alone this afternoon."

CHAPTER II

AUNT ROSALIE

THE Gray Ashtead motor swept up to the door of the saddler's shop punctually at a quarter to three. Mr. Lipseombe hurried to the door to assist the great lady to alight, though she had two men in attendance.

Miss Carewe was like her sister, with the beauty left out. In place of it, she had determination of character. She was her father's daughter.

Her blond hair was still bright, her complexion fresh and unfaded; though the elder of the two sisters, she looked the younger.

"Well Emmie, how are you?" The sisters embraced. "Where's the child?"

"I sent her out for a while, Rosie. I wanted to talk to you privately."

The shrinking manner, the "please-don't-hit-me" attitude, told Miss Carewe that her sister was as usual in financial straits. With the best will in the world to help her, she could do but little, since her father allowed her a sum which left no great margin for bounty.

"As it happens, I too wanted to see you alone, Emmie," she said slowly. "It may perhaps seem cruel to tell you, but I think you ought to know. What is the use of your sitting here helplessly, giving Germaine no definite training? You must face the future. What are you going to do?"

"Is there—anything fresh?" faltered Emmie.

"Yes, the latest idea at Gray Ashtead is that

father thinks of adopting Pereivale Byles formally, and making him his heir on condition of his taking the name of Carewe."

Emmeline caught her breath in sharply. This seemed a final blow. She broke into a low sobbing. "Oh, if only my poor little Ermie had been a boy!"

"My dear, I believe we might have done anything if she had been a boy and had a fair complexion. But as she is! With all that black hair, and such a foreign look. . . . She isn't even pretty, you know, Em."

"No, she isn't," answered Emmeline hopelessly. "I know that. Father will never relent. The only hope for her comes from the other side of her family."

"Indeed! I never thought of them as likely to help," said Rosalie drily. "Do you even know where they are? And of whom do they consist?"

"I heard from Mrs. Burnside the other day," faltered her sister.

"Mrs. Burnside?"

"Constant's mother. She married a Mr. Burnside, you know. He was a widower, with one son. He is dead now, it appears, and she lives with the son—her stepson."

"Does she offer any help?"

"She—she wants to make Ermie's acquaintance. Oh, Rosie, I do wish the poor thing was better-looking!"

"Much depends on appearance, doesn't it?" replied Miss Carewe thoughtfully. "Much more than one commonly believes. However, being so dark, her grandmother may think she takes after the Damiens, you know."

"Yes, there is that," was the reply, with a faint stirring of hope.

"May I see the letter?"

It was placed in her hands. She drew it from its cover, and read:

" FENDALLSCOMBE,
June 3rd.

" MY DEAR DAUGHTER-IN-LAW,

" Without doubt you will be surprised to hear from me after so long a silenee. Truth to tell, I should have written last winter, but by ill-fortune I had mislaid your address.

" I have now just found it, and hasten to express my hope that you are in good health, as also your young daughter.

" It was the intention of my late husband, the exeellent Mr. Burnside, to undertake the education of my grand-daughter, when she should be of an age to leave her mother. This intention his son, Mr. Miles Burnside, tells me he is ready to fulfil.

" I believe that poor Constant's child is now ten years old, and I should have written sooner. Pardon this delay, whlich I have in part explained. My bereavement rendered me for a time unable to consider other matters.

" May I ask if you will send your daughter to us, upon a long visit? My intention in begging this favour from you is that in this manner I shall be able to form an opinion of her abilities, her tastes, and so on, and shall then be in a position to judge of the kind of education best suited to her.

" We live here in a beautiful spot, the air is fine, and the child can have plenty of cream and all such food as children need. She can ride the pony and be much in the open air.

" Hoping for a favourable reply,

" I remain,

" Your mother-in-law,

" GERMAINE MARIE NICOLINE BURNSIDE."

" H'm!" said Miss Carewe thoughtfully. " She doesn't ask you, Em."

" No. She never liked me," replied Emmeline.

"My father looked down on Constant's family for their poverty, and they looked down on us for our want of descent."

"Well, it seems to me that this letter is a heaven-sent way out of a difficulty. Since father took up this notion about Pereivale, I have felt quite in despair about you two. If Ermie goes to this place, and creates a good impression, it may make all the difference to her future."

"Yes. That is what I thought," replied her sister sadly. "She is a nice child, you know, Rosalie, though she is not pretty——"

"My dear, she is a most interesting child. I like her—I should say, I love her. But she is not father's style, either in looks or manners. She may be, probably is, far more a Damien than a Carewe. Fathers nearly always transmit to their daughters, and vice versa."

"I have managed to see that her clothes are tidy," went on Emmie mournfully. "But how I can find the money for her railway ticket, unless you——"

"Oh yes, I can manage that all right. Don't worry," said Rosalie promptly. "Let her be well fitted out. Money spent on her now may turn out a good investment."

"If they will send her to a good school, she might grow less—less unlike other children," said Germaine's mother slowly. "I have never understood her."

"She has not been taught much, has she?" asked the aunt.

"She can read and write and work, and do easy sums. That is about all I have taught her, but she knows—well, Rosie, you would think I exaggerated if I were to tell you what she knows. The entire history of Europe, it seems to me."

"I know she is full of odds and ends of weird knowledge. I always remember that day you had to go to the dentist, and I came over to spend the day with

her. I took occasion to lecture her for some bit of childish naughtiness. She listened in pensive silence, and after a pause asked gravely, 'Aunt Rosalie, what is your opinion of the Anglo-Saxon period?'

They laughed together.

"I can't think where she gets it all, unless it is from Marianne Lipsecombe. I know she reads more than most girls of her age," said Mrs. Damien. "Here she comes, up the street. She is so lanky! She has outgrown all her old childish prettiness!"

The door was opened, and Germaine, running in, went eagerly to her aunt, and put her hands in hers. "I'm so glad to see you," she said rather breathlessly. "We should have been in before, but we have been in Sherwood Forest, stalking deer, and we didn't notice the time."

"There's no clock in the forest," quoted Miss Carewe. "Well, and so I hear great news about you, miss!"

"What, has mamma told you about the new boots?"

"Aye, and greater things than these——"

"No, Rosalie, I told her nothing until I had talked to you."

"Tell me, tell me," urged Germaine vehemently, clinging to her aunt.

"How would you like to go and see your father's people—to make acquaintance with the Damiens?"

Germaine stood up and looked earnestly at her aunt. Her large, deep-set eyes were not black, as her father's had been, but a clear grey, ringed with darker colour. They were eyes which seemed to see through things, rather than to look at them. Just now they looked Miss Carewe through and through. "The Damiens," she slowly said. "What Damiens are there?"

"Your father's mother—your grandmother, Mrs. Burnside."

"There is Rémy too," said mamma. "I do not know where he is, or what he is doing. He used to be a charming boy, ten years ago. Your Uncle Rémy."

The question which tingled upon Germaine's tongue, "Why do our relations on both sides never come to see us?" remained unasked. In her experience, her mother was always unequal to the task of answering inquiry upon any subject. She would submit the difficulty to Lacey later on.

"I should like to see my grandmother," she made answer. "Also my uncle. Where do they live?"

"Grandmother lives in Devonshire, in a fine old house called Fendallseombe. She married an Englishman after your grandfather's death, but he also is now dead. She lives with her stepson, who is, I presume, unmarried."

"It won't be a very lively family party for the child, will it?" asked Miss Carewe suddenly. "I wish there were children her own age."

"Oh, I don't like children, they are too idiotic," said Germaine suddenly and vehemently. "When I went to tea at the Vicarage, I said to Reggie, 'Let's play Quentin Durward,' and he said, 'What's that?' So I said, 'Well, if you don't know that, Ivanhoe would do'; and then he said he had never heard of Ivanhoe. And he's twelve. I don't think *anything* of children."

"My dear, it's time you went and learnt to be a child yourself," said Miss Carewe. "Let us hope that there are plenty round Fendallseombe, that they will all be invited to play with you, and that none of them has ever read anything but *Alice in Wonderland*."

Germaine was silent. She was reflecting that she would have to part from Marianne and Lacey. This was a drawback. But the thirst for adventure which

filled her soul still dominated her desire. She wished to go out into the world, what things soever she might leave behind. There must be great happenings everywhere except in Padlerby. To go and meet them seemed an alluring prospect.

CHAPTER III

POLITICS IN PALLERBY

"So Marianne tells me we're goin' ter lose yer for a bit," remarked Lacey, drawing a new thread along his lump of rosin. "Goin' to visit yer grandmother, seemin'ly."

"Yes, that's right. My father's mother, Mrs. Burnside."

"Thought yer father's name was Damien?"

"Yes, it was. My grandmother married an English husband after that."

"Bad exchange," observed Lacey, shaking his head. "The French are twice as advanced, twice as enlightened as what we are. A woman as had had a French husband would find it hard to be content with an English one, my way of thinking."

"An English husband would be good enough for me," put in Marianne coquettishly. She wore a pink sun-bonnet, and her nut-brown hair was all fuzzy above her freckled brow. She looked very nice.

"Go easy, my dear," said Lacey, patiently, lifting his keen hatchet face a moment from his work to contemplate her. "Marry one of the usual sort, would yer? One that 'ud swear if he caught yer with a book in yer hand, and tell yer to go get his dinner? One that 'ud jump down yer throat if yer ventured to give him yer opinion on this or that? One that 'ud spend his evenings in the pub., and come home



boozed, Saturdays? That's your Englishman, is it, Pollicy?"

"No, 'tain't, but there's more sorts than that," replied Marianne mischievously.

"I don't," went on Lacey, after a short pause—"I don't rightly understand about this family of missie's. I always believed that old Mr. Carewe east off his daughter because she married beneath her."

"No, dear, that ain't right, not exactly," Marianne instructed him. "It was money they hadn't got, the Damiens I mean. Father went up to the Free Library, and got out the book of County Families, and the Burnsides are there, right enough."

"'Tisn't a South Country name," observed Lacey.

"Tom, you're wonderful, so you are! No, the name of the family was Fendall, for generations and generations—Fendalls of Fendallseombe. But at last there were no males left to carry it on, and all went to a daughter, who married Alexander Burnside, Esq., of Dunlee in the county of Northumberland, in the year 1694."

"Oh, Marianne, you never told me that," cried Germaine, deeply interested.

"It was desired that the Burnsides should take the name of Fendall," continued Marianne, determined to impart all her knowledge, "but they was too proud of themselves for that. So Burnside it has been ever since."

"Proud of themselves no doubt they would be," said Lacey, in tones of such biting irony that Germaine felt sorry for the Burnsides. "A squire, that's what they call this fine gentleman. There's no worse breed on the face of this wicked earth for arrogance and hardness of heart, and grinding the faces of the poor."

"So you think," asked Germaine, with a fearful

joy, "that this Mr. Burnside that I am going to see grinds the faces of the poor?"

"I haven't a doubt but what he does. You go there, and you'll find him living like a king, with a staff of servants to saddle his horses, and a staff of keepers to shoot down the poor man that tries to snare a rabbit in his grounds. You'll find him living in a stately mansion, and his tenants huddled in a corner of their miserable shanties, trying to get out of the way of the leak in the roof! He lives on the rent they pay! You'll find him talking fair to the poor man's daughter and marrying the Duchess's youngest. Then he'll join the parson in harrying the first poor girl out of the parish which is too good for the likes of she. I know yer squires, blest if I don't. Hell's full of 'em."

"Do you really, seriously, think that Squire Burnside is like that?" asked Germaine, hardly above her breath.

"Almost certain to be. Madam very likely gives away skim milk for the babies, and bone-broth to the sick. Flannel petticoats too at Christmas time, and comforters. Oh, Lord! It makes my blood boil to talk of it! But you recollect, missie, don't let him come over you. I've learnt you better; don't you be taken in."

"I won't," the child fervently assured him. "I never forget what you say, Lacey. But now I want you to answer another difficulty of mine. Nobody has ever told me, and I am always wondering, why do mamma and I live without ever seeing any of my relations except Aunt Rosalie? There is Grandfather Carewe, and a lot of cousins called Willis and Byles. Then there is Grandmother Burnside and my Uncle Rémy. Why do none of them come to see us, or ask us to visit them?"

"Because, my lamb, they belong to the upper classes," replied Lacey, with a deadly emphasis.

"They belong to the upper classes, and you have no money. Why should they come and see you? There is nothing to be got out of visiting poor relations—unless you had a photo took of you adoin'g it, and put in the *Mirror* for all to admire."

"That isn't the reason, Tom," put in Marianne. "You may think so, and I don't deny but what it looks like it. But father says this is the way of it. Old Mr. Carewe is violent and obstinate, everybody knows it—you can't reason with him. He was set on Mrs. Damien marrying Byles—you know Byles—"

"Ay, blast him! I know his smug face on political platforms. Many's the time I've heckled him till he was fit to burst with spite at me!"

"Tom, do you forget I have told you never to swear when Miss Ermie is by?"

"Well then, you shouldn't talk about Byles."

"I won't. But I do have a bit of pity in the corner of my heart for Mr. Carewe. He worked hard for his money, whatever you say, Tom. He never had no capital, not to begin with; and he never had no son, neither. Do you wonder he wanted something of his own flesh and blood to carry on the business? Ain't that human?"

"It ain't civilized. Ask Bax. Ask Karl Marx. Your own child ought not to be no more to you than anybody else's—let alone Byles's!"

"Ah, my boy, you wait till you have one of your own," said Marianne softly; and then, afraid of what she had said, she rose abruptly and remarked that they must be getting home.

"But, Marianne, he hasn't explained why my father's mother never has been to see us, and never has written until now."

"Why should she, then?" asked Marianne brusquely. "Her son married against her wish every bit as much as the other way round. He married a lady whose father had piles and piles of money. It

was their place to look after you, not hers, for she had nothing of her own—it all belonged to her second husband, who was not your father's father. There's sense for you."

"If we was governed right, there would be no need for doles," began Lacey, in his platform manner. "The State 'ud see to it as the widow and the fatherless were not left destitute. More especial when the father died a martyr to his duty. You mark my words, missie dear, if you are going to build on anything that any squire may dole you out, you are going to be badly let in. A millowner is bad enough, hard enough, but a squire—oh, Lord!"

Germaine, with carmine cheeks, stood drinking in his eloquence.

It was a terrible state of things, this in which one lived. What ought to be done, what could one do, being a helpless child? Perhaps, if she were bravely to tackle this squire, this insensate monster, sunk in generations of privilege and callousness, she might conceivably help on the millennium one tiny step?

Her hands were clenched and her face aglow as she stood by Lacey to bid him farewell. "I'll remember," she told him, in a voice that trembled, not with fear, but with righteous indignation. "I won't mince matters, I promise you, Lacey. If I get half a chance—I'll testify!"

Marianne put her strong young arms round the frail shoulders of the young disciple. "Fine you'll do," she said, with an affectionate hug. "I shall miss you every hour of the day, that I shall. Tom'll have to lend me twice as many books as usual, to keep me from moping: and when you come back, we'll have a tea-party, won't we? Tom'll have to leave his work to come and hear all your adventures."

"Yes," returned the child eagerly. "I am going to keep a kind of diary, Tom, and send it in chunks to Marianne. She may read most of it to you. If

there is a very private bit, I will put it in red ink brackets, as of course, girls do have *some* secrets from men, don't they?"

Lacey raised his humorous, strong face with a kind smile.

"Shouldn't wonder," he said, in evident relish of her naïveté.

So it was arranged; and the three friends separated, without any distrust of the future, which was to scatter their plans to the four winds.

CHAPTER IV

FENDALLSCOMBE

It was a mere bundle of nerves which sat by itself in a corner of the compartment during the last stage of its long journey.

Rosalie Carewe sent Mansfield, her own maid, in charge of her young niece as far as Exeter, at which point the guard undertook to take Germaine from the train at Newton Abbot and put her into the branch train for Gaynton Road.

For a week past the excitable child had been strung to a high point of tension. Her forthcoming journey was a thing unprecedented in her history. The forebodings of Lacey were a weight upon her spirits. His worst fears concerning the snares of luxury awaiting his pupil seemed to be confirmed by the "bespoke order" given him by Miss Carewe, who bestowed two charming pairs of beaded shoes, one white, one bronze, upon her niece.

The parting with her mother caused Germaine's tears to flow, for her heart was very soft. The fact, of which she herself was all unconscious, that she had never depended upon her mother, either for amusement or instruction, dried her tears speedily, and enabled her to enjoy some part of her journey very much.

When Exeter was passed, there yawned suddenly a gulf of loneliness, a sense of being finally severed from experience, which had not visited her while

the demure figure of Mansfield occupied the same compartment. At this point, however, the beauties of Nature came to the rescue. The journey past Dawlish and Teignmouth—the path of the train seeming to be actually through the waters of the rippling ocean—was an experience of a totally new kind. The child had never seen the sea.

The sight brought a sob to her throat, a melting to her heart.

The sinking sun increased the redness of the rock. All creation seemed to her to have put on new colour. The poetry, the nameless longing in the childish heart, overfilled it, and the young traveller sat with streaming eyes in her empty earriage, because the world was not only so great, but so unexpectedly beautiful.

Such emotion is exhausting. After Newton Abbot came reaction. No ideas would now dwell with her, but just the horror of encountering strangers, and the unreasoning panic which is often induced by unusual fatigue.

The train performed this little journey leisurely. Gaynton Road, when at last it came, was a tiny wayside station, smothered in climbing roses. The guard remembered his instructions, and lifted her from the compartment, or it is likely that she would have been carried on beyond her destination, for by that time she was paralysed with fear.

She searched round a little wildly for a glimpse of anybody who should look as one's grandmother might conceivably look: but the only person on the platform was a man who seemed unnaturally huge—a man with a gruff voice and a rough, blond beard, who strode up to her and asked in a bantering kind of way whether she were Mademoiselle Damien.

She could hardly answer "Yes," for the pulsing of her heart.

"So far so good! Here you are. The thing now

is to get you home," observed the giant gravely. "Not afraid of horseflesh, I hope?"

For the moment the egregious notion that he was suggesting horseflesh as an article of diet came to her, and turned her sick and faint.

"Who are you?" she just managed to pant out, with shaking voice, and recoiling from his outstretched hand.

"Now I've frightened her," he remarked to the amused porter. "I'm not used to children. Come, little lady, I shan't bite. I only want to pop you in my trap and drive you home to Grand'mère. Won't you come?"

The sound of Grand'mère was reassuring. After a short hesitation, she laid her hand in his enormous one, and he was leading her through the little wicket to the road without, when her shy voice enquired, "Is my luggage safe? Mamma said I was not to forget."

"Oh yes, that's all right. Tucker will put that up behind," he answered amiably enough.

"I thank you," replied Germaine, so politely that her escort chuckled audibly.

He picked her up like a baby, and seated her in the high dog-cart behind the fretful mare, whose head was held by a young groom.

The trunks and the groom were bestowed behind, the big man lit a pipe and took his seat beside her; and they shot off down a lane, deep cut between banks of fern, the porter calling out a friendly

"Good evening, squire."

"*Squire!*" She was then in the hands of the enemy! This was the man who ground the faces of the poor, who lived in comfort on the unjust rents extorted from starving cottagers—who oppressed the hireling in his wages.

Germaine turned timidly to see whether his serfdom had cut deep traces on the countenance of the groom.

He was sitting with his arms folded, gazing along the road they had traversed, and his profile, she thought, looked sad and stern, though he seemed well nourished.

She was afraid she should never dare to charge this terrifying personage at her side with his misdeeds. The thought of her promise to Lacey began to torment her. After a long silence, which she never thought of trying to break, the squire, looking down sideways at the lowered brim of the straw hat, asked her if she liked driving.

"I have never driven, except in a motor," returned Germaine, lifting her face, but lowering it again because she disliked looking at him.

"A motor! We don't run to motors at Fendallscombe," he replied with amusement. "Horses must seem a poor show to you after motors—eh?"

No reply.

"I needn't be afraid of going too fast for you—eh?"

"No, thank you."

He decided that the child, in spite of her curiously impressive face, was not interesting. He had no experience to enable him to make allowance for loneliness and weariness unutterable. Moreover, the child beside him bore a strong family resemblance to the person who was his thorn in the flesh—a resemblance which by no means endeared her to him.

He made no further efforts to converse, and was glad when at last the lodge gate was reached.

Mrs. Yeo came out to unfasten the gate, with a beaming smile of greeting. She had been married to Yeo the groom about four weeks, and she wore an expression of great happiness. Seeing her prettiness and her blushes, Germaine wondered if she were one of the unhappy girls to whom the squire made love before becoming engaged to a lady of his own rank.

"Hallo, Kitty," said the squire, "how's the scullery tap?"

"Working beautiful, sir, thank you kindly, sir."

"And the new copper?"

"Been using of it to-day, sir, and it's a very great convenience, so it is."

"Mind you don't get the pipe stopp'd up," he advised her, with a friendly nod, as he drove on.

They were now traversing a grass park, with clumps of trees. Soon they approached a stream, and crossed a pretty, ivy-mantled bridge. On the hillside facing them, not very high up, was an old grey house, its oriels and gables, its dripstones and mullions, showing it to date from early Stuart days.

"You had better ring, Yeo, and then Madam will know we have arrived," said the squire, as he checked the mare at his own door. Yeo did as he was bid, then took the mare in charge, while Germaine was lifted down and led into the oak-panelled hall.

How the picture of that hall persisted in the mind of the child through all her future years! There was a big hearth fronting her, filled now with flowering boughs of blossoming things—escallonia, weigelia: before the hearth, upon a shabby skin rug, lay an enormous dog, a Scotch deerhound. He rose, with a glad whimper, at sight of his master; and the squire, fearing lest the strange little girl might be frightened, bid him curtly, "Lie down, Marquis," a command instantly obeyed by the mighty creature with humblest obedience. Even in her shyness and exhaustion, Germaine had time to think how everyone cringed before this precious squire!

No staircase was visible within the hall, but before the visitor had got over her bewilderment, a door just like the rest of the panelled wall, opened quickly, and two people came through it.

Mrs. Burnside—or Madam, as all the country people called her—was the first. She was a frail little old

lady, upright and active, with dark eyes which still flashed, and white hair becomingly arranged under her widow's cap. She wore a dress of black *moiré antique*—Germaine never saw her in any other—with a fichu of lace or net.

"Have you brought her, Miles?" she asked, in a voice which struck a responsive chord somewhere very deep down in Germaine's heart.

With a swift movement, the old lady seated herself in a chair which stood near, drew the child towards her, and with one hand pulled off the wide-brimmed straw hat. Then, passing an arm about her, she held her a little away from her, devouring her face with an expression upon her own very touching to witness. It was as though she recognized something which had been lost to her for long years.

"My little one! My Constant's daughter! Oh, *mon fils, mon fils!*" she faltered; and the words broke into a sob.

The child also burst into tears. Flinging her arms impetuously round her grandmother, she clung to her, and for a few minutes they wept together, the squire standing meanwhile, half amused, half touched, looking on.

An elderly woman, who had entered with Madam stood behind her chair with an expression between smiles and tears.

"Compose yourself, madame, compose yourself," she said haltingly, in English: then, breaking into her mother tongue, she whispered urgently "*N'attristez pas le pauvre p'tit chou, elle doit avoir peur de tous ces étrangers.*"

"Strangers! *Mais, Espérance!*—my little sweet, thou art not afraid of Grand'mère?"

"No! No! I love you!" sobbed her granddaughter, clinging to her.

"What is thy name, my treasured one?"

"Ger—Ger—Germaine!"

"Do you hear, Espérance? Germaine! She has my name! Her father called her after me! Oh, she is all mine! Why have I not sooner had this great pleasure?"

"You think her like her father?" asked the squire, evidently pleased at her pleasure. "I thought her like Rémy, myself."

"She is like him, but far more like Constant! The mouth, the eyes! Oh, my baby, my dear one!"

Thus cherished, Germaine closed her eyes, and crept ever nearer to the shelter of this wonderfully found relative. Accustomed as she was to hear Aunt Rosalie fretfully say how unlike she was to the Carewes, and what a calamity her dark colouring was, she had been saddened at times by the knowledge of her own plain looks. Here, however, there was no doubt of her pleasing. She felt like a little storm-tossed boat which has reached haven. Consciousness began to slip from her.

"She is tired to death," said Espérance reproachfully. "Let me carry her upstairs, madame, and put her to bed. She can eat her supper before she falls asleep."

"I'll carry her," said the squire, picking up the half-slumbering child in his arms.

This was, however, too much for the courage of Germaine. She was not too deeply asleep to realize who held her, and with a stifled cry she wriggled herself free, showing a strength and determination for which the young man had not been prepared. Once on the ground she darted to Espérance and seized her hand firmly in both her own.

"Ah, my little one, do not be ungrateful to Mr. Burnside. Were it not for him, you could not have come to me," said her grandmother gently.

Germaine, however, was at the extreme limit of her self-control. She hid her face against Espérance like a baby, and shivered with hysterical dislike.

The words of Laeey were beginning to bear their inevitable fruit. In this house, where lived her beloved grand'mère, and Espérance to whom she went naturally as though she had known her from infancy, the squire stood apart, alone, someone who did not belong to Germaine's narrow circle of intimate friends.

He laughed as she was led upstairs and away—the nervous laugh of a very young man who is a little hurt and wishes to make light of a child's unevaluated discourtesy. The laugh sounded mocking and heartless to her ears.

She was but half conscious of the little white chamber, with moss green carpet, into which she was led. She stood as in a trance while skilful hands undressed her, and a cooing voice told her that in former years those same hands used to disrobe *cher papa*, and Uncle Rémy.

She was thinking that she had come to the giant's castle; and though there were many kind people in it, the probability was that in the end the giant would get her somehow—get her and gobble her up.

When the old nurse and the child had disappeared, Madam rose from her chair, and went up to the squire, who had flung himself into a seat and was looking at the letters which had come by the second post.

"Many, many thanks, Miles, for bringing me my child," said she gratefully.

"That's all right," replied Miles amiably. "Shy little beggar. Seemed to take to you all right, though."

"Rémy will delight in her," said Madam in a voice of satisfaction.

The squire's face changed. "Ah!" he said, "What's he doing with himself to-day?"

"I have not seen him since lunch."

Madam spoke with a look of anxiety, an uneasiness, a desire to placate. Her stepson drew his tobacco pouch from his pocket and began slowly to fill his pipe.

There was a pause.

"I do not think he has gone to the Brooklands?" said Madam at last, almost timidly. "They are not coming down until next week, possibly later."

"No?" The monosyllable had an ironic intonation.

"His book is not ready for publication yet, Miles. He will take it to town as soon as it is. Meanwhile, the country, this lovely weather, is very good for him, is it not?"

"I'm not sure," was the brief reply; and the speaker unfolded the paper, as though to decline further conversation.

Madam lingered a moment, as if hoping he would say more. He did not, and, after a while, she shrugged her thin shoulders expressively and, turning, went out of the hall.

CHAPTER V

UNCLE RÉMY

WHEN Germaine's eyes unclosed next morning, she found herself in a new world. There were none of the usual well-known cheerful noises which greeted her at home—no clattering of milk carts down Padlerby High Street, no postman's knock approaching gradually and waxing louder at each door—no friendly interchange of greeting among the various errand boys, going to their work.

She awoke late, so the birds had finished their morning chatter. A spacious silence reigned everywhere. That same idea—of unwonted space—was suggested by her bedroom. It was not large, but it belonged to a date at which rooms were planned harmoniously, windows, doors, grates, and cupboards so proportioned that a restful feeling of there being room enough for everything pervaded the place. The panelled walls were of a mellow whiteness, the furniture was upholstered in chintz. There were two windows—high, dignified windows, put in about the time of Charles the Second—with deep window-seats, and a writing-table standing in a good light. Near the little bed on which she lay was a *prie-dieu* against the wall, with a crucifix and a rosary hung above it.

These things the child lazily noticed as she lay, wondering at the different aspect which life assumed in these new surroundings. Lacey and Marianne seemed very far away. Mamma had almost ceased to exist.

The door opened without noise, and Espérance came in. She bore upon a tray a tumbler of foamy milk, warm from the cow, which she bade the child drink. Her manner was so simple and motherly, that Germaine had the feeling of having always known her.

She brought big towels and a vast can of hot water, which she poured into the tin bath. She proceeded to bathe and dress Germaine as if she had been four years old instead of ten. The child assured her that she was used to doing everything for herself—mamma only brushed her hair: but Espérance said it was best for the young to have their toilette superintended. Apparently it was a relief to her to find her mistress's granddaughter clean, and passably well-nourished, though she was certainly thin.

Her new nurse was very particular about the due saying of prayers. This was an innovation. As a rule, Germaine knelt beside her bed, recited the Lord's Prayer and a short petition for her mother and herself, and jumped to her feet. It was as mechanical as brushing your teeth. The old Frenchwoman would not have this. She made her pupil kneel at the *prie-dieu*, and produced a little book of devotions which raised feelings of rebellion in the young heart. Lacey said religion was the refuge of the weak—of those who could not be moral and lead good lives without being propped up from outside. The higher kind of people, so he had taught Germaine, ought to have enough strength of character to do without such aid. She dare not say any of this to her new preceptress. Somehow, she felt for the very first time in all her life, in this woman's presence, as though God were something real, tremendously powerful, and beneficent, and not the mere abstraction she had previously believed Him to be.

As she bent her knees upon the faldstool, and looked at the crucifix, a new awe took possession of

the young soul. An unformulated wonder filled her, which, could it have been disentangled and written down, would have amounted to a speculation as to whether it were possible that God was more immanent in certain places than in others. Was He nearer at Fendallseombe, in the quiet, the clean, the calm, than at Padlerby, in the crampedness, the bustle, the sordid routine of petty trade?

Had Lacey, she wondered, ever experienced that sensation of a brooding presence which to her imagination filled this sunny room?

Having slept late, since *Espérance* would not awaken her, she was not in time for family prayers. The old nurse, therefore, accompanied her to the door of the dining-room, and saw her safely in. Madam never appeared downstairs for this British meal, taking her own toast and coffee in her chamber above. There was nobody in the big dining parlour when Germaine entered, except the squire, enwrapped in the *Times*, seated at one end of the table with Marquis under his chair.

"Hallo," he said, "how are you, Pixie?"

Germaine halted, looking at him without shyness, but with steady dislike. "My name is not Pixie," she said scornfully.

"Then it ought to be. You are just like one."

"What is a Pixie?"

"You will know when you have been a bit longer in Devonshire. There is a little mound in this very park where they dance on moonlit nights. Sit down now, and have breakfast. I hope you brought an appetite with you to Fendallseombe?"

She sat down uncomfortably in the place indicated, while her host uncovered a dish, helped her lavishly to porridge, added a heaping spoonful of Devonshire cream, with sugar, and placed it before her.

Germaine had never seen either porridge or clotted cream in her life. She looked upon the strange fare

with wonder and dread. It never occurred to young Burnside that a child would begin her breakfast otherwise than with porridge. He returned to his seat, having done his duty by his visitor, and she sat staring upon the untried mess and wondering if she dare venture to taste it.

At the moment, a voice was heard upon the terrace without—a tenor voice, carolling gaily—

“*Oh, le cœur de ma mie est si p'tit, p'tit, p'tit, p'tit!*” . . .

Miles Burnside's brows contracted irritably, but he did not look up, as the window was pushed open and a young man wearing a white flannel shirt and trousers, with an old morning coat, walked gaily in. At sight of the child at the breakfast table, he stopped short, and threw up his hands in a gesture which was French.

“*Com d'un nom, voici ma nièce—ma petite nièce à moi!*” he cried, “*Embrasses-moi donc, petite brunette aux yeux gris!*”

Again there came to Germaine that strange touching of some deep spring of being which had assailed her yesterday when she met her grandmother. This, however, was stronger, more insistent. Memory leaped up in a flame. She recalled her father, of whom she rarely thought. Gladly, without hesitation, she threw herself into the young man's embrace. Rémy felt himself hugged close, clipped by young energetic arms. He responded with a burst of real affection.

In Germaine's mind there was a picture of a breakfast table, so high that one could hardly see over its edge—of somebody who sat beside it, and of a little voice which pleaded, as its owner was raised to her father's knees, for—“*Tartine à confiture, dada!*”

She had forgotten her French now. Rémy soon found that it was of no use to try to speak to her in

that tongue. Yet the cadence of it was to her like the voice of home.

If she could not speak French, however, she found her tongue in English, quickly enough. In five minutes they were friends. She had confided her fears of the porridge, had been advised to make trial, and had found it surpassingly good. The squire listened, a little grimly, to the eager talk. In spite of her north-country English blood, he told himself the child was every inch a Damien.

"What are you doing with yourself to-day, Rémy?" he asked curtly, during a momentary pause in the chatter.

"I?" said Rémy, looking up with a smile. "I can hardly do better than show the child round and make her feel at home, can I?"

"Very good," was the reply, after a moment's hesitation.

"I suppose I may put her on the old pony if she likes to try?"

"Yes. I see no objection to that." It sounded grudging.

"Can't leave the poor mite to her own devices until she feels quite at home here, can we?" asked Rémy sweetly.

"I was told that you intended a visit to London, with the manuscript of your book, in order to interview a publisher."

"I have decided that the final chapters must be rewritten."

"Again?"

"Again; and if needful, again and again."

"It ought to be very good indeed by the time it is done," remarked Miles in an expressionless voice.

"It shall be as good as I can make it."

"The public," observed his step-brother, "is anxious to know just how good that is."

Rémy laughed pleasantly. "I don't think irony

is your strong point, old man," he said with determined good humour.

"I wish I knew what yours is."

"The care of infants is one thing I believe I might be good at, in time. I am going to practise on Germaine. Niece of mine, will you teach me how to play?"

The child's face glowed. "Do you mean real games—games like Robin Hood and Columbus, and the Last of the Mohicans?"

"Yes, just that. Games where you are scalped and pursued and you hold the fort and never, never surrender. I am sure I could play them."

"You could, you could!" cried the child in ecstasy. "I'll teach you! And this place is simply perfect! Look at the bridge down there, over the torrent! We could play Gareth and Lynette there!"

"Oh fair is the kingdom of makebelieve! We will go wander therein together, child of the roving fancy," was the reply. "Meanwhile, those who fain would play, must also eat. Here is a new-laid egg. Do you mark the pinky hue of the shell? That tint is caused by a fairy having stroked the egg as soon as it was laid. There is magic in it. If you eat it, you will play twice as well."

It was gravely spoken, and Germaine, though in her undermind she guessed that he was joking, yet seized upon his saying with the force of her fervent imagination, and succeeded in eating the egg, which she had a moment before rejected.

In those few minutes the young man had seen that the child, with her over-developed mentality, must be coaxed to eat; and that by the avenue of her imagination this could be achieved.

Miles, who could never have perceived nor acted in such wise, yet had the sense to see how well it had been done. There was instinctive comradeship and understanding between those two. He was out of it.

He said no more, and soon after got up and went away, leaving the new playfellows together.

When Espérance led Germaine into her grandmother's room to be kissed, the old lady could hardly believe that the dancing, radiant child before her was the same as the sombre, almost tragic being who had wept upon her bosom the previous evening.

"Ah, grand'mère, my Uncle Rémy is going to play with me! He is going to take me out, and to let me ride the pony, and—and all kinds of things! Is it not delightful?"

Grand'mère agreed that it was, and as the dancing feet skipped out by the door, she glanced at her country-woman with a smile.

"She is ours, Espérance—ours altogether. They say the daughter is always more the father's than are the sons. Her fool mother has given her no trace of the bourgeois blood."

Only one episode of that morning's adventure dwelt afterwards in Germaine's mind.

It was when they had made the round of gardens and stables, had seen the pony who was to carry her that afternoon, had fed rabbits, admired turkeys, and made the acquaintance of the beautiful herd of Jersey cows—just as she was beginning to feel hot, tired, and thirsty—that Uncle Rémy led her to the strawberry-bed. It was early in the season and the fruit was not yet in perfection. He stooped, gathered a handful, and was dangling the ripest above her mouth—opened, as he said, like a young swallow's—when the squire came round the box hedge, and called in a sharp and angry tone:

"Rémy! Leave that strawberry-bed alone!"

Rémy's eyes shone with mischief, as he popped the big strawberry into the red mouth. "It's for the child," he answered lightly.

"What does that matter? How many times have I told you not to meddle with the 'British Queens'?"

"Well, it's done now," replied Rémy coolly, wiping his fingers on his handkerchief. "How is one to remember all your fads and fancies?"

"If you could be made to remember anything except your own!" burst out the other. "There were hardly enough ripe ones for a dish to-night—the first! Now you have spoilt it!"

"Oh, keep your hair on, do! You are growling all day long," said Rémy pettishly. "Come along out of his way, or we shall be eaten alive."

"Is he often cross?" asked the child, when they were out of earshot.

"He's master, here, child, that's about the size of it. He's master, and I am merely my mother's son. You can't expect him to do more than tolerate me, you know."

He did not explain, as he could well have done, that the "British Queens" were Madam's special fancy, and that it was for her that her stepson guarded the bed so jealously.

"To be a landowner brings out all the worst part of a man, does it not?" she asked him gravely. "It makes him hard, tyrannical, self-indulgent."

He stared a minute, then burst into laughter. "You astonishing young person! Who taught you that? The best of it is, I believe it is true."

Germaine did not say who taught her. Her new intimacy was progressing by leaps and bounds, but she had not yet reached the point at which she dare mention Lacey and Marianne.

"The land for the people—that's your idea, small person, is it?" he asked her presently. "*A bas* the landlords!"

"Yes," she eagerly replied, "a living wage for everybody, and do away with the idle rich."

"The idle rich!" chuckled Rémy. "By Jove, how angry it would make Miles to be called that! Mind you don't spread yourself out in this way to him, my niece, or he would give you what for."

Germaine shuddered. "I should think not," she replied.

CHAPTER VI

MISS GRENFELL

It would be tedious to trace the slow degrees by which Germaine ceased to feel a stranger at Fendallscombe, and grew, as children will, into the life of the place.

For the first fortnight of her stay, Uncle Rémy was her devoted and constant companion. He taught her to ride, to drive, and to fish. The makebelieve games paled in lustre before the glowing fascination of realities as they presented themselves in this delightful spot.

With her grandmother she was from the first on terms of affection, but their intercourse was strictly bounded by Madame Burnside's notion of the due relation between the young and the old, imbibed before leaving France in her early youth. They never crossed the barrier which lies between kindness and true intimacy. There was always condescension in Madam's attitude towards her granddaughter; nothing to bridge the gulf of two generations.

There was practically no intercourse between Germaine and Miles Burnside. A sensitive young man is quick to feel a child's dislike. He had been willing to make friends with the strange, thin, brown girl of the fathomless eyes. He soon desisted, even from the attempt. The episode of the strawberry-bed was graven on Germaine's heart. Not long after, another incident clinched her aversion into something rather like hatred.

Going round one morning to the kitchen entrance, which was in the stable-yard, to beg food for the young turkeys from cook, she heard a hoarse voice raised in a tumult of words. Running to the spot, she beheld a tall, rough man, with clenched hands raised above his head, shaking with fury and calling down curses upon the squire.

A couple of grooms and an under-gardener stood grinning. Cook, her face red with indignation, was trying to shut the door, against which he stood, preventing her from closing it with the imposition of his weight.

"Look here, now, Sprott, my man," said cook with energy. "If you don't stop it, I'll send Fred for squire, sure as I'm alive, and you'll find yourself in the lock-up this evening."

"Squire may go to — before I stir! Fetch him! Fetch him, I say. Let him hear what I come to tell him," howled the man, hoarse with his own passion. "Me and my wife thrown out on the road, without a roof to cover us, nor a crust to eat! He'd better mind, for a poor man's curse'll stick—it'll stick, I tell you! 'E'll be cut off in his prime, that's what'll happen to him and all his like, blast 'em!"

Germaine stood just behind the grooms, unseen, shuddering with a mighty emotion, greater than anything she had ever experienced. Here was confirmation of her worst fears. The squire was a cruel, merciless tyrant. In the full flow of the man's invective, the door of the yard was opened and Burnside himself walked in.

He came straight up to the raving man, and stood there calmly. He had no whip or stick, and carried his hands behind him.

"I hear you wish to speak to me, Sprott," he said, in the dead silence which had suddenly descended.

The man addressed lifted himself upright, away from the door, and stood with fists clenched, and

heaving chest, glaring at the young squire. He looked daggers, but he said nothing at all.

"What have you to complain of?" asked Burnside.

"Aw, as fur as that goes," muttered the man, picking nervously at his cap which he had pulled hastily off, and now held in his hands. "I ain't got nowt to complain of in a manner of speaking. But it's 'ard, you know, it's 'ard to be turned out into the street." He showed signs of being about to weep.

"After all that has come and gone, I am surprised you should have been drinking so early in the morning," said his landlord quietly. "If you have really nothing to say, you had better go. I told you my mind yesterday, when you were sober. You thanked me then, for not calling in the police. Give him some bread and meat, cook, and send him home."

"'Ome!" echoed the man, with a howl, between fury and grief. "You to talk of 'ome to me!"

"I've give 'im a good loaf and some beef and cheese, sir, as you told me," said the cook in injured tones. "I 'adn't 'ardly give it to 'im when 'e breaks out like that! It's 'is por wife as I'm sorry for, I'm sure." She shut the kitchen door with a bang.

"Come," said Burnside patiently, "you'll get nothing more. Better go at once."

Sprott wavered, seemed inclined first to speak, then to run at his enemy; but thought better of it, clapped his cap on his head, and shambled out of the yard.

Germaine slipped away, shaking with sympathetic rage, to an empty loose-box; where she flung herself down in the straw and wept for the poor helpless man in the grip of this ruthless power.

"What had he done?" she later indignantly asked of cook. "What had he done, that the squire should turn him out?"

"Oh my dear, don't arst me! Incurable, that's what 'e is! A reg'lar bad 'un—a poacher all 'is life."

She named what she thought the most mentionable of Sprott's misdeeds to the child, as a kind of sample; and was amazed when Germaine flared up.

"A poacher! And why not, pray? He has every bit as good a right to the hares and pheasants as the squire has!"

"Oh my, hear 'er talk!" chuckled cook good-humouredly. "The keepers don't think so, my pretty, you run away and ask 'em!"

She was busy, and gently put Germaine out of the kitchen, with no further elucidation of the offences for which Sprott had been finally evicted than the one already mentioned. He was a poacher! Germaine's blood boiled. Lacey certainly knew well what he was talking about. What a *beast* Mr. Burnside was! So quiet and secure in his power over the miserable man!

She brooded over the awful scene. The sight of the wretched creature's emotion, his rags, his helplessness—the tyrant standing there, scorning him, daring him to do his worst.

"I wonder some of his downtrodden serfs don't *kill* him," she told herself.

Childlike, she never spoke a word of it all to Rémy. She nursed it secretly, in a heart which was growing fuller and fuller.

One day Uncle Rémy was in a mood of unwonted excitement. He was full of fun and spirits, but had long moments of abstraction when his niece evidently had no place in his thought. He suggested a ride for that afternoon, and when they set forth he chose a road which so far they had never traversed.

It led right down into the valley, and through a pretty village, with cottages smothered in climbing roses, and gardens full of sweet peas and great bushes of fuchsia and geranium. Beyond the village the

road went up towards the moor, and presently they turned to the right, and rode slowly, skirting a park which was full of beech trees, and bordered by a grey wall with tiny ferns growing in every chink.

Rémy had fallen silent, and was riding at a foot pace, glancing over the wall. As they approached a gate, his pace grew even slower; and, when a little rough wire-haired terrier rushed out from beneath it, barking a welcome, his face flushed scarlet, and his lips quivered.

The gate opened, and a girl came out into the lane.

Children do not usually classify grown-ups as beautiful or the reverse. They admire what they love. But even in the eyes of Germaine, Miss Grenfell was very lovely.

Her brow was shaded both by the waves of her corn-coloured hair and the sweep of her wide straw hat. Her eyes were as blue as speedwells, and the curve of her lips was delicious. She also blushed as her eyes met those of Rémy Damien. He leaned from his saddle, taking her hand in his.

"Twelve years," he said under his breath, "just twelve years!"

Her lips parted in a very normal girlish smile. "Twelve *weeks*! Don't be ridiculous," she said.

"My niece will tell you all about that," he rejoined gravely. "Let me introduce my niece, Germaine Damien. She often goes to fairyland, just as you have been, and she knows that what to you is a summer day is years and years to those left outside—as you left me."

"You should have come to London, too," faltered Miss Grenfell, her eyes deliciously cast down as she played with a buckle on his reins.

"Who was I, to stand between you and destiny?" he asked softly. "Did you meet him?"

"Did I meet whom?" she looked up, half puzzled.

"The fairy prince, of course."

"Oh, how absurd you are! Germaine, is not your uncle absurd?"

"In plain words, then, are you engaged to be married?"

"Mr. Damien, I am not."

He heaved a deep sigh. "Then the sun still shines in heaven."

She had had enough of this, apparently, for she made her way round to where Germaine sat gravely listening.

"Germaine, little girl with the sweet strange name, isn't your uncle a silly?" she asked mischievously.

"Yes, a darling silly," replied Germaine, bubbling into laughter, for, after all, this was almost a child, like herself. "He and I have such beautiful times, pretending and being as foolish as ever we like. Why have I never seen you before?"

"I only came back from London last night."

"Didn't you notice, Ernie, that this morning a brighter emerald twinkled on the grass, a purer sapphire melted in the sea? That was because her feet had touched the meadows and left the daisies rosy," said Rémy with a perfectly grave face.

"She is a fairy princess," said Ernie impetuously.

("We call her Ernie, because her own name is altogether too large for her—she must leave it off until it fits better," explained Uncle Rémy parenthetically.)

"I'm very glad you have come back," went on Ernie in pleased tones. "Doesn't it seem beautiful out here in the sunshine?"

"Oh, Ernie, yes, it does, it does! You can't think how sad it is to awake in London, and see the poor little sooty sparrows trying to rejoice in the poor sooty trees, and the flowers in the squares and parks, so prim and sad, when one's heart is crying for a Devon hedgerow!"

"Hedgerow," observed Rémy, "is quite a good word. I am glad there was something in Devon that your heart cried out for, even if it was only that."

"How goes the book?" asked the young lady abruptly. "You promised me that it should be finished by the time I came home."

"It is finished; but the latter chapters lacked fire. I had been too long without inspiration. I therefore laid it aside until your return. Now, if the kind fates will, I shall complete it brilliantly."

"Am I not to hear it before it goes away to be encased in its rigid mould of cold print? You have told me many times that it is my book; I claim to judge it before the eyes of the world have seen it."

"You shall," he answered gladly. "I will bring it to the glade to-morrow. Can you picnic with us, if we bring our lunch?"

She hesitated. "Not to-morrow. I must be at home to lunch to-morrow. Father has invited Mr. Burnside."

Rémy made an exclamation of piqued annoyance. "But doubtless," he said stiffly, "you are looking forward very much to seeing him once more."

"Mr. Burnside is an old friend," replied Miss Grenfell, with an expressionless face.

"Old? Indeed he is. Five-and-forty one would say, rather than five-and-twenty. I cannot be jealous of five-and-forty."

"You have no right to be jealous at all," she replied, quite coldly.

"I know," he faltered, charmingly contrite. "Forgive me much to-day. How can I see you again and remain calm and self-collected?"

"Does your little niece usually ride with you?" asked the girl, with a sweet smile at Germaine.

"Certainly, I am always with her—a sort of unsalaried nursemaid. Our dear Miles bids my mother

invite her here, but does not offer to help in her entertainment."

"Mr. Burnside has rather more to occupy him than you have just now," she reminded him archly.

"Snubbed again! Well, but when shall we meet if not to-morrow?"

"I could manage tea-time to-morrow."

"That will do admirably. Ermie, remember, we have a tryst with the fairy queen in the enchanted glade to-morrow afternoon."

"As if I should forget!" cried Ermie indignantly.

"It is he who will forget; you see, he has you remind him," said Miss Grenfell slyly.

"Helen! Take care!" muttered Remy, leaning down towards her from his saddle. His eyes, velvet-black, yet full of fire, burned into those of the girl. She laughed, but she was ill at ease. He had the mastery.

They did not linger much longer, for there was no means the young man's intention to make tea, or do anything else to arouse suspicion. He was very silent as they rode home. Ermie, on the contrary, talked fast and eagerly about the fair queen, Helen Grenfell. He seemed to be turning over something in his mind, and at last he spoke.

"Ermie, do you love poor old Uncle James?" asked.

"Almost more than anybody in the world," replied his slave promptly.

"I want to ask you to do something for me. Nothing wrong. It is only not to speak of Miss Grenfell and of meetings with her to anybody, not even Espérance."

"Not to speak of her to Espérance?"

"No. Nor to Miles."

"I shouldn't be likely to speak of her, or of anything else, to Mr. Burnside."

"No, I know you don't get on. He is jealous, I

suppose, because you are so fond of me. He is of a jealous nature."

"Tyrants always are," replied Germaine dreamily.

"Exactly. He wants a world cut out to fit him. He is not accustomed to be thwarted. He is angry because Miss Grenfell does me the honour to like me. If he could, he would prevent my ever seeing her. That is why I do not want you to mention anything about her. It might get round to him, and there would be trouble."

"I can't think why you stand it!" cried Ermie vehemently. "If I were you, I would not stay here a week!"

"Ah, little child, there are things, many things, that you don't understand," he sighed. "I would be in prison if I could. You may rest assured of that."

Prison! He called it prison! It was most puzzling to Ermie. He seemed to her to be able to do so exactly as he liked. Yet over him loomed the sinister influence of the squire smiting him, perhaps, to silence as Sprott the poacher had been silenced, so intimidated, by the very presence of the autocrat.

She shuddered at the thought of this man's unseen yet keenly felt serious power.

"Oh, when will freedom begin to come to the poor old world?" she sighed, as they checked their horses for a while upon a steep hill.

"You are a true descendant of your grandfather, Ermie," he said. "He was a real revolutionary; it is in our blood. He did not flinch even when it was a question of life and death. But perhaps I am hardly wise——" He broke off for a minute, and then resumed—"Did anybody ever tell you that you come of the same line as the finest woman ever produced by history—Charlotte Corday?"

"What?" cried Germaine breathlessly. "

say that I am related to Charlotte Corday ? She who killed Marat ? ”

He smiled at her flaming eyes and raised colour. “ Yes,” he replied. “ That is the very truth. Charlotte’s family had been noble, you know, before the Revolution began. They must also have been people of advanced views, for she herself said, at her trial : ‘ I was a republican before the Revolution.’ They belonged to the family of d’Armans. Our family, the d’Amiens, came, as our name will tell you, from Amiens. The aunt of Charlotte Corday, her father’s sister, Mademoiselle d’Armans, married a d’Amien, and you are her lineal descendant.”

“ Oh ! ” breathed Ermie from her very soul, “ I must write and tell Marianne e that ! ”

“ Who is Marianne ? ”

“ A great friend of mine. My greatest. You come next, I *think*—there is only one other who could, perhaps, count above you. He too will be most interested to hear that I actually have the blood of Charlotte Corday in my veins. She was very brave, was she not ? ”

“ Her courage was simply amazing. She was quite young, had been what they call carefully brought up, had, so far as is known, never quitted Caen, her birthplace, in all her life. She spoke no word to anybody. She made up her own mind, upon the facts known to her. France lay under the heel of a tyrant—France must be rescued ! . . . But you know the story.”

“ No, no ! Go on, go on ! ”

“ She simply left a letter to her father, saying she had gone to England, and he must forget her. She knew that she could not escape—that what she was about to do must end in her own death. It was her life in order to obtain that of the tyrant. She took her place in the Paris diligence, and for three days and two nights she bore the strain of that awful

journey, she looked intrepidly forward to that ghastly future. When she got to Paris, she went out and bought a big sheath knife, as simply as another girl might buy a pair of seissors. It was the thing she needed for the work she planned."

"Ah, she was brave!"

"Brave indeed! She had none to stand by her. Time after time she was turned away from Marat's door. He was ill, he could not be seen. When at last she got in, it was by forcing her way past the woman who waited upon him. He was, as you have doubtless heard, sitting in a half-closed bath. As he turned aside to write down the names she gave him, she drove in her avenging knife, up to the hilt. She killed him at one blow, she who presumably never had thought of harming a fly before! She hoped she was killing the Terror; but that monster was a hydra, and it is the most tragic part of Charlotte's martyrdom that, although she succeeded in her immediate object of ridding France of Marat, she failed in what she hoped to accomplish thereby."

There was a silence when he finished speaking. Germaine's eyes were fixed in a gloomy dream. At last she spoke. "Well, say she partly failed," she remarked at last.

Rémy looked up with an amused smile. In talking to his niece he often forgot that he was conversing with a child. "What do you mean, exactly?" he asked.

"I mean that what she did suggested a line of new thought," said Ermie quietly, quoting Lacey verbatim, though quite unconsciously. "She showed them that France was not going to stand it. She paved the way for the death of Robespierre. Had Charlotte never struck that blow for freedom, the nation might not have plucked up heart to—to——"

"Bless my soul, what books have you been reading?" asked Rémy, in great amusement.

Ernie was silenced. She coloured to her very brow, and made no reply. Uncle Rémy was a darling, but he did not understand as Lacey did.

He could not know how stupendous to her was the news she had just heard, of her own descent from the famous Charlotte. He did not perceive that she rode transfigured, with swelling heart and proud mien, plunged into that hero-worship which is to some children as the very breath of life. She felt at the moment immeasurably older than her gay young uncle. She believed that she had an insight denied to him.

As for Rémy, the idea that his niece's mind was in a morbid condition never struck him for a moment. He was at the time almost wholly pre-occupied with his own concerns. The face of Helen Grenfell was present to the eye of his mind—her voice, her little tricks of manner, the adorable way in which one side of her mouth curled the least bit more than the other when she smiled.

Germaine was a queer kiddie, and made an excellent excuse for long absences from home. Except for that, she was outside the main subject of his meditation.

Had he noted with true interest the curious precocity of the child—had he said to his mother, "Give Ernie children to play with, she has associated too long with grown-up persons and her own thoughts are not good company for her"—all might have been saved. Such a course never occurred to him; and as the days went by, Madam saw with increasing delight the fellowship of the uncle and his young niece, and told Miles that, for once in his life, Rémy was being really unselfish.

Miles had his doubts.

CHAPTER VII

THE SQUIRE INTERFERES

HELEN GRENFELL was now added to the list of Germaine's particular friends. The two girls were both privileged to hear portions of Uncle Rémy's book.

It was by no means without cleverness, but unbalanced and wild—a violent indictment of society, a tilting against privilege, an attack upon religion also. In justice to Rémy, it must be said that the most blasphemous portions of the great work were not read aloud. Conventional morality, however, was duly held up to ridicule.

Helen was unharmed, for the reason that she hardly understood a word of what was read. The fine sounding phrases, the rush of diction, the charm of the reader's voice, were all to her. Far otherwise was it with Germaine. She drank down in great draughts this array of fine excuses for shirking duty and indulging oneself. She saw herself in a new, free world, without the prison bars of custom and respectability.

When Espérance superintended her prayers, night and morning, she lounged to explain to the kindly creature how different was her God from the one Espérance worshipped.

Joyfully she wrote to Lacey and Marianne, that she was in the hands of a teacher such as they would delight in—that Uncle Rémy was actually writing a book which would awaken the dull world and revolutionize society.

The readings were never long enough for her, though they were as long as Helen could bear. Rémy was vain enough, and loved the sound of his own voice dearly; but at that period of his life he was in love, and to dally with Helen in the wild wood was sweeter even than reading his own works to her.

It was an understood thing that, when the reading was over, Ermie should make herself scarce until summoned by the two elders once more. They had much to say to each other which would not interest a child, as they told her. Ermie, innocent as dawn in all but those matters wherein Lacey and Rémy had enlightened her, earnestly believed in the grave and important nature of their talk. She was perfectly happy wandering by herself, imagining, inventing, weaving her fancies into solitary games. Moreover, hers was the proud office of scout. If anyone was seen, even at a distance, it was her part to give warning at once.

The secret nature of the meetings was now to her an unalloyed joy. She had felt uncomfortable at first, for her nature was open. Now, however, she believed herself arrayed on the side of Unele Rémy and his Helen, against the interference of the squire.

In after years, looking back upon these events, Germaine often asked herself what was the exact position of Helen Grenfell in these clandestine meetings. Was she playing off one stepbrother against the other? Did she really love Rémy? Or did she, half unknown to herself, prefer Miles, and flirt with Rémy to provoke Miles to a declaration?

Doubtless her parents wished her to marry young Burnside. The knowledge of that fact may have rendered her wayward, determined not to be pushed into a match. Her manner towards Rémy was usually playful. She was not serious with him. He seemed scarcely to wish her to be so.

To the Germaine of those days they were the ideal

pair of lovers, far above criticism, dazzling, beautiful creatures, to be served and adored.

One fine afternoon the tryst was in the park of Fendallscombe. The squire that day had gone with his bailiff to the county town to look at some new cattle. When he was at home, the *rendezvous* was always elsewhere.

As the little scout sat reading on the grass about half-past three o'clock in the afternoon, her watchful eyes desieried the figure of Miles Burnside himself, coming directly towards her. She sprang up, fled light-footed to the covert of the woods, and called softly, "The squire is coming!"

"If he asks you where I am, say you do not know," was Rémy's instruction.

Germaine hastened back to her post, picked up her book, resumed her reading. The squire approached.

"Hallo, Pixie!" he said, as he drew near; and she had to lift her face and say "Good afternoon."

"I find you, as might be expected, close to the mound where your kinsfolk dance," he remarked, sitting down beside her on the grass and taking off his straw hat to pass a handkerchief over his brow, for the day was hot.

As a matter of fact, the question of pixies and their habits would a few weeks back have been profoundly interesting to Ermie. Now, however, weightier matters engrossed her, and she told herself that she was beyond such childishness. She listened with the patient tolerance one gives to a bore.

"All alone?" asked Miles after a pause. "Where is your uncle?"

Whereupon Germaine obeyed orders and said, "I do not know," but, being by nature very truthful, she coloured painfully as she said it.

"Oh, you don't know, don't you?" said the squire slowly, his eyes upon her face. "But he

cannot have gone very far since you ran into the wood to speak to him a moment ago."

Germaine shook with anger. Did he know everything, this man who wielded powers of life and death? "If you think you know where my uncle is, why did you ask me?" she enquired hotly.

"To see what you would say," he replied promptly. "He has drilled you well. No use to ask more questions, unless I want to hear more lies, is it?" Whereupon, he arose from the grass, and walked off into the wood.

For a wretched moment the child sat paralysed, hating him who had caught her in the first lie of her life more than she could have thought it in her nature to hate anybody. Then, springing to her feet, she ran after him. He followed the woodland path for some distance, until, crossing the course of the brook which flowed through his grounds, he came upon Miss Grenfell, coming up the bank of the stream, a basket of ferns upon her arm.

She stopped short on sight of him, blushed charmingly, and cried out:

"Caught! Caught in the act! Yes, it is all true! I have been over to steal your ferns, Mr. Burnside! Are you very angry?"

She stood there, dappled with sunlight falling upon her white gown through the trees—a sight to rob a young man of his composure.

"You know you are welcome to every fern that grows in Fendallsecombe, Miss Grenfell."

"It's the *Osmunda*. It grows in so few places now, and there are heaps and heaps of roots here. I have only taken a few."

"Let me get you a few more."

"Oh no, thank you, I have all I want."

"Then, being caught red-handed, you must accept the penalty, which is that you come up to the house and let Madam give you tea."

