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SANDRA BELLONI

By George Meredith

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- XXVII. SMALL LIFE AT BROOKFIELD
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CHAPTER XXVI

It was midnight. Mr. Pole had appeased his imagination with a chop, and was trying to revive the memory of his old after-theatre night carouses by listening to a song which Emilia sang to him, while he sipped at a smoking mixture, and beat time on the table, rejoiced that he was warm from head to foot at last.

"That's a pretty song, my dear," he said. "A very pretty song. It does for an old fellow; and so did my supper: light and wholesome. I'm an old fellow; I ought to know I've got a grown-up son and grown-up daughters. I shall be a grandpa, soon, I dare say. It's not the thing for me to go about hearing glees. I had an idea of it. I'm better here. All I want is to see my children happy, married and settled, and comfortable!"

Emilia stole up to him, and dropped on one knee: "You love them?"

"I do. I love my girls and my boy. And my brandy-and-water, do you mean to say, you rogue?"

"And me?" Emilia looked up at him beseechingly.

"Yes, and you. I do. I haven't known you long, my dear, but I shall be glad to do what I can for you. You shall make my house your home as long as you live; and if I say, make haste and get married, it's only just this: girls ought to marry young, and not be in an uncertain position."

"Am I worth having?"

"To be sure you are! I should think so. You haven't got a penny; but, then, you're not for spending one. And"--Mr. Pole nodded to right and left like a man who silenced a host of invisible logicians, urging this and that--"you're a pleasant companion, thrifty, pretty, musical: by Jingo! what more do they want? They'll have their song and chop at home."

"Yes; but suppose it depends upon their fathers?"

"Well, if their fathers will be fools, my dear, I can't help 'em. We needn't take 'em in a lump: how about the doctor? I'll see him to-morrow morning, and hear what he has to say. Shall I?"

Mr. Pole winked shrewdly.

"You will not make my heart break?" Emilia's voice sounded one low chord as she neared the thing she had to say.

"Bless her soul!" the old merchant patted her; "I'm not the sort of man for that."

"Nor his?"

"His?" Mr. Pole's nerves became uneasy in a minute, at the scent of a mystification. He dashed his handkerchief over his forehead, repeating: "His? Break a man's heart! I? What's the meaning of that? For God's sake, don't bother me!"

Emilia was still kneeling before him, eyeing him with a shadowed steadfast air.

"I say his, because his heart is in mine. He has any pain that hurts me."

"He may be tremendously in love," observed Mr. Pole; "but he seems a deuced soft sort of a doctor! What's his name?"

"I love Wilfrid."

The merchant appeared to be giving ear to her, long after the words had been uttered, while there was silence in the room.

"Wilfrid? my son?" he cried with a start.

"He is my lover."

"Damned rascal!" Mr. Pole jumped from his chair. "Going and playing with an unprotected girl. I can pardon a young man's folly, but this is infamous. My dear child," he turned to Emilia, "if you've got any notion about my son Wilfrid, you must root it up as quick as you can. If he's been behaving like a villain, leave him to me. I detest, I hate, I loathe, I would kick, a young man who deceives a girl. Even if he's my son!--more's the reason!"

Mr. Pole was walking up and down the room, fuming as he spoke. Emilia tried to hold his hand, as he was passing, but he said: "There, my child! I'm very sorry for you, and I'm damned angry with him. Let me go."

"Can you, can you be angry with him for loving me?"

"Deceiving you," returned Mr. Pole; "that's what it is. And I tell you, I'd rather fifty times the fellow had deceived me. Anything rather than that he should take advantage of a girl."

"Wilfrid loves me and would die for me," said Emilia.

"Now, let me tell you the fact," Mr. Pole came to a halt, fronting her.

"My son Wilfrid Pole may be in love, as he says, here and there, but he is engaged to be married to a lady of title. I have his word--his oath. He got near a thousand pounds out of my pocket the other day on that understanding. I don't speak about the money, but--now--it's a lump--others would have made a nice row about it--but is he a liar? Is he a seducing, idling, vagabond dog? Is he a contemptible scoundrel?"

"He is my lover," said Emilia.

She stood without changing a feature; as in a darkness, holding to the one thing she was sure of. Then, with a sudden track of light in her brain: "I know the mistake," she said. "Pardon him. He feared to offend you, because you are his father, and he thought I might not quite please you. For, he loves me. He has loved me from the first moment he saw me. He cannot be engaged to another. I could bring him from any woman's side. I have only to say to myself--he must come to me. For he loves me! It is not a thing to doubt."

Mr. Pole turned and recommenced his pacing with hasty steps. All the indications of a nervous tempest were on him. Interjecting half-formed phrases, and now and then staring at Emilia, as at an incomprehensible object, he worked at his hair till it lent him the look of one in horror at an apparition.

"The fellow's going to marry Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, I tell you. He has asked my permission. The infernal scamp! he knew it pleased me. He bled me of a thousand pounds only the other day. I tell you, he's going to marry Lady Charlotte Chillingworth."

Emilia received this statement with a most perplexing smile. She shook her head. "He cannot."

"Cannot? I say he shall, and must, and in a couple of months, too!"

The gravely sceptical smile on Emilia's face changed to a blank pallor.

"Then, you make him, sir--you?"

"He'll be a beggar, if he don't."

"You will keep him without money?"

Mr. Pole felt that he gazed on strange deeps in that girl's face. Her voice had the wire-like hum of a rising wind. There was no menace in her eyes: the lashes of them drooped almost tenderly, and the lips were but softly closed. The heaving of the bosom, though weighty, was regular: the hands hung straight down, and were open. She looked harmless; but his physical apprehensiveness was sharpened by his nervous condition, and he read power in her: the capacity to concentrate all animal and mental vigour into one feeling--this being the power of the soul.

So she stood, breathing quietly, steadily eyeing him.

"No, no;" went on Mr. Pole. "Come, come. We'll sit down, and see, and talk--see what can be done. You know I always meant kindly by you."

"Oh, yes!" Emilia musically murmured, and it cost her nothing to smile again.

"Now, tell me how this began." Mr. Pole settled himself comfortably to listen, all irritation having apparently left him, under the influence of the dominant nature. "You need not be ashamed to talk it over to me."

"I am not ashamed," Emilia led off, and told her tale simply, with here and there one of her peculiar illustrations. She had not thought of love till it came to life suddenly, she said; and then all the world looked different. The relation of Wilfrid's bravery in fighting for her, varied for a single instant the low monotony of her voice. At the close of the confession, Mr. Pole wore an aspect of distress. This creature's utter unlikeness to the girls he was accustomed to, corroborated his personal view of the case, that Wilfrid certainly could not have been serious, and that she was deluded. But he pitied her, for he had sufficient imagination to prevent him from despising what he did not altogether comprehend. So, to fortify the damsel, he gave her a lecture: first, on young men--their selfish inconsiderateness, their weakness, the wanton lives they led, their trick of lying for any sugar-plum, and how they laughed at their dupes. Secondly, as to the conduct consequently to be prescribed to girls, who were weaker, frailer, by disposition more confiding, and who must believe nothing but what they heard their elders say.

Emilia gave patient heed to the lecture.

"But I am safe," she remarked, when he had finished; "for my lover is not as those young men are."

To speak at all, and arrange his ideas, was a vexation to the poor merchant. He was here like an irritable traveller, who knocks at a gate, which makes as if it opens, without letting him in. Emilia's naive confidence he read as stupidity. It brought on a fresh access of the nervous fever lurking in him, and he cried, jumping from his seat: "Well, you can't have him, and there's an end. You must give up--confound! why! do you expect to have everything you want at starting? There, my child--but, upon my honour! a man loses his temper at having to talk for an hour or so, and no result. You must go to bed; and--do you say your prayers? Well! that's one way of getting out of it--pray that you may forget all about what's not good for you. Why, you're almost like a young man, when you set your mind on a thing. Bad! won't do! Say your prayers regularly. And, please, pour me out a mouthful of brandy. My hand trembles--I don't know what's the matter with it;--just like those rushes on the Thames I used to see when out fishing. No wind, and yet there they shake away. I wish it was daylight on the old river now! It's night, and no mistake. I feel as if I had a fellow twirling a stick over my head. The rascal's been at it for the last month. There, stop where

you are, my dear. Don't begin to dance!"

He pressed at his misty eyes, half under the impression that she was taking a succession of dazzling leaps in air. Terror of an impending blow, which he associated with Emilia's voice, made him entreat her to be silent. After a space, he breathed a long breath of relief, saying: "No, no; you're firm enough on your feet. I don't think I ever saw you dance. My girls have given it up. What led me to think...but, let's to bed, and say our prayers. I want a kiss."

Emilia kissed him on the forehead. The symptoms of illness were strange to her, and passed unheeded. She was too full of her own burning passion to take evidence from her sight. The sun of her world was threatened with extinction. She felt herself already a wanderer in a land of tombs, where none could say whether morning had come or gone. Intensely she looked her misery in the face; and it was as a voice that said, "No sun: never sun any more," to her. But a blue-hued moon slipped from among the clouds, and hung in the black outstretched fingers of the tree of darkness, fronting troubled waters. "This is thy light for ever! thou shalt live in thy dream." So, as in a prison-house, did her soul now recall the blissful hours by Wilming Weir. She sickened but an instant. The blood in her veins was too strong a tide for her to crouch in that imagined corpse-like universe which alternates with an irradiated Eden in the brain of the passionate young.

"Why should I lose him!" The dry sob choked her.

She struggled with the emotion in her throat, and Mr. Pole, who had previously dreaded supplication and appeals for pity, caressed her. Instantly the flood poured out.

"You are not cruel. I knew it. I should have died, if you had come between us. Oh, Wilfrid's father, I love you!--I have never had a very angry word on my mouth. Think! think! if you had made me curse you. For, I could! You would have stopped my life, and Wilfrid's. What would our last thoughts have been? We could not have forgiven you. Take up dead birds killed by frost. You cry: Cruel winter! murdering cold! But I knew better. You are Wilfrid's father, whom I can kneel to. My lover's father! my own father! my friend next to heaven! Oh! bless my love, for him. You have only to know what my love for him is! The thought of losing him goes like perishing cold through my bones;--my heart jerks, as if it had to pull up my body from the grave every time it beats...."

"God in heaven!" cried the horrified merchant, on whose susceptible nerves these images wrought with such a force that he absolutely had dread of her. He gasped, and felt at his heart, and then at his pulse; rubbed the moisture from his forehead, and throwing a fixedly wild look on her eyes, he jumped up and left her kneeling.

His caress had implied mercy to Emilia: for she could not reconcile it with the rejection of the petition of her soul. She was now a little bewildered to see him trotting the room, frowning and blinking, and

feeling at one wrist, at momentary pauses, all his words being: "Let's be quiet. Let's be good. Let's go to bed, and say our prayers;" mingled with short ejaculations.

"I may say," she intercepted him, "I may tell my dear lover that you bless us both, and that we are to live. Oh, speak! sir! let me hear you!"

"Let's go to bed," iterated Mr. Pole. "Come, candles! do light them. In God's name! light candles. And let's be off and say our prayers."

"You consent, sir?"

"What's that your heart does?" Mr. Pole stopped to enquire; adding: "There, don't tell me. You've played the devil with mine. Who'd ever have made me believe that I should feel more at ease running up and down the room, than seated in my arm-chair! Among the wonders of the world, that!"

Emilia put up her lips to kiss him, as he passed her. There was something deliciously soothing and haven-like to him in the aspect of her calmness.

"Now, you'll be a good girl," said he, when he had taken her salute.

"And you," she rejoined, "will be happier!"

His voice dropped. "If you go on like this, you've done for me!"

But she could make no guess at any tragic meaning in his words. "My father--let me call you so!"

"Will you see that you can't have him?" he stamped the syllables into her ears: and, with a notion of there being a foreign element about her, repeated:--"No!--not have him!--not yours!--somebody else's!"

This was clear enough.

"Only you can separate us," said Emilia, with a brow levelled intently.

"Well, and I"--Mr. Pole was pursuing in the gusty energy of his previous explanation. His eyes met Emilia's, gravely widening. "I--I'm very sorry," he broke down: "upon my soul, I am!"

The old man went to the mantel-piece and leaned his elbow before the glass.

Emilia's bosom began to rise again.

She was startled to hear him laugh. A slight melancholy little burst; and then a louder one, followed by a full-toned laughter that fell short and showed the heart was not in it.

"That boy Braintop! What fun it was!" he said, looking all the while into the glass. "Why can't we live in peace, and without bother! Is your candle alight, my dear?"

Emilia now thought that he was practising evasion.

"I will light it," she said.

Mr. Pole gave a wearied sigh. His head being still turned to the glass, he listened with a shrouded face for her movements: saying, "Good night; good night; I'll light my own. There's a dear!"

A shouting was in his ears, which seemed to syllable distinctly: "If she goes at once, I'm safe."

The sight of pain at all was intolerable to him; but he had a prophetic physical warning now that to witness pain inflicted by himself would be more than he could endure.

Emilia breathed a low, "Good night."

"Good night, my love--all right to-morrow!" he replied briskly; and remorse touching his kind heart as the music of her 'good night' penetrated to it by thrilling avenues, he added injudiciously: "Don't fret. We'll see what we can do. Soon make matters comfortable."

"I love you, and I know you will not stab me," she answered.

"No; certainly not," said Mr. Pole, still keeping his back to her.

Struck with a sudden anticipating fear of having to go through this scene on the morrow, he continued: "No misunderstands, mind! Wilfrid's done with."

There was a silence. He trusted she might be gone. Turning round, he faced her; the light of the candle throwing her pale visage into ghostly relief.

"Where is sleep for you if you part us?"

Mr. Pole flung up his arms. "I insist upon your going to bed. Why shouldn't I sleep? Child's folly!"

Though he spoke so, his brain was in strings to his timorous ticking nerves; and he thought that it would be well to propitiate her and get her to utter some words that would not haunt his pillow.

"My dear girl! it's not my doing. I like you. I wish you well and happy. Very fond of you;--blame circumstances, not me." Then he murmured: "Are black spots on the eyelids a bad sign? I see big flakes of soot falling in a dark room."

Emilia's mated look fled. "You come between us, sir, because I have

no money?"

"I tell you it's the boy's only chance to make his hit now." Mr. Pole stamped his foot angrily.

"And you make my Cornelia marry, though she loves another, as Wilfrid loves me, and if they do not obey you they are to be beggars! Is it you who can pray? Can you ever have good dreams? I saved my father from the sin, by leaving him. He wished to sell me. But my poor father had no money at all, and I can pardon him. Money was a bright thing to him: like other things to us. Mr. Pole! What will any one say for you!"

The unhappy merchant had made vehement efforts to perplex his hearing, that her words might be empty and not future dragons round his couch. He was looking forward to a night of sleep as a cure for the evil sensations besetting him--his only chance. The chance was going; and with the knowledge that it was unjustly torn from him--this one gleam of clear reason in his brain undimmed by the irritable storm which plucked him down--he cried out, to clear himself:--

"They are beggars, both, and all, if they don't marry before two months are out. I'm a beggar then. I'm ruined. I shan't have a penny. I'm in a workhouse. They are in good homes. They are safe, and thank their old father. Now, then; now. Shall I sleep?"

Emilia caught his staggering arm. The glazed light of his eyes went out. He sank into a chair; white as if life had issued with the secret of his life. Wonderful varying expressions had marked his features and the tones of his voice, while he was uttering that sharp, succinct confession; so that, strange as it sounded, every sentence fixed itself on her with incontrovertible force, and the meaning of the whole flashed through her mind. It struck her too awfully for speech. She held fast to his nerveless hand, and kneeling before him, listened for his long reluctant breathing.

The 'Shall I sleep?' seemed answered.

CHAPTER XXVII

For days after the foregoing scene, Brookfield was unconscious of what had befallen it. Wilfrid was trying his yacht, the ladies were preparing for the great pleasure-gathering on Besworth lawn, and shaping astute designs to exclude the presence of Mrs. Chump, for which they partly condemned themselves; but, as they said, "Only hear her!" The excitable woman was swelling from conjecture to certainty on a continuous public cry of, "'Pon my hon'r!--d'ye think little Belloni's gone and marrud Pole?"

