

H. Rider Haggard

Dawn

o r i  i n a L



Генри Райдер Хаггард

Dawn

«РИПОЛ Классик»

1884

УДК 82
ББК 84

Хаггард Г.

Dawn / Г. Хаггард — «РИПОЛ Классик», 1884

ISBN 978-5-521-06596-7

Philip Caresfoot is all but promised to marry the local heiress, Maria Lee. They are both to inherit small fortunes in their own right. And thus their marriages to each other would make an ever wealthier household. However, when Hilda, a noblewoman with no wealth of her own, arrives in town to become Maria's companion, Philip begins to fall in love with her. They have an affair when Philip is sent away to Oxford and they marry in secret. When Philip returns to his home, his father inquires about his relationship with Maria Lee. Philip tells him that Maria Lee and himself are engaged. How will he keep all his lies together and still inherit the land and money from his father?

УДК 82
ББК 84

ISBN 978-5-521-06596-7

© Хаггард Г., 1884
© РИПОЛ Классик, 1884

Содержание

Chapter I	6
Chapter II	10
Chapter III	14
Chapter IV	18
Chapter V	22
Chapter VI	27
Chapter VII	30
Chapter VIII	35
Chapter IX	40
Chapter X	44
Chapter XI	48
Chapter XII	52
Chapter XIII	57
Chapter XIV	61
Chapter XV	65
Chapter XVI	70
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	73

H. Rider Haggard

Dawn

*"Our natures languish incomplete;
Something obtuse in this our star
Shackles the spirit's winged feet;
But a glory moves us from afar,
And we know that we are strong and fleet."*

Edmund Ollier.

*"Once more I behold the face of her
Whose actions all had the character
Of an inexpressible charm, expressed;
Whose movements flowed from a centre of rest,
And whose rest was that of a swallow, rife
With the instinct of reposing life;
Whose mirth had a sadness all the while
It sparkled and laughed, and whose sadness lay
In the heaven of such a crystal smile
That you longed to travel the self-same way
To the brightness of sorrow. For round her breathed
A grace like that of the general air,
Which softens the sharp extremes of things,
And connects by its subtle, invisible stair
The lowest and the highest. She interwreathed
Her mortal obscureness with so much light
Of the world unrisen, that angel's wings
Could hardly have given her greater right
To float in the winds of the Infinity."*

Edmund Ollier.

© T8RUGRAM, 2018

© Original, 2018

Chapter I

"You lie; you always were a liar, and you always will be a liar. You told my father how I spent the money."

"Well, and what if I did? I had to look after myself, I suppose. You forget that I am only here on sufferance, whilst you are the son of the house. It does not matter to you, but he would have turned me out of doors," whined George.

"Oh! curse your fine words; it's you who forget, you swab. Ay, it's you who forget that you asked me to take the money to the gambling-tent, and made me promise that you should have half of what we won, but that I should play for both. What, are you beginning to remember now—is it coming back to you after a whole month? I am going to quicken your memory up presently, I can tell you; I have got a good deal to pay off, I'm thinking. I know what you are at; you want to play cuckoo, to turn 'Cousin Philip' out that 'Cousin George' may fill the nest. You know the old man's soft points, and you keep working him up against me. You think that you would like the old place when he's gone — ay, and I daresay that you will get it before you have done, but I mean to have my penn'orth out of you now, at any rate," and, brushing the tears of anger that stood in his brown eyes away with the back of his hand, the speaker proceeded to square up to George in a most determined way.

Now Philip, with his broad shoulders and his firm-knit frame, would, even at eighteen, have been no mean antagonist for a full-grown man; much more then did he look formidable to the lankly, overgrown stripling crouching against the corner of the wall that prevented his further retreat.

"Philip, you're not going to strike me, are you, when you know you are so much stronger?"

"Yes, I am, though; if I can't match you with my tongue, at any rate I will use my fists. Look out."

"Oh, Philip, don't! I'll tell your father."

"Tell him! why, of course you will, I know that; but you shall have something to lie about this time," and he advanced to the attack with a grim determination not pleasant for his cousin to behold.

Finding that there was no escape, George turned upon him with so shrill a curse that it even frightened from his leafy perch in the oak above the tame turtle-dove, intensely preoccupied as he was in cooing to a new-found mate. He did more than curse; he fought like a cornered rat, and with as much chance as the rat with a trained fox-terrier. In a few seconds his head was as snugly tucked away in the chancery of his cousin's arm as ever any property was in the court of that name, and, to speak truth, it seemed quite possible that, when it emerged from its retreat, it would, like the property, be much dilapidated and extensively bled.

Let us not dwell upon the scene; for George it was a very painful one, so painful that he never quite forgot it. His nose, too, was never so straight again. It was soon over, though to one of the parties time went with unnatural slowness.

"Well, I think you've had about enough for once," soliloquized Philip, as he critically surveyed the writhing mass on the ground before him; and he looked a very handsome lad as he said it.

His curly black hair hung in waving confusion over his forehead, and flung changing lights and shadows into the depths of his brown eyes, whilst his massive and somewhat heavy features were touched into a more active life by the light of that pleasing excitement which animates nine men out of every ten of the Anglo-Saxon race when they are engaged on killing or hurting some other living creature. The face, too, had a certain dignity about it, a little of the dignity of justice; it was the face of one who feels that if his action has been precipitate and severe, it has at any rate been virtuous. The full but clear-cut lips also had their own expression on them, half serious, half comical; humour, contempt, and even pity were blended in it. Altogether Philip Caresfoot's appearance in the moment of boyish vengeance was pleasing and not uninteresting.

Presently, however, something of the same change passed over his face that we see in the sky when a cloud passes over the sun; the light faded out of it. It was astonishing to note how dull and heavy—ay, more, how bad it made him look all in a breath.

"There will be a pretty business about this," he murmured, and then, administering a sharp kick to the prostrate and groaning form on the ground before him, he said, "Now, then, get up; I'm not going to touch you again. Perhaps, though, you won't be in quite such a hurry to tell lies about me another time, though I suppose that one must always expect a certain amount of lying from a half-bred beggar like you. Like mother, like son, you know."

This last sentence was accompanied by a bitter laugh, and produced a decided effect on the grovelling George, who slowly raised himself upon his hands, and, lifting his head, looked his cousin full in the face.

It was not the ghastly appearance of his mangled and blood-soaked countenance that made Philip recoil so sharply from the sight of his own handiwork—he had fought too often at school to be chicken-hearted about a little bloodshed; and, besides, he knew that his cousin was only knocked about, not really injured—but rather the intense and almost devilish malignity of the expression that hovered on the blurred features and in the half-closed eyes. But no attempt was made by George to translate the look into words, and indeed Philip felt that it was untranslatable. He also felt dimly that the hate and malice with which he was regarded by the individual at his feet was of a more concentrated and enduring character than most men have the power to originate. In the lurid light of that one glance he was able, though he was not very clever, to pierce the darkest recesses of his cousin's heart, and to see his inmost thought, no longer through a veil, but face to face. And what he saw was sufficient to make the blood leave his ruddy cheek, and to fix his eyes into an expression of fear.

Next second George dropped his head on to the ground again, and began to moan in an ostentatious manner, possibly in order to attract some one whose footsteps could be plainly heard proceeding slowly down a shrubbery-path on the other side of the yard wall. At any rate, that was the effect produced; for next moment, before Philip could think of escape, had he wished to escape, a door in the wall was opened, and a gentleman, pausing on the threshold, surveyed the whole scene, with the assistance of a gold-mounted eye-glass, with some evident surprise and little apparent satisfaction.

The old gentleman, for he was old, made so pretty a picture, framed as he was in the arched doorway, and set off by a natural background of varying shades of green, that his general appearance is worth sketching as he stood. To begin with, he was dressed in the fashion of the commencement of this century, and, as has been said, old, though it was difficult to say how old. Indeed, so vigorous and comparatively youthful was his bearing that he was generally taken to be considerably under seventy, but, as a matter of fact, he was but a few years short of eighty. He was extremely tall, over six feet, and stood upright as a lifeguardsman; indeed, his height and stately carriage would alone have made him a remarkable-looking man, had there been nothing else unusual about him; but, as it happened, his features were as uncommon as his person. They were clear-cut and cast in a noble mould. The nose was large and aquiline, the chin, like his son Philip's, square and determined; but it was his eyes that gave a painful fascination to his countenance. They were steely blue, and glittered under the pent-house of his thick eyebrows, that, in striking contrast to the snow-white of his hair, were black in hue, as tempered steel glitters in a curtained room. It was those eyes, in conjunction with sundry little peculiarities of temper, that had earned for the old man the title of "Devil Caresfoot," a sobriquet in which he took peculiar pride. So pleased was he with it, indeed, that he caused it to be engraved in solid oak letters an inch long upon the form of a life-sized and life-like portrait of himself that hung over the staircase in the house.

"I am determined," he would say to his son, "to be known to my posterity as I was known to my contemporaries. The picture represents my person not inaccurately; from the nickname my descendants will be able to gather what the knaves and fools with whom I lived thought of my character. Ah! boy, I am wearing out; people will soon be staring at that portrait and wondering if

it was like me. In a very few years I shall no longer be 'devil,' but 'devilled,'" and he would chuckle at his grim and ill-omened joke.

Philip felt his father's eyes playing upon him, and shrunk from them. His face had, at the mere thought of the consequences of his chastisement of his cousin, lost the beauty and animation that had clothed it a minute before; now it grew leaden and hard, the good died away from it altogether, and, instead of a young god bright with vengeance, there was nothing but a sullen youth with dull and frightened eyes. To his son, as to most people who came under his influence, "Devil" Caresfoot was a grave reality.

Presently the picture in the doorway opened its mouth and spoke in a singularly measured, gentle voice.

"You will forgive me, Philip, for interrupting your *tete-a-tete*, but may I ask what is the meaning of this?"

Philip returned no answer.

"Since your cousin is not in a communicative mood, George, perhaps you will inform me why you are lying on your face and groaning in that unpleasant and aggressive manner?"

George lifted his blood-stained face from the stones, and, looking at his uncle, groaned louder than ever.

"May I ask you, Philip, if George has fallen down and hurt himself, or if there has been an—
an—altercation between you?"

Here George himself got up and, before Philip could make any reply, addressed himself to his uncle.

"Sir," he said, "I will answer for Philip; there *has* been an altercation, and he in the scuffle knocked me down, and I confess," here he put his hand up to his battered face, "that I am suffering a good deal, but what I want to say is, that I beg you will not blame Philip. He thought that I had wronged him, and, though I am quite innocent, and could easily have cleared myself had he given me a chance, I must admit that appearances are to a certain extent against me—"

"He lies!" broke in Philip, sullenly.

"You will wonder, sir," went on the blood-stained George, "how I allowed myself to be drawn into such a brutal affair, and one so discreditable to your house. I can only say that I am very sorry,"—which indeed he was —"and that I should never have taken any notice of his words— knowing that he would regret them on reflection—had he not in an unguarded moment allowed himself to taunt me with my birth. Uncle, you know the misfortune of my father's marriage, and that she was not his equal in birth, but you know too that she was my mother and I love her memory though I never saw her, and I could not bear to hear her spoken of like that, and I struck him. I hope that both you and he will forgive me; I cannot say any more."

"He lies again, he cannot speak the truth."

"Philip, will you allow me to point out," remarked his father in his blandest voice, "that the continued repetition of the very ugly word 'lie' is neither narrative nor argument. Perhaps you will be so kind as to tell me your side of the story; you know I always wish to be perfectly impartial."

"He lied to you this morning about the money. It's true enough that I gambled away the ten pounds at Roxham fair, instead of paying it into the bank as you told me, but he persuaded me to it, and he was to have shared the profits if we won. I was a blackguard, but he was a bigger blackguard; why should I have all the blame and have that fellow continually shoved down my throat as a saint? And so I thrashed him, and that is all about it."

"Sir, I am sorry to contradict Philip, but indeed he is in error; the recollection of what took place has escaped him. I could, if necessary, bring forward evidence—Mr. Bellamy—"

"There is no need, George, for you to continue," and then, fixing his glittering eye on Philip: "it is very melancholy for me, having only one son, to know him to be such a brute, such a bearer of false witness, such an impostor as you are. Do you know that I have just seen Mr. Bellamy, the

head clerk at the bank, and inquired if he knew anything of what happened about that ten pounds, and do you know what he told me?"

"No, I don't, and I don't want to."

"But I really must beg your attention: he told me that the day following the fair your cousin George came to the bank with ten pounds, and told him how you had spent the ten pounds I gave you to pay in, and that he brought the money, his own savings, to replace what you had gambled away; and Bellamy added that, under all the circumstances, he did not feel justified in placing it to my credit. What have you to say to that?"

"What have I to say? I have to say that I don't believe a word of it. If George had meant to do me a good turn he would have paid the money in and said nothing to Bellamy about it. Why won't you trust me a little more, father? I tell you that you are turning me into a scoundrel. I am being twisted up into a net of lies till I am obliged to lie myself to keep clear of ruin. I know what this sneak is at; he wants to work you into cutting me out of the property which should be mine by right. He knows your weaknesses—"

"My weaknesses, sir—my weaknesses!" thundered his father, striking his gold-headed cane on to the stones; "what do you mean by that?"

"Hush, uncle, he meant nothing," broke in George.

"Meant nothing! Then for an idle speech it is one that may cost him dear. Look you here, Philip Caresfoot, I know very well that our family has been quite as remarkable for its vices as its virtues, but for the last two hundred and fifty years we have been gentlemen, and you are not a gentleman; we have not been thieves, and you have proved yourself a thief; we have spoken the truth, and you are, what you are so fond of calling your cousin, who is worth two of you, a liar. Now listen. However imperious I may have grown in my old age, I can still respect the man who thwarts me even though I hate him; but I despise the man who deceives me, as I despise you, my dear son Philip— and I tell you this, and I beg you to lay it to heart, that if ever again I find that you have deceived me, by Heaven I will disinherit you in favour of —*oh, oh!*" and the old man fell back against the grey wall, pressing his hands to his breast and with the cold perspiration starting on to his pallid countenance.

Both the lads sprang forward, but before they reached him he had recovered himself.

"It is nothing," he said, in his ordinary gentle voice, "a trifling indisposition. I wish you both good morning, and beg you to bear my words in mind."

When he was fairly gone, George came up to his cousin and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Why do you insist upon quarrelling with me, Philip? it always ends like this, you always get the worst of it."

But Philip's only reply was to shake him roughly off, and to vanish through the door towards the lake. George regarded his departing form with a peculiar smile, which was rendered even more peculiar by the distortion of his swollen features.

Chapter II

It is difficult to imagine any study that would prove more fascinating in itself or more instructive in its issues, than the examination of the leading characteristics of individual families as displayed through a series of generations. But it is a subject that from its very nature is more or less unapproachable, since it is but little that we know even of our immediate ancestors. Occasionally in glancing at the cracking squares of canvas, many of which cannot even boast a name, but which alone remain to speak of the real and active life, the joys and griefs, the sins and virtues that centred in the originals of those hard daubs and of ourselves, we may light upon a face that about six generations since was the counterpart of the little boy upon our shoulder, or the daughter standing at our side. In the same way, too, partly through tradition and partly by other means, we are sometimes able to trace in ourselves and in our children the strong development of characteristics that distinguished the race centuries ago.

If local tradition and such records of their individual lives as remained are worthy of any faith, it is beyond a doubt that the Caresfoots of Bratham Abbey had handed down their own hard and peculiar cast of character from father to son unaffected in the main by the continual introduction of alien blood on the side of the mother.

The history of the Caresfoot family had nothing remarkable about it. They had been yeomen at Bratham from time immemorial, perhaps ever since the village had become a geographical fact; but it was on the dissolution of the monasteries that they first became of any importance in the county. Bratham Abbey, which had shared the common fate, was granted by Henry VIII. to a certain courtier, Sir Charles Varry by name. For two years the owner never came near his new possession, but one day he appeared in the village, and riding to the house of Farmer Caresfoot, which was its most respectable tenement, he begged him to show him the Abbey house and the lands attached. It was a dark November afternoon, and by the time the farmer and his wearied guest had crossed the soaked lands and reached the great grey house, the damps and shadows of the night had begun to curtain it and to render its appearance, forsaken as it was, inexpressibly dreary and lonesome.

"Damp here, my friend, is it not?" said Sir Charles with a shudder, looking towards the lake, into which the rain was splashing.

"You are right, it be."

"And lonely too, now that the old monks have gone."

"Ay, but they do say that the house be mostly full of the spirits of the dead," and the yeoman sank his voice to an awed whisper.

Sir Charles crossed himself and muttered, "I can well believe it," and then, addressing his companion—

"You do not know of any man who would buy an abbey with all its rights and franchises, do you, friend?"

"Not rightly, sir; the land be so poor it hath no heart in it; it doth scarce repay the tillage, and what the house is you may see. The curse of the monks is on it. But still, sir, if you have a mind to be rid of the place, I have a little laid by and a natural love for the land, having been bred on it, and taken the colour of my mind and my stubby growth therefrom, and I will give you—" and this astutest of all the Caresfoots whispered a very small sum into Sir Charles' ear.

"Your price is very small, good friend, it doth almost vanish into nothing; and methinks the land that reared you cannot be so unkind as you would have me think. The monks did not love bad land, but yet, if thou hast it in the gold, I will take it; it will pay off a debt or two, and I care not for the burden of the land."

And so Farmer Caresfoot became the lawful owner of Bratham Abbey with its two advowsons, its royal franchises of treasure-trove and deodand, and more than a thousand acres of the best land in Marlshire.

The same astuteness that had enabled this wise progenitor to acquire the estate enabled his descendants to stick tightly to it, and though, like other families, they had at times met with reverses, they never lost their grip of the Abbey property. During the course of the first half of the nineteenth century the land increased largely in value, and its acreage was considerably added to by the father of the present owner, a man of frugal mind, but with the family mania for the collection of all sorts of plate strongly developed. But it was Philip's father, "Devil Caresfoot," who had, during his fifty years' tenure of the property, raised the family to its present opulent condition, firstly, by a strict attention to business and the large accumulations resulting from his practice of always living upon half his income, and secondly, by his marriage late in middle life with Miss Bland, the heiress of the neighbouring Isleworth estates, that stretched over some two thousand acres of land.

This lady, who was Philip's mother, did not live long to enjoy her wealth and station. Her husband never spoke a rough word to her, and yet it is no exaggeration to say that she died of fear of him. The marriage had been one of convenience, not of affection; indeed poor Anna Bland had secretly admired the curate at Isleworth, and hated Mr. Caresfoot and his glittering eye. But she married him for all that, to feel that till she died that glance was always playing round her like a rapier in the hands of a skilled fencer. And very soon she did die, Mr. Caresfoot receiving her last words and wishes with the same exquisite and unmoved politeness that he had extended to every remark she had made to him in the course of their married life. Having satisfactorily eyed Mrs. Caresfoot off into a better world, her husband gave up all idea of further matrimonial ventures, and set himself to heap up riches. But a little before his wife's death, and just after his son's birth, an event had occurred in the family that had disturbed him not a little.

His father had left two sons, himself and a brother, many years his junior. Now this brother was very dear to Mr. Caresfoot; his affection for him was the one weak point in his armour; nor was it rendered any the less sincere, but rather the more touching, by the fact that its object was little better than half-witted. It is therefore easy to imagine his distress and anger when he heard that a woman who had till shortly before been kitchen-maid at the Abbey House, and was now living in the village, had been confined of a son which she fixed upon his brother, whose wife she declared herself to be. Investigation only brought out the truth of the story; his weak-minded brother had been entrapped into a glaring *mesalliance*.

But Mr. Caresfoot proved himself equal to the occasion. So soon as his "sister-in-law," as it pleased him to call her sardonically, had sufficiently recovered, he called upon her. What took place at the visit never transpired, but next day Mrs. E. Caresfoot left her native place never to return, the child remaining with the father, or rather with the uncle. That boy was George. At the time when this story opens both his parents were dead: his father from illness resulting from entire failure of brain power, the mother from drink.

Whether it was that he considered the circumstance of the lad's birth entitled him to peculiar consideration, or that he transferred to him the affection he bore his father, the result was that his nephew was quite as dear if not even dearer to Mr. Caresfoot than his own son. Not, however, that he allowed his preference to be apparent, save in the negative way that he was blind to faults in George that he was sufficiently quick to note in Philip. To observers this partiality seemed the more strange when they thought upon Philip's bonny face and form, and then noted how the weak-brained father and coarse-blooded mother had left their mark in George's thick lips, small, restless eyes, pallid complexion, and loose-jointed form.

When Philip shook off his cousin's grasp and vanished towards the lake, he did so with bitter wrath and hatred in his heart, for he saw but too clearly that he had deeply injured himself in his father's estimation, and, what was more, he felt that so much as he had sunk his side of the balance,

by so much he had raised up that of George. He was inculpated; a Bellamy came upon the scene to save George, and, what was worse, an untruthful Bellamy; he was the aggressor, and George the meek in spirit with the soft answer that turneth away wrath. It was intolerable; he hated his father, he hated George. There was no justice in the world, and he had not wit to play rogue with such a one as his cousin. Appearances were always against him; he hated everybody.

And then he began to think that there was in the very next parish somebody whom he did not hate, but who, on the contrary, interested him, and was always ready to listen to his troubles, and he also became aware of the fact that whilst his mind had been thinking his legs had been walking, and that he was very near the abode of that person—almost at its gates, in short. He paused and looked at his watch; it had stopped at half-past eleven, the one blow that George had succeeded in planting upon him having landed on it, to the great detriment of both the watch and the striker's knuckles; but the sun told him that it was about half-past twelve, not too early to call. So he opened the gate, and, advancing up an avenue of old beeches to a square, red-brick house of the time of Queen Anne, boldly rang the bell.

Was Miss Lee at home? Yes, Miss Lee was in the greenhouse; perhaps Mr. Philip would step into the garden, which Mr. Philip did accordingly.

"How do you do, Philip? I'm delighted to see you; you've just come in time to help in the slaughter."

"Slaughter, slaughter of what—a pig?"

"No, green fly. I'm going to kill thousands."

"You cruel girl."

"I daresay it is cruel, but I don't care. Grumps always said that I had no heart, and, so far as green fly are concerned, Grumps was certainly right. Now, just look at this lily. It is an auratum. I gave three-and-six (out of my own money) for that bulb last autumn, and now the bloom is not worth twopence, all through green fly. If I were a man I declare I should swear. Please swear for me, Philip. Go outside and do it, so that I mayn't have it on my conscience. But now for vengeance. Oh, I say, I forgot, you know, I suppose. I ought to be looking very sorry—"

"Why, what's the matter? Any one dead?"

"Oh, no, so much better than that. *It's got Grumps.*"

"Got her, what has got her? What is 'it'?"

"Why, Chancery, of course. I always call Chancery 'it.' I wouldn't take its name in vain for worlds. I am too much afraid. I might be made to 'show a cause why,' and then be locked up for contempt, which frequently happens after you have tried to 'show a cause.' That is what has happened to Grumps. She is now showing a cause; shortly she will be locked up. When she comes out, if she ever does come out, I think that she will avoid wards in Chancery in future; she will have too much sympathy with them, and too much practical experience of their position."

"But what on earth do you mean, Maria? What has happened to Miss Gregson?" (*anglice* Grumps).

"Well, you remember one of my guardians, or rather his wife, got 'it' to appoint her my chaperon, but my other guardian wanted to appoint somebody else, and after taking eighteen months to do it, he has moved the court to show that Grumps is not a 'fit and proper person.' The idea of calling Grumps improper. She nearly fainted at it, and swore that, whether she lived through it or whether she didn't, she would never come within a mile of me or any other ward if she could help it, not even the ward of an hospital. I told her to be careful, or she would be 'committing contempt,' which frightened her so that she hardly spoke again till she left yesterday. Poor Grumps! I expect she is on bread and water now; but if she makes herself half as disagreeable to the Vice-Chancellor as she did to me, I don't believe that they will keep her long. She'll wear the gaolers out; she will wear the walls out; she will wear 'it' down to the bone; and then they will let her loose upon the world again. Why, there is the bell for lunch, and not a single green fly the less! Never mind, I will do for them to-

morrow. How it would add to her sufferings in her lonely cell if she could see us going to a *tete-a-tete* lunch. Come on, Philip, come quick, or the cutlets will get cold, and I hate cold cutlets." And off she tripped, followed by the laughing Philip, who, by the way, was now looking quite handsome again.