"But how perfectly sweet of you! I am longing for tea."

She turned obediently, and followed him out of the wood. Looking back over her shoulder, she said, "That is your little niece?"

"Do you not know Germaine?" asked Miles, eyeing her steadily.

"Yes, we have met before," she replied, quite without embarrassment. "She knew, in fact, that I was thieving in your woods, and warned me that you were approaching."

He looked doubtfully at the child, whose face was again crimson. If he had misjudged her, he would feel himself a brute. "How did you and my niece become acquainted?" he asked bluntly.

"Your brother introduced us one day, when they were riding, and we met," was her perfectly frank reply. Then, as he was long silent, she added, "I hope you are all coming to our garden party?"

He said that he hoped so, and she went on to say that Germaine must certainly come, as some small cousins of her own would be present.

They walked slowly over the grass, and up to the terrace, talking idle nothings, followed all the way by the child, her mind seething with vexation and passion, knowing herself to have lied, wondering at the way in which Miss Grenfell, without any lie, was skilfully conveying a wholly false impression all the time. Nothing could have been more unconscious than her manner when mentioning Rémy.

Madam, in the cool, prim old drawing-room, laid aside her knitting and welcomed her visitor cordially.

It was a room which Germaine seldom entered—a room which reflected the foreign ideals of Madam in a way which other parts of the house had escaped. The drawing-room is, beyond all parts of the house, expressive of its mistress; and that absence of comfort, so strange to English ideas, which one finds

in French interiors, was noticeably present in this one.

Nothing, except the arrangement of the furniture, had been changed since the death of Miles's mother. That alone made the place dreary and as it were heartless. Madam sat always in the same chair, by the window in summer, by the fire in winter. There were no trifles about. There were no flowers—Madam disliked the scent of flowers in the house. They were allowed only in the hall, and even there things without perfume were selected.

"Are you there, my cherished?" asked Madam, catching sight of Ermie, hanging uncertainly in the background. "Where have you been all the afternoon?"

"In the wood with Miss Grenfell," replied Germaine. "At least, part of the time."

"Where is Uncle Rémy?" asked the old lady.

To which the answer came quick and ready. "I do not know, but Mr. Burnside says he does."

For a moment a strange look—almost an alarmed look—came into the eyes of Madam. She grew noticeably pale. "Have you seen him, Miles?" she asked in a rapid, nervous way.

"No, I haven't seen him since breakfast-time," replied he in tones of marked displeasure. "I thought he was usually with Germaine." As he spoke, he encountered the eyes of the child, and winced away from the intensity of dislike which he read in them.

"You had better run to Espérance, *mon enfant*," said Madam. "Your own tea will soon be ready."

Germaine went with lagging feet and an unwilling heart. She wanted to stay and hear all that passed between Miss Grenfell and the Ogre, as she named Miles in her heart. He possessed, so she told herself, the same dreadful kind of power over Helen which he exerted over such people as Sprott. He said

"Come to tea" and she came, leaving poor Uncle Rémy in the wood. She felt as though, all in a moment, she saw clearly a thing she had not previously suspected. The Ogre wanted to entice Miss Grenfell away from Uncle Rémy! How unfair, how detestable!

"He little thinks that he has an enemy!" she whispered to herself, climbing the stairs to the room where Espérance worked and she always had her tea. "He treats me like a baby, like nobody—he shall find out his mistake, if he tries in any way to come between Uncle Rémy and his beautiful lady-love."

Later in the afternoon, when he had walked back to the Brooklands with Miss Grenfell, and returned, Miles went into the drawing-room, where Madam sat as usual, knitting. He stood in the window, his hands in his pockets, his square shoulders hunched and obstinate-looking.

"Madam," he said, "I know that I am, in your estimation, a blundering person, always trying to break a butterfly on the wheel, but it's my nature, if I speak at all, to speak plainly. I must ask you to tell Rémy, definitely, that he has got to clear out."

Madam let her knitting fall upon her knee, and gazed at her stepson with apprehensive eyes.

"But Rémy is going very soon, Miles," she said. "It is his intention to go to London within a week or two."

"He must go sooner," replied Miles firmly.

"That sounds arbitrary, not to say unkind, Miles. Ought you not to tell me why this must be?"

"I can easily do that. It is because, if he stays on here, there will be a row, and I wish to avoid that, for your sake."

"Why need there be a row? He has been behaving quite well of late, has he not?"

"He is teaching that little niece of his to tell lies for one thing," said Miles shortly. "But that is not all. He is an adventurer. He is making love to a girl with money. He is leading her on, by means of elandestine meetings, by means of secret appointments, until he hopes to get her so far committed that she will be talked about, and Colonel Grenfell will have to consent to the marriage, and keep both him and his wife."

"Miles, have you one serap of evidenece that this is so?"

"I told you it was so, before the Grenfells went to town. The very day they came back, it all began again. I hear of it from the keepers, from the villagers—I don't suppose there is a neighbour of ours within miles who does not know that Miss Grenfell is 'carrying on' with young Mr. Damien. She is very young—quite a girl—and needs safeguarding. If Rémy chooses to play the part of fortune-hunter, let him. He shall not do it from my house."

Madam shook her head slowly and sadly. "I am with you, Miles. It is not right behaviour. English manners spoilt both my sons. My poor Constant married against my wish, in defiance of my authority. Now Rémy——"

"I think you will have to own that I have been pretty patient with him, Madam."

"Indeed you have, Miles. My heart is full of gratitude to you. I well know the difference which your father's second marriage made to you, and that my jointure prevents you from doing much that ought to be done to this place."

"That's all right, Madam. Your jointure is moderate enough in all conscience. I should be lonely, too, here without you. But I do grudge that you should spend pretty well all you have on a young waster like Rémy. You are not firm enough with him. I only ask you to be firm. He knows his own

position. But for what you give him, he is a beggar, and in the event of your death, which I hope may be long hence, he will have nothing at all. I do not consider myself bound to provide for him in any way. He knows, however, that I should be prepared to put down a certain sum if he became partner in any good firm. More than that I won't do, because I ought not."

"Indeed you are right. I will speak to Rémy this very evening."

"Thank you, Madam. Tell him simply that he has got to go. I insist upon it. He has rooms in London, let him go there and finish his book. He must be out of this by the end of the week."

"I shall tell him, Miles."

"The fact that he is doing the child no good helps to make me more determined. I don't quite see what he gets out of setting her against me. She will hardly speak a civil word to me of late."

"Indeed I am sure he cannot have intended to set her against you, Miles."

"Whether intentionally or not, he has done it pretty thoroughly."

CHAPTER VIII

EXIT RÉMY

It was a little later than usual when Germaine ran in by way of the window to breakfast next morning. The reason was, that the mother duck, who had been sitting for many weary days, had brought out her brood. The poultry girl had sent a message by Espérance, and it had seemed urgently necessary that the ducklings should be inspected before anything else was thought of.

The squire had finished his breakfast and left the room when she entered. Only Rémy sat there, idly stirring his coffee, his black eyes fixed broodingly upon the table-cloth.

"Oh, Uncle Rémy, you never saw—you simply can't imagine such perfect loveliness! All yellow, and fluffy and round, with innocent eyes—Oh, I felt as if I could not tear myself away! They are the sweetest sight in all the world!"

He neither moved nor spoke. No smile of sympathy lit up his gloomy face. Apprehension seized her. She had not seen him last night, after the intrusion of the squire into the wood. In summer the dinner hour at Fendallscombe was eight, and at that hour Germaine retired to Espérance's room, ate her bread and cream and fruit, and afterwards went to bed. Uncle Rémy had not returned to the house when she said "Good night" yesterday.

"Uncle Rémy—*darling*—is anything the matter?"

"Nothing that need worry you, kiddie."

"If it is about you, it must worry me! Don't you understand how *completely* I love you?" cried the child, flinging her arms about his neck.

He laughed, a trifle hardly. "If you had really loved me you wouldn't have given me away to Miles yesterday."

"What do you say! I give you away? I didn't! Oh, how can you be so unkind, when I told the first untruth I ever told in all my life, in order to save you!"

"You told him I was in the wood with Miss Grenfell."

"I did nothing of the kind! He said, 'Where is your Uncle Rémy?' and I said, as you told me to say, 'I do not know.'"

"What did he say then?"

"He laughed, in that horrid way he has, and he said, 'He can't have gone very far since you ran into the wood to speak to him just now.'"

"What did you say to that?"

"I said, 'If you know where he is, why do you ask me?' and he said, 'Just to see what you would say. He has drilled you well.' Ah, how angry I felt! I could have killed him!"

The young man negligently flung an arm about the slender body of the child. "I beg your pardon, Ermie. You do your poor little best for me, but he was too cunning for you. He has eyes in the back of his head. Well! You remember I told you that if he found out I was meeting Miss Grenfell, there would be trouble."

"Well, but what trouble can there be? You are not afraid of him?"

"No, by Heaven. But I am here, in his house, eating his bread, confound him, compelled to suffer his insolence, to see my unfortunate mother under his heel, and not to be able to lift a finger to help her!"

He has ordered me out of the house, and I have got to go."

Ermie uttered a sharp cry of bitter sorrow. "Going away? Oh, Unele Rémy!"

He caught her tightly to him, covering her mouth with his hand. "Sh-h-h! Don't cry, don't make any kind of noise, you never know where he is nor what he hears. I am certain he went to the cattle show yesterday as a blind, just to catch me in the act. You sit down and eat your breakfast now, and afterwards we will talk. You shall help me to pack my things."

She was sobbing bitterly. "I won't stay here without you! I shall be miserable, miserable, miserable!"

He devoted himself to soothing her, very kindly and gently. In his then mood, her loyalty, her devotion, were sweet to him—they eased his wounded pride. He coaxed her to eat her breakfast, and in a moment of inspiration succeeded in diverting her attention by a judicious mention of the ducklings.

Presently she was able to talk and think more calmly of his departure. He encouraged her to hope that things were not as bad as they seemed—that he might, after all, triumph over his surly and tyrannical half-brother.

Repairing to his room, after breakfast, they found Espérance, her face very pinched and grave, putting out his things in preparation for packing. Being plainly told that they were not wanted there, they decided to go for a ride, "The Last Ride together," as Unele Rémy sadly called it.

Owing to the interruption of yesterday's meeting, no plans for to-day had been made, and they had little hope of what between themselves they called "luck" that morning. Nevertheless they rode along that lane, one side of which was formed by the Brooklands park wall, with a little gate, seldom used

except by villagers going up to the kitchen parts of the house, and quite out of sight of any windows, or such parts of the grounds as were frequented by the family and their visitors.

Against all expectation, they did have "luck." As they neared the gate, Helen and her terrier ran out into the lane.

They dismounted, and led their horses into a field on the opposite side of the way, which was not Colonel Grenfell's property. Here was a little copse wherein they and the steeds were alike concealed from view. Ermie, in an access of vehement loyalty, became scout forthwith, and for an hour the two young people talked and discussed plans. When they parted, Rémy's face wore a new look of determination.

Germaine often in after years was able to recall the exact aspect of Helen Grenfell at that parting. She stood, a slip of a girl, her face white with intensity of feeling, but as though—as the child told herself—"underneath the whiteness there was fire." Her quivering lips seemed scarlet when compared with her wan cheeks—her eyes were full of a delicious trouble, her breast heaved up and down visibly under her summer gown.

Germaine heard only one sentence which she spoke to her lover: "You could charm the very heart out of my side, I believe." She said it with a laugh that tangled itself in a sob, and turned her head away. Rémy made a little compassionate sound, as one might soothe a frightened baby. "I haven't overborne you, have I?" he whispered softly.

Without turning towards him, she shook her head. Germaine, who could see her face, marked how the teeth caught the lower lip, and the eyes filled with tears.

Rémy went on his knees, took her hanging hands and covered them with kisses. Then he rose, without looking at her, caught Ermie in his arms, tossed her

to the saddle, mounted himself, and they moved slowly out of the copse, leaving Helen there motionless and alone.

When they came in to lunch, the squire asked Germaine whither they had ridden this morning. She had her answer ready, for they had gone on in a different direction from that of the Brooklands. "Round by Thicketside and Calmers Green," she answered promptly. He did not pursue the questioning, and she did not look at her uncle. The subject dropped.

Madam talked with her stepson of indifferent things, and Rémy was almost silent. After lunch, he asked that Ernie might go down to the station to see him off.

"I thought I would take you over in the cart," said Miles.

"It must be as you order, of course," returned Rémy politely. Miles reddened and said, "Have the brougham if you like. Madam might go too. I can send the luggage in by Simpson."

Madam was expecting the vicar's wife to tea, so said she would not go to the station; and the two, uncle and niece, went off together in the open carriage.

For some time they drove silently, each too full of their own thoughts for conversation. But presently Rémy took the slim brown hand in his own, and said gently, "I thought you would like to know that it is all right, Ernie. I mean, far from injuring me, as he thinks he is doing, by this move, Miles has done me the best of turns. I never hoped for anything like—like what I am feeling at this moment."

She turned ardent, comprehending eyes up to his.

"I believe I know," she whispered. "You were not sure before, and you are quite sure now."

"Yes," he replied. "I am quite sure," adding, after a pause, "when one is sure, one can act."

She looked an eager question.

He shook his head. "No, little Ermie, I can't tell you all about it. Not because I don't trust you, but because it is safer for you to know nothing, if asked. It shan't be said that I taught you untruth. So, least said, soonest mended. I only give you this one hint. I shall not be so far off as you think. You may see me when you least expect it."

This was joyful news. She kindled at it. He went on, absently stroking the little hand, which lay so warmly sympathizing in his own.

"And you won't have to wait so very long to know the rest of the story. Let me see—less than three weeks, I suppose. I can tell you, it will be worth waiting for!"

"Less than three weeks!" she repeated thirstily. "Do you mean that in less than three weeks I shall see you again, uncle?"

"I hardly know about that," he said laughing; "but you will hear of me. Oh, and it is possible that you may see me before that, just once. If you are certain you can keep this secret, I will tell you where." He bent his lips to her ear, and whispered, "At the garden-party at the Brooklands."

She burst out laughing, and clapped her hands for joy.

CHAPTER IX

THE FURTHER MACHINATIONS OF THE SQUIRE

For a few days Germaine missed Rémy's company very much. There had passed away a glory from the earth, and she found herself compelled to amuse herself in what practically amounted to complete solitude. Espérance, though uniformly kind and loving, was wholly unimaginative. It would have been quite useless to expect her to take a part in the games of Charlotte Corday which now occupied a considerable amount of her leisure.

It was Madam's intention that the child should be fortified, by a long summer in the country, for the ordeal of going to boarding-school. During all this time, unknown to Ermie, a long and detailed correspondence was being carried on between the old lady, her daughter-in-law, and the head mistresses of various first-rate schools.

All this being in train, Madam allowed her young guest complete freedom from discipline and restraint. The only person who ever made her do anything was Espérance, who insisted upon adequate prayer-saying, and regular bedtime and rising.

Germaine, as has been said, was possessed of an imagination which made it easy for her to amuse herself. The beauty of the country, and the warm summer weather made it difficult to be unhappy for long. Seeing that she was not bored, nor low-spirited, except for a day or two after losing her uncle, it did not occur either to Madam or her waiting-

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woman, that the child was in need of young companions.

She was now accompanied by one of the younger grooms when she went riding. The squire made a half-hearted attempt to arrange to ride with her: but she showed her dislike for such a plan too plainly for him to care to press the point.

Twice she rode past the Brooklands wall, but she did not succeed in seeing Miss Grenfell on either occasion. She lived from day to day on tenter-hooks of expectation; which increased in intensity as the day of the garden-party approached.

It was the time of year for such functions, and both the squire and Rémy had attended several during Germaine's sojourn at Fendallseombe. She, however, was specially invited to this one; and Madam was therefore going, in order to escort her.

Espérance made quite an event of it. She was busy for several days, fashioning a frock of dainty, soft white embroidery, and trimming a hat with white ribbon. The old woman's innately good taste showed her that Germaine's warm, deep colouring would best be set off by unrelieved white.

The month passed in the Devon air, with sunshine, exercise, and the best of food, had worked wonders for the child. Her thin limbs had filled out, colour glowed in her rounded cheeks. In the shadow of her hat, her eyes looked like jewels in a dusky setting. The squire would gaze wistfully from time to time upon her, if they met in the grounds. He would have liked to be friends. She, on her side, carried her antipathy so far that, in order to avoid his society, she begged that she might take her own breakfast with Espérance in her room after Uncle Rémy's departure, urging as a reason that in this manner she would get out of doors earlier.

It was on the day before the party that Miles Burnside found himself obliged to go to Yeominster,

in order to attend the Police Court and give evidence in the case of Sprott, who had got into trouble once more.

The men and maids were all talking of the affair, and Germaine heard scraps of it. Child-like, she did not seek to be more fully informed. Her mind, filled with unreasoned hatred, seized upon anything with which to feed that hatred.

When young Burnside returned at evening, hot and tired with a long day in a stifling court-house, he found Madam, wonderful to relate, seated upon the terrace in the shade, while her granddaughter read aloud to her.

The sight pleased him, but all that he showed was a petulant fatigue as he flung himself into a basket chair, and bade his man bring him a whisky-and-soda.

Madam roused herself to ask him a few questions, obtaining, however, only short, impatient replies. Sprott had been sentenced to six months'. Miles had been to interview the prison chaplain, and hoped the sentence might do good. "He ought to have been gaoled long ago," he said thoughtfully, "and that's the truth."

He was staring at the gravel as he said it, and not at the face of the child, scarlet with indignation and rage.

There was a pause after he had spoken. He was evidently brooding over something. Patiently, out it came.

"Whom think you I saw, Madam, in Yeominster?" he asked abruptly.

"Anybody that I know?"

"Your son, Rémy."

"Miles! Rémy is in London?"

"I know that you had a letter from him, post-marked 'London,' this morning. He has not, however, been in London, but in Yeominster, ever since leaving us."

"But, Miles, what can he be doing there?"

"That, as he reminded me, is his affair, not mine. I cannot compel him to go to London, if he prefers to be in Yeominster. The thing I object to, is his pretending to you that he was actually in London. That looks as though he did not wish it known that he was elsewhere. It suggests some kind of duplicity."

Madam laid down her knitting in real distress. "What did you say to him, Miles?"

"Very little. He was obviously taken aback when he saw me, but soon recovered. I had no right to question him. However, you can ask him any questions you like, for you will see him to-morrow. He is coming to the Brooklands garden-party."

He spoke grimly.

"Surely, Miles, that must be the reason why he is in Yeominster. He has come down there so as not to be too far away."

"That was what he told me. Unfortunately the man at the inn where he is putting up, gave him away. He has been there all the time."

"And you think he is in communication—that they—meet?" queried Madam timidly.

"I think there's more in it than that, but I will know to-morrow," replied Miles curtly. He rose. "Thought I had better prepare you, Madam. Forgive me," he said, and walked off.

Germaine, left behind, felt a tumult rage within her, such as she had never known. Her throat seemed to contract, she saw blackness before her eyes. For one wild moment she thought of appealing to her grandmother. She had the idea of crying to her, not to allow this tyrant to interfere to spoil the lives and the love of the two beings whom she so idolized.

She could not do it. There intervened between herself and Madam a distance too immeasurably

great. Like all children, she could be voluble to those who understood her, but was completely tongue-tied in other cases. She was not, when with Madam, sensible of a lack of capacity to understand, as in the case of her own mother. Rather she felt a remoteness too great for bridging, a terror of intrusion.

Madam, who had been for a moment startled out of her customary reserve, soon rallied. She looked at her grand-daughter, folded her lips to their customary propriety, rearranged her shawl, and remarked that it began to grow chilly when the sun was down, and that Ermie had better gather up her work-bag and carry the chairs into the house.

She was obeyed, as always. Had anybody asked her, that evening, what opinion she had formed of Constant's daughter—what was her temperament, what her bent—she would have replied that she was gentle and tractable, easily pleased, affectionate, and somewhat silent.

Had she but known how little below the surface of the sunny hill lay the seething red-hot lava of revolt—that the wordless child who carried her work-bag into the drawing-room was ready to fly at the throat of the man by whose hospitality she stood where she did—then Madam would have said that she could not believe it. It was too terrible. Children had no opinions in her young days.

Espérance was never wholly at ease respecting the religious conviction of her young charge. Heroically, the old woman refrained, at her mistress's command, from any attempt to proselytize: but she knew, from personal experience, that there was such a thing, strange though it seemed to her, as a devout Protestant; and she was most desirous that Germaine's Paternosters should come from the heart, even though she was not permitted an Ave.

That evening, however, an unusual thing happened. After completing that part of her devotions which

was audible, Germaine remained upon her knees for several minutes, absorbed in private supplication.

Espérance stood aside, with eyes dimmed by sympathetic tears. Were her prayers to be answered, and was this child, so dear to her heart, beginning to feel the constant, though unspoken pressure of a compelling force? Never had she so tenderly kissed and tucked up her nursling as she did that night.

Germaine loved her heartily, and her energetic arms met round her neck in a hug that was almost painful, but caused a lively joy.

"Sleep well, and the dear God grant thy prayers, thou little darling," murmured the old nurse, as she left the child alone in the fragrant quiet.

Could some power of telepathy but have revealed to her the words of the petition, over and over again repeated, with which Germaine had besieged the Throne of Grace!

"O God, I pray Thee, I beseech Thee, let the squire die in the night! Let him be dead in the morning, when they come to awake him! Let him not be left alive to do harm to Unele Rémy and his Helen!"

CHAPTER X

THE GARDEN-PARTY

THE temperament of an imaginative child is cut into a thousand facets, and flashes back whatever light be cast upon it. The morning sun, looking in upon Germaine as she lay with her web of black hair streaming all about her, brought first the glad remembrance that to-day was the day of "her party."

She was to see Helen, for the first time since Rémy's departure; she was to see Uncle Rémy himself, as well.

Thinking of all this gladness, she was on her feet in an instant, unfastening and pushing wide the casement, to see the beauty of the new day. Surely those two beloved ones, together, were strong enough to overcome any machinations of the tyrant! Besides, God might have granted her prayer. The squire might be dead. She thought of this possibility without the least twinge of sorrow. If he were dead, she would be very glad, just as the child at the pantomime, who weeps to see the clown put the dog into the sausage machine, shrieks with joy when the policeman gets knocked down, or burnt in the face with a red-hot iron. The squire was outside Germaine's universe. She cared not what became of him so long as he did not intrude.

She passed the long morning hours seated in a summer house, writing to Marianne a long letter, to be shown to Lacey. She had already written them accounts of the squire's tyranny, particularly in the

matter of Sprott, and Lacey had returned a message, through Marianne, that it was only what you might expect. Lacey himself had not written at all, and his messages struck her as less hearty and expansive than she had hoped they would be. She was too completely a child to realize that Lacey, whatever he might say to her in private, would know better than to write her letters, joining in a condemnation of her host, which might come to the eyes of anybody.

It would have been a tremendous relief to Ernie, to write a complete account of the state of things between the squire, his brother, and Miss Grenfell; but Lacey's reticence put her off. She desired his advice, at least his sympathy with her in her outbreak of helpless rage against tyranny; but his messages chilled her; and in consequence, she did not openly mention the subject which chiefly engrossed her thoughts. She gave in detail the account of how the vindictive landowner had gone to Yeominster to get poor Sprott gaoled, how he had succeeded, and how he declared the wretched man should have been gaoled long ago. She added only:

"He has done worse things even than this, but at present I shall not write about it. I will send more news when I see how it is all going to end, which I hope I shall know very shortly, perhaps even to-morrow. So look out for more news from me before very long. Your loving Ernie."

"P.S. The ducklings are simply *ekswisite*, like mimosa."

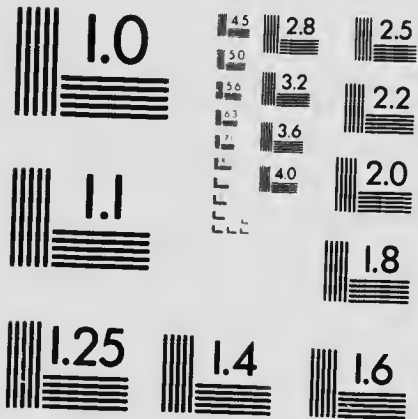
The letter completed, she sat dreaming, her chin on her hand, watching the squire, uninjured in spite of the fervour of her prayers, walking down the drive and across the bridge, in conversation with Yeo.

This groom was specially dear to Miles, coming of a family which had lived on Burnside property for three generations. He had married a girl whose



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family boasted an even longer record of association. For this reason, added to the fact of the young man's sterling qualities, Miles had taken a great interest in the marriage and made extensive alterations to the old lodge. He was by no means a rich man, his father having been a great contrast to most of his race, a man of the world, who much preferred town to his Devon Manor house, and had spent freely money which his neglected estate yielded grudgingly.

Miles, when he succeeded to the property, the exact condition of which his father had kept from him as much as he could, was hardly surprised to find that it would be several years before he could think of marrying.

He was glad that his stepmother and himself had always got on so pleasantly that she was content to go on living with him, as this made it easier to keep up the place. He was not altogether prepared for the difference which his father's death made in the pretensions of his stepbrother.

Rémy Damien had always been an idler. He was now determined that his mother should keep him. He chose to consider it an injustice that his stepfather had left him nothing, and that his mother had nothing to bequeath.

Old Squire Burnside had educated his stepson well, and made him a small allowance. This allowance Miles declined to continue, since he himself was pressed for money, and Rémy was well able to earn his own living if he chose. He offered to put down a certain sum to start him in whatever career he selected. This offer was ostensibly accepted by Rémy, but he had, so far, made no attempt to find an opening for himself.

Miles was a patient, but not a conspicuously sweet-tempered man. He had lived most of his life among people who did not understand him. His own father, and his father's second wife, were wholly unlike him

in tastes and temperament. Both had been attached to him, both were uniformly kind to him; but he had lived in his shell, always. His stepmother, for all her shrewd judgment, did not realize the man within. She was all unaware that Helen Grenfell had stirred in the shy heart, longings which were new and troubling. Rémy was in actual age two years older than the squire—in knowledge of the world, and of women, ten years older. He stepped in, at first in malice, afterwards very seriously; and the two were unacknowledged rivals.

There was not a soul to whom Miles could confide his trouble. It was a moment in which the uncomprehending, but sympathising love of a child, might have soothed him better than anything else.

This was, however, denied him. Rémy, who was taking Helen from him, monopolized also the society of the little girl whose claims he had so generously acknowledged.

The devotion of Yeo and the other men who worked under him was the only comfort he had in those unfriendly days.

He had once offered to take Ermie to have tea at the lodge with Yeo's wife: but Ermie, wholly biased by Lacey's fancy sketch, had been unable to separate in her mind the idea of the pretty girl at the lodge from that of the squire's supposed base flirtations. She had simply but emphatically declined the invitation, and it had been the last advance made to her by the young man.

The afternoon fulfilled the promise of the morning, and was radiantly fine, though with a falling barometer.

As the child came running down the oaken stair, in her white attire, she could not help wondering what Aunt Rosalie would say, could she see her now. She knew, as children do know these things, uncannily, that Aunt Rosalie was inclined to consider her looks

in the light of a misfortune. This opinion was not shared by anybody at Fendallscombe—she was well aware of that. All servants like young things about the place, and coachman, groom, and butler united in being proud of the little lady, as she sat facing her grandmother and the squire in the old-fashioned barouche which Madam always used.

Miles sat gloomily thinking his own thoughts, but even his eyes rested with pleasure upon the expressive small face beneath the Leghorn hat, and he wished, vaguely, that the child were not such a little Tartar.

The Brooklands was all *en fête* that day. The colonel and his wife were introducing their pretty only daughter for the first time to the county, since her presentation in London that spring.

Men are not as a rule too plentiful at garden parties in the provinces; they seemed to swarm that day, around a girl who was not merely an heiress, but so unnecessarily lovely.

There was not a man present who was more distinguished-looking than Rémy Damien.

Ermie took but one rush when she saw him—saw him in the innermost circle surrounding Helen.

He embraced and welcomed his small niece, but with a half-diverted attention. He was on guard this afternoon, afraid almost to allow Miss Grenfell to exchange a word with anyone, unheard by him. As for her, her beauty that day was astonishing. People came and went, her proud parents were congratulated upon their daughter; and nobody guessed, nobody could have suspected, that the penniless young scamp from Fendallscombe had already stepped in and secured what the whole district, it seemed, would soon be striving to gain.

To Ermie, with her elfish grasp of the situation, it was all wonderful. She forgot herself, she forgot everything else, in the fascination of it. She would have remained near her adored ones all the afternoon,

but Helen, as well as Rémy, was too nervous to allow of this. The child was wonderfully sensible, but at any moment she might unconsciously betray an amount of intimacy not to be accounted for without difficulty.

Helen sent one of her court of adoring youths to fetch her two young cousins, children of Ermie's own age. They came up, half shy, half eager, in charge of a delightful governess, who willingly took Ermie also under her wing. At first with reluctance, the child was led off to the delights of the aviary, the gold-fish pond, the swing-boat, and other joys, hitherto by her quite untasted.

As the afternoon wore on, her point of view changed marvellously. Hugh and Chrissie knew their *Ivanhoe* as well as she did. They were also familiar with a fascinating person known as the little Duke, whose adventures filled Ermie with a desire to be better acquainted with him. Time passed much too fast, and she could not believe that it was time to go, when the burly form of Miles Burnside approached their play-place to summon her to return home.

His face, she thought, wore an unusually forbidding expression, though he smiled when he came near, and looked with approval at the three somewhat dishevelled, but evidently happy young people, grouped round Miss Bennett on the grass.

"It's a shame to disturb you, Pixie," he said kindly, "but perhaps Miss Grenfell will allow your new friends to come and have tea with you to-morrow at Fendallseombe—do you think so?" he went on politely, addressing Miss Bennett.

Miss Bennett thought it almost certain that permission would be granted and the three children exchanged warmly affectionate farewells.

He strode away, Ermie walking mute beside him, and the moment the necessity for speech was past, he seemed to retire again into the mood which had

held him as he approached. His brows lowered, his eyes looked fixed and moody.

His curious fancy for letting his beard grow, made him a conspicuous figure among the young men present. Rémy had sometimes laughed at him, and called him Orson: but as Rémy was a person whose opinion on all subjects he regarded with contempt, that had no effect upon him. Madam was used to French young men, most of whom wear beards, and it did not strike her that her stepson's appearance was peculiar. She was used to it, and took it for granted.

As Ermie trotted beside him through the gardens, her petition was saying itself over and over in her heart: "Oh, God, please strike the squire dead! Please strike the squire dead!"

They came in sight of the group upon the lawn, near the large pavilion erected for the music. A good many people—those who had to drive home long distances—were already gone. Colonel and Mrs. Grenfell had proceeded indoors, to bid their guests farewell. Rémy and Helen sat together at a little distance from anybody else, and spoke in low tones.

As Miles and Ermie approached, Madam rose from the chair which she occupied upon the dry gravel terrace, and stood awaiting them.

"Call Rémy, to bid me good-bye," said she, when Miles was within hearing.

He turned, and went slowly across the lawn, where the sinking sun sent his shadow, huge and lengthy, before him over the golden grass.

Ermie thought it was symbolic. The two seated figures were now shrouded in shadow—his shadow. He came up to Miss Grenfell—Ermie saw that colour rose to her face, and that she looked distressed as she gave him her hand in leave-taking.

There was a waltz which was very popular that

year—a haunting, tender, regretful thing, called “The Last Time.” This waltz was at the moment being played by the band, and the sadness of it so overswept the watching child that the tears gathered in her eyes, and rolled down her cheeks, unseen in the shadow of her hat as she stood, so quiet, so all-observant by her grandmother’s side.

Miles evidently said something to Miss Grenfell. She seemed to make an effort to answer him. To Ermie’s fancy there was something pleading in her attitude towards him. It seemed to her that he held her hand too long, and that she had to draw it away from him.

Then, gaily, briefly, Uncle Rémy also bid her good-bye, raising his hat with some laughing remark, to which she responded with a smile that only succeeded in being tremulous. The stepbrothers came back together, across the lawn. Ermie watched them, and wondered what the Squire was saying to call such an expression to the other’s face. When they came near, Miles said to Madam :

“I have told Rémy that he had better come back to Fendallseombe with us to-night. There is no train now to Yeominster which will get him there before midnight.”

“Sorry, *maman*, but I can’t accept Miles’s princely hospitality,” was the light reply. “I have things to do; I must go back to-night.”

“I have things to say,” was Miles’s reply. “You cannot go back to-night.”

Rémy looked positively vindictive, but he preserved his smooth tone. “Your anxiety to keep me is flattering, but I won’t trouble you now with my presence,” he said. “Later on, I shall be only too pleased to accept an invitation, if you tender it.”

“You had better accept this one, Rémy,” said Miles, very quietly, but with some meaning or some menace in his voice.

"Sorry, but it does not suit my plans," answered Rémy, straight out.

"Then it is your plans which you must alter, I fear," was the calm retort.

"That is not practicable, much as I regret it. Good-night, *maman*, see you again soon."

"Rémy, you had better come home and talk to Miles as he desires," said Madam, with a tremor in her voice. "What can you have to do in Yeominster before to-morrow morning?"

"If you do not make up your mind to come," put in Miles, "I am afraid that I must ask to see Colonel Grenfell before discussing the matter with you. I don't wish to do that, but I shall do it, if you force me."

Rémy grew red and white in a surprisingly short minute. He looked at his stepbrother with one of the looks which would kill, were their power equal to the desire that wings them.

"If my coming is likely to prevent your making an irreparable blunder, my dear fellow," he said sourly, "I suppose I had better come. What idea you have in your head I cannot imagine, but with men of your temper . . . it is as hard to drive out an idea once in, as it is to get it there to begin with."

"That may be," was the unruffled reply, "but I think you had better come."

Ermie stood there during this colloquy, hardly daring to draw breath, trembling from head to foot with the strength of her emotion. She was tremendously wrought up. Her party, anticipated for many days previously—the new and exciting experience of playing with other children—all these things, joined to the delight of seeing her uncle once more, combined to make her frame of mind far from normal. She grasped Rémy's hand tightly in both her own, and he, reminded of her existence by the caress, smiled down upon her with eyes of furious resent-

ment. She replied with a look quite uncanny in such a child—a look which told him as though she had spoken, how completely she understood his rage.

They all went indoors, took leave of their host and hostess, and soon found themselves seated in the carriage, and bowling home through the lovely lanes in the evening quiet.

To Ermie's full heart, it was relief unutterable to have Rémy at her side in the carriage. She was afraid of the squire's frozen face, and she nestled close against her uncle, putting up her face to be kissed.

"Tired, little one?" asked Rémy tenderly. He could at least parade before Miles the child's devotion to himself. He drew her upon his knees, took off her large hat, laying it upon the seat beside him, and tied her scarf round her head, to keep her from the evening breeze. Something in the tenderness—the personal touch to which she was so unaccustomed—moved her beyond bearing, and she burst into tears.

"Why, what's the matter?" he cried, in consternation. A fruitless question, for she did not know. After some time, she sobbed out, "Oh, I don't know, but I think it was the music—so sad! So sad! And it is getting dark and everything is over, and the music goes on and on in my head."

Of the three other persons in the carriage, the only one who understood that cry was Miles. He had, however, no language in which to communicate with her. Rémy kissed and hushed her into silence, cuddling her against him: and the exhaustion following upon excitement, and the even motion of the bowling wheels, soon had their effect. She fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

EAVESDROPPING

THE cessation of motion, and the feeling of being lifted in Rémy's arms from the carriage, stirred Germaine to partial consciousness, but she did not open her eyes, nor move; for the stupor of fatigue still held her.

"It had better be at once, in the library," somebody was saying.

"With all my heart," replied Rémy's voice.

She felt herself carried along and laid down among furry cushions.

"Ring the bell for Espérance to carry that child upstairs," she heard the squire command.

"Oh, don't waken her, she's in such a beautiful sleep," was Rémy's reply. "I'll carry her up, later."

She was not asleep, but for some reason she dared not say so. There is in children a curious reluctance to tell any grown-up person that they are mistaken. With no idea in her mind of deceit, Germaine lay still: and for several minutes after that, she did actually lose consciousness.

The sound of a raised voice roused her faculties once more. She lay as still as a mouse, and peered under her eyelids.

Her couch was a sofa in a dark corner of the library—a room she had seldom entered. One lamp stood upon the writing-table, and illumined the face of Miles, as he sat with folded arms in his swing-chair.

Near him Madam, still wearing her bonnet, occupied an easy chair, further from the light. Rémy was by the mantel-piece, upon which he leaned his arm.

The French window was open, looking into the garden. The after-glow lingered in the west, and Venus showed pure and dazzling as a drop of dew in the melting, darkening sky.

"We have had enough of this—you must tell me in so many words, what you are going to do." These words from the squire, were the first which reached her brain.

"Well, as soon as this momentous interview is over, I hope you will give me some dinner," replied Rémy lightly.

Miles flung himself back in his chair and turned to Madam. "Will he answer you, Madam?" he asked wrathfully. "You see how he defies me."

"Rémy, for my sake," said Madam in a low voice. "Your brother has a right to ask these questions."

"What right?" flashed Rémy proudly.

"The right of the man who will not have his house, his position, used by an adventurer for his own ends," replied Miles icily. He was not conciliatory.

Rémy bowed. "Do you include my father also in your flattering description of me?" he asked.

"In decency's name, Rémy, what do you hope to accomplish by all this senseless equivocation? I tell you that I know your intentions. You mean to carry off this young, inexperienced girl from her home and friends, and to give her in exchange—what? A lazy loafer, who is without means and never yet did an honest day's work."

"When she could be mistress of Fendallscombe and its handsome and cultivated owner! Well! Some people might have a doubt as to which was the better bargain after all!" said Rémy with a smile. "If Helen marries me, she marries brains

and birth. If she marries you—pardon me, little brother—she marries a clod. I am but following your example in speaking thus plainly.”

“I fail to see why Miss Grenfell’s choice is so restricted as you infer it to be,” replied Miles. His voice shook with rage. “But I have no intention of arguing the point with you. You have made arrangements to elope with Miss Grenfell. I have brought you here to obtain your promise to do nothing of the kind.”

“How can I do anything of the kind when you will prevent it?” cried Rémy, suddenly flashing out. “What business are my affairs of yours? You give me no money, you grudge me even a roof over my head. I am at least not your dependent.”

“Rémy, I sometimes wonder whether you are quite right in your head! When you are married to Miss Grenfell, who is going to keep you? Answer me simply that question.”

“Of what use to talk to one who cannot understand?” replied Rémy witheringly. “You money-grubbing English, who bring down everything to the level of pounds, shillings, and pence! What do you understand of the feelings of a nobleman of France? Do you realize that Miss Grenfell does me the honour to say she loves me?”

“Oh, pshaw! You make me sick!”

“I daresay. It is the truth, however. She loves me, and what reason is there why she should not have the man she wants? When once we are married, do you suppose that her parents will allow her to suffer poverty?”

“Ah! I thought we should come to the bed-rock at last,” said Miles, and his voice grated. “You marry, in the hope that your wife’s parents will keep you both!” He was at the end of his self-command and lost his temper completely. “You may perhaps remember that your elder brother did

the same thing, precisely, and that in his case the financial results were hardly encouraging."

Rémy winced as though a wasp had stung him and Madam made some kind of indignant protest.

"You hear, *maman*," said Rémy in the tones of one cut to the quick, and nobly repressing passion. "He accuses Constant—our martyr Constant—of marrying for money—of being a fortune-hunter! Well then, Miles, I am content—quite content—to stand side by side with my brother. If he was a fortune-hunter, so am I." He folded his arms, and with his head high he looked a most heroic figure.

As for Germaine she could hardly lie still upon the sofa. Her heart swelled until she thought it must burst. Her father! her own beloved father, who had lived for his wife and child—more, had died for them! The man in the swing-chair was hardly human, he must be a devil in human guise; and how mildly did Madam reprove him!

"You should not have said that, Miles."

"I beg your pardon," he said, not at all penitently. "I only wished to show Rémy clearly what may be the result of his present designs. Constant's daughter is already almost dependent upon your goodness, Madam. It will be quite out of the question for us to provide for Rémy's family also."

Rémy turned away, making some remark upon Miles's coarseness, which Germaine could not catch. Madam stood up, resting one frail hand upon the table.

"I think there is no need to prolong this wrangle," said she. "In my judgment, Rémy, you are much to blame and it is a good thing that Miles was discovered your intentions in time. You must give your assurance that you will not attempt an elopement with Miss Grenfell, or I will take the matter out of Miles's hands, and go myself to the Colonel. My elder son made a clandestine marriage. I will not have the Damiens so disgraced again."

Oh, poor, poor Rémy! Even his own mother was against him now! Germaine's whole body shook with sobs which she could hardly keep from being audible. The three were all, however, too absorbed to take any notice of her.

"Sit down here and write now," went on Madam. "I will have the letter sent to Helen by messenger early to-morrow morning. Say that upon reflection you see how unjust, how little considerate of her your mad scheme is. Say that until you can elaim her openly you give her back her promise. I shall expect to see the letter when it is written."

"Thank you, Madam," said Miles in tones of gratitude.

Rémy took a turn through the room and back. Then he paused, stood before Miles and began to speak. His words came in a torrent, and for a while the squire made no attempt to check them. At last Madam interfered.

"Enough Rémy. Come with me to my dressing-room and write your letter there. I undertake to see, Miles, that it is done."

"What I hate—what I cannot pardon," cried Rémy, hoarse with his recent outburst, "is the treachery of it. What does Miles care for Colonel and Mrs. Grenfell? If that were all, he would by my marriage, rid himself for ever of the poor relation whose claims he finds so troublesome! But no! We must look deeper for the true reason! It is my paragon of a stepbrother who has cast loving eyes upon Helen's beauty and Helen's money-bags! Her fortune is to go to enrich the impoverished acres of Fendallseombe; she is to be the mother of a tribe of squires——"

Miles had risen from his chair. He was quite quiet and rather white. "If you don't stop it, Rémy, I shall knock you down," he said evenly, walk-

ing forward as he spoke across the room to where the other stood.

It might almost be said that Rémy turned tail, so suddenly did he retreat. He spoke once more, however, his hand upon the door handle.

"In France, we do not come to blows in the presence of ladies," he remarked.

"In England, we don't shelter ourselves behind petticoats," was the very prompt rejoinder. Rémy vanished, banging the door.

"I'm sorry, Madam," said Miles, the moment he was gone. "He does seem to have the art of making me lose my hair——"

"It would be better, could you try to manage him by other methods," was the agitated reply; "but I admit he is trying, to a man of your temperament particularly. However, I think you have prevented this terrible thing from happening. I am wholly with you—you are right—it could not be permitted. I will go to him at once."

She also left the room, with never a thought of the child upon the sofa.

Miles reseated himself in his swing-chair. It was quite dark by now. Only the lamp-light showed his face, pale and strained as he leaned his chin upon his hand. With all his heart he hated domestic strife. He was lonely, hurt and bewildered. Nobody understood, nobody cared. Life was hard.

The roll of the gong sounded in the hall presently. A cold supper had been ordered; for it was too late for dinner by the time they reached home. Germaine lay still. In a minute the squire would rise and go to supper, and she could escape and run upstairs to Espérance.

He did not move, however. He sat so still and all was so quiet, that she had nearly dropped asleep again when there came a knock at the door and Espérance entered.

"Madam sent me, sir, to remind you of supper. Is Mademoiselle Germaine here?"

"By Jove, yes she is. Take her away," he replied impatiently.

Espérance crossed the room, lifted the child in her arms, and went out. Germaine stirred as they crossed the hall and murmured, "I can walk."

The old woman gladly set her down, and they went upstairs together.

While being undressed, she had almost poured out her load of indignation, sympathy, and hatred in the ears of the Frenchwoman. She was held back only by the knowledge of how difficult it always is to get grown-ups, even nice ones, to understand exactly what you are talking about. Lacey was the sole exception. Even Unele Rémy was not invariably intelligent enough to please her.

She spoke very little, even when Espérance pressed for news of the party. She owned that she had liked Hugh and Chrissie, and enjoyed playing with them; but she did not expand. Espérance, though disappointed, realized that this was a creature of moods, and guessed that the exciting day had been too much for her. To-morrow she would have a graphie account, poured from those eager lips, which parted so charmingly above the pretty little teeth. It would all come out, torrents of it, as they sat together in the shade out on the terrace. So, assuring herself, the old woman tucked her charge in and left her.

Alone in the fragrant semi-darkness of the early summer night, Germaine lay upon her back, her big sombre eyes staring up at the ceiling, and revolved things in her mind.

The point she was debating, was the existence of God.

Somehow since her association with Espérance, God had come to seem to her a very real Person.

Laeey had told her that God was just the result of a human desire to impersonate everything. He said there was such a thing as Infinite Good, and that human beings, in their best moments, strained upwards towards it. This, so he said, grew into the two definite ideas of God and prayer. Both were good for the uninitiated, though the adept, the person who was advanced and enlightened, had no need of such helps. He or she just followed the good that was in them and resisted the evil, moving thus slowly ever upward towards Infinite Good.

But the story of a loving Father, which Espérance told her, made a strong appeal. She decided that she was not as yet old and advanced enough to take in the idea of the Infinite Good. She preferred to think of the Father who loved and cared for His children. He knew, so Espérance declared, when you were in trouble. He would send help to those who asked Him.

Then why, if that were so, had He sent no response to her urgent prayer for the removal of the squire? Here was such a clear, uncomplicated case, if only God could be brought to see it in the right light! A wicked man, representative of a wicked system, a doer of injustice, an oppressor. On the other hand, ground down under the heel of the tyrant, two perfect creatures, two ideal lovers, parted by a barrier of ridiculous money! If only the cruel, selfish being who was crushing out their life and happiness could be removed—then all would be well. Unele Rémy would become Squire of Fendallseombe, and he would turn it all into peasant holdings, and let anybody catch hares and pheasants if they wanted to, and bring Sprott out of gaol, and give to all their just dues. She was so ignorant that she supposed Miles's death would leave Rémy heir of Fendallseombe! She had never heard of the crabbed old second cousin, Burnside of Dunlee, who would inherit

a place in a part of the country he hated, and would no doubt sell the estate at once.

Why, why did God, if God there were, not come to her aid in this difficulty? Espérance had told her that God always acted in a mysterious, unlooked-for way—that man's extremity was God's opportunity. This did not look like it. She remembered a story Lacey had once told to her and Marianne, in illustration of one of his doctrines. It was about a hermit named Ferishtah, who saw, upon one of his daily walks, a nest of abandoned nestlings: and while he watched and pitied them, he saw a bird of prey bring food in its beak to nourish the forsaken little ones. Ferishtah was moved by this sight, to chide himself for want of faith. "If I really believed in God, I should be quite sure that He would also nourish me." He, therefore went back to his cell and sat there, hoping to be nourished. But when he was half dead of starvation, suddenly the thought came to him—"What if God intended me to be the feeder and not the fed? The bird who brought relief was equally God's creature with those whom he helped in their extremity."

The thought rushed like a draught of wine to Germaine's heart. She had prayed and prayed, in full faith. Did God mean her to be active and not passive in this matter? Was there something she might do, instead of waiting for God to do it all?

Another thought followed so hard upon the heels of this one that it almost stopped her breath. "*I am of the blood of Charlotte Corday. . . .*"

Charlotte had not sat at home and prayed. She had believed that God intended her to act. France would not be delivered by prayer alone, but by action. Joan of Arc had thought the same. Her God had sent her to execute justice—to still the enemy and the avenger.

. . . It had been hard for Charlotte. There had

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been money to find, a long journey to take, a knife to purchase, a house to enter. . . . Here all would be easy.

There were knives in plenty hanging in the hall. She had but to go and take one down from its place. She knew where the squire slept. She had but to wait until all the house was still. . . .

In a moment the childish heart was a vortex of seething passion. Unknown to anyone, her moral outlook had for long been so dominated by Lacey and his revolutionary teachings, that she saw everything through that medium. Added to this, her hungry, craving, child's heart, athirst for love, had twined itself in complete self-abandonment round those two figures, Rémy Damien and Helen Grenfell. Rémy had fostered her passionate partisanship. For his own reasons he had kept her feelings at fever heat; all her loyalty, all her devotion, belonged to him. Everything that Miles said or did was in her eyes wrong and detestable.

No scruple visited her mind. From the moment of the flashing upon her of the Great Idea, she knew what she had to do.

It was an inspiration from God, of that she was certain. She had but to act, promptly and faithfully, and her vehement prayer would be fulfilled.

She looked upon herself as an instrument, sent to accomplish the purposes of the Most High.

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CHAPTER XII

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

THE moon was one night past the full, and came up late. It peeped over that hill in the park where the pixies danced, and gradually poured its light over the side of the house where lay the squire's own room.

It was high in the heavens before a door opened, in the long corridor which belonged to the wing added in 1684.

From that noiselessly opened door, emerged a little figure, with a white face half drowned in the flowing of its night-black hair. Down the stairs it stole with lightest tread, as though a fairy should pass through the silent place.

In the hall, it mounted upon a high buffet of black, shiny oak, and took from the wall above, a Damascus dagger, sharp and gleaming.

Then, with no hesitation, moving always in the same still, but determined way, like a creature with a doom laid upon it for fulfilment, the same figure ascended noiselessly, and walked down the corridor to the door which closed its end.

All the time, as Germaine went through these movements, she was doing it to music. That waltz, that haunting refrain, "The Last Time" was sounding in her brain. The last time indeed: for on that summer night, her childhood stopped, and to her came the knowledge of good and evil.

Before the squire's door, Marquis, the great hound, lay extended, nose on paws. He looked up at the

light fall of the felt-shod feet, and, recognising the child, thudded with his tail upon the floor with a canine grin of greeting, and in his eyes a certain touch of wonder as to what she did there, at that time of night.

She stopped and stroked him: even that did not awaken her mind, clutching at its fixed idea, to the consciousness of hideous treachery.

Miles's door was never locked. Marquis was a greater protection than many bolts. But how escape if a man's foes are they of his own household?

With that same steadiness, that same mechanical precision, Germaine entered almost without noise, and shut Marquis outside. At that, the dog gave one wistful sound, more a grunt than a bark. It did not disturb the peaceful slumber of the healthy young man who lay in the great bed with a carved oak foot, the moonlight clearly showing his position.

One arm was thrown up under his head, the other lay wide upon the coverlet. Nothing but the thin silk of his sleeping suit intervened between him and the assassin's knife.

At the sight of that helplessness, that complete unconsciousness, nausea overcame the child. For a desperate minute she stood, gripping a chair, her heart thumping, her breath coming in gasps. But a power mightier than herself seemed to have possessed her. Who ever supposed that to slay was easy, even when righteous, as now? Was it to be thought that even Charlotte struck her delivering blow without an effort? . . .

There was a footstool near the bed-head. She mounted upon this, to give herself more power. She raised the knife in both hands, and brought it down with all her force. . . .

There was a smothered, choking cry. The sleeping man writhed, half rose, flung out clutching hands.

Marquis outside howled, low and sadly. The

horror which hitherto had held aloof so cunningly, descended suddenly upon the new Charlotte Corday and gripped her by the throat.

Snatching out the red, wet blade, she flung it to the far corner of the room, darted to the door, opened it, and fled. . . .

She found herself back in her own quarters, standing there with limbs that shook as if with palsy, gazing in the semi-darkness at a creature in the glass upon the front of whose pale-coloured dressing-gown was a dark stain.

What had happened? "What have I done? What have I done?" she repeated, trying to tear off the sullied garment; but as in a nightmare her fingers would not obey her will.

That sound—that dreadful choke—who would have believed that anything could sound so awful? . . . And the blood—somehow she had not been prepared for that.

It was as though someone else were present in the room, asking persistently: "What have you done? What have you done?"

Something was coming! Was it along the passage? Was he there, outside, with the knife in his hand? "Oh, God! Oh, God! Save me from the devil! . . ."

In the speaking, rustling silence of the house, she heard Marquis give a long, low howl.

At any cost she must be locked in, safe from pursuit! She must make a great effort, and walk that distance—that appalling distance from where she stood, to the door.

Her limbs refused to move—yet she could not stand there, in the clutch of that maddening idea that something or somebody was just about to enter and take possession of her.

The night was full of whisperings, of low, mocking laughter, of a kind of shudder as though angels hid their faces behind their trembling wings. There was

but one impulse in her—the impulse to flee—to run and run and run until she dropped—somewhere out of doors, far away, deep in some woodland, where, perhaps, one might find solitude and quiet. . . .

But she could not run. Her limbs refused to carry her. Again and again she made the effort, succeeding at last in staggering to the bed, where she fell, swooning away into utter darkness.

The fainting-fit must have passed into natural sleep: for presently she was dreaming. In her dream she re-enacted the tragedy, stole from bed, procured the dagger, entered the chamber of the sleeper, and struck with all her force. Again she heard the cry, but far louder, more dreadful, more prolonged. She sprang up. The sunlight poured in at her eastern window, she was lying across her bed, upon the outside of it—and the cry was not imaginary, but real. Somebody had shrieked—was even now shrieking:

“Murder! Murder!”

A thousand feelings leapt to life in the childish heart. It was done! The terrible deed had been accomplished, and Uncle Rémy was free! . . . And morning had risen, the sun still shone, the dreadfulness was all in the past, now came the moment of reward.

Clad only in her nightdress, the child flew to the door, flung it wide, ran out into the corridor.

Even as she did so, the door of Rémy Damien's room, nearly opposite, opened too, and he, newly sprung from bed, appeared. He was followed by Evans, the man who waited upon the squire, with a face like chalk, and shedding hysterical tears.

“Impossible, impossible!” cried Rémy wildly, “you must be dreaming—it's simply unthinkable!”

“Come and look, sir, for the Lord's sake! It was the dog who woke me, with his everlasting moaning—I wondered Mr. Burnside didn't wake and quiet him—

and when I got in—— Oh, my God! the place is like a shambles, and him on the floor halfway between his bed and the door!”

Germaine darted forward, her arms outstretched. “Uncle Rémy! Listen!”

He did not even hear her. He rushed past her down the corridor, and she heard his cry of horror as he entered the chamber of her victim.

A moment later, Espérance, wrapped in a dressing-gown, hurried up and joined the party in the death-room. She also cried out in horror.

Germaine still stood in the passage, shivering with excitement, longing, with a passion impossible to describe, for the reward of her heroism, the glow that should irradiate her uncle's face when he heard who had saved him!

It seemed to her an age before he came out, and when he did, she was shocked at the change in him. He was white, dry-lipped, his eye was wandering. He looked utterly unnerved.

The child ran to him, flung her arms about him, lifted her ardent eyes to his beloved face.

“Uncle Ré, I did it—I did it! You are free now—you and Miss Grenfell!”

For a minute he paused, dazed. Then he shook her off impatiently.

“Don't rave, child. The shock has been too much for you. Go back to bed.”

“But I must tell you, first!” She was struggling between smiles and tears. “I want to hear you say, ‘Well done!’ I have been Charlotte Corday! I have killed the tyrant!”

“What!” He recoiled as though from a serpent.

“It is true, it is true! I was awake in the library last night! I heard the things he said! He would have parted you and her——”

He gripped her by the thin shoulders, a look in his eyes which thrilled her with a nameless fear. “Do

you know what you are saying? You are raving mad! You cannot mean that *you* . . ."

"I do mean it! It was awfully difficult to do, much harder than I thought—but I have done it, and you are delivered!"

He gave a cry that was hardly more than a gasp. "You tell me that you—killed—Miles?"

"I did!" Frantically she clutched him. "I did! I tell you I did! For your sake, and for justice! Oh, Uncle Ré, don't look like that! What is the matter?"

He flung her from him with such violence, such suddenness of repulsion, that she fell back against the wall of the corridor.

"You mad, miserable, misguided child! What have you done?" Raising his fists he shook her. "What do you mean by justice? Murder is not justice! Great God, I suppose you will be saying next that I instigated you to this! . . . Who could have foreseen anything so awful, *so impossible*! No, don't come near me! Don't touch me! Go into your room and stay there! Do you know you have committed murder? and that murderers are *hanged*!"

Disregarding her prayers and tears, he pushed her into her room and turned the key upon her.

Nothing that can be written down can convey any idea of the mental agony of Germaine at that moment. Her unformed mind had hardly forecast punishment, but she had vaguely expected punishment, not infamy. Through it all, however, the tender love and gratitude of the man she had saved supported her. Now he had cast her aside.

She stood in the middle of her room, just a child, alone: and some glimmering of the nature of what she had done began to break through the clouds of high-flown delusion upon which her mind had fed so long.

For quite a long time, her eyes, though wide open, were incapable of vision. When she came to herself,

she was startled by her own image in the glass. Her white face, wild hair, staring eyes . . . and oh, horror ! On the front of her nightdress, five or six red drops !

She uttered a shriek which seemed as if it would tear her throat, and, laying hands forcibly upon the sullied garment, she rent it from top to bottom, cast it from her, and dressed herself in feverish haste.

It was not yet six o'clock.

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CHAPTER XIII

AFTERWARDS

HER mental equilibrium was returning. Her uncle's rejection of her sacrifice had restored her balance, as cold water dashed the face may revive the fainting.

When she bent on her clothes, she made frantic efforts to get out of her room, beating upon the door and crying out. Nobody heard her, however. She laid her ear to the hard panels, listening for any sound.

The usually quiet house was full of noise, voices, footsteps, exclamations. She heard the doctor's motor buzzing over the stone bridge and up to the door. She heard his arrival, and the nameless bustle which accompanied it.

What would happen to her ?

" Murderers are hanged."

She wondered how it was that the notions of a policeman and a prison had not before occurred to her. How was it that she had not understood that her deed was murder ? As she looked back upon it, she saw it from a wholly new point—a black treachery, a thing from which every instinct recoiled.

She thought of her mother—the mother for whom she felt so sorry—whose old age she always meant to comfort, whose living she meant to earn. Now she had done a thing which shut her out for ever from home and friends—she had stained her father's name, brought shame upon that helpless mother.

Oh to recall that night ! To be able to sleep,

awake, and find the thing a dream! Too late! Always now she would have the scene before her eyes—the moonlit room, the trustful dog, the sleeping victim, the base blow.

It was long before she heard the key turned, slowly and as it were unwillingly, in the lock.

Espérance entered, her eyes red and swollen with weeping. She had a shrinking, uncertain manner, as though the prisoner were some poisonous reptile, whom she pitied but hardly dared approach.

The child, who was standing by the open window, turned her head, searching her face with her sombre eyes, as if for hope of mercy.

“*Mademoiselle, chérie,*” faltered the old woman, “speak to me! Tell me you were not in your right senses when you spoke to Monsieur Rémy just now!”

“Oh, Espérance, if I could! If I could!”

Espérance looked weakly from side to side. The thing was too much for her. “Such things as these don’t happen,” she faltered vaguely.

“I didn’t know! I didn’t know what I was doing! I thought God had put the idea into my head, as an answer to my prayers!” cried the child, conscious that this sounded like nonsense, yet hoping against hope for sympathy or comprehension. “Oh, will nobody good ever touch me or come near me again, until I am hanged?” she cried pitifully.

“My child, you have learnt the commandments—‘Thou shalt do no murder.’”

“I didn’t think it was murder! You don’t say Jael murdered Sisera! Charlotte Corday didn’t murder Marat—she did it to save France!”

