

LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA

By

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***Free*editorial** 

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CHAPTER XXIV. LOVERS MATED

He was benevolently martial, to the extent of paternal, in thinking his girl, of whom he deigned to think now as his countess, pardonably foolish. Woman for woman, she was of a pattern superior to the world's ordinary, and might run the world's elect a race. But she was pitifully woman-like in her increase of dissatisfaction with the more she got. Women are happier enslaved. Men, too, if their despot is an Ormont. Colonel of his regiment, he proved that: his men would follow him anywhere, do anything. Grand old days, before he was condemned by one knows not what extraordinary round of circumstances to cogitate on women as fluids, and how to cut channels for them, that they may course along in the direction good for them, imagining it their pretty wanton will to go that way! Napoleon's treatment of women is excellent example. Peterborough's can be defended.

His Aminta could not reason. She nursed a rancour on account of the blow she drew on herself at Steignton, and she declined consolation in her being pardoned. The reconciliation evidently was proposed as a finale of one of the detestable feminine storms enveloping men weak enough to let themselves be dragged through a scene for the sake of domestic tranquillity.

A remarkable exhibition of Aminta the woman was, her entire change of front since he had taken her spousal chill. Formerly she was passive, merely stately, the chiselled grande dame, deferential in her bearing and speech, even when argumentative and having an opinion to plant. She had always the independent eye and step; she now had the tongue of the graceful and native great lady, fitted to rule her circle and hold her place beside the proudest of the Ormonts. She bore well the small shuffle with her jewel-box—held herself gallantly. There had been no female feignings either, affected misapprehensions, gapy ignorances, and snaky subterfuges, and the like, familiar to men who have the gentle twister in grip. Straight on the line of the thing to be seen she flew, and struck on it; and that is a woman's martial action. He would right heartily have called her comrade, if he had been active himself. A warrior pulled off his horse, to sit in a chair and contemplate the minute evolutions of the sex is pettish with his part in such battle-fields at the stage beyond amusement.

Seen swimming, she charmed him. Abstract views of a woman summon opposite advocates: one can never say positively, That is she! But the visible fair form of a woman is hereditary queen of us. We have none of your pleadings and counter-pleadings and judicial summaries to obstruct a ravenous loyalty. My lord beheld Aminta take her three quick steps on the plank, and spring and dive and ascend, shaking the ends of her bound black locks; and away she went with shut mouth and broad stroke of her arms into the sunny early morning river; brave to see, although he had to flick a bee of a question, why he enjoyed the privilege of seeing, and was not beside her. The only answer confessed to a distaste for all exercise once pleasurable.

She and her little friend boated or strolled through the meadows during the day; he fished. When he and Aminta rode out for the hour before dinner, she seemed pleased. She was amicable, conversable, all that was agreeable as a woman, and she was the chilliest of wives. My lord's observations and reflections came to one conclusion: she pricked and challenged him to lead up to her desired stormy scene. He met her and meant to vanquish her with the dominating patience Charlotte had found too much for her: women cannot stand against it.

To be patient in contention with women, however, one must have a continuous and an exclusive occupation; and the tax it lays on us conduces usually to impatience with men. My lord did not directly connect Aminta's chillness and Morsfield's impudence; yet the sensation roused by his Aminta participated in the desire to punish Morsfield speedily. Without wishing for a duel, he was moved by the social sanction it had to consider whether green youths and women might not think a grey head had delayed it too long. The practice of the duel begot the peculiar animal logic of the nobler savage, which tends to magnify an offence in the ratio of our vanity, and hunger for a blood that is not demanded by the appetite. Moreover, a waning practice, in disfavour with the new generation, will be commended to the conservative barbarian, as partaking of the wisdom of his fathers. Further, too, we may have grown slothful, fallen to moodiness, done excess of service to Omphale, our tyrant lady of the glow and the chill; and then undoubtedly the duel braces.

He left Aminta for London, submissive to the terms of intimacy dictated by her demeanour, his unacknowledged seniority rendering their harshness less hard to endure. She had not gratified him with a display of her person in the glitter of the Ormont jewels; and since he was, under common conditions, a speechless man, his ineptitude for amorous remonstrances precipitated him upon deeds, that he might offer additional proofs of his esteem and the assurance of her established position as his countess. He proposed to engage Lady Charlotte in a conflict severer than the foregoing, until he brought her to pay the ceremonial visit to her sister-in-law. The count of time for this final trial of his masterfulness he calculated at a week. It would be an occupation, miserable occupation though it was. He hailed the prospect of chastising Morsfield, for a proof that his tussles with women, prolonged study of their tricks, manoeuvrings and outwittings of them, had not emasculated him.

Aminta willingly promised to write from day to day. Her senses had his absence insured to them by her anticipation of the task. She did not conceive it would be so ponderous a task. What to write to him when nothing occurred! Nothing did occur, unless the arrival of Mr. Weyburn was to be named an event. She alluded to it: 'Mr. Weyburn has come, expecting to find you here. The dispatch-box is here. Is he to await you?'

That innocent little question was a day gained.

One day of boating on the upper reaches of the pastoral river, and walks in woods and golden meadows, was felicity fallen on earth, the ripe fruit of dreams. A dread surrounded it, as a belt, not shadowing the horizon; and she clasped it to her heart the more passionately, like a mother her rosy infant, which a dark world threatens and the universal fate.

Love, as it will be at her June of life, was teaching her to know the good and bad of herself. Women, educated to embrace principles through their timidity and their pudency, discover, amazed, that these are not lasting qualities under love's influence. The blushes and the fears take flight. The principles depend much on the beloved. Is he a man whose contact with the world has given him understanding of life's laws, and can hold him firm to the right course in the strain and whirling of a torrent, they cling to him, deeply they worship. And if they tempt him, it is not advisedly done. Nature and love are busy in conjunction. The timidities and pudencies have flown; they may hover, they are not present. You deplore it, you must not blame; you have educated them so. Muscular principles are sown only out in the world; and, on the whole, with all their errors, the worldly men are the truest as well as the bravest of men. Her faith in his guidance was equal to her dependence. The retrospect of a recent journey told her how he had been tried.

She could gaze tenderly, betray her heart, and be certain of safety. Can wine match that for joy? She had no schemes, no hopes, but simply the desire to bestow, the capacity to believe. Any wish to be enfolded by him was shapeless and unlighted, unborn; though now and again for some chance word or undefined thought she surprised the strange tenant of her breast at an incomprehensibly faster beat, and knew it for her own and not her own, the familiar the stranger—an utter stranger, as one who had snared her in a wreath and was pulling her off her feet.

She was not so guileless at the thought of little Selina Collett here, and of Selina as the letter-bearer of old; and the marvel that Matey and Brown and Selina were together after all! Was it not a kind of summons to her to call him Matey just once, only once, in play? She burned and ached to do it. She might have taxed her ingenuity successfully to induce little Selina to the boldness of calling him Matey—and she then repeating it, as the woman who revived with a meditative effort recollections of the girl. Ah, frightful hypocrite! Thoughts of the pleasure of his name aloud on her lips in his hearing dissolved through her veins, and were met by Matthew Weyburn's open face, before which hypocrisy stood rent and stripped. She preferred the calmer, the truer pleasure of seeing him modestly take lessons in the nomenclature of weeds, herbs, grasses, by hedge and ditch. Selina could instruct him as well in entomology, but he knew better the Swiss, Tyrolese, and Italian valley-homes of beetle and butterfly species. Their simple talk was a cool zephyr fanning Aminta.

The suggestion to unite the two came to her, of course, but their physical disparity denied her that chance to settle her own difficulty, and a whisper of one physically the match for him punished her. In stature, in healthfulness, they were equals, perhaps: not morally or intellectually. And she could claim headship of him on one little point confided to her by his mother, who was bearing him, and startled by the boom of guns under her pillow, when her husband fronted the enemy: Matthew Weyburn, the fencer, boxer, cricketer, hunter, all things manly, rather shrank from firearms—at least, one saw him put on a screw to manipulate them. In danger—among brigands or mutineers, for example—she could stand by him and prove herself his mate. Intellectually, morally, she had to bow humbly. Nor had she, nor could she do more than lean on and catch example from his prompt spiritual valiancy. It shone out from him, and a crisis fulfilled the promise. Who could be his mate for cheerful courage, for skill, the ready mind, easy adroitness, and for self-command? To imitate was a woman's utmost.

Matthew Weyburn appeared the very Matey of the first of May cricketing day among Cuper's boys the next morning, when seen pacing down the garden-walk. He wore his white trousers of that happiest of old days—the 'white ducks' Aminta and Selina remembered. Selina beamed. 'Yes, he did; he always wore them; but now it's a frock-coat instead of a jacket.'

'But now he will be a master instead of a schoolboy,' said Aminta. 'Let us hope he will prosper.'

'He gives me the idea of a man who must succeed,' Selina said; and she was patted, rallied, asked how she had the idea, and kissed; Aminta saying she fancied it might be thought, for he looked so confident.

'Only not what the boys used to call "cocky,"' said Selina. 'He won't be contemptuous of those he outstrips.'

'His choice of the schoolmaster's profession points to a modesty in him, does it not, little woman?'

'He made me tell him, while you were writing your letters yesterday, all about my brother and his prospects.'

'Yes, that is like him. And I must hear of your brother, "little Collett." Don't forget, Sely, little Collett was our postman.'

The Countess of Ormont's humorous reference to the circumstance passed with Selina for a sign of a poetic love of the past, and a present social elevation that allowed her to review it impassively. She admired the great lady and good friend who could really be interested in the fortunes of a mere schoolmaster and a merchant's clerk. To her astonishment, by some agency beyond her fathoming, she found herself, and hardly for her own pleasure, pushing the young schoolmaster animatedly to have an account of his aims in the establishment of the foreign school.

Weyburn smiled. He set a short look at Aminta; and she, conscious of her detected diplomacy, had an inward shiver, mixed of the fascination and repugnance felt by a woman who knows that under one man's eyes her character is naked and anatomized. Her character?—her soul. He held it in hand and probed it mercifully. She had felt the sweet sting again and again, and had shrunk from him, and had crawled to him. The love of him made it all fascination. How did he learn to read at any moment right to the soul of a woman? Did experience teach him, or sentimental sympathy? He was too young, he was too manly. It must be because of his being in heart and mind the brother to the sister with women.

Thames played round them on his pastoral pipes. Bee-note and woodside blackbird and meadow cow, and the fish of the silver rolling rings, composed the leap of the music.

She gave her mind to his voice, following whither it went; half was in air, higher than the swallow's, exalting him.

How is it he is the brother of women? They are sisters for him because he is neither sentimentalist nor devourer. He will not flatter to feed on them. The one he chooses, she will know love. There are women who go through life not knowing love. They are inanimate automatic machines, who lay them down at last, inquiring wherefore they were caused to move. She is not of that sad flock. She will be mated; she will have the right to call him Matey. A certain Brownny called him Matey. She lived and died. A certain woman apes Brownny's features and inherits her passion, but has forfeited her rights. Were she, under happiest conditions, to put her hand in his, shame would burn her. For he is just—he is Justice; and a woman bringing him less than his due, she must be a creature of the slime!

This was the shadowy sentiment that made the wall of division between them. There was no other. Lord Ormont had struck to fragments that barrier of the conventional oath and ceremonial union. He was unjust—he was Injustice. The weak may be wedded, they cannot be married; to Injustice. And if we have the world for the buttress of injustice, then is Nature the flaring rebel; there is no fixed order possible. Laws are necessary instruments of the majority; but when they grind the sane human being to dust for their maintenance, their enthronement is the rule of the savage's old deity, sniffing blood-sacrifice. There cannot be a based society upon such conditions. An immolation of the naturally constituted individual arrests the general expansion to which we step, decivilizes more, and is more impious to the God in man, than temporary revelries of a licence that Nature soon checks.

Arrows of thoughts resembling these shot over the half of Aminta's mind not listening. Her lover's head was active on the same theme while he spoke. They converged to it from looks crossing or catching profiles, or from tones, from a motion of hand, from a chance word. Insomuch that the third person present was kept unobservant only by her studious and humble speculations on the young schoolmaster's grand project to bring the nationalities together, and teach Old England to the Continent—the Continent to Old England: our healthy games, our scorn of the lie, manliness; their intellectual valour, diligence, considerate manners.

'Just to name a few of the things for interchange,' said Weyburn. 'As to method, we shall be their disciples. But I look forward to our fellows getting the lead. No hurry. Why will they? you ask in petto. Well, they're emulous, and they take a thrashing kindly. That's the way to learn a lesson. I've seen our fellows beaten and beaten—never the courage beaten out of them. In the end, they won and kept the field. They have a lot to learn—principally not to be afraid of ideas. They lose heaps of time before they can feel at home with ideas. They call themselves practical for having an addiction to the palpable. It is a pretty wreath they clap on their deficiencies. Practical dogs are for bones, horses for corn. I want the practical Englishman to settle his muzzle in a nosebag of ideas. When he has once got hold of them, he makes good stuff of them. On the Continent ideas have wings and pay visits. Here, they're stay-at-home. Then I want our fellows to have the habit of speaking from the chest. They shall return to England with the whoop of the mountains in them and ready to jump out. They shall have an Achillean roar; and they shall sing by second nature. Don't fear: they'll give double for anything they take. I've known Italians, to whom an Englishman's honesty of mind and dealing was one of the dreams of a better humanity they had put in a box. Frenchmen, too, who, when they came to know us, were astonished at their epithet of perfide, and loved us.'

