

The Penance of Portia James

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The Penance of Portia James

by Author of "Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill", "A Knight of the White Feather", etc.

London

William Heinemann

1899

Dedicated to Mr. Edmund Yates, in grateful recognition of much kindness.

The Penance of Portia James

Chapter I

PORTIA JAMES had been as good as her word, and, notwithstanding the fact that she had danced the evening before—Portia loved dancing—until the grey dawn was actually creeping into the gas-lit rooms, she was standing only five hours later, that is to say at eight o'clock the same morning, on the steps of Burlington House, waiting with a few other enthusiasts until the doors should be opened. To face the unsparing morning light after having made what is suggestively called a night of it, is not an experiment that can be entered upon becomingly after the freshness of youth is past. Portia, however, was still of an age to stand this test—and, what is more, to come out of it triumphantly. It was her first season in London. She had abundant health; pleasure and admiration seemed to act upon her as stimulants, and though she had never slept so little or lived (in the sense that living may be measured by keenness of sensation) so much as hitherto, she had never looked fresher, younger, rosier, or more generally blooming, than upon this particular June morning, as she stood waiting with the thick catalogue in her hand, a confident Peri, outside the gates of the particular Paradise she had flown from her bed at that early hour to enter.

Youth and the morning were ever well mated. Did not the Greeks, those wonderful pantheists, recognise this truth when they invoked the ever-young Aurora to coax their world into waking life with the aid of her rosy finger-tips? A certain young artist, who was hardly as yet out of the *rapin* stage, and who had seen Portia a few evenings before in the glory of full *décolleté* with rounded bust and arms emerging from old-rose satin—or something equally vague and charming as regarded its hue—and who had thought on that occasion of Byron's lines upon the score of beauty,

“Mellowed to that tender light,
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies,”

found himself inclined at the present moment to alter his opinion. He had reached the Academy a little before Portia, and had watched her unobserved as she mounted the steps. His eye, accustomed to transfer to an imaginary canvas all that it encountered, took in every detail of her appearance at a glance. The misty background of the London atmosphere, which looked as though at least two of the well-known Egyptian plagues, to wit, the reign of darkness and the rain of blood, were struggling for

supremacy over it—the simple explanation thereof being that the sun's rays were striving to penetrate a threatening fog—gave the indefiniteness of outline that stamps an impressionist picture to her *silhouette*, as she walked. Nevertheless, Harry Tolhurst, with the divination that comes of artistic training, was aware, as I have said, of all the details of it. Portia had a figure that might have inspired a Swinburnian rhapsody, and Harry did full justice to this in his mind as she walked up the steps in a tailor-made Scotch tweed that sat closely, but not tightly, round her exquisite form. Her bright head was covered with one of those patulous splashes of black lace that serve as a substratum for a garland of flowers. Perhaps it was not quite in keeping with the tailor-made dress, but it harmonised wonderfully well with the face that it framed; and this mention of her face brings me to the most difficult part of my description, for the face is supposed by most to be the crucial test or criterion by which beauty is to be gauged. Portia, it must be owned at once, did not possess what might be called, objectively speaking, a beautiful face. It was a face that did not focus well, as the photographers say, and those of her acquaintances who had only seen her photograph were agreeably surprised when they encountered the original. In the photographs the face was deprived of the very qualities that constituted its principal charm—namely, softness of colouring and mobility of expression. What is the loveliest landscape under a grey sky compared with the same landscape when the clouds and the sunlight sweep across it, revealing a thousand unsuspected charms? Portia in her photographs was the landscape on a sunless day. Portia in her own person was the landscape on a day of April showers, of summer storms, of autumn moons, of all that makes inanimate nature live and vibrate with human passion. To certain people, therefore—to those who could awake corresponding phases in her—she was subjectively beautiful; and for the fact that her eyes—of the warm hazel that accompanies chestnut hair—were too wide apart; that her nose was too short, or her mouth too large, they cared not one whit. Her eyes, as some of them had discovered to their cost, could “thoroughly undo” them betimes—and what could the most beautiful eyes of the most beautiful houri in an Eastern Paradise do more?—and this without *malice prepense* on her part, for if Portia was a coquette she was not a deliberate one. It was for this reason that her conquests were so serious and so lasting. Men took her seriously in spite of themselves, and none, I fear took her more seriously than Harry Tolhurst. Indeed, it would have been at variance with his nature to take her in any other way, for though his vocation was that of an artist, and although he loved his vocation, his actual bias was towards the austerity and self-renunciation of a therapist, in the religious application of the term. Even

as regarded his art, he aimed at giving it a transcendental significance, and nothing irritated him more than the French point of view respecting art and literature, which disdains to take account of the subject that inspires, and makes cleverness of execution on the one hand, and perfection of literary form on the other, its sole criterion of praise or blame.

Yet this very young man—the very, in this instance, does not point to extreme youth, for Harry was approaching the thirties—was led to take an interest in Miss James, in the first instance, for the entirely carnal reason that she had so charming a figure. It was as he told himself, a legitimate and artistic interest; for the pictures that he painted, and, far beyond these, those he dreamed of painting, necessitated the frequent study of the feminine outline. He had first been struck by Portia's figure as she rode past him in the park, the great clump of chestnut hair that could not be thrust under her hat lending a certain Lady-Godiva-like association of ideas to the picture; and he kept the vision of it in his mind until he was introduced to her by chance at a Joachim concert, at which she was present with some special friends of his, seated, as it happened, in his close neighbourhood. He never forgot the harmonies he had heard on that occasion. For ever after they seemed to blend themselves with the vision of Portia in her summer dress, as she listened to the heart-searching music with her eyes down, so completely under the spell that, when she raised them at the close, there were unconscious tears quivering on the lashes. He had thought then that such a tribute far exceeded the clamorous applause that filled the hall, and had envied the Master his power. But Portia's eyes were just as speaking without the tear-drops, and, before the concert was over, Harry's ambition to change places with Herr Joachim had passed away.

All that had passed between them, nevertheless, on that occasion might have been proclaimed on the housetops. So likewise might the conversation that followed upon their chance meeting at the house of a mutual friend. This, however, proves nothing. The Chinese, it is said, make the same word do duty for a hundred different meanings, according to the key in which they utter it; and even commonplace English phrases put on quite a new significance when they are pronounced with a certain inflexion that differentiates them from their compeers. Still, the fact remains that Portia and her admirer said nothing that might not have been taken down by a shorthand reporter and printed in a manual for daily use in crowded drawing-rooms. Even when she declared one day that it was her firm intention to go to the Academy one of these mornings before the doors were opened, Harry did not venture to do more than take silent note of the same. They were not upon terms that warranted his offering himself as a

guide, but he treasured the announcement in his heart, and thenceforth, for eight successive mornings, the policeman on duty at the doors of Burlington House was not more punctual in his attendance than he. On the ninth he had his reward. Portia, alone and unattended (this sequence of words is sanctioned by custom, though for my part I have always thought two of them were *de trop*), made her appearance in the courtyard, her face bright with its morning bloom, not quite like that of Shakespeare's schoolboy, and the exhilaration consequent upon having successfully achieved her escapade. She was so far from being *blasée* (we greatly need an English equivalent for this word) that she had actually derived an immense amount of enjoyment from her solitary drive down Knightsbridge and Piccadilly in a hansom; the heavily-branched, thickly-leaved trees in the Park looming through the mist at an immeasurable distance, the sloping green sward with the fat, unshorn sheep scattered over its bountiful surface, the mighty clubs, still and solemn as temples at that early hour—even to the opening shops and the unaccustomed aspect of the passers-by, all more or less hurrying on their way to set the work-a-day world going—everything she saw upon this matutinal drive was a source of admiration or amusement to her. The muffled influence upon sight and sound of the embryo fog exercised a mysterious charm upon her imagination. Indeed, if it had not been that, in common with most of us, she did not like to withdraw her hand from the plough after she had put it thereto, I believe she would have forsworn the Academy that morning, and exchanged the long rows of mute pictures within its walls for the living, breathing pictures outside. As it was, and fortunately, or perhaps *unfortunately* for Harry, she did nothing of the kind. She dismissed her hansom—bestowing, in violation of feminine canons, a tip upon the driver for the utterly inadequate motive that his horse was black and shiny, and that she had derived a certain amount of pleasure from the contemplation of his vigorous action as he trotted down Piccadilly—and made her way up the steps of Burlington House.

Chapter II

TO say that Portia was surprised when, upon reaching the top, she recognised Harry Tolhurst in the tall, square, and somewhat grave-looking young man who took off his hat as he approached her, would not be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Perhaps it would be safer to assume that, if his presence did not strike her as owing its cause to an entirely miraculous coincidence, his absence would not have appeared especially surprising to her either.

In any case, she thought it advisable to feign a slight surprise, and to greet him with a "What, *you* here!" and an almost imperceptible elevation of the eyebrows (which latter, coming under the heading of "pencilled," were one of her strong points), as though he were the last person whom she could have expected, under the circumstances, to encounter.

"I always come at this time when I come at all," he replied, thinking doubtless of the eight successive mornings during which he had done the *piéd de grue* on the steps of the Academy before the doors were opened.

"Oh, then you must know all the pictures by heart," said Portia, cordially, "and you can take me straight to those I am supposed to admire. I have a catalogue here; but it was my brother who marked it."

Harry laughed, and his companion echoed the laugh. She delivered up the book to him, for which he had extended his hand, without accompanying the gesture by a spoken request. She was conscious of enjoying the sense of unrestraint the early morning meeting seemed to bring with it. It amused her to watch his face as he scanned the catalogue. The brother to whom she had referred, who was actually her step-brother, and some seven-and-twenty years older than herself, had brought his own unaided judgment to bear upon his selection of the pictures that were to guide his little sister's taste; and the result seemed to furnish a certain amount of inward amusement to her friend, which was plainly reflected in his face. The Philistine point of view is indeed a never-failing source of mirth to the adept, when it does not irritate him—a fact, however, which does not prevent certain cliques of artists from demolishing certain other opposing cliques. For it is not only doctors who differ, as the saying has it, for the confusion of the uninitiated, but apostles of every calling and every pretension under the sun. Otherwise, where would be the point in Pilate's famous question?

Portia was in no wise offended by her friend's amused expression. Truth to tell, she would have liked to see it upon his face a little oftener. Its habitual cast was set in too severe a mould. He had excessively dark, deep-

set eyes, and their normal aspect was of those of a man who broods. The complexion was sallow, and would have suggested liver to the materially disposed. The mouth was in a great measure concealed under a drooping black moustache; but its lines, as far as could be seen, were indicative of a somewhat cheerless disposition of mind. One could almost imagine that the sable-coloured eyes and hair had given their hue to the temperament. When this chronic gloom gave way to a rare smile, the effect was like that of intense sunlight against the background of an inky sky, which, as everyone knows, has an irradiating effect upon the landscape. Harry's smile was almost a revelation to Portia. Her appreciation of it inclined her to see the pictures under his guidance with quite a new zest; and, the doors being opened, they passed in together upon the easy footing of a pair of old friends, instead of that of two young people who were hovering upon the brink of a flirtation. The catalogue remained in Harry's hands, definitely closed.

"But you might mark a fresh lot," said Portia, pleadingly. "I'm sure to mix up the pictures you show me with those my brother wanted me to see. Don't you think any of them were worth marking, then?"

"Not any that I have seen so far," said Harry, frankly. Whereat they both laughed again.

"Poor Wilmer," said Portia. (Wilmer, originally a baptismal name, had become the prefix by which her elder brother's name of plain James had become converted into that of Wilmer-James.) "As long as I remember him—even when we were living in the bush out in Australia, you know—he used to talk about Claudes and Ruysdaels as though he knew all about them. I had the profoundest belief in his knowledge until we came home; but I have lost faith in so many things since then."

"He *has* a kind of a picture-gallery, hasn't he?" said Harry, in tones that were alike doubtful and encouraging.

"Yes; he has a kind of a one," repeated Portia, briskly; then with a wicked look in her eyes, "principally old masters."

"Old masters!" Harry's tone was distinctly sceptical. "All his own selection, I suppose?"

"Yes, all!" Here Portia's voice betrayed the triumph she felt. "Ruysdaels and Claudes—those are his favourites. He went over to the Hotel Dieu last week for a sale, and he brought back a Claude about that big"—(there were vestiges of colonial looseness of expression in Portia's conversation that occasionally disconcerted her hearers)—"just about, I should think"—she indicated a space of some half-yard square with her hands as she spoke. "I was told that the thing to admire in it was a kind of coppery glow; and I *could* see that," doubtfully; "but then I could see nothing else. Would *you*

admire such a picture, do you think?"

"I should like to see it first," said Harry guardedly. He was thinking that a private view, under Portia's guidance, of the remarkable gallery of the "old-master"-bitten Australian would be a charming sequel to their walk round the Academy this morning.

"Would you? I'm sure Wilmer would be delighted to show it you, then," declared Portia, innocently. "But now let us set to work. I wonder if I shall have the courage to tell you what pictures I like. You can always tell me why I shouldn't and mustn't."

"I dare say you should and must most of the time. I have a great belief in your natural instincts as regards art——"

"Like Wilmer," she interrupted him. "Only it's not art, but wine. He *will* insist on making me taste his old 'cru'—doesn't that sound learned?—and the Australian wines he gets from his Yarraman vines. He says wine should be judged by a pure, unvitiated palate; and somehow—it's very funny—but I do generally manage to guess right."

All this time Harry had been leading her through rooms Nos. 1 and 2, with never a pause on the way. Portia was vaguely aware of canvases bright with brilliant sea-shores, and green rivers whereon white-robed damsels were afloat in greener boats. She would have liked to stop before some of these, but he led her on relentlessly until he brought her up before a portrait by Herkomer, which he bade her look at and tell him what she thought of it. Portia, was interested at once.

"But then there is something to be said for the model," she observed, after she had admired it with unaffected heartiness. "One would say there was such a straightforward soul looking through those eyes, wouldn't one? That must make it much easier, I should think, for an artist."

"Much easier," assented Harry. "A true portrait-painter finds himself in the position of a kind of involuntary Father Confessor. But I wasn't thinking so much of the expression as the work."

And thereupon he entered into considerations of drawing, and colouring, and technique, which, being all new to Portia, gave her the sensation of being led to the threshold of some vast unexplored region, peopled with ideal presentments of all the persons and objects she encountered in her everyday life.

"Oh, how I wish I had been born an artist," she said enthusiastically, after nearly two hours—she had forgotten all about the limits of her leave of absence by this time—had been spent in going from picture to picture at Harry's bidding. "You must find your life very full and happy always."

"Indeed I don't. It is the life of a Sisyphus, for the most part. What, are you going away already? Well, there is just one little painting I should like

you to see before you go. I won't give you any opinion about it. I want to know whether you like it yourself."

His voice sounded nervous and hurried, and Portia was perfectly aware that the picture she was expected to be honest about was his own. She hoped in her heart she would like it. Without establishing the standard laid down in the novels of the Flowery Empire for the regulation of the affections which makes Passion dependent upon the proficiency in classic lore of the adored object, she could not help feeling that she would like Mr. Tolhurst better if his work appealed to her sympathies. But when she finally found herself confronted with it, she was obliged to admit that the first impression was one of bewilderment and non-comprehension. Harry had chosen for his theme the hackneyed subject—old as the seasons, and young as spring-time—of the Madonna and Child. To Portia, who had never seen Munkacsy's "Christ before Pilate," nor "The Last Supper" of Uhde, with its wondrous stamp of mystic realism, there was something so unaccustomed in the modern treatment of the theme that she was aghast. The Madonna was a young woman in flesh and blood like herself—of a commoner type—"only so *much* handsomer," she added mentally—and the expression in her dark eyes was rather one of wistful pride than of confident glorification. She had working fingers, and the hands which held the child on her lap had evidently known manual labour. Portia could not appreciate the conscientious execution of the Jewish garb in white and blue, for all her interest was centered upon the manner in which the faces had been treated. The picture of the child—a realistic presentment of an eighteen-months-old infant, with curiously solemn, prominent blue eyes—seemed to arrest her attention. After a long and puzzled pause, she turned her face towards her companion. Harry had never seen it look so grave before.

"Well?" he said interrogatively—there had been many people in front of the picture when they had first approached it, but now the place was vacant—"what do you make of it?"

"I can hardly say," answered Portia—her voice had a little tremor in it. "I am going through such a curious experience. How or where I cannot say—but I have seen something like that picture before. I have seen it or I have dreamed it. Don't you know what it is to meet a face in the street that recalls some other face? you cannot tell whose? Or to have the impression of a dream when you wake in the morning that you can never, never lay hold of? That is how I feel in front of your picture. It makes me almost fancy that I have stood here with you before, and that I know what you are going to say. I am afraid it prevents me from looking at it properly. . . . It *is* very good, though, isn't it!"—she added hurriedly and demurely.

For all reply Harry was rude enough to laugh. He laughed so genuinely and with such thorough enjoyment that Portia, somewhat abashed, laughed too. What was more, he did not even excuse himself for his laughter. But it was impossible to be offended by it, for the reason that it conveyed a subtle assurance that whatever she had said to move it, far from being displeasing to him, was something that had only drawn him closer to her. In an instant, however, he had become grave again. "You ask me if it is very good—well, no. To give you my candid opinion, I think it is very bad. I am sorry I *exposed* it, as the French call it. But what you say about your being reminded of something you have seen before is a puzzle to me. I believe you are one of the most truthful persons I ever met—no, I don't jump at conclusions—but I have watched you as you looked at the pictures, and I am sure of what I say—yet you can't have seen anything like this before. The picture has never been out of my studio."

"I can't account for it either," said Portia, plaintively; "but the feeling is there, all the same. And what is the most uncomfortable, it suggests something unhappy. How I wish I could explain it. Do you believe in spirits and all that kind of thing?"

"Believe there are things undreamed of in our philosophy? Of course I do. Everyone who thinks at all must believe that much."

"Then you think an impression like this one of mine *may* have something in it?"

She put the question anxiously, for the vague foreboding that had come upon her as her eyes first encountered the picture seemed to gain in consistence as she looked more closely into it. The prominent blue orbs of the child, with their unabashed infant gaze, threatened to haunt her in the days to come.

"What can it mean?" she said again, without waiting for Harry's reply. No one could give a satisfactory solution of the mystery, which was, after all, entirely a subjective one. But as she parted from her companion at the outer gate of Burlington House, in the midst of the later fashionable throng, her erst-while joyousness seemed to have departed from her. He reproached himself with having allowed her to over-tire herself.

"You went at the pictures with all the zeal of a neophyte," he said, "and I never thought of holding you back. You should have told me you were getting tired."

"Oh, but I wasn't indeed," she assured him eagerly. "I did enjoy seeing them so much, until—" she stopped short, and gave vent to her emotion in a half-hysterical little laugh. "I'm afraid you must think me so awfully silly—"

"What, I? Think *you* silly! Oh, my dear Miss James!"

He stopped suddenly; annoyed at the weakness of his own disclaimer. Yet what was he to do? The very longing that beset him to say so much more than he had any warrant for saying seemed, in biblical phrase, to place a bridle on his tongue and check his utterance; and the parting between the two was so formal that no one could have suspected that he was actually carrying away a corner of Portia's heart that morning, leaving Heaven knows how large a share of his own behind him in exchange.

Chapter III

HURRYING back to Waratah Lodge, whereby the Kensington abode of Wilmer James, standing in its own quarter of an acre of garden, was known, Portia found there would be only time to get into later-day trim before luncheon. Her room, overlooking a riotous rose-bud, was a pleasant place to fritter away the time in. There were mirrors in white-enamel frames that multiplied her figure in all manner of unconsciously-becoming poses, and a square, low, Liberty-draped couch that might have inclined the most prosaic to maiden meditation of a pleasantly-dreamy description. The porcelain blues and whites of carpet and curtains—the yellow fever of decoration had not as yet broken out in every household—were suggestive of coolness and cleanliness. A white, pagoda-shaped cage, containing two budgery-guards, that Portia had brought all the way from her bush-home—a cage large enough to allow the love-sick Hebraic-looking little birds to play at pursuing each other through space after a period of unlimited fondling—stood upon a table near the window. The bed in the corner, under its soft concealment of blue and white crinkly curtains, became an unobtrusive appendage to the rest of the furniture in a room of such ample dimensions. The pretty trifles that are set forth in the West End shops every succeeding season, with a view to exciting a conflagration in the pockets of those whose money is popularly supposed to “burn” therein, were not wanting in Portia's room. The “chastest” china set—(will not the eighteenth-century use of this adjective, which, according to dictionary authorities, should only be applied to a *rosière* or a word, be something of a stumbling-block to philologists of the future?)—the chastest china-set, I say, adorned her five-o'clock tea-table. There was a miniature cuckoo-clock on the draped mantle-piece, and white and gold book-shelves bore a heterogeneous assemblage of the latest novels, poems, and nondescript specimens of the generally talked-about order of literature. Portia's tastes were nothing if not eclectic, and when she found the time to read, which was not very often, she could take up with equal appreciation a chapter of *Aurora Leigh* or the latest delightfully extravagant American absurdity. I have no desire to furnish in this connection a complete catalogue of all her possessions, but the one object in her room that she would not have allowed us to overlook was her writing-table, made to order in celebration of her twenty-first birthday, by her brother's command—a munificent gift, for he had himself discovered (and knew what he had paid for it) the authentic Wouvermans enshrined in the lid. For the further protection of the precious memento, Wilmer had designed a square cover, like an

inverted box, which was placed over the writing-table when it was not in use, and which gave it very much the appearance of a Singer's sewing-machine. This, indeed, was the normal aspect it presented, for Portia found it easier to scribble off her correspondence at an unassuming white-enamel-painted table, whereon her *buvard*, in old-stamped leather, found its resting-place. On the day of her return from the Academy, however, her eyes were instantly attracted to *the* writing-table by the sight of a magnificent bunch of flowers lying upon the sewing-machine lid, made up of all manner of blooms in season and out of season. But it was not the costly charm of speckled orchids or scentless camellias that attracted her gaze. It was the sight of an assemblage of yellow-beaded mimosa-branches, with blossoms of such an amazing quality of thick fluffiness that the almond-scent they scattered around them seemed to permeate all the air. As she beheld these flowers, Portia's face gathered a new and singular expression. The charming London room, with its wealth of so-called art equipments, its Bond Street bibelots and veiled London atmosphere, all melted away. She was riding across the far-away Australian plains on a Spring day in September, and around and above her the dark wattle-trees were shining in their gold-spangled robes. She could see again the vision of a man's face next to hers, moving up and down with the horse's trot—the reddish beard and moustache concealing lips that had a curious trick of appearing to be for ever engaged in the action of tasting, when he was not making use of them in speech; the sanguine hue of the hairy cheeks, and the blue eyes set, as the French express it, *à fleur de tête*. She could see herself, a “mere slip of a girl,” with a massive plait hanging down her back, the end trailing over the saddle, listening to the man's words as he sought to make her understand that, child as she was at that time, she was yet the one maid in all the world for him. She had believed what he had said then, and she was fain to believe it now. She had imagined in those days that the exultant sense of being a power in the world, of carrying some potent magic about with her, that this first wooing had brought with it (as, indeed, a first wooing brings in every case), was the going-out of her heart in response to the appeal she had heard. With the wattle-blooms for sole witnesses she had allowed the face so near her to come yet nearer still. The horse's flanks were rubbing against each other, and an arm had pressed itself close around the body of her little holland habit, as they went at a walking pace. The red-bearded face had been on a level with her own now—John Morrisson, truth to tell, was a head and shoulders taller than she, but women ride higher than men—and the ever-tasting lips had been suffered at last to feed upon her own. She had even allowed him to pull up the little gauze veil that protected her against the Australian sun and the

Australian flies, and this first kiss had been understood to signify the seal of her betrothal. Well, she had been young enough then, in all conscience, to make so solemn an engagement; but John, who was at least twenty years older, had held her to it. He was her step-brother's partner, but neither of the men had as yet developed the Midas-like faculty they afterwards acquired of turning all they touched into gold. Portia's engagement—she was only sixteen—was nevertheless interpreted as a serious obligation by the head of the house, and nothing but her own passionate pleading that she should not be married until she was twenty-one had saved her from becoming that saddest of sacramental victims, a child wife. The following year the great silver discovery had been made. John Morrisson was credited with the first preception of the marvellous possibilities concealed under a strip of Queensland bush, but Wilmer James had been the one to secretly test the ore, and to bring the wondrous discovery to a head. To wake and find ourselves famous is, perhaps, a more frequent experience in these days of rapid reputations than to wake and find ourselves millionaires. This, was, however, the wonderful fate that befell Portia's brother and his partner. Within a couple of years of the discovery, they were rich in the eternally-quoted Johnsonian sense of the word. Wilmer had brought his wife and step-sister to England. John had remained to superintend the carrying on of the great silver-mine operations, or, in Australian parlance, to “boss the concern.” It was understood that he should not appear upon the horizon—Portia's horizon, that was to say—until she had completed her twenty-first year. She was within eighteen months of it at the time of her sailing.

The period of European travelling that followed, during which Wilmer had struck out wildly in the direction of Claudes and Ruysdaels, the furnishing of the Kensington house, and the first experience of a real London season—all these had represented a dream of delight to Portia. Why did the dream seem to be checked by a rude awakening this morning, as she looked at the wattle-blooms that greeted her so unexpectedly, and read in their golden blobs the mute message that John Morrisson had come home? Come home! Come, then, to claim his promise. Come for *her*! The recollection of the free and happy experience of her morning among the pictures rushed into her mind, and with it, and against it, and mingled in some incomprehensible way with the image of John himself, the vision of the picture of Harry's Madonna and Child flashed through her brain. Had the picture, then, brought her a presentiment of her approaching fate? What possible network of disconnected ideas could have entangled the Madonna and her Child and John Morrisson in the same meshes! “I should go mad if I were to attempt to make sense of it,” said Portia—I am not sure that in

her thoughts, for she spoke to herself, she did not say, to “make head or tail of it”—and thereupon she made her way towards the flowers with a gait quite unlike the one that had been remarked by Harry Tolhurst on the steps of the Academy only a few hours previously. She was holding the flowers up to her face—wattle-blossoms were, in any case, objectively lovely, no matter through what channel they reached her—when the door was opened from outside, after it had been smartly tapped upon, by someone who did not even wait for her to say “Come in.”

Portia turned her head with the dignity of an offended queen, but her lips relaxed into a smile as she recognised the large Teutonic face of her sister-in-law, with grey frisettes surmounting her forehead and the fixed red upon the high cheek-bones that advancing years, rather than the rouge-pot, had placed there. Mrs. James had found favour in her lord's sight some thirty years previously, at a period when youth had condoned the unattested mould of her features. She had been engaged in the task of bringing up the daughters of a neighbouring squatter in guttural German-English and the belief that Goethe was the light of the world, when Mr. James married her, so to speak, off hand. Eligible brides were rare upon the Lachlan in those days. Mrs. James proved herself as good a Haus-frau as she had been a worshipper of Goethe, and when, some fifteen years later, her husband's orphaned step-sister was sent up to him from Melbourne for protection, she took the little creature to her heart in the place of the child she would fain have borne him, and brought her up with tender care according to her lights. Mr. James did not understand German, and I fear Portia's knowledge of it did not extend very far beyond the “Ach Gotts,” “Gott in Himmels,” and “So's,” that she heard her step-sister utter a hundred times a day. Since her sudden accession to wealth Mrs. James had resuscitated a legend that had been almost forgotten during her active existence of squatter's helpmate in the Australian wilds—a legend whereby the stock whence she came was *adelig*, and she herself, as well as her sisters, cousins, and aunts, were *adelig* likewise. Portia heard for the first time of her step-sister's uncle—a Rittmeister von something—who had married the daughter of a Graf. It had been always understood that they should see these great people when they came to Europe; but beyond a visit to a stuffy pension, conducted by the Rittmeister's widowed daughter, nothing had come of it. Mrs. James had explained that no one who was not *adelig* was allowed to become an inmate of the establishment, and Portia had noticed that a coronet was insinuated into all the crochet-worked antimacassars that encumbered the sad-looking reception-room. On the other hand, the furniture was terribly threadbare, and there was a pungent aroma of *biersuppe* from the kitchen, which, coupled with an utter absence of

ventilation in the sitting-room, inspired Portia (though she did not say so to her step-mother) with a *prévention*—prejudice, perhaps, would be too strong a word—against all that was *adelig* in the German sense. In England, in the beautiful Kensington mansion, Mrs. James gave the reins to her fancy in another direction. She had always been economical in her dress—in Germany she had clothed herself in her youthful days upon eighty-five marks a year. But now she developed a truly Oriental imagination as regarded the trailing glories of her attire. She would array her portly body in robes that the Queen of Sheba might have worn, and, the silver mine being apparently inexhaustible, she cultivated a taste for old lace as a *pendant* to her husband's taste for old masters, with at least a like success.

Her hasty entrance into Portia's room this morning was with the obvious motive, first, of imparting some startling piece of news, and, secondly, dazzling her vision by her appearance in a gorgeous gown of peacock blue, with a trimming that looked like the encrusted bands of jewels that adorned the gowns of Byzantine empresses. But there was a kind heart under the glittering adornments. Beholding a certain distressful look in Portia's eyes, after the smile had died out of them, Mrs. James plumped down into a chair, with a gesture not quite consistent with her mediaeval magnificence, and said, with deep-voiced sympathy—

“*Ach meine Liebe!* wherefore art thou sad?”

“I'm not sad,” said Portia, hastily; she put the flowers away from her as she spoke; then, with a sudden, inconsistent change of demeanour, she turned her face towards the elder woman. Her eyes were full of tears. “Oh, Emma! what shall I do!” she cried in a choked voice.

“*Liebchen! Herzchen!*” the incrusting trimming, with its aggressive irregularities, forbade the warm-hearted Emma from pressing the young girl's head to her heart, but she stood up and kissed her and led her to the confessional couch, and taking the cold young hands into her own, which were of an uncompromisingly beefy hue, but warm and sympathising withal, she said: “Now! you will *bore* out your heart to me, *Liebchen,*” and so waited for her to speak.

To put a dramatic sentiment into fitting words with a large, fat, expectant face looking anxiously into yours, is not always an easy matter. Portia felt a strong inclination to laugh, though at heart she was in no laughing mood. She compromised matters by covering her face with her disengaged hand, as she murmured weakly: “I don't like the thought of leaving you and Wilmer, Emma. This year *has* flown by so, and you see there—I have my summons.”

She nodded in the direction of the magnificent flowers scattered over the

cover of the writing-table. The wattle-blossoms lay with their rich yellow down uppermost, and Emma knew just what they signified.

“*Ach!* he is so fond of you,” she whispered; the idea that Portia was casting about for a possible means of gaining time, and deferring the fulfilment of her promise (she dared not think yet of breaking it altogether), never seemed to occur to her. “He will be by us to-day at lunch”—prepositions had never been able to take their relative places in the English sense in Emma's brain.

“At lunch!” repeated Portia, in tones that savoured more of terror than of rapture. “Then you have seen him already. What does he look like? What did he say?”

“He said, ‘I got not away until I have seen her, Now, it was to tell you he waits below, I must run so rash into you room awhile ago. *Ach!* how white you look then, my treasure. *Gott in Himmel!* one would say you were even disposing yourself to faint.”

“Nonsense! I never fainted in my life.” Portia's tone had taken a sudden resolve, but the fact that the blood had fled from her cheeks, leaving them, for an instant, of an unnatural whiteness, was incontestable. “He is below, you say. I will go to him at once. Is he alone?”

Mrs. James nodded significantly. “In the library—there awaits he alone your coming. Now——”

But Portia was gone before she could say more. The black-lace, flowered-wreathed hat was thrown aside, and she was running swiftly down the broad, heavily-carpeted stairs. A sudden and desperate resolution had seized her while her sister-in-law had been talking. Alas! that our “high resolves” should be so difficult of execution. By the time her fingers were on the handle of the library door, her courage was oozing out at the tips of them. After all, what possible pretext could she advance for becoming a renegade from her word! Had she not come to Europe in the character of an engaged girl? Did not everyone who had seen the parting on the mail-steamer between herself and John Morrisson know she was his affianced wife? Had her brother, her sister-in-law, the very servants who had come home with them, her Australian friends, any doubt that she belonged to him prospectively? Had not their English friends—everybody indeed, excepting recent and casual acquaintances, like Harry Tolhurst for instance—been apprised of the fact? Moreover, in what were her relations with her betrothed, or the world in general, changed since she had seen him last? Was it only that the eternal reproach levelled by Hamlet at her sex might have been addressed to her individually? Was she frail, and fickle, and false by nature, that after hardly eighteen months' separation from the man to whom she had pledged herself, she should feel—without any

assignable motive—that she would have been beholden to him for staying away yet longer? Under the influence of a flood of similar reflections, Portia slowly turned the handle of the library door, and entered, as one walking in her sleep, into the presence of John Morrisson.

Chapter IV

WHATEVER Portia might have contemplated saying, before she entered the room, the mere physical power to utter it was taken from her ere she was well inside, for she had hardly had time to close the door after her, when she found herself enveloped in so close an embrace that she was literally deprived of breath. She was conscious of being kissed with hungry, devouring kisses, upon forehead, lips and neck, until she was fain to plant her two small hands against the great shoulders that overshadowed her and push them away (after the fashion in which the man of Thessaly jumped into the quick-set hedge) that is to say, with all her “might and main.”

“How can you?” she cried, flushing and panting. “How *cruel* of you! You hurt me so, and you frighten me so!”

“My darling, my darling!” he said, releasing her. “Haven't we a two years' score to settle?”

He held her at arm's length from him, half-seated upon the edge of the library table, and scanned with eager scrutiny her face and figure. She had a kind of helpless sense that he was appraising her—taking in her points, indeed, as she had seen him do upon the station when he was judging a young horse that had been recently run in. (His judgment as regarded a horse or a sheep was that of an expert.) His lips had not lost their old trick of tasting (with nothing tangible before them to taste), while he was thinking. Portia reflected that he was bigger and burlier than when she had last seen him. There were people who even now would have considered him a handsome man, in a Henry VIII. or William Rufus kind of way. She had never been aware before of the curious hue—a sort of opaque blue—of his globular eyes. She made these observations half-unconsciously to herself as she stood in his powerful grasp. The somewhat rough handling she had experienced had produced a singular feeling of lassitude, and though—as she had declared to her sister-in-law a few moments back—she had never fainted in her life, and was not in the least what is called an hysterical subject, she felt now as though to creep into a dark room, and there lie down and cry herself to sleep, would be an untold relief.

She uttered, nevertheless, no protest while her lover was contemplating her, remaining passive until he made a movement as though to draw her towards him again. This she resisted.

“You're a lot prettier than you used to be,” was his verdict, when she had finally suffered him to pass his arm around her waist, as she stood by his side, with her back supported against the table. “You were pretty enough

out in the bush, but you're bewitchingly pretty now. I expect you've had no end of fellows after you in London. Come now, tell me all about it!"

"There's nothing to tell," said Portia, gravely. Her voice sounded like a funeral knell in her own ears. "We were travelling, as you know, until quite lately, and we don't know nearly as many people here as we did in Melbourne. How was it"—with a forced attempt to resume her natural manner—"you were able to come home so much sooner than you expected, Mr. Morrisson?"

"Don't you Mr. Morrisson *me*," said John, turning her face towards his own for another kiss; "or I'll make you pay a double forfeit every time. Well, you were asking about the coming home. I wasn't due for six weeks, was I?"

"No, not for six whole weeks," she replied with a sigh. This was a form of assent that was open to two interpretations. It might, from one point of view, have been construed in the most unflattering sense to the person to whom it was given. John elected (as he would have said himself) to give it the contrary signification.

"Six whole weeks!" he repeated, "that's a devil of a time to a man in love, Portia, and I've been in love with you now for over five years. I've been working like a demon to square up accounts and get home. Thank the Lord, that time's over, and now we can get fixed up as soon as you please."

She was silent. The numbness of despair was creeping over her, and curiously enough, as the prospect of losing her liberty loomed in terrible proximity before her mental gaze, the obtrusive vision of Harry Tolhurst's Madonna and Child coupled itself in her mind with her impending destiny. She could see once more the wistful eyes of the Virgin-mother looking out from their frame of strong black hair, and the unabashed gaze that marked the intent blue orbs of the Child. The impression of the whole was as strong as though it had been actually photographed on her brain, and she was so overcome by it that for a moment she almost forgot the actual business on hand, as the commercial people say—a business, nevertheless, that was of mighty import to herself.