Maria Lee was not very pretty at her then age—just eighteen—but she was a perfect specimen of a young English country girl; fresh as a rose, and sound as a bell, and endowed besides with a quick wit and a ready sympathy. She was essentially one of that class of Englishwomen who make the English upper middle class what it is—one of the finest and soundest in the world. Philip, following her into the house, thought that she was charming; nor, being a Caresfoot, and therefore having a considerable eye to the main chance, did the fact of her being the heiress to fifteen hundred a year in land detract from her charms.

The cutlets were excellent, and Maria ate three, and was very comical about the departed Grumps; indeed, anybody not acquainted with the circumstances would have gathered that that excellent lady was to be shortly put to the question. Philip was not quite so merry; he was oppressed both by recollections of what had happened and apprehensions of what might happen.

"What is the matter, Philip?" she asked, when they had left the table to sit under the trees on the lawn. "I can see that something is the matter. Tell me all about it, Philip."

And Philip told her what had happened that morning, laying bare all his heart-aches, and not even concealing his evil deeds. When he had done, she pondered awhile, tapping her little foot upon the turf.

"Philip," she said at last, in quite a changed voice, "I do not think that you are being well treated. I do not think that your cousin means kindly by you, but—but I do not think that you have behaved rightly either. I don't like that about the ten pounds; and I think that you should not have touched George; he is not so strong as you. Please try to do as your father—dear me, I am sure I don't wonder that you are afraid of him; I am—tells you, and regain his affection, and make it up with George; and, if you get into any more troubles, come and tell me about them before you do anything foolish; for though, according to Grumps, I am silly enough, two heads are better than one."

The tears stood in the lad's brown eyes as he listened to her. He gulped them down, however, and said—

"You are awfully kind to me; you are the only friend I have. Sometimes I think that you are an angel."

"Nonsense, Philip. If 'it' heard you talk like that, you would join Grumps. Don't let me hear any more such stuff," but, though she spoke sharply, somehow she did not look displeased.

"I must be off," he said at length. "I promised to go with my father to see a new building on Reynold's farm. I have only twenty minutes to get home;" and rising they went into the house through a French window opening on to the lawn.

In the dining-room he turned, and, after a moment's hesitation, stuttered out—

"Maria, don't be angry with me, but may I give you a kiss?"

She blushed vividly.

"How dare you suggest such a thing?—but—but as Grumps has gone, and there is no new Grumps to refer to, and therefore I can only consult my own wishes, perhaps if you really wish to, Philip, why, Philip, you may."

And he did.

When he was gone she leant her head against the cold marble mantelpiece.

"I do love him," she murmured, "yes, that I do."

Chapter III

Philip was not very fond of taking walks with his father, since he found that in nine cases out of ten they afforded opportunities for inculcation of facts of the driest description with reference to estate management, or to the narration by his parent of little histories of which his conduct upon some recent occasion would adorn the moral. On this particular occasion the prospect was particularly unpleasant, for his father would, he was well aware, overflow with awful politeness, indeed, after the scene of the morning, it could not be otherwise. Oh, how much rather would he have spent that lovely afternoon with Maria Lee! Dear Maria, he would go and see her again the very next day.

When he arrived, some ten minutes after time in the antler-hung hall of the Abbey House, he found his father standing, watch in hand, exactly under the big clock, as though he was determined to make a note by double entry of every passing second.

"When I asked you to walk with me this afternoon, Philip, I, if my memory does not deceive me, was careful to say that I had no wish to interfere with any prior engagement. I was aware how little interest, compared to your cousin George, you take in the estate, and I had no wish to impose an uncongenial task. But, as you kindly volunteered to accompany me, I regret that you did not find it convenient to be punctual to the time you fixed. I have now waited for you for seventeen minutes, and let me tell you that at my time of life I cannot afford to lose seventeen minutes. May I ask what has delayed you?"

This long speech had given Philip the opportunity of recovering the breath that he had lost in running home. He replied promptly—

"I have been lunching with Miss Lee."

"Oh, indeed, then I no longer wonder that you kept me waiting, and I must say that in this particular I commend your taste. Miss Lee is a young lady of good family, good manners, and good means. If her estate went with this property it would complete as pretty a five thousand acres of mixed soil as there is in the county. Those are beautiful old meadows of hers, beautiful. Perhaps—" but here the old man checked himself.

On leaving the house they had passed together down a walk called the tunnel walk, on account of the arching boughs of the lime-trees that interlaced themselves overhead. At the end of this avenue, and on the borders of the lake, there stood an enormous but still growing oak, known as Caresfoot's Staff. It was the old squire's favourite tree, and the best topped piece of timber for many miles round.

"I wonder," said Philip, by way of making a little pleasant conversation, "why that tree was called Caresfoot's Staff."

"Your ignorance astonishes me, Philip, but I suppose that there are some people who can live for years in a place and yet imbibe nothing of its traditions. Perhaps you know that the monks were driven out of these ruins by Henry VIII. Well, on the spot where that tree now stands there grew a still greater oak, a giant tree, its trunk measured sixteen loads of timber; which had, as tradition said, been planted by the first prior of the Abbey when England was still Saxon. The night the monks left a great gale raged over England. It was in October, when the trees were full of leaf, and its fiercest gust tore the great oak from its roothold, and flung it into the lake. Look! do you see that rise in the sand, there, by the edge of the deep pool, in the eight foot water? That is there it is supposed to lie. Well, the whole country-side said that it was a sign that the monks had gone for ever from Bratham Abbey, and the country-side was right. But when your ancestor, old yeoman Caresfoot, bought this place and came to live here, in a year when there was a great black frost that set the waters of the lake like one of the new-fangled roads, he asked his neighbours, ay, and his labouring folk, to come and dine with him and drink to the success of his purchase. It was a proud day for him, and when dinner was done and they were all mellow with strong ale, he bade them step down to the borders of the lake, as he would have them be witness to a ceremony. When they reached the spot they saw a

curious sight, for there on a strong dray, and dragged by Farmer Caresfoot's six best horses, was an oak of fifty years' growth coming across the ice, earth, roots and all.

"On that spot where it now stands there had been a great hole, ten feet deep by fourteen feet square, dug to receive it, and into that hole Caresfoot Staff was tilted and levered off the dray. And when it had been planted, and the frozen earth well trodden in, your grandfather in the ninth degree brought his guests back to the old banqueting-hall, and made a speech which, as it was the first and last he ever made, was long remembered in the country-side. It was, put into modern English, something like this:

"Neighbours,—Prior's Oak has gone into the water, and folks said that it was for a sign that the monks would never come back to Bratham, and that it was the Lord's wind that put it there. And, neighbours, as ye know, the broad Bratham lands and the fat marshes down by the brook passed by king's grant to a man that knew not clay from loam, or layer from pasturage, and from him they passed by the Lord's will to me, as I have asked you here to-day to celebrate. And now, neighbours, I have a mind, and though it seem to you but a childish thing, yet I have a mind, and have set myself to fulfil it. When I was yet a little lad, and drove the swine out to feed on the hill yonder, when the acorns had fallen, afore Farmer Gyrtton's father had gracious leave from the feoffees to put up the fence that doth now so sorely vex us, I found one day a great acorn, as big as a dow's egg, and of a rich and wondrous brown, and this acorn I bore home and planted in kind earth in the corner of my dad's garden, thinking that it would grow, and that one day I would hew its growth and use it for a staff. Now that was fifty long years ago, lads, and there where grew Prior's Oak, there, neighbours, I have set my Staff to-day. The monks have told us how in Israel every man planted his fig and his vine. For the fig I know not rightly what that is; but for the vine, I will plant no creeping, clinging vine, but a hearty English oak, that, if they do but give it good room to breathe in, and save their heirloom from the axe, shall cast shade and grow acorns, and burst into leaf in the spring and grow naked in the winter, when ten generations of our children, and our children's children, shall have mixed their dust with ours yonder in the graveyard. And now, neighbours, I have talked too long, though I am better at doing than talking; but ye will even forgive me, for I will not talk to you again, though on this the great day of my life I was minded to speak. But I will bid you every man pledge a health to the Caresfoot's Staff, and ask a prayer that, so long as it shall push its leaves, so long may the race of my loins be here to sit beneath its shade, and even mayhap when the corn is ripe and the moon is up, and their hearts grow soft towards the past, to talk with kinsman or with sweetheart of the old man who struck it in this kindly soil."

The old squire's face grew tender as he told this legend of the forgotten dead, and Philip's young imagination summoned up the strange old-world scene of the crowd of rustics gathered in the snow and frost round this very tree.

"Philip," said his father, suddenly, "you will hold the yeoman's Staff one day; be like it of an oaken English heart, and you will defy wind and weather as it has done, and as your forbears have done. Come, we must go on."

"By the way, Philip," he continued, after a while, "you will remember what I said to you this morning—I hope that you will remember it, though I spoke in anger—never try to deceive me again, or you will regret it. And now I have something to say to you. I wish you to go to college and receive an education that will fit you to hold the position you must in the course of Nature one day fill in the county. The Oxford term begins in a few days, and you have for some years been entered at Magdalen College. I do not expect you to be a scholar, but I do expect you to brush off your rough ways and your local ideas, and to learn to become such a person both in your conduct and your mind as a gentleman of your station should be."

"Is George to go to college too?"

"No; I have spoken to him on the subject, and he does not wish it. He says very wisely that, with his small prospects, he would rather spend the time in learning how to earn his living. So he is

going to be articulated to the Roxham lawyers, Foster and Son, or rather Foster and Bellamy, for young Bellamy, who is a lawyer by profession, came here this morning, not to speak about you, but on a message from the firm to say that he is now a junior partner, and that they will be very happy to take George as an articulated clerk. He is a hard-working, shrewd young man, and it will be a great advantage to George to have his advice and example before him.”

Philip assented, and went on in silence, reflecting on the curious change in his immediate prospects that this walk had brought to light. He was much rejoiced at the prospect of losing sight of George for a while, and was sufficiently intelligent to appreciate the advantages, social and mental, that the University would offer him; but it struck him that there were two things which he did not like about the scheme. The first of these was, that whilst he was pursuing his academical studies, George would practically be left on the spot—for Roxham was only six miles off—to put in motion any schemes he might have devised; and Philip was sure that he had devised schemes. And the second, that Oxford was a long way from Maria Lee. However, he kept his objections to himself. In due course they reached the buildings they had set out to examine, and the old squire, having settled what was to be done, and what was to be left undone, with characteristic promptitude and shrewdness, they turned homewards.

In passing through the shrubberies, on their way back to the house, they suddenly came upon a stolid-looking lad of about fifteen, emerging from a side-walk with a nest full of young blackbirds in his hand. Now, if there was one thing in this world more calculated than another to rouse the most objectionable traits of the old squire’s character into rapid action, it was the discovery of boys, and more especially bird-nesting boys, in his plantations. In the first place, he hated trespassers; and in the second, it was one of his simple pleasures to walk in the early morning and listen to the singing of the birds that swarmed around. Accordingly, at the obnoxious sight he stopped suddenly, and, drawing himself up to his full height, addressed the trembling youth in his sweetest voice.

“Your name is, I believe—Brady—Jim Brady—correct me if I am wrong—and you have come here, you—you—young—villain—to steal my birds.”

The frightened boy walked slowly backwards, followed by the old man with his fiery eyes fixed upon his face, till at last concussion against the trunk of a great tree prevented further retreat. Here he stood for about thirty seconds, writhing under the glance that seemed to pierce him through and through, till at last he could stand it no longer, but flung himself on the ground, roaring:

“Oh! don’t ee, squire; don’t ee now look at me with that ‘ere eye. Take and thrash me, squire, but don’t ee fix me so! I hayn’t had no more nor twenty this year, and a nest of spinxes, and Tom Smith he’s had fifty-two and a young owl. Oh! oh!”

Enraged beyond measure at this last piece of information, Mr. Caresfoot took his victim at his word, and, ceasing his ocular experiments, laid into the less honourable portion of his form with the gold-headed malacca cane in a way that astonished the prostrate Jim, though he was afterwards heard to declare that the squire’s cane “warn’t not nothing compared with the squire’s eye, which wore a hot coal, it wore, and frizzled your innards as sich.”

When Jim Brady had departed, never to return again, and the old man had recovered his usual suavity of manner, he remarked to his son:

“There is some curious property in the human eye; a property that is, I believe, very much developed in my own. Did you observe the effect of my glance upon that boy? I was trying an experiment on him. I remember it was always the same with your poor mother. She could never bear me to look at her.”

Philip made no reply, but he thought that, if she had been the object of experiments of that nature, it was not very wonderful.

Shortly after their return home he received a note from Miss Lee. It ran thus:

“My dear Philip,

"What *do* you think? Just after you had gone away, I got by the mid- day post, which Jones (the butcher) brought from Roxham, several letters, amongst them one from Grumps and one from Uncle Tom. Grumps has shown a cause. Why? 'It' said she was not an improper person; but, for all that, she is so angry with Uncle Tom that she will not come back, but has accepted an offer to go to Canada as companion to a lady; so farewell Grumps.

"Now for Uncle Tom. 'It' suggested that I should live with some of my relations till I came of age, and pay them four hundred a year, which I think a good deal. I am sure it can't cost four hundred a year to feed me, though I have such an appetite. I had no idea they were all so fond of me before; they all want me to come and live with them, except Aunt Chambers, who, you know, lives in Jersey. Uncle Tom says in his letter that he shall be glad if his daughters can have the advantage of my example, and of studying my polished manners (just fancy *my* polished manners; and I know, because little Tom, who is a brick, told me, that only last year he heard his father tell Emily—that's the eldest—that I was a dowdy, snub-nosed, ill-mannered miss, but that she must keep in with me and flatter me up). No, I will not live with Uncle Tom, and I will tell 'it' so. If I must leave my home, I will go to Aunt Chambers at Jersey. Jersey is a beautiful place for flowers, and one learns French there without the trouble of learning it; and I like Aunt Chambers, and she has no children, and nothing but the memory of a dear departed. But I don't like leaving home, and feel very much inclined to cry. *Hang* the Court of Chancery, and Uncle Tom and his interference too! —*there*. I suppose you can't find time to come over to-morrow morning to see me off? Good-bye, dear Philip,

"Your affectionate friend, "Maria Lee."

Philip did manage to find time next morning, and came back looking very disconsolate.

Chapter IV

Philip went to college in due course, and George departed to learn his business as a lawyer in Roxham, but it will not be necessary for us to enter into the details of their respective careers during this period of their lives.

At college Philip did fairly well, and, being a Caresfoot, did not run into debt. He was, as his great bodily strength gave promise of, a first-class athlete, and for two years stroked the Magdalen boat. Nor did he altogether neglect his books, but his reading was of a desultory and out-of-the-way order, and much directed towards the investigation of mystical subjects. Fairly well liked amongst the men with whom he mixed, he could hardly be called popular; his temperament was too uncertain for that. At times he was the gayest of the gay, and then when the fit took him he would be plunged into a state of gloomy depression that might last for days. His companions, to whom his mystical studies were a favourite jest, were wont to assert that on these occasions he was preparing for a visit from his familiar, but the joke was one that he never could be prevailed upon to appreciate. The fact of the matter was that these fits of gloom were constitutional with him, and very possibly had their origin in the state of his mother's mind before his birth, when her whole thoughts were coloured by her morbid and fanciful terror of her husband, and her frantic anxiety to conciliate him.

During the three years that he spent at college, Philip saw but little of George, since, when he happened to be down at Bratham, which was not often, for he spent most of his vacations abroad, George avoided coming there as much as possible. Indeed, there was a tacit agreement between the two young men that they would see as little of each other as might be convenient. But, though he did not see much of him himself, Philip was none the less aware that George's influence over his father was, if anything, on the increase. The old squire's letters were full of him and of the admirable way in which he managed the estate, for it was now practically in his hands. Indeed, to his surprise and somewhat to his disgust, he found that George began to be spoken of indifferently with himself as the "young squire." Long before his college days had come to an end Philip had determined that he would do his best, as soon as opportunity offered, to reduce his cousin to his proper place, not by the violent means to which he had resorted in other days, but rather by showing himself to be equally capable, equally assiduous, and equally respectful and affectionate.

At last the day came when he was to bid farewell to Oxford for good, and in due course he found himself in a second-class railway carriage— thinking it useless to waste money, he always went second—and bound for Roxham.

Just before the train left the platform at Paddington, Philip was agreeably surprised out of his meditations by the entry into his carriage of an extremely elegant and stately young lady, a foreigner as he judged from her strong accent when she addressed the porter. With the innate gallantry of twenty-one, he immediately laid himself out to make the acquaintance of one possessed of such proud, yet melting blue eyes, such lovely hair, and a figure that would not have disgraced Diana; and, with this view, set himself to render her such little services as one fellow-traveller can offer to another. They were accepted reservedly at first, then gratefully, and before long the reserve broke down entirely, and this very handsome pair dropped into a conversation as animated as the lady's broken English would allow. The lady told him that her name was Hilda von Holtzhausen, that she was of a German family, and had come to England to enter a family as companion, in order to obtain a perfect knowledge of the English language. She had already been to France and acquired French; when she knew English, then she had been promised a place as school-mistress under government in her own country. Her father and mother were dead, and she had no brothers or sisters, and very few friends.

Where was she going to? She was going to a place called Roxham; here it was written on the ticket. She was going to be companion to a dear young lady, very rich, like all the English, whom she had met when she had travelled with her French family to Jersey, a Miss Lee.

"You don't say so!" said Philip. "Has she come back to Rewtham?"

"What, do you, then, know her?"

"Yes—that is, I used to three years ago. I live in the next parish."

"Ah! then perhaps you are the gentleman of whom I have heard her to speak, Mr. Car-es-foot, whom she did seem to appear to love; is not that the word?—to be very fond, you know."

Philip laughed, blushed, and acknowledged his identity with the gentleman whom Miss Lee "did seem to appear to love."

"Oh! I am glad; then we shall be friends, and see each other often —shall we not?"

He declared unreservedly that she should see him very often.

From Fraulein von Holtzhausen Philip gathered in the course of their journey a good many particulars about Miss Lee. It appeared that, having attained her majority, she was coming back to live at her old home at Rewtham, whither she had tried to persuade her Aunt Chambers to accompany her, but without success, that lady being too much attached to Jersey to leave it. During the course of a long stay on the island, the two girls had become fast friends, and the friendship had culminated in an offer being made by Maria Lee to Fraulein von Holtzhausen to come and live with her as a companion, a proposal that exactly suited the latter.

The mention of Miss Lee's name had awakened pleasant recollections in Philip's mind, recollections that, at any other time, might have tended towards the sentimental; but, when under fire from the blue eyes of this stately foreigner, it was impossible for him to feel sentimental about anybody save herself. "The journey is over all too soon," was the secret thought of each as they stepped on to the Roxham platform. Before they had finally said good-bye, however, a young lady with a dainty figure, in a shady hat and pink and white dress, came running along the platform.

"Hilda, Hilda, here I am! How do you do, dear? Welcome home," and she was about to seal her welcome with a kiss, when her eye fell upon Philip standing by.

"Oh, Philip!" she cried with a blush, "don't you know me? Have I changed much? I should have known you anywhere; and I am glad to see you, awfully glad (excuse the slang, but it is such a relief to be able to say 'awful' without being pulled up by Aunt Chambers). Just think, it is three years since we met. Do you remember Grumps? How do I look? Do you think you will like me as much as you used to?"

"I think that you are looking the same dear girl that you always used to look, only you have grown very pretty, and it is not possible that I shall like you more than I used to."

"I think they must teach you to pay compliments at Oxford, Philip," she answered, flushing with pleasure, "but it is all rubbish for you to say that I am pretty, because I know I am not"—and then, confidentially, glancing round to see that there was nobody within hearing (Hilda was engaged with a porter in looking after her things): "Just look at my nose, and you will soon change your mind. It's broader, and flatter, and snubbier than ever. I consider that I have got a bone to pick with Providence about that nose. Ah! here comes Hilda. Isn't she lovely! There's beauty for you if you like. She hasn't got a nose. Come and show us to the carriage. You will come and lunch with us tomorrow, won't you? I am so glad to get back to the old house again; and I mean to have such a garden! 'Life is short, and joys are fleeting,' as Aunt Chambers always says, so I mean to make the best of it whilst it lasts. I saw your father yesterday. He is a dear old man, though he has such awful eyes. I never felt so happy in my life as I do now. Good-bye. One o'clock." And she was gone, leaving Philip with something to think about.

Philip's reception at home was cordial and reassuring. He found his father considerably aged in appearance, but as handsome and upright as ever, and to all appearance heartily glad to see him.

"I am glad to see you back, my boy," he said. "You come to take your proper place. If you look at me, you will see that you won't have long to wait before you take mine. I can't last much longer, Philip, I feel that. Eighty-two is a good age to have reached. I have had my time, and put the property in order, and now I suppose I must make room. I went with the clerk, old Jakes, and marked out my

grave yesterday. There's a nice little spot the other side of the stone that they say marks where old yeoman Caresfoot, who planted Caresfoot's Staff, laid his bones, and that's where I wish to be put, in his good company. Don't forget that when the time comes, Philip. There's room for another if you care to keep it for yourself, but perhaps you will prefer the vault."

"You must not talk of dying yet, father. You will live many years yet."

"No, Philip; perhaps one, perhaps two, not more than two, perhaps a month, perhaps not a day. My life hangs on a thread now." And he pointed to his heart. "It may snap any day, if it gets a strain. By the way, Philip, you see that cupboard? Open it! Now, you see that stoppered bottle with the red label? Good. Well now, if ever you see me taken with an attack of the heart (I have had one since you were away, you know, and it nearly carried me off), you run for that as hard as you can go, and give it me to drink, half at a time. It is a tremendous restorative of some sort, and old Caley says that, if I do not take it when the next attack comes, there'll be an end of 'Devil Caresfoot';" and he rapped his cane energetically on the oak floor.

"And so, Philip, I want you to go about and make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the property, so that you may be able to take things over when I die without any hitch. I hope that you will be careful and do well by the land. Remember that a big property like this is a sacred trust.

"And now there are two more things that I will take this opportunity to say a word to you about. First, I see that you and your cousin George don't get on well, and it grieves me. You have always had a false idea of George, always, and thought that he was underhand. Nothing could be more mistaken than such a notion. George is a most estimable young man, and my dear brother's only son. I wish you would try to remember that, Philip—blood is thicker than water, you know—and you will be the only two Caresfoots left when I am gone. Now, perhaps you may think that I intend enriching George at your expense, but that is not so. Take this key and open the top drawer of that secretaire, and give me that bundle. This is my will. If you care to look over it, and can understand it—which is more than I can—you will see that everything is left to you, with the exception of that outlying farm at Holston, those three Essex farms that I bought two years ago, and twelve thousand pounds in cash. Of course, as you know, the Abbey House, and the lands immediately round, are entailed—it has always been the custom to entail them for many generations. There, put it back. And now the last thing is, I want you to get married, Philip. I should like to see a grandchild in the house before I die. I want you to marry Maria Lee. I like the girl. She comes of a good old Marlshire stock—our family married into hers in the year 1703. Besides, her property would put yours into a ring-fence. She is a sharp girl too, and quite pretty enough for a wife. I hope you will think it over, Philip."

"Yes, father; but perhaps she will not have me. I am going to lunch there to-morrow."

"I don't think you need be afraid, Philip; but I won't keep you any longer. Shake hands, my boy. You'll perhaps think of your old father kindly when you come to stand in his shoes. I hope you will, Philip. We have had many a quarrel, and sometimes I have been wrong, but I have always wished to do my duty by you, my boy. Don't forget to make the best of your time at lunch to-morrow."

Philip went out of his father's study considerably touched by the kindness and consideration with which he had been treated, and not a little relieved to find his position with reference to his succession to the estate so much better than he had anticipated, and his cousin George's so much worse.