The old woman looked earnestly upon her, making a real effort to catch her meaning. “But, my dear, that is a very different thing. Those were bad men! You have murdered the best man in this county—a brave gentleman who never hurt a fly,

who did good to all—one whose place can never be filled. Oh, *mon Dieu*, my poor mistress! Turned out in her old age! He would never have sent her away!" Overcome at the thought of the desolation before them, Espérance sat down and her tears flowed afresh.

New distress seized the unhappy child. "But Uncle Rémy will not turn out grand'mère?" she cried anxiously.

"He will not be here to do the one or the other," was the sad reply. "The gentleman who takes the property has never even seen Madame, and they say he will sell Fendallseombe."

This was the climax. The new Charlotte Corday uttered a cry of utter disillusionment.

"Then it is all of no use," she wailed. "I have done it, and done it in vain! Oh, I shall kill myself!" she screamed in despair. Then, struggling with her choking mortification, "But he was not good—the squire! He was a tyrant, Uncle Rémy said so! He did injustice, he ground the faces of the poor! He turned Sprott out of his house and sent him to gaol, he made love to girls he ought not to, he tried to prevent darling Helen and Uncle Rémy from meeting, from being married. He was wicked, wicked, wicked, and you know it!" she stormed, clinging to her final shred of justification.

"Miss Ermie dear, I think you must be out of your senses," panted the amazed Espérance. "The patience of Moniseur Miles was a thing the whole house would talk of. What other man would have borne with Monsieur Rémy as he has done? I tell you this, I, although Rémy was my own nursling—the squire's little finger was worth more than all my poor Rémy's idle body! As for Sprott, what has been done for that good-for-nothing would fill a volume! Who has put these wicked tales into your head, child? I can't understand it!"

Germaine was at a loss. Who had done so? She had no reply.

"If it was Monsieur Rémy," went on the old woman, "he deserves to be punished—working on a child's mind like that! But even then—even then I don't understand—why, look how kind he was to you, *chérie*—he never spoke a harsh word to anybody in his life, except to his brother now and again when things were really too much to be borne in patience."

"Oh, Espérance, try, try, try to understand! Don't you know what he said to poor Uncle Rémy about Helen? Don't you know he wanted to keep them apart? If you had heard the shameful thing he said last night—that my own father, my splendid hero father—was a fortune-hunter, and married my mother for money! . . . Oh, don't drive me mad, you *know* he was not good, he was a wicked man, and it was my plain duty to kill him! If I must suffer the penalty, well, I am ready. Charlotte suffered, all alone! I am of her blood!"

Espérance surveyed the slip of a thing, thrilled with a sense of her own achievement, passionately battling against the cold weight of common sense, against the moral law, against anything which came into conflict with her own illusions. The good woman groaned.

"God forgive you, child, you're past me!" She threw up her hands. "I must leave you to them that have more knowledge. O dear Lord Christ, if they would but let me bring a priest to her!"

"I don't want a priest! Only those who are not strong enough to stand alone need priests," cried Germaine hotly. "I follow the inner light!"

"And look," cried Espérance in a terrible voice, "look where your following your own naughty light has led you!"

Germaine flinched from those awful words. In a

moment she was but a child again, a terrified, lonely child, in a world full of cruel bewilderments.

"How you could kneel and say your prayers as you have done, night and morning, with murder in your soul," pursued the old woman.

"I did pray! I prayed to God early and late, to let the squire die," cried Germaine. "Pray! I should think so! In bed, after you had left me, out in the garden, everywhere! I just cried to God to hear my prayer, and at last it came to me, like a voice speaking, that I was to do it myself!—And God was cheating me, it seems, cheating all the time! He knew that I was mistaken! I thought, if the squire is dead, Uncle Rémy will have everything, and he can marry Miss Grenfell and be happy ever after. God knew better—I suppose He understands these wicked English laws—I don't! He saw it would be no good to kill Mr. Burnside! Then He ought to have let me know—to show me in some way that I was not to do it!"

Espérance listened to this tirade with a face as white as paper. To her, as to Madam, Germaine was a silent child—what they call "biddable" in Devonshire. She had always seemed tranquilly pleased with all that came to her—happy, content, obedient.

Now, as the torrent of words, not half of which Espérance could understand, flowed from her, it was as though some different personality raged from the body which had once held another soul.

She sat silent for quite a long time after her outburst of blasphemy. It were better to leave the doctor to ascertain the state of mind. But one final question the old woman must put.

"Did you ever say a word to anybody about this idea of yours—that you wished the squire to die?"

"No, never!"

"Not to your Uncle Rémy?"—searchingly.

"No, certainly not."

Espérance sighed, and rose to her feet. "I will send you your breakfast," she said heavily.

"May I not go and find Unele Rémy?"

"No. You are to stay here."

She turned the key as she went out, upon the prisoner, who began to wonder when the police would arrive.

Espérance came back presently, with breakfast, which Germaine could hardly touch, though she drank tea thirstily.

Her eloquence had fallen from her suddenly, she was as silent as usual while the old nurse made her bed, put her room tidy, brushed her hair, and saw that she was neat.

When her attendant showed signs of being about to leave the room, the criminal ventured a question. "What are they going to do with me?"

"I cannot tell you. You are to remain here for the present," was the reply: and the prison door again closed.

Before leaving her, Espérance had put work and a story-book within reach. Germaine did not even see them. She went to the window, knelt down thereat, her arms upon the window-seat, and stared at the beauty of summer outside in the old park.

The intensity of her imagination infused a spirit of lamentation into the very look of things. The noisy brook rushing under the bridge was crying pitifully—"He is gone, he is gone, the last of the old race! Alas, alas, for Fendallscombe, strangers must rule us now! The old nursery where he played will never echo to the sound of his children's voices, the horses in the stables will never feel his touch upon the rein! In one moment, one black moment, this child from a far place has cut off the old race, has left us masterless!"

The child's brain was still reeling with the shock

of the terms used by Espérance in referring to the two young men. Never, to her knowledge, had she heard anybody express any opinion about the squire, except Rémy, who always disparaged him, and Sprott, who cursed him. The idea of his baseness was so ingrained in her mind that she had pictured everybody who had groaned beneath his tyranny as drawing a sigh of tremendous relief when his decease became known. If she had killed a good man, what was in store for her? Not only the gallows in this world, but also eternal punishment.

The idea that she had better kill herself flitted through her mind. The thought of Judas Iscariot restrained her. She remembered having once heard it said, in a sermon, that Judas might have been forgiven for betraying Christ, but could not be forgiven his despair and suicide. He had doubted God's mercy. Ah, but was there a God? It really seemed that Lacey was right, since God, if He existed, could hardly have allowed His child to be so cruelly deceived.

If there were no God, no life to come, then surely it were better to end all this misery. She felt sure that she could never live through another night. Always now for her, the night would be full of horror. And then there was the thought of being hanged——

She sprang to her feet in an agony of revolt. How was she to escape? She might throw herself out of window. But, though the fall would doubtless injure her, it was not nearly far enough to ensure the swift death which was what she desired.

As she leaned out among the roses and magnolia, she heard the key turn in the lock of her room, and a strange man entered, followed by Espérance. Evidently the moment was come. She was to be carried off to gaol.

Her visitor stopped short, as if uncertain, glanced at the nurse, and said hurriedly: "What, *she*? That child struck that blow?"

Espérance murmured assent. He came forward and sat down. "Come here to me, little girl," he said, not at all harshly.

Germaine slowly advanced, till she stood beside him, searching hungrily into his face, to see if he were by any chance somebody who could understand. She thought not. He had a broad, shaven face, and was rather stout and very clean-looking. He wore gold-rimmed pincenez. His eyes were grey and rather small, but very keen. He took her hand, laid his fingers just above her wrist, and looked at her without speaking for some time, during which she stood, strung up and tense, yet feeling that in a moment she might break down and shriek.

"H'm!" said he, after this, letting her hand go. "Fetch a chair and sit down. I want a few minutes' chat with you."

Germaine obeyed, sitting down in quivering suspense.

"Will you tell me how old you are?"

"I am nearly eleven."

"Indeed! You are an only child?"

"Yes."

"Have you many playmates at your own home?"

"Only one."

"Of your own age?"

"Oh no, she is grown up; but she plays beautifully."

"What sort of games? The kind you wanted your uncle to play, of knights and fighting and red Indians and so on?"

"Yes. Just those."

"Ah! Fond of reading?"

"Oh, very, very fond."

"*Alice in Wonderland*?"

She hesitated. "I liked *Alice* when I was very much smaller than I am now."

"And now you read——?"

"Oh, *Ivanhoe* and *Lorna Doone* and *Westward Ho!* and *The Chaplet of Pearls*, and Shakespeare, and——"

"That will do, thanks. Now I want you to tell me, as carefully as you can, just what happened last night. Will you? Did you dream—had you a nightmare?" She looked puzzled. "I mean, when your nurse put you to bed did you wake up frightened, or do you ever walk in your sleep?"

"I don't think I have ever walked in my sleep. I did not wake last night, because I did not go to sleep. I lay awake to hear the clock strike."

"Indeed! Why did you want to hear the clock strike?"

"So that I should know when it was two o'clock, because everybody would be fast asleep then, and dawn has not begun."

"What did you want to do?"

A look of terror came into her eyes. "You know."

"I have heard what you did. What I want to hear from your own lips is why you did it."

She began to shake with sobs. "I have told *Espérance* once——"

"But you know she is a Frenchwoman and she owns that she does not always understand all you say. I want you to tell me, because perhaps you can clear up the great mystery. What we want to know is—what caused you to think that Mr. Burnside deserved death? Don't be a bit afraid. Answer me freely. I am not an officer of the law, I am a friend, and I want to help you. Had he ever been unkind to you? Answer quite frankly."

"He was never unkind to *me*! I—I should never have thought he deserved death for *that*, even if he had been! I am not such a beast as that!"

"Then he had been unkind to someone else—he had done what you believed to be wrong?"

She was a little confused. "The worst thing he

did was to be cruel to my Unele Rémy, whom I l-l-love ! ”

“ Indeed ? Did Rémy complain of his cruelty to you ? ”

“ Oh yes, he did ! He had to eat the bread of slavery and be misunderstood ! The squire was master, and he spied upon Unele Rémy ! Why, the very first day I was here, he crept after us in the garden and was angry because Unele Rémy gave me a few strawberries.”

Espérance put in a word. “ They were the first fruits of the early bed the squire rears for Madame. There were just enough ripe and she was looking forward to have them for dessert. He had promised her, and was very angry that, with the garden full of fruit, Monsieur Rémy should take just those to give the child and to eat himself.”

How different that sounded !

“ But he is an oppressor ! He grinds the faces of the poor ! ” cried Germaine, once more growing fluent in her despair of making out her case. “ He keeps poor people in cottages with leaking roofs and sends them to prison when they catch a rabbit because they are starving ! He makes love to poor girls and then does not marry them, he is selfish and unjust, and everybody hates him ! ”

The stranger’s face was very grave. “ Do you say your uncle told you all this ? ”

“ N-no, not my uncle—not all of it. I know it, for myself. He went all the way over to Yeominster to get a poor man put in gaol, just for nothing.”

“ He went to Yeominster to put in a word for a poor wretch who has deceived and disappointed him a dozen times. He is keeping the man’s wife till he comes out of gaol, and is then going to give him another chance. I cannot think where you picked up such ideas as those you express. Mr. Burnside was the best loved man in this district, and he will be

sadly missed. He denied himself all he could, to improve the condition of his tenants. I fear your reading must be of a wider range than you gave me to understand. Your general style suggests the *Clarion* or some organ of that type."

"If you mean the *Clarion* newspaper, I do see that, often," said Germaine at once. "I have a great friend at home, a very, very clever person, who reads it to me."

"Ha!" cried the questioner abruptly. Here, at last, he had stumbled upon the clue. Skilfully masking his design, he drew from the child, bit by bit, the story of her friendship with Lacey. It was a long interview, but at its close, the examiner stood possessed of the main factor in the tragedy that had just been enacted.

Grimly he thought to himself, that it was a fortunate thing for Damien that Lacey had come to light. It was probable that, in the sequel, the Socialist shoemaker might be made responsible for more than his fair share in the chaos which filled Germaine's mind.

The young uncle was able, later on, to pretest, quite convincingly, that no words of his could have suggested, even in the most remote fashion, the remedy his niece had employed for the curing of his discontent. He admitted that he had told her of her relationship to the Corday family, but affirmed most solemnly that she was in complete ignorance of the fact that her father's father had committed any act of violence. He was quite ready to own that, in the circumstances, it was a most imprudent thing even to mention Charlotte; but then he had never heard of Lacey, and had, so he asseverated, no notion of the state of the child's mind. He could see now that the idea of her hereditary mission to right wrongs by means of murder—falling upon an accumulation of fuel smouldering in her heart—had set the small visionary aflame.

He had to admit that he had perhaps complained of his step-brother to her. Still more reluctantly he was forced to say that he had asked her to keep secret his meetings with Miss Grenfell. He did not come quite well out of the affair: but Lacey was an invaluable scapegoat.

At the conclusion of the doctor's lengthy visit, he rose and departed without leave-taking. Espérance, who had remained in the room all the time, listening in silent dismay, followed him, and once more turned the key in the lock.

"Oh, Espérance, must I stay here alone—quite alone?" was the piercing cry.

"I fear so, mademoiselle, for the present."

CHAPTER XIV

THE REPRIEVE

THE long hours crept past.

The magnitude of her failure—of her mistake—was perhaps more crushing to the child than the magnitude of her sin.

She had nerved herself to a deed of blood-curdling heroism—a deed so fell that nobody would believe she had done it. And she now knew that not only had she brought harm and not good to those whom she longed to help, but that she had raised her hand against an innocent and just man.

It seemed that the weight of her misery was too great to be endured: yet the idea of suicide had disappeared with the doctor's visit.

Since what she had done turned out to be not merely wrong, but wholly useless, then she ought to be ready to receive and bear the punishment of her crime. The innate justice awoke in her, and she was ready to submit to sentence.

She was alone all day, except when Espérance brought in her meals. Towards evening she began to be visited by terrors such as cannot be described—all the more awful for being intangible. She knew not what she feared—only that Fear brooded over her to the exclusion of any other sensation.

She crept into a corner, back to the wall—a corner whence she could watch the door: and was so crouching, with a look in her eyes like that of a hunted hare, when she heard the unlocking of the

other door of her room—the door never used, communicating with the next apartment.

Mereifully it was nothing worse than Espérance herself who came through it. She explained that it was thought Mademoiselle might be nervous during the night, so she herself was to sleep in the adjoining room. She did not explain that the servants believed Germaine to have walked in her sleep, to have been found by Miles with a weapon in her hand, to have wounded him and herself in his struggles to take it from her, and to be at this moment ill in bed.

To have Espérance near her was relief untold. Yet even so, the night must be dreadful. Looking onward through life, and realizing that every day she lived must be followed by a whole night, she began to think that hanging would be a merciful release.

For there brooded over the house a creeping terror like the approach of something which was horribly quiet at present, but was going to pounce——

The day had been breathlessly hot. The sunset was distressingly red—blood-red. Her room faced east, yet she could see a red glow spreading over everything—a glow which turned to copper colour, and then to purple, as a huge swollen cloud rolled up, with edges that flickered bright flashes, like the angel's sword which turned every way.

It was nearly midnight when the storm broke over Devonshire. Every crash of thunder that shook the solid house was to Germaine the voice of an avenging God. The rain hissed upon the roof, baked in the sunshine of the sultry day. The forked lightning stabbed and stabbed as if God thrust a spear down through the gloom, to find and punish the murderer.

From the yard, whither they had banished him, Marquis howled in the pauses of the storm.

When Germaine looked back upon that night, it seemed to her that it lasted for years and years.

She had once been present at a military funeral

at Padlerby, and it seemed to her as if the rolling thunder were like the drums that sounded over the grave. That whole house—venerable Fendallscombe,—so ancient in its simplicity and dignity—was a huge mausoleum, over which the elements lamented the untimely death of the last of his race.

At last the tempest erept muttering away into the distance, leaving a filmy grey sky, a drizzle of rain which was to last for days. Nature's obsequies were over. Only the tears of the mourners persisted.

She had a little troubled sleep : and on her waking, found it incredible that, after such a night, dawn could come again. That day she flung all her powers into the composition of an appeal to Rémy. She wrote it with sobs and tears, straining every faculty to put the situation before him as she herself had seen it. She could hardly believe that he could refuse such a cry for pardon.

As the time wore on, after the delivery to him by Espérance of the letter, she lived in hope for many hours ; but he came not.

Late that afternoon, the doctor visited her once more, inquired carefully concerning her health, and talked to her for a long time. She found it easy to converse with him. Grave and unexpansive though he was, he really did seem able to understand. If he could do so, why not her adored Uncle Rémy ? His defection cut deep.

She asked the doctor whether her mother knew. He replied that Madam would see to all that. She was refused permission to write herself, and she thought upon the whole she was glad of this, since her mother would have been so hopelessly, inconsolably distressed.

That night, from sheer exhaustion, she slept. Perhaps the draught which the doctor told Espérance to give her was partly instrumental also. She awoke quieter and less on edge.

The monotony of that day was extreme. Espérance grew more and more reticent. Her face looked pinched and old, as though she had lived ten years since the fatal night. She was like one in the grip of a devouring anxiety, and she so evidently was not in a state to talk or to be questioned, that Germaine subsided into total silence.

Another night of horrors—another day of drizzling rain without, and of unnatural gloom and stillness within.

The child began to pine and languish. She could not eat. She was wasting visibly.

Every moment, she thought might be her last of freedom. She lived in constant expectation of the appearance of the officers of the law to arrest her.

The house was like the enchanted palace in the fairy-tale. It seemed that those within were charmed into an eternal sleep. No sounds of life came to her ears, listen as she might. No carriages rolled up the drive, over the bridge. The very tradesmen's carts had been forbidden to enter the yard. She saw no coffin, she looked in vain for the issue of a funeral procession from the great doors. Nothing, so it seemed, would ever happen again. By degrees, the enormity of her action, the violence of her repentance, the extremity of her fear, alike faded. She had reached the limit of her capacity to feel, and for the time being was passive.

On the sixth morning, she awoke once more to a world of sunshine. The clouds were gone, a breeze had sprung up, a life-giving coolness was in the air.

That morning, Germaine, for the first time since the tragedy, said her prayers. They were simple enough. "God have mercy upon me, a sinner," was the gist of them, though she did not phrase it just like that.

She rose from her knees with a sense of being ready for the worst, and a clear premonition, coming who

shall say whence, that to-day was to be the end of the solemn pause which had descended upon her and upon the world as she knew it, and which had lasted, she sometimes thought, as long as time itself.

Breakfast was generally brought to her at eight o'clock. This morning it was, however, a good deal later before the key turned in the lock of her prison, and *Espérance* entered. She carried no tray, but her face told the child she brought something—a message—an ultimatum.

Germaine summoned her fortitude. She walked up to the old woman with a firm step, her hands behind her. *Espérance* was twisting her wrinkled fingers together, and biting her lips to keep back tears. She laid her shaking hand upon the flowing hair. "My dear—my little one," she began; but her voice broke in the helpless sobbing of the old. She sank upon a chair, and Germaine knelt by her, conscious of no longer being kept at a distance. In an agony of longing for a human touch, a human caress, she flung her arms round the old nurse's neck.

"I am ready—you need not be afraid to tell me. I have expected it and I deserve it. They are coming—to-day—to take me away."

"No—not that! Ah, my poor lost lamb! It is good news I have for you! Can you bear it?"

Good news? What could that mean? Her quick mind fastened upon it. A horrible idea, connected with those long visits from the doctor, flashed upon her. She pictured a life of restraint—shut up among those whose brains were touched. "Oh, *Espérance*, they are not going to send me to an asylum?"

"No, no, *chérie*. I try to tell you, but my foolish old tongue will not let me! It is better news than that! It is that you after all are not—not—as we all feared—guilty of the death of Mr. Burnside!"

"*Espérance*, speak! Tell me what you mean? Not guilty of his death? Oh, but I am, I am!" . . .

It was Sunday morning. At the moment, the bells of the little grey church in the valley began to chime. Their sound came in through the window and touched the old woman's heart with a nameless emotion.

"I mean that he has been given back to us—there is no doubt that he will live now!"

"He? Who? Mr. Burnside? *He will live?* Do you mean to say that *he is alive?*" It was a shriek. Germaine sprang up. Her hands gripped the old woman's arms, she shook her in her terrible excitement.

"Yes, he has been between life and death till now. You were not to be told till we were quite sure. He will live now, please God."

The child unlocked her clutching fingers, and began to laugh, in hysterical gasps. "So there is a God! There is a God after all! He knew! He guided the knife. Because He understood what none of you could believe—that I knew not what I did!"

"Miss Ermie, stop! Stop this minute! Such words, such laughter, at a so solemn moment! Down on your knees and thank God, instead of talking as if He were in the next room!"

"But He is! He is! In this room, as He was in that room that night! I could not harm Mr. Burnside, because he was good, and it was I—I, who was bad! Oh, Espérance, I cannot stay inside my body! I shall escape, and fly up—up to heaven on the sound of those bells! Do you hear them, how they are laughing and cheering? That's what it sounds like when angels cheer! Like bells—bells! AH joyful and triumphant! Over one sinner that—repen-teth!"

Espérance, who had risen, was just in time to catch the slip of a body as it collapsed. The chime of the carillon rushed in upon the scented breeze, charging all the air with triumphant echoes. It was not surprising that the sudden relief had been too much for the overwrought creature.

When the world came back, Germaine's friend, the doctor, was seated by the bed upon which they had laid her.

"This is a nice way to behave, when they bring you good news!"

She smiled. "Is this the world? The same one? The same room?" she said softly. "How different it all looks!"

"I expect it does. Will the air feel good, do you think, when you are out in it? I want you to have a run in the park presently."

She turned upon him the light of her remarkable eyes with an expression which told him that she felt him to be in sympathy.

"You are not one of the people who say 'Don't ask questions, child.' Be kind and tell me about—him. It is true, is it not, what Espérance said—I am not a murderess?"

"It is true, by God's grace, and no thanks to you," he answered with irony. "I own that when first I came to him I was desperately afraid of the worst. It was not merely the loss of blood, though that was serious, it was the fact that that weapon you selected was none too clean, and though it went nowhere near his heart, I was in dread of blood-poisoning. However, the fellow has the constitution of a healthy child, and a perfectly calm conscience. He has pulled through."

Germaine closed her eyes for a minute, letting the tidings sink in and bring all the comfort they held.

"Has he suffered much?"

"Not very much, I hope. He is marvellously better this morning."

After a pause she asked, "What will happen to me, do you think?"

He hesitated. "I do not fancy that Madam has come to any decision as yet. I will not conceal from you, Miss Germaine, that she has been more than

grieved—I might say utterly estranged—by what you have done. She is an old lady, and we must make allowance for the effect upon her of an awful shock. She feels herself quite unable to see you at present.”

“I don’t wonder. She must think I am a sort of wild beast. So I am. Do you think I ought to be shut up?”

“On the contrary, I think the trouble has always been that you have been too much shut up. You ought to go where there are plenty of young people your own age, and learn to be a child yourself.”

“That was what Aunt Rosalie said.”

“She is a sensible woman.”

“I had better go back to mother, if grand’mère can’t bear the sight of me.”

“No, not yet. Madam thinks, and I agree with her, that since it was Mr. Burnside who asked you here, and he who undertook to meet the cost of your education, it should be he who decides what is to become of you.”

“That is only just,” said Germaine, so sedately that the doctor smiled.

“There are other things it is well that you should know,” he went on. “You are too young at present to feel their full weight, but you have plenty of wits, so try and understand. It would be a terrible thing for you if this act of childish madness of yours came to be known. Folk would shun you, and no wonder. Your own grandmother’s feelings will give you some slight idea of what would be felt about you by others. My first care, after talking to you the other day, was to conceal the truth from everybody, if we could.

“Fortunately this house is so far away from others, that I was able to prevent the circulation of the real story. The servants were told that you walked in your sleep. They were also told that the family thought it wisest for you that this should never

be known, and that the account given by me and by everyone was to be the accidental explosion of a gun, while the squire was examining it, not knowing it to be loaded. Evans and Espérance were the only two who saw the exact nature of the accident. The other servants believe you have been confined to your room by illness during these past days."

"You thought of all this," she murmured, her cheeks growing hot. "Although he was so ill, you thought of me, and my future—a child who had done such a hateful deed?"

"I saw that the only chance for you was to keep it dark," he replied at once. "We should have had the police in, the whole thing in the papers, suspicion thrown on others—for no jury would believe the story you told me. Oh, the thing would have been endless—hideous! It would have killed Madam. But if he had died there must have been an inquest, and I don't see how anything could have been kept back then. Well, thank God we have escaped that!—Burnside ought to make a complete recovery."

"A complete recovery!" repeated Germaine, smiles stealing to her eyes and lips. She joined her hands as if in thanksgiving. He watched her keenly.

"It is you who will have the hardest task of all," he remarked.

"What is that?"

"Refraining from telling your own mother anything about this affair."

"I don't think that will be difficult," she replied at once. "I very seldom tell mamma things. They worry her and she cannot understand them very well."

He turned away his head to hide a smile. "Very well then, now have your breakfast, and afterwards go for a run in the sunshine."

CHAPTER XV

VERDICT AND SENTENCE

By degrees, during the ensuing weeks, the puzzling question of Germaine's future was decided.

Her mother consented to leave Padlerby, and go to live at Breconstead, where the celebrated college for girls is situated. Germaine was to live at home, and attend school every day.

So it was arranged, and the child knew nothing of the difficulties which had been overcome in the course of the negotiations. Mrs. Damien clung, with the tenacious obstinacy of the fool, to the idea of Padlerby and its proximity to her father.

Mrs. Burnside and her step-son, counselled by the doctor, made no mention of the strong reason which the presence of Lacey in the town constituted for the complete removal of Germaine from his influence. They preferred to put the matter as one of finance. The money they were able to give would go farther if the girl were a day-pupil, and the rest of her fees were paid to her mother for board and lodging.

Had it not been for the sound common sense of Aunt Rosalie the scheme might have fallen to the ground. She saw the advantage of the plan in a moment. She offered to pay removal expenses, and to guarantee an allowance of forty pounds a year to her sister. This made it possible to have a tiny home of their own in the fine upland air of Hertfordshire.

Thus, with pressure exerted upon both sides, Mrs. Damien was prevailed upon to take the step desired.

Further urged, she reluctantly sold a set of fine emeralds which she had been treasuring for Germaine's future, and thus acquired a little furniture. Aunt Rosalie said it was nonsense to keep the emeralds, and the sum they realized was certainly worth having.

When all was arranged, Mrs. Damien wrote and told her daughter—expecting a burst of indignation and grief at the prospect of parting from Marianne.

Germaine, however, replied that she liked the idea, and meant to work hard at her lessons. In fact, the child longed now for the hour of leaving Fendallscombe.

Her days passed in curious fashion. She was in the house, but excommunicated by its inmates. Her grandmother's nerves had not recovered—might never recover—from the shock of the news, thoughtlessly poured out to her by Rémy, of her granddaughter's attempt upon Miles's life.

The idea that her husband's own mad deed was not merely sporadic, but was *in the blood*—that the Damiens had, as it were, a hereditary murderous instinct, and that this had manifested itself *in a little girl*—was a shattering blow, which left her quite unhinged.

As soon as the squire was pronounced out of danger, Rémy left, not only the house, but England. He had cousins in Demerara whom he had more than once thought of joining. His scheme for an elopement with Miss Grenfell having fallen to the ground, he demanded his passage money and was gone. He bade no farewell to his unhappy niece, of whom he could not think without a creeping of the spine.

Germaine passed much of her time driving about the country in Dr. Preston's dog-cart. He talked to her, as they drove, of his own boys and girls, now grown-up and out in the world. He described their

healthy amusements, their cycling, their theatricals, their bathing, their school successes. Life was no longer presented to her in the light of a class-against-class struggle, but in its far truer aspect of family affection, youthful efforts, and youthful ambition.

He told her of other things, as well as these—things which interested her much. The doctor never talked down to her, he conversed as to an equal; and he told her something of Miles Burnside's life.

His mother had been a very young girl when she married; and she and her husband were not suited. The squire was urban in all his tastes: he liked travelling, he dabbled in essay-writing, he preferred London and the society of a little coterie there to his Devonshire home. Mrs. Burnside was country-bred—one who loved every hedgerow in her native county. She understood horses, dogs, poultry, flowers, a garden. London had nothing to interest her, and she and her baby boy pined so visibly when there, that by degrees the husband grew accustomed to leaving them at home together while he roamed.

Under her devoted care, Miles grew a strong, healthy fellow. He was so used to doing without his father that he never missed him. His mother was all in all. She died quite suddenly, during his first term at a public school. She had hardly been twelve months dead when his father brought home another wife, and a brother—older than Miles!

The arrival of a stepmother puzzled and hurt the boy, but he was uniformly courteous to her. She was always kind to him, and refrained from taking her own son's part in the squabbles that arose in the holidays.

It was, however, impossible for her to understand Miles's essentially Anglo-Saxon type of character. He lived a curiously isolated life. His father had never taken any interest in him, and the uncomfortable consciousness that he was spending too

much, and leaving his only son an embarrassed patrimony, intensified his distaste for his society.

It was quite an inspiration on the doctor's part to put Miles before Germaine in the aspect of a person like herself, lonely and not understood. It aroused her passionate sympathy.

The memory of what she had done grew to be to her so revolting a thing that, had it not been for Dr. Preston's wisdom, she might have become morbid or even insane, from dwelling upon it too much.

This he would not permit. He turned her mind always forward. She had a long life in which to atone, a specific way in which she could do this. Mr. Burnside was offering her a first-rate education. It was in her power to make good use of this opportunity—to show him by her pluck and diligence the sincerity of her repentance.

Meanwhile the doctor took her wherever she could hear the praise of Miles in the mouths of his tenants. The difference between the old times and these! The happiness, ever since the old squire died and the young one became master! The boy who had been bred and born among them, who had the blue of their seas, the sunshine of their skies, in his eyes and hair—even something of the roughness of their western speech upon his tongue. It was manifest that Lacey's theories were not always correct. Curiously enough, there was no landlord within many miles who answered at all to the description which was fixed in the child's mind as typical. Colonel Grenfell was a landowner on a far larger scale than Miles Burnside, and he did all in his power for the development of his estate and the good of his tenantry.

It is obvious, though it was not so to Germaine, that the doctor's cultivation of the child, and his securing of her confidence, had more than one object. It was necessary that the state of her mind should

be thoroughly ascertained, before sending her among other girls. In view of the need for secrecy in this case, a brain specialist was not sent for. A fortnight of companionship and many long talks convinced Dr. Preston of the truth of his first conclusion—that his patient was not only absolutely sane, but possessed of fine and strong mental qualities. What was wrong was that a certain part of her brain was unduly developed, by the circumstances of her upbringing: and the cure for this was manifestly fresh air, bodily exercise, suitable companionship, and suitable food for the active brain.

He pleaded her cause with her grandmother as well as he could, but the old lady was inexorable.

"She is the child of lawlessness and unrestrained inclination," said she. "Her mother was a young woman without self-respect, who married into a family which was far from soliciting the honour of the connection. My son also had been ruined by English ways. The regrettable lack of discipline, so noticeable in the English religion, and spreading thence, as is inevitable, to all departments of life, spoiled his fine character. His daughter has inherited the lawless instinct, joined to a cruelty which is, to me, inexplicable. I was ready to love her with all my heart—I opened my arms to her. She has disgraced me, she has brought blame and suspicion beyond his due upon my poor unhappy Rémy, she has shown herself quite unworthy of my dear Miles's kindness, and it is against my wish that he now undertakes the charge of her education. If, as you tell me, she is repentant, I am glad to hear it. She must, however, give proof of her change of heart by years of faithful endeavour, before I can consent to see her, and receive her as my own kindred."

This was her unalterable decision, and not even Miles could shake it.

Not even when all was finished—when the summer had grown old, Mrs. Damien's move from Padlerby to Breconstead had been accomplished, only a week remained before the opening of the school term, and Germaine's departure was fixed—not even then would she relent.

Breconstead is only about forty miles from London, and Mrs. Damien was to meet her daughter at Paddington and convey her thence to her new home. Dr. Preston undertook to put her into the train, and arrived that morning in very good time.

He found Germaine with *Espérance* in the garden, gathering a bouquet of flowers to be taken to mamma.

"Burnside wants to see you, to say good-bye before you go," said the doctor quietly, but quite without preface.

Germaine's heart leaped in her side, and she grew perfectly white. Her eyes were raised imploringly to the doctor's face. Their extraordinary beauty struck him afresh. "I should find it hard to resist those eyes," he thought. "Perhaps that is what her grandmother fears."

"Don't be a little silly, but come along," was what he said aloud.

Germaine possessed herself of his hand and clung to it. "You will come with me? You will?"

"Yes, yes, but he cannot eat you. He is still obliged to lie down, you know."

She walked at his side without a word.

They went into a room far removed from the one she had entered so stealthily that hot, still night.

The windows were all open, and it was very sunshiny.

Miles lay on a sofa quite near the oriel window, and he turned his head with a quick little smile of greeting as the door opened.

Germaine stood there before him, her head sunk upon her chest, her cheeks suffused with hot, pain-

ful colour. Dr. Preston held fast to her hand, drawing her unwilling steps across that wide expanse of carpet, and said, "Here she is, young sir!"

"At last!" said Miles. "I have been hoping every day you would ask if you might come, but you would not, so this morning I had to ask myself!"

She felt his hand close over her own as he spoke those incredible words. Her heart had been full of wild ideas, of frantic pleas for forgiveness, of self-reproaches and fine speeches. In face of his half-shy, half-playful manner, they all seemed ridiculous. She lifted her head—raised her brimming eyes, so that two huge tears rolled out upon her cheeks . . . and checked herself in a consternation almost comic to the young man who watched her.

Was that the squire? Or rather some mischievous boy, playing at being the squire? She caught her breath in sheer amazement; and instead of the abject things she had meant to say, her first words were these:

"Oh!!! What has become of your beard?"

Miles laughed. "Ah," he said, "since last you saw me, I have been reduced to submission by a couple of tyrants—nurse and doctor! They both declared my poor old beard was unbecoming, so as soon as I was strong enough to be shaved—off it came! Nurse said it was the proper thing for all convalescent men to be shaved! A sort of ritual!"

She had never heard him speak so easily nor so lightly. She was far too astonished to make an answer.

"What do you think about it?" he went on. "Do tell me. You were never an admirer of mine, you know, and the doctor suggests it may have been the beard."

"May have been! It was enough to frighten the crows," said the doctor grimly.

Here was something that she could say! Something both true and flattering. "I like you heaps and heaps better without it!" she cried breathlessly. "Of course I *meant* to like you, anyhow, but it's much easier now! Why, you are *beautiful*—like—like St. Michael in the church window!"

Both the men laughed so much that she was put to confusion; but there was a light in Miles's deep-set eyes which showed he was gratified by this spontaneous tribute.

"Come, that's encouraging, anyway," he said; and chuckled in the manner she used to think so detestable, but which now, coupled with that young mouth and boyish cheeks, seemed just the right thing.

"I'll leave you together," said Dr. Preston, "and send nurse to fetch her when it is time."

He went out as he spoke, and Germaine gave no heed to his going, for she was possessed by something she must say.

"How could I think you would want to see me, that you would let me come anywhere near you? Why, even grand'mère——"

"Grand'mère is old and does not understand children," he replied. "But I am different."

"Yes, you *are* different," she answered, misunderstanding him. "Ever so different! I never saw anything like it. Are you really Mr. Burnside? They haven't been telling me falsely, you really are yourself?"

"Why, Ermie, a beard oughtn't to make all that difference."

Her eyes were fixed upon him with an earnestness which was almost alarming. "If you had always looked like you look now, I should *never* have tried to kill you," she said, her voice breaking into a sob.

"Why? Tell me why?" he asked, still keeping hold of her hand.

"Because—because—oh, I don't know! Because you are looking at me as if you loved me!" she burst out, falling to her knees beside his couch, and hiding her face in her hands.

He put out an arm and drew her closer. "I always wanted to love you, Ermie, but you wouldn't let me. You were such a little tiger-eat."

"I thought you were wicked—I thought it would be wrong to love you! I hated you with all my strength."

"Yes, the doctor has told me about it," he answered with a sigh, as he stroked the black locks. "But we won't talk of that. I—we—shall we agree to forget it, Ermie?"

"Never, while I live," she whispered. "But I won't speak of it, if it makes you unhappy! Only, if you could—if you would—the difference it would make! But I ought not to dare to ask!"

"To ask what? What is it you want me to do? To talk about what you did?"

"No, no, of course not! To say—to say you forgive me! Oh, if you could!" . . .

"But, baby, of course I forgive you. I understand. The doctor has told me all about it. Shall we forgive each other? You haven't got a down on me any more, have you? You wouldn't try it on again?"

She let herself go, in a burst of tears which were half-relief, half-shame. "I would die for you! I would die for you!"

"I believe you would," he said gently. "Doesn't it seem waste, Ermie? All those weeks, misunderstanding each other, disliking each other, when we might have been friends, like this, all the time?"

"And now I must go away," she sobbed, "just when I have found you. But I know I ought. It is my punishment, and it is only beginning!"

"Yes," he said, disengaging his mind as it were with an effort, "and we have only a little time for

our farewells and much to say. Get a chair, little woman, and sit down close by me, will you? I'm still a bit of a crook, you see. They are going to take me to the sea to-morrow."

She stole from his arms, still and composed now, fetched a stool and sat beside him, her glowing face fixed in hero-worship upon him.

"What I have to say is of tremendous importance," he told her, "and you must listen as if your life depended upon it. In fact, it would hardly be exaggeration to say that your life *does* depend upon it. . . . There is a certain hard fact in human experience against which most of us bark our shins, sooner or later. It is this—*a thing once done can't be undone*. When you started to make the world better by removing me from it, you were not considering that, you acted without foreseeing consequences; but you will have to bear those consequences, just the same. With the best will in the world, I can't save you from that. I have forgiven you—we are friends—but still that deed of yours remains. . . . The doctor has told you that the servants know you were somehow mixed up in my accident. They think you walked in your sleep. Espérance knows better, of course: Evans also: these are faithful. But I want you to try and understand that *nobody else must ever know, as long as you live*. You are not old enough to realize all it means to you that this should be so. I have to ask you just to take it from me. It will be difficult indeed for you at first to keep the story from your mother. She knows I have had a bad accident, and been ill in bed. She must never know more than that. Remember. . . . During your school life you will make many friends. To no friend, however dear, however confidential, must you breathe one word of our secret. Ermie, try to realize that I am speaking as seriously as if we

were in church, and that this is the most solemn moment of your life. Will you fetch my Bible from that little table over there by the bookcase? Thanks! Do you know what an oath is?"

Germaine brought the Bible to him and gave it into his hands.

"I know what an oath is. It is a promise you must never break," she said.

"Then lay your hand on this Bible, and say after me these words: 'I solemnly swear, before Almighty God, and before Miles, whom I tried to kill, that I will never speak one word to any human being of the events of that night, or of anything that then happened. So help me, God.'"

Phrase by phrase he spoke the words, and phrase by phrase she repeated them after him. Her eyes were fixed all the time upon his face; he could feel her whole allegiance, her whole will, flung into the words she spoke.

He sank back upon his pillows with a sigh. "I think you will keep your word," he said. His eyes dwelt upon her with a look of puzzled interest, of newly awakened regard. "I said I would not speak of it," he remarked, "but you know it is frightfully interesting. How you could have screwed yourself up to it!" Holding her at arms' length, he contemplated the slenderness of her build, the seeming fragility of limb, the childish soft hands. "I can imagine your determining to do it—beforehand—I can imagine your getting as far as the bedside—but——"

"I said to myself, over and over again—'It has to be done, it must be done! God has laid it on me to do it, and I am small and weak, but I dare not flinch!' Of course I knew it would be sickening! I didn't suppose one could do such things without loathing it—But ah! When I saw you asleep—so helpless—such a big thing—in my power——"

She broke off, shuddering through all her being.

"Was I snoring, Ermie?"

She started as though stung. "Were you—what?" she gasped.

There was laughter in his eyes, which were very blue and dancing in the sunlight—like the Pied Piper's eyes, she thought.

"Sorry I had to chip in just then," he said, as one that apologizes. "I thought you were going to cry, and you mustn't cry any more now, you know. That's all over." He contemplated her as she sat on the edge of his couch, grave and tense. "With your gift of imagination and your iron nerve," he said dreamily, "you ought to grow up a most remarkable woman."

Her whole expression changed. "If I am ever worth anything at all it will be your doing!" she cried with passion. "Oh, if I could tell you what you have done for me to-day!"

"What have I done, Ermie?"

"No, call me Pixie, like you did, and I was such a little idiot that I didn't like it! Say Pixie—I want to hear you say it, now that I can see your mouth!"

The intense scrutiny of her eyes brought the colour to his face.

"Pixie, then," he laughed boyishly. "It is what you are most like——"

"Thank you." She drew breath. "Now I will tell you what you have done. You have rolled away the stone from the door of the cave. . . . If I had gone away from Fendallseombe to-day, leaving the remembrance of a gruff man with a beard, whom I had half killed, and who did not want to see me, or have anything to do with me, I don't know how I could have borne it. And now it is all different. There you are, lying in the sunshine—laughing and young—and not only forgiving me, but even"—here there crept into her voice a thrill as if her courage

were not equal to her daring—"but even loving me a little."

He held out both arms this time, and she nestled against him in a rush of affection. "If I could keep you with me," he whispered, "it would not be only a little, but a great deal."

The nurse knocked at the door. "Espérance asks me to say that she is ready to take Miss Damien to the station."

They looked at each other—looked wordlessly, an eloquence without tongues. He did not say "Will you kiss me?" Perhaps she read the question in his eyes, or he in hers.

Anyway, their lips met; and nurse, entering, brushed past the flying child, and found her patient with a heightened colour which suggested temperature.

END OF PART I

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PART II
THE KEEPING

CHAPTER I

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

It was an autumn day, close and somewhat damp. The air in the small committee room was such as tends to somnolence.

The energetic young woman at the head of the small green baize-covered table closed her notebook and pushed back her chair.

"That's all, I suppose? How tiresome that Miss Damien has not come."

"Give her another five minutes," replied a little elderly lady with spectacles and a neat exterior. "It has been raining so hard, she might not be able to get a tram at once."

"If she would volunteer," said the Chair reflectively, "there would be just enough of us."

"And we have to think of everything," appealingly added the very young girl who sat on her left, and was apparently the secretary. "Miss Damien is so handsome, it is very unlikely that any steward would knock her about. She might get a hearing."

As she spoke, a light step was heard along the stone-flagged passage, there was a tap on the door, and Germaine Damien came in.

"Am I too late? Is the meeting over?" she asked in tones of disappointment. "If ever I do happen to want to get away early, there is always something to keep me, and as you know, it doesn't do not to oblige the head of the firm."

As she spoke, she was laying a satchel and an

umbrella upon a side table, and unfastening the loose raincoat which she wore.

"It's all right, as you *have* come," said Miss Burland, the Chair of the late meeting. "We have been arranging for the heckling at the candidate's first meeting. There are two volunteers, Miss Bridges and Miss Tate; but we ought to have three, and as the meeting is to be at Breconstead, we thought you might be inclined to make the third."

"Is it an evening meeting?" asked Germaine, seating herself in a vacant chair near Miss Burland.

Ten years had accomplished for the young revolutionary more than could have been foreseen. At twenty she was beautiful—with that harmony of form and line which is felt at once, but is hard to describe.

It might be contended that she was too slender: yet girlhood and slenderness have a subtle affinity. Any artist would have craved her as a model, so finely proportioned was every line of her. Her skin, of a warm pallor, with a faint carnation tint on the cheeks, made a subtle background, as it were, for the splendours of her eyes, which as of old gazed into things, not at them; and for the hair, black and without lustre, which spilt itself like shadow about her brows.

Her office frock of blue serge, her plain hat, were wholly unremarkable. In this attire she contrived to make the other women in the small room look like mongrels.

"Yes. Evening. Town Hall," replied Miss Tate, the young secretary.

"All right, I'll do it," announced Germaine, after a pause. "But don't tell my mother anything about it, she would only worry."

"It is to be perfectly legitimate heckling," explained Miss Burland. "Give the man time to speak his piece, and then chip in, you know."

"Who can tell me something about the candidate?" inquired Germaine. "What sort is he?"

A copy of a local paper was pushed towards her, with the picture of a somewhat ornamental young man, under which was written—

"Mr. Norman Willis, Radical candidate for Breconstead."

"Mr. Willis is the eldest son of one of our captains of industry. His father, Sir Joshua Willis, was made a baronet by the present Government, and is the head of the celebrated firm of Willis & Co., Dyers, of Carford."

"He seems very much the usual thing," meditated Germaine. "He ought not to be difficult to put out of countenance."

"Mind you be careful how you go dressed," put in Miss Burland impressively if inelegantly. "Don't wear hatpins, or anything they might hurt you with: and no valuables."

Germaine leaned back in her chair, spread out her arms to their full extent, and stretched herself, while a slow smile played over her face. It was the most enchanting movement. The girl was altogether graceful. Her companions all watched her closely as she concluded with a bit of a yawn.

"Ugh! That office does get into my bones," she remarked. Then rising, she went to the fire, and held the wet soles of her shoes to its warmth. "I love a scrap," she remarked with satisfaction. "I only hope they won't knock me about so badly that mother will see it. I do hate telling fibs."

"They won't knock you about," said the neat little old Miss Danby with conviction.

"Who's the Unionist candidate? You know I was out at Waydale for the week-end, with the Knoxes, so I am famished for a paper."

"His name is Gordon, his father is lord somebody-or-other, and he seems to be amiable, that is

all I can tell you. He is quite sound on the Suffrage."

"Good!" said Germaine. "I suppose you have arranged all about the canvassing?"

"Yes. I have your district somewhere." Miss Tate searched among her papers.

"I hope," observed Germaine anxiously, "that Miss Danby is going with me? I will simply not canvass by myself, after last time."

"My dear, that is all right, we know you can't," replied Miss Burland calmly. They all admitted, quite simply, that a girl with such beauty as that of Miss Damien must have different usage from themselves.

As to Germaine, she was much inclined to look upon her looks as a curse. It is not merely beauty, but a certain type of beauty, which is detrimental to the girl who desires above all things to be able to pass unnoticed upon her daily work. Germaine could not be hid. It had taken her months to find a situation when she left school: and even now she dared never relax by one inch the frozen calm of her demeanour, when in the office where she worked with five fellow-clerks, of whom two were girls.

She chatted on for some few minutes with her friends, and then, glancing at her cheap little wrist watch, remarked that she had barely time to catch her train. It was a twenty minutes' journey from Almesbury, where her office was situated, to Breconstead, where she and her mother still lived.

Little Miss Danby, who also lived at Breconstead, and constituted herself guardian and chaperon whenever she could, arose, put on her waterproof, and stumped off with her, after they had made their adieux.

The rain had ceased, and the sun was darting strong rays from the west, where he was peering out between two bars of purple cloud. The wet streets were all

dazzling in the light, and Germaine's spirits kindled, as they always did, in response to any appeal of nature.

"The world's not a bad place," she remarked, "even when you are as brutally poor as we are!"

Miss Danby sighed. She may perhaps have considered it not so hard for a lovely girl to put up with poverty, since life contained, at least, possibilities.

She did not say this aloud, for she was always slow to reveal her thought; and they trudged on until they reached the railway station.

Germaine had not put on her rain-coat, and stood upon the platform in her serge suit. A breeze had sprung up, after the muggy day, and she had to lift one arm to hold her hat upon her head. The sunshine poured down upon her, and turning to Miss Danby, she laughed in sheer gladness of heart.

A man, who had just bought an evening paper at the bookstall, looked round and saw her. He was quite young and considered good-looking by most people. There was nothing remarkable in his features, and the pleasing whole was perhaps largely helped by the careful grooming and expensive tailoring of his general turn-out. His hair was putty-coloured, his eyes light blue, with good lashes: and he had one of those impressive chins which novelists are wont to describe as "strong," but which often betoken a weak obstinacy.

He came slowly along the platform, his eyes fixed upon the young girl with such absorption that he cannoned into a porter with luggage.

Having passed her, he turned and retraced his steps, and at every fresh glance he became more interested.

What a magnificent creature! It seemed a kind of desecration that she should be standing like that, upon a wet platform, with muddy shoes, satchel, umbrella, waterproof! He felt that there ought to be a liveried manservant behind her, an attentive

maid at her side, instead of the little elderly person who glared at him so sourly each time he passed.

She was talking—the fire and eagerness of her talk made him tingle to know what she was saying. She laughed, and he decided that her mouth was more lovely than anything he ever saw in his not very lengthy life.

The train came in. She mounted happily and naturally into a first class carriage. He threw away the grate part of a cigar and followed her. He sat down right opposite her. He did not mean to be impertinent, but he couldn't help it. If this kind of creature travelled so close to the public view, she could not expect to be able to shield themselves from their opportunities.

Miss Danby was unconscious both of his admiration and his company. The girl herself, however, seemed not to know that he was there. She was hardly settled in her place before she drew a book from her satchel, and began to read. It was a volume of Emerson, as he saw by the lettering on the back.

To read on a train was Germaine's invariable habit. Long as she was eighteen, she had found a book the only refuge for her eyes.

Desirous as she might be of studying human nature, she found that the male half of it was impossible. She had built up round herself a barrier of light indifference. She never looked at a man if she could help it, always walked fast, and always read when travelling.

It was a rainy afternoon, and at the first little station, a man, manifestly the worse for drink, got into the carriage. Miss Danby was in the corner by the window, Germaine next her. The navvy seated himself so close to the girl as to press against her. There was plenty of room on the seat, and the girl, glancing up from her book, made a slight move-

ment, and indicated that he should allow her more room. He laughed foolishly, and hunched towards her, muttering something about its being a fine afternoon for young folks to be out.

He smelt of beer, and Germaine, the warm blood rising to her face, looked up to see if she could change her place.

She met, for a moment, the indignant blue eyes of the young man opposite—eyes which had been bold enough a minute ago when she was not looking, but now flashed with championship. Raising his hat, he moved along the seat so as to leave the window corner free for her; and signed to her to take it, without speaking.

"Thank you," said Germaine at once, frankly. She rose and took the seat offered, conscious that he who offered it was a gentleman, and of a different stamp from her usual fellow travellers.

The labourer had just drunk enough to be talkative, and he began to expostulate.

"Shome girlsh was too fine to let a man brush their petticoat. Who was she, he'd like to know? Warn't he a man, as good as anybody? Warn't he and his like the rulers of this country? Let all stuek-up girls look to themselves when Lloyd George had set the working clawsses on their feet."

This was too much for Germaine's unknown admirer. He leaned forward to the man, who was seated exactly facing him. "Look here, you keep your head shut," he said curtly. "If you don't, I'll fire you out on the platform when this train stops—see?"

The labourer made a sordid derision, and prepared to bluster, while the other man, who was sitting with his back to the baskets at the other end of the carriage, looked up apprehensively to see what would happen.

Germaine, unused to

frank interest from her safe corner. She saw a set look appear upon the young man's jaw, and guessed at well-trained muscle behind his well-cut tweeds. The enemy faltered under his clear, steady gaze, attempted to rally, gave it up, and made a sound between a laugh and a hiccough. "No offence meant, guv'nor. Didn't know you were the young lady's friend."

"Keep quiet then, and let's hear no more of your silly jaw," was the stern admonition of the young man.

He sat back again, against the uncomfortable padding of the seat, glowing with the thought that she was close beside him, and that he had been able to save her from annoyance.

He did not, however, look at her. He had the self-control to keep his eyes lowered.

"Thank you," said a low voice. "But I have taken your seat."

"Oh, please!" He raised his hat once more, and the man opposite laughed sheepishly.

Little Miss Danby leaned forward and spoke gratefully. "We are much indebted to you. Such a thing seldom happens. Most of the people in these parts are quite well-behaved."

It sounded oddly, as though she were apologizing for allowing this goddess to travel about exposed to the admiration of any chance individual.

"Saturday afternoon," he said explanatorily, with a courteous smile.

"Exactly," replied the little lady.

He did not take advantage of this opening, to begin talking. In his heart, he was fully aware that to do so would be to lower himself in the eyes of the girl beside him. So far, he had behaved as her ideal man might behave. To try to found a claim upon so slight an incident would be caddish. He was travelling to Breconstead, and his chief pre-occupation was the thought that she might not go so far, but

alight at some station short of it. Next time the train stopped, their carriage filled quite up, and he enjoyed squashing the man on his left, in order that the lady on his right might have room to be free of him. To his satisfaction, she and her friend both went all the way, and only rose when the train trundled into Breconstead.

In rising to leave, Germaine turned her head, and gave him a bow, with the least suspicion of a smile. This parting salutation so wrought upon him that it prevented his feeling awkward, even when his friend's chauffeur, seeking along the train, let his jaw drop at the spectacle of his master's visitor emerging from a third!

"Mills," he said in an undertone, "do you happen to know who that young lady is, there in dark blue, with a coat on her arm?"

"No, sir, I don't, sir. I'm not one that goes much into shops and bars," replied Mills briskly. It was quite astonishing, how annoying this reply was! If that was a shop girl, then——

. . . But after all, she carried a satchel, she had all the air of a girl going to and from business! . . .

He thought of a Star on a Dustheap.

CHAPTER II

TECK VILLAS

MISS DANBY accepted Germaine's urgent invitation to come in and have tea.

They had walked some way down the fine wide old main street that passes through Breeonstead, and, taking a side road, had, after some time, reached a region where were rows of tiny villas, consisting of four rooms, with kitchen and bathroom built on behind.

They all had beautifully coloured tiles on the doorstep, and leaded glass in the narrow front doors, overarched by a gable and a white barge-board! Pathetic little places, frantically trying after beauty in such ways as occurred to the soul of their designer!

In one of these, Mrs. Damien and her daughter had passed the last ten years.

As Germaine let herself in with her latch-key, she was thinking that in many ways these ten years had been a disappointment.

Her buoyant nature seldom allowed itself to be damped. Yet sometimes she could not help recalling the high aspirations, the fervour of determination with which she had for the first time entered those tiny rooms.

They found Mrs. Damien sitting with a novelette over a fire in the wee parlour. It was a pretty room, for Aunt Rosalie had had the choosing of the furniture, and all was simple and harmonious. Moreover, there were plenty of books. Tea was laid, and Germaine

uttered an exclamation of pleasure. "Oh, mamma! How clever of you to have lit a fire!"

"Well, I grew chilly," said Mrs. Damien cheerfully, "and I sit still so much, my feet get cold. You know, the working party this afternoon was put off, so I have been rather dull."

"Poor dear! Well, never mind, I have brought Dannie to amuse you! Have you made tea? No! Waited for me! Exemplary parent! If more were like you, there would be fewer ruined homes!"

The girl rattled on as she settled Dannie in a comfortable chair, to cover that queer little touch of depression which had attacked her, she knew not why.

Mrs. Damien looked better and younger than in Padlerby days. She had, in Breconstead, plenty of society. A little coterie was there established, of gentlefolk of narrow means like herself, among whom poverty was cultivated as a fine art. She was interested in the Church, and parish matters, and found it agreeable to have a house of her own, however small. She prattled to Miss Danby of the fact that the parliamentary candidate for the division was named Willis and came from Carford. "He must be some kind of cousin of mine," she asserted.

Germaine said that Willis was a very common name, and she did not think Sir Joshua was any kin to them. Mrs. Damien admitted that she had never heard him spoken of. This was, as a matter of fact, not wonderful, since at the time of her marriage, nearly a quarter of a century ago, he had been merely a foreman in the mills now owned by him.

Germaine, as the ladies chatted, dreamed her own dreams.

When first they came to Breconstead it had seemed to her that the whole world was her oyster, to open when and how she would. Her heart was on fire with devotion towards and enthusiasm for the man she had injured, and who had so completely forgiven.

For his sake she would work and strive and nothing should seem too hard to be overcome.

The first year at school showed her that she could carry off any laurels she chose to win. All that year she was supported by the hope that, when summer came round, she and her mother might be asked to Fendallseombe.

But fate had decreed far otherwise. Mr. Burnside had, unfortunately, not made the complete recovery for which Dr. Preston hoped. In the course of the spring following his so-called accident, symptoms developed which made it advisable that he should be taken to a warm climate. Madam decided to accompany him, and for some years Fendallseombe remained shut up, while they passed their time upon the Riviera.

Madam did not recover from the shock to her nerves which she received at that awful time. After a few years, it was on account of her own health, more than that of her stepson, that they lingered in the South.

The absence and estrangement had had its inevitable effect upon the friendship born so hastily between Miles and his would-be murderess on the morning of their parting. They wrote regularly to each other at first; but they grew apart. As years passed, Germaine lost her childish unconsciousness, and found herself quite unable to write a natural outpouring. Her letters became short and formal.

As she grew up, she began to understand also that the sum spent upon her yearly was a real burden to the squire. Times were bad, his enforced absence was hurtful to his estate. The retirement to the Continent was prolonged on account of financial considerations, as well as those of health.

As soon as Germaine understood this, she determined that her own plans must be altered. She had intended to go from Breconstead to Girton with a

scholarship to help her. A college career, even with a scholarship, was, however, impossible without a continuance of their present allowance. She faced the question. The life she had planned for herself—that of a schoolmistress—was not to be had without a university training. She must, then, give up the idea, and find a post when she was eighteen.

Miles Burnside, who knew next to nothing about modern education, was very easy to deceive.

When Germaine wrote to him, saying that she was eighteen, that she had passed with every kind of honour in all subjects, and was now ready to leave school and earn her own living, and that he must stop the yearly sum he bestowed upon them, he accepted all she said in perfect good faith.

He persisted, however, in the determination of allowing them half what he had hitherto done, until the girl should be in occupation of a post which represented an equal sum.

Germaine was sorely tempted! With half their allowance, if her mother could be persuaded to give up the house and live in rooms in Cambridge, they might worry through the three years that must elapse before her training was complete.

But if she made this suggestion to Mr. Burnside, he would reply: "But why, then, did you tell me your education was finished, if you are not thinking of earning anything for another three years?"

Moreover, having dropped hints to her mother, she found that the mere idea of being uprooted from Breconstead was a nightmare to her. There was no help for it. She must resign her ambitions and shoulder her burden.

"Oh, if only I had been a man!" she thought, with an outburst of rebellion.

In such moods, the outlook before her seemed gloomy enough. To live on all her life, there in Breconstead, supporting a mother who would gradu-

ally become older and less active, less able to do without little comforts ! To take the train, year in, year out, all weathers alike, to Almesbury, and pass the days in the office of the solicitor who paid her twenty-seven-and-sixpence a week for her services !

Looking down the vista of years, it was not an alluring prospect. But it is an astonishing fact, that the way is much less thorny and rough when you actually traverse it, than it seems when you think of it in the abstract. Germaine's nature made life easier for her. The girls who were her fellow-clerks in Goldring's all adored her. Her membership of the Women's Suffrage Society gave her an interest. Though she could neither draw nor sing, she could play a little, could act charmingly, and do anything with her needle.

Taking one thing with another, she was not unhappy. Only, always in her heart, was a longing, a feeling of something lost that once might have been hers.

She knew it was her own doing. She it was who had wilfully rushed out of Paradise and slammed its gates behind her with her own mad hands. Her mother and Aunt Rosalie had by degrees come to suppose that her trial visit to her father's mother had not been a success, in spite of the benevolent plans for her future which had been its outcome.

