

THE TRAGIC COMEDIANS

By

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***Free*editorial** 

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He was down on the plains to her the second day, and as usual when they met, it was as if they had not parted; his animation made it seem so. He was like summer's morning sunlight, his warmth striking instantly through her blood dispersed any hesitating strangeness that sometimes gathers during absences, caused by girlish dread of a step to take, or shame at the step taken, when coldish gentlemen rather create these backflowings and gaps in the feelings. She had grown reconciled to the perturbation of his messages, and would have preferred to have him startling and thrilling her from a distance; but seeing him, she welcomed him, and feeling in his bright presence not the faintest chill of the fit of shyness, she took her bravery of heart for a sign that she had reached his level, and might own it by speaking of the practical measures to lead to their union. On one subject sure to be raised against him by her parents, she had a right to be inquisitive: the baroness.

She asked to see a photograph of her.

Alvan gave her one out of his pocketbook, and watched her eyelids in profile as she perused those features of the budless grey woman. The eyelids in such scrutinies reveal the critical mind; Clotilde's drooped till they almost closed upon their lashes—deadly criticism.

'Think of her age,' said Alvan, colouring. He named a grandmaternal date for the year of the baroness's birth.

Her eyebrows now stood up; her contemplation of those disenchanting lineaments came to an abrupt finish.

She returned the square card to him, slowly shaking her head, still eyeing earth as her hand stretched forth the card laterally. He could not contest the woeful verdict.

'Twenty years back!' he murmured, writhing. The baroness was a woman fair to see in the days twenty years back, though Clotilde might think it incredible: she really was once.

Clotilde resumed her doleful shaking of the head; she sighed. He shrugged; she looked at him, and he blinked a little. For the first time since they had come together she had a clear advantage, and as it was likely to be a rare occasion, she did not let it slip. She sighed again. He was wounded by her underestimate of his ancient conquest.

'Yes—now,' he said, impatiently.

'I cannot feel jealousy, I cannot feel rivalry,' said she, sad of voice.

The humour of her tranced eyes in the shaking head provoked him to defend the baroness for her goodness of heart, her energy of brain.

Clotilde 'tolled' her naughty head.

'But it is a strong face,' she said, 'a strong face—a strong jaw, by Lavater! You were young—and daringly adventurous; she was captivating in her distress. Now she is old—and you are friends.'

'Friends, yes,' Alvan replied, and praised the girl, as of course she deserved to be praised for her open mind.

'We are friends!' he said, dropping a deep-chested breath. The title this girl scornfully supplied was balm to the vanity she had stung, and his burnt skin was too eager for a covering of any sort to examine the mood of the giver. She had positively humbled him so far as with a single word to

relieve him; for he had seen bristling chapters in her look at the photograph. Yet for all the natural sensitiveness of the man's vanity, he did not seek to bury the subject at the cost of a misconception injurious in the slightest degree to the sentiments he entertained toward the older lady as well as the younger. 'Friends! you are right; good friends; only you should know that it is just a little—a trifle different. The fact is, I cannot kill the past, and I would not. It would try me sharply to break the tie connecting us, were it possible to break it. I am bound to her by gratitude. She is old now; and were she twice that age, I should retain my feeling for her. You raise your eyes, Clotilde! Well, when I was much younger I found this lady in desperate ill-fortune, and she honoured me with her confidence. Young man though I was, I defended her; I stopped at no measure to defend her: against a powerful husband, remember—the most unscrupulous of foes, who sought to rob her of every right she possessed. And what I did then I again would do. I was vowed to her interests, to protect a woman shamefully wronged; I did not stick at trifles, as you know; you have read my speech in defence of myself before the court. By my interpretation of the case, I was justified; but I estranged my family and made the world my enemy. I gave my time and money, besides the forfeit of reputation, to the case, and reasonably there was an arrangement to repay me out of the estate reserved for her, so that the baroness should not be under the degradation of feeling herself indebted. You will not think that out of the way: men of the world do not. As for matters of the heart between us, we're as far apart as the Poles.'

He spoke hurriedly. He had said all that could be expected of him.

They were in a wood, walking through lines of spruce firs of deep golden green in the yellow beams. One of these trees among its well-robed fellows fronting them was all lichen-smitten. From the low sweeping branches touching earth to the plumed top, the tree was dead-black as its shadow; a vision of blackness.

'I will compose a beautiful, dutiful, modest, oddest, beseeching, screeching, mildish, childish epistle to her, and you shall read it, and if you approve it, we shall despatch it,' said Clotilde.

'There speaks my gold-crested serpent at her wisest!' replied Alvan. 'And now for my visit to your family: I follow you in a day. En avant! contre les canons! A run to Lake Lemman brings us to them in the afternoon. I shall see you in the evening. So our separation won't be for long this time. All the auspices are good. We shall not be rich—nor poor.'

Clotilde reminded him that a portion of money would be brought to the store by her.

'We don't count it,' said he. 'Not rich, certainly. And you will not expect me to make money by my pen. Above all things I detest the writing for money. Fiction and verse appeal to a besotted public, that judges of the merit of the work by the standard of its taste: avaunt! And journalism for money is Egyptian bondage. No slavery is comparable to the chains of hired journalism. My pen is my fountain—the key of me; and I give my self, I do not sell. I write when I have matter in me and in the direction it presses for, otherwise not one word!'

'I would never ask you to sell yourself,' said Clotilde. 'I would rather be in want of common comforts.'

He squeezed her wrist. They were again in front of the black-draped blighted tree. It was the sole tree of the host clad thus in scurf bearing a semblance of livid metal. They looked at it as having seen it before, and passed on.

'But the wife of Sigismund Alvan will not be poor in renown!' he resumed, radiating his full bloom on her.

'My highest ambition is to be Sigismund Alvan's wife!' she exclaimed.

To hear her was as good as wine, and his heart came out on a genial chuckle. 'Ay, the choice you have made is not, by heaven, so bad. Sigismund Alvan's wife shall take the foremost place of all. Look at me.' He lifted his head to the highest on his shoulders, widening his eagle eyes. He was now thoroughly restored and in his own upper element, expansive after the humiliating contraction of his man's vanity under the glances of a girl. 'Do you take me for one who could be content with the part of second? I will work and do battle unceasingly, but I will have too the prize of battle to clasp it, savour it richly. I was not fashioned to be the lean meek martyr of a cause, not I. I carry too decisive a weight in the balance to victory. I have a taste for fruits, my fairest! And Republics, my bright Lutetia, can give you splendid honours.' He helped her to realize this with the assuring splendour of his eyes.

"Bride of the Elect of the People!" is not that as glorious a title, think you, as queen of an hereditary sovereign mumbling of God's grace on his worm-eaten throne? I win that seat by service, by the dedication of this brain to the people's interests. They have been ground to the dust, and I lift them, as I did a persecuted lady in my boyhood. I am the soldier of justice against the army of the unjust. But I claim my reward. If I live to fight, I live also to enjoy. I will have my station. I win it not only because I serve, but because also I have seen, have seen ahead, seen where all is dark, read the unwritten—because I am soldier and prophet. The brain of man is Jove's eagle and his lightning on earth—the title to majesty henceforth. Ah! my fairest; entering the city beside me, and the people shouting around, she would not think her choice a bad one?"

Clotilde made sign and gave some earnest on his arm of ecstatic hugging.

'We may have hard battles, grim deceptions, to go through before that day comes,' he continued after a while. 'The day is coming, but we must wait for it, work on. I have the secret of how to head the people—to put a head to their movement and make it irresistible, as I believe it will be beneficent. I set them moving on the lines of the law of things. I am no empty theorizer, no phantasmal speculator; I am the man of science in politics. When my system is grasped by the people, there is but a step to the realization of it. One step. It will be taken in my time, or acknowledged later. I stand for index to the people of the path they should take to triumph—must take, as triumph they must sooner or later: not by the route of what is called Progress—pooh! That is a middle-class invention to effect a compromise. With the people the matter rests with their intelligence! meanwhile my star is bright and shines reflected.'

'I notice,' she said, favouring him with as much reflection as a splendid lover could crave for, 'that you never look down, you never look on the ground, but always either up or straight before you.'

'People have remarked it,' said he, smiling. 'Here we are at this funereal tree again. All roads lead to Rome, and ours appears to conduct us perpetually to this tree. It 's the only dead one here.'

He sighted the plumed black top and along the swelling branches decorously clothed in decay: a salted ebon moss when seen closely; the small grey particles giving a sick shimmer to the darkness of the mass. It was very witch-like, of a witch in her incantation-smoke.

'Not a single bare spot! but dead, dead as any peeled and fallen!' said Alvan, fingering a tuft of the sooty snake-lichen. 'This is a tree for a melancholy poet—eh, Clotilde?—for him to come on it by moonlight, after a scene with his mistress, or tales of her! By the way and by the way, my fair darling, let me never think of your wearing this kind of garb for me, should I be ordered off the first to join the dusky army below. Women who put on their dead husbands in public are not well-mannered women, though they may be excellent professional widows, excellent!'

He snapped the lichen-dust from his fingers, observing that he was not sure the contrast of the flourishing and blighted was not more impressive in sunlight: and then he looked from the tree to his true love's hair. The tree at a little distance seemed run over with sunless lizards: her locks were golden serpents.

'Shall I soon see your baroness?' Clotilde asked him.

'Not in advance of the ceremony,' he answered. 'In good time. You understand—an old friend making room for a new one, and that one young and beautiful, with golden tresses; at first...! But her heart is quite sound. Have no fear! I guarantee it; I know her to the roots. She desires my welfare, she does my behests. If I am bound to her by gratitude, so, and in a greater degree, is she to me. The utmost she will demand is that my bride shall be worthy of me—a good mate for me in the fight to come; and I have tested my bride and found her half my heart; therefore she passes the examination with the baroness.'

They left the tree behind them.

'We will take good care not to return this way again,' said Alvan, without looking back. 'That tree belongs to a plantation of the under world; its fellows grow in the wood across Acheron, and that tree has looked into the ghastliness of the flood and seen itself. Hecate and Hermes know about it. Phoebus cannot light it. That tree stands for Death blooming. We think it sinister, but down there it is a homely tree. Down there! When do we go? The shudder in that tree is the air exchanging between Life and Death—the ghosts going and coming: it's on the border line. I just felt the creep. I think you did. The reason is—there is always a material reason—that you were warm, and a bit of chill breeze took you as you gazed; while for my part I was imagining at that very moment what of all possible causes might separate us, and I acknowledged that death could do the trick. But death, my love, is far from us two!'

'Does she look as grimmish as she does in the photograph?' said Clotilde.

