

Oliphant Margaret

The Sorceress. Volume 3 of

3



Маргарет Олифант

The Sorceress. Volume 3 of 3

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Margaret Oliphant

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CHAPTER I

When Charlie Kingsward fled from Oxford, half mad with disappointment and misery, he had no idea or intention about the future left in his mind. He had come to one of those strange passes in life beyond which the imagination does not go. He had been rejected with that deepest contumely which takes the aspect of the sweetest kindness, when a woman affects the most innocent suspicion at the climax to which, consciously or unconsciously, she has been working up.

“Oh, my poor boy, was that what you were thinking of?” There is no way in which a blow can be administered with such sharp and keen effect. It made the young man’s brain, which was only an ordinary brain, and for some time had exercised but small restraining power upon him in the hurry and sweep of his feelings, reel. When he pulled the door upon him of those gardens of Aminda, that fool’s paradise in which he had been wasting his youth, and which were represented in his case by a very ordinary suburban garden in that part of Oxford called the Parks, his rejected and disappointed passion had every possible auxiliary emotion to make it unbearable. Keen mortification, humiliation, the sharp sense of being mocked and deceived; the sudden conviction of having given what seemed to the half-maddened boy his whole life, for nothing whipped him like the lashes of the Furies. In most of the crises of life the thought what to do next occurs with almost the rapidity of lightning after a great catastrophe, but Charlie felt as if there was nothing beyond. The whole world had crumbled about him. There was no next step; his very footing had failed him. He rushed back to his rooms by instinct, as a wounded creature would rush to its lair, but on his way was met by eager groups returning from the “Schools,” in which he ought to have been, discussing among each other the stiffness of the papers, and how they had been done. This would scarcely add to his pain, but it added to that sickening effort of absolute failure of the demolition of everything around and before him, which was what he felt the most. They made the impossible more impossible still, and cut off every retreat. When he stood in his room, amid all the useless books which he had not opened for days or weeks, and heard the others mounting the staircase outside his locked door, it seemed to the unhappy young man as though the floor under his feet was the last spot on which standing ground was possible, and that beyond and around there was nothing but chaos. For what reason and on what impulse he rushed to London it would be difficult to tell. He had little money, few friends – or rather none who were not also the friends of his family – no idea or intention of doing anything.

“Perhaps the world will end to-night.”

He did not even think so much as that, though perhaps it was in some sort the feeling in his mind. Yet no suggestions of suicide, or of anything that constitutes a moral suicide, occurred to him. These would have been something definite, they would have provided for a future, but Charlie was stupefied and had none. He had not so much sense of any resource as consisted in a pistol or a plunge into the river. He flung himself into the train and went to London, because after a time the sound of his comrades, or of those who ought to have been his comrades, became intolerable to him. They kept pacing, rushing up and down the staircase, calling to each other. One or two, indeed, talked at his own closed door, driving him into a silent frenzy. As soon as they were gone he seized a travelling bag, thrust something, he did not know what, into it, and fled – to the desert – to London, where he would be lost and no one would drive him frantic by calling to him, by making believe that there was something left in life.

It occurred to him somehow, by force of that secondary consciousness which works for us when our minds are past all exertion, to fling himself into the corner of a third-class carriage as the

place where he was least likely to meet anyone he knew, though indeed the precaution was scarcely necessary, since he could not have recognised anyone, as he sat huddled up in his corner, staring blankly at the landscape that flew past the window and seeing nothing. When he arrived in the midst of the din and bustle of the great railway station, he fled once more through the crowd into the greater crowd outside, clutching instinctively at the bag which lay beside him, but seeing no one, nor whither he went nor where he was going. He walked fast, and in a fierce unconsciousness pushing his way through everything, and though he had in reality no aim, took instinctively the way to his father's house – his home – though it was at that time no home for him, being occupied by strangers. When he got into the park a vague recollection of this penetrated through the maze in which he was enveloped, and for a moment he paused, but then went on walking at the same pace, making the circuit of the park which lay before him in the mists of the afternoon, the frosty sun setting, the hay taking a rosy tint. He went all round the silences of the half-deserted walks, beginning to feel vaguely the strange desolate sentiment of not knowing where to go, though only in the secondary phase of his consciousness. Until all at once his strength seemed to fail him, his limbs grew feeble, his steps slow, and he stopped short, mechanically, as he had walked, not knowing why, and flung himself upon a bench, where he sat long, motionless, as if that had now become the only thing solid in the world and there was no step remaining to him beyond.

A young man, though he may have numberless friends, may yet make a despairing transit like this from one place to another through the midst of a crowd without being seen by anyone who knows him; if the encounters of life are wonderful, the failures to encounter, the manner in which we walk alone with friends on all hands, and in our desperate moments, when help is most necessary, do not meet or come within sight of any, is equally wonderful. The Kingswards had a large circle of acquaintance, and Charlie himself had the numberless intimates of a public school boy, a young university man, acquainted with half the youth of his period – yet nobody saw him, except one to whom he would scarcely have accorded a salutation in ordinary circumstances. Aubrey Leigh, who had been so strangely and closely connected for a moment with the Kingsward family, and then so swiftly and peremptorily cut off, arrived in London from a short visit to a suburban house by the same train which brought Charlie, and caught sight of him as he jumped out of his compartment with his bag in his hand. A very cool, self-possessed, and trim young man young Kingsward had always appeared to the other, with whose brightest and at the same time most painful recollections his figure was so connected. To see him now suddenly, with that air of desperation which had triumphed over all his natural habits and laws, that abstracted look, clutching his bag, half leaping, half stumbling out of the carriage, going off at a swift, unconscious pace, pushing through every crowd, filled Aubrey with surprise which soon turned into anxiety. Charlie Kingsward, with a bag in his hand, rushing through the London streets conveyed an entirely new idea to the minds of the spectators. What such an arrival would have meant in ordinary circumstances would have been the rattling up of a hansom, the careless calling out of an address, the noisy progress over the stones, of the driver expectant of something more than his fare, and keenly cognisant of the habits of the young gentlemen from Oxford.

Aubrey quickened his own pace to follow the other, whose arrival this time was in such different guise. A sudden terror seized his mind, naturally quite unjustified by the outward circumstances. Was anyone ill? – which meant, was Bee ill? Had anything dreadful happened? A moment's reflection would have shown that in such a case the hansom would be more needed than usual, as conveying her brother the more quickly to his home. But Aubrey did not pause on probabilities. A moment more would have made him sure of the unlikelihood that Charlie would be sent for in case of Bee's illness, unless, indeed, the question had been one of life and death.