Emilia's supposed flight had deeply grieved the ladies, when alarm and suspicion had subsided. Fear of some wretched male baseness on the part

of their brother was happily diverted by a letter, wherein he desired them to come to him speedily. They attributed her conduct to dread of Mr. Pericles. That fervid devotee of Euterpe received the tidings with an obnoxious outburst, which made them seriously ask themselves (individually and in secret) whether he was not a moneyed brute, and nothing more. Nor could they satisfactorily answer the question. He raved: "You let her go. Ha! what creatures you are--hein? But you find not anozer in fifty years, I say; and here you stop, and forty hours pass by, and not a sing in motion. What blood you have! It is water--not blood. Such a voice, a verve, a style, an eye, a devil, zat girl! and all drawn up and out before ze time by a man: she is spoilt!"

He exhibited an anguish that they were not able to commiserate. Certain expressions falling from him led them to guess that he had set some plot in motion, which Emilia's flight had arrested; but his tragic outcries were all on the higher ground of the loss to Art. They were glad to see him go from the house. Soon he returned to demand Wilfrid's address. Arabella wrote it out for him with rebuking composure. Then he insisted upon having Captain Gambier's, whom he described as "ce nonchalant dandy."

"Him you will have a better opportunity of seeing by waiting here," said Adela; and the captain came before Mr. Pericles had retreated. "Ce nonchalant" was not quite true to his title, when he heard that Emilia had flown. He did not say much, but iterated "Gone!" with an elegant frown, adding, "She must come back, you know!" and was evidently more than commonly puzzled and vexed, pursuing the strain in a way that satisfied Mr. Pericles more thoroughly than Adela.

"She shall come back as soon as she has a collar," growled Mr. Pericles, meaning captivity.

"If she'd only come back with her own maiden name," interjected Mrs. Chump, "I'll give her a character; but, upon my hon'r--d'ye think ut possible, now...?"

Arabella talked over her, and rescued her father's name.

The noisy sympathy and wild speculations of the Tinleys and Copleys had to be endured. On the whole, the feeling toward Emilia was kind, and the hope that she would come to no harm was fervently expressed by all the ladies; frequently enough, also, to show the opinion that it might easily happen. On such points Mrs. Chump never failed to bring the conversation to a block. Supported as they were by Captain Gambier, Edward Buxley, Freshfield Sumner, and more than once by Sir Twickenham (whom Freshfield, launching angry shafts, now called the semi-betrothed, the statistical cripple, and other strong things that show a developing genius for street-cries and hustings--epithets in every member of the lists of the great Rejected, or of the jilted who can affect to be philosophical), notwithstanding these aids, the ladies of Brookfield were crushed by Mrs. Chump. Her main offence was, that she revived for them so much of themselves that they had buried. "Oh! the unutterably sordid City life!" It hung about her like a smell of London smoke. As a mere animal, they

passed her by, and had almost come to a state of mind to pass her off. It was the phantom, or rather the embodiment of their First Circle, that they hated in the woman. She took heroes from the journals read by servant-maids; she thought highly of the Court of Aldermen; she went on public knees to the aristocracy; she was proud, in fact, of all City appetites. What, though none saw the peculiar sting? They felt it; and one virtue in possessing an 'ideal' is that, lodging in you as it does, it insists upon the interior being furnished by your personal satisfaction, and not by the blindness or stupidity of the outer world. Thus, in one direction, an ideal precludes humbug. The ladies might desire to cloak facts, but they had no pleasure in deception. They had the feminine power of extinguishing things disagreeable, so long as nature or the fates did them no violence. When these forces sent an emissary to confound them, as was clearly the case with Mrs. Chump, they fought. The dreadful creature insisted upon shows of maudlin affection that could not be accorded to her, so that she existed in a condition of preternatural sensitiveness. Among ladies pretending to dignity of life, the horror of acrid complaints alternating with public offers of love from a gross woman, may be pictured in the mind's eye. The absence of Mr. Pole and Wilfrid, which caused Mrs. Chump to chafe at the restraint imposed by the presence of males to whom she might not speak endearingly, and deprived the ladies of proper counsel, and what good may be at times in masculine authority, led to one fierce battle, wherein the great shot was fired on both sides. Mrs. Chump was requested to leave the house: she declined. Interrogated as to whether she remained as an enemy, knowing herself to be so looked upon, she said that she remained to save them from the dangers they invited. Those dangers she named, observing that Mrs. Lupin, their aunt, might know them, but was as liable to be sent to sleep by a fellow with a bag of jokes as a watchdog to be quieted by a bone. The allusion here was to Mrs. Lupin's painful, partially inexcusable, incurable sense of humour, especially when a gleam of it led to the prohibited passages of life. The poor lady was afflicted so keenly that, in instances where one of her sex and position in the social scale is bound to perish rather than let even the shadow of a laugh appear, or any sign of fleshly perception or sympathy peep out, she was seen to be mutely, shockingly, penitentially convulsed: a degrading sight. And albeit repeatedly remonstrated with, she, upon such occasions, invariably turned imploring glances--a sort of frowning entreaty--to the ladies, or to any of her sex present. "Did you not see that? Oh! can you resist it?" she seemed to gasp, as she made those fruitless efforts to drag them to her conscious level. "Sink thou, if thou wilt," was the phrase indicated to her. She had once thought her propensity innocent enough, and enjoyable. Her nieces had almost cured her, by sitting on her, until Mrs. Chump came to make her worst than ever. It is to be feared that Mrs. Chump was beginning to abuse her power over the little colourless lady. We cannot, when we find ourselves possessed of the gift of sending a creature into convulsions, avoid exercising it. Mrs. Lupin was one of the victims of the modern feminine 'ideal.' She was in mind merely a woman; devout and charitable, as her nieces admitted; but radically--what? They did not like to think, or to say, what;--repugnant, seemed to be the word. A woman who consented to perceive the double-meaning, who acknowledged its suggestions of a violation of decency laughable, and who could not restrain laughter, was,

in their judgement, righteously a victim. After signal efforts to lift her up, the verdict was that their Aunt Lupin did no credit to her sex. If we conceive a timorous little body of finely-strung nerves, inclined to be gay, and shrewdly apprehensive, but depending for her opinion of herself upon those about her, we shall see that Mrs. Lupin's life was one of sorrow and scourges in the atmosphere of the 'ideal.' Never did nun of the cloister fight such a fight with the flesh, as this poor little woman, that she might not give offence to the Tribunal of the Nice Feelings which leads us to ask, "Is sentimentalism in our modern days taking the place of monasticism to mortify our poor humanity?" The sufferings of the Three of Brookfield under Mrs. Chump was not comparable to Mrs. Lupin's. The good little woman's soul withered at the self-contempt to which her nieces helped her daily. Laughter, far from expanding her heart and invigorating her frame, was a thing that she felt herself to be nourishing as a traitor in her bosom: and the worst was, that it came upon her like a reckless intoxication at times, possessing her as a devil might; and justifying itself, too, and daring to say, "Am I not Nature?" Mrs. Lupin shrank from the remembrance of those moments.

In another age, the scenes between Mrs. Lupin and Mrs. Chump, greatly significant for humanity as they are, will be given without offence on one side or martyrdom on the other. At present, and before our sentimentalists are a concrete, it would be profitless rashness to depict them. When the great shots were fired off (Mrs. Chump being requested to depart, and refusing) Mrs. Lupin fluttered between the belligerents, doing her best to be a medium for the restoration of peace. In repeating Mrs. Chump's remarks, which were rendered purposely strong with Irish spice by that woman, she choked; and when she conveyed to Mrs. Chump the counter-remarks of the ladies, she provoked utterances that almost killed her. A sadder life is not to be imagined. The perpetual irritation of a desire to indulge in her mortal weakness, and listening to the sleepless conscience that kept watch over it; her certainty that it would be better for her to laugh right out, and yet her incapacity to contest the justice of her nieces' rebuke; her struggle to resist Mrs. Chump, which ended in a sensation of secret shameful liking for her--all these warring influences within were seen in her behaviour.

"I have always said," observed Cornelia, "that she labours under a disease." What is more, she had always told Mrs. Lupin as much, and her sisters had echoed her. Three to one in such a case is a severe trial to the reason of solitary one. And Mrs. Lupin's case was peculiar, inasmuch as the more she yielded to Chump-temptation and eased her heart of its load of laughter, the more her heart cried out against her and subscribed to the scorn of her nieces. Mrs. Chump acted a demon's part; she thirsted for Mrs. Lupin that she might worry her. Hitherto she had not known that anything peculiar lodged in her tongue, and with no other person did she think of using it to produce a desired effect; but now the scenes in Brookfield became hideous to the ladies, and not wanting in their trials to the facial muscles of the gentlemen. A significant sign of what the ladies were enduring was, that they ceased to speak of it in their consultations. It is a blank period in the career of young creatures when a fretting wretchedness forces them out of their dreams to action; and it is then that they will do things that, seen from the

outside (i.e. in the conduct of others), they would hold to be monstrous, all but impossible. Or how could Cornelia persuade herself, as she certainly persuaded Sir Twickenham and the world about her, that she had a contemplative pleasure in his society? Arabella drew nearer to Edward Buxley, whom she had not treated well, and who, as she might have guessed, had turned his thoughts toward Adela; though clearly without encouragement. Adela indeed said openly to her sisters, with a Gallic ejaculation, "Edward follows me, do you know; and he has adopted a sort of Sicilian-vespers look whenever he meets me with Captain Gambier. I could forgive him if he would draw out a dagger and be quite theatrical; but, behold, we meet, and my bourgeois grunts and stammers, and seems to beg us to believe that he means nothing whatever by his behaviour. Can you convey to his City-intelligence that he is just a trifle ill-bred?"

Now, Arabella had always seen Edward as a thing that was her own, which accounts for the treatment to which, he had been subjected. A quick spur of jealousy--a new sensation--was the origin of her leaning toward Edward; and the plea of saving Adela from annoyance excused and covered it. He, for his part, scarcely concealed his irritation, until a little scented twisted note was put in his hand, which said, "You are as anxious as I can be about our sweet lost Emilia! We believe ourselves to be on her traces." This gave him wonderful comfort. It put Adela in a beautiful fresh light as a devoted benefactress and delicious intriguante. He threw off some of his most telling caricatures at this period. Adela had divined that Captain Gambier suspected his cousin Merthyr Powys of abstracting Emilia, that he might shield her from Mr. Pericles. The Captain confessed it, calmly blushing, and that he was in communication with Miss Georgiana Ford, Mr. Powys's half-sister; about whom Adela was curious, until the Captain ejaculated, "A saint!"--whereat she was satisfied, knowing by instinct that the preference is for sinners. Their meetings usually referred to Emilia; and it was astonishing how willingly the Captain would talk of her. Adela repeated to herself, "This is our mask," and thus she made it the Captain's; for it must be said that the conquering Captain had never felt so full of pity to any girl or woman to whom he fancied he had done damage, as to Emilia. He enjoyed a most thorough belief that she was growing up to perplex him with her love, and he had not consequently attempted to precipitate the measure; but her flight had prematurely perplexed him. In grave debate with the ends of his moustache for a term, he concluded by accusing Merthyr Powys; and with a little feeling of spite not unknown to masculine dignity, he wrote to Merthyr's half-sister--"merely to inquire, being aware that whatever he does you have been consulted on, and the friends of this Miss Belloni are distressed by her absence."

The ladies of Brookfield were accustomed to their father's occasional unpremeditated absences, and neither of them had felt an apprehension which she could not dismiss, until one morning Mr. Powys sent up his card to Arabella, requesting permission to speak with her alone.

Georgiana Ford would have had little claim among the fair saints to be accepted by them as one of their order. Her reputation for coldness was derived from the fact of her having stood a siege from Captain Gambier. But she loved a creature of earth too well to put up a hand for saintly honours. The passion of her life centred in devotion to her half-brother. Those who had studied her said, perhaps with a touch of malignity, that her religious instinct had its source in a desire to gain some place of intercession for him. Merthyr had leaned upon it too often to doubt the strength of it, whatever its purity might be. She, when barely more than a child (a girl of sixteen), had followed him over the then luckless Italian fields--sacrificing as much for a cause that she held to be trivial, as he in the ardour of his half-fanatical worship. Her theory was: "These Italians are in bondage, and since heaven permits it, there has been guilt. By endurance they are strengthened, by suffering chastened; so let them endure and suffer." She would cleave to this view with many variations of pity. Merthyr's experience was tolerant to the weaker vessel's young delight in power, which makes her sometimes, though sweet and merciful by nature, enunciate Hebraic severities oracularly. He smiled, and was never weary of pointing out practical refutations. Whereat she said, "Will a thousand instances change the principle?" When the brain, and especially the fine brain of a woman, first begins to act for itself, the work is of heavy labour; she finds herself plunging abroad on infinite seas, and runs speedily into the anchorage of dogmas, obfusatory saws, and what she calls principles. Here she is safe; but if her thinking was not originally the mere action of lively blood upon that battery of intelligence, she will by-and-by reflect that it is not well for a live thing to be tied to a dead, and that long clinging to safety confesses too much. Merthyr waited for Georgians patiently. On all other points they were heart-in-heart. It was her pride to say that she loved him with no sense of jealousy, and prayed that he might find a woman, in plain words, worthy of him. This woman had not been found; she confessed that she had never seen her.

Georgians received Captain Gambier's communication in Monmouth. Merthyr had now and then written of a Miss Belloni; but he had seemed to refer to a sort of child, and Georgians had looked on her as another Italian pensioner. She was decisive. The moment she awoke to feel herself brooding over the thought of this girl, she started to join Merthyr. Solitude is pasturage for a suspicion. On her way she grew persuaded that her object was bad, and stopped; until the thought came, 'If he is in a dilemma, who shall help him save his sister?' And, with spiritually streaming eyes at a vision of companionship broken (but whether by his taking another adviser, or by Miss Belloni, she did not ask), Georgiana continued her journey.

At the door of Lady Gosstre's town-house she hesitated, and said in her mind, "What am I doing? and what earthliness has come into my love for him?"

Or, turning to the cry, "Will he want me?" stung herself. Conscious that there was some poison in her love, but clinging to it not less, she entered the house, and was soon in Merthyr's arms.

"Why have you come up?" he asked.

"Were you thinking of coming to me quickly?" she murmured in reply.

He did not say yes, but that he had business in London. Nor did he say what.

Georgiana let him go.

"How miserable is such a weakness! Is this my love?" she thought again.

Then she went to her bedroom, and knelt, and prayed her Saviour's pardon for loving a human thing too well. But, if the rays of her mind were dimmed, her heart beat too forcibly for this complacent self-deceit.

"No; not too well! I cannot love him too well. I am selfish. When I say that, it is myself I am loving. To love him thrice as dearly as I do would bring me nearer to God. Love I mean, not idolatry--another form of selfishness."

She prayed to be guided out of the path of snares.

"CAN YOU PRAY? CAN YOU PUT AWAY ALL PROPS OF SELF? THIS IS TRUE WORSHIP, UNTO WHATSOEVER POWER YOU KNEEL."

This passage out of a favourite book of sentences had virtue to help her now in putting away the 'props of self.' It helped her for the time. She could not foresee the contest that was commencing for her.

"LOVE THAT SHRIEKS AT A MORTAL WOUND, AND BLEEDS HUMANLY, WHAT IS HE BUT A PAGAN GOD, WITH THE PASSIONS OF A PAGAN GOD?"

"Yes," thought Georgiana, meditating, "as different from the Christian love as a brute from a man!"

She felt that the revolution of the idea of love in her mind (all that consoled her) was becoming a temptation. Quick in her impulses, she dismissed it. "I am like a girl!" she said scornfully. "Like a woman" would not have flattered her. Like what did she strive to be? The picture of another self was before her--a creature calmly strong, unruffled, and a refuge to her beloved. It was a steady light through every wind that blew, save when the heart narrowed; and then it waxed feeble, and the life in her was hungry for she knew not what.

