Superseded

By

May Sinclair

Freeditorial

SUPERSEDED

CHAPTER I

Prologue.—Miss Quincey Stops the Way

"Stand back, Miss Quincey, if you please."

The school was filing out along the main corridor of St. Sidwell's. It came with a tramp and a rustle and a hiss and a tramp, urged to a trot by the excited teachers. The First Division first, half-woman, carrying itself smoothly, with a swish of its long skirts, with a blush, a dreamy intellectual smile, or a steadfast impenetrable air, as it happened to be more or less conscious of the presence of the Head. Then the Second Division, light-hearted, irrepressible, making a noise with its feet, loose hair flapping, pig-tails flopping to the beat of its march. Then the straggling, diminishing lines of the Third, a froth of white pinafores, a confusion of legs, black or tan, staggering, shifting, shuffling in a frantic effort to keep time.

On it came in a waving stream; a stream that flickered with innumerable eyes, a stream that rippled with the wind of its own flowing, that flushed and paled and brightened as some flower-face was tossed upwards, or some crest, flame-coloured or golden, flung back the light. A stream that was one in its rhythm and in the sex that was its soul, obscurely or luminously feminine; it might have been a single living thing that throbbed and undulated, as girl after girl gave out the radiance and pulsation of her youth. The effect was overpowering; your senses judged St. Sidwell's by these brilliant types that gave life and colour to the stream. The rest were nowhere.

So at least it seemed to Miss Cursiter, the Head. That tall, lean, iron-grey Dignity stood at the cross junction of two corridors, talking to Miss Rhoda Vivian, the new Classical Mistress. And while she talked she watched her girls as a general watches his columns wheeling into action. A dangerous spot that meeting of the corridors. There the procession doubles the corner at a swinging curve, and there, time it as she would, the little arithmetic

teacher was doomed to fall foul of the procession. Daily Miss Quincey thought to dodge the line; daily it caught her at the disastrous corner. Then Miss Quincey, desperate under the eye of the Head, would try to rush the thing, with ridiculous results. And Fate or the Order of the day contrived that Miss Cursiter should always be there to witness her confusion. Nothing escaped Miss Cursiter; if her face grew tender for the young girls and the eight-year-olds, at the sight of Miss Quincey it stiffened into tolerance, cynically braced to bear. Miss Cursiter had an eye for magnificence of effect, and the unseemly impact of Miss Quincey was apt to throw the lines into disorder, demoralising the younger units and ruining the spectacle as a whole. To-day it made the new Classical Mistress smile, and somehow that smile annoyed Miss Cursiter.

She, Miss Quincey, was a little dry, brown woman, with a soft pinched mouth, and a dejected nose. So small and insignificant was she that she might have crept along for ever unnoticed but for her punctuality in obstruction. As St. Sidwell's prided itself on the brilliance and efficiency of its staff, the wonder was how Miss Quincey came to be there, but there she had been for five-and-twenty years. She seemed to have stiffened into her place. Five-and-twenty years ago she had been arithmetic teacher, vaguely attached to the Second Division, and she was arithmetic teacher still. Miss Quincey was going on for fifty; she had out-lived the old Head, and now she was the oldest teacher there, twice as old as Miss Vivian, the new Classical Mistress, older, far older than Miss Cursiter. She had found her way into St. Sidwell's, not because she was brilliant or efficient, but because her younger sister Louisa already held an important post there.

Louisa was brilliant and efficient enough for anybody, so brilliant and so efficient that the glory of it rested on her family. And when she married the Greek master and went away Juliana stayed on as a matter of course, wearing a second-hand aureole of scholarship and supporting a tradition.

She stayed on and taught arithmetic for one thing. And when she was not teaching arithmetic, she was giving little dictations, setting little themes,

controlling some fifty young and very free translators of Le Philosophe sous les Toils. Miss Quincey had a passion for figures and for everything that could be expressed in figures. Not a pure passion, nothing to do with the higher mathematics, which is the love of the soul, but an affection sadly alloyed with baser matter, with rods and perches, firkins and hogsheads, and articles out of the grocer's shop.

Among these objects Miss Quincey's imagination ran voluptuous riot. But upon such things as history or poetry she had a somewhat blighting influence. The flowers in the school Anthology withered under her fingers, and the flesh and blood of heroes crumbled into the dust of dates. As for the philosopher under the roofs, who he was, and what was his philosophy, and how he ever came to be under the roofs at all, nobody in St. Sidwell's ever knew or ever cared to know; Miss Quincey had made him eternally uninteresting. Yet Miss Quincey's strength was in her limitations. It was the strength of unreasoning but undying conviction. Nothing could shake her belief in the supreme importance of arithmetic and the majesty of its elementary rules. Pale and persistent and intolerably meek, she hammered hard facts into the brain with a sort of muffled stroke, hammered till the hardest stuck by reason of their hardness, for she was a teacher of the old school. Thus in her own way she made her mark. Among the other cyphers, the irrelevant and insignificant figure of Miss Quincey was indelibly engraved on many an immortal soul. There was a curious persistency about Miss Quincey.

Miss Quincey was not exactly popular. The younger teachers pronounced her cut and dried; for dryness, conscientiously acquired, passed for her natural condition. Nobody knew that it cost her much effort and industry to be so stiff and starched; that the starch had to be put on fresh every morning; that it was quite a business getting up her limp little personality for the day. In five-and-twenty years, owing to an incurable malady of shyness, she had never made friends with any of her pupils.

Her one exception proved her rule. Miss Quincey seemed to have gone out of her way to attract that odious little Laura Lazarus, who was known at St. Sidwell's as the Mad Hatter. At fourteen, being still incapable of adding two and two together, the Mad Hatter had been told off into an idiot's class by herself for arithmetic; and Miss Quincey, because she was so meek and patient and persistent, was told off to teach her. The child, a queer, ugly little pariah, half-Jew, half-Cockney, held all other girls in abhorrence, and was avoided by them with an equal loathing. She seemed to have attached herself to the unpopular teacher out of sheer perversity and malignant contempt of public opinion. Abandoned in their corner, with their heads bent together over the sums, the two outsiders clung to each other in a common misery and isolation.

Miss Quincey was well aware that she was of no account at St. Sidwell's. She supposed that it was because she had never taken her degree. To be sure she had never tried to take it; but it was by no means certain that she could have taken it if she had tried. She was not clever; Louisa had carried off all the brains and the honours of the family. It had been considered unnecessary for Juliana to develop an individuality of her own; enough for her that she belonged to Louisa, and was known as Louisa's sister. Louisa's sister was a part of Louisa; Louisa was a part of St. Sidwell's College, Regent's Park; and St. Sidwell's College, Regent's Park, was a part—no, St. Sidwell's was the whole; it was the glorious world. Miss Quincey had never seen, or even desired to see any other. That college was to her a place of exquisite order and light. Light that was filtered through the high tilted windows, and reflected from a prevailing background of green tiles and honey-white pine, from countless rows of shining desks and from hundreds of young faces. Light, the light of ideas, that streamed from the platform in the great hall where three times in the year Miss Cursiter gave her address to the students and teachers of St. Sidwell's.

Now Miss Cursiter was a pioneer at war with the past, a woman of vast ambitions, a woman with a system and an end; and she chose her

instruments finely, toiling early and late to increase their brilliance and efficiency. She was new to St. Sidwell's, and would have liked to make a clean sweep of the old staff and to fill their places with women like Rhoda Vivian, young and magnificent and strong. As it was, she had been weeding them out gradually, as opportunity arose; and the new staff, modern to its finger-tips, was all but complete and perfect now. Only Miss Quincey remained. St. Sidwell's in the weeding time had not been a bed of roses for Miss Cursiter, and Miss Quincey, blameless but incompetent, was a thorn in her side, a thorn that stuck. Impossible to remove Miss Quincey quickly, she was so very blameless and she worked so hard.

She worked from nine till one in the morning, from two-thirty till four-thirty in the afternoon, and from six-thirty in the evening till any hour in the night. She worked with the desperate zeal of the superseded who knows that she holds her post on sufferance, the terrified tenacity of the middle-aged who feels behind her the swift-footed rivalry of youth. And the more she worked the more she annoyed Miss Cursiter.

So now, above all the tramping and shuffling and hissing, you heard the self-restrained and slightly metallic utterance of the Head.

"Stand back, Miss Quincey, if you please."

And Miss Quincey stood back, flattening herself against the wall, and the procession passed her by, rosy, resonant, exulting, a triumph of life.

CHAPTER II

Household Gods

Punctually at four-thirty Miss Quincey vanished from the light of St. Sidwell's, Regent's Park, into the obscurity of Camden Town. Camden Town is full of little houses standing back in side streets, houses with porticoed front doors monstrously disproportioned to their size. Nobody ever knocks at those front doors; nobody ever passes down those side streets if they can possibly help it. The houses are all exactly alike; they melt and merge into each other in dingy perspective, each with its slag-bordered six foot of garden uttering a faint suburban protest against the advances of the pavement. Miss Quincey lived in half of one of them (number ninety, Camden Street North) with her old aunt Mrs. Moon and their old servant Martha. She had lived there five-and-twenty years, ever since the death of her uncle.

Tollington Moon had been what his family called unfortunate; that is to say, he had mislaid the greater portion of his wife's money and the whole of Juliana's and Louisa's; he, poor fellow, had none of his own to lose. Uncle Tollington, being the only male representative of the family, had been appointed to drive the family coach. He was a genial good-natured fellow and he cheerfully agreed, declaring that there was nothing in the world he liked better than driving; though indeed he had had but little practice in the art. So they started with a splendid flourishing of whips and blowing of horns; Tollington driving at a furious break-neck pace in a manner highly diverting and exhilarating to the ladies inside. The girls (they were girls in those days) sat tight and felt no fear, while Mrs. Moon, with her teeth shaking, explained to them the advantages of having so expert a driver on the box seat. Of course there came the inevitable smash at the corner. The three climbed out of that coach more dead than alive; but they uttered no complaints; they had had their fun; and in accidents of this kind the poor driver generally gets the worst of it.

Mrs. Moon at any rate found consolation in disaster by steadily ignoring its most humiliating features. Secure in the new majesty of her widowhood, she faced her nieces with an unflinching air and demanded of them eternal belief in the wisdom and rectitude of their uncle Tollington. She hoped that they would never forget him, never forget what he had to bear, never forget all he had done for them. Her attitude reduced Juliana to tears; in Louisa it roused the instinct of revolt, and Louisa was for separating from Mrs. Moon. It was then, in her first difference from Louisa, that Miss Quincey's tender and foolish little face acquired its strangely persistent air. Hitherto the elder had served the younger; now she took her stand. She said, "Whatever we do, we must keep together"; and she professed her willingness to believe in her uncle Tollington and remember him for ever.

To this Louisa, who prided herself on speaking the truth or at any rate her mind, replied that she wasn't likely to forget him in a hurry; that her uncle Tollington had ruined her life, and she did not want to be reminded of him any more than she could help. Moreover, she found her aunt Moon's society depressing. She meant to get on and be independent; and she advised Juliana to do the same.

Juliana did not press the point, for it was a delicate one, seeing that Louisa was earning a hundred and twenty pounds a year and she but eighty. So she added her eighty pounds to her aunt's eighty and went to live with her in Camden Street North, while Louisa shrugged her shoulders and carried herself and her salary elsewhere.

There was very little room for Mrs. Moon and Juliana at number ninety. The poor souls had crowded themselves out with relics of their past, a pathetic salvage, dragged hap-hazard from the wreck in the first frenzy of preservation. Dreadful things in marble and gilt and in papier-maché inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, rickety work tables with pouches underneath them, banner-screens in silk and footstools in Berlin wool-work fought with each other and with Juliana for standing-room. For Juliana, with her genius for collision, was always knocking up against them, always getting

in their way. In return, Juliana's place at an oblique angle of the fireside was disputed by a truculent cabinet with bandy legs. There was a never-ending quarrel between Juliana and that piece of furniture, in which Mrs. Moon took the part of the furniture. Her own world had shrunk to a square yard between the window and the fire. There she sat and dreamed among her household gods, smiling now and then under the spell of the dream, or watched her companion with critical disapproval. She had accepted Juliana's devotion as a proper sacrifice to the gods; but for Juliana, or Louisa for the matter of that, she seemed to have but little affection. If anything Louisa was her favourite. Louisa was better company, to begin with; and Louisa, with her cleverness and her salary and her general air of indifference and prosperity, raised no questions. Besides, Louisa was married.

But Juliana, toiling from morning till night for her eighty pounds a year; Juliana, painful and persistent, growing into middle-age without a hope, Juliana was an incarnate reproach, a perpetual monument to the folly of Tollington Moon. Juliana disturbed her dream.

But nobody else disturbed it, for nobody ever came to their half of the house in Camden Street North. Louisa used to come and go in a brief perfunctory manner; but Louisa had married the Greek professor and gone away for good, and her friends at St. Sidwell's were not likely to waste their time in cultivating Juliana and Mrs. Moon. The thing had been tried by one or two of the younger teachers who went in for all-round self-development and were getting up the minor virtues. But they had met with no encouragement and they had ceased to come. Then nobody came; not even the doctor or the clergyman. The two ladies were of one mind on that point; it was convenient for them to ignore their trifling ailments, spiritual or bodily. And as soon as they saw that the world renounced them they adopted a lofty tone and said to each other that they had renounced the world. For they were proud, Mrs. Moon especially so. Tollington Moon had married slightly, ever so slightly beneath him, the Moons again

marking a faint descent from the standing of the Quinceys. But the old lady had completely identified herself, not only with the Moons, but with the higher branch, which she always spoke of as "my family." In fact she had worn her connection with the Quinceys as a feather in her cap so long that the feather had grown, as it were, into an entire bird of paradise. And once a bird of paradise, always a bird of paradise, though it had turned on the world a somewhat dilapidated tail.

So the two lived on together; so they had always lived. Mrs. Moon was an old woman before she was five-and-fifty; and before she was five-and-twenty Juliana's youth had withered away in the sour and sordid atmosphere born of perishing gentility and acrid personal remark. And their household gods looked down on them, miniatures and silhouettes of Moons and Quinceys, calm and somewhat contemptuous presences. From the post of honour above the mantelshelf, Tollington, attired as an Early Victorian dandy, splendid in velvet waistcoat, scarf and chain-pin, leaned on a broken column symbolical of his fortunes, and smiled genially on the ruin he had made.

That was how Miss Quincey came to St. Sidwell's. And now she was five-and-forty; she had always been five-and-forty; that is to say, she had never been young, for to be young you must be happy. And this was so far an advantage, that when middle-age came on her she felt no difference.

CHAPTER III

Inaugural Addresses

It was evening, early in the winter term, and Miss Cursiter was giving her usual inaugural address to the staff. Their number had increased so considerably that the little class-room was packed to overflowing. Miss Cursiter stood in the free space at the end, facing six rows of eager faces arranged in the form of a horse-shoe. She looked upon them and smiled; she joyed with the joy of the creator who sees his idea incarnate before him.

A striking figure, Miss Cursiter. Tall, academic and austere; a keen eagle head crowned with a mass of iron-grey hair; grey-black eyes burning under a brow of ashen grey; an intelligence fervent with fire of the enthusiast, cold with the renunciant's frost. Such was Miss Cursiter. She was in splendid force to-day, grappling like an athlete with her enormous theme—"The Educational Advantages of General Culture." She delivered her address with an utterance rapid but distinct, keeping one eye on the reporter and the other on Miss Rhoda Vivian, M.A.