'Emile,' said Aminta. 'You remember Emile, Selina: the dear little French boy at Mr. Cuper's?'

'Oh, I do,' Selina responded.

'He will work with Mr. Weyburn in Switzerland.'

'Oh, that will be nice!' the girl exclaimed.

Aminta squeezed Selina's hand. A shower of tears clouded her eyes. She chose to fancy it was because of her envy of the modest, busy, peaceful girl, who envied none. Conquers also sincerity in the sincerest. She was vexed with her full breast, and had as little command of her thoughts as of her feelings.

'Mr. Weyburn has ideas for the education of girls too,' she said.

'There's the task,' said he. 'It's to separate them as little as possible. All the—passez-moi le mot—devilry between the sexes begins at their separation. They 're foreigners when they meet; and their alliances are not always binding. The chief object in life, if happiness be the aim, and the growing better than we are, is to teach men and women how to be one; for, if they 're not, then each is a morsel for the other to prey on. Lady Charlotte Eglett's view is, that the greater number of them on both sides hate one another.'

'Hate!' exclaimed Selina; and Aminta said: 'Is Lady Charlotte Eglett an authority?'

'She has observed, and she thinks. She has in the abstract the justest of minds: and that is the curious point about her. But one may say they are trained at present to be hostile. Some of them fall in love and strike a truce, and still they are foreigners. They have not the same standard of honour. They might have it from an education in common.'

'But there must be also a lady to govern the girls?' Selina interposed.

'Ah, yes; she is not yet found!'

'Would it increase their mutual respect?—or show of respect, if you like?' said Aminta, with his last remark at work as the shattering bell of a city's insurrection in her breast.

'In time, under management; catching and grouping them young. A boy who sees a girl do what he can't, and would like to do, won't take refuge in his muscular superiority—which, by the way, would be lessened.'

'You suppose their capacities are equal?'

'Things are not equal. I suppose their excellencies to make a pretty nearly equal sum in the end. But we 're not weighing them each. The question concerns the advantage of both.'

'That seems just!'

Aminta threw no voice into the word 'just.' It was the word of the heavens assuaging earth's thirst, and she was earth to him. Her soul yearned to the man whose mind conceived it.

She said to Selina: 'We must plan an expedition next year or the year after, and see how the school progresses.'

All three smiled; and Selina touched and held Aminta's hand shyly. Visions of the unseen Switzerland awed her.

Weyburn named the Spring holiday time, the season of the flowering Alpine robes. He promised welcome, pressed for a promise of the visit. Warmly it was given. 'We will; we will indeed!'

'I shall look forward,' he said.

There was nothing else for him or for her, except to doat on the passing minute that slipped when seized. The looking forward turned them to the looking back at the point they had flown from, and yielded a momentary pleasure, enough to stamp some section of a picture on their memories, which was not the burning now Love lives for, in the clasp, if but of hands. Desire of it destroyed it. They swung to the future, swung to the present it made the past, sensible to the quick of the now they could not hold. They were lovers. Divided lovers in presence, they thought and they felt in pieces. Feelings and thoughts were forbidden to speech. She dared look the very little of her heart's fulness, without the disloyalty it would have been in him to let a small peep of his heart be seen. While her hand was not clasped she could look tenderly, and her fettered state, her sense of unworthiness muffled in the deeps, would keep her from the loosening to passion.

He who read through her lustrous, transiently dwelling eyes had not that security. His part, besides the watch over the spring of his hot blood, was to combat a host, insidious among which was unreason calling her Brownie, urging him to take his own, to snatch her from a possessor who forfeited by undervaluing her. This was the truth in a better-ordered world: she belonged to the man who could help her to grow and to do her work. But in the world we have around us, it was the distorted truth: and keeping passion down, he was able to wish her such happiness as pertained to safety from shipwreck, and for himself, that he might continue to walk in the ranks of the sober citizens.

Oh, true and right, but she was gloriously beautiful! Day by day she surpassed the wondrous Brownie of old days. All women were eclipsed by her. She was that fire in the night which lights the night and draws the night to look at it. And more: this queen of women was beginning to have a mind at work. One saw already the sprouting of a mind repressed. She had a distinct ability; the good ambition to use her qualities. She needed life and air—that is, comprehension of her, encouragement, the companion mate. With what strength would she now endow him! The pride in the sharp imagination of possessing her whispered a boast of the strength her mate would have from her. His need and her need rushed together somewhere down the skies. They could not, he argued, be separated eternally.

He had to leave her. Selina, shocked at a boldness she could not understand in herself, begged him to stay and tell her of Switzerland and Alpine flowers and herbs, and the valleys for the gold

beetle and the Apollo butterfly. Aminta hinted that Lord Ormont might expect to find him there, if he came the next morning; but she would not try to persuade, and left the decision with him, loving him for the pain he inflicted by going.

Why, indeed, should he stay? Both could ask; they were one in asking. Anguish balanced pleasure in them both. The day of the pleasure was heaven to remember, heaven to hope for; not so heavenly to pray for. The praying for it, each knew, implored their joint will to decree the perilous blessing. A shadowy sentiment of duty and rectitude, born of what they had suffered, hung between them and the prayer for a renewal, that would renew the tempting they were conscious of when the sweet, the strained, throbbing day was over. They could hope for chance to renew it, and then they would be irresponsible. Then they would think and wish discreetly, so as to have it a happiness untainted. In refusing now to take another day or pray for it, they deserved that chance should grant it.

Aminta had said through Selina the utmost her self-defences could allow. But the idea of a final parting cut too cruelly into her life, and she murmured: 'I shall see you before you go for good?'

'I will come, here or in London.'

'I can trust?'

'Quite certain.'

A meeting of a few hasty minutes involved none of the dangers of a sunny, long summer day; and if it did, the heart had its claims, the heart had its powers of resistance. Otherwise we should be base verily.

He turned on a bow to leave her before there was a motion for the offer of her hand.

After many musings and frettings, she reached the wisdom of that. Wisdom was her only nourishment now. A cold, lean dietary it is; but he dispensed it, and it fed her, or kept her alive. It became a proud feeling that she had been his fellow in the achievement of a piece of wisdom; though the other feeling, that his hand's kind formal touching, without pressure of hers, would have warmed her to go through the next interview with her lord, mocked at pure satisfaction. Did he distrust himself? Or was it to spare her? But if so, her heart was quite bare to him! But she knew it was.

Aminta drove her questioning heart as a vessel across blank circles of sea, where there was nothing save the solitary heart for answer. It answered intelligibly and comfortingly at last, telling her of proof given that she could repose under his guidance with absolute faith. Was ever loved woman more blest than she in such belief? She had it firmly; and a blessedness, too, in this surety wavering beneath shadows of the uncertainty. Her eyes knew it, her ears were empty of the words. Her heart knew it, and it was unconfirmed by reason. As for his venturing to love her, he feared none. And no sooner did that reflection surge than she stood up beside him in revolt against her lion and lord. Her instinct judged it impossible she could ever have yielded her heart

to a man lacking courage. Hence—what? when cowardice appeared as the sole impediment to happiness now!

He had gone, and the day lived again for both of them—a day of sheer gold in the translation from troubled earth to the mind. One another's beauty through the visage into the character was newly perceived and worshipped; and the beauties of pastoral Thames, the temple of peace, hardly noticed in the passing of the day—taken as air to the breather; until some chip of the scene, round which an emotion had curled, was vivid foreground and gateway to shrouded romance: it might be the stream's white face browning into willow-droopers, or a wagtail on a water-lily leaf, or the fore-horse of an up-river barge at strain of legs, a red-finned perch hung a foot above the pebbles in sun-veined depths, a kingfisher on the scud under alders, the forest of the bankside weeds.

CHAPTER XXV. PREPARATIONS FOR A RESOLVE

That day receded like a spent billow, and lapsed among the others advancing, but it left a print deeper than events would have stamped. Aminta's pen declined to run to her lord; and the dipping it in ink was no acceleration of the process. A sentence, bearing likeness to an artless infant's trot of the half-dozen steps to mother's lap, stumbled upon the full stop midway. Desperate determination pushed it along, and there was in consequence a dead stop at the head of the next sentence. A woman whose nature is insurgent against the majesty of the man to whom she must, among the singular injunctions binding her, regularly write, sees no way between hypocrisy and rebellion. For rebellion, she, with the pen in her hand, is avowedly not yet ripe, hypocrisy is abominable.

If she abstained from writing, he might travel down to learn the cause; a similar danger, or worse, haunted the writing frigidly. She had to be the hypocrite or else—leap.

But an honest woman who is a feeling woman, when she consents to play hypocrite, cannot do it by halves. From writing a short cold letter, Aminta wrote a short warm one, or very friendly. Length she could avoid, because she was unable to fill a page. It seemed that she could not compose a friendly few lines without letting her sex be felt in them. What she had put away from her, so as not to feel it herself, the simulation of ever so small a bit of feeling brought prominently back; and where she had made a cast for flowing independent simplicity, she was feminine, ultra-feminine to her reading of it.

Better take the leap than be guilty of double-dealing even on paper! The nature of the leap she did not examine.

Her keen apprehension of the price payable for his benevolent intentions caught scent of them in the air. Those Ormont jewels shone as emblems of a detested subjection, the penalty for being the beautiful woman raging men proclaimed. Was there no scheme of some other sort, and far less agreeable, to make amends for Steignton? She was shrewd at divination; she guessed her lord's design. Rather than meet Lady Charlotte, she proposed to herself the 'leap' immediately; knowing it must be a leap in the dark, hoping it might be into a swimmer's water. She had her own pin-money income, and she loathed the chain of her title. So the leap would at least be honourable, as it assuredly would be unregretted, whatever ensued.

While Aminta's heart held on to this debate, and in her bed, in her boat, across the golden valley meadows beside her peaceful little friend, she gathered a gradual resolution without sight of agencies or consequences, Lord Ormont was kept from her by the struggle to master his Charlotte a second time—compared with which the first was insignificant. And this time it was curious: he could not subdue her physique, as he did before; she was ready for him each day, and she was animated, much more voluble, she was ready to jest. The reason being, that she fought now on plausibly good grounds: on behalf of her independent action.

Previously, her intelligence of the ultimate defeat hanging over the more stubborn defence of a weak position had harassed her to death's door. She had no right to retain the family jewels; she had the most perfect of established rights to refuse doing an ignominious thing. She refused to visit the so-called Countess of Ormont, or leave her card, or take one step to warrant the woman in speaking of her as her sister-in-law. And no,—it did not signify that her brother Rowsley was prohibited by her from marrying whom he pleased. It meant, that to judge of his acts as those of a reasoning man, he would have introduced his wife to his relatives—the relatives he had not quarrelled with—immediately upon his marriage unless he was ashamed of the woman; and a wife he was ashamed of was no sister-in-law for her nor aunt for her daughters. Nor should she come playing the Black Venus among her daughters' husbands, Lady Charlotte had it in her bosom to say additionally.

Lord Ormont was disconcerted by her manifest pleasure in receiving him every day. Evidently she consented to the recurrence of a vexatious dissension for the enjoyment of having him with her hourly. Her dialectic, too, was cunning. Impetuous with meaning, she forced her way to get her meaning out, in a manner effective to strike her blow. Anything for a diversion or a triumph of the moment! He made no way. She was the better fencer at the tongue.

Yet there was not any abatement of her deference to her brother; and this little misunderstanding put aside, he was the Rowsley esteemed by her as the chief of men. She foiled him, it might seem, to exalt him the more. After he had left the house, visibly annoyed and somewhat stupefied, she talked of him to her husband, of the soul of chivalry Rowsley was, the loss to his country. Mr. Eglett was a witness to one of the altercations, when she, having as usual the dialectical advantage, praised her brother, to his face, for his magnanimous nature; regretting only that it could be said he was weak on the woman side of him—which was, she affirmed, a side proper to every man worth the name; but in his case his country might complain. Of what?—Well, of a woman.—What had she done, for the country to complain of her?—Why, then, arts or graces, she had bewitched and weaned him from his public duty, his military service, his patriotic ambition.

Lord Ormont's interrogations, heightening the effect of Charlotte's charge, appeared to Mr. Eglett as a giving of himself over into her hands; but the earl, after a minute of silence, proved he was a tricky combatant. It was he who had drawn on Charlotte, that he might have his opportunity to eulogize—'this lady, whom you continue to call the woman, after I have told you she is my wife.' According to him, her appeals, her entreaties, that he should not abandon his profession or let his ambition rust, had been at one period constant.

He spoke fervently, for him eloquently; and he gained his point; he silenced Lady Charlotte's tongue, and impressed Mr. Eglett.

When the latter and his wife were alone, he let her see that the Countess of Ormont was becoming a personage in his consideration.

Lady Charlotte cried out: 'Hear these men where it's a good-looking woman between the winds! Do you take anything Rowsley says for earnest? You ought to know he stops at no trifle to get his advantage over you in a dispute. That 's the soldier in him. It 's victory at any cost!—and I like him for it. Do you tell me you think it possible my brother Rowsley would keep smothered years under a bushel the woman he can sit here magnifying because he wants to lime you and me: you to take his part, and me to go and call the noble creature decked out in his fine fiction my sister-in-law. Nothing 'll tempt me to believe my brother could behave in such a way to the woman he respected!'

So Mr. Eglett opined. But he had been impressed.