Georgiana's struggle was to make her great passion eat up all the others. Sure of the intensity and thoroughness of her love for Merthyr, she would forecast for herself tasks in his service impossible save to one sensually dead and therefore spiritually sexless. "My love is pure," she would say; as if that were the talisman which rendered it superhuman. She was under the delusion that lovers' love was a reprehensible egoism. Her heart had never had place for it; and thus her nature was unconsummated, and the torment of a haunting insufficiency accompanied her sweetest hours, ready to mislead her in all but very clearest

actions.

She saw, or she divined, much of this struggle; but the vision of it was fitful, not consecutive. It frightened and harassed without illuminating her. Now, upon Merthyr's return, she was moved by it just enough to take his hand and say:--

"We are the same?"

"What can change us?" he replied.

"Or who?" and as she smiled up to him, she was ashamed of her smile.

"Yes, who!" he interjected, by this time quite enlightened. All subtle feelings are discerned by Welsh eyes when untroubled by any mental agitation. Brother and sister were Welsh, and I may observe that there is human nature and Welsh nature.

"Forgive me," she said; "I have been disturbed about you."

Perceiving that it would be well to save her from any spiritual twists and turns that she might reach what she desired to know, he spoke out fully: "I have not written to you about Miss Belloni lately. I think it must be seven or eight days since I had a letter from her--you shall see it--looking as if it had been written in the dark. She gave the address of a London hotel. I went to her, and her story was that she had come to town to get Mr. Pole's consent to her marriage with his son; and that when she succeeded in making herself understood by him, the old man fell, smitten with paralysis, crying out that he was ruined, and his children beggars."

"Ah!" said Georgiana; "then this son is engaged to her?"

"She calls him her lover."

"Openly?"

"Have I not told you? 'naked and unashamed.'"

"Of course that has attracted my Merthyr!" Georgians drew to him tenderly, breathing as one who has a burden off her heart.

"But why did she write to you?" the question started up.

For this reason: it appears that Mr. Pole showed such nervous irritation at the idea of his family knowing the state he was in, that the doctor attending him exacted a promise from her not to communicate with one of them. She was alone, in great perplexity, and did what I had requested her to do. She did me the honour to apply to me for any help it was in my power to give.

Georgiana stood eyeing the ground sideways. "What is she like?"

"You shall see to-morrow, if you will come with me."

"Dark, or fair?"

Merthyr turned her face to the light, laughing softly. Georgiana coloured, with dropped eyelids.

She raised her eyes under their load of shame. "I will come gladly," she said.

"Early to-morrow, then," rejoined Merthyr.

On the morrow, as they were driving to the hotel, Georgians wanted to know whether he called 'this Miss Belloni' by her Christian name--a question so needless that her over-conscious heart drummed with gratitude when she saw that he purposely spared her from one meaning look. In this mutual knowledge, mutual help, in minute as in great things, as well as in the recognition of a common nobility of mind, the love of the two was fortified.

Emilia had not been left by Mr. Powys without the protection of a woman's society in her singular position. Lady Charlotte's natural prompt kindness required no spur from her friend that she should go and brace up the spirits of a little woman, whom she pitied doubly for loving a man who was deceiving her, and not loving one who was good for her. She went frequently to Emilia, and sat with her in the sombre hotel drawing-room. Still, frank as she was and blunt as she affected to be, she could not bring her tongue to speak of Wilfrid. If she had fancied any sensitive shuddering from the name and the subject to exist, she would have struck boldly, being capable of cruelty and, where she was permitted to see a weakness, rather fond of striking deep. A belief in the existence of Emilia's courage touched her to compassion. One day, however, she said, "What is it you take to in Merthyr Powys?" and this brought on plain speaking.

Emilia could give no reason; and it is a peculiarity of people who ask such questions that they think a want of directness in the answer suspicious.

Lady Charlotte said gravely, "Come, come!"

"What do you mean?" asked Emilia. "I like so many things in him."

"You don't like one thing chiefly?"

"I like--what do I like?--his kindness."

"His kindness!" This was the sort of reply to make the lady implacable. She seldom read others shrewdly, and could not know, that near her, Emilia thought of Wilfrid in a way that made the vault of her brain seem to echo with jarred chords. "His kindness! What a picture is the 'grateful girl!' I have seen rows of white-capped charity children giving a bob and a snuffle as the parson went down the ranks promising

buns. Well! his kindness! You are right in appreciating as much as you can see. I'll tell you why I like him;--because he is a gentleman. And you haven't got an idea how rare that animal is. Dear me! Should I be plainer to you if I called him a Christian gentleman? It's the cant of a detestable school, my child. It means just this--but why should I disturb your future faith in it? The professors mainly profess to be 'a comfort to young women,' and I suppose you will meet your comfort, and worship them with the 'growing mind;' and I must confess that they bait it rather cunningly; nothing else would bite. They catch almost all the raw boys who have anything in them. But for me, Merthyr himself would have been caught long ago. There's no absolute harm in them, only that they're a sentimental compromise. I deny their honesty; and if it's flatly proved, I deny their intelligence. Well! this you can't understand."

"I have not understood you at all," said Emilia.

"No? It's the tongue that's the natural traitor to a woman, and takes longer runs with every added year. I suppose you know that Mr. Powys wishes to send you to Italy?"

"I do," said Emilia.

"When are you going?"

"I am not going?"

"Why?"

Emilia's bosom rose. She cried "Dear lady!" on the fall of it, and was scarce audible--adding, "Do you love Wilfrid?"

"Well, you have brought me to the point quickly," Lady Charlotte remarked. "I don't commonly beat the bush long myself. Love him! You might as well ask me my age. The indiscretion would be equal, and the result the same. Love! I have a proper fear of the word. When two play at love they spoil the game. It's enough that he says he loves me."

Emilia looked relieved. "Poor lady!" she sighed.

"Poor!" Lady Charlotte echoed, with curious eyes fixed on the puzzle beside her.

"Tell me you will not believe him," Emilia continued. "He is mine; I shall never give him up. It is useless for you or any one else to love him. I know what love is now. Stop while you can. I can be sorry for you, but I will not let him go from me. He is my lover."

Emilia closed her lips abruptly. She produced more effect than was visible. Lady Charlotte drew out a letter, saying, "Perhaps this will satisfy you."

"Nothing!" cried Emilia, jumping to her feet.

"Read it--read it; and, for heaven's sake, ma fille sauvage, don't think I'm here to fight for the man! He is not Orpheus; and our modern education teaches us that it's we who are to be run after. Will you read it?"

"No."

"Will you read it to please me?"

Emilia changed from a look of quiet opposition to gentleness of feature.

"Why will it please you if I read that he has flattered you? I never lie about what I feel; I think men do." Her voice sank.

"You won't allow yourself to imagine, then, that he has spoken false to you?"

"Tell me," retorted Emilia, "are you sure in your heart--as sure as it beats each time--that he loves you? You are not."

"It seems that we are dignifying my gentleman remarkably," said Lady Charlotte. "When two women fight for a man, that is almost a meal for his vanity. Now, listen. I am not, as they phrase it, in love. I am an experienced person--what is called a woman of the world. I should not make a marriage unless I had come to the conclusion that I could help my husband, or he me. Do me the favour to read this letter."

Emilia took it and opened it slowly. It was a letter in the tone of the gallant paying homage with some fervour. Emilia searched every sentence for the one word. That being absent, she handed back the letter, her eyes lingering on the signature.

"Do you see what he says?" asked Lady Charlotte; "that I can be a right hand to him, as I believe I can."

"He writes like a friend." Emilia uttered this as when we have a contrast in the mind.

"You excuse him for writing to me in that style?"

"Yes; he may write to any woman like that."

"He has latitude! You really fancy that's the sort of letter a friend would write?"

"That is how Mr. Powys would write to me," said Emilia. Lady Charlotte laughed. "My unhappy Merthyr!"

"Only if I could be a great deal older," Emilia hastened to add; and Lady Charlotte slightly frowned, but rubbed it out with a smile.

Rising, the lady said: "I have spoken to you upon equal terms; and remember, very few women would have done what I have done. You are cared

for by Merthyr Powys, and that's enough. It would do you no harm to fix your eyes upon him. You won't get him; but it would do you no harm. He has a heart, as they call it; whatever it is, it's as strong as a cable. He is a knight of the antique. He is specially guarded, however. Well, he insists that you are his friend; so you are mine, and that is why I have come to you and spoken to you. You will be silent about it, I need not say. No one but yourself is aware that Lieutenant Pole does me the honour to liken me to the good old gentleman who accompanied Telemachus in his voyages, and chooses me from among the handmaidens of earth. On this head you will promise to be silent."

Lady Charlotte held forth her hand. Emilia would not take it before she had replied, "I knew this before you came," and then she pressed the extended fingers.

Lady Charlotte drew her close. "Has Wilfrid taken you into his confidence so far?"

Emilia explained that she had heard it from his father.

The lady's face lit up as from a sting of anger. "Very well--very well," she said; and, presently, "You are right when you speak of the power of lying in men. Observe--Wilfrid told me that not one living creature knew there was question of an engagement between us. What would you do in my case?"

Emilia replied, "Forgive him; and I should think no more of it."

"Yes. It would be right; and, presuming him to have the vice, I could be of immense service to him, if at least he does not lie habitually. But this is a description of treachery, you know."

"Oh!" cried Emilia, "what kind of treachery is that, if he only will keep his heart open for me to give all mine to it!"

She stood clutching her hands in the half-sobbing ecstasy which signalises a spiritual exaltation built on disquiet. She had shown small emotion hitherto. The sight of it was like the sight of a mighty hostile power to Lady Charlotte--a power that moved her--that challenged, and irritated, and subdued her. For she saw there something that she had not; and being of a nature leaning to great-mindedness, though not of the first rank, she could not meanly mask her own deficiency by despising it. To do this is the secret evil by which souls of men and women stop their growth.

Lady Charlotte decided now to say good-bye. Her parting was friendly--the form of it consisting of a nod, an extension of the hand, and a kind word or two.

When alone, Emilia wondered why she kept taking long breaths, and tried to correct herself: but the heart laboured. Yet she seemed to have no thought in her mind; she had no active sensation of pity or startled self-love. She went to smooth Mr. Pole's pillow, as to a place of

forgetfulness. The querulous tyrannies of the invalid relieved her; but the heavy lifting of her chest returned the moment she was alone. She mentioned it to the doctor, who prescribed for liver, informing her that the said organ conducted one of the most important functions of her bodily system.

Emilia listened to the lecturer, and promised to take his medicine, trusting to be perfectly quieted by the nauseous draught; but when Mr. Powys came, she rushed up to him, and fell with a cry upon his breast, murmuring broken words that Georgiana might fairly interpret as her suspicions directed. Nor had she ever seen Merthyr look as he did when their eyes next met.

CHAPTER XXIX

The card of Mr. Powys found Arabella alone in the house. Mrs. Lupin was among village school-children; Mrs. Chump had gone to London to see whether anything was known of Mr. Pole at his office, where she fell upon the youth Braintop, and made him her own for the day. Adela was out in the woods, contemplating nature; and Cornelia was supposed to be walking whither her stately fancy drew her.

"Will you take long solitary walks unprotected?" she was asked.

"I have a parasol," she replied; and could hear, miles distant, the domestic comments being made on her innocence; and the story it would be --"She thinks of no possible danger but from the sun."

A little forcing of her innocence now was necessary as an opiate for her conscience. She was doing what her conscience could only pardon on the plea of her extreme innocence. The sisters, and the fashion at Brookfield, permitted the assumption, and exaggerated it willingly. It chanced, however, that Adela had reason to feel discontented. It was a breach of implied contract, she thought, that Cornelia should, as she did only yesterday, tell her that she had seen Edward Buxley in the woods, and that she was of opinion that the air of the woods was bad for her. Not to see would have been the sisterly obligation, in Adela's idea-- especially when seeing embraced things that no loving sister should believe.

Bear in mind that we are sentimentalists. The eye is our servant, not our master; and--so are the senses generally. We are not bound to accept more than we choose from them. Thus we obtain delicacy; and thus, as you will perceive, our civilization, by the aid of the sentimentalists, has achieved an effective varnish. There, certainly, to the vulgar, mind a tail is visible. The outrageous philosopher declares vehemently that no beast of the field or the forest would own such a tail. (His meaning is, that he discerns the sign of the animal slinking under the garb of the stately polished creature. I have all the difficulty in the world to keep him back and let me pursue my course.) These philosophers are a

bad-mannered body. Either in opposition, or in the support of them, I maintain simply that the blinking sentimentalist helps to make civilization what it is, and civilization has a great deal of merit.

"Did you not leave your parasol behind you at Ipley?" said Adela, as she met Cornelia in the afternoon.

Cornelia coloured. Her pride supported her, and she violated fine shades painfully in her response: "Mr. Barrett left me there. Is that your meaning?"

Adela was too much shocked to note the courageousness of the reply. "Well! if all we do is to come into broad daylight!" was her horrified mental ejaculation.

The veil of life was about to be lifted for these ladies. They found Arabella in her room, crying like an unchastened school-girl; and their first idea was one of intense condemnation--fresh offences on the part of Mrs. Chump being conjectured. Little by little Arabella sobbed out what she had heard that day from Mr. Powys.

After the first stupor Adela proposed to go to her father instantly, and then suggested that they should all go. She continued talking in random suggestions, and with singular heat, as if she conceived that the sensibility of her sisters required to be aroused. By moving and acting, it seemed to her that the prospect of a vast misery might be expunged, and that she might escape from showing any likeness to Arabella's shamefully-discoloured face. It was impossible for her to realize grief in her own bosom. She walked the room in a nervous tremour, shedding a note of sympathy to one sister and to the other. At last Arabella got fuller command of her voice. When she had related that her father's positive wish, furthered by the doctor's special injunction to obey it scrupulously, was that they were not to go to him in London, and not to breathe a word of his illness, but to remain at Brookfield entertaining friends, Adela stamped her foot, saying that it was more than human nature could bear.

"If we go," said Arabella, "the London doctor assured Mr. Powys that he would not answer for papa's life."

"But, good heavens! are we papa's enemies? And why may Mr. Powys see him if we, his daughters, cannot? Tell me how Mr. Powys met him and knew of it! Tell me--I am bewildered. I feel that we are cheated in some way. Oh! tell me something clear."

Arabella said calmly: "Emilia is with papa. She wrote to Mr. Powys. Whether she did rightly or not we have not now to inquire. I believe that she thought it right."

"Entertain friends!" interjected Adela. "But papa cannot possibly mean that we are to go through--to--the fete on Besworth Lawn, Bella! It's in two days from this dreadful day."

"Papa has mentioned it to Mr. Powys; he desires us not to postpone it. We..." Arabella's voice broke piteously.

"Oh! but this is torture!" cried Adela, with a deplorable vision of the looking-glass rising before her, as she felt the tears sting her eyelids. "This cannot be! No father would...not loving us as dear papa does! To be quiet! to sit and be gay! to flaunt at a fete! Oh, mercy! mercy! Tell me--he left us quite well--no one could have guessed. I remember he looked at me from the carriage window. Tell me--it must be some moral shock--what do you attribute it to? Wilfrid cannot be the guilty one. We have been only too compliant to papa's wishes about that woman. Tell me what you think it can be!"

A voice said, "Money!"

Which of the sisters had spoken Adela did not know. It was bitter enough that one could be brought to utter the thing, even if her ideas were so base as to suspect it. The tears now came dancing over her under-lids like triumphing imps. "Money!" echoed through her again and again. Curiously, too, she had no occasion to ask how it was that money might be supposed to have operated on her father's health. Unable to realize to herself the image of her father lying ill and suffering, but just sufficiently touched by what she could conceive of his situation, the bare whisper of money came like a foul insult to overwhelm her in floods of liquid self-love. She wept with that last anguish of a woman who is compelled to weep, but is incapable of finding any enjoyment in her tears. Cornelia and Arabella caught her hands; she was the youngest, and had been their pet. It gratified them that Adela should show a deep and keen feeling. Adela did not check herself from a demonstration that enabled her to look broadly, as it were, on her own tenderness of heart. Following many outbursts, she asked, "And the illness--what is it? not its cause--itself!"