And here I must put in a word in behalf of Portia's apparently helpless and weak-minded course of action, two epithets which certainly do not apply to her character, however much her conduct may appear deserving of them. If her approaching marriage was actually becoming in her eyes the prototype of the sword which the wretched Damocles saw—as the juvenile story-books tell us—"suspended over his head by a single hair," why did she consent to dally under the same? She was still her own mistress, in the sense that she had not been through the dread ceremony which obliges a woman to swear eternal love and constancy and obedience to inconstant

man, and might reasonably be supposed to have been able to withdraw her word. Against this supposition, however, there is more than one argument to be advanced, of which I will only mention those that had most weight with Portia herself. In the first place, it was now, as John Morrisson himself had reminded her, more than five years since she had given him her troth. He had never, as she firmly believed, looked with eyes of longing in the direction of any other woman whatsoever since. Not that Portia thought very much of this accredited warrant of a sole and exclusive passion. Despite her varied reading, she had retained, as regarded many vexed questions an artless mind, and believed that people—men especially—did many things in books that they would never dream of doing in real life, and that, on the whole, exo-connubial affections were mainly to be met with in romances. In her own innocent eyes she was more than half married to John already, and this feeling assisted the aforementioned one of her belief in his enduring love, to hold her bound to him. What assurance could she give herself if now, at the end of his five years' probation, she should drive him away for no other reason than a want of fidelity on her own part—what assurance could she have that the same contingency might not occur the next time she should lose (or fancy she lost) her heart to somebody else? It was not as though she had given way to a sudden *engouement* and repented of it a week later, for she had known John almost as long as she could remember. She had been rather in awe of him as a little girl, and even to the time when he had in a measure appropriated her, while she was yet in short frocks. And she was not (no, certainly she was not) in love with anybody else. That Harry Tolhurst's deep-set black eyes and dreamy gentleness of manner should contrast themselves in her imagination with the ardent eyes and vehement caresses of her betrothed was, she hoped, attributable mainly to the fact that his picture of the Madonna haunted her so persistently. In any case, she had no reason, save one that would appear like a mere feminine caprice, to urge for sending John away at the present moment. The most she could hope to do was to gain time, and how could she answer for it that when she had been allowed to accustom herself again to him she might not be quite ready and willing to be married to him? Wilmer's heart, for one, was set upon the match; more than ever perhaps since the wonderful episode of the great silver-mine discovery. Moreover, ways of behaving that were disconcerting in a lover might not matter so much in a husband. And as long as the wedding-day was not actually fixed there would be time to reason with herself and to bring herself ultimately into a more befitting frame of mind. Very possibly she was too confused just now to make her thoughts worth heeding seriously. All these are not, it may be said,

arguments of a very forcible kind, but they had the effect of keeping Portia standing with her back against the table and her lover's arm round her waist.

“Why, yes!” he said again; “there's nothing to stand in the way of our being married straight off—as soon as you please. What's the use of bothering about a trousseau? You'll never have anything prettier, to my mind, than what you've got on now; and you shall buy all the best in the London shops afterwards, if you've a mind to. My word, my pet, but you'll show 'em the way! I was thinking how we'd show you off in the Park this morning as I was coming up in the train from Plymouth. What sort of a mount have you got—eh?”

“Oh! not bad!” Portia's interest was readily aroused in equine matters, as John knew of old. “A big bay, with black points—very nearly a thoroughbred. He's only a livery-stable horse, but Wilmer made it a condition with the keeper that no one should ride him but me.”

She did not say *I*, as, doubtless, she ought to have said; but Portia's education, such as it was, had been finished in the bush, and John was the last person in the world to notice the slip.

“We'll have something better than that for you before long,” he said, drawing her yet closer to his side. “Do you remember the little chestnut filly I was going to break in for you? She's grown into the prettiest mare you ever set your eyes on. A regular picture. I was offered a couple of hundred for her down the day before we started by a fellow who wanted to enter her for the Maiden Plate. She's worth a lot more than that, though. Well, I've brought her home for you. She'll be up in town this week. And jump!—good God, you should see her jump! You've not had any cross-country riding, I suppose?”

“No! but I *should* like it of all things,” with a pretty flush of anticipation rising in her cheeks. “There are no kangaroo in England, are there?”

“None that *I* ever heard of, excepting at the Zoo. But fox-hunting's about as good a sport as you can find. Wait till next season comes round, and we've got the filly fit—you'll take the shine out of some of them, I expect!”

“I remember the filly you mean quite well now,” declared Portia. She had been apparently musing deeply for the space of half a minute. “You won the Oaks with her mother. Oh! by the bye” (with an air of awakened interest), “what became of John, the trainer? Do you remember when his wife was bitten by the snake, and you cut the place out with your pocket-knife—and she died of something else, after all, poor woman, the same year?”

Launched upon this retrospective tide, Portia had been looking into a still recent past and had therefore failed to take note of the change that came

over her lover's face as she made mention of John, the trainer. It was an ugly change, for it set an ugly expression upon it. Whatever chain of associations the name might have suggested, the links thereof had evidently chafed John Morrisson's soul in bygone days. He did not speak for an instant, but his lips continued to work with the tasting movement Portia knew so well. Like the men she had read of in the novels, he was unconsciously gnawing his moustache. Quite unsuspectingly, however, she continued to perform the feat known in figurative French as that of putting her *pieds dans le plat*.

“And the daughter he was so proud of,” she went on, ruminating; “the one who had had such a ‘rare bringing up’? I left the station before she came up, and I never went back to it afterwards. Did she reach him all right? He was so solitary after his wife died. I hope she is keeping house for him now.”

Still no answer! Portia looked round in surprise. John had released her waist from the pressure of his encircling arm, and had actually turned his back upon her. He was looking, or pretending to look in his pocket-book for something that it was apparently imperative he would find at this particular moment, and none other. In the process of looking he had bent his head upon his chest, and Portia could see that the blood had mounted to his temples in a warm red flame.

“You don't tell me!” she said, half vexed.

“Tell you what?” he answered, roughly; “you're asking me a lot of questions about people I haven't come across for the Lord knows how long. I've been up in the north of Queensland, you know; and let me see, when I *did* stop at the station on one occasion, the Willets—father and daughter—had left.”

“Oh, dear! I'm sorry,” said Portia, simply; “it was John Willet who first taught me to ride, I believe, and he was never tired of talking of his ‘little lass’ in the old country. We were about of an age—she and I—he used to say.”

All this time John was still continuing to turn over the contents of his pocket-book, unheeding, to all appearance, of Portia's reflections: she, therefore held her peace, and carried them on mutely. She was thinking now of a time anterior even to the one when she had first known *him*—a time at which she had been alternately fondled and scolded by Emma, as she trotted bare-legged about the yard and garden that surrounded the Paradinyah homestead. The station and all its appurtenances had represented to to her in those days what the duck-pond represented to Andersen's Ugly Duckling—a vast region, with unlimited resources for the arousing of interest and amusement of every imaginable description. She

was made familiar with the draughting of cattle, the shearing of sheep, and the branding of calves and horses, almost as soon as she could run alone, and to her infant imagination these were the events round which the whole world revolved. As a matter of fact, her own world revolved around them; for what conception has a six-year-old brain of other than a subjective universe? One of her clearest recollections was of the first time she had ridden into the township for the letters with John Willet, mounted on an old mare of such amazing girth that her little feet dangling down from the saddle had hardly reached to the animal's ribs. Portia was, however, a practiced rider even at that time—for she would gallop her own pony barebacked through the scrub, mounted for the most part *à califourchon* like a Sioux chief. She had a miniature stock-whip, which she learned to crack in quite a professional way. It was not until she had come home for the holidays after the first year that she had been sent, protesting and weeping, to a Melbourne boarding-school, that John Morrisson, a newly-arrived inmate of the Paradinyah homestead, had appeared on her horizon. It was he who had brought money into the concern, and she had grown up with a kind of a vague belief that they were all under great obligations to him, and that Wilmer would inevitably have “gone broke” but for his timely intervention. Of her own parents, dead within a twelve-month of each other, when she was barely five years old, she retained but the most shadowy of recollections. Her father, as she knew, had married young, and Wilmer had been his only son. The mother had died at the birth. After five-and-twenty years of a widower's existence, spent in roving about the world, he had drifted to Australia, purchased a bush property for his son, and finally contracted a second marriage in Melbourne, with a girl some thirty years younger than himself. Portia knew little about her mother. She had gathered, however, that she was beautiful, though of insignificant extraction—not “*adelig*,” as Emma said, with a pitying shake of the head. All her own understanding of family ties, all that she had ever known of family love and tenderness and authority, she owed to her step-brother and his wife. Enveloped in a moral atmosphere at once bracing and tender from her childhood upwards, it had never occurred to her to regret that she was not only orphaned, but sisterless and brotherless as well, in the ordinary acceptance of the phrase. She never doubted that she had had as large share of love and care as falls to the lot of the most loved and looked-after of children, and that Wilmer and Emma only “wanted her good.” This conviction, that she held as firmly as—more firmly maybe than—the Articles set forth in the Creed in her Church of England Prayer-book, might have explained in a great measure the attitude of passive acceptance of her fate that had marked her engagement with John Morrisson. Even the

request she had proffered to be allowed to wait until she was of age before the marriage was consummated was the result of an inspiration so bold and unprecedented that she was unable to account for it to herself. Thinking over the past this morning, with the future in the guise of her returned lover standing mysteriously taciturn by her side, Portia was thunderstruck to find that the vision of the Madonna's effigy seemed to blend itself with those distant scenes, almost as determinedly as it had blended itself with the impression of vague terror provoked awhile ago by John's suggestion that she should marry him without delay. What magic made her perpetually embroil in her mind matters so wide apart in reality! Why, out of all the pictures she had seen that morning, did this one alone rise like a spectre before her, and spread its blurred hues over whatever passage in her life she might happen to pass under review? In olden times people would have declared there was some deadly witchcraft in the painting. Why did the Madonna's eyes, above all, haunt her as though they had some special message for her that none else in the world could understand? These thoughts, begot, as she would fain have believed, "of nothing but vain fantasy," continued nevertheless to run riot through her brain, until she was suddenly brought back (like a witness in the Supreme Court) to the "facts of the case" by John's triumphant voice.

"By George! I thought I'd lost it. See here, my pet, what I've brought you from the mine—quite close to it, that's to say. No—you shan't have it till you've given me a kiss first."

He had seated himself quite upon the edge of the table by this time, and was holding her close to his knee like a child. She kissed him timidly on the cheek, in such evident terror of fresh demonstrations on his part that he forbore for once to press his advantage.

"You know you're going to be a rich woman, don't you, dear? I expect you'll have money enough to get as many gimcracks as you've a fancy for. Still, here's a thing I want you to wear for *my* sake. It's *sui generis*—it is. I found it myself up in Queensland, and I got it set round with diamonds in Sydney. I guess its about the right size for you—ain't it?"

As he spoke, he unfolded, from a triple wrapping of soft tissue-paper, a ring composed of a gold band upon which was mounted a magnificent opal encircled by a setting of splendidly flashing brilliants. This he passed over the third finger of Portia's left hand—holding it aloft as he did so to admire the effect.

"Isn't it a stunner?" he said. "But look here, darling, let me just twist it round—this way—to make believe it's your wedding-ring, and we're man and wife!"

"No, no!" cried Portia, hastily withdrawing her hand, "it's much too

pretty as it is. I love opals; I wonder what fool it was who first thought of calling them unlucky!”

“Unlucky, are they? By Jove, if I thought there were anything in it, I'd throw the ring out of the window this moment.”

“Not for worlds!” she protested, closing her fingers tightly upon her treasure, while John seized her hand and feigned to wrench them open. Finally and matter was compromised by her allowing him to kiss them all in succession, a pastime which was only put an end to by the timely intervention of the gong clanging forth its summons to lunch.

Chapter V

THE breakfast-room in the Jameses' Kensington abode wherein they chose to take their mid-day meal, opened upon a conservatory that Wilmer had consecrated entirely to Australian trees and flowers. The half acrid, half aromatic, perfume of blue gum and peppermint saplings, that by-and-by would shoot up like Jack's beanstalk until nothing short of a cathedral dome would have sufficed to shelter their exuberant growth, was wafted therefrom into the apartment. Miniature Murray pines, with their rich green *bombé* surfaces, fern-trees from Tasmania, set in humid moss-grown beds, over which an artificial water-course trickled perpetually—more wonderful still, flowering specimens of the scarlet waratah and infoliated grass-tree blossom from Mount Wellington, set against a background of brilliantly-flowering creepers from New South Wales, made of this conservatory a place for an exiled Australian to dream in. John was loud in his praises of it, as he sat down to the exquisitely appointed table facing his betrothed, while Mr. and Mrs. James formally installed themselves at the head and foot of the same.

To hold up the assembled party to the eyes of English readers as thoroughly typical Australians, would be as unjust a proceeding as was that of Dumas *père* when he declared that all the inhabitants of Antwerp were *roux* because he had encountered two red headed girls on his way to the hotel. No one is thoroughly typical unless he be a savage or a peasant. Portia and her relatives retained their own underlying individualities none the less that they had been influenced in their outward bearing and modes of expressing themselves by a long sojourn in the back blocks of Victoria, in daily contact with all sorts and conditions of men—broken-down gentlemen, English yokels, bush-hands, and the like. After all, the moulding of character by outward influences alone is not a work to be achieved in one generation, or what would become of the theory of heredity, upon which everything is supposed to depend, more or less, in our present scientific age? If these people strike the English reader, therefore, as differing in certain respects from those he is accustomed to meet in his daily walk through life, let him remember that the differences which will strike him most are the merely superficial ones resulting from an occasional departure from the conventional rules of speech and behaviour that guide his own outward conduct, and that in all the main essentials they are, *au fond*, neither more like him nor more unlike him than though chance had willed that they should be born and brought up on the selfsame patch of earth as himself. A difference in the vocabulary of

the native-born Australian, or long resident in Australia, of the not too highly-educated order, as well as a difference in his tone of voice and enunciation, from that of a person belonging to a corresponding class in England, is one of those facts, however, which "nobody can deny." I am not going to enter in this connection upon a disquisition respecting the relative merits of what Mrs. James would have called "höfisch" English, and the English that has been coined out of entirely new conditions by pioneers and backwoodsmen. Suffice it to say, there *is* a difference, and Portia was never more sensible of it than when she returned, as on the present occasion, from moving among a London society crowd, into the Anglo-Australian social atmosphere of the Kensington house. Her sister-in-law's unconscious colonial slang, grafted on to a German mode of speech and pronunciation which she had never been able to forswear, struck her as being funnier than she had ever been aware of before. And when she heard Emma gravely accusing her London visitors of "pooting on zide," she was fain to invent a reason, which had not the remotest connection with the actual one, for breaking into an unadvised laugh.

"Might fancy yourself on the Plains again, mightn't you?" said Wilmer to his guest, as they sat down to lunch—he had placed him just where John could obtain a full view of the most flourishing of the eucalyptus saplings through the artistically-opened Liberty *portières* that closed the conservatory—"always barring the mosquitoes and the flies."

Wilmer James was what is called dapper in figure; light of build, though of a fair middle height. He was clean-shaven, and not unlike a squireen as represented in some delicately tinted engraving of seventy or eighty years back. His morning suit had something of a sporting cut, and he wore a monocle in his left eye. This, however, was a habit of very recent adoption, and practice had not as yet made him perfect in it. His hat had never been known to sit otherwise than a little tilted to one side on his head. He had been a well-known figure upon Australian race-courses for years, and none would have been more astonished than the people with whom he had horsey relations (of a strictly honourable kind as far as he himself was concerned) had they known to what extravagant lengths he would go when an opportunity for backing his judgment—in the purchase of some pseudo "old master"—came in his way. If humanity is not typical, as we have just essayed to show, neither is it consistent. The most adverse tastes are frequently to be met with in one and the same individual. There seems, it is true, to be little apparent connection between a love of horse-racing and a passion for Claudes and Ruysdaels, which last, to be properly followed up, would necessitate a long and arduous apprenticeship in old-world picture-galleries and museums. And yet it is a fact that Wilmer James would spend

hundreds and thousands upon a sombre-tinted canvas, of which the original hues had become merged into blackened greens and blues, provided it bore either of the above-mentioned great names. What was more, he thoroughly believed that he had provided himself with an inexhaustible fund of artistic pleasure when he succeeded in acquiring one or other of these mendacious works of art, to which the certainty that only he himself and a few of the initiated were capable of tasting it gave an added savour. This *idée fixe*, however, as it certainly was, had the advantage of being an entirely harmless one, and, excepting for the fact that he became a “mark” for picture-dealers, who occasionally “let him in” to an enormous extent, was in no way detrimental to the piece of mind of his family. It is to be wished as much might be said of the weaknesses of every *nouveau riche* who has become “dammed to Fame” in latter years.

Though John admired his host's Australian *gully*, as Wilmer called his conservatory, as unreservedly as could be wished, he was still better pleased to let his eyes rest upon the face just opposite him, that occasionally intercepted his view of the eucalyptus tree. Portia was conscious of his glance, and was feeling sadly ill at ease under it. As with his first greeting of her, so now in the air of proprietorship with which he publicly regarded her, there was something that made her long to “turn and flee.” It is Sir Walter Scott, I think, who has condensed into a single sentence words of so much purport, when he speaks in one of his romances of two lovers restored to each other, who manifest their joy by all the “endearments that mutual love at once suggests and sanctions.” Where such manifestations spring from a one-sided sentiment, as was the case, I fear, with John and Portia, they are apt to be more terrifying than reassuring to the non- or wrong-sided one. Portia was grateful when Wilmer created a diversion by asking John what he thought of the English salmon (served with a wonderful Pistachio sauce) that he was engaged in eating.

“It beats the Murray perch, old man, doesn't it?” he said. “Here's to your return to the old country. Thomas, fill Mr. Morrisson's glass with champagne. And Miss Portia's too! Emma, are you ready?”

The toast was acknowledged by a shake of the hands on the part of the recipient with all the company in turn.

“And now I'll propose the Little Wonder,” he said gravely; “and long may she prosper!”

The “Little Wonder” thus caressingly alluded to was the huge silver mine twelve thousand miles away, which, night and day, in heat and smoke, and steam and turmoil, yielded up the ore that was moulded into the mighty ingots, that, in their turn, became metamorphosed into the shining coins,

which, to crown the sequence, filled the Kensington mansion with exotic trees and old masters, at the will and pleasure of its master.

"I'll have to go and look after things a bit next year, I expect," continued John, after the second toast had been duly drunk. "The manager's all right enough; but there's no eye like the master's."

"How'll that suit *you*, Portia, eh?" asked her brother, looking across at her with a smile, which was suddenly contracted by the unexpected falling out of his monocle. "She's dead nuts on London," he added, addressing himself to John, as he picked it up and readjusted it methodically in his left eye. "It was getting about time you came to look after her, *I* tell you. Why, last night she was waltzing up to all hours. Emma couldn't drag her away; and this morning she was off all by herself, if you'll believe me, before anybody in the house was up. Come now, Miss, give us a full, true, unvarnished account of your proceedings since breakfast. Why, she's blushing—upon my soul, she's blushing! Things look promising for you, John. You'd better crossexamine her on the spot, if you'll take my advice."

"Why, you know where I went; and so does Emma," protested Portia, feeling it impossible to be playful under her brother's inopportune badinage; with the consciousness, too, that her cheeks were burning visibly, and that there was something more oppressive than ever in her lover's way of looking at her. "I went to the Academy. I always said I would go some morning as soon as the doors were opened."

"And you did gif her your gatalogue, Wilmer," put in his wife, reproachfully, whether with the intention of coming to Portia's rescue, or of reminding her husband that he had been aider and abettor in the transaction, was not clear.

"So I did; but I never thought she'd make use of it."

"Well! and who did you meet? How many of your *beaux* of last night did you drop across?"

"None," said Portia, immensely relieved to be saved from the necessity of telling a lie—an accomplishment in which she was miserably deficient; "but I wonder why you selected those particular pictures you marked in the catalogue. I saw ever so many I liked much better."

The stratagem succeeded. She had carried the war into the enemy's camp. Wilmer, who had been actuated by no other aim than that of making her feel as uncomfortable as possible, found it incumbent upon him now to defend his self-assumed claim to the character of art-critic without delay.

"What do you know about pictures? There's a lot of modern rubbish I wouldn't give a sixpence for. The ones I marked had an old master touch about them that made them a little better than the rest; but I wouldn't have 'em in *my* collection at any price. We'll take a turn through the gallery

when lunch is over, if John's agreeable."

"Just as you like," assented John; "but I don't pretend to know anything about pictures. Living pictures are the only ones to my taste."

He looked at Portia as he said this, but encountered no responsive glance, and the conversation took a more general turn. Everyone had something to ask about John's experiences on his homeward voyage. Mrs. James, who was wielding a huge feather-fan of barbaric magnificence, was interested to learn whether Mrs. So-and-so or Miss So-and-so had been considered the best-dressed woman on board. Portia wanted to know what John had thought of the earthly paradise of Ceylon, with its brilliant fringe of palm-trees standing like sentinels clad in green uniforms upon the surf-wreathed yellow coast. Also—and this was a melting reminiscence—whether he had seen among the little bronze-hued boys who dived under the ship at Aden, to the chorus of "à la mer" and "ab a dibe," the especial one whose leg had been bitten off by a shark. Wilmer asked to be informed as to the best day's run they had made, whether John had been lucky in the sweeps, and whether there had been much high play on board. When he had replied categorically to all these questions the party adjourned to the conservatory, where Mrs. James selected a cabbage-tree palm as the most becoming background for her gown of peacock-blue, and Wilmer offered his friend a cigar, with the remark, "and I'd just like to know what you think of it by-and-bye." A footman, in blue and silver—Mrs. James would have had him bewigged and bepowdered as well, if she had only had *carte blanche* in the matter—brought in coffee and liqueurs (this custom had only been in vogue since the Jameses' return from the Continent), and while the men smoked and talked, and the words "coupons, shares, *Little Wonder*, mining-plant, lode, and pyrites," frequently recurring, made their conversation as unintelligible as it was uninteresting to their feminine hearers, Mrs. James leant back in her lounge of gilt wickerwork, against a gold-embroidered cushion, and Portia gave herself up to a day-dream under the shadow of a spreading fern-tree. From her seat she could see through the curtain-wreathed archway into the room they had just left, where the silver-blue footman was engaged in removing the dishes. Only yesterday she had taken an almost childish pleasure in the reflection that there were so many lovely things to look at now in her daily surroundings. Yesterday it would have been entertainment enough only to sit under the ferns, with a book upon her lap and the vista of the table, like a scene upon the stage, with its carpet of exquisite flowers, its fruit-laden dishes, and crystal glasses to meet her eyes when she raised them abstractedly from the page. To-day her horizon seemed to be all dulled and contracted. Everyone about her—John with his heated face, Wilmer with his still unfamiliar monocle,

even poor, good Emma, in her peacock gown—no longer appeared the same. Life this morning, as she drove down Piccadilly in the dimly-looming fog, had seemed so full of wondrous possibilities. Now, it seemed to be all narrowed down to the prospect of perpetual imprisonment in a gorgeous mansion such as this, with a husband in whom there was nothing to awaken the vague rapture that love and marriage, as she would fain have imagined them, should have inspired.

“What do I want, after all?” she reflected; “and why has my world been out of joint since I came back from the Academy? Can it be that my only objection to John is that he is not new enough for me? Did I want marriage, if I had been free to marry, to mean some wonderful change that would have lifted me out of all my old associations? And in what direction, and to what end! Why should one always imagine there must be something in the unknown so infinitely beyond what we have within our reach?”

It was a perplexing question, and one that has been turned over in thousands of brains many thousands of times, since the day when slowly-developing man evolved his first ideal. Portia was spared the necessity of seeking for a solution of it at the present moment (though it was sure to haunt her later) by a general move towards the picture-gallery, whither her brother, triumphantly maintaining the monocle tightly screwed in his left eye, now led the way.

A person professing to be a connoisseur, and finding himself in presence of an unknown collection of works of art, with no real knowledge to fall back upon, presents a pitiable spectacle enough. In the present instance, however, there was no exposure of the kind to be feared. In the first place, because Wilmer, in his naïve and stupendous ignorance, was entirely of good faith, and took himself in even where he failed to take in others; and in the second, because nobody in the party that now accompanied him cared a rush for his Claudes, or for the value that he might think fit to set upon them. John eyed with scant respect the dimensions of the gallery, lighted from above, and in the eighteen or twenty sombre paintings that lined its opposite walls saw nothing that called forth his interest or admiration.

“But just wait till I show you this, old man!” Wilmer said enthusiastically, leading him up to an easel standing apart, upon which was displayed the coppery-skied Claude that Portia had so graphically but ungrammatically described to Harry.

“How's that for Hi! eh?”

“A landscape?” said John, dubiously, feeling that it was absolutely necessary he should say something.

“A landscape! why, what else would you take it for? You wouldn't

suppose I gave a cool” (here he whispered something in his partner's ear that made John lift his eyebrows high with surprise). “I did, indeed; and a wonderful bargain I consider it. Look at the colour in that sky; look at the sunset glow on those branches; look at the reflection in that water—just look at it, I say! Some people wouldn't have known it for a Claude; but I spotted it at once.”

“I suppose there *are* points about it,” began John, doubtfully.

“Such bease!” murmured Mrs. James, with emphasis, after she had made an elaborate feint of examining it more closely.

“It's peaceful enough,” assented John, catching at the phrase, “if that's all you want in a picture; but I'd look a long time at two hundred and eighty pounds before I spent it on that.”

“There's the picture I dislike the least,” said Portia, and as she moved away towards what happened to be the only genuine Ruysdael in the collection, representing the corner of a dark forest with a glade of surpassing softness in the foreground, John came up and stood by her side.

“I haven't got any eyes for pictures to-day,” he said; “I've only one thing in my head, and I mean to say it straight out. Wilmer, here, and Mrs. James will be my witnesses. Will you, Portia James, put your hand in mine and say, ‘This day week, or this day fortnight, or this day month’—not a day later than a month, though—I will take you, John Morrisson, for my wedded husband.’ Say it now,” he said eagerly, as his lips pressed themselves together in their accustomed tasting mould. “Make her say it, Wilmer, here in your presence and Emma's”—he had referred to his friend's wife by her Christian name in the pure agitation of the moment, or perhaps he was thinking of her only in her relation to her husband as his natural ally; “it's been pretty rough upon me to have to wait for my happiness all these years. But you can't say I haven't kept my word. There's our engagement ring on her finger,”—he continued, drawing Portia's cold and unresisting hand into his own, and crushing it with unconscious force as he turned to Wilmer—“the new one.”

Now, whether it was the difficulty of maintaining the monocle exactly in its proper place, or a result of the effort to look at the ring with the unoccupied and available eye in the meantime, it is impossible to say. But it is certain that the look which Portia directed at her brother, the mute appeal written in those speaking eyes of hers, was entirely lost upon him, otherwise this chapter of her life's history might never have been written. As it was, there was nothing in the fact of John's having had recourse to him, to urge his betrothed to a speedy marriage, that struck Wilmer as being in the least extraordinary or irregular. Without the smallest doubt in his own mind that the match was all that was desirable for his sister, and

quite convinced that she was entirely content with it herself, he thought he had noticed a tendency on her part to prolong her lover's time of probation beyond all reasonable limits. It must be remembered that though Portia was, in point of fact, a child at the time when she had dutifully promised to marry John Morrisson, all the years that had elapsed since then were counted as years that he had accorded her magnanimously and generously. It was time that this state of things should come to an end. It was only, Wilmer reflected, in the days of the patriarchs that a man could afford to throw away seven-year periods of his life in dangling after one woman. As regarded his own marriage, he had come, and seen, and conquered the unresisting Emma all in five weeks. He therefore adjusted his monocle with a fine stage effect, and said, magisterially, "Right you are, old man! Now, Portia, my dear, there's been shilly-shallying and dilly-dallying enough. When are you going to let our friend John lead you to the altar? One week"—he raised his hand as though he were conducting a sale, and brought it down with an imaginary auctioneer's hammer between each pause—"two weeks, three weeks—going, going, three weeks—four weeks, going—what, not gone? Oh, that'll never do; four weeks, four weeks—going—five weeks—*gone!* You made a sign—that meant *gone!* What! you didn't know it? Nonsense—anyhow it's a settled matter. Come, Emma, kiss her—kiss them both, and leave them to settle the matter between themselves."

Chapter VI

“IS Mrs. Morris at home?—and if so, will you give her my card, and ask her whether I may say a few words to her?”

It was Harry Tolhurst who spoke, proffering his soft-voiced request to a woman with the hard exterior of a sixth-rate lodging-house-keeper, standing in an aggressive “What's your business?” attitude just within the narrow entrance of a dingy-looking three-storey house in a by-street off Notting Hill. Harry looked more like the “Chevalier de la Triste Figure” than ever; he wore a mourning-band round his tall hat, and carried a pair of black gloves in his hand.

“She's in,” the woman said, in nasally-suspicious tones, as she took the card he handed her, with a manner as ungracious as her accents.

“Oh; then I'll wait inside a moment, if you'll allow me,” he said courteously.

It was necessary to take the initiative, for the woman had made a gesture as of shutting the half-opened house-door in his face. Now, however, she backed before him sullenly, and, opening the door of a musty room upon the corridor—of the flyblown-paper-flowers and bead-basket order— informed him grudgingly that she would carry his card “hupstairs.”

He laid his hat and gloves upon the dusty table, and remained standing as he awaited Mrs. Morris's advent. The room was as repellent as its mistress; the undusted glazed leather arm-chair, with its antimacassars in torn crochet-work slipping from the back and arms, seemed the most uninviting resting-place in the world. There was a green-gauze-enshrined, ill-looking mirror on the mantelpiece that, like the mirrors shipped off to remote colonial townships (where mechanical as well as moral failures are not unfrequently to be encountered), distorted all that it reflected.

“What pains people are at to make their lives ugly,” Harry thought within himself; it is “curious that man should be the most inartistic animal in existence! There is a shaping of the means to the end in the construction of every other living creature that spins, or weaves, or builds itself a habitation, out of which harmony and beauty spring, as a matter of course. It is only human life that encumbers itself with hideous and useless superfluities.”

It might be imagined from the tenor of the foregoing reflection that Harry's mind was like that of the Psalmist, to wit, a “kingdom” wherein none but decorous subjects were given their liberty of action—or, in other words, that his reflections were always of a purely abstract or professional nature. This, however, was far from being the case, especially this

morning, when he had so many closer interests to think of, that if the crude cheerlessness of the room had not literally jumped, in French parlance, at his eyes, he would hardly have known whether he was standing there or in the equally cheerless passage outside.

So many objects of interest, yet room for such an absorbing one besides! Ever since he had led Portia from picture to picture in the rooms of Burlington House to take final and formal leave of her among the unheeding crowd in Piccadilly, her sweet eyes had intercepted themselves between himself and his work. Sometimes he thought of her as Undine, endowed with an embryonic soul, that was still awaiting the influence that was to transform it into a steadfast one. Sometimes as Una, walking in her virginal innocence through a world beset by beasts of prey in human guise. He was convinced that she was entirely sincere, intelligent, confiding, and joy-loving. What a mind hers would be to open! From the little he had seen of her surroundings, he was sure that she must have been brought up in intellectual darkness, and doubtless, spiritual darkness too. Yet how easy it was to arouse her interest and sympathy in subjects that the majority of the women he talked to cared nothing about. Singularly enough, as he owned to himself, Portia was in no wise his ideal. His ideal, whom he had never as yet found incarnate, was a dreamy-eyed woman of a mystic bias, heroic and religious, and world-renouncing. That Portia should have taken such a hold upon his imagination, notwithstanding her complete divergence from this type, only seemed to him a stronger proof of the reality of the sentiment she had inspired in him, as the fact that nations continue to believe in revealed religions, despite the miracles and contradictions that must be accepted along with them, seems in the eyes of religious votaries a proof of the Heaven-inspired reality of the same. It was some three or four weeks now since that happy morning at the Academy when Harry had been rewarded for a week's *attente* by having Portia to himself for a whole two hours for the first time since he had met her. He had haunted the Burlington House approaches vainly since; had lost hours in the Park at the fashionable moments of the day; had grudged the three days' absence entailed by the funeral of a distant relative, who had left him a little sum of money; and had finally invented a pretext for ringing at the door of the Kensington mansion, "The family was in Paris," the man had replied, "but they were expected back shortly." And Harry had actually found himself pondering uneasily upon the motives that could have taken Portia and her belongings to Paris in the full flush of the season, when everybody with money is sure to be entertaining or being entertained, the first being often only a preliminary means of ensuring the second. There was, then, Portia's absence to ponder over, and this was a subject that, latent or active, was

seldom out of his mind; and there was the immediate execution of some artistic work to undertake, which formed, indeed, the object of his visit to the dingy lodging-house this morning. Mrs. Morris was the only person who could help him in the latter respect, and he waited with some impatience for her to descend from the regions the landlady had designated as “hupstairs.”

The door was opened at last, and a young woman with a pale face and black hair, carrying a baby in her arms, came into the room. She had large dark eyes, that seemed to possess a naturally dramatic intensity of expression—or was it that some brooding care sate behind them?—and her dress betokened an utter carelessness as to the impression she produced upon her callers. It consisted of a collarless outdoor jacket, that looked as though it might have been costly and handsome before it had done duty for house and nursing attire, and a limp black skirt that dragged the floor all round her as she walked. The child upon her arm in no way resembled her. Its eyes were of a curious thick shade of blue, that had an air of being never fully pierced by the light, and the bright auburn hair stuck out in scant locks from the large head. Harry held out his hand to the mother as to an old acquaintance, and placed one of the shiny leather chairs in readiness for her. She accepted it with a murmured “Thank you,” and seated herself listlessly, with the baby held against her breast.

“I've had some trouble in finding you out,” Harry told her. “I went to your old quarters first; you don't seem to have gained by the change.”

“It's cheaper here,” she replied indifferently. “Well, Mr. Tolhurst, I said ‘No’ last time you came, you remember; but I'll say ‘Yes’ now, if you want me.”

“I do want you,” Harry replied; he could not refrain from a feeling of pity for the evident desolation he found her in. “I'll give you double what you had before, but I don't want the baby this time.”

“Not the baby!” Her face fell. “I must bring him along anyhow. I couldn't come without him.”

“Bring him by all means. There's a woman at the studio who'll look after him. I should like you to come to-morrow if you will, nine o'clock sharp; and”—he hesitated, as though in fear of offending her—“if you want a little advance, I wish you would tell me.”

The kindly, cordial manner in which these words were uttered wrought an instant change in her face. Her mouth lost its weary, half-defiant expression, and trembled into pathetic curves, like that of a child on the point of crying. The tears gathered slowly in her eyes, veiling the sad expression of strained expectation they had worn hitherto. She placed her hand hastily before them, while Harry said, in a voice of genuine pity:

“I wish you would let me help you. You would be doing me the greatest favor if you would. Are you in want of money? Have you not heard lately from your husband? You were expecting him from America the last time I saw you. He hasn't turned up, then, yet? But he has written to you, I suppose?”

“No! oh no! not for ever so long!” The words were scarcely audible for the sobs—the uncontrollable outburst of some long pent-up grief—that shook her frame as she spoke.

“And have you no friends here, none of his or yours, that can help you?”

“Not one I could go to,” she said, with her handkerchief pressed to her face. She was weeping more quietly now. If the jilted hero of *Locksley Hall* declared, with some reason, that woman's emotions are less poignant than men's, he might have added that it was because, in the majority of cases, they know the relief of having “a good cry,” an outlet debarred, for the most part, to the sterner sex.

“That is a pity,” Harry said gravely; “but you mustn't lose heart so soon. If you want to earn money, I can find you plenty of work as a model. The Madonna was the best advertisement you could have. Meanwhile, you should move out of these wretched rooms. I will give you the address of some better ones to-morrow—not too dear; and then we must have proper inquiries made about your husband. I suppose you have written always?”

“Written, and written, and written,” she said despairingly. “What's the use if he doesn't choose to answer?”

A vengeful look flashed across her face; a look that would have better befitted the outraged Queen Athalie than the wistful-eyed Madonna in the Academy. Harry noticed it, and said softly:

“If I am to help you, Mrs. Morris, I think you should trust me altogether. It is very painful for you to speak about, I know; but I don't see how we can set to work till we know what ground we are treading on. Have you any reason to think your husband has deserted you?”

He said it gently, but firmly, looking down upon her compassionately as he spoke.

“I haven't any reason,” she said despondently; “but I *do* think so sometimes, all the same.”

Her eyes, still moist with tears, were looking up into his as though they were pleading for reassurance against her own worst terrors. Harry could see now how grief had worn and lined her face in the past few weeks. It was a young face, hardly more than a girl's; but motherhood and heartbreak had set their seal upon it, and the girl's look could never more return into it. The dark, almost Oriental eyes and clear pallor of the skin had been the special qualities that had made Harry seek her out as a model for her study

of the Madonna and Child as she stood in the midst of a crowd, waiting for an omnibus at Oxford Circus. The vehicles seemed to fill in rapid succession, and each time she made an attempt to push her way forward, with her infant in her arms, he had seen her pushed back by some rudely elbowing aspirant. He had stood watching the scene for a few moments before he came to her assistance. It was difficult to say to what class she belonged. The face was undeniably handsome, the features, regular and well-formed; yet the subtle, indefinable suggestion conveyed in the lines of the mouth was rather of Bank Holiday than of Lady's Mile associations. The figure was youthful and of middle height; the dress—an artist, accustomed to study hues and textures almost daily, is undesignedly an appraiser of dress—was rich in material, and well-made, but bore the appearance of having been lived and travelled and slept in. Harry had taken in all these details before coming to her aid. As the next Bayswater omnibus rolled up, the evening being a rarely beautiful one, such as a capricious clerk of the weather will sometimes ordain in the middle of February, he helped her to mount upon the top, and, with his Madonna still in his mind, seated himself beside her upon a double seat in front that they had all to themselves.

He did not know Portia in those days, but he was not moved by any other motive than a professional one in his accosting the young woman he had just encountered. He spoke to her as it is allowable to speak to a neighbour on the top of a 'bus. (What a curious record some of these fragmentary conversations would make, to be sure! What transient sympathies, that never have scope to ripen, they might betray! What first-chapters of three-volume popular novels they might furnish!) He asked her where she wished to be set down, and discovered by a curious coincidence that it was in the self-same spot as himself; looked with interest at her sleeping baby, and addressed her the familiar questions that chance acquaintances on an omnibus will also occasionally ask each other: questions that he felt intuitively would not be resented by her, though he would have hesitated to frame them in most cases. “Was that her own baby?” and “Did she live in London?” and “Was her husband with her?” and *ainsi de suite*.