But he had not even heard of his love for many months. His heart was hungry for news of her, and in that case he would have done his best to intercept Charlie, to extract from him, if possible, some news of his sister. He followed, accordingly, with something of the same headlong haste with

which Charlie was pushing through the streets, and for a long time, up to the gates of the park, indeed, kept him in sight. At the rate at which the young man was going it was impossible to do more.

Then Aubrey suddenly lost sight of the figure he was pursuing. There was a group of people collected for some vulgar, unsupportable object or other at that point, and it was there that Charlie deflected from the straight road for home, which he had hitherto taken, and which his pursuer took it for granted he would follow for the rest of the way. When Aubrey had pushed his way through the little crowd Charlie was no longer visible. He looked to left and to right in vain, scrutinised the short cut over the park, and the broad road full of passing carriages and wayfarers, but saw no trace of the figure he sought. Aubrey then walked quickly to the point where Charlie, as he supposed, must be going, and soon came to the gate on the other side and the street itself in which the house of the Kingswards was. But he saw no sign of Charlie, nor of anyone looking for him. He himself had no acquaintance with that house, to which he had never been admitted, but he had passed it many times in the vain hope of seeing Bee at a window, not knowing that it was occupied by strangers. While he walked down the street, however, anxiously gazing to see if there were any signs of illness, asking himself whether he dared to inquire at the door, he saw a gentleman come up and enter with a latch key, who certainly did not belong to the Kingsward family. This changed the whole current of Aubrey's thoughts. It was not here then that Charlie was coming. His rapid and wild walk could not mean any disaster to the family – any trouble to Bee. The discovery was at once a disappointment and a relief; a relief from the anxiety which had gradually been gaining upon him, a disappointment of the hope of hearing something of her. For if Charlie was not going home, who could trace out where such a young man might be going? To the dogs, Aubrey thought, instinctively; to the devil, to judge by his looks. Yet Charlie Kingsward, the most correct of modern young men, had surely in him no natural proclivity towards that facile descent. What could it be that had driven him along like a leaf before the wind?

Aubrey was himself greatly disturbed and stirred up by this encounter. He had schooled himself to quiet, and the pangs of his overthrow, though not quenched, had been kept under with a strong hand. The life which he desired for himself, which he had so fully planned, so warmly hoped for, had been broken to pieces and made an end of, leaving the way he had chosen blank to him, as he thought, for evermore. He had been very unfortunate in that way, his early venture ending in bitter disappointment; his other, more wise, more sweet, cut off before it had ever been. But he was a reasonable being, and knew that life had to be put to other uses, even when that sole fair path which the heart desired was closed. He had given it up definitely, neither thinking nor hoping again for the household life, the patriarchal existence among his own fields, his own people, under his own roof, and was now doing his best to conform his life to a more grey and monotonous standard.

But the sight of Charlie, or rather the sight of Bee's brother, evidently under the influence of some strong feeling, and utterly carried away by it so as to ignore all that regard for appearance and decorum which had been his leading principle, came suddenly like a touch upon a wound, reviving all the questions and impatiences of the past. Aubrey felt that he could not endure the ignorance of her and all her ways which had fallen over him like a pall, cutting off her being from him as if they were not still living in the same world, still within reach of each other. He might endure, he said to himself, to be parted from her, to give up hope of her, since she willed it so – yet, at least, he must know something of her, find out if she were ill or well, what she was doing, where she was even; for that mere outside detail he did not know. How was it possible he should bear this – not even to know where she was? This thought took hold of him, and drove him into a fever of sudden feeling. Oh! yes; he had resigned himself to live without her, to endure his solitary existence far from her, since she willed it so; but not even to know where she was, how she was, what she was doing!

Suddenly, in a moment, the fiery stinging came back, the sword plunged into the wound. He had not for a moment deluded himself with the idea that he was cured of it, but yet it had been subdued by necessity, by the very silence which now he felt to be intolerable. He went back into

the park, where the long lines of the misty paths were now almost deserted, gleams of the lamps outside shining through the dark tracery of the branches, and all quiet except in the broad road, still sounding with a diminished stream of carriages. He dived into the intersections of the deserted paths, something as Charlie had done, seeking instinctively a silent place where he could be alone with the newly-aroused torment of his thoughts.

When he came suddenly upon the bench upon which Charlie had flung himself, his first movement was to turn back. He had been walking over the grass, and his steps were consequently noiseless, and he was in the mood to which any human presence – the possible encounter of anyone who might speak to him and disturb his own hurrying passions – was intolerable. But as he turned, his eye fell on the bag – the dusty, half-empty thing still clutched by a hand that seemed more or less unconscious. This insignificant detail arrested Aubrey. He moved a little way, keeping on the grass, to get a fuller view of the half-reclining figure. And then he made out in the partial light that it was the same figure which he had pursued so long.

What was Charlie doing here in this secluded spot – he, the most unlike any such retirement, the well-equipped, confident, prosperous young man of the world, subject to so few delusions, knowing his way so well, both in the outer and the inner world?

Aubrey was more startled than tongue can tell. He thought no longer of family disaster, of illness, or trouble. Whatever was amiss, it was evidently Charlie who was the sufferer. He paused for a minute or more, reflecting what he should do. Then he stepped forward upon the gravel, and sitting down, put his hand suddenly upon that which held the half-filled bag.

“Kingsward!” he said.