She might well look to Rhoda Vivian. If she had needed a foil for her own commanding personality, she had found it there. But the new Classical Mistress was something more than Miss Cursiter's complement. Nature, usually so economical, not to say parsimonious, seemed to have made her for her own delight, in a fit of reckless extravagance. She had given her a brilliant and efficient mind in a still more brilliant and efficient body, clothed her in all the colours of life; made her a creature of ardent and elemental beauty. Rhoda Vivian had brown hair with sparkles of gold in it and flakes of red fire; her eyes were liquid grey, the grey of water; her lips were full, and they pouted a little proudly; it was the pride of life. And she had other gifts which did not yet appear at St. Sidwell's. There was something about her still plastic and unformed; you could not say whether it was the youth of genius, or only the genius of youth. But at three-and-twenty she had chosen her path, and gone far on it, and it had been honours all the way. She went up and down at St. Sidwell's, adored and

unadoring, kindling the fire of a secret worship. In any other place, with any other woman at the head of it, such a vivid individuality might have proved fatal to her progress. But Miss Cursiter was too original herself not to perceive the fine uses of originality. All her hopes for the future were centred in Rhoda Vivian. She looked below that brilliant surface and saw in her the ideal leader of young womanhood. Rhoda was a force that could strike fire from a stone; what she wanted she was certain to get; she seemed to compel work from the laziest and intelligence from the dullest by the mere word of her will. What was more, her nature was too large for vanity; she held her worshippers at arm's length and consecrated her power of personal seduction to strictly intellectual ends. At the end of her first term her position was second only to the Head. If Miss Cursiter was the will and intelligence of St. Sidwell's, Rhoda Vivian was its subtle poetry and its soul. And Miss Cursiter meant to keep her there; being a woman who made all sacrifices and demanded them.

So now, while Miss Cursiter stood explaining, ostensibly to the entire staff, the unique advantages of General Culture, it was to Rhoda Vivian as to a supreme audience that she addressed her deeper thought and her finer phrase. If Miss Cursiter had not had to consult her notes now and again, she must have seen that Rhoda Vivian's mind was wandering, that the Classical Mistress was if anything more interested in her companions than in the noble utterances of the Head. As her grey eyes swept the tiers of faces, they lingered on that corner where Miss Quincey seemed perpetually striving to suppress, consume, and utterly obliterate herself. And each time she smiled, as she had smiled earlier in the day when first she saw Miss Quincey.

For Miss Quincey was there, far back in the ranks of the brilliant and efficient. Note-book on desk, she followed the quick march of thought with a fatigued and stumbling brain. She was painfully, ludicrously out of step; yet to judge by the light that shone now and then in her eyes, by the smile that played about the corners of her weak, tender mouth, she too had

caught the sympathetic rapture, the intellectual thrill. Ready to drop was Miss Quincey, but she would not have missed that illuminating hour, not if you had paid her—three times her salary. It was her one glimpse of the larger life; her one point of contact with the ideal. Her pencil staggered over her note-book as Miss Cursiter flamed and lightened in her peroration.

"We have looked at our subject in the light of the ideals by which and for which we live. Let us now turn to the practical side of the matter, as it touches our business and our bosoms. Do not say we have no room for poetry in our crowded days." A score of weary heads looked up; there was a vague inquiry in all eyes. "You have your evenings—all of you. Much can be done with evenings; if your training has done nothing else for you it has taught you the economy of time. You are tired in the evenings, yes. But the poets, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Browning, are the great healers and regenerators of worn-out humanity. When you are faint and weary with your day's work, the best thing you can do is to rise and refresh yourselves at the living wells of literature."

Long before the closing sentence Miss Quincey's MS. had become a sightless blur. But she had managed to jot down in her neat arithmetical way: "Poets = healers and regenerators."

The address was printed and a copy was given to each member of the staff.

Miss Quincey treasured up hers as a priceless scripture.

Miss Quincey was aware of her shortcomings and had struggled hard to mend them, toiling pantingly after those younger ones who had attained the standard of brilliance and efficiency. She joined the Teachers' Debating Society. Not that she debated. She had once put some elementary questions in an inaudible voice, and had been requested to speak a little louder, whereupon she sank into her seat and spoke no more. But she heard a great deal. About the emancipation of women; about the women's labour market; about the doors that were now thrown open to women. She was told that all they wanted was a fair field and no favour. (The speaker, a

rosy-cheeked child of one-and-twenty, was quite violent in her repudiation of favour.) And Miss Quincey believed it all, though she understood very little about it.

But it was illumination, a new gospel to her, this doctrine of General Culture; it was the large easy-fitting formula which she had seemed to need. With touching simplicity she determined to follow the course recommended by the Head. Though by the time she had corrected some seventy manuscripts in marble-backed covers, and prepared her lesson for the next day, she had nothing but the fag-end of her brain to give to the healers and regenerators; as for rising, Miss Quincey felt much more like going to bed, and it was as much as she could do to drag her poor little body there. Still Miss Quincey was nothing if not heroic; night after night twelve o'clock would find her painfully trying to draw water from the wells of literature. She had begun upon Browning; set herself to read through the whole of Sordello from beginning to end. It is as easy as a sum in arithmetic if you don't bother your head too much about the Guelphs and Ghibellines and the metaphors and things, and if you take it in short fits, say three pages every evening. Never any more, or you might go to sleep and forget all about it; never any less, or you would have bad arrears. As there are exactly two hundred and thirteen pages, she calculated that she would finish it in ten weeks and a day. There was no place for Miss Quincey and her pile of marble-backed exercise-books in the dim and dingy first-floor drawing-room (Mrs. Moon and the bandy-legged cabinet would have had something to say to that). All this terrific intellectual travail went on in a dimmer and dingier dining-room beneath it.

Then one night, old Martha, disturbed by sounds that came from Miss Juliana's bedroom, groped her way fumblingly in and found Miss Juliana sitting up in her sleep and posing the darkness with a problem.

"If," said Miss Juliana, "three men can finish one hundred and nineteen hogsheads of Browning in eight weeks, how long will it take seven women

to finish a thousand and forty-five—forty-five—forty-five, if one woman works twice as hard as eleven men?"

Martha shook her head and went fumbling back to bed again; and being a conscientious servant she said nothing about it for fear of frightening the old lady.

About a fortnight later, Rhoda Vivian, sailing down the corridor, came upon the little arithmetic teacher all sick and tremulous, leaning up against the hot-water pipes beside a pile of exercise-books. The sweat streamed from her sallow forehead, and her face was white and drawn. She could give no rational account of herself, but offered two hypotheses as equally satisfactory; either she had taken a bad chill, or else the hot air from the water-pipes had turned her faint. Rhoda picked up the pile of exercise-books and led her into the dressing-room, and Miss Quincey was docile and ridiculously grateful. She was glad that Miss Vivian was going to take her home. She even smiled her little pinched smile and pressed Rhoda's hand as she said, "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Rhoda would have given anything to be able to return the pressure and the sentiment, but Rhoda was too desperately sincere. She was sorry for Miss Quincey; but all her youth, unfettered and unfeeling, revolted from the bond of friendship. So she only stooped and laced up the shabby boots, and fastened the thin cape by its solitary button. The touch of Miss Quincey's clothes thrilled her with a pang of pity, and she could have wept over the unutterable pathos of her hat. In form and substance it was a rock, beaten by the weather; its limp ribbons clung to it like seaweed washed up and abandoned by the tide. When Miss Quincey's head was inside it the hat seemed to become one with Miss Quincey; you could not conceive anything more melancholy and forlorn. Rhoda was beautifully attired in pale grey cloth. Rhoda wore golden sables about her throat, and a big black Gainsborough hat on the top of her head, a hat that Miss Quincey would have thought a little daring and theatrical on anybody else; but Rhoda wore it and looked like a

Puritan princess. Rhoda's clothes were enough to show that she was a woman for whom a profession is a superfluity, a luxury.

Rhoda sent for a hansom, and having left Miss Quincey at her home went off in search of a doctor. She had insisted on a doctor, in spite of Miss Quincey's protestations. After exploring a dozen dingy streets and conceiving a deep disgust for Camden Town, she walked back to find her man in the neighbourhood of St. Sidwell's.

CHAPTER IV

Bastian Cautley, M.D.

It was half-past five and Dr. Bastian Cautley had put on his house jacket, loosened his waistcoat, settled down by his library fire with a pipe and a book, and was thanking Heaven that for once he had an hour to himself between his afternoon round and his time for consultation. He had been working hard ever since nine o'clock in the morning; but now nobody could have looked more superlatively lazy than Bastian Cautley as he stretched himself on two armchairs in an attitude of reckless ease. His very intellect (the most unrestful part of him) was at rest; all his weary being merged in a confused voluptuous sensation, a beatific state in which smoking became a higher kind of thinking, and thought betrayed an increasing tendency to end in smoke. The room was double-walled with book-shelves, and but for the far away underground humming of a happy maidservant the house was soundless. He rejoiced to think that there was not a soul in it above stairs to disturb his deep tranquility. At six o'clock he would have to take his legs off that chair, and get into a frock-coat; once in the frock-coat he would become another man, all patience and politeness. After six there would be no pipe and no peace for him, but the knocking and ringing at his front door would go on incessantly till seven-thirty. There was flattery in every knock, for it meant that Dr. Cautley was growing eminent, and that at the ridiculously early age of nine-and-twenty.

There was a sharp ring now. He turned wearily in his chairs.

"There's another damned patient," said Dr. Cautley.

He was really so eminent that he could afford to think blasphemously of patients; and he had no love for those who came to consult him before their time. He sat up with his irritable nerves on edge. The servant was certainly letting somebody in, and from the soft rustling sounds in the hall he gathered that somebody was a woman; much patience and much politeness would then be required of him, and he was feeling anything but patient and polite.

"Miss Rhoda Vivian" was the name on the card that was brought to him. He did not know Miss Rhoda Vivian.

The gas-jets were turned low in the consulting-room; when he raised them he saw a beautiful woman standing by the fire in an attitude of impatience. He had kept her waiting; and it seemed that this adorable person knew the value of time. She was not going to waste words either. As it was impossible to associate her with the ordinary business of the place, he was prepared for her terse and lucid statement of somebody else's case. He said he would look round early in the morning (Miss Vivian looked dissatisfied); or perhaps that evening (Miss Vivian was dubious); or possibly at once (Miss Vivian smiled in hurried approval). She was eager to be gone. And when she had gone he stood deliberating. Miss Quincey was a pathological abstraction, Miss Vivian was a radiant reality; it was clear that Miss Quincey was not urgent, and that once safe in her bed she could very well wait till to-morrow; but when he thought of Miss Vivian he became impressed with the gravity and interest of Miss Quincey's case.

While the doctor was making up his mind, little Miss Quincey, in her shabby back bedroom, lay waiting for him, trembling, fretting her nerves into a fever, starting at imaginary footsteps, and entertaining all kinds of dismal possibilities. She was convinced that she was going to die, or worse still, to break down, to be a perpetual invalid. She thought of several likely illnesses, beginning with general paralysis and ending with anemia of the brain. It might be anemia of the brain, but she rather thought it would be general paralysis, because this would be so much the more disagreeable of the two. Anyhow Rhoda Vivian must have thought she was pretty bad or she would not have called in a doctor. To call in a doctor seemed to Miss Quincey next door to invoking Providence itself; it was the final desperate resort, implying catastrophe and the end of all things. Oh, dear! Miss Quincey wished he would come up if he was coming, and get it over.

After all he did not keep her waiting long, and it was over in five minutes. And yet it was amazing the amount of observation, and insight, and solid

concentrated thought the young man contrived to pack into those five minutes.

Well—it seemed that it was not general paralysis this time, nor yet anemia of the brain; but he could tell her more about it in the morning. Meanwhile she had nothing to do but to do what he told her and stay where she was till he saw her again. And he was gone before she realized that he had been there.

Again? So he was coming again, was he? Miss Quincey did not know whether to be glad or sorry. His presence had given her a rare and curiously agreeable sense of protection, but she had to think of the expense. She had to think too of what Mrs. Moon would say to it—of what she would say to him.

Mrs. Moon had a good deal to say to it. She took Juliana's illness as a personal affront, as a deliberate back-handed blow struck at the memory of Tollington Moon. With all the base implications of her daily acts, Juliana had never attempted anything like this.

"Capers and nonsense," she said, "Juliana has never had an illness in her life."

She said it to Rhoda Vivian, the bold young person who had taken upon herself to bring the doctor into the house. Mrs. Moon spoke of the doctor as if he was a disease.

Fortunately Miss Vivian was by when he endured the first terrifying encounter. Her manner suggested that she took him under her protection, stood between him and some unfathomable hostility.

He found the Old Lady disentangling herself with immense dignity from her maze of furniture. Mrs. Moon was a small woman shrunk with her eighty years, shrunk almost to extinction in her black woollen gown and black woollen mittens. Her very face seemed to be vanishing under the immense shadow of her black net cap. Spirals of thin grey hair stuck flat to her forehead; she wore other and similar spirals enclosed behind glass in

an enormous brooch; it was the hair of her ancestors, that is to say of the Quinceys. As the Old Lady looked at Cautley her little black eyes burned like pinpoints pierced in a paste-board mask.

"I think you've been brought here on a wild goose chase, doctor," said she, "there is nothing the matter with my niece."

He replied (battling sternly with his desire to laugh) that he would be delighted if it were so; adding that a wild goose chase was the sport he preferred to any other.

Here he looked at Miss Vivian to the imminent peril of his self-control. Mrs. Moon's gaze had embraced them in a common condemnation, and the subtle sympathy of their youth linked them closer and made them one in their intimate appreciation of her.

"Then you must be a very singular young man. I thought you doctors were never happy until you'd found some mare's nest in people's constitutions? You'd much better let well alone."

"Miss Quincey is very far from well," said Cautley with recovered gravity, "and I rather fancy she has been let alone too long."

Cautley thought that he had said quite enough to alarm any old lady. And indeed Mrs. Moon was slowly taking in the idea of disaster, and it sent her poor wits wandering in the past. Her voice sank suddenly from grating; antagonism to pensive garrulity.

"I've no faith in medicine," she quavered, "nor in medical men either. Though to be sure my husband had a brother-in-law once on his wife's side, Dr. Quincey, Dr. Arnold Quincey, Juliana's father and Louisa's. He was a medical man. He wrote a book, I daresay you've heard of it; Quincey on Diseases of the Heart it was. But he's dead now, of one of 'em, poor man. We haven't seen a doctor for five-and-twenty years."

"Then isn't it almost time that you should see one now?" said he, cheerfully taking his leave. "I shall look round again in the morning."

He looked round again in the morning and sat half an hour with Miss Quincey; so she had time to take a good look at him.

He was very nice to look at, this young man. He was so clean-cut and tall and muscular; he had such an intellectual forehead; his mouth was so firm, you could trust it to tell no secrets; and his eyes (they were dark and deep set) looked as if they saw nothing but Miss Quincey. Indeed, at the moment he had forgotten all about Rhoda Vivian, and did see nothing but the little figure in the bed looking more like a rather worn and wizened child than a middle-aged woman. He was very gentle and sympathetic; but for that his youth would have been terrible to her. As it was, Miss Quincey felt a little bit in awe of this clever doctor, who in spite of his cleverness looked so young, and not only so young but so formidably fastidious and refined. She had not expected him to look like that. All the clever young men she had met had displayed a noble contempt for appearances. To be sure, Miss Quincey knew but little of the world of men; for at St. Sidwell's the types were limited to three little eccentric professors, and the plaster gods in the art studio. But for the gods she might just as well have lived in a nunnery, for whenever Miss Quincey thought of a man she thought of something like Louisa's husband, Andrew Mackinnon, who spoke with a strong Scotch accent, and wore flannel shirts with celluloid collars, and coats that hung about him all anyhow. But Dr. Cautley was not in the least like Andrew Mackinnon. He had a distinguished voice; his clothes fitted him to perfection; and his linen, irreproachable itself, reproved her silently.

Her eyes left him suddenly and wandered about the room. She was full of little tremors and agitations; she wished that the towels wouldn't look so much like dish-cloths; she credited him with powers of microscopic observation, and wondered if he had noticed the stain on the carpet and the dust on the book-shelves, and if he would be likely to mistake the quinine tabloids for vulgar liver pills, or her bottle of hair-wash for hair-dye. Once released from its unnatural labours, her mind returned instinctively to the trivial as to its home. She glanced at her hat, perched

conspicuously on the knob of the looking-glass, and a dim sense of its imperfections came over her and vanished as it came. Then she tried to compose herself for the verdict.