A voice said, "Paralysis!"

Adela's tears stopped. She gazed on both faces, trying with open mouth to form the word.

CHAPTER XXX

Flying from port to port to effect an exchange of stewards (the endless occupation of a yacht proprietor), Wilfrid had no tidings from Brookfield. The night before the gathering on Besworth Lawn he went to London and dined at his Club--a place where youths may drink largely of the milk of this world's wisdom. Wilfrid's romantic sentiment was always corrected by an hour at his Club. After dinner he strolled to a not perfectly regulated theatre, in company with a brother officer; and when they had done duty before the scenes for a space of time, they lounged behind to disenchant themselves, in obedience to that precocious cynicism which is the young man's extra-Luxury. The first figure that caught

Wilfrid's attention there was Mr. Pericles, in a white overcoat, stretched along a sofa--his eyelids being down, though his eyes were evidently vigilant beneath. A titter of ladies present told of some recent interesting commotion.

"Only a row between that rich Greek fellow who gave the supper, and Marion," a vivacious dame explained to Wilfrid. "She's in one of her jealous fits; she'd be jealous if her poodle-dog went on its hind-legs to anybody else."

"Poodle, by Jove!" said Wilfrid. "Pericles himself looks like an elongated poodle shaved up to his moustache. Look at him. And he plays the tyrant, does he?"

"Oh! she stands that. Some of those absurd women like it, I think. She's fussing about another girl."

"You wouldn't?"

"What man's worth it?"

"But, would you?"

"It depends upon the 'him,' monsieur.

"Depends upon his being very handsome!"

"And good."

"And rich?"

"No!" the lady fired up. "There you don't know us."

The colloquy became almost tender, until she said, "Isn't this gassy, and stifling? I confess I do like a carriage, and Richmond on a Sunday. And then, with two daughters, you know! But what I complain of is her folly in being in love, or something like it, with a rich fellow."

"Love the poor devil--manage the rich, you mean."

"Yes, of course; that makes them both happy."

"It's a method of being charitable to two."

A rather fleshy fairy now entered, and walked straight up to the looking-glass to examine her paint--pronouncedly turning her back to the sofa, where Mr. Pericles still lay at provoking full length. Her panting was ominous of a further explosion.

"Innocent child!" in the mockery of a foreign accent, commenced it; while Wilfrid thought how unjustly and coldly critically he had accused his little Emilia of vulgarity, now that he had this feminine display of it swarming about him.

"Innocent child, indeed! Be as deaf as you like, you shall hear. And sofas are not made for men's dirty boots, in this country. I believe they're all pigs abroad--the men; and the women--cats! Oh! don't open your eyes--don't speak, pray. You're certain I must go when the bell rings. You're waiting for that, you unmanly dog!"

"A pig," Mr. Pericles here ventured to remind her, murmuring as one in a dream.

"A peeg!" she retorted mildly, somewhat mollified by her apparent success. But Mr. Pericles had relapsed into his exasperating composure. The breath of a deliberate and undeserved peacefulness continued to be drawn in by his nostrils.

At the accustomed warning there was an ostentatious rustle of retiring dresses; whereat Mr. Pericles chose to proclaim himself awake. The astute fairy-fury immediately stepped before him.

"Now you can't go on pretending sleep. You shall hear, and everybody shall hear. You know you're a villain! You're a wolf seeking..."

Mr. Pericles waved his hand, and she was caught by the wrist and told that the scene awaited her.

"Let them wait!" she shouted, and, sharpening her cry as she was dragged off, "Dare to take that girl to Italy! I know what that means, with you. An Englishman might mean right--but you! You think you've been dealing with a fool! Why, I can stop this in a minute, and I will. It's you're the fool! Why, I know her father: he plays in the orchestra. I know her name--Belloni!"

Up sprang the Greek like a galvanized corpse; while two violent jerks from the man hauling her out rattled the laugh of triumph which burst from her. At the same time Wilfrid strove forward, with the frown of one still bent listening, and he and Pericles were face to face. The eyebrows of the latter shot up in a lively arch. He made a motion toward the ceremony of 'shake-hands;' but, perceiving no correspondent overture, grinned, "It is warm--ha?"

"You feel the heat? Step outside a minute," said Wilfrid.

"Oh, no!" Mr. Pericles looked pleasantly sagacious. Ze draught--a cold."

"Will you come?" pursued Wilfrid.

"Many sanks!"

Wilfrid's hand was rising. At this juncture his brother officer slipped out some languid words in his ear, indicative of his astonishment that he should be championing a termagant, and horror at the idea of such a thing being publicly imagined, tamed Wilfrid quickly. He recovered himself with his usual cleverness. Seeing the signs of hostility vanish, Mr.

Pericles said, "You are on a search for your father? You have found him? Hom! I should say a maladie of nerfs will come to him. A pin fall--he start! A storm at night--he is out dancing among his ships of venture! Not a bid of corage!--which is bad. If you shall find Mr. Pole for to-morrow on ze lawn, vary glad."

With a smile compounded of sniffing dog and Parisian obsequiousness, Mr. Pericles passed, thinking "He has not got her:" for such was his deduction if he saw that a man could flush for a woman's name.

Wilfrid stood like a machine with a thousand wheels in revolt. Sensations pricked at ideas, and immediately left them to account for their existence as they best could. The ideas committed suicide without a second's consideration. He felt the great gurgling sea in which they were drowned heave and throb. Then came a fresh set, that poised better on the slack-rope of his understanding. By degrees, a buried dread in his brain threw off its shroud. The thought that there was something wrong with his father stood clearly over him, to be swallowed at once in the less tangible belief that a harm had come to Emilia--not was coming, but had come. Passion thinks wilfully when it thinks at all. That night he lay in a deep anguish, revolving the means by which he might help and protect her. There seemed no way open, save by making her his own; and did he belong to himself?. What bound him to Lady Charlotte? She was not lovely or loving. He had not even kissed her hand; yet she held him in a chain.

The two men composing most of us at the outset of actual life began their deadly wrestle within him, both having become awakened. If they wait for circumstance, that steady fire will fuse them into one, who is commonly a person of some strength; but throttling is the custom between them, and we are used to see men of murdered halves. These men have what they fought for: they are unaware of any guilt that may be charged against them, though they know that they do not embrace Life; and so it is that we have vague discontent too universal. Change, O Lawgiver! the length of our minority, and let it not end till this battle is thoroughly fought out in approving daylight. The period of our duality should be one as irresponsible in your eyes as that of our infancy. Is he we call a young man an individual--who is a pair of alternately kicking scales? Is he educated, when he dreams not that he is divided? He has drunk Latin like a vital air, and can quote what he remembers of Homer; but how has he been fortified for this tremendous conflict of opening manhood, which is to our life here what is the landing of a soul to the life to come?

Meantime, it is a bad business when the double-man goes about kneeling at the feet of more than one lady. Society (to give that institution its due) permits him to seek partial invulnerability by dipping himself in a dirty Styx, which corrects, as we hear said, the adolescent tendency to folly. Wilfrid's sentiment had served him (well or ill as it may be), by keeping him from a headlong plunge in the protecting river; and his folly was unchastened. He did not even contemplate an escape from the net at Emilia's expense. The idea came. The idea will come to a young man in such a difficulty. "My mistress! My glorious stolen fruit! My dark angel of love!" He deserves a little credit for seeing that Emilia never

could be his mistress, in the debased sense of the term. Union with her meant life-long union, he knew. Ultimate mental subjection he may also have seen in it, unconsciously. For, hazy thoughts of that nature may mix with the belief that an alliance with her degrades us, in this curious hotch-potch of emotions known to the world as youthful man. A wife superior to her husband makes him ridiculous wilfully, if the wretch is to be laughed at; but a mistress thus ill-matched cannot fail to cast the absurdest light on her monstrous dwarf-custodian. Wilfrid had the sagacity to perceive, and the keen apprehension of ridicule to shrink from, the picture. Besides, he was beginning to love Emilia. His struggle now was to pluck his passion from his heart; and such was already his plight that he saw no other way of attempting it than by taking horse and riding furiously in the direction of Besworth.

CHAPTER XXXI

"I am curious to see what you will make of this gathering. I can cook a small company myself. It requires the powers of a giantess to mix a body of people in the open air; and all that is said of commanders of armies shall be said of you, if you succeed."

This was Lady Gosstre's encouragement to the fair presidents of the fete on Besworth Lawn. There had been a time when they would have cried out internally: "We will do it, fail who may." That fallow hour was over. Their sole thought was to get through the day. A little feverish impulse of rivalry with her great pattern may have moved Arabella; but the pressure of grief and dread, and the contrast between her actions and feelings, forcibly restrained a vain display. As a consequence, she did her duty better, and won applause from the great lady's moveable court on eminences of the ground.

"These girls are clever," she said to Lady Charlotte. "They don't bustle too much. They don't make too distinct a difference of tone with the different sets. I shall propose Miss Pole as secretary to our Pin and Needle Relief Society."

"Do," was the reply. "There is also the Polish Dance Committee; and, if she has any energy left, she might be treasurer to the Ladies' General Revolution Ball."

"That is an association with which I am not acquainted," said Lady Gosstre, directing her eye-glass on the field. "Here comes young Pole. He's gallant, they tell me, and handsome: he studies us too obviously. That's a mistake to be corrected, Charlotte. One doesn't like to see a pair of eyes measuring us against a preconception quelconque. Now, there is our Ionian Am...but you have corrected me, Merthyr:--host, if you please. But, see! What is the man doing? Is he smitten with madness?"

Mr. Pericles had made a furious dash at the band in the centre of the lawn, scattered their music, and knocked over the stands. When his

gesticulations had been observed for some moments, Freshfield Sumner said: "He has the look of a plucked hen, who remembers that she once clapped wings, and tries to recover the practice."

"Very good," said Lady Gosstre. She was not one who could be unkind to the professional wit. "And the music-leaves go for feathers. What has the band done to displease him? I thought the playing was good."

"The instruments appear to have received a dismissal," said Lady Charlotte. "I suppose this is a clearing of the stage for coming alarms and excursions. Behold! the 'female element' is agitated. There are-- can you reckon at this distance, Merthyr?--twelve, fourteen of my sex entreating him in the best tragic fashion. Can he continue stern?"

"They seem to be as violent as the women who tore up Orpheus," said Lady Gosstre.

Tracy Runningbrook shrieked, in a paroxysm, "Splendid!" from his couch on the sward, and immediately ran off with the idea, bodily.

"Have I stumbled anywhere?" Lady Gosstre leaned to Mr. Powys.

He replied with a satiric sententiousness that told Lady Gosstre what she wanted to know.

"This is the isolated case where a little knowledge is truly dangerous," said Lady Gosstre. "I prohibit girls from any allusion to the classics until they have taken their degree and are warranted not to open the wrong doors. On the whole, don't you think, Merthyr, it's better for women to avoid that pool?"

"And accept what the noble creature chooses to bring to us in buckets," added Lady Charlotte. "What is your opinion, Georgey? I forget: Merthyr has thought you worthy of instruction."

"Merthyr taught me in camp," said Georgians, looking at her brother--her face showing peace and that confirmed calm delight habitual to it. "We found that there are times in war when you can do nothing, and you are feverish to be employed. Then, if you can bring your mind to study, you are sure to learn quickly. I liked nothing better than Latin Grammar."

"Studying Latin Grammar to the tune of great guns must be a new sensation," Freshfield Sumner observed.

"The pleasure is in getting rid of all sensation," said she. "I mean you command it without at all crushing your excitement. You cannot feel a fuller happiness than when you look back on those hours: at least, I speak for myself."

"So," said Lady Gosstre, "Georgey did not waste her time after all, Charlotte."

What the latter thought was: "She could not handle a sword or fire a

pistol. Would I have consented to be mere camp-baggage?" Yet no woman admired Georgiana Ford so much. Disappointment vitiated many of Lady Charlotte's first impulses; and not until strong antagonism had thrown her upon her generosity could she do justice to the finer natures about her. There was full life in her veins; and she was hearing the thirty fatal bells that should be music to a woman, if melancholy music; and she had not lived. Time, that sounded in her ears, as it kindled no past, spoke of no future. She was in unceasing rivalry with all of her sex who had a passion, or a fixed affection, or even an employment. A sense that she was wronged by her fate haunted this lady. Rivalry on behalf of a man she would have held mean--she would have plucked it from her bosom at once. She was simply envious of those who in the face of death could say, "I have lived." Pride, and the absence of any power of self-inspection, kept her blind to her disease. No recollection gave her boy save of the hours in the hunting-field. There she led gallantly; but it was not because of leading that she exulted. There the quick blood struck on her brain like wine, and she seemed for a time to have some one among the crowns of life. An object--who cared how small?--was ahead: a poor old fox trying to save his brush; and Charlotte would have it if the master of cunning did not beat her. "It's my natural thirst for blood," she said. She did not laugh as she thought now and then that the old red brush dragging over grey dews toward a yellow yolk in the curdled winter-morning sky, was the single thing that could make her heart throb.

Brookfield was supported in its trial by the discomfiture of the Tinleys. These girls, with their brother, had evidently plotted to 'draw out' Mrs. Chump. They had asked concerning her, severally; and hearing that she had not returned from town, had each shown a blank face, or had been doubtful of the next syllable. Of Wilfrid, Emilia, and Mr. Pole, question and answer were interchanged. "Wilfrid will come in a few minutes. Miss Belloni, you know, is preparing for Italy. Papa? Papa, I really do fear will not be able to join us." Such was Brookfield's concerted form of reply. The use of it, together with the gaiety of dancing blood, gave Adela (who believed that she ought to be weeping, and could have wept easily) strange twitches of what I would ask permission to call the juvenile 'shrug-philosophy.' As thus: 'What creatures we are, but life is so!' And again, 'Is not merriment dreadful when a duty!' She was as miserable as she could be but not knowing that youth furnished a plea available, the girl was ashamed of being cheerful at all. Edward Burley's sketch of Mr. Pericles scattering his band, sent her into muffled screams of laughter; for which she did internal penance so bitter that, for her to be able to go on at all, the shrug-philosophy was positively necessary; Mr. Pericles himself saw the sketch, and remarked critically, "It is zat I have more hair:" following which, he tapped the signal for an overture to commence, and at the first stroke took a run, with his elbows clapping exactly as the shrewd hand of Edward had drawn him.

"See him--zat fellow," Mr. Pericles said to Laura Tinley, pointing to the leader. "See him pose a maestro! zat leads zis tintamarre. He is a hum-a-bug!"

Laura did the vocal caricaturing, when she had gathered plenty of matter

of this kind. Altogether, as host, Mr. Pericles accomplished his duty in furnishing amusement.

Late in the afternoon, Sir Twickenham Pryme and Wilfrid arrived in company. The baronet went straight to Cornelia. Wilfrid beckoned to Adela, from whom he heard of his father's illness at the hotel in town, and the conditions imposed on them. He nodded, said lightly, "Where's Emilia?" and nodded again to the answer, "With papa," and then stopped as he was walking off to one of the groups. "After all, it won't do for us to listen to the whims of an invalid. I'm going back. You needn't say you've seen me."

"We have the doctor's most imperative injunction, dearest," pleaded Adela, deceived for a moment. "Papa's illness is mental chiefly. He is able to rise and will be here very soon, if he is not in any way crossed. For heaven's sake, command yourself as we have done--painfully indeed! Besides, you have been seen."

"Has she--?" Wilfrid began; and toned an additional carelessness. "She writes, of course?"

"No, not once; and we are angry with her. It looks like ingratitude, or stupidity. She can write."

"People might say that we are not behaving well," returned Wilfrid, repeating that he must go to town. But now Edward Burley came running with a message from the aristocratic heights, and thither Wilfrid walked captive--saying in Adela's ear, "Don't be angry with her."

