

SANDRA BELLONI

By

George Meredith

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***Free*editorial** 

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Emilia remained locked up with her mother all that evening. The good little shrill woman, tender-eyed and slatternly, had to help try on dresses, and run about for pins, and express her critical taste in undertones, believing all the while that her daughter had given up music to go mad with vanity. The reflection struck her, notwithstanding, that it was a wiser thing for one of her sex to make friends among rich people than to marry a foreign husband.

The girl looked a brilliant woman in a superb Venetian dress of purple velvet, which she called 'the Branciani dress,' and once attired in it, and the rich purges and swelling creases over the shoulders puffed out to her satisfaction, and the run of yellow braid about it properly inspected and flattened, she would not return to her more homely wear, though very soon her mother began to whimper and say that she had lost her so long, and now that she had found her it hardly seemed the same child. Emilia would listen to no entreaties to put away her sumptuous robe. She silenced her mother with a stamp of her foot, and then sighed: "Ah! Why do I always feel such a tyrant with you?" kissing her.

"This dress," she said, and held up her mother's chin fondlingly between her two hands, "this dress was designed by my friend Merthyr—that is, Mr. Powys—from what he remembered of a dress worn by Countess Branciani, of Venice. He had it made to give to me. It came from Paris. Countess Branciani was one of his dearest friends. I feel that I am twice as much his friend with this on me. Mother, it seems like a deep blush all over me. I feel as if I looked out of a rose."

She spread her hands to express the flower magnified.

"Oh! what silly talk," said her mother: "it does turn your head, this dress does!"

"I wish it would give me my voice, mother. My father has no hope. I wish he would send me news to make me happy about him; or come and run his finger up the strings for hours, as he used to. I have fancied I heard him at times, and I had a longing to follow the notes, and felt sure of my semi-tones. He won't see me! Mother! he would think something of me if he saw me now!"

Her mother's lamentations reached that vocal pitch at last which Emilia could not endure, and the little lady was despatched to her home under charge of a servant.

Emilia feasted on the looking-glass when alone. Had Merthyr, in restoring her to health, given her an overdose of the poison?

"Countess Branciani made the Austrian Governor her slave," she uttered, planting one foot upon a stool to lend herself height. "He told her who were suspected, and who would be imprisoned, and gave her all the State secrets. Beauty can do more than music. I wonder whether Merthyr loved her? He loves me!"

Emilia was smitten with a fear that he would speak of it when she next saw him. "Oh! I hope he will be just the same as he has been," she sighed; and with much melancholy shook her head at her fair reflection, and began to undress. It had not struck her with surprise that two men should be loving her, until, standing away from the purple folds, she seemed to grow smaller and smaller, as a fire-log robbed of its flame, and felt insufficient and weak. This was a new sensation. She depended no more on her own vital sincerity. It was in her nature, doubtless, to crave constantly for approval, but in the service of personal beauty instead of divine Art, she found herself utterly unwound without it: victim of a sense of most uncomfortable hollowness. She was glad to extinguish the candle and be covered up dark in the circle of her warmth. Then her young blood sang to her again.

An hour before breakfast every morning she read with Merthyr. Now, this morning how was she to appear to him? There would be no reading, of course. How could he think of teaching one to whom he trembled. Emilia trusted that she might see no change in him, and, above all, that he would not speak of his love for her. Nevertheless, she put on her robe of conquest, having first rejected with distaste a plainer garb. She went down the stairs slowly. Merthyr was in the library awaiting her. "You are late," he said, eyeing the dress as a thing apart from her, and remarking that it was hardly suited for morning wear. "Yellow, if you must have a strong colour, and you wouldn't exhibit the schwartz-gelb of the Tedeschi willingly. But now!"

This was the signal for the reading to commence.

"Wilfrid would not have been so cold to me," thought Emilia, turning the leaves of Ariosto as a book of ashes. Not a word of love appeared to be in his mind. This she did not regret; but she thirsted for the assuring look. His eyes were quietly friendly. So friendly was he, that he blamed her for inattention, and took her once to task about a melodious accent in which she vulgarized the vowels. All the flattery of the Branciani dress could not keep Emilia from her feeling of smallness. Was it possible that he loved her? She watched him as eagerly as her shyness would permit. Any shadow of a change was spied for. Getting no softness from him, or superadded kindness, no shadow of a change in that direction, she stumbled in her reading purposely, to draw down rebuke; her construing was villanously bad. He told her so, and she replied: "I don't like poetry." But seeing him exchange Ariosto for Roman History, she murmured, "I like Dante." Merthyr plunged her remorselessly into the second Punic war.

But there was worse to follow. She was informed that after breakfast she would be called upon to repeat the principal facts she had been reading of. Emilia groaned audibly.

"Take the book," said Merthyr.

"It's so heavy," she complained.

"Heavy?"

"I mean, to carry about."

"If you want to 'carry it about,' the boy shall follow you with it."

She understood that she was being laughed at. Languor, coupled with the consciousness of ridicule, overwhelmed her.

"I feel I can't learn," she said.

"Feel, that you must," was replied to her.

"No; don't take any more trouble with me!"

"Yes; I expect you to distinguish Scipio from Cicero, and not make the mistake of the other evening, when you were talking to Mrs. Cameron."

Emilia left him, abashed, to dread shrewdly their meeting within five minutes at the breakfast-table; to dread eating under his eyes, with doubts of the character of her acts generally. She was, indeed, his humble scholar, though she seemed so full of weariness and revolt. He, however, when alone, looked fixedly at the door through which she had passed, and said, "She loves that man still. Similar ages, similar tastes, I suppose! She is dressed to be ready for him. She can't learn: she can do nothing. My work mayn't be lost, but it's lost for me."

Merthyr did not know that Georgiana had betrayed him, but in no case would he have given Emilia the signs she expected: in the first place, because he had self-command; and, secondly, because of those years he counted in advance of her. So she had the full mystery of his loving her to think over, without a spot of the weakness to fasten on.

Georgiana's first sight of Emilia in her Branciani dress shut her heart against the girl with iron clasps. She took occasion to remark, "We need not expect visitors so very early;" but the offender was impervious. Breakfast finished, the reading with Merthyr recommenced, when Emilia, having got over her surprise at the sameness of things this day, acquitted herself better, and even declaimed the verses musically. Seeing him look pleased, she spoke them out sonorously. Merthyr applauded. Upon which Emilia said, with odd abruptness and solemnity, "Will he come to-day?" It was beyond Merthyr's power of self-control to consent to be taken into a consultation on this matter, and he attempted to put it aside. "He may or he may not—probably to-morrow."

"No; to-day, in the afternoon," said Emilia, "be near me."

"I have engagements."

"Some word, say, that will seem to be you with me."

"Some flattery, or you won't remember it."

"Yes, I like flattery."

"Well, you look like Countess Branciani when, after thinking her husband the basest of men, she discovered him to be the noblest."

Emilia blushed. "That's not easily forgotten! But she must have looked braver, bolder, not so under a burden as I feel."

"The comparison was meant to suit the moment of your reciting."

"Yes," said Emilia, half-mournfully, "then 'myself' doesn't sit on my shoulders: I don't even care what I am."

"That is what Art does for you."

"Only by fits and starts now. Once I never thought of myself."

There was a knock at the street-door, and she changed countenance. Presently there came a gentle tap at their own door.

"It is that woman," said Emilia.

"I fancy it must be Lady Charlotte. You will not see her?"

Merthyr was anticipating a negative, but Emilia said, "Let her come in."

She gave her hand to the lady, and was the less concerned of the two. Lady Charlotte turned away from her briskly.

"Georgey didn't say anything of you in her letter, Merthyr; I am going up to her, but I wished to satisfy myself that you were in town, first:—to save half-a-minute, you see I anticipate the philosophic manly sneer. Is it really true that you are going to mix yourself up in this mad Italian business again? Now that you're a man, my dear Merthyr, it seems almost inexcuseable—for a sensible Englishman!"

Lady Charlotte laughed, giving him her hand at the same time.

"Don't you know I swore an oath?" Merthyr caught up her tone.

"Yes, but you never succeed. I complain that you never succeed. Of what use on earth are all your efforts if you never succeed?"

Emilia's voice burst out:—

"'Piacemi almen che i miei sospir sien quali
Spera 'l Tevere e 'l Arno,
E 'l Po,—'"

Merthyr continued the ode, acting a similar fervour:—

"'Ben provvide Natura al nostro stato
Quando dell' Alpi schermo

Pose fra noi e la tedesca rabbis."

"We are merely bondsmen to the re-establishment of the provisions of nature."

"And we know we shall succeed!" said Emilia, permitting her antagonism to pass forth in irritable emphasis.

Lady Charlotte quickly left them, to run up to Georgiana. She was not long in the house. Emilia hung near Merthyr all day, and she was near him when the knock was heard which she could suppose to be Wilfrid's, as it proved. Wilfrid was ushered in to Georgiana. Delicacy had prevented Merthyr from taking special notice to Emilia of Lady Charlotte's visit, and he treated Wilfrid's similarly, saying, "Georgey will send down word."

"Only, don't leave me till she does," Emilia rejoined.

Her agitation laid her open to be misinterpreted. It was increased when she saw him take a book and sit in the armchair between two lighted candles, calmly careless of her. She did not actually define to herself that he should feel jealously, but his indifference was one extreme which provoked her instinct to imagine a necessity for the other. Word came from Georgiana, and Emilia moved to the door. "Remember, we dine half-an-hour earlier to-day, on account of the Cameron party," was all that he uttered. Emilia made an effort to go. She felt herself as a ship sailing into perilous waters, without compass. Why did he not speak tenderly? Before Georgiana had revealed his love for her, she had been strong to see Wilfrid. Now, the idea smote her softened heart that Wilfrid's passion might engulf her if she had no word of sustainment from Merthyr. She turned and flung herself at his feet, murmuring, "Say something to me." Merthyr divined this emotion to be a sort of foresight of remorse on her part: he clasped the interwoven fingers of her hands, letting his eyes dwell upon hers. The marvel of their not wavering or softening meaningly kept her speechless. She rose with a strength not her own: not comforted, and no longer speculating. It was as if she had been eyeing a golden door shut fast, that might some day open, but was in itself precious to behold. She arose with deep humbleness, which awakened new ideas of the nature of worth in her bosom. She felt herself so low before this man who would not be played upon as an obsequious instrument—who would not leap into ardour for her beauty! Before that man upstairs how would she feel? The question did not come to her. She entered the room where he was, without a blush. Her step was firm, and her face expressed a quiet gladness. Georgiana stayed through the first commonplaces: then they were alone.

CHAPTER LI

Commonplaces continued to be Wilfrid's refuge, for sentiment was surging mightily within him. The commonplaces concerning father, sisters, health, weather, sickened him when uttered, so

much that for a time he was unobservant of Emilia's ready exchange of them. To a compliment on her appearance, she said: "You like this dress? I will tell you the history of it. I call it the Branciani dress. Mr. Powys designed it for me. The Countess Branciani was his friend. She used always to dress in this colour; just in this style. She also was dark. And she imagined that her husband favoured the Austrians. She believed he was an Austrian spy. It was impossible for her not to hate him—"

"Her husband!" quoth Wilfrid. The unexpected richness that had come upon her beauty and the coolness of her prattle at such an interview amazed and mortified him.

"She supposed him to be an Austrian spy!"

"Still he was her husband!"

Emilia gave her features a moment's play, but she had not full command of them, and the spark of scorn they emitted was very slight.

"Ah!" his tone had fallen into a depth, "how I thank you for the honour you have done me in desiring to see me once before you leave England! I know that I have not merited it."

More he said on this theme, blaming himself emphatically, until, startled by the commonplaces he was uttering, he stopped short; and the stopping was effective, if the speech was not. Where was the tongue of his passion? He almost asked it of himself. Where was Hippogriff? He who had burned to see her, he saw her now, fair as a vision, and yet in the flesh! Why was he as good as tongue-tied in her presence when he had such fires to pour forth?

(Presuming that he has not previously explained it, the philosopher here observes that Hippogriff, the foal of Fiery Circumstance out of Sentiment, must be subject to strong sentimental friction before he is capable of a flight: his appetites must fast long in the very eye of provocation ere he shall be eloquent. Let him, the Philosopher, repeat at the same time that souls harmonious to Nature, of whom there are few, do not mount this animal. Those who have true passion are not at the mercy of Hippogriff—otherwise Sur-excited Sentiment. You will mark in them constantly a reverence for the laws of their being, and a natural obedience to common sense. They are subject to storm, as in everything earthly, and they need no lesson of devotion; but they never move to an object in a madness.)

Now this is good teaching: it is indeed my Philosopher's object—his purpose—to work out this distinction; and all I wish is that it were good for my market. What the Philosopher means, is to plant in the reader's path a staring contrast between my pet Emilia and his puppet Wilfrid. It would be very commendable and serviceable if a novel were what he thinks it: but all attestation favours the critical dictum, that a novel is to give us copious sugar and no cane. I, myself, as a reader, consider concomitant cane an adulteration of the qualities of sugar. My Philosopher's error is to deem the sugar, born of the cane, inseparable from it. The which is naturally resented, and away flies my book back at the heads of the librarians, hitting me behind them a far more grievous blow.

Such is the construction of my story, however, that to entirely deny the Philosopher the privilege he stipulated for when with his assistance I conceived it, would render our performance unintelligible to that acute and honourable minority which consents to be thwacked with aphorisms and sentences and a fantastic delivery of the verities. While my Play goes on, I must permit him to come forward occasionally. We are indeed in a sort of partnership, and it is useless for me to tell him that he is not popular and destroys my chance.

CHAPTER LII

"Don't blame yourself, my Wilfrid."

Emilia spoke thus, full of pity for him, and in her adorable, deep-fluted tones, after the effective stop he had come to.

The 'my Wilfrid' made the owner of the name quiver with satisfaction. He breathed: "You have forgiven me?"

"That I have. And there was indeed no blame. My voice has gone. Yes, but I do not think it your fault."

"It was! it is!" groaned Wilfrid. "But, has your voice gone?" He leaned nearer to her, drawing largely on the claim his incredulity had to inspect her sweet features accurately. "You speak just as—more deliciously than ever! I can't think you have lost it. Ah! forgive me! forgive me!"

Emilia was about to put her hand over to him, but the prompt impulse was checked by a simultaneous feminine warning within. She smiled, saying: "'I forgive' seems such a strange thing for me to say;" and to convey any further meaning that might comfort him, better than words could do, she held on her smile. The smile was of the acceptedly feigned, conventional character; a polished Surface: belonging to the passage of the discourse, and not to the emotions. Wilfrid's swelling passion slipped on it. Sensitively he discerned an ease in its formation and disappearance that shot a first doubt through him, whether he really maintained his empire in her heart. If he did not reign there, why had she sent for him? He attributed the unheated smile to a defect in her manner, that was always chargeable with something, as he remembered. He began systematically to account for his acts: but the man was so constituted that as he laid them out for pardon, he himself condemned them most; and looking back at his weakness and double play, he broke through his phrases to cry without premeditation: "Can you have loved me then?"

Emilia's cheeks tingled: "Don't speak of that night in Devon," she replied.

"Ah!" sighed he. "I did not mean then. Then you must have hated me."

"No; for, what did I say? I said that you would come to me—nothing more. I hated that woman. You? Oh, no!"

"You loved me, then?"

"Did I not offer to work for you, if you were poor? And—I can't remember what I said. Please, do not speak of that night."

"Emilia! as a man of honour, I was bound—"

She lifted her hands: "Oh! be silent, and let that night die."

"I may speak of that night when you drove home from Penarvon Castle, and a robber? You have forgotten him, perhaps! What did he steal? not what he came for, but something dearer to him than anything he possesses. How can I say—? Dear to me? If it were dipped in my heart's blood!—"

Emilia was far from being carried away by the recollection of the scene; but remembering what her emotion had then been, she wondered at her coolness now.

"I may speak of Wilming Weir?" he insinuated.

Her bosom rose softly and heavily. As if throwing off some cloak of enchantment that clogged her spirit! "I was telling you of this dress," she said: "I mean, of Countess Branciani. She thought her husband was the Austrian spy who had betrayed them, and she said, 'He is not worthy to live.' Everybody knew that she had loved him. I have seen his portrait and hers. I never saw faces that looked so fond of life. She had that Italian beauty which is to any other like the difference between velvet and silk."