He relieved his mind on the subject in a communication to Lord Adderwood; who habitually shook out the contents of his to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, and she, deeming it good for Aminta to have information of the war waging for her behoof, obtained her country address, with the resolve to drive down, a bearer of good news to the dear woman she liked to think of, look at, and occasionally caress; besides rather tenderly pitying her, now that a change of fortune rendered her former trials conspicuous.

An incident, considered grave even in the days of the duel and the kicks against a swelling public reprehension of the practice, occurred to postpone her drive for four-and-twenty hours. London was shaken by rumours of a tragic mishap to a socially well-known gentleman at the Chiallo fencing rooms. The rumours passing from mouth to mouth acquired, in the nature of them, sinister colours as they circulated. Lord Ormont sent Aminta word of what he called 'a bad sort of accident at Chiallo's,' without mentioning names or alluding to suspicions.

He treated it lightly. He could not have written of it with such unconcern if it involved the secretary! Yet Aminta did seriously ask herself whether he could; and she flew rapidly over the field of his character, seizing points adverse, points favourably advocative, balancing dubiously—most unjustly: she felt she was unjust. But in her condition, the heart of a woman is instantly planted in jungle when the spirits of the two men closest to her are made to stand opposed by a sudden excitement of her fears for the beloved one. She cannot see widely, and is one of the wild while the fit lasts; and, after it, that savage narrow vision she had of the unbeloved retains its vivid print in permanence. Was she unjust? Aminta cited corroboration of

her being accurate: such was Lord Ormont! and although his qualities of gallantry, courtesy, integrity, honourable gentleman, presented a fair low-level account on the other side, she had so stamped his massive selfishness and icy inaccessibility to emotion on her conception of him that the repulsive figure formed by it continued towering when her mood was kinder.

Love played on love in the woman's breast. Her love had taken a fever from her lord's communication of the accident at Chiallo's, and she pushed her alarm to imagine the deadliest, and plead for the right of confession to herself of her unrepented regrets. She and Matey Weyburn had parted without any pressure of hands, without a touch. They were, then, unlighted if now the grave divided them! No touch: mere glances! And she sighed not, as she pleaded, for the touch, but for the plighting it would have been. If now she had lost him, he could never tell herself that since the dear old buried and night-walking schooldays she had said once Matey to him, named him once to his face Matey Weyburn. A sigh like the roll of a great wave breaking against a wall of rock came from her for the possibly lost chance of naming him to his face Matey,—oh, and seeing his look as she said it!

The boldness might be fancied: it could not be done. Agreeing with the remote inner voice of her reason so far, she toned her exclamatory foolishness to question, in Reason's plain, deep, basso-profundo accompaniment tone, how much the most blessed of mortal women could do to be of acceptable service to a young schoolmaster?

There was no reply to the question. But it became a nestling centre for the skiey flock of dreams, and for really temperate soundings of her capacities, tending to the depreciatory. She could do little. She entertained the wish to work, not only 'for the sake of Somebody,' as her favourite poet sang, but for the sake of working and serving—proving that she was helpfuller than a Countess of Ormont, ranged with all the other countesses in china and Dresden on a drawing-room mantelpiece for show. She could organize, manage a household, manage people too, she thought: manage a husband? The word offends. Perhaps invigorate him, here and there perhaps inspire him, if he would let her breathe. Husbands exist who refuse the right of breathing to their puppet wives. Above all, as it struck her, she could assist, and be more than an echo of one nobler, in breathing manliness, high spirit, into boys. With that idea she grazed the shallows of reality, and her dreams whirled from the nest and left it hungrily empty.

Selina Collett was writing under the verandah letters to her people in Suffolk, performing the task with marvellous ease. Aminta noted it as a mark of superior ability, and she had the envy of the complex nature observing the simple. It accused her of some guiltiness, uncommitted and indefensible. She had pushed her anxiety about 'the accident at Chiallo's' to an extreme that made her the creature of her sensibilities. In the midst of this quiet country life and landscape; these motionless garden flowers headed by the smooth white river, and her gentle little friend so homely here, the contemplation of herself was like a shriek in music. Worse than discordant, she pronounced herself inferior, unfit mentally as well as bodily for the dreams of companionship with any noble soul who might have the dream of turning her into something better. There are couples in the world, not coupled by priestly circumstance, who are close to the true; union, by reason of generosity on the one part, grateful devotion, as for the gift of life, on the other. For instance, Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and Lord Adderwood, which was an instance without resemblance; but Aminta's heart beat thick for what it wanted, and they were the instance of two

that did not have to snap false bonds of a marriage-tie in order to walk together composedly outside it—in honour? Oh yes, yes! She insisted on believing it was in honour.

She saw the couple issue from the boathouse. She had stepped into the garden full of a presentiment; so she fancied, the moment they were seen. She had, in fact, heard a noise in the boathouse while thinking of them, and the effect on her was to spring an idea of mysterious interventions at the sight.

Mrs. Lawrence rushed to her, and was embraced. 'You 're not astonished to see me? Adder drove me down, and stopped his coach at the inn, and rowed me the half-mile up. We will lunch, if you propose; but presently. My dear, I have to tell you things. You have heard?'

'The accident?'

Aminta tried to read in Mrs. Lawrence's eyes whether it closely concerned her.

Those pretty eyes, their cut of lids hinting at delicate affinities with the rice-paper lady of the court of China, were trying to peer seriously.

'Poor man! One must be sorry for him: he—'

'Who?'

'You 've not heard, then?' Mrs. Lawrence dropped her voice: 'Morsfield.'

Aminta shivered. 'All I have heard-half a line from my lord this morning: no name. It was at the fencing-rooms, he said.'

'Yes, he wouldn't write more;' said Mrs. Lawrence, nodding. 'You know, he would have had to do it himself if it had not been done for him. Adder saw him some days back in a brown consultation near his club with Captain May. Oh, but of course it was accident! Did he call it so in his letter to you?'

'One word of Mr. Morsfield: he is wounded?'

'Past cure: he has the thing he cried for, spoilt boy as he was from his birth. I tell you truth, m' Aminta, I grieve to lose him. What with his airs of the foreign-tinted, punctilious courtly gentleman covering a survival of the ancient British forest boar or bear, he was a picture in our modern set, and piquant. And he was devoted to our sex, we must admit, after the style of the bears. They are for honey, and they have a hug. If he hadn't been so much of a madman, I should have liked him for his courage. He had plenty of that, nothing to steer it. A second cousin comes in for his estates.'

'He is dead?' Aminta cried.

'Yes, dear, he is gone. What the women think of it I can't say. The general feeling among the men is that some one of them would have had to send him sooner or later. The curious point, Adder says, is his letting it be done by steel. He was a dead shot, dangerous with the small sword, as your Mr. Weyburn said, only soon off his head. But I used to be anxious about the earl's meeting him with pistols. He did his best to provoke it. Here, Adder,'—she spoke over her shoulder,—'tell Lady Ormont all you know of the Morsfield-May affair.'

Lord Adderwood bowed compliance. His coolness was the masculine of Mrs. Lawrence's hardly feminine in treating of a terrible matter, so that the dull red facts had to be disengaged from his manner of speech before they sank into Aminta's acceptance; of them as credible.

'They fought with foils, buttons off, preliminary ceremonies perfect; salute in due order; guard, and at it.

Odd thing was, nobody at Chiallo's had a notion of the business till Morsfield was pinked. He wouldn't be denied; went to work like a fellow meaning to be skewered, if he couldn't do the trick: and he tried it. May had been practising some weeks. He's well on the Continent by this time. It'll blow over. Button off sheer accident. I wasn't lucky enough to see the encounter: came in just when Chiallo was lashing his poll over Morsfield flat on the ground. He had it up to the hilt. We put a buttoned foil by the side of Morsfield, and all swore to secrecy. As it is, it'll go badly against poor Chiallo. Taste for fencing won't be much improved by the affair. They quarrelled in the dressing room, and fetched the foils and knocked off the buttons there. A big rascal toady squire of Morsfield's did it for him. Morsfield was just up from Yorkshire. He said he was expecting a summons elsewhere, bound to await it, declined provocation for the present. May filliped him on the cheek.'

'Adder conveyed the information of her husband's flight to the consolable Amy,' said Mrs. Lawrence.

'He had to catch the coach for Dover,' Adderwood explained. 'His wife was at a dinner-party. I saw her at midnight.'

'Fair Amy was not so very greatly surprised?'

'Quite the soldier's wife!'

'She said she was used to these little catastrophes. But, Adder, what did she say of her husband?'

'Said she was never anxious about him, for nothing would kill him.'

Mrs. Lawrence shook a doleful head at Aminta.

'You see, my dear Aminta, here's another, and probably her last, chance of sharing the marquisate gone. Who can fail to pity her, except old Time! And I'm sure she likes her husband well enough. She ought: no woman ever had such a servant. But the captain has not been known to fight without her sanction, and the inference is—'Alas! woe! Fair Amy is doomed to be the

fighting captain's bride to the end of the chapter. Adder says she looked handsome. A dinner-party suits her cosmetic complexion better than a ball. The account of the inquest is in the day's papers, and we were tolerably rejoiced we could drive out of London without having to reply to coroner's questions.'

'He died-soon?' Aminta's voice was shaken.

Mrs. Lawrence touched at her breast, it might be for heart or lungs. Judging by Aminta's voice and face, one could suppose she was harking back, in woman's way, to her original sentiment for the man, now that he lay prostrate.

Aminta read the unrepentant irony in the smile addressed to her. She was too convulsed by her many emotions and shouting thoughts to think of defending herself.

Selina, in the drawing-room, diligently fingered and classed brown-black pressed weeds of her neophyte's botany-folios. The sight of her and her occupation struck Aminta as that of a person in another world beyond this world of blood, strangely substantial to view; and one heard her speak.

Guilty?—no. But she had wished to pique her lord. After the term of a length of months, could it be that the unhappy man and she were punished for the half-minute's acting of some interest in him? And Lord Ormont had been seen consulting Captain May; or was it giving him directions?

Her head burned. All the barren interrogations were up, running and knocking for hollow responses; and, saving a paleness of face, she cloaked any small show of the riot. She was an amiable hostess. She had ceased to comprehend Mrs. Lawrence, even to the degree of thinking her unfeminine. She should have known that the 'angelical chimpanzee,' as a friend, once told of his being a favourite with the lady, had called her, could not simulate a feeling, and had not the slightest power of pretence to compassion for an ill-fated person who failed to quicken her enthusiasm. In that, too, she was a downright boy. Morsfield was a kind of Bedlamite to her; amusing in his antics, and requiring to be manoeuvred and eluded while he lived: once dead, just a tombstone, of interest only to his family.

She beckoned Aminta to follow her; and, with a smirk of indulgent fun, commended Lord Adderwood to a study of Selina Collett's botany-folios, which the urbanest of indifferent gentlemen had slid his eyes over his nose to inspect before the lunch.

'You ought to know what is going on in town, my dear Aminta. You have won the earl to a sense of his duty, and he 's at work on the harder task of winning Lady Charlotte Eglett to a sense of hers. It 's tremendous. Has been forward some days, and no sign of yielding on either side. Mr. Eglett, good man, is between them, catching it right and left; and he deserves his luck for marrying her. Vows she makes him the best of wives. If he 's content, I 've nothing to complain of. You must be ready to receive her; my lord is sure to carry the day. You gulp. You won't be seeing much of her. I 'm glad to say he is condescending to terms of peace with the Horse Guards. We hear so. You may be throning it officially somewhere next year. And all 's well that ends well! Say that to me!'

'It is, when the end comes,' Aminta replied.

Mrs. Lawrence's cool lips were pressed to her cheek. The couple and their waterman rowed away to the party they had left with the four-in-hand at their inn.

A wind was rising. The trees gave their swish of leaves, the river darkened the patch of wrinkles, the bordering flags amid the reed-blades dipped and streamed.

Surcharged with unassimilated news of events, that made a thunder in her head, Aminta walked down the garden path, meeting Selina and bearing her on. She had a witch's will to rouse gales. Hers was not the woman's nature to be driven cowering by stories of men's bloody deeds. She took the field, revolted, dis severing herself from the class which tolerated them—actuated by a reflective morality, she believed; and loathed herself for having aspired, schemed, to be a member of the class. But it was not the class, it was against her lord as representative of the class, that she was now the rebel, neither naming him nor imaging him. Her enveloping mind was black on him. Such as one of those hard slaughtering men could call her his own? She breathed short and breathed deep. Her bitter reason had but the common pity for a madman despatched to his rest. Yet she knew hatred of her lord in his being suspected as instigator or accomplice of the hand that dealt the blow. He became to her thought a python whose coils were about her person, insufferable to the gaze backward.

Moments like these are the mothers in travail of a resolve joylessly conceived, undesired to clasp, Necessity's offspring. Thunderclouds have as little love of the lightnings they fling.

Aminta was aware only of her torment. The trees were bending, the water hissing, the grasses all this way and that, like hands of a delirious people in surges of wreck. She scorned the meaningless shake of the garments of earth, and exclaimed: 'If we were by the sea to-night!'

'I shall be to-morrow night,' said Selina. 'I shall think of you. Oh! would you come with me?'

'Would you have me?'

'My mother will indeed be honoured by your consenting to come.'

'Write to her before the post is out.'

'We shall travel down together?'

Aminta nodded and smiled, and Selina kissed her hand in joy, saying, that down home she would not be so shy of calling her Aminta. She was bidden to haste.