He did not ask these questions categorically; they found their *raison d'être* after the prescribed remarks had been “passed”—as Mrs. Morris herself would have called it, according to omnibus etiquette—between her and himself. The fineness of the evening, the astonishing mildness of the atmosphere for February, the redness of the sunset, the probability of a change on the morrow, the snowstorm of the preceding Sunday—all the old stock-subjects received their full and rightful share of consideration before more intimate topics were discussed. Harry found that his

companion's voice corresponded to the Bank Holiday contour of her mouth. But if the intonation did not speak of Newnham or Girton, the *timbre* was pleasant and unaffected. He learned that she had been to boarding-school at Brixton, but had travelled much since. She had been to Australia, and had stopped at the Cape on her way, and now she had just come from America, whence she was daily expecting her husband to join her. She had come in advance to see an old aunt in Clapham, who had brought her up, and who had telegraphed for her; but when she reached England she learned that the aunt had died, and now she found herself all alone in London with her child.

And then Harry had returned the confidence by telling her, in his soft, refined voice, as much as it was necessary that she should know about himself, before leading up to the question he had it in his mind to ask her. He explained that he painted pictures for his living, and that it was very hard work, but that it was the only work he cared about doing. He entered into the difficulty of finding faces to paint that corresponded to the ideas ("ideals" he abstained from saying, lest she should fail to understand him) that he had in his mind, and told her how much he had been struck by the fitness of her face for the study of a Madonna he was contemplating. She had looked half-pleased and half-frightened, and had said, "Oh my! what, *me* a Madonna! Go away with you!" But he had insisted, and had assured her that he would be more grateful than he could say if she would let him put her into his picture, and her baby too; adding that if she liked to earn a little extra money to spend, the obligation of sitting still with her child on her lap for eighteenpence an hour was a comparatively easy way of doing so. "And you'll put him in the picture, too?" she had asked, raising the child to her face and covering him with kisses. "That's what I think the most of."

"Of course; why, we couldn't do without him. Let me look at his face, will you, a moment?"

She turned it round to him with all a mother's pride, pushing the cap back from the baby's forehead with eager fingers. Harry gazed curiously into the small face, which Time's fingers had not as yet shaped into any definite mould. "He isn't like you," he said, in an unconsciously regretful tone.

"No; he takes after his father." It was impossible to say whether she was glad or grieved at the resemblance.

"He has fine eyes, though," said Harry; he could see that she was greedy of admiration for her first-born; "are they like his father's too?"

"The very image of them," with a sigh; "and you should see how he twists them about when he's looking after me. It's *that* pitiful, as if he was saying, 'What 'ud become of me without my mother, I'd like to know?' "

Harry remembered that his inspection of the baby on this occasion had led to his treating his subject in a more novel and unconventional way than he had originally intended. People were beginning now to speak of his picture; his rendering of the eyes of the Infant, especially were made an occasion for the exercise of polemics in the art, and would-be art, world, that had brought it into prompt notice. Some critics saw in these eyes only the mechanical mediums for the transmission of light without comprehension that the great French painter Deschamps sets in the heads of his realistic infants of a tender age. Others declared that what the former critics called a vacant gaze was in reality an expression charged with a mystic significance, and that "illimitable possibilities" lay behind the somewhat opaque blue orbs with the glareous whites. Two camps were formed, and the *Daily Telegraph* made a fresh harvest out of letters headed "Modern Treatment of Religious Subjects," to which Mrs. Nickleby's innumerable contributed.

The picture had been begun in February, and Harry had worked at it unceasingly until it was sufficiently advanced to be sent to the Academy, under the appellation of "A Study for the Virgin and Child." He had not exchanged much conversation with his model, being loth to lose the benefit of an abstracted, half-wisful expression that she wore when she was silent. He thought of all these things now, as she looked up towards him for help and counsel. Perhaps, if the vision of Portia had not been so ever-present in his mind, it would have been hard to resist answering the appeal by one of those demonstrations of sympathy that a man is so prompted to make when a young and pretty woman seeks consolation at his hands. But, besides the fact that he cherished Portia's image so closely, Harry had strongly-rooted principles as regarded the treatment of his models. He therefore replied to the glance by the formal words, "I assure you, my dear Mrs. Morris, I am most anxious to do everything in my power to help you. At nine o'clock to-morrow, then—and I shall hope to be able to advise you about your course then. I have an appointment to keep now; but if you will think over the matter to-day, and tell me as much of your case as may be necessary to enable me to help you, I will see what can be done, I promise you;" and without waiting for her to thank him he departed.

Chapter VII

PORTIA'S wedding-day was fast approaching. The last free Wednesday had come and gone, and now she was clinging to the last Thursday in the week that she might still call her own. Although the whole party had made a hurried visit to Paris, where alone, from Mrs. James's point of view, "a going-away bonnet" worthy of the occasion could be found; and though the chestnut filly had arrived from Plymouth and had proved herself all and more than a daughter of the winner of the Oaks might be expected to be, there were yet unnumbered hours in the day—hours that recurred in the dead watches of the night—when our heroine pondered distractedly over the coming great change in her life. "How I wish," she would think to herself at these times, "I had done like those Trappists we saw in the south of France, who say to each other over and over again, 'Brother, think of Death.' If I had only kept saying to myself, 'It's no use, I've got to be married—It's no use, I've got to be married,' I suppose it would have seemed as easy and natural to go to the altar when the time came, as it must seem to them to sink into the grave that they have been digging for themselves for so long. But I have always put away the thought of the inevitable. It seemed *so* far off—as far as to be grown-up seems when one is a child; and now the time has really come, and I don't feel more ready to meet my fate than if the marriage had been only this minute arranged."

If Portia, however, was in no bridal frame of mind, the same cannot be said of John. If he could have reversed the Joshuan miracle, and sent the sun coursing round the heavens, in accordance with Israelitish cosmogony, in double-quick time, he would certainly have done so during the weeks that intervened between his arrival in London and his wedding-day. There were moments when Portia felt an inexplicable physical shrinking in his presence, as though he were literally hungering to devour her bodily, and were whetting his lips in anticipation of the feast. She would entreat the good-natured Emma to accompany her whenever she went out with him, though her sister-in-law was not particularly well fitted either actually or metaphorically for playing the part of bodkin; and had she been brought up upon the system of the typical convent-bred *jeune fille*, instead of upon that of an Australian bush maiden who had been allowed to run wild during the greater portion of her life, she could not have maintained a more demure demeanour when she found herself for a few instants alone with him. She felt herself indeed at these times not unlike Andersen's Ice-maiden. But John had ardency enough to melt the snows on the frosty Caucasus itself. The best means she could find for leading him away from the topic of his

all-absorbing love for her, was to talk about their future plans. They were to return to London after a tour in Norway, where Portia, to whom even English twilights were a matter of constant surprise and delight, was to behold a sun-illuminated night. After which they were to instal themselves temporarily in a private apartment at a West-End hotel. John declared that once they were married he would never let her out of his sight. "I'll stick to you like your shadow, my darling," he said; "there'll never have been such spoons in this world as you and me."

Portia on these occasions would maintain a dead silence. Sometimes, like a slowly-fading picture in a dissolving view, a dim presentment of Harry's Madonna and Child would shape itself before her gaze as she listened. But the impression was growing fainter and fainter, and the unaccountable dread of renewing it prevented her from going to the Academy to see the actual picture again.

Never, in the course of her eighteen years of thinking life—for before the age of three the impressions upon a child's mind efface each other like the scrolls on a palimpsest—never had Portia felt so awfully alone as during the few weeks that preceded her wedding-day. With brother, sister, and lover all trying to heap fresh proofs of their tenderness upon her; with newly-made friends running in and out daily with a thousand offers of service and sympathy, she had a sensation of completest isolation. There was no one to whom she could speak of what she really felt, no one to whom she could turn for reassurance against her own forebodings. Never had she such a full understanding of the truth that money cannot buy peace of mind. As she drove from shop to shop with her sister and her betrothed, to inspect the dainty adornments they deemed necessary for her, it seemed to her that she was only buying the chains with which she would be loaded on her marriage-day. "Why cannot I speak out?" she would ask herself despairingly, as she lay reviewing her position in feverish unrest in the night-time. "Here I am, in the midst of the people who profess to be the fondest of me in the world, and I cannot say to them—and to John first of all—'Only show your love by making a little sacrifice. Give me just a little more time to get used to you.'"

But when the morning came, her courage would fail her afresh. How could she find it in her heart to hurl such a bombshell into the midst of all their pleasant anticipations! Moreover, if it was simply a matter of getting used to John, would not the wisest way of achieving it be to let him marry her at the appointed time! In one sense she had been more used to him years ago than she was now, so that the probability of her accustoming herself in the way she desired, seemed to be in inverse ratio to the time she was given to do it in. Curiously enough she had felt *used* to Harry within

two minutes of her meeting him in front of the closed Academy doors. How could one account for such perplexing contradictions! And how, above all, could one *help* feeling as one did!

There was one friend, and one only, to whom Portia felt she could have made plenary confession at this time; but that was a friend who was not at present within her reach. Upon the journey home in the P. and O. boat *Ismail*, a lady returning from Egypt had joined the steamer at Port Said, whom Portia had felt at once to be unlike anybody she had seen before. Mrs. James had not been pleasantly impressed by her. “*Ach!* she would topsy-turvy us all,” she said; “she has no gommon-sense!” But certain people, and Portia among them, believed that she was endowed with *uncommon* sense, and of such an exceptional kind, that the most ordinary matters in the world seemed to show themselves under a novel and interesting aspect in her company. Instead of looking at things through everybody else's glasses, she looked at them through her own—Anna Ross's—glasses; and though the view inclined her, no doubt to adopt the benevolently ironical standpoint that Renan declares to be the only one compatible with philosophy and culture, she did not adopt it outwardly or aggressively, but kept it for herself and a few of the initiated. She had taken a liking to Portia—such as solitary women with male brains will sometimes take for a charming young girl who has a naïve and unbounded, withal a timid admiration for them—had made her sit with her on the fore-castle when she chose to retreat thither for a quiet smoke upon sleepy afternoons in the Mediterranean, and had listened with a half-smiling, half sphinx-like demeanour to the young girl's tales of her life in the Australian bush, as one would listen to the prattle of a favourite child. She had made Portia promise to write to her from time to time, and the latter had done so at least once in two months since they had parted at Plymouth. The address that had been given her was that of a street in Paris where Anna had her atelier, and where she received communications addressed indifferently to “Monsieur” or “Mademoiselle Ross, artiste-peintre.” Portia had tried to see her friend during her hurried visit to Paris, but Miss Ross was out of town. She had therefore been fain to content herself by leaving a short letter for her, in which she informed Anna of her approaching marriage. To this communication she had received no answer, and the longing to write again, and to *se répandre* in the true significance of the word, in a letter that none but Anna could read, was checked by the fear that it would not arrive at its destination. Meanwhile, the days went relentlessly by, until the fatal morning arrived. It is a mistake to suppose that the time which seems to pass the most quickly is invariably that which is occupied by the most agreeable sensations. To Portia her last week of grace seemed to travel

with the swiftness of a gathering storm; and, by way of intensifying the morbid tension of mind from which she was suffering, she chose for her nightly reading that most appalling psychological study of Hugo's, called *Le dernier jour d'un condamné*. She felt in every nerve and fibre each line of the hideous narrative, and the opening phrase of one of the concluding chapters, "Eh bien donc, ayons courage avec la mort. Prenons cette horrible idée à deux mains, et considérons-la en face. Demandons-lui compte de ce qu'elle est, &c.," seemed, by the substitution of the words "mon sort" for "la mort," to meet her case so exactly, that the altar would assume in her imagination the very shape and substance of the sinister machine on the Place de Grève, with "les deux bras rouges avec leur triangle noir au bout." Small wonder if, when the morning of the wedding-day actually arrived, her heart failed her, and she would fain have begged once more for a reprieve.

But the time for reprieves was past. If she had been actually in the hands of the gendarmes, who laid pitiless hands upon Victor Hugo's condemned man as he grovelled in the last abasement of sick terror at the commissaire's feet, she could not have felt more powerless to free herself. The gendarmes, in her case, were represented by Emma and her brother and her friends (the clergyman who was to perform the ceremony might take the place of the *bourreau*), all of whom had her in their grasp to-day. She had felt hitherto as though a door of escape might still be opened to her on the last morning; but now she knew, as the condemned man in the cart had known, that the thing that loomed before her was the *Reality*.

They were hardly suitable reflections these for the typical bride whom the sun shines on—and the sun did shine on this late July morning, with the veiled intensity that only a London sun can manifest upon occasion. Portia sat by the open window with a loose wrap thrown over her shoulders, a cataract of descending hair falling below her hips. The pallor that her night-watches had set upon her cheeks was visible in the morning light; but to a face so fair as hers, with youth and health painted on the lips and sparkling in the eyes, paleness is not an unbecoming attribute. She was tired of thinking now. The less she thought, she told herself, the better. She laid her head down upon her hands, resting them in their turn on the window-sill, while a line in *The Light of Asia* that Anna had given her to read, "Who shall shut out Fate?" recurred to her mind. Her fate was lying in waiting for her outside this peaceful room, with the rose-bed in the garden that she had grown so fond of. It would be upon her in another moment, and even while she was pondering she heard a sudden knock at the door.

She started. It was as though she had herself summoned her destiny.

“Come in,” she said tremblingly; but it was only the maid, who brought her a letter that had come by the first post. Portia took it listlessly into her hands. The writing—a queer, cramped, lopsided writing enough—was familiar to her as Anna Ross's. “At last!” she said, as, dismissing the maid, she shook back her cloudy mantle of hair, and set herself to discover what her friend had to say to her about the great event impending. As she read, the listlessness disappeared, and a strange, eager look gathered in her eyes. What Anna had written was as follows:

“You don't expect me, my dear little girl, to add *banal* congratulations to those that have doubtless been heaped upon you already. What concerns me solely in the news you have given me is, how far your immediate happiness may be affected by it. Of your future happiness, despite what silly people may tell you to the contrary, you can know nothing, nor I either; but the readjustment of your actual life in the way you propose must affect it at the present moment for weal or for woe, and I am anxious beyond expression to hear that it is for weal. One man's meat is, as you know, another man's poison. From my own point of view, marriage, as it is at present understood, is the most foolish and suicidal step a woman can take. Why should we bind ourselves to belie for the remainder of our natural lives our real natures, our real selves, as expressed in the new instincts, promptings, or desires we may feel? Why, in short, should the union of a man and woman, which is meaningless and worth nothing without mutual inclination, be made the occasion of vows and oaths, and so-called binding ceremonies, which are not binding at all when the inclination is gone? The entire system upon which marriage is based is an outrage to common sense. It is one of the few contracts that must necessarily be entered into in the dark, and, at the same time, the one of all others that it is the hardest to cancel. If, at least, the law which regulated marriage had allowed for the laws which govern our being, and had made of it an engagement of a specified duration renewable at pleasure, there might be something to be said in mitigation of it. As it stands at present, I hold it in abhorrence, as one of the cumbersome contrivances by which man, who has systematized war and rapine, and oppression and persecution, has further burdened our existence upon earth; and I always feel more prompted to send a cypress branch than an orange wreath to an expectant bride.

“But this ‘sortie,’ dear child, must not discompose you. Though you do not tell me so, it can be for no other reason than the one that you love John Morrisson—at least, in the present—that you are going to be married to him. Therefore, I hope you may be as happy as you would be were you spared the marriage ceremony altogether. You are full young (you look so,

at least) to forfeit your liberty. Perhaps you will be shocked when I tell you I think every woman should see something of life before settling down, if to settle down at all is consistent with her nature. You have not had that advantage; and, seeing that at twenty-one you are legally your own mistress, it is a pity you did not give yourself time to come and take up your quarters here with me for a space, where you could have looked into the heart of things a little more than you have been accustomed to do hitherto. Remember this, anyhow. If now, or at any other time, you need a refuge, a place where you will be absolutely free to think, to say, to do whatever you please and how you please—to live, in fact, your own life, just as your instincts may lead you—come to me. You will find my arms, my hearth, and my home—such as it is—open to you. It is not even necessary to write beforehand. I have given your name to the *concierge*, who has orders to deliver you the key of my studio at any time you may appear upon the scene (I keep no servant). Tell me when you expect to be married, and whether I cannot persuade you to come to me beforehand.”

Portia read this letter twice. The effort of deciphering Anna's handwriting seemed to drive the meaning home. It was a letter as unsuitable to the occasion as her own thoughts had been, and for this reason it appealed strongly to her sympathies. The arguments against marriage, which are familiar to most people who have read the *pour* and the *contre* as set forth by Mrs. Lynn Linton on the one hand, and Mrs. Mona Caird on the other, were all new and startling to her. In her present frame of mind, they seemed to bear a wonderful stamp of truth as well. How such a letter would have affected her if it had been Harry Tolhurst, or someone with the self-same eyes and voice, to whom she was expected to swear love and allegiance that morning, she did not stop to ask herself. She went to her writing-table, the Wouvermans table, which Wilmer had caused to be stocked with every imaginable adjunct and extracted therefrom a telegram form, upon which she scribbled the words: “Thanks; but too late. Must be married this morning.—Portia,” and addressing it to Miss Ross, 317 Rue de Vaugirard, rang the bell and requested that it should be carried forthwith to the nearest telegraph office. To Emma, who came in a few moments later, clad in a dressing-gown of pale green satin, shrouded in diaphonous lace, and who melted into “*Achs!*” and “*Gottlobs!*” innumerable over the *Braut*, she made no mention of her letter. Was it in obedience to some mysterious presentiment that she had never even revealed Anna's whereabouts to her relatives either, the fact remains that as soon as she was alone, after reading the communication a third time and thus entirely mastering its meaning, she struck a match, and holding the letter to the flame watched it consume slowly in the open grate into which she had

thrown it, until it had curled into black shreds. Her last hope of succour, at the eleventh hour, died out of her heart; the door of escape had remained closed, and she prepared, as the history-books tell us of queenly victims upon the scaffold, to meet her fate with resignation and fortitude.

Chapter VIII

WHO that has ever watched a group of nursery-maids and errand-boys assembled in the neighbourhood of a house with a striped awning, where a wedding is impending, can deny imagination to the poorer classes? Well might one put the question to them, "What went ye out for to see?" since the reward of their long and patient dawdling on the pavement is often little more than a transient glimpse of a lace-or cashmere-enveloped figure, which, for all they can really see of it, might equally well represent a Mussulman lady (I wonder why a Mussulwoman is never heard of?) wrapped in her disguising "feredje," as an English bride. Among the scenes of London life in the season that Tissot has painted so well, a fashionable wedding, looked at from the point of view of the crowd outside, might form an amusing and characteristic subject. The picture should be made to represent the covered awning, bright with buff and scarlet stripes, which, while it conceals everything worth seeing from the beholder, presents nevertheless such an irresistible attraction to the loiterers on the pavement. As regards their own share in the show, it is certainly a case in which a very little is made to go a very long way—as little, maybe, as a fleeting view of the bride's silk-encased ankles as she mounts quickly into the carriage, or of the exterior surface of her bridal bouquet after she is seated inside. But as imagination, as Shakespeare has told us, "bodies forth the form of things unknown," even such vague indications as those conveyed by the ankles and the bouquet send the nursery-maids and errand-boys on their way rejoicing; and to have their imaginations stimulated in the same direction they will lie in wait for the next wedding-party with equal pertinacity, and be as thankful as ever for the same small mercies as those that have just fallen to their share.

In the bridal party which left the door of the Kensington mansion on Portia's wedding-day, there was nothing, however, to appeal to the imagination of passing nursemaids and errand-boys. There was no awning, which serves on these occasions as a rallying-flag for the crowd; there were no favours; and there was no throwing of rice or flinging of white-satin slippers. Having obtained the one great concession he had pleaded for, John had yielded upon every other point to the wishes of his bride. Indeed, he showed almost as great a desire to have the marriage ceremony conducted quietly and privately as herself. Though she had been obliged to give way as regarded the "going-away bonnet," Portia had remained firm upon other points. There was nothing to betray the bride in her appearance as she came down stairs on her wedding morning arrayed in just the same

clothes as she might have worn to drive into Regent Street on a round of morning shopping. The tailor-made frock was packed away. There were associations bound up with it that would make it hard for her to wear it again for many a long day. But her bridal array was none the less as demure in its way as the far-famed Jenny Wren's, upon the memorable occasion when she promised Cock Robin to "always wear her brown gown, and never dress too fine." It was in one of those indefinable hues that French *artistes* call *feuille morte*—a hue that may embrace a chromatic scale of colour ranging from vivid scarlet to palest gold, if the term be literally applied, but which, from the *tailleuse* stand-point signifies a shade as near the one preferred by the modest Jenny as possible. In this soft, dead-leaf setting, which brought into relief the warm tints in her hair and eyes (when you looked into them closely, Portia's eyes were not unlike a certain variety of jasper), with her pale cheeks, and the red line of her half parted lips, the bride looked pretty enough. She possessed one of those entirely supple figures which no dressmaker's craft can simulate, and even the conventionally made gown went into unexpectedly classic curves upon it.

Mrs. James, meanwhile, did not fall short in her self-adopted *rôle* of unconscious foil upon the occasion. Dead-leaf or dead anything else was not for her at her sister-in-law's wedding. She had never been an upholder of the self-effacing theory in any of its applications. Her gown was distinctly of the *voyant* order, and, what was more, she meant it to be so. There is an even stronger adjective than *voyant* in the word *criard*, which implies an association of ideas in dress that the English may feel, but which they have never been able to put into words. Mrs. James's dress was both *voyant* and *criard*, and to carry out the French train of comparisons, the colors *swore* as well. She wore a bonnet wreathed with apple-blossoms that would have been an exquisite work of art anywhere removed from the immediate neighbourhood of her head; a *visite* crusted with coruscating beads that flashed parti-coloured rays around her as she walked; and a train of sapphire velvet with salmon-coloured satin trimmings, that had been originally made, against her own better judgment, by a theatrical *faiseuse* in Paris as a theatre or dinner-dress. Thus attired, and carrying quite gratuitously a terracotta parasol with lace flounces, Emma mounted with her sister-in-law into the closed brougham which was to drive them to Kensington Church hard by. Very little was said on the way. Mrs. James found frequent occasion to apply a gold-topped scent-bottle to her nostrils, and to offer the same to her companion, sitting, "like rare pale Marguerite," in abstracted, silence by her side. Of the two, her emotion, was, perhaps, at this moment the keenest. Portia had fought her battle. She had been

fighting it night and day for weeks past. There were scars left behind, of which the pain might be divined by a certain set look in the eyes, as well as by the compressed lines around her red lips. But this morning she had capitulated; she had laid down her arms once and forever. Perhaps, after all, there was a certain sense of relief in knowing that the struggle was at an end; such a relief as the vanquished may feel, perchance, when they open the gates they have defended so long and so wearily to the beleaguering enemy. Whatever might betide, she must make the best of it now. And how many women there are, after all, she reflected, who go through life, and get a good deal of happiness out of it too, without any share in the thing we call Love. Perhaps there was only a fixed quantity of it in the universe, as there is of health and prosperity and other good things, and it fell to the lot of none but the favoured few to enjoy it. At any rate, it was a thing one could do without.

Farther in her reflections Portia was unable to go, for the brougham had drawn up before the church door, and Wilmer, in a frock-coat and white waist-coat (he had as nearly as possible slung his racing-glasses across it), his left eye screwed up painfully behind his eyeglass, was waiting to assist them to descend. And now John came out to meet them from the porch, and seized a hand of each. His thick red beard had been cut and trimmed in Renaissance fashion, and he looked more like a jovial Henri de Navarre or Henry VIII. than ever. The impalpable substance he was tasting must have had more relish than ever this morning, for to Portia it seemed that his lips worked unceasingly. "I *must* break him of that habit when we are married," she thought; and this, it is to be feared, was the reflection that was uppermost in her mind as she walked up the nave by his side. Of order in the wedding party there was none. The little group of four stood before the altar in a line, so that in the eyes of an indifferent observer they might have been undergoing marriage indiscriminately, and Wilmer had to be twice reminded that it was his duty to give away "this woman," under which designation he had somehow never thought of his sister. The only person who, mindful of etiquette, wept in her handkerchief was Emma, and even this was done in an obviously perfunctory manner. The clergyman, who had been bidden to the feast that was to precede the departure of the wedded pair, fixed to take place at five the same afternoon walked home with Mr. James. Emma had insisted upon abandoning the brougham to Mr. and Mrs. Morrisson, and had driven off in serene and unwitnessed triumph in a hansom. Thus it was that Portia found herself for a few minutes alone with her husband as they drove back to the house. Her husband! This big, red-bearded man with whom she had just walked down the nave—her husband! The idea was so unnatural that it seemed almost grotesque. Never

had she felt him so complete a stranger to her as at this moment. Far more of a stranger, indeed, than when the only tie that had bound her to him was that of a close and early friendship. She wondered now whether she could have been under the vague impression that the fact of standing before the altar and repeating the formula set forth in a particular part of her prayerbook, must of necessity operate an immediate miracle, and inspire her with wifely sentiment for him. If she had been under any such illusion it vanished now, as John took his seat by her side in his newly assumed character of her legal lord and master. And by her side he would be “to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,” and so on through all the morrows to come, “to the last syllable of recorded time.” Day and night he would be by her side, and she— God forgive her!—would have asked no greater boon of Heaven than to see him depart upon his wedding journey alone.

Another fatal discovery she made during this homeward drive was that the more loudly John proclaimed his happiness, the less she felt inclined to share in it herself. To have to sympathise with him for loving her, when it seemed so impossible to love him in return, was a hard task. It was like being called upon to act in real earnest the unsatisfactory part of the guest at the Barmecide's Feast, who, while seated before an empty board, is constrained to praise the exquisite flavours of the imaginary dishes his host continues to press upon him. And with what genuine conviction John played the part of the host! How terribly in earnest he was! How completely he believed that what to her was Dead Sea fruit was, in point of fact, real nectar and ambrosia! What royal dishes, served up at what a never-ending Agapemone, he seemed to behold; while, to her, the table was bare indeed, and the prospect little better than one of slow starvation! He had taken her hand—the ungloved one, upon which the first fetter, in the shape of the broad wedding-ring, had just been placed—almost as soon as he entered the carriage, and was placing it close over his heart.

“Just feel how it beats, deary,” he said; “I never thought of you, Portia, through all the years I've loved you, but it used to beat like that. It used to beat sometimes fit to burst. And to think I've got you to myself at last! Yes,” he repeated, in tones of husky triumph, “all to myself. There's no one can part us now. Neither God nor devil can take you from me now!”

He uttered the reckless words without any blasphemous intent—in the mere wild jubilation of his mood. But the blear-eyed Fates—or whichever of the three grim old women it may be whose office it is to avenge the outraged gods—had already taken due note of them. Even science has not been able to dispel the instinctive dread implanted in the breast of man, from the savage to the sage, the dread of exciting the jealousy of the

powers that be by defiant boasts of a happiness beyond the measure allotted to mortals. But John was intoxicated with his newborn bliss, as one drunk with new wine, and he did not count the meaning of his words.

Portia, in her present calm and sad disposition of mind, was frightened at their vehemence. By some unaccountable freak of fancy they seemed to conjure up once more the picture of Harry's Madonna to her spiritual vision. She had thought the noonday spectre had been finally laid to rest; but here it was again confronting her, with the same dark enigmatic expression in its haunting eyes as when she had first stood in front of it at the Academy by Harry's side. To free her mind from the oppression of it, she raised her eyes timidly towards her husband. What an exultant look there was in his face! And how his lips, that the close, square cut of beard and moustache had almost disclosed entirely, seemed to relish the impalpable delicacies they were tasting! It made her almost feel like Little Red Riding-Hood in presence of the wolf to watch them—only John had not a wolf-face though just now, it must be owned, there was something in it that recalled a hungry wolf's expression.

“We shall not be in Norway more than a fortnight, nor away more than three weeks in all, I suppose, John?” she questioned timidly.

She had forced herself to pronounce his name; but it was uttered almost under her breath. He heard it, nevertheless, and turned a rapturous face towards her.

“We won't be in a hurry to get back, I promise you, my pet,” he said. “It's a stupid arrangement that we've got to stick on there at Emma's until five o'clock this afternoon. I tell you what: we'll go away as soon as lunch is over. We can go for a drive or something till it's time for our train.”

“Oh, but I *can't*,” protested his wife, her heart sinking at the prospect. “I left all kinds of things to do to the last, and I shall have to be up in my room putting by and packing up to the last moment.”

“I'll come and help you, then; it'll help to pass the time.”

“No!” she said, wondering at the decision of her own voice; “that cannot be. You must sit and smoke with Wilmer until I come to call you.”

“Those are my orders, eh!” he said laughingly. “You're going to begin to boss me already, are you? Now you'll just see what you gain by that.”

“Oh, oh, my best going-away bonnet!” shrieked Portia, covering her face with her hands; and at this moment the brougham came to an opportune standstill at the door of the Kensington mansion.

I am not going to enter into details respecting the glories of the “breakfast-lunch” (as Mrs. James called it) that followed. It is a sorry task to describe not-to-be tasted dishes, almost as sorry as to assist at the Barmecide's Feast afore-mentioned. Everyone can imagine for himself the

perfection of Wilmer's old port—about which, perhaps, his judgment was surer (though not in his own opinion) than with regard to his “old masters.” Everyone may likewise take it for granted that the chicken mayonnaise, the Cingalese curry, and the pâté de foie gras in aspic were all that they ought to have been. Mrs. James, like Todgers's, could do it when she chose, and, with a perpetual silver-mine in Queensland to fall back upon, it was not hard for her to emulate Mrs. Todgers when she *did* choose. Although there was no one but the clergyman to be impressed by them, the wedding-cake was wreathed with as brave a show of costly orchids and out-of-season blooms as though all London had been there to applaud. Nothing, indeed, that the proceeds of the silver-mine could procure to heighten the effect had been forgotten; and as nobody was to suspect that, in the case of at least one of those who sat down to the banquet, the traditional dinner of herbs would have been far preferable if the traditional compensating element had been there as well, it followed that, on the surface, all appeared to go as “merrily as a marriage bell.” Mr. Benson, the clergyman, to whom Australians of Wilmer's type were a new experience, sat on the right hand of the gorgeous sapphire-velvet-and-salmon-silk-arrayed mistress of the house, with the newly-married couple opposite to him. Upon these he made his reflections between the intervals of tasting Wilmer's Australian wine, or listening to his opinions concerning Imperial Federation from an antipodean point of view. The bride appeared to him to be somewhat too refined for her surroundings; and what a curiously far-away look those strange brown eyes of hers, with the warm, rust-colored motes in the iris, seemed to wear! What a singular contrast they presented to the prominent eyes of the man who had just been made her husband—wherein the love of good cheer was perhaps a little too plainly written! Then the host was not quite like any one he had ever met before. Nevertheless, Wilmer's conversation was interesting to him. He knew all about the State school organisation in the various Australian colonies, could tell of the origin and growth of the eight-hours' system all over Australia, and, as long as he abstained from talking of Claudes and Ruysdaels, was an intelligent companion enough. He even possessed a certain glibness in speech-making, and, after he had successfully wedged his eyeglass into its place, stood up before the little party of four (a much harder thing than to stand up before a party of forty) and drank to the health of the newly-married couple, “whose union,” he declared, “had cemented ties that had first been formed in the forest primeval, and that were now more firmly knit than ever in the midst of civilisation.”

John, without rising from his seat, responded by declaring that he had never been much of a fist at speech-making. But his friend Wilmer might

make his mind easy about one thing. He knew he was the luckiest chap in the world, and he hoped they would never regret giving him Portia for his wife. He meant to do all a man could do to prove himself deserving of his happiness. His flow of speech failing him at this point, Wilmer rapped the table and said "Hear, hear," and the clergyman came to the rescue by proposing the health of the hostess, coupled with that of the bride. After this ceremony Portia was free to make her escape upstairs, where she hoped to spend the last few hours of her liberty in mournful, unhampered solitude.

Chapter IX

THE next episode in the strange, eventful history of our heroine is of so curious and unprecedented a nature, that it is necessary to bear in mind the often-proved truth that Fact is stranger than Fiction, to make it in any way possible of belief. It concerns an event that could only have been brought about by one of those fortuitous combinations of circumstances that we have agreed to call by the name of Chance; as though every event, no matter of how trivial a kind, were not the result of a long and intricate chain of antecedent causes, whose first links (if, indeed, there be any *first* in the matter at all) are lost in primeval chaos. Hitherto the narrative of Portia's life has run smoothly enough. Her quiet school-days in Melbourne; her happy, healthy existence in the Bush; her dogs and her horses; her sudden leap into richer surroundings; her journey to Europe; her travels on the Continent, where the first step to knowledge, in the perception that she was woefully ignorant, was primarily taken; her London balls and innocent flirtations, and finally her marriage with a man round whose feet she had played as a child—in all these smooth though varied experiences there has been nothing that could come under the heading of strange or eventful. It is only from the time when we mount with her into that pretty room of hers upstairs, where we witnessed a few weeks back the scene of her discovery of John's flowers—fraught with so mighty a significance—that there is aught in her career to justify the use of the words. To have been married somewhat against the grain was neither strange nor eventful, for, if not in England, in other countries at least, marriages of this kind are frequent enough. The unprecedented part of her history has still, therefore, to come; only, in order to show how such a thing as befel her could be possible, it will be necessary to say a few words about her immediate *entourage*.

The house, then, that the Jameses inhabited communicated at the back, by means of a garden gate, of which the cook kept the key, with an alley that gave free access to Kensington High Street. It was a means of egress and ingress that was only utilised by the servants, and its existence might almost have remained unsuspected by the masters for all the use they made of it. The existence of this door and this alley of communication is a necessary point to bear in mind. Another matter upon which it is needful to insist is the relation in which Portia stood to the domestics. From the blue-and-silver "Jeames" to the scullery-maid who came from the orphanage, one and all adored her. To have addressed them in any other than the natural friendly give-and-take voice in which she had been wont to chat from her childhood upwards with the station hands on Wilmer's run, would

have been impossible to her. Hence, everyone in the house rendered her prompt and willing service. There was only one, however, who could by any means aspire to the *rôle* of *confidante* in the sense in which we see that important function filled on the French stage by the lady whose duty it is to play “second fiddle” to the distracted heroine, and to receive the outpouring of her sombre confidences; and this was not an English servant at all, but a girl—she might still by courtesy be called a girl—who, some twelve or fifteen years older than her mistress, had been her first and only nurse. Her position in the Kensington house was ostensibly that of Portia's maid; but our heroine, notwithstanding the affection she cherished for nurse Eliza, was accustomed to *do* for herself, in the best sense of this familiar un-Websterian phrase, and beyond an occasional brushing and combing of her young mistress's resplendent locks, Eliza found little to do but to brush her riding-habit and put in her frillings. Being, however, of a conscientious turn of mind, she employed her leisure in checking the transactions of the cook with the tradespeople, and was consequently a thorn in the side of all the *personnel*, from the butler downwards. That this woman would have gone through fire and water—not only metaphorically but actually—to save her, Portia entertained not the smallest doubt. Eliza had had a love disappointment, but, instead of being soured by it, she had turned the pent-up flood of her affections in the direction of her charge, and the little girl had felt herself borne along upon it, as upon a smooth, strong current, until she grew to womanhood. Why she did not confide in her nurse during the troublous time that preceded her union with John Morrisson it would be hard to say. I am afraid it was for the reason that, though she could make sure of Eliza's unbounded love and devotion, she did not feel so certain of her wisdom; and here it may be said she was mistaken. Real affection is wonderfully clairvoyant, and singleness of purpose and goodness of heart will often dictate the proper thing to be said and done more surely than the most cultivated intellect. However this may be, Portia never disclosed her secret; and though she pined in thought, as she did not at the same time wear an outward green and yellow melancholy, it was not easy to divine her trouble. Eliza opined that her young mistress could have no aversion to Mr. John, after she had kept company with him for all these years; and though in her own heart she considered him too red and too rough to be a suitable match for her young lady, she would no more have thought of finding fault with the arrangement, than of cavilling at Mr. James's choice of “old masters,” or of criticising Mrs. James's taste in dress. It was an understood thing that, when Portia had a house of her own, nurse Eliza should go to her in the elastic capacity of confidential servant; and with this prospect in view, and

the sure hope that her mistress would find her employment as speedily as possible, in the shape of a baby to look after, she had witnessed the preparations for the wedding with comparative equanimity.