"Oh! do I require to be told the difference?" Wilfrid's heart throbbed.

"She," pursued Emilia, "she loved him still, I believe, but her country was her religion. There was known to be a great conspiracy, and no one knew the leader of it. All true Italians trusted Countess Branciani, though she visited the Austrian Governor's house—a General with some name on the teeth. One night she said to him, 'You have a spy who betrays you.' The General never suspected Countess Branciani. Women are devils of cleverness sometimes.

"But he did suspect it must be her husband—thinking, I suppose, 'How otherwise would she have known he was my spy?' He gave Count Branciani secret work and high pay. Then he set a watch on him. Count Branciani was to find out who was this unknown leader. He said to the Austrian Governor, 'You shall know him in ten days.' This was repeated to Countess Branciani, and she said to herself, 'My husband! you shall perish, though I should have to stab you myself.'"

Emilia's sympathetic hand twitched. Wilfrid's seized it, but it proved no soft melting prize. She begged to be allowed to continue. He entreated her to. Thereat she pulled gently for her hand, and persisting, it was grudgingly let go.

"One night Countess Branciani put the Austrians on her husband's track. He knew that she was true to her country, and had no fear of her, whether she touched the Black-yellow gold or not. But he did not confide any, of his projects to her. And his reason was, that as she went to the Governor's, she might accidentally, by a word or a sign, show that she was an accomplice in the conspiracy. He wished to save her from a suspicion. Brave Branciani!"

Emilia had a little shudder of excitement.

"Only," she added, "why will men always think women are so weak? The Count worked with conspirators who were not dreaming they would do anything, but were plotting to do it. The Countess belonged to the other party—men who never thought they were strong enough to see their ideas acting—I mean, not bold enough to take their chance. As if we die more than one death, and the blood we spill for Italy is ever wasted! That night the Austrian spy followed the Count to the meeting-house of the conspirators. It was thought quite natural that the Count should go there. But the spy, not having the password, crouched outside, and heard from two that came out muttering, the next appointment for a meeting. This was told to Countess Branciani, and in the meantime she heard from the Austrian Governor that her husband had given in names of the conspirators. She determined at once. 'Now may Christ and the Virgin help me!'"

Emilia struck her knees, while tears started through her shut eyelids. The exclamation must have been caught from her father, who liked not the priests of his native land well enough to interfere between his English wife and their child in such a matter as religious training.

"What happened?" said Wilfrid, vainly seeking for personal application in this narrative.

"Listen!—Ah!" she fought with her tears, and said, as they rolled down her face: "For a miserable thing one can not help, I find I must cry. This is what she did. She told him she knew of the conspiracy, and asked permission to join it, swearing that she was true to Italy. He said he believed her.—Oh, heaven!—And for some time she had to beg and beg; but to spare her he would not let her join. I cannot tell why—he gave her the password for the neat meeting, and said that an old gold coin must be shown. She must have coaxed it, though he was a strong man, who could resist women. I suppose he felt that he had been unkind.—Were I Queen of Italy he should stand for ever in a statue of gold!—The next appointed night a spy entered among the conspirators, with the password and the coin. Did I tell you the Countess had one child—a girl! She lives now, and I am to know her. She is like her mother. That little girl was playing down the stairs with her nurse when a band of Austrian soldiers entered the hall underneath, and an officer, with his sword drawn, and some men, came marching up in their stiff way—the machines! This officer stooped to her, and before the nurse could stop her, made her say where her father was. Those Austrians make children betray their parents! They don't think how we grow up to detest them. Do I? Hate is not the word: it burns so hot and steady with me. The Countess came out on the first landing; she saw what was happening. When her husband was led out, she asked permission to embrace him. The officer consented, but she had to say to him, 'Move back,' and then, with her lips to her husband's cheek, 'Betray no more of them!' she whispered. Count Branciani started. Now he understood what she had done, and why she had done it. 'Ask for the charge that makes me a prisoner,' he said. Her husband's noble face gave her a chill of alarm. The Austrian spoke. 'He is accused of being the chief of the Sequin Club.' And then the Countess

looked at her husband; she sank at his feet. My heart breaks. Wilfrid! Wilfrid! You will not wear that uniform? Say 'Never, never!' You will not go to the Austrian army—Wilfrid? Would you be my enemy? Brutes, knee-deep in blood! with bloody fingers! Ogres! Would you be one of them? To see me turn my head shivering with loathing as you pass? This is why I sent for you, because I loved you, to entreat you, Wilfrid, from my soul, not to blacken the dear happy days when I knew you! Will you hear me? That woman is changing you—doing all this. Resist her! Think of me in this one thing! Promise it, and I will go at once, and want no more. I will swear never to trouble you. Oh, Wilfrid it's not so much our being enemies, but what you become, I think of. If I say to myself, 'He also, who was once my lover—Oh! paid murderer of my dear people!'"

Emilia threw up both hands to her eyes: but Wilfrid, all on fire with a word, made one of her hands his own, repeating eagerly: "Once? once?"

"Once?" she echoed him.

"'Once my love?'" said he. "Not now?—does it mean, 'not now?' My darling!—pardon me, I must say it. My beloved! you said: 'He who was once my lover:'—you said that. What does it mean? Not that—not—? does it mean, all's over? Why did you bring me here? You know I must love you forever. Speak! 'Once?'"

"'Once?'" Emilia was breathing quick, but her voice was well contained: "Yes, I said 'once.' You were then."

"Till that night in Devon?"

"Let it be."

"But you love me still?"

"We won't speak of it."

"I see! You cannot forgive. Good heavens! I think I remember your saying so once—Once! Yes, then: you said it then, during our 'Once;' when I little thought you would be merciless to me—who loved you from the first! the very first! I love you now! I wake up in the night, thinking I hear your voice. You haunt me. Cruel! cold!—who guards you and watches over you but the man you now hate? You sit there as if you could make yourself stone when you pleased. Did I not chastise that man Pericles publicly because he spoke a single lie of you? And by that act I have made an enemy to our house who may crush us in ruin. Do I regret it? No. I would do any madness, waste all my blood for you, die for you!"

Emilia's fingers received a final twist, and were dropped loose. She let them hang, looking sadly downward. Melancholy is the most irritating reply to passion, and Wilfrid's heart waged fierce at the sight of her, grown beautiful!—grown elegant!—and to reject him! When, after a silence which his pride would not suffer him to break, she spoke to ask what Mr. Pericles had said of her, he was enraged, forgot himself, and answered: "Something disgraceful."

Deep colour came on Emilia. "You struck him, Wilfrid?"

"It was a small punishment for his infamous lie, and, whatever might be the consequences, I would do it again."

"Wilfrid, I have heard what he has said. Madame Marini has told me. I wish you had not struck him. I cannot think of him apart from the days when I had my voice. I cannot bear to think of your having hurt him. He was not to blame. That is, he did not say: it was not untrue."

She took a breath to make this last statement, and continued with the same peculiar implicity of distinctness, which a terrific thunder of "What?" from Wilfrid did not overbear: "I was quite mad that day I went to him. I think, in my despair I spoke things that may have led him to fancy the truth of what he has said. On my honour, I do not know. And I cannot remember what happened after for the week I wandered alone about London. Mr. Powys found me on a wharf by the river at night."

A groan burst from Wilfrid. Emilia's instinct had divined the antidote that this would be to the poison of revived love in him, and she felt secure, though he had again taken her hand; but it was she who nursed a mere sentiment now, while passion sprang in him, and she was not prepared for the delirium with which he enveloped her. She listened to his raving senselessly, beginning to think herself lost. Her tortured hands were kissed; her eyes gazed into. He interpreted her stupefaction as contrition, her silence as delicacy, her changing of colour as flying hues of shame: the partial coldness at their meeting he attributed to the burden on her mind, and muttering in a magnanimous sublimity that he forgave her, he claimed her mouth with force.

"Don't touch me!" cried Emilia, showing terror.

"Are you not mine?"

"You must not kiss me."

Wilfrid loosened her waist, and became in a minute outwardly most cool and courteous.

"My successor may object. I am bound to consider him. Pardon me. Once!—"

The wretched insult and silly emphasis passed harmlessly from her: but a word had led her thoughts to Merthyr's face, and what is meant by the phrase 'keeping oneself pure,' stood clearly in Emilia's mind. She had not winced; and therefore Wilfrid judged that his shot had missed because there was no mark. With his eye upon her sideways, showing its circle wide as a parrot's, he asked her one of those questions that lovers sometimes permit between themselves. "Has another—?" It is here as it was uttered. Eye-speech finished the sentence.

Rapidly a train of thought was started in Emilia, and she came to this conclusion, aloud: "Then I love nobody!" For she had never kissed Merthyr, or wished for his kiss.

"You do not?" said Wilfrid, after a silence. "You are generous in being candid."

A pressure of intensest sorrow bowed his head. The real feeling in him stole to Emilia like a subtle flame.

"Oh! what can I do for you?" she cried.

"Nothing, if you do not love me," he was replying mournfully, when, "Yes! yes!" rushed to his lips; "marry me: marry me to-morrow. You have loved me. 'I am never to leave you!' Can you forget the night when you said it? Emilia! Marry me and you will love me again. You must. This man, whoever he is—Ah! why am I such a brute! Come! be mine! Let me call you my own darling! Emilia!—or say quietly 'you have nothing to hope for:' I shall not reproach you, believe me."

He looked resigned. The abrupt transition had drawn her eyes to his. She faltered: "I cannot be married." And then: "How could I guess that you felt in this way?"

"Who told me that I should?" said he. "Your words have come true. You predicted that I should fly from 'that woman,' as you called her, and come to you. See! here it is exactly as you willed it. You—you are changed. You throw your magic on me, and then you are satisfied, and turn elsewhere."

Emilia's conscience smote her with a verification of this charge, and she trembled, half-intoxicated for the moment, by the aspect of her power. This filled her likewise with a dangerous pity for its victim; and now, putting out both hands to him, her chin and shoulders raised entreatingly, she begged the victim to spare her any word of marriage.

"But you go, you run away from me—I don't know where you are or what you are doing," said Wilfrid. "And you leave me to that woman. She loves the Austrians, as you know. There! I will ask nothing—only this: I will promise, if I quit the Queen's service for good, not to wear the white uniform—"

"Oh!" Emilia breathed inward deeply, scarce noticing the 'if' that followed; nodding quick assent to the stipulation before she heard the nature of it. It was, that she should continue in England.

"Your word," said Wilfrid; and she pledged it, and did not think she was granting much in the prospect of what she gained.

"You will, then?" said he.

"Yes, I will."

"On your honour?"

These reiterated questions were simply pretexts for steps nearer to the answering lips.

"And I may see you?" he went on.

"Yes."

"Wherever you are staying? And sometimes alone? Alone!—"

"Not if you do not know that I am to be respected," said Emilia, huddled in the passionate fold of his arms. He released her instantly, and was departing, wounded; but his heart counselled wiser proceedings.

"To know that you are in England, breathing the same air with me, near me! is enough. Since we are to meet on those terms, let it be so. Let me only see you till some lucky shot puts me out of your way."

This 'some lucky shot,' which is commonly pointed at themselves by the sentimental lovers, with the object of hitting the very centre of the hearts of obdurate damsels, glanced off Emilia's, which was beginning to throb with a comprehension of all that was involved in the word she had given.

"I have your promise?" he repeated: and she bent her head.

"Not," he resumed, taking jealousy to counsel, now that he had advanced a step: "Not that I would detain you against your will! I can't expect to make such a figure at the end of the piece as your Count Branciani—who, by the way, served his friends oddly, however well he may have served his country."

"His friends?" She frowned.

"Did he not betray the conspirators? He handed in names, now and then."

"Oh!" she cried, "you understand us no better than an Austrian. He handed in names—yes he was obliged to lull suspicion. Two or three of the least implicated volunteered to be betrayed by him; they went and confessed, and put the Government on a wrong track. Count Branciani made a dish of traitors—not true men—to satisfy the Austrian ogre. No one knew the head of the plot till that night of the spy. Do you not see?—he weeded the conspiracy!"

"Poor fellow!" Wilfrid answered, with a contracted mouth: "I pity him for being cut off from his handsome wife."

"I pity her for having to live," said Emilia.

And so their duett dropped to a finish. He liked her phrase better than his own, and being denied any privileges, and feeling stupefied by a position which both enticed and stung him, he remarked that he presumed he must not detain her any longer; whereupon she gave him her hand. He clutched the ready hand reproachfully.

"Good-bye," said she.

"You are the first to say it," he complained.

"Will you write to that Austrian colonel, your cousin, to say 'Never! never!' to-morrow, Wilfrid?"

"While you are in England, I shall stay, be sure of that."

She bade him give her love to all Brookfield.

"Once you had none to give but what I let you take back for the purpose!" he said. "Farewell! I shall see the harp to-night. It stands in the old place. I will not have it moved or touched till you—"

"Ah! how kind you were, Wilfrid!"

"And how lovely you are!"

There was no struggle to preserve the backs of her fingers from his lips, and, as this time his phrase was not palpably obscured by the one it countered, artistic sentiment permitted him to go.

CHAPTER LIII

A minute after his parting with Emilia, Wilfrid swung round in the street and walked back at great strides. "What a fool I was not to see that she was acting indifference!" he cried. "Let me have two seconds with her!" But how that was to be contrived his diplomatic brain refused to say. "And what a stiff, formal fellow I was all the time!" He considered that he had not uttered a sentence in any way pointed to touch her heart. "She must think I am still determined to marry that woman."

Wilfrid had taken his stand on the opposite side of the street, and beheld a male figure in the dusk, that went up to the house and then stood back scanning the windows. Wounded by his audacious irreverence toward the walls behind which his beloved was sheltered, Wilfrid crossed and stared at the intruder. It proved to be Braintop.

"How do you do, sir!—no! that can't be the house," stammered Braintop, with a very earnest scrutiny.

"What house? what do you want?" enquired Wilfrid.

"Jenkinson," was the name that won the honour of rescuing Braintop from this dilemma.

"No; it is Lady Gosstre's house: Miss Belloni is living there; and stop: you know her. Just wait, and take in two or three words from me, and notice particularly how she is looking, and the dress she wears. You can say—say that Mrs. Chump sent you to enquire after Miss Belloni's health."

Wilfrid tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and wrote:

"I can be free to-morrow. One word! I shall expect it, with your name in full."

But even in the red heat of passion his born diplomacy withheld his own signature. It was not difficult to override Braintop's scruples about presenting himself, and Wilfrid paced a sentinel measure awaiting the reply. "Free to-morrow," he repeated, with a glance at his watch under a lamp: and thus he soliloquized: "What a time that fellow is! Yes, I can be free to-morrow if I will. I wonder what the deuce Gambier had to do in Monmouthshire. If he has been playing with my sister's reputation, he shall have short shrift. That fellow Braintop sees her now—my little Emilia! my bird! She won't have changed her dress till she has dined. If she changes it before she goes out—by Jove, if she wears it to-night before all those people, that'll mean 'Good-bye' to me: 'Addio, caro,' as those olive women say, with their damned cold languor, when they have given you up. She's not one of them! Good God! she came into the room looking like a little Empress. I'll swear her hand trembled when I went, though! My sisters shall see her in that dress. She must have a clever lady's maid to have done that knot to her back hair. She's getting as full of art as any of them—Oh! lovely little darling! And when she smiles and holds out her hand! What is it—what is it about her? Her upper lip isn't perfectly cut, there's some fault with her nose, but I never saw such a mouth, or such a face. 'Free to-morrow?' Good God! she'll think I mean I'm free to take a walk!"

At this view of the ghastly shortcoming of his letter as regards distinctness, and the prosaic misinterpretation it was open to, Wilfrid called his inventive wits to aid, and ran swiftly to the end of the street. He had become—as like unto a lunatic as resemblance can approach identity. Commanding the length of the pavement for an instant, to be sure that no Braintop was in sight, he ran down a lateral street, but the stationer's shop he was in search of beamed nowhere visible for him, and he returned at the same pace to experience despair at the thought that he might have missed Braintop issuing forth, for whom he scoured the immediate neighbourhood, and overhauled not a few quiet gentlemen of all ages. "An envelope!" That was the object of his desire, and for that he wooed a damsel passing jauntily with a jug in her hand, first telling her that he knew her name was Mary, at which singular piece of divination she betrayed much natural astonishment. But a fine round silver coin and an urgent request for an envelope, told her as plainly as a blank confession that this was a lover. She informed him that she lived three streets off, where there were shops. "Well, then," said Wilfrid, "bring me the envelope here, and you'll have another opportunity of looking down the area."

