

# MARGARET OLIPHANT

THE  
SORCERESS.  
VOLUME 1 OF 3

Маргарет Олифант

**The Sorceress. Volume 1 of 3**

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# Mrs. Oliphant

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### CHAPTER I

It was the most exciting event which had ever occurred in the family, and everything was affected by it.

Imagine to yourselves such a young family, all in the very heyday of life, parents and children alike. It is true that Mrs. Kingsward was something of an invalid, but nobody believed that her illness was anything very serious, only a reason why she should be taken abroad, to one place after another, to the great enjoyment of the girls, who were never so happy as when they were travelling and gaining, as they said, experience of life. She was not yet forty, while Charlie was twenty-one and Bee nineteen, so that virtually they were all of the same age, so to speak, and enjoyed everything together – mamma by no means put aside into the ranks of the dowagers, but going everywhere and doing everything just like the rest, and as much admired as anyone.

To be sure she had not been able to walk about so much this time, and had not danced once, except a single turn with Charlie, which brought on a palpitation, so that she declared with a laugh that her dancing days were over. Her dancing days over! Considering how fond she had always been of dancing, the three young people laughed over this, and did not take the least alarm. Mamma had always been the ringleader in everything, even in the romps with the little ones at home. For you must not think that these three were all of the family by any means.

Bee and Betty were the eldest of I can't at this moment tell how many, who were safe in the big nursery at Kingswarden under the charge (very partial) of papa, and the strict and steady rule of nurse, who was a personage of high authority in the house. Papa had but lately left "the elder ones," as he called them, including his pretty wife – and had gone back to his work, which was that of an official at the Horse Guards, in some military department of which I don't even know the name, for I doubt whether the Intelligence Department, which satisfies all the necessities of description, had been invented in those days.

Colonel Kingsward was a distinguished officer, and the occasion of great *éclat* to the little group when he showed himself at their head, drawing round him a sort of cloud of foreign officers wherever he went, which Bee and Betty appreciated largely, and to which Mrs. Kingsward herself did not object; for they all liked the clank of spurs, as was natural, and the endless ranks of partners, attendants in the gardens, and general escort and retinue thus provided. It was not, however, among these officers, red, blue, green, and white – of all the colours in the rainbow – that Bee had found her fate. For I need scarcely say it was a proposal which had turned everything upside down and filled the little party with excitement.

A proposal! The first in the family! Mamma's head was as much turned by it as Bee's. She lay on the sofa in her white dressing gown, so flushed with happiness and amusement and excitement, that you would have supposed it was she who was to be the bride.

And then it was so satisfactory a thing all round. If ever Mrs. Kingsward had held anyone at arm's length in her life it was a certain captain of Dragoons who had clanked about everywhere after her daughters and herself for three weeks past. The moment they had appeared anywhere, even at the springs, where she went to drink her morning glass of disagreeable warm water, at the concert in the afternoon, in "the rooms" at night, not to speak of every picnic and riding party, this tall figure would jump up like a jack-in-a-box. And there was no doubt that the girls were rather pleased than otherwise to see him jump up. He was six foot two at least, with a moustache nearly a yard long, curling in a tawny and powerful twist over his upper lip. He had half-a-dozen medals on his breast;

his uniform was a compound of white and silver, with a helmet that literally blazed in the sun, and his spurs clanked louder than any other spurs in the gardens. The only thing that was wanting to him was a very little thing – a thing that an uninstructed English person might not have thought of at all – but which was a painful thing in his own troubled consciousness, and in that of the regiment, and even was doubtful to the English friends who had picked up, as was natural, all the prejudices of the class into which their own position brought them.

Poor Captain Kreutzner, I blush to say it, had no “Von” to his name. Nobody could deny that he was a distinguished officer, the hope of the army in his branch of the service; but when Mrs. Kingsward thought how the Colonel would look if he heard his daughter announced as Madame Kreutzner *tout court* in a London drawing-room, her heart sank within her, and a cold perspiration came out upon her forehead. “And I don’t believe Bee would care,” she cried, turning to her son for sympathy.

Charlie was so well brought up a young man that he cared very much, and gave his mother all the weight of his support. His office it was to beguile Captain Kreutzner as to the movements of the party, to keep off that bold dragoon as much as was possible; when, lo! all their precautions were rendered unnecessary by the arrival of the real man from quite another quarter, at once, and in a moment cutting the Captain out!

There was one thing Mrs. Kingsward could never be sufficiently thankful for in the light of after events, and that was, that it was Colonel Kingsward himself who introduced Mr. Aubrey Leigh to the family. He was a young man who was travelling for the good of his health, or rather for the good of his mind, poor fellow, as might be seen at a glance. He was still in deep mourning when he presented himself at the hotel, and his countenance was as serious as his hatband. Nevertheless, he had not been long among them before Bee taught him how to smile, even to laugh, though at first with many hesitations and rapid resuming of a still deeper tinge of gravity, as if asking pardon of some beloved object for whom he would not permit even himself to suppose that he had ceased to mourn. This way he had of falling into sudden gravity continued with him even when it was evident that every decorum required from him that he should cease to mourn. Perhaps it was one of the things that most attracted Bee, who had a touch of the sentimental in her character, as all young ladies had in those days, when Mrs. Hemans and L. E. L. were the favourite poets whom young ladies were expected to read. Well brought up girls were not permitted, I need not say, to read Byron. Shelley was a name of fear, and the poems of Mr. Thomas Campbell, not to say Mr. Thomas Moore (carefully selected) were likely to promote that quality.

The pale young man, with his black coat, his hatband, his look of melancholy, drove out the image of the Captain at once from Bee’s mind. She had perhaps had enough of captains, fine uniforms, spurs, and all. They had become what modern levity calls a drug in the market. They made *Fenster* parade all day long under her windows; they thronged upon her steps in the gardens; they tore the flounces from her tarlatan into pieces at the balls. It was something far more original to sit out in the moonlight and look at the moon with a sorrowful young hero, who gradually woke up into life under her hand. Poor, poor boy! – so young and so melancholy! – who had gone through so much! – who was really so handsome when the veil of grief began to blow away! – who had such a pretty name!

Bee was only nineteen. She had mocked and charmed and laughed at a whole generation of young officers, thinking of nothing but picnics and dinner parties and balls. She wanted something new upon which to try her little hand – and now it was thrown, just when she felt the need, in her way. She had turned a young fool’s head several times, so that the operation had lost its charm. But to bring a sad man back to life, to drive away sorrow, to teach him to hold up his head again, to learn how sweet it was to live and smile, and ride and run about this beautiful world, and wake every day to a new pleasure – that was something she felt worthy of a woman’s powers. And she did it with such effect that Mr. Aubrey Leigh went on improving for three weeks more, and finally ended up with

that proposal which was to the Kingsward family in general the most amusing, the most exciting, the most delightful incident in the world.