'Who? the baroness?' Alvan laughed. The baroness was not so easily defended from a girl as from her husband, it appeared. 'She is the best of comrades, best of friends. She has her faults; may not relish the writ announcing her final deposition, but be you true to me, and as true as she has unfailingly been to me, she will be to you. That I can promise. My poor Lucie! She is winter, if you will. It is not the winter of the steppes; you may compare her to winter in a noble country; a fine landscape of winter. The outlines of her face.... She has a great brain. How much I owe that woman for instruction! You meet now and then men who have the woman in them without being womanized; they are the pick of men. And the choicest women are those who yield not a feather of their womanliness for some amount of manlike strength. And she is one; man's brain, woman's heart. I thought her unique till I heard of you. And how do I stand between you two? She has the only fault you can charge me with; she is before me in time, as I am before you. Shall I spoil you as she spoilt me? No, no! Obedience to a boy is the recognition of the heir-apparent, and I respect the salique law as much as I love my love. I do not offer obedience to a girl, but succour, support. You will not rule me, but you will invigorate, and if you are petted, you shall not be spoilt. Do not expect me to show like that undertakerly tree till my years are one hundred. Even then it will be dangerous to repose beneath my branches in the belief that I am sapless because I have changed colour. We Jews have a lusty blood. We are strong of the earth. We serve you, but you must minister to us. Sensual? We have truly excellent appetites. And why not? Heroical too! Soldiers, poets, musicians; the Gentile's masters in mental arithmetic—keenest of weapons: surpassing him in common sense and capacity for brotherhood. Ay, and in charity; or what stores of vengeance should we not have nourished! Already we have the money-

bags. Soon we shall hold the chief offices. And when the popular election is as unimpeded as the coursing of the blood in a healthy body, the Jew shall be foremost and topmost, for he is pre-eminently by comparison the brain of these latter-day communities. But that is only my answer to the brutish contempt of the Jew. I am no champion of a race. I am for the world, for man!

Clotilde remarked that he had many friends, all men of eminence, and a large following among the people.

He assented: 'Yes: Tresten, Retka, Kehlen, the Nizzian. Yes, if I were other than for legality:—if it came to a rising, I could tell off able lieutenants.'

'Tell me of your interview with Ironsides,' she said proudly and fondly.

'Would this ambitious little head know everything?' said Alvan, putting his lips among the locks. 'Well, we met: he requested it. We agreed that we were on neutral ground for the moment: that he might ultimately have to decapitate me, or I to banish him, but temporarily we could compare our plans for governing. He showed me his hand. I showed him mine. We played open-handed, like two at whist. He did not doubt my honesty, and I astonished him by taking him quite in earnest. He has dealt with diplomatists, who imagine nothing but shuffling: the old Ironer! I love him for his love of common sense, his contempt of mean deceit. He will outwit you, but his dexterity is a giant's—a simple evolution rapidly performed: and nothing so much perplexes pygmies! Then he has them, bagsful of them! The world will see; and see giant meet giant, I suspect. He and I proposed each of us in the mildest manner contrary schemes—schemes to stiffen the hair of Europe! Enough that we parted with mutual respect. He is a fine fellow: and so was my friend the Emperor Tiberius, and so was Richelieu. Napoleon was a fine engine:—there is a difference. Yes, Ironsides is a fine fellow! but he and I may cross. His ideas are not many. The point to remember is that he is iron on them: he can drive them hard into the density of the globe. He has quick nerves and imagination: he can conjure up, penetrate, and traverse complications—an enemy's plans, all that the enemy will be able to combine, and the likeliest that he will do. Good. We opine that we are equal to the same. He is for kingcraft to mask his viziercraft—and save him the labour of patiently attempting oratory and persuasion, which accomplishment he does not possess:—it is not in iron. We think the more precious metal will beat him when the broader conflict comes. But such an adversary is not to be underrated. I do not underrate him: and certainly not he me. Had he been born with the gifts of patience and a fluent tongue, and not a petty noble, he might have been for the people, as knowing them the greater power. He sees that their knowledge of their power must eventually come to them. In the meantime his party is forcible enough to assure him he is not fighting a losing game at present: and he is, no doubt, by lineage and his traditions monarchical. He is curiously simple, not really cynical. His apparent cynicism is sheer irritability. His contemptuous phrases are directed against obstacles: against things, persons, nations that oppose him or cannot serve his turn against his king, if his king is restive; but he respects his king: against your friends' country, because there is no fixing it to a line of policy, and it seems to have collapsed; but he likes that country the best in Europe after his own. He is nearest to contempt in his treatment of his dupes and tools, who are dropped out of his mind when he has quite squeezed them for his occasion; to be taken up again when they are of use to him. Hence he will have no following. But let me die to-morrow, the party I have created survives. In him you see the dam, in me the stream. Judge, then, which of them gains the future!—admitting that, in the present he may beat me. He is a Prussian, stoutly defined from a German, and yet again a German stoutly defined from our borderers: and that completes him. He has as little the idea of humanity as the sword of our Hermann, the cannon-ball of our Frederick. Observe him. What an eye he has! I watched it as we were talking: and he

has, I repeat, imagination; he can project his mind in front of him as far as his reasoning on the possible allows: and that eye of his flashes; and not only flashes, you see it hurling a bolt; it gives me the picture of a Balearic slinger about to whizz the stone for that eye looks far, and is hard, and is dead certain of its mark—within his practical compass, as I have said. I see farther, and I fancy I proved to him that I am not a dreamer. In my opinion, when we cross our swords I stand a fair chance of not being worsted. We shall: you shrink? Figuratively, my darling have no fear! Combative as we may be, both of us, we are now grave seniors, we have serious business: a party looks to him, my party looks to me. Never need you fear that I shall be at sword or pistol with any one. I will challenge my man, whoever he is that needs a lesson, to touch buttons on a waistcoat with the button on the foil, or drill fiver and eights in cards at twenty paces: but I will not fight him though he offend me, for I am stronger than my temper, and as I do not want to take his nip of life, and judge it to be of less value than mine, the imperilling of either is an absurdity.'

'Oh! because I know you are incapable of craven fear,' cried Clotilde, answering aloud the question within herself of why she so much admired, why she so fondly loved him. To feel his courage backing his high good sense was to repose in security, and her knowledge that an astute self-control was behind his courage assured her he was invincible. It seemed to her, therefore, as they walked side by side, and she saw their triumphant pair of figures in her fancy, natural that she should instantly take the step to prepare her for becoming his Republican Princess. She walked an equal with the great of the earth, by virtue of her being the mate of the greatest of the great; she trod on some, and she thrilled gratefully to the man who sustained her and shielded her on that eminence. Elect of the people he! and by a vaster power than kings can summon through the trumpet! She could surely pass through the trial with her parents that she might step to the place beside him! She pressed his arm to be physically a sharer of his glory. Was it love? It was as lofty a stretch as her nature could strain to.

She named the city on the shores of the great Swiss lake where her parents were residing; she bade him follow her thither, and name the hotel where he was to be found, the hour when he was to arrive. 'Am I not precise as an office clerk?' she said, with a pleasant taste of the reality her preciseness pictured.

'Practical as the head of a State department,' said he, in good faith.

'I shall not keep you waiting,' she resumed.

'The sooner we are together after the action opens the better for our success, my golden crest!'

'Have no misgivings, Sigismund. You have transformed me. A spark of you is in my blood. Come. I shall send word to your hotel when you are to appear. But you will come, you will be there, I know. I know you so entirely.'

'As a rule, Lutetia, women know no more than half of a man even when they have married him. At least you ought to know me. You know that if I were to exercise my will firmly now—it would not waver if I called it forth—I could carry you off and spare you the flutter you will have to go through during our interlude with papa and mama.'

'I almost wish you would,' said she. She looked half imploringly, biting her lip to correct the peeping wish.

Alvan pressed a finger on one of her dimples: 'Be brave. Flight and defiance are our last resource. Now that I see you resolved I shun the scandal, and we will leave it to them to insist on it, if it must be. How can you be less than resolved after I have poured my influence into your veins? The other day on the heights—had you consented then? Well! it would have been very

well, but not so well. We two have a future, and are bound to make the opening chapters good sober reading, for an example, if we can. I take you from your father's house, from your mother's arms, from the "God speed" of your friends. That is how Alvan's wife should be presented to the world.'

Clotilde's epistle to the baroness was composed, approved, and despatched. To a frigid eye it read as more hypocritical than it really was; for supposing it had to be written, the language of the natural impulse called up to write it was necessarily in request, and that language is easily overdone, so as to be discordant with the situation, while it is, as the writer feels, a fairly true and well-formed expression of the pretty impulse. But wiser is it always that the star in the ascendant should not address the one waning. Hardly can a word be uttered without grossly wounding. She would not do it to a younger rival: the letter strikes on the recipient's age! She babbles of a friendship: she plays at childish ninny! The display of her ingenuous happiness causes feminine nature's bosom to rise in surges. The declarations of her devotedness to the man waken comparisons with a deeper, a longer-trying suffering. Actually the letter of the rising star assumes personal feeling to have died out of the abandoned luminary, and personal feeling is chafed to its acutest edge by the perusal; contempt also of one who can stupidly simulate such innocence, is roused.

Among Alvan's gifts the understanding of women did not rank high. He was too robust, he had been too successful. Your very successful hero regards them as nine-pins destined to fall, the whole tuneful nine, at a peculiar poetical twist of the bowler's wrist, one knocking down the other—figuratively, for their scruples, or for their example with their sisters. His tastes had led him into the avenues of success, and as he had not encountered grand resistances, he entertained his opinion of their sex. The particular maxim he cherished was, to stake everything on his making a favourable first impression: after which single figure, he said, all your empty naughts count with women for hundreds, thousands, millions: noblest virtues are but sickly units. He would have stared like any Philistine at the tale of their capacity to advance to a likeness unto men in their fight with the world. Women for him were objects to be chased, the politician's relaxation, taken like the sportsman's business, with keen relish both for the pursuit and the prey, and a view of the termination of his pastime. Their feelings he could appreciate during the time when they flew and fell, perhaps a little longer; but the change in his own feelings withdrew him from the communion of sentiment. This is the state of men who frequent the avenues of success. At present he was thinking of a wife, and he approved the epistle to the baroness cordially.

'I do think it a nice kind of letter, and quite humble enough,' said Clotilde.

He agreed, 'Yes, yes: she knows already that this is really serious with me.'

So much for the baroness.

Now for their parting. A parting that is no worse than the turning of a page to a final meeting is made light of, but felt. Reason is all in our favour, and yet the gods are jealous of the bliss of mortals; the slip between the cup and the lip is emotionally watched for, even though it be not apprehended, when the cup trembles for very fulness. Clotilde required reassuring and comforting: 'I am certain you will prevail; you must; you cannot be resisted; I stand to witness to the fact,' she sighed in a languor: 'only, my people are hard to manage. I see more clearly now, that I have imposed on them; and they have given away by a sort of compact so long as I did nothing decisive. That I see. But, then again, have I not your spirit in me now? What has ever resisted you?—Then, as I am Alvan's wife, I share his heart with his fortunes, and I do not really dread the scenes from anticipating failure, still—the truth is, I fear I am three parts an actress, and

the fourth feels itself a shivering morsel to face reality. No, I do not really feel it, but press my hand, I shall be true—I am so utterly yours: and because I have such faith in you. You never, yet have failed.'