"Think of yourself," replied she, saucily; but proved a diligent messenger. Then Wilfrid wrote on a fresh slip:

"When I said 'Free,' I meant free in heart and without a single chain to keep me from you. From any moment that you please, I am free. This is written in the dark."

He closed the envelope, and wrote Emilia's name and the address as black as his pencil could achieve it, and with a smart double-knock he deposited the missive in the box. From his station opposite he guessed the instant when it was taken out, and from that judged when she would be reading it. Or perhaps she would not read it till she was alone? "That must be her bedroom," he said, looking for a light in one of the upper windows; but the voice of a fellow who went by with: "I should keep that to myself, if I was you," warned him to be more discreet.

"Well, here I am. I can't leave the street," quoth Wilfrid, to the stock of philosophy at his disposal. He burned with rage to think of how he might be exhibiting himself before Powys and his sister.

It was half-past nine when a carriage drove up to the door. Into this Mr. Powys presently handed Georgiana and Emilia. Braintop followed the ladies, and then the coachman received his instructions and drove away. Forthwith Wilfrid started in pursuit. He calculated that if his wind held till he could jump into a light cab, his legitimate prey Braintop might be caught. For, "they can't be taking him to any party with them!" he chose to think, and it was a fair calculation that they were simply conducting Braintop part of his way home. The run was pretty swift. Wilfrid's blood was fired by the pace, until, forgetting the traitor Braintop, up rose Truth from the bottom of the well in him, and he felt that his sole desire was to see Emilia once more—but once! that night. Running hard, in the midst of obstacles, and with eye and mind fined on one object, disasters befell him. He knocked apples off a stall, and heard vehement hallooing behind: he came into collision with a gentleman of middle age courting digestion as he walked from his trusty dinner at home to his rubber at the Club: finally he rushed full tilt against a pot-boy who was bringing all his pots broadside to the flow of the street. "By Jove! is this what they drink?" he gasped, and dabbed with his handkerchief at the beer-splashes, breathlessly hailing the looked-for cab, and, with hot brow and straightened-out forefinger, telling the driver to keep that carriage in sight. The pot-boy had to be satisfied on his master's account, and then on his own, and away shot Wilfrid, wet with beer from throat to knee—to his chief protesting sense, nothing but an exhalation of beer! "Is this what they drink?" he groaned, thinking lamentably of the tastes of the populace. All idea of going near Emilia was now abandoned. An outward application of beer quenched his frenzy. She seemed as an unattainable star seen from the depths of foul pits. "Stop!" he cried from the window.

"Here we are, sir," said the cabman.

The carriage had drawn up, and a footman's alarum awakened one of the houses. The wretched cabman had likewise drawn up right under the windows of the carriage. Wilfrid could have pulled the trigger of a pistol at his forehead that moment. He saw that Miss Ford had recognized him, and he at once bowed elegantly. She dropped the window, and said, "You are in evening dress, I think; we will take you in with us."

Wilfrid hoped eagerly he might be allowed to hand them to the door, and made three skips across the mire. Emilia had her hands gathered away from the chances of seizure. In wild rage he began protesting that he could not possibly enter, when Georgiana said, "I wish to speak to you," and put feminine pressure upon him. He was almost on the verge of the word "beer," by way of despairing explanation, when the door closed behind him.

"Permit me to say a word to your recent companion. He is my father's clerk. I had to see him on urgent business; that is why I took this liberty," he said, and retreated.

Braintop was still there, quietly posted, performing upon his head with a pocket hair-brush.

Wilfrid put Braintop's back to the light, and said, "Is my shirt soiled?"

After a short inspection, Braintop pronounced that it was, "just a little."

"Do you smell anything?" said Wilfrid, and hung with frightful suspense on the verdict. "A fellow upset beer on me."

"It is beer!" sniffed Braintop.

"What on earth shall I do?" was the rejoinder; and Wilfrid tried to remember whether he had felt any sacred joy in touching Emilia's dress as they went up the steps to the door.

Braintop fumbled in the breast-pocket of his coat. "I happen to have," he said, rather shamefacedly.

"What is it?"

"Mrs. Chump gave it to me to-day. She always makes me accept something: I can't refuse. It's this:—the remains of some scent she insisted on my taking, in a bottle."

Wilfrid plucked at the stopper with a reckless desperation, saturated his handkerchief, and worked at his breast as if he were driving a lusty dagger into it.

"What scent is it?" he asked hurriedly.

"Alderman's Bouquet, sir."

"Of all the detestable!—" Wilfrid had no time for more, owing to fresh arrivals. He hastened in, with his smiling, wary face, half trusting that there might after all be purification in Alderman's Bouquet, and promising heaven due gratitude if Emilia's senses discerned not the curse on him. In the hall a gust from the great opening contention between Alderman's Bouquet and bad beer, stifled his sickly hope. Frantic, but under perfect self-command outwardly, he glanced to right and left, for the suggestion of a means of escape. They were seven steps up the stairs before his wits prompted him to say to Georgiana, "I have just heard very serious news from home. I fear—"

"What?—or, pardon me: does it call you away?" she asked, and Emilia gave him a steady look.

"I fear I cannot remain here. Will you excuse me?"

His face spoke plainly now of mental torture repressed. Georgiana put her hand out in full sympathy, and Emilia said, in her deep whisper, "Let me hear to-morrow." Then they bowed. Wilfrid was in the street again.

"Thank God, I've seen her!" was his first thought, overhearing "What did she think of me?" as he sighed with relief at his escape. For, lo! the Branciani dress was not on her shoulders, and therefore he might imagine what he pleased:—that she had arrayed herself so during the day to delight his eyes; or that, he having seen her in it, she had determined none others should. Though feeling utterly humiliated, he was yet happy. Driving to the station, he perceived starlight overhead, and blessed it; while his hand waved busily to conduct a current of fresh, oblivious air to his nostrils. The quiet heavens seemed all crowding to look down on the quiet circle of the firs, where Emilia's harp had first been heard by him, and they took her music, charming his blood with imagined harmonies, as he looked up to them. Thus all the way to Brookfield his fancy soared, plucked at from below by Alderman's Bouquet.

The Philosopher, up to this point rigidly excluded, rushes forward to the footlights to explain in a note, that Wilfrid, thus setting a perfume to contend with a stench, instead of wasting for time, change of raiment, and the broad lusty airs of heaven to blow him fresh again, symbolizes the vice of Sentimentalism, and what it is always doing. Enough!

CHAPTER LIV

"Let me hear to-morrow." Wilfrid repeated Emilia's petition in the tone she had used, and sent a delight through his veins even with that clumsy effort of imitation. He walked from the railway to Brookfield through the circle of firs, thinking of some serious tale of home to invent for her ears to-morrow. Whatever it was, he was able to conclude it—"But all's right now." He noticed that the dwarf pine, under whose spreading head his darling sat when he saw her first, had been cut down. Its absence gave him an ominous chill.

The first sight that saluted him as the door opened, was a pile of Mrs. Chump's boxes: he listened, and her voice resounded from the library. Gainsford's eye expressed a discretion significant that there had been an explosion in the house.

"I sha'nt have to invent much," said Wilfrid to himself, bitterly.

There was a momentary appearance of Adela at the library-door; and over her shoulder came an outcry from Mrs. Chump. Arabella then spoke: Mr. Pole and Cornelia following with a word, to which Mrs. Chump responded shrilly: "Ye shan't talk to 'm, none of ye, till I've had the bloom of his ear, now!" A confused hubbub of English and Irish ensued. The ladies drew their brother into the library.

Doubtless you have seen a favourite sketch of the imaginative youthful artist, who delights to portray scenes on a raft amid the tossing waters, where sweet and satiny ladies, in a pardonable abandonment to the exigencies of the occasion, are exhibiting the full energy and activity of creatures that existed before sentiment was born. The ladies of Brookfield had almost as utterly cast off their garb of lofty reserve and inscrutable superiority. They were begging Mrs. Chump to be, for pity's sake, silent. They were arguing with the woman. They were remonstrating—to such an extent as this, in reply to an infamous outburst: "No, no: indeed, Mrs. Chump, indeed!" They rose, as she rose, and stood about her, motioning a beseeching emphasis with their hands. Not visible for one second was the intense indignation at their fate which Wilfrid, spying keenly into them, perceived. This taught him that the occasion was as grave as could be. In spite of the oily words his father threw from time to time abruptly on the tumult, he guessed what had happened.

Briefly, Mrs. Chump, aided by Braintop, her squire, had at last hunted Mr. Pericles down, and the wrathful Greek had called her a beggar. With devilish malice he had reproached her for speculating in such and such Bonds, and sending ventures to this and that hemisphere, laughing infernally as he watched her growing amazement. "Ye're jokin', Mr. Paricles," she tried to say and think; but the very naming of poverty had given her shivers. She told him how she had come to him because of Mr. Pole's reproach, which accused her of causing the rupture. Mr. Pericles twisted the waxy points of his moustache. "I shall advise you, go home," he said; "go to a lawyer: say, 'I will see my affairs, how zey stand.' Ze man will find Pole is ruined. It may be—I do not know—Pole has left a little of your money; yes, ma'am, it may be."

The end of the interview saw Mrs. Chump flying past Mr. Pericles to where Braintop stood awaiting her with a meditative speculation on that official promotion which in his attention to the lady he anticipated. It need scarcely be remarked that he was astonished to receive a scent-bottle on the spot, as the only reward his meritorious service was probably destined ever to meet with. Breathless in her panic, Mrs. Chump assured him she was a howling beggar, and the smell of a scent was like a crool blow to her; above all, the smell of Alderman's Bouquet, which Chump—"tell'n a lie, ye know, Mr. Braintop, said was after him. And I, smell'n at 't over 'n Ireland—a raw garl I was—I just thought 'm a prince, the little sly fella! And oh! I'm a beggar, I am!" With which, she shouted in the street, and put Braintop to such confusion that he hailed a cab recklessly, declaring to her she had no time to lose, if she wished to catch the train. Mrs. Chump requested the cabman that as a man possessed of a feeling heart for the interests of a helpless woman, he would drive fast; and, at the station, disputed his charge on the ground of the knowledge already imparted to him of her precarious financial state. In this frame of mind she fell upon Brookfield, and there was clamour in the house. Wilfrid arrived two hours after Mrs. Chump. For that space the ladies had been saying over and over again empty words to pacify her. The task now devolved on their brother. Mr. Pole, though he had betrayed nothing under the excitement of the sudden shock, had lost the proper control of his mask. Wilfrid commenced by fixedly listening to Mrs. Chump until for the third time her breath had gone. Then, taking on a smile, he said: "Perhaps you are aware that Mr. Pericles has a particular reason for animosity tome. We've disagreed together, that's all. I suppose it's the habit of those fellows to attack a whole family where one member of it offends them." As soon as the meaning of this was made clear to Mrs. Chump, she caught it to her bosom for comfort; and finding it gave less than at the moment she required, she flung it away altogether; and then moaned, a suppliant, for it once more. "The only thing, if you are in a state of alarm about my father's affairs, is for him to show

you by his books that his house is firm," said Wilfrid, now that he had so far helped to eject suspicion from her mind.

"Will Pole do ut?" ejaculated Mrs. Chump, half off her seat.

"Of course I will—of course! of course. Haven't I told you so?" said Mr. Pole, blinking mightily from his armchair over the fire. "Sit down, Martha."

"Oh! but how'll I understand ye, Pole?" she cried.

"I'll do my best to assist in explaining," Wilfrid condescended to say.

The ladies were touched when Mrs. Chump replied, with something of a curtsy, "I'll thank ye vary much, sir." She added immediately, "Mr. Wilfrud," as if correcting the 'sir,' for sounding cold.

It was so trustful and simple, that it threw alight on the woman under which they had not yet beheld her. Compassion began to stir in their bosoms, and with it an inexplicable sense of shame, which soon threw any power of compassion into the background. They dared not ask themselves whether it was true that their father had risked the poor thing's money in some desperate stake. What hopeful force was left to them they devoted to her property, and Adela determined to pray that night for its safe preservation. The secret feeling in the hearts of the ladies was, that in putting them on their trial with poverty, Celestial Powers would never at the same time think it necessary to add disgrace. Consequently, and as a defence against the darker dread, they now, for the first time, fully believed that monetary ruin had befallen their father. They were civil to Mrs. Chump, and forgiving toward her brogue, and her naked outcries of complaint and suddenly—suggested panic; but their pity, save when some odd turn in her conduct moved them, was reserved dutifully for their father. His wretched sensations at the pouring of a storm of tears from the exhausted creature, caused Arabella to rise and say to Mrs. Chump kindly, "Now let me take you to bed."

But such a novel mark of tender civility caused the woman to exclaim: "Oh, dear! if ye don't sound like wheedlin' to keep me blind."

Even this was borne with. "Come; it will do you good to rest," said Arabella.

"And how'll I sleep?"

"By shutting my eye—'peeps,'—as I used to tell my old nurse," said Adela; and Mrs. Chump, accustomed to an occasional (though not public) bit of wheedling from her, was partially reassured.

"I'll sit with you till you do sleep," said Arabella.

"Suppose," Mrs. Chump moaned, "suppose I'm too poor aver to repay ye? If I'm a bankrupt'?—oh!"

Arabella smiled. "Whatever I may do is certainly not done for a remuneration, and such a service as this, at least, you need not speak of."

Mrs. Chump's evident surprise, and doubt of the honesty of the change in her manner, caused Arabella very acutely to feel its dishonesty. She looked at Cornelia with envy. The latter lady was leaning meditatively, her arm on a side of her chair, like a pensive queen, with a ready, mild, embracing look for the company. 'Posture' seemed always to triumph over action.

Before quitting the room, Mrs. Chump asked Mr. Pole whether he would be up early the next morning.

"Very early,—you beat me, if you can," said he, aware that the question was put as a test to his sincerity.

"Oh, dear! Suppose it's onnly a false alarm of the 'bomunable Mr. Paricles—which annybody'd have listened to—ye know that!" said Mrs. Chump, going forth.

She stopped in the doorway, and turned her head round, sniffing, in a very pronounced way. "Oh, it's you," she flashed on Wilfrid; "it's you, my dear, that smell so like poor Chump. Oh! if we're not rooned, won't we dine together! Just give me a kiss, please. The smell of ye's comfortin'."

Wilfrid bent his cheek forward, affecting to laugh, though the subject was tragic to him.

"Oh! perhaps I'll sleep, and not look in the mornin' like that beastly tallow, Mr. Paricles says I spent such a lot of money on, speculator—whew, I hate ut!—and hemp too! Me!—Martha Chump! Do I want to hang myself, and burn forty thousand pounds worth o' candles round my corpse danglin' there? Now, there, now! Is that sense? And what'd Pole want to buy me all that grease for? And where'd I keep ut, I'll ask ye? And sure they wouldn't make me a bankrup' on such a pretence as that. For, where's the Judge that's got the heart?"

Having apparently satisfied her reason with these interrogations, Mrs. Chump departed, shaking her head at Wilfrid: "Ye smile so nice, ye do!" by the way. Cornelia and Adela then rose, and Wilfrid was left alone with his father.

It was natural that he should expect the moment for entire confidence between them to have come. He crossed his legs, leaning over the fireplace, and waited. The old man perceived him, and made certain humming sounds, as of preparation. Wilfrid was half tempted to think he wanted assistance, and signified attention; upon which Mr. Pole became immediately absorbed in profound thought.

"Singular it is, you know," he said at last, with a candid air, "people who know nothing about business have the oddest ideas—no common sense in 'em!"

After that he fell dead silent.

Wilfrid knew that it would be hard for him to speak. To encourage him, he said: "You mean Mrs. Chump, sir?"

"Oh! silly woman—absurd! No, I mean all of you; every man Jack, as Martha'd say. You seem to think—but, well! there! let's go to bed."

"To bed?" cried Wilfrid, frowning.

"Why, when it's two or three o'clock in the morning, what's an old fellow to do? My feet are cold, and I'm queer in the back—can't talk! Light my candle, young gentleman—my candle there, don't you see it? And you look none of the freshest. A nap on your pillow'll do you no harm."

"I wanted to talk to you a little, sir," said Wilfrid, about as much perplexed as he was irritated.