CHAPTER XXVI. VISITS OF FAREWELL

The noise in London over Adolphus Morsfield's tragical end disturbed Lord Ormont much less than the cessation of letters from his Aminta; and that likewise, considering his present business on her behalf, he patiently shrugged at and pardoned, foreseeing her penitent air. He could do it lightly after going some way to pardon his offending country. For Aminta had not offended, his robust observation of her was moved to the kindly humorous by a reflective view here and there of the downright woman her clever little shuffles exposed her to be, not worse. It was her sex that made her one of the gliders in grasses, some of whom are venomous; but she belonged to the order only as an innocuous blindworm. He could pronounce her small by-play with Morsfield innocent, her efforts to climb the stairs into Society quite innocent; judging her, of course, by her title of woman. A woman's innocence has a rainbow skin. Set this one beside other women, she comes out well, fairly well, well enough.

Now that the engagement with Charlotte assumed proportions of a series of battle, properly to be entitled a campaign, he had, in his loneliness, fallen into the habit of reflecting at the close of his day's work; and the rubbing of that unused opaque mirror hanging inside a man of action had helped him piecemeal to perceive bits of his conduct, entirely approved by him, which were intimately connected, nevertheless, with a train of circumstances that he disliked and could not charge justly upon any other shoulders than his own. What was to be thought of it? He would not be undergoing this botheration of the prolonged attempt to bring a stubborn woman to a sense of her duty, if he had declared his marriage in the ordinary style, and given his young countess her legitimate place before the world. What impeded it? The shameful ingratitude of his countrymen to the soldier who did it eminent service at a crisis of the destinies of our Indian Empire! He could not condone the injury done to him by entering among them again. Too like the kicked cur, that! He retired—call it 'sulked in his tent,' if you like. His wife had to share his fortunes. He being slighted, she necessarily was shadowed. For a while she bore it contentedly enough; then began her mousy scratches to get into the room off the wainscot, without blame from him; she behaved according to her female nature.

Yes, but the battles with Charlotte forced on his recognition once more, and violently, the singular consequences of his retirement and Coriolanus quarrel with his countrymen. He had doomed himself ever since to a contest with women. First it was his Queen of Amazons, who, if vanquished, was not so easily vanquished, and, in fact, doubtfully,—for now, to propitiate her, he had challenged, and must overcome or be disgraced, the toughest Amazonian warrior man could stand against at cast of dart or lock of arms. No day scored an advantage; and she did not apparently suffer fatigue. He did: that is to say, he was worried and hurried to have the wrangle settled and Charlotte at Aminta's feet. He gained not an inch of ground. His principle in a contention of the sort was to leave the woman to the practice of her obvious artifices, and himself simply hammer, incessantly hammer. But Charlotte hammered as well. The modest position of the defensive negative was not to her taste. The moment he presented himself she flew out upon some yesterday's part of the argument and carried the war across the borders, in attacks on his character and qualities—his weakness regarding women, his incapacity to forgive, and the rest. She hammered on that head. As for any prospect of a termination of the strife, he could see none

in her joyful welcome to him and regretful parting and pleased appointment of the next meeting day after day.

The absurdest of her devices for winding him off his aim was to harp on some new word she had got hold of as, for example, to point out to him his aptitudes, compliment him on his aptitudes, recommend him to study and learn the limitations of his aptitudes! She revelled in something the word unfolded to her.

However, here was the point: she had to be beaten. So, if she, too, persisted in hammering, he must employ her female weapon of artifice with her. One would gladly avoid the stooping to it in a civil dispute, in which one is not so gloriously absolved for lying and entrapping as in splendid war.

Weyburn's name was announced to him at an early hour on Thursday morning. My lord nodded to the footman; he nodded to himself over a suggestion started in a tactical intelligence by the name.

'Ah! you 're off?' he accosted the young man.

'I have come to take my leave, my lord.'

'Nothing new in the morning papers?'

'A report that Captain May intends to return and surrender.'

'Not before a month has passed, if he follows my counsel.'

'To defend his character.'

'He has none.'

'His reputation.'

'He has too much.'

'These charges against him must be intolerable.'

'Was he not a bit of a pupil of yours?'

'We practised two or three times-nothing more.'

'Morsfield was a wasp at a feast. Somebody had to crush him. I 've seen the kind of man twice in my life and exactly the kind of man. If their law puts down duelling, he rules the kingdom!'

'My lord, I should venture to say the kind of man can be a common annoyance because the breach of the law is countenanced.'

'Bad laws are best broken. A society that can't get a scouring now and then will be a dirty set.'

With a bend of the head, in apology for speaking of himself, Weyburn said: 'I have acted on my view. I declined a challenge from a sort of henchman of his.'

'Oh! a poacher's lurcher? You did right. Fight such fellows with constables. You have seen Lady Charlotte?'

'I am on my way to her ladyship.'

'Do me this favour. Fourteen doors up the street of her residence, my physician lives. I have to consult him at once. Dr. Rewkes.'

Weyburn bowed. Lady Charlotte could not receive him later than half-past ten of the morning, he said. 'This morning she can,' said my lord. 'You will tell Dr. Rewkes that it is immediate. I rather regret your going. I shall be in a controversy with the Horse Guards about our cavalry saddles. It would be regiments of raw backs the first fortnight of a campaign.'

The earl discoursed on saddles; and passed to high eulogy of our Hanoverian auxiliary troopers in the Peninsula; 'good husbands,' he named them quaintly, speaking of their management of their beasts. Thence he diverged to Frederic's cavalry, rarely matched for shrewdness and endurance; to the deeds of the Liechtenstein Hussars; to the great things Blucher did with his horsemen.

The subject was interesting; but Weyburn saw the clock at past the half after ten. He gave a slight sign of restiveness, and was allowed to go when the earl had finished his pro and con upon Arab horses and Mameluke saddles. Lord Ormont nicked his head, just as at their first interview: he was known to have an objection to the English shaking of hands. 'Good-morning,' he said; adding a remark or two, of which et cetera may stand for an explicit rendering. It concerned the young man's prosperity: my lord's conservative plain sense was in doubt of the prospering of a giddy pate, however good a worker. His last look at the young man, who had not served him badly, held an anticipation of possibly some day seeing a tatterdemalion of shipwreck, a rueful exhibition of ideas put to the business of life.

Weyburn left the message with Dr. Rewkes in person. It had not seemed to him that Lord Ormont was one requiring the immediate attendance of a physician. By way of accounting to Lady Charlotte for the lateness of his call, he mentioned the summons he had delivered.

'Oh, that's why he hasn't come yet,' said she. 'We'll sit and talk till he does come. I don't wonder if his bile has been stirred. He can't oil me to credit what he pumps into others. His Lady Ormont! I believe in it less than ever I did. Morsfield or no Morsfield—and now the poor wretch has got himself pinned to the plank, like my grandson Bobby's dragonflies, I don't want to say anything further of him—she doesn't have much of a welcome at Steignton! If I were a woman to wager as men do, I'd stake a thousand pounds to five on her never stepping across the threshold of Steignton. All very well in London, and that place he hires up at Marlow. He respects our home. That's how I know my brother Rowsley still keeps a sane man. A fortune on it!—and so

says Mr. Eglett. Any reasonable person must think it. He made a fool of some Hampton-Evey at Madrid, if he went through any ceremony—and that I doubt. But she and old (what do they call her?) may have insisted upon the title, as much as they could. He sixty; she under twenty, I'm told. Pagnell 's the name. That aunt of a good-looking young woman sees a noble man of sixty admiring her five feet seven or so—she's tall—of marketable merchandise, and she doesn't need telling that at sixty he'll give the world to possess the girl. But not his family honour! He stops at that. Why? Lord Ormont 's made of pride! He'll be kind to her, he'll be generous, he won't forsake her; she'll have her portion in his will, and by the course of things in nature, she'll outlive him and marry, and be happy, I hope. Only she won't enter Steignton. You remember what I say. You 'll live when I 'm gone. It 's the thirst of her life to be mistress of Steignton. Not she!—though Lord Ormont would have us all open our doors to her; mine too, now he 's about it. He sets his mind on his plan, and he forgets rights and dues—everything; he must have it as his will dictates. That 's how he made such a capital soldier. You know the cavalry leader he was. If they'd given him a field in Europe! His enemies admit that. Twelve! and my clock's five minutes or more slow. What can Rowsley be doing?"

She rattled backward on the scene at Steignton, and her brother's handsome preservation of his dignity 'stood it like the king he is!' and to the Morsfield-May encounter, which had prevented another; and Mrs. May was rolled along in the tide, with a hint of her good reason for liking Lord Ormont; also the change of opinion shown by the Press as to Lord Ormont's grand exploit. Referring to it, she flushed and jiggled on her chair for a saddle beneath her. And that glorious Indian adventure warmed her to the man who had celebrated it among his comrades when a boy at school.

'You 're to teach Latin and Greek, you said. For you 're right: we English can't understand the words we 're speaking, if we don't know a good deal of Latin and some Greek. "Conversing in tokens, not standard coin," you said, I remember; and there'll be a "general rabble tongue," unless we English are drilled in the languages we filched from. Lots of lords and ladies want the drilling, then! I'll send some over to you for Swiss air and roots of the English tongue. Oh, and you told me you supported Lord Ormont on his pet argument for corps d'elite; and you quoted Virgil to back it. Let me have that line again—in case of his condescending to write to the papers on the subject.'

Weyburn repeated the half-line.

'Good: I won't forget now. And you said the French act on that because they follow human nature, and the English don't. We "bully it," you said. That was on our drive down to Steignton. I hope you 'll succeed. You 'll be visiting England. Call on me in London or at Olmer—only mind and give me warning. I shall be glad to see you. I 've got some ideas from you. If I meet a man who helps me to read the world and men as they are, I 'm grateful to him; and most people are not, you 'll find. They want you to show them what they 'd like the world to be. We don't agree about a lady. You 're in the lists, lance in rest, all for chivalry. You 're a man, and a young man. Have you taken your leave of her yet? She'll expect it, as a proper compliment.'

'I propose running down to take my leave of Lady Ormont to-morrow,' replied Weyburn.

'She is handsome?'

She is very handsome.'

'Beautiful, do you mean?'

'Oh, my lady, it would only be a man's notion!'

'Now, that 's as good an answer as could be made! You 're sure to succeed. I 'm not the woman's enemy. But let her keep her place. Why, Rowsley can't be coming to-day! Did Lord Ormont look ill?'

'It did not strike me so.'

'He 's between two fires. A man gets fretted. But I shan't move a step. I dare say she won't. Especially with that Morsfield out of the way. You do mean you think her a beauty. Well, then, there'll soon be a successor to Morsfield. Beauties will have their weapons, and they can hit on plenty; and it 's nothing to me, as long as I save my brother from their arts.'

Weyburn felt he had done his penance in return for kindness. He bowed and rose, Lady Charlotte stretched out her hand.

'We shall be sending you a pupil some day,' she said, and smiled.

'Forward your address as soon as you 're settled.' Her face gave a glimpse of its youth in a cordial farewell smile.

Lord Ormont had no capacity to do the like, although they were strictly brother and sister in appearance. The smallest difference in character rendered her complex and kept him simple. She had a thirsting mind.

Weyburn fancied that a close intimacy of a few months would have enabled him to lift her out of her smirching and depraving mean jealousies. He speculated, as he trod the street, on little plots and surprises, which would bring Lady Charlotte and Lady Ormont into presence, and end by making friends of them. Supposing that could be done, Lady Ormont might be righted by the intervention of Lady Charlotte after all.

Weyburn sent his dream flying with as dreamy an after-thought: 'Funny it will be then for Lady Charlotte to revert to the stuff she has been droning in my ear half an hour ago!—Look well behind, and we see spots where we buzzed, lowed, bit and tore; and not until we have cast that look and seen the brute are we human creatures.'

A crumb of reflection such as this could brace him, adding its modest maravedi to his prized storehouse of gain, fortifying with assurances of his having a concrete basis for his business in life. His great youthful ambition had descended to it, but had sunk to climb on a firmer footing.

Arthur Abner had his next adieu. They talked of Lady Ormont, as to whose position of rightful Countess of Ormont Mr. Abner had no doubt. He said of Lady Charlotte: 'She has a clear head; but she loves her "brother Rowsley" excessively; and any excess pushes to craziness.'

He spoke to Weyburn of his prospects in the usually, perhaps necessarily, cheerless tone of men who recognize by contrast the one mouse's nibbling at a mountain of evil. 'To harmonize the nationalities, my dear boy! teach Christians to look fraternally on Jews! David was a harper, but the setting of him down to roll off a fugue on one of your cathedral organs would not impose a heavier task than you are undertaking. You have my best wishes, whatever aid I can supply. But we're nearer to King John's time than to your ideal, as far as the Jews go.'

'Not in England.'

'Less in England,' Abner shrugged.

'You have beaten the Christians on the field they challenged you to enter for a try. They feel the pinch in their interests and their vanity. That will pass. I'm for the two sides, under the name of Justice; and I give the palm to whichever of the two first gets hold of the idea of Justice. My old schoolmate's well?'

'Always asking after Matey Weyburn!'

'He shall have my address in Switzerland. You and I will be corresponding.'

Now rose to view the visit to the lady who was Lady Ormont on the tongue, Aminta at heart; never to be named Aminta even to himself. His heart broke loose at a thought of it.

He might say Brownny. For that was not serious with the intense present signification the name Aminta had. Brownny was queen of the old school-time—enclosed it in her name; and that sphere enclosed her, not excluding him. And the dear name of Brownny played gently, humorously, fervently, too, with life: not, pathetically, as that of Aminta did when came a whisper of her situation, her isolation, her friendlessness; hardly dissimilar to what could be imagined of a gazelle in the streets of London city. The Morsfields were not all slain. The Weyburns would be absent.