Adela thought, very justly, "I shall, if you've been making a fool of her, naughty boy!"

Wilfrid saluted the ladies, and made his bow of introduction to Georgiana Ford, at whom he looked twice, to confirm an impression that she was the perfect contrast to Emilia; and for this reason he chose not to look at her again. Lady Charlotte dropped him a quick recognition.

If Brookfield could have thrown the burden from its mind, the day was one to feel a pride in. Three Circles were present, and Brookfield denominated two that it had passed through, and patronized all--from Lady Gosstre (aristocracy) to the Tinley set (lucre), and from these to the representative Sumner girls (cultivated poverty). There were also intellectual, scientific, and Art circles to deal with; music, pleasant to hear, albeit condemned by Mr. Pericles; agreeable chatter, courtly flirtation and homage, and no dread of the defection of the letter H from their family.

"I feel more and more convinced," said Adela, meeting Arabella, "that we can have really no cause for alarm; otherwise papa would not have been cruel to his children." Arabella kindly reserved her opinion. "So let us try and be happy," continued Adela, determining to be encouraged by silence. With that she went on tiptoe gracefully and blew a kiss to her sister's lips. Running to Captain Gambier, she said, "Do you really

enjoy this?"

"Charming," replied the ever-affable gentleman. "If I might only venture to say what makes it so infinitely!"

Much to her immediate chagrin at missing a direct compliment, which would have had to be parried, and might have led to 'vistas,' the too sprightly young lady found herself running on: "It's as nice as sin, without the knowledge that you are sinning."

"Oh! do you think that part of it disagreeable?" said the captain.

"I think the heat terrific:" she retrieved her ground.

"Coquet et coquette," muttered Lady Charlotte, observing them from a distance; and wondered whether her sex might be strongly represented in this encounter.

It was not in the best taste, nor was it perhaps good policy (if I may quote the Tinley set), for the ladies of Brookfield to subscribe openly to the right of certain people present to be exclusive. Arabella would have answered: "Lady Gosstre and her party cannot associate with you to your mutual pleasure and profit; and do you therefore blame her for not attempting what would fail ludicrously?" With herself, as she was not sorry to show, Lady Gosstre could associate. Cornelia had given up work to become a part of the Court. Adela made flying excursions over the lawn. Laura Tinley had the field below and Mr. Pericles to herself. That anxious gentleman consulted his watch from time to time, as if he expected the birth of an event.

Lady Gosstre grew presently aware that there was more acrimony in Freshfield Sumner's replies to Sir Twickenham (whom he had seduced into a political argument) than the professional wit need employ; and as Mr. Powys's talk was getting so attractive that the Court had become crowded, she gave a hint to Georgiana and Lady Charlotte, prompt lieutenants, whose retirement broke the circle.

"I never shall understand how it was done," Adela said subsequently. It is hoped that everybody sees the importance of understanding such points.

She happened to be standing alone when a messenger came up to her and placed a letter in her hand, addressed to her sister Cornelia. Adela walked slowly up to the heights. She knew Mr. Barrett's handwriting. "Good heavens!"--her thought may be translated out of Fine Shades--"does C. really in her heart feel so blind to our situation that she can go on playing still?" When she reached the group it was to hear Mr. Powys speaking of Mr. Barrett. Cornelia was very pale, and stood wretchedly in contrast among the faces. Adela beckoned her to step aside. "Here is a letter," she said: "there's no postmark. What has been the talk of that man?"

"Do you mean of Mr. Barrett?" Cornelia replied:--"that his father was a baronet, and a madman, who has just disinherited him."

"Just?" cried Adela. She thought of the title. Cornelia had passed on. A bizarre story of Mr. Barrett's father was related to Adela by Sir Twickenham. She grappled it with her sense, and so got nothing out of it. "Disinherited him because he wrote to his father, who was dying, to say that he had gained a livelihood by playing the organ! He had a hatred of music? It's incomprehensible! You know, Sir Twickenham, the interest we take in Mr. Barrett." The masked anguish of Cornelia's voice hung in her ears. She felt that it was now possible Cornelia might throw over the rich for the penniless baronet, and absolutely for an instant she thought nakedly, "The former ought not to be lost to the family." Thick clouds obscured the vision. Lady Gosstre had once told her that the point of Sir Twickenham's private character was his susceptibility to ridicule. Her ladyship had at the same time complimented his discernment in conjunction with Cornelia. "Yes," Adela now thought; "but if my sister shows that she is not so wise as she looks!" Cornelia's figure disappeared under the foliage bordering Besworth Lawn.

As usual, Arabella had all the practical labour--a fact that was noticed from the observant heights. "One sees mere de famille written on that young woman," was the eulogy she won from Lady Gosstre. How much would the great dame have marvelled to behold the ambition beneath the bustling surface! Arabella was feverish, and Freshfield Sumner reported brilliant things uttered by her. He became after a time her attendant, aide, and occasional wit-foil. They had some sharp exchanges: and he could not but reflect on the pleasure her keen zest of appreciation gave him compared with Cornelia's grave smile, which had often kindled in him profane doubts of the positive brightness, or rapidity of her intelligence.

"Besworth at sunset! What a glorious picture to have living before you every day!" said Lady Charlotte to her companion.

Wilfrid flushed. She read his look; and said, when they were out of hearing, "What a place for old people to sit here near the end of life! The idea of it makes one almost forgive the necessity for getting old--doesn't it? Tracy Runningbrook might make a poem about silver heads and sunset--something, you know! Very easy cantering then--no hunting! I suppose one wouldn't have even a desire to go fast--a sort of cock-horse, just as we began with. The stables, let me tell you, are too near the scullery. One is bound to devise measures for the protection of the morals of the household."

While she was speaking, Wilfrid's thoughts ran: "My time has come to strike for liberty."

This too she perceived, and was prepared for him.

He said: "Lady Charlotte, I feel that I must tell you...I fear that I have been calculating rather more hopefully..." Here the pitfall of sentiment yawned before him on a sudden. "I mean" (he struggled to avoid it, but was at the brink in the next sentence) "--I mean, dear lady, that I had hopes...Besworth pleased you... to offer you this..."

"With yourself?" she relieved him. A different manner in a protesting male would have charmed her better. She excused him, knowing what stood in his way.

"That I scarcely dared to hope," said Wilfrid, bewildered to see the loose chain he had striven to cast off gather tightly round him.

"You do hope it?"

"I have."

"You have hoped that I..." (she was not insolent by nature, and corrected the form) "--to marry me?"

"Yes, Lady Charlotte, I--I had that hope...if I could have offered this place--Besworth. I find that my father will never buy it; I have misunderstood him."

He fixed his eyes on her, expecting a cool, or an ironical, rejoinder to end the colloquy;--after which, fair freedom! She answered, "We may do very well without it."

Wilfrid was not equal to a start and the trick of rapturous astonishment.

He heard the words like the shooting of dungeon-bolts, thinking, "Oh, heaven! if at the first I had only told the woman I do not love her!"

But that sentimental lead had ruined him. And, on second thoughts, how could he have spoken thus to the point, when they had never previously dealt in anything save sentimental implications? The folly was in his speaking at all. The game was now in Lady Charlotte's hands.

Adela, in another part of the field, had released herself by a consummate use of the same weapon Wilfrid had so clumsily handled. Her object was to put an end to the absurd and compromising sighs of Edward Buxley; and she did so with the amiable contempt of a pupil dismissing a first instructor in an art "We saw from the beginning it could not be, Edward." The enamoured caricaturist vainly protested that he had not seen it from the beginning, and did not now. He recalled to her that she had said he was 'her first.' She admitted the truth, with eyes dwelling on him, until a ringlet got displaced. Her first. To be that, sentimental man would perish in the fires. To have been that will sometimes console him, even when he has lived to see what a thing he was who caught the budding fancy. The unhappy caricaturist groaned between triumph as a leader, and anguish at the prospect of a possible host of successors. King in that pure bosom, the thought would come--King of a mighty line, mayhap! And sentimental man, awakened to this disastrous view of things, endures shrewder pangs of rivalry in the contemplation of his usurping posterity than if, as do they, he looked forward to a tricked, perfumed, pommaded whipster, pirouetting like any Pierrot--the enviable image of the one who realized her first dream, and to whom specially missioned angels first opened the golden gates of her heart.

"I have learnt to see, Edward, that you do not honour me with a love you have diverted from one worthier than I am;" and in answer to the question

whether, though having to abjure her love, she loved him: "No, no; it is my Arabella I love. I love, I will love, no one but her"--with sundry caressing ejaculations that spring a thirst for kisses, and a tender 'putting of the case,' now and then.

So much for Adela's part in the conflict. Edward was unaware that the secret of her mastering him was, that she was now talking common-sense in the tone of sentiment. He, on the contrary, talked sentiment in the tone of common-sense. Of course he was beaten: and O, you young lovers, when you hear the dear lips setting what you call the world's harsh language to this music, know that an hour has struck for you! It is a fatal sound to hear. Edward believed that his pleading had produced an effect when he saw Miss Adela's bosom rise as with a weight on it. The burden of her thoughts was--"How big and heavy Edward's eyes look when he is not amusing!" To get rid of him she said, as with an impassioned coldness, "Go." Her figure, repeating this under closed eyelids, was mysterious, potent. When he exclaimed, "Then I will go," her eyelids lifted wide: she shut them instantly, showing at the same time a slight tightening-in of the upper lip. You beheld a creature tied to the stake of Duty.

But she was exceedingly youthful, and had not reckoned upon man's being a live machine, possessing impulses of his own. A violent seizure of her waist, and enough of kisses to make up the sum popularly known as a 'shower,' stopped her performance. She struggled, and muttered passionately to be released. "We are seen," she hazarded. At the repetition, Edward, accustomed to dread the warning, let her go and fled. Turning hurriedly about, Adela found that she had spoken truth unawares, and never wished so much that she had lied. Sir Twickenham Pryme came forward to her, with his usual stiff courtly step.

"If you could have been a little--a little earlier," she murmured, with an unflurried face, laying a trembling hand in his; and thus shielded herself from a suspicion.

"Could I know that I was wanted?" He pressed her hand.

"I only know that I wish I had not left your side," said she--adding, "Though you must have thought me what, if I were a man, you Members of Parliament would call 'a bore,' for asking perpetual questions."

"Nay, an apposite interrogation is the guarantee of a proper interest in the subject," said the baronet.

Cornelia was very soon reverted to.

"Her intellect is contemplative," said Adela, exhibiting marvellous mental composure. "She would lose her unerring judgement in active life. She cannot weigh things in her mind rapidly. She is safe if her course of action is clear."

Sir Twickenham reserved his opinion of the truth of this. "I wonder whether she can forgive those who offend or insult her, easily?"

A singular pleasure warmed Adela's veins. Her cheeks kindling, she replied, giving him her full face. "No; if they are worthy of punishment. But--" and now he watched a downcast profile--"one must have some forgiveness for fools."

"Indeed, you speak like charity out of the windows of wisdom," said the baronet.

"Do you not require in Parliament to be tolerant at times?" Adela pursued.

He admitted it, and to her outcry of "Oh, that noble public life!" smiled deprecatingly--"My dear young lady, if you only knew the burden it brings!"

"It brings its burden," said Adela, correcting, with a most proper instinct, another enthusiastic burst. "At the same time the honour is above the load. Am I talking too romantically? You are at least occupied."

"Nine-tenths of us to no very good purpose," the baronet appended.

She rejoined: "If it were but a fraction, the good done would survive."

"And be more honourable to do, perhaps," he ejaculated. "The consolation should be great."

"And is somehow small," said she; and they laughed softly.

At this stage, Adela was 'an exceedingly interesting young person' in Sir Twickenham's mental register. He tried her on politics and sociology. She kept her ears open, and followed his lead carefully--venturing here and there to indicate an opinion, and suggesting dissent in a pained interrogation. Finally, "I confess," she said, "I understand much less than I am willing to think; and so I console myself with the thought that, after all, the drawing-room, and the...the kitchen?--well, an educated 'female' must serve her term there, if she would be anything better than a mere ornament, even in the highest walks of life--I mean the household is our sphere. From that we mount to companionship--if we can."

Amazement of Sir Twickenham, on finding his own thought printed, as it were, on the air before him by these pretty lips!

The conversation progressed, until Adela, by chance, turned her eyes up a cross pathway and perceived her sister Cornelia standing with Mr. Barrett under a beech. The man certainly held one of her hands pressed to his heart; and her attitude struck a doubt whether his other hand was disengaged or her waist free. Adela walked nervously on without looking at the baronet; she knew by his voice presently that his eyes had also witnessed the sight. "Two in a day," she thought; "what will he imagine us to be!" The baronet was thinking: "For your sister exposed, you display more agitation than for yourself insulted."

Adela found Arabella in so fresh a mood that she was sure good news had been heard. It proved that Mrs. Chump had sent a few lines in a letter carried by Braintop, to this effect: "My dears all! I found your father on his back in bed, and he discharged me out of the room; and the sight of me put him on his legs, and you will soon see him. Be civil to Mr. Braintop, who is a faithful young man, of great merit, and show your gratitude to--Martha Chump."

Braintop confirmed the words of the letter: and then Adela said--"You will do us the favour to stay and amuse yourself here. To-night there will be a bed at Brookfield."

"What will he do?" Arabella whispered.

"Associate with the Tinleys," returned Adela.

In accordance with the sentiment here half concealed, Brookfield soon showed that it had risen from the hour of depression when it had simply done its duty. Arabella formed an opposition-Court to the one in which she had studied; but Mr. Pericles defeated her by constantly sending to her for advice concerning the economies of the feast. Nevertheless, she exhibited good pretensions to social queendom, both personal and practical; and if Freshfield Sumner, instead of his crisp waspish comments on people and things, had seconded her by keeping up a two-minutes' flow of talk from time to time, she might have thought that Lady Gosstre was only luckier than herself--not better endowed.

Below, the Tinleys and their set surrounded Mr. Pericles--prompting him, as was seen, to send up continual messages. One, to wit, "Is there to be dancing to-night?" being answered, "Now, if you please," provoked sarcastic cheering; and Laura ran up to say, "How kind of you! We appreciate it. Continue to dispense blessings on poor mortals."

"By the way, though" (Freshfield took his line from the calm closed lips of his mistress), "poor mortals are not in the habit of climbing Olympus to ask favours."

"I perceived no barrier," quoth Laura.

"Audacity never does."

"Pray, how am I to be punished?"

Freshfield paused for a potent stroke. "Not like Semele. She saw the God:--you never will!"

While Laura was hanging on the horrid edge between a false laugh and a starting blush, Arabella said: "That visual excommunication has been pronounced years ago, Freshfield."

"Ah! then he hasn't changed his name in heaven?" Laura touched her thus for the familiar use of the gentle-man's Christian name.

"You must not imagine that very great changes are demanded of those who can be admitted."

"I really find it hotter than below," said Laura, flying.

Arabella's sharp eyes discerned a movement in Lady Gosstre's circle; and she at once went over to her, and entreated the great lady, who set her off so well, not to go. The sunset fronted Besworth Lawn; the last light of day was danced down to inspiriting music: and now Arabella sent word for Besworth hall-doors and windows to be opened; and on the company beginning to disperse, there beckoned promise of a brilliant supper-table.

"Admirable!" said Lady Gosstre, and the encomium was general among the crowd surrounding Arabella; for up to this point the feasting had been delicate, and something like plain hunger prevailed. Indeed, Arabella had heard remarks of a bad nature, which she traced to the Tinley set, and bore with, to meet her present reward. Making light of her triumph, she encouraged Freshfield to start a wit-contest, and took part in it herself, with the gaiety of an unoccupied mind. Her sisters had aforesaid more than once challenged her supremacy, but they bowed to it now; and Adela especially did when, after a ringing hit to Freshfield (which the Tinleys might also take to their own bosoms), she said in an undertone, "What is there between C. and--?" Surprised by this astonishing vigilance and power of thinking below the surface while she performed above it, Adela incautiously turned her face toward the meditative baronet, and was humiliated by Arabella's mute indication of contempt for her coming answer. This march across the lawn to the lighted windows of Besworth was the culmination of Brookfield's joy, and the crown for which it had striven; though for how short a term it was to be worn was little known. Was it not a very queenly sphere of Fine Shades and Nice Feelings that Brookfield had realized?