"Now, no talk of bankers' books to-night!" rejoined his father. "I can't and won't. No cheques written 'tween night and morning. That's positive. There! there's two fingers. Shall have three to-morrow morning—a pen in 'em, perhaps."

With which wretched pleasantry the little merchant nodded to his son, and snatching up his candle, trotted to the door.

"By the way, give a look round my room upstairs, to see all right when you're going to turn in yourself," he said, before disappearing.

The two fingers given him by his father to shake at parting, had told Wilfrid more than the words. And yet how small were these troubles around him compared with what he himself was suffering! He looked forward to the bittersweet hour verging upon dawn, when he should be writing to Emilia things to melt the vilest obduracy. The excitement which had greeted him on his arrival at Brookfield was to be thanked for its having made him partially forget his humiliation. He had, of course, sufficient rational feeling to be chagrined by calamity, but his dominant passion sucked sustaining juices from every passing event.

In obedience to his father's request, Wilfrid went presently into the old man's bedroom, to see that all was right. The curtains of the bed were drawn close, and the fire in the grate burnt steadily. Calm sleep seemed to fill the chamber. Wilfrid was retiring, with a revived anger at his father's want of natural confidence in him, or cowardly secrecy. His name was called, and he stopped short.

"Yes, sir?" he said.

"Door's shut?"

"Shut fast."

The voice, buried in curtains, came after a struggle.

"You've done this, Wilfrid. Now, don't answer:—I can't stand talk. And you must undo it. Pericles can if he likes. That's enough for you to know. He can. He won't see me. You know why. If he breaks with me—it's a common case in any business—I'm... we're involved together." Then followed a deep sigh. The usual crisp brisk way of his speaking was resumed in hollow tones: "You must stop it. Now, don't answer. Go to Pericles to-morrow. You must. Nothing wrong, if you go at once."

"But, Sir! Good heaven!" interposed Wilfrid, horrified by the thought of the penance here indicated.

The bed shook violently.

"If not," was uttered with a sort of muted vehemence, "there's another thing you can do. Go to the undertaker's, and order coffins for us all. There—good night!"

The bed shook again. Wilfrid stood eyeing the mysterious hangings, as if some dark oracle had spoken from behind them. In fear of irritating the old man, and almost as much in fear of bringing on himself a revelation of the frightful crisis that could only be averted by his apologizing personally to the man he had struck, Wilfrid stole from the room.

CHAPTER LV

There is a man among our actors here who may not be known to you. It had become the habit of Sir Purcell Barren's mind to behold himself as under a peculiarly malign shadow. Very young men do the same, if they are much afflicted: but this is because they are still boys enough to have the natural sense to be ashamed of ill-luck, even when they lack courage to struggle against it. The reproaching of Providence by a man of full growth, comes to some extent from his meanness, and chiefly from his pride. He remembers that the old Gods selected great heroes whom to persecute, and it is his compensation for material losses to conceive himself a distinguished mark for the Powers of air. One who wraps himself in this delusion may have great qualities; he cannot be of a very contemptible nature; and in this place we will discriminate more closely than to call him fool. Had Sir Purcell sunk or bent under the thong that pursued him, he might, after a little healthy moaning, have gone along as others do. Who knows?—though a much persecuted man, he might have become so degraded as to have looked forward with cheerfulness to his daily dinner; still despising, if he pleased, the soul that would invent a sauce. I mean to say, he would, like the larger body of our sentimentalists, have acquiesced in our simple humanity, but without sacrificing a scruple to its grossness, or going arm-in-arm with it by any means. Sir Purcell, however, never sank, and never bent. He was invariably erect before men, and he did not console himself with a murmur in secret. He had lived much alone; eating alone; thinking alone. To complain of a father is, to a delicate mind, a delicate matter, and Sir Purcell

was a gentleman to all about him. His chief affliction in his youth, therefore, kept him dumb. A gentleman to all about him, he unhappily forgot what was due to his own nature. Must we not speak under pressure of a grief? Little people should know that they must: but then the primary task is to teach them that they are little people. For, if they repress the outcry of a constant irritation, and the complaint against injustice, they lock up a feeding devil in their hearts, and they must have vast strength to crush him there. Strength they must have to kill him, and freshness of spirit to live without him, after he has once entertained them with his most comforting discourses. Have you listened to him, ever? He does this:—he plays to you your music (it is he who first teaches thousands that they have any music at all, so guess what a dear devil he is!); and when he has played this ravishing melody, he falls to upon a burlesque contrast of hurdy-gurdy and bag-pipe squeal and bellow and drone, which is meant for the music of the world. How far sweeter was yours! This charming devil Sir Purcell had nursed from childhood.

As a child, between a flighty mother and a father verging to insanity from caprice, he had grown up with ideas of filial duty perplexed, and with a fitful love for either, that was not attachment: a baffled natural love, that in teaching us to brood on the hardness of our lot, lays the foundation for a perniciously mystical self-love. He had waged precociously philosophic, when still a junior. His father had kept him by his side, giving him no profession beyond that of the obedient expectant son and heir. His first allusion to the youth's dependency had provoked their first breach, which had been widened by many an ostentatious forgiveness on the one hand, and a dumbly-protesting submission on the other. His mother died away from her husband's roof. The old man then sought to obliterate her utterly. She left her boy a little money, and the injunction of his father was, that he was never to touch it. He inherited his taste for music from her, and his father vowed, that if ever he laid hand upon a musical instrument again, he would be disinherited. All these signs of a vehement spiteful antagonism to reason, the young man might have treated more as his father's misfortune than his own, if he could only have brought himself to acknowledge that such a thing as madness stigmatized his family. But the sentimental mind conceived it as 'monstrous impiety' to bring this accusation against a parent who did not break windows, or grin to deformity. He behaved toward him as to a reasonable person, and felt the rebellious rancour instead of the pity. Thus sentiment came in the way of pity. By degrees, Sir Purcell transferred all his father's madness to the Fates by whom he was persecuted. There was evidently madness somewhere, as his shuddering human nature told him. It did not offend his sentiment to charge this upon the order of the universe.

Against such a wild-hitting madness, or concentrated ire of the superior Powers, Sir Purcell stood up, taking blow upon blow. As organist of Hillford Church, he brushed his garments, and put a polish on his apparel, with an energetic humility that looked like unconquerable patience; as though he had said: "While life is left in me, I will be seen for what I am." We will vary it—"For what I think myself." In reality, he fought no battle. He had been dead-beaten from his boyhood. Like the old Spanish Governor, the walls of whose fortress had been thrown down by an earthquake, and who painted streets to deceive the enemy, he was rendered safe enough by his astuteness, except against a traitor from within.

One who goes on doggedly enduring, doggedly doing his best, must subsist on comfort of a kind that is likely to be black comfort. The mere piping of the musical devil shall not suffice. In Sir Purcell's case, it had long seemed a magnanimity to him that he should hold to a life so

vindictively scourged, and his comfort was that he had it at his own disposal. To know so much, to suffer, and still to refrain, flattered his pride. "The term of my misery is in my hand," he said, softened by the reflection. It is our lowest philosophy.

But, when the heart of a man so fashioned is stirred to love a woman, it has a new vital force, new health, and cannot play these solemn pranks. The flesh, and all its fatality, claims him. When Sir Purcell became acquainted with Cornelia, he found the very woman his heart desired, or certainly a most admirable picture of her. It was, perhaps, still more to the lady's credit, if she was only striving to be what he was learning to worship. The beneficial change wrought in him, made him enamoured of healthy thinking and doing. Had this, as a result of sharp mental overhauling, sprung from himself, there would have been hope for him. Unhappily, it was dependent on her who inspired it. He resolved that life should be put on a fresh trial in her person; and expecting that naturally to fail, of which he had always entertained a base conception, he was perforce brought to endow her with unexampled virtues, in order to keep any degree of confidence tolerably steadfast in his mind. The lady accepted the decorations thus bestowed on her, with much grace and willingness. She consented, little aware of her heroism, to shine forth as an 'ideal;' and to this he wantonly pinned his faith. Alas! in our world, where all things must move, it becomes, by-and-by, manifest that an 'ideal,' or idol, which you will, has not been gifted with two legs. What is, then, the duty of the worshipper? To make, as I should say, some compromise between his superstitious reverence and his recognition of facts. Cornelia, on her pedestal, could not prefer such a request plainly; but it would have afforded her exceeding gratification, if the man who adored her had quietly taken her up and fixed her in a fresh post, of his own choosing entirely, in the new circles of changing events. Far from doing that, he appeared to be unaware that they went, with the varying days, through circles, forming and reforming. He walked rather as a man down a lengthened corridor, whose light to which he turns is in one favourite corner, visible till he reaches the end. What Cornelia was, in the first flaming of his imagination around her, she was always, unaffected by circumstance, to remain. It was very hard. The 'ideal' did feel the want—if not of legs—of a certain tolerant allowance for human laws on the part of her worshipper; but he was remorselessly reverential, both by instinct and of necessity. Women are never quite so mad in sentimentalism as men.

We have now looked into the hazy interior of their systems—our last halt, I believe, and last examination of machinery, before Emilia quits England.

About the time of the pairing of the birds, and subsequent to the Brookfield explosion, Cornelia received a letter from her lover, bearing the tone of a summons. She was to meet him by the decayed sallow—the 'fruitless tree,' as he termed it. Startled by this abruptness, her difficulties made her take counsel of her dignity. "He knows that these clandestine meetings degrade me. He is wanting in faith, to require constant assurances. He will not understand my position!" She remembered the day at Besworth, of which Adela (somewhat needlessly, perhaps) had told her; that it had revealed two of the family, in situations censurable before a gossiping world, however intrinsically blameless. That day had been to the ladies a lesson of deference to opinion. It was true that Cornelia had met her lover since, but she was then unembarrassed. She had now to share in the duties of the household—duties abnormal, hideous, incredible. Her incomprehensible father was absent in town. Daily Wilfrid conducted Adela thither on mysterious business, and then Mrs. Chump was left to Arabella and herself in the lonely house.

Numberless things had to be said for the quieting of this creature, who every morning came downstairs with the exclamation that she could no longer endure her state of uncertainty, and was "off to a lawyer." It was useless to attempt the posture of a reply. Words, and energetic words, the woman demanded, not expostulations—petitions that she would be respectful to the house before the household. Yes, occasionally (so gross was she!) she had to be fed with lies. Arabella and Cornelia heard one another mouthing these dreadful things, with a wretched feeling of contemptuous compassion. The trial was renewed daily, and it was a task, almost a physical task, to hold the woman back from London, till the hour of lunch came. If they kept her away from her bonnet till then they were safe.

At this meal they had to drink champagne with her. Diplomatic Wilfrid had issued the order, with the object, first, of dazzling her vision; and secondly, to set the wheels of her brain in swift motion. The effect was marvellous; and, had it not been for her determination never to drink alone, the miserable ladies might have applauded it. Adela, on the rare days when she was fortunate enough to reach Brookfield in time for dinner, was surprised to hear her sisters exclaim, "Oh, the hatefulness of that champagne!" She enjoyed it extremely. She, poor thing, had again to go through a round of cabs and confectioners' shops in London. "If they had said, 'Oh, the hatefulness of those buns and cold chickens!'" she thought to herself. Not objecting to champagne at lunch with any particular vehemence, she was the less unwilling to tell her sisters what she had to do for Wilfrid daily.

"Three times a week I go to see Emilia at Lady Gosstre's town-house. Mr. Powys has gone to Italy, and Miss Ford remains, looking, if I can read her, such a temper. On the other days I am taken by Wilfrid to the arcades, or we hire a brougham to drive round the park,—for nothing but the chance of seeing that girl an instant. Don't tell me it's to meet Lady Charlotte! That lovely and obliging person it is certainly not my duty to undeceive. She's now at Stornley, and speaks of our affairs to everybody, I dare say. Twice a week Wilfrid—oh! quite casually!—calls on Miss Ford, and is gratified, I suppose; for this is the picture:—There sits Emilia, one finger in her cheek, and the thumb under her chin, and she keeps looking down so. Opposite is Miss Ford, doing some work—making lint for patriots, probably. Then Wilfrid, addressing commonplaces to her; and then Emilia's father—a personage, I assure you! up against the window, with a violin. I feel a bitter edge on my teeth still! What do you think he does to please his daughter for one while hour! He draws his fingers—does nothing else; she won't let him; she won't hear a tune-up the strings in the most horrible caterwaul, up and down. It is really like a thousand lunatics questioning and answering, and is enough to make you mad; but there that girl sits, listening. Exactly in this attitude—so. She scarcely ever looks up. My brother talks, and occasionally steals a glance that way. We passed one whole hour as I have described. In the middle of it, I happened to look at Wilfrid's face, while the violin was wailing down. I fancied I heard the despair of one of those huge masks in a pantomime. I was almost choked."

When Adela had related thus much, she had to prevent downright revolt, and spoil her own game, by stating that Wilfrid did not leave the house for his special pleasure, and a word, as to the efforts he was making to see Mr. Pericles, convinced the ladies that his situation was as pitiable as their own.

Cornelia refused to obey her lover's mandate, and wrote briefly. She would not condescend to allude to the unutterable wretchedness afflicting her, but spoke of her duty to her father being foremost in her prayers for strength. Sir Purcell interpreted this as indicating the beginning of their alienation. He chided her gravely in an otherwise pleasant letter. She was wrong to base her whole reply upon the little sentence of reproach, but self-justification was necessary to her spirit. Indeed, an involuntary comparison of her two suitors was forced on her, and, dry as was Sir Twickenham's mind, she could not but acknowledge that he had behaved with an extraordinary courtesy, amounting to chivalry, in his suit. On two occasions he had declined to let her be pressed to decide. He came to the house, and went, like an ordinary visitor. She was indebted to him for that splendid luxury of indecision, which so few of the maids of earth enjoy for a lengthened term. The rude shakings given her by Sir Purcell, at a time when she needed all her power of dreaming, to support the horror of accumulated facts, was almost resented. "He as much as says he doubts me, when this is what I endure!" she cried to herself, as Mrs. Chump ordered her champagne-glass to be filled, with "Now, Cornelia, my dear; if it's bad luck we're in for, there's nothin' cheats ut like champagne," and she had to put the (to her) nauseous bubbles to her lips. Sir Purcell had not been told of her tribulations, and he had not expressed any doubt of her truth; but sentimentalists can read one another with peculiar accuracy through their bewitching gauzes. She read his unwritten doubt, and therefore expected her unwritten misery to be read.

So it is when you play at Life! When you will not go straight, you get into this twisting maze. Now he wrote coldly, and she had to repress a feeling of resentment at that also. She ascribed the changes of his tone fundamentally to want of faith in her, and absolutely, during the struggle she underwent, she by this means somehow strengthened her idea of her own faithfulness. She would have phrased her projected line of conduct thus: "I owe every appearance of assent to my poor father's scheme, that will spare his health. I owe him everything, save the positive sacrifice of my hand." In fact, she meant to do her duty to her father up to the last moment, and then, on the extreme verge, to remember her duty to her lover. But she could not write it down, and tell her lover as much. She knew instinctively that, facing the eyes, it would not look well. Perhaps, at another season, she would have acted and thought with less folly; but the dull pain of her great uncertainty, and the little stinging whips daily applied to her, exaggerated her tendency to self-deception. "Who has ever had to bear so much?—what slave?" she would exclaim, as a refuge from the edge of his veiled irony. For a slave has, if not selection of what he will eat and drink, the option of rejecting what is distasteful. Cornelia had not. She had to act a part every day with Mrs. Chump, while all those she loved, and respected, and clung to, were in the same conspiracy. The consolation of hating, or of despising, her tormentress was denied. The thought that the poor helpless creature had been possibly ruined by them, chastened Cornelia's reflections mightily, and taught her to walk very humbly through the duties of the day. Her powers of endurance were stretched to their utmost. A sublime affliction would, as she felt bitterly, have enlarged her soul. This sordid misery narrowed it. Why did not her lover, if his love was passionate, himself cut the knot claim her, and put her to a quick decision? She conceived that were he to bring on a supreme crisis, her heart would declare itself. But he appeared to be wanting in that form of courage. Does it become a beggar to act such valiant parts? perhaps he was even then replying from his stuffy lodgings.