It did not come all at once. First of all he asked her a great many questions about herself and her family, whereupon she gave him a complete pathological story of the Moons and Quinceys. And all the time he looked so hard at her that it was quite embarrassing. His eyes seemed to be taking her in (no other eyes had ever performed that act of hospitality for Miss Quincey). He pulled out a little book from his pocket and made notes of everything she said; Miss Quincey's biography was written in that little book (you may be sure nobody else had ever thought of writing it). And when he had finished the biography he talked to her about her work (nobody else had ever been the least interested in Miss Quincey's work). Then Miss Quincey sat up in bed and became lyrical as she described the delirious joy of decimals—recurring decimals—and the rapture of cube-root. She herself had never got farther than cube-root; but it was enough. Beyond that, she hinted, lay the infinite. And Dr. Cautley laughed at her defence of the noble science. Oh yes, he could understand its fascination, its irresistible appeal to the emotions; he only wished to remind her that it was the most debilitating study in the world. He refused to commit himself to any opinion as to the original strength and magnitude of Miss Quincey's brain; he could only assure her that the most powerful intellect in the world would break down if you kept it perpetually doing sums in arithmetic. It was the monotony of the thing, you see; year after year Miss Quincey had been ploughing up the same little patch of brain. No, certainly not—she mustn't think of going back to St. Sidwell's for another three months.

Three months! Impossible! It was a whole term.

Dr. Cautley scowled horribly and said that if she was ever to be fit for cube-root and decimals again, she positively and absolutely must. Whereupon Miss Quincey gave way to emotion.

To leave St. Sidwell's, abandon her post for three months, she who had never been absent for a day! If she did that it would be all up with Miss Quincey; a hundred eager applicants were ready to fill her empty place. It was as if she heard the hungry, leaping pack behind her, the strong young animals trained for the chase; they came tearing on the scent, hunting her, treading her down.

When Rhoda Vivian looked in after morning school, she found a flushed and embarrassed young man trying to soothe Miss Quincey, who paid not the least attention to him; she seemed to have shrunk into her bed, and lay there staring with dilated eyes like a hare crouched flat and trembling in her form. From the other side of the bed Dr. Cautley's helpless and desperate smile claimed Rhoda as his ally. It seemed to say, "For God's sake take my part against this unreasonable woman."

Now no one (not even Miss Quincey) could realize the insecurity of Miss Quincey's position better than Rhoda, who was fathoms deep in the confidence of the Head. She happened to know that Miss Cursiter was only waiting for an opportunity like this to rid herself for ever of the little obstructive. She knew too that once they had ceased to fill their particular notch in it, the world had no further use for people like Miss Quincey; that she, Rhoda Vivian, belonged to the new race whose eternal destiny was to precipitate their doom. It was the first time that Rhoda had thought of it in that light; the first time indeed that she had greatly concerned herself with any career beside her own. She sat for a few minutes talking to Miss Quincey and thinking as she talked. Perhaps she was wondering how she would like to be forty-five and incompetent; to be overtaken on the terrible middle-way; to feel the hurrying generations after her, their breath on her shoulders, their feet on her heels; to have no hope; to see Mrs. Moon sitting before her, immovable and symbolic, the image of what she must become. They were two very absurd and diminutive figures, but they stood for a good deal.

To Cautley, Rhoda herself as she revolved these things looked significant enough. Leaning forward, one elbow bent on her knee, her chin propped on her hand, her lips pouting, her forehead knit, she might have been a young and passionate Pallas, brooding tempestuously on the world.

"Miss Vivian is on my side, I see. I'll leave her to do the fighting."

And he left her.

Rhoda's first movement was to capture Miss Quincey's hand as it wildly reconnoitred for a pocket handkerchief among the pillows.

"Don't worry about it," she said, "I'll speak to Miss Cursiter."

Dr. Cautley, enduring a perfunctory five minutes with Mrs. Moon, could hear Miss Vivian running downstairs and the front door opening and closing upon her. With a little haste and discretion he managed to overtake her before she had gone very far. He stopped to give his verdict on her friend.

She had expected him.

"Well," she asked, "it is overwork, isn't it?"

"Very much overwork; and no wonder. I knew she was a St. Sidwell's woman as soon as I saw her."

"That was clever of you. And do you always know a St. Sidwell's woman when you see one?"

"I do; they all go like this, more or less. It seems to me that St. Sidwell's sacrifices its women to its girls, and its girls to itself. I don't imagine you've much to do with the place, so you won't mind my saying so."

Rhoda smiled a little maliciously.

"You seem to take a great deal for granted. As it happens I am Classical

Mistress there."

Dr. Cautley looked at her and bit his lip. He was annoyed with himself for his blunder and with her for being anything but Rhoda Vivian—pure and simple.

Rhoda laughed frankly at his confusion.

"Never mind. Appearances are deceitful. I'm glad I don't look like it."

"You certainly do not. Still, Miss Quincey is a warning to anybody."

"She? She was never fit for the life."

"No. Your race is to the swift and your battle to the strong."

He was still looking at her as he spoke. She was looking straight before her, her nostrils slightly distended, her grey eyes wide, as if she sniffed the battle, saw the goal.

"We must make her strong," said he.

She had quickened her pace as if under a renewed impulse of energy and will. Suddenly at the door of the College she stopped and held out her hand.

"You will look after her well, will you not?" Her voice was resonant on the note of appeal.

Now you could withstand Rhoda in her domineering mood if you were strong enough and cool enough; but when she looked straight through your eyes in that way she was irresistible. Cautley did not attempt to resist her.

He went on his way thinking how intolerable the question might have been in some one else's mouth; how suggestive of impertinent coquetry, the beautiful woman's assumption that he would do for her what he would not do for insignificant Miss Quincey. She had taken it for granted that his interest in Miss Quincey was supreme.

CHAPTER V

Healers and Regenerators

Rhoda had spoken to Miss Cursiter. Nobody ever knew what she said to her, but the next day Miss Cursiter's secretary had the pleasure to inform Miss Quincey that she would have leave of absence for three months, and that her place would be kept for her.

Miss Quincey had become a person of importance. Old Martha fumbled about, unnaturally attentive, even Mrs. Moon acknowledged Juliana's right to be ill if her foolish mind were set on it. There was nothing active or spontaneous in the Old Lady's dislike of her niece, it was simply a habit she had got.

An agreeable sense of her dignity stole in on the little woman of no account. She knew and everybody knew that hers was no vulgar illness. It was brain exhaustion; altogether a noble and transcendental affair; Miss Quincey was a victim of the intellectual life. In all the five-and-twenty years she had worked there St. Sidwell's had never heard so much about Miss Quincey's brain. And on her part Miss Quincey was surprised to find that she had so many friends. Day after day the teachers left their cards and sympathy; the girls sent flowers with love; there were even messages of inquiry from Miss Cursiter. And not only flowers and sympathy, but more solid testimonials poured in from St. Sidwell's, parcels which by some curious coincidence contained everything that Dr. Cautley had suggested and Miss Quincey refused on the grounds that she "couldn't fancy it." For a long time Miss Quincey was supremely happy in the belief that these delicacies were sent by the Head; and she said to herself that one had only to be laid aside a little while for one's worth to be appreciated. It was as if a veil of blessed illusion had been spread between her and her world; and nobody knew whose fingers had been busy in weaving it so close and fine.

Dr. Cautley came every day and always at the same time. At first he was pretty sure to find Miss Vivian, sitting with Miss Quincey or drinking tea in perilous intimacy with Mrs. Moon. Then came a long spell when, time it

as he would, he never saw her at all. Rhoda had taken it into her head to choose six o'clock for her visits, and at six he was bound to be at home for consultations. But Rhoda or no Rhoda, he kept his promise. He was looking well after Miss Quincey. He would have done that as a matter of course; for his worst enemies—and he had several—could not say that Cautley ever neglected his poorer patients. Only he concentrated or dissipated himself according to the nature of the case, giving five minutes to one and twenty to another. When he could he gave half-hours to Miss Quincey. He was absorbed, excited; he battled by her bedside; his spirits went up and down with every fluctuation of her pulse; you would have thought that Miss Quincey's case was one of exquisite interest, rarity and charm, and that Cautley had staked his reputation on her recovery. When he said to her in his emphatic way, "We must get you well, Miss Quincey," his manner implied that it would be a very serious thing for the universe if Miss Quincey did not get well. When he looked at her his eyes seemed to be taking her in, taking her in, seeing nothing in all the world but her.

As it happened, sooner than anybody expected Miss Quincey did get well.

Mrs. Moon was the first to notice that. She hailed Juliana's recovery as

a sign of grace, of returning allegiance to the memory of Tollington

Moon.

"Now," said the Old Lady, "I hope we've seen the last of Dr. Cautley."

"Of course we have," said Miss Quincey. She said it irritably, but everybody knows that a little temper is the surest symptom of returning health. "What should he come for?"

"To run up his little bill, my dear. You don't imagine he comes for the pleasure of seeing you?"

"I never imagine anything," said the little arithmetic teacher with some truth.

But they had by no means seen the last of him. If the Old Lady's theory was correct, Cautley must have been the most grossly avaricious of young men. The length of his visits was infamous, their frequency appalling. He kept on coming long after Miss Quincey was officially and obviously well; and on the most trivial, the most ridiculous pretexts. It was "just to see how she was getting on," or "because he happened to be passing," or "to bring that book he told her about." He had prescribed a course of light literature for Miss Quincey and seemed to think it necessary to supply his own drugs. To be sure he brought a great many medicines that you cannot get made up at the chemist's, insight, understanding, sympathy, the tonic of his own virile youth; and Heaven only knows if these things were not the most expensive.

All the time Miss Quincey was trying to keep up with the new standard imposed on the staff. Hitherto she had laboured under obvious disadvantages; now, in her leisurely convalescence, sated as she was with time, she wallowed openly and wantonly in General Culture. And it seemed that the doctor had gone in for General Culture too. He could talk to her for ever about Shakespeare, Tennyson and Browning. Miss Quincey was always dipping into those poets now, always drawing water from the wells of literature. By the way, she was head over heels in debt to Sordello, and was working double time to pay him off. She reported her progress with glee. It was "only a hundred and thirty-eight more pages, Dr. Cautley. In forty-six days I shall have finished Sordello."

"Then you will have done what I never did in my whole life."

It amused Cautley to talk to Miss Quincey. She wore such an air of adventure; she was so fresh and innocent in her excursions into the realms of gold; and when she sat handling her little bits of Tennyson and Browning as if they had been rare nuggets recently dug up there, what could he do but feign astonishment and interest? He had travelled extensively in the realms of gold. He was acquainted with all the poets and intimate with most; he knew some of them so well as to be able to make

jokes at their expense. He was at home in their society. Beside his light-hearted intimacy Miss Cursiter's academic manner showed like the punctilious advances of an outsider. But he was terribly modern this young man. He served strange gods, healers and regenerators whose names had never penetrated to St. Sidwell's. Some days he was really dreadful; he shook his head over the Idylls of the King, made no secret of his unbelief in The Princess, and shamelessly declared that a great deal of In Memoriam would go where Mendelssohn and the old crinolines have gone.

Then something very much worse than that happened; Miss Quincey gave him a copy of the "Address to the Students and Teachers of St. Sidwell's," and it made him laugh. She pointed out the bit about the healers and regenerators, and refreshing yourself at the wells of literature. "That is a beautiful passage," said Miss Quincey.

He laughed more than ever.

"Oh yes, beautiful, beautiful. They're to do it in their evenings, are they? And when they're faint and weary with their day's work?" And he laughed again quite loud, laughed till Mrs. Moon woke out of a doze and started as if this world had come to an end and another one had begun. He was very sorry, and he begged a thousand pardons; but, really, that passage was unspeakably funny. He didn't know that Miss Cursiter had such a rich vein of humour in her. For the life of her Miss Quincey could not see what there was to laugh at, nor why she should be teased about Tennyson and bantered on the subject of Browning; but she enjoyed it all the same. He was so young; he was like a big schoolboy throwing stones into the living wells of literature and watching for the splash; it did her good to look at him. So she looked, smiling her starved smile and snatching a fearful joy from his profane conversation.

There were moments when she asked herself how he came to be there at all; he was so out-of-place somehow. The Moons and Quinceys denounced him as a stranger and intruder; the very chairs and tables had memories, associations that rejected him; everything in the room suggested the same

mystic antagonism; it was as if Mrs. Moon and all her household gods were in league against him. Oddly enough this attitude of theirs heightened her sense of intimacy with him, made him hers and no one else's for the time. The pleasure she took in his society had some of the peculiar private ecstasy of sin.

And Mrs. Moon wondered what the young man was going to charge for that little visit; and what the total of his account would be. She said that if Juliana didn't give him a hint, she would be obliged to speak to him herself; and at that Juliana looked frightened and begged that Mrs. Moon would do nothing of the kind. "There will be no charge for friendly visits," said she; and she made a rapid calculation in the top of her head. Nineteen visits at, say, seven-and-six a visit, would come to exactly nine pounds nine and sixpence. And she smiled; possibly she thought it was worth it.

And really those friendly visits had sometimes an ambiguous character; he dragged his profession into them by the head and shoulders. He had left off scribbling prescriptions, but he would tell her what to take in a light and literary way, as if it was just part of their very interesting conversation. Browning was bitter and bracing, he was like iron and quinine, and by the way she had better take a little of both. Then when he met her again he would ask, "Have you been taking any more Browning, Miss Quincey?" and while Miss Quincey owned with a blush that she had, he would look at her and say she wanted a change—a little Tennyson and a lighter tonic; strychnine and arsenic was the thing.

And Mrs. Moon still wondered. "I never saw anything like the indelicacy of that young man," said she. "You're running up a pretty long bill, I can tell you."

Oh, yes, a long, long bill; for we pay heavily for our pleasures in this sad world, Juliana!

CHAPTER VI

Spring Fashions

Winter had come and gone, and spring found Miss Quincey back again at St. Sidwell's, the place of illumination; a place that knew rather less of her than it had known before. After five-and-twenty years of constant attendance she had only to be away three months to be forgotten. The new staff was not greatly concerned with Miss Quincey; it was always busy. As for the girls, they were wholly given over to the new worship of Rhoda Vivian; impossible to rouse them to the faintest interest in Miss Quincey.

Her place had been kept for her by Rhoda. Rhoda had put out the strong young arm that she was so proud of, and held back for a little while Miss Quincey's fate; and now at all costs she was determined to stand between her and the truth. So Miss Quincey never knew that it was Rhoda who was responsible for the delicate attentions she had received during her illness; Rhoda who had bought and sent off the presents from St. Sidwell's; Rhoda who had conceived that pretty little idea of flowers "with love"; and Rhoda who had inspired the affectionate messages of the staff. (The Classical Mistress had to draw most extravagantly on her popularity in order to work that fraud.) Rhoda had taken her place, and it was not in Rhoda's power to give it back to her. But Miss Quincey never saw it; for a subtler web than that of Rhoda's spinning was woven about her eyes.

Possibly in some impressive and inapparent way her unhappy little favourite Laura Lazarus may have been glad to see her back again, though the two queer creatures exchanged no greeting more intimate than an embarrassed smile. In this rapidly-advancing world the Mad Hatter alone remained where Miss Quincey had left her. She explained at some length how the figures twisted themselves round in her head and would never stay the same for a minute together. Miss Quincey listened patiently to this explanation; she was more indulgent, less persistent than before.