Aunt Rosalie, on one of the very rare occasions of her visits to Breconstead—which took place only when the Carewes came to London—had questioned her niece pretty closely about Fendallseombe and its inmates. She had arrived at the conclusion that the child had been neglected, almost ignored except by Rémy Damien, who seemed to be a *mauvais sujet*. At any rate, it did not sound like a place where it would be well for Germaine to go frequently. Old Madam was apparently a mass of nerves, the squire

a misanthrope, who had, one gathered, now also become a valetudinarian. The hope that, through her father's side of the family, the orphan might find some social outlet, died away, and was put out of the reckoning.

For the first few years of her school life Germaine was much overshadowed by the haunting thought of her terrible act. Miles's large charity had cut into her heart as deeply as her knife had cut into his. The effect upon her was so profound as to alter her character more than a little. She grew softer, gentler, more tender of her mother, more tolerant of others' failings, more humble in her thoughts of herself. Her health had been affected hardly at all. For some long months, the sound of a street organ, or a band, playing the waltz called "The Last Time" would send her into floods of tears accompanied by a shivering fit, which scared her mother. This was cured as time went on, largely because the tune went out of fashion and was heard no more.

Everything in her surroundings was so different, so wholly severed from all that belonged to the past, that in process of the years the memory of it all sank away into the background. More and more rarely was she visited by the dream which at first was frequent and unnerving, of the plunging of a knife into something that lived and shrieked. In her early teens she had an attack of measles, which she took in a severe form, and for forty-eight hours she was delirious.

Her mother afterwards plaintively remarked that it was blood-curdling to hear her talk, and that she did not know where she got all her dreadful ideas. Pressed as to what she had said, Mrs. Damien was vague, as usual, but intimated that it was about murders and wandering in dark corridors, and about a great dog that howled.

Evidently she had no suspicion whatever that the

visions of the sick brain were founded upon fact, and nobody else heard the talk.

By this time Germaine had put away vain longings, and thrown herself into all that the daily life of the little town could offer her of diversion or interest.

The forthcoming election was an occasion of universal excitement in the district. It was a by-election, so the local papers spread themselves out over it, the local gentry interested themselves in it, and the local Suffrage Society having expressed its determination to have a say in the matter, the rougher element in the town looked forward to some sport.

The desire for adventure, for conflict, tingled in Germaine's blood—that blood of the d'Armans, of which she had hardly dared to think since her atrocious outbreak.

The circumstances of her own position, and that of her mother—their helplessness, their lack of any means whereby they could apply any lever to the State machine—inevitably drew the girl to throw herself into the Suffrage cause. Her intelligence was, however, too fine to allow of her flinging all other considerations to the winds, as she saw her friends doing. She had her living to earn, her mother to guard, her little obscure place in the obscure town to maintain. She would do what she could, but she would not sacrifice her whole future.

Little Miss Danby, far less balanced, less able to take a sane grasp of things, had lost her head completely upon the subject. For the suffrage, in her eyes, all things were lawful. The lonely little spinster had conceived for the beautiful Germaine an affection both ardent and unselfish. She went about with her, watched over her, acted the duenna whenever she could, taking the place of the mother who was incapable of any such care. Mrs. Damien, married from the schoolroom, had no idea of the snares that may beset young girls. She did not realize her

daughter's beauty, because she had been accustomed to consider her plain. Indeed there was, as we know, a time during which she had looked upon Germaine's appearance as a misfortune. Her daughter had no kinship with her own blonde style. She really had no idea that Germaine was unable to walk along a street without challenging attention. Miss Danby knew, and to the best of her power watched. Yet, such was the fervour of her devotion to the Suffragist cause, that she was willing to allow this cherished girl to expose herself to the chance of insult by interrupting a public meeting.

The little lady herself had once walked with a deputation, in perfectly law-abiding and constitutional fashion, to the House of Commons. The procession had been attacked by a mob of the brainless roughs upon whom legislators are so eager to bestow the vote which they withhold from educated women. A large policeman, quite at the beginning of affairs, had picked Dannie out of the scrum, carried her to a safe distance, set her upon her feet, dusted her down carefully, and told her to run home, which she had done, crying soft tears of impotent indignation. She had ever since felt herself ineffectual, so far as physical effort went.

But in the power of Germaine's beauty she had absolute faith. She felt convinced that her darling had only to stand up in any assembly, only to speak, to obtain a hearing. She thought Providence had created this girl, and sent her to live in poverty in this insignificant town, in order to help on the women's athletic cause.

But since the day when that procession marched to Westminster, much water had run under the bridges. A new spirit had grown up in the proletariat, a fierce resentment, fostered and kept alive by stupid acts of provocative violence. As the day of the Radical candidate's first meeting drew near,

those of his supporters who foresaw that he would be heckled by the Suffragists made their arrangements for the chucking out. They determined that it should be swift and exemplary.

Mrs. Damien rarely went to any evening function. She certainly would not think of attending a political meeting, having just about as much interest in politics as a Jersey cow might be supposed to cherish.

She hoped the Radical would get in, because Constant had been a Radical, and they were, of course, the right party. When, on the fateful night, Germaine, and Dannie who had been invited to supper, arose from table and departed to the town hall, such an idea as that they were intending to put a spoke in the wheel of the candidate would have seemed to her wilder than a nightmare.

The two conspirators, at the corner of the High Street, found Miss Tate and Miss Bridges awaiting them, and joined forces. It was a fine October night, the stars so bright as to suggest frost. Germaine was strung up to a high pitch of excitement, and her beauty was radiant.

They got places just about where they wished to have them—below the middle of the hall, so as not to be too near the platform, but not in the back rows, where the rougher element of the meeting would be situated.

It was quite near the beginning of the campaign, so that the Radical agents did not as yet know by sight the suffragist ladies who were canvassing for Mr. Gordon. Germaine's party passed in utterly unsuspected.

The hall filled rapidly, and the girls watched with eagerness for some of their own set to come and take seats immediately surrounding them, so as to render it difficult for stewards to reach them without delay.

They were obliged, however, to refrain from mak-

ing any signal of wishing to be together, lest this should be remarked. They made no sign of recognition when those they knew arrived, scanned the hall, and made their way to seats as near as possible. Two stout, solid supporters came immediately behind Germaine, much to the relief of Dannie, who was not altogether happy, in the background of her mind, now that the Ides of March were actually come.

An elderly man in a heavy inotor-coat appeared in the main doorway about halfway down the hall. They saw the stewards shake hands with him, and press him to go forward to a front seat.

"No, no," said he, loud enough for Germaine to hear, "I am not supposed to be here. Put me somewhere inconspicuous. Come to hear Master Norman without his seeing me, you know—hey?"

He laughed, not very good-humouredly, and was ushered by the obsequious steward into a seat in the row immediately in front of the Suffragists, but to their left by about six places. He made a great commotion while entering his place, taking off his enormous coat and folding it, trying to stow it beneath a chair, failing, calling back the steward to relieve him of it, and so forth. At last he sat down, blew his nose with a blast like a trumpet, and, putting on his spectacles, began to stare around him. He was a powerfully built man, whose hair must have been sandy in his youth, and was now white, with streaks of pale yellow. His complexion was florid, and he wore a large moustache of the same whitish yellow tinge as his still abundant and curly hair. His eyes were small and keen, very blue, and his expression truculent and choleric. His wandering gaze very soon fell upon Germaine, and dwelt there, with an admiration that was plainly expressed. Poor little Dannie marked it, and was distressed. It was really most inconvenient at times—any wandering eye that rested upon her darling was caught as by a bait.

Dannie was glad that Germaine herself was deeply unconscious of the scrutiny. She and the other girls were watching with zest a little by-play. A group of girls of their own society were purposely behaving rather like conspirators—beckoning one another, and making a point of sitting together. The stewards soon remarked it, and began to place their pickets. Dannie did not at all like the looks of some of the pickets. She grew even more perturbed, glancing from the red-faced gentleman in the row in front, back to the ill-favoured lot who were keeping the other girls under observation. Happily the platform group now advanced from unknown regions behind the end of the hall, and the eyes of everybody were turned towards them.

Mr. Norman Willis looked very well assured and smiling. The Earl of Rickmansworth, who was in the chair, was also well received. A group of young men followed, and sat in a semi-circle. Among these latter Germaine recognised a face. She nudged Dannie and whispered, "That is our friend who travelled with us last Saturday from Almesbury."

The meeting began. Mr. Norman Willis's speech was exactly the usual thing. Free land for the people—free education, free meals, no taxes and complete control—cheap food, high wages, and all the rest of the glittering programme, was flung to the crowd, greedily snatched, and loudly applauded. After the humming and hawing of the Earl, it seemed as though the young man were quite an orator. It being the first occasion of his standing for Parliament, he had taken pains to learn his speech, and he rolled out the well-worn catch-words with a gusto which made them seem quite interesting.

He was not, however, allowed to proceed quite without marks of disapprobation. There was a Unionist element in the room, and from time to time it made itself heard. The candidate was visibly put

off his stroke by the interruptions. Evidently he was not used to be heckled.

His wife, young and very well dressed, who, with a coquettish smile, sat near him on the platform holding a bouquet, grew wistful as he began to hesitate. There was, after a time, a pause, as he, having lost his thread, turned to the table beside him to consult his notes. Having recited a considerable portion of what he had prepared, he was not at once able to find his place; and in the pause, Germaine rose to her feet, and her thrilling voice sounded clear in the echoing hall:

"What has the candidate to say about Votes for Women?"

CHAPTER III

THE HECKLERS

A MURMUR, half annoyance, half a pleased anticipation of coming events, ran through the hall. There were several loud, isolated voices raised :

"Pitch her out! Pitch her out!"

The chuckers-out, who had been watching with deep apprehension the suspicious movements of the girls whom they had under observation, looked round in fierce indignation that a march should be thus stolen upon them. The candidate extended his hand with a polite smile.

"Order, please! Do not disturb the lady! I will ask her to put her question in writing, and I will deal with it after the speeches——"

"Answer it now, please. You have answered four questions by men, and you ought to answer mine!" came the crusading voice.

The red-faced old gentleman in front turned on his seat and said in hurried tones, "Be quiet, can't you? Silly girl, sit down, don't make a disturbance."

"A gentleman says, 'Silly girl, sit down!'" cried Germaine. "That is what men have said to women ever since the world began, but now you have got to listen to us!"

The stewards and their hirelings were elbowing their way towards her. She sprang upon her chair, and Miss Tate and Miss Bridges, one on either side, stood up in their places and joined their voices to

hers. "We do not wish to interrupt this meeting, but we want an answer! Are you in favour of giving votes to women?"

There was now quite a solid little block of women on their feet, surrounding Germaine, whose head and shoulders appeared above the throng.

The young man on the platform, who had thought of her almost continually since their travelling together, sprang up as if he had been shot, and his face grew crimson. He felt as though his life depended upon persuading her to sit down, before one of those ugly brutes laid hands upon her. He turned, and hastily endeavoured to leave the platform and reach the body of the hall; but he was stopped at every turn, and when he had rushed into the green-room, he could not find his way round, and there was nobody to ask.

Meanwhile, for a few incredible moments, Germaine held the floor. "You have just been telling us that you mean to give a vote to every man, however ignorant, however useless, however depraved. Will you give votes to women?"

So far she got, and those words were clearly heard all over the hall. Then they were drowned by roars of rage from the outraged throats of male persons who felt their intrinsic superiority had got to be demonstrated somehow.

The chuckers-out had fought and pushed their way to the little block of suffragists, one of whom had unfurled a flag of the Suffrage colours and was waving it aloft.

The advancing officials, furious at the opposition they met with, shoved the women aside, punching savagely. A shrill scream arose piercingly from one young girl, beside herself with terror and pain.

Women in the hall began to shriek out "Shame!" though whether they alluded to the conduct of the Suffragists or that of the stewards was not clear.

By this time, Dannie was beside herself. She had not anticipated a riot. She had looked forward to a triumphant assertion, by Germaine, of their right to be answered. It is quite possible that the candidate was offering to answer. His attitude as he stood perilously near the edge of the platform suggested that he was entreating that no violence might be used. But not a word of what he said could be heard. The hall was rent with tumult. Some Unionist men, from the gallery, were trying to get downstairs to the help of the women. The stewards were filled with the blind rage at being dared and opposed which sometimes invades the breast of half-civilized man. They were ready to lynch the frail creatures who had set themselves up against the age-long tradition of their feminine inferiority.

"Don't let 'em squall, yer silly clown, choke 'em," shouted hoarsely the leader of the band. His subordinates needed no further encouragement. They gripped the women by whatever portion of them came handiest and covered their mouths with their dirty and malodorous hands.

"You dare make one sound, and I'll let you know it," growled he who made prisoner of Dannie. But Dannie was game. Here, at last, was the crowning moment of her life. She really was in the thick and centre of a hand-to-hand struggle for justice. She clenched her tiny fists and hit at the brute's face, wild in her determination not to be separated from Germaine. She received a blow in the jaw which silenced her completely, and was thrown from the clutches of her captor to the next man in the gang, like a sack of coals. The triumphant chucker-out had now reached the centre of disturbance. He was behind Germaine. She still stood upon the chair, she still spoke, and her words were actually reaching those in the rows nearest to her, almost all of whom, as it chanced, were women. The representative of

law and order grasped her blouse by the back of the collar, his fingers against her glorious nape. He jerked her suddenly backward, and she, resisting with all her force, the button gave, and her white throat was exposed to view. There was a howl—one hardly knew what it expressed. The whole audience was in uproar, a good many men struggling to go to the rescue. Cries of "Shame!" "Serve 'em right!" "Let 'em have it!" "Call yourselves men!" and so on, rent the air.

The man seized Germaine next by the waist. She struggled, with the blind instinctive violence of the feminine creature who feels for the first time the contact of male brutality. He gripped her, dragged her from her chair, and was raising his fist, with the apparent intention of striking her in the face, when he received a blow upon his own jaw which caused him to turn, with a roar of fury.

The flaming face of an old man with whitish yellow hair was glaring into his. "Drop that lady, I tell you! Drop her, you dirty brute! You ruffianly blackguard, I'll have you sent to hard labour if you so much as lift a finger on these women. I'm a J.P."

The man stood for a moment irresolute, flinching from the tones of authority, believing the man who spoke to him to be a member of the bench at Breconstead itself.

As he spoke, the old gentleman had possessed himself of Germaine, whom he took from the craven's almost unresisting hold.

"You lay a finger on one of them, and we'll see what you get! Go before me—make a way out—by God, if I were ten years younger, I'd wipe the floor with your ugly mug," went on the infuriated pre-server. "Can you walk, my dear?" he muttered, stooping to Germaine's drooped head which rested against his rough coat. She had taken off her hat,

before rising to make her demonstration. Her dead-black hair, in considerable disorder, framed a face as white as a water-lily. Her eyes were raised to his with a curious, blind look, and her breath came sobbingly.

She was conscious, but he could see that she hardly understood what he said. There was not a moment to be lost, and turning, he moved, with his arm firmly about her, towards the door, following an irregular lane among the displaced chairs. There was still a din of the most piercing description. Women who had not offended, but had been mishandled by the stewards in their struggle through the crowd, were lying prostrate upon two or three chairs, and their companions were bending over them with scent bottles. The Suffragists, whatever their object, had certainly succeeded in breaking up the meeting. The candidate had relinquished the struggle to be heard, and sat, with a pale face, waiting for the tumult to subside.

At the swing doors of the hall they found some constables.

"Policeman, I give that man in charge for brutal usage of women. I am prepared to attend and give evidence against him," said the old gentleman in loud tones. "Here is my card."

He drew a card from his pocket and handed it to the constable, who was an inspector, and looked with respect upon the J.P.

The chucker-out was collared, none too gently, by another policeman.

"I'm all right, I am," he said defiantly. "You can't do nothing. I was doin' what they paid me to do. I was there to throw the women out, and told I needn't do it none too gentle, neither."

"Then, if that be true, we'll have the matter brought into open Court," was the sharp retort. "It is a disgrace to your borough, your candidate, and your

political organization. This young lady merely asked a question, as she had every right to do. When next you're hired to knock women about, you'll stop and consider whether it's worth the money. Show me a private room, and fetch some water for this lady."

He became aware that Germaine was trying to say something.

"Danby—Miss Danby—what have they done with her?"

"I'll go and see in a minute, my dear, but first I'll lay you down somewhere."

A door was opened to them—a uniformed official showed them through an office into a little parlour. Here was a couch, and the old gentleman laid Germaine down upon it. She was gasping and shivering, and making vain efforts to find a handkerchief. Her champion drew out a clean one, about the size of a table-cloth, and offered it with an apologetic air.

She took it, too mortified to feel inclined to laugh; and buried her face in it, struggling to keep back tears.

The policeman stood hesitating in the doorway.

"You need not wait. I will see this young lady home, when she is well enough to move."

"Beg pardon, sir. I want her to go up to the station to identify a lady that's been brought there."

Germaine turned white. "The police station! Have they taken Miss Danby there? . . . But we cannot be arrested for asking questions at meetings," she faltered.

Her new friend, with his eye keenly upon her, thought it no harm that she should have a fright. He guessed that the poor little lady had been taken to the police station merely because they did not know where else to take her. But evidently Germaine thought that she was in the clutch of the law.

"You see," he said slowly, "what comes of these mad pranks. The consequences are more serious

than you could have foreseen." He turned to the policeman. "Will you please send the secretary, or whoever organized this meeting, to me?"

The man touched his hat and departed. Germaine, sitting up, and drying her eyes, suddenly realized her dishevelled appearance. Instinctively she raised her arms, and began to loop up her hair. As she did so, her cheeks became scarlet with a live blush. She had discovered that her frock was torn at the throat.

She did not speak. Without a word she allowed him to see her gratitude, her modesty, her apology for the trouble she was giving.

He contemplated her. A thoroughbred and no mistake! The idea of her being in the position in which he had found her, made him grit his teeth.

"Well," he said at last, "I told you that you are a silly girl, didn't I?"

"I did not expect——" she managed to reply, and faltered.

"You didn't expect brutality from a British crowd," he replied. "No, I don't know that you were wrong there. But you must remember that the temper of the crowd has been tried of late. However, we won't talk of that. It's over, and I hope you are not seriously hurt."

"I don't think so. Only bruised. Will they really take me to prison?" she asked, with a sudden passion of appeal which caused his heart to constrict in a most unusual manner.

"Not if I can help it," he answered. "But you know, when you start out upon a crusade, you must take what comes to you on the road."

"I know. I did not think they could arrest me, just for asking a question. I don't a bit mind going to prison. I am only upset because of my mother. She knows nothing of what I have done, and I really can't think what she will do if she should have to hear that I am in the lock-up."

"Ah, you should take these things into consideration. But there! Old heads were not made to sit upon young shoulders. May I ask who you are?"

"My name is Germaine Damien."

He turned towards her suddenly. "Your name is——?"

She repeated it. "Germaine Damien."

He echoed it a third time. "A remarkable name," he said.

"Yes. My father was French, and I was named after his mother."

"Indeed! Do you live in this town?"

"Yes. Mother and I came here for my education. We have lived here ten years."

"Your mother is a widow?"

"Yes."

"I should think she has her hands full," he remarked; but it was so humorously said that it did not offend.

After a while he asked another question. "Did your mother come from Carford?"

"Yes. I think so—I am sure she did."

"Then you are a connection of young Willis, who is standing for this division. I think you must be old Carewe's granddaughter, are you not?"

Germaine smiled with a curl of her lip. She was beginning to recover from her shock. "I am given to understand that Mr. Carewe is my mother's father," she replied.

"That makes him your grandfather, don't it?"

"Oh no. He disowned my mother."

There was a pause. Germaine slipped her feet to the ground, and sat, leaning one elbow upon the top of the sofa.

"What did he do that for?" asked the old gentleman suddenly.

"Oh, for the one unpardonable fault—poverty! Mother and I are brutally poor. We should never do

to associate with a set of successful parvenus," said the girl, unable to keep from her voice the bitterness which always invaded her at the thought of the Carewes. The old gentleman laughed, as if it pleased him immensely to hear the Carewes and their circle thus referred to.

"I imagine you think rather small beer of this grandfather of yours?" he asked mischievously.

"I don't think about him at all," was the prompt reply. "Why should I?"

"Why, indeed? The loss is entirely upon his side. You are a very independent young lady!"

"I have nobody upon whom I can depend except myself."

"You have a mother?"

"Yes. She depends upon me, not I upon her."

He laughed again. "Well, you know, under those circumstances I am inclined to think that you are not free to fight in public halls and run the risk of finding yourself in quod."

"I am inclined to think you are right," she replied demurely.

As she spoke, a slight murmur of approaching voices was heard, and the candidate, with one or two others, came into the outer office.

"You stay quietly here," said her friend, "and I will go and speak to them. The whole affair was forced by the abominable behaviour of the stewards, and I think I can make them see that the best line they can take is to ignore the whole thing and put as little as they can in the papers."

He went out, shutting the door gently behind him, and Germaine was left to her own reflections. It must be recorded that her first action was to rise and look at herself in the dim and dusty glass which stood above the mantelpiece. Viewed above a border of fly-marked photographs, plaster casts coloured to imitate bronzes, and china ornaments

of a nameless description, she saw her pale face, with lips unduly red, and tumbled hair. She succeeded in making this more orderly, and sighed a little as she thought over the position.

Her new friend knew that she was a connection of the Willises. He would use this as a lever, to get her off. What would her mother think, if she knew that her daughter had brought herself to the notice of the Carewe side of the family by brawling in a public hall and spoiling Norman Willis's public meeting? Her cheeks burned at the thought.

There was very little doubt that the story would get round to old Carewe. From him, through Aunt Rosalie, it would travel back to her mother!!!

Still, in the background of her mind, Mrs. Damien cherished hopes of reconciliation. This would be a final, a crushing blow.

A sort of despair overswept the girl. It did indeed seem that for woman, close bound about with the swaddling clothes of custom and overawed by the bogey of propriety, there was no possible outlet. What had she done? She had lifted up her voice on behalf of those who found it hard to obtain a hearing. She had demanded an expression of opinion, upon a burning question, from one who stood as a champion of liberty, who begged her and all her sex to believe that the cause of woman was safe in male hands!

In her childhood she had made a headlong attempt to be Charlotte Corday. Now she felt as though she had essayed the rôle of Joan of Arc and failed as completely and as miserably.

There must have been plenty of people in the Town Hall who knew her by sight. Suppose the firm for whom she worked in Alnesbury should be informed, and should say they had no further need of her services?

This, when she came to reflect, was quite probable :

and, if she found herself out of place, without a good reference, then, indeed, the future lay dark before her. Once more the utter helplessness of woman in the terrible modern industrial conditions rushed over her and daunted her. Was it wonderful that the unrepresented should at last, in desperation, make an attempt to assert themselves?

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CHAPTER IV

"THE COLONEL"

THE door once more opened, and her old friend returned, closing it behind him, came forward and sat down.

"They are quite willing to let you go," he said, with a portentous gravity, "if you will give an undertaking to disturb no more meetings during this election."

Germaine reflected. It was a promise she might as well give, for there was no chance of her being able to repeat to-night's experience. That it could be kept from her mother's ears was an almost impossible hope. In any case, the same risk must not again be run. There was, however, another thought in her mind.

"I will give the promise you ask," she said, "on one condition. I have an idea that some of my friends have been taken. They must all be released."

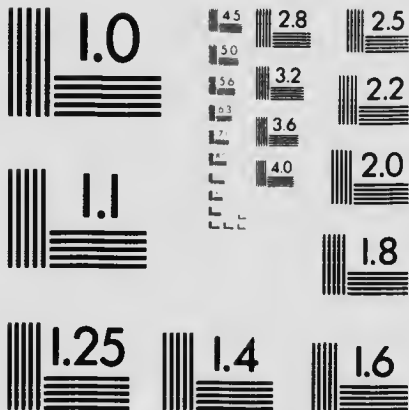
The stranger looked at her with a mixture of delight and mockery. "Is it for you to make terms, do you think?" he inquired.

Germaine's eyes flashed. "I should be a coward and a traitor if I got out of my serape just because Mr. Willis knows some cousin of mine in the north—and left the others to their fate. I was the ring-leader. They all have to work for their living. Will you let them run the risk of losing their job, just because they have made a protest—have cried audibly for justice?"



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"How do you know," he said, after a little deliberation, "that they will give the same undertaking that you have given?"

"I can answer for Miss Danby," cried the girl eagerly. "I will become surety for her!"

"In what amount?" he jested, still with that air of relishing her attitude of regal condescension. "However, as your majesty's go-between, I will carry back your terms to the opposite camp."

Once more he disappeared, and it seemed to the listener that the voices in the next room sounded curiously like those of persons endeavouring to stifle laughter.

"I am permitted to drive with you to the police station," said he, rejoining her, "to fetch your particular friend, on condition of her giving the same undertaking that you give."

"And the others?" she cried eagerly.

"I am told that they have not been detained," he replied, without a smile.

Her face lit up. "Oh, you are kind—I am grateful to you," she said, rising and coming to him with outstretched hand. "If all men were like you, there wouldn't have to be any sex war, would there?"

"Is there a sex war?" he asked. "I haven't been made aware of it."

"Can we go at once?" she begged, ignoring his irony. "I am afraid I have lost my hat and gloves—you will be ashamed to be seen with such a dishevelled female!"

He laughed, and crossing the room, held open the door and listened. "They are gone. The coast is clear, and we can get a fly just outside," said he. "You will not be much remarked. Come along."

She found her knees excessively shaky, and was glad to grip his strong arm as they emerged from the office. The vestibule outside was full of small groups

of persons chatting together, and several heads were turned in their direction.

At the end nearest the door which gave upon the main hall, and therefore at some distance from the departing couple, stood a young man, scanning everybody who came out. He caught sight of the yellowish white head moving slowly to the door, and started to follow in a great hurry. He had reached the scene of conflict a moment after the rescue of Germaine—just too late to break anybody's head in her defence. He was angry and sore, chafing at his own unreadiness. He ought to have taken a flying leap, through the marguerites and chrysanthemums that bordered the platform, down among the reporters. He had missed his chance, and was now, it seemed, missing it again.

The silvery head he was following disappeared with unexpected celerity, and he pushed his way among the loungers, only to see a closed cab drive away.

As she sank back in the darkness, against the stuffy cushions of the old fly, it occurred to Germaine that she was behaving in a somewhat reckless fashion. Without a word of introduction she had accepted the protection of a wholly unknown elderly gentleman, and was driving off with him, between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, entirely at his mercy! Somehow, she knew that it was all right. He had spoken and looked in a manner to inspire confidence. She was grateful, and not at all apprehensive.

He sat silent for a minute or two, with folded arms, and then burst out:

"Well, it beats me! What you girls—you young, charming girls—can think you want with a vote! My dear, you can't wear it, nor sell it—at least, I hope not!—nor eat it, nor flirt with it——"

"Oh, don't talk like that, just when I am beginning to like you so much," she said very earnestly. "Can't you see that girls such as you have in your mind—

girls who think about dress and eating and flirting—*don't* want the vote! That's just the point—they *don't*! It is we, who are face to face with the question of how we can find bread to eat—it is we who want it!"

"Bread to eat!" he said sharply. "What do you know about that?"

"It is just the one thing I have always had to consider," she replied calmly. "I have been brought up in want. At this present moment, I am indebted to the goodness of a man who is not really related to me at all, and who is not rich, for the education which enables me to be a wage-earner."

"God bless my soul!" he said, in a perturbed voice. "But women ought to be supported—their male relatives ought to support them! You a wage-earner!"

"Why not I?" she asked, indignant. "I am as hungry and as prone to feel the cold as if I were hunchbacked or cross-eyed. You think it sad that a girl who is young and not bad-looking should be a wage-earner. If I were forty, and crippled and consumptive, you would not care a bit!"

"My dear!" he murmured, almost as though he felt conscience-stricken.

"My case is just a case in point," she went on vehemently. "My mother is daughter to a man who, they tell me, is simply rolling in money. He would see her, his daughter, whom he professed to love, dead at his feet, before he would give her one halfpenny out of his abundance——"

"Oh, be just, my child. His daughter, so I hear, married the man of her choice. She chose between him and her father, and was warned that she must take the consequences."

"Just so. That is exactly what I mean. She was born a woman, and the man who had her in his power said—'You shall have everything you want all your

life—but at the price of slavery. If ever you do what I say you shall not do—if ever you assert your right to the freedom of an individual—you have no more of my money.' Don't you see that is an intolerable position for any self-respecting woman? Oh, *can't* you understand that? Men say—we will support our women, but only as long as those women are slaves! . . . Put yourself in my place—what would you feel? Wouldn't you rage, to see the whole power, the whole machinery of government, in the hands of such men as that? Can't you sympathize with our wanting some better security than the caprice of the individual man who happens to be related to us? . . . Think of my mother left a widow—helpless, untaught, not competent to earn one penny—left with a little child dependent upon her—with no way to get her voice heard, nothing to do but to go on bearing her poverty as best she could, alone!"

She ceased her tirade, breathless, and leaned back in her corner. "Oh, I ought to ask you to forgive me for talking like this," she said regretfully. "You have never for one moment thought of such things, have you? The economic position of woman has never presented itself to you as a question of importance. You are like Talleyrand, when the poor beggar woman said to him, '*Il faut vivre!*'—You do not see the necessity. But you must remember that we do."

He spoke, in a harsh, gruff way. "Girls of your age ought not to be forced into consideration of these matters, which are part of a far larger question."

"We have to consider what is, not what ought to be," she told him, swiftly.

He cleared his throat as though he would have said more; but at the moment, the cab stopped before the red lamp of the Police Station.

The police inspector, who had accompanied them on the box, got down, and led them within. After a

very short delay, they were taken to a room where Miss Danby had been laid upon a couch. She was unconscious, and so waxen white that a cry came from Germaine in a passion of remorse—"She is dead! She is dead!"

She flung herself down beside the pathetic little figure. Dannie was always so neat, so dainty in all her ways. Her black dress and lace collar and cuffs increased in some subtle way the shock of her appearance. They had tied a handkerchief round her chin, which was swollen and discoloured. A little blood had escaped from the corner of her mouth. Her white hair was ruffled.

"They've sent for the doctor from the Infirmary," said the wardress who stood near.

"This young lady knows who she is," said the inspector gruffly. "Could you take her home, miss? Do you know where she lives?"

"Yes, oh yes! But she lives quite alone! What shall I do?" cried Germaine, in acute distress. "Dannie, Dannie darling, look up! This is Ermie!"

"She ain't dead, miss," said the woman, not unkindly. "Don't you fret."

Germaine turned her pleading eyes upon the old gentleman, who stood very rigidly with his mouth drawn into a hard line. "Help me! What can I do? If I take her home, mamma will have to know all about it!"

"I advise you to tell your mother everything," he replied at once; "and if you will take this poor lady home, I will bring a good doctor to you without delay."

Germaine considered a moment. "Yes, that will be best," said she.

Dannie's landlady had not a sweet temper, and Dannie's narrow means would not admit of the services of a professional nurse. She must take her home, though every fibre of her winced away from

the idea of the shock she must inflict upon her mother.

"You are most kind. That will be the best way," she said meekly.

They lifted the little lady and bore her out to the waiting fly, where they placed her as well as they could.

"Shall you be nervous?" asked Germaine's unknown friend, as he looked in upon the two.

She shook her head with a smile, her eyes swimming in tears. He saw that she was afraid to trust her voice.

"Sorry to make myself a nuisance," he muttered apologetically, "but I must ask you to give me your address."

"It is number 135, Teek Villas," she told him; then, leaning forward with sudden recollection: "I have not thanked you—I am ashamed!—"

He withdrew himself quickly from her gratitude. "I shall hope to come round to-morrow and see how she is," he told her. "Meanwhile, I will hasten in pursuit of a doctor. Good-bye for the present."

They were driving away together, in the dark. Germaine saw the glittering sky of stars through a mist of unshed tears. Her first childish act of defiance to law had been kept entirely from "Mamma." This one, it appeared, could not be.

Well! As the old man had observed, crusaders must take the fortune of war!

Then a more insistent, practical difficulty intruded itself upon her mind. How was she to pay this fly?

She began to calculate. The fare from the Town Hall to the Police Station was eighteenpence. The man had waited a quarter of an hour—that made two shillings. From the Police Station to Teek Villas, two shillings. Four shillings altogether! Her heart sank. Whence would come her dinner during the remainder of this week? However, she *had* four

shillings in her purse at home, which was a comfort to think of. She had taken no money with her to the hall that night.

The flyman got down from the box when they arrived, and said he had promised "the Colonel" to carry the sick lady into the house.

"Oh, thank you, but wait a moment! I must just prepare my mother," she faltered with fluttering breath.

"Certainly, miss."

She slipped out carefully, past the unconscious lady, and opened the door with her latchkey. In the parlour Mrs. Damien was dozing comfortably before the fire, and some supper was laid out upon the table.

"Mother," said a shaking voice, as the astonished lady lifted her blond head and stared. "Don't be frightened—there has been an accident. Dannie has been badly hurt, and I have brought her here."

"Here! Oh, Ermie dear, why not the County Hospital? What can we do with her, here?"

"We will hear what the doctor says when he comes—perhaps he will advise us to have her moved," said the girl rapidly, "but I had to bring her here. She can have my bed. I will go and tell the nurse to bring her in. Don't be alarmed, she is unconscious."

"An accident! These nasty motors!" cried Mrs. Damien, laying down her book and coming forward, pale and trembling, as she always was with the least shock.

"I couldn't leave her at the Police Station, could I? They took her there," gulped Ermie, hastening out to the tiny gate.

Between them, they got the patient upstairs, and laid her down upon a bed. Then Germaine made a dive at her dressing-table drawer to get her purse.

"Good evening, miss! The Colonel, he settled up at the Police Station, he did," said the flyman

politely; "there's nothing at all to pay, miss, and only glad to be of use."

He departed, and Germaine heaved a sigh of vast relief.

She would have liked to throw herself down upon a bed and indulge in a good howl; but the necessity for immediate action drove her on.

She covered Dannie warmly, and, as the kettle was boiling, applied a hot bottle to her feet. She washed the blood from her face, bathed her temples with eau de Cologne, and tried to give her brandy, but the teeth were too tightly clenched.

Just as she was wondering what she could do next, the doctor arrived—Dr. Brooks, the leading practitioner of Breeonstead.

He looked grave, and could give no positive diagnosis. "I think she will have to be brought to the hospital," he said, when his examination was complete. "But if you will keep her to-night, I will send an ambulance to-morrow. It seems like concussion, but there is injury to the jaw as well."

He gave his directions. Somebody must sit up all night. The sick woman might not recover consciousness for hours, but on the other hand she might awake quite soon.

He was gone, and Germaine found herself faced by her mother's desire for an account of the accident.

She would have given all she possessed to be able to put her off. The impossibility of making her understand was, as of old, the barrier that could not be cast down.

"It happened at the meeting," she slowly said. "Some suffragettes interrupted, and there was a kind of riot. The stewards had brought in some horrid roughs, to chuck the women out: and Dannie got hurt. She had not done anything at all."

Her mother stared, petrified. "But you were

sitting together—you must have been in the thick of it too," she gasped. "Oh, Ermie, how dreadful! These women are a disgrace to their sex!"

Ermie laughed a little bitterly. "Ah, you are just the woman to please the Colonel," said she.

"The Colonel, my dear? What Colonel?"

"I do not know. He was a stranger to me, but he interfered to prevent my getting hurt. He disapproves of suffragists quite as much as you do, but for all that, he pulled me through. He was too late to save poor little Dannie."

"But, Ermie, I hope you explained to him, dearie, that you were not one of these frightful creatures—not a suffragist, I mean?"

"Mamma, you know quite well that I *am* a suffragist."

"Oh yes, darling, I know you think it right to go to committee meetings and so on. I have not a word to say against that. But fighting with rough men in a public place is *quite* different, isn't it? So unwomanly."

Ermie grew rather white. "To stand up for the weak is not unwomanly," she said in a low tone.

"No, darling, of course not. But anything public—anything that makes you conspicuous—in a town where one is well known, one cannot be too careful, can one?" the tone was so wistful, so helpless, that the girl's heart bled. She went and knelt upon the rug, winding her arms round the tall frail figure, and laying her head upon its breast.

"Mother, mother," she gasped. What could she say? There was nothing to be said. The translation of a principle into action was to Mrs. Damien a thing as difficult to grasp as it is to most English people. "Say what you like, so long as you do nothing at all," was the unwritten maxim which had governed her youth. Once she had broken out. Once she had acted for herself, and the consequences,

in her view, of that departure from true feminine precedent had been disastrous.

"You are sure to hear from somebody—I had better tell you myself. I went to that meeting to-night, pledged to heckle the candidate. I only asked a question. I had a right to do it. It was a public meeting. For that, they cuffed, kicked, and misused us. . . . Don't answer, mamma. Don't upbraid me. I ought not to have done it, seeing that you have only me. I have given my word not to do it again."

Mrs. Damien sat staring in front of her with her large pale blue eyes, holding her arms loosely about her daughter's pulsating frame. Her expression was that of one whose mind is travelling unwontedly—painfully fast.

"Oh, Ermie," she said, "supposing—just supposing it got known! I don't dare to think what might happen! Mr. Willis is a sort of cousin of ours, you know—and Damien is a very uncommon name. Suppose in some way *it were to get round to your grandfather* that you had done this?"

"Why, what on earth would that matter? He can't do less for us than he does already!"

The girl gave a little groan, and unloosed her clinging arms. What she had done mattered so little to her mother. It was the consequences thereof which she dreaded.

CHAPTER V

MAKING IT UP

It was with a premonition of misfortune that Germaine, after a sleepless night, bathed, dressed, and dragged her weary limbs downstairs.

Her mother had made wonderful exertions, having risen early, prepared tea, and taken over charge of the patient until the doctor should come. Dannie had moved, groaned, and tossed a little, but had never been anything like conscious. Once during the night, Germaine had succeeded in making her drink a very little milk.

The girl's unusual pallor made her look almost unearthly as she came downstairs and seated herself to eat what breakfast she could. The newspaper lay beside her place, but it was a London, not a local one, and she could not expect to find in it any account of the disturbance last night.

She did not trouble to open it, determining to buy a local paper at the station. As she ate, listlessly, her gaze fell upon the births, marriages, and deaths column, and an item of news caught her eye :

“BURNSIDE.—At Fendallscombe, Devon, on the 4th inst., after only two days' illness, Germaine Nicoline Marie, widow of the late John Burnside, Esq., aged seventy-seven.”

The brief statement of fact caused a constriction of Germaine's throat and a rush of tears to her eyes.

She had not cherished much hope of ever seeing her grandmother again ; but the knowledge that all hope must in future be done away was a shock, nevertheless.

It seemed appropriate that a piece of sad news should come to-day, when she was already so weighed down by depression. She must somehow find time to write a note of sympathy to the squire, when she came home this evening.

She decided not to tell her mother, who would discover it for herself quite soon enough, since she always read this special column of the paper.

As her weary feet lagged along the dismal station road, Germaine's thoughts turned themselves for a while from last night's experience to fix themselves upon Fendallseombe and wonder wistfully whether, now that Madam was gone, its doors would still be closed to her and her mother.

She bought a county paper at the bookstall, and what she found in it did not at all tend to restore her spirits. She had been recognized at the meeting, and the paper printed her name in full, at the end of a lurid account of the way the women had fought, headed :

MEETING BROKEN UP BY FURIES

This gave her such a disagreeable sensation inside, that it rendered her quite unable to take the nap which she had planned for herself between Breconstead and Almesbury. Instead of sleeping, she remained erect and pale, staring from the window with eyes that saw not.

Every step that she took towards the office felt to her like a step towards her doom. She argued with herself for so foolish a sense of foreboding. But it could not be argued away.

She went in and fancied the eyes of her fellow-

clerks keenly upon her. (One of them belonged to the Suffrage Society.) Work was slack that morning, and, to turn her thoughts, she wrote a little note of sympathy to Miles Burnside. Her own real sorrow for her grandmother's death made her letter warmer and more natural than anything she had sent to him of late. Nothing unusual happened until about half-past eleven, when one of the male clerks, coming out of the chief's office, said—

“Goldring wants to speak to Miss Damien.”

It had come. She rose without delay and went to receive the crushing blow. It fell. Mr. Goldring, as a matter of fact, had been for some weeks past seeking a good excuse to dismiss Miss Damien, for the reason that his eldest son was returning from Oxford and entering the office shortly; and this girl was not the kind of girl whom it was wise to have about, full in the eye of a susceptible young man who must marry well. She was a good clerk—true—but good female clerks are to be had in abundance.

The appearance of her name in the papers in connection with an affray in a public place gave just such a handle as Mr. Goldring desired. He admitted that he had no fault to find with her behaviour in the office, and assured her of his intention to speak well of her in the matter of a reference.

She took it quite quietly. As she stood there, pale and majestic, her head held rather high, meeting his gaze steadily, Mr. Goldring was conscious of feeling a worm. He thought she might be going to say something that she had better not—in the case of these suffragists, you never knew what they might say—they were always blurting out the awkward facts which one usually leaves unexpressed. His dismissed clerk, however, said nothing at all. She bowed, and walked out. She had a week's notice.

There came to her, as she put on her hat and coat that evening and fared forth upon her homeward

way, one of those fits of wild rebellion which at times attack the bravest of us.

This girl was of a sunny, hopeful temperament, in love with life, willing to believe all good of all men. She walked with arms outstretched and heart full of song, to gather the sweets of this wonderful, interesting world. She was, as in her childhood, brimful of the desire to champion lost causes, to relieve the oppressed, to oppose all tyranny.

Twice in her life had she dared to stand forth alone and make her individual attempt to put things straight: each time the result had been disaster. She was now without work. She remembered the difficulty she had experienced when last she sought it. Now it was all to do again—the facing of bold eyes that stared—the intimation that “we are considering several other applicants”—the searching questions as to why you left your last place.

“The Colonel” last night had pronounced that such questions were not for such as she. What should young girls know of economics? Ah, if some of the men in this kingdom could know what Germaine could tell them of social economics! If they could know what other girls could tell them—wage-earners with good looks, but without the dignity and fastidious pride which made a strong shield for this particular member of the class!

As the train lumbered along, she was determining to go to Canada. Why had she not thought of this before? She would sell all they had, and take her mother away, to a country with a future, a country not as yet bound fast in the chains of snobbery—a country where one might earn one’s bread without reproach, in spite of having been born a woman.

She was discouraged, daunted. She had, as it were, ridden forth to battle, and come home vanquished. She felt as if she dare not face the little home; dare not gaze upon Dannie’s crushed and

pitiful body nor encounter the steady, never varying incomprehension of her mother.

As she came out of the station, the rain descended in a perfect downpour. By the time she reached home, her boots were very wet. They were old friends, and needed renewal.

The town was flaring with posters—"Vote for Willis." Side by side, the white and blue—"Gordon and the Empire."

The contest seemed to matter very little. Her soul was dull, and she went heavily, for the enemy oppressed her.

As she put her latchkey into the door, her mother came out into the passage.

"Dr. Brooke came round this morning, and said Miss Danby must be taken to the Cottage Hospital," said she. "He thinks it is very serious. I asked him what his fee was, and he said all that had been arranged by the Radical Association, and she would be very well looked after. They fetched her away about three this afternoon. The Cottage Hospital is charming, you know."

Germaine took a long breath. The feeling that she could go to bed and have unbroken rest to-night was, to her vexation, the first thought that intruded. Then came a rush of remorse. Brave little Dannie, giving so much for the cause!

Yet she knew that the sufferer would have far better tendance where she now was, than would be possible in Teek Villas.

"I wonder," remarked Mrs. Damien, "if the Radical Association are afraid of things coming out. The doctor told me that Miss Bridges' father is going to bring an action. Her arm was dislocated."

"I hope he will," said Germaine vindictively.

She crept past her mother, upstairs, took off her wet shoes and stockings, smoothed her hair and came down again. Her mind was tossed upon billows of

conflicting feeling. When should she confess the humiliating truth that she had "got the sack"? Her knees grew weak, her heart turned to water as she flinched from the humiliation which lay before her, and must be faced.

She seated herself at table, and contemplated the slices of cut ham which lay in a little dish before her. She thought her supper would choke her if she tried to eat it with this burden upon her. She had the feeling that she was betraying her unconseious parent, who sat there so unsuspiciously pouring out tea, her face wearing an expression of unwonted animation, the result of the exciting day she had been through.

"And oh, Ermie, what do you think I saw in the paper? Your grandmother is dead, my dear. Is not that sad?"

Tears rushed to Ermie's eyes, sobs to her throat. She struggled with herself. A breakdown at this moment would be too utterly degrading and foolish. Yet the reminder of that bit of news acted as a last straw to the load of discouragements she had to face.

Death, with its finality, cut her off from the long-drawn-out hope she had cherished from childhood of one day finding herself again as of old, in Madam's frail, loving arms. She remembered, as if it were yesterday, her arrival at Fendallseombe, the abandonment of affection with which she had surrendered herself to the old woman's tenderness. That frantic blow had cut her off for ever from the shelter of those arms. She had not set eyes upon either Madam or Uncle Rémy since the fatal morning when the tragedy was discovered.

She sat wrestling with the rush of her feelings, conscious of a growing astonishment, a dawning fear, in her mother's light blue eyes.

In the silence they both heard the unusual sound

of the purring of a motor in the road outside. It came to a standstill, very close to their own door.

This diverted the girl's attention at the critical moment, and just saved her from giving way completely. She listened. It was absurd to suppose that the motor had business with No. 135; but steps rang upon the tiled approach to the tiny door, and the knocker was loudly plied.

Germaine rose from table. She slipped into the drawing-room, turned up the gas, and, returning, opened the door. Upon the threshold stood the "Colonel."

"Well," he greeted her, "I have come, as I said I should, to find out how you are to-day, after the battle. You don't look very fit, I must say."

She managed to summon a smile—he thought it the saddest he had ever seen. "I was up all night, you see."

He stepped, uninvited, into the tiny passage, where his elbows seemed to brush both walls. "Up all night? What, with that poor thing?—But they have taken charge of her now, I understand?"

"Yes. She has gone to the Cottage Hospital. I will go round before bed-time, and find out how she is."

He regarded her keenly. "Where have you been all day?"

"At work—at the office where I work," she replied, faintly colouring.

"In Breeconstead?"

"In Almesbury."

"Up all night, and at work all day! No wonder you look ready to drop," he began angrily. She held up her hand, and he broke off short.

"Please come in for a few minutes," she said, "I want my mother to see you and thank you for your care of me."

"Good," he replied, putting down his stick. "I came to see your mother really."

He was ushered into the tiny parlour, where the simplicity and harmony spoke of the taste of the inhabitants. He glanced round him.

Germaine went into the dining-room.

"Mamma, here is the old man I call the Colonel," said she. "He has kindly come, as he said he would, to inquire after me. Will you go in and thank him? I shou'd have fared worse than Dannie if he had not reseued me."

Mrs. Damien rose with alacritty. "How extremely kind!" she murmured, and went into the adjoining room.

Germaine heard her shriek.

With one bound, the girl, who had lingered to place a clean cup on the tea-table, in case the "Colonel" should like some tea, was upon the scene.

She saw her mother upon her knees on the ground, her head bent almost to the carpet, while the Colonel, his face scarlet with annoyance, was saying—"For God's sake don't be such a fool! Get up, can't you?"

Germaine's first idea was that her mother's brain had given way.

"Mamma," she gasped. "what is the matter? Are you ill?"

To her horror, Mrs. Damien rolled over, and lay quite limp upon the floor.

"Why, what can be the matter? What have you done to her?" cried Germaine, in mingled indignation and terror.

"Tut, tut, it's all right," he returned, quite good-humouredly. "We haven't met for a good many years, you see. That's all. Help me lift her. She will soon come to."

"You are somebody she used to know?" questioned Germaine doubtfully. "Ah, of course, you come from Carford, you knew her people——"

"Germaine, you little idiot, is it possible that you have not guessed who I am?"

With that, she raised her head. They had just lifted the unconscious woman and laid her down upon the little sofa. Now they stood confronting each other, and from each pair of eyes looked out the same pride, the same irdomitable will.

By slow degrees, the truth penetrated. Germaine began to recall some of what she had said last night to this man. Her comments upon her grandfather's behaviour, her theories of work and life. . . .

. . . This *was* her grandfather !

In a torrent the blood invaded her cheeks, dyed all her face. She felt as though she were blushing down to her very feet. She lowered her challenging eyes.

"Of course," said a surprisingly gentle voice, "I realize that, in your case, I must begin with an apology. Well then, I own that I have been in the wrong for—how long is it?—three-and-twenty years! I own it, and I own also that I am ashamed of myself. It seems that all I can do is to throw myself upon the mercy of my granddaughter: and she doesn't strike me as likely to be a particularly merciful judge."

Such an appeal was irresistible.

Germaine held out both hands. "Oh, grandfather !"

He took two steps, snatched her in his arms, and kissed her, first on one cheek and then upon the other.

"Little spitfire !" he said, in a voice oddly broken. "God knows I have punished myself enough, when I think that I might have had you with me all these years !"

Both of them forgot the distressing condition of the lady on the sofa. For Germaine had reached the end of her resistance. She burst into uncontrollable tears.

"Now, now, don't do that," he begged of her. "I thought you were a sensible girl! Come, come, leaders of movements don't dissolve in tears, you know! Buck up, little woman, buck up !"

"Ah, you don't know, you don't know what I

have been through to-day," she gasped, when she could speak. "I don't do it often, but I really can't help it. I shall be—all—right—in a minute."

"Very good, cry it out then," he answered patiently, "so long as you tell me all about it. But I was forgetting! You can't be a slave, can you? Dependent upon the caprice of the male tyrant who happens to own you?"

The taunt was a cunning one, for it stopped the tears as if by magic. "No," she said defiantly, lifting her head from his rough coat and smiling up at him with wet eye-lashes and lips parted deliciously. "I can't be a slave. But you won't ask that of me, I know!"

"I expect I shall be taught my place better than that," he replied, with inexpressible relish. "My education begins from to-day. Name your own terms, madam, for undertaking the difficult job of knocking some consideration for others into the wooden head of an old tyrant who has never been contradicted all his life!"

A sound—between a moan and a whimper—drew their attention to the third person present.

With a heart full of remorse, Germaine ran to a side table, took a scent spray and sprayed her mother's temples. She was herself shaking from head to foot with emotion, laughing with tear-wet cheeks, glancing up at the formidable old man with eyes which held a curious sympathy and understanding.

In a few minutes, Emmeline Damien sat up, pushed back her hair, and sent a startled glance round the room as though she feared that she had been mistaken. Her eyes rested upon the burly figure of Matthew Carewe standing upon the minute hearthrug, legs a-straddle.

"Well, Emmie," he said kindly.

She joined her hands, held them out to him, and cried fervently—"My father, forgive me!"

"Oh, pooh-pooh, that's all right," he said testily.

"I'd forgive you anything, as a means to procuring the custody of this violent young person, who ought to be under the restraint of a competent male relative, instead of running about the country like a fire-brand, breaking up peaceful homes."

The blank wonder that Germaine knew so well stole into her mother's wide eyes. "Oh, papa, what do you mean?"

"He means that it is all right, darling. He is sorry he did not forgive you long ago—he says so," murmured the girl, coaxing her. "Are you glad to see him, mamma?"

"Glad? Oh, Ermie, you know! You know all about it, how I have waited, prayed, hoped against hope!—And now!—I simply can't believe it! Oh, papa, kiss me, let me feel sure it is true."

He stooped and kissed her indulgently. "There, there," he said, as if she were a nervous horse. "Here's my granddaughter willing to let bygones be bygones, so it seems to be plain sailing. I want to get back to Gray Ashtead, and my plan is to take you both in the motor with me to-morrow. Can you get packed? We need not start very early, and we will sleep a night on the road. What says the *femme forte*? Can it be done, your ladyship?"

Germaine looked doubtful. "Dannie," she murmured. "I can't desert her."

"I'll pop you into my motor now, and run you round to see her, and to tell her that she is to come to Gray Ashtead for her convalescence. Now, how long will it take you to pack, and let your office know that they have got to get on without you?"

Germaine looked at her mother, to see what her wishes were. There was no doubt about them. "Oh, Ermie, let us do it! Let us do it!" she cried urgently. "Let us leave all this behind us, and go with him as he wishes! You can come back later on and complete arrangements here, and we can buy——"

He finished for her. "Buy clothes afterwards, at our leisure," he said, with satisfaction. "All you want for to-morrow is motor-coats and bonnets, and we can get those as we go through Almesbury. I say, Emmie, what a surprise for Rosie—eh?"

"Oh, beloved Aunt Rosalie!" cried Germaine.

"Why, what do you know about her, Puss?" he asked in his teasing voice.

"I have known her always," replied the girl quietly, looking him in the eyes. "You were well aware of that, were you not? You knew she used to motor over to Padlerby to see us?"

He grew red. "I may have guessed," he owned.

"And that she was depriving herself of things she ought to have had, in order to help us?" went on Germaine relentlessly.

"Ermie, Ermie, what a way to speak to your grandfather!" threw in Mrs. Damien in horror. Neither heeded her.

"I may have supposed that she was giving away odd five-pound-notes," said the old man stolidly.

"She has made us a definite allowance for the past ten years," continued his judge, without remorse. "As a sign that you really were in earnest in what you said to me just now, I think you ought to repay her all that she has given away to us."

"I will," he replied without hesitation. "Emmie, you are a witness. I have promised Germaine that I will refund her aunt all that has been spent upon her. Is there not another person to whom I ought to pay back something? You spoke just now, my granddaughter, of some man, not related to you, who had had the privilege of providing you with education."

Germaine blushed vividly, she hardly knew why.

"Oh, you could not offer to repay Mr. Burnside."

"And who the devil is Mr. Burnside?"

"He is my grandmother's step-son. Old Madame Damien married his father."

"In-deed!" slowly replied Mr. Carewe, his keen eye upon the varying hue of the girl's cheeks. "Do you see much of this young man?"

"I have never seen him since I was ten," replied Germaine evenly.

"He seems to be a person who neglects his opportunities," retorted the old man drily.

The whole of this conversation was profoundly puzzling to Mrs. Damien. She stared from one to the other in amazement.

"Mr. Burnside," said Germaine clearly, "is a person whose actions are governed by principle, not by caprice. He helped us because he thought it a duty, not because he was rather taken with my personal appearance."

"Ernie!!!" almost screamed her mother, jumping from the sofa in her horror.

Old Carewe roared with laughter. He patted Germaine on the shoulder. "Every word she says is true," he affirmed. "I was only recalled to a sense of my own duty by the sight of her face, and the stings she gave my conscience. Now, thank God, I am awake, and I ask you to believe, Emmeline, that I will do what little I can to atone to you for all these years of neglect. Only, whatever you do, make no attempt to gag the child, or to let her think she must consider what she says to me. She and I understand one another, don't we, spitfire?"

"Certainly I liked you very well before I knew who you were," said Germaine kindly.

"And now?" He was grinning, but there was anxiety and something far deeper trembling behind the question.

Her whole manner changed.

"After your apology, I should be a perfect beast if I didn't love you," she cried impulsively; and she flung her arms about his bull neck.

CHAPTER VI

JUST TOO LATE

"HAS Mr. Pereivale come in, Askew?"

"Yes, miss, he arrived about an hour ago."

"Ah, then he has gone upstairs to dress. I can't understand why he did not travel in the motor with Mr. Carewe."

"I understood him to say, miss, that Mr. Carewe started yesterday, and Mr. Pereivale stayed on to attend another meeting."

"Ah, that was probably it. Very good, Askew, he will be down before long, I expect. I wanted to know if he heard who these guests are, that Mr. Carewe is bringing."

Rosalie Carewe, little touched by the passage of ten years, stood in the hall of Gray Ashtead, holding a telegram in her hand. It read—"Arriving in ear about seven, bringing two guests, prepare rooms. Dad."

"Friends he met electioneering, I should make bold to suggest, miss."

"Yes, yes. The Willis clan would be there in force," replied his mistress. "I wonder how things are going."

"Mr. Pereivale, miss, did not seem to think the prospects was too rosy. At least, I gathered that things were not going as well as could be wished."

The butler passed on and disappeared, while Rosalie sat down before the fire in the hall and took up the *Times*.

Gray Ashtead was a solid, late Georgian house,

ugly but respectable. Its appointments were luxurious but not artistic. The paintings which adorned the hall were the painstaking works of Royal Academicians. The expensive linerusta walls were of a shade between brown and red which did not harmonize with the rather good mahogany of the staircase. The whole place, both within and without, was kept up to a standard of order and perfect repair which drove new servants half mad until they themselves had reached the required pitch. In the park, no leaf seemed to be out of place, the cutting of grass edgings was never in fault, the flowers succeeded each other in the beds with a punctuality which suggested that the gardeners must work all night. Indoors, such a thing as a clock which did not keep exact time, an unpunctual meal, or an untidy shelf, was unknown.

The attention of the house's mistress was not fixed upon the *Times* this evening. She was thinking with a troubled mind that her father had been, for the past few days, actually in Breconstead, the town in which his cast-off daughter lived her obscure life. His going thither had caused searchings of heart to Miss Carewe. She could not decide whether to tell him that Emmeline and her daughter lived there, or to tell Emmeline that her father was coming. In the end she had decided to do neither.

Of late, since Percivale had left Cambridge and come into the business, the old man had been decidedly less difficult and ill-tempered. To bring before him the name of Emmeline would be to revive anew the agony of disappointment which he was just beginning to forget.

As for telling Emmeline—that could but spell disaster. If she knew, it was quite likely that she might make some desperate attempt to bring herself to his notice, which would end in rage on his side, despair on hers.

Yet, now that it was over and he was returning home, Rose was wishing that she had risked his wrath. Her niece's future lay heavy on her mind, ever since the last time she saw her—an occasion upon which she had been forced to the conclusion that Germaine was most unfitted for the career either of a governess or a clerk.

She might have had the courage, she was thinking remorsefully, to give her father one more chance, unlikely though it was that he should take it. All she need have done would be to post him a line—

"Emmeline and her girl live in Breconstead, at 135, Teek Villas."

That would have cleared her of responsibility. Her mind had been recalled to the subject by the announcement, which she had seen a day or two before, of Madam's death. This seemed to leave the friendless pair bereft of yet another friend. What could she do for them? Certainly no more than she was already doing. Yet she felt that the one thing she might have done she had failed to venture.

As she so meditated, Pereivale came leisurely down the wide stairs tucking a handkerchief into his cuff.

He was tall and well set up, and usually considered good-looking.

"Hallo!" he said, drawing near.

"Hallo, old boy," responded the lady absently.

"What cheer—eh?" asked Pereivale, drawing up a chair and seating himself.

"Very little doing," she replied. "No news, except what Askew has probably told you already, that your grandfather is bringing home two men."

"What the deuce does he want to do that for?" inquired the young man, staring into the fire.

"Oh, I suppose some election ring idea. Now tell me all your news. How goes the candidature?"

"Oh, Norman isn't going to pull it off, I'm afraid."

"Sorry to hear that. Gordon is a strong candidate, I suppose?"

"Oh, these beastly suffragettes must needs put in their oar," he replied petulantly. "They made a row at a meeting, and the secretary had got ready some chaps who were far too zealous. They succeeded in half killing one poor little woman, and it created a bad impression. Gave the other lot a cry, 'Who pays roughs to lynch women?'"