The Spring was putting out primroses,—the first handwriting of the year,—as Sir Purcell wrote to er prettily. Deire for fresh air, and the neighbourhood of his beloved, sent him on a journey down to Hillford. Near the gates of the Hillford station, he passed Wilfrid and Adela, hurrying to catch the up-train, and received no recognition. His face scarcely changed colour, but the birds on a sudden seemed to pipe far away from him. He asked himself, presently, what were those black circular spots which flew chasing along the meadows and the lighted walks. It was with an effort that he got the landscape close about his eyes, and remembered familiar places. He walked all day, making occupation by directing his steps to divers eminences that gave a view of the Brookfield chimneys. After night-fall he found himself in the firwood, approaching the 'fruitless tree.' He had leaned against it musingly, for a time, when he heard voices, as of a couple confident in their privacy.

The footman, Gainsford, was courting a maid of the Tinley's, and here, being midway between the two houses, they met. He had to obtain pardon for tardiness, by saying that dinner at Brookfield had been delayed for the return of Mr. Pole. The damsel's questions showed her far advanced in knowledge of affairs at Brookfield and may account for Laura Tinley's gatherings of latest intelligence concerning those 'odd girls,' as she impudently called the three.

"Oh! don't you listen!" was the comment pronounced on Gainsford's stock of information. But, he told nothing signally new. She wished to hear something new and striking, "because," she said, "when I unpin Miss Laura at night, I'm as likely as not to get a silk dress that ain't been worn more than half-a-dozen times—if I manage. When I told her that Mr. Albert, her brother, had dined at your place last Thursday—demeaning of himself, I do think—there!—I got a pair of silk stockings,—not letting her see I knew what it was for, of coursed and about Mrs. Dump,—Stump;—I can't recollect the woman's name; and her calling of your master a bankrupt, right out, and wanting her money of him,—there! if Miss Laura didn't give me a pair of lavender kid-gloves out of her box!—and I wish you would leave my hands alone, when you know I shouldn't be so silly as to wear them in the dark; and for you, indeed!"

But Gainsford persisted, upon which there was fooling. All this was too childish for Sir Purcell to think it necessary to give warning of his presence. They passed, and when they had gone a short way the damsel cried, "Well, that is something," and stopped. "Married in a month!" she exclaimed. "And you don't know which one?"

"No," returned Gainsford; "master said 'one of you' as they was at dinner, just as I come into the room. He was in jolly spirits, and kept going so: 'What's a month! champagne, Gainsford,' and you should have sees Mrs.—not Stump, but Chump. She'll be tipsy to-night, and I shall bust if I have to carry of her upstairs. Well, she is fun!—she don't mind handin' you a five-shilling piece when she's done tender: but I have nearly lost my place two or three time along of that woman. She'd split logs with laughing:—no need of beetle and wedges! 'Och!' she sings out, 'by the piper!'—and Miss Cornelia sitting there—and, 'Arrah!'—bother the woman's Irish," (thus Gainsford gave up the effort at imitation, with a spirited Briton's mild contempt for what he could not do) "she pointed out Miss Cornelia and said she was like the tinker's dog:—there's the bone he wants himself, and the bone he don't want anybody else to have. Aha! ain't it good?"

"Oh! the tinker's dog! won't I remember that!" said the damsel, "she can't be such a fool."

"Well, I don't know," Gainsford meditated critically. "She is; and yet she ain't, if you understand me. What I feel about her is—hang it! she makes ye laugh."

Sir Purcell moved from the shadow of the tree as noiselessly as he could, so that this enamoured couple might not be disturbed. He had already heard more than he quite excused himself for hearing in such a manner, and having decided not to arrest the man and make him relate exactly what Mr. Pole had spoken that evening at the Brookfield dinner-table, he hurried on his return to town.

It was not till he had sight of his poor home; the solitary company of chairs; the sofa looking bony and comfortless as an old female house drudge; the table with his desk on it; and, through folding-doors, his cold and narrow bed; not till then did the fact of his great loss stand before him, and accuse him of living. He seated himself methodically and wrote to Cornelia. His fancy pictured her now as sharp to every turn of language and fall of periods: and to satisfy his imagined, rigorous critic, he wrote much in the style of a newspaper leading article. No one would have thought that tragic meaning underlay those choice and sounding phrases. On reperusing the composition, he rejected it, but only to produce one of a similar cast. He could not get to nature in his tone. He spoke aloud a little sentence now and then, that had the ring of a despairing tenderness. Nothing of the sort inhabited his written words, wherein a strained philosophy and ironic resignation went on stilts. "I should desire to see you once before I take a step that some have not considered more than commonly serious," came toward the conclusion; and the idea was toyed with till he signed his name. "A plunge into the deep is of little moment to one who has been stripped of all clothing. Is he not a wretch who stands and shivers still?" This letter, ending with a short and not imperious, or even urgent, request for an interview, on the morrow by the 'fruitless tree,' he sealed for delivery into Cornelia's hands some hours before the time appointed. He then wrote a clear business letter to his lawyer, and one of studied ambiguity to a cousin on his mother's side. His father's brother, Percival Barrett, to whom the estates had gone, had offered him an annuity of five hundred pounds: "though he had, as his nephew was aware, a large family." Sir Purcell had replied: "Let me be the first to consider your family," rejecting the benevolence. He now addressed his cousin, saying: "What would you think of one who accepts such a gift?—of me, were you to hear that I had bowed my head and extended my hand? Think this, if ever you hear of it: that I have acceded for the sake of winning the highest prize humanity can bestow: that I certainly would not have done it for aught less than the highest." After that he went to his narrow bed. His determination was to write to his uncle, swallowing bitter pride, and to live a pensioner, if only Cornelia came to her tryst, "the last he would ask of her," as he told her. Once face to face with his beloved, he had no doubt of his power; and this feeling which he knew her to share, made her reluctance to meet him more darkly suspicious.

As he lay in the little black room, he thought of how she would look when a bride, and of the peerless beauty towering over any shades of earthliness which she would present. His heated fancy conjured up every device and charm of sacredness and adoring rapture about that white veiled shape, until her march to the altar assumed the character of a religious procession—a sight to awe mankind! And where, when she stood before the minister in her saintly humility, grave and white, and tall—where was the man whose heart was now racing for that goal at her right hand? He felt at the troubled heart and touched two fingers on the rib, mock-quietly, and

smiled. Then with great deliberation he rose, lit a candle, unlocked a case of pocket-pistols, and loaded them: but a second idea coming into his head, he drew the bullet out of one, and lay down again with a luxurious speculation on the choice any hand might possibly make of the life-sparing or death-giving of those two weapons. In his neat half-slumber he was twice startled by a report of fire-arms in a church, when a crowd of veiled women and masked men rushed to the opening, and a woman throwing up the veil from her face knelt to a corpse that she lifted without effort, and weeping, laid it in a grave, where it rested and was at peace, though multitudes hurried over it, and new stars came and went, and the winds were strange with new tongues. The sleeper saw the morning upon that corpse when light struck his eyelids, and he awoke like a man who knew no care.

His landlady's little female scrubber was working at the grate in his sitting-room. He had endured many a struggle to prevent service of this nature being done for him by one of the sex—at least, to prevent it within his hearing and sight. He called to her to desist; but she replied that she had her mistress's orders. Thereupon he maintained that the grate did not want scrubbing. The girl took this to be a matter of opinion, not a challenge to controversy, and continued her work in silence. Irritated by the noise, but anxious not to seem harsh, he said: "What on earth are you about, when there was no fire there yesterday?"

"There ain't no stuff for a fire now, sir," said she.

"I tell you I did not light it."

"It's been and lit itself then," she mumbled.

"Do you mean to say you found the fire burnt out, when you entered the room this morning?"

She answered that she had found it so, and lots of burnt paper lying about.

The symbolism of this fire burnt out, that had warmed and cheered none, oppressed his fancy, and he left the small maid-of-all-work to triumph with black-lead and brushes.

She sang out, when she had done: "If you please, sir, missus have had a hamper up from the country, and would you like a country aig, which is quite fresh, and new lay. And missus say, she can't trust the bloaters about here bein' Yarmouth, but there's a soft roe in one she've squeezed; and am I to stop a water-cress woman, when the last one sold you them, and all the leaves jellied behind 'em, so as no washin' could save you from swallowin' some, missus say?"

Sir Purcell rolled over on his side. "Is this going to be my epitaph?" he groaned; for he was not a man particular in his diet, or exacting in choice of roes, or panting for freshness in an egg. He wondered what his landlady could mean by sending up to him, that morning of all others, to tempt his appetite after her fashion. "I thought I remembered eating nothing but toast in this place;" he observed to himself. A grunting answer had to be given to the little maid, "Toast as usual." She appeared satisfied, but returned again, when he was in his bath, to ask whether he had said "No toast to-day?"

"Toast till the day of my death—tell your mistress that!" he replied; and partly from shame at his unaccountable vehemence, he paused in his sponging, meditated, and chilled. An association of toast with spectral things grew in his mind, when presently the girl's voice was heard: "Please, sir, did say you'd have toast, or not, this morning?" It cost him an effort to answer simply, "Yes."

That she should continue, "Not sir?" appeared like perversity. "No aig?" was maddening.

"Well, no; never mind it this morning," said he.

"Not this morning," she repeated.

"Then it will not be till the day of your death, as you said," she is thinking that, was the idea running in his brain, and he was half ready to cry out "Stop," and renew his order for toast, that he might seem consecutive. The childishness of the wish made him ask himself what it mattered. "I said 'Not till the day;' so, none to-day would mean that I have reached the day." Shivering with the wet on his pallid skin, he thought this over.

His landlady had used her discretion, and there was toast on the table. A beam of Spring's morning sunlight illuminated the toast-rack. He sat, and ate, and munched the doubt whether "not till" included the final day, or stopped short of it. By this the state of his brain may be conceived. A longing for beauty, and a dark sense of an incapacity to thoroughly enjoy it, tormented him. He sent for his landlady's canary, and the ready shrill song of the bird persuaded him that much of the charm of music is wilfully swelled by ourselves, and can be by ourselves withdrawn: that is to say, the great chasm and spell of sweet sounds is assisted by the force of our imaginations. What is that force?—the heat and torrent of the blood. When that exists no more—to one without hope, for instance—what is music or beauty? Intrinsically, they are next to nothing. He argued it out so, and convinced himself of his own delusions, till his hand, being in the sunlight, gave him a pleasant warmth. "That's something we all love," he said, glancing at the blue sky above the roofs. "But there's little enough of it in this climate," he thought, with an eye upon the darker corners of his room. When he had eaten, he sent word to his landlady to make up his week's bill. The week was not at an end, and that good woman appeared before him, astonished, saying: "To be sure, your habits is regular, but there's little items one I'll guess at, and how make out a bill, Sir Purcy, and no items?"

He nodded his head.

"The country again?" she asked smilingly.

"I am going down there," he said.

"And beautiful at this time of the year, it is! though, for market gardening, London beats any country I ever knew; and if you like creature comforts, I always say, stop in London! And then the policemen! who really are the greatest comfort of all to us poor women, and seem sent from above especially to protect our weakness. I do assure you, Sir Purcy, I feel it, and never knew a right-minded woman that did not. And how on earth our grandmothers contrived to get about without them! But there! people who lived before us do seem like the most uncomfortable!"

When—my goodness! we come to think there was some lived before tea! Why, as I say over almost every cup I drink, it ain't to be realized. It seems almost wicked to say it, Sir Purcy; but it's my opinion there ain't a Christian woman who's not made more of a Christian through her tea. And a man who beats his wife my first question is, 'Do he take his tea regular?' For, depend upon it, that man is not a tea-drinker at all."

He let her talk away, feeling oddly pleased by this mundane chatter, as was she to pour forth her inmost sentiments to a baronet.

When she said: "Your fire shall be lighted to-night to welcome you," the man looked up, and was going to request that the trouble might be spared, but he nodded. His ghost saw the burning fire awaiting him. Or how if it sparkled merrily, and he beheld it with his human eyes that night? His beloved would then have touched him with her hand—yea, brought the dead to life! He jumped to his feet, and dismissed the worthy dame. On both sides of him, 'Yes,' and 'No,' seemed pressing like two hostile powers that battled for his body. They shrieked in his ears, plucked at his fingers. He heard them hushing deeply as he went to his pistol-case, and drew forth one—he knew not which.

CHAPTER LVI

On a wild April morning, Emilia rose from her bed and called to mind a day of the last year's Spring when she had watched the cloud streaming up, and felt that it was the curtain of an unknown glory. But now it wore the aspect of her life itself, with nothing hidden behind those stormy folds, save peace. South-westward she gazed, eyeing eagerly the struggle of twisting vapour; long flying edges of silver went by, and mounds of faint crimson, and here and there a closing space of blue, swift as a thought of home to a soldier in action. The heavens were like a battle-field. Emilia shut her lips hard, to check an impulse of prayer for Merthyr fighting in Italy: for he was in Italy, and she once more among the Monmouth hills: he was in Italy fighting, and she chained here to her miserable promise! Three days after she had given the promise to Wilfrid, Merthyr left, shaking her hand like any common friend. Georgiana remained, by his desire, to protect her. Emilia had written to Wilfrid for release, but being no apt letter-writer, and hating the task, she was soon involved by him in a complication of bewildering sentiments, some of which she supposed she was bound to feel, while perhaps one or two she did feel, at the summons. The effect was that she lost the true wording of her blunt petition for release: she could no longer put it bluntly. But her heart revolted the more, and gave her sharp eyes to see into his selfishness. The purgatory of her days with Georgiana, when the latter was kept back from her brother in his peril, spurred Emilia to renew her appeal; but she found that all she said drew her into unexpected traps and pitfalls. There was only one thing she could say plainly: "I want to go." If she repeated this, Wilfrid was ready with citations from her letters, wherein she had said 'this,' and 'that,' and many other phrases. His epistolary power and skill in arguing his

own case were creditable to him. Affected as Emilia was by other sensations, she could not combat the idea strenuously suggested by him, that he had reason to complain of her behaviour. He admitted his special faults, but, by distinctly tracing them to their origin, he complacently hinted the excuse for them. Moreover, and with artistic ability, he painted such a sentimental halo round the 'sacredness of her pledged word,' that Emilia could not resist a superstitious notion about it, and about what the breaking of it would imply. Georgiana had removed her down to Monmouth to be out of his way. A constant flight of letters pursued them both, for Wilfrid was far too clever to allow letters in his hand-writing to come for one alone of two women shut up in a country-house together. He saw how the letterless one would sit speculating shrewdly and spitefully; so he was careful to amuse his mystified Dragon, while he drew nearer and nearer to his gold apple. Another object was, that by getting Georgiana to consent to become in part his confidante, he made it almost a point of honour for her to be secret with Lady Charlotte.

At last a morning came with no Brookfield letter for either of them. The letters stopped from that time. It was almost as if a great buzzing had ceased in Emilia's ears, and she now heard her own sensations clearly. To Georgiana's surprise, she manifested no apprehension or regret. "Or else," the lady thought, "she wears a mask to me;" and certainly it was a pale face that Emilia was beginning to wear. At last came April and its wild morning. No little female hypocrisies passed between them when they met; they shook hands at arm's length by the breakfast-table. Then Emilia said: "I am ready to go to Italy: I will go at once."

Georgiana looked straight at her, thinking: "This is a fit of indignation with Wilfrid." She answered: "Italy! I fancied you had forgotten there was such a country."

"I don't forget my country and my friends," said Emilia.

"At least, I must ask the ground of so unexpected a resolution," was rejoined.

"Do you remember what Merthyr wrote in his letter from Arona? How long it takes to understand the meaning of some words! He says that I should not follow an impulse that is not the impulse of all my nature—myself altogether. Yes! I know what that means now. And he tells me that my life is worth more than to be bound to the pledge of a silly moment. It is! He, Georgey, unkind that you are!—he does not distrust me; but always advises and helps me: Merthyr waits for me. I cannot be instantly ready for every meaning in the world. What I want to do, is to see Wilfrid: if not, I will write to him. I will tell him that I intend to break my promise."

A light of unaffected pride shone from the girl's face, as she threw down this gauntlet to sentimentalism.

"And if he objects?" said Georgiana.

"If he objects, what can happen? If he objects by letter, I am gone. I shall not write for permission. I shall write what my will is. If I see him, and he objects, I can look into his eyes and say what I think right. Why, I have lived like a frozen thing ever since I gave him my word. I have felt at times like a snake hissing at my folly. I think I have felt something like men when they swear."