At the gate of his cottage garden Weyburn beheld a short unfamiliar figure of a man with dimly remembered features. Little Collett he still was in height. The schoolmates had not met since the old days of Cuper's.

Little Collett delivered a message of invitation from Selina, begging Mr. Weyburn to accompany her brother on the coach to Harwich next day, and spend two or three days by the sea. But Weyburn's mind had been set in the opposite direction—up Thames instead of down.

He was about to refuse, but he checked his voice and hummed. Words of Selina's letter jumped in italics. He perceived Lady Ormont's hand. For one thing, would she be at Great Marlow alone? And he knew that hand—how deftly it moved and moved others. Selina Collett would not

have invited him with underlinings merely to see a shoreside house and garden. Her silence regarding a particular name showed her to be under injunction, one might guess. At worst, it would be the loss of a couple of days; worth the venture. They agreed to journey by coach next day.

Facing eastward in the morning, on a seat behind the coachman, Weyburn had a seafaring man beside him, bound for the good port of Harwich, where his family lived, and thence by his own boat to Flushing. Weyburn set him talking of himself, as the best way of making him happy; for it is the theme which pricks to speech, and so liberates an uncomfortably locked-up stranger; who, if sympathetic to human proximity, is thankful. They exchanged names, delighted to find they were both Matthews; whereupon Matthew of the sea demanded the paw of Matthew of the land, and there was a squeeze. The same with little Collett, after hearing of him as the old schoolmate of the established new friend. Then there was talk. Little Collett named Felixstowe as the village of his mother's house and garden sloping to the sands. 'That 's it-you have it,' said the salted Matthew: 'peace is in that spot, and there I 've sworn to pitch my tent when I 'm incapacitated for further exercise—profitable, so to speak. My eldest girl has a bar of amber she picked up one wash of the tide at Felixstowe, and there it had been lying sparkling, unseen, hours, the shore is that solitary. What I like!—a quiet shore and a peopled sea. Ever been to Brighton? There it 's t' other way.'

Not long after he had mentioned the time of early evening for their entry into his port of Harwich, the coach turned quietly over on a bank of the roadside, depositing outside passengers quite safely, in so matter-of-course a way, that only the screams of an uninjured lady inside repressed their roars of laughter. One of the wheels had come loose, half a mile off the nearest town. Their entry into Harwich was thereby delayed until half-past nine at night. Full of consideration for the new mates now fast wedded to his heart by an accident. Matthew Shale proposed to Matthew Weyburn, instead of the bother of crossing the ferry with a portmanteau and a bag at that late hour, to sup at his house, try the neighbouring inn for a short sleep, and ship on board his yawl, the honest Susan, to be rowed ashore off the Swin to Felixstowe sands no later than six o'clock of a summer's morning, in time for a bath and a swim before breakfast. It sounded well—it sounded sweetly. Weyburn suggested the counter proposal of supper for the three at the inn. But the other Matthew said: 'I married a cook. She expects a big appetite, and she always keeps warm when I 'm held away, no matter how late. Sure to be enough.'

Beds were secured at the inn; after which came the introduction to Mrs. Shale, the exhibition of Susan Shale's bar of amber, the dish of fresh-fried whiting, the steak pudding, a grog, tobacco, rest at the inn, and a rousing bang at the sleepers' doors when the unwonted supper in them withheld an answer to the intimating knock. Young Matthew Shale, who had slept on board the Susan, conducted them to her boat. His glance was much drawn to the very white duck trousers Weyburn had put on, for a souvenir of the approbation they had won at Marlow. They were on, and so it was of no use for young Matthew to say they were likely to bear away a token from the Susan. She was one among the damsels of colour, and free of her tokens, especially to the spotless.

How it occurred, nobody saw; though everybody saw how naturally it must occur for the white ducks to 'have it in the eye' by the time they had been on board a quarter of an hour. Weyburn

got some fun out of them, for a counterbalance to a twitch of sentimental regret scarcely decipherable, as that the last view of him should bear a likeness of Brownny's recollection of her first.

A glorious morning of flushed open sky and sun on sea chased all small thoughts out of it. The breeze was from the west, and the Susan, lightly laden, took the heave of smooth rollers with a flowing current-curtsey in the motion of her speed. Fore-sail and aft were at their gentle strain; her shadow rippled fragmentarily along to the silver rivulet and boat of her wake. Straight she flew to the ball of fire now at spring above the waters, and raining red gold on the line of her bows. By comparison she was an ugly yawl, and as the creature of wind and wave beautiful.

They passed an English defensive fort, and spared its walls, in obedience to Matthew Shale's good counsel that they should forbear from sneezing. Little Collett pointed to the roof of his mother's house twenty paces rearward of a belt of tamarisks, green amid the hollowed yellows of shorebanks yet in shade, crumbling to the sands. Weyburn was attracted by a diminutive white tent, of sentry-box shape, evidently a bather's, quite as evidently a fair bather's. He would have to walk on some way for his dip. He remarked to little Collett that ladies going into the water half-dressed never have more than half a bath. His arms and legs flung out contempt of that style of bathing, exactly in old Matey's well-remembered way. Half a mile off shore, the Susan was put about to flap her sails, and her boat rocked with the passengers. Turning from a final cheer to friendly Matthew, Weyburn at the rudder espied one of those unenfranchised ladies in marine uniform issuing through the tent-slit. She stepped firmly, as into her element. A plain look at her, and a curious look, and an intent look fixed her fast, and ran the shock on his heart before he knew of a guess. She waded, she dipped; a head across the breast of the waters was observed: this one of them could swim. She was making for sea, a stone's throw off the direction of the boat. Before his wits had grasped the certainty possessing them, fiery envy and desire to be alongside her set his fingers fretting at buttons. A grand smooth swell of the waters lifted her, and her head rose to see her world. She sank down the valley, where another wave was mounding for its onward roll: a gentle scene of Weyburn's favourite Sophoclean chorus. Now she was given to him—it was she. How could it ever have been any other! He handed his watch to little Collett, and gave him the ropes, pitched coat and waistcoat on his knees, stood free of boots and socks, and singing out, truly enough, the words of a popular cry, 'White ducks want washing,' went over and in.

CHAPTER XXVII. A MARINE DUET

She soon had to know she was chased. She had seen the dive from the boat, and received all illumination. With a chuckle of delighted surprise, like a blackbird startled, she pushed seaward for joy of the effort, thinking she could exult in imagination of an escape up to the moment of capture, yielding then only to his greater will; and she meant to try it.

The swim was a holiday; all was new—nothing came to her as the same old thing since she took her plunge; she had a sea-mind—had left her earth-mind ashore. The swim, and Matey Weyburn pursuing her passed up, out of happiness, through the spheres of delirium, into the region where our life is as we would have it be a home holding the quiet of the heavens, if but midway thither, and a home of delicious animation of the whole frame, equal to wings.

He drew on her, but he was distant, and she waved an arm. The shout of her glee sprang from her: 'Matey!' He waved; she heard his voice. Was it her name? He was not so drunken of the sea as she: he had not leapt out of bondage into buoyant waters, into a youth without a blot, without an aim, satisfied in tasting; the dream of the long felicity.

A thought brushed by her: How if he were absent? It relaxed her stroke of arms and legs. He had doubled the salt sea's rapture, and he had shackled its gift of freedom. She turned to float, gathering her knees for the funny sullen kick, until she heard him near. At once her stroke was renewed vigorously; she had the foot of her pursuer, and she called, 'Adieu, Matey Weyburn!'

Her bravado deserved a swifter humiliation than he was able to bring down on her: she swam bravely, and she was divine to see ahead as well as overtake.

Darting to the close parallel, he said: 'What sea nymph sang me my name?'

She smote a pang of her ecstasy into him: 'Ask mine!'

'Brownny!'

They swam; neither of them panted; their heads were water-flowers that spoke at ease.

'We 've run from school; we won't go back.'

'We 've a kingdom.'

'Here's a big wave going to be a wall.'

'Off he rolls.'

'He's like the High Brent broad meadow under Elling Wood.'

'Don't let Miss Vincent hear you.'

'They 're not waves; they 're sighs of the deep.'

'A poet I swim with! He fell into the deep in his first of May morning ducks. We used to expect him.'

'I never expected to owe them so much.'

Pride of the swimmer and the energy of her joy embraced Aminta, that she might nerve all her powers to gain the half-minute for speaking at her ease.

'Who 'd have thought of a morning like this? You were looked for last night.'

'A lucky accident to our coach. I made friends with the skipper of the yawl.'

'I saw the boat. Who could have dreamed—? Anything may happen now.'

For nothing further would astonish her, as he rightly understood her; but he said: 'You 're prepared for the rites? Old Triton is ready.'

'Float, and tell me.'

They spun about to lie on their backs. Her right hand, at piano-work of the octave-shake, was touched and taken, and she did not pull it away. Her eyelids fell.

'Old Triton waits.'

'Why?'

'We 're going to him.'

'Yes?'

'Customs of the sea.'

'Tell me.'

'He joins hands. We say, "Brownny-Matey," and it 's done.'

She splashed, crying 'Swim,' and after two strokes, 'You want to beat me, Matey Weyburn.'

'How?'

'Not fair!'

'Say what.'

'Take my breath. But, yes! we'll be happy in our own way. We 're sea-birds. We 've said adieu to land. Not to one another. We shall be friends?'

'Always.'

'This is going to last?'

'Ever so long.'

They had a spell of steady swimming, companionship to inspire it. Brownny was allowed place a little foremost, and she guessed not wherefore, in her flattered emulation.

'I'm bound for France.'

'Slew a point to the right: South-east by South. We shall hit Dunkerque.'

'I don't mean to be picked up by boats.'

'We'll decline.'

'You see I can swim.'

'I was sure of it.'

They stopped their talk—for the pleasure of the body to be savoured in the mind, they thought; and so took Nature's counsel to rest their voices awhile.

Considering that she had not been used of late to long immersions, and had not broken her fast, and had talked much, for a sea-nymph, Weyburn spied behind him on a shore seeming flat down, far removed.

'France next time,' he said: 'we'll face to the rear.'

'Now?' said she, big with blissful conceit of her powers and incredulous of such a command from him.

'You may be feeling tired presently.'

The musical sincerity of her 'Oh no, not I!' sped through his limbs; he had a willingness to go onward still some way.

But his words fastened the heavy land on her spirit, knocked at the habit of obedience. Her stroke of the arms paused. She inclined to his example, and he set it shoreward.

They swam silently, high, low, creatures of the smooth green roller. He heard the water-song of her swimming. She, though breathing equably at the nostrils, lay deep. The water shocked at her chin, and curled round the under lip. He had a faint anxiety; and, not so sensible of a weight in the sight of land as she was, he chattered, by snatches, rallied her, encouraged her to continue sportive for this once, letting her feel it was but a once and had its respected limit with him. So it was not out of the world.

Ah, friend Matey! And that was right and good on land; but rightness and goodness flung earth's shadow across her brilliancy here, and any stress on 'this once' withdrew her liberty to revel in it,

putting an end to perfect holiday; and silence, too, might hint at fatigue. She began to think her muteness lost her the bloom of the enchantment, robbing her of her heavenly frolic lead, since friend Matey resolved to be as eminently good in salt water as on land. Was he unaware that they were boy and girl again?—she washed pure of the intervening years, new born, by blessing of the sea; worthy of him here!—that is, a swimmer worthy of him, his comrade in salt water.

'You're satisfied I swim well?' she said.

'It would go hard with me if we raced a long race.'

'I really was out for France.'

'I was ordered to keep you for England.' She gave him Brownny's eyes.

'We've turned our backs on Triton.'

'The ceremony was performed.'

'When?'

'The minute I spoke of it and you splashed.'

'Matey! Matey Weyburn!'

'Brownny Farrell!'

'Oh, Matey! she's gone!'

'She's here.'

'Try to beguile me, then, that our holiday's not over. You won't forget this hour?'

'No time of mine on earth will live so brightly for me.'

'I have never had one like it. I could go under and be happy; go to old Triton, and wait for you; teach him to speak your proper Christian name. He hasn't heard it yet,—heard "Matey,"—never yet has been taught "Matthew."'

'Aminta!'

'Oh, my friend! my dear!' she cried, in the voice of the wounded, like a welling of her blood: 'my strength will leave me. I may play—not you: you play with a weak vessel. Swim, and be quiet. How far do you count it?'

'Under a quarter of a mile.'

'Don't imagine me tired.'

'If you are, hold on to me.'

'Matey, I'm for a dive.'

He went after the ball of silver and bubbles, and they came up together. There is no history of events below the surface.

She shook off her briny blindness, and settled to the full sweep of the arms, quite silent now. Some emotion, or exhaustion from the strain of the swimmer's breath in speech, stopped her playfulness. The pleasure she still knew was a recollection of the outward swim, when she had been privileged to cast away sex with the push from earth, as few men will believe that women, beautiful women, ever wish to do; and often and ardently during the run ahead they yearn for Nature to grant them their one short holiday truce.

But Aminta forgave him for bringing earth so close to her when there was yet a space of salt water between her and shore; and she smiled at times, that he might not think she was looking grave.

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE PLIGHTING

They touched sand at the first draw of the ebb, and this being earth, Matey addressed himself to the guardian and absolving genii of matter-of-fact, by saying; 'Did you inquire about the tides?'