He spoke dreamily, and all the while his eyes saw a picture between them and the glowing coals—the picture of a girl's face, alight with enthusiasm, a voice ringing out across a sea of hostile faces—the vision of a brute who clutched at the beautiful creature and tore her down, backwards, into that raging mass of clutching hands and angry eyes—that vortex of trampling feet. . . .

"You seem hipped, old boy," said his adopted aunt kindly.

"Bit fagged, that's all. Beastly journey. Why couldn't the governor take me home in the car?"

"I thought you had to stay for another meeting?"

"So I had, but he might have waited. However, here I am, so there's no need to grouse."

His aunt looked at him apprehensively. He was certainly out of humour, or unwell. "The Lenoxes have arrived at Gunhatch," she said diplomatically. Hilda Lenox was usually a good bait.

"They generally come down about this time," he replied, without a tinge of enthusiasm. Certainly something had upset him considerably.

He was saying to himself, "What became of her? The governor said he paid her cab and sent her home. But he must have heard where she lived. If he could have remembered the road, I'd have knocked at every door all the way down! And was her name Bridges, or Damien, or Tate? She looked like Damien, so most probably she is really Tate."

"Do I hear the car?" said Miss Carewe.

"Sounds like it," he responded, after listening for a moment.

Askew advanced from the back part of the hall, and aunt and nephew went forward to greet "the governor."

"Good gracious, Percy, they are *ladies*," murmured Rosalie, laying her hand for a moment upon the young man's arm.

Two ladies, enveloped in long coats, and with faces concealed in motor veils, made their appearance, followed with astonishing alacrity by Mr. Carewe himself.

"Brought you a couple of visitors, Rose," he said self-consciously, in a voice that sounded oddly defiant.

One of the strangers went up to the other, unfastened her veil and removed it. Rosalie found herself looking into the face of her sister Emmie.

She gave a cry of amazement, which caused her father to rub his hands as though greatly pleased, and, running forward, she enfolded Mrs. Damien in a glad welcome.

"Emmeline!" she cried. "So he did find you out! I never dared to hope it!"

Meanwhile Pereivale stood petrified, awaiting the second unveiling. It came. Germaine disengaged herself from the pearly folds, and stood confessed. There, before his bodily vision, was that face which but now had been painting itself upon the air to his fancy—the vivid face, in which life seemed to shine, as the flame of a lamp shines through a crystal globe.

Each of the two stood a long moment without moving; then, as if by a common impulse, they went forward, each to each, and took hands.

"You are Pereivale?" she said softly.

"But who are you?" he stammered. "I don't know who you are, but I know you, don't I?"

She nodded. "I remember you," she said.

Mr. Carewe, his eyes upon the pair, felt a glow spreading from his heart, warming him through and through.

Was the solution here? It seemed too obvious a thing, too poetically just. Yet he knew that, never before, had he seen Percivale look as he was looking at this moment.

Two days later, Miles Burnside alighted at Breconstead from the train, and took his way to Teek Villas.

He had announced his visit by a letter arriving that morning only; but he had had an idea, foolish and impracticable, that he might have found Germaine at the station to meet him. It was afternoon, and it was Saturday. His feeling of disappointment at finding nobody awaiting him who could possibly be the person into whom Germaine had grown, revealed to him the fact that he had arranged his journey for Saturday entirely because it was her half-holiday.

As he walked along the platform and out of the gate, down the short road of poor shops which led to the High Street, he was luxuriating in a curious sense of freedom.

For the past five years he had been tied—only himself knew how completely tied—to the service of an invalid.

Though Dr. Preston and he had not realized it at the time, there was no doubt that her grand-daughter's attempt at murder had unsettled Madam's brain. She was never afterwards wholly herself, though the difference was at first so slight and subtle that it passed unnoticed.

The chief symptom of it was her demand for her step-son's constant presence. If he was out of her sight for long she became apprehensive of his safety, and worked herself up into a state of agitation which on more than one occasion produced a nervous crisis.

It seemed as though she had learned, by means of his danger, to appreciate Miles at something nearer his true value. With her devotion to him grew her detestation of the idea of the child who had rewarded his kindness with such treachery. She would not hear Germaine spoken of; and this state of health and nerves not only continued, but increased with the process of time. As the old lady grew weaker, her fixed idea waxed stronger.

The death of *Espérance*, upon whom she had for so long relied, left the frail creature still more wholly dependent upon the service and duty of her step-son. Miles's own health had, for some years after his illness, given cause, if not for anxiety, at least for care. He formed the habit, while himself convalescent, of constant attendance upon Madam. When his splendid constitution at last reasserted itself, and he was perfectly well, the habit was fixed, and remained.

The tyranny of an invalid is a thing difficult for those to realize who have not experienced it. Tender-hearted Miles was an easy prey to its exactions. He never, after the death of *Espérance*, left Madam alone in the house at night without him, when they were at Fendallsecombe. Away from England, this feature of her mania was less marked.

Thus it came about that, as he might not invite Germaine to Devonshire, and could not himself leave, those ten long years had rolled out their length without one single meeting.

But now all was changed, and as he advanced towards this long-delayed visit, he was exulting in the thought. An idea had come to him—a bright, glowing idea, which he was burning to communicate. This was nothing less than that Mrs. Damien and her daughter should thenceforward make their home at Fendallsecombe.

Nothing had come of that fancy of his, as a young man, for Helen Grenfell. She had been much shaken

by Rémy's withdrawal. She was but a girl in her teens—the burden of secrecy weighed heavily upon her: and when her lover wrote, and told her that he was not in a position to marry and that he was going to South America to make a fortune for her, she had, in consequence of the wholly clandestine nature of her love-affair, nobody to whom she could confide her mortification and grief. Her parents, finding her ailing, and unable to discover a reason for it, decided that the Devon climate did not suit her. They took her away for a long change; and at the winter sports at St. Moritz, she met Sir George Laseelles Hervey, and returned to her native county the following spring, engaged to him.

So ended the romance which had seemed to Germaine to be the idyll and fine essence of devotion and constancy—the love-story in defence of which she had lifted her childish hand against the great, slow-moving forces of law and morality.

There was one failing in the character of Miles Burnside. He was lacking in initiative. He had plenty of sense. He felt that, now that his home was his own, and his property, after all these years, at last unencumbered, he might enjoy a fuller life, a wider outlook than had hitherto been his. Yet, alone, he could not see how to set about the reforms he desired. This idea, of inviting Germaine and her mother, seemed quite an inspiration.

When once it had occurred to him, he lost no time. Three days after Madam's funeral, he started off, to answer—in person, as he put it in his note—Germaine's kind little letter of sympathy.

It took him some time to discover Teck Villas. When he had found it, the extreme smallness of the premises gave him as great a shock as Matthew Carewe himself had felt. He was more disturbed, however, by the fact that the blinds were drawn and that the house looked to be without inhabit-

This puzzled him. It was only four days since he had received Germaine's letter. He had made certain of not having mistaken the number, then rang and knocked, but no answer came. All was blank and dumb.

A curious fear and shrinking descended upon him, as though this hope which he had been nursing with such eagerness were a derisive will-o'-the-wisp, and had led him into a marsh.

Just as he was turning away in disappointment, he heard a door open, and a little woman emerged from a house some few doors down the street, with a shawl over her head.

"Beg pardon, sir, was you wanting to see Mrs. Damien?"

"I was. Does she not live here?"

"She did, sir, up to last Tuesday. Then she went away. She left the keys with me, sir, and I go in every day to forward letters. So, if you have a message, I can take it, sir."

He stood irresolute, so sharply east down that he wondered at himself. "Perhaps you can tell me where the ladies have gone?" he asked at last.

"Oh my, sir, it's like a story out of a book, so it is! My mistress, old Miss Draper, that I wait upon, she says never in all her life did she hear such a thing. But there! Somehow, when a young lady has looks same as what Miss Damien had, you sort of expect Romance, don't you, sir?"

"Please tell me about it. I am an old friend, a— a connection."

"I shouldn't wonder if it was your letter as I forwarded this morning, now, wasn't it?"

"I expect it was."

"Well, you see, sir, it was like this. Mrs. Damien, it appears, was daughter to a millionaire—at least, so they are saying he is now. He cast her off, upon her marriage, and she never saw no more of him,

not until the other day!--Well, the other day, he comes to Breconstead on account of the gentleman as is Radical candidate for Parliament being some sort of cousin of his, I understand; and at a meeting in the Town Hall, he sees Miss Damien, not knowing who she was, no more than the babe unborn! Well, sir, Miss Damien, like half the young ladies hereabouts, is bitten with this Votes for Women idea, and she ups in the middle of them all at the meeting, and 'What about Votes for Women?' she says. Well, sir, if you'll believe me, them Radicals had got in Sam Parsons, same as what fought the Benbury Stakes—but you'll perhaps not have heard about that? Anyway, he's a bad character, and a great rough brute. He makes for Miss Damien, and just in front of her was sitting her own grandfather, nor she didn't know, nor he didn't know, nothing at all of such a thing! However, the old gentleman, he wasn't going to sit quiet and see such a pretty thing knocked about, as you may well suppose, so he dealt Sam Parsons one in the jaw that they say he will take a long time to get over. Well, he deserved it, for he had just felled to the earth a poor little lady, a friend of Miss Damien's—such a bit of a thing, you'd think any man as *was* a man would have been frightened to touch her. In the Cottage Hospital she lies, but she is doing nicely, and as soon as she can be moved, she is coming to live here, in this cottage, that Mr. Carewe has give her rent free, and Miss Damien and her mother have give her the furniture——"

Miles broke in upon the stream of eloquence—"Then they are not coming back?"

"Oh no, sir, never no more! They are gone to live with Mr. Carewe up in the north, where they say he has a fine place. You see, he arst her name, and found out she was his granddaughter, and then he come here and saw her mother, and begged of her to

let bygones be bygones, and he took them both off in his motor-car the very next day."

Miles stood very still, reflecting.

They had escaped him—these two people, the only ones in the world upon whom he could feel that he had any claim. Life stretched out before him very empty and long. He had missed his chance—missed it, as you might say, by a hair's-breadth.

"Not coming back! Never no more!"

He cleared his throat. "I am a relative," he announced, stretching a point. "Would you let me go into the house, and allow me to sit down and write to Miss Damien?"

"Oh yes, sir, everything is in nice order, and we are keeping it aired. Nothing is packed up, because we hope Miss Danby will be coming in about a week's time."

She inserted the latchkey, which she had brought in her hand, and Miles walked in. He filled up the passage even more than Matthew Carewe had done.

The little woman pushed open the door of the parlour, and he entered.

"I was just a-going to water the plants and feed the bird," observed his guide cheerfully. "There's pen and ink, sir, on the side table, and I'll leave you to your writing."

She went out.

Miles did not move for several minutes. He was an impressive figure, in that tiny place. Ten years of European travel had turned him from a somewhat countrified and raw young man into a personality. The beard which Dr. Preston and the nurse had coaxed from his chin had not again been permitted to invade it. He still shaved clean, and his regular life and fine constitution made him appear younger than his actual four-and-thirty years—an illusion fostered by the fairness of his hair, which was still as thick as ever, and had an invincible tendency to

curl if he delayed by ever so few days his visit to the barber.

The black tie and dark grey suit which he wore emphasized his fairness. His eyes travelled round him. This was where she had lived--the child with the revolutionary heart--for ten long years. There was a photograph upon the chimney-piece. He went up and lifted it in his hand. He knew that it must be she. No mistaking the eyes. . . . She had grown as glorious as that! . . .

She was looking right out of the picture, her brow shadowed by the curve of her heavy hair. Her throat rose, like the stem of a flower, from some shadow of drapery, dimly seen. Something stirred in Miles like the once well-known and dreaded throb of his old wound.

He had been right—he and Dr. Preston! They had known that she was sound in heart and mind. Between them they had saved her, snatched her from the awful gulf of possibilities that had yawned beneath her feet—they had preserved her that she might become—this!

In spite of her surroundings—though she had been cabin'd, cribbed, confined, in this ridiculous maisonette—she had fulfilled the promise of her childhood—nay, had surpassed it!—And the first news he had of her was that once more she had been crusading!

Surely never was there a girl like her. He had never met one. During these past ten years he had encountered many girls. They had seemed to him all much the same. In Devonshire they played golf and rode to hounds, and in the intervals looked after the parish. In Switzerland they lugged, or went on skis. In Italy they looked at pictures, churches, and sculpture. All were more or less nice. They were members of a class. This was something wholly separate.

For ten years he had thought of her as dependent

upon him. It had seemed that, as soon as he was ready to summon her, she would come. She had been there, and he knew now that there never had been a time when he had not dimly looked forward to a meeting—a moment at which he and she should renew the charming friendship begun in the very act of farewell.

Now all was different. Her future had been taken out of his hands. If Madam had died just one short month earlier. . . .

Such speculation was eminently unprofitable.

The little woman looked in. "Are you ready, sir?"

"Thank you, yes. I have decided that it will be best for me to return to London, and write thence to Mrs. Damien."

He produced a gratuity which made the humble old creature start with pleasure. What with this gentleman and Mr. Carewe, real life seemed to her to be in the way of approaching to the level of fairy tales.

"But as I says to 'im," she remarked, later in the day, to old Miss Draper, upon whom she waited, "as I says to 'im, with looks same as 'ers, I says, the world's a very different story."

To which the fading woman who had never had a lover, answered doubtfully, "Perhaps it is."

CHAPTER VII

PERCIVALE

THE world was indeed a different story to Germaine. Who will blame her ?

She awoke on the morning after her arrival at Gray Ashtead in a setting of such luxury as she had never pictured.

Yet her first idea, as her eyes unclosed, was that the place in which she lay could not compare with her memory of her white and green chamber at Fendallseombe. This room was heavy in colour, and overcrowded with cumbersome, ugly furniture—inlaid with mother-o'-pearl at great cost, but with disastrous effect. The wallpaper was unpleasantly hot in tone, and had been chosen with no regard to the furniture. Her bed, however, was deliciously comfortable, and as the maid kindled her fire she sipped tea lazily, contemplating a coverlet of real lace over rose-coloured satin.

Outside lay the wide park, in the glory of late autumn tinting ; and through it she wandered, after breakfast, escorted by Percivale, and also by her grandfather, who for the first few days after her arrival, seemed as though he found it hard to let her out of his sight.

They surveyed the stables, the garage, the orchid-houses, the conservatories, and the farm. The place was far more extensive than she had at first supposed, and its upkeep was practically perfect.

Matthew Carewe evidently expected to have his

arrangements admired. Gray Ashtead was his hobby, and he drank in her expressions of wonder or admiration as greedily as a child.

"What kind of place was this Devonshire farm where your grandmother lived?" he asked disparagingly.

"Farm? Fendallscombe wasn't a farm!" cried she, in arms at once.

"Oh indeed, what was it then?"

"It was, and is, an old Elizabethan manor, a county place," she replied with pride. "There were Fendalls of Fendallscombe when Domesday was written, and the Burnsides are their descendants."

"Oho, I see! Not a 'set of successful parvenus'?" he asked wickedly; and to his rapture, his granddaughter shook her fist at him.

"I suppose I shall never be forgiven," she said, "though I have forgiven you so nobly. But men are so small!"

He chuckled with delight at these attacks. His daughter, or even his beloved Percivale, would no more have dared to chaff him than to fly. It was a wholly new joy.

"No doubt you prefer Fendallscombe, as you call it, to Gray Ashtead," was his next remark, with some real pique underlying the teasing.

She did not at once reply.

"Come, come, no fencing!"

"Well," she said slowly, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, darling, but as far as beauty goes, of course it was much more beautiful than your house."

"Oh, come, come, I don't suppose they spent a tenth of what I fling away on this place."

"Of course not! For their position, they were quite poor. They could not even afford a car. But you see, they had their oak panelling, the lovely oriel windows, and the drip-stones—the coats of arms on

the ceilings, and the hall. Oh, it was all like a story book ! ”

“ Then you don’t admire Gray Ashtead ? ”

The colour rushed to her cheeks. “ Oh, grandpapa, if I say I don’t, what would it matter ? What is my taste worth ? I have never been anywhere, nor seen anything ! ”

“ Except Fendallseombe ! ”

“ Yes, except that.”

“ Suppose Gray Ashtead were yours, what would you do with it ? Eh ? Buy some old oak panelling ripped from elsewhere, and cover your walls with it ? ”

“ Oh *no* ! You don’t quite see the point. Fendallseombe is beautiful, because it is all in keeping. But this house is as fine in its way as Fendallseombe, though it belongs to a different period. The effect is lost, because it is not treated right. It ought to be Adams, ought it not ? All the wood panelling painted white, and the furniture spindle and severe—lovely dark Sheraton, that shows up so well against the light walls. Your staircase is good, if the walls were right. Oh dear, dear, what *am* I saying ? Call me a cheeky minx, please, as you did at breakfast, and then I shall feel rebuked ! ”

He laughed with complete good humour. “ Insolent brat ! How does that suit ? So you admire the staircase ! ”

“ Of course. That belongs to the date of the house, which is good.”

“ Well, I know nothing about Adams, or whoever he was, but I suppose there are those that do, are there not ? ”

“ Of course,” she answered wonderingly.

As she spoke, they reached the vinery, and the conversation broke off short, nor did the old man again recur to it.

Percivale, during their sparring, walked along, quaking inwardly, yet obliged to own that, incredible

though it might be to others, Matthew the autocrat could be led by a silken thread if his granddaughter did but hold it. He sympathized completely. Nevertheless, he could not but wonder how far this infatuation would carry the old man. His present talk conveyed the notion that he contemplated the redecoration of his house to suit the young lady's taste. If that were so, then he might also very probably have in view the alteration of his will: in which case, where exactly would he, Percivale, come in? He decided that he would send a line that night to his father.

At half-past ten, the powerful motor swept off both the old man and the young one to Carford and the mills. Not a word passed between them, upon the journey, concerning the additions to the household since yesterday.

Percivale managed to get off in the afternoon earlier than old Carewe, who had a Board meeting; and he hastened back to Gray Ashtead with more eagerness than ever in his life had he hastened anywhere.

The ladies had been shopping all day, and were only just back, so both the elder ones were lying down. Germaine, however, he found, as he hoped he might, in the room they called the Blue Lounge, which belonged to nobody in particular, where smoking was allowed, and which was, in consequence, the most frequented room in the house.

She was seated, as he entered, before the writing-table, and tea stood awaiting her pleasure near the fire. She looked up as her cousin entered, and a smile of welcome lit up her face.

"How jolly! Now I need not have tea all alone," she said. "It has taken just twenty-four hours to turn my mother back into the finest of fine ladies. She will not appear until dinner-time!"

He walked to the window. "Think of the blessedness of coming home and finding you here to pour

out," he remarked. "I shall henceforward be like the young man in the song who always came home to tea. If you knew how dull this place usually is!" Her face expressed lively sympathy, and he nodded in response. "Putrid," he remarked, with true modern intensity.

She laughed lightly, turning her head again to the sheet of paper before her. "Can you wait two minutes for your tea?" she asked. "I want to dispatch this letter before five. It's important."

"Need you ask?" His tone was quite injured. She laughed again, signed and sealed her note, and addressed it, with a murmured request to him to add to his virtue by ringing the bell.

The servant appeared, carried off the letter, and Germaine seated herself beside the tray, and devoted herself to the task of pouring out.

"Sugar and cream? Only tell me this one time. Afterwards I shall know. What a queer thing coincidence is! You have heard us talking of Mr. Burnside of Fendallseombe, my grandmother's step-son? Well, I have not seen him for ten years, and half an hour before you came in, I got a letter, forwarded from Breconstead, to say that he is coming to-day! Poor fellow, I could not stop him, so he has gone there and found an empty house; but I have written forthwith to his London hotel, to say how sorry I am."

"Rough luck on the poor beggar," remarked Percivale.

"Oh, I don't suppose he would mind much. It was a duty visit," she returned lightly; and then for a moment a silence fell upon her, as she wondered what Miles Burnside was like now. She had hardly believed in his plea of being really unable to come and see them on account of leaving Madam. Yet he had lost no time in seeking them, as soon as this difficulty was removed. She sighed a little. Breconstead had slid into a remote past, far more remote than Fendalls-

combe. Her life there was already beginning to take on the aspect of something seen through a mist, at a vast distance. The flying motor had snatched her away from it, and the values of all things had changed. To use a vulgar metaphor, she felt at present as if she hardly knew whether she was on her head or her heels.

There was turmoil also in the heart of the young man who faced her. Their first meeting had smacked delicately of romance. Now, in fashion half miraculous, they were thrown together, and he found that his lovely unknown was his rival—for aught he knew, his supplanter.

This was a piquant situation, and gave a zest to an existence for the most part somewhat gloomy.

Percivale Carewe, *né* Byles, was well content to be the adopted son and acknowledged heir of a man so rich as Matthew Carewe. His position, however, was not without drawbacks. The code at Gray Ashtead was rigid, and he was himself not of a temperament to submit easily to hard and fast rules as to the hours he kept, the company he frequented, and so on.

There was not much society. Rosalie was a fastidious woman, and was in the case of not caring for the acquaintance of by far the larger portion of those who were anxious to know her. She might have been a member of the county set which she really liked, had she made more effort to enter it. Such effort, however, she had always declined. Her father was known to be choleric and dictatorial. His colleagues on the bench, and on various local committees, knew old Carewe as a person who was specially liable to the infirmity known as "losing one's hair." This did not tend to make him popular, nor beloved. It is often found that in such cases rumour is apt to exaggerate, sometimes grossly. It was known in the county that he had cut off his favourite daughter

without the proverbial shilling. It was freely said that his temper embittered the life of Miss Carewe and of the boy whom he had adopted.

Thus the Carewes were unpopular, and were left out of things, more on account of the fact that the old man was apt to be ill-tempered, and was suspected of far worse excesses in this line than he was actually guilty of, than because they were looked upon as "parvenus."

"You can't imagine," suddenly said the young man, "how insufferably dull it is here, usually."

"Is it?" asked the girl wonderingly. "I don't feel as if it could be dull, with motors and things, to take you wherever you want to go."

"You may be able to get the ear, if you want it—or one of 'em! you probably will; I can't. Oh well, it is bad form to growl at one's bread and butter; but, you see, the governor is not really my father, not even my uncle or grandfather. My mother was his wife's cousin, so it's not a close relationship, to say the least of it. My mother died when I was a little chap, and my own pater is the queerest old fish. Did you ever know that he wanted to marry your mother?"

Germaine smiled. Yes, she had often heard that.

"One can't wonder at her not seeing it," observed Percival, "for my pater can't have been attractive; but, unluckily, he was one of that kind that doesn't get over such a thing. He has a queer, brooding temper, and something—either his heart, or, as I am more inclined to think, his pride—was hit very hard by her turning him down like that. You see, he had been publicly engaged to her—it had been announced: and I have always heard that she was very pretty."

"She says so herself," answered Emmeline's daughter, with a twinkling eye. "And she will get back all her looks, with a few months of happiness and ease. She is one of the women born for luxury."

She has never been happy without it. I mean, never content, nor satisfied."

"It's a rum thing, what mistakes people do make over their matrimonial affairs," went on the young man thoughtfully. "My pater married my poor mother out of pique. He was determined to be married, just to show he didn't care. He wasn't a bit nice to mother. He just shrivelled up into a dry husk, and had no love nor tenderness left for anybody. He was pleased to have a son, and to know that your mother only had a daughter. That has been his one sole satisfaction all these years. I wonder what he will say now." He chuckled to himself.

"Will he come and have a look at us?" asked Germaine with amusement.

"I expect so: and if the governor is going to keep his resolution, and visit Rome, he will have to come soon. Are you pleased at the idea of going to Rome?"

"I couldn't describe what I am feeling about it. I have had to pinch myself on and off, all day, to find out if I am awake. Oh, you have no idea of what I have gone through in the way of craving, since I grew old enough to think. I have had to make-believe, for all my pleasures. I have often played at ancient Rome, and that I was a vestal virgin"—

"You can go and see their temple and their house, in the Forum you know"—

"—Yes, I have been thinking of that, all day—but it is no use. I just can't realize it. What a pity it is! In life we are able to feel so acutely all that we have not got; but when it comes—the thing we have longed for—there is not space enough in us to allow of our realizing it. Will you have some more tea?"

"Please. Yes, life is really a great deal more interesting than one is sometimes tempted to think. I never dreamed, when I got into that railway carriage to look at you, that we should meet again like this!"

And what a shock I got when I saw you stand up in that meeting and heard you speak! I only wish I had done what I first thought of doing—just jumped down off that stage arrangement, regardless of whom I slew in my haste.”

She smiled. “Oh, but grandfather was fine!”

Percivale looked at her, under his lashes. “Has he made you promise not to do it again?”

She flashed an indignant glance. “Certainly not!”

“Oh well, he’s going to,” he persisted, teasing her.

“Nothing of the kind. Why, it was partly for the Cause that I made friends with him. If you are somebody, you can do far more for a cause than if you are nobody! Do you suppose I am going to forget my sisters in adversity, the moment I am raised above such things myself?”

“You need not forget them. I dare say he would allow you to subsidize them if you want to. But you won’t be allowed to proclaim your sympathies openly. Certainly not in public.”

“Then I shall leave home and go away and earn my living!”

“I don’t think you had better do that,” he replied.

“I’m not a bit afraid. Grandfather has promised. He says I am not to be a slave. He does not expect me to hold certain views, or not to hold them, just because my male relatives hold them or don’t hold them.”

“Everybody in this house has got to hold his views, from Aunt Rosalie down to the knife-boy, so make no mistake about that,” maintained Percivale.

She tossed back her hair. “*Pas je*,” she remarked with energy.

“Knowing the language,” he retorted with relish.

“I forgot, of course you are half French.”

“Certainly; and proud of it.”

“Which reminds me. I met a man at Newmarket

not long ago, with your name. A perfectly charming fellow."

"My name?"

"Damien. A man who had been in South America. Handsome, interesting sort of fellow. I wonder if he is any relation?"

Full in the course of their gay, careless talk, Germaine caught her breath. Unele Rémy! . . . Was it? Could it be?

She reflected. There was no reason why not. Never once in the ten years had she heard from Miles a word respecting his step-brother. She knew, however, that he had gone to South America.

"It might be my unele," she hazarded. For some reason, her heart was beating rapidly. She felt as though, far away below the surface of her thought, lurked something ugly, or dangerous. Unele Rémy! He had never forgiven her. He had been irreconcilable.

But all that was ten years ago!

"What was your unele like?"

"Very handsome, when I remember him. Dark, striking, with splendid eyes."

"Now that I come to think of it, Damien's eyes are a little like yours," said Percivale softly.

"My grandmother thought me like him," she replied staidly. "He went to America ten years ago."

"This must be the same man. His wife is foreign, I think."

His wife! Unele Rémy had then consoled himself. She was conscious of a desire, so strong as to be painful, that she might not meet her unele. Yet she felt that this was absurd, an unreasoning feeling, to be subdued or held under.

"I'm sure to see him on the course at the Storeham autumn meeting; I shall tell him about you," said Percivale.

She could not answer. A stone had been flung

sharply into the pool of her new happiness. She thought it would sink to the bottom very soon, and the tossing caused by it would die down. Yet she had a dread.

Rémy Damien was, now that Espérance and Madam were dead, the only living being who knew the secret of her attempt on Miles's life. He knew it, and he was not sympathetic. Had Miles bound him over to secrecy?

She became aware of an overwhelming desire to see Miles.

Suppose her uncle, with the best intentions, were to warn Percivale of her tendency to homicide?

Every fibre in her quivered at the thought.

CHAPTER VIII

LACEY IN A NEW ASPECT

THE first week or two of life at Gray Ashtead consisted, almost exclusively, of that old pursuit so distressing to Germaine in the days of Miss Pincham—namely, being “tried on.”

She had to admit that there was now a flavour in the process which had been lacking in old days. To see one's beauty for the first time adorned in the manner most becoming to it, is an experience which may test the level-headedness of any girl of twenty.

One natural result of the stirring of childish memories was that Germaine was seized with a longing to re-visit Padlerby and her friends of long ago.

It was now many years since she had ceased to correspond with Marianne. She knew that Lacey and she married, about two years after her mother's removal from the town. Since then she had heard only of the birth of their first child.

There was nothing to prevent her going to Padlerby, or anywhere else. She had merely to express the wish. One day, therefore, she found herself in the car, with Aunt Rosalie, flying along the miles which separated the sleepy little town from Gray Ashtead.

Ten years had worked changes in the place. The saddler's shop in the High Street no longer bore the name of Lipsecombe, for Marianne's father was dead, and the widow lived with a married son. Lacey's tiny shop—which used to be hardly more than a cobbler's booth—had been pulled down, and a red-

brick house, with large plate-glass windows each side of the door, had been erected upon the site. Lacey's name still appeared, in bold characters, but he had become a boot manufacturer now, and the retail trade knew him in person no more. His manager lived in the red-brick house, and the ladies in the motor, enquiring where Mr. and Mrs. Lacey lived, were directed to the factory on the outskirts of the town.

Here was a neat pile of ugly buildings, humming with machinery ; and here, outside the factory walls, was a good square house, well kept, which suggested that the young manufacturer must be prospering.

Aunt Rosalie, who wanted to leave cards upon Lady Jane Sawyer, dropped Germaine and went off. The girl walked up the trim path from the gate to the house, and rang the bell.

A young maid opened the door, and, upon being asked if Mrs. Lacey were at home, said doubtfully that she was in the counting-house at this time of day.

"I am a very old friend. If you take that card, I think she will see me," said Germaine.

She was shown into a parlour, clean and well beeswaxed. An American organ, a gramophone, and a pianola occupied almost the whole of it between them. The lace curtains were snowy white, and the table-cover was blue chenille. There was a pause of some minutes, and then the door was flung open, and Marianne, laughing and almost crying, was in the room, had flung her arms about her visitor, and was hugging and kissing her in a manner which caused the years to drop away like a veil of mist.

"O Marianne, how nice ! How strange to see you again ! To hear your good old Yorkshire voice ! Oh, my dear, do you remember *Lady de Lisle, or the hero of the Revolution* ? "

Remember ! Marianne remembered all the games ! Oh, how she had missed her playfellow ! She re-

remembered the long, never-ending game in the wood—the game of Indian trackers—and the dell where the druids used to offer sacrifice—the dell where there truly was mistletoe on one tree, and all the rest could thus be confidently inferred. She remembered how closely Ermie and she used to guard the secret of that mistletoe, lest some Christmas it should all be carried off, and the game spoilt!

The two sat down upon the “couch, upholstered in mocatte,” which was the young housewife’s pride. They gazed upon each other, and commented.

“Well, for sure! But who could have thought you would grow up such a beauty?” cried Marianne. “Tom’s coming in to see you! He will be pleased, that he will. He felt it so, when you never came back to Padlerby, you can’t think!”

“I shall just love to see him,” replied Germaine warmly. “You know, Marianne, my grandfather has begged mother’s pardon, and we are living at Gray Ashtead now.”

“What!!!” Marianne took many minutes to digest the startling news. She surveyed Germaine and Germaine’s velvet suit, with appreciation, little short of rapture. Then there were questions to be asked about herself. She was the mother of two sons and three daughters.

“Fine and proud Tom is of ’em, I can tell you. He would insist on calling the little one Germaine. Cheek, wasn’t it?”

They chatted on, until the door opened, and Tom, who had evidently been making himself presentable, came in.

The man’s more complex nature had altered far more than that of his wife. Marianne was still Marianne. Lacey, the man with a quarrel against society, existed no longer.

The fact was evident from his first entrance. His manner was the manner of the successful man—

modest, but confident. They talked for some time of their various experiences, and of the pleasure of meeting again. Marianne, after a while, slipped off to make tea, for of course Miss Ermie must stay to tea and see the children. Then Germaine asked, with a smile, "And how are politics, Lacey?"

He answered her smile with his own. "I don't get very much time for politics nowadays, what with the factory and the family," he said.

"But I hope you still hold up the banner?" she asked playfully. "You never could be a renegade, Lacey?"

"I hope not," he replied, a little embarrassed. "But, you see, as a man gets older, his point of view changes, naturally. I see the other side now, miss, as I used not to be able. I am an employer of labour myself, and it makes a difference."

Germaine's breath was so taken away that she could not reply.

"I'm a Radical, right enough," he assured her quickly. "No mistake about that. But I do see the folly of trying to put down private enterprise, by making things too hard for the employers. A man must speak as he finds, miss."

Ah well! It was a shock. It was Germaine's first experience of the modifications wrought upon opinion by circumstances. She, who had drunk in this man's views, and acted upon them too, felt as though she stood upon a great height, looking down upon him. What a curious gulf lies in the English mind between speech and action! Had Lacey ever believed in the gospel he taught her, to the extent of having been willing to act upon it? She doubted. After a pause, she began to speak to him of the suffrage. He brightened enormously. This was an academic question. It did not much affect him. He already employed both men and woman. In his trade the women were not *tabu*. He was free to take an im-

partial view as regards Votes for Women. He was much amused and interested to hear how Ermie and her grandfather had been brought together. He looked with eyes of intense admiration at the beautiful girl. She was a plucky one, and no mistake. Ermie wondered what he would think, could she reveal to him her great act of what she had once imagined to be justice—the deed wrought under his direct inspiration?

During the rest of her visit she had a queer feeling of bewilderment. In a way that she could not analyse, this meeting with Lacey—the contented, prosperous Lacey—made her look back upon her own action with a wholly new sensation of horror. It was as though she had always seen the thing she had done against a background of Lacey, and his undoubted approval; and as if, now, the background melted away and she saw a hideous murder, in the full light of day.

During the drive home she was singularly silent. A creeping horror was invading her mind.

When she was a little child the true inwardness of Miles's command to her, never to speak of what she had done, had of course, not been apparent. Now she was awakening to its importance.

How would the opinion of her new-found kinsfolk change did they know this awful blot upon her childish past!

Would Uncle Rémy see, as Miles had seen, how vital to her it was that the whole episode should be sunk in oblivion? Had he, too, been bound over to secrecy? It would be well to write to Miles and ascertain.

He had sent her a courteous reply to her letter, regretting that it would be some time before they met, as he was going on the continent at once. She supposed letters would be forwarded from Fendallseombe.

That night one or two friends had been invited to

Gray Ashtead to meet Mrs. and Miss Damien. When Germaine came into the drawing-room before dinner one guest was already present.

As the big-framed, raw-boned man arose from his low chair to greet her, she guessed, even before her grandfather named him, that this was Mr. Byles, Percivale's father.

As is frequently the case with conspicuously ugly men, Mr. Byles was less unattractive in middle age than he had been in youth. His carrotty hair was grizzled, and the effect of wealth and good valeting was to make him presentable, though anything but comely.

He fixed his small, twinkling, light grey eyes upon Germaine, and remarked, in a harsh, gruff voice, that she was not in the least like her mother.

"Neither in looks, nor yet in character, to judge by what I hear," he croaked. "Fine tales I am told, miss, of your doings. Ever heard what St. Paul said to the women who wanted to get up and talk in public? But you'll put a stopper on all that in future, Matt, I hope?" he abruptly asked, turning to Mr. Carewe.

Germaine also turned to her grandfather, with a sidelong glance of mischief and understanding from the eyes he could not resist. Unseen by James Byles, the old man winked at the delinquent.

"Ashamed of yourself, I hope?" persisted this disagreeable person, still glaring upon Germaine.

"Grandpapa says bygones shall be bygones," she announced, with drooped lids and meek voice.

"Ah! ah! I see. Well, it's a subject you may well be glad to hear the last of. Your mother, young woman, was in her youth the model of everything that a young female should be. Had she not been led astray——"

Up came Germaine's head and her eyes flashed flame. "You are speaking of my father, Mr. Byles!"

"Quite right, Spitfire, keep him in his place,"

chuckled Matthew gleefully. "Here comes Emmie, James, so you will be able to tell her how sadly she is altered."

Mrs. Damien came in languidly, with her air of appeal and helplessness. There had been something rather despicable about this air of hers, in her days of poverty. It was exactly the right thing in her father's drawing-room. Her age, at this time, was forty-six, and her beauty was beginning to return apace in the hot-house atmosphere in which she now found herself.

She wore a black satin gown, which showed her arms and neck still white as cream. Her golden hair had been piled round her head by an expert; there were turquoise pins in it, and turquoises round her throat, matching her eyes.

She came slowly up to the group by the fire, and, when she was near, stopped short and held up her hands—"Is that James? Oh, James, *how* you have improved! I should hardly have known you!"

James Byles made a curious sound—laugh, cough, or sob. He was shaking from head to foot. He came forward, took one of the white hands, and held it in his own knobby ones.

"Emmeline—after all these years—I beg you to believe that it is a happiness to me—a great happiness—to see you again."

The conclusion of the sentence was almost inaudible. He stood, still holding Mrs. Damien's hand, looking into her face with eyes not keen-sighted enough to desery the lines worn upon the fair skin by time and carking care.

It was a difficult moment. To the astonishment of everybody, it was Emmeline herself who came to the rescue—Emmeline, who had never known what to do in any emergency, but whom some intuition prompted, in dealing with the man whose romance and tragedy she had always been.

"Sit down, dear James, and let us talk," she simply begged him. They sat down together upon a sofa, and she then ventured, very gently, to withdraw the hand he had gripped so fiercely.

"I have learnt to love your boy, already, James," she told him in her plaintive voice, which to him was like the echo of music of old times—like some ghost melody in a haunted house. He leaned his elbows on his knees and let his forehead drop upon his hands.

"My son, and not yours," he muttered. "Good God, how could it have happened? I tell you he has never seemed to belong to me."

Fortunately, what he said was unheard, except by Emmeline, for at the moment other guests were announced. Oddly enough, his wild words were perfectly comprehensible to her—to the woman who had never understood Germaine.

"Oh, don't say that," she reproached him gently. "He is such a fine fellow."

He looked up, at Germaine and Percivale, where they stood together, straight and tall, talking with the young girl who had just entered.

"That girl of yours," growled James, "she looks like a foreigner—she is like him, the damned French brute who stole you from me. I hate her."

"Oh, James," reproved the helpless voice. He turned his head, so that he could look at her. His eyes were quite blood-shot. "I wish to Heaven I had never come here, to see you and her," he growled. "It wakes the devil in me." To which the golden-haired matron at his side demurred plaintively—"Oh, James, why ever should it do that?"

The guests just now arrived, consisted of the Carewe's nearest neighbours, the Lenoxes of Gunhatch.

They were well-born folk, with little of this world's goods. Colonel Lenox was too fond of the races, considering the size of his income. Hilda, their only daughter, had decided to marry Percivale Carewe.

She was a slithering creature, who cultivated what she called a *bizarre* style. Her earrings were very long and drooping, and the arrangement of her hair remarkable. When she appeared in evening dress, one was possessed by the dread of her things dropping off her. She had a way of slipping out one shoulder from its shelter, and causing it to glide back again. The fashions at the moment demanding a slimness of appearance, she gave the impression of her frock having been tied in knots above her ankles, which were remarkably pretty and freely displayed. In spite of her fragile air, she was a good golf-player, and had made Germaine feel uncomfortable on the links the preceding day.

"What! going to London next week! Going on to Rome! Well, if that isn't the limit!" she was remarking, with disgust. "You mustn't go, simply you mustn't! You're the only man, except on Saturdays, who plays my handicap!"

"You had better come with us, Hilda," put in Percivale's grandfather. "Persuade your people to let you go to Italy with us. You and my granddaughter will be company for each other, and Miss Carewe will do the chaperoning."

"You had much better come," said Percivale, not eagerly, but quite readily. "We are taking the car, you know, and motoring over the Simplon. It will be quite good sport."

"Don't make me too murderously jealous," replied Hilda. "I might as well ask my father for the moon. Besides, I should be just the one too many in the car."

The subject then dropped, for the vicar, the last of the party, arrived and dinner was announced almost immediately after his entrance.

Mr. Carewe had, to say the truth, very little idea of his offer being accepted, for he knew how meagre were the resources of the Lenox family.

Mrs. Lenox, however, was prepared for heroic measures.

In all their financial straits, she had nursed in secret the hope of a match between Hilda and Pereivale. She and her husband were both cadets of good houses. There was blood on their side, wealth on the other. The Carewes had not a large circle of friends. They, the Lenoxes, were practically their only intimates. It had seemed as nearly sure as these things can be.

Now, in a moment, the sky had changed. Hilda's mother arrived at Gray Ashtead that evening in a frame of mind to be described as apprehensive. She saw Germaine, and departed desperate. It needed but small intelligence to see how intensely gratifying to old Carewe a marriage between these two young people would be. His grandchild, his adopted son! It was ideal.

Her only chance would be to throw Hilda into the society of the young man continually. The suggested tour offered an unexpected opportunity.

Hilda spoke slightly of Miss Damien, considered as a rival.

"Dull as ditchwater," she said. "No idea of golf, can't smoke, can't ride, and talks about the suffrage if you give her half a chance. She is fine to look at, but that's all. Pereivale is a bit dazzled, but he will soon get over that."

Mrs. Lenox accordingly wrote a cordial note the following day, asking whether Mr. Carewe had meant his suggestion seriously. If so, Hilda might go, and would Mr. Carewe let her know what sum would cover her expenses. It was a chance, she felt, not to be missed.

Hilda's feelings were mixed. She would have liked to wait until after Christmas, and then go to the winter sports, and spend a month skiing all day, dancing all night, and flirting twenty-five hours in the twenty-four. Rome did not attract her. It might

be expected of her that she should betray a knowledge of history, or take an interest in old columns and bits of stone, or the sites of heathen temples or primitive Christian Churches. This would, she knew, bore her to tears. However, she consoled herself. There were plenty of English in Rome in the winter, she knew. They could not all be unnatural enough to take an interest in what she stigmatized as "stones and bones." In a big hotel she could find congenial companionship, even though it should prove impossible to detach Percivale from the pursuit of ancient history and his cousin Germaine.

It must be confessed that the receipt of Mrs. Lenox's letter caused some consternation at Gray Ashtead. It was, however, clear that Mr. Carewe himself and none other was responsible for the original suggestion; and, as his granddaughter pointed out to him, the fact that he only issued his invitation in full confidence of its being declined was by no means a mitigation, but rather an aggravation, of his crime.

Aunt Rosalie was the only person who thought the addition to the party might be a good thing, inasmuch as it would perhaps make it possible for her to stay at home.

Mr. Carewe had in fact, definitely determined upon having the interior of his house re-modelled to please Germaine. The alterations were to be carried out during their eight weeks' absence from England. It would be much better done if the mistress were on the spot. Then another complication arose. Mrs. Damien also would rather stay at home. How far this desire was connected with James Byles was not to be ascertained. Fortunately, the idea did not occur to her daughter.

But, if the two elder ladies both remained behind, would Mrs. Lenox consider that Mr. Carewe was chaperon enough for his granddaughter and her friend?

This, as it turned out, need not have distressed them for a moment. The ideas of the Lenox family as to chaperonage were quite modern.

It was thus ultimately decided that Mr. Carewe should depart in charge of the three young people and that his daughters should remain behind, to superintend workmen and hurry on proceedings generally.

The only member of the party left dissatisfied by this arrangement was the one person whose pleasure was being expressly studied in the whole affair, namely, Germaine. She did not like Miss Lenox. Hilda belonged to the world she knew not—the smart, unintelligent, pleasure-loving, idle set with which she had never come in contact.

Already, in their short acquaintance, Hilda had succeeded, consciously or unconsciously, in making Germaine feel “out of it” in various small ways. Germaine thought her manner bold, and her opinions unpleasant. What Hilda thought of Germaine has been stated.

It was not, however, open to Germaine to make any objection. The Lenoxes were old friends, she was as it were an upstart in the family. It could do her no harm to travel with Hilda, who might possibly improve on further acquaintance.

For the rest, Percivale seemed pleased, and “the governor” evidently thought that he was conferring pleasure upon herself by giving her a companion of her own age and sex. No remonstrance was possible.

CHAPTER IX

RE-ENTER RÉMY

THE day before the departure of the travellers for London, the Storeham race-meeting took place, and Mr. Carewe was determined that Germaine should attend, both because it was his sole opportunity to exhibit his beautiful granddaughter in public, and because this would be her only chance of seeing any racing until next season.

It had been a surprise and pleasure to him to find that, though she had not been on a horse's back for ten years, she rode well. He looked forward to her delightful companionship in future, during his daily rides about his property.

Something more, however, than a mere ability to ride is necessary for intelligent participation in the sport of racing. On the Grand Stand Germaine found herself altogether a fish out of water. Hilda Lenox, on the contrary, was in great form. Her thin body clad in a perfectly straight racing-coat, her head shrouded in a soft felt hat which left visible only her chin, and two long pearl-drop earrings, she went about with her ivory tablets, entering her bets with cool precision. She and Percivale had a great deal to say upon the probable results of the day's racing. They were much occupied with the misdoings of one of the "starters"—one Sammy Biddle, "whom the committee ought to have scratched."

Germaine was so unsophisticated as to picture the

committee applying its finger-nails to the reprehensible Sammy. She had, however, the prudence not to give herself away. Many young men were constantly surging about their party, but Percivale introduced her to very few. He was not going to have the rag-tag and bobtail priding itself upon an introduction to his cousin! Germaine heard them cracking jokes with Hilda, and was perfectly unconscious that it was herself who was the attraction. Not so Miss Lenox. She was bitterly aware of the admiration her rival was exciting, and deeply resentful of it.

A pulse of unrest was thrilling in Germaine that day. Percivale had said that the Mr. Damien who might be Uncle Rémy would, in all probability, come to these races. She was anxious to see him, yet dreaded the moment of introduction.

It came upon her unawares at last, just as she had begun to be certain that the gentleman in question was not present. It was when lunch was over, and they were strolling along the course before taking their places for the final race, that Percivale raised his hat to a distinguished-looking man with hair slightly grey upon the temples. Then he turned swiftly to Germaine. "That is Damien," he said.

Germaine's eyelids flashed up. Ah, there was no doubt! It *was* Uncle Rémy! He stopped, right in front of them, and gazed upon her with an incredulous, wondering smile.

The blood rushed to her face. She went a step towards him, holding out her hand.

"But this can't be," she heard him saying, in his pleasant, wooing voice. "The long arm of coincidence cannot reach thus far! Yet it is, I must believe the evidence of my eyes. You are my long-lost niece."

"I am Germaine," she answered shyly.

"Hey what? Who is this?" chimed in Mr.

Carewe, coming up to rejoin his party, after speaking to an acquaintance.

"Grandfather, it is my uncle, Mr. Damien, whom I have not seen for ten years."

Mr. Carewe was cordial in his greeting. Rémy's appearance was all in his favour. His manner was good. He expressed very agreeably the pleasure it gave him to see his niece once more. He begged to be informed as to how she came to be where he found her.

Mr. Carewe, as he himself would have expressed it, "took the bull by the horns." Mr. Damien had doubtless heard how badly he had behaved—keeping up a family feud for years. He had now repented and reformed.

While he offered his frank explanation, Germaine stood, conscious all the time of her uncle's eye unwaveringly upon her.

"You live in these parts?" she heard her grandfather ask.

"Not exactly. We are rolling stones. We took a cottage furnished for the season, and we expect to stay the winter, as my wife is fond of hunting. Unfortunately, however, she is prone to bronchitis, and it is possible that we may have to fly to the south of Europe when the cold weather comes."

"Is my aunt here, to-day?" asked Germaine, with her droll smile.

"No, she is not, or I would have the pleasure of letting her see that I not only possess a real flesh-and-blood relation, but one of the very first quality," he replied, in tones of warm, almost proprietary admiration. "I feel several inches taller since I saw my niece. My niece! How delightful that sounds! Shall you be too proud to come and visit your uncle and aunt?"

"She will be charmed," her grandfather replied for her, "but the pleasure must wait a while. We

are off to-morrow for London, *en route* to Italy, with our motor, and shall not be home before Christmas."

"Then I must make the most of these few minutes," replied Rémy: and he turned to walk with them, strolling along by Germaine's side, and always observing her keenly.

Soon they had dropped behind the others, and could converse unheard.

"Well, Charlotte Corday, so we meet at last," he said, after a pause in their superficial chat.

Germaine raised her face full to his, and the splendour of her glance filled him with admiration.

"Are you like my grandmother, who never forgave, or like Mr. Burnside, who forgave freely?" she asked, in a low tone.

"But, my beautiful niece, what had I to forgive? Surely you committed your sad blunder in the vain hope of doing me service?"

"You did understand that?" she gasped breathlessly. "I was so afraid you had never understood."

"I was a hard-hearted brute," he answered. "I admit it. But you, of course, could not at that time realize how terribly serious things might have been for me. At first I did not see how we could possibly keep the thing quiet: and if it had come to a court of justice, think how I should have felt, had you stood up and proclaimed that you did it under my influence and as the direct result of my teaching! In my opinion, no jury would have believed that you did such a thing without having been put up to it. I tell you, I went through some bad half-hours."

"I do see that, now. I have seen it for a long while. How much we owe to Mr. Burnside!" she replied fervently. "You know—of course—that he made me vow never to mention it? My own mother has never known. You are the only person now alive who does know."

"What," he interpolated quickly, "does Mr. Carewe know nothing of it?"

"Nothing."

He gave a long whistle. "That might be awkward for you, might it not?"

"Do you think so? How?"

He stared straight before him. "There were other people, you know, who, though not officially informed, yet had a good deal of knowledge. What of Miles's man—what-was-his-name—who found him lying on the floor?"

Germaine was puzzled. "I don't quite see. How could it be awkward for me?"

"Well," he replied slowly, "anyway, it puts you into Burnside's power altogether, doesn't it? Suppose he were to wish you to do, or not to do, anything—he could put on the screw pretty hard, couldn't he?"

She protested indignantly. "He would never conceivably do such a thing."

"Believe me, my niece, Burnside is an excellent hand at making use to its fullest of any advantage he may happen to possess."

"He was splendid—splendid, about me!" she quickly rejoined.

"He consulted his own interests, fully as much as yours," was the cool answer. "You had been in the house during a critical period—a period during which his treatment of me had been, to say the least of it, unsportsmanlike. He found out suddenly that his miserable step-brother, whom he had for so long ground down under his heel, was not the only witness. There was a very inconvenient, disgustingly honest child, who had been among us, taking notes. It was much better to have that uncompromising young person one's friend than one's enemy. If it could be arranged, it would be a fine thing to have her altogether in one's power—one's pensioner—nobly pardoned!"

"Oh, Uncle Rémy, how can you say such things? You know very little of Mr. Burnside's character! When did you last see him?"

"Oh, quite recently. I went down to Fendallscombe for my mother's funeral. We had some rather frank conversation."

"Did he—did he—speak of me?" she asked apprehensively.

"Oh yes, he spoke of you. What he said is, of course, between him and me. But let me give you this one hint. You formed a pretty strong opinion of my excellent Miles during your visit to Fendallscombe. You afterwards veered completely round, and you think of him now as a martyred saint. Your first impression of him, your spontaneous, childish detestation—was far nearer the truth than your carefully cultivated reverence will ever be."

Germaine was agitated. This man's personality was beginning to exert upon her its old effect. The conviction with which he spoke, the sad, quiet manner, the beautiful smile—all were impressive.

After all, what had she with which to combat what he said? He knew a great deal more of Miles Burnside than she did. Her own opinion of him had never wavered until that one interview, which seemed almost unreal, in his sick-room. How could she tell that Rémy was not right?

"Let me point out one thing to you," he went on gently. "You thought me cruel, unsympathetic, hateful, because I resisted your pitiful pleadings, because I left you to yourself. I have told you the more superficial reason for my conduct. There was another. If Miles were inclined to think clemency his best policy, it was far better for your chances that I should keep away altogether. The house was full of his spies. Even Espérance, my mother's woman, was among them. How he found out that Miss Grenfell and I had made our plans to go off together, I

shall never know. But it can have been only through a most efficient system of spying. My renunciation of you was your best chance, and I knew it."

Germaine tried to rally. "Now that you are married and happy," she suggested smiling, "you ought not to bear a grudge."

"Oh, believe me, dear niece, I don't bear a grudge. I don't suppose I shall ever see the fellow again, as long as I live. I succeeded in making him hand over the few paltry hundreds my poor mother had managed to save for me; and there is an end. I ought not to have begun this conversation, I suppose, but you surprised me into it. I was startled to hear that Burnside has you in his power with this promise of secrecy: so I venture on a warning."

"I know you meant to be kind," she said. The day seemed to have changed, and the wind to blow with a wintry chill. She had been made conscious that she was not as other girls, and she knew she should be restless until she had succeeded in persuading Mr. Burnside to free her from her promise.

At this point they were joined by Percivale, who thought Germaine had been long enough monopolized by her new-found relative. The talk became general, and Rémy exerted himself to be charming, with so much effect, that, when he had taken graceful leave and disappeared into the crowd again, Mr. Carewe remarked with energy: "Pleasant fellow, that. If his father had his charm of manner, your mother was less to blame than I used to think, Ermie."

Germaine smiled mischievously. "I think father must have been very unlike Mr. Byles," she said: and then, in sudden horror, "Oh, Percivale, what *have* I said?"

"Nothing that matters," replied the young man. "I never thought my father a ladies' man." It was worth while indeed that she should have made the slip, since it caused her to fling such a depth of ex-

pression into those eyes which were uplifted to his. Percivale could not meet their gaze without a shiver of emotion. The clear blueness of their whites, the curve of their lashes, the ever-new shock of surprise with which one realized that the pupils were not brown nor black but very dark grey—these things filled him with such feeling as was wholly new to him. She was a kind of shrine before which his whole being burnt incense.

Hilda Lenox was not in high spirits when she went home that night. She consoled herself, however. Naturally the men had swarmed around the girl who was not only handsome, but who had made such sensational entry into the district—who was doubtless to be an heiress on a great scale. But they had not tried to talk to her. They had not heard her faltering, fatuous comments upon the racing. When it came to keeping a man amused—holding his attention—Hilda was prepared to back herself.

When the Gray Ashted party arrived home there was a square package awaiting Germaine. It had come by registered post, and the post-mark was the postal village of Fendallsee.

They were late, and there was not much time to dress before dinner, so Germaine carried her parcel upstairs, and opened it while the maid arranged her hair.

It contained an old-fashioned rosewood dressing-case, with a silver plate at the top, inscribed with her name, "Germaine Damien." The date below was that of her grandmother's first marriage. On the lid lay a letter from Mr. Butside, with a key enclosed.

"DEAR MISS DAMIEN," he wrote—he had always called her Germaine until now.

"I have only had time to tell you through the few possessions left by your grandmother and I think

that his articles of jewellery should belong to you, as her son's daughter, and her only feminine descendant. I do not know whether you will care for them. They are out of date as regards the setting, but I am told they are of some value. You may possibly be by this time in possession of so many pretty things that you do not care for these. If this be so, please send them back to me.

All good wishes, from

"Yours sincerely,

"MILLIE BURNSIDE."

She gave the package partly to Germaine. She took the key and opened the box with eagerness. It contained a tray, holding the usual little glass pots with silver tops, a brush and comb of ivory, and some other trifles.

Underneath, carefully wrapped in jeweller's paper, were various trinkets. They had evidently been cleaned quite recently, and were in good order. Germaine found them charming. They were mostly composed of peridots, beryls, garnets, and such like, not very valuable stones. But there was a necklet of small diamond stars, with a diamond pendant, which she admired immensely, and which must, she felt sure, be valuable.

It was with great pleasure that she carried her treasures downstairs and exhibited them. That very day her grandfather had seen her only living relation and had been pleased. Now she had this bequest to show him, and she knew instinctively that his mind was of the calibre which is impressed by the possession of valuables. The Damiens would no longer be in his eyes as those utterly contemned.

CHAPTER X

SIGHT-SEEING

ROME! From the moment when the car, winding along the Campagna, first came in sight of the line of gigantic figures lifting their arms upon the roof of St. John Lateran, to the day when her foot trod the actual paving of the Via Sacra, life was to Germaine as a new thing, an experience fresh minted for her to revel in and enjoy.

Hilda Lenox was the only drawback to her pleasure. Hilda had enjoyed the journey out, in spite of her ever-growing jealousy. There had been a constant change of hotels, new experiences of every kind. But as they advanced, from stage to stage, it became more and more evident that the money raised by her parents with such difficulty for her equipment and journey would be money thrown away. Percivale had eyes only for his cousin. He was in love in the violent, wholly preoccupied way in which a young man falls in love with a woman of a most unexpected type.

How it was that he was not bored Hilda honestly could not explain to herself. At every place at which they stayed Germaine wanted to see the cathedral, the city walls, or what not—things that were of no conceivable interest to anybody but an antiquary. Percivale and her grandfather went with her, apparently enjoying it all as much as she did. Hilda would have declined such expeditions, but she found that, if she did so, the result was that old Mr. Carewe

thought he ought to remain to keep her company and Percivale was sent off in a cloud of bliss with Germaine.

Hilda was no fool, and she had known Percivale for a good many years. She felt quite certain that he could never be permanently happy with Germaine. It was not as though this girl, ignorant of all the things that people take an interest in—racing, golf, bridge, hunting—was ready to be taught, anxious to learn. She seemed wholly impervious to Hilda's hints that, if she wished to get on at all in society, she would be obliged to acquire facility in these subjects. She appeared indifferent as to whether she "got on" or no. Of course, as Hilda reflected, looks like hers do go a long way. A girl so lovely, could always have a fresh man when she had bored the last one to tears. But that Percivale—old Percy, who had been such a good pal, could be going to marry her—to condemn himself permanently to the society of a young person who, if you stripped off her looks, was more like a governess than anything else!—

She knew that he would "get fed up" with Germaine sooner or later: probably later—at least, too late for him to retrieve his error. The whole question was—could Hilda make him sensible of his mistake in time? She began to despair, when she found that St. Peter's, the Vatican, the Forum, seemed all alike to him—that he went thither gladly, discussed what he had seen with eagerness, and hunted up information in guide-books for his cousin's better entertainment. It quite gave Miss Lenox the horrors.

Why should anybody want to see the prison of Beatrice Cenci, whoever she was? Why be eager to peer down a hole in the floor, to look into a dungeon where somebody said St. Paul was immured?

Germaine actually treasured a few grains of sand from the hole where St. Peter's cross was said to have stood!

As to the tomb of Ceeilia Metella—why, nobody even knew who she was, or why she should have had so elaborate a monument!

The weather was gloriously fine, and as it was still early for the Roman season when they arrived, they found nothing unpleasantly crowded. The car was in perfect order, and took them all around to outlying places of interest. Tivoli was a destination from which Hilda expected a certain amount of pleasure. There was, to her, a nice savour of the music-hall about it. When she found that it also was ruins—that you saw only the Temple of the Sibyl, the Villa d'Este, and so on: and that Hadrian's Villa, when you got there, turned out to be as fragmentary as the Forum—she gave it up as a bad job.

"Don't you think," she suggested to Germaine that evening, "that you might give those two poor men a rest to-morrow?"

"What, from sight-seeing? But we are not going anywhere particular to-morrow," replied Germaine. "Do you think grandfather is over-tired?"

"Oh, I don't know. But it stands to reason they must be fed up with all these Cæsars and Borgias and people. Isn't there a place somewhere that isn't all ruins, where there is a Casino, and a decent band?"

"But there is a good band here, in Rome," said Germaine, puzzled. "Do you want to go on the Pincian?"