Georgiana's features expressed a slight but perceptible disgust. Emilia continued humbly: "Forgive me. I wish you to know how I hate the word I gave that separates me from Merthyr in my Italy, and makes you dislike your poor Emilia. You do. I have pardoned it, though it was twenty stabs a day."

"But, why, if this promise was so hateful to you, did you not break it before?" asked Georgiana.

"I had not the courage," Emilia stooped her head to confess; "and besides," she added, curiously half-closing her eyelids, as one does to look on a minute object, "I could not see through it before."

"If," suggested Georgiana, "you break your word, you release him from his."

"No! if he cannot see the difference," cried Emilia, wildly, "then let him keep away from me for ever, and he shall not have the name of friend! Is there no difference—I wish you would let me cry out as they do in Shakespeare, Georgey!" Emilia laughed to cover her vehemence. "I want something more than our way of talking, to witness that there is such a difference between us. Am I to live here till all my feelings are burnt out, and my very soul is only a spark in a log of old wood? and to keep him from murdering my countrymen, or flogging the women of Italy! God knows what those Austrians would make him do. He changes. He would easily become an Austrian. I have heard him once or twice, and if I had shut my eyes, I might have declared an Austrian spoke. I wanted to keep him here, but it is not right that I—I should be caged till I scarcely feel my finger-ends, or know that I breathe sensibly as you and others do. I am with Merthyr. That is what I intend to tell him."

She smiled softly up to Georgiana's cold eyes, to get a look of forgiveness for her fiery speaking.

"So, then, you love my brother?" said Georgiana.

Emilia could have retorted, "Cruel that you are!" The pain of having an unripe feeling plucked at without warning, was bitter; but she repressed any exclamation, in her desire to maintain simple and unsensational relations always with those surrounding her.

"He is my friend," she said. "I think of something better than that other word. Oh, that I were a man, to call him my brother-in-arms! What's a girl's love in return for his giving his money, his heart, and offering his life every day for Italy?"

As soon as Georgiana could put faith in her intention to depart, she gave her a friendly hand and embrace.

Two days later they were at Richford, with Lady Gosstre. The journals were full of the Italian uprising. There had been a collision between the Imperial and patriotic forces, near Brescia, from which the former had retired in some confusion. Great things were expected of Piedmont, though many, who had reason to know him, distrusted her king. All Lombardy awaited the signal from Piedmont. Meanwhile blood was flowing.

In the excitement of her sudden rush from dead monotony to active life, Emilia let some time pass before she wrote to Wilfrid. Her letter was in her hand, when one was brought in to her from him. It ran thus:—

"I have just returned home, and what is this I hear? Are you utterly faithless? Can I not rely on you to keep the word you have solemnly pledged! Meet me at once. Name a place. I am surrounded by misery and distraction. I will tell you all when we meet. I have trusted that you were firm. Write instantly. I cannot ask you to come here. The house is broken up. There is no putting to paper what has happened. My father lies helpless. Everything rests on me. I thought that I could rely on you."

Emilia tore up her first letter, and replied:—

"Come here at once. Or, if you would wish to meet me elsewhere, it shall be where you please: but immediately. If you have heard that I am going to Italy, it is true. I break my promise. I shall hope to have your forgiveness. My heart bleeds for my dear Cornelia, and I am eager to see my sisters, and embrace them, and share their sorrow. If I must not come, tell them I kiss them. Adieu!"

Wilfrid replied:—

"I will be by Richford Park gates to-morrow at a quarter to nine. You speak of your heart. I suppose it is a habit. Be careful to put on a cloak or thick shawl; we have touches of frost. If I cannot amuse you, perhaps the nightingales will. Do you remember those of last year? I wonder whether we shall hear the same?—we shall never hear the same."

This iteration, whether cunningly devised or not, had a charm for Emilia's ear. She thought: "I had forgotten all about them." When she was in her bedroom at night, she threw up her window. April was leaning close upon May, and she had not to wait long before a dusky flutter of low notes, appearing to issue from the great rhododendron bank across the lawn, surprised her. She listened, and another little beginning was heard, timorous, shy, and full of mystery for her. The moon hung over branches, some that showed young buds, some still bare. Presently the long, rich, single notes cut the air, and melted to their glad delicious chuckle. The singer was answered from a farther bough, and again from one. It grew to be a circle of melody round Emilia at the open window. Was it the same as last year's? The last year's lay in her memory faint and well-nigh unawakened. There was likewise a momentary sense of unreality in this still piping peacefulness, while Merthyr stood in a bloody-streaked field, fronting death. And yet the song was sweet. Emilia clasped her arms, shut her eyes, and drank it in. Not to think at all, or even to brood on her sensations, but to rest half animate and let those divine sounds find a way through her blood, was medicine to her.

Next day there were numerous visits to the house. Emilia was reserved, and might have been thought sad, but she welcomed Tracy Runningbrook gladly, with "Oh! my old friend!" and a tender squeeze of his hand.

"True, if you like; hot, if you like; but I old?" cried Tracy.

"Yes, because I seem to have got to the other side of you; I mean, I know you, and am always sure of you," said Emilia. "You don't care for music; I don't care for poetry, but we're friends, and I am quite certain of you, and think you 'old friend' always."

"And I," said Tracy, better up to the mark by this time, "I think of you, you dear little woman, that I ought to be grateful to you, for, by heaven! you give me, every time I see you, the greatest temptation to be a fool and let me prove that I'm not. Altro! altro!"

"A fool!" said Emilia caressingly; showing that his smart insinuation had slipped by her.

The tale of Brookfield was told over again by Tracy, and Emilia shuddered, though Merthyr and her country held her heart and imagination active and in suspense, from moment to moment. It helped mainly to discolour the young world to her eyes. She was under the spell of an excitement too keen and quick to be subdued, by the sombre terrors of a tragedy enacted in a house that she had known. Brookfield was in the talk of all who came to Richford. Emilia got the vision of the wretched family seated in the library as usual, when upon midnight they were about to part, and a knock came at the outer door, and two men entered the hall, bearing a lifeless body with a red spot above the heart. She saw Cornelia fall to it. She saw the pale-faced family that had given her shelter, and moaned for lack of a way of helping them and comforting them. She reproached herself for feeling her own full physical life so warmly, while others whom she had loved were weeping. It was useless to resist the tide of fresh vitality in her veins, and when her thoughts turned to their main attraction, she was rejoicing at the great strength she felt coming to her gradually. Her face was smooth and impassive: this new joy of strength came on her like the flowing of a sea to a land-locked water. "Poor souls!" she sighed for her friends, while irrepressible exultation filled her spirit.

That afternoon, in the midst of packing and preparations for the journey, at all of which Lady Gosstre smiled with a complacent bewilderment, a card, bearing the name of Miss Laura Tinley, was sent up to Emilia. She had forgotten this person, and asked Lady Gosstre who it was. Arabella's rival presented herself most winningly. For some time, Emilia listened to her, with wonder that a tongue should be so glib on matters of no earthly interest. At last, Laura said in an undertone: "I am the bearer of a message from Mr. Pericles; do you walk at all in the garden?"

Emilia read her look, and rose. Her thoughts struck back on the creature that she was when she had last seen Mr. Pericles, and again, by contrast, on what she was now. Eager to hear of him, or rather to divine the mystery in her bosom aroused by the unexpected mention of his name, she was soon alone with Laura in the garden.

"Oh, those poor Poles!" Laura began.

"You were going to say something of Mr. Pericles," said Emilia.

"Yes, indeed, my dear; but, of course, you have heard all the details of that dreadful night? It cannot be called a comfort to us that it enables my brother Albert to come forward in the most disinterested—I might venture to say, generous—manner, and prove the chivalry of his soul; still, as things are, we are glad, after such misunderstandings, to prove to that sorely-tried family

who are their friends. I—you would little think so from their treatment of me—I was at school with them. I knew them before they became unintelligible, though they always had a turn for it. To dress well, to be refined, to marry well—I understand all that perfectly; but who could understand them? Not they themselves, I am certain! And now penniless! and not only that, but lawyers! You know that Mrs. Chump has commenced an action?—no? Oh, yes! but I shall have to tell you the whole story."

"What is it?—they want money?" said Emilia.

"I will tell you. Our poor gentlemanly organist, whom you knew, was really a baronet's son, and inherited the title."

Emilia interrupted her: "Oh, do let me hear about them!"

"Well, my dear, this unfortunate—I may call him 'lover,' for if a man does not stamp the truth of his affection with a pistol, what other means has he? And just a word as to romance. I have been sighing for it—no one would think so—all my life. And who would have thought that these poor Poles should have lived to convince me of the folly! Oh, delicious humdrum!—there is nothing like it. But you are anxious, naturally. Poor Sir Purcell Barren—he may or may not have been mad, but when he was brought to the house at Brookfield—quite by chance—I mean, his body—two labouring men found him by a tree—I don't know whether you remembered a pollard-willow that stood all white and rotten by the water in the fir-wood:—well, as I said, mad or not, no sooner did poor Cornelia see him than she shrieked that she was the cause of his death. He was laid in the hall—which I have so often trod! and there Cornelia sat by his poor dead body, and accused Wilfrid and her father of every unkindness. They say that the scene was terrible. Wilfrid—but I need not tell you his character. He flutters from flower to flower, but he has feeling Now comes the worst of all—in one sense; that is, looking on it as people of the world; and being in the world, we must take a worldly view occasionally. Mr. Pole—you remember how he behaved once at Besworth: or, no; you were not there, but he used your name. His mania was, as everybody could see, to marry his children grandly. I don't blame him in any way. Still, he was not justified in living beyond his means to that end, speculating rashly, and concealing his actual circumstances. Well, Mr. Pericles and he were involved together; that is, Mr. Pericles—"

"Is Mr. Pericles near us now?" said Emilia quickly.

"We will come to him," Laura resumed, with the complacency of one who saw a goodly portion of the festival she was enjoying still before her. "I was going to say, Mr. Pericles had poor Mr. Pole in his power; has him, would be the correcter tense. And Wilfrid, as you may have heard, had really grossly insulted him, even to the extent of maltreating him—a poor foreigner—rich foreigner, if you like! but not capable of standing against a strong young man in wrath. However, now there can be little doubt that Wilfrid repents. He had been trying ever since to see Mr. Pericles; and the very morning of that day, I believe, he saw him and humbled himself to make an apology. This had put Mr. Pole in good spirits, and in the evening—he and Mrs. Chump were very fond of their wine after dinner—he was heard that very evening to name a day for his union with her; for that had been quite understood, and he had asked his daughters and got their consent. The sight of Sir Purcell's corpse, and the cries of Cornelia, must have turned him

childish. I cannot conceive a situation so harrowing as that of those poor children hearing their father declare himself an impostor! a beggar! a speculator! He cried, poor unhappy man, real tears! The truth was that his nerves suddenly gave way. For, just before—only just before, he was smiling and talking largely. He wished to go on his knees to every one of them, and kept telling them of his love—the servants all awake and listening! and more gossiping servants than the Poles always, by the most extraordinary inadvertence, managed to get, you never heard of! Nothing would stop him from humiliating himself! No one paid any attention to Mrs. Chump until she started from her chair. They say that some of the servants who were crying outside, positively were compelled to laugh when they heard her first outbursts. And poor Mr. Pole confessed that he had touched her money. He could not tell her how much. Fancy such a scene, with a dead man in the house! Imagination almost refuses to conjure it up! Not to dwell on it too long—for, I have never endured such a shock as it has given me—Mrs. Chump left the house, and the next thing received from her was a lawyer's letter. Business men say she is not to blame: women may cherish their own opinion. But, oh, Miss Belloni! is it not terrible? You are pale."

Emilia behind what she felt for her friends, had a dim comprehension of the meaning of their old disgust at Laura, during this narration. But, hearing the word of pity, she did not stop to be critical. "Can you do nothing for them?" she said abruptly.

The thought in Laura's shocked grey eyes was, "They have done little enough for you," i.e., toward making you a lady. "Oh!" she cried; "I can you teach me what to do? I must be extremely delicate, and calculate upon what they would accept from me. For—so I hear—they used to—and may still—nourish a—what I called—silly—though not in unkindness—hostility to our family—me. And perhaps now natural delicacy may render it difficult for them to..."

In short, to accept an alms from Laura Tinley; so said her pleading look for an interpretation.

"You know Mr. Pericles," said Emilia, "he can do the mischief—can he not? Stop him."

Laura laughed. "One might almost say that you do not know him, Miss Belloni. What is my influence? I have neither a voice, nor can I play on any instrument. I would—indeed I will—do my best my utmost; only, how even to introduce the subject to him? Are not you the person? He speaks of you constantly. He has consulted doctors with regard to your voice, and the only excuse, dear Miss Belloni, for my visit to you to-day, is my desire that any misunderstanding between you may be cleared. Because, I have just heard—Miss Belloni will forgive me!—the origin of it; and tidings coming that you were in the neighbourhood, I thought—hoped that I might be the means of re-uniting two evidently destined to be of essential service to one another. And really, life means that, does it not?"

Emilia was becoming more critical of this tone the more she listened. She declared, her immediate willingness to meet Mr. Pericles. With which, and Emilia's assurance that she would write, and herself make the appointment, Laura retired, in high glee at the prospect of winning the gratitude of the inscrutable millionaire. It was true that the absence of any rivalry for the possession of the man took much of his sweetness from him. She seemed to be plucking him from the hands of the dead, and half recognized that victory over uncontesting rivals claps the laurel-wreath rather rudely upon our heads.

Emilia lost no time in running straight to Georgiana, who was busy at her writing-desk. She related what she had just heard, ending breathlessly: "Georgey! my dear! will you help them?"

"In what possible way can I do so?" said Georgiana. "To-morrow night we shall have left England."

"But to-day we are here." Emilia pressed a hand to her bosom: "my heart feels hollow, and my friends cry out in it. I cannot let him suffer." She looked into Georgiana's eyes. "Will you not help them?—they want money."

The lady reddened. "Is it not preposterous to suppose that I can offer them assistance of such a kind?"

"Not you," returned Emilia, sighing; and in an under-breath, "me—will you lend it to me? Merthyr would. I shall repay it. I cannot tell what fills me with this delight, but I know I am able to repay any sum. Two thousand pounds would help them. I think—I think my voice has come back."

"Have you tried it?" said Georgiana, to produce a diversion from the other topic.

"No; but believe me when I tell you, it must be. I scarcely feel the floor; no misery touches me. I am only sorry for my friends, not down on the ground with them. Believe me! And I have been studying all this while. I have not lost an hour. I would accept a part, and step on the boards within a week, and be certain to succeed. I am just as willing to go to the Conservatorio and submit to discipline. Only, dear friend, believe me, that I ask for money now, because I am sure I can repay it. I want to send it immediately, and then, good-bye to England."

Georgiana closed her desk. She had been suspicious at first of another sentiment in the background, but was now quite convinced of the simplicity of Emilia's design. She said: "I will tell you exactly how I am placed. I do not know, that under any circumstances, I could have given into your hands so large a sum as this that you ask for. My brother has a fortune; and I have also a little property. When I say my brother has a fortune, he has the remains of one. All that has gone has been devoted to relieve your countrymen, and further the interests he has nearest at heart. What is left to him, I believe, he has now thrown into the gulf. You have heard Lady Charlotte call him a fanatic."

Emilia's lip quivered.

"You must not blame her for that," Georgiana continued. "Lady Gosstre thinks much the same. The world thinks with them. I love him, and prove my love by trusting him, and wish to prove my love by aiding him, and being always at hand to succour, as I should be now, but that I obeyed his dearest wish in resting here to watch over you. I am his other self. I have taught him to feel that; so that in his devotion to this cause he may follow every impulse he has, and still there is his sister to fall back on. My child! see what I have been doing. I have been calculating here." Georgiana took a scroll from her desk, and laid it under Emilia's eyes. "I have reckoned our expenses as far as Turin, and have only consented to take Lady Gosstre's valet for courier,

just to please her. I know that he will make the cost double, and I feel like a miser about money. If Merthyr is ruined, he will require every farthing that I have for our common subsistence. Now do you understand? I can hardly put the case more plainly. It is out of my power to do what you ask me to do."

Emilia sighed lightly, and seemed not much cast down by the refusal. She perceived that it was necessarily positive, and like all minds framed to resolve to action, there was an instantaneous change of the current of her thoughts in another direction.

"Then, my darling, my one prayer!" she said. "Postpone our going for a week. I will try to get help for them elsewhere."