In Arabella's conscience lay a certain reproach of herself for permitting the "vice of a lower circle" to cling to her--viz., she had still betrayed a stupid hostility to the Tinleys: she had rejoiced to see them incapable of mixing with any but their own set, and thus be stamped publicly for what they were. She had struggled to repress it, and yet, continually, her wits were in revolt against her judgement. Perhaps one reason was that Albert Tinley had haunted her steps at an early part of the day; and Albert--a sickening City young man, "full of insolence, and half eyeglass," according to Freshfield--had once ventured to propose for her.

The idea that the Tinleys strove to catch at her skirts made Arabella spiteful. Up to the threshold of Besworth, Freshfield, Mr. Powys, Tracy, and Arabella kept the wheel of a dazzling run of small-talk, throwing intermittent sparks. Laura Tinley would press up, apparently to hear, but in reality (as all who knew her could see) with the object of being a rival representative of her sex in this illustrious rare encounter of divine intelligences. "You are anxious to know?" said Arabella, hesitatingly.

"To know, dear?" echoed Laura.

"There was, I presumed, something you did not hear." Arabella was half ashamed of the rudeness to which her antagonism to Laura's vulgarity forced her.

"Oh! I hear everything," Laura assured her.

"Indeed!" said Arabella. "By the way, who conducts you?" (Laura was on Edward Burley's arm.) "Oh! will you go to"--such and such an end of the table. "And if, Lady Gosstre, I may beg of you to do me the service to go there also," was added aloud; and lower, but quite audibly, "Mr. Pericles will have music, so there can be no talking." This, with the soupcon of a demi-shrug; "You will not suffer much" being implied. Laura said to herself, "I am not a fool." A moment after, Arabella was admitting in her own mind, as well as Fine Shades could interpret it, that she was. On entering the dining-hall, she beheld two figures seated at the point whither Laura was led by her partner. These were Mrs. Chump and Mr. Pole, with champagne glasses in their hands. Arabella was pushed on by the inexorable crowd of hungry people behind.

CHAPTER XXXII

Despite the pouring in of the flood of guests about the tables, Mrs. Chump and Mr. Pole sat apparently unconcerned in their places, and, as if to show their absolute indifference to observation and opinion, went through the ceremony of drinking to one another, upon which they nodded and chuckled: a suspicious eye had the option of divining that they used the shelter of the table cloth for an interchange of squeezes. This would have been further strengthened by Mrs. Chump's arresting exclamation, "Pole! Company!" Mr. Pole looked up. He recognized Lady Gosstre, and made an attempt, in his usual brisk style, to salute her. Mrs. Chump drew him back. "Nothin' but his legs, my lady," she whispered. "There's nothin' sets 'm up like champagne, my dears!" she called out to the Three of Brookfield.

Those ladies were now in the hall, gazing, as mildly as humanity would allow, at their common destiny, thus startlingly displayed. There was no doubt in the bosom of either one of them that exposure was to follow this prelude. Mental resignation was not even demanded of them--merely physical. They did not seek comfort in an interchange of glances, but dropped their eyes, and masked their sight as they best could. Caesar assassinated did a similar thing.

"My dears!" pursued Mrs. Chump, in Irish exaggerated by wine, "I've found 'm for ye! And if ye'd seen 'm this afternoon--the little peaky, shaky fellow that he was! and a doctor, too, feelin' his pulse. 'Is ut slow,' says I, 'doctor?' and draws a bottle of champagne. He could hardly stand before his first glass. 'Pon my hon'r, my lady, ye naver saw s'ch a change in a mortal bein.--Pole, didn't ye go 'ha, ha!' now, and seem to

be nut-cracking with your fingers? He did; and if ye ever saw an astonished doctor! 'Why,' says I, 'doctor, ye think ut's maguc! Why, where's the secret? drink with 'm, to be sure! And you go and do that, my lord doctor, my dear Mr. Doctor! Do ut all round, and your patients 'll bless your feet." Why, isn't cheerful society and champagne the vary best of medicines, if onnly the blood 'll go of itself a little? The fault's in his legs; he's all right at top!--if he'd smooth his hair a bit.

Checking her tongue, Mrs. Chump performed this service lightly for him, in the midst of his muttered comments on her Irish.

The fact was manifest to the whole assembly, that they had indeed been drinking champagne to some purpose.

Wilfrid stepped up to two of his sisters, warning them hurriedly not to go to their father: Adela he arrested with a look, but she burst the restraint to fulfil a child's duty. She ran up gracefully, and taking her father's hand, murmured a caressing "Dear papa!"

"There--all right--quite right--quite well," Mr. Pole repeated. "Glad to see you all: go away."

He tried to look kindly out of the nervous fit into which a word, in a significant tone, from one of his daughters had instantly plunged him. Mrs. Chump admonished her: "Will ye undo all that I've been doin' this blessed day?"

"Glad you haven't missed the day altogether, sir," Wilfrid greeted his father in an offhand way.

"Ah, my boy!" went the old man, returning him what was meant for a bluff nod.

Lady Charlotte gave Wilfrid an open look. It meant: "If you can act like that, and know as much as I know, you are worth more than I reckoned." He talked evenly and simply, and appeared on the surface as composed as any of the guests present. Nor was he visibly disturbed when Mrs. Chump, catching his eye, addressed him aloud:--

"Ye'd have been more grateful to me to have brought little Belloni as well now, I know, Mr. Wilfrid. But I was just obliged to leave her at the hotel; for Pole can't endure her. He 'bomunates the sight of 'r. If ye ever saw a dog burnt by the fire, Pole's second to 'm, if onnly ye speak that garl's name."

The head of a strange musician, belonging to the band stationed outside, was thrust through one of the window apertures. Mr. Pericles beckoned him imperiously to retire, and perform. He objected, and an altercation in bad English diverted the company. It was changed to Italian. "Mia figlia," seized Wilfrid's ear. Mr. Pericles bellowed, "Allegro." Two minutes after Braintop felt a touch on his shoulder; and Wilfrid, speaking in a tone of friend to friend, begged him to go to town by the

last train and remove Miss Belloni to an hotel, which he named.

"Certainly," said Braintop; "but if I meet her father..?" Wilfrid summoned champagne for him; whereupon Mrs. Chump cried out, "Ye're kind to wait upon the young man, Mr. Wilfrid; and that Mr. Braintop's an invaluable young man. And what do ye want with the hotel, when we've left it, Mr. Paricles?"

The Greek raised his head from Mr. Pole, shrugging at her openly. He and Wilfrid then measured eyes a moment. "Some champagne togezer?" said Mr. Pericles. "With all my heart," was the reply; and their glasses were filled, and they bowed, and drank. Wilfrid took his seat, drew forth his pocket-book; and while talking affably to Lady Charlotte beside him, and affecting once or twice to ponder over her remarks, or to meditate a fitting answer, wrote on a slip of paper under the table:--

"Mine! my angel! You will see me to-morrow.

"YOUR LOVER."

This, being inserted in an envelope, with zig-zag letters of address to form Emilia's name, he contrived to pass to Braintop's hands, and resumed his conversation with Lady Charlotte, who said, when there was nothing left to discover, "But what is it you concoct down there?" "!" cried Wilfrid, lifting his hands, and so betraying himself after the fashion of the very innocent. She despised any reading of acts not on the surface, and nodded to the explanation he gave--to wit: "By the way, do you mean-- have you noticed my habit of touching my fingers' ends as I talk? I count them backwards and forwards."

"Shows nervousness," said Lady Charlotte; "you are a boy!"

"Exceedingly a boy."

"Now I put a finger on his vanity," said she; and thought indeed that she had played on him.

"Mr. Pole," (Lady Gosstre addressed that gentleman,) "I must hope that you will leave this dining-hall as it is; there is nothing in the neighbourhood to match it!"

"Delightful!" interposed Laura Tinley; "but is it settled?"

Mr. Pole leaned forward to her ladyship; and suddenly catching the sense of her words, "Ah, why not?" he said, and reached his hand to some champagne, which he raised to his mouth, but drank nothing of. Reflection appeared to tell him that his safety lay in drinking, and he drained the glass at a gulp. Mrs. Chump had it filled immediately, and explained to a wondering neighbour, "It's that that keeps 'm on his legs."

"We shall envy you immensely," said Laura Tinley to Arabella; who replied, "I assure you that no decision has been come to."

"Ah, you want to surprise us with cards on a sudden from Besworth!"

"That is not the surprise I have in store," returned Arabella sedately.

"Then you have a surprise? Do tell me."

"How true to her sex is the lady who seeks to turn 'what it is' into 'what it isn't!'" said Freshfield, trusty lieutenant.

"I think a little peeping makes surprises sweeter; I'm weak enough to think that," Lady Charlotte threw in.

"That is so true!" exclaimed Laura.

"Well; and a secret shared is a fact uncommonly well aired--that is also true. But, remember, you do not desire the surprise; you are a destroying force to it;" and Freshfield bowed.

"Curiosity!" sighed some one, relieving Freshfield from a sense of the guilt of heaviness.

"I am a Pandora," Laura smilingly said.

"To whom?" Tracy Runningbrook's shout was heard.

"With champagne in the heads of the men, and classics in the heads of the women, we shall come; to something," remarked Lady Gosstre half to herself and Georgiana near her.

An observer of Mr. Pole might have seen that he was fretting at a restriction on his tongue. Occasionally he would sit forward erect in his chair, shake his coat-collar, frown, and sound a preparatory 'hem; but it ended in his rubbing his hair away on the back of his head. Mrs. Chump, who was herself perceiving new virtues in champagne with every glass, took the movements as indicative of a companion exploration of the spiritual resources of this vintage. She no longer called for it, but lifted a majestic finger (a Siddons or tenth-Muse finger, as Freshfield named it) behind the row of heads; upon which champagne speedily bubbled in the glasses. Laughter at the performance had fairly set in. Arabella glanced nervously round for Mr. Pericles, who looked at his watch and spread the fingers of one hand open thrice--an act that telegraphed fifteen minutes. In fifteen minutes an opera troupe, with three famous chiefs and a renowned prima-donna were to arrive. The fact was known solely to Arabella and Mr. Pericles. It was the Surprise of the evening. But within fifteen minutes, what might not happen, with heads going at champagne-pace?

Arabella proposed to Freshfield to rise. "Don't the ladies go first?" the wit turned sensualist stammered; and incurred that worse than frown, a cold look of half-comprehension, which reduces indefinitely the proportions of the object gazed at. There were probably a dozen very young men in the room waiting to rise with their partners at a signal for dancing; and these could not be calculated upon to take an initiative, or

follow one--as ladies, poor slaves! will do when the electric hostess rustles. The men present were non-conductors. Arabella knew that she could carry off the women, but such a proceeding would leave her father at the mercy of the wine; and, moreover, the probability was that Mrs. Chump would remain by him, and, sole in a company of males, explode her sex with ridicule, Brookfield in the bargain. So Arabella, under a prophetic sense of evil, waited; and this came of it. Mr. Pole patted Mrs. Chump's hand publicly. In spite of the steady hum of small-talk--in spite of Freshfield Sumner's circulation of a crisp anecdote--in spite of Lady Gosstre's kind effort to stop him by engaging him in conversation, Mr. Pole forced on for a speech. He said that he had not been the thing lately. It might be his legs, as his dear friend Martha, on his right, insisted; but he had felt it in his head, though as strong as any man present.

"Hark at 'm!" cried Mrs. Chump, letting her eyes roll fondly away from him into her glass.

"Business, my lady!" Mr. Pole resumed. "Ah, you don't know what that is. We've got to work hard to keep our heads up equal with you. We don't swim with corks. And my old friend, Ralph Tinley--he sells iron, and has got a mine. That's simple. But, my God, ma'am, when a man has his eye on the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic, and the Baltic, and the Black Sea, and half-a-dozen colonies at once, he--you--"

"Well, it's a precious big eye he's got, Pole," Mrs. Chump came to his relief.

"--he don't know whether he's a ruined dog, or a man to hold up his head in any company."

"Oh, Lord, Pole, if ye're going to talk of beggary!" Mrs. Chump threw up her hands. "My lady, I naver could abide the name of 't. I'm a kind heart, ye know, but I can't bear a ragged friend. I hate 'm! He seems to give me a pinch."

Having uttered this, it struck her that it was of a kind to convulse Mrs. Lupin, for whose seizures she could never accurately account; and looking round, she perceived, sure enough, that little forlorn body agitated, with a handkerchief to her mouth.

"As to Besworth," Mr. Pole had continued, "I might buy twenty Besworths. If--if the cut shows the right card. If--" Sweat started on his forehead, and he lifted his eyebrows, blinking. "But none!" (he smote the table) "none can say I haven't been a good father! I've educated my girls to marry the best the land can show. I bought a house to marry them out of; it was their own idea." He caught Arabella's eyes. I thought so, at all events; for why should I have paid the money if I hadn't thought so? when then--yes, that sum..." (was he choking!) saved me!--saved me!"

A piteous desperate outburst marked the last words, that seemed to struggle from a tightened cord.

"Not that there's anything the matter," he resumed, with a very brisk wink. "I'm quite sound: heart's sound, lungs sound, stomach regular. I can see, and smell, and hear. Sense of touch is rather lumpy at times, I know; but the doctor says it's nothing--nothing at all; and I should be all right, if I didn't feel that I was always wearing a great leaden hat."

"My gracious, Pole, if ye're not talkin' pos'tuv nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Chump.

"Well, my dear Martha" (Mr. Pole turned to her argumentatively), "how do you account for my legs? I feel it at top. I declare I've felt the edge of the brim half a yard out. Now, my lady, a man in that state--sound and strong as the youngest--but I mean a vexed man--worried man bothered man, he doesn't want a woman to look after him;--I mean, he does--he does! And why won't young girls--oh! they might, they might--see that? And when she's no extra expense, but brings him--helps him to face--and no one has said the world's a jolly world so often as I have. It's jolly!" He groaned.

Lady Charlotte saw Wilfrid gazing at one spot on the table without a change of countenance. She murmured to him, "What hits you hits me."

Mr. Pole had recommenced, on the evident instigation of Laura Tinley, though Lady Gosstre and Freshfield Sumner had both sought to check the current. In Chump's lifetime, it appeared, he (Mr. Pole) had thought of Mrs. Chump with a respectful ardour; and albeit she was no longer what she was when Chump brought her over, a blooming Irish girl--"her hair exactly as now, the black curl half over the cheek, and a bright laugh, and a white neck, fat round arms, and--"

A shout of "Oh, Pole! ye seem to be undressin' of me before them all," diverted the neighbours of the Beauty.

"Who would not like such praise?" Laura Tinley, to keep alive the subject, laid herself open to Freshfield by a remark.

"At the same personal peril?" he inquired smoothly.

Mr. Pericles stood up, crying "Enfin!" as the doors were flung open, and a great Signora of operatic fame entered the hall, supported on one side by a charming gentleman (a tenore), who shared her fame and more with her. In the rear were two working baritones; and behind them, outside, Italian heads might be discerned.

The names of the Queen of Song and Prince of Singers flew round the room; and Laura uttered words of real gratitude, for the delightful surprise, to Arabella, as the latter turned from her welcome of them. "She is exactly like Emilia--young," was uttered. The thought went with a pang through Wilfrid's breast. When the Signora was asked if she would sup or take champagne, and she replied that she would sup by-and-by, and drink porter now, the likeness to Emilia was established among the Poles.