"Oh la, la," sighed Hilda, extending still further a bare leg in a rose-coloured shoe and open-work stocking of the same colour. "My dear child, if I were not cheek on my part, I would say to you that you who have passed your life in the class-room and the office, know very little indeed about men and what their tastes are! Don't draw the strings too tight, or the poor creatures may rebel, you know!"

Germaine stood looking down upon her, as she lounged in the low chair. "Draw the strings too

tight!" she echoed, puzzled. "Do I seem to you to dictate—to make them go out when they would rather not?"

"Oh, of course not! But you see, they are so unselfish, showing you about—they know all this kind of thing is new to you——"

"Is it not new to you too?" asked Germaine in all simplicity. The question annoyed Hilda.

"That's not the point. You ought to have the tact to see that Percy must be starving for a hand at bridge, or an evening at the Casino. They can't be amusing you all the time."

"I see. I didn't know," replied Germaine, wishing that Hilda did not jar upon her so constantly.

She left the lounge, which was Miss Lenox's favourite spot since it commanded a view of all who went in or out of the hotel, and walked slowly upstairs. Percivale was coming down, and he called her to a recess upon the half-landing, where were some chairs and a table, and whence one could have a glimpse of the Capitol, in spite of the modern atrocity which New Italy has raised to shut it out.

"Look at the sunset," softly said Percivale. "Isn't it fine?"

Germaine looked, first at it, and then at him.

"Is it true, Percivale, that it bores you to take me about to see Rome?"

He stared with a lack of comprehension which was reassuring. "Bores me to take you about?"

"Hilda says you do not care for any of these things, but are only anxious to give me a good time," she told him. "She says you want to go and bet at the tables. You know, if that is so, how much rather I would that you should go. She hates sight-seeing. Had you not better take her to-morrow to something that she would like, and grandfather can go with me to Ostia?"

"I'm bothered if I do anything of the kind. If

Hilda is such a little fool, she can stay at home. Or she can go out with those Americans, whose one idea is to go shopping in the Corso, and eat ices at that place in the Piazza di Spagna. You and I are going to Ostia."

"But, Percivale, it is rather hard on her, isn't it, if we are always doing things that bore her?"

"What did she come for?" he asked impatiently, "if she didn't want to? She knew we were coming to Rome, and that it was your first time—hers too, for that matter! Is it likely that I am going to fag after her, when I have you to go about with?" his voice dropped to its most persuasive. His look bathed her in an atmosphere of adoration. She stood there in the window, her outline silhouetted against the red sunset; and several of the hotel guests passed up or down, slowly, with lingering gaze. The girl was the talk of Rome, the beauty of the coming season. Percivale felt that, if he was to have any chance, he must step in before Germaine began to understand her power.

"Hilda's a nuisance," he went on, dropping his voice very low. "I can't think why the governor was foolish enough to ask her. I tell you what we'll do. We'll tell him she is dull, and he must take her over to the tables at Crevola to-morrow. They can get there by train, and you and I will have the car and go to Ostia, taking lunch with us, and have the day of our lives."

She looked up at him. He caught the light of pleasure and anticipation in her eyes—those eyes that he actually dreamt about at night!

"You'd like it?" he asked, under his breath. "Then we'll do it. I shall go and tackle the governor now."

It was done. Percivale went straight to the old man and asked for one whole day alone with Ger-

maine, "as he wanted to ask her something." Matthew Carewe was more agitated than his adopted son had ever seen him.

"Percy," he said, "you know my boy, even you are not worthy of her. It seems to me that she might have any man upon whom she chose to confer her hand. Perhaps I am prejudiced, but I am judging by hard facts. See the struggle we have here to keep ourselves to ourselves! The whole world seems to want to know us, and it has not been so until this year. If she does take you—if she will—it would be to me the—the fulfilment—Good Lord! In a minute I shall be talking like the heavy father in a melodrama! Be off with you, you young rascal, and do your best! God be with you! I say, Percy, by the way"—laying an eager hand upon the young man's shoulder as he moved away—"has she led you to suppose—do you think——"

"I daren't think. It seems too wild—like going to Heaven, you know. But I know she likes me. Of course I'm not good enough, but then, whatever fellow she marries won't be good enough. Anyway, I am going to have my try."

"You go. I'll undertake the other little girl. Poor Hilda! I used to think it might be she—eh, Percy?"

Percy looked blank. Hilda was so entirely out of his range of vision he could not remember that she had ever been in it.

It was a perfect October day. The air was so still as to suggest a dream-like unreality. The far horizon of the Campagna melted in purple haze, into the purple sky. It is not a beautiful stretch of country, that flat expanse that lies between Rome and her forgotten sea-port; but the colouring of Italy takes it in hand. The "endless fleecy of feathery grasses, everywhere", whispers of a past of mighty ghosts.

One sees the deserted road thick with traffic, the endless rows of mules and pack-horses, the endless bales of merchandise, the endless marching of the legions, to and from the capital of the world.

And, at the journey's end—no town! Nothing but a few cottages, and the modest house of the Government Curator.

No conqueror sacked Ostia. No whirlwind of war swept her away. The receding ocean forsook her, and as the waves ebbed on the one hand, so the course of commerce drew away upon the other—to Puteoli. Now her foundations lie exposed, and one sees her great square, with its amphitheatre, the thresholds of the shops, with the trade of the owner pictured in mosaic on the door-sill; the pavement of her great baths, the temple of the sea-god who deserted her. They will show you the old quarters of the fire-brigade, with the stone step worn into furrows by the wheels of the hydrant—the rules for the police, and the hours they were to keep, being still inscribed upon the wall.

Here, then, was a place in which Germaine must delight.

She was rapt into a very ecstasy of wonder and fancy. Percivale was so glad of her pleasure that his sympathy seemed perfect.

She could not have talked to him for five minutes upon any subject of general culture without discovering his ignorance. Here they were both on new ground, and they moved forward together.

Life, which had been hitherto so sparing of gifts to Germaine, had now turned, and flung her, as it were, into the arms of love and family life. The sweetness of it was indescribable.

All the analytical part of the girl slumbered. Her revolutionary instincts were as it were chloroformed. The hitherto unsatisfied part of her, which had craved for cherishing, tenderness, and the natural

joy of life, was awake, and conscious of a trembling, new, untried existence.

The silent, sunny peace of the solitary place wove a spell, more and more compelling. It was as though she and Percivale walked hand in hand down a flowery slope, and when they reached the valley—something would have to happen.

They ate their lunch on the steps of the Temple of Neptune. They had just been exploring that mysterious, small dark temple of Mithras whose worship constitutes so great a puzzle. Germaine's eyes were dark with the thoughts she conjured up concerning the life of this ancient place. When they had done eating, she reclined in the sun, while her companion smoked his cigarette: and so close about her had Destiny woven her web, that she could not see beyond.

CHAPTER XI

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

By degrees their talk died down. The cigarette had been thrown away. Pereivale was lying on the steps a little below her. She sat with her arms round her knees, gazing out at the wide open end of the temple, to the dim and ruined outline of what had been one of the principal streets. In all the clefts were wild flowers, among them the bees still hummed, the air was full of scents and murmurs. In the midst of it all, youth throbbed vociferously. It was Love among the Ruins.

Pereivale raised himself to a level with her, locked his own arms round his knees, and whispered, as though the sound of his own voice scared him.

"Oh, Ernie! I love you so that it's—it's perfectly awful. It—*it hurts!*"

The tremendous words were spoken. He could say no more, because, to his own wrath and rage, he wanted to burst into tears. He felt helpless, at her mercy—he desired to utter a frantic plea, and was wholly tongue-tied and ridiculous.

For a moment he was minded to spring up and run away—somewhere out of reach, where she could not see his humiliating trouble. Then he became aware of the miraculous fact that she was to the full as moved, as shaken as himself.

Love had never touched Germaine. She had never seen anybody who awakened in her even a momentary response. She was used to admiration,

and she loathed it. This agony of shy devotion, this acute feeling, was a thing without precedent, wholly new in her experience.

To her it seemed the fitting outcome of all the wonders that had gone before. She had found kinsfolk, a home, family affection—now she had found love. In her complete ignorance she had no idea that her own response was nothing but a glad recognition of his passion. It was wholly fitting that she and Percivale should mate. They had but to join hands and go on through life together, as they had begun, only more intimate, more united in their aims and wishes.

They nestled to each other, there upon the broken marble steps, awestruck and almost aghast at what had come upon them. Her agitation gave him back his own self-mastery, and presently he was able to tell her how he had first seen her at the little railway station on the Breconstead line, and how her face had drawn his eye, then his heart. She had to hear of all his sensations when she was seated by him in the railway carriage—of the thrills as of mysterious affinity which had visited him—of his stupefaction of surprise and delight when his grandfather presented her as his cousin.

There was in the girl's mind a wonderful glow of security and content. The romance of her reconciliation with her grandfather had been so capricious and improbable, that sometimes she had thought it might be fairy gold—that one morning she would awaken to find herself on the bleak hillside once more, deprived somehow of all the good gifts which fate had poured into her lap.

Now, however, she began to believe things. If she were Percivale's wife, her tenure was secure indeed. She could have no doubt of her grandfather's pleasure; and had such doubt existed, Percivale's words must have dispelled it instantly.

"He'll be crazy with joy," he told her simply.

They wandered for more than an hour through the deserted remnants of what had been human homes, and the thought of his own home to be made warmth and sunshine in Pereivale's heart. How unfeignedly glad he would be not to have to live at Gray Ashtead any more! Mr. Carewe would surely not be stupid enough to wish the young couple to reside in the house. No! Germaine and he would have a little place of their own—a home in which he might keep his own hours and invite his own friends. His love was at present so young and shy that he dared not speak of this to the girl. Her own imagination did not carry her on to marriage. She was sunk in the flowery illusion of the present moment.

At last he became aware that time was passing, and went to tell the chauffeur to get ready, leaving Germaine seated among the open graves, just outside the place where the old city landward gate stood.

Here the Ostians laid their dead, just as they were laid outside Rome, along the Appian Way.

Germaine surveyed the pathetic excavated bones, and came in her strays to the place where, under a glass lid, lies the coffin of a young mother, who died in child-birth at the age of twenty-five, and was buried with her babe between her knees.

At that sight, the newly betrothed maiden stopped short. She gazed upon the frail remains with eyes dim with tears.—Ah, those tiny, tiny bones, that wee skull, that fluttering life for which the mother had surrendered hers!

For some cause which lay much too deep to be analysed, the sight disturbed the gazer. An uneasy foreboding stirred in her heart. Life then, was not all play and love-making, and easy strays down blossoming alleys. There was more in marriage

than pleasure. There was a grave, dark side to it upon which she did not desire to dwell. Somehow, the thought of herself as a mother, and the thought of Percivale, did not seem to harmonize. She dismissed it with a little shudder, and, turning away, went across the uneven, trenched ground to meet him, being for some reason anxious that he should not join her there, nor see the mother and child in their long rest.

The sunset was over the Campagna as they rapidly crossed the miles that lay between them and Rome. As they entered the city, Percivale suddenly remembered that he had arranged with two men who were staying at the Grand Hôtel des États-Unis, that he would go and play bridge with them that evening. As he had now no intention of doing anything of the sort, he told the chauffeur to stop at the hotel and put him down, that he might leave a message. Then, just as he alighted, a brilliant thought struck him.

"Bentley shall drive you to Ziffi's," he said, "to look at rings. I will just speak to these chaps, or leave a note if they are out, and cut through to the Corso from here. Meanwhile, you can be looking at pretty things."

Germaine consented gladly, for she never found it pleasant to wait in an open car in the streets of Rome, where staring is carried almost to the height of a fine art. Percivale hurried up the steps into the hotel, and Bentley turned the car towards the Piazza di Spagna.

As they pursued their way, up a very narrow street, they were conscious of a mass of people surging down it. A noise of shouting—the hubbub of an excited crowd—came to Germaine's ears.

She thought there must be a fire, or an accident. Some women, passing the car, cried out something in Italian which she could not understand.

"What is it, Bentley?" she asked, standing up in the car. "Those people seemed to be telling us to go back."

"I don't know, miss, but I heard some of 'em at the garage talking this morning about a strike of bricklayers. They say the workmen are always striking, and then they come out and riot in the streets. But I can't turn here, miss. The minute I get out in the Piazza I can, but not here."

"Be quick then! Look! There are soldiers going past the top of the street!"

"At the double, too! Something's up, sure enough," he returned.

"Oh, Bentley, this is quite an adventure! Go on, but drive dead slow in case you hurt somebody!" cried Germaine in great excitement. The adventurous blood, dormant of late, began to stir within.

Bentley was not so sure that he was pleased. An Italian crowd can be very nasty tempered; and among such numbers, some will always be out for loot. He wished he had taken another route, but he had now no choice but to go on.

They shot out into the Piazza, and found themselves in a seething mob of vociferating persons, howling, dancing, haranguing. A company of soldiers swept into the open space from another street driving the crowd before them, and in a moment the car was wedged in a solid mass of human beings, who, tired of doing nothing in particular, began in no measured terms to tell Bentley what they thought of a bloated aristocracy. Fortunately the stolid Englishman could not understand, but he could see that their mien was threatening.

"You sit very still, miss, I'll turn and bolt as soon as I get half a chance," he muttered; and then, to his joy, he remembered that a courier with whom he had made friends at the garage, and who spoke fluent English, had advised him that morning to

carry a revolver, and had, moreover, put one into the pocket of the car. To Bentley this had seemed very amusing. Revolvers are not, in England, practical politics. He had accepted the loan with a grin of rather supereilious gratitude, much as he might have accepted a set of anklets to guard against the bites of sharks. Now he remembered it with relief; and as a villainous-looking man began to try and open the car door, to the utter astonishment of Germaine her peaceful chauffeur produced the deadly weapon, and pointed it, with the calm announcement—"The first of you Johnnies as offers to set foot in this car'll get what for. I mean it."

The crowd did not understand the words, but the tone was quite explicit. They hesitated, for to rush upon an armed man means that somebody is likely to get hurt, and the lowest class Italian is not a hero.

Meanwhile Bentley, seeing a slight gap in the crowd ahead of him, had, still holding his revolver, with his left hand caused the car to slide along the edge of the square, until they came to a very narrow side court, almost empty of people. There he came to a stop, and, holding off the now very angry crowd with his weapon, he said calmly, "I advise you, miss, to open that door and slip out before they know what you are doing. They can't follow, except through the car, and I'll see that somebody pays if they try that on."

Germaine hesitated. All her courage was up in arms. "But what will you do then, Bentley?"

"Drive off, miss, and pick you up the other end. Most of Rome's perfectly quiet," said the man simply.

At the moment, while the girl tried to collect her thoughts, and to evade, without outwardly seeming to shrink, the gesticulations of the mob, a voice spoke, in easy Italian, saying something sharply. This voice proceeded from the mouth of the tiny alley

against which Bentley had brought the car to rest. As it spoke, she turned her head, and saw an English gentleman open the door, and make an authoritative gesture for her to alight. In a moment she fled to him as to a refuge, and before she had time to think, he had whisked her off, and was hurrying her down the ill-smelling little place, where piles of brown-looking macaroni grew stale behind dim windows, and an old woman, squatting on the ground, sold oranges and nuts.

"Is my chauffeur all right?" she cried almost immediately.

"Yes, I think so. Look back."

She did. The car was no longer surrounded, for the police had arrived. Bentley watched them until they reached the end of the alley and then, making a sign with his hand, drove slowly off.

"Ah!" she sighed. "Was that what you said to them? Did you tell them the police were coming?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact I did not know it was so true. But it is all right now. Your chauffeur is a fine fellow. He will find his way round and pick you up. Let us walk along slowly. Which is your hotel?"

She told him.

"Then, if you permit, we will go a little way in this direction."

"You are very kind," she said; and for the first time raised her eyes to survey him with attention. He also looked down at her. Her heart gave a leap and her pulses seemed to begin racing. His deeply set blue eyes lit up with extraordinary light.

"Why," he said, with pleasure unmistakable, "surely this is you—this is Germaine?"

"Mr. Burnside!"

They stood still, near one of Rome's great bronze fountains, and held each other's hands. She could not speak, for the rush of succeeding impressions.

Oh, what a stupid, unobservant child she must have been, not to feel from the first, the attraction, the distinction of this man!

This—this—was the person whom she had sought to improve the world by removing! This was the odious tyrant, the cruel step-brother!

There he stood before her, the one creature on earth who knew the truth about her! The one! For Rémy, though he had known her crime, was wholly ignorant of her repentance.

"Oh, what can I *say*? What *can* I say?" she faltered idiotically.

"If it is true, it would be grand to hear you say you are glad to see me."

"I am!—oh, I am! For hundreds of reasons! I have so much to say to you!"

"Not more than I want to hear, I assure you!"

"Is that true? Do you really care to know about me? I thought you had given me up, as a friend, though you still helped me as a duty."

"It was natural enough that you should think so."

"If you knew," she stammered in her eagerness—"if I could tell you how I counted days, weeks, months, and in the end years, wanting to see you again!"

The blood rushed to his face. "Is that really so? Why did you not let me know?"

"Oh, how can I tell? I grew shy, when you never came, nor asked me to go to you. I told myself that it was impossible you could ever like me, though you had been noble enough to forgive me!"

"I was not free," he cried sharply. "But I see now that I ought to have been. Madam was not reasonable, and it was my part to have persuaded her out of her unreasonableness. But at least I came the first moment I could—came and found myself just a day too late!"

"A day too late!"

"Yes. When I went to Breconstead, it was to ask you and your mother to come and make your home at Fendallseombe."

It was as though the sentences of this dialogue had been poured out red hot. But when he said those words, there fell a silence as remarkable as had been their previous haste to express themselves. Germaine gave a gasp of surprise, but no articulate reply. She stood gazing at the pavement, the splash of the fountain in her ears. The dull sounds of the mob they had left behind hardly reached the quiet spot. The little street boys who are usually to be found about the fountains, were all in the Piazza di Spagna, to see the fun. They stood, so it seemed, in a huge, echoing silence, and Germaine could not rid herself of a feeling that something had happened—something which touched her more deeply than her promise so lately given to Percivale.

The sight of Burnside and her perception of the change in him, took her thoughts back to the crisis of her life. . . .

How could she ever have forgotten it?

She was gripped by the thought suggested by Rémy the other day—the thought of this man's power over her. If he wished, he could say—"Softly! How do you know that I shall permit your marriage? I have it in my discretion to stop it if I choose."

"How strange," she murmured at last, "how strange everything is! And this the most strange of all—that you, too, should have been ready with help!"

"Help?" he asked, puzzled. "I don't quite understand."

"No," she replied, "but you must. You will have to. I must speak to you. Will you come with me to the hotel, and see my grandfather?"

"I should like it very much."

As he spoke, the car slipped up to them behind,

Bentley with a face of satisfaction, and flushed as it were with victory.

Germaine explained that Mr. Burnside was an old friend, and directed the chauffeur to go back to Ziffi's to pick up Mr. Percivale.

"Begging your pardon, miss, I think I had better take you straight home first. Mr. Percivale couldn't get from the hotel to the Corso without knowing of the riot, and he would guess that I should drive you home at once, out of it all. He is much safer on foot than he would be in the car, and he is as likely as not to have got back by the time we arrive. If not, then I can drop you and the gentleman and slip back to Ziffi's to fetch him, leaving you safe."

"He's right," said Burnside, helping the girl into the car. "The sooner we get you home, the better your grandfather will be pleased."

They sat down, side by side, and when they were started, Germaine made up her mind to be brave and look fully at the Squire, to see more exactly what he was like, and how far he was friendly to herself.

She turned half round, and raised her eyes with deliberate intention to his.

The effect was remarkable. His eyes were blue, and had that effect of fathomlessness which such eyes, if deep set, occasionally possess. They drew her as the moon draws the waves. The sense of being completely in his control, of being his to command, was unlike anything she had experienced. It was so startling that it suggested a wholly new view of life's possibilities. She had, apparently, lived her life up to now with no idea of what might be in store for her. She had never known what it was to feel afraid of anyone. She was afraid of Burnside, for the simple reason that she believed she would have to do as he told her.

No human being could be more unconscious of the

effect produced, than the owner of the eyes which so troubled her. Miles had at the moment three ideas in his head. Satisfaction at having found her, satisfaction at finding her at once so beautiful and so friendly, and satisfaction at having been able to do her a trifling service.

"How jolly this is!" he said simply. "Do you think Mr. Carewe will allow me to see something of you? I suppose I am the loneliest man in Rome at this moment."

"You must be lonely. I should think you really wanted mother and me worse than grandfather does. He has Percivale, and you have nobody, have you?"

"Nobody at all," he replied. "But if you really are sorry for me, perhaps Mr. Carewe would allow you and your mother to come and pay me a visit some time."

Delight flashed into her face. "To see Fendallsecombe again?"

"Why, would that please you? I was always afraid you might hate the place and all its associations."

"Oh," she said, "I could not make you understand how I feel about it. To me it is *THE* place out of all the world. My whole life at Breeonstead fades away into nothing when I think of it; but concerning Fendallsecombe I remember every little thing—the very pattern of the soup-plate in which I used to have my porridge served! The shape of *Espérance's* cap! Your whip that had an agate in the handle—I used to steal it when I went out riding! I feel as if my whole life had been spent at Fendallsecombe, and as if Padlerby and Breeonstead were just incidents. What nameless emotions I lived through! And how impossible it would have been for me then to give you any idea of what was going on inside my head! But now—now——"

He cut in keenly. "Now you could tell me? It would not wound you to talk over it?"

"No, it would not wound, it would heal wounds that have always bled now and then, though I supposed them to be healed," she answered thoughtfully: and realized with a start that she was thinking aloud, and that the man at her side assumed quite naturally that she should do so.

"The gap there is, between childhood and the grown-up person!" she laughed.

"There should not be. But I had the misfortune to be an only child, and my mother's early death cut me off completely from human sympathy. How many thousand times have I thought the thing out, wondering whether any different course of conduct on my part might have saved you!"

The tone of his voice as he said this drew her gaze once again to his face. She looked up at him pleadingly, her eyes luminous with unshed tears: and he broke off, saying sharply—"Don't!—I see you were mistaken—it *does* hurt you——"

"It doesn't, it doesn't! Oh, please don't shut up, and begin to talk like—like anybody else! For all these years I have obeyed you, I have choked, stifled with the craving to speak of it all to somebody! Now that you have come, you simply *shall* allow me to pour things out! Do you hear? You *shall*!"

Her vehemence astonished herself. She knew it was a sign of weakness. She was not at all sure of being able to compel him to her will. His instant surrender and gentleness were a new surprise.

"Oh, Germaine! Is that how it has been? Yes, then, yes, we will talk as much as you will. There is no other subject on earth which interests me so profoundly."

She drew a long breath, as if relieved. "Oh, I am glad to know that! And now, here we are at the hotel, and you must come in and be introduced to my grandfather."

CHAPTER XII

NO RELEASE

THE news of the strike riot had reached the hotel, and Mr. Carewe was on the steps, looking anxiously for the appearance of the car. As he descried Germaine, his face cleared, and he hastened to help her to alight. Then he paused, looking apprehensively at the stranger at her side.

Hilda Lenox, who was also on the look-out, came swiftly forward and joined them. She, too, had her eyes fixed upon the stranger. In truth, he was a man to draw the eye. His fine physique and air of distinction were tinged with a certain melancholy which seemed, when first you met him, almost like a pose.

Germaine made a valiant attempt to relieve her grandfather's anxiety at once.

"Percivale got out," she eagerly cried, "to go and leave a message for Mr. Carton at the *États-Unis*. He told Bentley to drive me to Ziffi's. As we went, we got wedged in the crowd—oh, grandfather, such a hateful crowd!—and Bentley was splendid! He kept them off with a revolver—I can't think where he got it!—and he stopped the car by a little narrow lane, so that I could slip out, and this gentleman was there, and took me away safely, and then—and then—— Before I tell you anything else, had not Bentley better drive back to Ziffi's to pick up Percivale?"

"If I may suggest it," interposed Miles, "it would

be far better for your chauffeur to go on foot, with his revolver in his pocket. The car will only excite hostility."

Bentley was eager to do as the stranger suggested. He looked wistfully to his master for permission, and, when this was accorded, slipped off with his car, to put it in the garage before sallying forth to amuse himself with a Roman crowd.

"Now," said Germaine, when he had gone, "let me make an introduction. Grandfather, this is Mr. Burnside, of Fendallseombe."

"Eh—what?" cried the old man in frank astonishment. He shook hands gratefully with the imposing personage, who had come thus dramatically to the rescue. They all proceeded together into the hotel, making polite enquiry of him as to how long he had been in Rome, where he was staying, and so on; the tremendous question which was in Matthew Carewe's heart being forced for the present to remain in the background. He watched Germaine, however, with unwonted keenness as she sat, her eyes fixed upon Burnside, with an absorbed interest which seemed to her grandfather incompatible with her having just engaged herself to another man. A wonder crossed his mind as to whether Pereivale had lost his chance.

As to Germaine, it was not until Pereivale hurried in ten minutes later, that she remembered the momentous events of the day.

She saw a quick exchange of looks between him and Mr. Carewe; and she saw the glow of joy, pride, and satisfaction with which the old man turned his eyes upon her. She grew crimson with colour she would have given much to control. Hilda, who had scarcely spoken, was watching, under her heavy lids.

Mr. Burnside was easily persuaded to stop and dine with them that night. The old plutocrat was more and more impressed with the discovery that

Constant Damien's connections were by no means persons to be despised.

"Why did nobody tell me at the time?" was the undercurrent of his thoughts. "If Emmeline had not been the most surprising fool that ever was born, none of this family division need have taken place." He ignored the fact that at the time of Emmeline's marriage Mrs. Burnside had, in stately phrases, demanded a conference which he had rudely declined.

Miles went back to his hotel to dress for dinner, and the ladies repaired upstairs for the same purpose.

"You do have all the luck," remarked Hilda sourly, as they moved to the door together. "Fancy being resented by that man! He looks like the hero of a Ouida novel."

"Does he?" cried Germaine in unfeigned surprise. "When I was a little girl, I always thought him so dreadfully ugly I could hardly bear to look at him!"

"I'm not surprised," opined Hilda grimly. "Sort of opinion you might be expected to hold. Will you ever grow up, I wonder, Germaine?"

"Grow up?" returned Germaine laughingly; "why, I have been grown up ever since I was twelve years old. I am now just starting to grow young again!"

They were passing out of the salon as she spoke, and Percivale, hurrying up, grasped her elbow gently. "A moment," he whispered.

He seemed hardly conscious of Hilda's presence. His eyes had the blank, inward look of one who sees visions. His face was working curiously as he and Germaine turned back together into the now empty room.

"I am the most unlucky beggar," he muttered resentfully. "That I should have left you, just as trouble was threatening! Who could have foreseen

a riot all in a minute like that?—and you were in danger—and I not there to help! It doesn't bear thinking about!"

He took her hands, and would have drawn her close to him, but she was stiff and aloof.

"Don't fret about it," she said gently, "but do something for me now, like the kind boy you are——"

"Anything!" he cried eagerly.

"Don't say anything, except to grandfather—I mean, don't make our—our——"

"—Our engagement?"

"Yes, our engagement—public this evening! I—I fancy that crowd must have been a shock. I thought at the time that it was fun, it was an adventure—and I love adventure—but now I feel a little—shaky—and as if I could not bear things: and grandfather has asked Mr. Burnside to dinner, and he is almost a—a stranger. So please, dear Perey, will you ask grandfather not to say a word until to-morrow?"

"But of course I will, sweet. What am I for, but to do as you wish? The knowledge of it is enough! I should like to hug it tight to my heart for days before letting it out into the light—into the public gaze."

She looked more affectionately at him. "You feel like that? I am glad. Oh, Pereivale, it is such a very big thing, I am almost—frightened."

He was very tender with her. It was beautiful that she should feel like that. She allowed him to put his eager arms about her, and hold her for a few moments which were to him blind with ecstasy. It was agreed between them that Pereivale should ask the old man not so much as to congratulate Germaine until he was given leave.

"Would you rather go to bed, darling? Do you feel unequal to the *table d'hôte*?" asked the lover wistfully.

"Oh, no, I want to come down," she swiftly returned.

This was an under-statement of the case. She not only wanted, but longed to see Miles again. She did not attempt to ask herself why. She did not know whether the fascination that drew her was liking or repulsion. The subtle link between them—the craving to be able to speak to him upon the forbidden topic—these things constituted a sensation of which she could say nothing except that she had never felt before as she did this evening.

It was, of course, an exceptional moment. She had just become engaged, she had been, for a moment, in danger of being robbed, or roughly handled. Her nerves were, doubtless, in an unusual state of tension. Thus she explained to herself the thrill, half of fear, half of desire, with which she later on entered the room wherein she knew Miles to be.

She wore pale blue, with some violets which Percivale had brought her. She was a trifle paler than was her wont, and her eyes were starry and melting with the new emotions which were crowding upon her. It seemed a long way from the door to the window, where the party was grouped, and whence Miles turned to greet her.

In the Piazza she had met him unaware, but now every smallest nerve of her was sensitive to the touch of his big hand. She looked up at him, choking with all the things she wanted to ask—such as whether his wound ever pained him now, whether he was quite well again, and so on.

Under that smooth white shirt-front, on that man's very flesh, there was a scar—indelible—the result of a child's mad handiwork. Not given in sudden rage, but deliberately—all in a moment the thought stormed at her heart that she was, to all intents and purposes, a murderess. Strange though

it seems, she had not been wont to think of herself in that light.

The colour forsook her cheeks and lips, and Miles thought she was going to faint. He set a chair for her so quickly that she sank into it quite naturally, and he interposed his large person between her and the rest of the party until the moment was past.

She found herself evenly recounting their route through France in the car, and when, after a few minutes, during which her colour returned and her breath came easily once more, he turned away to converse with Mr. Carewe, Germaine was left marvelling at the fact that he had known how she felt, and had saved her from the public notice which would have been distressing.

They were not neighbours at dinner, and things went on smoothly. Hilda Lenox was lost in admiration of Miles's personal appearance. She began to wonder whether it would not be wise to turn her attention to him wholly, since it was practically certain that Percivale was lost to her, and how dared she return to her fond parents unless she were engaged?

"Is Mr. Burnside rich?" she asked of Germaine, strolling in the garden after dinner.

"Rich? Oh, no. He is a poor man for his position in the county."

"Then he is county?"

"Very much so."

"His place is in Devonshire?"

"Yes."

"A pretty place?"

"The prettiest in the world to my thinking. Very remote and far from the madding crowd."

"H'm!" said Hilda, who had not found the magnificent squire easy to talk to during dinner.

"Why doesn't he sell it?"

"Sell Fendallseombe? He would rather die!"



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cried Germaine, so fiercely that Hilda laughed a little disagreeably.

"You know all about his thoughts and feelings?"

"I know that much," returned Germaine, nettled.

This was not very satisfactory, but Hilda did not lose hope. If she laid determined siege to Mr. Burnside's heart and won, she would not find it difficult, she thought, to insist upon his selling a horrible old farmy place in the country, and going to live somewhere within reach of town, and where there were good golf-links.

The men now appeared, strolling towards them from the hotel terrace.

Hilda fastened herself upon Miles, leaving Percivale and Germaine somewhat ostentatiously in each other's company.

Miles, however, intended to speak to Germaine that evening, and as Germaine was at least as desirous as he of a *tête-à-tête*, they presently found it accomplished, and that they had drifted away from the rest of the party, into an ilex alley, with a curved marble seat.

They sat down side by side. The moon was nearly full, and the first thing that Miles said was, "We will go to-morrow night and see the Coliseum, shall we not? We must take advantage of this perfect weather."

"It seems strange to think that we left winter in England," said Germaine, leaning forward, with her elbow on her knee, her hand supporting her chin.

He studied the outline of the beautiful little head. His heart was in a state which he could only describe to himself as "full of music." It sang and rejoiced within him that he was alive and free—that he was here, beside Germaine, between whom and himself there existed a link so intimate that it set one's heart a-beat in great slow throbs like the ringing of a tocsin.

"What a beautiful world!" he said slowly, as if he enjoyed the taste of the words he spoke.

"Yes—Rome," she answered softly. "Just ourselves, modern, insignificant creatures, sitting under the same moon that shone down on Cæsar's body—on the red-flowing Tiber, on St. Peter's cross."

He only took up one word in her sentence. "Does it seem to you that we are insignificant—without any meaning—you and I?" he asked, leaning forward to bring himself nearer to her.

She caught her breath. Suddenly an alarm clashed in her heart. She must speak while still mistress of herself, before this man usurped over her a mastery which she dreaded.

"No," she answered, speaking as low as he had done, "not insignificant. Far from that . . . if anything, there is too much meaning. I—I—have something to say. Help me out."

"I shall understand," he answered confidently. "I have before my mind's eye the remembrance of you with your hands full of flowers, creeping into the lion's lair, so shy, so miserably afraid—with all your black hair flowing about your shoulders—and of—"

She held up her hand. "Don't!" Her cheeks were flooded with colour, consciousness awake and active. Did she not remember the close of that interview? . . . It seemed to her that his eyes were asking her—"Do you remember?"

"It has to be said," she spoke suddenly, in a different voice, not so traitorously low. "I am always having to confess my shortcomings to you. It is incredible, but it is true, that, since grandfather made it up and took us to live with him, the memory of—of that—of what I did—had been growing vaguer and vaguer. I have hardly thought of it! And now you are here! You hold the key of all my future in your hands! I must at least tell you that

I have kept my promise. Never in all these years has one word of our secret slipped from me. Now I come to ask you to release me—to give me my promise back—to allow me to tell my grandfather the truth.”

“No, by God!” was the sudden, unexpected, explosive rejoinder. Miles turned so as to face her fully. “That is my secret and yours. It is between us—us——” he had begun aloud, but was almost whispering now. “It is the thing I must keep, and you must keep—the bond——” he broke off. “I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be violent. But you don’t even now realize that this secret *must* be kept.”

She paused a minute, reflecting. She had not wished to speak of her engagement, but his attitude compelled it. She nerved herself.

“Since you take that view, I must let you into my fuller confidence. The reason for which I must have back my promise is so strong that you yourself will at once realize its force. I—I promised—this afternoon, to—marry Percivale. You will see that I must have permission to tell him. I cannot marry him unless I do.”

She hurried to the end of her sentence, because of a strange feeling she had that she was causing Miles a suffering so acute as to be dreadful. As she blurted out the news of her engagement, he had started, and put his two hands down, one on either side of him, gripping the marble seat on which he sat. He made no reply at all for some long time, during which laughter and voices came to them fitfully on the warm wind, from other parts of the garden. The moon was full upon his face, giving it an extraordinary illusion of age. He might have been sixty years old, so drawn and white did he appear. She waited, excitement surging in her, though what caused it she could not exactly say. At last the silence grew too

much to be borne, and she spoke again, timidly this time.

"You do see, don't you—that I *must* speak?"

He answered in colourless tones—

"I will never give you leave to speak, as long as I live."

She gave a little cry of surprise. "Mr. Burnside!"

"Never!" he repeated dully.

"But, why? Why?" she turned to him with a burst of indignation. "Would you have me marry a man who knows nothing of me—with such a secret between us?"

"No. I would not have you marry with a secret between you," he returned calmly.

She was perfectly silent for a long minute. Then—"I see," she faltered, with a thrill in her voice that showed her near to tears. "You think I ought not to marry. With such a taint in the blood! . . . And I never saw it like that! I could not realize! I—I—somehow, I do not feel like a bad woman!"

She fumbled among her lace for a handkerchief, and brushed her eyes.

He sat on, like a man carved in granite. As the pause lengthened, she trembled. Was Rémy right after all? Was he a hard, merciless man?

He stirred, after what seemed a long time, and she heard him sigh deeply. "Nobody would understand," he said, speaking very slowly. "They would think things that are not true. I—I have to shield you against yourself. You must not speak of this thing. It is unspeakable."

She thought again of Rémy, and his suggestion of her being completely in the power of Miles Burnside, owing to the secret which they shared. She shuddered, and then spoke out, a thought which this suggested.

"There is somebody else who knows—it is not between you and me," she murmured.

"Someone else who knows?"

"Uncle Rémy, of course."

"Rémy?" he said in a voice of contempt. "I can keep that animal quiet."

"You are quite sure that he will not speak?" she asked apprehensively. His strange vehemence had shaken her considerably. "Do you know that he is living just now not far from Gray Ashtead, and has made acquaintance with my grandfather and—and Percivale?"

She could see that he was surprised; more, that he was taken aback. The reason she could not understand. Miles knew the family record. He was aware of the fact that Germaine's outbreak was regarded, both by her uncle and Madame, as a trait inherited from her grandfather Damien.

He found himself faced with the fact that Germaine herself was not aware of this, and that Rémy was, and would, if occasion served, make use of his knowledge. It would be terrible for Germaine if it were known that she herself had attempted murder at the age of ten. If it were also known that she was not the only member of her family to break out into murderous violence, she would have, socially speaking, a poor chance.

After a pause, he reiterated, "He will not speak"—evidently he would have added more, but for the fact that at the moment the sound of voices reached them, and two figures outlined themselves, shadowy, in the vista of the garden alley.

He pulled himself together with an effort. "You remember," he said, "it was an oath—you swore to me, on the Bible?"

In a tumult of strange feeling she replied—"Do I remember!!"

"Then you will keep your oath?"

"Until you release me—ut, please, Mr. Burnside, please——"

Her voice died away, for Percivale and Hilda drew near.

"I say, Mr. Burnside, we ought to do the Coliseum to-morrow night, if Rome is quiet again," said Percivale, moving to Germaine's side as if determined to resume possession of her, and hand Hilda over to the other.

"I don't think I shall be in Rome to-morrow night," said Miles, in a stifled voice. "I intend to go on to Naples."

END OF PART TWO



PART III
THE COST

CHAPTER I

"A MARRIAGE HAS BEEN ARRANGED"

OUTSIDE Gray Ashtead, the landscape lay grey and motionless, in the cold sleep of December. The Park was bare, except for the ilex and Scotch firs. The walks and drives were exquisitely neat, the grass looked wan, as though it never had been really green. The smoke from the chimneys in the village rose straight into the air and made an opal haze, through which the black groves in the distance looked purple. The cold was piercing.

Within, all was warmth and light. The electric bulbs bloomed with tinted radiance and shed a mellow glow upon the burn-new milky paint, the severe mouldings, and the pale, golden-brown of the embossed walls of the stair.

The wine-coloured tapestry showed itself at last at its correct value.

In the hall stood James, the tails of his dress-coat drawn forward, his hands in his pockets, in the Englishman's typical attitude before the immense wood fire. His expression as he looked around was that of impatient contempt and dislike; but there was something else also. His eyes were turned continually to the staircase. Into their fish-like dullness a spark had been inserted. His whole body looked tense. Ten years had quietly slipped from his age. He had shaved the fringe which formerly encircled his shaven chin.

The rustle of silks at last greeted him as he stepped into the car.

Emmeline was coming. It was the first time she had descended the main staircase since the alterations and improvements were completed. She felt very like the fashionable middle-aged heroine of a modern play, as she listened to the frong-frong of her skirt upon the faintly tinted rose and blue and amber of the Louis Seize anbusson.

Could this be the same woman who, ten years previously, had knelt upon the oil-cloth of the saddler's parlour, to watch Miss Pincham fit a new frock upon Germaine?

She moved now as though none but a French maid had ever touched those artistically *ondulés* locks.

Over the Persian rugs which covered the parquet she advanced to where he stepped eagerly forward to meet her. Feverishly he snatched her hands, his head craned forward for the kiss he was hungering to take from the lips which had regained their full curve, and something even of their girlish bloom—though just how much was the French maid's secret.

"Oh, James, no! The hall is too public," she murmured.

"Then why am I left in the beastly place, full of draughts?" demanded the lover querulously. "Come, let us go into the drawing-room, or the library, or whatever place may have been left untouched by your daughter's inveterate taste!"

"Oh, James! What shall we say of *your* taste?" she demanded in a tone of much offence. "Pray go, to whichever room seems to you the most comfortable. I remain here to welcome my darling child home again."

"Ah, Emmie, Emmie dearest, I did not mean to be irritable! Forgive me! Forgive me," he pleaded, his rough voice broken with an emotion greater than he had ever felt before.

"You must understand, James dear, that I simply cannot endure irritability," she replied, unperturbed.

" I shall always feel the same. When we are married, you must always wait to come near me, until your temper is under control. I cannot be bullied."

He prostrated himself, figuratively, before her. Never should she hear a harsh word from him! In reply to his pleading, she gave him the cool, sweet oval of her cheek, and allowed him to hold her hand and kiss each carefully manicured finger separately.

" They ought to be here, by now," she sighed, as they sat down together upon a couch, well protected from all draughts by a fine lacquered folding screen.

" As for me, I can wait very patiently," observed James, with an attempt at lightness. " So near Christmas time, the train is very likely to be late."

" You will be good to Germaine, James dear? You must understand that all is at an end between us unless you can promise that. She will, of course, continue to live here with her grandfather, who is so devoted to her; but my house must be always open to her."

" Of course, of course. But before we marry, Emmie, I must come to a very definite understanding with Matthew. He has made my son his legal heir, and I mean to see that he keeps to that. Granddaughter or no granddaughter, he is not going to disappoint Peree." Mr. Byles's strong north-country accent made his son's name sound like "Purrus!"

" Oh, James, you would not have my poor little Germaine go without a dowry? "

" Of course not, but she shall not have Gray Ashtead, while I am alive to prevent it. A d—d Frenchman's daughter! "

Without a word, his lady-love rose and walked away. This time he had offended seriously. He followed her, pleading, repenting, urging. She was for some time inexorable.

" I will not be sworn at, I will not be spoken to in that manner. I will not allow Constant's memory

to be insulted," she gently told him. "If you cannot behave yourself, then we will break off our engagement. I shall never change. You will always have to be on your good behaviour with me. If you feel that this will be too great an effort, then it is better to make an end of things while yet there is time. Your manners are simply execrable."

She was quite safe in going so far. The man was abject. To marry her he would have done anything she might have exacted. Otherwise, she would not have dared so much, for she fully intended to marry him and be mistress of his house and his money. Here at Gray Ashtead she must always play third fiddle. Rosalie was mistress, and her father cared for Germaine and had never loved herself. She would be mistress of her own house and the first object of some one's devotion, even were that some one James Byles.

He had promised her a motor and chauffeur of her own, munificent pin-money, and a flat in town. He was lavishing jewellery upon her. The only thorn in her soft couch was a doubt as to how the news would strike Germaine.

A reconciliation had hardly been effected between them when the approaching motors were heard.

The butler, hastening into the hall, sounded the gong, and Rosalie came running downstairs. In another minute the travellers had arrived, and Germaine was folded in the arms of a mother in a state of most unwonted agitation.

The first thing which struck Rosalie's quick eye was that Germaine had altered. There was something in her face which had not been there before. What was it?

She was looking well, her beauty perhaps greater than before. She did not look unhappy, but there was a gravity—a poise——

It was difficult to define; but it was as though the

girl had retreated into herself. She was less spontaneous, less unguarded. This seemed surprising, since the change from being the responsible breadwinner to being her grandfather's petted darling should have produced a different effect.

The news—which Matthew was too eager to announce for him to be able to wait, even an hour—seemed to supply a clue. Pereivale and his cousin had become engaged to be married!

Mrs. Damien was delighted. To her mind this solved the whole difficulty of the inheritance. Yet in a way it piqued her. Once again her young daughter and not herself was become the centre of attraction. What did the elderly engagement between her and her old suitor amount to, beside the tremendous tidings of a union between the two possible heirs to the Carewe property?

Her mother's betrothal was, to Germaine, a shock more deep than that mother could have any idea of. It was not merely her jealousy for her own father's memory, it was the strong personal antagonism between herself and Mr. Byles which caused the sinking of the girl's heart. Though her mother had never been her friend, yet she had been, for many years, the chief interest of her life, the object to be considered, the goal of endeavour. Now she was to depart utterly. As regards cutting herself off from her daughter, she might almost as well be dead as married to James Byles. In the background of her own squashy mind, she vaguely knew this herself. It made her very vehement in her assurance that James's house was always open to her darling, it was to be her second home.

James, himself, was by no means delighted with the announcement of his son's betrothal.

The public method of its announcement, by "that old fool, Matthew," prevented him from being able to express his opinion.

He stood with hands in pockets, grimly frowning, and muttering to himself under his breath, "bad blood, bad blood—bad, revolutionary, French blood!"

He foresaw, however, that he could not have the relief of expressing his sentiments to Emmie. He would be obliged to keep his tongue between his teeth, since here was his own betrothed, weeping for joy, hanging about her daughter's neck, calling upon him for congratulations and raptures.

It was an uncomfortable quarter of an hour for all of them, though Matthew himself was entirely pleased. He would get rid of Emmie, who was wholly uninteresting to him, and he would have his darling, Germaine, permanently with him; for he was as determined that the young couple should live at Gray Ashted as Percivale was that they would not.

The fact of the newly made alterations gave everybody something else to talk about. It amused Percivale and Rosalie to see how visibly anxious the old autocrat was for the approval of the girl who had so captivated his heart.

Together they wandered from room to room, commending or doubting, criticizing or admiring, deciding what must be purchased to stand here, or what they could do to carry on a certain idea from one stage to another.

The subject completely filled in an evening which might otherwise have held awkward moments.

When the men were left to their wine after dessert, James Byles spoke with extreme plainness to Matthew about his son's prospects. He could not, however, be otherwise than pleased by the old man's frank statement of his intentions. Since Percivale and Germaine had fallen in with his dearest wish, they would have everything in his power to bestow, with the exception of what he should settle upon

Emmie, and an annuity to be paid to Rosalie during her life.

" Percivale is the luckiest young man on this earth," declared Matthew. " He is marrying a girl who is not merely a beauty, but has the most perfect disposition and very real brain-power. It is a union which seems almost too ideal to be actual fact."

" That's as may be," returned the pessimistic James, grimly. " Let us hope the girl turns out as fair as she looks. It's a bewildering path that a girl whose looks make fools o' men has to tread. It makes a many of 'em dizzy. Happen her head's strong."

" It is," returned her grandfather. " She inherits that from me."

Upon which James muttered something under his breath which might have been, " Lord help us ! "

Germaine carried up with her to her regenerated sleeping apartment one or two letters which had arrived too late for forwarding.

One was from Dannie, joyfully accepting the invitation to pass Christmas at Gray Ashtead, with her travelling expenses paid. She had moved into the little house which had been Germaine's home for so many strenuous years, and was so happy that she sometimes dreaded lest she might awaken and find it all a dream.

Germaine smiled, with a glow of true pleasure over the purring contentment of the little woman's letter.

She sat upon a downy Chesterfield which stood before the fire that burned in her last new thing in fire-places. Wherever she turned, in this nest of luxury, everything was a delight to the eye. The dingy paper, the inlaid pitch-pine, were all gone, and the place was a harmony alike in line and colour.

This was her home, during all her life to come—her home, with Percivale !

As she leaned her chin upon her two upturned palms, the picture of Fendallseombe was before her eyes. She saw the hall, the old, faded drawing-room; Madame's little sofa, with the small carpet in front of it, and an empire table with gilt legs.

She smelled the fragrance of the roses that leaned in at her window—the window of that room where she had passed hours of mental torment which she still shuddered to recall. She saw Miles sitting all alone with his *Times* at the end of the table in the long panelled dining-room, looking on the terrace.

So plainly could she see it that her present surroundings faded out of sight. His face—every feature—the light in his eyes, when he had stood and faced her in the Roman Street—the moonlight on his white, stricken features in the hotel garden.

Her long-ago, foolish hate had given to this man a life-long hold upon her. In a way which she resented, she was his, and Percivale could never know. It seemed to her that this locked door kept Percivale out. He was not near enough—no nearer—not so near, as he had been when they sat at Ostia in the Temple of Neptune.

It was bewildering, and it was, somehow, wrong. Yet she determined that, upon this, her first night at home, she must not dwell upon the subject. To turn her thoughts, she went on reading Dannie's letter and its enclosures. There was to be an immense Suffrage demonstration in Leeds. The north was going to emulate the south, and a huge procession was being organized. Of course Germaine would walk in the procession, and she was also wanted to sit on the Platform at the mass meeting afterwards, and to make a speech.

The girl grasped at the whole scheme.

Here was something definite, tangible, keenly interesting, into which she could throw herself, and

which would hold her back from dwelling upon her secret trouble.

She sat down before her writing-table, lavishly furnished with all requisites, and wrote to Dannie, making plans for the proession and meeting, before she lay down to sleep in her sybarite couch.

CHAPTER II

RÉMY TAKES A HAND

IN the small and somewhat dingy drawing-room of Gunhatch, Hilda Lenox sat alone, crouching on the fender-stool before a roaring fire. The drawn curtains and the lamplight made a cosy interior, veiling the shabbiness and concealing the shortcomings.

Outside, the weather was lamentable—too bad for there to be a chance of visitors; and Hilda was cursing her stars in solitude. Mrs. Lenox had departed, as she always did early in January, to visit her mother, the Dowager Lady Tweede, a strait-laced old person who so energetically disapproved of her granddaughter, that Hilda was never included in the invitation. "Of course," said Mrs. Lenox, "if you could only make a good marriage the old snob would come round fast enough." She herself had been persuaded that Hilda's charm, if a trifle daring, was such as would tempt somebody. For the past year or so, however, this opinion was growing shaken.

Hilda was trying her eyes by attempting to read the local newspaper by the flickering light of the flames, and something she found therein caused her to put down the page upon her knee, with a curl of her disdainful lip.

As she did so, there came the unexpected and welcome sound of the front-door bell. A moment of excitement and uncertainty, and the maid announced "Mr. Damien."

Hilda half sighed and half smiled. It might have

been better, but it also manifestly might have been far worse. She unwound herself slowly from her pose, and held out a slim warm hand.

"Oh, you are a Godsend!" she remarked. "Such beastly weather—what?"

"That was the inducement. Certain to find you at home," replied Rémy, who had established himself at Gunhatch as something of an intimate.

The girl re-seated herself upon her fender-stool, stretching herself in the warmth, like a cat, and knowing that his eyes were upon her sinuous movements. "I was so bored that I was actually reduced to the reading of the *Carford Herald*! I was a bit amused by something that I saw there!"

"Amused! Since when has the *Herald* become amusing? I should like to see the paragraph, because I take you to be a judge of wit."

"Oh, it isn't a case of wit. It is the bare fact which amuses me. Look here!"

The light was so bad that Rémy had to rise from his seat and hold the paper under the solitary lamp, in its dingy red petticoat.

THE GREAT DEMONSTRATION IN THE NORTH.

SUFFRAGETTES PREPARING ON A GRAND SCALE!

MARCH PAST AND MEETING IN THE GREAT HALL.

MILLIONAIRE'S HEIRESS TO ADDRESS THE CROWD.

PORTRAITS OF MISS GERMAINE DAMIEN AND HER FIANCÉ, MR. PERCIVALE CAREWE.

(Here followed medallion portraits of the two young people.)

"The fact that Mr. Carewe's granddaughter is interesting herself in the Suffrage movement is likely to have far-reaching effects in Carford. We may be sure that those employed in the Carewe mills will be in attendance at the meeting, and that the appearance of this beautiful young lady as the champion of her sex will prove an enormous attraction. Miss Damien will give an account of her own mishandling and 'pitching out' from a political meeting, merely because she asked a question of the candidate."

Rémy read this through with deep and absorbed interest.

"Jove!" said he, seating himself once more, "I wonder how young Carewe likes that?"

"Or old Matt?" returned the girl, with a sneer. "The question is, how much will they stand? It seems to me that a woman can just do anything she likes on this mortal earth, if only she is pretty enough."

"She has certainly grown up pretty," returned Rémy grudgingly. Something indefinable in his tone made Hilda look up quickly. "Did you know much of her when she was a child?" she asked lazily.

"That's a difficult question to answer. I *saw* a good deal of her. My poor mother did her best to befriend her. But as to knowing—Miss Germaine takes a good deal of knowing, I think."

She considered him profoundly, under her bent brows. "You speak as if you were not particularly fond of your beautiful niece."

"Oh, pardon me," cried Rémy, shocked. "How could that be? Even if it were so, should I be likely to betray the fact to you, her particular friend?"

"Her particular friend? Oh, mercy! I would as soon be friends with a statue of Minerva!" cried Hilda fervently. "She's a fad—a crank—a propa-

gandist—the most profound, unutterable bore I ever struck! Friend indeed!”

The tone spoke volumes, and told Rémy many things. He smiled to himself.

“How does that suit young Carewe?” he asked after a pause.

Unclasping her hands from about her knees, she spread them out expressively. “Ugh! Don’t talk about it! That marriage will be a disaster!”

For a long moment he gazed into the fire without replying: then—“I agree with you,” he gravely said. “I think it will.”

A thrill passed through her. His tone was extraordinarily suggestive. She eyed him hungrily. “Why do you think so?” she almost whispered.

He let his eyes rest upon her for a moment, gauging the exact effect he had produced. “Let us leave these delicate family matters and talk of something else. Have you seen the Marquis lately?”

Their looks met and crossed. She understood. It was Rémy’s ambition to be acquainted with the Marquis of Carford, a youngish, not very strong-minded man, who was going the pace. Since his lordship was by way of flinging his money about, it seemed a pity that none should be flung in Rémy’s direction. The Lenoxes were the only people he knew, whose personal intimacy would make it possible for them to give the coveted introduction. He had thrown out several hints, and Hilda, though understanding them perfectly, had, at her mother’s bidding, been deaf to all of it. Now she perceived, with equal clearness, that he was offering her a *quid pro quo*. He had let her know, with no words said, that he possessed knowledge of a kind disparaging to Germaine, and that this knowledge was for sale at the price of an introduction to the Marquis.

“I met him quite lately,” was the reply she made to his spoken question. “You know, the Gorrings

want him to take over the hounds, and he says it is too much, fag. I believe"—she spoke as if reflecting—"he might be induced to do it, if somebody would undertake the hard work—secretarial, and so on. I suppose that would not tempt you?"

He shrugged his shoulders, looking not at all eager. "Bit of a fag," he said, "but of course I cannot pretend that I am very busy just now. The difficulty of my taking any work lies in my wife. I never know when she will up stakes and away to the end of the world. I fancy, however, that she will stay here now until Easter. She enjoys the runs immensely."

"Mother's away," said Hilda after a pause, "so I couldn't well invite Mrs. Damien. But dad's not hard to deal with. I might get Carford and you to dinner with just nobody else, and we could have auction bridge?"

"Delightful," he murmured.

Her lip curled. "Shall we invite the engaged couple to meet you?" she slyly suggested.

"Ah!" said Rémy, "there would not be much fear of their accepting your invitation I fancy, if my niece knew I should be present. I fancy she would prefer to avoid reminiscences of her childhood."

"I expect," said Hilda suddenly, "that you know that man who turned up in Rome, don't you—the man who paid for her education and so on—Miles Burnside?"

His face showed that he was surprised. "Did Burnside turn up in Rome?"

"Most romantically. He rescued Germaine—or old Matt chose to suppose that he rescued her—from some kind of a riot in the Piazza di Spagna. He's as handsome as she is, and, I believe, every bit as dull. I wished he would have stayed longer, but he fled from us. Old Matt insisted upon his dining with us, but Germaine got hold of him afterwards, out in

the garden, and we never saw him more. He left Rome precipitately. Perhaps you know why."

"I suppose I could make a guess," admitted Rémy; continuing after a pause—"Of course I know Burnside. His father married my mother. We had to live in the same house for a portion of our lives. You know what terrible things those step-relationships are—or, fortunately for you, you don't. Men as unlike as the Pole and the Equator have pretended to be brothers! Ah, the dear old hypocrisy of British domesticity! How much it has to answer for!"

"Then he is no kind of relation of Germaine?"

"None whatever. My mother asked him to allow her to invite her granddaughter to visit in his house. He agreed. He was always very decent to my mother, I will say that for him. It was part of his plaguey British pride, I suppose. Well, you know, the child, Germaine, preferred me to him. He was a gruff sort, and never tried to make himself pleasant to her; but he was always kind of me, and when the child began to show dislike of him and devotion to me, I can assure you I was very pleased."

"Well, what then?" asked Hilda, when he paused for some time.

"What then? Oh—nothing particular. It caused unpleasantness, that's all."

She looked at him with half-shut eyes. "I thought you were going to tell me something interesting," she said, with a sigh. "I have just been thinking that, after all, I had better not worry dad about asking Carford here. Mother might not like it while she is away."

He bent forward with a whimsical smile, seeking her eyes, which were downcast. "Little Hilda," said he caressingly, "what would you give to have the match between Percy Carewe and my niece broken off? Is that plain speaking?"

She flung back her head, looking at him defiantly: "Oh, you are odious. You think it is mere spite and jealousy! I tell you it is not! It is just that I happen to be a judge of character, and I know Percy in and out, through and through! I foresee what a failure his marriage must be, and it maddens me—the folly of it!" She clenched those little, ineffectual hands of hers.

"I am a poor devil, Hilda," he said, after a minute. "I am not much good in the world, but I am your friend. I could stop this marriage if I told what I knew; but I am so devilish hard up that I should have to ask my price."

She looked at him, half sullen, half inclined to be confidential. His eyes were alight with kindness—with that radiance of expression which all his life had endeared him to women. He went on without waiting for an answer—"But let us try other methods first; because I don't want to cook the poor kid's goose altogether. I would rather help you without having to injure her. How about this suffrage craze of hers? Can't you represent to him that this kind of thing must be stopped? You mark my words. If he attempts to coerce her, she will jilt him!"

"Oh, but she couldn't! She couldn't! She hasn't a penny but what old Matt gives her, and he is set upon the match—dead set upon it! She dare not back out!"

"Does she care about Percivale, do you think?"

"Not a scrap! She is just doing the obvious thing to secure her own position! He is taken of his feet by her beauty, and she has him in her pocket there in the house, to do as she likes with! But she isn't in love—she couldn't be—she hasn't got it in her! I couldn't make you understand half how stupid she is! She is just blundering on to destruction!"

The tears were in her eyes. She, Hilda, for once in her life, had lowered her guard. Rémy had her at his mercy.

In the pause after her last sentence, they both heard the sound of an approaching motor. He said hurriedly—

"If what you say be true, then it would be a righteous act to stop the marriage if we could. Have you thought of it in that light?"

"I've thought of it in every light, but what can I do? I've no money, no opportunity—when I was in Italy with them, you might as well have told a man falling over Niagara to stop and consider the view, as make Pereivale notice anybody but her."

She checked herself abruptly as the maid opened the door and announced—"Mr. Pereivale Carewe."

"Hallo!" said Pereivale, coming in gaily, "isn't Germaine here? She said I was to call for her in the motor, but I suppose it was too beastly wet for the governor to let her come out."

"But, as you are here, you might stay a few minutes," said Hilda, when they had exchanged salutations. "Mr. Damien and I were just talking of you; we are so surprised and interested to hear that Mr. Carewe approves of Germaine's suffrage campaign."

"Germaine's what?" he asked blankly.

Hilda glanced at Rémy. "Surely you have seen the *Herald*?"

He took the paper which Rémy held out to him, mechanically, and gazed at the sensational headlines.

"I don't believe the governor knows one word of this," he said at last. "I feel sure that he won't permit it."

Hilda turned with a relish his red face and disturbed aspect.

"Do you mean," said she, "that Mr. Carewe can prevent Germaine from doing what she likes?"

"Oh, you don't know how sweet and lovable she is," he replied impetuously. "She wouldn't do anything he didn't like for worlds."