Georgiana was pleased by Emilia's manner of taking the rebuff; but it required an altercation before she consented to this postponement; she nodded her head finally in anger.

CHAPTER LVII

By the park-gates that evening, Wilfrid received a letter from the hands of Tracy Runningbrook. It said: "I am not able to see you now. When I tell you that I will see you before I leave England, I insist upon your believing me. I have no head for seeing anybody now. Emilia"—was the simple signature, perused over and over again by this maddened lover, under the flitting gate-lamp, after Tracy had left him. The coldness of Emilia's name so briefly given, concentrated every fire in his heart. What was it but miserable cowardice, he thought, that prevented him from getting the peace poor Barrett had found? Intolerable anguish weakened his limbs. He flung himself on a wayside bank, grovelling, to rise again calm and quite ready for society, upon the proper application of the clothes-brush. Indeed; he patted his shoulder and elbow to remove the soil of his short contact with earth, and tried a cigar: but the first taste of the smoke sickened his lips. Then he stood for a moment as a man in a new world. This strange sensation of disgust with familiar comforting habits, fixed him in perplexity, till a rushing of wild thoughts and hopes from brain to heart, heart to brain, gave him insight, and he perceived his state, and that for all he held to in our life he was dependent upon another; which is virtually the curse of love.

"And he passed along the road," adds the Philosopher, "a weaker man, a stronger lover. Not that love should diminish manliness or gains by so doing; but travelling to love by the ways of Sentiment, attaining to the passion bit by bit, does full surely take from us the strength of our nature, as if (which is probable) at every step we paid fee to move forward. Wilfrid had just enough of the coin to pay his footing. He was verily fining himself down. You are tempted to ask what the value of him will be by the time that he turns out pure metal? I reply, something considerable, if by great sacrifice he gets to truth—gets to that oneness of feeling which is the

truthful impulse. At last, he will stand high above them that have not suffered. The rejection of his cigar."

This wages too absurd. At the risk of breaking our partnership for ever, I intervene. My Philosopher's meaning is plain, and, as usual, good; but not even I, who have less reason to laugh at him than anybody, can gravely accept the juxtaposition of suffering and cigars. And, moreover, there is a little piece of action in store.

Wilfrid had walked half way to Brookfield, when the longing to look upon the Richford chamber-windows stirred so hotly within him that he returned to the gates. He saw Captain Gambier issuing on horseback from under the lamp. The captain remarked that it was a fine night, and prepared to ride off, but Wilfrid requested him to dismount, and his voice had the unmistakeable ring in it by which a man knows that there must be no trifling. The captain leaned forward to look at him before he obeyed the summons, All self-control had abandoned Wilfrid in the rage he felt at Gambier's having seen Emilia, and the jealous suspicion that she had failed to keep her appointment for the like reason.

"Why do you come here?" he said, hoarsely.

"By Jove! that's an odd question," said the captain, at once taking his ground.

"Am I to understand that you've been playing with my sister, as you do with every other woman?"

Captain Gambier murmured quietly, "Every other woman?" and smoothed his horse's neck. "They're not so easily played with, my dear fellow. You speak like a youngster."

"I am the only protector of my sister's reputation," said Wilfrid, "and, by heaven! if you have cast her over to be the common talk, you shall meet me."

The captain turned to his horse, saying, "Oh! Well!" Being mounted, he observed: "My dear Pole, you might have sung out all you had to say. Go to your sister, and if she complains of my behaviour, I'll meet you. Oh, yes! I'll meet you; I have no objection to excitement. You're in the hands of an infernally clever woman, who does me the honour to wish to see my blood on the carpet, I believe; but if this is her scheme, it's not worthy of her ability. She began pretty well. She arranged the preliminaries capitally. Why, look here," he relinquished his ordinary drawl; "I'll tell you something, which you may put down in my favour or not—just as you like. That woman did her best to compromise your sister with me on board the yacht. I can't tell you how, and won't. Of course, I wouldn't if I could; but I have sense enough to admire a very charming person, and I did the only honourable thing in my power. It's your sister, my good fellow, who gave me my dismissal. We had a little common sense conversation—in which she shines. I envy the man that marries her, but she denies me such luck. There! if you want to shoot me for my share in that transaction, I'll give you your chance: and if you do, my dear Pole, either you must be a tremendous fool, or that woman's ten times cleverer than I thought. You know where to find me. Good night."

The captain gave heel to his horse, hearing no more.

Adela confirmed to Wilfrid what Gambier had spoken; and that it was she who had given him his dismissal. She called him by his name, "Augustus," in a kindly tone, remarking, that Lady Charlotte had persecuted him dreadfully. "Poor Augustus! his entire reputation for evil is owing to her black paint-brush. There is no man so easily 'hooked,' as Mrs. Bayruffle would say, as he, though he has but eight hundred a year: barely enough to live on. It would have been cruel of me to keep him, for if he is in love, it's with Emilia."

Wilfrid here took upon himself to reproach her for a certain negligence of worldly interests. She laughed and blushed with humorous satisfaction; and, on second thoughts, he changed his opinion, telling her that he wished he could win his freedom as she had done.

"Wilfrid," she said suddenly, "will you persuade Cornelia not to wear black?"

"Yes, if you wish it," he replied.

"You will, positively? Then listen, dear. I don't like the prospect of your alliance with Lady Charlotte."

Wilfrid could not repress a despondent shrug.

"But you can get released," she cried; and ultimately counselled him: "Mention the name of Lord Eltham before her once, when you are alone. Watch the result. Only, don't be clumsy. But I need not tell you that."

For hours he cudgelled his brains to know why she desired Cornelia not to wear black, and when the light broke in on him he laughed like a jolly youth for an instant. The reason why was in a web so complicated, that, to have divined what hung on Cornelia's wearing of black, showed a rare sagacity and perception of character on the little lady's part. As thus:—Sir Twickenham Pryme is the most sensitive of men to ridicule and vulgar tattle: he has continued to visit the house, learning by degrees to prefer me, but still too chivalrous to withdraw his claim to Cornelia, notwithstanding that he has seen indications of her not too absolute devotion towards him:—I have let him become aware that I have broken with Captain Gambier (whose income is eight hundred a year merely), for the sake of a higher attachment: now, since the catastrophe, he can with ease make it appear to the world that I was his choice from the first, seeing that Cornelia will assuredly make no manner of objection:—but, if she, with foolish sentimental persistence, assumes the garb of sorrow, then Sir Twickenham's ears will tingle; he will retire altogether; he will not dare to place himself in a position which will lend a colour to the gossip, that jilted by one sister, he flew for consolation to the other; jilted, too, for the mere memory of a dead man! an additional insult!

Exquisite intricacy! Wilfrid worked through all the intervolutions, and nearly forgot his wretchedness in admiration of his sister's mental endowments. He was the more willing to magnify them, inasmuch as he thereby strengthened his hope that liberty would follow the

speaking of the talismanic name of Eltham to Lady Charlotte, alone. He had come to look upon her as the real barrier between himself and Emilia.

"I think we have brains," he said softly, on his pillow, upon a review of the beggared aspect of his family; and he went to sleep with a smile on his face.

CHAPTER LVIII

A sharp breath of air had passed along the dews, and all the young green of the fresh season shone in white jewels. The sky, set with very dim distant stars, was in grey light round a small brilliant moon. Every space of earth lifted clear to her; the woodland listened; and in the bright silence the nightingales sang loud.

Emilia and Tracy Runningbrook were threading their way toward a lane over which great oak branches intervened; thence under larches all with glittering sleeves, and among spiky brambles, with the purple leaf and the crimson frosted. The frost on the edges of the brown-leaved bracken gave a faint colour. Here and there, intense silver dazzled their eyes. As they advanced amid the icy hush, so hard and instant was the ring of the earth under them, their steps sounded as if expected.

"This night seems made for me!" said Emilia.

Tracy had no knowledge of the object of the expedition. He was her squire simply; had pitched on a sudden into an enamoured condition, and walked beside her, caring little whither he was led, so that she left him not.

They came upon a clearing in the wood where a tournament of knights might have been held. Ranged on two sides were rows of larches, and forward, fit to plume a dais, a clump of tall firs stood with a flowing silver fir to right and left, and the white stems of the birch-tree shining from among them. This fair woodland court had three broad oaks, as for gateways; and the moon was above it. Moss and the frosted brown fern were its flooring.

Emilia said eagerly, "This way," and ran under one of the oaks. She turned to Tracy following: "There is no doubt of it." Her hand was lying softly on her throat.

"Your voice?" Tracy divined her.

She nodded, but frowned lovingly at the shout he raised, and he understood that there was haply some plot to be worked out. The open space was quite luminous in the middle of those three deep walls of shadow. Emilia enjoined him to rest where he was, and wait for her on that spot

like a faithful sentinel, whatsoever ensued. Coaxing his promise, she entered the square of white light alone. Presently she stood upon a low mound, so that her whole figure was distinct, while the moon made her features visible.

Expectancy sharpened the stillness to Tracy's ears. A nightingale began the charm. He was answered by another. Many were soon in song, till even the pauses were sweet with them. Tracy had the thought that they were calling for Emilia to commence; that it was nature preluding the divine human voice, weaving her spell for it. He was seized by a thirst to hear the adorable girl, who stood there patiently, with her face lifted soft in moonlight. And then the blood thrilled along his veins, as if one more than mortal had touched him. It seemed to him long before he knew that Emilia's voice was in the air.

In such a place, at such a time, there is no wizardry like a woman's voice. Emilia had gained in force and fulness. She sang with a stately fervour, letting the notes flow from her breast, while both her arms hung loose, and not a gesture escaped her. Tracy's fiery imagination set him throbbing, as to the voice of the verified spirit of the place. He heard nothing but Emilia, and scarce felt that it was she, or that tears were on his eyelids, till her voice sank richly, deep into the bosom of the woods. Then the stillness, like one folding up a precious jewel, seemed to pant audibly.

"She's not alone!" This was human speech at his elbow, uttered in some stupefied amazement. In an extremity of wrath, Tracy turned about to curse the intruder, and discerned Wilfrid, eagerly bent forward on the other side of the oak by which he leaned. Advancing toward Emilia, two figures were seen. Mr. Pericles in his bearskin was easily to be distinguished. His companion was Laura Tinley. The Greek moved at rapid strides, and coming near upon Emilia, raised his hands as in exclamation. At once he disencumbered his shoulders of the enormous wrapper, held it aloft imperiously, and by main force extinguished Emilia. Laura's shrill laugh resounded.

"Oh! beastly bathos!" Tracy groaned in his heart. "Here we are down in Avernus in a twinkling!"

There was evidently quick talk going on among the three, after which Emilia, heavily weighted, walked a little apart with Mr. Pericles, who looked lean and lank beside her, and gesticulated in his wildest manner. Tracy glanced about for Wilfrid. The latter was not visible, but, stepping up the bank of sand and moss, appeared a lady in shawl and hat, in whom he recognized Lady Charlotte. He went up to her and saluted.

"Ah! Tracy," she said. "I saw you leave the drawing room, and expected to find you here. So, the little woman has got her voice again; but why on earth couldn't she make the display at Richford? It's very pretty, and I dare say you highly approve of this kind of romantic interlude, Signor Poet, but it strikes me as being rather senseless."

"But, are you alone? What on earth brings you here?" asked Tracy.

"Oh!" the lady shrugged. "I've a guard to the rear. I told her I would come. She said I should hear something to-night, if I did. I fancied naturally the appointment had to do with her voice, and

wished to please her. It's only five minutes from the west-postern of the park. Is she going to sing any more? There's company apparently. Shall we go and declare ourselves?"

"I'm on duty, and can't," replied Tracy, and twisting his body in an ecstasy, added: "Did you hear her?"

Lady Charlotte laughed softly. "You speak as if you had taken a hurt, my dear boy. This sort of scene is dangerous to poets. But, I thought you slighted music."

"I don't know whether I'm breathing yet," Tracy rejoined. "She's a Goddess to me from this moment. Not like music? Am I a dolt? She would raise me from the dead, if she sang over me. Put me in a boat, and let her sing on, and all may end! I could die into colour, hearing her! That's the voice they hear in heaven."

"When they are good, I suppose," the irreverent lady appended. "What's that?" And she held her head to listen.

Emilia's mortal tones were calling Wilfrid's name. The lady became grave, as with keen eyes she watched the open space, and to a second call Wilfrid presented himself in a leisurely way from under cover of the trees; stepping into the square towards the three, as one equal to all occasions, and specially prepared for this. He was observed to bow to Mr. Pericles, and the two men extended hands, Laura Tinley standing decently away from them.

Lady Charlotte could not contain her mystification. "What does it mean?" she said. "Wilfrid was to be in town at the Ambassador's to-night! He wrote to me at five o'clock from his Club! Is he insane? Has he lost every sense of self-interest? He can't have made up his mind to miss his opportunity, when all the introductions are there! Run, like a good creature, Tracy, and see if that is Wilfrid, and come back and tell me; but don't sag I am here."

"Desert my post?" Tracy hugged his arms tight together. "Not if I freeze here!"

The doubt in Lady Charlotte's eyes was transient. She dropped her glass. Visible adieux were being waved between Mr. Pericles and Laura Tinley on the one hand, and Wilfrid and Emilia, on the other. After which, and at a quick pace, manifestly shivering, Mr. Pericles drew Laura into the shadows, and Emilia, clad in the immense bearskin, as with a trailing black barbaric robe, walked toward the oaks. Wilfrid's head was stooped to a level with Emilia's, into whose face he was looking obliviously, while the hot words sprang from his lips. They neared the oak, and Emilia slanted her direction, so as to avoid the neighbourhood of the tree. Tracy felt a sudden grasp of his arm. It was momentary, coming simultaneously with a burst of Wilfrid's voice.

"Do I know what I love, you ask? I love your footprints! Everything you have touched is like fire to me. Emilia! Emilia!"

"Then," came the clear reply, "you do not love Lady Charlotte?"

"Love her!" he shouted scornfully, and subdued his voice to add: "she has a good heart, and whatever scandal is talked of her and Lord Eltham, she is a well-meaning friend. But, love her! You, you I love!"

"Theatrical business," Lady Charlotte murmured, and imagined she had expected it when she promised Emilia she would step out into the night air, as possibly she had.

The lady walked straight up to them.

"Well, little one!" she addressed Emilia; "I am glad you have recovered your voice. You play the game of tit-for-tat remarkably well. We will now sheath our battledores. There is my hand."

The unconquerable aplomb in Lady Charlotte, which Wilfrid always artistically admired, and which always mastered him; the sight of her pale face and courageous eyes; and her choice of the moment to come forward and declare her presence;—all fell upon the furnace of Wilfrid's heart like a quenching flood. In a stupefaction, he confessed to himself that he could say actually nothing. He could hardly look up.

Emilia turned her eyes from the outstretched hand, to the lady's face.

"What will it mean?" she said.

"That we are quits, I presume; and that we bear no malice. At any rate, that I relinquish the field. I like a hand that can deal a good stroke. I conceived you to be a mere little romantic person, and correct my mistake. You win the prize, you see."

"You would have made him an Austrian, and he is now safe from that. I win nothing more," said Emilia.

When Tracy and Emilia stood alone, he cried out in a rapture of praise, "Now I know what a power you have. You may bid me live or die."

The recent scene concerned chiefly the actors who had moved onward: it had touched Emilia but lightly, and him not at all. But, while he magnified the glory of her singing, the imperishable note she had sounded this night, and the power and the triumph that would be hers, Emilia's bosom began to heave, and she checked him with a storm of tears. "Triumph! yes! what is this I have done? Oh, Merthyr, my true hero! He praises me and knows nothing of how false I have been to you. I am a slave! I have sold myself—sold myself!" She dropped her face in her hands, broken with grief. "He fights," she pursued; "he fights for my country. I feel his blood—it seems to run from my body as it runs from his. Not if he is dying—I dare not go to him if he is dying! I am in chains. I have sworn it for money. See what a different man Merthyr is from any on earth! Would he shoot himself for a woman? Would he grow meaner the more he loved her? My hero! my hero! and Tracy, my friend! what is my grief now? Merthyr is my hero, but I hear him—I hear him speaking it into my ears with his own lips, that I do not love him. And it is true. I never should have sold myself for three weary years away from him, if I had loved him. I know it now it is done. I thought more of my poor friends and Wilfrid, than of Merthyr, who bleeds for my

country! And he will not spurn me when we meet. Yes, if he lives, he will come to me gentle as a ghost that has seen God!"