'Never: and it is impossible for me to conceive it,' said Alvan thoughtfully.

His last word to her on her departure was 'Courage!' Hers to him was conveyed by the fondest of looks. She had previously said 'To-morrow!' to remind him of his appointment to be with her on the morrow, and herself that she would not long stand alone. She did not doubt of her courage while feasting on the beauty of one of the acknowledged strong men of earth. She kissed her hand, she flung her heart to him from the waving fingers.

CHAPTER VIII

Alvan, left to himself, had a quiet belief in the subjugation of his tricky Clotilde, and the inspiring he had given her. All the rest to come was mere business matter of the conflict, scarcely calling for a plan of action. Who can hold her back when a woman is decided to move? Husbands have tried it vainly, and parents; and though the husband and the parents are not dealing with the same kind of woman, you see the same elemental power in her under both conditions of rebel wife and rebel daughter to break conventional laws, and be splendidly irrational. That is, if she can be decided: in other words, aimed at a mark and inflamed to fly the barriers intercepting. He fancied he had achieved it. Alvan thanked his fortune that he had to treat with parents. The consolatory sensation of a pure intent soothed his inherent wildness, in the contemplation of the possibility that the latter might be roused by those people, her parents, to upset his honourable ambition to win a wife after the fashion of orderly citizens. It would be on their heads! But why vision mischance? An old half-jesting prophecy of his among his friends, that he would not pass his fortieth year, rose upon his recollection without casting a shadow. Lo, the reckless prophet about to marry!

No dark bride, no skeleton, no colourless thing, no lichen tree, was she. Not Death, my friends, but Life, is the bride of this doomed fortieth year! Was animation ever vivid in contrast with obstruction? Her hair would kindle the frosty shades to a throb of vitality: it would be sunshine in the subterranean sphere. The very thinking of her dispersed that realm of the poison hue, and the eternally inviting phosphorescent, still, curved forefinger, which says, 'Come.'

To think of her as his vernal bride, while the snowy Alps were a celestial garden of no sunset before his eyes, was to have the taste of mortal life in the highest. He wondered how it was that he could have waited so long for her since the first night of their meeting, and he just distinguished the fact that he lived with the pulses of the minutes, much as she did, only more fierily. The ceaseless warfare called politics must have been the distraction: he forgot any other of another kind. He was a bridegroom for whom the rosy Alps rolled out, a panorama of illimitable felicity. And there were certain things he must overcome before he could name his bride his own, so that his innate love of contention, which had been constantly flattered by triumph, brought, his whole nature into play with the prospect of the morrow: not much liking it

either. There is a nerve, in brave warriors that does not like the battle before, the crackle of musketry is heard, and the big artillery.

Methodically, according to his habit, he jotted down the hours of the trains, the hotel mentioned by Clotilde, the address of her father; he looked to his card-case, his writing materials, his notes upon Swiss law; considering that the scene would be in Switzerland, and he was a lawyer bent on acting within and up to the measure of the law as well as pleading eloquently. The desire to wing a telegram to her he thought it wise to repress, and he found himself in consequence composing verses, turgid enough, even to his own judgement. Poets would have failed at such a time, and he was not one, but an orator enamoured. He was a wild man, cased in the knowledge of jurisprudence, and wishing to enter the ranks of the soberly blissful. These he could imagine that he complimented by the wish. Then why should he doubt of his fortune? He did not.

The night passed, the morning came, and carried him on his journey. Late in the afternoon he alighted at the hotel he called Clotilde's. A letter was handed to him. His eyes all over the page caught the note of it for her beginning of the battle and despair at the first repulse. 'And now my turn!' said he, not overjoyously. The words Jew and demagogue and baroness, quoted in the letter, were old missiles hurling again at him. But Clotilde's parents were yet to learn that this Jew, demagogue, and champion of an injured lady, was a gentleman respectful to their legal and natural claims upon their child while maintaining his own: they were to know him and change their tone.

As he was reading the letter upstairs by sentences, his door opened at the answer to a tap. He started; his face was a shield's welcome to the birdlike applicant for admission. Clotilde stood hesitating.

He sent the introducing waiter speeding on his most kellnerish legs, and drew her in.

'Alvan, I have come.'

She was like a bird in his hands, palpitating to extinction.

He bent over her: 'What has happened?'

Trembling, and very pale, hard in her throat she said, 'The worst.'

'You have spoken to them both subsequent to this?' he shook the letter.

'It is hopeless.'

'Both to father and mother?'

'Both. They will not hear your name; they will not hear me speak. I repeat, it is past all hope, all chance of moving them. They hate—hate you, hate me for thinking of you. I had no choice; I wrote at once and followed my letter; I ran through the streets; I pant for want of breath, not want of courage. I prove I have it, Alvan; I have done all I can do.'

She was enfolded; she sank on the nest, dropping her eyelids.

But he said nothing. She looked up at him. Her strained pale eyes provoked a closer embrace.

'This would be the home for you if we were flying,' said he, glancing round at the room, with a sensation like a shudder, 'Tell me what there is to be told.'

'Alvan, I have; that is all. They will not listen; they loathe Oh! what possesses them!'

'They have not met me yet!'

'They will not, will not ever—no!'

'They must.'

'They refuse. Their child, for daring to say she loves you, is detested. Take me—take me away!'

'Run?—facing the enemy?' His countenance was the fiery laugh of a thirster for strife. 'They have to be taught the stuff Alvan is made of!'

Clotilde moaned to signify she was sure he nursed an illusion. 'I found them celebrating the betrothal of my sister Lotte with the Austrian Count Walburg; I thought it favourable for us. I spoke of you to my mother. Oh, that scene! What she said I cannot recollect: it was a hiss. Then my father. Your name changed his features and his voice. They treated me as impure for mentioning it. You must have deadly enemies. I was unable to recognize either father or mother—they have become transformed. But you see I am here. Courage! you said; and I determined I would show it, and be worthy of you. But I am pursued, I am sure. My father is powerful in this place; we shall barely have time to escape.'

Alvan's resolution was taken.

'Some friend—a lady living in the city here—name her, quick!—one you can trust,' he said, and fondled her hastily, much as a gentle kind of drillmaster straightens a fair pupil's shoulders. 'Yes, you have shown courage. Now it must be submission to me. You shall be no runaway bride, but honoured at the altar. Out of this hotel is the first point. You know some such lady?'

Clotilde tried to remonstrate and to suggest. She could have prophesied certain evil from any evasion of the straight line of flight; she was so sure of it because of her intuition that her courage had done its utmost in casting her on him, and that the remainder within her would be a drawing back. She could not get the word or even the look to encounter his close and warm imperiousness; and, hesitating, she noticed where they were together alone. She could not refuse the protection he offered in a person of her own sex; and now, flushing with the thought of where they were together alone, feminine modesty shrivelled at the idea of entreating a man to bear her off, though feminine desperation urged to it. She felt herself very bare of clothing, and she named a lady, a Madame Emerly, living near the hotel. Her heart sank like a stone. 'It is for you!' cried Alvan, keenly sensible of his loss and his generosity in temporarily resigning her—for a subsequent triumph. 'But my wife shall not be snatched by a thief in the night. Are you not my wife—my golden bride? And you may give me this pledge of it, as if the vows had just been uttered... and still I resign you till we speak the vows. It shall not be said of Alvan's wife, in the days of her glory, that she ran to her nuptials through rat-passages.'

His pride in his prevailingness thrilled her. She was cooled by her despondency sufficiently to perceive where the centre of it lay, but that centre of self was magnificent; she recovered some of her enthusiasm, thinking him perhaps to be acting rightly; in any case they were united, her step was irrevocable. Her having entered the hotel, her being in this room, certified to that. It seemed to her while she was waiting for the carriage he had ordered that she was already half a wife. She was not conscious of a blush. The sprite in the young woman's mind whispered of fire not burning when one is in the heart of it. And undoubtedly, contemplated from the outside, this room was the heart of fire. An impulse to fall on Alvan's breast and bless him for his chivalrousness had to be kept under lest she should wreck the thing she praised. Otherwise she was not ill at ease. Alvan summoned his gaiety, all his homeliness of tone, to give her composure, and on her quitting the room she was more than ever bound to him, despite her gloomy foreboding. A maid of her household, a middle-aged woman, gabbling of devotion to

her, ran up the steps of the hotel. Her tale was, that the General had roused the city in pursuit of his daughter; and she heard whither Clotilde was going.

Within half an hour, Clotilde was in Madame Emerly's drawing-room relating her desperate history of love and parental tyranny, assisted by the lover whom she had introduced. Her hostess promised shelter and exhibited sympathy. The whole Teutonic portion of the Continent knew Alvan by reputation. He was insurrectionally notorious in morals and menacingly in politics; but his fine air, handsome face, flowing tongue, and the signal proof of his respect for the lady of his love and deference toward her family, won her personally. She promised the best help she could give them. They were certainly in a romantic situation, such as few women could see and decline their aid to the lovers.

Madame Emerly proved at least her sincerity before many minutes had passed.

Chancing to look out into the street, she saw Clotilde's mother and her betrothed sister stepping up to the house. What was to be done? And was the visit accidental? She announced it, and Clotilde cried out, but Alvan cried louder: 'Heaven-directed! and so, let me see her and speak to her—nothing could be better.'

Madame Emerly took mute counsel of Clotilde, shaking her own head premonitorily; and then she said: 'I think indeed it will be safer, if I am asked, to say you are not here, and I know not where you are.'

'Yes! yes!' Clotilde replied: 'Oh! do that.'

She half turned to Alvan, rigid with an entreaty that hung on his coming voice.

'No!' said Alvan, shocked in both pride and vanity. 'Plain-dealing; no subterfuge! Begin with foul falsehood? No. I would not have you burdened, madame, with the shadow of a conventional untruth on our account. And when it would be bad policy?... Oh, no, worse than the sin! as the honest cynic says. We will go down to Madame von Rudiger, and she shall make acquaintance with the man who claims her daughter's hand.'

Clotilde rocked in an agony. Her friend was troubled. Both ladies knew what there would be to encounter better than he. But the man, strong in his belief in himself, imposed his will on them.

Alvan and Clotilde clasped hands as they went downstairs to Madame Emerly's reception room. She could hardly speak: 'Do not forsake me.'

'Is this forsaking?' He could ask it in the deeply questioning tone which supplies the answer.

'Oh, Alvan!' She would have said: 'Be warned.'

He kissed her fingers. 'Trust to me.'

She had to wrap her shivering spirit in a blind reliance and utter leaning on him.