"That is good hearing," said Rémy pleasantly. "Odd how charming some people grow up after being quite disagreeable as children. My niece is evidently a case in point."

"You don't mean that Germaine was a disagreeable child?" asked Pereivale rather mockingly. "Mr. Burnside, whom we met in Rome, told a very different tale."

"Ah well—he ought to know," replied Rémy, with a very peculiar inflection of voice. "She was certainly headstrong, and, if I may so far presume upon my relationship as to criticize, I should add that this trait seems to have persisted, if she could allow herself and her family to be thus advertised without your knowledge."

Pereivale hardly heard. He was thinking how furious the Willises—already sore at having lost the election—would be if the story of Germaine's chucking-out were related from a Carford platform. He collected himself, however. "I must be wrong," he said. "No doubt Mr. Carewe does know. I have not been home all day, and shall probably find that he and she arranged it between them. We have all been much occupied in other ways lately—you know, my father and her mother are to be married next week, and we have been helping them with their furnishing, and so on."

"I'm looking forward to the wedding no end," said Hilda sleepily; "what is Mrs. Damien going to wear?"

"Oh, you must ask Germaine that. Somebody said moonlight blue and chinchilla fur; but that conveys nothing to my mind."

"Mr. Carewe was so kind as to invite my wife and me," said Rémy. "I am all curiosity to behold

the lady who, after being the wife of my brother, is to wed that particularly unattractive person, Mr. James Byles."

He checked himself, warned by a gurgling laugh from Hilda, and the admonition of her suède slipper against his boot. "What have I said?"

"Blunderer! Don't you know that Mr. Byles is Pereivale's father?"

"But of course I never knew it—how should I? Surely your name is Carewe?" he cried, embarrassed, turning to Pereivale.

"Yes. My father allowed me to change it, upon being made Mr. Carewe's legal heir."

"A-a-ah!" murmured Rémy, enlightened.

CHAPTER III

"WOMAN IS THE LESSER MAN"

GERMAINE and Dannie returning from a committee meeting in Carford, so prolonged as to leave no time for the projected call at Gunhateh, reached Gray Ashtead in the motor only just in time to dress for dinner. Germaine was in high spirits, her mind active, her emotions stirred. The feeling of nameless dissatisfaction which had weighed upon her ever since her meeting with Miles Burnside in Rome was forgotten. Life once more smiled upon her, rainbow coloured.

At her age one is not, as a rule, deeply self analytical. She was aware, somewhere in the depths of her, that her engagement to Pereivale had not brought her the happiness she expected. She assumed, without much heart-searching, that this was because she was not the kind of person to take pleasure in what she called "spooning." Her fiancé was perhaps just a little too devoted. He was, beyond doubt, supremely interested in herself; but he could not be described as interested in her pursuits. Dannie bored him to extinction, so Germaine naturally, when he was present, refrained from speaking of the woman question, or other such topics, upon which her mind was really engaged, and occupied herself with billiards or auction bridge, or even in trying to be keen upon the local hunt.

She resolutely put from her the notion that these things bored her; but, none the less, she turned with

delight to those realities of life which Dannie's coming brought once more to the fore. The real world of working, struggling, suffering men and women swam once more into her ken. She had for a time been enclosed, as it were, within the park palings of her new life, and everything had taken on an artificial aspect.

With Dannie, she could be her true self. The arrangements for the Carford Suffrage campaign brought her back into the fighting line, and all the revolutionary in her rejoiced.

She ran downstairs that evening, with a snatch of song upon her lips. Percivale was waiting for her, at the foot of the staircase.

"Darling," he said, "Grandfather wants to see you in the library."

They repaired together along the corridor behind the hall, to the stiff apartment wherein Matthew Carewe transacted business. It was more like an office than a library. Germaine meant one day to take it in hand.

Her grandfather looked up as the young couple entered, with a look upon his face of mingled affection and irritation.

"Ah, here comes the culprit," he said, in tones meant to be severe.

"The culprit!" echoed Germaine in amazement, "why, what in the world have I been and gone and done?"

Without a word, he pushed the Carford *Herald* across the table to her. She took it up, glanced at the photos, then at Percivale, with a gleam of fun.

"Why, Gran, surely you don't hold me responsible for the way the local printer has treated Percivale's beautiful nose?"

"I want to know, you young villain, how far you are responsible for the local interviewer's cheek?"

"Have they said anything very awful? I glanced over it, and did not think it particularly offensive," she responded, taking up the paper and studying the column.

"But, my precious child," said Matthew seriously, "surely you see that this kind of thing will never do?"

"The newspaper publicity?" she asked, puzzled. "But of course, darling, we *must* use advertisement. Such a cause as we have on hand *has* to be helped by the press. We can't do without it. The Suffrage never progressed at all as long as the newspaper boycott lasted."

He cleared his throat, and looked down at the table. Germaine came round and perched herself upon one of his knees. She was so lovely, in her diaphanous gown, that he smiled, in spite of himself.

"Doesn't it occur to you, madcap, that you had no right at all to say you would have anything to do with all this stuff, until you had consulted Percivale and me?"

She looked a little dashed. "Percivale is not interested in social questions," she said after a minute: "and I never supposed—I never thought for a minute—that either of you would object to my doing as I feel to be right."

"But you see you can't do this kind of thing in public, Ermie, without dragging us all in," said Percivale, a little petulantly.

Germaine looked reproachfully at her grandfather. "You promised," she murmured, "that I should never be a slave to your caprice. I assure you, most earnestly, I never for a moment supposed that your consent was to be obtained in this matter."

"Well, the fact of it is, darling," said Matthew very fondlingly, "that Percivale is right in saying that any sort of public appearance of yours draws us all in. Here he is, poor chap, you see, pilloried

in this silly rag, as a champion of the Suffrage, when he takes no interest in it at all——"

"I'm sorry for that, Gran. It was not my fault. I do not know where they got the photos, and of course I had no idea they were going to put them in. But I am a little puzzled. Percivale not only did not mind when our photos appeared in the *Daily Rally*—he actually sent them, and paid to have them published."

"That was very different," said Percivale at once. "That was just the announcement of our engagement. It did not commit me to any of this silly rot. Why, I hope to stand for Parliament myself, next election, and I shall be hampered at every turn by these unsexed women——"

Germaine made a movement as if to jump up, and Matthew held his hand out to stop Percivale.

"They spoil every election they put their blooming foot into," went on the young man, nevertheless. "I am awfully sorry, Ermie, but it is best for me to tell you, straight out, that I have no sympathy with all this nonsense. It is my definite wish that you have nothing to do with this meeting, and that you cancel your promise to speak, or even to appear."

There was a pause. "Oh, Percivale, you can't mean that," said the girl at last, in a low, hurt voice.

"I am afraid I do mean it, Ermie."

"Little girl," said her grandfather tenderly, "are you not happy here with us? Can you not leave these questions to such people as poor little Miss Danby, who have no home interests, nothing else to occupy them? Must you be making public appearances, wanting to stand up on a platform before all these rough people—after your experience at Breeonstead?"

"Oh, Gran!" murmured the girl. She rose from his knee, and took her seat upon a chair.

"Can't you see," she pleaded, "that the mere fact

that I am so happy, so safe, so sheltered, increases my obligation to do something for those who are not? I feel like the Princess in the poem—

"Once it came into my heart, and whelmed me, like a flood
That these too are men and women, human flesh and blood—
Men with hearts and men with souls, though trodden down like
mud!

They shall take all, to buy them life—take all I have to give.
I, if I perish, perish—they to-day shall eat, and live! . . .

Once to speak before the world, rend bare my heart, and show
The lesson I have learned, which is death, is life to know:
I, if I perish, perish: in the name of God I go!"

As she burst into the quotation Germaine rose to her feet. The vehemence, the sincerity of her own feeling, shook her. Her voice quivered with the intensity of the words she uttered, and her grandfather, listening, grew hot and cold by turns. He hardly knew what he felt: pride in her, and a certain middle-class embarrassment, fought within him; but paramount was the determination that this passionate creature must not be allowed to stand up in public and inflame the hearts of the people.

Percivale listened with a depth of disapproval which surprised himself. He heard, as it were, with Hilda Lenox's ears. He saw her half-shut eyes, her mocking smile. How she would despise this outburst of sentimentalism! For a minute he wondered why he had asked Germaine to marry him. Then he raised his eyes. She stood there, warm, palpitating, starry-eyed. A rush of admiration fought with his disgust.

"My darling," said Matthew, shaking his head, "it won't do. I honour you for your feeling, for your unselfish championship. But you must leave it to others to do work of this kind. You have different duties before you. You are pledged to Percivale, and, as his wife, public propaganda will be out of

your line. Leave women of mature judgment, women of leisure, to stand up on public platforms. You belong to us, and we cannot share you with the crowd."

She tossed back her head. "And when Perey stands for Parliament, he will not want me to help in his election——?"

Her lover broke in. "Certainly not to speak on public platforms——"

"Oh no! Merely to make my way down private slums where men don't care to go—vote-eatching! To sit, in my prettiest clothes, in dirty rooms among infection germs—vote-eatching! Anything secret, underground, indirect—using my powers of wheedling, the only powers, say you, that nature meant me to use!"

Matthew put out his gnarled hand and laid it upon hers. "Oh, Gran," she besought him, "you feel it too—you know what I mean! Pereivale will want me to sit upon the platform at his meetings, showing myself to crowds of people—he will not think that degrading for his wife, because she is doing it on his behalf! Yet for my own sex, who have nobody to speak for them——" She paused, for tears were not far off.

"Ernie, if Perey feels so strongly on this point, ought you not to defer to him? Has he not the nearest, the most intimate claim upon you? After all, he should mean most to you——"

Pereivale came a little nearer. He looked very eager, and remarkably handsome. Into his eyes had crept the glint of battle. If he could conquer here and now, he felt that the thing would be done, once for all—Damien and Hilda could not sneer then.

"Oh, my precious," he said fervently, "if you could know how I feel about it! If you could understand what Gran and I both felt when we saw you there, among the wild beasts, at the Breconstead

meeting! Ermie, I don't say it's for ever—I don't say I want to make you conform to my opinions in everything—I only want you to have a little pity on me just now, during this short, beautiful time of our engagement—when I do want to have you all to myself—when I cannot somehow help feeling savagely jealous of any cause that draws your heart off, away from me, even for a few hours!"

This was the right note. Matthew saw the change sweep over Germaine's sensitive face. He hastened to back the boy up. "Can't you realize how cruelly it hurts that this thing should be sprung upon him, *Ermie*?" he said, more gravely than he had ever spoken to her. "How would you have liked it, in his place? To have this vulgar rag shown to him by people who were amused at his discomfiture—to have to feel that you must have been responsible at least for some of it?"

Germaine's generosity awoke at once. "Oh, *Percivale*, I am sorry! I ought to have remembered! I ought not to have allowed this to come out without asking you first! I did not realize a bit! I didn't know they would make so much of it, nor that you would feel it so keenly. I am very, very sorry. Forgive me for hurting you!"

He drew her close to him, and kissed her soft cheek. As he so held her, he felt that she might do as she pleased, he could not give her up.

"But, *Percivale* dear," she went on, more firmly, when he had wiped her eyes, "you will see that, as far as this meeting is concerned, I cannot now go back. I stand pledged, and I must fulfil my engagement. Gran will agree with me there."

"No!" cried *Percivale*, holding her more closely, "I can't have it, *Ermie*! That would be the thin end of the wedge! Once you had spoken and appeared for this confounded Suffrage, you would stand committed for all the future! That's what I want to prevent!

"That's what will spoil my election chances ! Ermie, give it up ! Give it up, for my sake ! I will make it all right for you with the League or whatever it is—Gran will make it all right ! We'll do the disagreeable for you ! Only just let me have these next few weeks without this weight upon me—without the thought of the awful day when I should have to face the press comments upon you, my white dove, stuck up there for crows to peck at ! I tell you, I can't bear it !"

She grew white. Her grandfather watched her colour fade—watched, with the traitor hope somewhere in the depths of him, that she would hold out yet. She laid her hand upon her lover's coat.

"Percivale, let me go ! Let me go away ! I must think this out ! I must fight it out with my conscience. I—for the minute—I can't see which way my duty lies."

"Let her go, Percy," said Matt, hoarsely. "It is not fair to use any kind of constraint. Leave her her freedom."

Percivale unclasped his arms, and the girl, with a little moan, let herself sink upon her grandfather's knees. "Tell him," she faltered, with choking sobs, "explain to him that I can't break promises—that I must keep my word——"

Then, suddenly, in a swift silence, she was gone, leaving the two staring at each other ; Percivale quite bewildered, old Matt with the thought that not even Percivale was worthy of his darling.

After all, it was Dannie who came to the rescue—Dannie, who was so largely indebted to the bounty of her host, and who feared lest she might be looked upon as a corrupter of youth. She took the undeniable ground that Percivale had a right to have been consulted before Germaine made her arrangements. Germaine was to be his wife. He had the prior claim.

To this Early Victorian attitude she adhered, in spite of a great deal of eloquence from Germaine.

"It is not a question of sacrificing your principles, but merely of refraining from action just at the present time," she maintained. "I am not saying that you must do everything he tells you, but I am saying that you have no right to take important steps without consulting him, and I should say equally that he has no right to take important steps without consulting you. Suppose that he, without your knowledge, wrote and asked Lady Dormant, head of the Antis, to come to your wedding, and Lord Royle, who contributed half the funds to the Anti-Suffrage campaign, to be his best man. Should you not think it, to say the least of it, inconsiderate?"

Germaine admitted it.

"There is many a young man," went on Dannie, "who would not show the consistency and honesty of dear young Mr. Carewe. They will let a girl do anything she likes before marriage, and then they turn round upon her. He begins as he means to go on, and when you do something that he thinks needs explaining, he comes straight into the open, and instead of sulking or quarrelling, he lays the matter before your excellent grandfather, and gives you the chance to talk it out sensibly. In my opinion, he is a young man in a thousand; and you see, darling, by the time you are married, and his election is at hand, in all probability the Suffrage will have been carried, and it will be all right. Men are extremely conservative, but their very conservatism reconciles them to things, when once those things have become the law of the land."

"Humph!" was all that Germaine had to say to this.

Her affectionate uncle's prophecy did not, however, come true. She allowed herself to be coerced,

and she did not break off her engagement. She suffered, in health and spirits, but she said little. All her sympathy and attention were needed by the lady who was to be Mrs. Byles. As the wedding day approached, she found herself in a state of increasing disquiet.

Mr. Burnside had accepted an invitation to be a guest in the house on the occasion.

CHAPTER IV

"THE LAST TIME"

TOWARDS the end of January the weather turned very cold, and snow fell in the north of England.

As Miles Burnside was driven in the motor, through the park to Gray Ashtead, the moon lit up the wide expanse of whiteness, and made it look like a fairy-tale demesne. The crisply frozen snow lay heavily upon the broad boughs of the stately trees, and glittered in the rays of the half moon, which turned their upper surfaces to diamonds and silver.

The beauty and weirdness of it gave him a sense of unreality. Snow was a thing of which he saw but little in his mild Devon valley. His many winters abroad caused him to think of it as something which crowned the mountains in splendour, but not as something which extended all around one—which covered the whole face of the world as in an old-fashioned Christmas story!

It seemed that his unprecedented visit had been accorded an unprecedented setting.

Restlessness was the dominant emotion of his mind. He was tossed between regret at having accepted the invitation, and impatient desire to be at his journey's end. Nobody had been at the station to meet him. The chauffeur brought many apologies. They were all so busy up at the house, to-morrow being the wedding day.

He could fancy it. Naturally they were busy; the bride's daughter more especially. No doubt he

would have but a slender chance of private talk with her. He had been a fool to come. Yet he owed it to Germaine to make some kind of explanation or apology. He had behaved atrociously in Rome. His utter, fatuous disappointment upon hearing the news of her commonplace, obvious engagement to the gilded cousin had so repelled him, so shattered his ideal of her, that he had succeeded in leaving her under an erroneous impression; and, if she were at all like the Germaine of other days, she must have suffered. In any case, it was necessary to reassure himself upon the point.

As the motor came to a stand-still at the door, he glimpsed an interior which, lacking though it did the ancient dignity of his own old place, yet seemed to the arriving guest to have so much charm as to make of Germaine's openly expressed preference for Fendallseombe, a compliment of a peculiarly subtle flavour.

Matthew Carewe and Pereivale were both in the hall to greet him, and their cordiality left nothing to desire. He was the only guest coming from a distance—they thought it good of him to take so long a journey. His coming was a source of deep gratification to Mrs. Damien, who had, on her husband's side, so few family connections, that it was a matter of congratulation indeed that both were able to be present.

"Both?" he asked, drawing off his gloves in the warm airiness of the place, which struck him as resembling an Orchardson interior—pale yet mellow.

Yes, both. His half-brother, Mr. Damien, and his wife, were living near and were expected to-morrow.

Miles remembered then that Germaine had told him of Rémy's being not far off. Her final shattering piece of news had thrown all others out of perspective, and the unwelcome proximity of his step-brother had been forgotten. As Pereivale escorted him up to

his room, he reflected that to see Rémy would be an excellent plan. He could let him know how imperative his silence must for ever be.

Percivale's own room was already busy unpacking and arranging his things, in a well-lighted, well-heated and luxurious room. When he had sent him away, and had leisure to look round, he found the books in his shelves so well-chosen that he felt sure Germaine and not her future husband must have made the selection. Something there was, too, somewhere, which had a home-like feeling—some subtle interpenetrating suggestion of Fendallscombe lingered in the air—or the furniture—or—where was it?

He stood gazing about him, drawing in his breath, trying to capture something which suggested Devon. Ha! A scent! No bringer-to-mind of other days or climes so subtle as perfume. Something among the flowers on his writing-table. He stooped. Yes, it was lemon-scented verbena; and the memory of the great bush which grew by the hall door, upon the sunny south-facing terrace, flooded him.

Was that accidental? He remembered how she told him, in Rome, that she remembered every little thing about Fendallscombe. She had mentioned his old, agate-handled riding-whip, and since his return home he had used it every day. He could not believe that this suggestive fragrance had been included in his posy by accident.

He stood, lost in thought, for so long that he was almost late for dinner. All of them were assembled in the hall when he came down. The bridegroom-elect and himself were the only additions to the family.

When the necessary introductions had been duly made, Germaine approached him with a constraint which hurt him acutely. He noticed at once that she was changed. Some alteration had passed subtly over her since he saw her in Rome. With

a sinking heart he realized that she did not look happy.

It was not long before he told himself that this was but natural, since she was to lose her mother the following day. At that mother he looked with keen interest. Was it possible that a mother and daughter could be so little alike? It was quite a study in physiology to compare the one with the other. And yet—so subtle a thing is heredity and so anxious is nature to blend the sexes, that he saw in Germaine a distinct, almost a striking, likeness to her grandfather. She was less a Damien than she had been as a child, her resemblance to Rémy was much less strong. Looking at Matthew Carewe, in all the self-confidence of material success and prosperity, Miles detected a glimpse of that quality one saw in his granddaughter's eyes—the quality of looking through, rather than at a person or thing: and surmised a hidden group of traits, tucked somewhere away unused in the self-made manufacturer—something that only a woman could have developed—only the touch of a beloved woman. It seemed more than probable that no woman had ever loved Matthew Carewe—certain that he had not married a woman whom he loved. The love that should have been his in youth had now undergone subtle transmutation, and had re-awakened in the guise of devotion to his sole descendant. His eyes followed Germaine about the room, rested upon her constantly. Miles had not been long in the house before he noticed that, if she began to speak, Matthew would abruptly break off what he was saying to someone else, in order to listen.

Miles sat next her at dinner, for she was on her grandfather's left, he on Aunt Rosalie's right, the engaged pair, opposite, being divided by Percivale, whose joke it was to call Mrs. Damien "Ma."

The conversation throughout the meal was, of

course, general, and everyone made desperate efforts to throw off constraint, and as Percivale put it, "to be funny without being vulgar."

To these efforts, Miles lent himself manfully. He had behind him a long experience of making conversation with all kinds of people in foreign hotels, and though he was neither funny nor voluble, he was without doubt interesting.

Aunt Rosalie admired him extremely. When the ladies had gone into the drawing-room, she wanted to know why nobody had ever told her what an exceptionally handsome and distinguished man he was.

"But I suppose," said she, "that Germaine had no eyes but for Percivale, when she was in Rome."

Germaine said almost nothing. During dinner she had made a great effort, and now she felt curiously exhausted.

To avoid conversation, she went to the music cabinet, and began to turn over piles of old dance music which were stored therein. Percivale and she had been told to make a selection for the band which was to attend at the wedding reception on the morrow. They had, in the pressing hurry of the week, forgotten to do so. Now it was presumably too late, and the band would play its own selection; but if there should be anything here which they liked particularly, perhaps. . . .

She started, and a shiver ran through her. In huge letters of blue and silver, a waltz title was staring up at her from the pile upon her knee.

"*The Last Time!*"

For a few moments she had the illusion that memory was pouring over her in floods of something more than thought—as if she were experiencing what is technically known as reconstruction—as if the scene around her had really vanished from her eyes, and she was sitting in an open carriage, bowling

along a twilight road, sobbing for some reason she could not understand, with Unele Rémy's arms about her.

She felt the pain of that sorrow peculiar to children—a sorrow that can be neither explained nor understood—which is like a premonition of coming disaster.

Rising from the floor, she sat down to the piano, and began to play the music of the haunting air. She had not been so occupied long, when the door opened to admit both Percivale and Miles. Together they crossed the room and stood near her.

She dared not look up. She felt that at the moment she would have endured a great deal, sooner than meet Miles's eyes.

"I say, Ermie, that's a stunning thing you're playing," cried Percivale, drawing a chair close behind her, and leaning forward so that her hair brushed his face. "What is it, where does it come from? I've heard it somewhere before. I say, let's make the band play it to-morrow—what?"

She broke off—let her hands fall. "It's quite an old waltz, Per. I shouldn't think they would have the music."

"I don't care if it's old or young, it's just the weird kind of thing I fancy. Tell me the name, and I'll go and ring up old Meyer, and ask him if it can be managed."

She took the piece of music from the stand and showed him the title. He read it and went off to the telephone. Miles had neither moved nor spoken. He stood silently near the piano. The two sisters, at the other end of the room, were discussing some detail of the morrow. The two elder men had gone into the library to consider the final terms of a settlement.

"I should like to see the conservatory," said Miles.

"Should you?" she answered; and rose from her place.

They passed together into the fragrant, dimly-lit aisles, redolent of heliotrope and many other perfumed things. For a time they paced in utter silence, like two who understand without words. Presently they came to a fragile bush with pale green slender leaves. Miles put out his hand, plucked a sprig, and held it close to her face.

"*Pixie*," he said, "did you put that into my room on purpose?"

She raised her eyes then, and managed to meet his look. Memory, so long asleep, was now sharply and vividly awake. "Oh, Mr. Burnside," she said, in weak haste, "don't!"

He did not seem to require further enlightenment as to the reference of her prohibition. He drew the morsel of verbena through his button-hole, and replied, "Then why 'The Last Time'?"

"How should I know?" she asked wearily, as though life had so many problems as to leave her exhausted. "There are some seats just beyond here," she went on, "and I have so many things to say to you."

"Yes I know," he answered quietly.

They found the chairs and sat down. For a minute neither spoke. Germaine was fighting insurgent feeling, and inly resenting the fact that she was more overpoweringly conscious of Miles when he was merely there, than she was when he was speaking. At last she broke the pause, with a question to him so unexpected, that it brought him up with a start.

"Are you on the side of Woman's Suffrage?" she asked.

"Woman's Suffrage? Do you mean, am I of the opinion that landowners, property-holders, and taxpayers should be disqualified on voting registers because they happen to be women? Certainly I don't think that. It is an absurdity which future genera-

tions will find hard to justify—as hard as we find it to defend our ancestors for buying and selling human beings as slaves."

She looked at him triumphantly. "I thought so," she murmured.

"At the same time, I am a very non-political person," he went on. "I am afraid I don't take much interest in it—I mean, I am not as keen as perhaps I ought to be. You ought to know my neighbour, Lady Laseelles Hervey—Miss Grenfell that used to be."

The colour rushed to her face, but the light was not strong and she hoped he would not see.

"Is she very keen?" she faltered.

"Enormously. When her father dies, she will be the owner of all that property, controlling all those workmen, and the owner of the property will not have a voice in deciding who is to be member for the county of which it forms a considerable part. She feels it strongly."

"I don't wonder," said Germaine with a sigh. "But you don't think it so important as that? I mean, you would not say that it was of first rate importance," . . . she said no more, though he waited, thinking there must be more to come.

"It is a subject on which there can certainly be two opinions," he replied, wondering what, exactly, she wanted him to say, and by no means eager to plunge into the whole weighty question at that moment.

She did not answer, but sat still, her chin propped on her hand, gazing down the vista of blossoming things.

"I want, if I might be permitted to change the subject," he ventured, finding she said no more, "to say something to you. I came—I accepted your grandfather's invitation—in order to say it. I was so afraid that I left you, in Rome, under a wrong

impression. I feared I had allowed you to suppose that I thought you ought not to marry." . . .

"Yes," she replied, after a pause. She spoke without charge of attitude. "I did think so. I have been unhappy ever since. It has preyed on my mind."

"Oh, what a brute I am," he muttered, but she held up an imperious hand to check him.

"May I talk about it?" she asked.

"It is what I came for."

"Thank you. I wondered if you would let me. You see—there is nobody else——"

"Quite so. Nobody else."

"—And I am in a difficult position. You know, after I left Fendallseombe, and all the time I was growing up, I had no intercourse with you or with grand'mère. I had my own life to live, and it was so strenuous—I had so many little anxieties, and interests—that the remembrance of my—my curse—the burden I have to bear—grew quite faint. I know it must be hard for you to believe that. You parted from me directly after; and when you saw me again, you leaped those intervening years, and saw the whole thing clear and fresh. But I want you to try and realize that I, until I saw you in Rome, had been forgetting—I had allowed the thing to recede into distance. I had never said to myself: 'You are a girl who must not think of happiness or love, because you have a sickening crime on your conscience.'"

"Germaine——"

"No, don't interrupt. I want to finish. I did not know that you looked at it that way, either. To me, it was a child's madness, long and bitterly repented of, a fault which had been punished and forgiven. . . . My life at Breconstead was a hard life. I had to rise early, to go out to work in all weathers, to go about as it were with my eyes shut, because men were not always respectful, nor chivalrous. I had before

me, to look forward to, nothing but this life of toil, and I threw myself into the Suffrage cause, because I did and do really feel how hard the world is for women who have no men to befriend them. Then, as you know, came the evening when I was hustled at the meeting, and next morning I got what was much worse—I got what we call 'the sack'."

"Because of that?"

"Yes. Because I had made a public protest. I can hardly tell you how I felt that morning. I had found it so hard to get a post before, and after that, I knew it would be harder, ever so much. I felt almost as despairing as I did at Fendallseombe. It seemed as if I had a second time, done all I could to break mother's heart. I was half desperate. Then, as you know, grandfather came to the rescue. I think the swing of the pendulum must have knocked me silly, as the footballers say. It was to me so wonderful, so incredible, to have men to stand between me and the world—to have protectors, servants, comforts, instead of having to be myself the person who fought for food and carried it home to the den for my mother to eat. . . . I let myself go. I flung myself into the arms of it all. I just cuddled down in shelter, and forgot the world outside. But what I want to make you understand is this. I do *not* think I should have gone on very long in that chloroformed kind of state. I should have awakened, even if you had not come to confront me with all my lurid Past."

"Germaine!"

"Yes, I should! I am not as contemptible as you thought me, in the garden. I have a conscience, of a kind! . . . But you see, when you met me, it was just too late. I had done it. I had said I would marry Percivale. And now what am I to do? Because you say you will not let me off my oath, and I cannot very well say I want to break my engage-

ment without giving a reason for my change of mind. That is why I asked you about the Suffrage. Percivale does not approve of it. He has made me cancel an engagement to speak in Carford at the Mass Meeting. I thought, perhaps, that would be important enough to make a convincing reason for breaking it off. But you think not?"

He drew a deep breath. "You are the most surprising person I have ever known," he said. "What a boundless contempt you must have for me! For me, who never so much as conceived the kind of life you were living at Breconstead! Me, who had made myself responsible for you, and yet never came to see how you fared! Me, who left you to the world's mercy, just at the time you most needed me! Well! If ever I thought for a moment that perhaps I had something to forgive you, that score has long ago been settled! It is you who must forgive now—if you can."

She looked troubled. "That is nonsense, of course. But for you, mother and I could hardly have got along at all. You were the only person who ever did anything. But that is not the question. We are considering what I ought to do now. I ought not to marry, you think, with this secret thing between me and my husband. Then what am I to do?"

"Of course you may marry," he said, almost angrily: and he spoke with his hands wrung together, as if he were in pain. "I spoke like a fool. Don't think about it again for a moment. Don't think about me at all. Let me go altogether, as if you never had seen me. God forbid I should stand between you and happiness—I who ought to have stood between you and adversity, and who failed—failed!"

She turned her face to him, alight with joy, as if it had been the face of little Ermie when they said

Good-bye at Fendallseombe. "Then you give me leave to speak?"

He started, pulled himself together, and seemed to withdraw himself.

"Oh, no," he said rigidly, "you must not speak."

She retorted sharply. "That means that you think Percivale would break off our marriage if I did?"

He answered steadily, "I do think so; because he could never be made to understand how it all happened."

"Then," she slowly responded, "you have not helped me at all, and I am just as unhappy and uncertain as I ever was. Oh! Don't you think you are cruel?"

"I don't know," he answered, "truly I don't know. I am only sure that I am right. Here is the situation—I did not make it! I have to deal with it. I am convinced that you must never let young Carewe know what you did. Oh, forgive me! It is hard that it should be laid upon me to insist upon what distresses you. But I can't yield. I must not yield."

He rose, as if he dared not trust himself in such close proximity any longer. He moved away, with his head bent, staring at a pot of cyclamens with eyes that saw not. After an interval he heard her voice.

"Does it," she began uncertainly. He turned. She had risen, and come a step nearer to him. "I must ask this, I have wanted to, so often! Does it ever hurt you now?"

"Does it hurt? Does what hurt?" he stammered blankly. She made a little gesture with her hand, towards his heart. He felt as if a touch had been laid there which almost stopped its beating. A surge of colour which he could not repress rose to his face. "No," he said curtly, "of course not. Certainly not."

"I beg your pardon," she murmured meekly, as if daunted by his manner.

He had almost to bite his tongue to keep back all the mad, wild things that were rushing to his lips. The effort made him feel dizzy. She stood with her wide eyes gazing as it were, through him, and he thought his whole soul, with its pitiful secret, must be clear to that wistful gaze. He took a step towards her, the excitement mounting in his brain. He had no idea what he was going to say or do. It was not exactly relief he felt, but an indefinable sense of danger escaped, when Pereivale's voice came towards them, calling as he approached between the rows of ferns and flowers.

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CHAPTER V

A WEDDING AND A QUARREL

As far as Miles was concerned, his first night at Gray Ashtead was not at all a success. After a time, he thought it must be the fault of the lemon-scented verbena, crushed in his hand, and he got out of bed and put it in water.

The fragrance of it, however, remained, and held his fancy fast chained in the realms of the past.

He was sitting beside a child on the Pixie's Mount in the Park—asking where Rémy was, and half sorry, half enraged to see the blush with which she told the lie they had put into her mouth.

How far had he been influenced, in that matter of Rémy's love affair, by the fact that he himself had thought Helen Grenfell pretty, and that she had been at some pains to show him that she found him interesting?

Was he ever in love with her? It is difficult to say. She was a woman who had not worn well—one of those who, having achieved matrimony, let themselves go to pieces. He thought of her now as prosaically as if she had been his aunt.

In truth he had had to live in the world for four and thirty years before encountering the force that now subdued him.

It was bad to bear. It seemed to him that, wherever he turned, there was nothing else to think of. His own life was empty, aimless. In no direction could he see anything to enchain his love or his duty, except one glorious, flowery, forbidden path.

She was to marry young Carewe—to marry the son of James Byles ! Could anything of a calibre to match Germaine, come from the fatherhood of James Byles ?

And did she love Percivale ? That, after all, was the crux of the position. In Rome, it had seemed to him that the eager old grandfather had pushed the young people into each other's arms, to save a very difficult and delicate question when it came to the division of the property.

Further observation, however, made him sure that Matthew would think first of all of Germaine's happiness. There was no doubt that he was fully persuaded that she was in love with Percivale.

Was she ? Miles thought hard.

She was of a blood and temperament which would forbid her being demonstrative in public. She might even assume an air of stiffness in order to blind people to the strength of what she was feeling.

That curious thing she had said, about wondering whether Percivale's feelings with regard to the Suffrage question were a sufficient reason for the breaking of her engagement, did not sound as if she were deep in love. Yet, if she were, he could fancy her speaking in some such way, with the design of making it easier for him to give an unprejudiced reply—withdrawing her personal feeling out of sight, for fear of biasing his decision.

Before going to bed he had talked to young Carewe, with the design of drawing him out, and had found just what he expected, no more, no less.

He was more sure than of any other fact in life, that for the happiness of Germaine's married future, her husband must never know the story of what she had done.

There was, however, a danger. With a man like Percivale—who would indubitably grow harder as he grew older—there would be one thing more fatal than to tell him now, and that would be for him, in

some way, to find out later on, and know that such knowledge had been withheld.

That would indeed mean shipwreck ; not of course, public disgrace, or even separation. Burnside did not fear that. What he foresaw was the contemptuous outlook, the mean satisfaction in having always something to cast in his wife's teeth, if she had ceased to exercise her spell upon him, or was beating her wings against his will in some such matter as the Suffrage problem.

Suppose he were told now ? Suppose that Miles gave leave, and the story were laid before him and his grandfather ? Miles was in terror lest he should *not* break off the match. The gentleman was in love, there was no doubt about that, whatever were the lady's feelings. He would be horrified, at first revolted—then, on thinking it over, he would feel that, though unpleasant, it was not such a thing as could be held to preclude marriage. Since nobody else knew it, he would graciously consent to overlook it ; and there was the weapon for the future, forged to his hand—the weapon that might lacerate her heart in the coming years. If one of their children showed uncontrolled passion, it would be—"I hope he does not inherit your homicidal instinct !"

Ah, if only one could be sure that Percivale would think more seriously of it—seriously enough to break his engagement—then indeed the millennium might dawn, for he, Miles, might conceivably have a chance !

But the risk was too great, the chance too remote. It was unthinkable that a young man engaged to Germaine should let her go on such grounds—not so long as he remained in love. With a man of his temperament, how short a time that might be !

Such soul-searchings do not conduce to sleep : and when the slow January dawn broke, the visitor had had but little rest in his comfortable bed.

He found no chance, as the morning wore on, of any

talk with Germaine. Her mother, invisible until she should issue forth to drive to church, kept her almost constantly in attendance. She made only meteoric appearances, in reply to vehement calls from Gran or Pereivale, to decide where the band should be placed, whether the doors between the drawing-rooms should be open or shut, and who should go down to the station with the luggage.

The wedding was to be at two sharp, and the bridal pair would catch the 4.30 express to London, en route for the Riviera.

The family lunched anyhow, standing about the Blue Lounge where cold food had been placed, the dining-room being already arranged for the reception.

Matthew Carewe was in high spirits. He was getting rid of Emmeline and keeping Germaine—both of them facts upon which his mind dwelt with pleasure. He was chaffing the young pair about this being a dress rehearsal for their own wedding, which was to be at the beginning of June. Then Germaine ran away to attire herself for the ceremony, and to help her mother's maid to give the finishing touches.

The bride looked extremely handsome and distinguished when she finally descended to the hall, followed by her daughter.

Rosalie and Miles were packed into the first carriage, Pereivale and Germaine into the second, and the bride and her father brought up the rear.

The church was crammed with guests when they arrived, and there was some amusement, especially among the spectators who were villagers, at the mature age of the contracting couple. "Seems as if it did ought to be them two, don't it?" murmured one good dame to another, as Pereivale led Germaine up the central passage on his arm.

"Ermine, ain't it?" replied the other, in a voice hushed with admiration, her eyes on Miss Damien's furs. "What queens 'as on their robes. Ain't she

a picture ! Look at that muff ! What a size ! Chiffong velvet they calls that stuff 'er gown's made of. Left 'er cloak in the motor ! Oh my, I never see such a young lady, outside of a novelette ! What I say is, this 'ere style of cutting the frocks low round the throat do look proper when you've got a throat like 'ers, don't it ! ”

“ I *don't* think,” murmured her friend absently, too deeply employed in gazing to be able to appreciate any comments.

James Byles was the centre of attention and anxiety to the bridal party themselves. His excitement was so tremendous that they were in fear of his breaking down. He was pale as ashes, shaking so that everyone could see it : and Emmeline was deeply vexed, since it looked like nervousness, and no bride likes to have a husband shaking with fright. It was not fright, but sheer triumph—triumph so dizzy that he feared something would come and dash it. He could not believe that he stood there at last, in sight of his goal, holding the hand, receiving the troth, of the woman who had always been for him the only woman in the world.

Miles had hardly settled himself in his place, when he saw two eyes, under the brim of a daring hat, slanted coquettishly upon him. He recognized Miss Lenox, whom he had met in Rome, and acknowledged her salutation with the stiff gravity which seemed to him becoming in church.

Hilda laughed inwardly, and told herself he was “ another of the pious ones.”

She was not only enjoying every minute, but looking forward to a keener, more stimulating enjoyment later on. She had informed her mother, that, for weighty reasons, she must have a “ top-hole ” gown for this occasion ; and Mrs. Lenox, not without protest, had managed to cajole her modiste into bestowing further credit. The garb in which Hilda appeared was

Parisian and quite unprecedented in the neighbourhood. The effect was amazing, yet one had to admit that it was successful. Miles felt his eyes being drawn to her, whether he would or no. So much did it preoccupy him, that the clergy had entered, and the service was beginning before he caught Rémy's eye, and noted that that gentleman was much surprised and not at all pleased to see him there.

He had, however, little leisure to wonder why Rémy should be so visibly perturbed. The preliminary exhortation was over, and the voice of a different cleric broke in, pronouncing words which fell upon his ear with new and affrighting meaning.

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed——"

It was as if he heard the admonition for the first time. On the instant he raised his head, and turned his eyes upon Germaine. With equal suddenness she looked full at him. Having met, their looks were held, bound in a tumult of mute questioning. It was as though she was crying to him:

"Do you hear that?" As though he cried back: "Can you bear it?"

"Must I stand and listen to that, and say nothing?" persisted her eyes: and his replied with

"How can I help it?"

He thought, if he gazed upon her a second longer, he must say aloud,

"Break it off, then. Why don't you break it off?"

He forced himself to look away: and turning his head abruptly, encountered a look of malign understanding and mockery from under the half-shut lids of Hilda Lenox.

For a moment he felt agitation. Could she by any means suspect? Then he reassured himself. She was only amused because she had intercepted their prolonged look. He remembered, even during the

few hours they had been together in Rome, her inability to conceal her jealousy of Germaine.

On their return, after the ceremony, the order of things was slightly altered. The bride being now in the bridegroom's ear, Mr. Carewe took Aunt Rosalie, and, Pereivale being detained at the church, paying the various fees for his father and marshalling the guests, Miles found himself seated at the side of Germaine, in a solitude à deux.

He would have avoided it. What was there to say between them?

Had he been quite certain of her heart not being involved, he would have counselled her openly: "Break it off."

But he was not certain; in fact, his knowledge of her character made it seem impossible that she should be marrying unless she gave her heart. He could not inquire, could not even suggest a doubt. His conduct must be built upon the assumption that she loved Pereivale so ardently that her future happiness lay in his hands: and if that were so, there was nothing for it but to risk matrimony and keep her secret.

He saw that she was very pale, and that her lips were set. He looked upon her miserably, feeling that he could not help her.

His silent sympathy irritated her, as it had done the previous evening. It was intolerable that he should assume that he understood the very workings of her mind! She tried to lash herself to anger, telling herself that he made, as Rémy had suggested that he would make, a cruel use of his power over her. He must be brought to feel her independence of him—she must show him his place without delay.

"What a tip-top wedding!" she said suddenly, smiling and amused. "So satisfactory from all points of view! Enough lace veils—or their equivalent—to satisfy Selina herself."

He had started quite evidently as her mocking

voice broke upon his thought. "What in the world are you talking of? Who is Selina?" he asked vaguely.

"Ah, you don't read your Jane Austen. If you did, you would know that Emma's wedding did not satisfy Mrs. Elton. She said Selina would stare. Selina would have stared to-day, I feel sure, but with eager admiration, not contempt! Old Lady Haysman had on the celebrated diamond rivi re! By the way I am wearing my own diamonds—the ones you gave me—for the first time to-day."

He kept his eyes averted. She was too near. He dared not turn and look at her. "I noticed that," was all he said.

"Why are you so gloomy?" she asked teasingly. "It is I who ought to be sunk in tragie silence, not you! You have successfully exerted the male prerogative of holding down the woman—of compelling her to your will. I sit here in woman's true position—subject to the male members of my family. My fianc  refuses me leave to do any work for my sex, my stepuncle stands over me with a 'Thou shalt not' so ponderous that one knows beforehand that any kind of struggle will be in vain."

"Be quiet," he said abruptly. "I can't be expected to stand this."

It was remarkable, even to himself, that he should not be in the least shy of her. He was usually shy with women. With Germaine he felt as if all preliminaries had been passed, and he spoke as he thought.

She seized upon the form of his remonstrance.

"Listen," she said, "to the tyrant—how he phrases it! 'Be quiet!' quoth he, in full expectation of instant obedience on the part of his slave!"

"At any rate you need not refer to me as your stepuncle," he growled, almost too angry to speak quietly.

"Oh! Why not?" she goaded him. "Yet another prohibition! I think you had better write me

out a rule of speech and conduct, to be followed when you grant me an audience. Ah, I was right, after all. Children usually know, their instinct is to be trusted. I knew when I was ten that you were a tyrant really."

He was utterly amazed. How could he know that she was bullying him in order to hide her fear? Or that her very limbs were trembling because she had to drive in the same carriage with him?

"Good heavens, you are talking as if I were doing this for *my* sake," he burst out. "You know—yes, of course you know, that I am insisting upon your silence altogether for your own! What would it hurt me if everything were known? . . . That is . . ."

They faced each other now. She had worked herself up into a state of anger great enough to enable her to dare him.

"Of course not. As you say, it would not hurt you. *You* would not care," she flung at him.

He turned suddenly pale. He looked at her something as he might have looked when he opened his eyes to find her stabbing him. "Say what you like," he retorted; and leant back in his corner as if exhausted.

"Then, saying what I like, I say you are pushing me too far. Men, as a race, have pushed us too far. You have a hold over me and are wielding it without mercy. Unele Rémy said you would."

"Ah, I forgot!"—with rage—"you have been discussing the subject with him?"

The motor was bearing them swiftly through the park, up to the door. The end of their wrangle was in sight. "And why should I not discuss it with him?" she asked.

"You said there was nobody but me," he managed to reply; and he heard her answer as they came to a stand-still.

"You are the only person that could help, of

course. Uncle Rémy is helpless. It is you who have my oath."

A moment later she was in the midst of the crowd of arriving guests, going about among them, greeting those she knew, being presented to those to whom she was a stranger.

He was left outside, as it were. He moved listlessly through the rooms; filled with a dull distaste for social functions, for his fellow creatures, for life generally.

His natural courtesy, however, stood him in good stead, and he went about seeing that various ladies had as much as they desired of champagne and wedding-cake. He duly congratulated the newly wedded pair, and envied James Byles from the bottom of his heart. There stood a man who had, after a lifetime of disappointment, achieved his heart's desire. He had the right woman. Emmeline, so ineffective in poverty, so inadequate when surrounded by her first husband's literary set, would make an excellent mistress of this man's house, and would wield over him a power that would soften his rough edges and sweeten the whole cup of his existence.

It is often said that men should be allowed two wives—the adored one and the daily comrade. If that be so, it seems even more clear that a woman should be allowed two men—the young warrior, going out to fight life, and later, the old lover, waiting patiently until the woman's eyes, dazzled by vainly trying to follow the flight of the gay creature who caught her early fancy, come back to earth, and she sees him standing there.

Rémy strolled up and shook hands patronizingly with his step-brother.

"Well," he said, "our poor relations are getting on, are they not?" He stood with his well-gloved hands behind him, gazing with great amusement at

Germaine, who was being presented by Mrs. Byles to some of her husband's friends.

Miles exchanged a few civilities with Mrs. Rémy, a foreign-looking woman, handsome in a showy fashion, who somehow suggested gaming-tables. When she had drifted on to talk to more congenial spirits, Rémy turned to Miles before he had time to get away, and said—

"I suppose that Germaine will make a clean breast of things to young Carewe before her marriage? You wouldn't advise any attempt at suppressing the whole thing?"

Miles let his eyes rest upon his brother. "You think that, as you share the secret, any such attempt would be futile?" he asked gravely.

"Do you think I deserve that, Miles?"

"You used to profess to be attached to Germaine in old days."

"That was before her *sans-culottism* came so definitely to the fore. Now"—he shrugged his shoulders.

"Now you no longer feel affection for her?" questioned his brother earnestly.

Rémy took up a wedding-present and considered it absently. "Now," he said, "I know a good deal of young Carewe—jolly nice chap. I think it would be playing it a bit low down upon him to allow him to marry a girl with a record like that, unless he did it with his eyes open."

"And you are thinking of opening them for him?"

"That," said Rémy slowly, "would of course depend——"

"Upon what?"

The other man hesitated. "I am unfortunately, not in a position to enable me to put my own advantage quite out of the question," he slowly said.

"Oh, I see. Blackmail," returned his step-brother.

"Pardon me. The expression is as undeserved

as it is coarse. I see before me a clear duty, namely to enlighten young Carewe—to tell him he has been entrapped into an engagement with a girl who—well then, I don't want to say anything offensive. Obviously I have nothing to gain by speaking, I should do it as a duty. If you wish to persuade me not to do my duty, it is up to you to suggest some reason why I should refrain. Unfortunately, as I have just said, I am not in a position to refuse a good offer."

"You have made a bad mistake, Rémy," returned Miles sternly. "You will get nothing from me. If you are sunk so low as to do this thing, you cannot expect me to be silent. I shall see that your share in Germaine's act is fully known and explained, and you will be obliged to withdraw from a neighbourhood where I hear you are making way, and helping a genuine Marquis, no less, with the management of his hounds."

"Oh ho, it is threat for threat, is it?" said Rémy softly, his eyes fixed upon Hilda Lenox, who was talking with evident mutual satisfaction to Percivale.

"No, it is no case for threats. It is too late for that. You see, Germaine naturally wishes herself to tell her lover the truth."

CHAPTER VI

STILL BOUND

IN the same conservatory where, the previous night, Miles and Germaine had talked, sat Hilda and Percivale.

She had begged him—humbly, almost timidly—to take her out of the crush, as she was not feeling well.

This was so unprecedented a state for Hilda, that Percivale felt it demanded his full attention, if only for a few minutes. The contrast between her almost outrageous toilette, and her new and sudden softness was arresting. There was a languor in her drooping pose. Her eyes swam in a mist of unshed tears.

Much as he appreciated her wit and effrontery, there was something in her present mood which made a far more powerful appeal. He soon elicited the fact that her *malaise* was more mental than bodily. By degrees he extracted from her the admission that she was feeling utterly miserable.

"The fact that it is horrid of me to feel so, makes no difference," she reluctantly confessed. "Life has changed for me, since last autumn. It can't be helped. Marriage must part friends. I know that after a bit—after the first infatuation has worn off—you will come partly back to me; but it will not be the same Percy. My own old chum is dead and gone. I shan't be able to talk to a married man as I used to talk to my old playfellow; and somehow the sight of this wedding brought it all to mind—

made it seem real—and I know that all the old time is dead and gone. I'm a poor little girl who has lost her best pal; and—and I don't like it!"

What was he to say? A great many emotions swept over him. He thought that if Hilda had shown him this side of herself before, it might have made a difference. He managed to convey to her something in halting words—of his not having realized her as the possessor of that inconvenient attribute which we call a heart. She smiled at that, in a sad little disdain of male obtuseness. Did he suppose she wore her heart on her sleeve—like—like a governess in a *feuilleton*?

His conscience began to reproach him. If he had made Hilda unhappy, he was a regular beast. Now he came to think of it, he had treated her shabbily. Until Germaine came, she had been, as she said, his best pal. Since that date, he had wiped her out of his calendar.

The expression of his regret was inelegant, but certainly rang true to her eagerly attentive ear.

She assured him that, if his happiness were secure, she was content; only she did want him to have the right girl; was he quite convinced that Germaine was the right girl? She dared even that.

Of course he said that there was no doubt—that Germaine was the one love of his life; and of course she nobly hoped they would be very, very happy. "There are plenty of other men," she said, sighing; "that is not the difficulty with me. I can pick and choose. But I love old friends, and somehow, even Archie Dugdale doesn't count as you do."

Percival hated Archie Dugdale. He was on the opposite side in politics, and would very likely stand for the constituency against himself at the next election. He thought of Archie's wife—of Hilda, as Archie's wife—flashing round in her motor, dressed in something that drew all eyes, smiling upon the

electors, bandying wit and repartee with jaded agents and irreconcilable opponents. It was a picture which did not please him at all.

"Are you going to marry that brute?" he cried hotly.

"You see, the dreadful thing is that I must marry somebody," she replied with regret. "I can't live on the fact of my connection with the peerage; and that is all I have."

He sighed impatiently. Certainly things were not exactly as he had pictured them in his own mind. Germaine was not shaping so obediently as he had anticipated. Moreover, she was so devoted to her grandfather, that she was eagerly seconding the plan that she and Percivale should, at least at first, live at Gray Ashtead after their marriage. This was a course to which Percivale knew that nothing would have made Hilda consent.

. . . And, certainly, Germaine had dropped into his arms, like—like what was it? A governess in a *feuilleton*? That rankled: though of course Hilda had not meant it to refer to Germaine.

Hilda knew just how far to take him. Having brought him to that pitch, she knew how to shut the door to further advance. She said she must go and find her mother, as they were going on to a late afternoon bridge party at the Dugdales. Would Percivale be at the Warley Dale Meet next Thursday? He thought so.

"We might have a regular good cross-country run, like old times," she suggested wistfully. She knew that Germaine did not go across country.

Percivale assented eagerly. As they strolled back together to the reception-room, she began to think that she might not have to use the knowledge Rémy had sold her, after all.

They found the bride and bridegroom in the act of departure. Percivale had to go on duty, as it

were, and all the family were gathered in the hall to give the final send-off.

Rémy encountered Hilda in an almost deserted drawing-room.

"Just a word," he murmured confidentially, "apart from what I told you the other day. I think you had better use your knowledge here and now—convey a hint to your brother-in-law at once."

She stopped, she looked at him with some sweetly rueful expression. "Why do you say that?"

"Because the young man of a step-brother has been married with his ponderous slowness, that it would be better for the girl to tell Percival herself than let him hear it from anybody else. Finding that I am within the range of practical politics, I gather that he has removed his profession."

"That she is going to make the fatal mistake and take the opportunity."

Hilda looked at him. "Then that disposes of any need for me to dabble in the thing at all, doesn't it?"

"He is in a state of disappointment. 'And I am so clever!' Think a minute. A lovely girl—a girl in love with—tells a man a story of a childish past—tells it with every embellishment—her sense of her own danger can suggest. She knows she had better speak, because if she does not, somebody else probably will. She does so, with the best to which necessity can spur her wit. How can he break it off? He will be upset, no doubt; but under the circumstances, it would be pretty difficult for him to say, 'Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid'? See?"

Her expression changed from vexation to dislike.

"Whereas if he gets an anonymous letter, suggesting that his beloved is keeping something dark? Eh? Look at the difference!"

"Oh, I see it. But you seem to forget that I don't want to injure Germaine, only to break off the match. I believe I could do it without saying anything at all—just by my power with him——"

"Oh, my good girl, what *are* you talking about? He has got to know, because she means to tell him. It is merely a question of whether you or she speaks first."

She made a restless movement with her shoulder, half turning away; then she faced him, with a curious look. "I never came up against an utter sweep until I met you," she remarked smoothly. "But do you know, I advise you to keep very quiet. If you should be thinking of putting yourself forward at all in this matter, I warn you that you will have me to reckon with."

Several people flowed back into the room as she spoke, and he had to let her go. His expression was not good to see. He had made an unsuccessful attempt to blackmail Miles—now he had gone too far with Miss Lenox, and apparently he had alienated her. His own urgent need of funds had prompted both mistakes. Why had he not rather tried on the game with Germaine herself? Hilda was clever, and Miles, he knew of old, was not easy to hoodwink. His safer game would have lain with his niece, no doubt. Was it now too late?

As he strolled into the hall, the band began to play a waltz.

Something in the music set his memory working. It took him back to the time when he had made love to Helen at the party at Brookland.

Wedged into the doorway, Germaine saw the car drive away. Slip-
chattering guests, her eyes dimmed with tears, she sought

for a spot in which she might possibly shed them unseen. That mother who had been the sole object for so long of her work and her care, was taken out of her life, and she knew that the separation was for ever.

As she crossed the hall, making for the library, where she might obtain a minute's quiet in which to recapture her self-possession, the notes of the waltz fell upon her ears like a reminder of all she would fain forget.

With swift steps she gained the desired haven, and sank down upon a sofa. She had but a moment. Guests would be departing, and her grandfather would miss her. Her red eye-lids might be pardoned, but she must subdue the tears which were falling with such sudden violence.

She heard a step approaching—a long, deliberate step. Miles came in quietly, but without knocking, in his curiously direct way, as if he had a right to enter. His look, however, was not masterful, but compassionate.

How he looked, mattered nothing; the mere sight of him made her flame.

"Oh, what *do* you want? Can't you let me have a minute to myself?" she cried.

"I won't stay a minute." He closed the door with care, and stood on the further side of the table. "I've come to say something that may be a sort of comfort. I want to beg your pardon for my stupidity. I see now what a brute I have been, and I am here to tell you that you are free. I mean, that your oath to me no longer holds. I release you from it. You must use your own judgment in the matter, and tell anyone, everyone, or no one, as you think fit."

She sat upright upon the old leather sofa, looking, as he thought, in her shining raiment, like a vision in a dusty place.

"I may tell?" she repeated dully.

"As far as I am concerned." He came no nearer, and found himself obliged to turn his head, that he might not see her tears. She wiped them away in a long pause, accompanied by the distant music.

"I am afraid," she said at last, speaking in her own, clear voice, "that I was hateful to you in the carriage this morning. I—I did not mean half I said."

He smiled a little ruefully. "You always did know how to—how to strike—where I was concerned," he muttered low. "You say that you knew, when you were ten years old, that I was a tyrant. I can't and simply won't have you say that. You are free. That taunt freed you. I am ashamed of myself, for I am a coward. For your sake I ought to have held out, I ought to be able to endure your resentment. Well, I can't. That's all. I may be spoiling your whole life by what I do, but I do it. Your step-uncle"—he flung an astonishing amount of bitterness into the pronunciation of the word—"your step-uncle relaxes the hold upon you which he used so cruelly. You are free to wreck your own fortunes in your own way."

She said nothing. Still she sat there, as though she hardly grasped what he said. He had succeeded in drying her tears, at least. He went slowly towards the door, but hesitated, with his hand upon the lock.

"One word, and I will leave you in peace. It is possible—just possible—that you may find that truth does not pay. If you should find that—I mean, if things should be hard and unhappy for you . . . you and Miss Danby might, perhaps, care to come to Fendallseombe. Will you remember? I don't for a minute suppose that it would come to that. Only—if it does—Fendallseombe might be better than nothing."

As he spoke, she put her hands before her face. He waited awhile, after speaking, to see if she would remove them. As she did not, he went out, closing the door behind him. She heard his steps go muffled along the tiles, and the wail of the waltz "The Last Time" died gradually away.

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CHAPTER VII

MURDER WILL OUT

THINGS were very quiet at Gray Ashtead for a time, after the wedding.

Germaine's subdued spirits were naturally set down to her having parted so recently from her mother. Only Matthew himself suspected that there was more in it—that all was not well with the creature he loved so devotedly.

He could see that she had chafed under Percivale's demands upon her in the matter of the Suffrage Procession. He realized that many of her characteristics were inherited from himself, and he knew how badly he would in his own youth have taken that kind of restriction. His tenderness for her had no words, but expressed itself in a thousand little ways, which cut deep into her feelings.

She and he rode much together—every day, in fact—and there was between them a wordless sympathy which was in one way a comfort, in another way a torment to her. Now that Miles had laid the matter in her hands, she flinched, she wavered.

How dare she make known the fact that she owed it to a mere chance that she was not a murderess? It was by no means dread of the consequences to herself, but fear of giving pain to Gran which caused her struggle and hesitation.

Percivale was much occupied at the Works during this time, his father's absence throwing upon him much extra business and responsibility. He came home tired, and Germaine sought in vain for what

seemed to her a suitable chance to tell him the story from end to end.

He was, after all, quite unable to attend the Warley Dale meet, though Gran and Germaine were both there. From them he learned that Hilda had ridden across country with Archie Dugdale and that they had been among the first in at the end of the run. He reflected moodily that it was just his luck—the open weather coming in while his father was away. In a month, there would be hard frost—just see if there wasn't!

It seemed to Germaine that she and he were slipping ever farther apart. Her great sacrifice of her own wishes, in the matter of the Suffrage—made in the hope of reaching his inmost heart—had had no such effect. She grew more timid of approaching him on any intimate matter, while he, day by day, grew less careful in manner, more inclined to be fraternal, doing things which vexed her, such as flinging a careless arm about her waist if he came and sat down beside her on the sofa. She disliked, without knowing how successfully to resent, such familiarity.

Aunt Rosalie longed to tell her that humility does not pay with young men of Percivale's stamp. He needed bullying, and it was not in Germaine's nature to bully anybody.

As to Hilda, she was going through what she herself styled "a devil of a time."

The rôle of a woman scorned was not in the least to her taste, but when day after day passed without sign from Percivale—when the Warley Dale meet came and went, and he neither appeared nor sent her any word—she began to be consumed with the furious suspicion that she had missed her chance.

At the wedding, she had thought she was drawing him back to her. Now her only hope was that his studious avoidance of her was a sign that he felt the pull more strongly than was comfortable.

She did all she could—flirted with Dugdale, even rode deliberately in directions where she thought herself likely to meet Percivale. As he was always home so late that the motor was sent for him, she never succeeded in catching him.

Her better feeling sank by degrees into the background. Her father and mother were at the time in considerable financial straits, and Mrs. Lenox urged her not to be a fool, but to take Dugdale while she could get him. Her old jealousy of Germaine, who had what she coveted, and did not prize it, swelled during these weeks into hatred. She knew not what to think, but she inclined to the belief that Germaine had taken her risk, told her story and “made good,” as the saying is. Nobody, of course, would ever know. The thing was a family secret buried in oblivion; and all the time she—Hilda—had the power to fling it broadcast over the countryside.

On a Sunday—the last before the home-coming of the bride and bridegroom—the two families, Carewe and Lenox, met outside the church for a few minutes after service.

Hilda succeeded in insinuating herself next to Percivale, and in sending up to him a fluttering glance, which seemed to him as soft—as unlike herself—as her demeanour upon the day of the wedding. He hardly knew what he felt as he encountered it. He was half horrified, half delighted. She saw and exulted. Was her instinct right as usual? Was it a sense of his own danger that kept him from her? In a flash she felt that some decided step must be taken: and as a preliminary, she must find out whether Germaine had confessed.