Under that veil of illusion she herself had become communicative. She went up and down between the classes and poured out her soul as to an

audience all interest, all sympathy. There was a certain monotony about her conversation since the epoch of her illness. It was, "Oh yes, I am quite well now, thank you. Dr. Cautley is so very clever. Dr. Cautley has taken splendid care of me. Dr. Cautley has been so very kind and attentive, I think it would be ungrateful of me if I had not got well. Dr. Cautley—" Perhaps it was just as well for Miss Quincey that the staff were too busy to attend to her. The most they noticed was that in the matter of obstruction Miss Quincey was not quite so precipitate as she had been. She offended less by violent contact and rebound than by drifting absently into the processions and getting mixed up with them.

Rhoda saw a change in her; Rhoda was never too busy to spare a thought for Miss Quincey. "Yes," she said, "you are better. Your eyes are brighter."

"That," said Miss Quincey, with simple pride "is the arsenic. Dr. Cautley is giving me arsenic."

Now arsenic (like happiness) has some curious properties. It looks most innocently like sugar, which it is not. A little of it goes a long way and undoubtedly acts as a tonic; a little more may undermine the stoutest constitution, and a little too much of it is a deadly poison and kills you. As yet Miss Quincey had only taken it in microscopic doses. Something had changed her; it may have been happiness, it may have been illusion; whatever it was Miss Quincey thought it was the arsenic—if it was not the weather, the very remarkable weather. For that year Spring came with a burst.

Indeed there is seldom anything shy and tentative, anything obscure and gradual about the approaches of the London Spring. Spring is always in a hurry there, for she knows that she has but a short time before her; she has to make an impression and make it at once; so she works careless of delicacies and shades, relying on broad telling strokes, on strong outlines and stinging contrasts. She is like a clever artist handicapped with her materials. Only a patch of grass, a few trees and the sky; but you wake one morning and the boughs are drawn black and bold against the blue; and

leaves are sharp as emeralds against the black; and the grass in the squares and the shrubs in the gardens repeat the same brilliant extravaganza; and it is all very eccentric and beautiful and daring. That is the way of a Cockney Spring, and when you are used to it the charm is undeniable.

One day Miss Quincey walked in Camden Town and noted the singular caprices of the Spring. Strange longings, freaks of the blood and brain, stirred within her at this bursting of the leaf. They led her into Camden Road, into the High Street, to the great shops where the virginal young fashions and the artificial flowers are. At this season Hunter's window blooms out in blouses of every imaginable colour and texture and form. There was one, a silk one, of so discreet and modest a mauve that you could have called it lavender. To say that it caught Miss Quincey's eye would be to wrong that maidenly garment. There was nothing blatant, nothing importunate in its behaviour. Gently, imperceptibly, it stole into the field of vision and stood there, delicately alluring. It could afford to wait. It had not even any pattern to speak of, only an indefinable white something, a dice, a diaper, a sprig. It was the sprig that touched her, tempted her.

Amongst the poorer ranks of Miss Quincey's profession the sumptuary laws are exceptionally severe. It is a crime, a treachery, to spend money on mere personal adornment. You are clothed, not for beauty's sake, but because the rigour of the climate and of custom equally require it. Miss Quincey's conscience pricked her all the time that she stood looking in at Hunter's window. Never before had she suffered so terrible a solicitation of the senses. It was as if all those dim and germinal desires had burst and blossomed in this sinful passion for a blouse. She resisted, faltered, resisted; turned away and turned back again. The blouse sat immovable on its wooden bust, absolute in its policy of reticence. Miss Quincey had just decided that it had a thought too much mauve in it, and was most successfully routing desire by depreciation of its object when a shopman stepped on to the stage, treading airily among the gauzes and the flowers.

There was no artifice about the young man; it was in the dreamiest abstraction that he clasped that fair form round the collar and turned it to the light. It shuddered like a living thing; its violent mauve vanished in silver grey. The effect was irresistible. Miss Quincey was tempted beyond all endurance; and she fell. Once in possession of the blouse, its price, a guinea, paid over the counter, Miss Quincey was all discretion. She carried her treasure home in a pasteboard box concealed under her cape; lest its shameless arrival in Hunter's van should excite scandal and remark.

That night, behind a locked door, Miss Quincey sat up wrestling and battling with her blouse. To Miss Quincey in the watches of the night it seemed that a spirit of obstinate malevolence lurked in that deceitful garment. Like all the things in Hunter's shop, it was designed for conventional well-rounded womanhood. It repudiated the very idea of Miss Quincey; in every fold it expressed its contempt for her person; its collar was stiff with an invincible repugnance. Miss Quincey had to take it in where it went out, and let it out where it went in, to pinch, pull, humour and propitiate it before it would consent to cling to her diminished figure. When all was done she wrapped it in tissue paper and hid it away in a drawer out of sight, for the very thought of it frightened her. But when next she went to look at it she hardly knew it again. The malignity seemed all smoothed out of it; it lay there with its meek sleeves folded, the very picture of injured innocence and reproach. Miss Quincey thought she might get reconciled to it in time. A day might even come when she would be brave enough to wear it.

Not many days after, Miss Quincey might have been seen coming out of St. Sidwell's with a reserved and secret smile playing about her face; so secret and so reserved, that nobody, not even Miss Quincey, could tell what it was playing at.

Miss Quincey was meditating an audacity.

That night she took pen and paper up to her bedroom and sat down to write a little note. Sat down to write it and got up again; wrote it and tore it

up, and sat down to write another. This she left open for such emendations and improvements as should occur to her in the night. Perhaps none did occur; perhaps she realized that a literary work loses its force and spontaneity in conscious elaboration; anyhow the note was put up just as it was and posted first thing in the morning at the pillar-box on her way to St. Sidwell's.

Old Martha was cleaning the steps as Miss Quincey went out; but Miss Quincey carefully avoided looking Martha's way. Like the ostrich she supposed that if she did not see Martha, Martha could not see her. But Martha had seen her. She saw everything. She had seen the note open on Miss Juliana's table by the window in the bedroom when she was drawing up the blind; she had seen the silk blouse lying in its tissue paper when she was tidying Miss Juliana's drawer; and that very afternoon she discovered a certain cake deposited by Miss Juliana in the dining-room cupboard with every circumstance of secrecy and disguise.

And Martha shook her old head and put that and that together, the blouse, the cake and the letter; though what connection there could possibly be between the three was more than Miss Juliana could have told her. Even to Martha the association was so singular that it pointed to some painful aberration of intellect on Miss Juliana's part.

As in duty bound, Martha brought up her latest discovery and laid it before Mrs. Moon. Beyond that she said nothing, indeed there was nothing to be said. The cake (it was of the expensive pound variety, crowned with a sugar turret and surrounded with almond fortifications) spoke for itself, though in an unknown language.

"What does that mean, Martha?"

"Miss Juliana, m'm, I suppose."

Martha pursed up her lips, suppressing the impertinence of her own private opinion and awaiting her mistress's with respect.

No doubt she would have heard it but that Miss Juliana happened to come in at that moment, and Mrs. Moon's attention was distracted by the really amazing spectacle presented by her niece. And Miss Juliana, who for five-and-twenty years had never appeared in anything but frowsy drab or dingy grey, Miss Juliana flaunting in silk at four o'clock in the afternoon, Miss Juliana, all shining and shimmering like a silver and mauve chameleon, was a sight to take anybody's breath away. Martha dearly loved a scene, for to be admitted to a scene was to be admitted to her mistress's confidence; but the excellent woman knew her place, and before that flagrant apparition she withdrew as she would have withdrawn from a family scandal.

Miss Quincey advanced timidly, for of course she knew that she had to cross that room under fire of criticism; but on the whole she was less abject than she might have been, for at the moment she was thinking of Dr. Cautley. He had actually accepted her kind invitation, and that fact explained and justified her; besides, she carried her Browning in her hand, and it made her feel decidedly more natural.

Mrs. Moon restrained her feelings until her niece had moved about a bit, and sat down by her enemy the cabinet, and presented herself in every possible aspect. The Old Lady's eyes lost no movement of the curious figure; when she had taken it in, grasped it in all its details, she began.

"Well, I declare, Juliana"—(five-and-twenty years ago she used to call her "Jooley," keeping the full name to mark disapproval or displeasure. Now it was always Juliana, so that Mrs. Moon seemed to be permanently displeased)—"whatever possessed you to make such an exhibition of yourself? (And will you draw your chair back—you're incommoding the cabinet.) I never saw anything so unsuitable and unbecoming in my life—at this hour of the day too. Why, you're just like a whirligig out of a pantomime. If you think you can carry off that kind of thing you're very much mistaken."

That did seem to be Miss Quincey's idea—to carry it off; to brazen it out; to sit down and read Browning as if there was nothing at all remarkable in her personal appearance.

"And to choose lilac of all things in the world! You never could stand that shade at the best of times. Lilac! Why, I declare if it isn't mauve-pink."

"Mauve-pink!" She had given voice to the fear that lay hidden in Miss Quincey's heart. A sensitive culprit caught in humiliating guilt could not look more cowed with self-consciousness than Miss Quincey at that word. Criminal and crime, Miss Quincey and her blouse, seemed linked in an awful bond of mutual abhorrence. The blouse shivered as Miss Quincey trembled in nervous agitation; as she went red and yellow by turns it paled and flushed its painful pink. They were blushing for each other. For it was mauve-pink; she could see that well enough now.

"Turn round!"

Miss Quincey turned round.

"Much too young for you! Why, bless me, if it doesn't throw up every bit of yellow in your face! If you don't believe me, look in the glass."

Miss Quincey looked in the glass.

It did throw up the yellow tints. It threw everything up to her. If she had owned to a little fear of it before, it affected her now with positive terror. The thing was young, much too young; and it was brutal and violent in its youth. It was possessed by a perfect demon of juvenility; it clashed and fought with every object in the room; it made them all look old, ever so old, and shabby. And as Miss Quincey stood with it before the looking glass, it flared up and told her to her face that she was forty-five—forty-five, and looked fifty.

"Louisa," murmured the Old Lady, "was the only one of our family who could stand pink."

"I will give it to Louisa," cried Miss Quincey with a touch of passion.

"Tchee—tchee!" At that idea the Old Lady chuckled in supreme derision. "Capers and nonsense! Louisa indeed! Much good it'll do Louisa when you've been and nipped all the shape out of it to suit yourself. However you came to be so skimpy and flat-chested is a mystery to me. All the Quinceys were tall, your uncle Tollington was tall, your father, he was tall; and your sister, well; I will say this for Louisa, she's as tall as any of 'em, and she has a bust."

"Yes, I daresay it would have been very becoming to Louisa," said Miss

Quincey humbly. "I—I thought it was lavender."

"Lavender or no lavender, I'm surprised at you—throwing money away on a thing like that."

"I can afford it," said Miss Quincey with the pathetic dignity of the turning worm.

Now it was not worm-like subtlety that suggested that reply. It was positive inspiration. By those simple words Juliana had done something to remove the slur she was always casting on a certain character. Tollington Moon had not managed his nieces' affairs so badly after all if one of them could afford herself extravagances of that sort. The blouse therefore might be taken as a sign and symbol of his innermost integrity. So Mrs. Moon was content with but one more parting shot.

"I don't say you can't afford the money, I say you can't afford the colour—not at your time of life."

Two tears that had gathered in Miss Quincey's eyes now fell on the silk, deepening the mauve-pink to a hideous magenta.

"I was deceived in the colour," she said as she turned from her tormentor.

She toiled upstairs to the back bedroom and took it off. She could never wear it. It was waste—sheer waste; for no other woman could wear it either; certainly not Louisa; she had made it useless for Louisa by paring it

down to her own ridiculous dimensions. Louisa was and always had been a head and shoulders taller than she was; and she had a bust.

So Miss Quincey came down meek and meagre in the old dress that she served her for so many seasons, and she looked for peace. But that terrible old lady had not done with her yet, and the worst was still to come.

No longer having any grievance against the blouse, Mrs. Moon was concentrating her attention on that more mysterious witness to Juliana's foolishness—the Cake.

"And now," said she, pointing as she might have pointed to a monument, "will you kindly tell me the meaning of this?"

"I expect—perhaps—it is very likely—that Dr. Cautley will come in to tea this afternoon."

The Old Lady peered at Miss Quincey and her eyes were sharp as needles, needles that carried the thread of her thought pretty plainly too, but it was too fine a thread for Miss Quincey to see. Besides she was looking at the cake and almost regretting that she had bought it, lest he should think that it was eating too many of such things that had made her ill.

"And what put that notion into your head, I should like to know?"

"He has written to say so."

"Juliana—you don't mean to tell me that he invited himself?"

"Well, no. That is—it was an answer to my invitation."

"Your invitation? You were not content to have that man poking his nose in here at all hours of the day and night, but you must go out of your way to send him invitations?"

"Dr. Cautley has been most kind and attentive, and—I thought—it was time we paid him some little attention."

"Attention indeed! I should be very sorry to let any young man suppose that I paid any attention to him. I should have thought you'd have had a

little more maidenly reserve. Besides, you know perfectly well that I don't enjoy my tea unless we have it by ourselves."

Oh yes, she knew; they had been having it that way for five-and-twenty years.

"As for that cake," continued the Old Lady, "it's ridiculous. Look at it. Why, you might just as well have ordered wedding cake at once. I tell you what it is, Juliana, you're getting quite flighty."

Flighty? No mind but a feminine one, grown up and trained under the shadow of St. Sidwell's, could conceive the nature of Miss Quincey's feelings on being told that she was flighty. She herself made no attempt to express them. She sat down and gasped, clutching her Browning to give herself a sense of moral support. All the rest was intelligible, she had understood and accepted it; but to be told that she, a teacher in St. Sidwell's, was flighty—the charge was simply confusing to the intellect, and it left her dumb.

Flighty? When Martha came in with the tea-tray and she had to order a knife for the cake and an extra cup for Dr. Cautley, she saw Mrs. Moon looking at Martha, and Martha looking at Mrs. Moon, and they seemed to be saying to each other, "How flighty Miss Juliana is getting."

Flighty? The idea afflicted her to such a degree that when Dr. Cautley came she had not a word to say to him.

For a whole week she had looked forward to this tea-drinking with tremors of joyous expectancy and palpitations of alarm. It was to have been one of those rare and solitary occasions that can only come once in a blue moon. The lump sum of pleasure that other people get spread for them more or less thickly over the surface of the years, she meant to take once for all, packed and pressed into one rapturous hour, one Saturday afternoon from four-thirty to five-thirty, the memory of it to be stored up and economised so as to last her life-time, thus justifying the original expense. She knew that success was doubtful, because of the uncertainty of things in general

and of the Old Lady's temper in particular. And then she had to stake everything on his coming; and the chances, allowing for the inevitable claims on a doctor's time, were a thousand to one against it. She had nothing to go upon but the delicate incalculable balance of events. And now, when the blue moon had risen, the impossible thing happened, and the man had come, he might just as well, in fact a great deal better, have stayed away. The whole thing was a waste and failure from beginning to end. The tea was a waste and a failure, for Martha would bring it in a quarter of an hour too soon; the cake was a waste and a failure, for nobody ate any of it; and she was a waste and a failure—she hardly knew why. She cut her cake with trembling fingers and offered it, blushing as the gash in its side revealed the thoroughly unwholesome nature of its interior. She felt ashamed of its sugary artifice, its treacherously festive air, and its embarrassing affinity to bride's-cake. No wonder that he had no appetite for cake, and that Miss Quincey had no appetite for conversation. He tried to tempt her with bits of Browning, but she refused them all. She had lost her interest in Browning.

He thought, "She is too tired to talk," and left half an hour sooner than he had intended.

She thought, "He is offended. Or else—he thinks me flighty."

And that was all.

CHAPTER VII

Under a Blue Moon

It was early on another Saturday evening, a fortnight after that disastrous one, and Miss Quincey was taking the air in Primrose Hill Park. She was walking to keep herself warm, for the breeze was brisk and cool. There was a little stir and flutter in the trees and a little stir and flutter in her heart, for she had caught sight of Dr. Cautley in the distance. He was coming round the corner of one of the intersecting walks, coming at a frantic pace, with the tails of his frock-coat waving in the wind.