Now, however, the parting hour grew near. The marriage ceremony had been solemnised. The breakfast was over. The cake had been cut and distributed and in a very few hours Portia's home would know her no more. Mightily depressed by these considerations, which she had never seemed to fully realise until now, Eliza ascended to her young mistress's room, with red-rimmed, swollen eyes—she possessed, it may be said, a good and not uncomely face of her own, of plebeian type—and implored that she might be allowed to do just whatever came to hand. In her secret heart Portia, perhaps, would rather have been left alone. Among the little relics she still had to pack away there were many over which she would fain have lingered before burying them, and the associations they conjured up, for ever out of her sight. I have alluded to her innocent flirtations. More than one was recalled to her as she turned over the store of her girlish treasures now. Her book of pressed flowers, wherein every faded blossom was accompanied by the name of a place and a date, was as full of eloquent meaning to her as though it had contained pages of burning poems. The chronicle opened with a sprig of Australian myrtle that John had given her years ago—and the hand in which she had inscribed the native name of the place where he had found it, was obviously unformed and childish. But there were other chapters in the record too. How fresh the bunch of beautiful wildflowers from King George's Sound still looked, and how fresh in her mind was the expression on the face of the blue-eyed second officer of the *Ismail* who had gathered them for her! How plainly he had made her understand, before she left the ship, that it was only his sailor-poverty that prevented him from laying heart and hand at her feet! And the Alpine *edelweiss* that a young English traveller—who turned out to be a great personage at home, and who had spoken so mysteriously and sadly about the signification of *obligations*—had plucked for her!— he who had married the very plain-looking girl with royal blood in her veins, that had been pointed out to her in the Park as his bride! These and many others. How plainly they proved that her heart had been still a rover—all unknown to herself—while she was addressing her fortnightly duty epistles to her future husband in Queensland! She would fain have pondered over these and many other tokens of a past happy existence (how far away from her it seemed already!) in solitude. There was yet another volume in which neither flowers were pressed, nor names of places or dates inscribed, and which seemed nevertheless to have more to say to her than all the rest together, and this was none other than the prosaic Academy catalogue that

she had not yet found it in her heart to part with, and which she had deceitfully insinuated, to prevent it from being claimed, into one of those dainty coverings in old brocades, wherein books in one sense can certainly be said to wear “new faces.” The only message it contained was in the underlining in violet pencil-marks of certain paintings, statues, and engravings. Yet to Portia it furnished a text for many a reverie. In whatever other respect nurse Eliza might be fitted to play the *rôle* of *confidante*, it was not upon topics like these that our heroine could unburden her mind to her. The fancies suggested by her collection of *souvenirs intimes* were not of those that can well be uttered aloud. So delicate and fleeting they were, indeed, that she hardly even formulated them in her own mind. They might have been embodied in a nocturne, set in a minor key, to be deftly played in the twilight, but nothing more. However, as she could not ask Eliza to depart in the face of her tear-swollen eyes, and with the certain knowledge that the faithful creature would proceed to cry them out in real earnest as soon as she was outside the door, she busied her in wrapping up and putting by some indifferent books taken from the book-shelf for the special purpose—a work which might have been just as well left, she told herself, until her return. Eliza was finding an outlet for her emotions in banging and dusting these volumes, which required, to tell the truth, neither form of discipline, accompanying the operation meanwhile by an occasional sniff of distress, when she was suddenly summoned from the room. She was away long enough to give Portia the time to take up the interrupted train of her somewhat mournful meditations once more; and when she returned it was with a face that bore an important hint of something unforeseen and mysterious to be communicated.

“What has happened, Eliza?” asked her mistress, quietly. As nothing, not even “God or devil,” to quote John's words (that somehow recurred to her memory at this moment), could *un*-marry her now, Portia felt that the would-be importance expressed in her maid's face, in connection with whatever news she might have to impart to her, was clearly superfluous and uncalled for. Supposing the kitchen chimney to be on fire, or the Queen to have suddenly departed this life—the two contingencies that first suggested themselves to her imagination—she would none the less have to leave the house as “Mrs. John Morrisson” in another two hours: none the less be whirled away, by her husband's side, in the night-train for Flushing, where it was arranged that they should rest until they resumed their journey on the morrow. So she repeated once more, in indifferent tones, “What has happened, Eliza? Is anything wrong?”

The maid shut the door before replying, with the same elaborate air of mystery that had marked her demeanour from the beginning. There was

something portentous in her expression. "My dear," she said—it was only upon occasions where etiquette had to be considered that she called her young mistress "Miss"—"there's a lady below—I won't answer for it she's a real lady, though—who says she wants to see you. I never set eyes on her before myself, and she's never been near the place yet that *I* know of. She's all in black, and she's brought a baby along with her. She was that eager and excited when I went down, and out o' breath with running all the way from High Street—so she told me. James wouldn't let her in until she told her business; but she wouldn't, and they couldn't get her to go away neither, and so they had to send for me."

"I don't see why I shouldn't see her," said Portia, simply; "but did you ask her whether she could not send me a message by you?"

"That's just what I did," said the maid. It would not have been in human nature—not in an abigail's nature, at least—to refrain from the temptation of making the most of the occasion. " 'What is your business, ma'am?' I said—just like that. 'Our young lady is going away on her honeymoon this very afternoon, and can't see you,' I says. The lady says nothing to that for a good minute or more. She seemed to be catching her breath, like, behind her veil; for she's got a long black veil, that thick you can't hardly see her face through it. Then she says, in a kind of a choked voice, 'So Miss James is married!' she says. 'Married this morning, ma'am,' says I. 'Well,' says she, holding her throat—this way—'I hope you'll let me see her. I've got a present for her; it's a present no one can give her but me. Perhaps she'll take it along with her on her wedding-trip. Ask her to see me for her own sake, if she won't see me for mine,' I says. The lady says nothing to that for a good minute or more. She seemed to be catching her breath, like, behind her veil; for she's got a long black veil, that thick you can't hardly see her face through it. Then she says, in a kind of a choked voice, 'So Miss James is married!' she says. 'Married this morning, ma'am,' says I. 'Well,' says she, holding her throat—this way—'I hope you'll let me see her. I've got a present for her; it's a present no one can give her but me. Perhaps she'll take it along with her on her wedding-trip. Ask her to see me for her own sake, if she won't see me for mine,' and with that she outs with a pencil and a bit of paper from her pocket, hitches her baby under her arm, and scribbles off a letter as fast as you please; and nothing'll content her after that but we must fetch her a henvelope from below stairs, and she must gum it down herself."

Having improved the occasion to her own satisfaction as regarded the agreeable and stimulating task of narrating all the preliminaries *in extenso*, Eliza now bethought herself of handing the letter to her mistress. Portia took it from her with irresolute hands. What possible reference to her own

affairs could the affairs of the mysterious visitor involve? And why should she have chosen her wedding-day of all others as the one upon which to divulge the secret? Her cheeks were flushed with agitated anticipation as she tore the envelope open. Was it relief, was it disappointment, was it simple astonishment that was painted in her face as she read: "It is Mary Willett that begs and prays of you to see her—the daughter of John Willett, of Yarraman Station. I would have come before, but I only just heard by chance an hour ago that you were getting married to Mr. Morrisson. For the love of Heaven, Miss James, let me see you alone. I won't delay you long."

Mary Willett! The girl who was to join her father at the dear old homestead Portia had loved so well! The little lass, about whom she had heard so much and so often from old John, as she galloped by his side round the station fences! The person about whom she had asked, before all others, to be informed at her first memorable interview with her lover six weeks ago. Mary Willett in London, and in distress—most evidently in distress! Oh, why had not she known it before? Of course she would see her, of course she would help her! The trouble whatever it might be, was clearly one that concerned poor Mary alone. But perhaps she had felt a delicacy in speaking of it before strangers, and had therefore purposely tried to give the impression that it was connected with a matter concerning Portia herself. Well, she had still two hours—three nearly—that she could call her own. It was a pity that all questions of money settlements should have been deferred until after her marriage, and that at this moment she should have nothing but fifteen sovereigns and some odd silver in her possession. Mary might need immediate help, and she must have it. Thinking these things over in the flash of an instant, Portia turned to the eagerly-expectant Eliza, and disappointed her cruelly by announcing in a calm voice, "It is nothing, really nothing, Eliza; someone who has been recommended to me. I know the name quite well; and I ought to see her alone, I think, as she makes such a point of it."

A drama that was destined not to go beyond the prologue—a tale brought to an immediate and unexpected close, just as it had been launched upon the significant opening of "Once upon a while"! This, in other words, was the comment that Eliza, swallowing her disappointment as best she could, was fain to pass upon the abrupt termination to the incident so full of promise that she had witnessed. She felt irritated with the young woman in black for having made "such a fuss all about nothing," as she complained to herself, and her irritation was expressed in the tart way in which she delivered the message, "that Miss James—Mrs. Morrisson, that was to say—will be pleased to see you if you'll step this way; but it's as well to

remember” (the addition was her own) “she hasn't a minute to spare.”

Portia was standing up to receive them, as Mary, holding her baby upon her left arm, entered the room. The deep black veil prevented her from distinguishing at first sight the features of her visitor; but when Eliza had beaten a reluctant retreat, and had closed the door finally in her wake, Mary threw back her veil, and Portia uttered an involuntary cry of surprise. The vision that had pursued her for so long was standing there in flesh and blood before her. The dim presentment of Harry's Madonna and Infant that had intruded itself upon her dreams at night, that had been shadowed forth during her solitary musings in the daytime, had become a living, breathing reality. The one presentiment she had ever known had been suddenly and miraculously verified. “But, oh! how could I feel, when I saw the picture first,” she asked herself in bewilderment, “that it spoke to me of something I had vaguely seen and known already? Was it a warning of what was to come? But, no! It was more like a groping after something I had lost.”

The answer to her question was to come sooner than she could have anticipated. The explanation of the mystery that had haunted her so long and so persistently was to fall upon her comprehension at last like a thunderbolt. Before she had well-nigh recovered from the shock of surprise that the unexpected appearance of the Madonna in the person of Mary Willett had occasioned her, the latter had made a rapid step forward, and was thrusting the baby—a solemn-eyed baby that neither cried nor laughed—into her arms.

“Take him,” she was saying hysterically, as Portia mechanically stretched out her arms for the child, “take him and keep him. Oh! it's no time for compliments. Miss James; if you'd been through what I have, you wouldn't stop to make compliments either. Take him and look at him well. He's John Morrisson's child, if you want to know. He's nobody else's. He's my present to John Morrisson and his wife on their wedding-day. You may give him a lot of children yet, but you won't give him any that'll be more like their father. You can tell him so from me, if you choose. Oh, my God, my God! what'll become of us all!”

The last exclamation was accompanied by a burst of unrelieving, agonising tears. She had sunk down upon the first chair that came to hand, and was rocking herself to and fro in a reckless abandonment of despair, as one who had passed the point at which self-restraint and dignity of demeanour are any longer considerations worth taking into account.

Chapter X

AND Portia! Portia stood, with the baby in her arms (he had submitted to the transfer, and had even let his head nestle against her shoulder without any kind of protest), as one turned to stone. For a moment her brain seemed to refuse to act. Overwhelming as the revelation she had just heard had been, impossible of realization, or even of comprehension, as it had appeared, there was yet even more behind it than Mary herself knew. For here, with her husband's child in her arms, with John's very eyes looking up towards her from the baby face, with John's tasting lips repeated in the baby mouth, the haunting signifi- cance of Harry's picture had finally come home to Portia's understanding once and forever. If presentiment had had its say, there had been a tangible association of ideas as well. How could she have failed to see the resemblance before! Why need she have waited until the fatal, the irretrievable step that sealed her doom had been taken before she thought of coupling the face of the infant in the picture with the face of the man she called her husband! Oh, fool that she had been, and fool—a thousand times fool—to let her heart be moved by the ready lies he had told her! He faithful and constant, serving his time for her in the bush, as Jacob had served his seven years for his well-beloved Rachel! *He* a Sir Galahad among men, as she had innocently believed him to be! She could have found it in her heart to laugh out loud, bitterly and scornfully, at her own utter foolishness and credulity. Well, the awakening had come, and it was a thorough one. All the written and spoken arguments in the world, all the proofs that poets and philosophers had ever accumulated of the truth of the simple statement that “men were deceivers ever,” gathered in a heap before her, could not have brought such strong, such overwhelming conviction as the one short damnatory experience of the last few seconds. Her brain seemed literally to reel under the shock, her knees to give way under her. It was necessary to pull herself together, physically as well as morally, to call her best energies up before considering what now remained to be done. She felt as though she had leaped at one bound from innocent, ignorant girlhood into mature and cynical womanhood. Never could she feel the same again! Never could the world put on the same aspect that it had worn only five minutes ago! Never could men and women, and the relations they bore to each other, become the same that she had fancied them only this morning! But it was not a time for dealing with the abstract side of the question. There would be time for that later. Anna Ross would help to achieve the work of enlightenment in which Portia herself had taken so tremendous a step on this her wedding morning. At the present

moment it was action—not reflection—that was needed. What if Mary Willett were secretly married to John? God forgive her, but it would be the most acceptable solution of the trouble that she could imagine! Her heart gave a bound at the thought that even now she might be legally as well as morally free. But it sank again as she reflected upon the improbability of John's having performed such a transparently and easily detected feat of bigamy. But time was speeding, and she would want to escape. At all costs, and whatever should betide, escape was the first and only consideration. Let her only try now to keep cool, and to get at the rights of this wonderful story. With a mighty effort at self-control, she drew near to where Mary was seated, and still holding John's child tenderly upon her arm (it is wonderful with what an instinctive knack of tenderness every true woman, be she maid or mother, will hold a little baby), she laid her hand upon the sobbing girl's, and said gently: "Tell me all about it, and how I can help you, Mary. We have known each other in one way, haven't we, since we were quite children? This is a trouble that concerns us both, and I must know all there is to know before anything can be done. First of all, are you married to John Morrisson?"

"No, no! I'm—I'm not," sobbed Mary; "that's where it is. That's why I'm fit to drown myself, if it wasn't for the baby. Oh, my God! my God! What is to become of me and him?"

There was no getting her to speak in her present condition. Portia drew a chair by her side, and sate herself down, with the little one on her knees, to reflect upon the situation. She felt as though she were under the influence of one of those portentous dreams, such as Jane Eyre dreamed the night before she fled from Mr. Rochester—such as most people have dreamed when the air about them is thick with impending disaster—a dream wherein she found herself carrying a wailing infant in her arms, with the impossibility of either laying it down or ridding herself of the burden. But in her sleep the dreary nightmare had never weighed upon her with the force of her actual impressions. . . . And who was there to whom she could turn for help or counsel? Who that would assist her now to put herself entirely out of John's reach? For as long as he knew where to find her, there could be no safety, no refuge for her. Others might laugh at her fears; they might say that in London, in the nineteenth century, the drama whereby the Sabine maidens became Roman spouses was one that could not well be repeated. But Portia knew better. She knew that John considered himself literally in the light of her legal lord and master now — of her *owner*, if it came to that. She had seen it in his eyes as they drove home together in the brougham a while ago as man and wife. She had seen it in the avidity that marked his unresting lips. She had heard it in the voice

in which he declared that neither God nor devil could take her from him now. Well! that might turn out to have been a vain boast after all. She had money enough, thank Heaven! to enable her to run away and hide herself for to-day at least, and before they had found her she would have made up her mind as to the course of action she should take. She would begin by putting herself under the protection of Anna Ross, whose actual whereabouts was known to none of them. But time pressed, and there was still so much to do. Hardly an hour in which to lay her plans and make her escape. And there was Mary to be thought of, and the baby. And how were they to make their way out of the house without being seen and followed! And how should she herself escape pursuit and recapture? The very recklessness of her project—the danger attending it—seemed to inspire Portia with courage. Her resolution rose as she measured the difficulty of her enterprise. Just as the bodily frame will perform unheard-of feats under the spur of some tremendous excitation, so, in rare crises, the mind will act with quite a new and unwonted energy. During the interval that Portia accorded Mary for crying *tout son soûl* (as the French say)—in other words, for sobbing her very heart out—by her side, she had arranged her plan of escape. The calm that comes of a supreme resolution irrevocably taken was in her voice as she addressed herself again to the latter.

“You had better tell me all, Mary,” she said gently. “I am sure I shall be able to help you. Take your little one into your arms again—so—there. He was just going to cry, and then what should we have done?”

“You're too g-good to me, miss,” gurgled Mary, breaking down once more; she took the child nevertheless and, Portia—with a spasm of wonderment, wherein a thousand confused sensations of pity, revolt, tenderness, and repulsion (the instincts of wifehood, motherhood, and nature, arrayed against what Carlyle would have called the artificialities of her actual existence) fought *à tour de rôle* to get the upper hand—saw her gather the little creature to her bosom for nourishment. The simple operation of such sublime significance withal had an instantly pacifying effect upon mother and child. Portia thought of a certain line in a poem she knew by heart: ‘Baby fingers, waxen touches press me from the mother's breast,’ with quite a new understanding of its meaning. In the childless surroundings she had been accustomed to all her life the ways of mothers and their offspring had been as a sealed book to her. The ineffable content in the eyes of the little one—John's very eyes— moved her with an infinite pity. Not only were mothers and children, but a woman placed in the circumstances in which Mary had appeared before her, equally novel facts in her experience. She had read of such cases, certainly. *David Copperfield*, for instance, was well known to her; and the impression she

had retained from her reading of that and similar works was that a “fallen” girl (for this she knew was the approved adjective to employ in cases so analogous to Mary's)—that a “fallen” woman must be looked upon as a kind of moral leper, whose very skirts it would be a contamination for an “honest woman” to touch. Now, however, that she was drawing her experience no longer from books, but from real living facts, the matter seemed to put on quite a different aspect. No tragic phrases suggested themselves to her imagination; nor did they, apparently, to Mary's. Her mental attitude (as George Eliot would have said) was not one of anger or indignation, but rather of a great and sorrowing pity. Mary had probably been deceived by John as she had been deceived herself, and had believed that, Church or no Church, she was wedded to him, in point of fact, for time and eternity.

“Tell me how this trouble came upon you, Mary,” she asked once more. “I can be going on with my preparations while you are talking.”

Truth to tell, there was little time to lose. She had unstrapped an ancient valise of small dimensions—it was one of those she had intended to take upon her wedding-trip, with the naïve design of concealing the fact that she was a bride—and bundling out (for she was in a desperate hurry) all that bore her new and hated name, she thrust into it such of her former articles of attire as might be required for immediate use. The tailor-made suit was next disinterred from its hiding-place—it would be just the thing to travel in—and away with her bridal bravery; was she not going to regain her freedom? All the time she was moving nimbly about the room, making her necessary and speedy preparations (and perhaps marvelling a little at her own promptitude of action in an emergency), she was encouraging Mary to make full and open confession.

“Yes, I understand. I see how it was. Oh, what a pity! Don't be afraid to tell the rest, Mary.” With such intercalations she contrived to extract from the unwilling lips of the weeping girl the tale of her own ruin.

“You see, miss,” she began—Portia would have been the first to resent the employment of her new and rightful title—“I was pretty near the only woman at Yarraman when I went out that time (after you'd gone away, you know) to keep house for father. There was a lot of men about the place; but father, he used to keep me pretty well by his side when he'd be out counting the lambs in the home paddock, maybe, or seeing to things about the place. He'd be so sorry you was gone. He thought a lot of me, you know, miss, and he'd say, ‘You wouldn't have wanted for someone to talk to, my dear, if Miss Portia had a-been here.’ He thought no one was too good for me—poor father” (a profound sigh accompanied these words, followed by a long pause). “Well, I don't suppose I'd been three weeks at

the station—and pretty dull I found it, I can tell you; it was in the January, and the place so burned up you couldn't walk over it for the cracks in the ground—it was almost three weeks, you may say, after I'd come up that Mr. Morrisson wrote word to say he was coming. I'd heard say you was engaged to him, and I was curious enough to see him. I used to go up of an evening to the verandah at the homestead after I'd taken a dip in the water-hole—you remember, miss, the water-hole in the bed of the creek—and let down my back-hair to dry, I was sitting that way one evening when a gentleman comes riding up—you may guess who he was—and seems struck of a heap, like, to see me. And that was just how it all begun. I couldn't but think a little of him after that. It was like as if he'd been so pleased and so astonished at finding me there. He couldn't take his eyes off me at first. And I believed what he told me, miss. I believed it as if it was Gospel truth. He told me he had been engaged to you once on a while, but that you wanted to break it off. He said I was the only person in the world that could console him—and, miss, he spoke that soft and loving I couldn't *help* believing him. Father never thought any harm. So long as Mr. Morrisson was there he'd go off to the township, or go riding round the fences. He was away two days and a night once, with a fire that had broken out on the next run and partly on ours.”

“And Mr. Morrisson was in charge, I suppose?” put in Portia, shaking out the tailor-made dress, and placing it in readiness to put on.

“Yes, he was in charge,” said Mary, reluctantly; “and, miss, I *did* believe in him then. There was nothing I wouldn't have done for him. I believe I'd have blacked his boots for him if he'd asked me. But he didn't. He came down to the cottage, and he got me to go up to the homestead and dine with him. Me and him all alone. And he told me it was just like as if we were man and wife already, for we was to go down to be married the very week after in Melbourne. Oh! I *did* believe him, miss. He told me he only didn't speak to father because father'd got it into his head that he was bound to marry *you*—and there! I believe my head was turned. He waited on me at that dinner as if I was a queen; he'd pour out the champagne for me with his own hands, and he said it would be always like that. He called me Mrs. Morrisson, and he praised me up to the skies and, oh! miss, I was a wicked, foolish girl—but more foolish than wicked, I believe. Well! I've been punished enough since.”

“And afterwards?” asked Portia—her voice sounded dry in her own ears. “I want to know how you came to leave your home.”

“What could I do else?” cried Mary; there was helpless despair in her accents. “Soon after, I pretended to poor father I must go down to Melbourne to stop with a board-ship friend. Mr. Morrisson was in

Queensland. He hadn't sent for me as he promised, and I was beside myself with terror and misery. But he came back before my baby was born—and, if you'll believe it, miss, father found out what was the matter—and, miss, it broke his heart. The doctors said afterwards his heart had always been weak; but that makes no difference—it was I killed him. Oh! I can't speak of it, miss,” she covered her face with her handkerchief and broke into a fresh wail of anguish. “I've not been to look after the money or anything, for I feel just as though I'd murdered him. Well, when my baby was born, Mr. Morrisson let me know pretty clearly he'd no intention of marrying me, and I hadn't any hold upon him. I cursed him, I did, in father's name and my own; but he didn't care for that. He said he'd send me money as long as I gave him no more trouble—and, perhaps, when his Queensland business was settled up, he'd think about marrying me, after all. But I must go to America, he said, where I wasn't known, and he'd send me money and come to join me later. Well, I had no choice, it seemed. I went off to San Francisco under the name of Mrs. Morris; but after I'd stayed there eating my heart out for six weeks or more, I made up my mind to come on home and wait for him. It seemed more home-like in London—and I had an aunt here too; but she died before I could join her. I told the woman I was lodging with in San Francisco to send me on my money and my letters; but from the day I left I've never heard a word of her or of Mr. Morrisson either until to-day, and it was only by a chance, when I was posing—that's what they call it, miss, when you're sitting for your portrait (not quite your portrait, you know, but to figure in a picture under anybody else's name)—while I was posing in young Mr. Tolhurst's studio, miss—ah! that's a gentleman and a Christian, if you like—that I found out you was going to be married this morning, and who to. I thought I should have died, miss, on the spot. I took up my baby and I ran out of the house as though I were mad—Mr. Tolhurst *did* think I was mad, I believe—and I ran for a cab and drove all the way to the church thinking I'd stop the banns; but it was too late, and I got out and ran straight here.”

“But *how* did you find out? and who told you?” questioned Portia. “Not Mr. Tolhurst, was it?”

She had turned her face away as she made the inquiry, feigning to be absorbed once more in the arrangement of her wearing apparel in the valise.

“Mr. Tolhurst? No, miss. I believe it was Providence. In the picture he's doing of me—leastways it is me, though he's called it ‘News from the Camp,’—I've got to be sitting reading a newspaper. Many's the time he's put a paper in my hand before; but, bless you, I never thought o' looking at what was printed in it. But this morning, of all mornings in the world, I

must needs fix my eyes on the very lines that told about you and Mr. Morrisson. To be married on the 27th, it said—and there was the name of the church and all!”

She paused, and for a long time Portia made no comment. What she had been thinking, however, might almost have been divined by her expression as she turned her face towards Mary and said slowly:

“It was with the idea of preventing the marriage that you came to the church, I suppose?”

The other hung her head. “Miss, I was beside myself. To have my baby branded for base-born all his life—him that's got his father's face, that it'ud have been a pride and a pleasure to see 'em together—it was more than I could stand. I ought to have thought about you. Why, when I came running on here awhile ago, well-nigh out of my mind, I couldn't tell but what you'd have me put outside the door by the servants. But I didn't seem to care. Oh, miss, you are a young lady!—you was never in the way of being tempted as I was, and I don't want to excuse myself; but I had no mother by me, and Mr. Morrisson he *did* speak so fair.”

She had begun to weep afresh. Tears seemed, indeed, to be the only relief to the sense of rankling injury that she evidently carried about with her. Portia compassionated her—and with sincerity—but, at this moment, she was thinking more of her own case than of Mary's. If Providence had indeed directed her eyes, as Mary had said, to that newspaper paragraph, why could it not have happened only just one hour earlier? She would have had no occasion to play the part of a runaway wife then. How easily matters might still have been arranged before the fatal “I will” had been pronounced—before her hand had traced so unwillingly the unreal, unfamiliar signature of Portia Morrisson in the book they had set before her. Perhaps Mary's eyes had fallen upon the paragraph at the very instant when John had uttered aloud his blasphemous boast. He had dared something more than Providence to take her away from him, she remembered. In obedience to which form of power was she going to prove to him now how vain that boast had been? “But I cannot reason it out at this moment,” she reflected hurriedly. “There is only one thing I am clear about. I must get out of his way as fast as ever I can.”

Her little valise was packed by this time. Her wedding-ring, John's engagement-ring, and such other costly gifts as he had bought her were left scattered upon the table. She took her watch, her diamond earrings, and one or two valuables. Of the fifteen sovereigns which represented all the money she could lay her hands upon, she pressed five upon her visitor wherewith to buy a present for the baby.

“And now, Mary,” she said in a firm voice, after all these arrangements

were concluded, "I owe you a lifelong debt of gratitude. You have saved me from taking a step I should have repented more bitterly than I can say. I am not going away with—with Mr. Morrisson. I don't look upon him as my husband at all. Go back to your lodgings now and leave me your address. Mr. Morrisson shall be sent to you to-day. He is yours, and not mine; and if the law cannot be made to interfere (which I think it can be), we must act for ourselves. I am going to some friends—for I must be out of the way; but I shall contrive to hear how you are getting on, and I will see that justice is done you. My own marriage is no marriage. Yours is the only real one"—she stopped short—the phrases in Anna's letter suggested themselves to her memory. Was there such a thing as *real* marriage at all? "Now you had better go; you have carried out the thing you came for."

"And—and you're not angry, miss," stammered Mary, rising with a bewildered air. Burning resentment, a bitter desire for vengeance, hatred towards her betrayer, a deeper hatred perhaps towards her rival, the woman he was about to marry—all these feelings had held her in their power as she entered the room. Now they had given way to astonishment and gratitude. Astonishment, perhaps, was the uppermost feeling of the two.

That a newly-married bride, on the point of starting off on her wedding-trip with the bridegroom, should renounce her honeymoon and her husband as easily as though they had been represented by a ball-room partner and a round dance, was a phenomenon undreamed of in her philosophy. What she had intended to bring about by her denunciation she was not quite clear. Vengeance had been the sentiment that had mainly dictated her action. She had felt on her way to the church as a Paris *vitrioleuse* (if there be such a word) might feel on her way to blast a hated rival. And here she had been received with pitying consideration and words of gentlest sympathy. Her rival had not only taken her by the hand and kindly invited her confidence, but had actually ceded the place to her. It was inexplicable. Perhaps it was education that did it. It might not be considered manners in Miss James's world to show one's feelings upon occasions like the present one. Nevertheless, before she went away, Mary placed her child for the second time in Portia's arms. But the gesture that accompanied the action was as different from the former one as the expression she now wore on her face.

"I can't say all that's in my mind, miss," she said in trembling tones; "but won't you give the little one a kiss as a token you've forgiven me?"

And Portia bent her head, and pressed her pure lips against the velvety surface of the baby cheek. Then with her own hands she adjusted Mary's thick veil around the tear-stained face, and after writing down her address and promising once more that she should have redress, she prepared to take

final leave of her, At the door, however, she detained her an instant while she said, "One thing I must ask you, Mary— to keep what has passed this morning a secret between ourselves. You don't tell Mr. Tolhurst things. I suppose?"

"Mr. Tolhurst! Oh, no, miss. He's been a good friend to me—I'll say that for him; but he's distant-like in his manner."

"Of course," continued Portia, "I have no right to control your confidences. Only I couldn't bear that *my* name should be mentioned in connection with anything that has happened when you are talking to—to—outsiders, you understand?"

"Yes, I quite understand, miss—and oh, dear! if I thought it would spoil your life, I'd undo all my morning's work this minute, and thankfully too."

"It hasn't spoiled my life, Mary," replied Portia, gravely. "On the contrary. And now good-bye— and take heart; things may still come right in the end."

She turned back into the room, after watching her visitor departed down the long corridor that led to a back staircase, whence Mary might find her way out of the house through the kitchen regions. Whatever might happen in the future, her appearance this morning had had at least the effect of exorcising the ghost that had haunted Portia's imagination so long. Never again would Harry's Madonna fix, as she had been wont to do of late, her mournful and enigmatic gaze upon her whenever Portia was alone with her thoughts. Henceforth her mind would be at rest upon *that* point. The enigma had been solved. The ghost was laid. "But I should have heeded the warning while there was time," she reflected sorrowfully. "Who knows whether my new-born antipathy to John—that I don't remember feeling in Australia, or how could I have promised to marry him?—was not dictated by a kind of occult influence, exercising itself through the painted effigy of the woman who stood, and who still stands, between us? I have had an instinctive shrinking from him lately that made me see all his actions in what I thought must be a distorted kind of light. If he kissed me I felt it was brutal of him. And how truly my instincts spoke, after all!"

Portia did not, however, allow her reflections to interfere with her preparations for her departure. She had always had a tendency to dress and pack, to do most things indeed, *rouf-rouf* (as the Brussels people call doing things in a hurry), and the habit stood her in good stead now. Not six minutes after Mary's departure, she was standing in the tailor-made dress of grey tweed, upon her head a felt travelling hat and covered by a gossamer veil as baffling to those who would have penetrated its folds from the outside, as that of the Veiled Prophet himself; her keys and her purse in an accessible pocket; her wraps and her waterproof made into a

geometrical bundle, with the aid of Wilmer's Australian saddle-bag, that had somehow passed into her possession; her demeanour composed, her mind as clear as though she had been bent upon no more important mission than that of taking the dogs for a walk. When all her arrangements were completed, she looked at herself for an instant in the glass before tying on her veil. Her cheeks were curiously pale, but there was such a light of fierce excitement in her eyes, that the rusty stains that marked their yellow-brown depths seemed to burn and glitter as though they were reflecting some inward flame. With her veil tied closely over her face, Portia satisfied herself that she was hardly to be recognized. But the outline, what painters call the *ar abesque* of her figure might yet betray her. She reached down from a peg a long dark cloak, the counterpart of the one that a certain order of nursing-sisters wear, and threw it over her shoulders. Her final step was to take a piece of paper and a pencil, and to write, with a firm hand, the following:

“DEAREST EMMA,—I have not gone mad, and I am not going to kill myself; but I should do one or the other, perhaps both, if I were obliged to live with Mr. Morrisson now. I have just discovered that he has a wife (or a mistress) and a child—the latter not a year old. If I were to stay here I am afraid I should be forced to go away with him all the same; so, to avoid a painful scene, I have made up my mind to leave the house for a time, and to hide somewhere until things are settled. Don't try to have me followed; it would be of no use—and don't be uneasy about me. I am of age now, and can do as I please, and you know that I am well able to take care of myself. You may just fancy I have gone to the seaside for a week, if you like. You will hear again from me soon—and meanwhile, with best love to Wilmer and yourself, *au revoir*.

“PORTIA.”

Within this missive she placed a sealed envelope addressed to John Morrisson, Esq., inside which she had written in pencil: “If you want an explanation of my letter to Emma, call at No. 77 Silver Street.— PORTIA JAMES.”

The signature was written with defiant clearness. Like many young women who are not otherwise distinguished as scribes, Portia had a signature worthy of a Minister of State. She re-read hurriedly her letter to her sister. Yes, it would do. There was nothing in its contents to warrant violent alarm on the part of her belongings. And now there remained nothing more for her to do but to make her escape, with the faithful Eliza's aid.

But this part of her project turned out, as the event proved, the most difficult of all to carry into effect. Upon being called back into the room, after her curiosity had been roused to a point that was well-nigh unbearable

by the distinct sound of smothered sobs proceeding from it, nurse Eliza's face wore an air of justifiable resentment. Her compressed lips plainly told of a slight offered, not only to her dignity, but to her most intimate feelings—her most tender susceptibilities. Portia saw how the case stood in a moment, but there was no time to perform the necessary operation of smoothing nurse Eliza down before enlisting her services. To do the latter justice, when she was made finally aware of her young mistress's desperate resolve, and the cause of it, her own private grievance in connection with the matter melted away. The magnitude of the news was so infinitely beyond anything she could have suspected or dreamed of in her wildest moments, that it seemed to swallow up all other considerations. Upon one point, however, nurse Eliza was obdurate. If her young lady was bent upon going—why, she would go with her. In vain, Portia expended herself in arguments to prove that there was no time for her to get ready in—that the only real service she could render was by remaining behind and guarding the room as though its occupant were still there, until such time as it should be incumbent upon her to betray the secret. The woman remained inflexible, until, at length, in a moment of desperation, Portia flew to the window.

“I'll jump out of it,” she cried vehemently; “and it will be you who have killed me. I *won't* be hunted like an animal.”

She had thrown back her veil, and stood like a tigress at bay; her eyes seemed actually to throw out sparks of fire.

“Oh, miss,” sobbed the terrified Eliza, “what are you about? Don't you know if you was to jump out I'd be after you before you'd get to the bottom? I'll do what you want; but you'll break my heart, you cruel girl, that you will.”

“They all seem to cry but me,” said Portia to herself, as she pulled down her veil again, and listened in secret triumph to the hysteric sniffs of distress whereby Eliza found vent for her feelings. But aloud she cajoled the faithful creature with honeyed words. She promised that Eliza should be the first to hear her news. “And you shall come and join me, dear, I am going to friends. My letters will be addressed to you *always*, on the condition that you don't betray my whereabouts. I only don't tell you where I am going, in order that you may not have to tell a lie—you *can't* tell lies, you know, Eliza dear—when they ask you where I am. And now go and see that the coast is clear; that the door of the smoking-room is shut; that my sister is having a nap; that the servants are out of the way, and the back-door in the garden open. Then come and make a sign to me from the end of the corridor. I will come out with my valise and the saddle-bag, and in High Street I shall get into the first hansom I see.”

And all these directions Eliza, in fear and trembling, carried out *au pied de la lettre*. She cleared the path, as one who assists a prisoner to escape at dead of night from his dungeon. If James or any one of his silver-blue tribe had a fleeting glimpse of the nurse-uniform's cloak skurrying down the garden-path—if the groom in the coachhouse, hosing the wheels of the equipage that was to drive the newly-married pair to the station, and pondering upon the extent of the tip he would most probably receive from the bridegroom, caught a transient view of a figure so like his young mistress's hurrying up the mews, that he paused to say, "Well, I'm blown;" there was nothing in either of these events that need have caused the fugitive alarm. Nevertheless, it was not when Portia had scuttled through the corridor and down the backstairs, not when she had left the yard, the garden, and the garden-door behind her, not even when she had received her valise at Eliza's hand outside, and had walked undisturbed into High Street—it was not, indeed, until she was safely ensconced in a swift-bowling hansom, to the driver whereof she had given the order "London Bridge Station," that her breath seemed to come freely once more, and her heart to resume, to a certain extent, its normal functions. She had accomplished her great *coup*. She had acted upon the brave motto "to dare and to do," and she had succeeded. A curious exhilaration seemed to take possession of her. The world was before her, and she had her liberty. She might live her own life now, as Anna had put it, where and how she pleased. It is generally supposed that there is no case so curious or exceptional but that its counterpart might be found among the thousand and one curious and exceptional cases that occur daily in London without anybody's being the wiser for them. Yet I doubt if, in any other quarter of that vast conglomeration, a newly-married bride, leaving her home under similar conditions to those which attended our heroine's departure, and wearing a similar look of elation in her tell-tale eyes concealed behind her gossamer veil, could have been readily encountered. And what was our heroine thinking of, as the cab rolled on its long, smooth course into the City? I think, if the truth must be told, the route she intended to take to Paris was the uppermost consideration in her mind during the first few moments of her flight. "Newhaven and Dieppe," she concluded triumphantly. "They will never think of that; and I shall be safe in hiding at Anna's before they have had time to make up their minds in what direction they are to look for me."

Chapter XI

FORTUNE, or perhaps one of those powers that John in his wild jubilation had defied, favored Portia's flight. Her hansom bowled her in swift safety to the London Bridge station, where it deposited her an hour before the departure of her train—which hour she spent waiting in an obscure corner of the ladies' waiting-room, with her veil down, and her heart, as the saying goes, in her mouth. She dared not venture upon the platform outside, where the hurrying crowd was running to and fro like ants about their nests; she could not even command the resolution to make her way into the refreshment-room, where, despite her agitation of mind, she would have been glad to provide herself with one of the fossil Bath buns displayed upon the counter (for violent emotion and a long hour's drive incline to emptiness): It was in vain she told herself that no one would think of looking for her here, and that in so far as her chances of being recognised went, she had counteracted them effectually by merging her identity into that of the class of average young-lady travellers, who flit unperceived about the world with “Come like shadows, so depart” for their apparent rule of action. Conscience, that makes cowards of us all, made a coward of Portia. It seemed to her that everyone who looked in her direction did so with *malice prepense*, having detected the fact that she was running away from her home. Even the man who took the tickets eyed her, as she thought, with suspicion. The more effectually to screen herself from observation she had taken a second-class place, and now mounted heroically into a second-class carriage of the order known as stuffy, and dissimulated herself between a fat French priest and a little girl on her way to school in France, who spent her time in alternate fits of weeping and sucking oranges.