CHAPTER II

Meanwhile Colonel Kingsward had remained in Oxford. It was necessary that he should regulate all Charlie's affairs, find out and pay what bills he had left, and formally sever his connection with the University. It is a thing which many fathers have had to do, with pain and sorrow, and a sense of premature failure, which is one of the bitterest things in life; but Colonel Kingsward had not this painful feeling to aggravate the annoyance and vexation which he actually felt. The fact that his son had been idle in the way of books, and was leaving Oxford without taking his degree, did not affect his mind much. Many young fellows did that, especially in the portion of the world to which Charlie belonged. The Colonel was irritated by having to interfere, by the trouble he was having, and the deviation from salutary routine, but he felt no humiliation either for himself or his son. And Charlie's liabilities were not large, so far as he could discover. The fellow, at least, had no vices, he said to himself. Even the unsympathetic Don had nothing to say against him but that charge of idleness, which the Colonel rather liked than otherwise. Had he been able to say that it was his son's social or even athletic successes which were the causes of the idleness he would have liked it altogether. He paid Charlie's bills with a compensating consciousness that these were the last that would have to be paid at Oxford, and he was not even sorry that he could not get back to town by the last train. Indeed, I think he could have managed that very well had he tried. He remained for the second night with wonderful equanimity, finding, as a matter of course, a man he knew in the hotel, and dining not unpleasantly that day. Before he went back to town, he thought it only civil to go out to the Parks to return, as politeness demanded, the visit of the lady who had so kindly and courageously gone to see him, and from whom he had received the only explanation of Charlie's strange behaviour. He went forth as soon as he had eaten an early luncheon, in order to be sure to find Miss Lance before she went out, and stopped only to throw a rapid glance in passing at a band of young ruffians – mud up to their eyes, and quite undistinguishable for the elegant undergraduates which some of them were – who were playing football in the Parks. The Colonel had, like most men, a warm interest in athletic sports, but his soldierly instincts disliked the mud. Miss Lance's house was beyond that much broken up and down-trampled green. It was a house in a garden of the order brought into fashion by the late Randolph Caldecott, red with white "fixings" and pointed roof, and it bore triumphantly upon its little gate post the name of Wensleydale, Oxford Dons, and the inhabitants of that district generally, being fond of such extension titles. Colonel Kingsward unconsciously drew himself together, settled his head into his collar, and twisted his moustache, as he knocked at the door, and yet it was not an imposing door. It was opened, not by a solemn butler, but by a neat maid, who showed Colonel Kingsward into a trim drawing-room, very feminine and full of flowers and knick-knacks. Here he waited full five minutes before anyone appeared, looking about him with much curiosity, examining the little stands of books, the work-tables, the writing-tables, the corners for conversation. It was not a large room, and yet space had been found for two little centres of social intercourse. There were, therefore, the Colonel divined, two ladies who shared this abode. Colonel Kingsward had never been what is called a ladies' man. The feminine element in life had been supplied to him in that subdued way naturally exhibited by a yielding and gentle wife in a house where the husband is supreme. He was quite unacquainted with it in its unalloyed state, and the spectacle amused and pleasantly affected him with a sense at once of superiority and of novelty. It was pleasant to see how these little known creatures arranged themselves in their own private dominion, where they had everything their own way, and the touch of the artificial which appeared in all these dainty particulars seemed appropriate and commended itself agreeably to the man who was accustomed to a broader and larger style of household economy. A man likes to see the difference well marked, at least a man who holds Colonel Kingsward's ideas of life. He had gone so far as to note the "Laura" with a large and flowing "L" on

the notepaper, which “L” was repeated on various pretty articles about. When the door opened and Miss Lance appeared, she came up to him holding out both her hands as to an old friend.

“Will you forgive me for keeping you waiting, Colonel Kingsward? The fact is we have just come in, and you know that a woman has always a toilette to make, not like you lucky people who put on or put off a hat and all is done.”

“I did not think you were likely to be out so early,” the Colonel said.

“My friend has a son at Oriel,” replied Miss Lance. “He is a great football player as it happens, and we are bound to be present when he is playing; besides, the Parks are so near.”

“I did not think it was a game that would interest you.”

“It does not, except in so far that I am interested in everything that interests my surroundings. My friend goes into it with enthusiasm; she even believes that she understands what it is all about.”

“It seems chiefly mud that is about,” said the Colonel, with a slight tone of disapproval, for it displeased him to think that a woman like this should go to a football match, and also it displeased him after his private amusement and reflections on the feminine character of the house to find, after all, a man connected with it, even if that man were only a boy.

“Come,” said Miss Lance, indicating a certain chair, “sit down here by me, Colonel Kingsward, and let us not talk commonplaces any longer. You have been obliged to stay longer than you intended. I had been thinking of you as in London to-day.”

“It was very kind to think of me at all.”

“Oh, don’t say so – that is one of the commonplaces too. Of course, I have been thinking of you with a great deal of interest, and with some rather rebellious, undutiful sort of thoughts.”

“What thoughts?” cried the Colonel, in surprise.

“Well,” she said, “it is a great blessing, no doubt, to have children – to women, perhaps, an unalloyed blessing; and yet, you know, an unattached person like myself cannot help a grudge occasionally. Here are you, for instance, in the prime of life; your thoughts about everything matured, your reason more important to the world than any of the escapades of youth, and yet you are depleted from your own grave path in life; your mind occupied, your thoughts distracted; really your use to your country interrupted by – by what are called the cares of a family,” she concluded, with a short laugh.

She spoke with much use of her hands in graceful movement that could scarcely be called gesticulation – clasping them together, spreading them out, making them emphasise everything. And they were very white and pretty hands, with a diamond on one, which sparkled at appropriate moments, and added its special emphasis too.

The Colonel was flattered with this description of himself and his capacities.

“There is great truth,” he said, “in what you say. I have felt it, but for a father at the head of a family to put forth such sentiments would shock many good people.”

“Fortunately there are no good people here, and if there were I might still express them freely. It is a thing that strikes me every day. In feeble specimens it destroys the individuality; in strong characters like yourself – ”

“You do me too much honour, Miss Lance. My position, you are aware, is doubly unfortunate, for I have all upon my shoulders. Still, one must do one’s duty at whatever cost.”

“That would be your feeling, of course,” said Miss Lance, with a sort of admiring and regretful expression. “For my part, I am the most dreadful rebel. I kick against duty. I think a man has a duty to himself. To stint a noble human being for the sake of nourishing some half-dozen secondary ones, is to me – Oh, don’t let us talk of it! Tell me, dear Colonel Kingsward, have you got everything satisfactorily settled, and heard of the arrival – ? Oh,” she cried, clasping those white hands, “how can I sit here calmly and ask, seeing that I have a share in causing all this trouble – though, heaven knows, how unintentionally on my part!”

“Don’t say so,” said the Colonel, putting his hands for a second on those clasped white hands. “I am sure that you can have done nothing but good to my foolish boy. To be admitted here at all was too much honour.”

“I shall never be able to take an interest in anyone again,” she said, drooping her head. “It is so strange, so strange to have one’s motives misunderstood, but you don’t do so. I am so thankful I had the courage to go to you. My friend dissuaded me strongly from taking such a step. She said that a parent would naturally blame anyone rather than his own son – ”

“My dear Miss Lance, who could blame you? I don’t know,” said the Colonel, “that I blame poor Charlie so much either. To be much in your company might well be dangerous for any man.”