He pulled himself up as he neared her and held out a friendly hand.

"That's right, Miss Quincey. I'm delighted to see you out. You really are getting strong again, aren't you?"

"Yes, thank you—very well, very strong."

Was it her fancy, or did his manner imply that he wanted to sink that humiliating episode of the tea-party and begin again where they had left off? It might be so; his courtesy was so infinitely subtle. He had actually turned and was walking her way now.

"And how is Sordello?" he asked, the tone of his inquiry suggesting that there was something seriously the matter with Sordello.

"Getting on. Only fifty-six pages more."

"You are advancing, Miss Quincey—gaining on him by leaps and bounds.

You're not overdoing it, I hope?"

"Oh no, I read a little in the evenings—I have to keep up to the standard of the staff. Indeed," she added, turning with a sudden suicidal panic, "I ought to be at home and working now."

"What? On a half-holiday? It is a half-holiday?"

"For some people—not for me."

His eyes—she could not be mistaken—were taking her in as they had done before.

"And why not for you? Do you know, you're looking horribly tired. Suppose we sit down a bit."

Miss Quincey admitted that it would be very nice.

"Hadn't you better put your cape on—the wind's changing."

She obeyed him.

"That's hardly a thick enough wrap for this weather, is it?"

She assured him it was very warm, very comfortable.

"Do you know what I would like to do with you, Miss Quincey?"

"No."

"I should like to pack you off somewhere—anywhere—for another three months' holiday."

"Another three months! What would my pupils do, and what would Miss

Cursiter say?"

It was part of the illusion that she conceived herself to be indispensable to Miss Cursiter.

"Confound Miss Cursiter!"

Evidently he felt strongly on the subject of Miss Cursiter. He confounded her with such energy that the seat provided for them by the London County Council vibrated under it. He stared sulkily out over the park a moment; he gave his cuffs a hitch as if he were going to fight somebody, and then—he let himself go.

At a blind headlong pace, lashing himself up as he went, falling furiously on civilization, the social order, women's education and women's labour, the system that threw open all doors to them, and let them be squeezed and trampled down together in the crush. He was ready to take the

nineteenth century by the throat and strangle it; he squared himself against the universe.

"What," said Miss Quincey, "do you not believe in equal chances for men and women?" She was eager to redeem herself from the charge of flightiness.

"Equal chances? I daresay. But not unequal work. The work must be unequal if the conditions are unequal. It's not the same machine. To turn a woman on to a man's work is like trying to run an express train by clock-work, with a pendulum for a piston, and a hairspring for steam."

Miss Quincey timidly hinted that the question was a large one, that there was another side to it.

"Of course there is; there are fifty sides to it; but there are too many people looking at the other forty-nine for my taste. I loathe a crowd."

Stirred by a faint esprit de corps Miss Quincey asked him if he did not believe in the open door for women?

He said, "It would be kinder to shut it in their faces."

She threw in a word about the women's labour market—the enormous demand.

He said that only meant that women's labour could be bought cheap and sold dear.

She sighed.

"But women must do something—surely you see the necessity?"

He groaned.

"Oh yes. It's just the necessity that I do see—the damnable necessity. I only protest against the preventable evil. If you must turn women into so many machines, for Heaven's sake treat them like machines. You don't work an engine when it's undergoing structural alterations—because, you know, you can't. Your precious system recognises no differences. It sets up the

same absurd standard for every woman, the brilliant genius and the average imbecile. Which is not only morally odious but physiologically fatuous. There must be one of two results—either the average imbeciles are sacrificed by thousands to a dozen or so of brilliant geniuses, or it's the other way about."

"Whichever way it is," said Miss Quincey, with her back, so to speak, to the wall, "it's all part of civilization, of our intellectual progress."

"They're not the same thing. And it isn't civilization, it's intellectual savagery. It isn't progress either, it's a blind rush, an inhuman scrimmage—the very worst form of the struggle for existence. It doesn't even mean survival of the intellectually fittest. It develops monstrosities. It defeats its own ends by brutalising the intellect itself. And the worst enemies of women are women. I swear, if I were a woman, I'd rather do without an education than get it at that price. Or I'd educate myself. After all, that's the way of the fittest—the one in a thousand."

"Do you not approve of educated women then?" Miss Quincey was quite shaken by this cataclysmal outbreak, this overturning and shattering of the old beacons and landmarks.

He stared into the distance.

"Oh yes, I approve of them when they are really educated—not when they are like that. You won't get the flower of womanhood out of a forcing-house like St. Sidwell's; though I daresay it produces pumpkins to perfection."

What did he say to Miss Vivian then? Miss Quincey could not think badly of a system that could produce women like Miss Vivian.

A cloud came over his angry eyes as they stared into the distance.

"That's it. It hasn't produced them. They have produced it."

Miss Quincey smiled. Evidently consistency was not to be expected of this young man. He was so young, and so irresponsible and passionate. She

admired him for it; and not only for that; she admired him—she could not say exactly why, but she thought it was because he had such a beautiful, bumpy, intellectual forehead. And as she sat beside him and shook to that vibrating passion of his, she felt as if the blue moon had risen again and was shining through the trees of the park; and she was happy, absolutely, indubitably happy and safe; for she felt that he was her friend and her protector and the defender of her cause. It was for her that he raged and maddened and behaved himself altogether so unreasonably.

Now as it happened, Cautley did champion certain theories which Miss Cursiter, when she met them, denounced as physiologist's fads. But it was not they, nor yet Miss Quincey, that accounted for his display of feeling. He was angry because he wanted to come to a certain understanding with the Classical Mistress; to come to it at once; and the system kept him waiting. It was robbing him of Rhoda, and Rhoda of her youth. Meanwhile Rhoda was superbly happy at St. Sidwell's, playing at being Pallas Athene; as for checking her midway in her brilliant career, that was not to be thought of for an instant.

The flower of womanhood—it was the flower of life. He had never seen a woman so invincibly and superlatively alive. Cautley deified life; and in his creed, which was simplicity itself, life and health were one; health the sole source of strength, intelligence and beauty, of all divine and perfect possibilities. At least that was how he began. But three years' practice in London had somewhat strained the faith of the young devotee. He soon found himself in the painful position of a priest who no longer believes in his deity; overheard himself asking whether health was not an unattainable ideal; then declaring that life itself was all a matter of compromise; finally coming to the conclusion that the soul of things was Neurosis.

Beyond that he refused to commit himself to any theory of the universe. He even made himself unpleasant. A clerical patient would approach him with conciliatory breadth, and say: "I envy you, Cautley; I envy your marvellous experience. Your opportunities are greater than mine. And sometimes, do

you know, I think you see deeper into the work of the Maker." And Cautley would shrug his shoulders and smile in the good man's face, and say, "The Maker! I can only tell you I'm tired of mending the work of the Maker." Yet the more he doubted the harder he worked; though his world spun round and round, shrieking like a clock running down, and he had persuaded himself that all he could do was to wind up the crazy wheels for another year or so. Which all meant that Cautley was working a little too hard and running down himself. He had begun to specialize in gynecology and it increased his scepticism.

Then suddenly, one evening, when he least looked for it, least wanted it, he saw his divinity incarnate. Rhoda had appealed to him as the supreme expression of Nature's will to live. That was the instantaneous and visible effect of her. Rhoda was the red flower on the tree of life.

At St. Sidwell's, that great forcing-house, they might grow some vegetables to perfection; whether it was orchids or pumpkins he neither knew nor cared; but he defied them to produce anything like that. He was sorry for the vegetables, the orchids and the pumpkins; and he was sorry for Miss Quincey, who was neither a pumpkin nor an orchid, but only a harmless little withered leaf. Not a pleasant leaf, the sort that goes dancing along, all crisp and curly, in the arms of the rollicking wind; but the sort that the same wind kicks into a corner, to lie there till it rots and comes in handy as leaf mould for the forcing-house. Rhoda's friend was not like Rhoda; yet because the leaf may distantly suggest the rose, he liked to sit and talk to her and think about the most beautiful woman in the world. To any other man conversation with Miss Quincey would have been impossible; for Miss Quincey in normal health was uninteresting when she was not absurd. But to Cautley at all times she was simply heart-rending.

For this young man with the irritable nerves and blasphemous temper had after all a divine patience at the service of women, even the foolish and hysterical; because like their Maker he knew whereof they were made. This very minute the queer meta-physical thought had come to him that

somehow, in the infinite entanglement of things, such women as Miss Quincey were perpetually being sacrificed to such women as Rhoda Vivian. It struck him that Nature had made up for any little extra outlay in one direction by cruel pinching in another. It was part of her rigid economy. She was not going to have any bills running up against her at the other end of the universe. Nature had indulged in Rhoda Vivian and she was making Miss Quincey pay.

He wondered if that notion had struck Rhoda Vivian too, and if she were trying to make up for it. He had noticed that Miss Quincey had the power (if you could predicate power of such a person), a power denied to him, of drawing out the woman-hood of the most beautiful woman in the world; some infinite tenderness in Rhoda answered to the infinite absurdity in her. He was not sure that her attitude to Miss Quincey was not the most beautiful thing about her. He had begun by thinking about the colour of Rhoda's eyes. He could not for the life of him remember whether they were blue or green, till something (Miss Quincey's eyes perhaps) reminded him that they were grey, pure grey, without a taint of green or a shadow of blue in them. That was what his mind was running on as he looked into the distance and Miss Quincey imagined that his bumpy intellectual forehead was bulging with great thoughts. And now Miss Quincey supplied a convenient pivot for the wild gyrations of his wrath. He got up and with his hands behind his back he seemed to be lashing himself into a fury with his coat-tail.

"The whole thing is one-sided and artificial and absurd. Bad enough for men, but fatal for women. Any system that unfits them for their proper functions—"

"And do we know—have we decided—yet—what they are?" Miss Quincey was anxious to sustain her part in the dialogue with credit.

He stared, not at the distance but at her.

"Why, surely," he said more gently, "to be women first—to be wives and mothers."

She drew her cape a little closer round her and turned from him with half-shut eyes. She seemed at once to be protecting herself against his theory and blinding her sight to her own perishing and thwarted woman-hood.

"All Nature is against it," he said.

"Nature?" she repeated feebly.

"Yes, Nature; and she'll go her own way in spite of all the systems that ever were. Don't you know—-you are a teacher, so you ought to know—that overstrain of the higher faculties is sometimes followed by astonishing demonstrations on the part of Nature?"

Miss Quincey replied that no cases of the kind had come under her notice.

"Well—your profession ought to go hand-in-hand with mine. If you only saw the half of what we see—But you only see the process; we get the results. By the way I must go and look at some of them."

His words echoed madly in a feverish little brain, "Ought to go—hand-in-hand—hand-in-hand with mine."

"Nature can be very cruel," said she.

Something in her tone recalled him from his flight. He stood looking down at her, thoughtful and pitiful. "And Nature can be very kind; kinder than we are. You are a case in point. Nature is trying to make you well against your will. A little more rest—a little more exercise—a little more air—"

She smiled. Yes, a little more of all the things she wanted and had never had. That was what her smile said in its soft and deprecating bitterness.

He held out his hand, and she too rose, shivering a little in her thin dress.

She was the first to hurry away.

He looked after her small figure, noted her nervous gait and the agitated movement of her hand as the streamers on her poor cape flapped and fluttered, the sport of the unfeeling wind.

CHAPTER VIII

A Painful Misunderstanding

And now, on early evenings and Saturday afternoons when the weather was fine, Miss Quincey was to be found in Primrose Hill Park. Not that anybody ever came to look for Miss Quincey. Nevertheless, whether she was walking up and down the paths or sitting on a bench, Miss Quincey had a certain expectant air, as if at any moment Dr. Cautley might come tearing round the corner with his coat-tails flying, or as if she might look up and find him sitting beside her and talking to her. But he did not come. There are some histories that never repeat themselves.

And he had never called since that day—Miss Quincey remembered it well; it was Saturday the thirteenth of March. April and May went by; she had not seen him now for more than two months; and she began to think there must be a reason for it.

At last she saw him; she saw him twice running. Once in the park where they had sat together, and once in the forked road that leads past that part of St. Sidwell's where Miss Cursiter and Miss Vivian lived in state. Each time he was walking very fast as usual, and he looked at her, but he never raised his hat; she spoke, but he passed her without a word. And yet he had recognised her; there could be no possible doubt of it.

Depend upon it there was a reason for that. Miss Quincey was one of those innocent people who believe that every variety of human behaviour must have a reason (as if only two months ago she had not been favoured with the spectacle of an absolutely unreasonable young man). To be sure it was not easy to find one for conduct so strange and unprecedented, and in any case Miss Quincey's knowledge of masculine motives was but small. Taken by itself it might have passed without any reason, as an oversight, a momentary lapse; but coupled with his complete abandonment of Camden Street North it looked ominous indeed. Not that her faith in Bastian Cautley wavered for an instant. Because Bastian Cautley was what he was, he could never be guilty of spontaneous discourtesy; on the other hand, she

had seen that he could be fierce enough on provocation; therefore, she argued, he had some obscure ground of offence against her.

Miss Quincey passed a sleepless night reasoning about the reason, a palpitating never-ending night, without a doze or a dream in it or so much as the winking of an eyelid. She reasoned about it for a week between the classes, and in her spare time (when she had any) in the evening (thus running into debt to Sordello again). At the end of the week Miss Quincey's mind seemed to have become remarkably lucid; every thought in it ground to excessive subtlety in the mill of her logic. She saw it all clearly. There had been some misunderstanding, some terrible mistake. She had forfeited his friendship through a blunder nameless but irrevocable. Once or twice she wondered if Mrs. Moon could be at the bottom of it—or Martha. Had her aunt carried out her dreadful threat of giving him a hint to send in his account? And had the hint implied that for the future all accounts with him were closed? Had he called on Mrs. Moon and been received with crushing hostility? Or had Martha permitted herself to say that she, Miss Quincey, was out when perhaps he knew for a positive fact that she was in? But she soon dismissed these conjectures as inadequate and fell back on her original hypothesis.

And all the time the Old Lady's eyes, and her voice too, were sharper than ever; from the corner where she dreamed she watched Miss Quincey incessantly between the dreams. At times the Old Lady was shaken with terrible and mysterious mirth. Bastian Cautley began to figure fantastically in her conversation. Her ideas travelled by slow trains of association that started from nowhere but always arrived at Bastian Cautley as a terminus. If Juliana had a headache Mrs. Moon supposed that she wanted that young man to be dancing attendance on her again; if Juliana sighed she declared that Dr. Cautley was a faithless swain who had forsaken Juliana; if Martha brought in the tea-tray she wondered when Dr. Cautley was coming back for another slice of Juliana's wedding-cake. Mrs. Moon referred to a certain abominable piece of confectionery now crumbling away on a shelf in the

sideboard, where, with a breach in its side and its sugar turret in ruins, it seemed to nod at Miss Quincey with all sorts of satirical suggestions. And when Louisa sent her accounts of Teenie who lisped in German, Alexander who wrote Latin letters to his father, and Mildred who refused to read the New Testament in anything but Greek, and Miss Quincey remarked that if she had children she wouldn't bring them up so, the Old Lady laughed—"Tchee—Tchee! We all know about old maids' children." Miss Quincey said nothing to that; but she hardened her heart against Louisa's children, and against Louisa's husband and Louisa. She couldn't think how Louisa could have married such a dreadful little man as Andrew Mackinnon, with his unmistakable accent and problematical linen. The gentle creature who had never said a harsh word to anybody in her life became mysteriously cross and captious. She hardened her heart even to little Laura Lazarus.