"That red-haired fox has plotted in vain," he thought, with secret exultation. And then he set himself to consider the desirability of falling in with his father's wishes as regards marriage. Of Maria he was, as the reader is aware, very fond; indeed, a few years before he had been in love with her, or something very like it; he knew too that she would make him a very good wife, and the match was one that in every way commended itself to his common sense and his interests. Yes, he would certainly take his father's advice. But every time he said this to himself—and he said it pretty often that evening—there would arise before his mind's eye a vision of the sweet blue eyes of Miss Lee's stately companion. What eyes they were, to be sure! It made Philip's blood run warm and quick

merely to think of them; indeed, he could almost find it in his heart to wish that Hilda was Maria and Maria was in Hilda's shoes.

What between thoughts of the young lady he had set himself to marry, and of the young lady he did not mean to marry, but whose eyes he admired, Philip did not sleep so well as usual that night.

Chapter V

Philip did not neglect to go to luncheon at Rewtham house, and a very pleasant luncheon it was; indeed, it would have been difficult for him to have said which he found the pleasantest: Maria's cheerful chatter and flattering preference, or Hilda's sweet and gracious presence.

After luncheon, at Maria's invitation he gave Fraulein von Holtzhausen her first lesson in writing in English character; and to speak truth he found the task of guiding her fair hand through the mysteries of the English alphabet a by no means uncongenial occupation. When he came away his admiration of Hilda's blue eyes was more pronounced than ever; but, on the other hand, so was his conviction that he would be very foolish if he allowed it to interfere with his intention of making Maria Lee his wife.

He who would drive two women thus in double harness must needs have a light hand and a ready lash, and it is certainly to the credit of Philip's cleverness that he managed so well as he did. For as time went on he discovered his position to be this. Both Hilda and Maria were in love with him, the former deeply and silently, the latter openly and ostensibly. Now, however gratifying this fact might be to his pride, it was in some ways a thorny discovery, since he dared not visibly pay his attentions to either. For his part he returned Hilda von Holtzhausen's devotion to a degree that surprised himself; his passion for her burnt him like a fire, utterly searing away the traces of his former affection for Maria Lee. Under these circumstances, most young men of twenty-one would have thrown prudence to the winds and acknowledged, either by acts or words, the object of their love; but not so Philip, who even at that age was by no means deficient in the characteristic caution of the Caresfoot family. He saw clearly that his father would never consent to his marriage with Hilda, nor, to speak truth, did he himself at all like the idea of losing Miss Lee and her estates.

On the other hand, he knew Hilda's proud and jealous mind. She was no melting beauty who would sigh and submit to an affront, but, for all her gracious ways, at heart a haughty woman, who, if she reigned at all, would reign like Alexander, unrivalled and alone. That she was well aware of her friend's tendresse for Philip the latter very shortly guessed; indeed, as he suspected, Maria was in the habit of confiding to her all her hopes and fears connected with himself, a suspicion that made him very careful in his remarks to that young lady.

The early summer passed away whilst Philip was still thinking over his position, and the face of the country was blushing with all the glory of July, when one afternoon he found himself, as he did pretty frequently, in the shady drawing-room at Miss Lee's. As he entered, the sound of voices told him that there were other visitors beside himself, and, as soon as his eyes had grown accustomed to the light, he saw his cousin George, together with his partner Mr. Bellamy, and a lady with whom he was not acquainted.

George had improved in appearance somewhat since we last saw him meeting with severe treatment at his cousin's hands. The face had filled up a little, with the result that the nose did not look so hooked, nor the thick lips so coarse and sensual. The hair, however, was as red as ever, and as for the small, light-blue eyes, they twinkled with the added sharpness and lustre that four years of such experience of the shady side of humanity as can be gathered in a lawyer's office, is able to give to the student of men and manners.

So soon as Philip had said how-do-you-do to Maria and Hilda, giving to each a gentle pressure of the hand, George greeted him with warmth.

"How are you, Philip? delighted to see you; how is my uncle? Bellamy saw him this morning, and thought that he did not look well."

"I certainly did think, Mr. Philip," said the gentleman alluded to, a very young-looking, apple-faced little man, with a timid manner, who stood in the background nervously rubbing his dry hands together—"I certainly did think that the squire looked aged when I saw him this morning."

"Well, you see, Mr. Bellamy, eighty-two is a good age, is it not?" said Philip, cheerfully.

"Yes, Mr. Philip, a good age, a very good age, for the *next heir*," and Mr. Bellamy chuckled softly somewhere down in his throat, and retreated a little.

"He is getting facetious," broke in George, "that marriage has done that for him. By the way, Philip, do you know Mrs. Bellamy? she has only been down here a fortnight, you know. What, no! Then you have a pleasure to come" (raising his voice so that it might be heard at the other end of the room), "a very clever woman, and as handsome as she is clever."

"Indeed! I must ask you to introduce me presently, Mr. Bellamy. I only recently heard that you were married."

Mr. Bellamy blushed and twisted and was about to speak, when George cut in again.

"No, I dare say you didn't; sly dog, Bellamy; do you know what he did? I introduced him to the lady when we were up in town together last Christmas. I was dreadfully hard hit myself, I can assure you, and as soon as my back was turned he went and cut me out of the water—and turned my adored into Mrs. Bellamy."

"What are you taking my name in vain about, Mr. Caresfoot?" said a rich, low voice behind them.

"Bless me, Anne, how softly you move, you quite startled me," said little Mr. Bellamy, putting on his spectacles in an agitated manner.

"My dear, a wife, like an embodied conscience, should always be at her husband's shoulder, especially when he does not know it."

Bellamy made no reply, but looked as though the sentiment was one of which he did not approve; meantime the lady repeated her question to George, and the two fell into a bantering conversation. Philip, having dropped back a little, had an opportunity of carefully observing Mrs. Bellamy, an occupation not without interest, for she was certainly worthy of notice.

About twenty years of age, and of medium height, her figure was so finely proportioned and so roomily made that it gave her the appearance of being taller than she really was. The head was set squarely on the shoulders, the hair was cut short, and clustered in ringlets over the low, broad brow; whilst the clearly carved Egyptian features and square chin gave the whole face a curious expression of resoluteness and power. The eyes were heavily-lidded and greyish-green in hue, with enormously large dark pupils that had a strange habit of expanding and contracting without apparent reason.

Gazing at her, Philip was at a loss to know whether this woman so bizarrely beautiful fascinated or repelled him; indeed, neither then nor at any future time did he succeed in deciding the question. Whilst he was still contemplating, and wondering how Bellamy of all people in the world had managed to marry such a woman, and what previous acquaintance George had had with her, he saw the lady whisper something to his cousin, who at once turned and introduced him.

"Philip," he said, "let me introduce you to the most charming lady of my acquaintance, Mrs. Bellamy."

Philip bowed and expressed himself delighted, whilst the lady curtsied with a mixture of grace and dignity that became her infinitely well.

"Your cousin has often spoken to me of you, Mr. Caresfoot, but he never told me—" here she hesitated, and broke off.

"What did he never tell you, Mrs. Bellamy? Nothing to my disadvantage, I hope."

"On the contrary, if you wish to know," she said, in that tone of flattering frankness which is sometimes so charming in a woman's mouth, "he never told me that you were young and handsome. I fancied you forty at least."

"I should dearly like to tell you, Mrs. Bellamy, what my cousin George never told *me*; but I won't, for fear I should make Bellamy jealous."

"Jealousy, Mr. Caresfoot, is a luxury that *my* husband is not allowed to indulge in; it is very well for lovers, but what is a compliment in a lover becomes an impertinence in a husband. But if I

keep you here much longer, I shall be drawing the enmity of Miss Lee, and—yes, of Fraulein von Holtzhausen, too, on to my devoted head, and, as that is the only sort of jealousy I have any fear of, or indeed any respect for, being as it is the expression of the natural abhorrence of one woman for another, I had rather avoid it.”

Philip followed the direction of her sleepy eyes, and saw that both Miss Lee and Hilda appeared to be put out. The former was talking absently to Mr. Bellamy, and glancing continually in the direction of that gentleman’s wife. The latter, too, whilst appearing to listen to some compliment from George, was gazing at Mrs. Bellamy with a curious look of dislike and apprehension in her face.

“You see what I mean; Fraulein von Holtzhausen actually looks as though she were afraid of me. Can you fancy any one being afraid of me, except my husband, of course?—for as you know, when a woman is talking of men, her husband is *always* excepted. Come, we must be going; but, Mr. Caresfoot, bend a little nearer; if you will accept it from such a stranger, I want to give you a bit of advice—make your choice pretty soon, or you will lose them both.”

“What do you mean—how do you know—”

“I mean nothing at all, or just as much as you like, and for the rest I use my eyes. Come, let us join the others.”

A few minutes later Hilda put down her work, and, declaring that she felt hot, threw open the French window and went out into the garden, whither, on some pretext or other, Philip followed her.

“What a lovely woman that is,” said Mrs. Bellamy, with enthusiasm, to Miss Lee, as soon as Philip was out of earshot. “Her *tout ensemble* positively kills one. I feel plain and dowdy as a milkmaid alongside of a Court-beauty when I am in the room with her. Don’t you, Miss Lee?”

“Oh, I don’t know, I never thought about it, but of course she is lovely and I’m plain, so there is no possibility of comparison between us.”

“Well, I think you rate yourself rather low, if you will allow me to say so; but most women would but ‘poorly satisfy the sight’ of a man when she was present. I know that I should not care to trust my admirer (if I had one), however devoted he might be, for a single day in her company; would you?”

“I really don’t know; what *do* you mean?”

“Mean, Miss Lee, why I mean nothing at all; what should I mean, except that beauty is a magnet which attracts all men; it serves them for a standard of morality and a test of right and wrong. Men are different from women. If a man is faithful to one of us, it is only because no other woman of sufficient charm has become between him and us. You can never trust a man.”

“What dreadful ideas you have.”

“Do you think so? I hope not. I only speak what I have observed. Take the case of Fraulein von Holtzhausen, for instance. Did you not notice that whilst she was in the room the eyes of the three gentlemen were all fixed upon her, and as soon as she leaves it one of them follows her, as the others would have done had they not been forestalled? One cannot blame them; they are simply following a natural law. Any other man would do the same where such a charming person is concerned.”

“I certainly did not notice it; indeed, to speak the truth, I thought that they were more occupied with you—”

“With me! why, my dear Miss Lee, *I* don’t set up for being good-looking. What a strange idea. But I dare say you are right, it is only one of my theories based upon my own casual observations, and, after all, men are not a very interesting subject, are they? Let’s talk of something more exciting—dresses, for instance.”

But poor Maria was too uncomfortable and disturbed to talk of anything else, so she collapsed into silence, and shortly after Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy and George made their adieux.

Meanwhile Philip and Hilda had been walking leisurely down the shrubberies adjoining the house.

“Why have you come out?” she asked in German, a language he understood well.

“To walk with you. Why do you speak to me in German?”

"Because it is my pleasure to do so, and I never asked you to walk with me. You are wanted in the drawing-room, you had better go back."

"No, I won't go, Hilda; that is, not until you have promised me something."

"Do not call me Hilda, if you please. I am the Fraulein von Holtzhausen. What is it you want me to promise?"

"I want you to meet me this evening at nine o'clock in the summer-house."

"I think, Mr. Caresfoot, that you are forgetting a little what is due to me, to yourself, and—to Miss Lee?"

"What do you mean by due to Miss Lee?"

"Simply that she is in love with you, and that you have encouraged her in her affection; you need not contradict me, she tells me all about it."

"Nonsense, Hilda; if you will meet me to-night, I will explain everything; there is no need for you to be jealous."

She swept round upon him, tossing her head, and stamping her dainty foot upon the gravel.

"Mr. Caresfoot," she said, "once and for all I am not jealous, and I will not meet you; I have too much respect for myself, and too little for you," and she was gone.

Philip's face, as he stood looking after her, was not pleasant to see; it was very hard and angry.

"Jealous, is she? I will give her something to be jealous for, the proud minx;" and in his vexation he knocked off the head of a carnation with his stick.

"Philip, what *are* you doing? Those are my pet Australian carnations; at least, I think they are Australian. How can you destroy them like that?"

"All right, Maria; I was only plucking one for you. Won't you put it in your dress? Where are the others?"

"They have all gone. Come in, it is so hot out there; and tell me what you think of Mrs. Bellamy."

"I think that she is very handsome and very clever. I wonder where Bellamy picked her up."

"I don't know; I wish he hadn't picked her up at all. I don't like her, she says unpleasant things; and, though I have only seen her three times, she seems to know all about me and everybody else. I am not very quick; but do you know just now I thought that she was insinuating that you were in love with Hilda; that's not true, is it, Philip? Don't think me forward if I ask you if that is true, and if I say that, if it is, it is better that I should know it. I sha'n't be angry, Philip;" and the girl stood before him to await his answer, one hand pressed against her bosom to still the beating of her heart, whilst with the other she screened her blushing brow.

And Philip too stood face to face with her sweet self, with conscience, and with opportunity. "Now," whispered conscience, "is the time, before very much harm is done; now is the acceptable time to tell her all about it, and, whilst forbidding her love, to enlist her sympathy and friendship. It will be wrong to encourage her affection; when you ardently love another woman, you cannot palter any more." "Now," whispered opportunity, shouldering conscience aside, "is the time to secure her, her love, and her possessions, and to reward Hilda for her pride. Do not sacrifice yourself to an infatuation; do not tell her about Hilda—it would only breed jealousies; you can settle with her afterwards. Take the goods the gods provide you."

All this and more passed through his mind; and he had made his choice long before the rich blood that mantled in the lady's cheek had sunk back to the true breast from whence it came.

Oh, instant of time born to colour all eternity to thine own hue, for this man thou hast come and gone! Oh, fleeting moment, bearing desolation or healing on thy wings, how the angels, in whose charge lie the souls of men, must tremble and turn pale, as they mark thy flight through the circumstances of a man's existence, and thence taking thy secrets with thee away to add thy fateful store to the records of his past!

He took her hand, the hand that was pressed upon her bosom.

"Maria," he said, "you should not get such ideas into your head. I admire Hilda very much, and that is all. Why, dear, I have always looked upon myself as half engaged to you—that is, so far as I am concerned; and I have only been waiting till circumstances would allow me to do so, to ask you if you think me worth marrying."

For a while she made no reply, but only blushed the more; at last she looked up a little.

"You have made me very happy, Philip." That was all she said.

"I am very glad, dear, that you can find anything in me to like; but if you do care for me, and think me worth waiting for, I am going to ask something of your affection: I am going to ask you to trust me as well as to love me. I do not, for reasons that I will not enter into, but which I beg you to believe are perfectly straightforward, wish anything to be said of our engagement at present, not even to your friend Hilda. Do you trust me sufficiently to agree to that?"

"Philip, I trust you as much as I love you, and for years I have loved you with all my heart. And now, dear, please go; I want to think."

In the hall a servant gave him a note; it was from Hilda, and ran thus —

"I have changed my mind. I will meet you in the summer-house this evening. I have something to say to you."

Philip whistled as he read it.

"Devilish awkward," he thought to himself; "if I am going to marry Maria, she must leave this. But I cannot bear to part with her. I love her! I love her!"

Chapter VI

It was some time before Philip could make up his mind whether or no he would attend his tryst with Hilda. In the first place, he felt that it was an unsafe proceeding generally, inasmuch as moonlight meetings with so lovely a person might, should they come to the knowledge of Miss Lee, be open to misconstruction; and particularly because, should she show the least tenderness towards him, he knew in his heart that he could not trust himself, however much he might be engaged in another direction. At twenty-one the affections cannot be outraged with impunity, but have an awkward way of asserting themselves, ties of honour notwithstanding.

But as a rule, when in our hearts we wish to do anything, that thing must be bad indeed if we cannot find a satisfactory excuse for doing it; and so it was with Philip. Now, thought he to himself, would be his opportunity to inform Hilda of his relations with Maria Lee, and to put an end to his flirtation with her; for, ostensibly at any rate, it was nothing more than a very serious flirtation—that is to say, though there had been words of love, and even on her part a passionate avowal of affection, wrung in an unguarded moment from the depths of her proud heart, there had been no formal engagement. It was a thing that must be done, and now was the time to do it. And so he made up his mind to go.

But when, that night, he found himself sitting in the appointed place, and waiting for the coming of the woman he was about to discard, but whom he loved with all the intensity of his fierce nature, he began to view the matter in other lights, and to feel his resolution oozing from him. Whether it was the silence of the place that told upon his nerves, strained as they were with expectation—for silence, and more especially silence by night, is a great unveiler of realities,—or the dread of bitter words, or the prescience of the sharp pang of parting—for he knew enough of Hilda to know that, what he had to say once said, she would trouble him no more—whether it was these things, or whatever it was that affected him, he grew most unaccountably anxious and depressed. Moreover, in this congenial condition of the atmosphere of his mind, all its darker and hidden characteristics sprang into a vigorous growth. Superstitions and presentiments crowded in upon him. He peopled his surroundings with the shades of intangible deeds that yet awaited doing, and grew afraid of his own thoughts. He would have fled from the spot, but he could not fly; he could only watch the flicker of the moonlight upon the peaceful pool beside him, and—wait.

At last she came with quick and anxious steps, and, though but a few minutes before he had dreaded her coming, he now welcomed it eagerly. For our feelings, of whatever sort, when directed towards each other, are so superficial as compared with the intensity of our fears when we are terrified by calamity, or the presence, real or fancied, of the unknown, that in any moment of emergency, more especially if it be of a mental kind, we are apt to welcome our worst enemy as a drowning man welcomes a spar.

"At last," he said, with a sigh of relief. "How late you are!"

"I could not get away. There were some people to dinner;" and then, in a softened voice, "How pale you look! Are you ill?"

"No, only a little tired."

After this there was silence, and the pair stood facing one another, each occupied with their own thoughts, and each dreading to put them into words. Once Philip made a beginning of speech, but his voice failed him; the beating of his heart seemed to choke his utterance.

At length she leaned, as though for support, against the trunk of a pine-tree, in the boughs of which the night breeze was whispering, and spoke in a cold clear voice.

"You asked me to meet you here to-night. Have you anything to say to me? No, do not speak; perhaps I had better speak first. I have something to say to you, and what I have to say may influence

whatever is in your mind. Listen; you remember what passed between us nearly a month ago, when I was so weak as to let you see how much I loved you?"

Philip bowed his head in assent.

"Very good. I have come here to-night, not to give you any lover's meeting, but to tell you that no such words must be spoken again, and that I am about to make it impossible that they should be spoken either by you or by me. I am going away from here, *never*, I hope, to return."

"Going away!" he gasped. "When?"

Here was the very thing he hoped for coming to pass, and yet the words that should have been so full of comfort fell upon him cold as ice, and struck him into misery.

"When! why, to-morrow morning. A relation of mine is ill in Germany, the only one I have. I never saw him, and care nothing for him, but it will give me a pretext; and, once gone, I shall not return. I have told Maria that I must go. She cried about it, poor girl."

At these words, all recollection of his purpose passed out of Philip's mind; all he realized was that, unless he could alter her determination, he was about to lose the woman he so passionately adored, and whose haughty pride was to him in itself more charming than all poor Maria's gentle love.

"Hilda, do not go," he said, seizing her hand, which she immediately withdrew; "do not leave me. You know how I love you."

"And why should I not leave you, even supposing it to be true that you do love me? To my cost I love you, and am I any longer to endure the daily humiliation of seeing myself, the poor German companion, who has nothing but her beauty, put aside in favour of another whom I also love. You say you love me, and bid me stay; now, tell me what is your purpose towards me? Do you intend to try to take advantage of my infatuation to make me your mistress? It is, I am told, a common thing for such proposals to be made to women in my position, whom it would be folly for wealthy gentlemen to marry. If so, abandon that idea; for I tell you, Philip, that I would rather die than so disgrace my ancient name to gratify myself. I know you money-loving English do not think very much of race unless the bearers of the name are rich; but we do; and, although you would think it a *mesalliance* to marry me, I, on the other hand, should not be proud of an alliance with you. Why, Philip, my ancestors were princes of royal blood when yours still herded the swine in these woods. I can show more than thirty quarterings upon my shield, each the mark of a noble house, and I will not be the first to put a bar sinister across them. Now, I have spoken plainly, indelicately perhaps, and there is only one more word to be said between us, and that word is *good-bye*," and she held out her hand.

He did not seem to see it; indeed, he had scarcely heard the latter part of what she said. Presently he lifted his face, and it bore traces of a dreadful inward struggle. It was deadly pale, and great black rings had painted themselves beneath the troubled eyes.

"Hilda," he said, hoarsely, "don't go; I cannot bear to let you go. I will marry you."

"Think of what you are saying, Philip, and do not be rash. I do not wish to entrap you into marriage. You love money. Remember that Maria, with all her possessions, asks nothing better than to become your wife, and that I have absolutely nothing but my name and my good looks. Look at me," and she stepped out into a patch of moonlight that found its way between the trees, and, drawing the filmy shawl she wore from her head and bare neck and bosom, stood before him in all the brightness of her beauty, shaded as it was, and made more lovely by the shadows of the night.

"Examine me very carefully," she went on, with bitter sarcasm, "look into my features and study my form and carriage, or you may be disappointed with your bargain, and complain that you have not got your money's worth. Remember, too, that an accident, an illness, and at the best the passage of a few years, may quite spoil my value as a beautiful woman, and reflect, before I take you at your word."

Philip had sat or rather crouched himself down upon the log of a tree that lay outside the summer-house, and covered his face with his hand, as though her loveliness was more than he could bear to look upon. Now, however, he raised his eyes and let them dwell upon her scornful features.

"I had rather," he said slowly—"I had rather lose my life than lose you; I love you so that I would buy you at the price even of my honour. When will you marry me?"

"What, have you made up your mind so quickly? Are you sure? Then," —and here she changed her whole tone and bearing, and passionately stretched out her arms towards him,— "my dearest Philip, my life, my love, I will marry you when you will."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, if you like!"

"You must promise me something first."

"What is it?"

"That you will keep the marriage a complete secret, and bear another name until my father's death. If you do not, he will most probably disinherit me."

"I do not like your terms, Philip. I do not like secret marriages; but you are giving up much to marry me, so I suppose I must give up something to marry you."

"You solemnly promise that nothing shall induce you to reveal that you are my wife until I give you permission to do so?"

"I promise—that is, provided you do not force me to in self- defence."

Philip laughed.

"You need not fear that," he said. "But how shall we arrange about getting married?"

"I can meet you in London."

"Very well. I will go up early to-morrow, and get a licence, and then on Wednesday I can meet you, and we can be married."

"As you will, Philip; where shall I meet you?"

He gave her an address which she carefully noted down.

"Now," she said, "you must go, it is late. Yes, you may kiss me now. There, that will do, now go." In another minute he was gone.

"I have won the game," she mused; "poor Maria. I am sorry for her, but perhaps hers is the better part. She will get over it, but mine is a sad fate; I love passionately, madly, but I do not trust the man I love. Why should our marriage be so secret? He cannot be entangled with Maria, or she would have told me." And she stretched out her arms towards the path by which he had left her, and cried aloud, in the native tongue that sounded so soft upon her lips, "Oh, my heart's darling! if I could only trust you as well as I love you, it is a happy woman that I should be to-night."

Chapter VII

Nothing occurred to interfere with the plan of action decided on by Hilda and Philip; no misadventure came to mock them, dashing the Tantalus cup of joy to earth before their eyes. On the contrary, within forty-eight hours of the conversation recorded in the last chapter, they were as completely and irrevocably man and wife, as a special licence and the curate of a city church, assisted by the clerk and the pew-opener, could make them.

Then followed a brief period of such delirium as turned the London lodgings, dingy and stuffy as they were in the height of the hot summer, into an earthly paradise, a garden of Eden, into which, alas! the serpent had no need to seek an entrance. But, as was natural, when the first glory of realized happiness was beginning to grow faint on their horizon, the young couple turned themselves to consider their position, and found in it, mutually and severally, many things that did not please them. For Philip, indeed, it was full of anxieties, for he had many complications to deal with. First there was his secret engagement to Maria Lee, of which, be it remembered, his wife was totally ignorant, and which was in itself a sufficiently awkward affair for a married man to have on his hands. Then there was the paramount need of keeping his marriage with Hilda as secret as the dead, to say nothing of the necessity of his living, for the most part, away from his wife. Indeed, his only consolation was that he had plenty of money on which to support her, inasmuch as his father had, from the date of his leaving Oxford, made him an allowance of one thousand a year.