“You must not speak so – indeed, indeed, you must not! I feel more and more ashamed! When a woman comes to a certain age – and has no children of her own. Surely, surely – ”

“Come!” he cried. “You said a parent’s cares destroyed one’s individuality – ”

“Not with a woman. What individuality has a woman? The only use of her is to sink that pride in a better – the pride of being of some use. What I regretted was for you – and such as you – if there are enough of such to make a class – . Yes, yes,” she added, looking up, “I acknowledge the inconsistency. I have not sense enough to see the pity of it in all cases – but my real principle, my deep belief is that to draw a man like you away from your career, to trouble and distress you about others, who are not of half your value – is a thing that ought to be prevented by Act of Parliament,” she cried, breaking off with a laugh. “But you have not told me yet how everything has finished,” she added, in a confidential low tone, after a pause.

Then he told her in some detail what he had done. It was delightful to tell her, a woman so sympathising, so quick to understand, with that approving, consoling, remonstrating action of her white hands which seemed at the same moment to applaud and deprecate, with a constant inference that he was too good, that really he ought not to be so good. She laughed at his description of the Don, adding a graphic touch or two to make the picture more perfect – till Colonel Kingsward was surprised at himself to think how cleverly he had done it, and was delighted with his own success. This gave a slightly comic character to his other sketches of poor Charlie’s tradesmen, and scout, and an unutterable cad of a young fellow who had met the Colonel leaving the college and had told him of a small sum which Charlie owed him.

“The little beast!” the Colonel said.

“Worse!” cried Miss Lance, “I would not slander any gentlemanly dog by calling him of the same species.”

Altogether, her interest and sympathy changed this not particularly lively occasion into one of the brightest moments of Colonel Kingsward’s life. He had not been used to a woman so clever, who took him up at half a word, and enhanced the interest of everything. Had he been asked, indeed, he would have said that he did not like clever women. But then Miss Lance had other qualities. She was very handsome, and she had an evident and undisguised admiration for him. She was so very frank and sure of her position as a woman of a certain age – a qualification which she appropriated to herself constantly, though most women thought it an insult – that she did not find it needful to conceal that admiration. When he thanked her for her kindness for the patient hearing of all his story, and the interest she had shown, to which he had so little claim, Miss Lance smiled and held out those white hands.

“I assure you,” she said, “the benefit is all on my side. Living here among very young men, you must think what it is to talk to, to be treated confidentially, by a man like yourself. It is like a glance into another life.” She sighed, and added, “The young are delightful. I am very fond of young people. Still, to meet now and then with someone of one’s own age, of one’s own species, if I may say so – ”

“You do me too much honour,” said Colonel Kingsward, feeling with a curious elation, how superior he was. She went with him to the garden gate, not afraid of the wintry air, showing no sense of the chill, and though she had given him her hand before, offered it again with the sweetest friendliness.

“And you promised,” she said, looking in his face while he held it, “that you would send me one line when you got home, to tell me how you find him – and that all is well – and forgiven.”

“I shall be too happy to be permitted to write,” Colonel Kingsward said.

“Forgiven,” she said, “and forgotten!” holding up a finger of the other hand, the hand with the diamond. She stood for a moment watching while he closed the low gate, and then, waving her hand to him, turned away. Colonel Kingsward had never been a finer fellow, in his own estimation, than when he walked slowly off from that closed door.

CHAPTER III

I will not repeat the often described scene of anxiety which existed in Kingswarden for some time after. Colonel Kingsward returned, as Bee had done, to find that nothing had been seen or heard of Charlie, whom both had expected to find defiant and wretched at home. It is astonishing how quickly in such circumstances the tables are turned, and the young culprit – whom parents and friends have been ready to crush the moment he appears with well-deserved rebuke – becomes, when he does not appear, the object of the most eager appeals; forgiveness, and advantages of every kind all ready to greet him if only he will come back. The girls were frightened beyond description by their brother's disappearance, and conjured up every dreadful image of disaster and misery. They thought of Charlie in his despair going off to the ends of the earth and never being seen more. They thought of him as in some wretched condition on shipboard, sick and miserable, reduced to dreadful work and still more dreadful privations, he who had lain in the lilies and fed on the roses of life. They thought of him, Colonel Kingsward's son, enlisted as a private soldier, in a crowded barrack-room. They thought of him wandering about the street, cold, perhaps hungry, without a shelter. The most dreadful images came before their inexperienced eyes. The old aunt who was their companion told them dreadful stories of family prodigals who disappeared and were never heard of again, and terror took hold of the girls' minds.

Their constant walk was to the station, with the idea that he might perhaps come as far as the village, and that there his heart might fail him. Except for that melancholy indulgence, they would not be out of the house at any time together, lest at that moment Charlie might arrive, and no one be there to welcome him. There was always one who ran to the door at every sound, scandalising the servant, who could never get there so fast but one of the young ladies was before him. They had endless conversations and consultations on the subject, forming a hundred plans as to how they should go forth into the world to seek for him, all rendered abortive by the reflection that they knew not where to go. Bee and Betty were very unhappy during these lingering, chilly days of early spring. The tranquillity of the family life seemed to be destroyed in a moment. Where was Charlie? Was there any news of Charlie? This was the question that filled their minds day and night.

Colonel Kingsward was not less affectionate, but he was more practical and experienced. He knew that now and then it does happen that a young man disappears, sinks under the stream, and goes, as people say, to the dogs, and is heard of no more – or, at least, only in a shipwrecked condition, the shame and trouble of his friends. It did not seem to him, at first, that there could be any such danger for his son. He anticipated nothing more than a few days' sullenness, perhaps in some friend's house, who would make cautious overtures and intercede for the rebellious but shame-stricken boy. When, however, the time passed on, and a longer interval than any judicious friend would permit had elapsed, a deep anxiety arose also in Colonel Kingsward's mind. The *esclandre* of an Oxford failure did not trouble him much, but, in view of Charlie's future career, he could not employ detectives, or advertise in the papers, or take any steps which might lead to a paragraph as to the anxiety of a distinguished family on account of a son who had disappeared. Colonel Kingsward might not be a very tender parent, but he was fully alive to the advantage of his children, and would allow no stigma to be attached to them which he could prevent. He went a great deal about London in these days, going into many a spot where a man of his dignity was out of place, with an anxious and troubled eye upon the crowds of young men, the familiars of these confused regions, among whom, however, no trace was to be found of his son.