And yet, of course, it was attended with a certain amount of anxiety which in her – temporarily – invalid state was not very good for mamma. Everybody insisted on all occasions that it was a most temporary state, and that by the end of the summer she would be all right – the palpitations quite calmed down, the flush – which made her so pretty – a little subdued, and herself as strong as ever. But in the meantime this delightful romantic incident, which certainly acted upon her like a glass of champagne, raising her spirits, brought her some care as well. Her first interview was of course with Bee, and took place in the privacy of her chamber, where she cross-examined her daughter as much as was compatible with the relations between them – which indeed were rather those of companions and comrades than of mother and daughter.

“Now, Bee, my dear child,” she said, “remember you have always been a little rover, and Mr. Leigh is so quiet. Do you think you really, really, can devote yourself to him, and never think of another man all your life?”

“Mamma,” said Bee, “if you were not such a dear I should think you were very insulting. Another man! Why, where should I find another man in the world that was fit to tie Aubrey’s shoe?”

“Well,” said Mrs. Kingsward, dubiously; but she added, after a moment, “You know, darling, that’s not quite the question. If you did find in the after ages a man that perhaps was – fit to tie Mr. Leigh’s shoe?”

“Why in all this world, *petite mère*, will you go on calling him Mr. Leigh?”

“Well, well,” said Mrs. Kingsward; “but I don’t feel,” she said again, after a moment’s hesitation, “that I ought to go so far as to call him Aubrey until we have heard from papa.”

“What could papa find to object to?” said Bee. “Why, it was he who introduced him to us! We should not have known Aubrey, and I should never have been the happiest girl in the world, if it had not been for papa. Dear papa! I know what he’ll say: ‘I can’t understand, my dear, why you should hesitate for a moment. Of course, you don’t suppose I should have introduced Mr. Leigh to my family without first ascertaining, &c., &c.’ That, of course, is what papa will say.”

“I dare say you are right, Bee. It is quite what I expect, for, of course, a man with girls knows what it is, though for my part I confess I always thought it would be a soldier – Captain Kreutzner or Otto von – ”

“Mamma!” cried Bee, almost violently, light flashing out of the blue eyes, which were so bright even on ordinary occasions as to dazzle the beholder – you may imagine what fire came out of them now – “as if I should ever have looked twice at one of those big, brainless, clinking and clanking Germans. (N.B. – Mr. Aubrey Leigh was not tall.) No! Though I may like foreigners well enough because it’s amusing to talk their language and to feel that one has such an advantage in knowing German and all that – yet, when it comes to be a question of spending one’s life, an Englishman for me!”

Thus, it will be seen, Bee forestalled the patriotic sentiments of a later generation by resolving, in spite of all temptations, to belong to other nations – to select an Englishman for her partner in life. It is doubtful, however, how far this virtuous resolution had existed in her mind before the advent of Aubrey Leigh.

“I am sure I am very glad, Bee,” said her mother, “for I always had a dread that you would be snatched off somewhere to – Styria or Dalecarlia, or heaven knows where – (these were the first out-of-the-way names that came to Mrs. Kingsward’s mind; but I don’t know that they were altogether without reference or possibilities), where one would have had no chance of seeing you more than once in two or three years. I am very thankful it is to be an Englishman – or at least I shall be,” she added, with a sigh of suspense, “as soon as I have heard from papa – ”

“One would think, *Mütterchen*, that you were frightened for papa.”

“I shouldn’t like you ever to try and go against him, Bee!”

“Oh, no,” said Bee, lightly, “of course I shouldn’t think of going against him – is the inquisition over? – for I promised,” she said, with a laugh and a blush, “to walk down with Aubrey as far as the river. He likes that so much better than those noisy blazing gardens, with no shade except under those stuffy trees – and so do I.”

“Do you really, Bee? I thought you thought it was so nice sitting under the trees – ”

“With all the *gnadige* Fraus knitting, and all the *wohlgeborne* Herrs smoking. No, indeed, I always hated it!” said Bee.

She jumped up from where she had been sitting on a stool by her mother’s sofa, and took her hat, which she had thrown down on the table. It was a broad, flexible, Leghorn hat, bought in Florence, with a broad blue ribbon – the colour of her eyes, as had often been said – floating in two long streamers behind. She had a sash of the same colour round the simple waist of her white frock. That is how girls were dressed in the early days of Victoria. These were the days of simplicity, and people liked it, seeing it was the fashion, as much as they liked crinolines and chignons when such ornamental arrangements “came in.” It does not become one period to boast itself over another, for fashion will still be lord – or lady – of all.

Mrs. Kingsward looked with real pleasure at her pretty daughter, thinking how well she looked. She wore very nearly the same costume herself, and she knew that it also looked very well on her. Bee’s eyes were shining, blazing with brightness and happiness and love and fun and youth. She was not a creature of perfect features, or matchless beauty, as all the heroines were in the novels of her day, and she was conscious of a great many shortcomings from that high standard. She was not tall enough – which, perhaps, however, in view of the defective stature of Mr. Aubrey Leigh was not so great a disadvantage – and she was neither fair enough nor dark enough for a Minna or a Brenda, the definite and distinct blonde and brunette, which were the ideal of the time; and she was not at all aware that her irregularity, and her mingling of styles, and her possession of no style in particular, were her great charms. She was not a great beauty, but she was a very pretty girl with the additional attraction of those blue diamonds of eyes, the sparkle of which, when my young lady was angry or when she was excited in any more pleasurable way, was a sight to see.

“All that’s very well, my dear,” said Mrs. Kingsward, “but you’ve never answered my question: and I hope you’ll make quite, quite sure before it’s all settled that you do like Aubrey Leigh above everybody in the world.”

“*A la bonne heure*,” said Bee; “you have called him Aubrey at last, without waiting to know what papa will say:” with which words she gave her mother a flying kiss, and was gone in a moment, thinking very little, it must be allowed, of what papa might say.