Her head shook, stunned with what had passed. She waded to shore, after motioning for him to swim on. Men, in comparison beside their fair fellows, are so little sensationally complex, that his one feeling now, as to what had passed, was relief at the idea of his presence having been a warrantable protectorship.

Aminta's return from the sea-nymph to the state of woman crossed annihilation on the way back to sentience, and picked up meaningless pebbles and shells of life, between the sea's verge and her tent's shelter; hardly her own life to her understanding yet, except for the hammer Memory became, to strike her insensible, at here and there a recollected word or nakedness of her soul.

He swam along by the shore to where the boat was paddled, spying at her bare feet on the sand, her woman's form. He waved, and the figure in the striped tunic and trousers waved her response, apparently the same person he had quitted.

Dry and clad, and decently formal under the transformation, they met at Mrs. Collett's breakfast-table, and in each hung the doubt whether land was the dream or sea. Both owned to a swim; both omitted mention of the tale of white ducks. Little Collett had brought Matey's and his portmanteau into the house, by favour of the cook, through the scullery. He, who could have been a pictorial and suggestive narrator, carried a spinning head off his shoulders from this wonderful Countess of Ormont to Matey Weyburn's dark-eyed Brownny at High Brent, and the Sunday walk in Sir Peter Wensell's park. Away and back his head went. Brownny was not to be thought of as Brownny; she was this grand Countess of Ormont; she had married Matey Weyburn's hero: she would never admit she had been Brownny. Only she was handsome then, and she is handsome now; and she looks on Matey Weyburn now just as she did then. How strange is the world! Or how if we are the particular person destined to encounter the strange things of the world? And fancy J. Masner, and Pinnett major, and young Oakes (liked nothing better than a pretty girl, he strutted boasting at thirteen), and the Frenchy, and the lot, all popping down at the table, and asked the name of the lady sitting like Queen Esther—how they would roar out! Boys, of course—but men, too!—very few men have a notion of the extraordinary complications and coincidences and cracker-surprises life contains. Here 's an instance; Matey Weyburn positively will wear white ducks to play before Aminta Farrell on the first of May cricketing-day. He happens to have his white ducks on when he sees the Countess of Ormont swimming in the sea; and so he can go in just as if they were all-right bathing-drawers. In he goes, has a good long swim with her, and when he comes out, says, of his dripping ducks, 'tabula votiva... avida vestimenta,' to remind an old schoolmate of his hopping to the booth at the end of a showery May day, and dedicating them to the laundry in these words. It seems marvellous. It was a quaint revival, an hour after breakfast, for little Collett to be acting as intermediary with Selina to request Lady Ormont's grant of a five-minutes' interview before the church-bell summoned her. She was writing letters, and sent the message: 'Tell Mr. Weyburn I obey.' Selina delivered it, uttering 'obey' in a demurely comical way, as a word of which the humour might be comprehensible to him.

Aminta stood at the drawing-room window. She was asking herself whether her recent conduct shrieked coquette to him, or any of the abominable titles showered on the women who take free breath of air one day after long imprisonment.

She said: 'Does it mean you are leaving us?' the moment he was near.

'Not till evening or to-morrow, as it may happen,' he answered: 'I have one or two things to say, if you will spare the time.'

'All my time,' said she, smiling to make less of the heart's reply; and he stepped into the room.

They had not long back been Matey and Brownny, and though that was in another element, it would not sanction the Lady Ormont and Mr. Weyburn now. As little could it be Aminta and Matthew. Brother and sister they were in the spirit's world, but in this world the titles had a sound of imposture. And with a great longing to call her by some allying name, he rejected 'friend' for its insufficiency and commonness, notwithstanding the entirely friendly nature of the burden to be spoken. Friend, was a title that ran on quicksands: an excuse that tried for an excuse. He distinguished in himself simultaneously, that the hesitation and beating about for a

name had its origin in an imperfect frankness when he sent his message: the fretful desire to be with her, close to her, hearing her, seeing her, besides the true wish to serve her. He sent it after swinging round abruptly from an outlook over the bordering garden tamarisks on a sea now featureless, desolately empty.

However, perceptibly silence was doing the work of a scourge, and he said: 'I have been thinking I may have—and I don't mind fighting hard to try it before I leave England on Tuesday or Wednesday—some influence with Lady Charlotte Eglett. She is really one of the true women living, and the heartiest of backers, if she can be taught to see her course. I fancy I can do that. She 's narrow, but she is not one of the class who look on the working world below them as, we'll say, the scavenger dogs on the plains of Ilium were seen by the Achaeans. And my failure would be no loss to you! Your name shall not be alluded to as empowering me to plead for her help. But I want your consent, or I may be haunted and weakened by the idea of playing the busy-body. One has to feel strong in a delicate position. Well, you know what my position with her has been—one among the humble; and she has taken contradictions, accepted views from me, shown me she has warmth of heart to an extreme degree.'

Aminta slightly raised her hand. 'I will save you trouble. I have written to Lord Ormont. I have left him.'

Their eyes engaged on the thunder of this. 'The letter has gone?'

'It was posted before my swim: posted yesterday.'

'You have fully and clearly thought it out to a determination?'

'Bit by bit—I might say, blow by blow.'

'It is no small matter to break a marriage-tie.'

'I have conversed with your mother.'

'Yes, she! and the woman happiest in marriage!'

'I know. It was hatred of injustice, noble sympathy. And she took me for one of the blest among wives.'

'She loved God. She saw the difference between men's decrees for their convenience, and God's laws. She felt for women. You have had a hard trial Aminta.'

'Oh, my name! You mean it?'

'You heard it from me this morning.'

'Yes, there! I try to forget. I lost my senses. You may judge me harshly, on reflection.'

'Judge myself worse, then. You had a thousand excuses. I had only my love of you. There's no judgement against either of us, for us to see, if I read rightly. We elect to be tried in the courts of the sea-god. Now we 'll sit and talk it over. The next ten minutes will decide our destinies.'

His eyes glittered, otherwise he showed the coolness of the man discussing business; and his blunt soberness refreshed and upheld her, as a wild burst of passion would not have done.

Side by side, partly facing, they began their interchange.

'You have weighed what you abandon?'

'It weighs little.'

'That may be error. You have to think into the future.'

'My sufferings and experiences are not bad guides.'

'They count. How can you be sure you have all the estimates?'

'Was I ever a wife?'

'You were and are the Countess of Ormont.'

'Not to the world. An unacknowledged wife is a slave, surely.'

'You step down, if you take the step.'

'From what? Once I did desire that station—had an idea it was glorious. I despise it: or rather the woman who had the desire.'

'But the step down is into the working world.'

'I have means to live humbly. I want no more, except to be taught to work.'

'So says the minute. Years are before you. You have weighed well, that you attract?'

She reddened and murmured: 'How small!' Her pout of spite at her attractions was little simulated.

'Beauty and charm are not small matters. You have the gift, called fatal. Then—looking right forward—you have faith in the power of resistance of the woman living alone?'

He had struck at her breast. From her breast she replied.

'Hear this of me. I was persecuted with letters. I read them and did not destroy them. Perhaps you saved me. Looking back, I see weakness, nothing worse; but it is a confession.'

'Yes, you have courage. And that comes of a great heart. And therein lies the danger.'

'Advise me of what is possible to a lonely woman.'

'You have resolved on the loneliness?'

'It means breathing to me.'

'You are able to see that Lord Ormont is a gentleman?'

'A chivalrous gentleman, up to the bounds of his intelligence.'

The bounds of his intelligence closed their four walls in a rapid narrowing slide on Aminta's mind, and she exclaimed:

'If only to pluck flowers in fields and know their names, I must be free! I say what one can laugh at, and you are good and don't. Is the interrogatory exhausted?'

'Aminta, my beloved, if you are free, I claim you.'

'Have you thought—?'

The sense of a dissolving to a fountain quivered through her veins.

'Turn the tables and examine me.'

'But have you thought—oh! I am not the girl you loved. I would go through death to feel I was, and give you one worthy of you.'

'That means what I won't ask you to speak at present but I must have proof.'

He held out a hand, and hers was laid in his.

There was more for her to say, she knew. It came and fled, lightened and darkened. She had yielded her hand to him here on land, not with the licence and protection of the great holiday salt water; and she was trembling from the run of his blood through hers at the pressure of hands, when she said in undertones: 'Could we—we might be friends.'

'Meet and part as friends, you and I,' he replied.

His voice carried the answer for her, his intimate look had in it the unfolding of the full flower of the woman to him, as she could not conceal from such eyes; and feeling that, she was all avowal.

'It is for life, Matthew.'

'My own words to myself when I first thought of the chance.'

'But the school?'

'I shall not consider that we are malefactors. We have the world against us. It will not keep us from trying to serve it. And there are hints of humaner opinions; it's not all a huge rolling block of a Juggernaut. Our case could be pleaded before it. I don't think the just would condemn us heavily. I shall have to ask you to strengthen me, complete me. If you love me, it is your leap out of prison, and without you, I am from this time no better than one-third of a man. I trust you to weigh the position you lose, and the place we choose to take in the world. It 's this—I think this describes it. You know the man who builds his house below the sea's level has a sleepless enemy always threatening. His house must be firm and he must look to the dykes. We commit this indiscretion. With a world against us, our love and labour are constantly on trial; we must have great hearts, and if the world is hostile we are not to blame it. In the nature of things it could not be otherwise. My own soul, we have to see that we do—though not publicly, not insolently, offend good citizenship. But we believe—I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you—that we are not offending Divine law. You are the woman I can help and join with; think whether you can tell yourself that I am the man. So, then, our union gives us powers to make amends to the world, if the world should grant us a term of peace for the effort. That is our risk; consider it, Aminta, between now and tomorrow; deliberate. We don't go together into a garden of roses.'

'I know. I should feel shame. I wish it to look dark,' said Aminta, her hand in his, and yet with a fair-sailing mind on the stream of the blood.

Rationally and irrationally, the mixed passion and reason in two clear heads and urgent hearts discussed the stand they made before a world defied, neither of them quite perceiving what it was which coloured reason to beauty, or what so convinced their intellects when passion spoke the louder.

'I am to have a mate.'

'She will pray she may be one.'

'She is my first love.'

Aminta's lips formed 'mine,' without utterance.

Meanwhile his hand or a wizardry subdued her will, allured her body. She felt herself being drawn to the sign and seal of their plighting for life. She said, 'Matthew,' softly in protest; and he said, 'Never once yet!' She was owing to his tenderness. Her deepened voice murmured: 'Is this to deliberate?' Colour flooded the beautiful dark face, as of the funeral hues of a sun suffusing all the heavens; firing earth.

CHAPTER XXIX. AMINTA TO HER LORD

On Friday, on Saturday, on Sunday, Lady Charlotte waited for her brother Rowsley, until it was a diminished satisfaction that she had held her ground and baffled his mighty will to subdue her. She did not sleep for thinking of him on the Sunday night. Toward morning a fit of hazy horrors, which others would have deemed imaginings, drove her from her bed to sit and brood over Rowsley in a chair. What if it was a case of heart with him too? Heart disease had been in the family. A man like Rowsley, still feeling the world before him, as a man of his energies and aptitudes, her humour added in the tide of his anxieties, had a right to feel, would not fall upon resignation like a woman.

She was at the physician's door at eight o'clock. Dr. Rewkes reported reassuringly; it was a simple disturbance in Lord Ormont's condition of health, and he conveyed just enough of disturbance to send the impetuous lady knocking and ringing at her brother's door upon the hour of nine.

The announcement of Lady Charlotte's early visit informed my lord that Dr. Rewkes had done the spiriting required of him. He descended to the library and passed under scrutiny.

'You don't look ill, Rowsley,' she said, reluctantly in the sound.

'I am the better for seeing you here, Charlotte. Shall I order breakfast for you? I am alone.'

'I know you are. I've eaten. Rewkes tells me you've not lost appetite.'

'Have I the appearance of a man who has lost anything?' Prouder man, and heartier and ruddier, could not be seen, she thought.

'You're winning the country to right you; that I know.'

'I don't ask it.'

'The country wants your services.'

'I have heard some talk of it. That lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late. If they promoted and offered me the command in India to-morrow—'My lord struck the arm of his chair. 'I live at Steignton henceforth; my wife is at a seaside place eastward. She left the jewel-case when on her journey through London for safety; she is a particularly careful person, forethoughtful. I take her down to Steignton two days after her return. We entertain there in the autumn. You come?'

'I don't. I prefer decent society.'

'You are in her house now, ma'am.'

'If I have to meet the person, you mean, I shall be civil. The society you've given her, I won't meet.'

'You will have to greet the Countess of Ormont if you care to meet your brother.'

'Part, then, on the best terms we can. I say this, the woman who keeps you from serving your country, she 's your country's enemy.'

'Hear my answer. The lady who is my wife has had to suffer for what you call my country's treatment of me. It 's a choice between my country and her. I give her the rest of my time.'

'That's dotage.'

'Fire away your epithets.'

'Sheer dotage. I don't deny she's a handsome young woman.'

'You'll have to admit that Lady Ormont takes her place in our family with the best we can name.'

'You insult my ears, Rowsley.'

'The world will say it when it has the honour of her acquaintance.'

'An honour suspiciously deferred.'

'That's between the world and me.'

'Set your head to work, you'll screw the world to any pitch you like—that I don't need telling.'

Lord Ormont's head approved the remark.

'Now,' said Lady Charlotte, 'you won't get the Danmores, the Dukerlys, the Carminters, the Oxbridges any more than you get me.'