She could almost have said: 'Know me better'; and she would, sincere as her passion in its shallow vessel was, have been moved to say it for a warning while yet there was time to leave the house instead of turning into that room, had not a remainder of her first exaltation (rapidly degenerating to desperation) inspired her with the thought of her being a part of this handsome, undaunted, triumph-flashing man.

Such a state of blind reliance and utter leaning, however, has a certain tendency to disintegrate the will, and by so doing it prepares the spirit to be a melting prize of the winner.

Men and women alike, who renounce their own individuality by cowering thus abjectly under some other before the storm, are in reality abjuring their idea of that other, and offering themselves up to the genius of Power in whatsoever direction it may chance to be manifested, in

whatsoever person. We no sooner shut our eyes than we consent to be prey, we lose the soul of election.

Mark her as she proceeds. For should her hero fail, and she be suffering through his failure and her reliance on him, the blindness of it will seem to her to have been an infinite virtue, anything but her deplorable weakness crouching beneath his show of superhuman strength. And it will seem to her, so long as her sufferings endure, that he deceived her just expectations, and was a vain pretender to the superhuman:—for it was only a superhuman Jew and democrat whom she could have thought of espousing. The pusillanimous are under a necessity to be self-consolated when they are not self-justified: it is their instinctive manner of putting themselves in the right to themselves. The love she bore him, because it was the love his high conceit exacted, hung on success she was ready to fly with him and love him faithfully but not without some reason (where reason, we will own, should not quite so coldly obtrude) will it seem to her, that the man who would not fly, and would try the conflict, insisted to stake her love on the issue he provoked. He roused the tempest, he angered the Fates, he tossed her to them; and reason, coldest reason, close as it ever is to the craven's heart in its hour of trial, whispers that he was prompted to fling the gambler's die by the swollen conceit in his fortune rather than by his desire for the prize. That frigid reason of the craven has red-hot perceptions. It spies the spot of truth. Were the spot revealed in the man the whole man, then, so unerring is the eyeshot at him, we should have only to transform ourselves into cowards fronting a crisis to read him through and topple over the Sphinx of life by presenting her the sum of her most mysterious creature in an epigram. But there was as much more in Alvan than any faint-hearted thing, seeing however keenly, could see, as there is more in the world than the epigrams aimed at it contain.

'Courage!' said he: and she tremblingly: 'Be careful!' And then they were in the presence of her mother and sister.

Her sister was at the window, hanging her head low, a poor figure. Her mother stood in the middle of the room, and met them full face, with a woman's combative frown of great eyes, in which the stare is a bolt.

'Away with that man! I will not suffer him near me,' she cried.

Alvan advanced to her: 'Tell me, madame, in God's name, what you have against me.'

She swung her back on him. 'Go, sir! my husband will know how to deal with one like you. Out of my sight, I say!'

The brutality of this reception of Alvan nerved Clotilde. She went up to him, and laying her hand on his arm, feeling herself almost his equal, said: 'Let us go: come. I will not bear to hear you so spoken to. No one shall treat you like that when I am near.'

She expected him to give up the hopeless task, after such an experience of the commencement. He did but clasp her hand, assuring the Frau von Rudiger that no word of hers could irritate him. 'Nothing can make me forget that you are Clotilde's mother. You are the mother of the lady I love, and may say what you will to me, madame. I bear it.'

'A man spotted with every iniquity the world abhors, and I am to see him holding my daughter by the hand!—it is too abominable! And because there is no one present to chastise him, he dares to address me and talk of his foul passion for my daughter. I repeat: that which you have to do is to go. My ears are shut. You can annoy, you can insult, you cannot move me. Go.' She stamped: her aspect spat.

Alvan bowed. Under perfect self-command, he said: 'I will go at once to Clotilde's father. I may hope, that with a reasonable man I shall speedily come to an understanding.'

She retorted: 'Enter his house, and he will have you driven out by his lacqueys.'

'Hardly: I am not of those men who are driven from houses,' Alvan said, smiling. 'But, madame, I will act on your warning, and spare her father, for all sakes, the attempt; seeing he does not yet know whom he deals with. I will write to him.'

'Letters from you will be flung back unopened.'

'It may, of course, be possible to destroy even my patience, madame.'

'Mine, sir, is at an end.'

'You reduce us to rely on ourselves; it is the sole alternative.'

'You have not waited for that,' rejoined Frau von Rudiger. 'You have already destroyed my daughter's reputation by inducing her to leave her father's house and hesitate to return. Oh! you are known. You are known for your dealings with women as well as men. We know you. We have, we pray to God, little more to learn of you. You! ah—thief!'

'Thief!' Alvan's voice rose on hers like the clapping echo of it. She had up the whole angry pride of the man in arms, and could discern that she had struck the wound in his history; but he was terrible to look at, so she made the charge supportable by saying:

'You have stolen my child from me!'

Clotilde raised her throat, shrewish in excitement. 'False! He did not. I went to him of my own will, to run from your heartlessness, mother—that I call mother!—and be out of hearing of my father's curses and threats. Yes, to him I fled, feeling that I belonged more to him than to you. And never will I return to you. You have killed my love; I am this man's own because I love him only; him ever! him you abuse, as his partner in life for all it may give!—as his wife! Trample on him, you trample on me. Make black brows at your child for choosing the man, of all men alive, to worship and follow through the world. I do. I am his. I glory in him.'

Her gaze on Alvan said: 'Now!' Was she not worthy of him now? And would they not go forth together now? Oh! now!

Her gaze was met by nothing like the brilliant counterpart she merited. It was as if she had offered her beauty to a glass, and found a reflection in dull metal. He smiled calmly from her to her mother. He said:

'You accuse me of stealing your child, madame. You shall acknowledge that you have wronged me. Clotilde, my Clotilde! may I count on you to do all and everything for me? Is there any sacrifice I could ask that would be too hard for you? Will you at one sign from me go or do as I request you?'

She replied, in an anguish over the chilling riddle of his calmness: 'I will,' but sprang out of that obedient consent, fearful of over-acting her part of slave to him before her mother, in a ghastly apprehension of the part he was for playing to the same audience. 'Yes, I will do all, all that you command. I am yours. I will go with you. Bid me do whatever you can think of, all except bid me go back to the people I have hitherto called mine:—not that!'

'And that is what I have to request of you,' said he, with his calm smile brightening and growing more foreign, histrionic, unreadable to her. 'And this greatest sacrifice that you can perform for me, are you prepared to do it? Will you?'

She tried to decipher the mask he wore: it was proof against her imploring eyes. 'If you can ask me—if you can positively wish it—yes,' she said. 'But think of what you are doing. Oh! Alvan, not back to them! Think!'

He smiled insufferably. He was bent on winning a parent-blest bride, an unimpeachable wife, a lady handed to him instead of taken, one of the world's polished silver vessels.

'Think that you are doing this for me!' said he. 'It is for my sake. And now, madame, I give you back your daughter. You see she is mine to give, she obeys me, and I—though it can be only for a short time—give her back to you. She goes with you purely because it is my wish: do not forget that. And so, madame, I have the honour,' he bowed profoundly.

He turned to Clotilde and drew her within his arm. 'What you have done in obedience to my wish, my beloved, shall never be forgotten. Never can I sufficiently thank you. I know how much it has cost you. But here is the end of your trials. All the rest is now my task. Rely on me with your whole heart. Let them not misuse you: otherwise do their bidding. Be sure of my knowing how you are treated, and at the slightest act of injustice I shall be beside you to take you to myself. Be sure of that, and be not unhappy. They shall not keep you from me for long. Submit a short while to the will of your parents: mine you will find the stronger. Resolve it in your soul that I, your lover, cannot fail, for it is impossible to me to waver. Consider me as the one fixed light in your world, and look to me. Soon, then! Have patience, be true, and we are one!'

He kissed cold lips, he squeezed an inanimate hand. The horribly empty sublimity of his behaviour appeared to her in her mother's contemptuous face.

His eyes were on her as he released her and she stood alone. She seemed a dead thing; but the sense of his having done gloriously in mastering himself to give these worldly people of hers a lesson and proof that he could within due measure bow to their laws and customs, dispelled the brief vision of her unfitness to be left. The compressed energy of the man under his conscious display of a great-minded deference to the claims of family ties and duties, intoxicated him. He thought but of the present achievement and its just effect: he had cancelled a bad reputation among these people, from whom he was about to lead forth a daughter for Alvan's wife, and he reasoned by the grandeur of his exhibition of generosity—which was brought out in strong relief when he delivered his retiring bow to the Frau von Rudiger's shoulder—that the worst was over; he had to deal no more with silly women: now for Clotilde's father! Women were privileged to oppose their senselessness to the divine fire: men could not retreat behind such defences; they must meet him on the common ground of men, where this constant battler had never yet encountered a reverse.

Clotilde's cold staring gaze, a little livelier to wonderment than to reflection, observed him to be scrupulous of the formalities in the diverse character of his parting salutations to her mother, her sister; and the lady of the house. He was going—he could actually go and leave her! She stretched herself to him faintly; she let it be seen that she did so as much as she had force to make it visible. She saw him smiling incomprehensibly, like a winner of the field to be left to the enemy. She could get nothing from him but that insensible round smile, and she took the ebbing of her poor effort for his rebuff.

'You that offered yourself in flight to him who once proposed it, he had the choice of you and he abjured you. He has cast you off!'

She phrased it in speech to herself. It was incredible, but it was clear: he had gone.

The room was vacant; the room was black and silent as a dungeon.

'He will not have you: he has handed you back to them the more readily to renounce you.'

She framed the words half aloud in a moan as she glanced at her mother heaving in stern triumph, her sister drooping, Madame Emerly standing at the window.

The craven's first instinct for safety, quick as the cavern lynx for light, set her on the idea that she was abandoned: it whispered of quietness if she submitted.

And thus she reasoned: Had Alvan taken her, she would not have been guilty of more than a common piece of love-desperation in running to him, the which may be love's glory when marriage crowns it. By his rejecting her and leaving her, he rendered her not only a runaway, but a castaway. It was not natural that he should leave her; 'not natural in him to act his recent part; but he had done it; consequently she was at the mercy of those who might pick her up. She was, in her humiliation and dread, all of the moment, she could see to no distance; and judging of him, feeling for herself, within that contracted circle of sensation—sure, from her knowledge of her cowardice, that he had done unwisely—she became swayed about like a castaway in soul, until her distinguishing of his mad recklessness in the challenge of a power greater than his own grew present with her as his personal cruelty to the woman who had flung off everything, flung herself on the tempestuous deeps, on his behalf. And here she was, left to float or founder! Alvan had gone. The man raging over the room, abusing her 'infamous lover, the dirty Jew, the notorious thief, scoundrel, gallowsbird,' etc., etc., frightful epithets, not to be transcribed—was her father. He had come, she knew not how. Alvan had tossed her to him.