The night was a divine one. Through the window of the compartment, which her fellow-travellers persisted in keeping closed, Portia could see the summer landscape fading into indistinctness under the waning twilight. By-and-by a red-gold moon swung herself slowly aloft through the sky. What would not Portia have given to be able to stop the train and walk about in the midst of that enchanted scene? It seemed so redolent of calm and repose, to breathe such “bease,” as Emma had said of the coppery Claude—and “bease” appeared as far out of Portia's reach at this instant as the moonlit landscape itself. A thousand disquieting thoughts were succeeding each other in her brain. A woman does not run away upon her wedding-day with just the kind of sensation with which she might start upon a personally-conducted circular tour, paid for by anticipation—and

this was what our heroine was discovering to her cost. At one moment she would picture the scene that must ensue when the fact of her flight was discovered: Emma's guttural ejaculations, Wilmer's nervous manipulation of his monocle, John's baffled rage—she could imagine it all so vividly. At another she would ponder upon the possible consequences of her action. She was not at all sure that she had not placed herself under the ban of the “law of the land” —a mysterious and vaguely-understood power—nor that the emissary who would finally capture her might not turn out to be a policeman. Then, what would Anna say? And how long would it be before her hiding-place in Paris could be discovered? This last reflection diverted her mind from dwelling upon the consternation her flight would necessarily arouse in the home-circle. It is well known that in cases of family separation the person who goes among fresh surroundings has less time and less opportunity for fretting than the friends who are left behind. Such importance, indeed, do we attach to the considering and sustaining (to say nothing of the detaching influence) of new surroundings, that even when the destination of the voyager is that unknown country from whose bourne no traveller returns, we think ourselves warranted in saying, with a shake of the head: “Ah! it is not *he* who is to be pitied, poor fellow! It is those he is leaving behind.”

Portia thought of this fact in connection with her own experience. The excitement of the journey, the having a definite object in view, a place where she might be sure of a welcome awaiting her, made her position a very different one from that of the friends she was leaving in ignorance of her fate, from whose horizon she was vanishing without leaving a trace of her passage or a clue to her possible whereabouts. She promised herself that she would let them have news through Eliza as soon as she could do so with safety. Mary and her baby were also much in her thoughts. The mystery of the coincidence that had inspired her with her first presentiment in connection with them, through Harry Tolhurst's agency, recurred to her mind. The Madonna picture had faded away, but the vision of the prototype of that Madonna, weeping over her shattered life, with her baby at her breast, had taken its place. A horror of the man she called her husband was Portia's next feeling. “I am glad I left the opal ring he gave me where Emma will see it and take it to him,” she thought; “that and the wedding-ring will speak more plainly than any reproaches I could have made him.”

What John would do was, however, beyond her power to divine. She pondered so much upon this question, and so many complicated problems seemed to spring out of it as regarded the claim Mary had upon his affection, and the extent to which it would be justifiable to force him to

marry her (if such a thing were possible) after his own inclination towards her had died out, that she lost herself in the labyrinth. If, as physiologists tell us, the amount of thinking we go through increases the convolutions of our brains, and removes us still further in the scale from our cousins the chimpanzees, Portia's brain must have acquired many an added twist during her journey from Newhaven over the sea. Of trouble in getting across she had none. If railway companies and steamer agencies set out with the express purpose of facilitating flights and elopements, they could not render the means of accomplishing them more easy. The theory of swimming, or writing, or of doing anything else whatsoever "made easy," is nothing to the theory of travelling made easy as it has been actually carried into effect by companies; and except for the fact that a traveller is occasionally launched into eternity, without so much as a "by your leave," through their operations, the arrangements by which they whisk us about the world, from London to Timbuctoo, are all, so to speak, plain sailing. "They must think the passengers are blind or deaf," thought Portia, "to make it necessary for a man to go on shouting, 'This way for the boat!' all the time—as if there were anywhere else to go to, if one wanted." Arrived on board, she had the courage to descend to the second-cass ladies' cabin, but not the courage to remain there. The elaborate preparations that the majority of the inmates were making for the worst, together with the ostentatious display of unbreakable basins on the berths, was a spectacle before which she shuddered and fled. In return for a handsome *pourboire*, a French steward placed a mattress and a pillow for her on the deck, and there, with the moon's rays casting their silvery radiance over her, this bride of a day laid herself down to sleep. It was by no means the first time she had slept thus, under the stars. She had known in olden times the joys of camping-out in the Australian bush, when Wilmer had allowed her to accompany him upon a mustering expedition to a distant part of the run. She knew the exhilaration of waking in the cool morning, with the vast blue dome of the far-reaching Australian sky for her only canopy, and the wondrous chant of the native magpie, wild and sweet as the bush itself, to usher in her morning visions. She had built many an innocent castle-in-the-air in those far-away childish days. But in none of them had she seen herself lying solitary under the starlit sky on her wedding-night. Now she had no longer anything to fear, she lifted her veil, and allowed the cool moist air—"chargé de sels et d'aromes," as the enigmatic Verlaine has it—to wander over her face. When a travelling 'Arry approached too near, with inquisitive glances that spoke of "making up to her," she let it fall again. But she was not the only lady on the deck. A palpable bride, with her head on her lord's shoulder, sate in an obscurer patch at some little distance from

her. Portia felt a strange pang as she looked in the direction of the newly-wedded pair. The silhouette of the bride was vague and indefinite, yet it bore the stamp of a serenity blissful beyond expression.

Our heroine, I may remark *par parenthèse*, was blessed with the possession that comes first in the triad of good things popularly supposed to ensure our earthly happiness. She enjoyed (and if ever the word “enjoyed” were well applied it is in this connection) —she *enjoyed* good health. Not all the thinking she had done during her journey in the train could render her unmindful of the fact that she had had no bun after all, stale or otherwise, at London Bridge station, and that it was a very long time since she had assisted at Emma's breakfast-lunch—supposed to be a bridal breakfast, too, but more suggestive of a funeral feast of baked meats, as far as her own feelings in partaking of it were concerned. And not all her agitation on the score of her “escapade” could prevent her from thinking the fresh ham sandwiches and sweet lemonade wherewith she supped on deck very nice indeed. She lay awake notwithstanding, listening to the swish swish and thump thump of screw and engine, until the moon was but a pale reflection of the golden globe that had climbed so majestically up the heavens a few hours ago. The pale dawn was creeping up from behind the rim of the quiet ocean. Then Portia fell asleep, and in her sleep she fancied she was walking in front of the lions' cage at the Zoo. It was the hour at which the beasts were to be fed, and the particular lion she was looking at was walking up and down in wild agitation, with his eyes flaming, his tail curling, and his mouth gaping, uttering hoarse and hungry howls; she saw the food, a mass of raw and bleeding flesh, brought close to his cage, and, just as he was springing upon it wildly, she saw that it was withdrawn by the keeper. The rage of the lion thereupon was terrific to behold, and it seemed to Portia in her dream that it was against herself that he was raging. Under the influence of the horrible fascination exercised upon her in her nightmare she was constrained to approach the cage, with the full certainty of being eaten in her turn; but her terror was so great when she discovered that the lion was turning into John that she awoke. The boiler was letting off steam, and the lion's howls she had heard in her dream had been suggested by its hoarse roar. Her cheeks felt cold and clammy. The harbour of Dieppe, with the masts of the ships at anchor, and the towers of the grey cathedral swimming in the amber morning light, were before her. Another six hours, and she would be in Paris with Anna.

Chapter XII

THE day-journey from Dieppe to Paris, though infinitely more fatiguing, was not, in one sense, as trying to our heroine as her flight of the previous night. For one thing, she had had the time to review her position calmly; and even after sleeping over it—a process which is supposed to be most efficacious in readjusting our mental focus—she felt that if the thing were to do over again, she would act in precisely the same way; now as the lives of most of us are made up of regrets that we could not have acted differently, this was a conclusion that could not fail to have a tranquillising effect. Moreover, as regarded the fact of running away, the contempt that is born of familiarity was beginning to assert its reassuring influence upon her mind. She no longer imagined that when any of her fellow-travellers looked her way it must necessarily be with the set purpose of denouncing her to her relations, and was even composed enough after a while to look through the window of the high and jolting second-class carriage into which she had climbed, and to admire the landscape, after an abstracted and desultory fashion, in the calm, clear sunshine of a July day. The woods and fields, twinkling with light, reminded her of a newly-varnished picture. The words in which Mark Twain, in the *Innocents Abroad*, emphasises the refrain, “Oh, pleasant land of France,” by adding “and it *is* a pleasant land,” recurred to her memory, and she felt that she could fully indorse them. The crops were a particular source of wonder and delight. The sloping fields of wheat, a rippling expanse of pale gold set round with a garland of fiery poppies and sky-blue cornflowers, excited her admiration, I fear, even more than the grey towers of Rouen Cathedral, which also claimed her passing notice. But Portia was, as we have seen, a Bushbred maiden, and she had not grown up in the midst of the farming operations carried on at Yarraman Station upon the virgin soil of Australia—so parched and dried up for the most part of the year, that “elderly spinster soil” would have been a more applicable designation for it—to be oblivious, when she beheld them, of the marvels of an unbroken succession of fields of waving corn waiting in all their ripened glory for harvesting. Then there were the trees—the wonderful European trees—with their rich and varying liveries of heavy summer green, to be contrasted with her recollection of the gaunt Australian gums and the black and scraggy she-oaks she remembered. Her reflections upon these topics were, however, more of the nature of passing impressions than an actual exercise of her cogitative faculties, for the part that she herself was to play in her new surroundings was the consideration that was really uppermost in her mind

most of the time. She had wisely, but not too well, as regarded her own comfort, taken refuge in the ladies' carriage, where for all society she found only two *religieuses* and an exclusive lady's-maid, with whom she hardly exchanged a word all the way. Arrived at the Gare St. Lazare, she had a momentary quailing in presence of the unfamiliar and somewhat formidable crowd that thronged in its vicinity. In the Bush, she was fully able, in the literal sense of the phrase, to find her way about; but to accomplish a similar feat, in the slang acceptance of the words, and in a city like Paris, of all others, seemed quite another matter. There were women here, too, with that in their faces that dismayed her—she could not tell why—and the hot colour mounted to her cheeks upon more than one occasion as her eyes encountered behind her veil those of some Frenchman who was trying to *dévisager* her (the fact that we have no equivalent for the word in English is a proof that the habit is more of a Continental than an insular one). It was with a sigh of relief that she deposited herself at last, with rugs and valise, in the *petite voiture* that was to drive her to the Rue Vaugirard. Was it fancy, or had the *cocher* in the polished white belltopper, to whom she had just confided herself, really intended to leer at her with insolent meaning as she gave him the address? The idea was such a disquieting one that she stopped him before they had rolled many yards to inquire of him, in timid Australian-French, whether he had understood where he was to take her. The *cocher* replied, “Parfaitement,” with a shrug and in a testy tone of voice, as though he had been annoyed by her asking; but this was so much more reassuring than his previous way of conducting himself, that Portia began to think she must have misjudged him after all, and that her first impression was the result of pure nervousness.

It was not the first time that our heroine had been in Paris. She had been brought thither, as we have seen, only a fortnight ago, for the solemn purpose of making choice of her going-away bonnet. The difference between that mission and her actual one was not less great than the difference between the Paris she had known then and the Paris she was to come into contact with now. During her former visit she had stayed at the Hôtel Continental, and had seen from her windows the same trim and beautiful portion of the Tuileries gardens opposite, as the deposed Queen Zara, in Daudet's *Rois en Exil*, saw the morning after her hasty arrival. The Paris she had known then had been that glittering surface of the great city which draws to itself the rich, the young, the gay, and the pleasure-loving of all the nations upon earth. It was the Paris of the *grands boulevards*, the Théâtre Français, the Opéra, Brébants, and the Palais Royal. From her short experience of it, Portia had gathered the impression that existence here meant being steeped to the neck in every kind of agreeable and

delightful sensation. She had a clear remembrance of sitting under the awning of a well-known café on the Boulevard Poissonnière with Wilmer and John, eating *sorbets*, and of looking across the intensely interesting crowd of carriages and pedestrians that streamed past her, to the houses on the opposite side. How grandly high they rose above the topmost boughs of the beautiful limes and chestnuts and sycamores standing in front of them, and what a gay surface of golden letters picked out on a soft grey background they presented to her gaze. Many different families, people of all ranks and callings, she had been told, dwelt in layers in these marvellous habitations, sinking in the social scale as they rose in the architectural one; but she could hardly realise this fact. Like the hero in Thackeray's sketch in the little dinner at Timmins's, who imagined that the pastry-cooks' young ladies at whose shrine, or, rather, at whose counter, he worshipped, must be nurtured upon the most delicate of intangible dainties, upon whiffs and emanations of creams and jellies, she could not help connecting the mingled perfumes she was conscious of—those of the hyacinth-laden flower-cart that passed along in front of her, of the patchouli-scented *cocolte* (whom she took for a charming lady) seated next to her, of the *sauce piquante* that was being fabricated in the kitchen of a celebrated restaurant at hand—with the lives of the dwellers in these enchanted regions. The atmosphere they lived in harmonised with the brilliancy of their surroundings. For Portia they were all part of a brilliant show. The whole of Paris, indeed, presented itself to her mind, so far, in the guise of a grand theatrical display, and the thought of living in it as Anna's guest took no more definite shape than that of helping to swell the pageant as she had done before, by driving to the Bois, along the Champs Elysées, or sitting in front of the Café Riche or the Maison Doré, or making purchases in one of those wonderful shops with the delicately-painted ceilings, where the *dame* or *demoiselle de magasin* would serve her with the most exquisite urbanity, and show her the loveliest *dernières créations*, maintaining at the same time her own right of pronouncing the final verdict—"Voilà ce qu'il faut pour Mademoiselle"—with an inflexible calmness of conviction against which it would have been futile to protest.

This Paris of Portia's recollection was but a limited Paris, after all. Nevertheless, it is the only one of which the majority of her sex placed under similar circumstances have much knowledge. For the first part of her drive there was nothing to dispel her illusions. The cab drove down the asphalted Rue de Richelieu, and across the narrow and crowded Rue St. Honoré, coming, however, to a standstill in the Rue de Rivoli, where the driver *sacréd* at having to back before a tremendous Crichy-Odéon omnibus, with its three white classic steeds, worthy of figuring upon a

Pompeian frieze, harnessed abreast. When the omnibus had gone on its way she found herself rattled, with much clatter, across the stony Place de Carrousel, whence she could discern ahead of her, to the right, the lower portion of the skeleton frame-work of the mighty Eiffel Tower, then in process of construction. The thick mass of foliage in the Tuileries Gardens, and the ascending perspective of the Champs Elysées, with its double rows of trees and its moving mass of carriages, evoked familiar memories. It was not until the *cocher* had driven her across the Pont des Arts, and was whipping his horse up the Rue de Seine in a fashion which led her to remonstrate with him in reckless French, that her surroundings began to wear an unfamiliar aspect. Once, and only once, had Portia crossed the river before—upon the occasion of her accompanying Emma upon a shopping expedition to the Bon Marché. The old part of Paris, that no Cook's tourist would be allowed to neglect—Notre-Dame, the Tour St.-Jacques, the Pantheon, the Luxembourg—were all unknown to her. The Quartier Latin was *terra incognita*. The appearance of the Boulevard St.-Germain raised the temporary hope that here, perhaps, the enchanted region would begin to unfold itself once more; but, as the cab continued its jolting away up the stony Rue de Rennes, the hope died gradually away. If she had an objection to formulate to this part of Paris it was on the score of its being so noisy. Omnibuses came thundering along with a rackety sound that seemed to go through her head. Carts and carriages rattled over the stones with an aggressive and deafening clatter. How people carried on the business of life—above all, how they carried on any kind of connected conversation in the midst of such a din, was a mystery. No wonder they bawled and squalled when they spoke to each other. And as though they did not get share enough of the noise indoors, they seemed to carry on the greater part of their business outside. How different were the *magasins* from those she remembered on the *grands boulevards*. Their contents seemed to sprawl not only “all over the shop,” but all over the pavement as well. Even the mantles and costumes were displayed upon portly wicker presentments of the feminine form ranged in the street outside, and groceries, crockery-ware, and market produce of all kinds overflowed upon the *trottoir*.

Portia was a little tired. The reaction following upon her exciting experiences of the last four-and-twenty hours was exerting its depressing influence. The noise, the heat, the dust, and the glare oppressed her, and though she had remained dry-eyed as a Medusa under all the emotions consequent upon her marriage and her subsequent flight from her home, I will not answer for it that as the cab drew up in front of a shabby wooden door, opening upon a paved courtyard, wherein a fat, hard-eyed woman,

white-jacketed and blue-aproned, sat shelling peas, she did not feel a kind of unreasoning inclination to shed a desolate tear or two.

“Mademoiselle Ross?” she inquired timidly, as she entered the yard with her valise and her rugs, after she had submissively handed to the *cocher* the five francs he claimed from her—the last that remained out of the pound she had changed at Dieppe. She was perfectly aware that the man had cheated her; but how was she to defend herself against extortionate charges in an unfamiliar tongue?

“Mademoiselle Ross est sortie,” said the woman, shortly. And now there could be no longer any concealment of the humiliating fact. It was an actual tear—just such a one as she had shed the first night it had happened to her to sleep away from home as a little girl—that was trembling on her lashes and forcing its way down her cheek. The house in which Anna lived was a so-called *maison de derrière*, and to Portia's unaccustomed eyes it looked sadly shabby. It was very tall—at least five or six storeys high, she thought—and the windows upon each storey were as large as those at a photographer's. In the centre of the yard, in front, was a small railed-round garden, poor as regarded its blooms, but rich in the possession of a drooping mountain ash, with berry-hung branches that swept the ground. This tree gave the only relieving touch, in Portia's eyes, to the dismalness of the scene. She remembered that Anna had promised to give her the liberty of her rooms should she appear unexpectedly upon the scene, and that it was an understood thing that the key should be left for her with the concierge. But the woman eyed her with such sharp curiosity, and there was so little sympathy expressed in her hard face, that our heroine lost countenance. It was only the desperation of her case that emboldened her to ask as best she could at what time Mademoiselle Ross might be expected to return.

“Ne m'a pas dit,” muttered the woman, indifferently.

Then Portia bethought herself of taking a visiting-card from her pocket and showing it, after reading which the concierge, holding up her peas in her apron, went grudgingly into the lower room of a building near the entrance, and returned with the key. This room, from the cursory glance that Portia bestowed upon it, appeared to serve in the threefold capacity of kitchen, bedroom, and dwelling-room, and to be equally trim and tidy in all three. In handing her the key, the woman informed her briefly, “Au quatrième première porte en face—et tournez deux fois la clef,” nodding meanwhile in the direction of the tall, prison-like house on the other side of the court. “Au quatrième” and “première porte en face!”—the words meant nothing to the person to whom they were addressed. Yet rather than run the risk of again exciting the displeasure of the concierge, who she felt for

some reason or other manifestly disliked and distrusted her, Portia made her way unaided towards the door that had been pointed out to her, and, finding herself at the foot of a carpetless, sombre, not over-clean, and somewhat steep winding staircase, began to climb the same, valiantly dragging as best she could, her valise and her rugs up with her. Arrived at the second landing she was fain to sit down to rest. The whole experience seemed like a hideous dream. Where, upon this gloomy, prison-like flight of stairs, could be the door that opened into her friend's abode? Sitting wearily on a step upon the landing, and reflecting that there was nothing for it but to retrace her tired steps again (only, could she dare to leave her portmanteau and her rugs unprotected on the staircase?), Portia was just about to descend once more, when a door behind her was opened, and a young man, wearing corduroy trousers and a plum-coloured, close fitting jersey that sat easily upon his well-knit figure, emerged from it. A glance was sufficient to prove to Portia that she was in the presence of a gentleman. The intruder would have bowed and gone past her, but something helpless and pleading in her manner of returning the salutation made him pause.

“Are you going higher?” he asked her in English. “Pray let me help you up with your things.”

“I am looking for Miss Ross,” said Portia. She had accepted his help as naturally as he had offered it. “I don't know where to find her rooms. She left the key for me with her concierge”—producing it as she spoke. “I am her friend, you know.”

It seemed to her that some explanation was due for thus descending (or rather, *ascending*) upon another person's abode in her absence; but her new acquaintance seemed to regard the proceeding as perfectly *en règle*.

“That is all right,” he said. “She is two *étages* higher.” And he began to precede her up the staircase, carrying her valise and the bundle.

“Oh, I can't think of letting you take so much trouble,” protested Portia, toiling after him.

“No trouble at all,” he laughed; “I am only sorry I didn't meet you at the bottom.”

He was a young man, and he had a pleasant face: such a face as may be seen among the crew of a University eight, or the members of a cricket team at Lord's, with the refined jaw and well-trained muscles—facial as well as bodily—that speak of much mental and physical training. He apologised for going in front, on the ground of having to show his companion the way, and it was he who placed the key, after what seemed to Portia an interminable climb, in the door for her, when they arrived eventually in front of Anna's room, and who gave her a practical

illustration of what the “*deux fois tourner*” signified. He even carried her things unasked inside, and, seeing a huge tin water-jug standing empty at the entrance, took it up with the remark, “They have forgotten to leave you any water, I see,” and was off and down the stairs and out of sight before Portia, in her bewilderment, had found any words in which to remonstrate with him. While he was away she took a hasty glance round the apartment. The first rapid impression it conveyed was one of new perplexity, and there had been so much to perplex her already. It was large. Portia, in common with her sex, was no appraiser of proportions, but it was what she would have called a fairly big room, and it was high—higher than any of the rooms, not excepting the picture-gallery itself, in the Kensington mansion. There was a faded blue curtain slung across one end, behind an opening in which she could discern a camp bedstead, a washing-stand, and a wardrobe. The other part of the room seemed to serve as a sitting-room and studio combined—to say nothing of eating and cooking-room as well. There was, nevertheless, something attractive in its general aspect. The floor was of stained wood, with Turkey carpets and rugs scattered about it. There was a piano on one side and book-shelves on the other. Upon a low table, in the neighbourhood of a large easel stood a Benares vase filled with peonies in full bloom, with petals that looked like frayed rose-colored silk. There were some royal stuffs—Portia did not know of what description—thrown across a low canopy. In one corner was a red crock, out of which the end of a loaf as long as an umbrella was protruding. Against the walls were pinned or nailed all manner of paintings, drawings, and sketches. Some of these were charcoal studies from the nude, and to Portia, who did not as yet know the meaning of “Academies,” they conveyed a startling and almost terrifying impression. She was still standing with the uneasy air of one who does not know what to make of her surroundings, when her gentleman-help returned, with the jug filled to the brim.

“They pretend it's *eau sur tous les étages*,” he remarked parenthetically as he set it down; “but it's humbug, one always has to go to the *première* for it. Now; is there nothing else I can do for you?”

“No, indeed; and I can't thank you enough,” declared Portia, earnestly.

She had come out upon the landing, and with her veil thrown back, her face a little burned by the sun, and her eyes enlarged, by fatigue and excitement, looked even more striking than of custom.

“You know Miss Ross, I suppose,” she asked hesitatingly.

“I've known her since I moved into the *atelier* below. I have a studio here with a friend, and we go into her rooms sometimes—he and I—in the evening, when we're feeling down about our work.”

“About your work?” repeated Portia, interrogatively.

“Yes; we get discouraged sometimes, and we make each other worse. Then we go to Anna Ross. You may be sure of hearing the truth from her—about that and everything else. She's great fun, too, don't you think? Are you going to work with her?”

“Oh no; I don't think so; I can't draw even,” said Portia; and, confused by the recollection of all she had seen in her friend's room she half extended her hand in token of farewell. “I'll tell Anna how you came to my assistance.”

“Oh, we're always assisting each other in this community,” he laughed. “Tell Miss Ross I'm expecting my friend over in a few weeks; but that I shall be very lonely until he comes. You won't forget, will you, to impress that fact upon her?”

“No,” replied Portia, diffidently. She was conscious that she was blushing, and both the fact and the consciousness of it were equally annoying to her. The result of her annoyance was that she withdrew her hand, and bestowed a stiff little bow upon her gentleman-help, as he turned to descend the staircase, instead of the cordial hand-shake with which she had felt impelled a moment ago to mark her sense of her gratitude towards him.

Chapter XIII

AN hour later, after Portia had performed her ablutions with the aid of the water brought her by her self-constituted help (it was the famous *eau de la Vanne*, as pure and soft as freshly-fallen rain), and had seated herself with a towel around her shoulders for the further refreshment of a brushing and combing of her beautiful hair, streaming in undulating profusion down her back, she was aware of a step coming up the stairs with a slow pounding footfall that seemed to denote that the owner of it was very tired, but refused to acknowledge the fact. It must be Anna, she reflected, straightening herself expectantly upon her chair; and Anna it was in truth. Before the friends meet, however, it may be as well to inform the reader, in two words, who and what this acquaintance of our heroine's was.

She was *not* in any case what the French call *la première venue*, for in her person, as in her mind, Anna Ross possessed a strange and strongly marked individuality. Scientific people declared her to be simply a curious instance of atavism. Belonging to a good English county family of the most approved, fair-skinned, conventional, Church-and-State-respecting type, she had performed at a very early age the feat known in equine metaphor as that of “kicking over the traces.” Not all the combined influences of family, county, Church and State, pressing with their united force upon this one little rebel could force her into the mould—a very bed of Procrustes in its way—that social usage had prepared for her. Her very appearance—her sisters were all of the blonde and lymphatic type—was a kind of defiance hurled at her progenitors. Even in her childish days it was impossible to look at her without thinking of an Indian squaw—if one could imagine such a thing as an intellectual squaw—and the likeness seemed to become more accentuated as she grew older. There was the coarse, jet-black, heavy hair, growing low upon a narrow forehead, and parting naturally in the middle; there was the high cheekbones and the unmistakable aquiline nose; there were the black eyes that contracted, all unconsciously, into a narrowing line when their owner was interested or excited; and, to crown all, there was the swarthy, un-English skin. The lips in repose said little. Their prevailing expression was one of strongly exercised self-repression. They could bend into curves that were both tender and cruel as occasion demanded. The figure was of the supple, untrammelled order—not tall and not daintily waisted, but flexible and muscular. It was known that on the mother's side Anna descended in a direct line from an English officer who had fought in the war with America, and who had contracted an alliance *à la mode du pays*, with a Chocktaw or Chickasaw belle. On his return to

England he had been accompanied by a strange-eyed little girl, to whom he had given the name and privileges of a daughter, and who certainly resembled him sufficiently to warrant the appellation. It had been supposed, however, at the end of several generations, of which each succeeding one had grown fairer and more English than the last, that the alloy of savage blood must now have had filtering enough through English veins to prevent the risk of any such catastrophe occurring as that known to breeders as a “throw back,” when Anna's disconcerting identity set all these calculations at naught. From her babyhood she remained a thorn in the side of her family, and as soon as she reached woman's estate she left her home for good. The pittance she received from her relatives, who strongly condemned her course of life, was just sufficient to relieve their consciences from the stigma of allowing her to die of starvation. She earned, however, a little by her brush. In age she might have been anything between five-and-twenty and five-and-thirty. The contrast of her black hair and eyes with her sallow skin, and a certain undefinable magnetic attraction that she possessed to a remarkable degree, caused her to be a good deal noticed when she walked in the streets of Paris. She wore a masculine jacket, with a dark hat and veil, and a close-fitting short skirt in all seasons. Her hands and feet were models. They were, indeed, the only points in connection with her personal appearance upon which she might be said to display the smallest symptoms of coquetry. Indifference and stolidity were the qualities she aimed at cultivating outwardly, and she was rarely betrayed into manifesting the least token of pleasure or surprise.

This, as she appeared to the outside world, was the young woman who now opened the door of the studio where Portia was seated. In her right hand she carried a paper bag that obviously contained butter. In her left, her paint-box, a three-legged folding-stool, and an immense bunch of freshly gathered poppies. Upon beholding her visitor her black brows showed a transitory, almost imperceptible elevation.

“I thought it might be you,” she said; “the concierge told me ‘une demoiselle’ had taken the key. No,” as Portia rose to greet her, “don't speak to me till I have put the butter into water.”

She swept past, and dived under a cupboard for a crock of water, into which she tossed her butter. Then scooping up a handful of rock-salt from a receptacle at hand, she scattered it over the contents. Her eyes travelled over the crock containing the loaf. “Mice again!” she said briefly; “I must give them another dose. I hate myself for doing it, but Rousky says they're in a very low stage of development *as* mice, and it's only helping them on to something better. I'm not sure, though, I should care to be helped on in that particular way—improved off by poison. Well!” she turned round to

her visitor, "let me wish you the *bien venue*," and, bending down, she kissed the young girl gravely between the eyes. Portia would have thrown her arms about Anna's neck, but the latter repulsed her with a firm, though kindly, hand.

"There, sit down, my dear," seating herself at the table opposite to her, and regarding her with attentive eyes. "You mayn't know it, but you're much prettier than you used to be—and, good gracious! child, why didn't you tell me you had such hair? It's marvellous. I'll make a sketch of you like that tomorrow—An Impenitent Magdalen. No, that wouldn't do! A Potential Magdalen. Is that better? Your hair is wonderful—and what a colour! Simple as you stand there, as the Irish say, you could make a fortune as a model; but I must have first choice. By the bye, I had your telegram yesterday, so I hardly expected you to-day. I thought your fate was sealed. I'm glad you thought better of it at the last."

"I'm afraid you'll say I thought worse of it when you hear all," said Portia. She essayed to speak lightly, but her lips were trembling visibly. "I was married yesterday."

"And you've managed to get rid of your husband already! Bravo! you must tell me how you did it. I shouldn't mind being married myself on those terms. It's an exact illustration of what Rousky was saying the other night. The ideals are only perfect, he said, as long as they remain ideals. If you try to introduce facts into them you spoil them. Monarchy without a monarch, religion without a god, *and* marriage without a husband. That would be perfect! But tell me how you did it?"

"I'll tell you all," said Portia, gravely, "if you'll only be serious, Anna. It's a thing I can't help being matter-of-fact about myself, for I mind it so much; and then I'm matter-of-fact about most things. I want you to help me in two ways—to hide me away first, and then to advise me about what I'd better do next."

"Well, you must tell me first. Meanwhile, I'll make you some tea. But don't put your hair up on any account; I want to study an effect."

She went to the broad windows and drew aside one of the curtains. The afternoon sun came pouring through the pane, scattering gilt and bronze over Portia's pendent locks, and framing her head in a nimbus of amber light. "There, that'll do. Now, don't stir from where you are, and you can talk on while I'm making the tea."

It was pleasant to Portia to watch Anna's movements as she performed this housewifely office. Her hands were unlike any she had ever seen before. There was a deftness and celerity in their way of going to work that spoke of the long apprenticeship they must have had. Never had tea tasted so delicious in all her experience as this first cup of Anna's making. And

the delicate rounds of *pain de gruau* spread with the unequalled Paris butter! If Anna would only let her live altogether upon such fare as this, she would ask for nothing better. She felt ashamed that it should be possible for her to like it all so well, at the very moment when she was about to unfold a tale of wrong and error and suffering—the narrative of three wrecked lives, her own among the number. Anna, however, obliged her to speak, and it was in obedience to her request that she narrated from beginning to end the chapter of her life's history that we know.

Chapter XIV

“YOU’VE done the best thing you could do under the circumstances,” was Anna’s verdict when Portia had come to an end of her story. “Even according to benighted Catholic laws I believe you would be able to get a divorce. And I suppose a divorce is the only solution of the difficulty you would care about.”

“The only one,” said Portia, firmly. “I can see you think it was shockingly weak-minded of me to let myself be married at all with such a feeling as I had. But I *used* to care for John at one time—at least, I always believed I did. And then, how could I have imagined he was deceiving me?”

“I should not have waited for that to give him his *congé*, if I had been you. To believe one has cared for a person at some time or another is rather a lukewarm sentiment to start marriage upon, don’t you think? I suppose you thought if there was no great love in the beginning, ‘heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance.’ Well, you are safe out of his reach now, at any rate! You don’t imagine they would ever think of looking for you here?”

“Never! They don’t even know you are in Paris. But, oh! Anna, I feel so lost I don’t know *what* I am going to do.”

“Do! I’ll find you plenty to do. Never fear. You’ve been nothing but a summer insect till now. I suppose you only thought of gadding about amusing yourself all the time you were in London.”

“Not much else. There was the riding in the morning, and sometimes in the afternoon; and Emma always liked me to go shopping or visiting with her. And when we were not at balls, there were theatres or concerts. It was all pleasure from morning to night.”

“Well, it won’t be all pleasure here, then, I can tell you,” said Anna, grimly. “At least, not that kind of pleasure—though, for the matter of that, such a life as you have been describing would be hateful to me.”

“I *was* getting a little tired of it too,” admitted Portia. “It was awfully nice, but somehow it always seemed to lead to nothing.”

“You may say that of existence altogether, as Rousky does,” put in Anna.

“Who *is* the Rousky you are always quoting?” asked Portia. “Last time I saw you it was a Wiluski who was the oracle. You used to tell me so much about his ideas.”

“Did I?” There was a momentary inexplicable gleam in Anna’s black eyes, accompanied by an enigmatic half smile, more sardonic than mirthful. “I had forgotten. It must be some time back. I don’t know where

Wiluski is now. But to come back to you own affairs. I can't *faire des phrases*—I never could; but you had better know, once for all, that I consider your coming to me about the most gratifying compliment you could have paid me. You are going to let me be responsible for you for the present? I should like to teach you how to depend upon yourself a little, so that you won't risk marrying only for the sake of pleasing other people another time. You haven't brought any money with you, I hope?"

"N—no; a few pounds only."

"It's more than you want. If you had come as a rich person I shouldn't have let you stay. We don't admit riches here. We don't tolerate the *épicier* element among us, excepting when we have a picture to sell. You'll be able to earn as much money as you need."

"I earn money!" exclaimed Portia, with shame-faced pleasure in her looks. "I never earned a penny in my life. I shouldn't know how!"

"Then it's more than time you began. You may pose for the *tête d'expression* first of all, and for your hair, and your neck, and your arms, *et puis nous verrons!* It's tiring work at first; but you'll get into it. And now I must clear out a corner of the *atelier* for you to sleep in to-night. To-morrow we can find a room somewhere, if you're not comfortable. And you'll have to come to dinner with me at Cloutz's to-night. It's quite close at hand."

"Whatever you like," assented Portia. She had put herself entirely into Anna's hands, and was perfectly content to abide by her decision in all things; to surrender to her even that newly-found liberty which she had deemed it so great a privilege to obtain. It was a relief under the present circumstances to be saved from the responsibility of thinking and acting for herself. As for measuring the distance that separated Anna's way of living from the way in which Wilmer and Emma lived—the way in which she herself and all the Kensington household had lived as well—these were considerations that could have no kind of weight with her. Portia's mind was of a plastic mould, and she was still at a plastic age. To find herself in a luxurious English home one day, and to have to share a single room on a Paris *quatrième* with a friend the next, was a contrast of which she was more likely to see the amusing than the inconvenient side. When she found that Anna possessed a tub, and that the antagonistic concierge filled it nightly with the beautiful *eau de la Vanne*; also that she might hire a similar luxury for herself, all misgivings as regarded her new *local* were done away with. Anna, moreover, was a woman of fertile contrivances. To see her transform a cumbersome-looking easy-chair into a couch and wheel it behind the faded blue curtain, whisk off an extra mattress from her camp bedstead and place it upon the couch, unstrap Portia's rugs and arrange the

coverlet and pillows comfortably thereupon; clear out drawers and *placards* for her to put her things into, set the fast-dropping poppies in water and shake them out into the full display of their crimson glories, wash up the cups and saucers, and sprinkle her charcoal sketches with *fixatif* before putting them by in her portfolio, was to be impressed anew with a profound sense of her neat-handedness and orderliness. In this, at least, she showed none of the ancestral tendencies; or possibly the military precision of the husband of the squaw had counteracted in his descendants the *laisseraller* principle of savage races as regards domestic arrangements.

“I'm doing nothing to help you,” said Portia, at last. She had been partly gazing out of the window into the courtyard below, that looked a terrific way down, partly watching her friend's operations in naive and wondering admiration. “You should give me something to do, Anna.”

“Oh; you must be content to fill a decorative *rôle* for to-day. You'll have all your work cut out for you soon, I can tell you. Now I'm going to do your hair for you as *I* like it.”

And to this also Portia submitted, and gratefully. And by the time the red-gold coil was twisted in Cingalese fashion behind her head, where, to her astonishment, Anna fixed it with a solitary silver arrow, it was time to go to dinner.

“You needn't put on your cloak,” Anna told her, and Portia, all unconscious that her friend had designs of showing her off, submissively did as she was ordered. Descending the four flights of stairs and passing through the courtyard, where they did not meet a soul, Anna conducted her through unknown streets to Cloutz's.