Mrs. Kingsward lay still for a little, and thought it all over after Bee was gone. She knew a little better than the others what her Colonel was, and that there were occasions on which he was not so easy to deal with as all the young ones supposed. She thought it all over from the moment that young Mr. Leigh had appeared on the scene. What a comfort it was to think that it was the Colonel himself who had introduced him! Of course, as Bee said, before presenting anyone to his wife and family, Colonel Kingsward would have ascertained, &c., &c. It was just how he would write no doubt. Still, a man may introduce another to his wife and family without being ready at once to accept him as a son-in-law. On the other hand, Colonel Kingsward knew well enough what is the possible penalty of such introductions. Young as Bee was, she had already attracted a good deal of attention, though this was the first time it had actually come to an offer. But Edward must surely have thought of that. She was, though it seemed so absurd, and though Bee had laughed at it, a little afraid of her husband. He had never had any occasion to be stern, yet he had it in him to be stern; and he would not hesitate to quench Bee’s young romance if he thought it right. And, on the other hand, Bee, though she was such a little thing, such a child, so full of fun and nonsense, had a spirit which would not yield as her mother’s did. Mrs. Kingsward drew another long fluttering sigh before she got up reluctantly in obedience to her maid, who came in with that other white gown, not unlike Bee’s, over her arm, to

dress her mistress. She would have liked to lie still a little longer, to have finished the book she was reading, to have thought over the situation – anything, indeed, to justify her in keeping still upon the couch and being lazy, as she called it. Poor little mother! She had not been lazy, nor had the chance of being lazy much in her life. She had not begun to guess why it was she liked it so much now.

## CHAPTER II

I have now to explain how it was that Mr. Aubrey Leigh was so interesting and so melancholy, and thus awoke the friendship and compassion, and secured the ministrations of the Kingsward family. He was in deep mourning, for though he was only eight-and-twenty he was already a widower, and bereaved beside of his only child. Poor young man! He had married with every appearance of happiness and prosperity, but his wife had died at the end of the first year, leaving him with a baby on his inexperienced hands. He was a young man full of feeling, and, contrary to the advice of all his friends, he had shut himself up in his house in the country and dedicated himself to his child. Dedicated himself to a baby two months old!

There was nobody who did not condemn this unnecessary self-sacrifice. He should have gone away; he should have left the child in the hands of its excellent nurse, under the supervision of that charming person who had been such a devoted nurse to dear Mrs. Leigh, and whom the desolate young widower had not the courage to send away from his house. Her presence there was a double reason, people said, why he should have gone away. For though his sorrow and trouble was so great that nobody for a moment supposed that he had any idea of such a thing, yet the presence of a lady, and of a lady still called by courtesy a young lady, though older than himself, and who could not be treated like a servant in his house, was embarrassing and not very seemly, everybody said. Suggestions were made to her that she should go away, but then she answered that she had nowhere to go to, and that she had promised to dear Amy never to forsake her child. The country ladies about who took an interest in the young man thought it was “just like” dear Amy, who had always been a rather silly young woman, to exact such a promise, but that Miss Lance would be quite justified in not keeping it, seeing the child had plenty of people to look after her – her grandmother within reach and her father dedicating himself to her.

Miss Lance, however, did not see her duty in the same way; indeed, after the poor little child died – and there was no doubt she had been invaluable during its illness, and devoted herself to it as she had done to its mother – she stayed on still at Leigh Court, though now at last poor Aubrey was persuaded to go away. The mind of the county was relieved beyond description when at last he departed on his travels. These good people did not at all want to get up any scandal in their midst. They did not very much blame Miss Lance for declining to give up a comfortable home. They only felt it was dreadfully awkward and that something should be done about it, though nobody knew what to do. He had left home nearly six months before he appeared at the Baths with that letter to Mrs. Kingsward in his pocket, and the change and the travel had done him good.

A young man of twenty-eight cannot go mourning all the days of his life for a baby of eight months old, and he had already begun to “get over” the death of his wife before the second event occurred. This troublous beginning of his life had left him very sad, with something of the feeling of a victim, far more badly treated than most in the beginning of his career. But this is not like real grief, which holds a man’s heart with a grip of steel. And he was in the stage when a man is ready to be consoled when Bee’s blue eyes first flashed upon him. The Kingswards had received him in these circumstances with more *abandon* than they would have done in any other. He was so melancholy; his confidences, when he began to make them, were so touching; his waking up to interest and happiness so delightful to see. And thus, before anyone had thoroughly realized it, the deed was done. They knew nothing about Miss Lance – as how should they? – and what could she have had to do with it if they had known?

So there really was nothing but that doubt of Colonel Kingsward’s approval to alloy the pleasure of the party, and it was only Mrs. Kingsward who thought of it. Charlie pooh-poohed the idea altogether. “I think I should know my father better than anyone,” the young man said, with much scorn of his mother’s hesitation. He was very fond and very proud of his mother, but felt that as a

man himself, he probably understood papa better than the ladies could. “Of course he will approve; why shouldn’t he approve? Leigh is a very decent fellow, though I don’t think all the world of him, as you girls do. Papa, of course, knew exactly what sort of a fellow he was; a little too quiet – not Bee’s sort at all. No, you may clamour as you like, but he’s not in the least Bee’s sort – ”

“I’m supposed to prefer a noisy trooper, I believe,” said Bee.

“Well, I should have said that was more like it – but mind you, the governor would never have sent us out a man here who was not good enough for anything. Oh, I understand the old boy!”

“Charlie, how dare you?” cried his mother; but the horror was modified by a laugh, for anything more unlike an old boy than Colonel Kingsward it would not have been very easy to conceive.

“Well, mamma, you wouldn’t have me call him my honoured father, would you?” the young man said. He was at Oxford, and he thought himself on the whole not only by far the most solid and serious member of the present party, but on the whole rather more experienced in the world than the gentleman whom in the bosom of the family he still condescended to call “papa.”

As for little Betty, who up to this time had been Bee’s shadow, and who had not yet begun to feel herself *de trop*, she, no more than her sister, was moved by any of these cares. She was wholly occupied in studying the new thing which had suddenly started into being before her eyes. Betty was of opinion that it was entirely got up for her amusement and instruction. When she and Bee were alone, she never ceased in her interrogatory. “Oh, Bee, when did you first begin to think about him like that? Oh, Bee, how did you first find out that he was thinking about you? Oh, Bee, don’t you mind that he was once in love before?” Such were the questions that poured in an incessant stream into Bee’s ears. That young lady was equal to them all, and she was not unwilling to let her sister share more or less in the new enlightenment that had come to herself.

“When did I first begin to think of him?” she said. “Oh, Betty, the first minute I saw him coming through the garden with Charlie to speak to mamma! There were all those horrid men about, you remember, in those gaudy uniforms, and their swords and spurs, and so forth – such dreadful bad taste in foreigners always to be in uniform – ”

“But, Bee,” cried Betty, “why, I’ve heard you say – ”

“Oh, never mind what you’ve heard me say! I’ve been silly, I suppose, in my day, like almost everybody. Aubrey says he cannot think how they can live, always done up in those hot, stiff clothes – none of the ease of Englishmen about them.”