She abandoned herself to weeping. Tracy, in a tender reverence for one who could speak such solemn matter spontaneously, supported her, and felt her tears as a rain of flame on his heart.

The nightingales were mute. Not a sound was heard from bough or brake.

CHAPTER LIX

A wreck from the last Lombard revolt landed upon our shores in June. His right arm was in a sling, and his Italian servant following him, kept close by his side, with a ready hand, as if fearing that at any moment the wounded gentleman's steps might fail. There was no public war going on just then: for which reason he was eyed suspiciously by the rest of the passengers making their way up the beach; who seemed to entertain an impression that he had no business at such a moment to be crippled, and might be put down as one of those foreign fools who stand out for a trifle as targets to fools a little luckier than themselves. Here, within our salt girdle, flourishes common sense. We cherish life; we abhor bloodshed; we have no sympathy with your juvenile points of honour: we are, in short, a civilized people; and seeing that Success has made us what we are, we advise other nations to succeed, or be quiet. Of all of which the gravely-smiling gentleman appeared well aware; for, with an eye that courted none, and a perfectly calm face, he passed through the crowd, only once availing himself of his brown-faced Beppo's spontaneously depressed shoulder when a twinge of pain shooting from his torn foot took his strength away. While he remained in sight, some speculation as to his nationality continued: he had been heard to speak nothing but Italian, and yet the flower of English cultivation was signally manifest in his style and bearing. The purchase of that day's journal, giving information that the Lombard revolt was fully, it was thought finally, crushed out, and the insurgents scattered, hanged, or shot, suggested to a young lady in a group melancholy with luggage, that the wounded gentleman was one who had escaped from the Austrians.

"Only, he is English."

"If he is, he deserves what he's got."

A stout Briton delivered this sentence, and gave in addition a sermon on meddling, short, emphatic, and not uncheerful apparently, if estimated by the hearty laugh that closed it; though a lady remarked, "Oh, dear me! You are very sweeping."

"By George! ma'am," cried the Briton, holding out his newspaper, "here's a leader on the identical subject, with all my views in it! Yes! those Italians are absurd: they never were a

people: never agreed. Egad! the only place they're fit for is the stage. Art! if you like. They know all about colouring canvas, and sculpturing. I don't deny 'em their merits, and I don't mind listening to their squalling, now and then: though, I'll tell you what: have you ever noticed the calves of those singers?—I mean, the men. Perhaps not—for they' ve got none. They're sticks, not legs. Who can think much of fellows with such legs? Now, the next time you go to the Italian Opera, notice 'em. Ha! ha!—well, that would sound queer, told at secondhand; but, just look at their legs, ma'am, and ask yourself whether there's much chance for a country that stands on legs like those! Let them paint, and carve blocks, and sing. They're not fit for much else, as far as I can see."

Thus, in the pride of his manliness, the male Briton. A shrill cry drew the attention of this group once more to the person who had just kindly furnished a topic. He had been met on his way by a lady unmistakeably foreign in her appearance. "Marini!" was the word of the cry; and the lady stood with her head bent and her hands stiffened rigidly.

"Lost her husband, I dare say!" the Briton murmured. "Perhaps he's one of the 'hanged, or shot,' in the list here Hanged! shot! Ask those Austrians to be merciful, and that's their reply. Why, good God! it's like the grunt of a savage beast! Hanged! shot!—count how many for one day's work! Ten at Verona; fifteen at Mantua; five—there, stop! If we enter into another alliance with those infernal ruffians!—if they're not branded in the face of Europe as inhuman butchers! if I—by George! if I were an Italian I'd handle a musket myself, and think great guns the finest music going. Mind, if there's a subscription for the widows of these poor fellows, I put down my name; so shall my wife, so shall my daughters, so we will all, down to the baby!"

Merthyr's name was shouted first on his return to England by Mrs. Chump. He was waiting on the platform of the London station for the train to take him to Richford, when, "Oh! Mr. Pow's, Mr. Pow's!" resounded, and Mrs. Chump fluttered before him. She was on her way to Brookfield, she said; and it was, she added, her firm belief that heaven had sent him to her sad, not deeming "that poor creature, Mr. Braintop, there, sufficient for the purpose. For what I've got to go through, among them at Brookfield, Mr. Pow's, it's perfectly awful. Mr. Braintop," she turned to the youth, "you may go now. And don't go takin' ship and sailin' for Italy after the little Belloni, for ye haven't a chance—poor fella! though he combs 's hair so careful, Mr. Pow's, and ye might almost laugh and cry together to see how humble he is, and audacious too—all in a lump. For, when little Belloni was in the ship, ye know, and she thinkin', 'not one of my friends near to wave a handkerchief!' behold, there's that boy Braintop just as by maguc, and he wavin' his best, which is a cambric, and a present from myself, and precious wet that night, ye might swear; for the quiet lovers, Mr. Pow's, they cry, they do, buckutsful!"

"And is Miss Belloni gone?" said Merthyr, looking steadily for answer.

"To be sure, sir, she has; but have ye got a squeak of pain? Oh, dear! it makes my blood creep to see a man who's been where there's been firing of shots in a temper. Ye're vary pale, sir."

"She went—on what day?" asked Merthyr.

"Oh! I can't poss'bly tell ye that, Mr. Pow's, havin' affairs of my own most urrgent. But, Mr. Paricles has got her at last. That's certain. Gall'ns of tears has poor Mr. Braintop cried over it, bein' one of the mew-in-a-corner sort of young men, ye know, what never win the garl, but cry enough to float her and the lucky fella too, and off they go, and he left on the shore."

Merthyr looked impatiently out of the window. His wounds throbbed and his forehead was moist.

"With Mr. Pericles?" he queried, while Mrs. Chump was giving him the reasons for the immediate visit to Brookfield.

"They're cap'tal friends again, ye know, Mr. Pow's, Mr. Paricles and Pole; and Pole's quite set up, and yesterday mornin' sends me two thousand pounds—not a penny less! and ye'll believe me, I was in a stiff gape for five minutes when Mr. Braintop shows the money. What a temptation for the young man! But Pole didn't know his love for little Belloni."

"Has she no one with her?" Merthyr seized the opportunity of her name being pronounced to get clear tidings of her, if possible.

"Oh, dear, yes, Mr. Paricles is with her," returned Mrs. Chump. "And, as I was sayin', sir, two thousand pounds! I ran off to my lawyer; for, it'll seem odd to ye, now, Mr. Pow's, that know my 'ffection for the Poles, poor dears, I'd an action against 'em. 'Stop ut,' I cries out to the man: if he'd been one o' them that wears a wig, I couldn't ha' spoken so—'Stop ut,' I cries, not a bit afraid of 'm. I wouldn't let the man go on, for all I want to know is, that I'm not rrooned. And now I've got money, I must have friends; for when I hadn't, ye know, my friends seemed against me, and now I have, it's the world that does, where'll I hide it? Oh, dear! now I'm with you, I don't mind, though this brown-faced forr'ner servant of yours, he gives me shivers. Can he understand English?—becas I've got ut all in my pockut!"

Merthyr sighed wearily for release. At last the train slackened speed, and the well-known fir-country appeared in sight. Mrs. Chump caught him by the arm as he prepared to alight. "Oh! and are ye goin' to let me face the Poles without anyone to lean on in that awful moment, and no one to bear witness how kind I've spoken of 'em. Mr. Pow's! will ye prove that you're a blessed angel, sir, and come, just for five minutes—which is a short time to do a thing for a woman she'll never forget."

"Pray spare me, madam," Merthyr pleaded. "I have much to learn at Richford."

"I cann't spare ye, sir," cried Mrs. Chump. "I cann't go before that fam'ly quite alone. They're a tarr'ble fam'ly. Oh! I'll be goin' on my knees to ye, Mr. Pow's. Weren't ye sent by heaven now? And you to run away! And if you're woundud, won't I have a carr'ge from the station, which'll be grander to go in, and impose on 'em, ye know. Pray, sir! I entreat ye!"

The tears burst from her eyes, and her hot hand clung to his imploringly.

Merthyr was a witness of the return of Mrs. Chump to Brookfield. In that erewhile abode of Fine Shades, the Nice Feelings had foundered. The circle of a year, beginning so fairly for them, enfolded the ladies and their first great scheme of life. Emilia had been a touchstone to this family. They could not know it in their deep affliction, but in manner they had much improved. Their welcome of Mrs. Chump was an admirable seasoning of stateliness with kindness. Cornelia and Arabella took her hand, listening with an incomparable soft smile to her first protestations, which they quieted, and then led her to Mr. Pole; of whom it may be said, that an accomplished coquette could not in his situation have behaved with a finer skill; so that, albeit received back into the house, Mrs. Chump had yet to discover what her footing there was to be, and trembled like the meanest of culprits. Mr. Pole shook her hand warmly, tenderly, almost tearfully, and said to the melted woman: "You're right, Martha; it's much better for us to examine accounts in a friendly way, than to have strangers and lawyers, and what not—people who can't possibly know the whole history, don't you see—meddling and making a scandal; and I'm much obliged to you for coming."

Vainly Mrs. Chump employed alternately innuendo and outcry to make him perceive that her coming involved a softer business, and that to money, she having it now, she gave not a thought. He assured her that in future she must; that such was his express desire; that it was her duty to herself and others. And while saying this, which seemed to indicate that widowhood would be her state as far as he was concerned, he pressed her hand with extreme sweetness, and his bird's-eyes twinkled obligingly. It is to be feared that Mr. Pole had passed the age of improvement, save in his peculiar art. After a time Nature stops, and says to us 'thou art now what thou wilt be.'

Cornelia was in black from neck to foot. She joined the conversation as the others did, and indeed more flowingly than Adela, whose visage was soured. It was Cornelia to whom Merthyr explained his temporary subjection to the piteous appeals of Mrs. Chump. She smiled humorously to reassure him of her perfect comprehension of the apology for his visit, and of his welcome: and they talked, argued a little, differed, until the terrible thought that he talked, and even looked like some one else, drew the blood from her lips, and robbed her pulses of their play. She spoke of Emilia, saying plainly and humbly: "All we have is owing to her." Arabella spoke of Emilia likewise, but with a shade of the foregone tone of patronage. "She will always be our dear little sister." Adela continued silent, as with ears awake for the opening of a door. Was it in ever-thwarted anticipation of the coming of Sir Twickenham?

Merthyr's inquiry after Wilfrid produced a momentary hesitation on Cornelia's Part—"He has gone to Verona. We have an uncle in the Austrian service," she said; and Merthyr bowed.

What was this tale of Emilia, that grew more and more perplexing as he heard it bit by bit? The explanation awaited him at Richford. There, when Georgiana had clasped her brother in one last jealous embrace, she gave him the following letter straightway, to save him, haply, from the false shame of that eager demand for one, which she saw ready to leap to words in his eyes. He read it, sitting in the Richford library alone, while the great rhododendron bloomed outside, above the shaven sunny sward, looking like a monstrous tropic bird alighted to brood an hour in full sunlight.

"My Friend!"

"I would say my Beloved! I will not write it, for it would be false. I have read of the defeat. Why was a battle risked at that cruel place! Here are we to be again for so many years before we can win God to be on our side! And I—do you not know? we used to talk of it!—I never can think it the Devil who has got the upper hand. What succeeds, I always think should succeed—was meant to, because the sky looks clear over it. This knocks a blow at my heart and keeps it silent and only just beating. I feel that you are safe. That, I am thankful for. If you were not, God would warn me, and not let me mock him with thanks when I pray. I pray till my eyelids burn, on purpose to get a warning if there is any black messenger to be sent to me. I do not believe it.

"For three years I am a prisoner. I go to the Conservatorio in Milan with Mr. Pericles, and my poor little mother, who cries, asking me where she will be among such a people, until I wonder she should be my mother. My voice has returned. Oh, Merthyr! my dear, calm friend! to keep calling you friend, and friend, puts me to sleep softly!—Yes, I have my voice. I felt I had it, like some one in a room with us when we will not open our eyes. There was misery everywhere, and yet I was glad. I kept it secret. I began to feel myself above the world. I dreamed of what I would do for everybody. I thought of you least! I tell you so, and take a scourge and scourge myself, for it is true that in her new joy this miserable creature that I am thought of you least. Now I have the punishment!

"My friend! the Poles were at the mercy of Mr. Pericles: Wilfrid had struck him: Mr. Pericles was angry and full of mischief. Those dear people had been kind to me, and I heard they were poor. I felt money in my breast, in my throat, that only wanted coining. I went to Georgiana, and oh! how truly she proved to me that she loves you better than I do. She refused to part with money that you might soon want. I laid a scheme for Mr. Pericles to hear me sing. He heard me, and my scheme succeeded. If Italy knew as well as I, she would never let her voice be heard till she is sure of it:—Yes! from foot to head, I knew it was impossible to fail. If a country means to be free, the fire must run through it and make it feel that certainty. Then—away the whitecoat! I sang, and the man twisted, as if I had bent him in my hand. He rushed to me, and offered me any terms I pleased, if for three years I would go to the Conservatorio at Milan, and learn submissively. It is a little grief to me that I think this man loves music more deeply than I do. In the two things I love best, the love of others exceeds mine. I named a sum of money—immense! and I desired that Mr. Pericles should assist Mr. Pole in his business. He consented at once to everything. The next day he gave me the money, and I signed my name and pledged my honour to an engagement. My friends were relieved.

"It was then I began to think of you. I had not to study the matter long to learn that I did not love you: and I will not trust my own feelings as they come to me now. I judge myself by my acts, or, Merthyr! I should sink to the ground like a dead body when I think of separation from you for three years. But, what am I? I am a raw girl. I command nothing but raw and flighty hearts of men. Are they worth anything? Let me study three years, without any talk of hearts at all. It commenced too early, and has left nothing to me but a dreadful knowledge of the weakness in most people:—not in you!

"If I might call you my Beloved! and so chain myself to you, I think I should have all your firmness and double my strength. I will not; for I will not have what I do not deserve. I think of you reading this, till I try to get to you; my heart is like a bird caught in the hands of a cruel boy.

By what I have done I know I do not love you. Must we half-despise a man to love him? May no dear woman that I know ever marry the man she first loves! My misery now is gladness, is like rain-drops on rising wings, if I say to myself 'Free! free, Emilia!' I am bound for three years, but I smile at such a bondage to my body. Evviva! my soul is free! Three years of freedom, and no sounding of myself—three years of growing, and studying; three years of idle heart!—Merthyr! I throb to think that those three years—true man! my hero, I may call you!—those three years may make me worthy of you. And if you have given all to Italy, that a daughter of Italy should help to return it, seems, my friend, so tenderly sweet—here is the first drop from my eyes!

"I would break what you call a Sentiment: I broke my word to Wilfrid. But this sight of money has a meaning that I cannot conquer. I know you would not wish me to for your own pleasure; and therefore I go. I hope to be growing; I fly like a seed to Italy. Let me drill, and take sharp words, and fret at trifles! I lift my face to that prospect as if I smelt new air. I am changeing—I have no dreams of Italy, no longings, but go to see her like a machine ready to do my work. Whoever speaks to me, I feel that I look at them and know them. I see the faults of my country—Oh, beloved Breseians! not yours, Florentines! nor yours, dear Venice! We will be silent when they speak of the Milanese, till Italy can say to them, 'That conduct is not Italian, my children.' I see the faults. Nothing vexes me.

"Addio! My friend, we will speak English in dear England! Tell all that I shall never forget England! My English Merthyr! the blood you have shed is not for a woman. The blood that you have shed, laurels spring from it! For a woman, the blood spilt is sickly and poor, and nourishes nothing. I shudder at the thought of one we knew. He makes Love seem like a yellow light over a plague-spotted city, like a painting I have seen. Goodbye to the name of Love for three years! My engagement to Mr. Pericles is that I am not to write, not to receive letters. To you I say now, trust me for three years! Merthyr's answer is already in my bosom. Beloved!—let me say it once—when the answer to any noble thing I might ask of you is in my bosom instantly, is not that as much as marriage? But be under no deception. See me as I am. Oh, good-bye! good-bye! Good-bye to you! Good-bye to England!

"I am,

"Most humbly and affectionately,

"Your friend,

"And her daughter by the mother's side,

"Emilia Alessandra Belloni."

THE END

Freeeditorial 