'You are wrong, ma'am. I had yesterday a reply from Lady Danmore to a communication of mine.'

'It 's thickening. But while I stand, I stand for the family; and I 'm not in it, and while I stand out of it, there 's a doubt either of your honesty or your sanity.'

'There's a perfect comprehension of my sister!'

'I put my character in the scales against your conduct, and your Countess of Ormont's reputation into the bargain.'

'You have called at her house; it 's a step. You 'll be running at her heels next. She 's not obdurate.'

'When you see me running at her heels, it'll be with my head off. Stir your hardest, and let it thicken. That man Morsfield's name mixed up with a sham Countess of Ormont, in the stories flying abroad, can't hurt anybody. A true Countess of Ormont—we 're cut to the quick.'

'We 're cut! Your quick, Charlotte, is known to court the knife.'

Letters of the morning's post were brought in.

The earl turned over a couple and took up a third, saying: 'I 'll attend to you in two minutes'; and thinking once more: Queer world it is, where, when you sheath the sword, you have to be at play with bodkins!

Lady Charlotte gazed on the carpet, effervescent with retorts to his last observation, rightly conjecturing that the letter he selected to read was from 'his Aminta.'

The letter apparently was interesting, or it was of inordinate length. He seemed still to be reading. He reverted to the first page.

At the sound of the paper, she discarded her cogitations and glanced up. His countenance had become stony. He read on some way, with a sudden drop on the signature, a recommencement, a sound in the throat, as when men grasp a comprehensible sentence of a muddled rigmarole and begin to have hopes of the remainder. But the eye on the page is not the eye which reads.

'No bad news, Rowsley?'

The earl's breath fell heavily.

Lady Charlotte left her chair, and walked about the room.

'Rowsley, I 'd like to hear if I can be of use.'

'Ma'am?' he said; and pondered on the word 'use,' staring at her.

'I don't intend to pry. I can't see my brother look like that, and not ask.'

The letter was tossed on the table to her. She read these lines, dated from Felixstowe:

'MY DEAR LORD,

'The courage I have long been wanting in has come at last, to break a tie that I have seen too clearly was a burden on you from the beginning. I will believe that I am chiefly responsible for inducing you to contract it. The alliance with an inexperienced girl of inferior birth, and a perhaps immoderate ambition, has taxed your generosity; and though the store may be inexhaustible, it is

not truly the married state when a wife subjects the husband to such a trial. The release is yours, the sadness is for me. I have latterly seen or suspected a design on your part to meet my former wishes for a public recognition of the wife of Lord Ormont. Let me now say that these foolish wishes no longer exist. I rejoice to think that my staying or going will be alike unknown to the world. I have the means of a livelihood, in a modest way, and shall trouble no one.

'I have said, the sadness is for me. That is truth. But I have to add, that I, too, am sensible of the release. My confession of a change of feeling to you as a wife, writes the close of all relations between us. I am among the dead for you; and it is a relief to me to reflect on the little pain I give...'

'Has she something on her conscience about that man Morsfield?' Lady Charlotte cried.

Lord Ormont's prolonged Ah! of execration rolled her to a bundle.

Nevertheless her human nature and her knowledge of woman's, would out with the words: 'There's a man!'

She allowed her brother to be correct in repudiating the name of the dead Morsfield—chivalrous as he was on this Aminta's behalf to the last!—and struck along several heads, Adderwood's, Weyburn's, Randeller's, for the response to her suspicion. A man there certainly was. He would be probably a young man. He would not necessarily be a handsome man.... or a titled or a wealthy man. She might have set eyes on a gypsy somewhere round Great Marlow—blood to blood; such things have been. Imagining a wildish man for her, rather than a handsome one and one devoted staidly to the founding of a school, she overlooked Weyburn, or reserved him with others for subsequent speculation.

The remainder of Aminta's letter referred to her delivery of the Ormont jewel-case at Lord Ormont's London house, under charge of her maid Carstairs. The affairs of the household were stated very succinctly, the drawer for labelled keys, whatever pertained to her management, in London or at Great Marlow.

'She 's cool,' Lady Charlotte said, after reading out the orderly array of items, in a tone of rasping irony, to convince her brother he was well rid of a heartless wench.

Aminta's written statement of those items were stabs at the home she had given him, a flashed picture of his loss. Nothing written by her touched him to pierce him so shrewdly; nothing could have brought him so closely the breathing image in the flesh of the woman now a phantom for him.

'Will she be expecting you to answer, Rowsley?'

'Will that forked tongue cease hissing!' he shouted, in the agony of a strong man convulsed both to render and conceal the terrible, shameful, unexampled gush of tears.

Lady Charlotte beheld her bleeding giant. She would rather have seen the brother of her love grimace in woman's manner than let loose those rolling big drops down the face of a rock. The big sob shook him, and she was shaken to the dust by the sight. Now she was advised by her deep affection for her brother to sit patient and dumb, behind shaded eyes: praising in her heart the incomparable force of the man's love of the woman contrasted with the puling inclinations of the woman for the man.

Neither opened mouth when they separated. She pressed and kissed a large nerveless hand. Lord Ormont stood up to bow her forth. His ruddied skin had gone to pallor resembling the berg of ice on the edge of Arctic seas, when sunlight has fallen away from it.

CHAPTER XXX. CONCLUSION

The peaceful little home on the solitary sandy shore was assailed, unwarned, beneath a quiet sky, some hours later, by a whirlwind, a dust-storm, and rattling volleys. Miss Vincent's discovery, in the past school-days, of Selina Collett's 'wicked complicity in a clandestine correspondence' had memorably chastened the girl, who vowed at the time when her schoolmistress, using the rod of Johnsonian English for the purpose, exposed the depravity of her sinfulness, that she would never again be guilty of a like offence. Her dear and lovely Countess of Ormont, for whom she then uncomplainingly suffered, who deigned now to call her friend, had spoken the kind good-bye, and left the house after Mr. Weyburn's departure that same day; she, of course, to post by Harwich to London; he to sail by packet from the port of Harwich for Flushing. The card of an unknown lady, a great lady, the Lady Charlotte Eglett, was handed to her mother at eight o'clock in the evening.

Lady Charlotte was introduced to the innocent country couple; the mother knitting, the daughter studying a book of the botany of the Swiss Alps, dreaming a distant day's journey over historic lands of various hues to the unimaginable spectacle of earth's grandeur. Her visit lasted fifteen minutes. From the moment of her entry, the room was in such turmoil as may be seen where a water-mill wheel's paddles are suddenly set rounding to pour streams of foam on the smooth pool below. A relentless catechism bewildered their hearing. Mrs. Collett attempted an opposition of dignity to those vehement attacks for answers. It was flooded and rolled over. She was put upon her honour to reply positively to positive questions: whether the Countess of Ormont was in this house at present; whether the Countess of Ormont left the house alone or in company; whether a gentleman had come to the house during the stay of the Countess of Ormont; whether Lady Ormont had left the neighbourhood; the exact time of the day when she quitted the house, and the stated point of her destination.

Ultimately, protesting that they were incapable of telling what they did not know—which Lady Charlotte heard with an incredulous shrug—they related piecemeal what they did know, and

Weyburn's name gave her scent. She paid small heed to the tale of Mr. Weyburn's having come there in the character of young Mr. Collett's old schoolmate. Mr. Weyburn had started for the port of Harwich. This day, and not long subsequently, Lady Ormont had started for the port of Harwich, on her way to London, if we like to think it. Further corroboration was quite superfluous.

'Is there a night packet-boat from this port of yours?' Lady Charlotte asked.

The household servants had to be consulted; and she, hurriedly craving the excuse of their tedious mistress, elicited, as far as she could understand them, that there might be and very nearly was, a night packet-boat starting for Flushing. The cook, a native of Harwich, sent up word of a night packet-boat starting at about eleven o'clock last year.

Lady Charlotte saw the chance as a wind-blown beacon-fire under press of shades. Changing her hawkish manner toward the simple pair, she gave them view of a smile magical by contrast, really beautiful—the smile she had in reserve for serviceable persons whom she trusted—while thanking them and saying, that her anxiety concerned Lady Ormont's welfare.

Her brother had prophesied she would soon be 'running at his wife's heels,' and so she was, but not 'with her head off,' as she had rejoined. She might prove, by intercepting his Aminta, that her head was on. The windy beacon-fire of a chance blazed at the rapid rolling of her carriage-wheels, and sank to stifling smoke at any petty obstruction. Let her but come to an interview with his Aminta, she would stop all that nonsense of the woman's letter; carry her off—and her Weyburn plucking at her other hand to keep her. Why, naturally, treated as she was by Rowsley, she dropped soft eyes on a good-looking secretary. Any woman would—confound the young fellow! But all 's right yet if we get to Harwich in time; unless... as a certain coldfish finale tone of the letter playing on the old string, the irrevocable, peculiar to women who are novices in situations of the kind, appeared to indicate; they see in their conscience-blasted minds a barrier to a return home, high as the Archangelical gate behind Mother Eve, and they are down on their knees blubbing gratitude and repentance if the gate swings open to them. It is just the instant, granting the catastrophe, to have a woman back to her duty. She has only to learn she has a magnanimous husband. If she learns into the bargain how he suffers, how he loves her,—well, she despises a man like that Lawrence Finchley all the more for the 'magnanimity' she has the profit of, and perceives to be feebleness. But there 's woman in her good and her bad; she'll trick a man of age, and if he forgives her, owning his own faults in the case, she won't scorn him for it; the likelihood is, she 'll feel bound in honour to serve him faithfully for the rest of their wedded days.

A sketch to her of Rowsley's deep love.... Lady Charlotte wandered into an amazement at it. A sentence of her brother's recent speaking danced in her recollection. He said of his country: That Lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late. True, Old England is always louting to the rear, and has to be pricked in the rear and pulled by the neck before she 's equal to the circumstances around her. But what if his words were flung at him in turn! Short of 'Lout,' it rang correctly. 'Too late,' we hope to clip from the end of the sentence likewise. We have then, if you stress it—'comes to a knowledge of his wants;—a fair example of the creatures men are; the greatest of

men; who have to learn from the loss of the woman—or a fear of the loss—how much they really do love her.

Well, and she may learn the same or something sufficiently like it, if she 's caught in time, called to her face, Countess of Ormont, sister-in-law, and smoothed, petted, made believe she 's now understood and won't be questioned on a single particular—in fact, she marches back in a sort of triumph; and all the past in a cupboard, locked up, without further inquiry.

Her brother Rowsley's revealed human appearance of the stricken man—stricken right into his big heart—precipitated Lady Charlotte's reflections and urged her to an unavailing fever of haste during the circuitous drive in moonlight to the port. She alighted at the principal inn, and was there informed that the packetboat, with a favouring breeze and tide, had started ten minutes earlier. She summoned the landlord, and described a lady, as probably one of the passengers: 'Dark, holds herself up high. Some such lady had dined at the inn on tea, and gone aboard the boat soon after.

Lady Charlotte burned with the question: Alone? She repressed her feminine hunger and asked to see the book of visitors. But the lady had not slept at the inn, so had not been requested to write her name.

The track of the vessel could be seen from the pier, on the line of a bar of moonlight; and thinking, that the abominable woman, if aboard she was, had coolly provided herself with a continental passport—or had it done for two by her accomplice, that Weyburn, before she left London—Lady Charlotte sent a loathing gaze at the black figure of the boat on the water, untroubled by any reminder of her share in the conspiracy of events, which was to be her brother's chastisement to his end.

Years are the teachers of the great rocky natures, whom they round and sap and pierce in caverns, having them on all sides, and striking deep inward at moments. There is no resisting the years, if we have a heart, and a common understanding. They constitute, in the sum of them, the self-examination, whence issues, acknowledged or not, a belated self-knowledge, to direct our final actions. She had the heart. Sight of the high-minded, proud, speechless man suffering for the absence of a runaway woman, not ceasing to suffer, never blaming the woman, and consequently, it could be fancied, blaming himself, broke down Lady Charlotte's defences and moved her to review her part in her brother Rowsley's unhappiness. For supposing him to blame himself, her power to cast a shadow of blame on him went from her, and therewith her vindication of her conduct. He lived at Olmer. She read him by degrees, as those who have become absolutely tongueless have to be read; and so she gathered that this mortally (or lastingly) wounded brother of hers was pleased by an allusion to his Aminta. He ran his finger on the lines of a map of Spain, from Barcelona over to Granada; and impressed his nail at a point appearing to be mountainous or woody. Lady Charlotte suggested that he and his Aminta had passed by there. He told a story of a carriage accident: added, 'She was very brave.' One day, when he had taken a keepsake book of England's Beauties off the drawing-room table, his eyes dwelt on a face awhile, and he handed it, with a nod, followed by a slight depreciatory shrug. 'Like her, not so handsome,' Lady Charlotte said.

He nodded again. She came to a knowledge of Aminta's favourite colours through the dwelling of his look on orange and black, deepest rose, light yellow, light blue. Her grand-daughters won the satisfied look if they wore a combination touching his memory. The rocky are not imaginative, and have to be struck from without for a kindling of them. Submissive though she was to court and soothe her brother Rowsley, a spur of jealousy burned in the composition of her sentiments, to set her going. He liked visiting Mrs. Lawrence Finchley at her effaced good man's country seat, Brockholm in Berkshire, and would stay there a month at a time. Lady Charlotte learnt why. The enthusiast for Aminta, without upholding her to her late lord, whom she liked well, talked of her openly with him, confessed to a fondness for her. How much Mrs. Lawrence ventured to say, Lady Charlotte could not know. But rivalry pushed her to the extreme of making Aminta partially a topic; and so ready was he to follow her lead in the veriest trifles recalling the handsome runaway; that she had to excite his racy diatribes against the Burgess English and the pulp they have made of a glorious nation, in order not to think him inclining upon dotage.