“By the way,” she said, with a smile and a sigh, after the preliminary greetings, “I saw that you succeeded with Germaine as far as that Suffrage affair was concerned! Congratulations!”

He coloured and looked away. "I told you how sweet and affectionate she is," he muttered hurriedly. "I knew we had only to tell her what we felt about it."

"It is wonderful," continued Hilda softly, "that such a strong nature should be so easily influenced. Are you not sometimes afraid that she may break out into some of the more impetuous methods of her early youth?"

He looked at her in complete astonishment. She met his eyes, and scanned his expression with instincts made keen as a razor in pursuit of truth. She saw that he had no idea what she meant. Then nothing, after all, was known—Miles Burnside had merely bluffed Mr. Damien. There was no intention of revealing the secret.

"What do you mean?" asked Percivale.

She laughed pleasantly. "Oh, she has sometimes told me of the wondrous games of make-believe she used to play as a child—she was always a champion defending the truth, you know!"

"Oh, I know." He echoed her laugh; uneasily, but not at all self-consciously. "I was so sorry not to be able to manage a day off for Warley Dale," he went on. "My pater's being away gives me about as much as I can get through. I heard *you* had a ripping run, though."

"Top-hole," she responded merrily.

That was all. They reached the lych gate, the Carewes entered their motor, and she was left—hugging a purpose—a desperate purpose—in her sore heart.

Mr. and Mrs. James Byles came home to The Sycamores, as his house was called, upon the Thursday afternoon following.

Gran, Aunt Rosalie, and Germaine were all assembled to welcome them, and to pour out tea.

The house had been re-decorated throughout, to suit the taste of its new mistress. James Byles would even have gone the length of black satin in the drawing-room, had Emmie seemed to desire it. Her taste lay, however, in a different direction. There was a great deal of French grey and Rose du Barri panelling—gilded chairs, faint-hued tapestries, white fur rugs, hot-house flowers, and mirrors.

When the travellers arrived, and the mistress of it all walked in, looking lazily content and extremely handsome, one had to admit that she had created the right setting for herself.

James was more improved than one could have thought possible. He had all the elation of the man who has got at last exactly what he wants. He was gracious even to his step-daughter.

"Where's Purrus?" he asked complacently, standing upon the snowy fleece that lay before the hearth in his wife's boudoir: and, as she glanced up with a wifely smile and a wee shudder, he repeated the name less harshly, "Where's Percivale?"

"He'll be here directly; the motor went to fetch him half an hour ago, but he has had a busy time of it during your honeymoon, James," said Matthew.

"A good thing too. Make a man of him! He ought to be able to do a man's work now-a-days. I thought to myself, 'Happen if Purrus.' " . . . Once more he caught his wife's eye, and corrected himself. "Perhaps, if Percy has more responsibility put upon him, he'll rise to it: and from what they say in the office, he has!"

"There he is," said Germaine, as the approach of the car was heard. In a minute or two, Percivale walked in, with the air of having just discarded his overcoat, tucking a handkerchief into his cuff, and advancing with the purposeful step of the business man.

Greetings were affectionate and playful, but Germaine noted that his manner in receiving them was

a little distrait, and that his eye sought hers with a kind of question in it.

"I should have been here sooner," he said, taking his seat and the cup of tea brought him by his fiancée. "I was detained by a stupid little incident. Somebody sent me an anonymous letter. I should have taken no notice, but that it contained an insulting reference to Germaine, so that I waited to try and find out who had brought it. It did not come through the post."

"An insulting reference to Germaine!" thundered Matt. "Upon my word!"

"I'm inclined to think it is some of those suffragettes, riled because I wouldn't let them exploit her for their own ends," said Percivale loftily. "It was brought to the porter by the boy who leaves the afternoon milk; which boy, on being questioned, says a woman asked him to take it in—a common woman."

"My dear Germaine, don't look as if you were going to faint," said Rosalie laughing. "What do you suppose Percivale cares for an anonymous letter?"

Germaine forced a laugh, through teeth that actually chattered. She could not speak. Her grandfather, looking keenly at her, felt a sudden thumping of the heart.

Percivale pulled from his pocket a shabby envelope, addressed in an illiterate hand to himself. He evidently thought it a joke, for he tossed it on Rosalie's knee.

"They might," he observed, "have thought of something a little more probable while they were about it—something that could, by some wild accident, be true." He took a solid bite of hot muffin.

Aunt Rosalie slowly drew from the envelope a half-sheet of soiled cheap note-paper.

"Duz the adopted sun an air of Mister Carew kno or is he aware that the yung person he means to

mary only just escaped bein tried fer merder wen she wos a child ? Duz he kno er granfeyther done the same wen he wos yung an ad to run for it ? Arst er wot she done to the squire time she was in Devonsher. Arst er wot about the Dammaskus dager an ear wot she ses.

“ A WELL WISHER.”

Rosalie Carewe deciphered the scrawl very slowly and carefully, and then read it aloud. She tossed it back to Percivale with a short, contemptuous laugh. “ As you say, they might have invented something probable, if they wanted to make mischief between you,” she remarked drily.

Germaine stood for a moment immovable, a plate of cakes in either hand, which she was in the act of bringing to Percivale. It was not so much the shock of being confronted, without warning, by the accusation she had dreaded—it was the mysterious words about her grandfather which for the moment paralysed her mind. Matthew’s touch made her start. He took the plates from her, and spoke gently.

“ My lass,” he said, almost reprovingly, gazing at her blanched face, “ surely there is no need to trouble yourself over that.”

“ Tried for murder when she was in Devonshire ! ” cried Mrs. Byles lightly. “ Why, she had the dullest visit, poor chiek, and was glad to be back again with me !—And how hateful to rake up that old story agaist poor Constant’s father ! ”

“ Mother ! ” cried Germaine, in a voice which drew the eyes of everyone in the room to her. “ Mother, what are you saying ? What old story about my grandfather ? ”

James Byles, after a prolonged contemplation, gave vent to a series of low exclamations.

“ Hallo, hallo, hallo-o-o ! What’s this ? Is there some kernel of truth in this extraordinary document ? ”

"Yes, there is," she cried distractedly, "some, but I do not know how much! Mother, you must tell me how much truth there is!"

She sank upon a chair, clasping her hands upon its back as if for support. In that moment she had become fully aware of the reasons for Miles's exaction of her oath. The thing she had done was not a childish violation of law but the re-emergence of a homicidal tendency. Charlotte Corday—her own father's father—they were all murderers, and the inherited taint had flamed up in her, in her very childhood. For the moment she was so stricken that she could neither speak nor think—merely fix her mental gaze upon a picture so horrible that she winced away from it, cowering down upon her seat as if some one had struck her a blow.

"Ernie, how can you talk like that?" cried her mother, vexed. "She does not know what she means, James. If there had been any accident, or any cause for complaint against her, while she was at Vendallscombe, do you suppose that I, her mother, would not have been informed of it?"

"You ought to have been informed of it," replied James grimly, "but if this is all nonsense, why is she looking like that? Come, Germaine, speak up—don't sit there looking as if you had been caught picking pockets."

"Give her time!" said Matthew Carewe sharply. "She has heard something which is news to her, and it has shocked her. Is there any truth in the suggestion that Constant Damien's father was concerned in anything of the sort, Emmeline?"

Percivale went up to the girl and knelt beside her chair. "Ernie darling, what is it?" he coaxed. "Tell us what this means."

She sat up, her hands twisted tightly together upon her knees. "I should have told all about it—long ago," she brought out slowly, "only I had promised.

In fact, I had taken an oath—on the Bible—not to tell.”

“Germaine!” screamed her mother hysterically.

“Hold your tongue, Emmeline!” said Gran angrily; and James Byles bellowed—

“Be careful how you speak to my wife, Matt!”

“Let us understand,” went on Gran, ignoring this. “To whom was your oath of secrecy made, lass?”

“To Mr. Burnside.”

“Mr. Burnside!” There was a consensus of amazement.

“I did all I could,” she faltered. “I asked him—I begged him—when we saw him in Rome—to let me tell. He said it was most important that nobody should ever know. He held me to my promise.”

“But apparently somebody does know!” cried Percivale, half choking with feelings he could not analyse. In his confusion of mind, he swore. “Damnation! I’d have knocked anybody’s teeth down his throat who came to me with such a story!”

Germaine looked at him with a pity so deep that she felt years and years older than he. “Oh, Percivale, I have been so wrong—so inexcusable,” she cried. “When Mr. Burnside came here—for mother’s wedding—I begged him again, and that time he did release me. He said I might tell, and I—I haven’t. I have been trying to speak and I couldn’t . . . and bad though I thought it, you see it is even worse—worse than I ever knew!”

They stood silently around her, understanding hardly anything of what she said. Raising her head, she became conscious of the intent faces, the breathless expectation, the dawning horror that encompassed her. She sprang to her feet and rushed to Matthew Carewe, clinging to him with desperate arms.

“Gran, I can’t! I can’t! Don’t make me say it here—not now! Have a little mercy! I could tell you—only you!” . . .

He was shaken with compassion, but he spoke uncompromisingly.

"Germaine," he said, "here is your mother, your betrothed lover, and his father. All these have a better right than ever I, to know your secret. Nothing can now be gained by concealment, much may be gained by a clear statement. Come! This thing is no doubt not half so grave as you are making us fear it may be. Speak up, now, and tell us what it was that you did. Some childish escapade——"

"Ah no!" She unlocked her arms and stood up, but still clung to his hand. "It was no childish escapade. It was a crime. They saw more clearly than I what was involved. They made me take an oath, because they saw that if it were known, I should be an outcast."

"Outcast!" cried Percivale, with strong emphasis. "Now after that, ~~hark~~ you simply must explain what you mean!"

"That is what I can't do! I can't explain! The only explanation seems to me in what mother said just now—what I never knew before—that homicide is in our family. All I can do is to blurt out to you the fact that I got up in the middle of the night, went into Mr. Burnside's room with a knife, and almost succeeded in murdering him."

Mrs. Byles had been standing beside her husband, and she was looking at him, not at her daughter, as these words were uttered. So much did his expression horrify her, that, with a small, inarticulate sound, she fainted away, and he was only just in time to prevent her falling upon the floor.

"God bless me!" said Gran; and he repeated this benediction several times in the confusion of his ideas, as Percivale and his father laid Mrs. Byles upon the sofa.

Percivale stood staring with wide eyes upon the unconscious lady, and then upon the girl—this utterly

different being suddenly presented to him in place of the soft and silky Germaine of his dreams. Germaine, realizing, as she glanced at him, how hard he was hit, cried out miserably—

"Oh, Percy, Percy, I never meant to blurt it out like that! You pushed me—you all pushed me! I—— Oh, Gran, I don't know what I am saying!"

"Yes, that is it," stammered Percivale, as if with a gleam of hope, "she doesn't know what she is saying."

Matthew was silent, not because he condemned, but because he was deeply troubled. He had thought that all Germaine's life lay open under his gaze. Her naïve championship of women, her personal courage, her beauty and her impulsive affection, had seemed to him the ingredients of an eminently lovable character. To find suddenly that this sweet, youthful creature, so unspotted from the world, had committed murder at the age of ten, was a shock.

"You did it in a minute of mad passion. He had been unkind to you—there was a weapon handy—you used it, and then awoke to a consciousness of what you had done," he faltered.

"I made my plan deliberately. I stayed awake till two o'clock in the morning to carry it out—I went downstairs in the dark to get the knife to do it. I entered his room and shut his big dog outside in the passage. It was the most deliberate thing I ever did: and it was not until everybody turned from me with loathing that I knew it was wrong. I thought I was a heroine and a martyr."

Thus she lashed herself. There was no use in mincing the matter. The whole truth must come out now. "*I require and charge you both*"—the words seemed to say themselves over in her head. For a while, her blunt avowal reduced everyone to silence, though James Byles kept up a kind of muffled growl of speechless comment.

Pereivale stood with bent head and an expression hard to decipher.

"You see," cried Germaine at last, addressing Gran, "you see how right they were! Mr. Burnside and the doctor both said that nobody would ever understand. The only thing was to keep it all a secret for ever."

"How has it come out? How can it have come out?" asked the old man hoarsely.

She shook her head. "I cannot tell. Uncle Rémy is the only person who knows. He must have been talking about it——"

Then Pereivale moved. He held his hands up as if to ward off something horrible. "It will be all over the county in a couple of days!" he said.

His father, standing on the hearthrug in the manner of the British householder, gave a kind of snarl.

"What's bred in the bone," said he, "will come out in the flesh. When I found my son desired to marry a daughter of Constant Damien, I can't say I was pleased, even though Emmeline was her mother. But then I didn't know what I know now. I knew there was bad blood—I knew he was a revolutionary and a sneak, who stole my girl from me. I had heard, too, that the other one, Rémy, is a scamp—gambler and adventurer! I knew nothing at all of any strain of homicide in the family; and above all I didn't know that it had actually come out in the girl there. I must withdraw my consent to your marriage, Purrus; and though it sounds harrush, I must decline to have that girl here in the house, daughter though she be to the best woman on erruth."

Before he had got far in this speech, Pereivale had gone quickly up to him. He finished what he had to say, holding off the young man, who wished to silence him. "In my own house, Purrus, I say what I think," he concluded emphatically. "I speak out plain, before I hear what Matt is going to say, for

in this matter nobody's opinion is going to affect mine one jot. You're the son of a poor sorrut of body, but she had no vice in her. I mean to do what I can to keep my blood clean. If you marry a Damien, the whole of my share in the business goes to the Willisses, so make up your mind to that, lad."

Germaine had risen, and by the time he had thus delivered himself she had drawn off her ring of sparkling gems, and laid it upon the table.

"You are quite right, Mr. Byles," she said, in a voice once more under her control. "I see quite plainly now that I must never marry anybody. I understand what Mr. Burnside meant, in Rome. He seemed to think I ought not to marry. I am very sorry, Percivale dear. I have always known I ought not to have been engaged to you with this between us. But I did not know it all—indeed, indeed, I never knew that my grandfather, too, was tainted with this—this horror! Ah, don't be so unhappy, dear! It is far better that all this should have come out! I might never have had the courage, but for that letter——"

He removed the hands which covered his face, and showed her features blurred with boyish tears, flushed and working with a mixture of wrath, shame, and tenderness.

"Oh, Ermie, I thought you so perfect! So far above all other girls!" he cried in a passion of reproach. Then, fearing to lose all control of himself, he burst hastily out of the room, and in the dejected silence which ensued they heard the hall door slam.

CHAPTER VIII

GUESTS FOR MILES

BEFORE starting for Italy that autumn, Miles Burnside had bought a motor-car. He sent it down to Fendallsecombe, with instructions to Yeo to go and get himself turned into a chauffeur by the time he came back.

Upon his return from the wedding of Mrs. James Byles, it was perhaps owing to the existence of this car that he preserved his mental balance, and did not sink into lethargic despair.

He set out at once upon a tour through England, leaving no address behind. It was as though he intended to recapture the years he had spent in bondage, by covering as much ground in as brief a time as could be accomplished, considering the shortness of the winter days. It was an odd time of year for touring, but the demon of restlessness drove him on continually. Only when the rapidity of motion, the cold, and the fatigue of sight-seeing induced physical exhaustion, could he dull, even for a moment, the pain he suffered, or turn his mind from the consideration of his solitary, aimless existence.

He formed no plans, but simply went from day to day where the fancy took him, visiting castles, cathedrals, ruined abbeys and ancient cities, trying to wrench off his mind from its brooding and to tread down his craving. No man could have seen less of his native land than he had done in past years. He was determined to remedy this, and

he bought Gazetteers and Guide Books, Motorists' Touring Routes, and other literature of the same species, loading his mind with facts and dates, and feeling that every day, instead of helping him, made him more utterly miserable.

If only he knew what had happened since his parting from Germaine! If he could be sure that all was right—that she had made her confession and been absolved. He thought it certain that she would speak on the first opportunity. And she must be absolved, since Percivale was young and human and she was—Germaine!

As he lay during sleepless hours in the stuffy beds of country inns he was torturing himself with the notion of Percivale nobly kissing away her tears—Percivale loyal as ever, but in future a little condescending in his devotion.

Back his fancy would drag him, night after night, to the moment when he saw her face—white and lovely in its intensity of life—in the midst of the Roman crowd. He felt again the grasp of her fingers as they stood and joined hands beside the great bronze fountain. He could see every curve of her slenderness as she sat beside him on the marble seat in the hotel garden—the very way in which she held up the toe of her little suede shoe—blue, like her stocking—as she talked. Hilda had rallied her about wearing blue stockings, he remembered, and had told her they were quite appropriate. . . .

. . . And they had not met again until that talk in the conservatory. He could hardly believe it. He felt as if all his life had been passed with her, she loomed so largely through every thought.

At last he realized that the tour was useless. He could not forget, he could not enjoy. He must go home and set himself to the daily round, the common task, in hopes that routine might at last dull the keen edge of what he endured.

As the miles between himself and Fendallscombe lessened, he began to consider the chance that a letter from her might be awaiting him there. He was oppressed by the feeling that he ought to have urged her to make her confession promptly, lest she be forestalled. Yet as he pondered the matter, it seemed to him highly improbable that Rémy should betray her. Even bad men do not do bad things simply for the sake of being bad. Rémy would give away Germaine unhesitatingly, if it were to his interest to do so; but, as far as Miles could see, his interest lay the other way, since, were the secret to come out through him, he would know that all hope of financial assistance from Miles was over for ever.

Nevertheless, the squire felt vaguely apprehensive; and as, in the murk of the winter twilight, he approached his home, he became almost feverishly anxious to know if there were a letter, and to rail at himself for his folly in cutting himself off from news for so long.

Since the death of Espérance, Mr. and Mrs. Yeo had lived in the house, she acting as housekeeper. The ladies of the neighbourhood were full of pity for Miles in the discomfort of such an arrangement, since the Yeos had three children, at the boisterous age. Their compassion was, however, wasted. There was plenty of room in the spacious kitchen premises at Fendallscombe, and Mrs. Yeo's sense of what was fitting kept her from allowing the master to be troubled.

"We're a nice pair, Yeo," remarked Miles, who was sitting beside his chauffeur, as they crossed the bridge in the grounds. "We never wired to Kitty to say we were coming. There will be nothing for dinner."

"I thought of that in Exeter," replied Yeo calmly. "I bought some fish and a joint. There's always plenty of eggs and cream."

"Good! You're one in a thousand," replied Miles

more cheerfully. "And Kitty has had the sense to put a fire in the hall, apparently—at least, there are lights there."

"I daresay she's been looking for us any time the last few days," was the unruffled rejoinder: and so the car slid up to the door and came to a standstill.

Miles gave a sigh, half sadness, half relief that he was once more at home. He was glad there were lights in the hall. He opened the door, and pushed his way in, laden with an armful of fur rugs.

Then he stopped short and stared.

The fire roared now upon the hearth which had been filled with plants when first Germaine saw it. Marquis, grown a little old and feeble, lay extended in the grateful heat; and on either side of the carved chimney sat a lady. That is, at the moment of his entrance they were seated; but as he walked in they both rose, and for a breathless second there was silence. Then the one who to his dazzled eyes looked like Germaine, spoke: and her speech confirmed the sweet delusion.

"Oh!" she cried, "have you come? Why didn't you send word? Mrs. Yeo is not expecting you!"

He flung down the furs in a heap on the ground, snatched his hat from his head, came forward and felt her warm hand in the clasp of his. He was so bewildered that words would not come.

"May I introduce Miss Danby?" said Germaine.

She spoke now uncertainly, almost timidly, as if she detected a lack of welcome in him.

The little frail Dannie burst eagerly into speech.

"Oh, Mr. Burnside, I must explain! I fear we have been most intrusive! I can but offer sincerest apologies! Dearest Ernie wrote to me to say that she was coming to stay with you, and I was to meet her in town, at the Great Western terminus. Well, I did, and we came down here and she said—'I hope we shall get a welcome, but I did not write to Mr.

Burnside in time to receive an answer. However, I told him to wire me at Paddington before eleven if he could not have us, and there is no telegram for me—I have inquired—so I suppose it will be all right.' Then you know, when we arrived at the station, of course there was no carriage to meet us, so then she was frightened, and she said, 'I don't know what to do.' So we consulted the station-master and he said he believed you were away for a few days, but he advised us to drive here, because he said you would not like it if we did not, and really there was nowhere else to go, because there was no other train stopping there till next morning, and there is no village and no hotel, so we came on here, when we had succeeded in getting a—a conveyance—and then good Mrs. Yeo said we must stop, on no account must we go before you came back—and she has made us so comfortable——"

He had found his voice at last. "Go! I should think not! How long have you been here?"

"Let me see, I think this must be the—the fourth day—is it not, Ermie dear? Yes, indeed it is—eating you out of house and home!"

"The fourth day? I have wasted four days?" he cried in tones of such bitter vexation that Germaine's brow cleared a little. "What a fool I was to go away and leave no address! And there was no carriage to meet you!—But Mrs. Yeo was equal to the occasion?" he asked the final question directly of Germaine: and she broke into a smile as she replied:

"Oh, she has been such a perfect dear, and so have the children. She did not know me at first, and when she did she had to tell me how much I had improved. 'You was the most stand-offish child I ever did know,' she said."

He did not reply in words. Their eyes had met in one of those long, curious looks which she had begun

to dread. Now, however, there was no reluctance, no shrinking in her gaze. He received an impression of such exhilaration that for some seconds the room swam round him.

Then, with a gasp, he came to himself, and became the eager host. He sat down, and began to talk. Mrs. Yeo ran in, saw him, disappeared, and brought tea at once. They heard where he had been, they recounted their own adventures: and for an hour they sat round the fire, talking, laughing at nothing at all, while all the time his heart was crying out one question which she could not answer. What had happened? What *could* have happened, to have brought her there?

Dannie was sublimely unconscious of his mystification. She did not realize that the letter from Germaine to him, announcing the rupture of her engagement, had not been received by him.

At last the parlourmaid came in to remove the tea-things, and brought with her a tray filled with letters which had accumulated during his absence. When Germaine saw that, she rose in a hurry.

"I will go and change," she said, smiling bravely at him. "Mrs. Yeo has let me have my own little room, and it—it is such good discipline for me."

To his astonishment, a rush of tears accompanied this admission; and she fled from the room.

Dannie looked fondly after her, and then, putting her knitting into the book of social economics she was studying, to keep the place, she said—

"Dear Mr. Burnside, though I know you are no blood relation, yet I feel more thankful than words can say that Germaine has you to trust to."

He looked seriously sympathetic. "Tell me," he said "for I have read nothing yet. What has happened?"

"Well, Germaine broke off her engagement to her cousin," said Dannie with a half smile and a half

sigh. "I can't say, you know, that I was altogether *surprised*. When I stayed at Gray Ashtead for Christmas, I could see that he was not *adequate*. Not what I should have called the right man for a girl with Ermie's ability. However, it all seemed so suitable. She found out, however, that she had made a mistake. She says she had never really been in love with him"—her listener's eyes caught the fire of the leaping flames—"and things came to a crisis, so she tells me, and she found out that he did not love her with the depth of real attachment which she had expected. Then you see it was not very comfortable for her. Old Mr. Byles, who was indignant, of course, at his son being jilted, said she would not be welcome in his house, and you understand it was most awkward for her at Gray Ashtead, being in the society of Mr. Percivale after the rupture between them. . . . Her grandfather wished her to remain at Gray Ashtead, and for Percivale to go to the Syeamores, and I fancy that is how it will finally be arranged: but naturally she felt restless, poor child, so she came away for a time. I believe she told Mr. Carewe that she had received a definite invitation from you? . . ."

"Oh, that's quite true. I told her to come. She did quite right, and you have befriended her splendidly." He spoke so cordially, and the light in his eyes was so benignant, that Dannie felt her heart swell. What a charming man, to be sure!

Her rapid, rambling talk, had told him far more than she knew herself. The rupture of the engagement must have been the result of Germaine's confession. He was so surprised at this that he could think of nothing else.

Before hastening upstairs to dress, he searched his pile of letters until he found hers, which he opened and read.

An anonymous letter! Rémy, of course.

Well, that was the very end. No further consideration of any kind would that scoundrel receive from him. He sat there raging—reconstructing the whole scene—the family assembly, the forced confession, the general horror, the decisive cutting of the knot.

“Gran is adorable,” ran Germaine’s letter. “But even he thinks most strongly that I ought to have insisted, before engaging myself, upon obtaining your leave to break my oath; or have told you straight out that I would no longer be bound by it. Mr. Byles and mamma seem to be wholly consumed with their terror lest the news should get about, but as far as we can tell, nobody has heard anything. Percivale I have not seen. He has taken it far harder than I expected.”

It was all horrible, and he called himself a brute for having allowed her to face it. But it had had this glorious, unforeseen result—it had brought her to Fendallseombe, whither he had believed she never could come, any more, for ever.

He was so excited that he wondered if he would be able to keep up any appearance of decent solemnity. He sprang to his feet, and raced upstairs, followed by Marquis, all a-quiver at such unwonted activity on the part of his staid master. He burst into his room, clapped old Evans upon the back, and laughed heartily at the sight of that ancient retainer’s dejected countenance.

Evans was nursing a grievance. His master had left him at home that winter, instead of taking him to Italy. His master had also taken to motoring, and when he went touring, had thought Yeo’s company enough. Evans was melancholy and thought himself superseded.

“What cheer, old man?” cried Miles absurdly, as he flung off his coat. “What a fool I was not to leave you a series of addresses—you might have

caught me somewhere! I have chucked away four days."

The servant stared gloomily at his smiling face. "Humph! Should think you were home soon enough," he muttered. "Better keep your door locked to-night, hadn't you?"

There fell a silence so uncanny that the man realized with a shock how much too far he had gone. Miles had drawn himself up till he looked more like Ernie's typical tyrant squire than ever in his life before.

"You can take a month's notice from to-day, Evans," said he curtly. "Leave my room at once."

The man made some kind of cry, staggered forward. Miles did not move, but as Evans lifted his eyes to that face, he winced away as if he saw some angel of judgment. Thrice he strove to speak, and thrice the attempt failed. Turning, he slunk from the room like a beaten dog.

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CHAPTER IX

THE FIRE KINDLES

THE evening passed as in a dream. Nobody made any kind of explanation. Miles sat at table, and afterwards, with his pipe, beside the hall fire, wondering at the home peacefulness of it all. The drawing-room had never been used since madam's death. Mrs. Yeo, unable without an increased staff to prepare it for her visitors, had thought it wisest to wait for orders until her master's return.

In the hall, the huge leather screen which Miles had found in Italy some years ago, was drawn across the doorway. Another, in Oriental lacquer, a family possession, stood before the door which led to the stairs and passages. The great wood-fire glowed upon their faces, gilded Germaine's night-black hair, and lit up her serious profile as she bent over the embroidery which was so little a characteristic employment of hers.

He might sit there and look at her—might talk to her. Could he be the same man who had awakened that morning in a stuffy bed in a comfortless inn, and had felt that life held nothing to which he might look forward with interest?

They talked of his tour. It was a good, safe subject. He spread out his motoring map upon the gate-leg table, when coffee had been carried away, and told them of what he had seen, and where he had been, and of sundry small adventures which had befallen him. The questions which he thirsted to ask, the story he was longing to hear, were out of the



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question in the presence of the gentle, but alert little chaperon.

Dannie had no idea as to his feelings. In her eyes, he was a reliable, middle-aged person, who stood in the position of some kind of guardian to Germaine. The idea that they might desire to be left alone together—that Germaine might give to him confidences which she could not give to her own Dannie—had never presented itself.

As for Germaine, she was whelmed in a peace which she had no desire to break. She had fled to Fendallscombe in a mood of trouble; with a heart, as she supposed, half broken.

She was young, she could not but know, at least in part, her own power. She was unprepared for the way in which Mr. Byles—and, as a result, his wife and his son—had received the news of her childish past.

She had felt sure, from the moment of knowing that her mother was to marry again, that she, Germaine, would cease to count—that her mother was lost to her. To hear herself formally forbidden to enter her stepfather's doors was, however, another matter.

The scene in the drawing-room of the Sycamores had left an indelible impression. It confirmed her previous uneasy suspicion that her new relations were people whom she could not understand. The manner in which her grandfather and Percivale had regarded her intended participation in the Suffrage procession had puzzled and hurt her. Their point of view in the present case was incomprehensible. It seemed to her to be summed up in the terror lest the thing should "get about."

For herself, the pain lay in the fact that those with whom she particularly wished to stand well, should lower their opinion of her. What such people as the Lenoxes might think, or say, was a matter of absolute indifference.

The only one of them all, who showed himself grieved by the thing that grieved her, was her grandfather. He was hurt, as she was hurt, by the reflection that she had hidden from him a knowledge so essential to their confidence in each other. Yet he, too, felt acutely the loss of prestige. The story seemed to turn his lovely granddaughter into an adventuress, concealing her dubious past—coming into the society—save the mark!—around Gray Ashtead, under false pretences.

When James Byles decreed that Percival must remain for the present at the Sycamores, until the family had had time to think the situation out, Gran could not but agree that this was best.

Emmeline pointed out that nobody would think it peculiar that dear Percy should be staying a few days with his father and his new mother upon their return: and this consideration seemed to give, not only the Byleses, but even Gran, a good deal of relief. To do anything at this crisis, which would "look odd" seemed to be the thing to avoid.

On those grounds, Germaine's desire to go to Fendallscombe had been opposed. People would wonder that she should leave home so soon upon her mother's return. Germaine warmly opposed this idea. Mr. Burnside was the person most closely affected by the scandal concerning her. That she should be staying in his house, was above all things a proof that he at least did not regard it as a bar to friendly intercourse. This was a view which had not presented itself. It was admitted to have weight—weight enough to enable her to gain her point. If Miles thought lightly of the offence, was it not somewhat ridiculous that the Carewes should pull long faces about it?

Matthew thought that, if the knowledge did not circulate in the neighbourhood, there was no doubt of Germaine's eclipse being quite temporary. It

would be merely a lover's quarrel—Percivale would come round. He liked the girl's spirit, in withdrawing herself at once from the scene. She had not pleaded, she had taken the initiative, and herself broken the engagement: which Pereivale in honour could hardly have done. That was the way to bring him to her feet. All was going to be well. He, Gran, would write to Mr. Burnside in a week or two, and ask for a full account of the Charlotte Corday episode. It was too much to expect of the girl that she should describe such happenings dispassionately.

Thus he had let her go; and he could not know that the bird he had eaged so skilfully, for his own delight, had taken wing, and was soaring away, no more to be caught in any cage save one.

As for Germaine, the misery which had been in her heart when she journeyed down to Fendallseombe had increased a thousandfold when she found the master absent.

She had had three days in which to brood over her own life, and her own mistakes; and this upon the scene of her worst lapse from the path of rectitude.

Three times, she told herself, had she "come a regular cropper." Once when she tried to kill Miles, once when she tried to interrupt a meeting, once when she tried to suppress her misdeeds and pass herself off as a charming young lady of the usual blameless kind.

She had lost irrevocably the golden prospects which had dangled before her so alluringly during the preceding autumn. The knowledge of having lost them was not much of a trouble. She had never been at home in the atmosphere of Gray Ashtead. She belonged to a different plane. During all those weeks of glamour, she had known it, in the under current of her mind. She was not for gilded respectability.

In her three days of brooding, and solitary thought,

she had come to the conclusion that she would be independent.

She felt quite sure that Gran would make her an allowance. She would go to London and emulate her father. She would become a journalist, and fan the flames of revolution. Dannie would, she knew, readily resign Teck Villas in order to live with her in town, in the thick of the Woman's movement.

Roaming through the wintry park, she recalled the fiery thoughts, the wild ambitions, which had animated her as a child. The struggle for daily bread had beaten her down, but by no means killed the hidden longings. Now, surely, she had experience. Now, surely she had passed through the fire, and might be trusted to have some mental balance, some power of behaving sensibly.

Thus had she thought, thus determined; and then Miles came home, and for the moment the future vanished altogether, and gave place to a present so radiant, that her one idea was not to think of anything that could disturb it.

As the firelight glowed over the little group, as she felt the soft weight of Marquis's head upon her shoe, and heard his long sighs of heartfelt content—as the wind howled along the countryside, and the perfume of Miles's tobacco mingled with the violets she had placed in water upon a little table near the chimney corner, she thought, with a secret satisfaction, that to-night was the Hunt Ball at Carford. She might have been there, dancing with the hunting squires, who dropped their final "g's," racking her brains for something to talk about which could interest them, and driven to beg them for minute accounts of every hound in their pack, every spinney in the district, because no subject that she could introduce seemed to light any spark of interest in them.

How preferable was the present moment, from every conceivable point of view! She wished that

Miles were her brother. Then she might live here and keep house for him. . . .

. . . Well, at any rate, here she was for the present, and she was going to bask in it as long as she could.

When at last Miles rose at Dannie's bidding, and went reluctantly to the table where stood the silver bedroom candlesticks, lighting one for each lady, Germaine, as she took her lighted candle from his hand, looked up at him, with eyes which would have compelled him to anything she desired, though of this she was amazingly unconscious.

"You won't ask me to talk about anything—will you?" she murmured.

"To talk about anything?" he repeated vaguely. He stood there gazing upon her, and half his mind was fastened upon the delight it gave him that there should be three bedroom candles there, instead of one only, as there had been for so many dreary years.

"You shall do exactly as you like," he managed to say—"so long as you promise to stay here a bit."

She looked pleased, and nodded, turning rather suddenly away, and hastening to catch up Dannie, as though she feared to be alone with him.

If that were so—if she was afraid that he meant to cross-question her—then he would wait until Doomsday if necessary, for further enlightenment. He tried to say so more forcibly—to frame some sentence which should not be too openly lover-like, in which to tell her that it was for her to issue orders, for him to obey them. But it was too late, she was gone. His tongue, he told himself, was rusty with long disuse.

He turned back to the fireside and sank into the chair upon which she had sat. He wanted to realize her presence—to think things over.

She had puzzled him greatly upon that last visit of his to Gray Ashtead. Her hostility, her attitude of armed resistance, had seemed to need explanation.

She implored not to be asked to explain—that, or anything else. He was quite willing to obey, for the reason that the attitude of hostility had disappeared. Her manner this evening was sweet, and almost meek. He thought about this for so long that the fire began to die down. Then he knocked out his pipe on the bars, stretched, and realized that he was very tired, and had hardly slept for many nights.

“Come, Marquis, old lad,” he said, rising to his feet. “Let’s see that all is safe. We have her to take care of now, you know.”

Meanwhile, upstairs, Germaine sat by her bedroom fire, listening for his tread along the corridor.

She occupied her old room, Dannie that adjoining, wherein Espérance had slept during the term of her incarceration.

It had been an effort, these last three days, not to tell Dannie anything about that tragic time. Yet she would not do so. It would be a treachery to him. He had given way only in the one case of Percivale. The secret was still his.

On the first night of her stay she had soaked the pillow with her tears. On the second she had dreamed horribly, and made outcry in the night. On the third, she had slept fitfully, and to-night she believed that she would sleep soundly. Her doubt was over. The master had returned, and evidently they were welcome guests.

As he passed her door, with Marquis pattering at his heels, she was kneeling at the little prie-dieu at which Espérance had taught her to pray. She finished her devotions, rose, crept into bed, extinguished her light, and was asleep almost before she lay down.

CHAPTER X

THE END CROWNS ALL

THERE followed two or three incredible days, during which nothing happened. On the first day, the master of the house awoke with an acute sense of his own deficiencies, when considered in the light of entertainer. He sent for Kitty, bade her at once engage another housemaid, and put the drawing-room in order. He also begged her to make suggestions as to the manner in which two ladies could be entertained in the country in the depths of winter.

Kitty was quite scornful. When you had a motor, she saw no difficulty. There was the Cathedral—that meant lunch in Yeominster. One day provided for. Then there was the castle at Knowle Clyst. There was an inn there, and if Yeo went to the village the day previous, and sent a telegram, they could give you quite a good lunch. Then there were the joys of the cinematograph in Yeominster. "Not more than an hour, in the car." She saw no difficulty and Miles's courage rose.

His sudden desire to go sight-seeing was a little surprising to Germaine, who asked nothing better than to roam about the park, and sit by the hall fire. She was, however, deeply touched by his eagerness to play the host; and, after their first expedition, the pathos of it struck her so deeply that she would have gone to a meeting of the Salvation Army, had he proposed such a manner of diverting themselves.

He had never had anybody to play with, and the delight of ordering his car and escorting his guests was to him absolutely new and fresh.

Moreover, Dannie enjoyed it all to the full as much as he. Dannie's hard life had left little margin for frivolity. She seldom saw a theatre or a picture palace, except from the outside. Germaine accordingly found herself, not only by day, but also by night, seated in the luxurious car, Dannie at her side, and Miles opposite, his long legs ingeniously doubled, in a state of bodily discomfort, doubtless, but distilling mental satisfaction from every pore.

Germaine had the impression of being in the society of two delightful children, bent on having a good time. Miles's suggestions followed so hard upon each other's heels, that she saw she must postpone any discussion of her future with him until the first novelty of "gadding" had worn off.

Dannie was always there. Had she had the least inkling of the state of Miles's affections, she would have vanished with discreet dexterity. Nothing could, however, have been farther from her thoughts. She was in the lap of luxury. Things might be old-fashioned at Rendallseombe, but they were extremely comfortable. Windows and doors in that fine old building let in draughts in a way unknown to such edifices as Teck Villas. Bedroom fires were kept going all day, chairs were cosy and deep—all meals were glorified by the presence of Devonshire cream; and Yeo ran down to the station with the car and changed the books every morning. It was Holiday House, or Liberty Hall. If only Germaine had been happy, there would have been no crumpled rose-leaf in Dannie's couch. As it was, she did not seem unhappy; though from time to time her old friend marvelled at her silence.

Miles watched her all the time. He saw the eyes that looked into some mysterious recess of life which

had no connection with the material universe. He caught their wistful light, and said to himself in misery—

“She is suffering for that worthless bounder.”

He knew that he could not hold his tongue much longer. The fire within him was kindling, fiercer and hotter. It was his fault that she suffered thus. He, in his selfishness, had imposed upon her an unfair condition. How loyal she had been! How finely she had kept her promise! That she should suffer for his mistake was an outrage. He must tell her that.

Once or twice, she reassured him. Once or twice when they were all sitting round the fire, and silence had fallen, she raised her lids as if in response to the pleading of his gaze, and showed him eyes which did not seem full of regret—eyes which met his own with something that seemed like security of understanding; and her lips had parted in a faint smile.

When he saw that, there sprang in his heart the hope that the time of pause and rest which she was undergoing might do something to heal her pain. If he insisted upon touching the wound—upon making her speak to him upon the forbidden topic—he might hurt her. He dared not risk it. He must wait, and let the healing process go on. . . .

. . . And indeed, she had laughed quite heartily at the play they went to see that afternoon.

Upon the day following, Germaine was the last of the three to enter the breakfast-room. Miles, eating porridge and cream as in old days, raised his head as she came in, and watched her narrowly. Her hand was upon the grizzled muzzle of old Marquis. The dog had fallen in love with her, and each morning of her stay, after his master had gone downstairs, Marquis repaired to the landing outside Germaine's door, to wait for her.

She was in a mood of unrest that morning. Two days ago, something had happened to break in upon the false peace which she was hugging to her heart. A letter had come to which she had instantly replied. She dreaded lest this morning should bring another ; and as she took her seat, she saw that it was so.

With a glance at Dannie, she slipped the unopened envelope into her pocket.

She had been looking forward to this morning, for Miles had succeeded in hiring a mount for her, and she and he were to have gone riding after breakfast. It was, however, raining, in a steady, decided manner—not a Devonshire drizzle, but a real down-pour. She smiled reassuringly at Miles when he began to scold the climate. It was, she said, a good thing they could not go out. She had letters which must be written.

During breakfast she spoke little and ate less ; and as soon as she could do so, she slipped away to the little room where she and Dannie wrote letters—bidding the dog follow her, with a scarcely perceptible motion of the hand, which, however, Marquis understood and obeyed.

Dannie rose from table, drew her chair to the magnificent fire, and produced her knitting. Miles stood on the hearthrug, thoughtfully filling his pipe.

"That was from young Carewe?" he asked, a little hoarsely.

Dannie raised mild, short-sighted eyes to his face. Something in his voice struck her. She could not, however, see plainly enough to discern his expression.

"Yes," she replied, "it was from young Mr. Carewe. She had one from him two days ago, you know."

"I didn't know. Did she answer it?"

"By return of post."

"And now he writes again."

"I suppose that was only to be expected."

"Doubtless. I—I gather that there is a good chance that they will—make it up?"

Dannie laid down her knitting in her lap, and gazed pensively in the fire. "I feel inclined to say that I hope not. Yet how can one tell what is really for the best? Young Mr. Carewe is not an ideal lover for Germaine; but is she likely to find a better? . . . A girl so lovely ought to marry—do you not agree? . . . Now she talks of going to London and taking up journalism. She wants me to go with her. I shall go, if she really decides upon such a course, but I cannot say I think it advisable. She had better be among her own people. If she marries her cousin, one would feel that she was safe." . . .

Her voice died away, as she continued her desultory musings. Miles leaned an elbow upon the stone mantel. Here was food for reflection.

If Germaine had planned out a future for herself, regardless of Percivale, it looked as if she had made up her mind not to marry him.

Whether she did or did not, there was apparently no room for him, Miles, in the scheme of things.

He walked restlessly to the window and back. If he could but be sure that she would hold firm! . . .

. . . Yet even if she did, now was most assuredly not the moment in which to obtrude his own claims. A fortnight ago, she had been going to marry Percivale. As for him, she hardly knew him. As the remembrance of their meetings—how few and scanty—swept over him, he laughed, a little grating laugh which fell oddly upon the silence, and made Miss Danby look up questioningly.

"I think, in the end, that Germaine will do as she pleases," he said, as some kind of explanation of his laugh: and went out into the hall.

Here too, the fire blazed merrily, and he stood before it some time in meditation. Should he take the bull by the horns, go to her, and tell her that

there was a home for her there, at Fendallseombe, upon her own terms—with Dannie as chaperon if she desired it—and himself as guardian merely—anything, so long as she understood that she was not homeless nor friendless.

Then he sneered at himself for the absurdity of the whole idea. After some restless pacing, he spied the morning papers upon the table which stood in the oriel. Flinging himself down in the first chair, he opened the *Times* mechanically, and tried to turn his thoughts with a leading article.

The oriel was deep, and as he sat there, he was entirely concealed from the view of any person entering from the staircase door, unless such person walked almost across the room. He had not been sitting many minutes, before the said door gently opened and someone, light of footfall, came in. He thought it must be Dannie, but it might, on the other hand, be Germaine. He listened, without moving, not at first realizing that he could not be seen.

Whoever it was had come apparently to find something which lay upon the writing-table, which stood against the wall between the oriel and the door by which she had entered.

Miles's heart began to beat furiously. If it were Germaine, dare he come forward and tell her that the moment had arrived for them to talk things out? Ought he to allow her to write finally to Percivale, one way or the other, without telling her that she had a home here, albeit not such a luxurious one as the Carewe marriage would provide?

A rustling of papers was audible, as though something were being searched for. Two or three drawers were opened, and shut again, somewhat petulantly he thought. He heard the footfall go near the hearth, and the bell was rung. He was about to rise and declare himself, when a smothered sound—either a gasp or a small sob—arrested him. If it were Ger-

maine, and if she were in grief—would she think he had spied upon her? It dawned upon him that she did not know of his presenee, and he was in the act of getting to his feet, when the door opened, and the voice of Evans demanded in melancholy accents—“Did you ring, miss?”

“Oh yes, please,” came from Germaine in reply, equally melancholy. “I want a telegraph form, and cannot find one here. Do you know if there are any in the house?”

“In the lowest drawer, miss; I will find one for you.” He produced what was required, there was a murmur of thanks. The servant stood at her side as she wrote. Then he spoke. “As I have the luck to find you here, miss, I wonder if I might venture to say a word to you?”

The man’s voice broke oddly, and Germaine made a little sound of sympathy.

“Why, Evans, what is it? Are you in trouble?”

Miles suddenly realized his enormity. He was eavesdropping. Yet he could not make up his mind to show himself at that instant. He listened in amaze.

“Yes, miss, I am in trouble, and what I wish to ask is, whether you would be so kind and so forgivin’ as to say a word to the master for me.”

“To say a word to the master for you!” echoed Germaine in surprise. “Why, what can be the matter?”

“He has given me notice to leave his service, miss. A month’s notice! After all these years! I don’t feel as if I can bear it, miss, I don’t indeed!——”

“But surely you can speak to him yourself! What happened? Did you quarrel?”

“I was impertinent, miss. I said a thing I did not ought to have said. And since then he won’t look at me—won’t let me go near him—won’t say a word.” The voice grew desperately shaky. “I—I think it’ll break my ’cart, miss.”

"Oh, but Evans! That doesn't sound a bit like Mr. Burnside."

"No, miss, it ain't like him. Not like I ever knew him before. But when a gentleman his age falls in love——"

She broke in there—very hurriedly. "In love? Mr. Burnside? I did not know. You must not tell me your master's secrets."

There was a slight pause, as though the man were discomfited. "No, miss," he murmured, then: "I did not know as I was saying anything I had better not. Only I thought, if anything would turn him, it might be your word in my favour."

It was Germaine's turn to hesitate. At last—"Mr. Burnside has been a wonderful friend to me," she replied seriously. "Now that Espérance is gone, I think that you are the only person who knows exactly how much he has done for me, are you not, Evans? I will speak to him about you. Perhaps he does not know how sorry you are."

"No, miss, he do not, for the reason he won't let me speak and tell him so. I am sure I am very grateful to you, miss. I could not say how grateful. You are returning good for evil, that you are, for I—I——" he choked and halted; then, fearing to lose his self-control, turned and made abruptly for the door.

She called him back. "One moment! Please tell me one thing. Is—do you know—is Mr. Burnside going to be married?"

Evans paused in desperate discomfort. "I am sure, miss, I don't know. I could not say. I ought not to have named it, only I supposed you might have been aware—in fact, miss, he haven't spoken not three words to me since he turned me off, so I can say nothing at all about it."

On the salver in the man's hand lay the message which Germaine had scrawled, and the shilling to pay for the telegram. The girl laid her hand upon it.

"I—I think I will not send this message quite yet," she said. "I may perhaps ring for you later. Thank you."

The door closed softly behind the servant, and she stood where he had left her, in the centre of the room, motionless in body, inly reeling with the shock of his words.

Miles was, himself, in the midst of a love-affair!

Why not? Was he not pre-eminently lovable, and also eligible? Why had the idea not occurred to her before? What more likely than that the owner of Fendallscombe, loneliest of men, should be contemplating matrimony?

He had perhaps been longing for sympathy, trying to drop hints, which she in her selfish absorption had been too stupid to take! . . . And she had foisted her company upon him, demanded his attention, assumed his interest, taken it for granted that she might stay as long as she pleased and do exactly as she liked.

She had, as it were, commanded his leisure, his unfailing patience, his hospitality. She remembered that, the previous day, she had actually been sensible of pique, because he found himself bound to attend the meeting of some local Committee.

And all the time another object was claiming his attention, filling his heart! She herself was just what she must always have appeared to him—the unmanageable girl whose other relatives shirked the care of her, who had been burdensome to him for years—whom he had forgiven, maintained, helped, comforted. . . .

Such feeling as she could not master assailed her suddenly. It was as though an unknown monster leaped upon her unawares, tearing with tooth and claw. She had no name to give to the torment he inflicted.

Rushing to the old couch, which stood sideways to

the fire, she flung herself down upon it with all the impetuosity of the old Germaine.

She had suffered much during the past few weeks, but she knew—it was the one thing she did know clearly—that she had never suffered anything like the agony of this moment.

She was far beyond the relief of tears. She felt as if a vast flame had shot up in an instant, enveloped her whole being, and scorched her to a cinder. She wrung and twisted her hands together in the intensity of her feeling: and all the time she had no revelation of the meaning of this suffering—of what she was enduring, or why.

She did not know how long she lay so, prone upon the cushions, her face hidden, her shoulders huddled.

A voice roused her—Miles's voice, quiet and friendly.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?" he asked simply.

She sat up, overwhelmed with shame. Colour flamed into her white, ravaged face. Its expression startled him, but he would not show it.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she murmured, putting up her hands to arrange her hair. "I—I don't know what made me give way like that. I—really I am very sorry. I am better now, and perhaps you would not mind—as we are here alone—I have something to say to you."

He laid aside his empty pipe upon the mantel and said simply:

"Yes, I think it is time we had it out. You heard from young Carewe this morning, did you not?"

She signified assent.

"And he wants you to give him another chance?"

Surprise gave her speech. "How did you know?"

"I didn't. I only guessed. A man who had been engaged to you, wouldn't be likely to give you up without a struggle."

She had no reply for that.

"What have you said to him?" he asked, risking the direct question with inward quailing.

She smoothed out the crumpled bit of paper in her hand, and held it to him. "On no account come. Quite useless," he read. "Will write in a few days." "He wanted to come here, then?" he asked.

She nodded, and added after a moment, "It is of no use for him to do that."

He considered this. "Why is it of no use?"

She answered very low. "Since I have been here I have realized the truth. I have looked it in the face. I can never marry."

"Never marry! Why not?"

"I saw," she broke forth hurriedly, "that in one way you and Dr. Preston did me a bad turn. You were very skillful—you arranged it all so that I should be shielded from the consequence of what I did. But you could not change me—what I am. I know now that I am not fit to be any man's wife."

He contemplated her keenly, and his reply was not what she had expected. There was a note of disappointment in his voice. "That then is your only reason for choking off Carewe! You don't think you ought to marry anybody? If it were not for this idea, you might marry him, after all?"

"Need we discuss other reasons? That is a reason, final enough—dreadful enough, against my marrying anybody. Whether people know it or not, I am one of a family of homicides—a woman who is only not a murderess because her physical strength was not as great as her wicked intent."

"Don't talk like that," he blurted out. "It is mere nonsense. You did what you hated doing, in a moment of magnificent courage."

"I did what my grandfather did—what my grandfather's great-aunt did——"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know," she persisted, steadily. "The homicidal taint."

"Who told you any such thing?"

"Mother knew that my father's father——"

"Your father's father killed a man who had inflicted such unspeakable torture upon a woman that death was a light punishment. He was guilty, at worst, of manslaughter. As for you—the whole story was worked out clearly by Dr. Preston. You yielded to a variety of influences which were brought to bear upon your innocent soul. That you had a grandfather who killed a man in righteous indignation was the merest coincidence. There is no question of hereditary taint in the matter. Your brain is clear, your mind strong, your heart good. You are in every respect perfectly normal. If anybody has been telling you to the contrary, they lie. Now—are you reassured?"

She looked into his kindled eyes, and drew a long sigh.

"A little comforted, perhaps."

He knitted his brows and frowned. "Then will you go and send a message to bring your lover to your feet? You may tell him, if you like, that I am in a position to reassure him as to your perfect sanity, and that if necessary, Dr. Preston can be called upon to corroborate me."

There was a pause. She sat there, looking down. Her breath came quickly, and her expression had changed.

When she spoke, her words and tone were alike wholly unexpected.

"I have just heard—I have been told—that you are going to be married. Is that true?"

... And upon those words, and the piteous tone of them, revelation came to him and he knew that he was.

"Yes," he cried quickly, giving himself no time

for reflection. "I am going to be married. Do you find that very surprising?"

Then, in the ensuing silence, he realized, half incredulously, that she really did believe his heart to be elsewhere; that he was giving her the same pain that she had inflicted upon him in the hotel garden at Rome. It was hard to keep back his words, but he must hear what she would say.

"If I find it surprising, it is because I am so self-absorbed. I have thought only of myself and my trivial worries. I hope you will be—very—happy."

"I'll promise you one thing," he flung out recklessly, on the spur of the moment, "when I am married, I will never tell my wife what you once did to me!"

He saw the flame of indignation rise—saw her struggle with it—realize that she must take the blows he chose to inflict—make an effort to speak calmly; yet she did not succeed—there was a passion of resentment in her voice and eyes as she cried—

"Then there will be a secret between you, after all!"

"Oh, no there won't," he assured her, a very madness of triumph dawning upon his thought, "I will have no secrets between my wife and me."

"Then you have already told her?" she demanded faintly, in her eyes an *Et tu, Brute*, look which made him all the more certain of something he had not dared to foresee.

"You're right, she knows already," he laughed. "But the things she doesn't know are much, much more astonishing than the things she does! Why even poor old Evans can see more clearly than she can!"

"Evans!" she echoed faintly: and as she spoke, she made a movement as though she would escape. It was enough to precipitate the event. He imprisoned her in his arms, with a queer cry.

"Oh, can't you see," he said, speaking like one that gasps for breath, "that there is no other way out, either for you or me? Only one woman for me, only one man for you! We two against the world—can't you feel it yourself? I know you do, though I can't say why I know."

He broke off. She was lying in his arms, quite still, and so white that at first he thought she was faint. Yet he could feel that there was no resistance—she let him hold her: and after a moment she opened her eyes upon him.

"You?" she almost whispered. "It can't be true. You, of all men on earth! You whom I——"

"As you say," he broke in tenderly. "I whom you—Ah, that's right!—Let your head lie there, and heal what you wounded! They didn't tell the truth when they said you hadn't reached the heart. You did, and it *has* hurt—these last weeks almost more than I could bear."

She turned her face inwards, hiding it against him. For a long while she could not speak. At last, gently freeing herself, she looked at him in utter wonder.

"Miles, how was it I didn't know?" she asked, "I suppose because of the wild improbability! . . . And now I can see—now, looking back. From the moment I met you in Rome I have been restless and unsatisfied. I didn't know why. I felt angry with myself, and with you, because you made me feel so—strange. I lay awake all night, before you came to Gray Ashted: and when I saw you, I felt a wild desire to hurt you—to say and do things that would make you dislike me. Then I was so wretched because I thought I had succeeded . . . and it meant this, all the time."

"This, and far more than this," he told her.

"Tell me," he asked presently, when they were sitting side by side upon the old couch, "there is

one thing I must know. Were you ever in love with Pereivale?"

"Never. Not for a day. But how is a girl to know? When I said 'Yes' to him I did not know what I was doing. I had not met you. I could not tell that there were such feelings in the world as you awoke in me! But I did not know it was love, I thought it was only the acuteness of the memory, the secret, that we shared—Oh, Miles! Oh, Miles!"

"I think," he said, "that I have been yours ever since that day you kissed me, when you were ten years old. There was magic in your lips even then. They sealed me yours, though I had no idea then that you would come to such splendour of beauty."

"Nonsense!"

"You must let me tell you the truth for once, Pixie. You are the most beautiful thing I ever saw."

"But I hope you are not in love with my looks only? That would be very disappointing. I feel as if there were something much deeper between us. You seem to know what I mean, and what I want, and I have the same perception where you are concerned. Now at Gray Ashted, I could see what *they* wanted, and with a little trouble, I could make myself the kind of person they wanted me to be. But they never knew, nor cared to know, what *I* wanted, nor what kind of person I really was."

"I know what you mean," he replied, "but you must consider that in giving up Gray Ashted you are giving up a great deal. I am not a bit rich, and I like a quiet country life. I'm afraid we shall have to be here most of the year—there is so much to be done, and it wants personal supervision. Shall you mind living here?"

"Mind?" Her glowing eyes reassured him. "I have always loved Fendallscombe. If I lived permanently the kind of life I lived up there, I should be choked with weeds, and grow selfish and artificial."

Here I feel as if—I don't know how to say it—I can possess my own soul."

"In the clutches of a tyrant step-uncle?"

She laughed with pleasure, regarding him approvingly.

"Has anyone ever told you how handsome you are, Miles?" she asked. "I believe, if you had gone a-hunting, you might have married *anybody*—some great heiress or peeress or something. Now, might you not have married Helen Grenfell, back in the old days? Instead of a pauper child with homicidal——"

"Rot about my looks," he broke in, red and embarrassed. "Unless it is to please you, I don't care how I look."

"I used to be so frightened of your beard!"

"Well, I was a weird kind of being. I don't know why I wore the thing. But I remember how bucked I was, after I had shaved, to find that it pleased you—you said I was like Michael in the church window!"

"So you are still," she answered dreamily. Then, with sudden vehemence: "Oh, Miles, how right it all is! How completely right! And yet how near we came to missing it!"

"That," he said thoughtfully, "was the result of my slowness and inertia. Even this morning I was hesitating—perhaps it is fair to say that it was partly humility. I did not dare to think—and it seemed so soon after your being engaged to him. Of course, I did not know then, that you had never cared for him. And it was poor old Evans who enlightened me! I was sitting over there in the oriel and I heard what he said to you."

"He enlightened us both then. I can't tell you what I felt, at the idea of your marrying anybody else! I was as jealous as a pre-historic woman. Miles, whatever he did, you must forgive him now."

"That will be all right," replied Miles, flushing.

For a minute silence fell—each occupied in delicious reverie. Suddenly Germaine spoke.

"The marriage service won't matter a bit now," she remarked, with exultation. Her betrothed positively jumped.

"What did you say?" he demanded, after a stupefied pause. "Are you proposing to dispense——"

"Oh, Miles, you *must* know what I mean! Don't pretend to be stupid! When Mamma was being married don't you remember how you turned and looked at me?"

"Ah!" Enlightenment dawned upon him. "I require and charge you both," he murmured.

"You said to me then, as plainly as anyone can without speaking, '*Don't you see that there is only one way out of this?*'"

"I am glad you understood so well."

"I did, but of course I wouldn't," was her reply, perfectly satisfactory to him, though somewhat elliptical.

Their eyes met in a smile of content.

Miles sat, his arm along the back of the couch behind Germaine's head, watching the light of the leaping flames play upon her face. Outside, the rain dashed against the panes, and the sou-wester went howling over Devon. Marquis gave a long sigh of utter well-being, dropping his head upon his paws; and the squire thought of that evening so recent, yet so far away, in which he had dreaded the thought of his own fireside, and had entered to find her sitting by it.

It seemed to him that a man whose empty house had suddenly become a home, could have nothing left to wish for.

Dannie, knitting by the breakfast-room fire, wondered that Germaine took so long over her letters.

With a sudden thought that the child might be grieving alone, she rose and went in search of her. Failing to find her, either in writing-room or bedroom, she directed her steps at last to the hall.

She went in very quietly, not really expecting to find the girl there: and stopped short, tremulously, at the sight that met her eyes. Two heads visible above the back of the Chesterfield—one blond, one black—but in such close proximity!

For a moment she felt quite staggered. It was, to her, completely unexpected. There they sat, as they might sit during many a winter's eve in the time to come—side by side, and cheek to cheek.

Dannie was a very intelligent woman, and as she gazed, she began to see that she had been more than a little stupid.

The reason for Germaine's broken engagement—the reason for her flight from Gray Ashted were now apparent: though she felt certain that Germaine herself had not been aware of what ailed her. She cleared her throat.

"Ermie darling, are you there?"

They did not move, nor start. "Yes, Dannie, we are both here," replied Germaine sweetly.

Dannie came round the back of the couch and smiled upon them both as they lifted their glowing, conscious faces to her.

"My dears, my dears! I had not thought of it; but it is very right."

"Absolutely right," said Miles: and his smile was good to see.

THE END

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