Nobody ever knew how much the Colonel undertook, in how many strange scenes he found himself, or half of what he really did to recover Charlie, and save him from the consequences of his folly. The most devoted father could scarcely have done more, and his mind was almost as full of the prodigal as were the minds of the girls, who thought of so many grievous dangers, yet did not think

of those that filled their father's mind. Colonel Kingsward went about everywhere, groping, saying not a word to betray his ignorance of Charlie's whereabouts. To those who had any right to know his family affairs, he explained that he had decided not to press Charlie to undergo any examination beyond what was necessary, that he had given up the thought of taking his degree, and was studying modern languages and international law, which were so much more likely to be useful to him. "He is a steady fellow – he has no vices," he said, "and I think it is wise to let him have his head." Colonel Kingsward was by nature a despotic man, and his friends were very glad to hear that he was, in respect to Charlie, so amiable – they said to each other that his wife's death had softened Kingsward, and what a good thing it was that he was behaving so judiciously about his son.

A pause like this in the life of a family – a period of darkness in which the life of one of its members is suspended, interrupted, as it were, in mid career, cut off, yet not with that touch of death which stills all anxieties – is always a difficult and miserable one. Some, and the number increases of these uncontrolled persons, cry out to earth and heaven, and make the lapse public and set all the world talking of their affairs. But Colonel Kingsward sternly put down even the tears of his young daughters.

"If you cannot keep a watch over yourselves before the servants, you had better leave the house," he said, all the more stern to them that he was soft to Charlie; but indeed it was not so much that he was soft to Charlie as that he was concerned and anxious about Charlie's career.

"Betty, I suppose, can go back to the Lyons' in Portman Square, and Bee –"

"If you think that I can go visiting, papa, and no one with the children, and poor Charlie –"

"I think – and, indeed, I know, that you can and will do what I think best for you," said Colonel Kingsward.

Bee looked up at him quickly and met her father's eyes. The two looked at each other suspiciously, almost fiercely. Bee saw in her father's look possibilities and dangers as yet undeveloped, mysteries which she divined and feared, yet neither could nor would have put into words, while he looked at her divining her divinations, defying unconsciously the suspicion which he could not have expressed any more than she.

"Let it be understood once for all," he said, "that the children have their nurses and governess, and that your presence is by no means indispensable to them. You are their eldest sister, you are not the mistress of the house. Nothing will happen to the children. In considering what is best for you –"

"Papa!" cried Bee, almost fiercely; but she did not pour out upon him that bitterness which had been collecting in her heart. She paused in time; but then added, "I have not asked you to consider what was best for me."

"That is enough to show that it is time for me to consider it," he said.

And then, once more their looks met, and clashed like the encounter of two armies. What did she suspect? What did he intend? They both breathed short, as if with the impulse of battle, but neither, even to themselves, could have answered that question. Colonel Kingsward cried "Take care, Bee!" as he went away, a by no means happy man, to his library, while she threw herself down upon a sofa, and – inevitable result in a girl of any such rising of passion – burst into tears.

"Bee," said the sensible Betty, "you ought not to speak like that to papa."

"I ought to be thankful that he has considered what was best for me, and spoilt my life!" cried Bee, through her tears. "Oh, it is very easy for you to speak. You are to go to the Lyons', where you wish to go – to be free of all anxiety – for what is Charlie to you but only your brother, and you know that you can't do him any good by making yourself miserable about him? And you will see Gerald Lyon, who is doing well at Cambridge, and listen to all the talk about him, and smile, and not hate him for being so smug and prosperous, while poor Charlie –"

"How unjust you are!" cried Betty, growing red and then pale. "It is not Gerald Lyon's fault that Charlie has not done well – even if I cared anything for Gerald Lyon."

“It is you who ought to take care,” said Bee, “if papa thinks it necessary to consider what is best for you.”

“There is nothing to consider,” said Betty, with a little movement of her hands.

“But it can never be so bad for you,” said Bee, with a tone of regret. “Never! To think that my life should be ruined and all ended for the sake of a woman – a woman – who has now ruined Charlie, and whom papa – oh, papa!” she cried, with a tone indescribable of exasperation and scorn and contempt.

“What is it about papa? You look at each other, you and he, like two tigers. You have got the same dreadful eyes. Yes, they are dreadful eyes; they give out fire. I wonder often that they don’t make a noise like an explosion. And Bee, you said yourself that there was something else. You never would have given in to papa, but there was something of your own that parted you from Aubrey – for ever. You said so, Bee – when his mother – ”

“Is there any need for bringing in any gentleman’s name?” cried Bee, with the dignity of a dowager. And then, ignoring her own rule, she burst forth, “What I have got against him is nothing to anyone – but that Aubrey Leigh should be insulted and rejected and turned away from our door, and that my heart should be broken because of a woman whom papa and Charlie – whom papa – ! He writes to her, and she writes to him – he tells her everything – he consults her about us, *us*, my mother’s children! And yet it was on her account that Aubrey Leigh was turned from the door – Oh, if you think I can bear that, you must think me more than flesh and blood!” Bee cried, the tears adding to the fire and sparkle of her blazing eyes.

“It isn’t very nice,” said little Betty, sagely, “but I am not so sure that it was her fault, for if you had stuck to Aubrey as you meant to do at first, your heart would not have been broken, and if Charlie had not been very silly, a person of that age could not have done him any harm; and then papa – . What can she do to papa? I suppose he thinks as she is old he may write to her as a friend and ask her advice. There is not any harm that I can see in that.”

Bee was too much agitated to make any reply to this. She resumed again, after a pause, as if Betty had not spoken: “He writes to her, and she writes to him, just as she did to Charlie, for I have seen them both – long letters, with that ridiculous “Laura,” and a big L, as if she were a girl. You can see them, if you like, at breakfast, when he reads them instead of his papers, and smiles to himself when he is reading them, and looks – ridiculous” – cried Bee, in her indignation. “Ridiculous! as if he were young too; a man who is father of all of us; and not much more than a year ago – . Oh, if I were not to speak I think the very trees would, and the bushes in the shrubbery! It is more than anyone can bear.”

“You are making up a story,” said Betty, wonderingly. “I don’t know what you mean.” Then she cried, carrying the war into the enemy’s country, “Oh, Bee, if you had not given him up, if you had been faithful to him! – now we should have had somebody to consult with, somebody that could have gone and looked for poor Charlie; for we are only two girls, and what can we do?”