Hilda had begun to discover that she was not without her troubles. For one thing, her husband's fits of moodiness and fretful anxiety troubled her, and led her, possessed as she was with a more than ordinary share of womanly shrewdness, to suspect that he was hiding something from her. But what chiefly vexed her proud nature was the necessity of concealment, and all its attendant petty falsehoods and subterfuges. It was not pleasant for Hilda Caresfoot to have to pass as Mrs. Roberts, and to be careful not to show herself in public places in the daytime, where there was a possibility of her being seen by any one who might recognize in her striking figure the lady who had lived with Miss Lee in Marlshire. It was not pleasant to her to be obliged to reply to Maria Lee's affectionate letters, full as they were of entreaty for her return, by epistles that had to be forwarded to a country town in a remote district of Germany to be posted, and which were in themselves full of lies that, however white they might have seemed under all the circumstances, she felt in her conscience to be very black indeed. In short, there was in their union none of that sense of finality and of security that is, under ordinary circumstances, the distinguishing mark of marriage in this country; it partook rather of the nature of an illicit connection.

At the end of a fortnight of wedded bliss all these little things had begun to make themselves felt, and in truth they were but the commencement of evils. For, one afternoon, Philip, for the first time since his wedding, tore himself away from his wife's side, and paid a visit to a club to which he had been recently elected. Here he found no less than three letters from his father, the first requesting his return, the second commanding it in exceptionally polite language, and the third—which, written in mingled anxiety and anger, had just arrived—coolly announcing his parent's intention, should he not hear of him by return, of setting detective officers to work to discover his whereabouts. From this letter it appeared, indeed, that his cousin George had already been despatched to London to look for him, and on reference to the hall porter he discovered that a gentleman answering to his description had already inquired for him several times.

Cursing his own folly in not having kept up some communication with his father, he made the best of his way back to his lodgings, to find Hilda waiting for him somewhat disconsolately.

"I am glad you have come back, love," she said, drawing him towards her till his dark curls mingled with her own fair locks, and kissing him upon the forehead. "I have missed you dreadfully. I don't understand how I can have lived all these years without you."

"I am afraid, dear, you will have to live without me for a while now; listen," and he read her the letters he had just received.

She listened attentively till he had finished.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, with some anxiety in her voice.

"Do? why of course I must go home at once."

"And what am I to do?"

"Well, I don't know; I suppose that you must stop here."

"That will be pleasant for me, will it not?"

"No, dear, it will be pleasant neither for you nor me; but what can I do? You know the man my father is to deal with; if I stop here in defiance to his wishes, especially as he has been anxious about me, there is no knowing what might not happen. Remember, Hilda, that we have to deal with George, whose whole life is devoted to secret endeavours to supplant me. If I were to give him such an opportunity as I should by stopping away now, I should deserve all I got, or rather all I did not get."

Hilda sighed and acquiesced; had she been a softer-minded woman she would have wept and relieved her feelings, but she was not soft-minded. And so, before the post went out, he wrote an affectionate letter to his father, expressing his sorrow at the latter's anxiety at his own negligence in not having written to him, the fact of the matter being, he said, that he had been taken up with visiting some of his Oxford friends, and had not till that afternoon been near his club to look for letters. He would, however, he added, return on the morrow, and make his apologies in person.

This letter he handed to his wife to read.

"Do you think that will do?" he asked, when she had finished.

"Oh, yes!" she replied, with a touch of her old sarcasm, "it is a masterpiece of falsehood."

Philip looked very angry, and fumed and fretted; but he made no reply, and on the following morning he departed to Bratham Abbey.

"Ah, Philip, Philip!" said his father, under the mellow influence of his fourth glass of port, on the night of his arrival. "I know well enough what kept you up in town. Well, well, I don't complain, young men will be young men; but don't let these affairs interfere with the business of life. Remember Maria Lee, my boy; you have serious interests in that direction, interests that must not be trifled with, interests that I have a right to expect you will *not* trifle with."

His son made no reply, but sipped his wine in silence, aching at his heart for his absent bride, and wondering what his father would say did he really know what had "kept him in town."

After this, matters went on smoothly enough for a month or more; since, fortunately for Philip, the great Maria Lee question, a question that the more he considered it the more thorny did it appear, was for the moment shelved by the absence of that young lady on a visit to her aunt in the Isle of Wight. Twice during that month he managed, on different pretexts, to get up to London and visit his wife, whom he found as patient as was possible under the circumstances, but anything but happy. Indeed, on the second occasion, she urged on him strongly the ignominy of her position, and even begged him to make a clean breast of it to his father, offering to undertake the task herself. He refused equally warmly, and some sharp words ensued to be, however, quickly followed by a reconciliation.

On his return from this second visit, Philip found a note signed "affectionately yours, Maria Lee," waiting for him, which announced that young lady's return, and begged him to come over to lunch on the following day.

He went—indeed, he had no alternative but to go; and again fortune favoured him in the person of a diffident young lady who was stopping with Maria, and who never left her side all that afternoon, much to the disgust of the latter and the relief of Philip. One thing, however, he was not spared, and that was the perusal of Hilda's last letter to her friend, written apparently from Germany, and giving a lively description of the writer's daily life and the state of her uncle's health, which, she said, precluded all possibility of her return. Alas! he already knew its every line too well; for, as Hilda refused to undertake the task, he had but a week before drafted it himself. But Philip was growing

hardened to deception, and found it possible to read it from end to end, and speculate upon its contents with Maria without blush or hesitation.

But he could not always expect to find Miss Lee in the custody of such an obtuse friend; and, needless to say, it became a matter of very serious importance to him to know how he should treat her. It occurred to him that his safest course might be to throw himself upon her generosity and make a clean breast of it; but when it came to the point he was too weak to thus expose his shameful conduct to the woman whose heart he had won, and to whom he was bound by every tie of honour that a gentleman holds sacred.

He thought of the scornful wonder with which she would listen to his tale, and preferred to take the risk of greater disaster in the future to the certainty of present shame. In the end, he contrived to establish a species of confidential intimacy with Maria, which, whilst it somewhat mystified the poor girl, was not without its charm, inasmuch as it tended to transform the every-day Philip into a hero of romance.

But in the main Maria was ill-suited to play heroine to her wooer's hero. Herself as open as the daylight, it was quite incomprehensible to her why their relationship should be kept such a dark and mysterious secret, or why, if her lover gave her a kiss, it should be done with as many precautions as though he were about to commit a murder.

She was a very modest maiden, and in her heart believed it a wonderful thing that Philip should have fallen in love with her—a thing to be very proud of; and she felt it hard that she should be denied the gratification of openly acknowledging her lover, and showing him off to her friends, after the fashion that is so delightful to the female mind.

But, though this consciousness of the deprivation of a lawful joy set up a certain feeling of irritation in her mind, she did not allow it to override her entire trust in and love for Philip. Whatever he did was no doubt wise and right; but, for all that, on several occasions she took an opportunity to make him acquainted with her views of the matter, and to ask him questions that he found it increasingly difficult to answer.

In this way, by the exercise of ceaseless diplomacy, and with the assistance of a great deal of falsehood of the most artistic nature, Philip managed to tide over the next six months; but at the end of that time the position was very far from improved. Hilda was chafing more and more at the ignominy of her position; Maria was daily growing more and more impatient to have their engagement made public; and last, but by no means least, his father was almost daily at him on the subject of Miss Lee, till at length he succeeded in wringing from him the confession that there existed some sort of understanding between Maria and himself.

Now, the old squire was a shrewd man of the world, and was not therefore slow to guess that what prevented this understanding from being openly acknowledged as an engagement was some entanglement on his son's part. Indeed, it had recently become clear to him that London had developed strange attractions for Philip. That this entanglement could be marriage was, however, an idea that never entered into his head; he had too good an opinion of his son's common-sense to believe it possible that he would deliberately jeopardize his inheritance by marrying without his permission. But Philip's reluctance and obstinacy annoyed him excessively. "Devil" Caresfoot was not a man accustomed to be thwarted; indeed, he had never been thwarted in his life, and he did not mean to be now. He had set his heart upon this marriage, and it would have to be a good reason that could turn him from his purpose.

Accordingly, having extracted the above information, he said no more to Philip, but proceeded to lay his own plans.

That very afternoon he commenced to put them into action. At three o'clock he ordered the carriage and pair, a vehicle that was rarely used, giving special directions that the coachman should see that his wig was properly curled. An ill-curled wig had before now been known to produce a very bad effect upon Mr. Caresfoot's nerves, and also upon its wearer's future prospects in life.

At three precisely the heavy open carriage, swung upon C-springs and drawn by two huge greys, drew up in front of the hall-door, and the squire, who was as usual dressed in the old-fashioned knee-breeches, and carried in his hand his gold-headed cane, stepped solemnly into it, and seated himself exactly in the middle of the back seat, not leaning back, as is the fashion of our degenerate days, but holding himself bolt upright. Any more imposing sight than this old gentleman presented thus seated, and moving at a stately pace through the village street, it is impossible to conceive; but it so oppressed the very children that fear at the spectacle (which was an unwonted one, for the squire had not thus driven abroad in state for some years) overcame their curiosity, and at his approach they incontinently fled.

So soon as the carriage had passed through the drive-gates of the Abbey, the squire ordered the coachman to drive to Rewtham House, whither in due course he safely arrived.

He was ushered into the drawing-room, whilst a servant went in search of Miss Lee, whom she found walking in the garden.

"A gentleman to see you, miss."

"I am not at home. Who is it?"

"Mr. Caresfoot, miss!"

"Oh, why didn't you say so before?" and taking it for granted that Philip had paid her an unexpected visit, she started off for the house at a run.

"Why, Philip," she exclaimed, as she swung open the door, "this *is* good of you, o—oh!" for at that moment Mr. Caresfoot senior appeared from behind the back of the door where he had been standing by the fireplace, and made his most imposing bow.

"That, my dear Maria, was the first time that I have heard myself called Philip for many a long year, and I fear that that was by accident; neither the name nor the blush were meant for me; now, where they?"

"I thought," replied Maria, who was still overwhelmed with confusion, "I thought that it was Philip, your son, you know; he has not been here for so long."

"With such a welcome waiting him, it is indeed wonderful that he can keep away;" and the old squire bowing again with such courtly grace as to drive what little self-possession remained to poor Maria after her flying entry entirely out of her head.

"And now, my dear," went on her visitor, fixing his piercing eyes upon her face, "with your permission, we will sit down and have a little talk together. Won't you take off your hat?"

Maria took off her hat as suggested, and sat down meekly, full under fire of the glowing eyes that had produced such curious effects upon subjects so dissimilar as the late Mrs. Caresfoot and Jim Brady. She could, however, think of nothing appropriate to say.

"My dear," the old gentleman continued presently, "the subject upon which I have taken upon myself to speak to you is one very nearly affecting your happiness and also of a delicate nature. My excuse for alluding to it must be that you are the child of my old friend—ah! we were great friends fifty years ago, my dear—and that I have myself a near interest in the matter. Do you understand me?"

"No, not quite."

"Well then, forgive an old man, who has no time to waste, if he comes to the point. I mean I have come to ask you, Maria, if any understanding or engagement exists between Philip and yourself?"

The eyes were full upon her now, and she felt that they were drawing her secret from her as a corkscrew does a cork. At last it came out with a pop.

"Yes, we are engaged."

"Thank you, my dear. How long have you been engaged?"

"About eight months."

"And why has the affair been kept so secret?"

"I don't know; Philip wished it. He told me not to tell any one. I suppose that I should not by rights have told you."

"Make yourself easy, my dear. Philip has already told me that there was an understanding between you; I only wanted to hear the confirmation of such good news from your own lips. Young men are great coxcombs, my dear, and apt to fancy things where ladies are concerned. I am rejoiced to hear that there is no mistake on his part."

"I am so glad that you are pleased," she said shyly.

"Pleased, my dear!" said the old gentleman, rising and walking up and down the room in his excitement, "pleased is not the word for it. I am more rejoiced than if some one had left me another estate. Look here, Maria, I had set my heart upon this thing coming to pass; I have thought of it for years. I loved your father, and you are like your father, girl; ay, I love you too, because you are a generous, honest woman, and will bring a good strain of blood into a family that wants generosity—ay, and I sometimes think wants honesty too. And then your land runs into ours, and, as I can't buy it, I am glad that it should come in by marriage. I have always wanted to see the Abbey, Isleworth, and Rewtham estates in a ring fence before I died. Come and give me a kiss, my dear."

Maria did as she was bid.

"I will try to be a good daughter to you," she said, "if I marry Philip; but," and here her voice trembled a little, "I want to make you understand that, though this engagement exists, I have sometimes thought of late that perhaps he wanted to break it off, and—"

"Break it off?" almost shouted the old man, his eyes flashing. "Break it off; by God, the day he plays fast and loose with you, that day I leave the property to his cousin, George;—there, there, I frightened you, I beg your pardon, but in his own interest, Maria, I advise you to hold him fast to his word. To change the subject, your news has freshened me up so much that I mean to have a little company; will you come and dine with me next Thursday?"

"I shall be very glad, Mr. Caresfoot."

"Thank you; and perhaps till then you will not, unless he happens to ask you, mention the subject of our conversation to Philip. I want to have a talk with him first."

Maria assented, and the squire took his leave with the same magnificence of mien that had marked his arrival.

Chapter VIII

That evening his father astonished Philip by telling him that he intended to give a dinner-party on that day week.

"You see, Philip," he said, with a grim smile, "I have only got a year or so at the most before me, and I wish to see a little of my neighbours before I go. I have not had much society of late years. I mean to do the thing well while I am about it, and ask everybody in the neighbourhood. How many can dine with comfort in the old banqueting-hall, do you suppose?"

"About five-and-forty, I should think."

"Five-and-forty! I remember that we sat down sixty to dinner when I came of age, but then we were a little crowded; so we will limit the number to fifty."

"Are you going to have fifty people to dinner?" asked Philip aghast.

"Certainly; I shall ask you to come and help me to write the invitations presently. I have prepared a list; and will you kindly send over to Bell at Roxham. I wish to speak to him, he must bring his men over to do up the old hall a bit; and, by the way, write to Gunter's and order a man-cook to be here on Tuesday, and to bring with him materials for the best dinner for fifty people that he can supply. I will see after the wine myself; we will finish off that wonderful port my grandfather laid down. Now, bustle about, my lad, we have no time to lose; we must get all the notes out to-day."

Philip started to execute his orders, pretty well convinced in his own mind that his father was taking leave of his senses. Who ever heard of a dinner being given to fifty people before, especially in a house where such rare entertainments had always been of a traditionally select and solemn nature? The expense, too, reflected Philip, would be large; a man of his father's age had, in his opinion, no right to make such ducks-and-drakes of money that was so near to belonging to somebody else. But one thing was clear: his father had set his mind upon it, and when once that was the case to try to thwart him was more than Philip dared.

When the notes of invitation arrived at their respective destinations, great was the excitement in the neighbourhood of Bratham Abbey. Curiosity was rampant on the point, and the refusals were few and far between.

At length the eventful evening arrived, and with it the expected guests, among whom the old squire, in his dress of a past generation— resplendent in diamond buckles, frilled shirt-front, and silk stockings —was, with his snow-white hair and stately bearing, himself by far the most striking figure.

Standing near the door of the large drawing-room, he received his guests as they arrived with an air that would have done credit to an ambassador; but when Miss Lee entered, Philip noticed with a prophetic shudder that, in lieu of the accustomed bow, he gave her a kiss. He also noticed, for he was an observant man, that the gathered company was pervaded by a curious air of expectation. They were nearly all of them people who had been neighbours of the Caresfoot family for years—in many instances for generations— and as intimate with its members as the high-stomached stiffness of English country-life will allow. They therefore were well acquainted with the family history and peculiarities; but it was clear from their faces that their knowledge was of no help to them now, and that they were totally in the dark as to why they were all gathered together in this unwonted fashion.

At length, to the relief of all, the last of the chosen fifty guests put in an appearance, and dinner was announced. Everybody made his way to his allotted partner, and awaited the signal to move forward, when a fresh piquancy was added to the proceedings by an unexpected incident—in which Maria Lee played a principal part. Maria was sitting in a corner of the drawing-room, wondering if Philip was going to take her in to dinner, and why he had not been to see her lately, when suddenly she became aware that all the room was looking at her, and on raising her eyes she perceived the cause. For there, close upon her, and advancing with majestic step and outstretched arm, was old Mr. Caresfoot, possessed by the evident intention of taking her down in the full face of all the married

ladies and people of title present. She prayed that the floor might open and swallow her; indeed, of the two, she would have preferred that way of going down to dinner. But it did not, so there was no alternative left to her but to accept the proffered arm, and to pass, with as much dignity as she could muster in such a trying moment, in front of the intensely interested company—from which she could hear an involuntary murmur of surprise—through the wide-flung doors, down the great oak staircase loaded with exotics, thence along a passage carpeted with crimson cloth, and through double doors of oak that were flung open at their approach, into the banqueting-hall. On its threshold not only she, but almost every member of the company who passed in behind them, uttered an exclamation of surprise; and indeed the sight before them amply justified it.

The hall was a chamber of noble proportions, sixty feet in length by thirty wide. It was very lofty, and the dark chestnut beams of the beautiful arched roof were thrown into strong relief by the light of many candles. The walls were panelled to the roof with oak that had become almost black in the course of centuries, here and there relieved by portraits and shining suits of armour.

Down the centre of the room ran a long wide table, whereon, and on a huge sideboard, was spread the whole of the Caresfoot plate, which, catching the light of the suspended candles, threw it back in dazzling gleams till the beholder was positively bewildered with the brilliancy of the sight.

"Oh, how beautiful!" said Maria, in astonishment.

"Yes," answered the old gentleman as he took his seat at the head of the table, placing Maria on his right, "the plate is very fine, it has taken two hundred years to get together; but my father did more in that way than all of us put together, he spent ten thousand pounds on plate during his lifetime; that gold service on the sideboard belonged to him. I have only spent two. Mind, my love," he added in a low voice, "when it comes into your keeping that it is preserved intact; but I don't recommend you to add to it, there is too much already for a simple country gentleman's family."

Maria blushed and was silent.

The dinner, which was served on a most magnificent scale, wore itself away, as all big county-dinners do, in bursts of sedate but not profoundly interesting conversation. Indeed, had it not been for the novelty of the sight, Maria would have been rather bored, the squire's stately compliments notwithstanding. As it was, she felt inclined to envy the party at the other end, amongst whom, looking down the long vista of sparkling glass and silver, she could now and again catch sight of Philip's face beaming with animation, and even in the pauses of conversation hear the echo of his distant laughter.

"What good spirits he is in!" she thought to herself.

And, indeed, Philip was, or appeared to be, in excellent spirits. His handsome face, that of late had been so gloomy, was lit up with laughter, and he contrived by his witty talk to keep those round him in continual merriment.

"Philip seems very happy, doesn't he," said George, *sotto voce* to Mrs. Bellamy, who was sitting next to him.

"You must be a very bad judge of the face as an index to the mind if you think that he is happy. I have been watching him all dinner, and I draw a very different conclusion."

"Why, look how he is laughing."

"Have you never seen a man laugh to hide his misery; never mind his lips, watch his eyes: they are dilated with fear, see how he keeps glancing towards his father and Miss Lee. There, did you see him start? Believe me he is not happy, and unless I am mistaken he will be even less so before the night is over. We are not all asked here for nothing."

"I hope not, I hope not; if so we shall have to act upon our information, eh! But, to change the subject, you look lovely to-night."

"Of course I do, I *am* lovely; I wish I could return the compliment, but conscientiously I can't. Did you ever see such plate? look at that centre-piece."

"It is wonderful," said George. "I never saw it at all out before. I wonder," he added, with a sigh, "if I shall ever have the fingering of it."

"Yes," she said, with a strange look of her large eyes, "if you continue to be guided by me, you shall. I tell you so, and I *never* make mistakes. Hush, something is going to happen. What is it?"

The dinner had come to an end, and in accordance with the old-fashioned custom the cloth had been removed, leaving bare an ancient table of polished oak nearly forty feet in length, and composed of slabs of timber a good two inches thick.

When the wine had been handed round, the old squire motioned to the servants to leave the room, and then, having first whispered something in the ear of Miss Lee that caused her to turn very red, he slowly rose to his feet in the midst of a dead silence.

"Look at your cousin's face," whispered Mrs. Bellamy. George looked; it was ghastly pale, and the black eyes were gleaming like polished jet against white paper.

"Friends and neighbours, amongst whom or amongst whose fathers I have lived for so many years," began the speaker, whose voice, soft as it was, filled the great hall with ease, "it was, if tradition does not lie, in this very room and at this very table that the only Caresfoot who ever made an after-dinner speech of his own accord, delivered himself of his burden. That man was my ancestor in the eighth degree, old yeoman Caresfoot, and the occasion of his speech was to him a very important one, being the day on which he planted Caresfoot's Staff, the great oak by the water yonder, to mark the founding of a house of country gentry. Some centuries have elapsed since my forefather stood where I stand, most like with his hand upon this board as mine is now, and addressed a company not so fine or so well dressed, but perhaps—I mean no disrespect—on the whole, as good at heart as that before me now. Yes, the sapling oak has grown into the biggest tree in the country-side 'twixt then and now. It seems, therefore, to be fit that on what is to me as great a day as the planting of that oak was to my yeoman forefather, that I, like him, should gather my ancient friends and neighbours round me under the same ancient roof that I may, like him, make them the partakers of my joy.

"None of you sitting at this board to-day can look upon the old man who now asks your attention, without realizing what he himself has already learned: namely, that his day is over. Now, life is hard to quit. When a man grows old, the terrors of the unknown land loom just as large and terrible as they did to his youthful imagination, larger perhaps. But it is a fact that must be faced, a hard, inevitable fact. And age, realizing this, looks round it for consolations, and finds only two: first, that as its interests and affections *here* fade and fall away, in just that same proportion do they grow and gather *there* upon the further shore; and secondly that, after Nature's eternal fashion, the youth and vigour of a new generation is waiting to replace the worn-out decrepitude of that which sinks into oblivion. My life is done, it cannot be long before the churchyard claims its own, but I live again in my son; and take such cold comfort as I may from that idea of family, and of long-continued and assured succession, that has so largely helped to make this country what she is.

"But you will wonder what can be the particular purpose for which I have bidden you here to-night. Be assured that it was not to ask you to listen to gloomy sermons on the, to others, not very interesting fact of my approaching end, but rather for a joyful and a definite reason. One wish I have long had, it is—that before I go, I may see my son's child, the little Caresfoot that is to fill my place in future years, prattling about my knees. But this I shall never see. What I have to announce to you, however, is the first step towards it, my son's engagement to Miss Lee, the young lady on my right."

"Look at his face," whispered Mrs. Bellamy to her neighbour, during the murmur of applause that followed this announcement. "Look quick."

Philip had put his hands down upon his chair as though to raise himself up, and an expression of such mingled rage and terror swept across his features as, once seen, could not easily be forgotten. But so quickly did it pass that perhaps Mrs. Bellamy, who was watching, was the only one in all that company to observe it. In another moment he was smiling and bowing his acknowledgements to whispered and telegraphed congratulations.

"You all know Miss Lee," went on the old squire, "as you knew her father and mother before her; she is a sound shoot from an honest stock, a girl after my own heart, a girl that I love, and that all

who come under her influence will love, and this engagement is to me the most joyful news that I have heard for many a year. May God, ay, and man too, so deal with my son as he deals with Maria Lee!

"And now I have done; I have already kept you too long. With your consent, we will have no more speeches, no returning of thanks; we will spare Philip his blushes. But before I sit down I will bid you all farewell, for I am in my eighty-third year, and I feel that I shall never see very many of your faces again. I wish that I had been a better neighbour to you all, as there are many other things I wish, now that it is too late to fulfil them; but I still hope that some of you will now and again find a kind thought for the old man whom among yourselves you talk of as 'Devil Caresfoot.' Believe me, my friends, there is truth in the old proverb: the devil is not always as black as he is painted. I give you my toast, my son Philip and his affianced wife, Maria Lee."