Abuse of a lover is ordinarily retorted on in the lady's heart by the brighter perception of his merits; but when the heart is weak, the creature suffering shame, her lover the cause of it, and seeming cruel, she is likely to lose all perception and bend like a flower pelted. Her cry to him: 'If you had been wiser, this would not have been!' will sink to the inward meditation: 'If he had been truer!'—and though she does not necessarily think him untrue for charging him with it, there is already a loosening of the bonds where the accusation has begun. They are not broken because they are loosened: still the loosening of them makes it possible to cut them with less of a snap and less pain.

Alvan had relinquished her he loved to brave the tempest in a frail small boat, and he certainly could not have apprehended the furious outbreak she was exposed to. She might so far have exonerated him had she been able to reflect; but she whom he had forced to depend on him in blind reliance, now opened her eyes on an opposite power exercising material rigours. After having enjoyed extraordinary independence for a young woman, she was treated as a refractory child, literally marched through the streets in the custody of her father, who clutched her by the hair—Alvan's beloved golden locks!—and held her under terror of a huge forester's weapon, that he had seized at the first tidings of his daughter's flight to the Jew. He seemed to have a grim indifference to exposure; contempt, with a sense of the humour of it: and this was a satisfaction to him, founded on his practical observance of two or three maxims quite equal to the fullest knowledge of women for rightly managing them: preferable, inasmuch as they are simpler, and, by merely cracking a whip, bring her back to the post, instead of wasting time by hunting her as she likes to run. Police were round his house. The General chattered and shouted of the desperate lawlessness and larcenies of that Jew—the things that Jew would attempt. He dragged her indoors, muttering of his policy in treating her at last to a wholesome despotism.

This was the medicine for her—he knew her! Whether he did or not, he knew the potency of his physic. He knew that osiers can be made to bend. With a frightful noise of hammering, he himself nailed up the window-shutters of the room she was locked in hard and fast, and he left

her there and roared across the household that any one holding communication with the prisoner should be shot like a dog. This was a manifestation of power in a form more convincing than the orator's.

She was friendless, abused, degraded, benighted in broad daylight; abandoned by her lover. She sank on the floor of the room, conceiving with much strangeness of sentiment under these hard stripes of misfortune, that reality had come. The monster had hold of her. She was isolated, fed like a dungeoned captive. She had nothing but our natural obstinacy to hug, or seem to do so when wearifulness reduced her to cling to the semblance of it only. 'I marry Alvan!' was her iterated answer to her father, on his visits to see whether he had yet broken her; and she spoke with the desperate firmness of weak creatures that strive to nail themselves to the sound of it. He listened and named his time for returning. The tug between rigour and endurance continued for about forty hours. She then thought, in an exhaustion: 'Strange that my father should be so fiercely excited against this man! Can he have reasons I have not heard of?' Her father's unwonted harshness suggested the question in her quailing nature, which was beginning to have a movement to kiss the whip. The question set her thinking of the reasons she knew. She saw them involuntarily from the side of parents, and they wore a sinister appearance; in reality her present scourging was due to them as well as to Alvan's fatal decision. Her misery was traceable to his conduct and his judgement—both bad. And yet all this while he might be working to release her, near upon rescuing! She swung round to the side of her lover against these executioner parents, and scribbled to him as well as she could under the cracks in her windowshutters, urging him to appear. She spent her heart on it. A note to her friend, the English lady, protested her love for Alvan, but with less abandonment, with a frozen resignation to the loss of him—all around her was so dark! By-and-by there was a scratching at her door. The maid whom she trusted brought her news of Alvan: outside the door and in, the maid and mistress knelt. Hope flickered up in the bosom of Clotilde: the whispers were exchanged through the partition.

'Where is he?'

'Gone.'

'But where?'

'He has left the city.'

Clotilde pushed the letter for her friend under the door: that one for Alvan she retained, stung by his desertion of her, and thinking practically that it was useless to aim a letter at a man without an address. She did not ask herself whether the maid's information was honest, for she wanted to despair, as the exhausted want to lie down.

She wept through the night. It was one of those nights of the torrents of tears which wash away all save the adamant within us, if there be ought of that besides the breathing structure. The reason why she wept with so delirious a persistency was, that her nature felt the necessity for draining her of her self-pitifulness, knowing that it nourished the love whereby she was tormented. They do not weep thus who have a heart for the struggle. In the morning she was a dried channel of tears, no longer self-pitiful; careless of herself, as she thought: in other words, unable any further to contend.

Reality was too strong! This morning her sisters came to her room imploring her to yield:—if she married Alvan, what could be their prospects as the sisters-in law of such a man?—her betrothed sister Lotte could not hope to espouse Count Walburg: Alvan's name was infamous in society; their house would be a lazar-house, they would be condemned to seclusion. A favourite

brother followed, with sympathy that set her tears running again, and arguments she could not answer: how could he hold up his head in his regiment as the relative of the scandalous Jew democrat? He would have to leave the service, or be duelling with his brother officers every other day of his life, for rightly or wrongly Alvan was abhorred, and his connection would be fatal to them all, perhaps to her father's military and diplomatic career principally: the head of their house would be ruined. She was compelled to weep again by having no other reply. The tears were now mixed drops of pity for her absent lover and her family; she was already disunited from him when she shed them, feeling that she was dry rock to herself, heartless as many bosoms drained of self-pity will become.

Incapable of that any further, she leaned still in that direction and had a languid willingness to gain outward comfort. To be caressed a little by her own kindred before she ceased to live was desirable after her heavy scourging. She wished for the touches of affection, knowing them to be selfish, but her love of life and hard view of its reality made them seem a soft reminder of what life had been. Alvan had gone. Her natural blankness of imagination read his absence as an entire relinquishment; it knelled in a vacant chamber. He had gone; he had committed an irretrievable error, he had given up a fight of his own vain provoking, that was too severe for him: he was not the lover he fancied himself, or not the lord of men she had fancied him. Her excessive misery would not suffer a picture of him, not one clear recollection of him, to stand before her. He who should have been at hand, had gone, and she was fearfully beset, almost lifeless; and being abandoned, her blank night of imagination felt that there was nothing left for her save to fall upon those nearest.

She gave her submission to her mother. In her mind, during the last wrestling with a weakness that was alternately her love, and her cowardice, the interpretation of the act ran: 'He may come, and I am his if he comes: and if not, I am bound to my people.' He had taught her to rely on him blindly, and thus she did it inanimately while cutting herself loose from him. In a similar mood, the spiritual waverer vows to believe if the saint will appear. However, she submitted. Then there was joy in the family, and she tasted their caresses.

CHAPTER IX

After his deed of loftiness Alvan walked to his hotel, where the sight of the room Clotilde had entered that morning caught his breath. He proceeded to write his first letter to General von Rudiger, repressing his heart's intimations that he had stepped out of the friendly path, and was on a strange and tangled one. The sense of power in him was leonine enough to promise the forcing of a way whithersoever the path: yet did that ghost of her figure across the room haunt him with searching eyes. They set him spying over himself at an actor who had not needed to be acting his part, brilliant though it was. He crammed his energy into his idea of the part, to carry it forward victoriously. Before the world, it would without question redound to his credit, and he heard the world acclaiming him:

'Alvan's wife was honourably won, as became the wife of a Doctor of Law, from the bosom of her family, when he could have had her in the old lawless fashion, for a call to a coachman! Alvan, the republican, is eminently a citizen. Consider his past life by that test of his character.'

He who had many times defied the world in hot rebellion, had become, through his desire to cherish a respectable passion, if not exactly slavish to it, subservient, as we see royal personages, that are happy to be on bowing terms with the multitude bowing lower. Lower, of course, the multitude must bow, to inspire an august serenity; but the nod they have in exchange for it is not an independent one. Ceasing to be a social rebel, he conceived himself as a recognized dignitary, and he passed under the bondage of that position.

Clotilde had been in this room; she had furnished proof that she could be trusted now. She had committed herself, perished as a maiden of society, and her parents, even the senseless mother, must see it and decide by it. The General would bring her to reason: General von Rudiger was a man of the world. An honourable son-in-law could not but be acceptable to him—now, at least. And such a son-in-law would ultimately be the pride of his house. 'A flower from thy garden, friend, and my wearing it shall in good time be cause for some parental gratification.'

The letter despatched, Alvan paced his chamber with the ghost of Clotilde. He was presently summoned to meet Count Walburg and another intimate of the family, in the hotel downstairs. These gentlemen brought no message from General von Rudiger: their words were directed to extract a promise from him that he would quit his pursuit of Clotilde, and of course he refused; they hinted that the General might have official influence to get him expelled the city, and he referred them to the proof; but he looked beyond the words at a new something of extraordinary and sinister aspect revealed to him in their manner of treating his pretensions to the hand of the lady.

He had not yet perfectly seen the view the world took of him, because of his armed opposition to the world; nor could he rightly reflect on it yet, being too anxious to sign the peace. He felt as it were a blow startling him from sleep. His visitors tasked themselves to be strictly polite; they did not undervalue his resources for commanding respect between man and man. The strange matter was behind their bearing, which indicated the positive impossibility of the union of Clotilde with one such as he, and struck at the curtain covering his history. He could not raise it to thunder his defence of himself, or even allude to the implied contempt of his character: with a boiling gorge he was obliged to swallow both the history and the insult, returning them the equivalent of their courtesies, though it was on his lips to thunder heavily.

A second endeavour, in an urgent letter before nightfall to gain him admission to headquarters, met the same repulse as the foregoing. The bearer of it was dismissed without an answer.

Alvan passed a night of dire disturbance. The fate of the noble Genoese conspirator, slipping into still harbour water on the step from boat to boat, and borne down by the weight of his armour in the moment of the ripeness of his plot at midnight, when the signal for action sparkled to lighten across the ships and forts, had touched him in his boy's readings, and he found a resemblance of himself to Fiesco, stopped as he was by a base impediment, tripped ignominiously, choked by the weight of the powers fitting him for battle. A man such as Alvan, arrested on his career by an opposition to his enrolment of a bride!—think of it! What was this girl in a life like his? But, oh! the question was no sooner asked than the thought that this girl had been in this room illuminated the room, telling him she might have been his own this instant, confounding him with an accusation of madness for rejecting her. Why had he done it? Surely

women, weak women, must be at times divinely inspired. She warned him against the step. But he, proud of his armoury, went his way. He choked, he suffered the torture of the mailed Genoese going under; worse, for the drowner's delirium swirls but a minute in the gaping brain, while he had to lie all, night at the mercy of the night.

He was only calmer when morning came. Night has little mercy for the self-reproachful, and for a strong man denouncing the folly of his error, it has none. The bequest of the night was a fever of passion; and upon that fever the light of morning cleared his head to weigh the force opposing him. He gnawed the paradox, that it was huge because it was petty, getting a miserable sour sustenance out of his consciousness of the position it explained. Great enemies, great undertakings, would have revived him as they had always revived and fortified. But here was a stolid small obstacle, scarce assailable on its own level; and he had chosen that it should be attacked through its own laws and forms. By shutting a door, by withholding an answer to his knocks, the thing reduced him to hesitation. And the thing had weapons to shoot at him; his history, his very blood, stood open to its shafts; and the sole quality of a giant, which he could show to front it, was the breath of one for a mark.