Meantime the unhappy Braintop received an indication that he must depart. As he left the hall he brushed past the chief-clerk of his office, who soon appeared bowing and elbowing among the guests. "What a substitute for me!" thought Braintop bitterly; and in the belief that this old clerk would certainly go back that night, and might undertake his commission, he lingered near the band on the verge of the lawn. A touch at his elbow startled him. In the half-light he discerned Emilia. "Don't say you have seen me," were her first words. But when he gave her the letter, she drew him aside, and read it by the aid of lighted matches held in Braintop's hat drawing in her fervent breath to a "Yes! yes!" at the close, while she pressed the letter to her throat. Presently the singing began in an upper room, that had shortly before flashed with sudden light. Braintop entreated Emilia to go in, and then rejoiced that she had refused. They stood in a clear night-air, under a yellowing crescent, listening to the voice of an imperial woman. Impressed as he was, Braintop had, nevertheless, leisure to look out of his vinous mist and notice, with some misgiving, a parading light at a certain distance--apparently the light of cigarettes being freshly kindled. He was too much elated to feel alarm: but "If her father were to catch me again," he thought. And with Emilia on his arm!

Mr. Pole's chief-clerk had brought discomposing news. He was received by an outburst of "No business, Payne; I won't have business!"

Turning to Mr. Pericles, the old clerk said: "I came rather for you, sir, not expecting to find Mr. Pole." He was told by Mr. Pericles to speak what he had to say: and then the guests, who had fallen slightly back, heard a cavernous murmur; and some, whose eyes were on Mr. Pole, observed a sharp conflict of white and red in his face.

"There, there, there, there!" went Mr. Pole. "'Hem, Pericles!" His handkerchief was drawn out; and he became engaged, as it were, in wiping a moisture from the palm of his hand. "Pericles, have you got pluck now? Eh?"

Mr. Pericles had leaned down his ear for the whole of the news.

"Ten sossand," he said, smoothing his waistbands, and then inserting his thumbs into the pits of his waistcoat. "Also a chance of forty. Let us not lose time for ze music."

He walked away.

"I don't believe in that d---d coolness, ma'am," said Mr. Pole, wheeling round on Freshfield Sumner. "It's put on. That wears a mask; he's one of those confounded humbugs who wear a mask. Ten-forty! and all for a shrug; it's not human. I tell you, he does that just out of a sort of jealousy to rival me as an Englishman. Because I'm cool, he must be. Do you think a mother doesn't feel the loss of her children?"

"I fear that I must grow petticoats before I can answer purely feminine questions," said Freshfield.

"Of course--of course," assented Mr. Pole; "and a man feels like a mother to his money. For the moment, he does--for the moment. What are those fellows--Spartans--women who cut off their breasts--?"

Freshfield suggested, "Amazons."

"No; they were women," Mr. Pole corrected him; "and if anything hurt them, they never cried out. That's what--ha!--our friend Pericles is trying at. He's a fool. He won't sleep to-night. He'll lie till he gets cold in the feet, and then tuck them up like a Dutch doll, and perspire cold till his heart gives a bound, and he'll jump up and think his last hour's come. Wind on the stomach, do ye call it? I say it's wearing a mask!"

The bird's-eye of the little merchant shot decisive meaning.

Two young ladies had run from his neighbourhood, making as if to lift hands to ears. The sight of them brought Mrs. Chump to his side. "Pole! Pole!" she said, "is there annything wrong?"

"Wrong, Martha?" He bent to her, attempting Irish--"Arrah, now! and mustn't all be right if you're here?"

She smote his cheek fondly. "Ye're not a bit of an Irish-man, ye deer little fella."

"Come along and dance," cried he imperiously.

"A pretty spectacle--two fandangoes, when there's singing, ye silly!" Mrs. Chump led him upstairs, chafing one of his hands, and remarking loudly on the wonder it was to see his knees constantly 'give' as he walked.

On the dark lawn, pressing Wilfrid's written words for fiery nourishment to her heart, Emilia listened to the singing.

"Why do people make a noise, and not be satisfied to feel?" she said angrily to Braintop, as a great clapping of hands followed a divine aria. Her ideas on this point would have been different in the room.

By degrees a tender delirium took hold of her sense; and then a subtle emotion--which was partly prompted by dim rivalry with the voice that seemed to be speaking so richly to the man she loved--set her bosom rising and falling. She translated it to herself thus: "What a joy it will be to him to hear me now!" And in a pause she sang clear out--

"Prima d'Italia amica;"

and hung on the last note, to be sure that she would be heard by him.

Braintop saw the cigarette dash into sparks on the grass. At the same moment a snarl of critical vituperation told Emilia that she had offended

taste and her father. He shouted her name, and, striding up to her, stumbled over Braintop, whom he caught with one hand, while the other fell firmly on Emilia.

"Amica--amica-a-a," he burlesqued her stress of the luckless noting it at her, and telling her in triumphant Italian that she was found at last. Braintop, after a short struggle, and an effort at speech, which was loosely shaken in his mouth, heard that he stood a prisoner. "Eh! you have not lost your cheeks," insulted his better acquaintance with English slang.

Alternately in this queer tongue and in Italian the pair of victims were addressed.

Emilia knew her father's temper. He had a habit of dallying with an evil passion till it boiled over and possessed him. Believing Braintop to be in danger of harm, she beckoned to some of the faces crowding the windows; but the movement was not seen, as none of the circumstances were at all understood. Wilfrid, however, knew well who had sung those three bars, concerning which the 'Prima donna' questioned Mr. Pericles, and would not be put off by hearing that it was a startled jackdaw, or an owl, and an ole nightingale. The Greek rubbed his hands. "Now to recommence," he said; "and we shall not notice a jackdaw again." His eye went sideways watchfully at Wilfrid. "You like zat piece of opera?"

"Immensely," said Wilfrid, half bowing to the Signora--to whom, as to Majesty, Mr. Pericles introduced him, and fixed him.

"Now! To seats!"

Mr. Pericles' mandates was being obeyed, when a cry of "Wilfrid!" from Emilia below, raised a flutter.

Mr. Pole had been dozing in his chair. He rose at the cry, looking hard, with a mechanical jerk of the neck, at two or three successive faces, and calling, "Somebody--somebody" to take his outstretched hand trembling in a paroxysm of nervous terror.

Hearing his son's name again, but more faintly, he raised his voice for Martha. "Don't let that girl come near me! I--I can't get on with foreign girls!"

His eyes went among the curious faces surrounding him. "Wilfrid!" he shouted. To the second summons, "Sir" was replied, in the silence. Neither saw the other as they spoke.

"Are you going out to her, Wilfrid?"

"Someone called me, sir."

"He's got the cunning of hell," said Mr. Pole, baffled by his own agitation.

"Oh! don't talk o' that place," moaned Mrs. Chump.

"Stop!" cried the old man. "Are you going? Stop! you shan't do mischief. I mean--there--stop! Don't go. You're not to go. I say you're not to go out."

Emphasis and gesticulations gave their weight to the plain words.

But rage at the upset of all sentiments and dignity that day made Wilfrid reckless, and he now felt his love to be all he had. He heard his Emilia being dragged away to misery--perhaps to be sold to shame. Maddened, he was incapable of understanding his father's state, or caring for what the world thought. His sisters gathered near him, but were voiceless.

"Is he gone?" Mr. Pole burst forward. "You're gone, sir? Wilfrid, have you gone to that girl? I ask you whether...(there's one shot at my heart," he added in a swift undertone to one of the heads near him, while he caught at his breast with both hands). "Wilfrid, will you stay here?"

"For God's sake, go to him, Wilfrid," murmured Adela. "I can't."

"Because if you do--if you don't--I mean, if you go..." The old man gasped at the undertone. "Now I have got it in my throat."

A quick physical fear caught hold of him. In a moment his voice changed to entreaty. "I beg you won't go, my dear boy. Wilfrid, I tell you, don't go. Because, you wouldn't act like a d--d--I'm not angry; but it is like acting like a--Here's company, Wilfrid; come to me, my boy; do come here. You mayn't ha--have your poor old father long, now he's got you u--up in the world. I mean accidents, for I'm sound enough; only a little nervous from brain--Is he gone?"

Wilfrid was then leaving the room.

Lady Gosstre had been speaking to Mr. Powys. She was about to say a word to Lady Charlotte, when the latter walked to the doorway, and, in a manner that smote his heart with a spasm of gratitude, said; "Don't heed these people. He will bring on a fit if you don't stop. His nerves are out, and the wine they have given him... Go to him: I will go to Emilia, and do as much for her as you could."

Wilfrid reached his father in time to see him stagger back into the arms of Mrs. Chump, whose supplication was for the female stimulant known as 'something.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

On reaching home that night, Arabella surprised herself thinking, in the midst of her anguish: "Whatever is said of us, it cannot be said that there is a house where the servants have been better cared for." And

this reflection continued to burn with an astounding brilliancy through all the revolutions of a mind contemplating the dread of a fallen fortune, the fact of a public exposure, and what was to her an ambition destroyed. Adela had no such thoughts. "I have been walking on a plank," she gasped from time to time, as she gave startled glances into the abyss of poverty, and hurried to her bedchamber--a faint whisper of self-condemnation in her ears at the 'I' being foremost. The sisters were too proud to touch upon one another's misery in complaints, or to be common by holding debate on it. They had not once let their eyes meet at Besworth, as the Tinleys wonderingly noticed. They said good night to their papa, who was well enough to reply, adding peremptorily, "Downstairs at half-past eight,"--an intimation that he would be at the break-fast table and read prayers as usual. Inexperienced in nervous disease, they were now filled with the idea that he was possibly acting--a notion that had never been kindled in them before; or, otherwise, how came these rapid, almost instantaneous, recoveries?

Cornelia alone sounded near the keynote. Since the night that she had met him in the passage, and the next morning when Mrs. Chump had raised the hubbub about her loss, Cornelia's thoughts had been troubled by some haunting spectral relationship with money. It had helped to make her reckless in granting interviews to Purcell Barrett. "If we are poor, I am free;" and that she might then give herself to whomever she pleased, was her logical deduction. The exposure at Besworth, and the partial confirmation of her suspicions, were not without their secret comfort to her. In the carriage, coming home, Wilfrid had touched her hand by chance, and pressed it with good heart. She went to the library, imagining that if he wished to see her he would appear, and by exposing his own weakness learn to excuse hers. She was right in her guess; Wilfrid came. He came sauntering into the room with "Ah! you here?" Cornelia consented to play into his hypocrisy. "Yes, I generally think better here," she replied.

"And what has this pretty head got to do with thinking?"

"Not much, I suppose, my lord," she replied, affecting nobly to acknowledge the weakness of the female creature.

Wilfrid kissed her with an unaccustomed fervour. This delicate mumming was to his taste. It was yet more so when she spoke playfully to him of his going soon to be a married man. He could answer to that in a smiling negative, playing round the question, until she perceived that he really desired to have his feeling for the odd dark girl who had recently shot across their horizon touched, if only it were led to by the muffled ways of innuendo.

As a dog, that cannot ask you verbally to scratch his head, but wishes it, will again and again thrust his head into your hand, petitioning mutely that affection may divine him, so:--but we deal with a sentimentalist, and the simile is too gross to be exact. For no sooner was Wilfrid's head scratched, than the operation stuck him as humiliating; in other words, the moment he felt his sisters fingers in the ticklish part, he flew to another theme, then returned, and so

backward and forward--mystifying her not slightly, and making her think, "Then he has no heart." She by no means intended to encourage love for Emilia, but she hoped for his sake, that the sentiment he had indulged was sincere. By-and-by he said, that though he had no particular affection for Lady Charlotte, he should probably marry her.

"Without loving her, Wilfrid? It is unfair to her; it is unfair to yourself."

Wilfrid understood perfectly who it was for whom she pleaded thus vehemently. He let her continue: and when she had dwelt on the horrors of marriages without love, and the supreme duty of espousing one who has our 'heart's loyalty,' he said, "You may be right. A man must not play with a girl. He must consider that he owes a duty to one who is more dependent;"--implying that a woman's duty was distinct and different in such a case.

Cornelia could not rise and plead for her sex. Had she pushed forth the 'woman,' she must have stood for her.

This is the game of Fine Shades and Nice Feelings, under whose empire you see this family, and from which they are to emerge considerably shorn, but purified--examples of One present passage of our civilization.

"At least, dear, if" (Cornelia desperately breathed the name)
"--if Emilia were forced to give her hand...loving...you...we should be right in pitying her?"

The snare was almost too palpable. Wilfrid fell into it, from the simple passion that the name inspired; and now his hand tightened. "Poor child!" he moaned.

She praised his kind heart: "You cannot be unjust and harsh, I know that. You could not see her--me--any of us miserable. Women feel, dear. Ah! I need not tell you that. Their tears are not the witnesses. When they do not weep, but the hot drops stream inwardly:--and, oh! Wilfrid, let this never happen to me. I shall not disgrace you, because I intend to see you happy with...with her, whoever she is; and I would leave you happy. But I should not survive it. I can look on Death. A marriage without love is dishonour."

Sentiment enjoys its splendid moods. Wilfrid having had the figure of his beloved given to him under nuptial benediction, cloaked, even as he wished it to be, could afford now to commiserate his sister, and he admired her at the same time. "I'll take care you are not made a sacrifice of when the event is fixed," he said--as if it had never been in contemplation.

"Oh! I have not known happiness for years, till this hour," Cornelia whispered to him bashfully; and set him wondering why she should be happy when she had nothing but his sanction to reject a man.

On the other hand, her problem was to gain lost ground by letting him

know that, of the pair, it was not she who would marry beneath her station. She tried it mentally in various ways. In the end she thought it best to give him this positive assurance. "No," he rejoined, "a woman never should." There was no admission of equality to be got out of him, so she kissed him. Of their father's health a few words were said--of Emilia nothing further. She saw that Wilfrid's mind was resolved upon some part to play, but shrank from asking his confidence, lest facts should be laid bare.

At the breakfast-table Mr. Pole was a little late. He wore some of his false air of briskness on a hazy face, and read prayers--drawing breath between each sentence and rubbing his forehead; but the work was done by a man in ordinary health, if you chose to think so, as Mrs. Chump did. She made favourable remarks on his appearance, begging the ladies to corroborate her. They were silent.

"Now take a chop, Pole, and show your appetite," she said. "'A Chump-chop, my love?' my little man used to invite me of a mornin'; and that was the only joke he had, so it's worth rememberin'."

A chop was placed before Mr. Pole. He turned it in his plate, and wonderingly called to mind that he had once enjoyed chops. At a loss to account for the distressing change, he exclaimed to himself, "Chump! I wish the woman wouldn't thrust her husband between one's teeth. An egg!"

The chop was displaced for an egg, which he tapped until Mrs. Chump cried out, "Oh! if ye're not like a postman, Pole; and d'ye think ye've got a letter for a chick inside there?"

This allusion scared Mr. Pole from the egg. He quitted the table, muttering, "Business! business!" and went to the library.

When he was gone Mrs. Chump gave a cry to know where Braintop was, but, forgetting him immediately, turned to the ladies and ejaculated, "Broth'm. It's just brothin' he wants. Broth, I say, for anny man that won't eat his chop or his egg. And, my dears, now, what do ye say to me for bringing him home to ye? I expect to be thanked, I do; and then we'll broth Pole together, till he's lusty as a prize-ox, and capers like a monkey."

Wretched woman! that could not see the ruin she had inflicted--that could not imagine how her bitter breath cut against those sensitive skins! During a short pause little Mrs. Lupin trotted to the door, and shot through it, in a paroxysm.

Then Wilfrid's voice was heard. He leaned against a corner of the window, and spoke without directly looking at Mrs. Chump; so that she was some time in getting to understand the preliminary, "Madam, you must leave this house." But presently her chin dropped; and after feeble efforts to interpose an exclamation, she sat quiet--overcome by the deliberate gravity of his manner, and motioning despairingly with her head, to relieve the swarm of unborn figure-less ideas suggested by his passing speech. The ladies were ranged like tribunal shapes. It could

not be said of souls so afflicted that they felt pleasure in the scene; but to assist in the administration of a rigorous justice is sweet to them that are smarting. They scarcely approved his naked statement of things when he came to Mrs. Chump's particular aspiration in the household--viz., to take a station and the dignity of their name. The effect he produced satisfied them that the measure was correct. Her back gave a sharp bend, as if an eternal support had snapped. "Oh! ye hit hard," she moaned.