And one morning when she came upon the Mad Hatter in her corner of the class-room, and found her adding two familiar columns of figures together and adding them all wrong, Miss Quincey was very cross and very captious indeed. The Mad Hatter explained at more length than ever that the figures twisted themselves about; they wouldn't stay still a minute so that she could hold them; they were always going on and on, turning over and over, and growing, growing, till there were millions, billions, trillions of them; oh, they were wonderful things those figures; you could go on watching them for ever if you were sharp enough; you could even—here Laura lowered her voice in awe of her own conception, for Laura was a mystic, a seer, a metaphysician, what you will—you could even think with them, if you knew how; in short you could do anything with them but turn them into sums. And as all this was very confusing to the intellect Miss Quincey became crosser than ever. And while Miss Quincey quivered all over with irritability, the Mad Hatter paid no heed whatever to her instructions, but thrust forward a small yellow face that was all nose and eyes, and gazed at Miss Quincey like one possessed by a spirit of divination.

"Have you got a headache, Miss Quincey?" she inquired on hearing herself addressed for the third time as "Stupid child!"

Miss Quincey relied tartly that no, she had not got a headache. The Mad Hatter appeared to be absorbed in tracing rude verses on her rough notebook with a paralytic pencil.

"I'm sorry; because then you must be unhappy. When people are cross," she continued, "it means one of two things. Either their heads ache or they are unhappy. You must be very unhappy. I know all about it." The paralytic pencil wavered and came to a full stop. "You like somebody, and so somebody has made you unhappy."

But for the shame of it, Miss Quincey could have put her head down on the desk and cried as she had seen the Mad Hatter cry over her sums, and for the same reason; because she could not put two and two together.

And what Mrs. Moon saw, what Martha saw, what the Mad Hatter divined with her feverish, precocious brain, Rhoda Vivian could not fail to see. It was Dr. Cautley's business to look after Miss Quincey in her illness, and it was Rhoda's to keep an eye on her in her recovery, and instantly report the slightest threatening of a break-down. Miss Quincey's somewhat eccentric behaviour filled her with misgivings; and in order to investigate her case at leisure, she chose the first afternoon when Miss Cursiter was not at home to ask the little arithmetic teacher to lunch.

After Rhoda's lunch, soothed with her sympathy and hidden, not to say extinguished, in an enormous chair, Miss Quincey was easily worked into the right mood for confidences; indeed she was in that state of mind when they rush out of their own accord in the utter exhaustion of the will.

"Are you sure you are perfectly well?" so Rhoda began her inquiry.

"Perfectly, perfectly—in myself," said Miss Quincey, "I think, perhaps—that is, sometimes I'm a little afraid that taking so much arsenic may have disagreed with me. You know it is a deadly poison. But I've left it off lately, so I ought to be better—unless perhaps I'm feeling the want of it."

"You are not worrying about St. Sidwell's—about your work?"

"It's not that—not that. But to tell you the truth, I am worried, Rhoda. For some reason or other, my own fault, no doubt, I have lost a friend. It's a hard thing," said Miss Quincey, "to lose a friend."

"Oh, I am sure—Do you mean Miss Cursiter?"

"No, I do not mean Miss Cursiter."

"Do you mean—me then? Not me?"

"You, dear child? Never. To be plain—this is in confidence, Rhoda—I am speaking of Dr. Cautley."

"Dr. Cautley?"

"Yes. I do not know what I have done, or how I have offended him, but he has not been near me for over two months."

"Perhaps he has been busy—in fact, I know he has."

"He has always been busy. It is not that. It is something—well, I hardly care to speak of it, it has been so very painful. My dear"—Miss Quincey's voice sank to an awful whisper—"he has cut me in the street."

"Oh, I know—he will do it; he has done it to all his patients. He is so dreadfully absent-minded."

If Miss Quincey had not been as guileless as the little old maid she was, she would have recognised these indications of intimacy; as it was, she said with superior conviction, "My dear, Iknow Dr. Cautley. He has never cut me before, and he would not do it now without a reason. There has been some awful mistake. If I only knew what I had done!"

"You've done nothing. I wouldn't worry if I were you."

"I can't help worrying. You don't know, Rhoda. The bitter and terrible part of this friendship is, and always has been, that I am under obligations to Dr. Cautley. I owe everything to him; I cannot tell you what he has done

for me, and here I am, not allowed, and I never shall be allowed, to do anything for him." A sob struggled in Miss Quincey's throat.

Rhoda was silent. Did she know? Very dimly, with a mere intellectual perception, but still a great deal better than the little arithmetic teacher could have told her, she understood the desire of that innocent person, not for love, not for happiness, but just for leave to lay down her life for this friend, this deity of hers, to be consumed in sacrifice. And the bitter and terrible thing was that she was not allowed to do it. The friend had no use for the life, the deity no appetite for the sacrifice.

"Don't think about it," she said; it seemed the best thing to say in the singular circumstances. "It will all come right."

By this time Miss Quincey had got the better of the sob in her throat. "It may," she replied with dignity; "but I shall not be the first to make advances."

"Advances? Rather not. But if I thought he was thinking things—he isn't, you know, he's not that sort; still, if I thought it I should have it out with him."

"How could you have it—'out with him'?"

"Oh I should just ask him what he thought of me; or better still, tell him what I thought of him."

Miss Quincey shrank visibly from the bold suggestion.

"Would you? Oh, that would never do. You won't mind my saying so, but I think it would look a little indelicate. Of course it would be very different if it were a woman; if it were you for instance."

"I should do it any way. It's the straightest thing."

"I daresay, dear, in your friendships it is. But I think you can hardly judge of this. You do not know Dr. Cautley as I do."

"No," said Rhoda meekly, "perhaps I don't." Not for worlds would she have destroyed that beautiful illusion.

"It has been," continued Miss Quincey, "a very peculiar, a very interesting relationship. Strange too—considering. If you had asked me six months ago I should have told you that the thing was impossible, or rather, that in nine cases out of ten—I mean I should have said it was highly improbable that Dr. Cautley would take the faintest interest in me, let alone like me."

"He does like you, dear Miss Quincey, I know he does."

"How do you know?"

"He told me so." (Miss Quincey quivered and a faint flush worked up through the sallow of her cheek.) "And I'm sure he would be most distressed to think you were unhappy."

"It is not unhappiness; certainly not unhappiness. On the contrary I have been happy, quite happy lately. And I think it has been bad for me. I wasn't used to it. Perhaps, if it had happened five-and-twenty years ago—Do not misunderstand me, I am merely speaking of friendship, dear; but it might—I mean I might—"

Far back in the chair and favoured by Rhoda's silence, Miss Quincey dropped into a dream. Presently she woke up as it were with a start.

"What am I thinking of? Let us be reasonable; let us reduce it to figures. Forty-five—thirty—he is thirty. Take twenty-five from thirty and five remain. Why, Rhoda, he would have been—"

They looked at each other, but neither said: "He would have been five years old."

Miss Quincey seemed quite prostrated by the result of her calculations.

To everything that Rhoda could urge to soothe her she answered steadily:

"You do not know him as I do."

The voice was not Miss Quincey's voice; it was the monotonous, melancholy voice of the Fixed Idea.

Her knowledge of him. After all, nothing could take from her the exquisite privacy of that possession.

"Eros anikate machan," said Rhoda.

Miss Quincey was gone and the Classical Mistress was in school again, coaching a backward student through the "Antigone."

"Oh Love, unconquered in fight. Love who—Love who fliest, who fliest about among things," said the student. And the teacher laughed.

Laughed, for the entertaining blunder called up a vivid image of the god in Miss Quincey's drawing-room, fluttering about among the furniture and doing terrific damage with his wings.

"What's wrong?" asked the student.

"Oh nothing; only a slight confusion between flying about and falling upon. 'Oh Love who fallest on the prey'; please go on."

"'Oh Love who fallest on the prey'—" The chorus mumbled and stumbled, and the student sighed heavily, for the Greek was hard. "He who has—he who has—Oh dear, I can't see any sense in these old choruses; I do hate them."

"Still," said Rhoda sweetly, "you mustn't murder them. 'He who has love has madness.'"

The chorus limped to its end and the student left the coach to some curious reflections.

"Eros anikate machan!"

"Oh Love, unconquered in fight!" It sang in her ears persistently, joyously, ironically—a wedding-song, a battle-song, a song of victory.

Bastian Cautley was right when he said that the race was to the swift and the battle to the strong. How eager she had been for the fight, how mad for the crowded course! She had rushed on, heat after heat, outstripping all competitors and carrying off all the crowns and the judges' compliments at

the end of the day. She loved the race for its own sake, this young athlete; and though she took the crowns and the compliments very much as a matter of course, she had come to look on life as nothing but an endless round of Olympic games. And just as she forgot each successive event in the excitement of the next, she also had forgotten the losers and those who were tumbled in the dust. Until she had seen Miss Quincey.

Miss Quincey—so they had let her come to this among them all? They had left her so bare of happiness that the first man (it happened to be her doctor) who spoke two kind words to her became necessary to her existence. No, that was hardly the way to put it; it was underrating Bastian Cautley. He was the sort of man that any woman—But who would have thought it of Miss Quincey? And the really sad thing was that she did not think it of herself; it showed how empty of humanity her life had been. It was odd how these things happened. Miss Quincey was neither brilliant nor efficient, but she had made the most of herself; at least she had lived a life of grinding intellectual toil; the whole woman had seemed absorbed in her miserable arithmetical function. And yet at fifty (she looked fifty) she had contrived to develop that particular form of foolishness which it was Miss Cursiter's business to exterminate. There were some of them who talked as if the thing was done; as if competitive examinations had superseded the primitive rivalry of sex.

Bastian Cautley was right. You may go on building as high as you please, but you will never alter the original ground-plan of human nature. And how she had scoffed at his "man's view"; how indignantly she had repulsed his suggestion that there was a side to the subject that her friends the idealists were much too ideal to see.

Were they really, as Bastian Cautley put it, so engrossed in producing a new type that they had lost sight of the individual? Was the system so far in accordance with Nature that it was careless of the single life? Which was the only life open to most of them, poor things.

And she had blundered more grossly than the system itself. What, after all, had she done for that innocent whom she had made her friend? She had taken everything from her. She had promised to keep her place for her at St. Sidwell's and was monopolising it herself. Worse than that, she had given her a friend with one hand and snatched him from her with the other. (If you came to think of it, it was hard that she who had so much already could have Bastian Cautley too, any day, to play with, or to keep—for her very own. There was not a bit of him that could by any possibility belong to Miss Quincey.) She had tried to stand between her and her Fate, and she had become her Fate. Worse than all, she had kept from her the knowledge of the truth—the truth that might have cured her. Of course she had done that out of consideration for Bastian Cautley.

There it seemed that Rhoda's regard for his feelings ended. Though she admitted ten times over that he was right, she was by no means more disposed to come to an understanding with him on that account. On the contrary, when she saw him the very next evening (poor Bastian had chosen his moment indiscreetly) she endeavoured to repair her blunders by visiting them on his irreproachable head, dealing to him a certain painful, but not wholly unexpected back-hander in the face.

She had done all she could for Miss Quincey. At any rate, she said to herself, she had spared her the final blow.

CHAPTER IX

Through the Stethoscope

One morning the Mad Hatter was madder than ever. It was impossible to hold her attention. The black eyes blazed as they wandered, the paralytic pencil was hot in her burning fingers. When she laid it down towards the end of the morning and rested her head on her hands, Miss Quincey had not the heart to urge her to the loathsome toil. She let her talk.

"Miss Quincey," said the Mad Hatter in a solemn whisper, "I'm going to tell you a secret. Do you see her?" She indicated Miss Rhoda Vivian with the point of her pencil.

It was evident that Laura Lazarus did not adore the Classical Mistress, and Rhoda, sick of her worshippers, had found this attitude refreshing. Even now she bestowed a smile and a nod on the Mad Hatter that would have kept any other St. Sidwellite in a fortnight's ecstasy.

"Laura, that is not the way to speak of your teachers."

The child raised the Semitic arch of her eye-brows. Her face belonged to the type formed from all eternity for the expression of contempt.

"She's not my teacher, thank goodness. Do you know what I'm going to be some day, when she's married and gone away? I'm going to be what she is—Classical Mistress. I shan't have to do any sums for that, you know. I shall only have to know Greek, and isn't it a shame, Miss Quincey, they won't let me learn it till I'm in the Fourth, and I never shall be. But—don't tell any one—they've stuck me here, behind her now, and when she's coaching that young idiot Susie Parker—"

"Laura, that is not the way to speak of your school-fellows."

"I know it isn't, but she is, you know. I've bought the books, and I get behind them and I listen hard, and I can read now. What's more, I've done a bit of a chorus. Look—" The pariah took a dirty bit of paper from the breast of her gown. "It goes, 'Oh Love unconquered in battle,' and it's

simply splend_if_erous. Miss Quincey—when you like anything very much—or any_body_—it doesn't matter which—do you turn red all over? Do you have creeps all down your back? And do you feel it just here?" The child clapped her yellow claw to Miss Quincey's heart. "You do, you do, Miss Quincey; I can see it go thump, I can feel it go thud!"

She gazed into the teacher's face, and again the power of divination was upon her.

"Laura!" Miss Quincey gasped; for the Head had been looming in their neighbourhood, a deadly peril, and now she was sweeping down on them, smiling a dangerous smile.

"Miss Quincey, I hope you've been making that child work," said she and passed on.

"I say! She didn't see my verses, did she? You won't let on that I wrote them?"

"You'll never write verses," said Miss Quincey, deftly improving a bad occasion, "if you don't understand arithmetic. Why, it's the science of numbers. Come now, if ninety hogsheads—"

"Oh-h! I'm so tired of hogsheads; mayn't it be firkins this time?"

And, for fancy's sake, firkins Miss Quincey permitted it to be.

Now Rhoda was responsible for much, but for what followed the Mad Hatter must, strictly speaking, be held accountable.

Miss Quincey had never been greatly interested in the movements of her heart; but now that her attention had been drawn to them she admitted that it was beating in a very extraordinary way; there was a decided palpitation, a flutter.

That night she lay awake and listened to it.

It was going diddledy, diddledy, like the triplets in a Beethoven sonata (only that it had no idea of time); then it suddenly left off till she put her hand over it, when it gave a terrifying succession of runaway knocks. Then

it pretended that it was going to stop altogether, and Miss Quincey implicitly believed it and prepared to die. Then its tactics changed; it seemed to have shifted its habitation; to be rising and rising, to be entangled with her collar-bone and struggling in her throat. Then it sank suddenly and lay like a lump of lead, dragging her down through the mattress, and through the bedstead, and through the floor, down to the bottom of all things. Miss Quincey did not mind much; she had been so unhappy. And then it gave an alarming double-knock at her ribs, and Miss Quincey came to life again as unhappy as ever.

And of what it all meant Miss Quincey had no more idea than the man in the moon, though even the Mad Hatter could have told her. Her heart went through the same performance a second and a third night, and Miss Quincey said to herself that if it happened again she would have to send for Dr. Cautley. Nothing would have induced her to see him for a mere trifle, but pride was one thing and prudence was another.

It did happen again, and she sent.

She may have hoped that he would discover something wrong, being dimly conscious that her chance lay there, that suffering constituted the incontestable claim on his sympathy; most distinctly she felt the desire (monstrous of course in a woman of no account) to wear the aureole of pain for its own sake; to walk for a little while in the glory and glamour of death. She did not want or mean to give any trouble, to be a source of expense; she had saved a little money for the supreme luxury. But she had hardly entertained the idea for a moment when she dismissed it as selfish. It was her duty to live, for the sake of St. Sidwell's and of Mrs. Moon; and she was only calling Dr. Cautley in to help her to do it. But through it all the feeling uppermost was joy in the certainty that she would see him on an honourable pretext, and would be able to set right that terrible misunderstanding.

She hardly expected him till late in the day; so she was a little startled, when she came in after morning school, to find Mrs. Moon waiting for her at the stairs, quivering with indignation that could have but one cause.

He had lost no time in answering her summons.

The drawing-room door was ajar; the Old Lady closed it mysteriously, and pushed her niece into the bedroom behind.

"Will you tell me the meaning of this? That man has been cooling his heels in there for the last ten minutes, and he says you sent for him. Is that the case?"