“Papa says they are such soldier-like men,” says little Betty, who had not been converted from the *regime* of the officers, like Bee.

“Oh, well, papa – he is an officer himself, but he never wears his uniform when he can help it, you know.”

“Well,” said Betty, “you may say what you like – for my part, I do love a nice uniform. I don’t want ever again to dance with a man in a black coat. But Bee, you’re too bad – you won’t say a word, and I want so to know how it all came about. What put it into your head? And what did you say to one another? And was it he that began first – or was it you?”

“You little dreadful thing,” said Bee; “how could a girl ever begin? It shows how little you know! Of course he began; but we didn’t begin at all,” she said, after a pause, “it just came – all in a moment when I wasn’t thinking, and neither was he.”

“Do you mean to say that he didn’t intend to propose to you?” said Betty, growing pale.

“Oh!” said Bee, impatient, “as if proposing was all! Do you think he just came out with it point blank – ‘Miss Kingsward, will you marry me?’ ”

“Well,” said Betty: “what did he say then if he didn’t say that?”

“Oh, you little goose!” said Bee.

“I am sure if he had said ‘Oh, you little goose’ to me,” said Betty, “I should never have spoken a word to him again.”

“It is no use talking to little girls,” said Bee, with a sigh. “You don’t understand; and, to be sure, how could you understand – at your age and all?”

“Age!” said Betty, indignant, “there is but fifteen months between us, and I’ve always done everything with you. We’ve always had on new things together, and gone to the same places and everything. It is you that are very unkind now you have got engaged; and I do believe you like this big horrid man better than me.”

“Oh, you little goose!” said Bee, again.

“No, it isn’t a big but a little, horrid man. I made a mistake,” said Betty, “not like Captain Kreutzner that you used to like so much. It’s small people you care for now; not your own nice people like me and mamma, but a man that you had never heard the name of when you first came here, and now you quote and praise him, and make the most ridiculous fuss about him, even to Charlie, who is far nicer-looking! – and won’t even tell your sister what he says!”

This argument came to so high a tone that mamma called out from her room to know what was amiss. “It does not become you girls to carry on your old scuffles and quarrels,” she said, “now that one of you, at least, is so grown up and about to take upon herself the responsibilities of life.”

“Is Aubrey a responsibility?” Betty whispered in her sister’s ears.

“Oh, you little silly thing!” Bee replied; and presently Mrs. Kingsward’s maid came in to say that Mr. Leigh was in the sitting-room, and would Miss Bee go to him as her mistress was not ready; for this was the little fiction that was kept up in those days before Colonel Kingsward’s letter had been received. It will be seen, however, that it was but a fiction, and that as a matter of fact there was very little restraint put on the young people’s intercourse. “You must not consider that anything is settled; you must not think there’s any engagement,” Mrs. Kingsward had said. “Indeed, indeed, I cannot take upon me to sanction anything till I hear from her papa.” But virtually they met as much as they liked, and even indulged in little talks apart, and meetings by themselves, before Mrs. Kingsward was ready; so that as a matter of fact this restriction did very little harm.

And in due time Colonel Kingsward’s letter was received, and it was not unfavourable. The Colonel said that, on the whole, he should have preferred it had Mr. Leigh waited till they had all returned home. It would have been a seemly forbearance, and saved Mrs. Kingsward a great deal of anxiety; but as matters stood and as his dear wife approved, and he heard nothing but good of Mr. Leigh, he would not withdraw the provisional consent which she seemed to have given. “It will be expedient in the circumstances that you should all return home as soon as possible, that I may go into matters with the young man,” the Colonel added in that part of his letter which was not intended to be read to Aubrey Leigh. And he added, as Bee had prophesied, “You might have been sure that I should not introduce a young man to my family, and to yourself, my dear, without ascertaining previously,” etc., etc., just as Bee had said. He added, “Of course I never contemplated anything of this sort: but one can never tell what may happen when young people are thrown together. The property is a good one, and the young man unexceptionable, from all I can hear.” Then Mrs. Kingsward’s mind was set at ease. It seemed to Bee that her father might have said something on the subject of her happiness, and acknowledged Aubrey to be something more than an unexceptionable young man. It was inconceivable, she thought to herself, how cool people are when they come to that age. The property good, and the young man unexceptionable – was that all? Did papa take no more interest than that? But at all events the engagement was now quite permitted and acknowledged, and they might walk out together all day, and dance together all night, without a word said; for which Bee forgave and instantly forgot – it was really of so little importance – the coolness of papa.

Mrs. Kingsward’s “cure” was over, and by this time most people were leaving the Bath. Our party made their preparations for leaving too, in the pleasantest way. It was not to be at all a rapid journey, which would not have been good for Mrs. Kingsward. They were to make their way at leisure from one beautiful old city to another across the breadth of Germany, staying a day here and a day there, travelling for the most part in a large, old-fashioned carriage, such as was the custom then, with

a wide-hooded seat in front, like the *banquette* of a French diligence, in which two people could be extremely happy, seeing the scenery much better than those inside could do, or perhaps not seeing the scenery at all, but occupying each other quite as agreeably with the endless talk of lovers, which is not interesting to anybody but themselves. Before they set out upon this journey, however, which was to hold so great a place in Bee's life, a little incident occurred to her which did not appear to be of very much consequence, but which made some impression on her mind at the time, and vaguely appeared afterwards to throw light on various other events. The German Bath at which the little story of her love took place is surrounded with woods – woods of a kind that are never seen anywhere else, though they are the special feature of German Baths. They are chiefly composed of fir trees, and they are arranged upon the most strictly mathematical principles, with that precision which is dear to the German mind, row upon row standing close together, as if they had been stuck in so at their present height, with so many cubit feet of air to each, as in the London lodging-houses. They are traversed by broad roads, with benches at intervals, and at each corner there is a wooden board on which is painted indications how to find the nearest *restauration* where beer is to be had, and the veal of the country – for the German, in his hours of ease and amusement, has continual occasion to be “restored.”

Bee had gone out early in the morning to make a little sketch of an opening in the trees through which a village spire was visible. There were not many points for the artist in landscape, especially one of such moderate powers as Bee, and she was very anxious to finish this to present it, I need scarcely say, to Aubrey, as a memento of the place. Probably there was some other sentimental reason – such as that they had first spoken words of special meaning there, or had first exchanged looks that were of importance in their idyll, or some other incident of equal weight. She was seated on one of the benches, with her little colour box and bottle of water, giving the finishing touches to her sketch. Sooth to say, Bee was no great performer, and the ranks of the dark trees standing arithmetically apart to permit of that little glimpse of distance, were too much for her. They looked in her sketch like two dark green precipices rather than like trees, and had come to a very difficult point, when a lady coming along by one of the side walks, round the corner past the *restauration*, suddenly sat down by Bee's side and startled her a little. She was not a girl who was easily frightened, but the suddenness of the apparition out of the silent morning when she had thought nobody was in sight was a little startling and made her hand shake.