This famous restaurant to which Portia was introduced was of a kind much frequented by students and artists of the Quartier Latin, those who were ranged in the category of *les petites bourses*. In later days they would probably refer to Cloutz's as “une gargote”; but in their actual necessitous days—before they had, in their own vocabulary, “arrived”—they were very glad to assemble at the small tables in the small, smoke-filled dining-room—at one end of which the restaurateur and his wife carried on their cooking operations in full view of the customers—and there dine off a *potage* and the *plat du jour*, or some similar luxury, for the not too extortionate sum of one franc or a franc and a half, with occasional credit for the same when funds were low. English and American artists of both sexes favoured Cloutz's. The fare, to be sure, was not very delicate, but the “portions” were more liberal than at a *Duval's*, and the publicity of the cooking was a guarantee against the harbouring of sundry dark suspicions that are apt to trouble the appetites of the frequenters of one-franc restaurants. Besides which, there was always the option of dining *à la*

carte—a person with extravagant tastes and an inordinate appetite might spend from three to four francs at Cloutz's—and for an extra halfpenny you might have a clean cloth to cover the stained marble in front of you. There was only room for four people at each table, and even so the fit was rather a tight one. But anybody who was an *habitué* was sure to encounter friends enough at Cloutz's to make up a table of his own; and in that case it was an advantage to make exchanges of half-plates of *petits pois* or *flageolets* with one's neighbours, by which means you were enabled to vary the *menu*, and have quite a number of different *plats* for your twenty or five-and-twenty sous.

Portia had been to the Maison Doré, and had dined at the Continental and the Grand Hotel, but she had never seen a restaurant of this kind before. She tried not to think that it was rather “awful” (though this, I fear, was the adjective that would have most nearly expressed her secret feelings) as she followed her friend up the crowded room to a table near the cooking end, where the restaurateur—a fat Alsacien, in a white paper cap—was shaking potatoes in a frying-pan over his stove. Seated next to Anna, she saw that people were looking round at them in various directions, and that here and there a head would bow recognition. The atmosphere was impregnated with cigar-smoke, and one did not require to be a connoisseur, any more than Portia was, to feel (as she did) that it had not the fragrance of the atmosphere she had been accustomed to when Wilmer and his friends were smoking. Anna acknowledged the various bows she received by stately little nods. She had turned back her veil square across her forehead, and, sitting in the shade, in her masculine jacket, with her jet-black hair, her sallow skin, and the curious contour of her face, bore an odd resemblance to the effigy of an Egyptian Pharaoh as handed down to us in the paintings on some old-world sarcophagus. After a time Portia became aware that somebody was bowing to her, and for an instant her heart stood still. But it was only her “gentleman-help,” seated among a group with whom he was engaged in an apparently animated discussion. His bow in her direction caused the others to look at her for the first time, and, placed as she was, she could not help being conscious that they were asking him questions about her.

Anna, meanwhile, had been giving her orders to the *garçon*, a country-bred youth fresh from his *pays*, with a face as unlike the cynical mask of the typical *garçon* as possible. *Bouillon* with a powdering of *fromage rapé*, *tête de veau à l'huile*, *haricots verts*, and *crème suisse*, composed the *menu* she submitted gravely to her companion's approval. Portia declared her readiness to like whatever Anna did. Her tastes were eclectic—a consequence, no doubt, of that plasticity of temperament and of age

already referred to, which was one of her prominent qualities. She persuaded herself therefore, that the better portion of the ear of a cold calf's-head, soused in oil, and plentifully besprinkled with chopped onions, was the most delectable diet in the world, and was only sorry she could not honestly like the *vin ordinaire*, that seemed to have such a taste of ink, which Anna continued to press upon her.

Between the intervals that followed the arrival of the "portions" (and they were very long ones, the country-bred *garçon* being the only aid that the restaurateur and his wife allowed themselves), Portia learned a good deal respecting the company at Cloutz's. Her "gentleman-help" had had, it seemed, a landscape in the Salon. He had colour, but was no draughtsman, and would have to "piocher" a good deal, in Anna's opinion, before he could come to the front. The group he was with was made up of three American artists and one Australian. They were all in the *atelier* of Jean Paul Laurens, and one of them had also had a head in the Salon, of which the *Figaro* had said that it had "des qualités remarquables." Behind them, the man with the dark beard and the girl with the delicately-cut face worked at the same studio; you generally saw them together. The lady sitting alone reading the *Petit Journal* was an American. Her line was wood-engraving.

"And does it—does it pay them?" asked Portia, timidly, though she had hardly uttered the words before she would have liked to retract them. To look upon art as a means to an end, when it was so evidently, in Anna's eyes, and in those of all her friends, the be-all and end-all itself, was, she felt, a sordid and Philistinish point of view. But to her relief Anna answered her matter-of-fact question in just as matter-of-fact a way.

"None of them are *arrivé* yet, or they wouldn't be here. Some are well on their way, though; others have about as much as they can do to scrape along. There are not many among those you see who have made it pay in the sense of living by their art."

"But you have?" hazarded Portia.

"I have—nearly," said Anna, shortly; "but I've gone in for rather an expensive *atelier*. Sixty pounds a year—that's what my rent comes to. My living costs me from two to two francs fifty a day; then one *has* to dress in some kind of way; and colours and studio expenses (I go to Laurens, too, you know) are pretty heavy. I sold a little 'plein air' this year, though—an old woman I did on the beach at Etretat—so I'm in funds just now. But, see, there is Rousky coming."

She half rose from her place, and motioned to Portia to remove her parasol and gloves from the place opposite to her, towards which the young man she called Rousky was making his way. As he came closer Portia

could not refrain from casting a look of interested curiosity in the direction of this friend and oracle of Miss Ross's. Rousky was a man apparently under thirty years of age, with nothing in his lean personality and bearded face to distinguish him save a pair of most remarkable blue eyes, which might almost have been said to *kindle*, in the literal sense of the word. They seemed, in contradiction to all optical laws, to gather their light from within, and made Portia feel for an instant as though she were in the presence of an illuminate or a seer. His nostrils were somewhat wide, and his cheeks betrayed the formation of the Kalmuck's skull. The general coloring was fair. The head-covering a "beret," which he pulled off before shaking hands with Anna and seating himself in the place pointed out to him. The clothes—a much-worn slop-suit, flannel shirt, and carelessly-knotted black tie.

"This is Ivan Evarchus Rousky," said Anna, at once introducing him to her companion. "Is that right?" she laughed—"and Miss——?" She paused, in order to give Portia time to decide by what name she would choose to be called.

Rousky had turned his eyes like beacon-fires upon her. In obedience to a curious impulse that she could not account for to herself, and as though that look, like the very touch of Truth, could penetrate all disguises, she said simply, "Portia," and went on with her dinner. Rousky bowed, but paid no further attention to her. Anna drew a book from her coat pocket, printed in characters which suggested nothing to Portia's imagination save the "unknown tongues" in type, and opened it at a passage which she asked him to read aloud for her.

"The *Kreuzer Sonata!*" he murmured, turning it over; his manner of pronouncing his "the" had a careful precision that proved his knowledge of English to be an acquirement of later years. His voice was amazingly soft. He glanced through the pages before reading the passage Anna had asked for, absorbing their contents, as it appeared, in a manner peculiar to himself, for all the time he was softly humming the refrain of "Père la Victoire" through his closed lips. "Why did you choose that?"

"Because I've read everything else of Tolstoi's. If you don't choose to read me the passage I showed you, give me back the book."

Her tone was imperious. He raised his head and glanced at her. She returned his look, and they had a passage at arms, not in words, but—mutely—with their eyes, exchanging glances that made Portia think of keen-edged swords, and electric discharges from thunder-clouds. By-and-by, a certain troubled expression gathered in the black depths of Anna's eyes. She lowered them gently, and Rousky read aloud, in a language which, despite the musical cultivation of his voice, corresponded, to

Portia's thinking, with the break-jaw complexity of the characters, the passage that Anna had pointed out to him.

The reading was followed by a conversation in which our heroine felt, as she owned to herself, very much “out of it.” The names of Tolstoi, Dolstoievsky, Tourguénief, and many others, about which they spoke, were all unknown to her. To Anna and her friend they seemed to furnish a topic for endless discussion. “Tolstoi!” said Rousky once, with a shrug, “he is only a kind of neonomian!” Whereupon Anna demanded that the signification of the word “neonomian,” and its applicability to Tolstoi, should be expounded to her. But to do this it was necessary to refer to the *Kreuzer Sonata* once more, and to determine just what Tolstoi had in his mind when he wrote it. When they came to this part of their subject Rousky relapsed into French, and Anna answered him in the same language, so that Portia, notwithstanding the fact that she strained her ears and her brain to the uttermost, only gleaned fragmentary bits of the conversation. Occasionally, however, she heard things which inclined her to surmise that perhaps, after all, it was as well that her powers of comprehending the whole should be so limited. Her mental pabulum hitherto had been of the milk-for-babes quality, and the kind she was assimilating now would have been pungent fare even to seasoned palates. Besides which, though Anna and her friend appeared very much in earnest in what they were talking about, they did not seem to affix any standard of right or wrong to the actions of the characters they discussed. How they would probably have felt themselves if they had been placed under conditions which induced them to commit a murder like the hero of a book they were talking about was a notion, for instance, that they discussed quite calmly. Portia was a little shocked at this. She heard them characterise conduct as weak or strong, but never as right or wrong. Nevertheless, she could not help being interested in watching Rousky's eyes. He did not seem to pay any heed to his “portion,” which Anna had ordered while he was speaking, and without consulting him (as though she knew what his preference must be beforehand), but talked on with the curiously *illuminated* look that had attracted Portia from the first. Hardly twenty-four hours since she had left her home, and into what a strange new world she seemed to have entered already! She could not imagine what part in it she should find to play. There were moments when a spasm of home-sickness overcame her, and she felt tempted to run back to England as fast as she had run away from it. But in England she would not be her own mistress. She had always understood that there a husband might *force* his wife to live with him, and she could not be sure that even Wilmer could protect her against a husband armed with legal rights. There was something, too, in the

utter freedom of the lives of all these people around her that was beginning to exercise its fascination upon her. Each one evidently did as he pleased, went where he pleased, and lived as he pleased. There could be no Mrs. Grundy where people did not even acknowledge the existence of that formidable abstraction. After Rousky had finished his dinner he asked, "You will be in this evening?"

"*We* shall be in," said Anna pointedly, glancing in Portia's direction. "You can come up all the same; and you had better bring Mr. Eames and your Polish friend with you, too."

Chapter XV

ONE is inclined to regret sometimes that after Shakespeare had drawn his inspired picture of the seven ages of man, he did not add thereto a similar presentment of the seven ages of woman. The first and the last of these would have been evidently the same for both sexes, but the intervening period—the one which marks the rise and decline of woman's influence—the phases during which she is unconscious of her power and uses, it, or is conscious of it and abuses it, would have been of a very different kind, and might have marked a history as strange and eventful as that of any man “who in his time plays many parts.” Maidenhood and wifehood and motherhood might have represented each their separate act, fraught with at least as great a significance as the ages of the lover, the soldier, and the justice, and writers in succeeding ages would have had their choice of seven feminine parts to which they might have adapted their heroines, as well as of seven masculine parts for their heroes. In that case Portia might have found her place in the act which corresponds to the third age in the history of Shakspeare's man. But the act would have been subdivided, in this instance, into many separate scenes; and to her own thinking the scene of her life with Anna upon the *quatrième* of the tall house in the Rue de Vaugirard would not assuredly have been one of the least strange.

She had been nearly a week under the shelter of her friend's roof when we see her sitting alone, with a letter from her husband in her hand, enclosed under cover of a missive from her faithful Eliza. Anna had gone to market, bidding her, as she left the room, be ready to accompany her on her return to the studio of a famous painter, where Portia was to begin her apprenticeship to the career of a model. The place was steeped in the calm, warm atmosphere of eight o'clock in the morning, under an August sky; and the distant noises from outside—the rumbling of the great omnibuses, the crashing of the carts and carriages, the strident street-cries—among which the “Marchand d'ha—bi-i-i-i,” with the long-drawn nasal prolonging of the last syllable, had such a dreary sound—reached her ears through the open window in a kind of softened cadence. The hour would have been considered as still very early in the Kensington mansion. Had it not been looked upon as an astonishing feat on Portia's part to go to the Academy even later in the day in that far-away time, so near as regarded the date, so immeasurably far as regarded her own feelings, when she had met Harry Tolhurst on the steps? Here, on the contrary, the morning seemed to be well on—for before eight o'clock much had already been done in Anna's

atelier. The room had been done for one thing. Anna, in morning *déshabille*, with a towel twisted round her head, had swept the floor, while Portia had dusted and tidied. Then there had been the door to open five times in succession—twice for the concierge, who brought the water for the tubs and came up afterwards with the letters; and then for the baker's woman, with her yard-long loaves; for the milk-woman, who filled the can hanging to the door-handle; and for the *Auvergnat* with the sooty face who brought the *braise*. They had breakfasted, besides, upon their usual meal of *café au lait* and *petits pains*, and Portia had washed up and put by the breakfast things. The week had gone by slowly—not that the time had hung heavily on her hands, for every hour had been charged with some new and strange experience, but that it seemed as though untold ages had elapsed since she had left her home. She had performed the operation known as shaking into place quickly enough as regarded her bodily requirements, but the adjusting of her mind to her new surroundings had not been so easy a task. If she had had a vocation as Anna had, or passionate convictions like some of her friends, the untrammelled existence she was free to lead here would have been everything her heart could have desired. But she was not by any means sure that she possessed the necessary qualifications for the full and proper appreciation of such a life. She had been, as Anna had said, a mere summer insect hitherto; but her wings had been singed, and she had flown for refuge to a safe hiding-place. Nevertheless, she was still fluttering in imagination about the scenes she had left. She did not mean to hide for ever. She was quite willing in the meantime to lead the life Anna had mapped out for her: to sit and do model for her in the morning, to take long walks with her in the afternoon, to wander about the Luxembourg gardens—the quiet end of them—while Anna was at Laurens, to dine with her at Cloutz's, and help her make tea in the evening for the art-students—men and women who climbed to the *quatrième* afterwards—to earn her livelihood, and to do her duty, in short, in that state of life to which Anna would please to call her; but she could not bring herself to feel a genuine enthusiasm for such a career. She had the consciousness that she was only resting on her oars after all, and that by-and-by, she would be steering her way again through the unknown seas beyond.

Anna had enclosed Portia's letters to Eliza to a London friend, who in her turn had them dropped into various post offices in and near London, to which Eliza addressed them in turn. They were subsequently called for by her friend and despatched to Paris. By this means no clue to her hiding-place was obtainable, and, before revealing it, Portia was resolved that John should give her his written promise to help her to untie the knot she

had unwittingly helped him to tie on their wedding morning. She had not written for the first day, in deference to Anna's strongly-urged advice on the subject.

“Let them be anxious,” she said. “It won't kill them, and they'll be all the more ready to do what you want. “You let them have a notion where you are, and you'll never bring them to terms.” Nevertheless, Portia's own anxiety would not let her rest, and before she had been fifty-six hours absent— fifty-six hours that had had the effect of as many months in their influence upon John's outward appearance—Eliza had brought her mistress a note containing the words:

“DEAREST EMMA,—I am well and biding my time, leading a very peaceable existence in my hiding-place, and only anxious about you and Wilmer. When you both give me your solemn assurance that my marriage may be undone, or that, at any rate, I may go on living with you as I did when I was unmarried, and never see John again, I will come back, but not before. Pray, pray, tell me all about everything, and see that my birds have their fresh bath every morning.”

Portia had received a long letter in reply, wherein Emma had, as she would have said, “bored” out her heart to her sister-in-law. She had been inspired to recount the whole scene of the tragic discovery of the bride's disappearance in redundant German-English—how she herself had flown to the conservatory (Portia could not help smiling at the metaphor in connection with the writer's proportions) where the two gentlemen were smoking: how Wilmer thought she must have put her foot upon a snake as she had done once in the bedroom at Yarraman, this being the only occasion besides the actual one upon which she had run outside with her hair in crimps. Portia smiled once more at the vision of Emma rushing from her apartment in casual attire with pellets of hair upon her bare temples—how Wilmer had asked if she was “off her chump,” and she had replied that she was “wholly rational”; and what a terrible look John had in his eyes when he saw her come in dressed in that fashion, with the wedding ring and the opal ring in one hand and the letter for himself in the other.

It did not require Emma's assurance to make Portia believe that John had looked terrible. Had she not seen that very look in her dreams night after night since the evening of her flight, when she had dreamed that he was a raging lion? The letter entered also into as coherent a description as the writer was able to give of the scene that had ensued between the baffled bridegroom and the relatives of the bride. Wilmer and Emma had both upbraided him in turn, and he had sworn that they were in a plot to rob him of his wife; that they had nothing to do with his private concerns, and that whoever said he had a wife or a mistress when he married uttered a lie.

“And he did *stürmen* and *toben, mein Gott!*” added Emma, with consternation in her handwriting. He had said he would follow his wife to the end of the world. Portia shuddered as she read this threat, But subsequent correspondence was of a more reasoning kind. Wilmer had been very much vexed, his wife wrote, by the scandal to which Portia's conduct had given rise. Already a paragraph headed, “Elopement of a Bride on her Wedding Day,” had appeared in one of the papers. He was of opinion that Portia should have put herself under her brother's protection instead of running away and making herself a byword. “How could I?” she thought at this point. “John would have talked him over. I had nothing for it but to go.”

Such had been the nature of the correspondence between the runaway and her home until the sixth morning after her flight, which was marked by the advent of a letter from John himself.

Portia trembled and turned pale as she received it from the hands of the concierge. Sitting in the solitude of Anna's *quatrième*, like Dame Malbrook on her “tour,” she opened it with a heart-sinking it was vain to struggle against. The letter that had been warm under his touch but yesterday, was here in her hands this morning. How easily he might have come with his letter if he had only known. Involuntarily she cast a terrified glance at the door; nobody could enter without the key, and Anna, who had it in her possession, would be the last to give it up to Portia's legal lord. Angered against herself, she opened the envelope—John wrote what is known as a commercial hand—decipherable even when he had written, as now, under the stress of violent emotion, and his words were clear to his wife's comprehension at once.

“I could not write before,” the letter began. “You have put me into the state of mind when a man puts a bullet into his head like nothing at all. Why have you acted so? What satisfaction can it give you to torture me? If you had told me what was up I could have explained everything. I have never loved any woman but you, and I never shall, to my dying day. Men are not like women in those ways. You think I was fond of that girl who came and parted us just as we'd been made man and wife! I never cared a straw for her. If you hadn't been twelve thousand miles away, and if you hadn't sent me one or two letters that seemed to send a kind of a chill to my heart, it would never have happened. I wasn't so much to blame in the matter as you might think. You would say so, too, if you knew a little more about men and the world. But you were always the veriest sucking-dove in those ways, and that's another reason why I was so fond of you. I treated the girl as handsomely as I could. I've been sending her supplies to America—as much as she could want—ever since she left. It was her own

fault if she ran away and let someone else collar the money. She could have lived where she pleased, and made a good marriage; and as for the brat, though I'm in no way bound to believe what she tells me, she would have had no cause to complain. She only had to speak. What can a man do more? You wouldn't have had me marry her, would you? There's only one woman in the world, as you well know, I could ever marry—and I *have* married her. In the eyes of God and man she's my wedded wife. Portia! don't break my heart altogether. If you want to kill me, take a different way of doing it. While you're hiding away I am eating my heart out about you. You don't know what it is to feel wild about anyone as I do about you, or you would have a little pity for me. If you will let us know where you are, I swear that I will explain everything to your satisfaction. The girl herself wants you to come back. Emma says you had no money when you ran away, and she can't for the life of her think of any friends you would have cared to go to in England. Write, and make your own conditions. You don't suppose I shall rest night or day till I've found you, so you had better make your terms while you've got the right end of the stick. Don't be afraid to trust me because of anything that's happened lately.

“What I suffered when I found you had run away from me is a lesson that will about last me for the rest of my days. I ought to have told you everything, but I was afraid. I thought I'd wait until we were married and you had got to know me a little better, though it was on the tip of my tongue to tell you when I put the opal ring—that confounded ring that's done all the mischief—on your finger. Don't keep your hiding-place a secret any longer. It's too rough on us all. Wilmer wants to see us come together again, too. You shall have your own way in everything. I care for you so much that you will always have the whip-hand of me. Emma says you've upset all their plans for the autumn. They can't go away till they know where you are. If you would come back we could all make a trip together. Perhaps you would prefer that to our Norway journey that you have knocked on the head. Wherever you may be when this reaches you, my darling—for you *are my* darling, whatever happens, and the thought of you seems to choke me now as I write—let your heart move you to a little compassion for me. I am so abjectly miserable without you—I was never a great hand at letter-writing, but I could fill pages telling you of the different visions I have had of you lately. When I sit in that greenhouse of Wilmer's, with my eyes shut, and smell the peppermints and blue-gums, I declare I can see you just as you were at Yarraman in the old days—a dear little harum-scarum girl, with your hair flying over your shoulders, tearing down the paddock with the kangaroo dogs at your heels. Who would ever have thought you were going to turn into such a queen of beauty and

fashion then! I've been weak and I've been a fool. I won't deny it; but if you could see into my heart you would believe me when I say that even when I was most of a fool my heart was fullest of you— fuller than it could hold. Now, there is God's truth for you, Portia; and with the prayer that you will think I have been punished enough, I sign myself your husband, who loves you better than his life,

“JOHN MORRISSON.”

Portia sat with this letter in her hand, gazing abstractedly before her, until Anna came back, with her basket full and housewifely triumph in her tones.

“I've been to the *rôtisserie*, and you shall have *poulet* and salad for your lunch; what do you think of that? I met Mr. Eames and the Swedish girl on their way to the *atelier*. They are raving about the new model—an Italian girl. By the bye, Portia, what an ideal picture of Truth one might make of *you*, with your hair down! A pity you're so prejudiced still. I must show you Lefebvre's picture at the Luxembourg. It makes me think of what Mérimée said about artists' models, and why a *femme du monde*—a beautiful one—might be treated so much more satisfactorily. But what is the matter? Have you had bad news?”

“Bad news? No.” It is doubtful whether Portia had heard aught of Anna's words save the concluding ones. “Only I feel rather as if we were playing at cross-questions and crooked answers with our correspondence. I've had a letter from John, and—and he thinks I'm jealous.”

“And you're not?” Anna put this question sharply, with her straight, black brows drawn together over her snake-like eyes. “Perhaps you are?”

“No, indeed I'm not,” Portia answered slowly. “I've been trying to analyse my feelings ever since I've been here, and I think it's because I don't care properly for John that the feeling of jealousy had nothing to do with my running away. I know pretty well what made me do it. You see, I only married him because I thought he had a kind of sacred claim on me. I believed he had been living upon my promise for years past. When I found that in reality he had been doing nothing of the kind, my own obligation was gone. Don't you see? There was no longer any necessity for me to sacrifice myself. Then Mary had prior claims. Hers were the real ones; mine were only artificial and conventional ones. But John would have put them first, and at home they would have done the same; just because we had had the marriage service said over us. I was afraid of that; I could think of nothing better than to run away; but now, I suppose, it is nearly time to come to an arrangement of some kind—to write and say—”

“Not to write and say where you are!” interrupted Anna. “Whatever you think of doing, don't do that! Let all the *pour parlors* be carried on by

correspondence. You have everything in your favour as long as they don't know where to find you. You can dictate your own terms. I had hoped," she went to the table and began to unpack her basket, continuing to talk all the time she was placing her purchases upon plates or in jars—"I had hoped you would find interests here. I know it is dull work sitting to me in the mornings; but that was only for practice. If you knew what appreciation you would have, and what money you might earn! Of course, you could get as much money as you liked if you went back— I know that. But that is not like earning it yourself; and would it not be tantamount to selling yourself? After all, I believe you are hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt, if the truth were known!"

"What, the home fleshpots! Oh, no!" said Portia, smiling. "But," she leaned her head upon the window-sill with a gesture of discouragement, "I feel now as I did when I was living what you called the summer insect life. What is it to lead to?"

"What does anything lead to?" said Anna, gloomily. "A little less, or a little more; what does it matter? Who was that Frenchman who said of the universe that it was the work of the Devil gone mad? If you reason about things, you may come to that conclusion as well as any other. What you have to think about is, what each day brings. I believe your days here would bring you a sense of independence and power you have never known before—if you will make a little longer trial of them. You would find a zest in life, when you realised that you could do exactly as you liked with it, that you have no idea of now. You are still under the influence of a multitude of conventional ideas and prejudices. Wait until you have shaken yourself a little more free of them before you ask what your life here will lead to."

"You have shaken yourself free of them, I suppose, Anna?" The question seemed to rise unbidden to Portia's lips, "Are you quite content and happy in your life?"

"Content and happy? Who *is*? who stops to consider whether he is or not? 'Oui! de leur sort tous les hommes sont las!' It was Hugo who said that. But I would as soon go to prison as go back to my old life—rather, in fact, for there would be less pretence about it. However, try and hold out a little longer. We're to see about your pose this afternoon, and we can go to the Luxembourg afterwards; then Cloutz's; and we'll wind up with the Gaieté Montparnasse, if it's a cool evening."

Chapter XVI

IF Portia had been told to mount her horse anywhere in the wilds of Australia, and to ride in a beeline from one given point to another, with nothing but her own bird-like instinct of locality to guide her, she would have obeyed without the smallest hesitation. But when Anna desired her to explore unaided the old and new streets of the Quartier Latin, she avowed that she was afraid of the undertaking. The dangers that might befall her in the Bush, where to lose her way, to be thrown from her horse, or, worst of all, to be “stuck up” by a “sun-downer,” were contingencies that pointed to the most tragic endings, seemed as nothing compared with the formidableness of finding herself in such unknown labyrinths as the precincts of the Sorbonne or the Odéon, with the consciousness that she was being observed and tracked by some casual admirer. Upon the first occasion that she had become aware that she was followed she had never doubted that the person so following her was a private French detective in John's employ; and when she heard the formula, “Permettez-vous que je vous accompagne, made-moiselle?” she had hurried on with an expression of such genuine terror in her face that her chance adorer had been discouraged, and had fallen behind. “That's only their way of showing their appreciation; you needn't take any notice of it,” Anna had said, laughing, when Portia tremulously recounted her adventure. But the sense of being noticed and pursued in any fashion, under present circumstances, was such a terrifying one that she preferred to sit and think, or to sit and *brood*, as Anna called it, alone, when the latter was away, to venturing out by herself. Nothing could have marked more plainly the difference between the Portia of a few weeks back and the Portia of to-day—the Portia who had set out so gaily in the ruddily-gathering fog by herself to visit the Academy, and the Portia who shrank now from going unaccompanied round the corner.

“It's to do the Lorelei you'll be wanted,” Anna explained to her the same afternoon as they were walking together along the unfrequented end of the Rue d'Assas, bordering the Luxembourg Gardens— “ ‘and she combed her golden hair,’ you remember, don't you? Delstanche” (she named a painter since celebrated) “thinks you must have come into the world for the express purpose.”

“I wonder why you care so much to have me pose,” observed Portia, reflectively; “you make such a point of it, Anna! And it never seems to me that it is really earning money to make it in that way. I might be an idiot—I should earn it all the same. It is not as though I had to work for what I get, or as though it cost me any trouble. I feel ashamed to be paid for just sitting

still. There is nothing to *do*. I only have to *be*——”

“You little goose!”—Anna's tones were incisive and disdainful—“that is just the glory of it. It is not for anything grafted on to you; it is for being you yourself that you are paid. Did you never read what Renan says about a beautiful woman being the highest expression of the Creator's power? That is the way you should look at it. As for not earning what you get like any one else, that is all nonsense. One person has a fine voice, and makes money by it. Another has brains, and he makes money by *them*. You have what is better than either.”

“I can't think that,” said Portia, sceptically; “that is only your way of looking at it, Anna. Besides, one has to work hard to cultivate a voice and brains; but to pose, one has nothing to cultivate— that is just what I complain of.”

“One has to cultivate the art of keeping still— which you have not quite acquired yet, my dear, let me tell you. I can see you are dead-beat sometimes . . . But you want to know why I make such a point of having you pose. I'm afraid it's just for the gratification of producing you. A model like you is as rare in her way as a Patti or a Sarah Bernhardt in hers. Then you happen to be going through an experience that intensifies all your natural advantages. You needn't laugh; what I am telling you is perfectly true. Any one can see you are not thinking of yourself when you pose. I don't know what you are thinking of, but you have a kind of abstracted look in your eyes, and *that* coupled with their curious colour, makes them just like an Undine's or a Lorelei's. And then your wonderful hair! Your hair and your skin are exactly the kind that artists rave about, and so seldom find.”

Portia made no reply to this tirade. Perhaps her thoughts had already been wandering in other directions. She had not forgotten to deliver Anna the message her gentleman-help had confided to her the day of her arrival, and there had been hardly an evening since upon which Mr. Eames, as he was called, had not knocked at their door upon their return from Cloutz's. Sometimes he stayed an hour, sometimes longer. He would begin the conversation by talking artistic “shop” to Anna, and Portia would marvel at the animation they showed in discussing “plein air” and “impressionist toiles.” But after a while Rousky and his Polish friend, or some newer interest of Anna's, would monopolise her attention. She and her fellow-smokers would form a little group apart, and Portia would be left to talk to Mr. Eames alone. She could not help feeling that he was interested in her, and that he showed his interest by trying, not obtrusively, but naively, to find out who and what she was. She had decided with Anna that she should be called by her mother's name of Drew, and no one among her new

entourage suspected that she was other than Miss Drew, or that she had been at any time of her life though the marriage ceremony. She could not talk about pictures to Mr. Eames; but they had other points in common. He was fond of music and played with expression, though with little science or execution. Portia also loved music, and allowed herself to be persuaded to sing her simple ballads of "Ben Bolt" and "Robin Adair" to please him. He seemed to take it for granted that she knew infinitely more than was the case, and often when he was speaking to her she was obliged to interrupt him by asking for information upon some point that was evidently only the A B C of his theme. But she had explained to him that she came from Australia, and, far from making her feel "small," when she confessed her ignorance he appeared to take a delight in placing her on the same level as himself, and implying that she could teach him perhaps even more than he could teach *her*. Her gentleman-help was the only artist, excepting Harry Tolhurst, whom Portia had met, and she was willing now to like the whole tribe.

"Does Mr. Eames paint good pictures?" she asked of Anna, after a long pause, with apparent inconsequence in the question, though in reality it was the result of a long train of thought.

Anna replied with a shrug; the gesture was so natural and appropriate that one would never have supposed that she was not to the manner born. "He makes wonderful beginnings," she said; "perhaps he will make good ends, too, some days. But here we are at Delstanche's. Mind, now, you pull out that silver arrow from your hair when I tell you."

While Portia Morrisson, *alias* James, *alias* Drew, is engaged in putting on the attributes of the soul-and-body-alluring Lorelei, her friend Mr. Eames has been busily engaged in making a sketch from memory of her in his studio. He is so much engrossed in it, and there is such a fascination in evoking the image of her charming figure standing near the piano, that it is only when a man's step mounting the staircase stops before his door, and a voice he recognises calls from the landing outside, "Let me in, old fellow," that he desists from his work. But before going to the door he has thrust his sketch, with a heap of others, into a portfolio. Miss Drew's image on paper must not be revealed to indifferent eyes, any more than the image of her he is beginning to carry about in his mind. "Heart" would be, perhaps, the more fitting word to use in this connection, though Mr. Eames, perhaps, was not aware of it himself in his present phase.

"And you never sent me word you were coming," he said reproachfully, a moment later, and after a grip of the hands had been exchanged between himself and the new-comer.

"I didn't know it myself till last night, to tell the truth," replied Harry

Tolhurst—for the young man in the ulster, with the canvas-covered paint-box in his hand, to whom Mr. Eames had just opened the door, was none other than Harry. “I knew I should find you in the old place. And how are you getting on, old fellow? You got your ‘Saint Bavon’ into the Salon all right?”

“N—no, I didn't;” the admission was made reluctantly. “I wasn't satisfied with it in the end.”

“And you made such a splendid *ébauche*. You want someone to wrench your work away from you when you've brought it up to a certain point, I fancy. What are you at work on now?”

“Oh, I've half a dozen things in hand. I'll show them to you by-and-by. Tell me first though—I'm awfully glad to see you—but why didn't you give me warning? You're not looking up to the mark, by any means. You haven't had the influenza——”

“Influenza? No. I've been rather knocked out of time by a trouble I've been mixed up with lately, that's all. I thought I'd propose a walking tour in Brittany, if you haven't made any plans of your own.”

“Brittany be bothered! I haven't any money. Let's go to Barbizon.”

“That wouldn't be any cheaper. Besides, it's no use to potter about the forest. I want to go in for active exercise of some kind. I think I need it.”

“You look as though you did, old man! 'Pon my word, I believe you must have had the influenza, after all—or you've been overdoing it somehow.”

“Perhaps I *have* been working too hard,” admitted Harry; but the admission was obviously made for the purpose of putting an end to the cross-examination to which his friend seemed inclined to subject him. “And how are all the Paris lot? Is Miss Ross always to the fore?”

“Rousky's to the fore,” responded Mr. Eames, shortly. He paused a moment, and continued: “There's a girl, a young lady, staying with Anna Ross just now.”

“Ah!” said Harry, indifferently.

“Yes. You'll see her to-night, I expect, at Cloutz's. I should like to know what you think of her.”

“Ah!” said Harry again. “*Pour cause?*”

“*Pour cause*—if her presence accounts for the fact that I am irresistibly drawn to Anna's studio every evening. But I'm afraid she's not a *permanent*; she's only some beautiful bird of passage. With us, and not of us.”

“It's as serious as that!” said his friend smiling. Harry's smiles were, as we have seen, extremely rare; and it would seem that they had become more fleeting as well, for his face relapsed almost immediately into its accustomed *morne* expression.

His companion, meanwhile, was already half regretting the confidences he had made. To tell the truth, it was only the longing to find a pretext for speaking about Portia that had prompted him to make them at all, though perhaps he was not loth to let his friend know at the same time that the priority of right of paying particular court to the charming bird of passage overhead was, in a measure, bespoken. A growing interest of a tender description will manifest itself sometimes in an irresistible desire to speak of the adored object in season and out of season; and until Harry appeared upon the scene, there was no one to whom Portia's gentleman-help could unburden himself in any degree respecting the nature of the sentiment she had awakened in him. He did not go so far, however, as to display his memory-sketch of her to Harry. There were a hundred congenial topics for the newly-restored friends to talk about without entering into their *affaires de coeur*, as women would have done in their place—their own works and that of their fellow-artists being naturally the most congenial topic of all. Harry had to be posted up in all the latest gossip of the *atelier*, to be informed as to which of the band was *arrivé*, who among them had “exposed” at the Salon, who had been lucky enough to have his *toile* purchased by the French Government, and a great deal more to the same effect. Occasionally, however, he would relapse into the kind of reverie known as a “brown study” (though why a study should be brown, while the devils of despondency are blue, is a fact that no one has ever satisfactorily explained), and would apparently gaze right through the “St. Bavon” that he had been criticising in his friend's behoof, or beyond it, to some intangible picture of his own evoking. At these moments a puzzled look would flit across Mr. Eames's pleasant blue eyes, and turning around to place his picture against the wall, he would hum softly—

“Elle avait des manières très bien,
“Elle était coiffée à la chien,
“Elle chantait comme une petite folle,
A Batignolles.”

“Let's take a turn in the Luxembourg before dinner,” he said at last. “It seems to me you want rousing up, old man!”

“All right,” assented Harry coming back to himself with an effort from the visionary regions he had been wandering in. “But haven't you to get ready first?”

“Ready! That won't take me long. I'm ready now.”

He had been, in point of fact, peeling off his plum-coloured jersey and dragging it over his head as he spoke, and now substituted in its place a

morning coat and artistically-knotted Lavallière tie.

A Tam-o'-Shanter completed his costume; and thus attired, with his pipe and tobacco-pouch thrust into his pocket, he followed his friend out of the studio.

It was an afternoon upon which the band of the Garde Républicaine had been announced to play in the Luxembourg Gardens, and, though the performance was drawing to a close, the crowd was still great. In the close neighbourhood of the music all the chairs were taken, but a throng of promenaders was circling round them, amid which the grisettes of the Quartier Latin mustered in full force. Harry paused a moment before joining in the round to take in the details of the scene. It had been familiar enough to him during his last long residence in Paris, but it came upon him now with an air of novelty. Looked at from a surface point of view, it was a gay and enlivening spectacle enough. What prettier setting for holiday-makers assembled in the open air would it be possible to find than this exquisite commingling of nature and art—this glorious profusion of trees and lawns, and terraces and parterres, and fountains and statues, blended into a stately and harmonious *mise en scène*? There, as he remembered it, was the grotto of the monster Polyphemus, with the water still musically coursing over the white body of the beautiful nymph Galatea. Away in front of him were the rigid statues of the Queens of France, ranged in stony propriety against their background of leafy green. To his right, the descending steps of the terrace leading to a vast parterre of flowers, worthy of framing the “stately pleasure dome” of Kubla Khan, in the midst of which a mighty jet of water rose and fell, lazily and without effort, as though it were dancing up and down for its own pleasure alone. Among the crowds of listeners the streaming ribands of the *nourrices* and their gold-pinned capes made a pretty variety, while around the feet of the fat French *mamans* and *bonnes* the little *chérissés* and *bibiches* in limited number (for olive-branches in France are a luxury not to be too recklessly indulged in) turned up the dusty soil with their miniature wooden spades.