The whole company rose, actuated by a common impulse, and drank the health standing; and such was the pathos of the old squire's speech, that there were eyes among those present that were not free from tears. Then the ladies retired, amongst them poor Maria, who was naturally upset at the unexpected, and, in some ways, unwelcome notoriety thus given to herself.

In the drawing-room, she was so overwhelmed with congratulations, that at last, feeling that she could not face a fresh edition from the male portion of the gathering, she ordered her carriage, and quietly slipped away home, to think over matters at her leisure.

Philip, too, came in for his share of honours down below, and acknowledged them as best he might, for he had not the moral courage to repudiate the position. He felt that his father had forced his hand completely, and that there was nothing to be done, and sank into the outward calmness of despair. But if his companions could have seen the whirlpool of hatred, terror, and fury that raged within his breast as he sat and chatted, and sipped his great-grandfather's port, they would have been justifiably astonished.

At length the banquet, for it was nothing less, came to an end, and, having bowed their farewell to the last departing guest, the old man and his son were left alone together in the deserted drawing-room. Philip was seated by a table, his face buried in his hand, whilst his father was standing by the dying fire, tapping his eye-glass nervously on the mantelpiece. It was he who broke the somewhat ominous silence.

"Well, Philip, how did you like my speech?"

Thus addressed, the son lifted his face from his hand; it was white as a sheet.

"By what authority," he asked in a harsh whisper, "did you announce me as engaged to Miss Lee?"

"By my own, Philip. I had it from both your lips that you were engaged. I did not choose that it should remain a secret any longer."

"You had no right to make that speech. I will not marry Miss Lee; understand once and for all, I will *not* marry her."

In speaking thus, Philip had nerved himself to bear one of those dreadful outbursts of fury that had earned his father his title; but, to his astonishment, none such came. The steely eyes glinted a little as he answered in his most polite manner, and that was all.

"Your position, Philip, then is that you are engaged, very publicly engaged, to a girl whom you have no intention of marrying—a very disgraceful position; mine is that I have, with every possible solemnity, announced a marriage that will not come off—a very ridiculous position. Very good, my dear Philip; please yourself. I cannot force you into a disgraceful marriage. But you must not suppose that you can thus thwart me with impunity. Allow me to show you the alternative. I see you are tired, but I shall not detain you long. Take that easy-chair. This house and the land round it, also the plate, which is very valuable, but cannot be sold—by the way, see that it is safely locked up before you go to bed—are strictly entailed, and must, of course belong to you. The value of the entailed land is about 1000 pounds a year, or a little less in bad times; of the unentailed, a clear 4000 pounds; of my personal property about 900 pounds. Should you persist in your refusal to marry Miss Lee, or

should the marriage in any way fall through, except from circumstances entirely beyond your control, I must, to use your own admirably emphatic language, ask you to ‘understand, once and for all,’ that, where your name appears in my will with reference to the unentailed and personal property, it will be erased, and that of your cousin George substituted. Please yourself, Philip, please yourself; it is a matter of entire indifference to me. I am very fond of George, and shall be glad to do him a good turn if you force me to it, though it is a pity to split up the property. But probably you will like to take a week to consider whether you prefer to stick to the girl you have got hold of up in town there—oh, yes! I know there is some one—and abandon the property, or marry Miss Lee and retain the property—a very pretty problem for an amorous young man to consider. There, I won’t keep you up any longer. Good night, Philip, good night. Just see to the plate, will you? Remember, you have a personal interest in that; I can’t leave it away.”

Philip rose without a word and left the room, but when he was gone it was his father’s turn to hide his face in his hands.

"Oh, God!" he groaned aloud, "to think that all my plans should come to such an end as this; to think that I am as powerless to prevent their collapse as a child is to support a falling tree; that the only power left me is the power of vengeance—vengeance on my own son. I have lived too long, and the dregs of life are bitter.”

Chapter IX

Poor Hilda found life in her London lodging anything but cheerful, and frequently begged Philip to allow her to settle somewhere in the country. This, however, he refused to do on two grounds: in the first place, because few country villages would be so convenient for him to get at as London; and in the second, because he declared that the great city was the safest hiding-place in the world.

And so Hilda continued perforce to live her lonesome existence, that was only cheered by her husband's short and uncertain visits. Friends she had none, nor did she dare to make any. The only person whose conversation she could rely on to relieve the tedium of the long weeks was her landlady, Mrs. Jacobs, the widow of a cheesemonger, who had ruined a fine business by his drinking and other vicious propensities, and out of a good property had only left his wife the leasehold of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, which, fortunately for her, had been settled upon her at her marriage. Like most people who have seen better days—not but what she was now very comfortably off—she delighted in talking of her misfortunes, and of the perfidiousness of man; and in Hilda, who had, poor girl, nothing else to listen to, she found a most attentive audience. As was only natural where such a charming person and such a good listener were concerned, honest Mrs. Jacobs soon grew fond of her interesting lodger, about whose husband's circumstances and history she soon wove many an imaginary tale; for, needless to say, her most pertinent inquiries failed to extract much information from Hilda. One of her favourite fictions was that her lodger was the victim of her handsome husband, who had in some way beguiled her from her home beyond the seas, in order to keep her in solitary confinement and out of the reach of a hated rival. Another, that he kept her thus that he might have greater liberty for his own actions.

In course of time these ideas took such possession of her mind that she grew to believe in them, and, when speaking of Hilda to any of her other lodgers, would shake her head and talk of her mysteriously as a "lamb" and a "victim."

As for that lady herself, whilst far from suspecting her good landlady's gloomy surmises, she certainly fell more and more a prey to depression and anxieties, and occasionally even to suspicion, to all of which evils she grew increasingly liable as she drew nearer to an event that was no longer very distant. She could not but notice a change in Philip's manner on the rare occasions when he was able to visit her, of which the most marked developments were fits of silence and irritability. A certain reticence also, that became more and more noticeable as time went on, led her to feel that there was an invisible something growing up between them—a something that the pride she possessed in such a striking degree forbade her to attempt to pierce, but which was none the less galling to her on that account. Very shortly before the events narrated in the last chapter she had taken the occasion of a visit from Philip to complain somewhat bitterly of her position, begging him to tell her when there was any prospect of her being allowed to take her rightful place—a question her husband was quite unable to answer satisfactorily. Seeing that there was nothing to be got out of him, with womanly tact she changed the subject, and asked after Maria Lee (for whom she entertained a genuine affection)—when he last saw her, how she was looking, if there was any prospect of her getting married, and other questions of the same sort—the result of which was to evoke a most violent, and to her inexplicable, fit of irritability on the part of her husband. Something of a scene ensued, which was finally terminated about five o'clock in the afternoon by Philip's abrupt departure to catch his train.

Shortly afterwards Mrs. Jacobs, coming up to bring some tea, found Hilda indulging in tears that she had been too proud to shed before her husband; and, having had an extended personal experience of such matters, rightly guessed that there had been a conjugal tiff, the blame of which, needless to say, she fixed upon the departed Philip.

"Lor, Mrs. Roberts" (as Hilda was called), she said, "don't take on like that; they're all brutes, that's what they are; if only you could have seen my Samuel, who's dead and gone these ten years and

buried in a private grave at Kensal Cemetery—though he didn't leave anything to pay for it except three dozen and five of brandy—he was a beauty, poor dear, he was; your husband ain't nothing to him.”

"My husband, let me tell you, Mrs. Jacobs, is not a brute at all," sobbed Hilda, with dignity.

"Ah, Mrs. Roberts, that is just what I used to say of Samuel, but he was the biggest brute in the three kingdoms, for all that; but if you ask me, meaning no offence, I call a man a brute as only comes to see his lawful wife about twice a month, let alone making an angel cry.”

"Mr. Roberts has his reasons, Mrs. Jacobs; you must not talk of him like that.”

"Ah, so my Samuel used to say when he stopped away from home for three nights at a time, till I followed him and found out his 'Reason,' and a mighty pretty 'Reason' she was too, all paint and feathers, the hussy, and eyes as big as a teacup. They all have their reasons, but they never tell 'em. But come and put on your things and go out a bit, there's a dear; it is a beautiful warm evening. You feel tired—oh, never mind that; it is necessary for people as is in an interested way to take exercise. I well remembers—”

Here Hilda, however, cut the subject short, and deprived herself of Mrs. Jacobs' reminiscences by going to put on her things.

It was a bright warm evening, and she found the air so pleasant that, after strolling round Lincoln's Inn Fields, she thought she would extend her walk a little, and struck past Lincoln's Inn Hall into New Square, and then made her way to the archway opposite to where the New Law Courts now stand. Under this archway a legal bookseller has built his nest, and behind windows of broad plate-glass were ranged specimens of his seductive wares, baits on which to catch students avaricious of legal knowledge as they pass on their way to chambers or Hall. Now, at this window a young man was standing at the moment that Hilda entered the archway, his eyes fixed upon a pamphlet on the laws of succession. That young man was George Caresfoot, who was considering whether it would be worth his while to buy the pamphlet in order to see if he would be entitled to anything if his uncle should happen to die intestate, as he sometimes feared might be the case. He had come up to town on business connected with his firm, and was now waiting till it was time to begin an evening of what he understood as pleasure; for George was a very gay young man.

He was, however, also a very sharp one, so sharp that he even noticed shadows, especially when, as in this case, the shadow was clearly defined and flung, life-sized, on the dark background of the books before him. He watched it for a moment, and as its owner, with an absent air, slowly passed from the bright sunlight into the shade of the arch, it struck the astute George that there was something familiar about this particular and by no means unpleasing shadow. Waiting till it had vanished and the footsteps gone past him, he turned round and at a glance recognized Hilda von Holtzhausen, Miss Lee's beautiful companion, who was supposed to have departed into the more distant parts of Germany. George's eyes twinkled, and a whole host of ideas rushed into his really able mind.

"Caught at last, for a sovereign," he muttered.

Meanwhile Hilda walked slowly on into Chancery Lane, then turned to the left till she came into Holborn, and thence made her way round by another route back to Lincoln's Inn Fields. Needless to say, George followed at a respectful distance. His first impulse had been to go up and speak to her, but he resisted the inclination.

On the doorstep of the house where Hilda lodged, stood her landlady giving a piece of her mind to a butcher-boy both as regarded his master's meat and his personal qualities. She paused for breath just as Hilda passed up the steps, and, turning, said something that made the latter laugh. The butcher-boy took the opportunity of beating a rapid retreat, leaving Mrs. Jacobs crowing after him from her own doorstep. As soon as Hilda had gone into the house, George saw his opportunity. Advancing politely towards Mrs. Jacobs, he asked her if she was the landlady of the house, and, when she had answered in the affirmative, he made inquiries about apartments.

"Thank you, sir," said Mrs. Jacobs, "but I do not let rooms to single gentlemen.”

"You take too much for granted, ma'am. I am married."

She looked at him doubtfully. "I suppose, sir, you would have no objection to giving a reference."

"A dozen, if you like, ma'am; but shall we look at the rooms?"

Mrs. Jacobs assented, and they made their way upstairs, George keeping in front. On the first-floor he saw a pair of lady's shoes on a mat outside the door, and guessed to whom they belonged.

"Are these the rooms?" he said, laying his hand upon the door-handle.

"No, sir, no, they are Mrs. Roberts'; next floor, please, sir."

"Mrs. Roberts?—I suppose the very handsome young lady I saw come into the house. No offence, ma'am; but a man's bound to be careful where he brings his wife. I suppose she's all right."

"Lord, yes, poor dear!" answered Mrs. Jacobs, in indignation; "why, they came here straight from St. Jude's, Battersea, the day they were married; a runaway match, I fancy."

"That's all right; she looked charming. I hope her husband is worthy of her," remarked George, as he gazed round Mrs. Jacobs' rooms.

"Well, as to that, he's handsome enough, for them as likes those black men; but I don't like people as only comes to visit their lawful wives about twice a month. But," suddenly checking herself, "it isn't any affair of mine."

"No, indeed, very reprehensible: I am, as a married man, entirely of your mind. These are charming rooms, ma'am, charming. I shall certainly take them if my wife approves; I will let you know by to-morrow's post—Jacobs, yes, I have it down. Good evening, ma'am," and he was gone.

Instead of going out that evening as he had intended, George sat in the smoking-room of his hotel and thought. He also wrote a letter which he addressed to Mrs. Bellamy.

Next morning, taking a cab, he drove to St. Jude's, Battersea, and inspected the register.

Presently he asked for a certified copy of the following entry: "August 1, 1856. Philip Caresfoot, bachelor, gentleman, to Hilda von Holtzhausen, spinster (by license). Signed J. Few, curate; as witness, Fred. Natt, Eliza Chambers."

That evening Hilda received an anonymous letter, written in a round clerk's hand, that had been posted in the City. It was addressed to Mrs. Roberts, and its contents ran thus:

"A sincere friend warns Mrs. Philip Caresfoot that her husband is deceiving her, and has become entangled with a young lady of her acquaintance. *Burn this; wait and watch!*"

The letter fell from her hands as though it had stung her.

"Mrs. Jacobs was right," she said aloud, with a bitter laugh, "men always have a 'reason.' Oh, let him beware!" And she threw back her beautiful head and the great blue eyes sparkled like those of a snake about to strike. The sword of jealousy, that she had hitherto repelled with the shield of a woman's trust in the man she loves, had entered into her soul, and, could Philip have seen her under these new circumstances, he would have realized that he had indeed good reason to "beware." "No wonder," she went on, "no wonder that he finds her name irritating upon my lips; no doubt to him it is a desecration. Oh, oh!" And she flung herself on her face, and wept tears of jealous rage.

"Well," said George to Mrs. Bellamy, as they drove home together after the great dinner party (do not be shocked, my reader, Bellamy was *on the bow*), "well, how shall we strike? Shall I go to the old man to-morrow, and show him my certified copy? There is no time to lose. He might die any day."

"No; we must act through Mrs. Philip."

"Why?"

"It is more scientific, and it will be more amusing."

"Poor thing! it will be a blow to her. Don't you like her?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because she did not trust me, and because she eclipses me. Therefore I am glad of an opportunity of destroying her."

"You are a very ruthless woman."

"When I have an end in view, I march straight to it; I do not vacillate—that is all. But never mind me; here we are near home. Go to town by the first train to-morrow morning and post another letter announcing what has happened here. Then come back and wait."

"Ay," reflected George, "that is a wonderful woman—a woman it is good to have some hold over."

* * *

We left Hilda stretched on her face sobbing. But the fit did not last long. She rose, and flung open the window; she seemed stifled for want of air. Then she sat down to think what she should do. Vanish and leave no trace? No; not yet. Appear and claim her place? No; not yet. The time was not ripe for choice between these two extremes. Upbraid Philip with his faithlessness? No; not without proofs. What did that hateful letter say? "Wait and watch;" yes, that was what she would do. But she could not wait here; she felt as though she must go somewhere, get some change of scene, or she should break down. She had heard Mrs. Jacobs speak of a village not more than two hours from London that a convalescent lodger of hers had visited and found charming. She would go there for a week, and watch the spring cast her mantle over the earth, and listen to the laughter of the brooks, and try to forget her burning love and jealousy, and just for that one week be happy as she was when, as a little girl, she roamed all day through the woods of her native Germany. Alas! she forgot that it is the heart and not the scene that makes happiness.

That evening she wrote a note to her husband, saying that she felt that change of air was necessary for her, and that she was going out of London for a few days, to some quiet place, from whence she would write to him. He must not, however, expect many letters, as she wanted complete rest.

On the following morning she went; and, if the sweet spring air did not bring peace to her mind, at any rate, it to a very great extent set up her in strength. She wrote but one letter during her absence, and that was to say that she should be back in London by midday on the first of May. This letter reached Philip on the morning of the great dinner-party, and was either accidentally or on purpose sent without the writer's address. On the morning of the first of May—that is, two days after the dinner-party, which was given on the twenty-ninth of April—Hilda rose early, and commenced to pack her things with the assistance of a stout servant girl, who did all the odd jobs and a great deal of the work in the old-fashioned farmhouse in which she was staying. Presently the cowboy came whistling up the little garden, bright with crocuses and tulips, that lay in front of the house, and knocked at the front door.

"Lawks!" said the stout girl, in accents of deep surprise, as she drew her head in from the open lattice; "Jim's got a letter."

"Perhaps it is for me," suggested Hilda, a little nervously; she had grown nervous about the post of late. "Will you go and see?"

The letter was for her, in the handwriting of Mrs. Jacobs. She opened it; it contained another addressed in the character the sight of which made her feel sick and faint. She could not trust herself to read it in the presence of the girl.

"Sally," she said, "I feel rather faint; I shall lie down a little. I will ring for you presently."

Sally retired, and she opened her letter.

Fifteen minutes after the girl received her summons. She found Hilda very pale, and with a curious look upon her face.

"I hope you're better, mum," she said, for she was a kind-hearted girl.

"Better—ah, yes! thank you, Sally; I am cured, quite cured; but please be quick with the things, for I shall leave by the nine o'clock train."

Chapter X

The night of the dinner-party was a nearly sleepless one for Philip, although his father had so considerably regretted his wearied appearance, he could do nothing but walk, walk, walk, like some unquiet ghost, up and down his great, oak-panelled bedroom, till, about dawn, his legs gave way beneath him; and think, think, think, till his mind recoiled, confused and helpless, from the dead wall of its objects. And, out of all this walking and thinking, there emerged, after an hour of stupor, that it would be a misnomer to call sleep, two fixed results. The first of these was that he hated his father as a lost soul must hate its torturing demon, blindly, madly, impotently hated him; and the second, that he could no longer delay taking his wife into his confidence. Then he remembered the letter he had received from her on the previous morning. He got it, and saw that it bore no address, merely stating that she would be in London by midday on the first of May, that was on the morrow. Till then it was clear he must wait, and he was not sorry for the reprieve. His was not a pleasant story for a husband to have to tell.

Fortunately for Philip, there was an engagement of long standing for this day, the thirtieth of April, to go, in conjunction with other persons, to effect a valuation of the fallows, &c., of a large tenant who was going out at Michaelmas. This prevented any call being made upon him to go and see Maria Lee, as, after the events of the previous evening, it might have been expected he would. He started early on this business, and did not return till late, so he saw nothing of his father that day.

On the morning of the first of May he breakfasted about half-past eight, and then, without seeing his father, drove to Roxham to catch a train that got him up to London about twenty minutes to twelve. As he steamed slowly into Paddington Station, another train steamed out, and had he been careful to examine the occupants of the first-class carriages as they passed him in a slow procession, he might have seen something that would have interested him; but he was, not unnaturally, too much occupied with his own thoughts to allow of the indulgence of an idle curiosity. On the arrival of his train, he took a cab and drove without delay to the house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and asked for Mrs. Roberts.

"She isn't back yet, sir," was Mrs. Jacobs' reply. "I got this note from her this morning to say that she would be here by twelve, but it's twenty past now, so I suppose that she has missed the train or changed her mind; but there will be another in at three, so perhaps you had best wait for that, sir."

Philip was put out by this contretemps, but at the same time he was relieved to find that he had a space to breathe in before the inevitable and dreadful moment of exposure and infamy, for he had grown afraid of his wife.

Three o'clock came in due course, but no Hilda. Philip was seriously disturbed; but there was now no train by which she could arrive that day, so he was forced to the conclusion that she had postponed her departure. There were now two things to be done, one to follow her down to where she was staying—for he had ascertained her address from Mrs. Jacobs; the other, to return home and come back on the morrow. For reasons which appeared to him imperative, but which need not be entered into here, he decided on the latter course; so leaving a note for his wife, he drove, in a very bad temper, back to Paddington in time to catch the five o'clock train to Roxham.

Let us now return to the Abbey House, where, whilst Philip was cooling his heels in Lincoln's Inn Fields, a rather curious scene was in progress.

At one o'clock, old Mr. Caresfoot, as was his rule, sat down to lunch, which, frugal as it was, so far as he was concerned, was yet served with some old-fashioned ceremony by a butler and a footman. Just as the meal was coming to an end, a fly, with some luggage on it, drove up to the hall-door. The footman went to open it.

"Simmons," said the squire, to the old butler, "look out and tell me who that is."

Simmons did as he was bid, and replied:

"I don't rightly know, squire; but it's a lady, and she be wonderful tall."

Just then the footman returned, and said that a lady, who would not give her name, wished to speak to him in private.

"Are you sure the lady did not mean Mr. Philip?"

"No, sir; she asked for Mr. Philip first, and when I told her that he was out, she asked for you, sir. I have shown her into the study."

"Humph! at any rate, she has come off a journey, and must be hungry. Set another place and ask her in here."

In another moment there was a rustle of a silk dress, and a lady, arrayed in a long cloak and with a thick veil on, was shown into the room. Mr. Caresfoot, rising with that courteous air for which he was remarkable, bowed and begged her to be seated, and then motioned to the servants to leave the room.

"Madam, I am told that you wish to speak to me; might I ask whom I have the honour of addressing?"

She, with a rapid motion, removed her hat and veil, and exposed her sternly beautiful face to his inquiring gaze.

"Do you not know me, Mr. Caresfoot?" she said, in her foreign accent.

"Surely, yes, you are the young lady who lived with Maria, Miss von Holtzhausen."

"That *was* my name; it is now Hilda Caresfoot. I am your son Philip's wife."

As this astounding news broke upon his ears, her hearer's face became a shifting study. Incredulity, wonder, fury, all swept across it, and then in a single second it seemed to freeze. Next moment he spoke with overpowering politeness.

"So, madam; then I have to congratulate myself on the possession of a very lovely daughter-in-law."

A silence ensued that they were both too moved to break; at last, the old man said, in an altered tone:

"We have much to talk of, and you must be tired. Take off your cloak, and eat whilst I think."

She obeyed him, and he saw that not only was she his son's wife, but that she must before long present the world with an heir to the name of Caresfoot. This made him think the more; but meanwhile he continued to attend to her wants. She ate little, but calmly.

"That woman has nerve," said he to himself.

Then he rang the bell, and bade Simmons wait till he had written a note.

"Send James to Roxham at once with this. Take this lady's things off the fly, and put them in the red bedroom. By the way, I am at home to nobody except Mr. Bellamy;" and then, turning to Hilda, "Now, if you will come into my study, we will continue our chat," and he offered her his arm. "Here we are secure from interruption," he said, with a ghost of a smile. "Take this chair. Now, forgive my impertinence, but I must ask you if I am to understand that you are my son's *legal*wife?"

She flushed a little as she answered:

"Sir, I am. I have been careful to bring the proof; here it is;" and she took from a little hand-bag a certified copy of the register of her marriage, and gave it to him. He examined it carefully through his gold eye-glass, and handed it back.

"Perfectly in order. Hum! some eight months since, I see. May I ask why I am now for the first time favoured with a sight of this interesting document—in short, why you come down, like an angel from the clouds, and reveal yourself at the present moment?"

"I have come," she answered, "because of these." And she handed him two letters. "I have come to ascertain if they are true; if my husband is a doubly perjured or a basely slandered man."

He read the two anonymous letters. With the contents of the first we are acquainted; the second merely told of the public announcement of Philip's engagement.

"Speak," she said, with desperate energy, the calm of her face breaking up like ice before a rush of waters. "You must know everything; tell me my fate!"

"Girl, these villanous letters are in every particular true. You have married in my son the biggest scoundrel in the county. I can only say that I grieve for you."

She listened in silence; then rising from her chair, said, with a gesture infinitely tragic in its simplicity:

"Then it is finished; before God and man I renounce him. Listen," she went on, turning to her father-in-law, "I loved your son, he won my heart; but, though he said he loved me, I suspected him of playing fast and loose with me, on the one hand, and with my friend, Maria Lee, on the other. So I determined to go away, and told him so. Then it was that he offered to marry me at once, if I would change my purpose. I loved him, and I consented—yes, because I loved him so, I consented to even more. I agreed to keep the marriage secret from you. You see what it has led to. I, a Von Holtzhausen, and the last of my name, stand here a byword and a scorn; my story will be found amusing at every dinner-table in the country-side, and my shame will even cling to my unborn child. This is the return he has made me for my sacrifice of self-respect, and for consenting to marry him at all; to outrage my love and make me a public mockery."