“I hope I am not intruding upon you,” the lady said.

“Oh, no!” said Bee, looking up with her bright face. She was as fresh as the morning in her broad Leghorn hat with the blue ribbon, and her eyes that danced and sparkled. The stranger by her side was much older than Bee. She was a handsome woman; dark, with fine eyes, too, a sidelong look in them, and a curious half smile which was like La Gioconda, that famous picture Bee had seen in the Louvre, as we all have. She thought of La Gioconda at once, when she looked up into the lady's face. She was entirely dressed in black, and there could not have been found anywhere a more perfect contrast to Bee.

They got into conversation quite easily, for Bee was a girl who loved to talk. The lady gave her several hints about her little picture which Bee knew enough to know were dictated by superior knowledge, and then they got talking quite naturally about the place and the people who were there. After they had discussed the society and the number of English people at the Bath, and Bee had disclosed the hotel at which she was staying, and many details of her innocent life, which she was not at all conscious of disclosing – the stranger began to inquire about various people. It was not by any means at once that she introduced the name of Leigh; not indeed till she had been over the Reynoldses, and the Gainsboroughs, and the Collinses, under Bee's exultant guidance and fine power of narrative; then she said tentatively, that there was she believed, at one of the hotels, a family of Leighs.

“Oh!” cried Bee, her countenance flushing over with a sudden brilliant delightful blush, which seemed to envelop her from top to toe. She had been looking up into her companion's face so that the stranger got the full benefit of this sudden resplendent change of colour. She then turned very

demurely to her sketch, and said meekly, "I don't know any family, but there is a Mr. Leigh at our hotel."

"Oh," said the lady, but in a very different tone from Bee's startled "oh!" She said it coldly, as if recording a fact. "I thought," she said, "it was the Leighs of Hurstleigh, friends of mine. I may have been deceived by seeing the name in the lists."

"But I think, indeed I am sure, that Mr. Aubrey Leigh is connected with the Leighs of Hurstleigh," Bee said.

"Oh, a young man, a widower, an inconsolable; I think I remember hearing of him. Is that the man?"

"I don't know if he is an inconsolable," cried Bee, with a quick movement of anger and then she thought how foolish that was, for of course a stranger like this could have no unkind meaning. She added with great gravity, "It is quite true that he has been married before."

Poor little Bee, she was not at all aware how she was betraying herself. She was more vexed and indignant than words can say, when the woman (who after all could not be a lady) burst into a laugh. "Oh! I think I can see how matters stand with Aubrey Leigh," this impertinent intruder cried.

## CHAPTER III

It was just two days after the interview in the wood described above, that the Kingsward party got under weigh for home, accompanied, I need not say, by Aubrey Leigh. Bee had not told him of that chance meeting, restrained I do not know by what indefinite feeling that he would not care to hear of it, and also by the sensation that she had as good as told the lady, who was so disagreeable and impertinent as to laugh, what change had taken place in Aubrey's sentiments, and what she had herself to do with that change. It was so silly, oh, so silly of her, and yet she had said nothing, or next to nothing. And there was no reason why she should not have said whatever she pleased, now that the engagement was fully acknowledged and known; indeed, if that woman were in any society at all, she must have heard of it, seeing that, as Bee was aware, not without pleasure, it had afforded a very agreeable diversion to the floating community, a pleasant episode in the tittle-tattle of the gardens and the wells. Bee had no absurd objection to being talked of. She knew that in her condition of life, which was so entirely satisfactory as a condition, everything that concerned a family was talked over and universally known. It was a thing inevitable to a certain position, and a due homage of society to its members. But somehow she did not mention it to Aubrey, nor, indeed, to anyone, which was a very unusual amount of reticence. She did not even give him the sketch, though it was finished. She had been quite grateful for that person's hints at the time, and eagerly had taken advantage of them to improve her drawing; but it seemed to her, when she looked at it now, that it was not her own at all, that the other hand was so visible in it that it would be almost dishonest to call it hers. This, of course, was wholly fantastic, for even supposing that person to have given valuable hints, she had never touched the sketch, and Bee alone had carried them out. But, anyhow, her heart sickened at it, and she thrust it away at the very bottom of the box that Moulsey was packing. She had no desire to see the horrid thing again.

In a day or two, however, Bee had altogether forgotten that interview in the wood. She had so many things to occupy her mind. There were few railways in those days, and the party had a long way to travel before they came to Cologne, where that method of travelling began. They all felt that common life would re-commence there and their delightful wandering would be over. In the meantime, there was a long interval of pleasure before them. The early breakfast at the hotel in the first hours of the autumnal morning, the fun of packing everyone away in the big coach, the books to be brought out to fill up corners, both of time and space, and "Murray" then alone in his glory, with no competitive American, no Badæker, no Joanne, to share his reign – spread out open at the right place, so that mamma inside should be able to lay her finger at once upon any village or castle that struck her – and above all the contrivances to be carried out for securing the *banquette*, as Bee said, for "ourselves," made a lively beginning. Charlie and Betty sometimes managed to secure this favourite place if the attention of the others flagged for a moment, and though mamma generally interposed with a nod or a whisper to restore it to the privileged pair, sometimes she was mischievous too, and consented to their deprivation, and desired them for once to keep her company inside. She generally, however, repented of this before the day was over, and begged that their favourite seat might be restored to them.

"For they are really no fun at all," the poor lady said. "I might as well have two images from Madame Tussaud's."

"It had been a little hard upon Aubrey at the moment of their departure to find half the garrison round the carriage, and bouquets enough to fill a separate vehicle thrust into every corner, the homage of those warriors to the gracious ladies. He had been very cross, and had made a great exhibition of himself, especially when Captain Kreutzner's faggot of forget-me-nots, tied with a ribbon like that on Bee's hat, had been presented with indescribable looks. What did the fellow mean by bringing forget-me-nots? He wanted to pitch it out of the window as soon as they were fairly started.

“What an idiotic custom!” he cried. “What do the fools think you want with such loads of flowers when you are starting on a journey?”

“Why, it is just then you do want them,” cried Betty, who had a dozen or so to her own share, “to smell sweet and show us how much our friends think of us.”

“They will not smell sweet very long, and then what will your friends think of you?” said the angry lover.