These direct perceptions of the circumstances were played on by the fever he drew from his Fiesco bed. Accuracy of vision in our crises is not so uncommon as the proportionate equality of feeling: we do indeed, frequently see with eyes of just measurement while we are conducting ourselves like madmen. The facts are seen, and yet the spinning nerves will change their complexion; and without enlarging or minimizing, they will alternate their effect on us immensely through the colour presenting them now sombre, now hopeful: doing its work of extravagance upon perceptibly plain matter. The fitful colour is the fever. He must win her, for he never yet had failed—he had lost her by his folly! She was his—she was torn from him! She would come at his bidding—she would cower to her tyrants! The thought of her was life and death in his frame, bright heaven and the abyss. At one beat of the heart she swam to his arms, at another he was straining over darkness. And whose the fault?

He rose out of his amazement crying it with a roar, and foreignly beholding himself. He pelted himself with epithets; his worst enemies could not have been handier in using them. From Alvan to Alvan, they signified such an earthquake in a land of splendid structures as shatters to dust the pride of the works of men. He was down among them, lower than the herd, rolling in vulgar epithets that, attached to one like him, became of monstrous distortion. O fool! dolt! blind ass! tottering idiot! drunken masquerader! miserable Jack Knave, performing suicide with that blessed coxcomb air of curling a lock!—Clotilde! Clotilde! Where has one read the story of a man who had the jewel of jewels in his hand, and flung in into the deeps, thinking that he flung a pebble? Fish, fool, fish! and fish till Doomsday! There's nothing but your fool's face in the water to be got to bite at the bait you throw, fool! Fish for the flung-away beauty, and hook your shadow of a Bottom's head! What impious villain was it refused the gift of the gods, that he might have it bestowed on him according to his own prescription of the ceremonies! They laugh! By Orcus! how they laugh! The laughter of the gods is the lightning of death's irony over mortals. Can they have a finer subject than a giant gone fool?

Tears burst from him: tears of rage, regret, selfflashing. O for yesterday! He called aloud for the recovery of yesterday, bellowed, groaned. A giant at war with pigmies, having nought but their weapons, having to fight them on his knees, to fight them with the right hand while smiting himself with the left, has too much upon him to keep his private dignity in order. He was the same in his letters—a Cyclops hurling rocks and raising the seas to shipwreck. Dignity was cast off; he came out naked. Letters to Clotilde, and to the baroness, to the friend nearest him just

then, Colonel von Tresten, calling them to him, were dashed to paper in this naked frenzy, and he could rave with all the truth of life, that to have acted the idiot, more than the loss of the woman, was the ground of his anguish. Each antecedent of his career had been a step of strength and success departed. The woman was but a fragment of the tremendous wreck; the woman was utterly diminutive, yet she was the key of the reconstruction; the woman won, he would be himself once more: and feeling that, his passion for her swelled to full tide and she became a towering splendour whereat his eyeballs ached, she became a melting armful that shook him to big bursts of tears.

The feeling of the return of strength was his love in force. The giant in him loved her warmly. Her sweetness, her archness, the opening of her lips, their way of holding closed, and her brightness of wit, her tender eyelashes, her appreciating looks, her sighing, the thousand varying shades of her motions and her features interflowing like a lighted water, swam to him one by one like so many handmaiden messengers distinctly beheld of the radiant indistinct whom he adored with more of spirit in his passion than before this tempest. A giant going through a giant's contortions, fleshly as the race of giants, and gross, coarse, dreadful, likely to be horrible when whipped and stirred to the dregs, Alvan was great-hearted: he could love in his giant's fashion, love and lay down life for the woman he loved, though the nature of the passion was not heavenly; or for the friend who would have to excuse him often; or for the public cause—which was to minister to his appetites. He was true man, a native of earth, and if he could not quit his huge personality to pipe spiritual music during a storm of trouble, being a soul wedged in the gnarled wood of the standing giant oak, and giving mighty sound of timber at strife rather than the angelical cry, he suffered, as he loved, to his depths.

We have not to plumb the depths; he was not heroic, but hugely man. Love and man sometimes meet for noble concord; the strings of the hungry instrument are not all so rough that Love's touch on them is indistinguishable from the rattling of the wheels within; certain herald harmonies have been heard. But Love, which purifies and enlarges us, and sets free the soul, Love visiting a fleshly frame must have time and space, and some help of circumstance, to give the world assurance that the man is a temple fit for the rites. Out of romances, he is not melodiously composed. And in a giant are various giants to be slain, or thoroughly subdued, ere this divinity is taken for leader. It is not done by miracle.

As it happened cruelly for Alvan, the woman who had become the radiant indistinct in his desiring mind was one whom he knew to be of a shivery steadfastness. His plucking her from another was neither wonderful nor indefensible; they two were suited as no other two could be; the handsome boy who had gone through a form of plighting with her was her slave, and she required for her mate a master: she felt it and she sided to him quite naturally, moved by the sacred direction of the acknowledgement of a mutual fitness. Twice, however, she had relapsed on the occasions of his absence, and owning his power over her when they were together again, she sowed the fatal conviction that he held her at present, and that she was a woman only to be held at present, by the palpable grasp of his physical influence. Partly it was correct, not entirely, seeing that she kept the impression of a belief in him even when she drifted away through sheer weakness, but it was the single positive view he had of her, and it was fatal, for it begat a devil of impatience.

'They are undermining her now—now—now!'

He started himself into busy frenzies to reach to her, already indifferent to the means, and waxing increasingly reckless as he fed on his agitation. Some faith in her, even the little she

deserved, would have arrested him: unhappily he had less than she, who had enough to nurse the dim sense of his fixity, and sank from him only in her heart's faintness, but he, when no longer flattered by the evidence of his mastery, took her for sand. Why, then, had he let her out of his grasp? The horrid echoed interrogation flashed a hideous view of the woman. But how had he come to be guilty of it? he asked himself again; and, without answering him, his counsellors to that poor wisdom set to work to complete it: Giant Vanity urged Giant Energy to make use of Giant Duplicity. He wrote to Clotilde, with one voice quoting the law in their favour, with another commanding her to break it. He gathered and drilled a legion of spies, and showered his gold in bribes and plots to get the letter to her, to get an interview—one human word between them.

CHAPTER X

His friend Colonel von Tresten was beside him when he received the enemy's counter-stroke. Count Walburg and his companion brought a letter from Clotilde—no reply; a letter renouncing him.

Briefly, in cold words befitting the act, she stated that the past must be dead between them; for the future she belonged to her parents; she had left the city. She knew not where he might be, her letter concluded, but henceforward he should know that they were strangers.

Alvan held out the deadly paper when he had read the contents; he smote a forefinger on it and crumpled it in his hand. That was the dumb oration of a man shocked by the outrage upon passionate feeling to the state of brute. His fist, outstretched to the length of his arm, shook the reptile letter under a terrible frown.

Tresten saw that he supposed himself to be perfectly master of his acts because he had not spoken, and had managed to preserve the ordinary courtesies.

'You have done your commission,' the colonel said to Count Walburg, whose companion was not disposed to go without obtaining satisfactory assurances, and pressed for them.

Alvan fastened on him. 'You adopt the responsibility of this?' He displayed the letter.

'I do.'

'It lies.'

Tresten remarked to Count Walburg: 'These visits are provocations.'

'They are not so intended,' said the count, bowing pacifically. His friend was not a man of the sword, and was not under the obligation to accept an insult. They left the letter to do its work.

Big natures in their fits of explosiveness must be taken by flying shots, as dwarfs peep on a monster, or the Scythian attacked a phalanx. Were we to hear all the roarings of the shirted Heracles, a world of comfortable little ones would doubt the unselfishness of his love of Dejanaira. Yes, really; they would think it was not a chivalrous love: they would consider that he thought of himself too much. They would doubt, too, of his being a gentleman! Partial glimpses of him, one may fear, will be discomposing to simple natures. There was a short black eruption.

Alvan controlled it, to ask hastily what the baroness thought and what she had heard of Clotilde. Tresten made sign that it was nothing of the best.

'See! my girl has hundreds of enemies, and I, only I, know her and can defend her—weak, base shallow trickster, traitress that she is!' cried Alvan, and came down in a thundershower upon her: 'Yesterday—the day before—when? just now, here, in this room; gave herself—and now!' He bent, and immediately straightening his back, addressed Colonel von Tresten as her calumniator, 'Say your worst of her, and I say I will make of that girl the peerless woman of earth! I! in earnest! it's no dream. She can be made.... O God! the beast has turned tail! I knew she could. There 's three of beast to one of goddess in her, and set her alone, and let her be hunted and I not by, beast it is with her! cowardly skulking beast—the noblest and very bravest under my wing! Incomprehensible to you, Tresten? But who understands women! You hate her. Do not. She 's a riddle, but no worse than the rest of the tangle. She gives me up? Pooh! She writes it. She writes anything. And that vilest, I say, I will make more enviable, more Clotilde!' he thundered her signature in an amazement, broken suddenly by the sight of her putting her name to the letter. She had done that, written her name to the renunciation of him! No individual could bear the sight of such a crime, and no suffering man could be appeased by a single victim to atone for it. Her sex must be slaughtered; he raged against the woman; she became that ancient poisonous thing, the woman; his fury would not distinguish her as Clotilde, though the name had started him, and it was his knowledge of the particular sinner which drew down his curses on the sex. He twisted his body, hugging at his breast as if he had her letter sticking in his ribs. The letter was up against his ribs, and he thumped it, crushed it, patted it; he kissed it, and flung it, stamped on it, and was foul-mouthed. Seeing it at his feet, he bent to it like a man snapped in two, lamenting, bewailing himself, recovering sight of her fragmentarily. It stuck in his ribs, and in scorn of the writer, and sceptical of her penning it, he tugged to pull it out, and broke the shaft, but left the rankling arrow-head:—she had traced the lines, and though tyranny racked her to do that thing, his agony followed her hand over the paper to her name, which fixed and bit in him like the deadly-toothed arrow-head called asp, and there was no uprooting it. The thing lived; her deed was the woman; there was no separating them: witness it in love murdered.

O that woman! She has murdered love. She has blotted love completely out. She is the arch-thief and assassin of mankind—the female Apollyon. He lost sight of her in the prodigious iniquity covering her sex with a cowl of night, and it was what women are, what women will do, the one and all alike simpering simulacra that men find them to be, soulless, clogs on us, bloodsuckers! until a feature of the particular sinner peeped out on him, and brought the fresh agony of a reminder of his great-heartedness. 'For that woman—Tresten, you know me—I would have sacrificed for that woman fortune and life, my hope, my duty, my immortality. She knew it, and she—look!' he unwrinkled the letter carefully for it to be legible, and clenched it in a ball.' Signs her name, signs her name, her name!—God of heaven! it would be incredible in a holy chronicle—signs her name to the infamous harlotry! See: "Clotilde von Rudiger." It's her writing; that's her signature: "Clotilde" in full. You'd hardly fancy that, now? But look!' the colonel's eyelids were blinking, and Alvan dented his finger-nail under her name: 'there it is: Clotilde: signed shamelessly. Just as she might have written to one of her friends about bonnets, and balls, and books! Henceforward strangers, she and I?'