Bee did not make any reply, but looked at her sister with startled eyes.

“Mamma was never against Aubrey Leigh,” said Betty, pursuing her advantage. “She never would have wished you to give him up. And it is all your own doing, not papa’s doing, or anyone’s. If I had ever cared for him I never, never should have given him up; and then we should have had as good as another brother, that could have gone into the world and hunted everywhere and brought Charlie home.”

The argument was taken up at hazard, a chance arrow lying in the young combatant’s way, without intention – but it went straight to its mark.

CHAPTER IV

The house that had been so peaceful was thus full of agitation and disturbance, the household, anxious and alarmed, turning their weapons upon each other, to relieve a little the gnawing of that suspense which they were so unaccustomed to bear. It was true what Bee's keen and sharply aroused observation had convinced her, that Colonel Kingsward was in correspondence with Miss Lance, and that her letters were very welcome to him, and read with great interest. He threw down the paper after he had made a rush through its contents, and read eagerly the long sheets of paper, upon which the great L, stamped at the head of every page, could be read on the other side of the table. How did that woman know the days he was to be at home, that her letters should always come on those mornings and never at any other time? Bee almost forgot her troubles, those of the family in respect to Charlie, and those which were her very own, in her passionate hatred and distrust of the new correspondent to whom Colonel Kingsward, like his son, had opened his heart.

He was not, naturally, a man given to correspondence. His letters to his wife, in those days which now seemed so distant, had been models of concise writing. His opinions, or rather verdicts, upon things great and small had been conveyed in terse sentences, very much to the purpose; deliverances not of his way of thinking, but of the unalterable dogmas that were to rule the family life; and her replies, though diffuse, were always more or less regulated by her consciousness of the little time there would be given to them, and the necessity of making every explanation as brief as possible – not to worry papa, who had so much to do.

Why it was that he found the long letters, which he read with a certain defiant pride in the presence of his daughters at the breakfast table, so agreeable, it would be difficult to tell. They were very carefully adapted to please him, it is true; and they were what are called clever letters – such letters as clever women write, with a *faux air* of brilliancy which deceives both the writer and the recipient, making the one feel herself a Sevigné and the other a hero worthy the exercise of such powers. And there was something very novel in this sudden inroad of sentimental romance into an existence never either sentimental or romantic, which had fallen into the familiar calm of family life so long ago with a wife, who though sweet and fair enough to delight any man, had become in reality only the chief of his vassals, following every indication of his will, when not eagerly watching an opportunity of anticipating his wishes. His new friend treated the Colonel in a very different way. She expounded her views of life with all the adroitness of a mind experienced in the treatment of those philosophies which touch the questions of sex, the differences between a man's and a woman's view, the sentiment which can be carried into the most simple subjects. There is nothing that can give more entertaining play of argument, or piquancy of intercourse, than this mode of correspondence when cleverly carried out, and Miss Laura Lance was a mistress of all its methods. It was all entirely new to Colonel Kingsward. He was as much enchanted with it as his son had been, and thought the writer as brilliant, as original, as poor Charlie had done, who had no way of knowing better. The Colonel's head, which generally had been occupied by professional or public matters – by the intrigues of the service or the incompetencies of the Department – now found a much more interesting private subject of thought. He was a man full of anxiety and annoyance at this particular crisis of his career, and his correspondent was by way of sharing his anxiety to the utmost and even blaming herself as the cause of it; yet she contrived to amuse him, to bring a smile, to touch a lighter key, to relieve the tension of his mind from time to time, without ever allowing him to feel that the chief subject of their correspondence was out of her thoughts. He got no relief of this description at home, where the girls' anxious questions about Charlie, their eagerness to know what had been done, seemed to upbraid him with indifference, as if he were not doing everything that was possible. Miss Lance knew better the dangers that were being run, the real difficulties of the case, than these inexperienced chits of children; but she knew also that a man's mind requires relief, and that, in point of fact, the Colonel's

health, strength and comfort, were of more importance than many Charlie's. This was a thing that had to be understood, not said, and the Colonel indeed was as anxious and concerned about Charlie as it was almost possible to be. He did not form dreadful pictures as Bee and Betty did of what the boy might be suffering. The boy deserved to suffer, and this consideration, had he dwelt upon it, would have afforded a certain satisfaction. But what did make him wretched was the fear of any exposure, the mention in public of anything that might injure his son's career. An opportunity was already dawning of getting him an appointment upon which the Colonel had long kept his eye, and which would be of double importance at present as sending him out of the country and into new scenes. But of what use were all a father's careful arrangements if they were thus balked by the perversity of the boy?

Things were still in this painful suspense when Miss Lance announced to Colonel Kingsward her arrival in town. She described to him how it was that she was coming.

"My friend is absent with her son till after Easter, and I am understood to be fond of town, and am coming to spend a week or two to see the first of the season, the pictures, &c., as well as a few friends whom I still keep up, the relics of brighter and younger days – this is the reason I give, but you will easily understand, dear Colonel Kingsward, that there is another reason far more near to my heart. Your poor boy! Or may I for once say our poor boy? For you are aware that I have never ceased to upbraid myself for what has happened, and that I shall always bear a mother's heart to Charlie, dear fellow, to whom, in wishing him nothing but good, I have been so unfortunate as to do such dreadful wrong. Every word you say about your hopes for him, and the great chance which he is so likely to miss, cuts me to the heart. And it has occurred to me that there are some places in which he may have been heard of, to which I could myself go, or where I might take you if you wished, which you would not yourself be likely to know. I wish I had thought of them before. I come up now full of hope that we may hear something and find a reliable clue. I shall be in George Street, Hanover Square, a place which is luckily in the way for everything. Please come and see me. I hope you will not think I am presuming in endeavouring to solve a difficulty for which I am, alas, alas! partially to blame. To assure me of this at least if no more, come, do come to see me to-morrow, Tuesday afternoon. I shall do nothing till I have your approval."

This letter had an exciting effect upon the Colonel, more than anything he had known for years. He held it before him, yielding himself up to this pleasurable sensation for some minutes after he had read it. The Easter recess had left London empty, and he had been deprived of some of the ordinary social solaces which, though they increased the difficulty of keeping his son's disappearance a secret, still broke the blank of his suspense and made existence possible. Hard to bear was the point blank shock which he had sometimes received, as when an indiscreet but influential friend suddenly burst upon him, "I don't see your son's name in the Oxford lists, Kingsward." "No," the Colonel had replied, with a countenance from which all expression had been dismissed, "we thought it better that he should keep to his special studies." "Quite right, quite right," answered that great official, for what is a mere degree to F. O.? Even to have such things as this said to him, with the chance of putting in a response, was better than the stagnation, in which a man is so apt to feel that all kinds of whispers are circulating in respect to the one matter which it is his interest to conceal.