"I tell you kindly that we (who, you will acknowledge, must count for something here) do not sanction any change that revolutionizes our domestic relations," said Wilfrid; while Mrs. Chump heaved and rolled on the swell of the big words like an overladen boat. "You have only to understand so much, and this--that if we resist it, as we do, you, by continuing to contemplate it, are provoking a contest which will probably injure neither you nor me, but will be death to ham in his present condition."

Mrs. Chump was heard to mumble that she alone knew the secret of restoring him to health, and that he was rendered peaky and poky only by people supposing him so.

"An astonishin' thing!" she burst out. "If I kiss 'm and say 'Poor Pole!' he's poor Pole on the spot. And, if onnly I--"

But Wilfrid's stern voice flowed over her. "Listen, madam, and let this be finished between us. You know well that when a man has children, he may wish to call another woman wife--a woman not their mother; but the main question is, will his children consent to let her take that place? We are of one mind, and will allow no one--no one--to assume that position. And now, there's an end. We'll talk like friends. I have only spoken in that tone that you might clearly comprehend me on an important point. I know you entertain a true regard for my father, and it is that belief which makes me--"

"Friends!" cried Mrs. Chump, getting courage from the savour of cajolery in these words. "Friends! Oh, ye fox! ye fox!"

And now commenced a curious duett. Wilfrid merely wished to terminate his sentence; Mrs. Chump wantonly sought to prevent him. Each was burdened with serious matter; but they might have struck hands here, had not this petty accidental opposition interposed.

--"Makes me feel confident..." Wilfrid resumed.

"And Pole's promos, Mr. Wilfrud; ye're forgettin' that."

"Confident, ma'am."

"He was the firrst to be soft."

"I say, ma'am, for his sake--"

"An' it's for his sake. And weak as he is on 's legs, poor fells; which marr'ge 'll cure, bein' a certain rem'dy."

"Mrs. Chump! I beg you to listen."

"Mr. Wilfrud! and I can see too, and it's three weeks and ye kissed little Belloni in the passage, outside this vary door, and out in the garden."

The blow was entirely unexpected, and took Wilfrid's breath, so that he was not ready for his turn in this singular piece of harmony.

"Ye did!" Mrs. Chump rejoiced to behold how her chance spark kindled flame in his cheeks. "It's pos'tuv ye did. And ye're the best blusher of the two, my dear; and no shame to ye, though it is a garl's business. That little Belloni takes to 't like milk; but you--"

Wilfrid strode up to her, saying imperiously, "I tell you to listen!"

She succumbed at once to a show of physical ascendancy, murmuring, "It's sure he was seen kissin' of her twice, and mayhap more; and hearty smacks of the lips, too--likin' it."

The ladies rewarded Wilfrid for his service to their cause by absolutely hearing nothing--a feat women can be capable of.

Wilfrid, however, was angered by the absurdity of the charge and the scene, and also by the profane touch on Emilia's name.

"I must tell you, ma'am, that for my father's sake I must desire you to quit this--you will see the advisability of quitting this house for a time."

"Pole's promus! Pole's promus!" Mrs. Chump wailed again.

"Will you give me your assurance now that you will go, to be our guest again subsequently?"

"In writin' and in words, Mr. Wilfrud!"

"Answer me, ma'am."

"I will, Mr. Wilfrud; and Mr. Braintop's a witness, knowin' the nature of an oath. There naver was a more sacrud promus. Says Pole, 'Martha--'"

Wilfrid changed his tactics. Sitting down by her side, he said: "I am sure you have an affection for my father."

"I'm the most lovin' woman, my dear! If it wasn't for my vartue I don't know what'd become o' me. Ye could ask Chump, if he wasn't in his grave, poor fella! I'll be cryin' like a squeezed orr'nge presently. What with Chump and Pole, two's too many for a melanch'ly woman."

"You have an affection for my father I know, ma'am. Now, see! he's ill. If you press him to do what we certainly resist, you endanger his life."

Mrs. Chump started back from the man who bewildered her brain without stifling her sense of justice. She knew that there was another way of putting the case, whereby she was not stuck in the criminal box; but the knowledge groped about blindly, and finding herself there, Mrs. Chump lost all idea of a counter-accusation, and resorted to wriggling and cajolery. "Ah! ye look sweeter when ye're kissin' us, Mr. Wilfrud; and I wonder where the little Belloni has got to!"

"Tell me, that there maybe no misunderstanding." Wilfrid again tried to fix her.

"A rosy rosy fresh bit of a mouth she's got! and pouts ut!"

Wilfrid took her hand. "Answer me."

"Deed, and I'm modust, Mr. Wilfrud."

"You do him the honour to be very fond of him. I am to believe that? Then you must consent to leave us at the end of a week. You abandon any idea of an impossible ceremony, and of us you make friends and not enemies."

At the concluding word, Mrs. Chump was no longer sustained by her excursive fancy. She broke down, and wrung her hands, crying, "En'mies! Pole's children my en'mies! Oh, Lord! that I should live to hear ut! and Pole, that knew me a bride first blushin'!"

She wailed and wept so that the ladies exchanged compassionate looks, and Arabella rose to press her hand and diminish her distress. Wilfrid saw that his work would be undone in a moment, and waved her to her seat. The action was perceived by Mrs. Chump.

"Oh, Mr. Wilfrud! my dear! and a soldier! and you that was my favourut! If half my 'ffection for Pole wasn't the seein' of you so big and handsome! And all my ideas to get ye marrud, avery one so snug in a corner, with a neat little lawful ring on your fingers! And you that go to keep me a lone woman, frightened of the darrk! I'm an awful coward, that's the truth. And ye know that marr'ge is a holy thing! and it's such a beaut'ful cer'mony! Oh, Mr. Wilfrud!--Lieuten't y' are! and I'd have bought ye a captain, and made the hearts o' your sisters jump with bonnuts and gowns and jools. Oh, Pole! Pole! why did you keep me so short o' cash? It's been the roon of me! What did I care for your brooches and your gifts? I wanted the good will of your daughters, sir-- your son, Pole!"

Mrs. Chump stopped her flow of tears. "Dear hearts!" she addressed her silent judges, in mysterious guttural tones, "is it becas ye think there's a bit of a fear of...?"

The ladies repressed a violent inclination to huddle together, like

cattle from the blowing East.

"I assure ye, 'taint poss'ble," pursued Mrs. Chump. "Why do I 'gree to marry Pole? Just this, now. We sit chirpin' and chatterin' of times that's gone, and live twice over, Pole and myself; and I'm used to 'm; and I was soft to 'm when he was a merry buck, and you cradle lumber in ideas, mind! for my vartue was always un'mpeach'ble. That's just the reason. So, come, and let's all be friends, with money in our pockuts; yell find me as much of a garl as army of ye. And, there! my weak time's after my Porrt, my dears. So, now ye know when I can't be refusin' a thing to ye. Are we friends?--say! are we?"

Even if the ladies had been disposed to pardon her vulgarity, they could not by any effort summon a charitable sentiment toward one of their sex who degraded it by a public petition for a husband. This was not to be excused; and, moreover, they entertained the sentimentalist's abhorrence of the second marriage of a woman; regarding the act as simply execrable; being treason to the ideal of the sex--treason to Woman's purity--treason to the mysterious sentiment which places Woman so high, that when a woman slips there is no help for it but she must be smashed.

Seeing that each looked as implacable as the other, Mrs. Chump called plaintively, "Arr'bella!"

The lady spoke:--

"We are willing to be your friends, Mrs. Chump, and we request that you will consider us in that light. We simply do not consent to give you a name...."

"But, we'll do without the name, my dear," interposed Mrs. Chump. "Ye'll call me plain Martha, which is almost mother, and not a bit of 't. There--Cornelia, my love! what do ye say?"

"I can only reiterate my sister's words, which demand no elucidation," replied Cornelia.

The forlorn woman turned her lap towards the youngest.

"Ad'la! ye sweet little cajoler! And don't use great cartwheels o' words that leave a body crushed."

Adela was suffering from a tendency to levity, which she knew to be unbecoming the occasion, and likely to defeat its significance. She said: "I am sure, Mrs. Chump, we are very much attached to you as Mrs. Chump; but after a certain period of life, marriage does make people ridiculous, and, as much for your sake as our own, we would advise you to discard a notion that cannot benefit anybody. Believe in our attachment; and we shall see you here now and then, and correspond with you when you are away. And..."

"Oh, ye puss! such an eel as y' are!" Mrs. Chump cried out. "What are ye doin' but sugarin' the same dose, miss! Be qu't! It's a traitor that

makes what's nasty taste agree'ble. D'ye think my stomach's a fool? Ye may wheedle the mouth, but not the stomach."

At this offence there fell a dead silence. Wilfrid gazed on them all indifferently, waiting for the moment to strike a final blow.

When she had grasped the fact that Pity did not sit in the assembly, Mrs. Chump rose.

"Oh! if I haven't been sitting among three owls and a raven," she exclaimed. Then she fussed at her gown. "I wish ye good day, young ladus, and mayhap ye'd like to be interduced to No. 2 yourselves, some fine mornin'? Prov'dence can wait. There's a patient hen on the eggs of all of ye! I wouldn't marry Pole now--not if he was to fall flat and howl for me. Mr. Wilfrud, I wish ye good-bye. Ye've done your work. I'll be out of this house in half-an-hour."

This was not quite what Wilfrid had meant to effect. He proposed to her that she should come to the yacht, and indeed leave Brookfield to go on board. But Mrs. Chump was in that frame of mind when, shamefully wounded by others, we find our comfort in wilfully wounding ourselves. "No," she said (betraying a meagre mollification at every offer), "I'll not stop. I won't go to the yacht--unless I think better of ut. But I won't stop. Ye've hurrt me, and I'll say good-bye. I hope ye'll none of ye be widows. It's a crool thing. And when ye've got no children of your own, and feel, all your inside risin' to another person's, and they hate ye--hate ye! Oh! Oh!--There, Mr. Wilfrud, ye needn't touch me elbow. Oh, dear! look at me in the glass! and my hair! Annybody'd swear I'd been drinkin'. I won't let Pole look at me. That'd cure 'm. And he must let me have money, because I don't care for 'cumulations. Not now, when there's no young--no garls and a precious boy, who'd say, when I'm gone, 'Bless her' Oh! 'Poor thing! Bless--' Oh! Augh!" A note of Sorrow's own was fetched; and the next instant, with a figure of dignity, the afflicted woman observed: "There's seven bottles of my Porrt, and there's eleven of champagne, and some comut clar't I shall write where ut's to be sent. And, if you please, look to the packing; for bits o' glass and a red stain's not like your precious hope when you're undoin a hamper. And that's just myself now, and I'm a broken woman; but naver mind, nobody!"

A very formal and stiff "Good-bye," succeeding a wheezy lamentation, concluded the speech. Casting a look at the glass, Mrs. Chump retired, with her fingers on the ornamental piece of hair.

The door having closed on her, Wilfrid said to his sisters: "I want one of you to come with me to town immediately. Decide which will go."

His eyes questioned Cornelia. Hers were dropped.

"I have work to do," pleaded Adela.

"An appointment? You will break it."

"No, dear, not--"

"Not exactly an appointment. Then there's nothing to break. Put on your bonnet."

Adela slipped from the room in a spirit of miserable obedience.

"I could not possibly leave papa," said Arabella, and Wilfrid nodded his head. His sisters knew quite well what was his business in town, but they felt that they were at his mercy, and dared not remonstrate. Cornelia ventured to say, "I think she should not come back to us till papa is in a better state."

"Perhaps not," replied Wilfrid, careless how much he betrayed by his apprehension of the person indicated.

The two returned late that night, and were met by Arabella at the gate.

"Papa has been--don't be alarmed," she began. "He is better now. But when he heard that she was not in the house, the blood left his hands and feet. I have had to use a falsehood. I said, 'She left word that she was coming back to-night or to-morrow.' Then he became simply angry. Who could have believed that the sight of him so would ever have rejoiced me!"

Adela, worn with fatigue, sobbed, "Oh! Oh!"

"By the way, Sir Twickenham called, and wished to see you," said Arabella curiously.

"Oh! so weary!" the fair girl ejaculated, half-dreaming that she saw herself as she threw back her head and gazed at stars and clouds. "We met Captain Gambier in town." Here she pinched Arabella's arm.

The latter said, "Where?"

"In a miserable street, where he looked like a peacock in a quagmire."

Arabella entreated Wilfrid to be careful in his management of their father. "Pray, do not thwart him. He has been anxious to know where you have gone. He--he thinks you have conducted Mrs. Chump, and will bring her back. I did not say it--I merely let him think so."

She added presently, "He has spoken of money."

"Yes?" went Adela, in a low breath.

"Cornelia imagines that--that we--he is perhaps in--in want of it. Merchants are, sometimes."

"Did Sir Twickenham say he would call to-morrow?" asked Adela.

"He said that most probably he would."

Wilfrid had been silent. As he entered the house, Mr. Pole's bedroom-bell rang, and word came that he was to go to his father. As soon as the sisters were alone, Adela groaned: "We have been hunting that girl all day in vile neighbourhoods. Wilfrid has not spoken more than a dozen sentences. I have had to dine on buns and hideous soup. I am half-dead with the smell of cabs. Oh! if ever I am poor it will kill me. That damp hay and close musty life are too intolerable! Yes! You see I care for what I eat. I seem to be growing an animal. And Wilfrid is going to drag me over the same course to-morrow, if you don't prevent him. I would not mind, only it is absolutely necessary that I should see Sir Twickenham."

She gave a reason why, which appeared to Arabella so cogent that she said at once: "If Cornelia does not take your place I will."

The kiss of thanks given by Adela was accompanied by a request for tea. Arabella regretted that she had sent the servants to bed.

"To bed!" cried her sister. "But they are the masters, not we! Really, if life were a round of sensual pleasure, I think our servants might congratulate themselves."

Arabella affected to show that they had their troubles; but her statement made it clear that the servants of Brookfield were peculiarly favoured servants, as it was their mistress's pride to make them. Eventually Adela consented to drink some sparkling light wine; and being thirsty she drank eagerly, and her tongue was loosed, insomuch that she talked of things as one who had never been a blessed inhabitant of the kingdom of Fine Shades. She spoke of 'Cornelia's chances;' of 'Wilfrid's headstrong infatuation--or worse;' and of 'Papa's position,' remarking that she could both laugh and cry.

Arabella, glad to see her refreshed, was pained by her rampant tone; and when Adela, who had fallen into one of her reflective 'long-shot' moods, chanced to say, "What a number of different beings there are in the world!" her reply was, "I was just then thinking we are all less unlike than we suppose."

"Oh, my goodness!" cried Adela. "What! am I at all--at all--in the remotest degree--like that creature we have got rid of?"

The negative was not decisively enunciated or immediate; that is, it did not come with the vehemence and volume that could alone have satisfied Adela's expectation.

The "We are all of one family" was an offensive truism, of which Adela might justly complain.

That night the ladies received their orders from Wilfrid--they were to express no alarm before their father as to the state of his health, or to treat him ostensibly as an invalid; they were to marvel publicly at Mrs. Chump's continued absence, and a letter requesting her to return was to be written. At the sign of an expostulation, Wilfrid smote them down by

saying that the old man's life hung on a thread, and it was for them to cut it or not.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A marriage without love is dishonour
Bear in mind that we are sentimentalists--The eye is our servant
I am not ashamed
Love that shrieks at a mortal wound, and bleeds humanly
Love the poor devil
My mistress! My glorious stolen fruit! My dark angel of love
Poor mortals are not in the habit of climbing Olympus to ask
Revived for them so much of themselves
Solitude is pasturage for a suspicion
Victims of the modern feminine'ideal'

End of this Project Gutenberg Etext of Sandra Belloni, v4
by George Meredith

, v4

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