Was it possible that Bee was detaching a little knot of the blue flowers to put in her waistband? Bee, Bee! his own property, who had no right so much as to look at another man’s flowers! And what did she do, seeing the cloud upon his face, but arrange another little bouquet, which, with her sweetest smile – the little coquette – she endeavoured to put into his, Aubrey’s, button-hole! He snatched them out of her hand in a sort of fury. “Do you want me never to forget that heavy brute of a German?” he cried, in his indignation. “You may put him near your heart, but I should like to kick him!” These very natural sentiments made Bee laugh – which was cruel: but then poor Captain Kreutzner had been blotted out of her life some time ago, and knew his fate, and had really no right whatever to present her with these particular flowers. His lovely bouquet with its blue ribbon was given to a girl in the first village, and awakened the still more furious jealousy of another swain who was less easily appeased than Aubrey; but this *ricochet* was not thought of by the first and principal pair.

There was not perhaps so many remarkable features in that journey as if it had been through Italy. There were great plains to traverse, where the chief sights were cottages and farmhouses, women going by with great loads of freshly cut grass full of flowers on their heads, fodder for the home-dwelling cows – or men carrying their hops clinging to the pole, to be picked at home, or long straggling branches of the tobacco plant; and in the evening the postillion would whip up his horses, and Charlie in the *banquette*, or John, the manservant, in the rumble, would tootle upon a horn which the former had acquired clandestinely before the party set out – as they dashed through a village or little town with lighted windows, affording them many a flying peep of the domestic life of those tranquil places. And in the middle of the day they stopped to rest somewhere, where the invariable veal was to be found at some Guest-house a little better than the ordinary, where perhaps a bigger village stood with all its high peaked stream: and at night rattled into an old walled town with shadowy high houses which belonged to the fourteenth century, and had not changed a whit since that time. There they stayed a day or two, varying the confinement of the coach by a course through everything that was to be seen, setting out in a party through the roughly-paved streets, but parting company before long, so that Aubrey and Bee would find themselves alone in the shelter of a church or in an insignificant corner by the walls, while the others pursued their sightseeing conscientiously.

“As for me, what I like is the general aspect,” said Bee, with an air of superiority. “I don’t care to poke into every corner, and Aubrey knows the history, which is the chief thing.”

“Are they talking all the time of the history?” said Betty, overawed.

But this perhaps, was not the opinion of Charlie and mamma. No, they did not care very much for the history. People are bad travellers in that stage of life. They are too much interested in their own history. They went about like a pair of Philistines through all these ancient streets, talking of nothing but the things of to-day. The most serious part of their talk was about the home in the depths of England in which they were henceforth to spend their lives. Aubrey had ideas about re-furnishing – about making everything new. It would be impossible to tell the reader how bad was the taste of the time, and with what terrible articles of furniture he proposed to replace the spindle legs and marquetry of his grandfathers. But then these things were the fashion, and supposed to be the best things of the time. To hear them talking of sofas and curtains, and of the colour for the boudoir and the hangings of the drawing-room in the midst of all those graceful old places, was inconceivable. You would have said the stupidest, unimpressionable pair, talking of ugly modern English furniture, when they should have been noting the old world of Nuremberg – the unchanging mediæval city. But you must remember that the furniture was only a symbol of their love and their new life, and all the blessedness

of being together, and the endless delights of every day. The sofas and the curtains meant the *Vita Nuova*, and the refurnishing of the old house a beautiful fabric of all the honour and the joy of life.

Then came the great river, and the progress down its shining stream, and between those beautiful banks, where again they made several pauses to enjoy the scenery. The Rhine is not now the river it was then. It was still the great river of romance in those days – Byron had been there, and the young people remembered Roland and his tower, with his love in the white convent opposite, and felt a shudder at the thought of the Lorelei as they floated under the high and gloomy bank. I doubt, however, whether the lovers thought much even of these things. They were busy just now about the gardens, which Bee was fully minded to remodel and fill with everything that was new and delightful in the way of flowers.

“I shall have masses of colour about the terrace, and every spot covered. I wonder which you like best, majolica vases or rustic baskets?” Bee was saying, when her mother called her to point out the Platz and Bishop Hatto’s tower.

“Oh, yes, mamma, it’s very pretty. But you like clematis, Aubrey, for the balustrade – to wind in and out of the pillars. Yes, yes, I can see it well enough. I like every kind of clematis, even the common one, the traveller’s joy – and it would hang down, you know, over that old bit of wall you told me of. Do go forward, Aubrey, and let them see you are taking an interest. I do see it all quite well, and it is very romantic, and we are quite enjoying it I can assure you, mamma.”

This was how they made their way down stream; in the moonlight nights they ceased to talk of practical matters, and went back to the history of their loves.

“Do you remember, Bee, that first time in the wood – ?”

“Oh, Aubrey, don’t you recollect that drive coming back in the dark – before I knew – ?”

“But you always did know from the very beginning, Bee?”

“Well, perhaps I suspected – and used to think – ”

“You darling, what did you think? – and did you really care – as early as that?”

They went on like this whatever happened outside, giving a careless glance at the heights, at the towers, at the robbers’ castle above and the little villages below; not so much as looking at them, and yet remembering them ever after, enclosing the flow of their young lives, as it were, in that strong flowing of the Rhine, noting nothing and yet seeing everything with the double sight which people possess at the highest moment and crisis of their career. They came at length to Cologne, where this enchanted voyage was more or less to end. To be sure, they were still to be together; but only in the railway, with all the others round them, hearing more or less what they said. They said good-bye to the Rhine with a little sentiment, a delightful little sadness full of pleasure.

“Shall we ever be so happy again?” said Bee, with a sigh.

“Oh, yes, my sweet, a hundred times, and happier, and happier,” said the young man; and thus they were assured it was to be.

I don’t think any of them ever forgot that arrival at Cologne. They came into sight of the town just in the evening, when the last glow of sunset was still burning upon the great river, but lights beginning to show in the windows, and glimmering reflected in the water. The Cathedral was not completed then, and a crane, like some strange weird animal stood out against the sky upon the top of the tower. The hotel to which they were going had a covered terrace upon the river with lights gleaming through the green leaves. They decided they would have their table there, and dine with all that darkling panorama before their eyes through the veil of the foliage, the glowing water, the boats moving and passing, with now and then a raft coming down from the upper stream, and the bridge of boats opening to give passage to a fuming fretting steamboat. Aubrey and Bee went hand in hand up the steps; nobody noticed in the half dark how close they were together. They parted with a close pressure of warm hands.

“Don’t be long, darling,” he said, as they parted, only for a moment, only to prepare a little for the evening, to slip into a fresh dress, to take out a new ribbon, to make one’s youthful self as fair as such unnecessary adjuncts permitted.

But what did Aubrey care for a new ribbon? The only blue he thought of was that in Bee’s eyes.