"We have been accustomed," broke in the old squire, his pride somewhat nettled, "to consider our own a good family to marry into. You do not seem to share that view."

"Good; yes, there is plenty of your money for those who care for it; but, sir, as I told your son, it is not a *family*. He did me no honour in marrying me, though I was nothing but a German companion, with no dower but her beauty. I,"—and here she flung her head back with an air of ineffable pride—"did him the honour. My ancestors, sir, were princes, when his were plough-boys."

"Well, well," answered the old man, testily, "ten generations of country gentry, and the Lord only knows how many more of stout yeomen before them, is a good enough descent for us; but I like your pride, and I am glad that you spring from an ancient race. You have been shamefully treated, Hilda—is not your name Hilda?—but there are others, more free from blame than you are, who have been treated worse."

"Ah, Maria! then she knows nothing?"

"Yes, there is Maria and myself. But never mind that. Philip will, I suppose, be back in a few hours—oh, yes! he will be back," and his eyes glinted unpleasantly, "and what shall you do then? what course do you intend to take?"

"I intend to claim my rights, to force him to acknowledge me here where he suffered his engagement to another woman to be proclaimed, and then I intend to leave him. He has killed my respect; I will not live with him again. I can earn my living in Germany. I have done with him; but, sir, do not you be hard upon him. It is a matter between me and him. Let him not suffer on my account."

"My dear, pray confine yourself to your own affairs, and leave me to settle mine. There shall be no harshness; nobody shall suffer more than they deserve. There, don't break down, go and rest, for there are painful scenes before you."

He rang the bell, and sent for the housekeeper. She came presently, a pleasant-looking woman of about thirty years of age, with a comely face and honest eyes.

"This lady, Pigott," said the old squire, addressing her, "is Mrs. Philip Caresfoot, and you will be so kind as to treat her with all respect. Don't open your eyes, but attend to me. For the present, you had best put her in the red room, and attend to her yourself. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I understand," Pigott replied, curtseying. "Will you be pleased to come along with me, ma'am?"

Hilda rose and took Pigott's arm. Excitement and fatigue had worn her out. Before she went, however, she turned, and with tears in her eyes thanked the old man for his kindness to a friendless woman.

The hard eyes grew kindly as he stooped and kissed the broad, white brow, and said in his stately way—

"My dear, as yet I have shown you nothing but the courtesy due to a lady. Should I live, I hope to bestow on you the affection I owe to a much-wronged daughter. Good-by."

And thus they parted, little knowing where they should meet again.

"A woman I respect—well, English or German, the blood will tell" —he said as soon as the door had closed. "Poor thing—poor Maria too. The scoundrel!—ah! there it is again;" and he pressed his hand to his heart. "This business has upset me, and no wonder."

The pang passed, and sitting down he wrote a letter that evidently embarrassed him considerably, and addressed it to Miss Lee. This he put in the post-box, and then, going to a secretaire, he unlocked it, and taking out a document he began to puzzle over it attentively.

Presently Simmons announced that Mr. Bellamy was waiting.

"Show him in at once," said the old man briskly.

Chapter XI

It was some minutes past seven that evening when the lawyer left, and he had not been gone a quarter of an hour before a hired gig drove up to the door containing Philip, who had got back from town in the worst of bad tempers, and, as no conveyance was waiting for him, had been forced to post over from Roxham. Apparently his father had been expecting his arrival, for the moment the servant opened the door he appeared from his study, and addressed him in a tone that was as near to being jovial as he ever went.

"Hallo, Philip, back again, are you? Been up to town, I suppose, and driven over in the 'George' gig? That's lucky; I wanted to speak to you. Come in here, there's a good fellow, I want to speak to you."

"Why is he so infernally genial?" reflected Philip. "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes;" then aloud, "All right, father; but if it is all the same to you, I should like to get some dinner first."

"Dinner! why, I have had none yet; I have been too busy. I shall not keep you long; we will dine together presently."

Philip was surprised, and glanced at him suspiciously. His habits were extremely regular; why had he had no dinner?

Meanwhile his father led the way into the study, muttering below his breath—

"One more chance—his last chance."

A wood fire was burning brightly on the hearth, for the evening was chilly, and some sherry and glasses stood upon the table.

"Take a glass of wine, Philip; I am going to have one; it is a good thing to begin a conversation on. What says the Psalmist: 'Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make him a cheerful countenance'—a cheerful countenance! Ho, ho! my old limbs are tired; I am going to sit down—going to sit down."

He seated himself in a well-worn leather arm-chair by the side of the fire so that his back was towards the dying daylight. But the brightness of the flames threw the clear-cut features into strong relief against the gloom, and by it Philip could see that the withered cheeks were flushed. Somehow the whole strongly defined scene made him feel uncanny and restless.

"Cold for the first of May, isn't it, lad? The world is very cold at eighty-two. Eighty-two, a great age, yet it seems but the other day that I used to sit in this very chair and dandle you upon my knee, and make this repeater strike for you. And yet that is twenty years since, and I have lived through four twenties and two years. A great age, a cold world!"

"Ain't you well?" asked his son, brusquely, but not unkindly.

"Well; ah, yes! thank you, Philip, I never felt better, my memory is so good, I can see things I have forgotten seventy years or more. Dear, dear, it was behind that bookcase in a hole in the board that I used to hide my flint and steel which I used for making little fires at the foot of Caresfoot's Staff. There is a mark on the bark now. I was mischievous as a little lad, and thought that the old tree would make a fine blaze. I was audacious, too, and delighted to hide the things in my father's study under the very nose of authority. Ay, and other memories come upon me as I think. It was here upon this very table that they stood my mother's coffin. I was standing where you are now when I wrenched open the half-fastened shell to kiss her once more before they screwed her down for ever. I wonder would you do as much for me? I loved my mother, and that was fifty years ago. I wonder shall we meet again? That was on the first of May, a long-gone first of May. They threw branches of blackthorn bloom upon her coffin. Odd, very odd! But business, lad, business—what was it? Ah! I know," and his manner changed in a second and became hard and stern. "About Maria, have you come to a decision?"

Philip moved restlessly on his chair, poked the logs to a brighter blaze, and threw on a handful of pine chips from a basket by his side before he answered. Then he said—

"No, I have not."

"Your reluctance is very strange, Philip, I cannot understand it. I suppose that you are not already married, are you, Philip?"

There was a lurid calm about the old man's face as he asked this question that was very dreadful in its intensity. Under the shadow of his thick black eyebrows, gleams of light glinted and flickered in the expanded pupils, as before the outburst of a tempest the forked lightning flickers in the belly of the cloud. His voice too was constrained and harsh.

Owing to the position of his father's head, Philip could not see this play of feature, but he heard the voice and thought that it meant mischief. He had but a second to decide between confession and the lie that leaped to his lips. An inward conviction told him that his father was not long for this world, was it worth while to face his anger when matters might yet be kept dark till the end? The tone of the voice—ah! how he mistook its meaning—deceived him. It was not, he thought, possible that his father could know anything. Had he possessed a little more knowledge of the world, he might have judged differently.

"Married, no, indeed; what put that idea into your head?" And he laughed outright.

Presently he became aware that his father had risen and was approaching towards him. Another moment and a hand of iron was laid upon his shoulder, the awful eyes blazed into his face and seemed to pierce him through and through, and a voice that he could not have recognized hissed into his ear—

"You unutterable liar, you everlasting hound, your wife is at this moment in this house."

Philip sprang up with an exclamation of rage and cursed Hilda aloud.

"No," went on his father, standing before him, his tall frame swaying backwards and forwards with excitement; "no, do not curse her, she, like your other poor dupe, is an honest woman; on yourself be the damnation, you living fraud, you outcast from all honour, who have brought shame and reproach upon our honest name, on you be it; may every curse attend *you*, and may remorse torture *you*. Listen: you lied to me, you lied to your wife, trebly did you lie to the unfortunate girl you have deceived; but, if you will not speak it, for once hear the truth, and remember that you have to deal with one so relentless, that fools, mistaking justice for oppression, call him 'devil.' I, 'Devil Caresfoot,' tell you that I will disinherit you of every stick, stone, and stiver that the law allows me, and start you in the enjoyment of the rest with my bitterest curse. This I will do now whilst I am alive; when I am dead, by Heaven, I will haunt you if I can."

Here he stopped for want of breath, and stood for a moment in the full light of the cheery blaze, one hand raised above his head as though to strike, and, presenting with his glittering eyes and working features, so terrible a spectacle of rage that his son recoiled involuntarily before him.

But fury begets fury as love begets love, and in another second Philip felt his own wicked temper boil up within him. He clenched his teeth and stood firm.

"Do your worst," he said; "I hate you; I wish to God that you were dead."

Hardly had these dreadful words left his lips when a change came over the old man's face; it seemed to stiffen, and putting one hand to his heart he staggered back into his chair, pointing and making signs as he fell towards a little cupboard in the angle of the wall. His son at once guessed what had happened; his father had got one of the attacks of the heart to which he was subject, and was motioning to him to bring the medicine which he had before shown him, and which alone could save him in these seizures. Actuated by a common impulse of humanity, Philip for the moment forgot their quarrel, and stepped with all speed to fetch it. As it happened, there stood beneath this cupboard a table, and on this table lay the document which his father had been reading that afternoon before the arrival of Mr. Bellamy. It was his will, and, as is usual in the case of such deeds, the date was endorsed upon the back. All this Philip saw at a single glance, and he also saw that the will was dated

some years back, and therefore one under which he would inherit, doubtless the same that his father had some months before offered to show him.

It flashed through his mind that his father had got it out in order to burn it; and this idea was followed by another that for a moment stilled his heart.

"If he should die now he cannot destroy it! If he does not take the medicine he will die."

Thought flies fast in moments of emergency. Philip, too, was a man of determined mind where his own interests were concerned, and his blood was heated and his reason blinded by fury and terror. He was not long in settling on his course of action. Taking the bottle from the cupboard, he poured out its contents into one of the wine-glasses that stood upon the table, and coming up to his father with it addressed him. He knew that these attacks, although they were of a nature to cause intense pain, did not rob the sufferer of his senses. The old man, though he lay before him gasping with agony, was quite in a condition to understand him.

"Listen to me," he said, in a slow, distinct voice. "Just now you said that you would disinherit me. This medicine will save your life, and if I let it fall you will die, and there is no more in the house. Swear before God that you will not carry out your threat, and I will give it to you. Lift up your hand to show me that you swear."

Silence followed, only broken by the gasps of the dying man.

"If you will not swear, I will pour it out before your eyes."

Again there was silence; but this time the old man made an effort to rise and ring the bell.

His son threw him roughly back.

"For the last time," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "will you swear?"

A struggle passed over his father's face, now nearly black with pain; and presently from the distended lips, that did not seem to move, there burst a single word—destined to echo for ever in his son's ears—

"Murderer!"

It was his last. He sank back, groaned, and died; and at the same moment the flame from the pine-chips flickered itself away, and of a sudden the room grew nearly dark. Philip stood for awhile aghast at his own handiwork, and watched the dull light glance on the dead white of his father's brow. He was benumbed by terror at what he had done, and in that awful second of realization would have given his own life to have it undone.

Presently, however, the instinct of self-preservation came to his aid. He lit a candle, and taking some of the medicine in the glass, smeared it over the dead man's chin and coat, and then broke the glass on the floor by his side—thus making it appear that he had died whilst attempting to swallow the medicine.

Next he raised a loud outcry, and violently rang the bell. In a minute the room was full of startled servants, one of whom was instantly despatched for Mr. Caley, the doctor. Meanwhile, after a vain attempt to restore animation, the study-table was cleared and the corpse laid on it, as its mother's had been on that day fifty years before.

Then came a dreadful hush, and the shadow of death came down upon the house and brooded over it. The men-servants moved to and fro with muffled feet, and the women wept, for in a way they had all loved the imperious old man, and the last change had come very suddenly. Philip's brain burned; he was consumed by the desire of action. Suddenly he bethought him of his wife upstairs: after what he had just passed through, no scene with her could disturb him—it would, he even felt, be welcome. He went up to the room where she was, and entered. It was evident that she had been told of what had happened, as both she and Pigott, who was undressing her—for she was wearied out—were weeping. She did not appear surprised at his appearance; the shock of the old man's death extinguished all surprise. It was he who broke the silence.

"He is dead," he said.

"Yes, I have heard."

"If you are at liberty for a few minutes, I wish to talk to you," he said savagely.

"I, too," she answered, "have something to say, but I am too weary and upset to say it now. I will see you to-morrow."

He turned and went without answering, and Pigott noticed that no kiss or word of endearment passed between them, and that the tone of their words was cold.

Soon after Philip got downstairs the doctor came. Philip met him in the hall and accompanied him into the study, where the body was. He made a rapid examination, more as a matter of form than anything else, for his first glance had told him that life was extinct.

"Quite dead," he said sorrowfully; "my old friend gone at last. One of a fine sort too; a just man for all his temper. They called him 'devil,' and he was fierce when he was younger, but if I never meet a worse devil than he was I shall do well. He was very kind to me once—very. How did he go?—in pain, I fear."

"We were talking together, when suddenly he was seized with the attack. I got the medicine as quick as I could and tried to get it down his throat, but he could not swallow, and in the hurry the glass was knocked by a jerk of his head right out of my hands. Next second he was dead."

"Very quick—quicker than I should have expected. Did he say anything?"

"No."

Now, just as Philip delivered himself of this last lie, a curious incident happened, or rather an incident that is apt to seem curious to a person who has just told a lie. The corpse distinctly moved its right hand—the same that had been clasped over the old man's head as he denounced his son.

"Good God!" said Philip, turning pale as death, "what's that?" and even the doctor started a little, and cast a keen look at the dead face.

"Nothing," he said. "I have seen that happen before where there has been considerable tension of the muscles before death; it is only their final slackening, that is all. Come, will you ring the bell? They had better come and take it upstairs."

This sad task had just been performed, and Mr. Caley was about to take his leave, when Pigott came down and whispered something into his ear that evidently caused him the most lively astonishment. Drawing Philip aside, he said—

"The housekeeper asks me to come up and see 'Mrs. Philip Caresfoot,' whom she thinks is going to be confined. Does she mean your wife?"

"Yes," answered Philip sullenly, "she does. It is a long story, and I am too upset to tell it you now. It will soon be all over the country I suppose."

The old doctor whistled, but judged it advisable not to put any more questions, when suddenly an idea seemed to strike him.

"You said you were talking to your father when the fit took him; was it about your marriage?"

"Yes."

"When did he first know of it?"

"To-day, I believe."

"Ah, thank you;" and he followed Pigott upstairs.

That night, exactly at twelve o'clock, another little lamp floated out on the waters of life: Angela was born.

Chapter XII

When the doctor had gone upstairs, Philip went into the dining-room to eat something, only to find that food was repugnant to him; he could scarcely swallow a mouthful. To some extent, however, he supplied its place by wine, of which he drank several glasses. Then, drawn by a strange fascination, he went back into the little study, and, remembering the will, bethought himself that it might be as well to secure it. In taking it off the table, however, a folded and much erased sheet of manuscript was disclosed. Recognizing Bellamy's writing, he took it up and commenced to read the draft, for it was nothing else. Its substance was as follows.

The document began by stating that the testator's former will was declared null and void on account of the "treacherous and dishonourable conduct of his son Philip." It then, in brief but sweeping terms, bequeathed and devised to trustees, of whom Philip was not one, the unentailed property and personalty to be held by them: firstly, for the benefit of any *son* that might be born to the said disinherited Philip by *his wife Hilda*— the question of daughters being, probably by accident, passed over in silence —and failing such issue, then to the testator's nephew, George Caresfoot, absolutely, subject, however, to the following curious condition: Should the said George Caresfoot, *either by deed of gift or will*, attempt to convey the estate to his cousin Philip, or to descendants of the said Philip, then the gift over to the said George was to be of none effect, and the whole was to pass to some distant cousins of the testator's who lived in Scotland. Then followed several legacies and one charge on the estate to the extent of 1000 pounds a year payable to the *separate* use of the aforesaid Hilda Caresfoot for life, and reverting at death to the holder of the estate.

In plain English, Philip was, under this draft, totally disinherited, first in favour of his own male issue, by his wife Hilda, all mention of daughters being omitted, and failing such issue, in favour of his hated cousin George, who, as though to add insult to injury, was prohibited from willing the property back either to himself or his descendants, by whom the testator had probably understood the children of a second marriage.

Philip read the document over twice carefully.

"Phew!" he said, "that was touch and go. Thank heavens he had no time to carry out his kind intentions."

But presently a terrible thought struck him. He rang the bell hastily. It was answered by the footman, who, since he had an hour before helped to carry his poor master upstairs, had become quite demoralized. It was some time before Philip could get an answer to his question as to whether or no any one had been with his father that day whilst he was out. At last he succeeded in extracting a reply from the man that nobody had been except the young lady— "leastways, he begged pardon, Mrs. Caresfoot, as he was told she was."

"Never mind her," said Philip, feeling as though a load had been taken from his breast, "you are sure nobody else has been?"

"No, sir, nobody, leastways he begged pardon, nobody except lawyer Bellamy and his clerk, who had been there all the afternoon writing, with a black bag, and had sent for Simmons to be witnessed."

"You can go," said Philip, in a quiet voice. He saw it all now, he had let the old man die *after* he had executed the fresh will disinheriting him. He had let him die; he had effectually and beyond redemption cut his own throat. Doubtless, too, Bellamy had taken the new will with him; there was no chance of his being able to destroy it.

By degrees, however, his fit of brooding gave way to one of sullen fury against his wife, himself, but most of all against his dead father. Drunk with excitement, rage, and baffled avarice, he seized and candle and staggered up to the room where the corpse had been laid, launching imprecations as he went at his dead father's head. But when he came face to face with that dread Presence his passion

died, and a cold sense of the awful quiet and omnipotence of death came upon him and chilled him into fear. In some indistinct way he realized how impotent is the chafing of the waters of Mortality against the iron-bound coasts of Death. To what purpose did he rail against that solemn quiet thing, that husk and mask of life which lay in unmoved mockery of his reviling?

His father was dead, and he, even he, had killed his father. He was his father's murderer. And then a terror of the reckoning that must one day be struck between that dead man's spirit and his own took possession of him, and a foreknowledge of the awful shadow under which he must henceforth live crept into his mind and froze the very marrow in his bones. He looked again at the face, and, to his excited imagination, it appeared to have assumed a sardonic smile. The curse of Cain fell upon him as he looked, and weighed him down; his hair rose, and the cold sweat poured from his forehead. At length he could bear it no longer, but, turning, fled out of the room and out of the house, far into the night.

When, haggard with mental and bodily exhaustion, he at length returned, it was after midnight. He found Dr. Caley waiting for him; he had just come from the sick-room and wore an anxious look upon his face.

"Your wife has been delivered of a fine girl," he said; "but I am bound to tell you that her condition is far from satisfactory. The case is a most complicated and dangerous one."

"A girl!" groaned Philip, mindful of the will. "Are you sure that it is a girl?"

"Of course I am sure," answered the doctor, testily.

"And Hilda ill—I don't understand."

"Look here, my good fellow, you are upset; take a glass of brandy and go to bed. Your wife does not wish to see you now, but, if necessary, I will send for you. Now, do as I tell you, or you will be down next. Your nerves are seriously shaken."

Philip did as he was bid, and, as soon as he had seen him off to his room, the doctor returned upstairs.

In the early morning he sent for two of his brother-practitioners, and they held a consultation, the upshot of which was that they had come to the conclusion nothing short of a miracle could save Hilda's life—a conclusion that she herself had arrived at some hours before.

"Doctor," she said, "I trust to you to let me know when the end is near. I wish my husband to be present when I die, but not before."

"Hush, my child—never talk of dying yet. Please God, you have many years of life before you."

She shook her golden head a little sadly.

"No, doctor, my sand has run out, and perhaps it is as well. Give me the child—why do you keep the child away from me? It is the messenger sent to call me to a happier world. Yes, she is an angel messenger. When I am gone, see that you call her 'Angela,' so that I may know by what name to greet her when the time comes."

During the course of the morning, she expressed a strong desire to see Maria Lee, who was accordingly sent for.

It will be remembered that old Mr. Caresfoot had on the previous day, immediately after Hilda had left him, sat down and written to Maria Lee. In this note he told her the whole shameful truth, ending it with a few words of bitter humiliation and self-reproach that such a thing should have befallen her at the hands of one bearing his name. Over the agony of shame and grief thus let loose upon this unfortunate girl we will draw a veil. It is fortunate for the endurance of human reason that life does not hold many such hours as that through which she passed after the receipt of this letter. As was but natural, notwithstanding old Mr. Caresfoot's brief vindication of Hilda's conduct in his letter, Maria was filled with indignation at what to herself she called her treachery and deceit.

While she was yet full of these thoughts, a messenger came galloping over from Bratham Abbey, bringing a note from Dr. Caley that told her of her old friend's sudden death, and of Hilda's dangerous condition, and her desire to see her. The receipt of this news plunged her into a fresh access of grief,

for she had grown fond of the old man; nor had the warm affection for Hilda that had found a place in her gentle heart been altogether wrenched away; and, now that she heard that her rival was face to face with that King of Terrors before whom all earthly love, hate, hope, and ambition must fall down and cease their troubling, it revived in all its force; nor did any thought of her own wrongs come to chill it.

Within half an hour she was at the door of the Abbey House, where the doctor met her, and, in answer to her eager question, told her that, humanly speaking, it was impossible her friend could live through another twenty-four hours, adding an injunction that she must not stay with her long.

She entered the sick-room with a heavy heart, and there from Hilda's dying lips she heard the story of her marriage and of Philip's perfidy. Their reconciliation was as complete as her friend's failing voice and strength would allow. At length she tore herself away, and, turning at the door, took her last look at Hilda, who had raised herself upon her elbow, and was gazing at her retreating form with an earnestness that was very touching. The eyes, Maria felt, were taking their fill of what they looked upon for the last time in this world. Catching her tearful gaze, the dying woman smiled, and, lifting her hand, pointed upwards. Thus they parted.

But Maria could control herself no longer: her own blasted prospects, the loss of the man she loved, and the affecting scene through which she had just passed, all helped to break her down. Running downstairs into the dining-room, she threw herself on a sofa, and gave full passage to her grief. Presently she became aware that she was not alone. Philip stood before her, or, rather, the wreck of him whom she knew as Philip. Indeed, it was hard to recognize in this scared man, with dishevelled hair, white and trembling lips, and eyes ringed round with black, the bold, handsome youth whom she had loved. The sight of him stayed her sorrow, and a sense of her bitter injuries rushed in upon her.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"Want! I want forgiveness. I am crushed, Maria, crushed—quite crushed," and he put his hands to his face and sobbed.

She answered him with the quiet dignity that good women can command in moments of emergency—dignity of a very different stamp from Hilda's haughty pride, but perhaps as impressive in its way.

"You ask forgiveness of me, and say that you are crushed. Has it occurred to you that, without fault of my own, except the fault of trusting you as entirely as I loved you, I too am crushed? Do you know that you have wantonly, or to gain selfish ends, broken my heart, blighted my name, and driven me from my home, for I can live here no more? Do you understand that you have done me one of the greatest injuries one person can do to another? I say, do you know all this, Philip Caresfoot, and, knowing it, do you still ask me to forgive you? Do you think it possible that I *can* forgive?"

He had never heard her speak like this before, and did not remember that intense feeling is the mother of eloquence. He gazed at her for a moment in astonishment; then he dropped his face into his hands again and groaned, making no other answer. After waiting awhile, she went on—

"I am an insignificant creature, I know, and perhaps the mite of my happiness or misery makes little difference in the scale of things; but to me the gift of all my love was everything. I gave it to you, Philip—gave it without a doubt or murmur, gave it with both hands. I can never have it back to give again! How you have treated it you best know." Here she broke down a little, and then continued: "It may seem curious, but though my love has been so mistakenly given; though you to whom it was given have dealt so ill with it; yet I am anxious that on my side there should be no bitter memory, that, in looking back at all this in after years, you should never be able to dwell upon any harsh or unkind word of mine. It is on that account, and also because I feel that it is not for me to judge you, and that you have already much to bear, that I do as you ask me, and say, 'Philip, from my heart I forgive you, as I trust that the Almighty may forgive me.'"