The band was playing the *Marche Indienne* as Harry and his companion drew near, and the wild joyousness of the strain seemed to harmonise well with the scene around them. Harry centred his attention upon the students and the grisettes, as being the newest element that the show could furnish him after his long severance from Quartier Latin ways. He saw that the students walked by themselves, and the grisettes by themselves, either in arm-in-arm couples or in affectionate clusters of threes and fours, and whenever one group or couple passed or met another group, a word, or a nod, or a passing “Hé, mon petit!” or “Tiens, ma belle!” testified to the friendly relations existing between them. Some of the grisettes—modistes,

perhaps, in their own right—wore wildflower-wreathed hats that recalled a vision of Portia on the Academy morning to Harry's mind. Others, apparently of the *blanchisseuse* order, who possessed nothing, in all probability, but their bodies in their own right, wore no hats at all. These, however, were always daintily *coiffé*, and all bore alike a certain air of trim neatness and artistic nattiness. Few possessed pretty faces, and among those who had lost their first freshness more than one had hard eyes and an animal mouth. It was in vain that Harry sought to discover a Mimi Pinson among them. He turned away from the spectacle with a grave face, while his friend laughed, and observed:

“A page out of the *Vie de Bohème*. You should go to the Bal Bullier to see the *suite*.”

“I don't care to see it,” he said, with a sigh, “when I think it's been going on since Murger's time—and how long before?—and that it will be going on when all these people are dead and gone. I feel like that Duke—I forget his name—I should like to build myself a place underground, and never come out of my hole again.”

The bitterness with which Harry said these words struck painfully upon his friend's ear. “There's something more than influenza in this,” he said to himself sagely. “Whatever the trouble that he's been mixed up with may be, it's evident he's been pretty hard hit; it's gone deep.”

“Come on, old fellow!” he added aloud. “Don't do the King Solomon business over again. It's very pleasant while it lasts, and where's the use of looking ‘before and after’? I wish you would tell me your yarn. I'm as open with you myself as a child. Come on to the bench over there, and let's have a smoke.”

Now, as Fate or Chance would have it—for Fate and Chance mean much the same thing—at the very moment when the two young men were about to take their seats upon the empty bench on the other side of the broad avenue, beneath one of the properest of the stone queens arrayed in her chiselled *vertugadin*, Portia was crossing the same spot from the opposite end of the garden. Her visit to the painter, Delstanche, had not been altogether as satisfactory to herself as to Anna. She had been made to take her hair down, and to show her neck and arms in all their summer whiteness; and though she had done as much times out of mind during the past week while she had been posing for Anna, to do so on the present occasion had seemed a formidable ordeal. Anna had upbraided her for her self-consciousness, and had declared that she had no true feeling for art, otherwise she would have been glad to consecrate her beautiful person to the cause; and had left her, after thus scolding her, to go to Colla Rossi's studio, but not until she had shown her friend how she might return

through the Luxembourg Gardens alone. Portia had sat for a long time in a secluded corner of these, out of the way of the crowd and the band, thinking drearily of what she should do, and only solacing herself by glancing from time to time at the evening sky, made up of a mass of dark grey clouds, through which the declining sun seemed to burn redly in patches and scratches of flame. After a time she noticed that the bench she was sitting on had another occupant. A Frenchman of the *méridional* type (though, to our heroine, he was neither more nor less than a Frenchman), with swarthy skin and piercing black eyes, was eyeing her with undisguised admiration. She looked away in the vain effort to appear unconscious of his glance, but the tell-tale colour mantling over cheek and neck betrayed her. He moved a little nearer, and said abruptly:

“Mon Dieu! mademoiselle, ne vous effrayez pas. Mais vous êtes tellement jolie—on aurait de la peine à ne pas vous regarder, et——”

Portia did not give him time, however, to finish all his sentence. At the first words she had jumped from her seat with the rapid movement of a frightened bird, and was walking away, straight in front of her, with no definite idea but to escape. She heard quick footsteps behind her, and the same voice that had already addressed her repeated reproachfully, “O, la cruelle!”

Notwithstanding her real alarm the solemn absurdity of this denunciation was almost too much for Portia's gravity. But she felt that to lose her dignity at this juncture would be fatal. She walked on, therefore, looking neither to the right nor the left, with her head erect; quite unmindful of the fact that two young men, new-comers these, were about to cross her path diagonally.

“*There's* an illustration of the hawk and the pigeon game,” Mr. Eames said. He had taken in the situation at a glance. “It wouldn't be a bad idea for a *tableau de genre*. *Why*”—his voice changed suddenly, and its tones become strangely eager, “if I don't believe—no, surely—it *can't* be—yes, it is—it is—it's she—it's *Miss Drew!*”

“*That* Miss Drew!” echoed Harry. It was all that in the profound astonishment of the discovery he could find voice to say, for at this moment Portia looked round, and a shock of mutual recognition ensued between them.

The quality that renders a man of the world so valuable in an emergency is, above all, his presence of mind. Having reached the point at which nothing can any longer take him by surprise, he never commits the blunder of losing his head, but keeps his mind clear for action under the most startling and unforeseen circumstances. Harry Tolhurst was not perhaps, strictly speaking, a man of the world in this sense. The surprise of suddenly

beholding the woman who had become such a living memory to him; the woman whom he believed to be lost to him for ever—to be married indeed, and wandering over Europe with her husband (for Mary had disappeared since the morning when she had rushed with her child, like one demented, from his studio, and there had been no one to inform him of the sequel to Portia's wedding); the astonishment of encountering her here in Paris under a new name, a name that belonged to her neither as maid nor as wife; of finding her transformed into a denizen of the Quartier Latin, and a guest of the emancipated Anna; roving about the Luxembourg by herself, and fleeing before unwelcome attentions—the shock of it was so great that he was unable at first to command his countenance. Portia had “gone white,” as the common people say, on beholding him, and to a casual observer it might have seemed that these two young people, meeting by accident upon a lovely summer's evening in the brightest place in creation, must have taken each other for ghosts, so unduly startled did they appear. To anyone who had witnessed the exquisite rendering of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Lyceum there would have been a something, however, underlying the terror in Portia's eyes that might have dimly recalled the expression in Juliet's face when she beheld Romeo for the first time. Though not a man of the world, Harry was able to divine that there was more than one cause for the emotion his presence had aroused. That Portia wished him to appear as though he did not recognise her was evident to him from the half-imploring glance that followed her first uncontrollable start of surprise. It was well for both, perhaps, that the gentleman-help was so wholly engrossed in his own share of interest in the meeting, and that three subjects filled his mind at this moment to the exclusion of all others: the first being disappointment that he could not gratify his impulse to pommel the *méridional* on the spot; the second, the desire to know whether Miss Drew's sudden pallor was to be entirely ascribed to the emotion consequent upon having been accosted, or whether his own appearance as a rescuer could have had any share in it; and the third the regret that he had come out in his Tam-o'-Shanter, and was obliged to feel himself so altogether unfit an object to accompany the perfectly dressed lady of his allegiance.

By the time he had made up his mind that none of these subjects could be satisfactorily disposed of at the present moment, Portia had been enabled to recover a certain degree of *sang-froid*, and Harry had mastered himself sufficiently to become a party to the farce of being formally presented to her by his friend. Under ordinary circumstances there would have been nothing to justify Mr. Eames in doing more than raising his hat and passing on—but Fate seemed to have willed that he and Miss Drew should never meet save under extraordinary circumstances. Had not they broken the ice

once and for all when he had done “*porte-faix*” and “water-carrier,” to say nothing of all-round gentleman-help, for her upon the first occasion of his meeting her as she sat helpless upon the stairs outside his room? And was he going to abandon her now, when he encountered her speeding like a fluttered bird before the unwelcome advances of an insolent foreigner! There was every warrant, he told himself, for stopping to speak to her—he did not add that even had there been none at all he would probably have done the same. But he addressed her in the soft, half-caressing, half-protecting voice that came to him instinctively when he spoke to a pretty woman. He asked permission to see her safe through the Gardens (“safe” seemed an allowable adjective in the face of what he had just witnessed), and he excused himself for being in such ragamuffin trim; and finally he bethought himself of his friend, in whose direction Miss Drew had studiously refrained from looking, and begged to be allowed to introduce Mr. Harry Tolhurst, a distinguished painter and Academician “*en herbe*” to her notice.

Portia bowed assent, and for one brief instant Harry's eyes encountered her in full. Well may the eyes be called the windows of the soul when so much can stand revealed through them in the mearest flash of time. That Portia understood and appreciated his reticence, that she was grateful to him beyond words for having exercised it and that she trusted—yes, that she *trusted* him entirely—all this Harry could read in that one transient glance. The knowledge that he shared a secret with her, unknown to anybody else in the world (bewildering as the existence of a secret of any kind undoubtedly was, and terrifying as the revelation of a mystery of any kind in connection with her pure young life must necessarily appear), was the greatest possible solace to him. Just as he had parted from her in Piccadilly, after that red-letter, radiant white-stone morning he had spent with her at the Academy, so she appeared to him now? The very dress that clung in its tailor-made folds round her supple, beautiful form—the very rose-splattered hat, under whose broad rim he had last looked into her eyes, were the same. The intensity of his recollection of her was made clear to him as he measured the resemblance between it and the living, breathing woman in front of him. It must have been a prophetic intuition surely that had made him attribute the “seediness” that his friend had detected in him to a “trouble he had been mixed up with;” for the trouble had been none other than Portia herself, and though the “mixing up” had not as yet occurred, it seemed likely to take place now. But how far would she trust him?—how far would her spoken confidences ratify the assurance of her belief in him that he could read in her eyes? It could be nothing but a providential interposition surely that had sent him to the very place to

which she had fled for refuge, in order that he might be at hand to help and perhaps to save her. Anna Ross's *quatrième* was not perhaps the precise ark of refuge in which he would have cared to see a sister of his own take shelter; but Portia, in her transparent innocence, was no doubt like Charity—fearing nothing, believing all things, and hoping all things.

To think, however, that his friend Eames's babble concerning the stranger overhead—the beautiful bird of passage, as he had called her—should have had none other than Portia James for its object! How different from the unconcerned “Ah!” with which he had greeted the communication, would have been his manner of receiving it, if he could have had the least idea to whom it referred. The thought that Portia might still be free; that her marriage announcement which he had read in the papers (would he ever forget the chill it had sent through all his being?) was the result of some ghastly blunder, made his heart beat high with hope. He watched with jealous eyes for the manifestation of some particular sympathy existing between his friend and the supposed Miss Drew; but Portia's manner reassured him. Not so his friend's! That the gentleman-help had been, in vulgar parlance, “bowled over” would have been clear to less jealous eyes than his. Portia was the same, and yet not the same. She had lost the *enjouement* that he remembered, which had been a great charm. But she had gained something in its place that seemed to rivet him to her more closely still. When he had thought of her hitherto, it had been as of Undine before she had awakened to the possession of a soul, or as of the little mermaid before she had acquired a pair of white human feet and immortality by walking over knives. He could have fancied that Portia was walking over the knives now, and that the dawn of the newly-awakened soul was reflected in her eyes. If he had been walking by her side in the Palace of Truth he would have spoken out his thoughts concerning her; but as he was walking under the eyes of a third person, and as she had chosen to appear in the character of the young lady to whom he had been only just introduced, he maintained a discreet silence. To feign indifference was his only refuge. Under the actual circumstances he felt that he could not trust himself to speak.

Mr. Eames, for his own part, thought it wiser to abstain from making any reference to the hawk-and-pigeon episode he had witnessed, but he promised himself that he would be at hand upon the very next occasion that it should befall Miss Drew to sit in the Luxembourg Gardens alone.

“Miss Ross is not with you?” he said inquiringly; his tone seemed to imply that she ought to have been. “I thought I saw you go out together.”

“She had to go to Colla Rossi's,” replied Portia. “She told me to meet her at Cloutz's at six; and there is a book I promised to call for at the *atelier*

first on the way.”

“May *I* get it for you?” he asked; “or may we wait for you until you are ready, as we are going to Cloutz's too?”

“Thanks,” said Portia, hesitatingly; “but, indeed, I know my way so well from the *atelier* now.”

Though her words conveyed no absolute refusal of the offer, Harry gathered from them that she did not wish to *afficher* herself in public—the public at Cloutz's—with Mr. Eames, and he rejoiced thereat in his heart. The latter, however, did not allow himself to be discouraged.

“I hope you will keep places for us at your table, then,” he said, “Or, if we are there first, shall we keep yours at ours? Tolhurst and Miss Ross are old friends.”

“Oh, are they?” said Portia, raising her eyes shyly towards Harry's face as she spoke. “I must prepare Anna for the meeting. I am sure she will be very pleased.”

It was the first time she had looked in his direction, though she was walking between the two young men as they made their way along the gravelled terrace fronting the ancient palace, bordered by the trim row of orange trees in green tubs. The pleasant feeling of complete ease which she had known when she had last encountered Harry was gone. She had herself willed that he should pass for a stranger in her eyes: yet how could she bring herself to address him as a stranger when he was in reality so closely bound up with all the associations that she clung to most in her past life? She had not said to him in so many words, like the conspirators in a burlesque, “Let us dissemble.” But her eyes had said it for her, and he had dissembled accordingly. What could he have thought of the obligation she had thus laid upon him? There was yet another curious sensation respecting him in her mind. Though the feeling of being at ease in his society had disappeared, the knowledge of the tacit understanding existing between herself and him, the sense of the secret they were sharing together unknown to all (for even Anna need not be told that Harry was a former acquaintance), seemed to have brought her into closer communion with him than ever. She remembered how she had felt in her childish days when a household birthday was in store and a surprise was to be operated upon Emma or Wilmer—how the person with whom she shared the secret involved in the preparation of the surprise had assumed quite a new importance in her life; how the interchange of a look had become an action fraught with a mysterious significance of its own; how the idea of “*we know something*” seemed to be expressed in every gesture of the person who was in partnership in her secret, and what good friends it had made them as long as the secret lasted. Were these the terms upon which she

would find herself placed henceforth with Harry, or was he condemning her in his mind for having a secret at all? He had answered her look of inquiry when Anna's name was mentioned, but his voice had sounded formal and distant.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Ross at Julian's some three years ago," he said. "Does she go there still?"

"No; she is at Laurens' now, and she works out of doors a good deal besides."

"Yes, she is a tremendous worker," put in Mr. Eames. "She is *serieuse*, as they say at the *atelier*. That reminds me, Tolhurst, you must see her old woman on the beach at Etretat. As a 'plein air' it is capital, full of air and light. By the bye, what has become of your Madonna? A lot of fellows here have told me about it. They say you could never have painted such a picture if you hadn't done your time in Paris. Where is she now?"

"Well, the picture is hanging in my studio," said Harry. "The dealers would have none of it although the critics waged a fierce war over it. As for my model, she left me *en plan*. That is one of the reasons why I came over. I was at work upon a fresh subject with the same model, and about a week ago she disappeared, and I have not been able to find a trace of her so far."

"Fancy that!" said Mr. Eames, with mock solemnity, and he softly chanted:

" 'Je l' ai aimee autant que j' ai, pu
Mais j' ai pas pu lorsque j' ai su
Qu'elle me trompait avec Anatole
A Batignolles.' "

"Did you inquire at the place she lived at?" asked Portia, in a strained and eager voice. "Could they tell you nothing of her there?"

"Nothing whatever!" The interest manifested by Miss Drew in his friend's model surprised Mr. Eames not a little. "But she was not a professional model. I rather think she was a deserted wife. Her husband had sent her over from America with the promise that he would follow her, but after she reached London she heard nothing more of him; she was glad to earn a little money by posing, and I think she used to ruminate over her wrongs while she was sitting for me. I have seen her eyes flash and her lips move more than once."

"Perhaps the husband came back," said Portia, in a low voice, with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"I hope he did, for *her* sake, though not for mine. It will be a long time

before I find such a model again. I believe that must have been the explanation of the mystery though, for they told me at the place she lived at that a broad, red-bearded man—a swell (they were careful to mention that he was a *swell*)—had been to see her the day she ran away from the studio—the husband, without any doubt; and there had been a scene between the newly-united couple, as it appeared. The next morning Mrs. Morris disappeared with her baby, bag and baggage, and left no address, but behaved ‘and-some’—as her landlady told me—from which I concluded that the husband is rich, and that I may look for my model again in vain.”

“What a curious story!” said Portia. She paused, and a deep roselike flush mounted in her cheeks before she spoke again. “Do you know—did they say—could you tell me, perhaps” (she seemed to find a difficulty in framing her question). “whether the husband was finally reconciled to his—wife?—whether they stayed together, I mean?”

“I don't know the sequel,” said Harry. The interest Miss James took in his unknown model, which he had attributed in the first instance to her sole recollection of his picture (how well he remembered her telling him of her weird impression in connection with it the first time she had seen it standing by his side!), was beginning to puzzle him almost as much as Mr. Eames. “I daresay I could find out, though, if you want to be satisfied upon the point of whether they lived happily ‘ever after.’ But I'm afraid they didn't, and that they never will. She evidently had no confidence in *him*, and he seems to have left her after making the scene I was told about. Whether she intended to run after him when she left in such a hurry the next morning, or whether she was running away from him in *her* turn, I have no means of knowing. Sometimes I think she will turn up again, for, to say the least of it, she ought to have written me a line if she had no intention of coming back at all,”

“It would interest me to know, if you do hear,” persisted Portia, “I have seen the picture Mr. Eames was talking about in the Academy; I remember it very well. The child was fair and blue-eyed, and the Madonna had strange dark eyes, with a wistful look, that seemed to see some far-away vision of the cross. They were eyes that would haunt one afterwards. Mary's dress was a sort of striped blue and white drapery, was it not? And through an open space in the background you could see a glimpse of an Eastern landscape in a kind of blinding sunlight.”

“Well, if your picture impressed itself upon the memory of everyone who saw it as thoroughly as upon Miss Drew, you have no cause to complain, old man,” said Mr. Eames; “you must have struck oil this time, and no mistake! And this is the person who will never say a word about pictures to

me—who can't draw, she says!”

Harry turned towards her, with a gratified smile— one of his rare smiles—lighting up his sombre eyes.

“You must have been a good many times to the Academy, I should think.”

“Only once,” responded Portia, with an answering smile of quiet triumph in her glance. An unreasoning pleasure was coursing through her veins as she exchanged this look of secret understanding with him. Those two little words implied so much more than any but he and she could wot of.

“Only once!” echoed Mr. Eames, while Harry was hugging himself with the idea that her avowal might be construed as he would fain have construed it in his heart. “Then you have a phenomenal memory for pictures, that is all I can say; and upon the *ex pede Herculem* basis you should make a capital art critic. By the bye, Miss Ross said she was going to initiate you into the mysteries of the Gaieté Montparnasse to-night. It's a great institution. Those *cafés chantants* on the other side of the river are the abomination of desolation in my eyes, but the Gaieté is almost worthy of its name. You remember it, Harry?”

“I don't think I can boast of any acquaintance with it,” replied Harry, drily, “if it is a thing to boast of at all. Miss Ross's ways are peculiar, and tastes differ; but if the Gaieté Montparnasse is what I imagine it to be, I don't think Miss James—Miss Drew, I mean—will be particularly edified or amused by a visit there—a kind of sixth-rate Paulus-and-Thérèse entertainment, I suppose?”

“Not a bit of it! It has a line of its own,” laughed Mr. Eames. And once more he hummed:

“ ‘La morale de c'tte oraison là
C'est qu' les p'tites fill's qu'a pas d' papa
Doiv'nt jamais aller à l'école
A Batignolles.’ ”

The closing “Batignolles” had each time a long-drawn sonorous sound that fell tunefully upon the ear.

“Do tell me all the song, please,” said Portia.

“I will concoct an expurgated rendering of it, if you will allow me,” he said; “but you mustn't let yourself be prejudiced by anticipation against the Gaieté. It has its vile side, of course, if you look for it; but you won't look for it—and there is some awfully pretty singing. It's a great place, too, for seeing the populace. If Miss Ross really means to go, my friend and I” (he looked at Harry for assent) “will ask leave to accompany you. It's not a

place where a lady ought to go by herself.”

“If Miss Ross is as I remember her, she does not admit that such places exist,” said Harry.

“Well, then, we'll help her to take care of Miss Drew, who *does* admit it,” said Mr. Eames, and, the limit of the gardens being reached by this time, the two separated by the large iron gates that guard the entrance to the Luxembourg Gardens on the Rue de Vaugirard side. Portia went on her way alone. The expression that Harry read in her eyes as she wished him “Au revoir” expressed the word *Remember* as plainly as ever the voice of the murdered Charles sounding through the ages could have uttered it. Before separating, it was arranged that the party should meet again at Cloutz's half an hour later.

“Has Miss Drew been here long?” was Harry's first question as he turned away with his friend; there was no loop-hole of a pretext for running after Portia, as he was longing to do; and the burden upon his mind was only in part alleviated by finding her again under circumstances so unexpected and mysterious.

“Six days and six nights,” answered Mr. Eames sententiously; he had lit his pipe immediately the feminine element was removed from his path, and he was puffing it into savour as he spoke; “she dropped down upon us from the skies. I had never heard Miss Ross mention her name until one day, going out of the studio, I found ‘a maiden sitting all forlorn’ on the staircase, with a portmanteau that a ‘hamal’ in Constantinople would have looked at twice. She let me shoulder it for her up the stairs, and that was the informal way in which we first became acquainted.”

“And I suppose you have seen a good deal of her since!” said Harry, gloomily.

“That depends on what you call a good deal. If it were any one *but* Miss Drew I might say yes. Being Miss Drew, I feel I have seen very little of her. She is amazingly reticent too—so a good deal in any case would only go for a little. What I'm mostly afraid of is that she's only here as an ‘oiseau sur la branche’—‘a beautiful bird of passage,’ in short, as I said before. Some day she will fly away as she came. She never says a word about herself, either,” and with his pipe between his lips Mr. Eames concluded:

“ ‘Quand ell’ s’ balladait sous l’ ciel bleu
Avec ses ch’veux couleur de feu
On croyait voir une auréole
A Batignolles.’ ”

That is really the colour of her hair, you know.”

“She doesn't look as though she had been used to the kind of life Anna will induct her into,” observed Harry.

“Neither has she; she has roughed it, she told me, but in a different way. She comes from Australia, you know; that accounts for her being a little crude sometimes; but even her crudity has a charm of its own. You haven't told me what you think of her yet.”

“Of Miss Drew!” said Harry, jesuitically. “My good fellow, I can't form an opinion of a woman whom I've hardly seen.”

“You've seen enough of her to form an opinion of her looks,” I should think.

“Of her looks. Oh! she's good-looking enough, if that's what you mean.”

“What a cold-blooded, unappreciative fellow you are. Well! you may do the amiable to Anna Ross by-and-by if you choose, only leave the ‘bird of passage’ to me.”

And in the belief that his friend was totally unimpressed by the graces that he himself saw with clearer eyes every day, he conducted Harry, with a light heart, to Cloutz's.

Chapter XVII

“A party of pleasure, a party of four,
Too few if one less, and too many if more.”

THESE words occurred to Mr. Eames's mind, with a mournful sense of their inappropriateness to the occasion, as he threaded his way through the turmoil of the Rue de la Gaieté, towards the famous *café chantant* of the same name, by Anna's side, while Harry and the supposed Miss Drew followed at a respectful distance. Even a party of three would be preferable, he thought, when one of the three happened to be the right one. It was a singular fact, too, that after the almost officious display of indifference his friend had manifested towards the “beautiful bird of passage” to whom he had been recently introduced, he should have contrived, nevertheless, and apparently by accident, to fall behind with her as soon as they left the restaurant. Though to Miss Ross one part of Paris was just the same as another, and though he believed her capable of walking fearlessly about in such uncanny places as the Boulevards extérieurs, regardless even of the hideous presence of the professional *rodeurs de barrières*, he knew that it was not the same with her companion. Miss Drew still shrank involuntarily when she found herself in the noisy workmen's quarters of the Gaieté Montparnasse, where blouses and *sabots* might be said to hold the *haut du pavé*, for all the share of it they gave the passers-by of gentler associations. She would retreat into the middle of the street before the advance of some tipsy Coupeau staggering out of the shop of a *marchand de vin*, and the person accompanying her at such a time might possibly gain the inestimable privilege of having her place her hand within his arm for protection. Mr. Eames, it is needless to say, would fain have been that privileged person; but though Miss Ross walked defiantly on, keeping her place on the *trottoir* with a grim determination not to be pushed off it by all the *voyous* in Paris, and though his presence was, as he well knew, entirely superfluous upon the occasion, he could not pay her the questionable compliment of leaving her to prove her independence alone. His misgivings, however, were not allayed by perceiving, every time he glanced round in Miss Drew's direction, that the ice was apparently broken between her new friend and herself. He had imagined at the outset that, in accordance with spiritualistic theories, their *auras* must be antagonistic, and he had regretted the circumstance — moderately—for he would have liked them to be friends in reason. But

now another fear, and a keener, had taken possession of his soul. To walk as they were doing just now, with their heads inclined towards each other, they must have hit upon some wonderfully congenial topic since they had left Cloutz's, at which place he had noticed that they had hardly exchanged a word. Now the whole distance from Cloutz's to the café was not a mile: therefore the spontaneity of the sympathy was, to say the least of it, disquieting.

Harry had, however, the best of reasons, though Mr. Eames was all unaware of them, for waiving initiatory formalities when he found himself for a few moments in the unhampered enjoyment of Miss Drew's society. By a kind of mutual understanding, he and Portia had successfully evaded the manoeuvres whereby her gentleman-help sought to remain by her side as they left Cloutz's. And as it is impossible for four people to walk abreast in the evening in the Rue de la Gaieté, it followed that, by calmly maintaining his place and ignoring all his friend's transparent efforts to oust him from it, Harry had all the advantage on his side, for he was enabled to fall slowly behind with his companion. Once the others were separated from him by ever so short a distance, he might speak without fear. In the midst of the foreign crowd he and his companion were as much alone for all conversational purposes as though they had been on a desert island. They might, indeed, have shouted State secrets or talked treason in each other's ears, had they been so inclined, without anybody's being the wiser.

But State secrets and treason would not have had half the effect upon Harry of the few timid words uttered, as soon as they found themselves alone, by the girl who walked next to him. Portia plunged recklessly and without preamble into the heart of her subject—the most interesting one in the world to Harry; since it concerned herself; and if he had cherished her half-confidences before, the sensation with which he received her fuller confidences now, and the rapture of deducing therefrom that she must in part have divined the nature of the sentiment he had given her unsought, may be imagined by all who have known what it is at some period of their lives to worship “a bright particular star, and think to wed it?”

“I want to thank you,” Portia began hurriedly—the people she encountered were pushing past her, and bearing down upon her, with the swagger that is so true an expression of the mental attitude of a certain type of *ouvrier* in Paris; but Harry was there to clear a way for her—“I want to thank you, while I have the opportunity, for not seeming to know me in the Luxembourg this afternoon. I am hiding for a little. I have good reasons for it. It isn't my own fault, indeed. You may be sure of that. Anna knows all about it. But I don't want my friends to know I am here. I have taken my mother's name to make more sure. If Mr. Eames had seen that you knew

me, he might have asked questions—”

She caught her breath spasmodically between each sentence, and Harry guessed that the effort of controlling her emotion was severe. There was something in her tones that suggested a risk of her breaking into a sob between the pauses. To have answered her with any kind of ceremony, or other than straight from his heart, feeling as he did at this moment, would have been impossible to him.

“It is I who thank you for trusting me,” he said earnestly; it was necessary to speak very close in her ear in the midst of the jostling, unyielding crowd, and this was just the moment that Mr. Eames chose for taking observations in the rear. “I know we have only met a very few times, but each time has counted for so much in my life. I venture to tell you this, though I would not have dared to so soon under any other circumstances. Only I am so grateful to you for trusting me, and I should be so much more grateful if you would let me help you. I have not the least idea how you are placed; but, you see, I have the strongest motives a man can have for wanting to help you. Will you tell me what you can of your trouble? Even after our last meeting at the Academy I did an unwarrantable thing. I had not seen you in the Park or anywhere else for so long. I couldn't stand it any longer. I went to your house to inquire. You were in Paris, they said; and soon after I saw an announcement that you were married. It was only a few hours ago that the wonderful idea that you were still free dawned upon me, when I came upon you, as *Miss Drew*, in the Luxembourg.”

“I am not free!” said Portia, in low tones. “I was married the day I ran away!”

The announcement was followed by a dead silence. Harry had received what is called, in pugilistic lore, a staggerer. The hope that had beat so high an instant ago went out suddenly, leaving utter blackness behind. The “one maid, by Heaven's grace,” in all the world for him was another man's wife. It was the bride of a week that he was wooing here in this unholy atmosphere, in the midst of the stifling crowd. Do battle for her he would, as he had pledged himself to do, but without hope of guerdon. She would always be more to him than any other woman in the world, but the “bright particular star” shining overhead in attendance upon the pale moon was not farther removed from his sphere than she. Some men, learning what he had learned, would have given vent to an oath under their breath. Harry said nothing. Portia, on her side, maintained an equal silence. There was nothing to add to her avowal. She was chewing the cud of her own weakness and folly, and very bitter it tasted. By what right had she trampled down the holy instinct that had rendered John's arrival a terror to

her the morning she returned from the Academy, with her mind full of Harry's picture, and her heart full of—— But she had never owned that to herself before this evening. A little resolution—a great deal of resolution even—for the united wills of John and Wilmer and Emma made a barrier difficult to overcome—might she not have called it to her aid when all her life's happiness was at stake? Oh, if Harry had only spoken before! If, instead of *looking* his sympathy as he bade her good-bye in crowded Piccadilly, he had said the simple words “I love you!” her heart would have responded instantly. She would not have lacked the courage to fight her battle then. She would have gone armed and strong to the contest. But he had given her no such weapon to fight with. He had shown her a picture that thrust itself into the foreground, and *him* into the background. And she had been given no time for resistance, hardly time for resignation, before her fate had been sealed. And nothing but those dreary words “it might have been”—“the saddest,” as the poet has told us, “of all the sad words of tongue or pen”—remained for her to fall back upon now.

They had been making their way along a line of cheap shops and stalls, whence the acrid odours of *pommes frites* hissing in rancid fat, of slopped-over counters at the *marchands de vin*, mingled with the fumes of cigars at two for a sou, filled the air. Harry thought bitterly that it was a fitting background for the snuffing out of his love idyll. But, after the first sharp pang of personal disappointment, pity for the woman by his side overcame his egoistic suffering. It must be a dire tragedy in a young life that could drive a bride from the bridegroom's arms on the day that consecrated their union. And he had promised to help her. It might be that there were wrongs to redress, or, if redress were no longer possible, to avenge. In a few moments more the opportunity for speaking would be gone—perhaps for ever. Mr. Eames, who had never shown himself in so officious a light before, was looking round, and pointing ahead of him along the street. At the Gaieté Montparnasse there would be no possibility of exchanging a word. He hardly regretted now that the crowd should push against them so roughly. It gave him an excuse for loitering behind, and saying all that remained to be said. The silence that had seemed so long had endured perhaps only a few seconds before he was replying to her words:

“That's about as bad a piece of news as you could give me; it's no use telling you how I feel about it. The question is, can anything be done to help you? I suppose you didn't run away on your wedding-day without having a reason for it!”

“I had a reason.” Her voice had regained its wonted calm, and every word fell distinctly on her hearer's understanding. “The very day I was married, and just as I was on the point of going away with—with my

husband, a woman came with a little baby. She told me my husband did not belong to me at all—that he belonged by rights to *her*. The little baby was theirs,” she said. “She was the woman whom you had put into your picture of the Madonna. I understood, when I saw her, why it seemed to me that I must have seen something that reminded me of that picture when you showed it me for the first time. The eyes you had painted—the baby's eyes, you know—are so exactly like those of—of my husband.”

“But he isn't your husband at all, thank God!” exclaimed Harry, eagerly. “He's only a miserable impostor! He need never cross your path again unless you choose. Why did you run away? Were you afraid to denounce him? Did you—did you care for him?”

His voice sank as he asked the question, but Portia heard it and understood. Her answer nevertheless was slow in coming. If she should say *Yes*, she would be telling an untruth; if she said *No*, what must he think of her? What would any man think of a woman who would go in cold blood to the altar to swear eternal love to a man for whom she cared nothing?

“I thought I cared for him,” she said at last, employing the same subterfuge as she had had recourse to in her communings with herself. “We had been engaged almost since I was a little girl, and he had come from Australia on purpose to marry me. Everything was changed when I found out the truth.”

“And you found it out directly you came out of the church?” insisted Harry, in a husky, eager voice strangely unlike his usual measured utterance, “What a Heaven-sent miracle of salvation that was!”

He took off his hat for an instant, and wiped his forehead, round which the perspiration was pearly in thick beads.

“I was getting ready to go away upon my wedding trip with Mr. Morrisson, when Mary came and stopped me,” Portia explained; but Harry interrupted her sharply:

“Morrisson! Is that the man's name? My model called herself Mrs. Morris.”

“Did she?” The words that came next dealt a fresh stab to her hearer's heart. “I am afraid it would not have been so easy to stay behind after all and denounce *him*, as you say I should have done. For I don't think somehow the woman—was—was married to him at all. He had promised to marry her, and that seems just as binding in reality. But by law he was married to *me*. I was afraid they might force me to go on being his wife if I stayed behind, so I just ran away.”

“What! You ran away alone?”

“Yes, quite alone; but I knew that Anna would take me in, and that she would hide me until we had decided what I should do. She is a very good

friend.”

“Y—yes,” assented Harry, doubtfully. “I am sure she means to be; but she has her own way of interpreting social obligations. It's unusual, to say the least of it.”

“They are signing to us to come,” interrupted Portia, hastily. “Let me just say thank you once more.”

“If there were only something to thank me for. Tell me, could you not be in the Luxembourg, just where we met you to-day, at the same hour to-morrow? I have such a great wish to be of use to you if I can.”

“I will try. Only please don't let them think we have been talking about anything out of the way now.”

Her injunction did not come too soon. Mr. Eames had retraced his steps, and was hastening towards them as she spoke.

“Miss Ross's orders are that you hurry up,” he said. “I give the message verbatim. It seems that there is a new programme on to-night. Garçon inaugurates his latest ‘Ca la fait rire,’ and all the best places are taken.”

“You needn't stay longer than you like,” whispered Harry to his companion, as Mr. Eames elbowed a way for her through the crowd. “Only make me a sign when you are tired.”

She nodded. They had rejoined Anna by this time and found her standing as though rooted to one spot, with an expression upon her face that seemed to say not all the powers of darkness and the Quartier Montparnasse combined should cause her to budge from it.

“How you dawdled!” she said to her friend. “We'd better make haste in now,” and she led the way through a broad, covered passage that conducted into the body of the building. Portia found herself, as soon as the glare of the gas and the haze of the tobacco-smoke allowed her to take stock of her surroundings, in a small theatre of shabby appointments. Just as she had felt upon her first introduction to Cloutz's, she felt here now. If she had dared to exercise her private right of judgment, *very* more than *rather* awful would have most appropriately rendered her impressions. The spectators were on a par with the theatre—not that they were shabby, but they were dressed for the most part in the garments in which they earned their livelihood by the “sweat of their brow”; and the fact was patent to more than one of her senses. Some were ambulant vendors of oranges, *crevettes*, and other street delicacies. Others—the aristocracy these—belonged to the *petit-bourgeois* order, and were mostly habitués of the Gaieté. Sometimes their wives accompanied them; more frequently the wife remained away to mind the shop. There was a scattered contingent of *grisettes*—not unaccompanied—and a sprinkling of students and artists, with or without the latter. The seats that Anna found were a little behind

the orchestra, and, having a broad ledge in front of them, conveyed a grotesque suggestion to Portia's mind of pews in a church. There were no prayer-books, however, only *consommations* of divers kinds—bocks, *mazagrans*, and *petits verres* ranged thereupon.

“You'll have to take something,” Anna explained to her as they sat down. “Would you like to taste what absinthe is like? You need only put your lips to it.”

“Oh, please not,” cried Portia, “I'll have coffee, with milk in it.” The coffee was brought in a long tumbler. It bore a very medicinal appearance, and was accompanied by three slabs of unsweetening sugar that seemed to have been provided to take the taste away. The party of four was seated in a row, Portia between her two admirers. Mr. Eames, to make up for time wasted, addressed all his conversation to her. The orchestra was playing the waltz from *Madame Angot* as they entered, and the curtain was up, displaying a tawdry stage, with faded draperies in the background. Portia had never seen a music-hall performance of any kind before. When an ingenuous-looking youth with an occasional twist of the mouth that signified unutterable things came on the stage and proceeded to sing a dozen verses with the invariable refrain of “*Sije connaissais mon papa*,” and when he set forth in detail the various indulgences he would allow himself could the words of the refrain be realized, she laughed out loud and thought the performance exceedingly funny, without in the least comprehending the drift of it. Her naïve enjoyment of it delighted Mr. Eames. Harry, on the contrary, looked as John Knox might have looked when he was thundering in Mary's presence against the French levity of her blood. The *scabreux* element in the Gaieté songs, which was the salt of the entertainment to the rest of the audience, repelled and disgusted him. Without that element they were *fade* and meaningless. It distressed him to see Portia laughing in the innocence of her heart at jokes of which the hidden meaning would have revolted her had she been capable of understanding it. And what an epilogue her appearance here was to her marriage! A week-old bride, fresh from her girlhood's home, seated between two men who were both intent upon wooing her, laughing at utterances that she should have ignored all her life, in company with a crowd who set her down in all likelihood as the mistress of one or of both. Allowance must be made for Harry if he exaggerated the situation in his mind. He had worshipped this woman next to him as the incarnation of a dream of innocent purity, and it hurt and angered him beyond endurance to see the white wings of his divinity smirched by contact with the gross things of earth.