And his heart, though it was a middle-aged, and no longer nimble organ given to leaping, jumped up in his breast when he read his letter. There was the possible clue which it was good to hear of – and there was the listener to whom he could tell everything, who took such an entire and flattering share in his anxieties, with whom there was no need to invent excuses, or to conceal anything. Perhaps there were other reasons, too, which he did not put into words. The image which had dazzled him at Oxford rose again before his eyes. It was an image which had already often visited him. One of the handsomest women he had ever seen, and so flattering, so confidential, so deeply impressed by himself, so candid and anxious to blame herself, to place herself in his hands. He went back to town with agreeable instead of painful anticipations. To share one's cares is always an alleviation – to be able openly to take a friend's advice. The girls, to whom alone he could be perfectly open on

this matter, were such little fools that he had ceased to discuss it with them, if, indeed, he had ever discussed it. And to nobody else could he speak on the subject at all. The opportunity of pouring forth all his speculations and alarms, of hearing the suggestions of another mind – and such a mind as hers – of finding a new clue, was balm to his angry, annoyed and excited spirit. There were other *douceurs* involved, which were not absent from his thoughts. The pleasure of the woman's society, who was so flatteringly pleased with his, her mature beauty, which had so much attraction in it, the look of her eyes, which said more than words, the touch – laid upon his for a moment with so much eloquent expression, appeal, sympathy, consolation, provocation – of her beautiful hands. All this was in the Colonel's mind. He had scarcely known what was the touch of a woman's hand, at least in this way, during the course of his long, calm domestic life. He had been very fond of his wife, of course, and very tender, as well as he knew how, during her illness, though entirely unconscious of how much he demanded from her even in the course of that illness. But this was utterly different, apart from everything he had ever known. Friendship – that friendship between man and woman which has been the subject of so much sentimental controversy. Somebody whom Miss Lance had quoted to him, some great man in Oxford, had said it was the only real friendship; many others, amongst whom Colonel Kingsward himself had figured when at any moment so ridiculous an argument had crossed his path, denounced it as a mere unfounded fiction to conceal other sentiments. Dolts! It was the Oxford great man who was in the right of it. The only friendship! – with sweetness in it which no man could give, a more entire confidence, a more complete sympathy. He knew that he could say things to Laura – Miss Lance – which he could say to no man, and that a look from her eyes would do more to strengthen him than oceans of kind words from lips which would address him as “old fellow.” He had her image before him all the time as he went up in the train; it went with him into the decorous dulness of his office, and when he left his work an hour earlier than usual his steps were as light as a young man's. He had not felt so much exhilaration of spirit since – ; but he could scarcely go back to a date on which his bosom's lord had sat so lightly on his throne. Truth to tell, Colonel Kingsward had fallen on evil days. Even the course of his ordinary existence, when he had gone through life with his pretty wife by his side, dining out constantly, going everywhere, though enjoyable in its way, and with the satisfaction of keeping up to the right mark, had not been exciting. She no doubt told for a great deal in his happiness, but there were no risks, no excitements, and not as much as the smart of an occasional quarrel between them. He had known what to expect of her in every emergency; there was nothing novel to be looked for, no unaccustomed flavour in anything she was likely to do or say. He did not make this comparison consciously, for indeed there was no comparison at all between his late wife (he called her so already in his mind) and Miss Lance – not the slightest comparison! The latter was a far more piquant thing – a friend – and the most delightful friend, surely, that ever man had!

He found her in a little drawing-room on the first floor of what looked very much like an ordinary London lodging-house; but within it had changed its character completely, and had become, though in a different, more subtle way than that of the drawing-room in Oxford, the bower of Laura, a special habitation marked with her very name, like the notepaper on her table. He could not for the first moment avoid a bewildering idea that it was the same room in which he had seen her in Oxford transported thither. There seemed the same pictures on the walls, the same writing-table, or at least one arranged in precisely the same way, the same chairs placed two together for conversation. What a wonderful creature she was, thus to put the stamp of her own being upon everything she touched. Once more he had to wait for a minute or two before she came, but she made no apology for her delay. She came in with her hand extended, with an air of sympathy yet satisfaction at the sight of him which went to Colonel Kingsward's heart. If she had been sorry only it would have displeased him, as showing a mind occupied wholly with Charlie, but the delicate mingling of pleasure with concern was exactly what the Colonel felt to be most fit.

“I am so glad to see you,” she said. “How kind of you to come so soon, to pay such prompt attention to my wish.”

“Considering that it was my own wish,” he said, “and what I desired most, I should say how good of you to come, but I can’t venture to hope that it was entirely for me.”

“It was very much for you, Colonel Kingsward. You know what blame I take to myself for all that has happened. And I think, perhaps, I may have it in my power to make some inquiries that would not suggest themselves. But we must talk of this after. In the meantime, I can’t but think first of you. What an ordeal for you – what weary work! But what a pull over us you men have! You keep your great spirit and command over yourself through everything, while, whatever little trouble we may have, it shows immediately. Oh,” said Miss Lance, clasping her hands, “a calm strong man is a sight which it elevates one only to see.”

“You give me far too much credit. One is obliged to keep a good face to the world. I don’t approve of people who wash their dirty linen in public.”

“Don’t try to make yourself little with all this commonplace reasoning. You need not explain yourself to me, dear Colonel Kingsward. I flatter myself that I have the gift of understanding, if nothing else.”

“A great many things else,” he said; “and indeed my keeping up in this emergency has been greatly helped by your great friendship and moral support. I don’t know what you have done to this room,” he added, changing the theme quickly, “did you bring it with you? It is not a mere room in London – it is your room. I should have known it among a thousand.”

“What a delightful compliment,” she said. “I am so glad you think so, for it is one of the things I pride myself on. I think I can always make even a lodging-house look a bit like home.”