I do not think she was more than ten minutes over these little changes. She dressed like a flash of lightning, Betty said, who could not find her own things half so quickly, Moulsey being occupied with mamma. Such a short moment not worth counting, and yet enough, more than enough, to change a whole life!

Bee ran down as light as air to the sitting-room which had been engaged for the party. She felt sure that Aubrey would hurry, too, so as to have a word before dinner, before the rest were ready – as if the whole day had not been one long word, running through everything. She came lightly to the door of the room in her fresh frock and her blue ribbons, walking on air, knowing no shadow of any obstacle before her or cloud upon the joyful triumphant sky. She did not even hear the sound of the subdued voices, her faint little sob, strangest of all sounds at such a moment, which seemed to come out to meet her as she opened the door. Bee opened it wondering only if Aubrey were there, thinking of some jibe to address to him about the length of time men took to their toilettes, if she happened to be ready first.

She was very much startled by what she saw. Her mother, still in her travelling dress, sat by the table with a letter open in her hands. She had not made any preparation for dinner – she, usually so dainty, so anxious to get rid of the cloaks and of the soils of the journey. She had taken off her hat, which lay on the table, but was still enveloped in the shawl which she had put on to keep off the evening chills. As for Aubrey, he was exactly as he had been when they parted with him, except that all the light had gone out of his face. He was very pale, and he, too, had a letter in his hand. He uttered a stifled exclamation when he saw Bee at the door, and, lifting his arms as though in protest against something intolerable, walked away to the other end of the room.

“Oh, Bee,” said Mrs. Kingsward, “Oh, go away, my dear, go away! I mean – get something to eat, you and Charlie, and Betty, and then get to bed. Get to bed! I am too tired to take anything, and I am going upstairs at once.”

“I thought you had been upstairs, mamma, half-an-hour ago. What is the matter? You look like a ghost, and so does Aubrey. Has anything happened? Mamma, you won’t look at me, and Aubrey turns his back. What have I done? Is it anything about me?”

“What nonsense, child!” said Mrs. Kingsward, with a pretence at a smile. “What could you have to do with it? We have both – Mr. Leigh and myself – found letters, and we are busy reading them. I am sure the dinner must be served. We ordered it in the balcony, don’t you remember? Run away and make Charlie and Betty sit down at once. I am too tired. Moulsey will run down in a little and get something for me.”

“Mamma,” said Bee, “you cannot make up a story. Something has happened, I am sure of it; and it is something about me.”

“Nonsense, child! Go away and have your dinner. I would come if I could. Don’t you see what a budget of letters I have got? And some of them I must answer to-night.”

“Have you letters, too, Aubrey?” said Bee, in her amazement, standing still as she had paused, arrested by the sight of them, just within the door.

“Bee, I must beg you will not put any questions; go and do what I tell you; your brother and sister will be coming downstairs. Yes, of course, you can see that Mr. Leigh has his letters to read as well as I.”

“Mr. Leigh! I wonder if we have all gone mad, or what is the matter? Aubrey! tell me – you, at least, if mamma won’t. You must have had a quarrel. Mamma, why do you call him Mr. Leigh?”

“Oh, for goodness sake, Bee, go away.”

“I am not going away,” cried the girl. “You have had a quarrel about something. Come, mamma, you must not quarrel with Aubrey – if he has done something wrong or said something silly, I will answer for him, he never intended it. Aubrey, what do you mean, sir, turning your back both on mamma and me? Come here, quick, and ask her pardon, and say you will never do it again.”

Poor little Bee’s heart was fluttering, but she would not allow herself to believe there was anything really wrong. She went close up to her mother and stood by her, with a hand upon her shoulder. “Aubrey!” she said, “never mind if you are wrong or not, come and beg mamma’s pardon, and she will forgive you. There must not – there must not – oh, it is too ridiculous! – be anything wrong between mamma and you. Aubrey!”

He turned round slowly and faced them both with a face so pale that Bee stopped short with a gasp, and could not say a word more. Mrs. Kingsward had buried her face in her hands. Bee looked from one to the other with a dismay which she could not explain to herself. “Oh, what is the matter? What is the matter?” she said.

## CHAPTER IV

There was no merry dinner that night in the verandah of the hotel under the clinging wreaths of green. Mrs. Kingsward went up to her room still with her heavy shawl about her shoulders which she had forgotten, though it added something to her discomfort – followed by Bee, pale and rigid, offering no help, following her mother like an angry shadow. Charlie and Betty met them on the stairs and stood aside in consternation, unable to conceive what had happened. Mrs. Kingsward gave them a sort of troubled smile and said: “Get your dinner, dears; don’t wait for us. I am too tired to come down to-night.”

“But, mamma – ” they both began in remonstrance.

“Go down and get your dinner,” said Mrs. Kingsward, peremptorily.

As for Bee, she did not look at them at all. Her eyes were fierce with some sentiment which Betty could not divine, and angry, blazing, as if they might have set light to the hotel.

Little Betty pressed against Charlie’s side as they went down, startled and alarmed. “Bee has had a quarrel with mamma,” she whispered, in tones of awe.

“That’s impossible,” said Charlie.

“Oh, no, it’s not impossible. There was once – ”

It comforted them both a little in the awful circumstances that such a thing had perhaps happened before. They went very silently and much cast down to that table in the verandah, whither obsequious waiters beckoned them, and contemplated with dismay all the plates laid, all the glitter of the lamps and the glasses.

“I suppose we must not wait for them as they said so,” said Charlie, sitting down in his place at the bottom of the table. “Tell Mr. Leigh – that is the other gentleman – that we are ready.”

“The other gentleman, sir,” said the waiter, who was the pride of the establishment for his English, “has gone out.”

“Gone out!” said Charlie. He could only stare at Betty and she at him, not knowing what to think.

“He has had his letters, too, sir,” said the waiter in a significant tone.

His letters! What could that have to do with it? Charlie also had had his letters, one of them a bill which he did not view with any satisfaction; but even at twenty-one a man already learns to disguise his feelings, and sits down to dinner cheerfully though he has received a bill by the post. Charlie’s mind at first could not perceive any connection between Bee’s withdrawal upstairs and Aubrey’s disappearance. It was Betty who suggested, sitting down very close to him, that it looked as if Aubrey and Bee had quarrelled too.

“Perhaps that is what it is,” she said, as if she had found out a satisfactory reason. “Lovers always quarrel; and mamma will have taken Aubrey’s part, and Bee will be so angry, and feel as if she could never forgive him. There, that is what it must be.”

“A man may quarrel with his sweetheart,” said Charlie, severely, “but he needn’t spoil other people’s dinner for that;” however, they comforted themselves that this was the most likely explanation, and that all would come right in the morning. And they were very young and hungry, having eaten nothing since the veal at one o’clock. And these two made on the whole a very satisfactory meal.