His laughter, even to Tresten, a man of camps, sounded profane as a yell beneath a cathedral dome. 'Why, the woman has been in my hands—I released her, spared her, drilled brain and blood, ransacked all the code, to do her homage and honour in every mortal way; and we two strangers! Do you hear that, Tresten? Why, if you had seen her!—she was lost, and I, this man

she now pierces with ice, kept hell down under bolt and bar—worse, I believe, broke a good woman's heart! that never a breath should rise that could accuse her on suspicion, or in malice, or by accident, justly, or with a shadow of truth. "I think it best for us both." So she thinks for me! She not only decides, she thinks; she is the active principle; 'tis mine to submit.—A certain presumption was in that girl always. Ha! do you hear me? Her letter may sting, it shall not dupe. Strangers? Poor fool! You see plainly she was nailed down to write the thing. This letter is a flat lie. She can lie—Oh! born to the art! born to it!—lies like a Saint tricking Satan! But she says she has left the city. Now to find her!

He began marching about the room with great strides. 'I'll have the whole Continent up; her keepers shall have no rest; I'll have them by the Law Courts; and by stratagem, and, if law and cunning fail, force. I have sworn it. I have done all that honour can ask of a man; more than any man, to my knowledge, would have done, and now it's war. I declare war on them. They will have it! I mean to take that girl from them—snatch or catch! The girl is my girl, and if there are laws against my having my own, to powder with the laws! Well, and do you suppose me likely to be beaten? Then Cicero was a fiction, and Caesar a people's legend. Not if they are history, and eloquence and commandership have power over the blood and souls of men. First, I write to her!'

His friend suggested that he knew not where she was. But already the pen was at work, the brain pouring as from a pitcher.

Writing was blood-letting, and the interminable pages drained him of his fever. As he wrote, she grew more radiant, more indistinct, more fiercely desired. The concentration of his active mind directed his whole being on the track of Clotilde, idealizing her beyond human. That last day when he had seen her appeared to him as the day of days. That day was Clotilde herself, she in person; he saw it as the woman, and saw himself translucent in the great luminousness; and behind it all was dark, as in front. That one day was the sun of his life. It had been a day of rain, and he beheld it in memory just as it had been, with the dark threaded air, the dripping streets; and he glorified it past all daily radiance. His letter was a burning hymn to the day. His moral grandeur on the day made him live as part of the splendour. Was it possible for the woman who had seen him then to be faithless to him? The swift deduction from his own feelings cleansed her of a suspicion to the contrary, and he became lighthearted. He hummed an air when he had finished his letter to her.

Councils with his adherents and couriers were held, and some were despatched to watch the house and slip the letter to her maid; others were told off to bribe and hound their way on the track of Clotilde. His gold rained into their hands with the directions.

Colonel von Tresten was the friend of his attachment to the baroness; a friend of both, and a warm one. Men coming into contact with Alvan took their shape of friend or enemy sharply, for he was friend or enemy of no dubious feature, devoted to them he loved, and a battery on them he opposed. The colonel had been the confidant of the baroness's grief over this love-passion of Alvan's, and her resignation. He shared her doubts of Clotilde's nobility of character: the reports were not favourable to the young lady. But the baroness and he were of one opinion, that Alvan in love was not likely to be governable by prudent counsel. He dropped a word of the whispers of Clotilde's volatility.

Alvan nodded his perfect assent. 'She is that, she is anything you like; you cannot exaggerate her for good or evil. She is matchless, colour her as you please.' Adopting the tone of argument, he said: 'She writes that letter. Well? It is her writing, and the moment, I am sure of it as hers, I would not have it unwritten. I love it!' He looked maddish with his love of the horrible thing, and

resumed soberly: 'The point is, that she has the charm for me. She is plastic in my hands. Other men would waste the treasure. I make of her what I will, and she knows it, and knows that she hangs on me to flourish worthily. I breathe the very soul of the woman into her. As for that letter of hers—' it burnt him this time to speak of the letter: 'she may write and write! She's weak, thin, a reed; she—let her be! Say of her when she plays beast—she is absent from Alvan! I can forgive. The letter's nothing; it means nothing—except "Thou fool, Alvan, to let me go." Yes, that! Her people are acting tyrant with her—as legally they have no right to do in this country, and I shall prove it to them. When I have gained admission to her—and I soon shall: it can't be refused: I am off to the head of her father's office to-morrow, and I have only to represent the state of affairs to the Minister in my language to obtain his authority to demand admission to her:—then, friend, you will see! I lift my finger, and you will see! At my request she went back to her mother. I have but to beckon.'

He had cooled to the happy assurance of his authority over her, all the giants of his system being well in action, and when that is the case with a big nature it is at rest, or such is the condition of repose granted it in life.

On the morrow he was off to batter at doors which would have expected rather the summons of an armed mob at his heels than the strange cry of the Radical man maltreated by love.

CHAPTER XI

The story of Clotilde's departure from the city, like that of Alvan's, communicated to her by her maid, was an anticipation of the truth, disseminated by her parents. She was removed when the swarm of spies and secret letter-bearers were attaining a position of dignity through the rumour of legal gentlemen about to direct the movements of the besieging army.

A stir seemed to her to prognosticate a rescue and she went not unwillingly. To be in motion, to see roadside faces, pricked her senses with some hope. She had gained the peace she needed, and in that state her heart began to be agitated by a fresh awakening, luxurious at first rather than troublesome. She had sunk so low that the light of Alvan seemed too distant for a positive expectation of him; but few approached her whom she did not fancy under strange disguises: the gentlemen were servants, the blouses were gentlemen; she looked wistfully at old women bearing baskets, for the forbidden fruit to peep out in the form of an envelope. All passed her blankly, noticing her eyes.

The journey was short; she was taken to a place a little beyond the head of the lake, and there, though she had liberty to breathe the air, fast fixed within the walls of a daily sameness that became gradually the hum of voices accusing Alvan of one in excess of the many sins laid against him by his enemies. Was he not possibly an empty pretender to power—a mere great talker?

Her bit of liberty increased her chafing at the deadly monotony of this existence, and envenomed the accusation by seeming to push her forth quite half way to meet him, if he would but come or show sign! She impetuously vindicated him from the charge of crediting the

sincerity of any words she might have committed to paper at the despotic dictation of her father. Oh, no; Alvan could not be guilty of such folly as that; he could not; it would be to suppose him unacquainted with her, ignorant of the nature of women. He would know that she wrote the words—why? She could not perfectly recollect how she had come to write them, and found it easier to extinguish the act of having written them at all, which was done by the angry recurrence to his failure to intervene now when the drama cried for his godlike appearance. Perhaps he was really unacquainted with her thought her stronger than she was! The idea reflected a shadow on his intelligence. She was not in a situation that could bear of her blaming herself.

While she was thus devoured by the legions of her enfeebled wits, Clotilde was assiduously courted by her family, and her father from time to time brought pen and paper for her to write anew from his dictation. He was pleased to hail her as his fair secretary, and when the letters were unimportant she wrote flowingly, happy to be praised. They were occasionally addressed to friends; she discovered herself writing one to the professor, in which he was about to be informed that she had resolved to banish Alvan from her mind for ever. She stopped; her heart stopped; the pen fell from her hand, in loathing. Her father warily bade her proceed. She could not; she signified it choking. Only a few days before she had written to the professor exultingly of her engagement. She refused to belie herself in such a manner; retrospectively her rapid contradictions appeared impossible; the picture of her was not human, and she gave out a negative of her whole frame convulsed, whereat the General was not slow to remind her of the scourgings she had undergone by a sudden burst of his wrath. He knew the proper physic. 'You girls want the lesson we read to skittish recruits; you shall have it. Write: "He is now as nothing to me." You shall write that you hate him, if you hesitate! Why, you unreasonable slut, you have given him up; you have told him you have given him up, and what objection can you have to telling others now you have done it?'

'I was forced to it, body and soul!' cried Clotilde, sobbing and bursting into desperation out of a weak show of petulance that she had put on to propitiate him. 'If I have to tell, I will tell how it was. For that my heart is unchanged, and Alvan is, and will be, my lord, all the world may see. I would rather write that I hate him.'

'You write, the man is now as nothing to me!' said her father, dashing his finger in a fiery zig-zag along the line for her pen to follow. 'Or else, my girl, you've been playing us a pretty farce!' He strung himself for a mad gallop of wrath, gave her a shudder, and relapsed. 'No, no, you're wiser, you're a better girl than that. Write it. I must have it written—here, come! The worst is over; the rest is child's play. Come, take the pen, I'll guide your hand.'

The pen was fixed in her hand, and the first words formed. They looked such sprawling skeletons that Clotilde had the comfort of feeling sure they would be discerned as the work of compulsion. So she wrote on mechanically, solacing herself for what she did with vows of future revolt. Alvan had a saying, that want of courage is want of sense; and she remembered his illustration of how sense would nourish courage by scattering the fear of death, if we would only grasp the thought that we sink to oblivion gladly at night, and, most of us, quit it reluctantly in the morning. She shut her eyes while writing; she fancied death would be welcome; and as she certainly had sense, she took it for the promise of courage. She flattered herself by believing, therefore, that she who did not object to die was only awaiting the cruelly-delayed advent of her lover to be almost as brave as he—the feminine of him. With these ideas in her head much clearer than when she wrote the couple of lines to Alvan—for then her head was reeling, she was then beaten and prostrate—she signed her name to a second renunciation of him, and was aware of a flush of self-reproach at the simple suspicion of his being deceived by it; it was an insult to

his understanding. Full surely the professor would not be deceived, and a lover with a heart to reach to her and read her could never be hoodwinked by so palpable a piece of slavishness. She was indeed slavish; the apology necessitated the confession. But that promise of courage, coming of her ownership of sense, vindicated her prospectively; she had so little of it that she embraced it as a present possession, and she made it Alvan's task to put it to the trial. Hence it became Alvan's offence if, owing to his absence, she could be charged with behaving badly. Her generosity pardoned him his inexplicable delay to appear in his might: 'But see what your continued delay causes!' she said, and her tone was merely sorrowful.