“It looks like you,” he repeated. “I don’t notice such matters much, but no one could help seeing. And I hope you are to be here for some time, and that if I can be of any use – ”

“Oh! Colonel Kingsward, don’t hold out such flattering hopes. You of use! Of course, to a lone woman in town you would be far more than of use – you would simply be a tower of strength. But I do not come here to make use of you. I come – ”

“You could not give me greater pleasure than by making use of me. I am not going much into society, my house is not open – my girls are too young to take the responsibilities of a season upon themselves; but anything that a single individual can do to be of service – ”

“Your dear girls – how I should like to see them, to be able to take them about a little, to make up to those poor children as far as a stranger could! But I can scarcely hope that you would trust them to me after the trouble I have helped to bring on you all. Dear Colonel Kingsward, your chivalrous offer will make all the difference in my life. If you will give me your arm sometimes, on a rare occasion – ”

“As often as you please – and the oftener the more it will please me,” he cried, in tones full of warmth and eagerness. Miss Lance raised her grateful eyes to him full of unspeakable things. She made no further reply except by one of those light touches upon his arm less than momentary, if that were possible, like the brush of a wing, or an ethereal contact of ideas.

And then she said gravely, “Now about that poor, dear boy; we must find him, oh, we must find him. I have thought of several places where he may have been seen. Do you know that I met him once by chance in town last year? It was at the Academy, where I was with some artist friends. I introduced him to them, and you know there is great freedom among them, and they have a great charm for young men. I think some of them may have seen him. I have put myself in communication with them.”

“I would not for a moment,” said the Colonel, somewhat stiffly, “consent to burden you with inquiries of this kind!”

“You do not think,” she said, sweetly, “that I would do anything, or say anything to compromise him or you?”

The Colonel looked at her with the strangest sudden irritation. “I was not thinking either of him or myself. Why should you receive men, who must be entirely out of your way, for our sakes?”

“Oh,” she said, with a soft laugh, “you are afraid that I may compromise myself.” She rose with an unspoken impulse, which made him rise also, in spite of himself, with a feeling of unutterable

downfall, and the sense of being dismissed. “Don’t be afraid for me, Colonel Kingsward, I beg. I shall not compromise anyone.” Then she turned with a sudden illumination of a smile. “Come back and see me to-morrow, and you shall hear what I have found out.”

And he went away humbly, relieved yet mortified, not holding his head as high as when he came, but already longing for to-morrow, when he might come back.

CHAPTER V

Colonel Kingsward had been flattered, he had been pleased. He had felt himself for a moment one of the exceptional men in whom women find an irresistible attraction, and then he had been put down and dismissed with the calmest decision, with a peremptoriness which nobody in his life had ever used to him. All these sweetnesses, and then to be, as it were, huddled out of doors the moment he said a word which was not satisfactory to that imperial person! He could not get it out of his mind during the evening nor all the night through, during which it occurred to him whenever he woke, as a prevailing thought does. And he had been right, too. To send for men, any kind of men, artists whom she herself described as having so much freedom in their ways, and have interviews with them, was a thing to which he had a good right to object. That is, her friend had a right to object to it – her friend who took the deepest interest in her and all that she was doing. That it was for Charlie's advantage made really no difference. This gave a beautiful and admirable motive, but then all her motives were beautiful and admirable, and it must be necessary in some cases to defend her against the movements of her own good heart. Evidently she did not sufficiently think of what the world would say, nor, indeed, of what was essentially right; for that a woman of her attractions, still young, living independently in rooms of her own, should receive artists indiscriminately, nay, send for them, admit them to sit perhaps for an hour with her, with no chaperon or companion, was a thing that could not be borne. This annoyance almost drove Charlie out of Colonel Kingsward's head. He felt that when he went to her next day he must, with all the precautions possible, speak his mind upon this subject. A woman with such attractions, really a young woman, alone; nobody could have more need of guarding against evil tongues. And artists were proverbially an unregulated, free-and-easy race, with long hair and defective linen, not men to be privileged with access under any circumstances to such a woman. Unquestionably he must deliver his soul on that subject for her own sake.

He thought about it all the morning, how to do it best. It relieved his mind about Charlie. Charlie! Charlie was only a young fellow after all, taking his own way, as they all did, never thinking of the anxiety he gave his family. And no doubt he would turn up of his own accord when he was tired of it. That she should depart from the traditions which naturally are the safeguards of ladies for the sake of a silly boy, who took so little trouble about the peace of mind of his family, was monstrous. It was a thing which he could not permit to be.

When he went into his private room at his office, Colonel Kingsward found a card upon his table which increased the uneasiness in his mind, though he could not have told why. He took it up with great surprise and anger. "Mr. Aubrey Leigh." He supposed it must have been a card left long ago, when Aubrey Leigh was Bee's suitor, and had come repeatedly, endeavouring to shake her father's determination. He looked at it contemptuously, and then pitched it into the fire.

What a strange perversity there is in these inanimate things! It seemed as if some malicious imp must have replaced that card there on that very morning to disturb him.

Colonel Kingsward did not remember how it was that the name, the sacred name, of Miss Lance was associated with that of Aubrey Leigh. He had been much surprised, as well as angry, at the manner in which Bee repeated that name, when she heard it first, with a vindictive jealousy (these words came instinctively to his mind) which was not comprehensible. He had refused indignantly to allow that she had ever heard the name before. Nevertheless, her cry awakened a vague association in his mind. Something or other, he could not recollect what, of connection, of suggestion, was in the sound. He threw Aubrey's card into the fire, and endeavoured to dismiss all thought on the subject. But it was a difficult thing to do. It is to be feared that during those morning hours the work which Colonel Kingsward usually executed with so much exactitude, never permitting, as he himself stated, private matters – even such as the death of his wife or the disappearance of his son – to interfere with it, was carried through with many interruptions and pauses for thought, and at the earliest possible

moment was laid aside for that other engagement which had nothing to do either with the office or the Service, though it was, he flattered himself, a duty, and one of the most lofty kind.

To save a noble creature, if possible, from the over generosity of her own heart; to convince her that such proceedings were inappropriate, inconsistent with her dignity, as well as apt to give occasion for the adversary to blaspheme – this was the mission which inspired him. If he thought of a natural turning towards himself, the friend of friends, in respect to whom the precautions he enforced were unnecessary, in consequence of these remonstrances, he kept it carefully in the background of his thoughts. It was a duty. This beautiful, noble woman, all frankness and candour, had taken the part of an angel in endeavouring to help him in his trouble. Could he permit her to sully even the tip of a wing of that generous effort. Certainly not! On the contrary, it became doubly his duty to protect her in every way.

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