The scene upstairs was very different. Mrs. Kingsward sent Moulsey away on pretence of getting her some tea, and then turned to her daughter who stood by the dressing-table and stared blankly, without seeing anything, into those mysterious depths of the glass which are so suggestive to people in trouble. She said, faintly, “Bee, I would so much rather you would not ask me any more questions to-night.”

“That is,” said Bee, “you would like to send me away to be miserable by myself without even knowing what it is, while you will take your sleeping draught and forget it. How can you be so selfish, mamma? And you have made my Aubrey join in the conspiracy against me – my Aubrey who belongs to me as papa does to you. If you are against us it is all very well, though I can’t imagine why you should be against us – but at least you need not interfere between Aubrey and me.”

“Oh, my dear child, my poor darling!” said Mrs. Kingsward, wringing her hands.

“It is all very well to call me your poor child, when it is you that are making me poor,” said Bee.

She kept moving a little, first on one foot then on the other, but always gazing into the glass which presented the image of an excited girl, very pale, but lit up with a sort of blaze of indignation, and unable to keep still. It was not that girl’s face, however, that Bee was gazing at, but at the dim world of space beyond in which there were faint far-away reflections of the light and the world. “And if you think you will get rid of me like this, and hang me up till to-morrow without knowing what it is, you are mistaken, mamma. I will not leave you until you have told me. What is it? What has papa got in his head? What does he say in that horrid – horrid letter? I wish I had known when I gave it to you I should have thrown it into the river instead of ever letting it come into your hands.”

“Bee, you must know that this passion is very wrong and very improper. You ought not to face me like that, and demand an answer. I am your mother,” said Mrs. Kingsward, but with a falter which was all unlike that assumption of authority, “and I have no need to tell you anything more than I think is for your good.”

“Ah! I know where that comes from,” cried Bee; “that’s papa’s thunder! that’s what he has told you to say! You don’t believe, yourself, that you have a right to hang up a poor girl over some dreadful, dreadful abyss, when she was so happy and never suspected anything.” Here Bee’s voice faltered for a moment, but she quickly recovered herself. “And to drag her away from the one person that could support her, and to cut the ground from under her feet, and never to tell her what it means!”

It was at this point that Moulsey, with a little discreet cough to herald her approach, came into the room, bearing a tray with tea, and a little cover from which came a faint but agreeable odour. Mrs. Kingsward was in great trouble about her child, but she was much exhausted and in want of physical support, and it did seem to her hard that she might not be permitted to eat the smallest of cutlets before embarking on a scene such as she knew this would be. Oh, why didn’t papa come and say it himself, when there was so much that was dreadful to say?

“Shall I fetch something for Miss Bee, too?” said Moulsey. “It ain’t a good thing for a young creature to go without her dinner. If she’s not going down, ma’am, as would be much the best, I’ll just run and fetch a little something for Miss Bee too.”

“Indeed, indeed, Bee, Moulsey is right. Think how miserable the others will feel all alone, and thinking something has happened. Do go down, darling, and strengthen yourself with a little food, and take a glass of wine just for once to please me. And after that you shall be told everything – all that I know.”

Bee grew paler and paler, standing there before the glass, and her eyes blazed more and more. “It is as bad as that, then!” she said under her breath to herself, and then went away from where she was standing to the further end of the room. “I shall wait here, mamma, till you have had your tea. I know you want it. Oh, go away Moulsey! Let me alone! No, you shall not bring me anything! or, if you do, I will throw it out of the window,” she said, stamping her foot. The dark end of the room seemed suddenly lighted up by a sort of aurora borealis, with the fire of poor Bee’s burning eyes and the flashes here and there of her white frock – oh, poor white frock! put on in the sunshine of life and happiness to please her love, and now turned into a sort of sacrificial robe.

“Take it away, Moulsey; I can’t eat anything – I can’t, indeed – no more than Miss Bee – ”

“But you must, ma’am,” said Moulsey. “Miss Bee’s young; she’s had nothing to drain away her strength. But it’s far different with you, after all your family and so weak as you are. If Miss Bee were

a real good girl, as I always thought her, she'd go away and get something herself just for her poor mamma's sake, and leave you alone for a moment to get a little peace and rest."

"There is no rest for me," murmured the poor lady. "Oh, papa, papa, why didn't you come and tell them yourself?"

These piteous tones went to Bee's heart. They moved her half with contempt, half with compassion – with something of that high indignant toleration of weakness which is one kind of pity. If mamma could eat and drink at such a moment, why shouldn't she be left to do it? The girl started up and left the room in the quick flashing impulse of her passion. She walked up and down in the corridor outside, her arms folded over her high-beating, tumultuous heart. Yes, no doubt she was going to be miserable, all her happiness was cut down and withered away, but in her present passionate impulse of resistance and gathering of all her forces to resist the catastrophe, which she did not understand, it could scarcely be said that she was wretched yet. What was it – what was it? she was saying to herself. It might still be something that would pass away, which would be overcome by the determined, impassioned stand against it, which Bee felt that it was in her to make. The thing that was worst of all, that stole away her courage, was that Aubrey had failed her. He should have been there by her side whatever happened. He ought not to have abandoned her. No doubt he thought it was more delicate, more honourable, more something or other; and that it was his duty to leave her to brave it alone. It must have been one of those high-flown notions of honour that men have. Honour! to leave a girl to fight for herself and him, alone – but, no doubt, that was what had seemed right in his eyes. Bee walked up and down in the half-lighted passage, sometimes almost pushing against someone going up or down, waiters or chambermaids or surprised guests, who looked after her when she had passed; but she did not take any notice of them, and she heard as she passed her mother's door little sounds of tea-cups and dishes, and Moulsey's voice saying "A little more," and her mother's faint replies. Poor mamma! After all, what ever it was, it could not be her affair as it was Bee's. She would be unhappy about it, but not all unhappy. She had the others, who were all right. She had papa. It would not shatter her to pieces even if one of the children was to be shipwrecked. It was the shipwrecked one only who would be broken to pieces. For the first time in her life Bee felt the poignant sensation, the jealous pride, the high, desolate satisfaction of suffering. The others could all eat and do the ordinary things. She was elevated over all that, silent as on a Peak in Darien. She felt almost a kind of dreadful pleasure in the situation, smiling to herself at the sounds of her mother's little meal. She could dine while Bee was miserable. They could all dine – Charlie (which was natural), Betty, even Aubrey. She had no doubt that he, too, must be seated, feeling as a man does that dinner must go on whatever happens, at the table downstairs.

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