Philippa's occasional scoff in fun concerning 'grandmama's tutor,' hurt Lady Charlotte for more reasons than one, notwithstanding the justification of her fore-thoughtfulness. The girl, however, was privileged; she was Bobby Benlew's dearest friend, and my lord loved the boy; with whom nothing could be done at school, nor could a tutor at Olmer control him. In fine, Bobby saddened the family and gained the earl's anxious affection by giving daily proofs of his being an Ormont in a weak frame; patently an Ormont, recurrently an invalid. His moral qualities hurled him on his physical deficiencies. The local doctor and Dr. Rewkes banished him twice to the seashore, where he began to bloom the first week and sickened the next, for want of playfellows, jolly fights and friendships. Ultimately they prescribed mountain air, Swiss air, easy travelling to Switzerland, and several weeks of excursions at the foot of the Alps. Bobby might possibly get an aged tutor, or find an English clergyman taking pupils, on the way.

Thus it happened, that seven years after his bereavement, Lord Ormont and Philippa and Bobby were on the famous Bernese Terrace, grandest of terrestrial theatres where soul of man has fronting him earth's utmost majesty. Sublime: but five minutes of it fetched sounds as of a plug in an empty phial from Bobby's bosom, and his heels became electrical.

He was observed at play with a gentleman of Italian complexion. Past guessing how it had come about, for the gentleman was an utter stranger. He had at any rate the tongue of an Englishman. He had the style, too, the slang and cries and tricks of an English schoolboy, though visibly a foreigner. And he had the art of throwing his heart into that bit of improvised game, or he would never have got hold of Bobby, shrewd to read a masker.

Lugged-up by the boy to my lord and the young lady, he doffed and bowed. 'Forgive me, pray,' he said; 'I can't see an English boy without having a spin with him; and I make so bold as to speak to English people wherever I meet them, if they give me the chance. Bad manners? Better than that. You are of the military profession, sir, I see. I am a soldier, fresh from Monte Video. Italian, it is evident, under an Italian chief there. A clerk on a stool, and hey presto plunged into the war a month after, shouldering a gun and marching. Fifteen battles in eighteen months; and Death a lady at a balcony we kiss hands to on the march below. Not a bit more terrible! Ah, but your pardon, sir,' he hastened to say, observing rigidity on the features of the English gentleman; 'would I boast? Not I. Accept it as my preface for why I am moved to speak the English

wherever I meet them:—Uruguay, Buenos Ayres, La Plata, or Europe. I cannot resist it. At least, he bent gracefully, 'I do not. We come to the grounds of my misbehaviour. I have shown at every call I fear nothing, kiss hand of welcome or adieu to Death. And I, a boy of the age of this youngster—he 's not like me, I can declare!—I was a sneak and a coward. It follows, I was a liar and a traitor. Who cured me of that vileness, that scandal? I will tell you—an Englishman and an Englishwoman: my schoolmaster and his wife. My schoolmaster—my friend! He is the comrade of his boys: English, French, Germans, Italians, a Spaniard in my time—a South American I have sent him—two from Boston, Massachusetts—and clever!—all emulous to excel, none boasting. But, to myself; I was that mean fellow. I did—I could let you know: before this young lady—she would wither me with her scorn, Enough, I sneaked, I lied. I let the blame fall on a schoolfellow and a housemaid. Oh! a small thing, but I coveted it—a scarf. It reminded me of Rome. Enough, there at the bottom of that pit, behold me. It was not discovered, but my schoolfellow was unpunished, the housemaid remained in service; I thought, I thought, and I thought until I could not look in my dear friend Matthew's face. He said to me one day: "Have you nothing to tell me, Giulio?" as if to ask the road to right or left. Out it all came. And no sermon, no! He set me the hardest task I could have. That was a penance!—to go to his wife, and tell it all to her. Then I did think it an easier thing to go and face death—and death had been my nightmare. I went, she listened, she took my hand she said: "You will never do this again, I know, Giulio." She told me no English girl would ever look on a man who was a coward and lied. From that day I have made Truth my bride. And what the consequence? I know not fear! I could laugh, knowing I was to lie down in my six-foot measure to-morrow. If I have done my duty and look in the face of my dear Matthew and his wife! Ah, those two! They are loved. They will be loved all over Europe. He works for Europe and America—all civilized people—to be one country. He is the comrade of his boys. Out of school hours, it is Christian names all round—Matthew, Emile, Adolf, Emilio, Giulio, Robert, Marcel, Franz, et caetera. Games or lessons, a boy can't help learning with him. He makes happy fellows and brave soldiers of them without drill. Sir, do I presume when I say I have your excuse for addressing you because you are his countryman? I drive to the old school in half an hour, and next week he and his dear wife and a good half of the boys will be on the tramp over the Simplon, by Lago Maggiore, to my uncle's house in Milan for a halt. I go to Matthew before I see my own people.'

He swept another bow of apology, chiefly to Philippa, as representative of the sex claiming homage.

Lord Ormont had not greatly relished certain of the flowery phrases employed by this young foreigner. 'Truth his bride,' was damnable: and if a story had to be told, he liked it plain, without jerks and evolutions. Many offences to our taste have to be overlooked in foreigners—Italians! considered, before they were proved in fire, a people classed by nature as operatic declaimers. Bobby had shown himself on the road out to Bern a difficult boy, and stupefyingly ignorant. My lord had two or three ideas working to cloudy combination in his head when he put a question, referring to the management of the dormitories at the school. Whereupon the young Italian introduced himself as Giulio Calliani, and proposed a drive to inspect the old school, with its cricket and football fields, lake for rowing and swimming, gymnastic fixtures, carpenter's shed, bowling alley, and four European languages in the air by turns daily; and the boys, too, all the boys rosy and jolly, according to the last report received of them from his friend Matthew. Enthusiasm struck and tightened the loose chord of scepticism in Lord Ormont; somewhat as if a

dancing beggar had entered a kennel-dog's yard, designing to fascinate the faithful beast. It is a chord of one note, that is tightened to sound by the violent summons to accept, which is a provocation to deny. At the same time, the enthusiast's dance is rather funny; he is not an ordinary beggar; to see him trip himself in his dance would be rather funnier. This is to say, inspect the trumpeted school and retire politely. My lord knew the Bern of frequent visits: the woman was needed beside him to inspire a feeling for scenic mountains. Philippa's admiration of them was like a new-pressed grape-juice after a draught of the ripe vintage. Moreover, Bobby was difficult: the rejected of his English schools was a stiff Ormont at lessons, a wheezy Benlew in the playground: exactly the reverse of what should have been. A school of four languages in bracing air, if a school with healthy dormitories, and a school of the trained instincts we call gentlemanly, might suit Master Bobby for a trial. An eye on the boys of the school would see in a minute what stuff they were made of. Supposing this young Italianissimo with the English tongue to be tolerably near the mark, with a deduction of two-thirds of the enthusiasm, Bobby might stop at the school as long as his health held out, or the master would keep him. Supposing half a dozen things and more, the meeting with this Mr. Calliand was a lucky accident. But lucky accidents are anticipated only by fools.

Lord Ormont consented to visit the school. He handed his card and invited his guest; he had a carriage in waiting for the day, he said; and obedient to Lady Charlotte's injunctions, he withheld Philippa from the party. She and her maid were to pass the five hours of his absence in efforts to keep their monkey Bobby out of the well of the solicitous bears.

My lord left his carriage at the inn of the village lying below the school-house on a green height. The young enthusiast was dancing him into the condition of livid taciturnity, which could, if it would, flash out pungent epigrams of the actual world at Operatic recitative.

'There's the old school-clock! Just in time for the half-hour before dinner,' said Calliani, chattering two hundred to the minute, of the habits and usages of the school, and how all had meals together, the master, his wife, the teachers, the boys. 'And she—as for her!' Calliani kissed finger up to the furthest skies: into which a self-respecting sober Northerner of the Isles could imagine himself to kick enthusiastic gesticulators, if it were polite to do so.

The school-house faced the master's dwelling house, and these, with a block of building, formed a three-sided enclosure, like barracks! Forth from the school-house door burst a dozen shouting lads, as wasps from the hole of their nest from a charge of powder. Out they poured whizzing; and the frog he leaped, and pussy ran and doubled before the hounds, and hockey-sticks waved, and away went a ball. Cracks at the ball anyhow, was the game for the twenty-five minutes breather before dinner.

'French day!' said Calliani, hearing their cries. Then he bellowed 'Matthew!—Giulio!'

A lusty inversion of the order of the names and an Oberland jodel returned his hail. The school retreating caught up the Alpine cry in the distance. Here were lungs! Here were sprites!

Lord Ormont bethought him of the name of the master. 'Mr. Matthew, I think you said, sir,' he was observing to Calliani, as the master came nearer; and Calliani replied: 'His Christian name. But if the boys are naughty boys, it is not the privilege. Mr. Weyburn.'

There was not any necessity to pronounce that name Calliani spoke it on the rush to his friend.

Lord Ormont and Weyburn advanced the steps to the meeting. Neither of them flinched in eye or limb.

At a corridor window of the dwelling-house a lady stood. Her colour was the last of a summer day over western seas; her thought: 'It has come!' Her mind was in her sight; her other powers were frozen.

The two men conversed. There was no gesture.

This is one of the lightning moments of life for the woman, at the meeting of the two men between whom her person has been in dispute, may still be; her soul being with one. And that one, dearer than the blood of her body, imperilled by her.

She could ask why she exists, if a question were in her grasp. She would ask for the meaning of the gift of beauty to the woman, making her desireable to those two men, making her a cause of strife, a thing of doom. An incessant clamour dinned about her: 'It has come!'

The two men walked conversing into the school-house. She was unconscious of the seeing of a third, though she saw and at the back of her mind believed she knew a friend in him. The two disappeared. She was insensible stone, except for the bell-clang: 'It has come'; until they were in view again, still conversing: and the first of her thought to stir from petrification was: 'Life holds no secret.'

She tried, in shame of the inanimate creature she had become, to force herself to think: and had, for a chastising result, a series of geometrical figures shooting across her brain, mystically expressive of the situation, not communicably. The most vivid and persistent was a triangle. Interpret who may. The one beheld the two pass from view again, still conversing.

They are on the gravel; they bow; they separate. He of the grey head poised high has gone.

Her arm was pressed by a hand. Weyburn longed to enfold her, and she desired it, and her soul praised him for refraining. Both had that delicacy.

'You have seen, my darling,' Weyburn said. 'It has come, and we take our chance. He spoke not one word, beyond the affairs of the school. He has a grandnephew in want of a school: visited the dormitories, refectory, and sheds: tasted the well-water, addressed me as Mr. Matthew. He had it from Giulio. Came to look at the school of Giulio's "friend Matthew,"—you hear him. Giulio little imagines!—Well, dear love, we stand with a squad in front, and wait the word. It mayn't be spoken. We have counted long before that something like it was bound to happen. And you are brave. Ruin's an empty word for us two.'

'Yes, dear, it is: we will pay what is asked of us,' Aminta said. 'It will be heavy, if the school... and I love our boys. I am fit to be the school-housekeeper; for nothing else.'

'I will go to the boys' parents. At the worst, we can march into new territory. Emile will stick to us. Adolf, too. The fresh flock will come.'

Aminta cried in the voice of tears: 'I love the old so!'

'The likelihood is, we shall hear nothing further.'

'You had to bear the shock, Matthew.'

'Whatever I bore, and you saw, you shared.'

'Yes,' she said.

'Mais, n'oublions pas que c'est aujourd'hui jour francais; si, madame, vous avez assez d'appetit pour diner avec nous?'

'Je suis, comme toujours, aux ordres de Monsieur.' She was among the bravest of women. She had a full ounce of lead in her breast when she sat with the boys at their midday meal, showing them her familiar pleasant face.

Shortly after the hour of the evening meal, a messenger from Bern delivered a letter addressed to the Headmaster. Weyburn and Aminta were strolling to the playground, thinking in common, as they usually did. They read the letter together. These were the lines:

'Lord Ormont desires to repeat his sense of obligation to Mr. Matthew for the inspection of the school under his charge, and will be thankful to Mr. Calliani, if that gentleman will do him the favour to call at his hotel at Bern to-morrow, at as early an hour as is convenient to him, for the purpose of making arrangements, agreeable to the Head-master's rules, for receiving his grandnephew Robert Benlew as a pupil at the school.'

The two raised eyes on one another, pained in their deep joy by the religion of the restraint upon their hearts, to keep down the passion to embrace.

'I thank heaven we know him to be one of the true noble men,' said Aminta, now breathing, and thanking Lord Ormont for the free breath she drew.

Weyburn spoke of an idea he had gathered from the earl's manner. But he had not imagined the proud lord's great-heartedness would go so far as to trust him with the guardianship of the boy. That moved, and that humbled him, though it was far from humiliating.

Six months later, the brief communication arrived from Lady Charlotte

'She is a widow.'

'Unlikely you will hear from me again. Death is always next door, you said once. I look on the back of life.

'Tell Bobby, capital for him to write he has no longing for home holidays. If any one can make a man of him, you will. That I know.

'CHARLOTTE EGLETT.'

THE END

Freeeditorial 