He flung himself upon his knees before her, and tried to take her hand. "You do not know how you have humbled me," he groaned.

She gazed at him with pity.

"I am sorry," she said; "I did not wish to humble you. I have one word more to say, and then I must go. I have just bid my last earthly farewell to —your wife. My farewell to you must be as complete as that, as complete as though the grave had already swallowed one of us. We have done with each other for ever. I do not think that I shall come back here. In my waking moments your name shall never willingly pass my lips again. I will say it for the last time now. *Philip, Philip, Philip*, whom I chose to love out of all the world, I pray God that He will take me, or deaden the edge of what I suffer, and that He may never let my feet cross your path or my eyes fall upon your face again."

In another second she had passed out of the room and out of his life.

That night, or rather just before dawn on the following morning, Hilda, knowing that her end was very near, sent for her husband.

"Go quickly, doctor," she said. "I shall die at dawn."

The doctor found him seated in the same spot where Maria Lee had left him.

"What, more misery!" he said, when he had told his errand. "I cannot bear it. There is a curse upon me—death and wickedness, misery and death!"

"You must come if you wish to see your wife alive."

"I will come;" and he rose and followed him.

A sad sight awaited him. The moment of the grey dawn was drawing near, and, by his wife's request, a window had been unshuttered, that her dimmed eyes might once more look upon the light. On the great bed in the centre of the room lay Hilda, whose life was now quickly draining from her, and by her side was placed the sleeping infant. She was raised and supported on either side by pillows, and her unbound golden hair fell around her shoulders, enclosing her face as in a frame. Her pallid countenance seemed touched with an awful beauty that had not belonged to it in life, whilst in her eyes was that dread and prescient gaze which sometimes come to those who are about to solve death's mystery.

By the side of the bed knelt Mr. Fraser, the clergyman of the parish, repeating in an earnest tone the prayers for the dying, whilst the sad-faced attendants moved with muffled tread backwards and forwards from the ring of light around the bed into the dark shadows that lay beyond.

When Philip came, the clergyman ceased praying, and drew back into the further part of the room, as did Pigott and the nurse, the former taking the baby with her.

Hilda motioned to him to come close to her. He came, and bent over and kissed her, and she, with an effort, threw one ivory arm around his neck, and smiled sweetly. After about a minute, during which she was apparently collecting her thoughts, she spoke in a low voice, and in her native tongue.

"I have not sent for you before, Philip, for two reasons—first, because I wished to spare you pain; and next, in order that I might have time to rid my mind of angry thoughts against you. They are all gone now—gone with every other earthly interest; but I *was* angry with you, Philip. And now listen to me—for I have not much time—and do not forget my words in future years, when the story of my life will seem but as a shadow that once fell upon your path. Change your ways, Philip dear, abandon deceit, atone for the past; if you can, make your peace with Maria Lee, and marry her—ah! it is a pity that you did not do that at first, and leave me to go my ways—and, above all, humble your heart before the Power that I am about to face. I love you, dear, and, notwithstanding all, I am thankful to have been your wife. Please God, we shall meet again."

She paused awhile, and then spoke in English. To the astonishment of all, her voice was strong and clear, and she uttered her words with an energy that, under the circumstances, seemed almost awful.

"Tell her to bring the child."

There was no need for Philip to repeat what she said, for Pigott heard her, and at once came forward with the baby, which she laid beside her.

The dying woman placed her hand upon its tiny head, and, turning her eyes upwards with the rapt expression of one who sees a vision, said—

"May the power of God be about you to protect you, my motherless babe, may angels guard you, and make you as they are; and may the heavy curse and everlasting doom of the Almighty fall upon those who would bring evil upon you."

She paused, and then addressed her husband.

"Philip, you have heard my words; in your charge I leave the child, see that you never betray my trust."

Then, turning to Pigott, she said, in a fainter voice—

"Thank you for your kindness to me. You have a good face; if you can, stop with my child, and give her your love and care. And now, may God have mercy on my soul!"

Then came a minute's silence, broken only by the stifled sobs of those who stood around, till a ray of light from the rising sun struggled through the grey mist of the morning, and, touching the heads of mother and child, illumined them as with a glory. It passed as quickly as it came, drawing away with it the mother's life. Suddenly, as it faded, she spread out her arms, sighed, and smiled. When the doctor reached the bed, her story was told: she had fallen asleep.

Death had been very gentle with her.

Chapter XIII

Go, my reader, if the day is dull, and you feel inclined to moralize—for whatever may be said to the contrary, there are less useful occupations—and look at your village churchyard. What do you see before you? A plot of enclosed ground backed by a grey old church, a number of tombstones more or less decrepit, and a great quantity of little oblong mounds covered with rank grass. If you have any imagination, any power of thought, you will see more than that. First, with the instinctive selfishness of human nature, you will recognize your own future habitation; perhaps your eye will mark the identical spot where the body you love must lie through all seasons and weathers, through the slow centuries that will flit so fast for you, till the crash of doom. It is good that you should think of that, although it makes you shudder. The English churchyard takes the place of the Egyptian mummy at the feast, or the slave in the Roman conqueror's car—it mocks your vigour, and whispers of the end of beauty and strength.

Probably you need some such reminder. But if, giving to the inevitable the sigh that is its due, you pursue the vein of thought, it may further occur to you that the plot before you is in a sense a summary of the aspirations of humanity. It marks the realization of human hopes, it is the crown of human ambitions, the grave of human failures. Here, too, is the end of the man, and here the birthplace of the angel or the demon. It is his sure inheritance, one that he never solicits and never squanders; and, last, it is the only certain resting-place of sleepless, tired mortality.

Here it was that they brought Hilda, and the old squire, and laid them side by side against the coffin of yeoman Caresfoot, whose fancy it had been to be buried in stone, and then, piling primroses and blackthorn blooms upon their graves, left them to their chilly sleep. Farewell to them, they have passed to where as yet we may not follow. Violent old man and proud and lovely woman, rest in peace, if peace be the portion of you both!

To return to the living. The news of the sudden decease of old Mr. Caresfoot; of the discovery of Philip's secret marriage and the death of his wife; of the terms of the old man's will, under which, Hilda being dead, and having only left a daughter behind her, George inherited all the unentailed portion of the property, with the curious provision that he was never to leave it back to Philip or his children; of the sudden departure of Miss Lee, and of many other things, that were some of them true and some of them false, following as they did upon the heels of the great dinner-party, and the announcement made thereat, threw the country-side into a state of indescribable ferment. When this settled down, it left a strong and permanent residuum of public indignation and contempt directed against Philip, the more cordially, perhaps, because he was no longer a rich man. People very rarely express contempt or indignation against a rich man who happens to be their neighbour in the country, whatever he may have done. They keep their virtue for those who are impoverished, or for their unfortunate relations. But for Philip it was felt that there was no excuse and no forgiveness; he had lost both his character and his money, and must therefore be cut, and from that day forward he was cut accordingly.

As for Philip himself, he was fortunately, as yet, ignorant of the kind intentions of his friends and neighbours, who had been so fond of him a week ago. He had enough upon his shoulders without that—for he had spoken no lie when he told Maria Lee that he was crushed by the dreadful and repeated blows that had fallen upon him, blows that had robbed him of everything that made life worth living, and given him in return nothing but an infant who could not inherit, and who was therefore only an incumbrance.

Who is it that says, "After all, let a bad man take what pains he may to push it down, a human soul is an awful, ghostly, unique possession for a bad man to have?" During the time that had elapsed between the death and burial of his father and wife, Philip had become thoroughly acquainted with the truth of this remark.

Do what he would, he could never for a single hour shake himself free from the recollection of his father's death; whenever he shut his eyes, his uneasy mind continually conjured up the whole scene with uncanny distinctness; the gloomy room, the contorted face of the dying man, the red flicker of the firelight on the wall—all these things were burnt deep into the tablets of his memory. More and more did he recognize the fact that, even should he live long enough to bury the events of that hour beneath the debris of many years, the lapse of time would be insufficient to bring forgetfulness, and the recognition brought with it moral helplessness. He had, too, sufficient religious feeling to make him uneasy as to his future fate, and possessed a certain amount of imagination, which was at this time all directed towards that awful day when he and his dead father must settle their final accounts. Already, in the quiet nights, he would wake with a start, thinking that the inevitable time had come. Superstitious fears also would seize him with their clammy fingers, and he would shake and tremble at the fancied step of ghostly feet, and his blood would curdle in his veins as his mind hearkened to voices that were for ever still.

And, worst of all, what had been done, and could never be undone, had been done in vain. These deadly torments must be endured, whilst the object for which they had been incurred had utterly escaped him. He had sold himself to the powers of evil for a price, and that price had not been paid. But the bond was good for all that.

And so he would brood, hour after hour, till he felt himself drawing near to madness. Sometimes by a strong effort he would succeed in tearing his mind away from the subject, but then its place was instantly filled by a proud form with reproachful eyes, and he would feel that there, too, death had put it out of his power to make atonement. Of those whom he had wronged Maria Lee alone survived, and she had left him in sorrow, more bitter than any anger. Truly, Philip Caresfoot was in melancholy case. Somewhere he had read that the wages of sin is death, but surely what he felt surpassed the bitterness of death. His evil-doing had not prospered with him. The snare he had set for his father had fallen back upon himself, and he was a crushed and ruined man.

It affords a curious insight into his character to reflect that all these piled-up calamities, all this wreck and sudden death, did not bring him penitent on his knees before the Maker he had outraged. The crimes he had committed, especially if unsuccessful, or the sorrows that had fallen upon him, would have sufficed to reduce nine-tenths of ordinary men to a condition of humble supplication. For, generally speaking, irreligion, or rather forgetfulness of God, is a plant of no deep growth in the human heart, since its roots are turned by the rock of that innate knowledge of a higher Power that forms the foundation of every soul, and on which we are glad enough to set our feet when the storms of trouble and emergency threaten to destroy us. But with Philip this was not so. He never thought of repentance. His was not the nature to fall down and say, "Lord, I have sinned, take Thou my burden from me." Indeed, he was not so much sorry for the past as fearful for the future. It was not grief for wrong-doing that wrung his heart and broke his spirit, but rather his natural sorrow at losing the only creature he had ever deeply loved, chagrin at the shame of his position and the failure of his hopes, and the icy fingers of superstitious fears.

The crisis had come and passed: he had sinned against his Father in heaven and his father on earth, and he did not sorrow for his sin; his wife had left him, murmuring with her dying lips exhortations to repentance, and he did not soften; shame and loss had fallen upon him, and he did not turn to God. But his pride was broken, all that remained to him of strength was his wickedness; the flood that had swept over him had purged away not the evil but the good, from the evil it only took its courage. Henceforth, if he sins at all, his will be no bold and hazardous villainy which, whilst it excites horror, can almost compel respect, but rather the low and sordid crime, the safe and treacherous iniquity.

Ajax no longer defies the lightning—he mutters curses on it beneath his breath.

On the evening of the double funeral—which Philip did not feel equal to attending, and at which George, in a most egregious hatband and with many sobs and tears, officiated as chief mourner—

Mr. Fraser thought it would be a kind act on his part to go and offer such consolation to the bereaved man as lay within his power, if indeed he would accept it. Somewhat contrary to his expectation, he was, on arrival at the Abbey House, asked in without delay.

"I am glad to see a human face," said Philip to the clergyman, as he entered the room; "this loneliness is intolerable. I am as much alone as though I lay stark in the churchyard like my poor wife."

Mr. Fraser did not answer him immediately, so taken up was he in noticing the wonderful changes a week had wrought in his appearance. Not only did his countenance bear traces of the illness and exhaustion that might not unnaturally be expected in such a case of bereavement, but it faithfully reflected the change that had taken place in his mental attitude. His eyes had lost the frank boldness that had made them very pleasing to some people, they looked scared; the mouth too was rendered conspicuous by the absence of the firm lines that once gave it character; indeed the man's whole appearance was pitiful and almost abject.

"I am afraid," he said at length, in a tone of gentle compassion, "that you must have suffered a great deal, Caresfoot."

"Suffered! I have suffered the tortures of the damned! I still suffer them, I shall always suffer them."

"I do not wish," said the clergyman, with a little hesitation, "to appear officious or to make a mockery of your grief by telling you that it is for your good; but I should fail in my duty if I did not point out to you that He who strikes the blow has the power to heal the wound, and that very often such things are for our ultimate benefit, either in this world or the next. Carry your troubles to Him, my dear fellow, acknowledge His hand, and, if you know in your heart of any way in which you have sinned, offer Him your hearty repentance; do this, and you will not be deserted. Your life, that now seems to you nothing but ashes, may yet be both a happy and a useful one."

Philip smiled bitterly as he answered—

"You talk to me of repentance—how can I repent when Providence has treated me so cruelly, robbing me at a single blow of my wife and my fortune? I know that I did wrong in concealing my marriage, but I was driven to it by fear of my father. Ah! if you had seen him as I saw him, you would have known that they were right to call him 'Devil Caresfoot.'" He checked himself, and then went on—"He forced me into the engagement with Miss Lee, and announced it without my consent. Now I am ruined—everything is taken from me."

"You have your little daughter, and all the entailed estate—at least, so I am told."

"My little daughter!—I never want to see her face; she killed her mother. If it had been a boy, it would have been different, for then, at any rate, that accursed George would not have got my birthright. My little daughter, indeed! don't enumerate her among my earthly blessings."

"It is rather sad to hear you talk like that of your child; but, at any rate, you are not left in want. You have one of the finest old places in the county, and a thousand a year, which to most men would be riches."

"And which to me," answered Philip, "is beggary. I should have had six, and I have got one. But look you here, Fraser, I swear before God—"

"Hush! I cannot listen to such talk."

"Well, then, before anything you like, that, while I live, I will never rest one single moment until I get my own back again. It may seem impossible, but I will find a way. For instance," he added, as a thought struck him, "strangely enough, the will does not forbid me to buy the lands back. If I can get them no other way, I will buy them—do you hear?—I will buy them. I *must* have them again before I die."

"How will you get the money?"

"The money—I will save it, make it, steal it, get it somehow. Oh! do not be afraid; I will get the money. It will take a few years, but I will get it somehow. It is not the want of a few thousands that will stop a determined man."

"And suppose your cousin won't sell?"

"I will find a way to make him sell—some bribe, something. There, there," and his enthusiasm and eagerness vanished in a moment, and the broken look came back upon his face. "It's all nonsense; I am talking impossibilities—a little weak in my mind, I suppose. Forget it, there's a good fellow; say nothing about it. And so you buried them? Ah, me! ah, me! And George did chief mourner. I suppose he blubbered freely; he always could blubber freely when he liked. I remember how he used to take folks in as a lad, and then laugh at them; that's why they called him 'Crocodile' at school. Well, he's my master now, and I'm his very humble servant; perhaps one day it will be the other way up again. What, must you go? If you knew how fearfully lonely I am, you would not go. My nerves have quite gone, and I fancy all sorts of things. I can think of nothing but those two graves out there in the dark. Have they sodded them over? Tell them to sod them over. It was kind of you to come and see me. You mustn't pay any attention to my talk; I am not quite myself. Good night."

Mr. Fraser was an extremely unsuspecting man, but somehow, as he picked his way to the vicarage to eat his solitary chop, he felt a doubt rising in his mind as to whether, his disclaimer notwithstanding, Philip had not sincerely meant all he said.

"He is shockingly changed," he mused, "and I am not sure that it is a change for the better. Poor fellow, he has a great deal to bear, and should be kindly judged. It is all so painful that I must try to divert my mind. Mrs. Brown, will you bring me a little chocolate- coloured book, that you will see on the table in my study, when you come back with the potatoes? It has Plato —P-l-a-t-o —printed on the back."

Chapter XIV

The jubilation of George at the turn events had taken may perhaps be more easily imagined than described. There is generally one weak point about all artful schemes to keep other people out of their rights; they break down over some unforeseen detail, or through the neglect of some trivial and obvious precaution. But this was one of the glorious instances to the contrary that prove the rule. Nothing had broken down, everything had prospered as a holy cause always should, and does—in theory. The stars in their courses had fought for Sisera, everything had succeeded beyond expectation, nothing had failed. In the gratitude of his heart, George would willingly have given a thousand pounds towards the establishment of a training-school for anonymous letter-writers, or the erection of a statue to Hilda Caresfoot, whose outraged pride and womanly jealousy had done him such yeoman service.

Speaking seriously, he had great cause for rejoicing. Instead of a comparatively slender younger son's portion, he had stepped into a fine and unencumbered property of over five thousand a year, and that in the heyday of his youth, when in the full possession of all his capacities for enjoyment, which were large indeed. Henceforth everything that money could buy would be his, including the respect and flattery of his poorer neighbours. An added flavour too was given to the overflowing cup of his good fortune by the fact that it had been wrenched from the hands of the cousin whom he hated, and on whom he had from a boy sworn to be avenged. Poor Philip! bankrupt in honour and broken in fortune, he could afford to pity him now, to pity him ostentatiously and in public. He was open-handed with his pity was George. Nor did he lack a sympathizer in these delicious moments of unexpected triumph.

"Did I not tell you," said Mrs. Bellamy, in her full, rich tones, on the afternoon of the reading of the will—"did I not tell you that, if you would consent to be guided by me, I would pull you through, and have I not pulled you through? Never misdoubt my judgment again, my dear George; it is infinitely sounder than your own."

"You did, Anne, you certainly did; you are a charming woman, and as clever as you are charming."

"Compliments are all very well, and I am sure I appreciate yours" —and she gave a little curtsy —"at their proper value; but I must remind you, George, that I have done my part of the bargain, and that now you must do yours."

"Oh! that's all right; Bellamy shall have the agency and two hundred a year with it, and, to show you that I have not forgotten you, perhaps you will accept this in memorial of our joint achievement;" and he drew from his pocket and opened a case containing a superb set of sapphires.

Mrs. Bellamy had all a beautiful woman's love for jewels, and especially adored sapphires.

"Oh!" she said, clasping her hands, "thank you, George; they are perfectly lovely!"

"Perhaps," he replied, politely; "but not half so lovely as their wearer. I wonder," he added, with a little laugh, "what the old boy would say, if he could know that a thousand pounds of his personalty had gone by anticipation to buy a necklace for Anne Bellamy."

To this remark she made no reply, being apparently absorbed in her own thoughts. At last she spoke.

"I don't want to seem ungracious, George, but these"—and she touched the jewels—"were not the reward I expected: I want the letters you promised me back."

"My dear Anne, you are under a mistake, I never promised you the letters; I said that, under the circumstances, I might possibly restore them—a very different thing from promising."

Mrs. Bellamy flushed a little, and the great pupils of her sleepy eyes contracted till she looked quite dangerous.

"Then I must have strangely misunderstood you," she said.

"What do you want the letters for? Can't you trust me with them?"

"Don't you think, George, that if you had passed through something very terrible, you would like to have all the mementoes of that dark time destroyed? Those letters are the record of my terrible time; nothing remains of it but those written lines. I want to burn them, to stamp them into powder, to obliterate them as I have obliterated all the past. Whilst they exist I can never feel safe. Supposing you were to turn traitor to me and let those letters fall into the hands of others, supposing that you lost them, I should be a ruined woman. I speak frankly, you see; I fully appreciate my danger, principally because I know that, the more intimate a man and woman have been, the more chance there is of their becoming bitter enemies. George, give me those letters; do not overcloud my future with the shadows of the past."

"You talk as well as you do everything else, Anne; you are really a very remarkable woman. But, curiously enough, those letters, the existence of which is so obnoxious to you, are to me a source of great interest. You know that I love to study character—curious occupation for a young man, isn't it?—but I do. Well, in my small experience, I have never yet, either in fiction or in real life, come across such a fascinating display as is reflected in those letters. There I can, and often do, trace in minutest detail the agony of a strong mind, can see the barriers of what people call religion, early training, self-respect, and other curiosities which we name virtues, bursting away one by one under pressure, like the water-tight bulkheads they put in passenger steamers, till at length the work is done; the moral ship sinks, and the writer stands revealed what you are, my dear Anne, the loveliest, the cleverest, and the most utterly unscrupulous woman in the three kingdoms."

She rose very quietly, but quite white with passion, and answered in her low voice—

"Whatever I am you made me, and *you* are a devil, George Caresfoot, or you could not take pleasure in the tortures you inflicted before you destroyed. But, don't go too far, or you may regret it. Am I a woman to be played with? I think that you have trained me too well."

He laughed a little uneasily.

"There, you see; *grattez le Russe*, &c., and out comes the true character. Look at your face in the glass; it is magnificent, but not pleasant; rather dangerous, indeed. Why, Anne, do be reasonable; if I gave you those letters, I should never be able to sleep in peace. For the sake of my own safety I dare not abandon the whip-hand I have of you. Remember you could, if you chose, say some unpleasant things about me, and I don't want that any more than you do just now. But, you see, whilst I hold in my power what would, if necessary, effectually ruin you, and probably Bellamy too—for this country society is absurdly prejudiced—I have little cause for fear. Perhaps in the future you may be able to render me some service for which you shall have the letters—who knows? You see I am perfectly frank with you, for the simple reason that I know that it is useless to try to conceal my thoughts from a person of your perception."

"Well, well, perhaps you are right: it is difficult to trust oneself, much less any one else. At any rate," she said, with a bitter smile, "you have given me Bellamy, a start in society, and a sapphire necklace. In twenty years, I hope, if the fates are kind, to have lost Bellamy on the road—he is really unendurable—to rule society, and to have as many sapphire necklaces and other fine things as I care for. In enumerating my qualities, you omitted one, ambition."

"With your looks, your determination, and your brains, there is nothing that you will not be able to do if you set your mind to it, and don't make an enemy of your devoted friend."

And thus the conversation ended.

Now little Bellamy had, after much anxious thought, just about this time come to a bold determination—namely, to assert his marital authority over Mrs. Bellamy. Indeed, his self-pride was much injured by the treatment he received at his wife's hands, for it seemed to him that he was utterly ignored in his own house. In fact, it would not be too much to say that he *was* an entire nonentity. He had married Mrs. Bellamy for love, or rather from fascination, though she had nothing in the world—married her in a fortnight from the time that George had first introduced him. When he had walked out of church with his beautiful bride, he had thought himself the luckiest man in London,

whereas now he could not but feel that matrimony had not fulfilled his expectations. In the first place, Love's young dream—he was barely thirty—came to a rude awakening, for, once married, it was impossible—though he had, in common with the majority of little men, a tolerably good opinion of himself—but that he should perceive that his wife did not care one brass farthing about him. To his soft advances she was as cold as a marble statue, the lovely eyes never grew tender for him. Indeed, he found that she was worse than a statue, for statues cannot indulge in bitter mockery and contemptuous comments, and Mrs. Bellamy could, and, what is more, frequently did.

"It is very well," reflected her husband, "to marry the loveliest woman in the county, but I don't see the use of it if she treats one like a dog."

At last this state of affairs had grown intolerable, and, meditating in the solitude of his office, Mr. Bellamy resolved to assert himself once and for all, and set matters on a proper footing, and Mrs. Bellamy in her place. But it is one thing for husbands of the Bellamy stamp to form high-stomached resolutions, and another for them to put those resolutions into active and visible operation on wives of the Mrs. Bellamy stamp. Indeed, had it not been for a little incident about to be detailed, it is doubtful if Mr. Bellamy would have ever come to the scratch at all.

When George had gone, Mrs. Bellamy sat down in by no means the sweetest of tempers to think. But thinking in this instance proved an unprofitable occupation, and she gave it up, in order to admire the sapphire necklace that lay upon her knee. At that moment her husband entered the room, but she took no notice, merely going on examining the stones. After moving about a little, as though to attract attention, the gentleman spoke.

"I have managed to get home to lunch, my dear."

"Indeed."

"Well, you might take a little notice of me."

"Why? Is there anything remarkable about you this morning?"