The next song pleased Portia even better. The singer was a woman, who,

though very plump, looked still very young, and who wore an expression of artless innocence which was almost angelic. She sang of an interview with "Monsieur le Curé," and though the air was undeniably pretty, since Portia understood very little French, and could follow none of the words, it was somewhat of a bewilderment to her to see the audience laugh so boisterously at it. This was followed by a performance which was a relief to Harry's overstrained feelings. Like the dish of sugared rose-leaves that Eastern epicures insert in a succession of highly-seasoned *plats*, it turned upon birds and springtime—upon bucolic joys and pastoral pleasures. It was sung by an elegantly dressed lady and had a *succès d'estime*. Harry expressed his satisfaction for the first time, but relapsed into moody silence a moment later when the far-famed Garçon made his appearance, and was hailed with derisive shouts of welcome from the audience. Garçon's rôle was to look like a fool, and he was dressed accordingly. He wore a red wig, and trousers that were too short for him. His face, which was blonde and shaven, had an expression of mingled imbecility and *ruse* that was in itself a triumph of art. He could put on an air of naiveté that was almost pathetic in its intensity, and could condense such volumes of suggestion into a mere quivering of the eyelid that his least gesture was the signal for a laugh. Garçon's song of the evening had a refrain called "Ca la fait rire," and described his wooing and wedding of a certain Josephine. It was boisterously encored—and at the end of it Harry shot a rapid glance in the direction of his neighbour. Portia had laughed delightedly at Garçon's face at the outset, but now she was looking away with a grave and somewhat terrified expression. Despite the heat, her cheeks and even her lips were pale. Mr. Eames was affecting to be engrossed in his programme. Garçon had *souigné'd* his song in a way that, even to the comprehension of an utterly unversed and unsuspecting person like our heroine, conveyed a hint of its turbid depths, and Portia had been seized with a sudden misgiving.

"Haven't you had almost enough of this?" Harry said shortly to his neighbour. "I think your friend has."

"Take her away, then," replied Miss Ross, without looking round. "I will follow when I please."

"Miss Ross thinks you are looking tired," was his next observation, addressed this time to Portia; he had ventured upon a free translation of Anna's words; "and so I think you are. Won't you let me see you home? It isn't really worth stopping in this bad air for, is it?"

"By the bye, I ought to be in too; I have no end of letters to write," observed Mr. Eames, jumping up suddenly. "I can see Miss Drew back, if she will let me. I know this thing from end to end. You'd better see it out with Miss Ross, Tolhurst."

“Thanks!” said Harry, grimly; he tried to put himself in his friend's place, and to remember that, in the ignorance in which the latter remained of the real aspect of the case, his conduct in attempting to monopolise Miss Drew's society must appear like that of an impertinent interloper. And Eames had confided in him too—had hinted that he was on the point of losing his heart to Miss Ross's friend, if he had not lost it already. Nevertheless, Harry was loth to see the pair depart together, and his hesitation was so apparent that Anna said indignantly, “I won't have one of you three remain. If you do, I shall go—and I don't want to be driven away. I will come back when I please and *as* I please.”

“You must let one of us stay to see you home,” urged Harry, reluctantly.

“To see *me* home! Poor little dear!” No reasoned refutation could have been half so convincing as the briefly-uttered mocking rejoinder, into which she infused all the scorn that stirred her soul. “You *do* look tired, child,” she observed, as Portia turned round to smile farewell at her. “Take a cup of tea when you get back—you may give *them* some too,” nodding in the direction of the two young men, who stood up in eager readiness to bear her away. “And keep the kettle on, will you? I dare say I shall bring Rousky back with me.”

The party of three did not prove much more satisfactory, after all, than the party of four, to Mr. Eames's thinking. Harry said but little, certainly; his presence made it impossible to talk of other than indifferent subjects. No allusion was made to the place they had left. Portia felt a sudden and unaccountable diffidence in referring to it. The only thing it suggested to her mind was a dim recollection of a childish experience she had had years ago when she had run to pluck a beautiful rose-bough in the Yarraman garden. As she stretched out her hand for the rose a cluster of caterpillar larvae, one moving mass of black corruption, curled and wriggled round the stem. She had burst into tears and run away. Besides the disgust inspired by the larvae, there was the degradation of the poor rose to afflict her. The tuneful singing she had heard a while ago made her think of this experience anew. But it was not a thing to be discussed aloud. She invited her two escorts into Anna's room—and despite the letters that Mr. Eames had on his mind, he eagerly responded to the invitation.

Chapter XVIII

IT was under the shelter of the effigy of one of the earlier French queens, clad in the stiff, cumbersome garments of her time, beneath the stone presentment of which the chisel of even a French sculptor had been unable to suggest the existence of a woman's form, that Portia had her promised interview with Harry the next day. Early as she had arrived at the trysting place, he was there before her. She had recognized him from afar off, as she advanced slowly, with a step that spoke of inward trepidation, towards the bench upon which he was seated. In accepting his offer of help, as in promising to see him alone, she was doing nothing for which her conscience need smite her. Yet so unused was Portia to anything that savoured of deception, that even this innocent *cachotterie* set her trembling. There was no one to watch her here, no one to whom she need feel herself accountable for her comings and goings. Yet there was such a startled expression in her eyes of curious hue, those eyes that Harry knew so well and thought of so often, that the sight of them moved him with pity. Her manner had none of the confident buoyancy that had marked it when she mounted the Academy steps radiant, and smiling a few weeks ago. She wore what seemed to him a haunted look, and to reassure her he essayed to speak of commonplace subjects in the easy tones of one who meets unpremeditatedly a mere casual acquaintance.

“How do you do?” he shook her hand cordially.

“Isn't it a lovely afternoon for sitting out under the trees? I have found such a pleasant seat over there. I was looking up through the branches of the yellow leaves hidden in the green. Have you ever seen an autumn in the Luxembourg?”

“No,” she replied; she was beginning to feel a little more at her ease now, and she took her seat by his side on the bench. “I have seen only one autumn in Europe, but it seemed to me almost too wonderful to be real. We have no autumn in Australia, you know. We were travelling through Switzerland. It was the end of October, and the Alps were covered with snow to their base. The trees—those tall Lombardy poplars—had lost none of their leaves, but they had turned a golden yellow all over. The weather was lovely, and the sky was a shining blue. When I saw the golden trees growing out of the dazzling white snow, I thought it *too* wonderful—I could not have believed a landscape could ever come to look like that.”

“I know the effect you speak of,” Harry said, musing. “Out of the thousand autumn picture one sees, I have never seen that particular combination exactly rendered. I think, though, the most gorgeous autumn

scene I ever beheld was on the shores of the Bosphorus. You have been to Constantinople? No! Then I don't know how I am to give you any idea in words of the riotous medley of colours you see from a distance."

He essayed nevertheless, warming to his subject as he recalled every marvellous detail of the brilliant panorama, bright and many-hued as a parrot's wing. Portia listened in silence. She had forgotten for the moment the chain that bound her. She was walking in imagination through the enchanted scenes Harry was word-painting for her, scenes that had not existed for her hitherto, save in the pages of the *Arabian Nights* or of *Lalla Rookh*, the two sources whence she had drawn, it is to be feared, her principal knowledge of an Oriental *mise-en-scène*. A sense of the boundless delights the world had to offer to two minds in entire sympathy grew upon her as she listened. And the possibility of such joys as these had been within her reach!—she would have had but to stretch out her hand to grasp it at the very moment when she had deliberately and recklessly flung it away! For a moment she could have wished that, like Anna, she had asserted her right to do as she pleased before marriage instead of after it. The artist band in Paris would soon be dispersing now, and each would go his separate way without let or hindrance. Why, even if the Swedish girls and her friend should go to Constantinople, no one would say them nay, and on their return they would find the same *atelier*, the same table at Cloutz's, the same interests and associations open to them as before. Perhaps Anna was right, after all. It was the people themselves who spoiled the world, either by violence, or by restrictions, or by interference with each other's movements; and it was only those who heeded none of these things, and who went their own ways, who could find any satisfaction in living.

Reflections of this nature brought Portia back to the actual circumstances of her position. It was one thing to wander in fancy with Harry against an intangible Oriental background, and quite another to be found with Mr. Tolhurst against the actual background of the Luxembourg Gardens. Despite Anna's "live and let live" principle, she would not have cared to see her cross the gardens just now. Portia felt herself, indeed, something of a traitress to her friend, for had she not come out this afternoon to take counsel of another all unknown to her?

"After what you said last night," she began, suddenly and irrelevantly, as she traced unconscious patterns on the gravel-path at her feet with the point of her parasol (many a hieroglyph drawn by the point of a woman's parasol is the unenduring record of some paramount passage in her life's history), "I know I need not be afraid to tell you everything and to ask you what you think I had better do."

She paused irresolute, her eyes still fixed upon the ground. Harry, for his part, was hanging on her every word. He could not see her face, for she persisted in keeping her head down, but he had a view of the lower half of her charming profile, and his imagination filled up the remainder. He had known he loved her from the beginning; but in accordance with the irony of Fate, he must needs be deprived of the opportunity of avowing it until just after she had contracted marriage with another man. Meeting her during the crisis that followed, he must find himself in the position of her counsellor and mentor, instead of her wooer, and must force himself to give her the very same advice that he would have given to a cherished sister under like circumstances. Here, at least, was his clearly defined duty, but it was a duty that promised to be all the harder of fulfilment, that something in Portia's manner seemed to tell him that if she had still possessed her freedom he would not have wooed her in vain. That was a maddening thought for a man situated as he was. Portia, in asking him to decide for her, was surrendering herself virtually into his hands. Her action in marrying a man she did not love simply because she had no power to resist surrounding influences, her flight immediately after the marriage, and her helplessness and irresolution when the flight was accomplished—all this seemed to prove to him that she was without the moral support known as backbone (an appropriate designation, since it is only with the vertebrates that the faculty of resisting our environments seems to have been evolved). He had suspected as much before, but he did not love her the less for it. He would have had backbone enough for both if he could have made her his wife. He reproached himself bitterly in secret with his faint-heartedness upon the memorable day when he had shown her his picture of the Madonna. Perhaps that day had been the turning-point in their lives, and he had not known how to seize it. Yet how could he have imagined that she was about to slip out of his life for ever? They had been such entire friends that morning—it would have seemed almost an easy matter to say to her then, “You know I love you! do you not? and I want you to be my wife, if you will.” But he had not dared to say it. He had allowed worldly considerations to weigh with him. He was not so sure of making his mark then as he felt now. Portia was spoken of as an heiress, and he had nothing but his art and his work to set against her fortune. People would have said that he had taken undue advantage of the first chance of winning the heiress that had fallen in his way. He had been moved by considerations which after all would have been reasonable enough under ordinary circumstances. Yet it required no little effort to remember at this moment how he was situated towards Portia, and to give her the counsel that honour and duty demanded he should give her. “What

do you think I had better do?" she had asked, and her words echoed through his brain, and raised a strange tumult in his heart. He felt that he had only to say, "Of course, you must stay where you are," and in a very short time, in a school like Anna's—under an influence like Anna's—he might persuade her of his Heaven-sent right to become all in all to her. And, once he had persuaded her of this, legal formalities might be deferred for subsequent regulation. Her relations would move Heaven and earth, or rather the Church and the State, to have her union with him properly ratified, and to have the other meaningless ceremony annulled. But let her return to England now, and all their influence and power would be employed to force her back into the unholy bonds that she had been driven into against her will at the outset.

"You ask me what you are to do," he said at last slowly; he would not avow that he shrank from the responsibility laid upon him. "Will you answer me one question first? Supposing you were convinced that the man you married most bitterly repented the sin that drove you away from him—supposing this woman, Mrs. Morris, or whatever she calls herself, could be spirited away, right away, no matter where—would you still have the some horror of returning to your husband? Would you want to separate your life from his under *any* circumstances? I am more anxious than I can say to advise you for the best. I thought I must be dreaming yesterday when I came upon you suddenly in the Luxembourg; but afterwards, as I thought over your story in the night, the dream seemed to turn into a nightmare. I can advise you up to a certain point, but your own feelings are what you should consult before all. If this obstacle had not arisen, the thought of running away would never have entered into your head."

He made this assertion doubtfully, almost interrogatively. Portia continued to trace patterns with the point of her parasol. The first autumn leaves were fluttering down upon her in the soft evening breeze.

"I had thought of doing it before," she said at last, in a scarcely audible voice; "but never after I was once married."

Pleasant sounds were wandering to the bench where they sat. The distant babble of children's voices, the twittering of the fearless sparrows, the mingled cadence of falling water and rustling leaves, all these would have made a soothing accompaniment to the beating of a peaceful heart. But Harry's heart was far from being peaceful. Disappointment unspeakable was causing it to ache and throb. He loved this woman by his side. She was weak beyond all believing. She had allowed herself to be married almost in spite of herself. There were none of the elements of a Bride of Lammermoor in her nature. Nevertheless he loved her. Her personality had a charm for him that set all reasoning at defiance. Her very weakness

attracted him. How entirely she would have leaned upon him if he could have won her for himself, to have and to hold till death parted him from her. But now it was his bounden duty to send her away from him. The longer she stayed with Anna, the more critical her position would become. There were dangers around her of which she could have no understanding. Even as it was, would not the shadow of her rash action hang like a dark cloud over all her future life? Moreover, there was the moral aspect of the question to be considered. Had she not taken upon herself solemn vows in the most solemn place in the world? Harry Tolhurst possessed what is known as the religious temperament. The fact that the marriage rite had been actually performed was one that had great weight with him. The evening before he had supposed for an instant that Portia's husband had committed bigamy, in which event her own share in the vows she had taken would have counted for nothing. But the marriage, as he now knew, was a valid one, and the religious service could not be gainsaid. He reviewed the case rapidly in his mind before he said gently, but firmly:

“Then you had counted the cost! And the discovery you made after your marriage is all we have to think of.”

“Yes, I suppose so.” There was something hopelessly despondent in her manner of assent. “I thought we might arrange something here; but it does not seem like it now. Anna wants me to stay with her at all costs. She wants me to become a model”—Harry fancied he could detect a slight tremor in her voice—“but I don't see my way. I feel as though I were drifting, as though I were rudderless—if you can understand.”

“Indeed I can;” his tones were full of sympathy. “I was on board a ship once that had lost her rudder. There is always great danger of drifting on to the rocks. Now, if you will let me advise, I think you ought to go home directly. Go and put yourself under your brother's protection. You seem to have run away just to escape from a position in which you felt yourself helpless to act. But when you go back things will have arranged themselves, There is no risk of your being forced to act now without due time for reflection. And you will be safer there than here. Believe me you will. Miss Ross's home is no place for you.”

All the time he was urging her to depart, his heart was crying out to him to bid her remain. But for the very reason that he was doing a violence to his secret desires, his spoken words were vehement. Portia could have no conception of the extent to which she tried him by her reply.

“Then I know how it will all end!” she said piteously. “John cares for me terribly” (it was the first time he had heard her speak of her husband as John); “he will never hear of anything but my returning to him, and he will have talked the others over by now.”

To this Harry made no rejoinder until he had gathered strength sufficient to say, "Even that would be better than following out Anna's plan of life—I think."

"Do you think so? Oh! I wish you could hear her talk!" She paused, and continued rapidly, without looking at him, "Unless people come together from sheer love of each other, and only stay together just as long as the want to do so is there, it is all wrong and unnatural, she says. She talks about it so wonderfully sometimes; I wish you could hear her."

"Oh! I know the free love doctrine," Harry said grimly. "Listen." Portia raised her head in astonishment, his voice and manner were solemn. "I am going to speak to you, if I can, as father, brother, lover—all in one. For I want you to understand that I love you better than myself. Do you know that if it were to any one but me you quoted Anna's words, you would be doing a very risky thing? People might not understand. Supposing I were to take advantage of the fact that you are Anna's disciple to uphold her doctrine to you on my own account. Do you know where it would lead us? It would lead, in the first place, to my trying to compass your ruin. If love and inclination are to be the only arbiters; if honour and duty and self-control are to have no say in the matter at all, what is to prevent my acting upon the impulse that moves me now? What is to prevent my entreating you to try and care for me a little? Why should I not say, Forget all the ghastly business of the other day, and let us begin a new life together here. Don't look terrified" (for Portia had turned a face of pale astonishment towards him), "I care for you too truly to say it"—his voice was trembling with agitation. "I care for you for *yourself*, my dear. That means, that I set too great a value upon your peace of mind, and your reputation, to ever want you to fling them away for me. There are things that count for more than love——"

He broke off suddenly. Portia's eyes were suffused. He felt that his resolution was giving way. If she continued to look at him like that it would abandon him altogether; or, rather, it would expend itself in words, while, in obedience to the overmastering instinct that stirred him, his arm would steal round her neck, and his lips would seek hers.

But Portia had lowered her eyes again. "I know why you speak like that," she said. "You are thinking of what is to come afterwards—after we are dead, I mean."

"Yes!" he replied. "I believe in a future, too. I think we are called upon most often to climb the steep and thorny path to Heaven."

"But if one did not think that!" she was transfixing the withered leaves at her feet with her parasol, and sweeping them over the hieroglyphs on the gravel.

“If one did not think *that*,” he repeated. But his voice changed; Anna and Mr. Eames, walking side by side, were advancing towards them under the trees. The dissatisfaction of the latter was apparent in his step. It is not only the facial muscles; every muscle of the body expresses moods—witness the difference in the outline, however distant, of a boy on his way to be caned, and the same boy out for a holiday.

“Found at last!” said Anna, triumphantly. There was a mocking gleam in her black eyes as Portia rose in confusion to greet her. “See, I have a telegram for you. I dare say it's only a device on the part of your friends to get you away.”

The message delivered into Portia's hands had been through double forms. Addressed in the first instance to the suburban post-office in London where Anna's friend called for the letters she transmitted to the runaway, it had been re-telegraphed by her to Paris. Portia ran her eyes over it hurriedly. The signature which caught her eye first was Eliza's and the message was to the following effect:

“Come back. Mary Willet run over; not expected to live. Wants you immediately.”

Portia to the profound and jealous astonishment of Mr. Eames, put this dispatch into Harry's hands at once. She had turned pale to the lips as she read the contents. Harry felt that some explanation was due to the others.

“We have found out,” he said hurriedly, “that we have a friend—Miss—er—Drew and I whom we are both in Paris to assist. I suppose,” he added, turning gravely to her, “you will go to her at once—won't you?”

“Yes; oh, yes!” There was sharp distress in her tones. “I will leave for England to-night.”

Chapter XIX

PORTIA was not suffered to repeat the experience that attended her flight from London, as she took her hurried departure from Paris a few hours later. Four people saw her off at the Gare du Nord by the night train for Calais. Mr. Eames, who sadly realised that his designation of her as a beautiful bird of passage had been only too appropriate, was among them. Neither he nor his friend, between whom and himself a marked coldness had sprung up, dared to put into execution a project that both had secretly cherished of offering to escort her to London. Portia was conscious of a slight sense of shame as she stood at the window of the first-class ladies' compartment to wish her friends good-bye. She felt that to indulge in luxurious travelling was a backsliding; besides which Anna and Rousky scorned all save third-class fares.

Nevertheless, as the train moved smoothly off, to the satisfaction of everybody (for the whole party, was fast relapsing into the condition of mental vacuity that prolonged railway-station farewells engender), she could not be indifferent to the fact that here at least she might think over things in comfortable and cushioned solitude. The news of Mary's accident had shocked her profoundly. It seemed as though the mysterious message of Harry's Madonna had not been fully delivered even yet. The final words had still to be spoken. Portia believed now that from the first moment of beholding the picture she had recognised the power that would henceforth control her destiny. At Mary's call she had fled from her home; at the same call she was returning to it now. On Mary's behalf she had put her husband away from her. What might she not be called upon to do next! Her thoughts travelled backwards and forwards between Anna's *quairième* and the rose-embowered Kensington home. She reflected that only where a woman's affections are fixed there can she cast her anchor. Perhaps it was the impossibility of so fixing them that made Anna renounce all home ties and lead a vagrant life. She had a dim suspicion that Anna dragged her anchor from time to time, and that, despite her apparent indifference, she was one of those whom the "howling winds," would drive devious, tempest-tossed to the end of her days. This time there was no moonlit landscape to mingle its fantastic glories with the dreams our heroine was weaving. The reign of the August moon was over, and a warm darkness covered the face of the earth. The tide of voyagers was setting from, not towards, the English shores. Portia might have been wandering with ghosts through an impalpable limbo for all the communion she held with her few fellow-passengers on the journey. It was hardly past sunrise when she

arrived at Victoria Station and found herself once again under the familiar overhung London sky. Her hair felt dank against her temples as she drove to Kensington. The trees in the Park looked black and drooping. Where was the radiant green, shining behind a shimmery silver veil, that she remembered so well? She leaned back in her cab and closed her eyes wearily. She could not have believed that all could change so utterly above and around her, without and within, in so short a space of time.

Portia had never so fully realised that she had put herself into the position of an outcast as upon her return to her home at this early hour of the day. As no one expected her, no one was up to receive her. The cabman was obliged to hammer at the door and ring the area bell persistently, with an oft-repeated “*that'll* bring 'em out!” before the blue-and-silver footman, stripped of his distinguishing trappings, proceeded to unlock and unchain the front door. The person to whom he opened it scuttled past him with a short “Good morning, William!” to her room. It annoyed her to feel sure that the first thing he would do would be to clatter round to the servant's regions to give the news of her return redhot. She found the door of her room locked, and it was necessary to climb another storey to wake Nurse Eliza, who probably kept the key. And Eliza, once awakened, would not let her go. Time had been when Portia had crept into the faithful creature's bed upon thundery nights at Yarraman, when the vision of the picture of devils in Wilmer's illustrated copy of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, over the words

“Then did she reek, and squeak, and shriek,
With a wild, unearthly yell.”

had recurred to her with disagreeable force every time the lightning flashed. She recognised, just as of old, the row of light little plaits into which Eliza was wont to twist her hair, to give it a wave the following day.

“Did you plait up your hair the day I ran away, Eliza?” were her first words, as she sat upon the edge of her nurse's bed, after she had roused her by lightly kissing her upon the forehead.

“Don't tell me it's you come back!” cried Eliza, joyfully but irrelevantly. “It's too good to be true.”

“You knew I would be obliged to come when you sent me that message.” Portia had flung down her hat; her chestnut hair was ruffled into softest disorder, and her face was pale with the mingled effects of her night journey and the excitement of her home-coming. “Poor, poor Mary! is it as bad as you thought?”

“It's very bad, my dear,” Eliza made reply, sitting up in bed and looking

gravely at her; “but it hadn't ought to have been any business of yours. Such goings on I never saw in my life! *That* Mary Willet doesn't know what shame means; and her family so respectable, too! But there, you was always too good-hearted. Don't I remember when you used to cry fit to break your heart every time they were going to stick a pig at the station!”

“Oh! never mind about the pig; tell me about Mary. When did she send for me? Where is she? How did it happen? Who says she can't live?”

“Miss, I can't tell you everything all in a minute. I only know this much: a woman came round here from Mary Willet's lodgings yesterday, just as I was setting out the flowers for lunch. ‘Mrs. Morris’—that's the name the hussy gave herself—‘Mrs. Morris has been run over,’ she says, ‘and she can't die easy, she says, without Miss James goes to see her.’ Mr. James, he said I was to telegraph straight off to the place where I used for to send your letters; and its just a chance they called for the telegram and sent it off to you so soon, though I expect you weren't very far off, if the truth were known.”

“Far enough to take ten hours to get back. But I must go to Mary at once!” cried Portia, springing from the bed. “She is expected to die, you say, and here I sit doing nothing at all. I won't disturb the others now. Give me her address, quick, and let me go.”

She had been plunging a towel into the water-jug as she spoke, and now passed it rapidly over her face. Her hat and veil were on in an instant. “The address, Eliza!” she repeated impatiently.

“They've been and changed you, my dear!” said the nurse, dolefully. “You're that headstrong, one 'ud never dream you was the same. Oh, the address!”—for Portia was stamping her foot with impatience—“it's Latimer Road somewhere—let me see—I put it into my purse. But wherever has my purse got to? I thought I had it under my pillow, but you put everything out of my head, being so impatient. Stay, though; I remember now—it's 92 A or B: I can't remember which, but 92 I'll swear to. I couldn't forget it, 'cause 'twas the number of my cabin on the *Ismail*. But won't you just give me time to get up and go along with you? I don't like to trust you out o'my sight any more, my dear!”

“I'll send for you if I want you. Don't keep me now, Eliza dear; and tell them all—Emma and Wilmer, I mean—that I shall be back soon.”

Precipitate departures seemed to enter now into the normal order of events in Portia's life. The tale told by the unfrocked footman would have received no credence had it not been for the presence in the hall of the valise and saddle-bag, which (failing a gentleman-help) it was nobody's business to carry upstairs at this unseemly hour. The owner of them had departed, and, judging by the manner of her former disappearance, there

was no saying when she would return. As she left the house, Portia realised that here, too, all was changed, and that the old, happy, unthinking existence she had led in it was a thing of the past. Even if John should pass out of her life forever, things could never be the same again. But would he pass out of it? As far as practical results went, her flight to Paris had been little better than the famous expedition of the King of Spain who went up a hill and then came down again. She had run away irresolute, and irresolute she returned. But meanwhile this, at least, had been gained, that John's sin had found him out.

It was only seven o'clock still, and Portia had many steps to walk before she encountered a cab. In Paris at this hour all the world was astir. This was Anna's sweeping morning, and Portia could picture her with the towel pinned square over her swarthy brow, looking like the last of the Pharaohs, as she sternly wielded her broom. The cab stopped at the door of a trim-looking house, with a pathway in white flagstones leading through the little front garden. A bare-armed maid was "hearthstoning" the flags on her knees. The blinds were up upon the first storey, whence Portia concluded, before she descended from the cab, that the worst was not yet to be feared. She ran up the steps, overcome by the sick, half-sinking sensation that the apprehension of bodily suffering to ourselves or to others is wont to bring with it. The bare-armed maid had silently pushed open the front door (standing ajar) for her to enter, and, in answer to the trembling inquiry, "Mrs. Morris?" was about to lead her through the short entrance-hall, and up the staircase at the farther end, when a man's form was seen descending the stairs. Portia shrank back with a gesture of dismay. The man was John: he had recognised her, and was coming down the stairs to meet her.

Situations that we picture to ourselves as necessarily impressive and tragic are often very tame and trite in real life. It is the feeling which accompanies them, not the words that are uttered, which gives them their true significance. That is why the commonplace phrases that Ibsen puts into the mouths of his characters, at the moment when they perform their most tragic deeds, lend such ghastly reality to his dramas. The step from the sublime to the ridiculous is stumbled across most easily when our nerves are most highly strung. The slippers of Hedda Gabler's husband thrust themselves in some form or another upon all our most dramatic experiences.

Portia shrank back as John came towards her. She was totally unprepared for such a meeting. She had fancied that her only sensation upon encountering her husband again would be one of righteous indignation; but as he came towards her now she was overcome by a sense of guiltiness on her own account that placed her at a manifest disadvantage. What if he

were to carry the war into the enemy's camp—if, instead of waiting to be upbraided, he were to begin by upbraiding her. He was armed with undeniable authority; he had power, if he chose, to call her to account for her desertion of him. In any case, he might judge that it would have been her duty to hear what he, as well as Mary, had to say before she ran away from him. She was touched, in spite of herself, to note how his trouble had told upon him physically. She could not have believed that he could have changed so much within a week. There were traces of many a sleepless night, of many a baffled quest, of many a heartsick longing written in his face. He had turned pale as he saw her (and the effect was the more startling that his hue was so rubicund under its normal aspect), but his eyes had a sterner expression than she had ever seen in them before. In vain she raised her head with a half-defiant gesture. Despite her certitude that she had had the best of warrants for running away, she felt and looked liked a culprit.

The unexpectedness of his attitude disconcerted her. John in his letters and John in the flesh seemed to be no longer one and the same person. Judging by his written appeal, which she had not answered, she had expected to find him wellnigh crushed to the earth under the weight of his remorseful misery. Meeting him face to face, he looked more like a severe judge than a penitent evil-doer. “He thinks he has me quite in his power now,” Portia said to herself; but it was not a favourable moment for proving the contrary. The bare-armed maid had retreated to her hearthstoning, little dreaming that the lady and gentleman who had stared at each other in the hall were husband and wife; but close behind John a person was descending the stairs, whom Portia divined to be the doctor. In addition to the sedately professional air that a medical man puts on almost unconsciously with the coat in which he makes his morning rounds, there was a solemnity in his demeanour that spoke of a serious case. Portia had made a little movement forward as John descended the last step of the stairs. Neither she nor her husband had extended a welcoming hand to each other.

“I have come to see Mary,” Portia said in strangled tones. Never since her childhood had she been so conscious of the presence of an aching lump in her throat. “She sent for me. Can I go to her now!”

“You had better speak to the doctor,” replied John, briefly. His wife did not see the yearning in his eyes as she turned away from him.

She waylaid the doctor as he passed through the hall, and appealed to him in trembling anxiety:

“Is Mary Willet—Mrs. Morris,” she stammered—“is the person who had the accident able to see me? Do please tell me. Is she very dangerously

hurt?"

"Are you a friend of hers?" the doctor asked gently.

"Yes," replied Portia, firmly; "but I know she was not expected to live yesterday. Is there any hope of saving her now?"

"I am afraid—none. The wonder is that she should be alive still. You know how the accident happened, I suppose? No? She slipped in the street yesterday with her child; a cart was going by at the moment. She managed to save the child, but the wheel came into contact with her neck, which was fatally injured. It is indeed wonderful that she has not succumbed to it already. She is conscious and coherent still. Everything that could be done has been done for her. I shall be back again myself directly—but there is no possibility of saving her."

He bowed and left her. Portia turned helplessly round, intimating by a gesture to her husband that she desired to be taken to Mary's room. John preceded her up the staircase without a word, and passed uninvited after her into the chamber of death, of which the door opening on to a narrow landing was only partially closed. The blind was up, and as Portia entered the room she became aware, like the Physician in Andersen's tales, that Death was seated at the head of the bed. It was the first time she had ever stood in his mighty presence, but her feeling was more of awe than of fear.

Mary's throat was covered with bandages. But the haunting Madonna eyes, set in a face of most ghastly pallor, looked up from the pillow as Portia entered. The dark hair was tumbled and trowsled. The left arm was lying on the counterpane, and the hand, with the mark of dark needle-pricks on the fore-finger, clutched tightly at the flannel gown of the solemn-faced baby, sitting up baby-wise with wagging head, by her side. The sight wrung Portia's heart. Mary's eyes, shining already with the strange, flickering light of a lamp that is nearly spent, were seeking hers, and she could read the supreme appeal that was written in them. She walked softly to the bedside, and, with her husband's eyes directed towards her every movement, stooped over the pillow of the dying woman and kissed her tenderly on the forehead. There was unspeakable longing in Mary's gaze. Her lips moved but no sound issued from them. Portia was fain to bend low to catch the almost inaudible words, of which the utterance was every moment arrested by a hoarse, unnatural wheeze, like that of a child with the croup. But the movement of the speaker's head in the direction of the child, and the feeble attempt to draw it closer to her side, made clear much that was left unsaid.

"My little one, Miss." The hoarse whisper seemed to drive through Portia's brain and to penetrate to her very heart. "Please take him—bring him up." There was a gasping intensity in the spasmodically uttered words

that rendered them doubly impressive. “His father—too—” hoarse wheezing choked her utterance.

Portia knelt by the bedside and encircled the child with her arm. “Mary—poor Mary,” she said pitifully, and there were tears in her voice, “he shall be safe with me—he shall indeed. I promise you—I will keep him always, Mary dear—I will tell him about you—and—and—is there nothing I can do for you now? I am afraid you are in great pain.” For at this moment a spasm of agony, the strain of catching at her fast departing breath, was contracting the dying woman's face. But Mary's message was not all spoken. The final mission of the pictured Madonna had still to be accomplished upon earth. With the dews of death gathering upon her forehead, she turned her gaze towards her rival's husband, towards the man who had betrayed her, standing silent at the foot of the bed, and petitioned him mutely to come closer to her. As he approached the bedside, she reached out feeble fingers for his hand, and placed it upon his child's head. Before he could withdraw it, she had clutched at Portia's hand, and now essayed to unite it with John's in her dying clasp. At this moment Portia's fate might be said to tremble in the balance. She struggled to free herself, and had she obeyed the first strong impulse all her life's history might have been changed. But John's hand had already closed around hers, and as she raised her eyes in protest to his face she saw something written there that forbade her to draw it away. Thinking over the scene afterwards, she wondered how it was that she had come to capitulate so promptly and so entirely. Was it because she deemed that her husband had been punished enough? Was her heart melted by the evidence of the mental suffering he had endured, by the traces of hope-deferred heart-sickness, of wounded affection, of yearning tenderness she could read in his eyes? Was it simply that she felt once more as she had felt on her wedding morning—“Who shall shut out fate?” and that she recognised the futility of struggling against her destiny? Or did it occur to her that if she had thought (not only at the eleventh hour, but when the eleventh hour was past that she might still escape her fate by espousing Mary's cause, the pretext was unavailing now, since it was Mary herself who had forced her to return, and Mary's hand, already clammy with death, that was riveting her to her husband with a force stronger than that of the grave? Was she impelled to act as she did by her sense of the sacredness of the charge she had undertaken? Did Mary's child forge the chain that must bind her henceforth to John? Was it that her short insight into Anna's life had been a disillusion, and that she was afraid of launching, as Anna had done, upon a rudderless existence? Did the recollection of Harry's advice to her to return, given with the full knowledge that he ran the risk of losing her for ever, influence her

decision? Was she moved by the sudden impulse to immolate herself that has converted so many women into nuns and nursing sisters? Was she tired out by her night journey and her emotion, and unable to form a resolution? Was it apathy, was it pique, was it pity, was it reawakening love, or was it a mixture of all these together that swayed her! Whatever might have been the motive (and even to herself it was never clear), the fact remained that she allowed her hand to lie in John's grasp. Mary's agony was mercifully short, but before her eyes rolled upwards in death they were irradiated by a light that spoke more eloquently than any words of a soul that departed in peace. Her work was done, her mission accomplished. Her child would be the gainer by her death, and for herself the sleep that knows no awakening was a boon.

Half an hour later Mr. and Mrs. Morrisson walked back to breakfast at Kensington arm in arm. Wilmer and Emma welcomed them as naturally as though they had just returned from the conventional honeymoon trip they had contemplated. Three months afterwards, upon an afternoon of November fog that had no crimson sunbeams captive this time, the whole party stood upon the hurricane deck of a huge Orient liner in the docks upon the eve of a separation. The bride and bridegroom were leaving for Australia. A stout lady, easily recognisable as Mrs. James, wearing a huge mantle entirely composed of the minute and costly furs of the Australian duck-billed platypus, was holding two embroidered handkerchiefs in readiness—one for wetting, the other for waiving. The young married lady of the party, clad in a becoming sea-going suit of tweed, was dividing her attentions between the stout lady with the handkerchiefs, and a solemn-looking infant seated upon its nurse's arm.

“Don't you think it's too cold for him on deck, Emma?” she said anxiously. “I'll just show Eliza the cabin next to ours that we've taken for him. I'll be back again directly.”

She hurried below, followed by the maid with the child, but after installing them in the cabin in question was stopped on her way through the splendid dining-saloon by a gentleman crossing it from the opposite end. The fast-gathering fog, of a dingy brown-ochre hue, prevented her from seeing him until he was quite close to her. Then she recognised Harry Tolhurst.

“I thought I might be allowed just to come and wish you god-speed, he said, holding out his hand. He had not seen her since the day when he had urged her at all costs to return to London. “I know what you have done, and I trust you have your reward. If I could only hear you say—before I wish you good-bye for ever—that you have found it already!” Tears started into Portia's eyes. She tried her utmost not to let them fall. “Do you

remember what you said,” she whispered, “about climbing the steep and thorny path to Heaven? But then, *you* are sure at least that it does lead to Heaven—But see?” Her voice changed, and its tone became placid and conventional. “Here is my husband. Let me introduce you to Mr. Tolhurst, John.” There was little time for conversation. Harry felt that it would not be fitting for him to intrude upon the farewell effusions of the bride and her relatives. His last vision of Portia was standing by her husband's side close to the bulwarks, bravely trying to smile, as the vessel moved from the docks. The fog was not so thick but that he could see the moisture shining in her eyes at the same instant. It was in just such an atmosphere that she had passed out of his sight a few months ago, after their joyous meeting at the Academy. But the fog had been rose-stained then, and there had been hope in his heart. It was mud-coloured to-day, and the hope was crushed and dead. If he could have put on the Town Councillor's magic shoes that Hans Andersen writes about, if he could have gone back to the day when he had sat with Portia under the shadow of the stone queen in the Luxembourg Gardens, would he have given her the same advice as he had given her then? Would he have upheld the selfsame standard, and essayed, as he had also done, to act up to it himself? He tried to think that he had answered both these questions in the affirmative as he went back to his self-imposed career of work and solitude.