Miss Quincey meekly admitted that it was, and entered upon a vague description of her trouble.

"It's all capers and nonsense," said the Old Lady, "there's nothing the matter with your heart. You're just hysterical, and you just want—?"

"I want to know, and Dr. Cautley will tell me."

"Oh ho! I daresay he'll find some mare's nest fast enough, if you tell him where to look."

Miss Quincey took off her hat and cape and laid them down with a sigh. She gave a terrified glance at the looking-glass and smoothed her thin hair with her hand.

"Auntie—I must go. I can't keep him waiting any longer."

"Go then—I won't stop you."

She went trembling, followed so closely by Mrs. Moon that she looked like a prisoner conducted to the dock.

"How will he receive me?" she wondered.

He received her coldly and curtly. There was a hurry and abstraction in his manner utterly unlike his former leisurely sympathy. Many causes contributed to this effect; he was still all bruised and bleeding from the blow dealt to him by Rhoda's strong young arm; an epidemic had kept him

on his legs all day and a great part of the night; his time had never been so valuable, and he had been obliged to waste ten minutes of it contemplating the furniture in that detestable drawing-room. He was worried and overworked, and Miss Quincey thought he was still offended; his very appearance made her argue the worst. No hope to-day of clearing up that terrible misunderstanding.

She tremulously obeyed his first brief order, one by one undoing the buttons of her dress, laying bare her poor chest, all flat and formless as a child's. A momentary gentleness came over him as he adjusted the tubes of his stethoscope and began the sounding, backwards and forwards from heart to lungs, and from lungs to heart again; while the Old Lady looked on as merry as Destiny, and nodded her head and smiled, as much to say, "Tchee-tchee, what a farce it is!"

He put up the stethoscope with a click.

"There is nothing the matter with you."

Mrs. Moon gave out a subdued ironical chuckle.

Miss Quincey looked anxiously into his face. "Do you not think the heart—the heart is a little—?"

He smiled and at the same time he sighed. "Heart's all right. But you've left off your tonic."

She had, she was afraid that so much poison—

"Poison?" (He was not in the least offended.) "Do you mean the arsenic? There are some poisons you can't live without; but you must take them in moderation."

"Will you—will you want to see me again?"

"It will not be necessary."

At that Mrs. Moon's chuckle broke all bounds and burst into a triumphant "Tchee-tchee-chee!" He went away under cover of it. It was her way of putting a pleasant face on the matter.

She hardly waited till his back was turned before she delivered herself of that which was working within her.

"I tell you what it is, Juliana; you're a silly woman."

Miss Quincey looked up with a faint premonitory fear. Her fingers began nervously buttoning and unbuttoning her dress bodice; while half-dressed and shivering she waited the attack.

"And a pretty exhibition you've made of yourself this day. Anybody might have thought you wanted to let that young man see what was the matter with you."

"So I did. He says there is nothing the matter with me."

"Nothing the matter with you, indeed! He knows well enough what's the matter with you."

The victim was staring now, with terror in her tired eyes. Her mouth dropped open with the question her tongue refused to utter.

"If you," continued Mrs. Moon, "had wanted to tell him plainly that you were in love with him, you couldn't have set about it better. I should have thought you'd have been ashamed to look him in the face—at your age. You're a disgrace to my family!"

The poor fingers ceased their labour of buttoning and unbuttoning; Miss

Quincey sat with her shoulders naked as it were to the lash.

"There!" said Mrs. Moon with an air of drawing back the whip and putting it by for the present. "If I were you I'd cover myself up, and not sit there catching cold with my dress-body off."

CHAPTER X

Miss Quincey Stands Back

As it happened on a Saturday morning she had plenty of time to think about it. All the afternoon and the evening and the night lay before her; she was powerless to cope with Sunday and the night beyond that.

The remarkable revelation made to her by Mrs. Moon was so great a shock that her mind refused to realize it all at once. It was an outrage to all the meek reticences and chastities of her spirit. But she owned its truth; she saw it now, the thing they all had seen, that she only could not see.

She had sinned the sin of sins, the sin of youth in middle-age.

Now it was not imagination in Miss Quincey, so much as the tradition of St. Sidwell's, that gave her innocent affection the proportions of a crime. Miss Quincey had lived all her life in ignorance of her own nature, having spent the best part of five-and-forty years in acquiring other knowledge. She had nothing to go upon, for she had never been young; or rather she had treated her youth unkindly, she had fed it on saw-dust and given it nothing but arithmetic books to play with, so that its experiences were of no earthly use to her.

And now, if they had only let her alone, she might have been none the wiser; her folly might have put on many quaint disguises, friendship, literary sympathy, intellectual esteem—there were a thousand delicate subterfuges and innocent hypocrisies, and under any one of them it might have crept about unchallenged in the shadows and blind alleys of thought. As love pure and simple, if it came to that, there was no harm in it. Many an old maid, older than she, has just such a secret folded up and put away all sweet and pure; the poor lady does not call it love, but remembrance, which is so to speak love laid in lavender; and she—who knows? She might have contrived a little shrine for it somewhere; she had always understood that love was a holy thing.

Unfortunately, when a holy thing has been pulled about and dragged in the mud, it may be as holy as ever but it will never look the same. In Miss Quincey's case mortal passion had been shaken out of its sleep and forced to look at itself before it had time to put on a shred of immortality. In the sudden glare it stood out monstrous, naked and ashamed; she herself had helped to deprive it of all the delicacies and amenities that made it tolerable to thought. With her own hands she had delivered it up to the stethoscope.

He knew, he knew. In the mad rush of her ideas one sentence detached itself from the torrent. "He knows well enough what's the matter with you."

The nature of the crime was such that there was no possibility or explanation or defence against the accuser whose condemnation weighed heaviest on her soul. He loomed before her, hovered over her, with the tubes of the heart-probing stethoscope in his ears (as a matter of fact they gave him a somewhat grotesque appearance, remotely suggestive of a Hindoo idol; but Miss Quincey had not noticed that); his bumpy forehead was terrible with intelligence; his eyes were cold and comprehensive; the smile of a foregone conclusion flickered on his lips.

He must have known it all the time. There never had been any misunderstanding. That was the clue to his conduct; that was the reason why he had left off coming to the house; for he was the soul of delicacy and honour. And yet she had never said a word that might be interpreted—He must have seen it in her face, then,—that day—when she allowed herself to sit with him in the park. She remembered—things that he had said to her—did they mean that he had seen? She saw it all as he had seen it. "Delicacy" and "honour" indeed! Disgust and contempt would be more likely feelings.

She lay awake all Saturday night and all Sunday night, until four o'clock on Monday morning; always reviewing the situation, always going over the same patch of ground in the desperate hope of finding some place where her self-respect could rest, and discovering nothing but the traces of her guilty feet. A subtler woman would have flourished lightly over the

territory, till she had whisked away every vestige of her trail; another would have seen the humour of the situation and blown the whole thing into the inane with a burst of healthy laughter; but subtlety and humour were not Miss Quincey's strong points. She could do nothing but creep shivering to bed and lie there, face to face with her own enormity.

On Monday morning and on many mornings after she crept out into the street stealthily, like a criminal seeking some shelter where she could hide her head. She acquired a habit—odd enough to the casual onlooker—of slinking cautiously round every turning and rushing every crossing in her abject terror of meeting Bastian Cautley.

There was nobody to tell her that it would not matter if she did meet him; no cheerful woman of the world to smile in her frightened face and say: "My dear Miss Quincey, there is nothing remarkable in this. We all do it, sooner or later. Too late? Not a bit of it; better too late than never, and if it's that Cautley man I'm sure I don't wonder. I'm in love with him myself. Lost your self-respect, have you? Self-respect, indeed, why bless your soul, you are all the nicer for it. As for hiding your head I never heard such rubbish in my life. Nobody is looking at you—certainly not the Cautley man. In fact, to tell you the truth, at this moment he is particularly engaged in looking the other way."

But Miss Quincey did not know that lady. She knew no one but Rhoda and Mrs. Moon; and if Mrs. Moon was too old, Rhoda was too young to take that view; besides, Mrs. Moon was not a woman of the world and no ridiculous delicacy prompted her to look the other way. In any case Juliana's state of mind, advertised as it was by her complexion and many eccentricities of behaviour, could not have escaped her notice.

The Old Lady had reverted to her former humorous attitude, and was trying whether Juliana's state of mind would not yield to skilfully directed banter. In these tactics she was not left unsupported. Louisa had written a long letter about her husband and her children, with a postscript.

"P.S.—I don't half like what you tell me about Juliana and Dr. C—. For goodness' sake don't encourage her in any of that nonsense. Sit on it. Laugh her out of it. I agree with you that it would be better if she cultivated her mind a little more.

"P.P.S.—Andrew has just come in. He says we oughtn't to call her

Juliana, but Fooliana."

So laughed Louisa, the married woman.

And Fooliana she was called. The joke was quite unworthy of the Greek Professor's reputation, but for Mrs. Moon's purposes he could hardly have made a better one.

Louisa had put a terrible weapon into the Old Lady's hands. It was many weapons in one. It could be turned on in all its broad robust humour—"Fooliana!" Or refined away into a playful or delicate suggestion, pointed with an uplifted finger—"Fooli!" Or cut down and compressed into its essential meaning—"Fool!"

But whichever missile came handy, the effect was much the same. Juliana's complexion grew redder or grayer, but her state of mind remained unchanged. Sometimes the Old Lady tried a graver method.

"If you would cultivate your mind a little in the evenings you would have no time for all this nonsense."

But Juliana had abandoned the cultivation of her mind. She made no attempt to pay off that small outstanding debt to Sordello. There was an end of the intellectual life; for the living wells of literature were tainted; Browning had become a bitter memory and Tennyson a shame.

But if Miss Quincey had no heart for General Culture, she was busier than ever in the discharge of her regular duties. At the end of the midsummer term the pressure on the staff was heavy. Her work had grown with the growth of St. Sidwell's, and the pile of marble and granite copy-books rose higher than ever; it was monumental, and Miss Quincey was glad enough

to bury her grief under it for a time. Indeed it looked as if in St. Sidwell's she had found the shelter where she could hide her head; and a very desirable shelter too, as long as Mrs. Moon continued in that lively temper. Gradually she began to realize that of all those five hundred pairs of eyes there was none that had discovered her secret; that not one of those busy brains was occupied with her affairs. It was a relief to lose herself among them all and be of no account again. In the corner behind Rhoda Vivian she and the Mad Hatter seemed to be clinging together more than ever in an ecstasy of isolation.

After all, above the turmoil of emotion a little tremulous, attenuated ideal was trying to raise its head. Her duty. She dimly discerned a possibility of deliverance, of purification from her sin. Therefore she clung more desperately than ever to her post. Seeing that she had served the system for five-and-twenty years, it was hard if she could not get from it a little protection against her own weakness, if she could not claim the intellectual support it professed to give. It was the first time she had ever put it to the test. If she could only stay on another year or two—

And now at the very end of the midsummer term it really looked as if St. Sidwell's was anxious to keep her. Everybody was curiously kind; the staff cast friendly glances on her as she sat in her corner; Rhoda was almost passionate in her tenderness. Even Miss Cursiter seemed softened. She had left off saying "Stand back, Miss Quincey, if you please"; and Miss Quincey began to wonder what it all meant.

She was soon to know.

One night, the last of the term, the Classical Mistress was closeted with the Head. Rhoda, elbow-deep in examination papers, had been critically considering seventy variously ingenious renderings of a certain chorus, when the sudden rapping of a pen on the table roused her from her labours.

"You must see for yourself, Rhoda, how we are placed. We must keep up to a certain standard of efficiency in the staff. Miss Quincey is getting past her work."

(Rhoda became instantly absorbed in sharpening a pencil.)

"For the last two terms she has been constantly breaking down; and now

I'm very much afraid she is breaking-up."

The Head remained solemnly unconscious of her own epigram.

"No wonder," said Rhoda to herself, "first love at fifty is new wine in old bottles; everybody knows what happens to the bottles."

The flush and the frown on the Classical Mistress's face might have been accounted for by the sudden snapping of the pencil.

"You see," continued Miss Cursiter, as if defending herself from some accusation conveyed by the frown, "as it is we have kept her on a long while for her sister's sake."

(A murmur from the Classical Mistress.)

"Of course we must put it to her prettily, wrap it up—in tissue paper."

(The Classical Mistress is still inarticulate.)

"You are not giving me your opinion."

"It seems to me I've said a great deal more than I've any right to say."

"Oh you. We know all about that. I asked for your opinion."

"And when I gave it you told me I was under an influence."

"What if I did? And what if it were so?"

"What indeed? You would get the benefit of two opinions instead of one."

Now if Miss Cursiter were thinking of Dr. Cautley there was some point in what Rhoda said; for in the back of her mind the Head had a curious respect for masculine judgment.

"There can be no two opinions about Miss Quincey."

"I don't know. Miss Quincey," said Rhoda thoughtfully to her pencil, "is a large subject."

"Yes, if you mean that Miss Quincey is a terrible legacy from the past.

The question for me is—how long am I to let her hamper our future?"

"The future? It strikes me that we're not within shouting distance of the future. We talk as if we could see the end, and we're nowhere near it, we're in all the muddle of the middle—that's why we're hampered with Miss Quincey and other interesting relics of the past."

"We are slowly getting rid of them."

At that Rhoda blazed up. She was young, and she was reckless, and she had too many careers open to her to care much about consequences. Miss Cursiter had asked for her opinion and she should have it with a vengeance.

"It's not enough to get rid of them. We ought to provide for them. Who or what do we provide for, if it comes to that? We're always talking about specialisation, and the fact is we haven't specialised enough. Don't we give the same test papers to everybody?"

"I shall be happy to set separate papers for each girl if you'll undertake to correct them."

The more Rhoda fired the more Miss Cursiter remained cold.

"That's just it—we couldn't if we tried. We know nothing about each girl. That's where we shall have to specialise in the future if we're to do any good. We've specialised enough with our teachers and our subjects; chipped and chopped till we can't divide them any more; and we've taken our girls in the lump. We know less about them than they do themselves. As for the teachers—"

"Which by the way brings us back to Miss Quincey."

"Everything brings us back to Miss Quincey. Miss Quincey will be always with us."

"We must put younger women in her place."

Rhoda winced as though Miss Cursiter had struck her.

"They will soon grow old. Our profession is a cruel one. It uses up the finest and most perishable parts of a woman's nature. It takes the best years of her life—and throws the rest away."

"Yet thousands of women are willing to take it up, and leave comfortable homes to do it too."

"Yes," sighed Rhoda, "it's the rush for the open door."

"My dear Rhoda, the women's labour market is the same as every other. The best policy is the policy of the open door. Don't you see that the remedy is to open it wider—wider!"

"And when we've opened all the doors as wide as ever they'll go, what then? Where are we going to?"

"I can't tell you." Miss Cursiter looked keenly at her. "Do you mean that you'll go no further unless you know?"

Rhoda was silent.

"There are faults in the system. I can see that as well as you, perhaps better. I am growing old too, Rhoda. But you are youth itself. It is women like you we want—to save us. Are you going to turn your back on us?"

Miss Cursiter bore down on her with her steady gaze, a gaze that was a menace and an appeal, and Rhoda gave a little gasp as if for breath.

"I can't go any farther."

"Do you realize what this means? You are not a deserter from the ranks.

It is the second in command going over to the enemy."

The words were cold, but there was a fiery court-martial in Miss Cursiter's eyes that accused and condemned her. If Rhoda had been dashing her head against the barrack walls her deliverance was at hand. It seemed that she

could never strike a blow for Miss Quincey without winning the battle for herself.

"I can't help it," said she. "I hate it—I hate the system."

"The system? Suppose you do away with it—do away with every woman's college in the kingdom—have you anything to put in its place?"

"No. I have nothing to put in its place."

"Ah," said Miss Cursiter, "you are older than I thought."