She had forgotten her signature to the letter to the professor when his answer arrived. The sight of the handwriting of one of her lover's faithfulest friends was like a peal of bells to her, and she tore the letter open, and began to blink and spell at a strange language, taking the frosty sentences piecemeal. He begged her to be firm in her resolution, give up Alvan and obey her parents! This man of high intelligence and cultivation wrote like a provincial schoolmistress moralizing. Though he knew the depth of her passion for Alvan, and had within the month received her lark-song of her betrothal, he, this man—if living man he could be thought—counselled her to endeavour to deserve the love and respect of her parents, alluded to Alvan's age and her better birth, approved her resolve to consult the wishes of her family, and in fine was as rank a traitor to friendship as any chronicler. Out on him! She swept him from earth.

And she had built some of her hopes on the professor. 'False friend!' she cried.

She wept over Alvan for having had so false a friend.

There remained no one that could be expected to intervene with a strong arm save the baroness. The professor's emphasized approval of her resolve to consult the wishes of her family was a shocking hypocrisy, and Clotilde thought of the contrast to it in her letter to the baroness. The tripping and stumbling, prettily awkward little tone of gosling innocent new from its egg, throughout the letter, was a triumph of candour. She repeated passages, paragraphs, of the letter, assuring herself that such affectionately reverential prattle would have moved her, and with the strongest desire to cast her arms about the writer: it had been composed to be moving to a woman, to any woman. The old woman was entreated to bestow her blessing on the young one, all in Arcadia, and let the young one nestle to the bosom she had not an idea of robbing. She could not have had the idea, else how could she have made the petition? And in order to compliment a venerable dame on her pure friendship for a gentleman, it was imperative to reject the idea. Besides, after seeing the photograph of the baroness, common civility insisted on the purity of her friendship. Nay, in mercy to the poor gentleman, friendship it must be.

A letter of reply from that noble lady was due. Possibly she had determined not to write, but to act. She was a lady of exalted birth, a lady of the upper aristocracy, who could, if she would, bring both a social and official pressure upon the General: and it might be in motion now behind the scenes, Clotilde laid hold of her phantom baroness, almost happy under the phantom's whisper that she need not despair. 'You have been a little weak,' the phantom said to her, and she acquiesced with a soft snuffle, adding: 'But, dearest, honoured lady, you are a woman, and know what our trials are when we are so persecuted. O that I had your beautiful sedateness! I do admire it, madam. I wish I could imitate.' She carried her dramatic ingenuousness farthel still by saying: 'I have seen your photograph'; implying that the inimitable, the much coveted air of composure breathed out of yonder presentment of her features. 'For I can't call you good looking,' she said within herself, for the satisfaction of her sense of candour, of her sense of

contrast as well. And shutting her eyes, she thought of the horrid penitent a harsh-faced woman in confession must be:

The picture sent her swimmingly to the confessional, where sat a man with his head in a hood, and he soon heard enough of mixed substance to dash his hood, almost his head, off. Beauty may be immoderately frank in soul to the ghostly. The black page comprised a very long list. 'But put this on the white page,' says she to the surging father inside his box—'I loved Alvan!' A sentence or two more fetches the Alvanic man jumping out of the priest: and so closely does she realize it that she has to hunt herself into a corner with the question, whether she shall tell him she guessed him to be no other than her lover. 'How could you expect a girl, who is not a Papist, to come kneeling here?' she says. And he answers with no matter what of a gallant kind.

In this manner her natural effervescence amused her sorrowful mind while gazing from her chamber window at the mountain sides across the valley, where tourists, in the autumnal season, sweep up and down like a tidal river. She had ceased to weep; she had outwept the colour of her eyes and the consolation of weeping. Dressed in black to the throat, she sat and waited the arrival of her phantom friend, the baroness—that angel! who proved her goodness in consenting to be the friend of Alvan's beloved, because she was the true friend of Alvan! How cheap such a way of proving goodness, Clotilde did not consider. She wanted it so.

The mountain heights were in dusty sunlight. She had seen them day after day thinly lined on the dead sky, inviting thunder and doomed to sultriness. She looked on the garden of the house, a desert under bee and butterfly. Looking beyond the garden she perceived her father on the glaring road, and one with him, the sight of whom did not flush her cheek or spring her heart to a throb, though she pitied the poor boy: he was useless to her, utterly.

Soon her Indian Bacchus was in her room, and alone with her, and at her feet. Her father had given him hope. He came bearing eyes that were like hope's own; and kneeling, kissing her hands, her knees, her hair, he seemed unaware that she was inanimate.

There was nothing imaginable in which he could be of use.

He was only another dust-cloud of the sultry sameness. She had been expecting a woman, a tempest choral with sky and mountain and valley-hollows, as the overture to Alvan's appearance.

But he roused her. With Marko she had never felt her cowardice, and his passionately beseeching, trembling, 'Will you have me?' called up the tiger in the girl; in spite of pity for his voice she retorted on her parents:

'Will I have you? I? You ask me what is my will? It sounds oddly from you, seeing that I wrote to you in Lucerne what I would have, and nothing has changed in me since then, nothing! My feeling for him is unaltered, and everything you have heard of me was wrung out of me by my unhappiness. The world is dead to me, and all in it that is not. Sigismund Alvan. To you I am accustomed to speak every thought of my soul, and I tell you the world and all it has is dead to me, even my parents—I hate them.'

Marko pressed her hands. If he loved her slavishly, it was generously. The wild thing he said was one of the frantic leaps of generosity in a heart that was gone to impulse: 'I see it, they have martyred you. I know you so well, Clotilde! So, then, come to me, come with me, let me cherish you. I will take you and rescue you from your people, and should it be your positive wish to meet Alvan again, I myself will take you to him, and then you may choose between us.'

The generosity was evident. There was nevertheless, to a young woman realizing the position foreshadowed by such a project, the suspicion of a slavish hope nestling among the

circumstances in the background, and this she was taught by the dangerous emotion of gratitude gaining on her, and melting her to him.

She too had a slavish hope that was athirst and sinking, and it flew at the throat of Marko's, eager to satiate its vengeance for these long delays in the destroying of a weaker.

She left her chair and cried: 'As you will. What is it to me? Take me, if you please. Take that glove; it is the shape of my hand. You have as much of me as is there. My life is gone. You or another! But take this warning and my oath with it. I swear to you, that wherever I see Sigismund Alvan I go straight to him, though the way be over you, all of you, lying dead beneath me.'

The lift of incredulous horror in Marko's large black eyes excited her to a more savage imagination: 'Rejoice! I should rejoice to see you, all of you, dead, that I might walk across you safe from disturbance to get to him I love. Be under no delusion. I love him better than the lives of any dear to me, or my own. I am his. He is my faith, my worship. I am true to him, I am, I am. You force my hand from me, you take this miserable body, but my soul is free to love him and to go to him when God gives me sight of him. I am Alvan's eternally. All your laws are mockeries. You, and my people, and your priests, and your law-makers, are shadows, brain-vapours. Let him beckon!—So you have your warning. Do what I may, I cannot be called untrue. And now let me be; I want repose; my head breaks; I have been on the rack and I am in pieces!'

Marko clung to her hand, said she was terrible and pitiless, but clung.

The hand was nerveless: it was her dear hand. Had her tongue been more venomous in wildness than the encounter with a weaker than herself made it be, the holding of her hand would have been his antidote. In him there was love for two.

Clotilde allowed him to keep the hand, assuring herself she was unconscious he did so. He brought her peace, he brought her old throning self back to her, and he was handsome and tame as a leopard-skin at her feet.

If she was doomed to reach to Alvan through him, at least she had warned him. The vision of the truthfulness of her nature threw a celestial wan beam on her guilty destiny.

She patted his head and bade him leave her, narrowing her shoulders on the breast to let it be seen that the dark household within was locked and shuttered.

He went. He was good, obedient, humane; he was generous, exquisitely bred; he brought her peace, and he had been warned. It is difficult in affliction to think of one who belongs to us as one to whom we owe a duty. The unquestionably sincere and devoted lover is also in his candour a featureless person; and though we would not punish him for his goodness, we have the right to anticipate that it will be equal to every trial. Perhaps, for the sake of peace... after warning him... her meditations tottered in dots.

But when the heart hungers behind such meditations, that thinking without language is a dangerous habit; for there will suddenly come a dash usurping the series of tentative dots, which is nothing other than the dreadful thing resolved on, as of necessity, as naturally as the adventurous bow-legged infant pitches back from an excursion of two paces to mother's lap; and not much less innocently within the mind, it would appear. The dash is a haven reached that would not be greeted if it stood out in words. Could we live without ourselves letting our animal do our thinking for us legibly? We live with ourselves agreeably so long as his projects are phrased in his primitive tongue, even though we have clearly apprehended what he means, and though we sufficiently well understand the whither of our destination under his guidance. No counsel can be saner than that the heart should be bidden to speak out in plain verbal speech

within us. For want of it, Clotilde's short explorations in Dot-and-Dash land were of a kind to terrify her, and yet they seemed not only unavoidable, but foreshadowing of the unavoidable to come. Or possibly—the thought came to her—Alvan would keep his word, and save her from worse by stepping to the altar between her and Marko, there calling on her to decide and quit the prince; and his presence would breathe courage into her to go to him. It set her looking to the altar as a prospect of deliverance.

Her mother could not fail to notice a change in Clotilde's wintry face now that Marko was among them; her inference tallied with his report of their interview, so she supposed the girl to have accepted more or less heartily Marko's forgiveness. For him the girl's eyes were soft and kind; her gaze was through the eyelashes, as one seeing a dream on a far horizon. Marko spoke of her cheerfully, and was happy to call her his own, but would not have her troubled by any ceremonial talk of their engagement, so she had much to thank him for, and her consciousness of the signal instance of ingratitude lying ahead in the darkness, like a house mined beneath the smiling slumberer, made her eager to show the real gratefulness and tenderness of her feelings. This had the appearance of renewed affection; consequently her parents lost much of their fear of the besieger outside, and she was removed to the city. Two parties were in the city, one favouring Alvan, and one abhorring the audacious Jew. Together they managed to spread incredible reports of his doings, which required little exaggeration to convince an enemy that he was a man with whom hostility could not be left to sleep. The General heard of the man's pleading his cause in all directions to get pressure put upon him, showing something like a devilish persuasiveness, Jew and demagogue though he was; for there seemed to be a feeling abroad that the interview this howling lover claimed with Clotilde ought to be granted. The latest report spoke of him as off to the General's Court for an audience of his official chief. General von Rudiger looked to his defences, and he had sufficient penetration to see that the weakest point of them might be a submissive daughter.

A letter to Clotilde from the baroness was brought to the house by a messenger. The General thought over it. The letter was by no means a seductive letter for a young lady to receive from such a person, yet he did not anticipate the whole effect it would produce when ultimately he decided to give it to her, being of course unaware of the noble style of Clotilde's address to the baroness. He stipulated that there must be no reply to it except through him, and Clotilde had the coveted letter in her hands at last. Here was the mediatrix—the veritable goddess with the sword to cut the knot! Here was the manifestation of Alvan!

END OF VOLUME -2

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