Rhoda smiled. By this time, wrong or right, she was perfectly reckless. If everybody was right in rejecting Miss Quincey, there was rapture in being wildly and wilfully in the wrong. She had flung up the game.

Miss Cursiter saw it. "I was right," said she. "You are under an influence, and a dangerous one."

"Perhaps—but, influence for influence" (here Rhoda returned Miss Cursiter's gaze intrepidly), "I'm not far wrong. I honestly think that if we persist in turning out these intellectual monstrosities we shall hand over worse incompetents than Miss Quincey to the next generation."

Rhoda was intrepid; all the same she reddened as she realized what a mouthpiece she had become for Bastian Cautley's theories and temper.

"My dear Rhoda, you're an intellectual monstrosity yourself."

"I know. And in another twenty years' time they'll want to get rid of me."

"Of me too," thought the Head. Miss Cursiter felt curiously old and worn. She had invoked Rhoda's youth and it had risen up against her. Influence for influence, her power was dead.

Rhoda had talked at length in the hope of postponing judgment in Miss Quincey's case; now she was anxious to get back to Miss Quincey, to escape judgment in her own.

"And how about Miss Quincey?" she asked.

Miss Cursiter had nothing to say about Miss Quincey. She had done with that section of her subject. She understood that Rhoda had said in effect, "If Miss Quincey goes, I go too." Nevertheless her mind was made up; in tissue paper, all ready for Miss Quincey.

Unfortunately tissue paper is more or less transparent, and Miss Quincey had no difficulty in perceiving the grounds of her dismissal when presented to her in this neat way. Not even when Miss Cursiter said to her, at the close of the interview they had early the next morning, "For your own sake, dear Miss Quincey, I feel we must forego your valuable—most valuable services."

Miss Cursiter hesitated, warned by something in the aspect of the tiny woman who had been a thorn in her side so long. Somehow, for this occasion, the most incompetent, most insignificant member of her staff had contrived to clothe herself with a certain nobility. She was undeniably the more dignified of the two.

The Head, usually so eloquent at great moments, found actual difficulty in getting to the end of her next sentence.

"What I was thinking of—really again entirely for your own sake—was whether it would not be better for you to take a little longer holiday. I do feel in your case the imperative necessity for rest. Indeed if you found that you wished to retire at the end of the holidays—of course receiving your salary for the term—"

Try as she would to speak as though she were conferring a benefit, the Head had the unmistakable air of asking a favour from her subordinate, of imploring her help in a delicate situation, of putting it to her honour.

Miss Quincey's honour was more than equal to the demand made on it. She had sunk so low in her own eyes lately that she was glad to gain some little foothold for her poor pride. She faced Miss Cursiter bravely with her innocent dim eyes as she answered: "I am ready to go, Miss Cursiter,

whenever it is most convenient to you; but I cannot think of taking payment for work I have not done."

"My dear Miss Quincey, the rule is always a term's notice—or if—if any other arrangement is agreed upon, a term's salary. There can be no question—you must really allow me—"

There Miss Cursiter's address failed her and her voice faltered. She had extracted the thorn; but it had worked its way deeper than she knew, and the operation was a painful one. A few compliments on the part of the Head, and the hope that St. Sidwell's would not lose sight of Miss Quincey altogether, and the interview was closed.

It was understood by the end of the morning that Miss Quincey had sent in her resignation. The news spread from class to class—"Miss Quincey is going"—and was received by pupils and teachers with cries of incredulity. After all, Miss Quincey belonged to St. Sidwell's; she was part and parcel of the place; her blood and bones had been built into its very walls, and her removal was not to be contemplated without dismay. Why, what would a procession be like without Miss Quincey to enliven it?

And so, as she went her last round, a score of hands that had never clasped hers in friendship were stretched out over the desks in a wild leave-taking; three girls had tears in their eyes; one, more emotional than the rest, sobbed audibly without shame. The staff were unanimous in their sympathy and regret. Rhoda withdrew hastily from the painful scene. Only the Mad Hatter in her corner made no sign. She seemed to take the news of Miss Quincey's departure with a resigned philosophy.

"Well, little Classical Mistress," said Miss Quincey, "we must say good-bye. You know I'm going."

The child nodded her small head. "Of course you're going. I might have known it. I did know it all along. You were booked to go."

"Why, Laura?" Miss Quincey was mystified and a little hurt.

"Because"—a sinister convulsion passed over the ugly little pariah face—"because"—the Mad Hatter had learnt the force of under-statement—"because I like you."

At that Miss Quincey broke down. "My dear little girl—I am going because I am too old to stay."

"Write to me, dear," she said at the last moment; "let me know how you are getting on."

But she never knew. The Mad Hatter did not write. In fact she never wrote anything again, not even verses. She was handed over next term to Miss Quincey's brilliant and efficient successor, who made her work hard, with the result that the Mad Hatter got ill of a brain fever just before the Christmas holidays and was never fit for any more work; and never became Classical Mistress or anything else in the least distinguished. But this is by the way.

As the College clock struck one, Miss Quincey walked home as usual and went up into her bedroom without a word. She opened a drawer and took from it her Post Office Savings Bank book and looked over her account. There stood to her credit the considerable sum of twenty-seven pounds four shillings and eight pence. No, not quite that, for the blouse, the abominable blouse, had been paid for out of her savings and it had cost a guinea. Twenty-six pounds three shillings and eight pence was all that she had saved in five-and-twenty years. This, with the term's salary which Miss Cursiter had insisted on, was enough to keep her going for a year. And a year is a long time. She came slowly downstairs to the drawing-room where her aunt was dozing and dreaming in her chair. There still hung about her figure the indefinable dignity that had awed Miss Cursiter. If she was afraid of Mrs. Moon she was too proud to show her fear.

"This morning," she said simply, "I received my dismissal."

The old lady looked up dazed, not with the news but with her dream. Miss Quincey repeated her statement.

"Do you mean you are not going back to that place there?" she asked mildly.

"I am never going back."

Still with dignity she waited for the burst of feeling she felt to be justifiable in the circumstances. None came; neither anger, nor indignation, nor contempt, not even surprise. In fact the Old Lady was smiling placidly, as she was wont to smile under the spell of the dream.

Slowly, very slowly, it was dawning upon her that the reproach had been taken away from the memory of Tollington Moon. Henceforth his niece Miss Quincey would be a gentlewoman at large. At the same time it struck her that after all poor Juliana did not look so very old.

"Very well then," said she, "if I were you I should put on that nice silk blouse in the evenings."

CHAPTER XI

Dr. Cautley Sends in his Bill

"I wonder," Mrs. Moon observed suddenly one morning, "if that man is going to let his bill run on to the day of judgment?"

The Old Lady had not even distantly alluded to Dr. Cautley for as many as ten months. After the great day of what she called Juliana's "resignation" she seemed to have tacitly agreed that since Juliana had spared her dream she would spare Juliana's. Did she not know, she too, that the dream is the reality? As Miss Quincey, gentlewoman at large, Juliana had a perfect right to set up a dream of her own; as to whether she was able to afford the luxury, Juliana was the best judge. Her present wonder, then, had no malignant reference; it was simply wrung from her by inexorable economy. Juliana's supplies were calculated to last a year; as it was the winter season that they had lately weathered, she was rather more than three-quarters of the way through her slender resources, and it behoved them to look out for bills ahead. And Mrs. Moon had always suspected that young man, not only of a passion for mare's-nesting, but of deliberately and systematically keeping back his accounts that he might revel in a larger haul.

The remark, falling with a shock all the greater for a silence of ten months, had the effect of driving Juliana out of the room. Out of the room and out of the house, down High Street, where Hunter's shop was already blossoming in another spring; up Park Street and past the long wall of St. Sidwell's, till she found herself alone in Primrose Hill Park.

The young day was so glorious that Miss Quincey had some thoughts of climbing Primrose Hill and sitting on the top; but after twenty yards or so of it she abandoned the attempt. For the last few months her heart had been the seat of certain curious sensations, so remarkably like those she had experienced in the summer that she took them for the same, and sternly resolved to suppress their existence by ignoring it. That, she understood, was the right treatment for hysteria.

But this morning Miss Quincey's heart protested so violently against her notion of ascending Primrose Hill, threatening indeed to strangle her if she persisted in it, that Miss Quincey unwillingly gave in and contented herself with a seat in one of the lower walks of the park. There she leaned back and looked about her, but with no permanent interest in one thing more than another.

Presently, as she settled down to quieter breathing, there came to her a strange sensation, that grew till it became an unusually vivid perception of the outer world; a perception mingled with a still stranger double vision, a sense that seemed to be born in the dark of the brain and to be moving there to a foregone conclusion. And all the time her eyes were busy, now with a bush of May in crimson blossom, now with the many-pointed leaves of a sycamore pricked against the blue; now with the straight rectangular paths that made the park an immense mathematical diagram. From where she sat her eyes swept the length of the wide walk that cuts the green from east to west. Far down at the west end was a seat, and she could see two people, a man and a woman, sitting on it; they must have been there a quarter of an hour or more; she had noticed them ever since she came into the park.

They had risen, and her gaze left everything else to follow them; or rather, it went to meet them, for they had turned and were coming slowly eastward now. They had stopped; they were facing each other, and her gaze rested with them, fascinated yet uncertain. And now she could see nothing else; the park, with the regions beyond it and the sky above it, had become merely a setting for one man and one woman; the avenue, fresh strewn with red golden gravel, led up to them and ended there at their feet; a young poplar trembled in the wind and shook its silver green fans above them in delicate confusion. The next minute a light went up in that obscure and prophetic background of her brain; and she saw Rhoda Vivian and Bastian Cautley coming towards her, greeting her, with their kind faces shining.

She rose, turned from them, and went slowly home.

It was the last rent in the veil of illusion that Rhoda had spun so well. Up till then Miss Quincey had seen only half the truth. Now she had seen the whole, with all that Rhoda had disguised and kept hidden from her; the truth that kills or cures.

Miss Quincey did not go out again that day, but sat all afternoon silent in her chair. Towards evening she became talkative and stayed up later than had been her wont since she recovered her freedom. She seemed to be trying to make up to her aunt for a want of sociability in the past.

At eleven she got up and stood before the Old Lady in the attitude of a penitent. Apparently she had been seized with a mysterious impulse of confession.

"Aunt," she said, "there's something I want to say to you."

She paused, casting about in her mind for the sins she had committed.

They were three in all.

"I am afraid I have been very extravagant"—she was thinking of the blouse—"and—and very foolish"—she was thinking of Bastian Cautley—"and very selfish"—she was thinking of her momentary desire to die.

"Juliana, if you're worrying about that money"—the Old Lady was thinking of nothing else—"don't. I've plenty for us both. As long as we can keep together I don't care what I eat, nor what I drink, nor what I put on my poor back. And if the worst comes to the worst I'll sell the furniture."

It seemed to Miss Quincey that she had never known her aunt in all those five-and-twenty years; never known her until this minute. For perhaps, after all, being angry with Juliana was only Mrs. Moon's way of being sorry for her. But how was Juliana to know that?

"Only," continued the Old Lady, "I won't part with your uncle's picture.

Don't ask me to part with your uncle's picture."

"You won't have to part with anything. I'll—I'll get something to do.

I'm not worrying. There's nothing to worry about."

She stooped down and tenderly kissed the wrinkled forehead.

A vague fear clutched at the Old Lady's heart.

"Then, Juliana, you are not well. Hadn't you better see"—she hesitated—pausing with unwonted delicacy for her words—"a doctor?"

"I don't want to see a doctor. There is nothing the matter with me." And still insisting that there was nothing the matter with her, she went to bed.

And old Martha had come with her early morning croak to call Miss Juliana; she had dumped down the hot-water can in the basin with a clash, pulled up the blind with a jerk, and drawn back the curtains with a clatter, before she noticed that Miss Juliana was up all the time. Up and dressed, and sitting in her chair by the hearth, warming her feet at an imaginary fire.

She had been sitting up all night, for her bed was as Martha had left it the night before. Martha approached cautiously, still feeling her way, though there was no need for it, the room being full of light.

She groped like a blind woman for Miss Juliana's forehead, laying her hand there before she looked into her face.

After some fumbling futile experiments with brandy, a looking-glass and a feather, old Martha hid these things carefully out of sight; she disarranged the bed, turning back the clothes as they might have been left by one newly wakened and risen out of it; drew a shawl over the head and shoulders of the figure in the chair; pulled down the blind and closed the curtains till the room was dark again. Then she groped her way out and down the stairs to her mistress's door. There she stayed a moment, gathering her feeble wits together for the part she meant to play. She had made up her mind what she would do.

So she called the Old Lady as usual; said she was afraid there was something the matter with Miss Juliana; thought she might have got up a bit too early and turned faint like.

The Old Lady answered that she would come and see; and the two crept up the stairs, and went groping their way in the dark of the curtained room. Old Martha fumbled a long time with the blind; she drew back the curtains little by little, with infinite precaution letting in the light upon the fearful thing.

But the Old Lady approached it boldly.

"Don't you know me, Jooley dear?" she said, peering into the strange eyes. There was no recognition in them for all their staring.

"Don't know me, m'm," said Martha soothingly; "seems all of a white swoon, don't she?"

Martha was warming to her part. She made herself busy; she brought hot water bottles and eau de cologne; she spent twenty minutes chafing the hands and forehead and laying warmth to the feet, that the Old Lady might have the comfort of knowing that everything had been done that could be done. She shuffled off to find brandy, as if she had only thought of it that instant; and she played out the play with the looking-glass and the feather.

The feather fluttered to the floor, and Martha ceased bending and peering, and looked at her mistress.

"She's gone, m'm, I do believe."

The Old Lady sank by the chair, her arms clinging to those rigid knees.

"Jooley—Jooley—don't you know me?" she cried, as if in a passion of affront.

CHAPTER XII

Epilogue.—The Man and the Woman

By daylight there is neither glamour nor beauty in the great burying-ground of North London; you must go to it at evening, in the first fall of the summer dusk, to feel the fascination of that labyrinth of low graves, crosses and headstones, urns and sarcophagi, crowded in the black-green of the grass; of marble columns, granite pyramids and obelisks, massed and reared and piled in the grey of the air. It is nothing if not fantastic. Even by day that same mad grouping and jostling of monumental devices, gathered together from the ends of the world, gives to the place a cheerful half-pagan character; now, in its confusion and immensity, it might be some city of dreams, tossed up in cloud and foam and frozen into marble; some aerial half-way limbo where life slips a little from the living and death from the dead.

For these have their own way here. No priest interferes with them, and whatever secular power ordains these matters is indulgent to its children. If one of them would have his horse or his dog carved on his tomb instead of an angel, or a pair of compasses instead of a cross, there is no one to thwart his fancy. He may even be humorous if he will. It is as if he implored us to laugh with him a little while though the jest be feeble, and not to chill him with so many tears.

At twilight a man and a woman were threading their way through this cemetery, and as they went they smiled faintly at the memorial caprices of the living and the still quainter originalities of the dead. But on the whole they seemed to be trying not to look too happy. They said nothing to each other till they came to a mound raised somewhere in the borderland that divides the graves of the rich from the paupers' ground. There was just room for them to stand together on the boards that roofed in the narrow pit dug ready for the next comer.

"If I believed in a Creator" (it was the man who spoke), "I should want to know what pleasure he found in creating that poor little woman."

The woman did not answer as she looked at him.

"Yet," he went on, "I'm selfish enough to be glad that she lived. If I had not known Miss Quincey, I should not have known you."

"And I," said the woman, and her face was rosy under the touch of grief, "if I had not loved Miss Quincey, I could not have loved you."

They seemed to think Miss Quincey had justified her existence. Perhaps she had.

And the woman took the roses that she wore in her belt and laid them on the breast of the grave. She stood for a minute studying the effect with a shamefaced look, as if she had mocked the dead woman with flowers flung from her wedding-wreath of youth and joy.

Then she turned to the man; the closing bell tolled, and they passed through the iron gates into the ways of the living.

THE END