"No, there is not; but, remarkable or not, a man who has been fool enough"—Mr. Bellamy laid great emphasis on the word "fool"—"to get married has a right to expect when he comes into his own house that he will have a little notice taken of him, and not be as completely overlooked as—as though he were a tub of butter in a grocer's shop;" and he pugged out his chest, rubbed his hands, and looked defiant.

The lady laid her head back on the chair, and laughed with exquisite enjoyment.

"Really, my dear John, you will kill me," she said at length.

"May I ask," he replied, looking as though there was nothing in the world that he would like better, "what you are laughing at?"

"Your slightly vulgar but happy simile; it is easy to see where you draw your inspiration from. If you had only said butterine, inferior butter, you know, the counterfeit article, it would have been perfect."

Her husband gave a glance at his tubby little figure in the glass.

"Am I to understand that you refer to me as 'butterine,' Mrs. Bellamy?"

"Oh! certainly yes, if you like; but, butter or not, you will melt if you lose your temper so."

"I have not lost my temper, madam; I am perfectly cool," he replied, positively gasping with fury. Here his eye fell upon the necklace. "What necklace is that? who gave you that necklace? I demand to know."

"You *demand* to know! Be careful what you say, please. Mr. George Caresfoot gave me the necklace. It cost a thousand pounds. Are you satisfied?"

"No, I am not satisfied; I will not have that cursed George Caresfoot continually here. I will send him back his necklace. I will assert my rights as an Englishman and a spouse, I will—"

"You will sit down and listen to me."

The tone of the voice checked his absurd linguistic and physical capers, and caused him to look at his wife. She was standing and pointing to a chair. Her face was calm and immovable, only her

eyes appeared to expand and contract with startling rapidity. One glance was enough for Bellamy. He felt frightened, and sat down in the indicated chair.

"That's right," she said, pleasantly; "now we can have a cosy chat. John, you are a lawyer, and therefore, I suppose, more or less a man of the world. Now, *as* a lawyer and a man of the world, I ask you to look at me and then at yourself, and say if you think it likely or even possible that I married you for love. To be frank, I did nothing of the sort; I married you because you were the person most suited to my purpose. If you will only understand that it will save us both a great deal of trouble. As for your talk about asserting yourself and exercising your authority, it is simple nonsense. You are very well in your way, my dear John, and a fair attorney, but do you suppose for one moment that you are capable of matching yourself against me? If so, you make a shocking mistake. Be advised, and do not try the experiment. But don't think that the bargain is all my side—it is not. If you will behave yourself properly and be guided by my advice, I will make you one of the richest and most powerful men in the county. If you will not, I shall shake myself free of you as soon as I am strong enough. Rise I must and will, and if you will not rise with me, I will rise alone. As regards your complaints of my not caring about you, the world is wide, my dear John; console yourself elsewhere. I shall not be jealous. And now I think I have explained everything. It is so much more satisfactory to have a clear understanding. Come, shall we go to lunch?"

But Bellamy wanted no lunch that day.

"After all," he soliloquized to himself, between the pangs of a racking headache brought on by his outburst of temper, "time sometimes brings its revenges, and, if it does, you may look out, Mrs. Bellamy."

Chapter XV

It is perhaps time that the reader should know a little of the ancient house and loyalty where many of the personages of whose history these pages treat, lived and moved and had their being.

The Abbey House, so called, was in reality that part of the monastery which had been devoted to the use of successive generations of priors. It was, like the ruins that lay to its rear, entirely built of grey masonry, rendered greyer still by the lichens that fed upon its walls, which were of exceeding strength and thickness. It was a long, irregular building, and roofed with old and narrow tiles, which from red had, in the course of ages, faded to sober russet. The banqueting-hall was a separate building at its northern end, and connected with the main dwelling by a covered way. The aspect of the house was westerly, and the front windows looked on to an expanse of park-like land, heavily timbered with oaks of large size, some of them pollards that might have pushed their first leaves in the time of William the Conqueror. In spring their vivid green was diversified by the reddish brown of a double line of noble walnut-trees, a full half mile in length, marking the track of the carriage-drive that led to the Roxham high-road.

Behind the house lay the walled garden, celebrated in the time of the monks as being a fortnight earlier than any other in the neighbourhood. Skirting the southern wall of this garden, which was a little less than a hundred paces long, the visitor reached the scattered ruins of the old monastery that had for generations served as a stone quarry to the surrounding villages, but of which enough was left, including a magnificent gateway, to show how great had been its former extent. Passing on through these, he would come to an enclosure that marked the boundaries of the old graveyard, now turned to agricultural uses, and then to the church itself, a building with a very fine tower, but possessing no particular interest, if we except some exceedingly good brasses and a colossal figure of a monk cut out of the solid heart of an oak, and supposed to be the effigy of a prior of the abbey who died in the time of Edward I. Below the church again, and about one hundred and fifty paces from it, was the vicarage, a comparatively modern building, possessing no architectural attraction, and evidently reared out of the remains of the monastery.

At the south end of the Abbey House itself lay a small grass plot and pleasure-garden fringed with shrubberies, and adorned with two fine cedar-trees. One of these trees was at its further extremity, and under it there ran a path cut through the dense shrubbery. This path, which was edged with limes and called the "Tunnel Walk," led to the lake, and debouched in the little glade where stood Caresfoot's Staff. The lake itself was a fine piece of water, partly natural and partly constructed by the monks, measuring a full mile round, and from fifty to two hundred yards in width. It was in the shape of a man's shoe, the heel facing west like the house, but projecting beyond it, the narrow part representing the hollow of the instep, being exactly opposite to it, and the sole swelling out in an easterly direction.

Bratham Abbey was altogether a fine old place, but the most remarkable thing about it was its air of antiquity and the solemnity of its peace. It did not, indeed, strike the spirit with that religious awe which is apt to fall upon us as we gaze along the vaulted aisles of great cathedrals, but it appealed perhaps with equal strength to the softer and more reflective side of our nature. For generation after generation that house had been the home of men like ourselves; they had passed and were forgotten, but it remained, the sole witness of the stories of their lives. Hands of which the very bones had long since crumbled into dust had planted those old oaks and walnuts, that still donned their green robes in summer, and shed them in the autumn, to stand great skeletons through the winter months, awaiting the resurrection of the spring.

There lay upon the place and its surroundings a burden of dead lives, intangible, but none the less real. The air was thick with memories, as suggestive as the grey dust in a vault. Even in the summer, in the full burst of nature revelling in her strength, the place was sad. But in the winter,

when the wind came howling through the groaning trees, and drove the grey scud across an ashy sky, when the birds were dumb, and there were no cattle on the sodden lawn, its isolated melancholy was a palpable thing.

That hoary house might have been a gateway of the dim land we call the Past, looking down in stony sorrow on the follies of those who so soon must cross its portals, and, to the wise who could hear the lesson, pregnant with echoes of the warning voices of many generations.

Here it was that Angela grew up to womanhood.

Some nine and a half years had passed from the date of the events described in the foregoing pages, when one evening Mr. Fraser bethought him that he had been indoors all day, and proposed reading till late that night, and that therefore he had better take some exercise.

A tall and somewhat nervous-looking man, with dark eyes, a sensitive mouth, and that peculiar stoop and pallor of complexion which those devoted to much study almost invariably acquire, he had "student" written on his face. His history was a sufficiently common one. He possessed academical abilities of a very high order, and had in his youth distinguished himself greatly at college, both as a classical and a mathematical scholar. When quite young, he was appointed, through the influence of a relation, to his present living, where the income was good and the population very small indeed. Freed from all necessity for exertion, he shut himself up with his books, having his little round of parish work for relaxation, and never sought to emerge from the quiet of his aimless studies to struggle for fame and place in the laborious world. Mr. Fraser was what people call an able man thrown away. If they had known his shy, sensitive nature a little better, they would have understood that he was infinitely more suited for the solitary and peaceful lot in life which he had chosen, than to become a unit in the turbulent and greedy crowd that is struggling through all the ages up the slippery slopes of the temple of that greatest of our gods—Success.

There are many such men, probably you, my reader, know one or two. With infinite labour they store up honey from the fields of knowledge, collect endless data from the statistics of science, pile up their calculations against the very stars; and all to no end. As a rule, they do not write books; they gather the learning for the learning's sake, and for the very love of it rejoice to count their labour lost. And thus they go on from year to year, until the golden bowl is broken and the pitcher broken at the fountain, and the gathered knowledge sinks, or appears to sink, back to whence it came. Alas, that one generation cannot hand on its wisdom and experience—more especially its experience—to another in its perfect form! If it could, we men should soon become as gods.

It was a mild evening in the latter end of October when Mr. Fraser started on his walk. The moon was up in the heavens as he, an hour later, made his way from the side of the lake, where he had been wandering, back to the churchyard through which he had to pass to reach the vicarage. Just before he came to the gate, however, he was surprised, in such a solitary spot, to see a slight figure leaning against the wall opposite the place where lay the mortal remains of the old squire and his daughter-in-law, Hilda. He stood still and watched; the figure appeared to be gazing steadily at the graves. Presently it turned and saw him, and he recognized the great grey eyes and golden hair of little Angela Caresfoot.

"Angela, my dear, what are you doing here at this time of night?" he asked, in some surprise.

She blushed a little as she shook hands rather awkwardly with him.

"Don't be angry with me," she said in a deprecatory voice; "but I was so lonely this evening that I came here for company."

"Came here for company! What do you mean?"

She hung her head.

"Come," he said, "tell me what you mean."

"I don't quite know myself. How can I tell you?"

He looked more puzzled than ever, and she observed it and went on:

"I will try to tell you, but you must not be cross like Pigott when she cannot understand me. Sometimes I feel ever so much alone, as though I was looking for something and could not find it, and then I come and stand here and look at my mother's grave, and I get company and am not lonely any more. That is all I know; I cannot tell you any more. Do you think me silly? Pigott does."

"I think you are a very strange child. Are you not afraid to come here alone at night?"

"Afraid—oh, no! Nobody comes here; the people in the village dare not come here after dark, because they say that the ruins are full of spirits. Jakes told me that. But I must be stupid; I cannot see them, and I want so very much to see them. I hope it is not wrong, but I told my father so the other day, and he turned white and was angry with Pigott for giving me such ideas; but you know Pigott did not give them to me at all. I am not afraid to come; I like it, it is so quiet, and, if one listens enough in the quiet, I always think one may hear something that other people do not hear."

"Do you hear anything, then?"

"Yes, I hear things, but I cannot understand them. Listen to the wind in the branches of that tree, the chestnut, off which the leaf is falling now. It says something, if only I could catch it."

"Yes, child, yes, you are right in a way; all Nature tells the same eternal tale, if our ears were not stopped to its voices," he answered, with a sigh; indeed, the child's talk had struck a vein of thought familiar to his own mind, and, what is more, it deeply interested him; there was a quaint, far-off wisdom in it.

"It is pleasant to-night, is it not, Mr. Fraser?" said the little maid, "though everything is dying. The things die softly without any pain this year; last year they were all killed in the rain and wind. Look at that cloud floating across the moon, is it not beautiful? I wonder what it is the shadow of; I think all the clouds are shadows of something up in heaven."

"And when there are no clouds?"

"Oh! then heaven is quite still and happy."

"But heaven is always happy."

"Is it? I don't understand how it can be always happy if *we* go there. There must be so many to be sorry for."

Mr. Fraser mused a little; that last remark was difficult to answer. He looked at the fleecy cloud, and, falling into her humour, said—

"I think your cloud is the shadow of an eagle carrying a lamb to its little ones."

"And I think," she answered confidently, "that it is the shadow of an angel carrying a baby home."

Again he was silenced; the idea was infinitely more poetical than his own.

"This," he reflected, "is a child of a curious mental calibre."

Before he could pursue the thought further, she broke in upon it in quite a different strain.

"Have you seen Jack and Jill? They *are* jolly."

"Who are Jack and Jill?"

"Why, my ravens, of course. I got them out of the old tree with a hole in it at the end of the lake."

"The tree at the end of the lake! Why, the hole where the ravens nest is fifty feet up. Who got them for you?"

"I got them myself. Sam—you know Sam—was afraid to go up. He said he should fall, and that the old birds would peck his eyes. So I went by myself one morning quite early, with a bag tied round my neck, and got up. It was hard work, and I nearly tumbled once; but I got on the bough beneath the hole at last. It shook very much; it is so rotten, you have no idea. There were three little ones in the nest, all with great mouths. I took two, and left one for the old birds. When I was nearly down again, the old birds found me out, and flew at me, and beat my head with their wings, and pecked—oh, they did peck! Look here," and she showed him a scar on her hand; "that's where they pecked. But I stuck to my bag, and got down at last, and I'm glad I did, for we are great friends now; and I am sure the cross old birds would be quite pleased if they knew how nicely I am educating their young

ones, and how their manners have improved. But I say, Mr. Fraser, don't tell Pigott; she cannot climb trees, and does not like to see me do it. She does not know I went after them myself."

Mr. Fraser laughed.

"I won't tell her, Angela, my dear; but you must be careful—you might tumble and kill yourself."

"I don't think I shall, Mr. Fraser, unless I am meant to. God looks after me as much when I am up a tree as when I am upon the ground."

Once more he had nothing to say; he could not venture to disturb her faith.

"I will walk home with you, my dear. Tell me. Angela, would you like to learn?"

"Learn!—learn what?"

"Books, and the languages that other nations, nations that have passed away, used to talk, and how to calculate numbers and distances."

"Yes, I should like to learn very much; but who will teach me? I have learnt all Pigott knows two years ago, and since then I have been trying to learn about the trees and flowers and stars; but I look and watch, and can't understand."

"Ah! my dear, contact with Nature is the highest education; but the mind that would appreciate her wonders must have a foundation of knowledge to work upon. The uneducated man is rarely sensitive to the thousand beauties and marvels of the fields around him, and the skies above him. But, if you like, I will teach you, Angela. I am practically an idle man, and it will give me great pleasure; but you must promise to work and do what I tell you."

"Oh, how good you are! Of course I will work. When am I to begin?"

"I don't know—to-morrow, if you like; but I must speak to your father first."

Her face fell a little at the mention of her father's name, but presently she said, quietly—

"My father, he will not care if I learn or not. I hardly ever see my father; he does not like me. I see nobody but Pigott and you and old Jakes, and Sam sometimes. You need not ask my father; he will never miss me whilst I am learning. Ask Pigott."

At that moment Pigott herself hove into view, in a great flurry.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Angela! Where have you been to, you naughty girl? At some of your star-gazing tricks again, I'll be bound, frightening the life out of a body. It's just too bad of you, Miss Angela."

The little girl looked at her with a peculiarly winning smile, and took her very solid hand between her own tiny palms.

"Don't be cross, Pigott, dear," she said. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I couldn't help going—I couldn't indeed; and then I stopped talking to Mr. Fraser."

"There, there, I should just like to know who can be cross with you when you put on those ways. Are your feet wet? Ah! I thought so. Run on in and take them off."

"Won't that be just a little difficult?" and she was gone with a merry laugh.

"There, sir, that's just like her, catching a body up like and twisting what she says, till you don't know which is head and which is heels. I'll be bound you found her down yonder;" and she nodded towards the churchyard.

"Yes."

Pigott drew a little nearer, and spoke in a low voice.

"'Tis my belief, sir, that that child sees *things*; she is just the oddest child I ever saw. There's nothing she likes better than to slip out of a night, and to go to that there beastly churchyard, saving your presence, for 'company,' as she calls it—nice sort of company, indeed. And it is just the same way with storms. You remember that dreadful gale a month ago, the one that took down the North Grove and blew the spire off Rewtham Church. Well, just when it was at its worst, and I was a-sitting and praying that the roof might keep over our heads, I look round for Angela, and can't see her. 'Some of your tricks again,' thinks I to myself; and just then up comes Mrs. Jakes to say that Sam

had seen little missy creeping down the tunnel walk. I was that scared that I ran down, got hold of Sam, for Jakes said he wouldn't go out with all them trees a-flying about in the air like straws—no, not for a thousand pounds, and off we set after her." Here Pigott paused to groan at the recollection of that walk.

"Well," said Mr. Fraser, who was rather interested—everything about this queer child interested him; "where did you find her?"

"Well, sir, you know where the old wall runs out into the water, before Caresfoot's Staff there? Well, at the end of it there's a post sunk in, with a ring in it to tie boats to. Now, would you believe it? out there at the end of the wall, and tied to the ring by a scarf passed round her middle, was that dreadful child. She was standing there, her back against the post, right in the teeth of the gale, with the spray dashing over her, her arms stretched out before her, her hat gone, her long hair standing out behind straight as an iron bar, and her eyes flashing as though they were on fire, and all the while there were the great trees crashing down all round in a way enough to make a body sick with fright. We got her back safe, thank God; but how long we shall keep her, I'm sure I don't know. Now she is drowning herself in the lake, for she takes to the water like a duck, and now breaking her neck off trees, and now going to ghosts in the churchyard for company. It's wearing me to the bone—that's what it is."

Mr. Fraser smiled, for, to tell the truth, Pigott's bones were pretty comfortably covered.

"Come," he said, "you would not part with her for all her wicked deeds, would you?"

"Part with her," answered Pigott, in hot indignation, "part with my little beauty? I would rather part with my head. The love, there never was another like her, nor never will be, with her sweet ways; and, if I know anything about girls, she'll be the beauty of England, she will. She's made for a beautiful woman; and look at them eyes and forehead and hair—where did you ever see the like? And, as for her queer ways, what can you expect from a child as has got a great empty mind and nothing to put in it, and no one to talk to but a common woman like me, and a father"—here she dropped her voice—"as is a miser, and hates the sight of his own flesh and blood?"

"Hush! you should not say such things, Pigott! Now I will tell you something; I am going on to ask your master to allow me to educate Angela."

"I'm right glad to hear it, sir. She's sharp enough to learn anything, and it's kind of you to teach her. If you can make her mind like what her body will be if she lives, somebody will be a lucky man one of these days. Good- night, sir, and many thanks for bringing missy home."

Next day Angela began her education.

Chapter XVI

Reader, we are about to see Angela again, and to see a good deal of her; but you must be prepared for a change in her personal appearance, for the curtain has been down for ten years since last you met the child whose odd propensities excited Pigott's wonder and indignation and Mr. Fraser's interest; and ten years, as we all know, can work many changes in the history of the world and individuals. In ten years some have been swept clean off the board, and their places taken by others; a few have grown richer, many poorer, some of us sadder, some wiser, and all of us ten years older. Now, this was exactly what had happened to little Angela—that is, the Angela we knew as little, and ten years make curious differences between the slim child of nine and a half and the woman of nearly twenty.

When we last saw her, Angela was about to commence her education. Let us re-introduce ourselves on the memorable evening when, after ten years of study, Mr. Fraser, a master by no means easily pleased, expressed himself unable to teach her any more.

It is Christmas Eve. Drip, drop, drip, falls the rain from the leafless boughs on to the sodden earth. The apology for daylight that has been doing its dull duty for the last few hours is slowly effacing itself, and the gale is celebrating the fact, and showing its joy at the closing-in of the melancholy night by howling its loudest through the trees, and flogging the flying scud it has brought with it from the sea, till it whirls across the sky like a succession of ghostly racehorses.

This is outside the vicarage; let us look within. In a well-worn arm-chair in the comfortable study, near to a table covered with books and holding some loose sheets of foolscap in his hand, sits Mr. Fraser. His hair is a little greyer than when he began Angela's education, about as grey as rather accommodating hair will get at the age of fifty-three; otherwise his general appearance is much the same, and his face as refined and gentlemanlike as ever. Presently he lays down the sheets of paper which he has been studying attentively, and says:

"Your solution is perfectly sound, Angela; but you have arrived at it in a characteristic fashion, and by your own road. Not but what your method has some merits—for one thing, it is more concise than my own; but, on the other hand, it shows a feminine weakness. It is not possible to follow every step from your premises to your conclusion, correct as it is."

"Ah!" says a low voice, with a happy ripple in it, the owner of which is busy with some tea-things out of range of the ring of light thrown by the double reading-lamp, "you often blame me for jumping to conclusions; but what does it matter, provided they are right? The whole secret is that I used the equivalent algebraic formula, but suppressed the working in order to puzzle you," and the voice laughed sweetly.

"That is not worthy of a mathematician," said Mr. Fraser, with some irritation; "it is nothing but a trick, a *tour de force*."

"The solution is correct, you say?"

"Quite."

"Then I maintain that it is perfectly mathematical; the object of mathematics is to arrive at the truth."

"*Vox et preterea nihil*. Come out of that corner, my dear. I hate arguing with a person I cannot see. But there, there, what is the use of arguing at all? The fact is, Angela, you are a first-class mathematician, and I am only second-class. I am obliged to stick to the old tracks; you cut a Roman road of your own. Great masters are entitled to do that. The algebraic formula never occurred to me when I worked the problem out, and it took me two days to do."

"You are trying to make me vain. You forget that whatever I know, which is just enough to show me how much I have to learn, I have learnt from you. As for being your superior in mathematics, I

don't think that, as a clergyman, you should make such a statement. Here is your tea." And the owner of the voice came forward into the ring of light.

She was tall beyond the ordinary height of woman, and possessed unusual beauty of form, that the tight-fitting grey dress she wore was well calculated to display. Her complexion, which was of a dazzling fairness, was set off by the darkness of the lashes that curled over the deep grey eyes. The face itself was rounded and very lovely, and surmounted by an ample forehead, whilst her hair, which was twisted into a massive knot, was of a tinge of chestnut gold, and marked with deep-set ripples. The charm of her face, however, did not, as is so often the case, begin and end with its physical attractions. There was more, much more, in it than that. But how is it possible to describe on paper a presence at once so full of grace and dignity, of the soft loveliness of woman, and of a higher and more spiritual beauty? There hangs in the Louvre a picture by Raphael, which represents a saint passing with light steps over the prostrate form of a dragon. There is in that heaven-inspired face, the equal of which has been rarely, if ever, put on canvas, a blending of earthly beauty and of the calm, awe-compelling spirit-gaze—that gaze, that holy dignity which can only come to such as are in truth and in deed "pure in heart"—that will give to those who know it a better idea of what Angela was like than any written description.

At times, but, ah, how rarely! we may have seen some such look as that she wore on the faces of those around us. It may be brought by a great sorrow, or be the companion of an overwhelming joy. It may announce the consummation of some sublime self-sacrifice, or convey the swift assurance of an everlasting love. It is to be found alike on the features of the happy mother as she kisses her new-born babe, and on the pallid countenance of the saint sinking to his rest. The sharp moment that brings us nearer God, and goes nigh to piercing the veil that hides His presence, is the occasion that calls it into being. It is a beauty born of the murmuring sound of the harps of heaven; it is the light of the eternal lamp gleaming faintly through its earthly casket.

This spirit-look, before which all wickedness must feel ashamed, had found a home in Angela's grey eyes. There was a strange nobility about her. Whether it dwelt in the stately form, or on the broad brow, or in the large glance of the deep eyes, it is not possible to say; but it was certainly a part of herself as self-evident as her face or features. She might well have been the inspiration of the lines that run:

"Truth in her might, beloved, Grand in her sway; Truth with her eyes, beloved, Clearer than day; Holy and pure, beloved, Spotless and free; Is there one thing, beloved, Fairer than thee?"

Mr. Fraser absently set down the tea that Angela was giving him when we took the liberty to describe her personal appearance.

"Now, Angela, read a little."

"What shall I read?"

"Oh! anything you like; please yourself."

Thus enjoined, she went to a bookshelf, and, taking down two volumes, handed one to Mr. Fraser, and then, opening her copy at haphazard, announced the page to her companion, and, sitting down, began to read.

What sound is this, now soft and melodious as the sweep of a summer gale over a southern sea, and now again like to the distant stamp and rush and break of the wave of battle? What can it be but the roll of those magnificent hexameters with which Homer charms a listening world. And rarely have English lips given them with a juster cadence.

"Stop, my dear, shut up your book; you are as good a Greek scholar as I can make you. Shut up your book for the last time. Your education, my dear Angela, is satisfactorily completed. I have succeeded with you—"

"Completed, Mr. Fraser!" said Angela, open-eyed. "Do you mean to say that I am to stop now just as I have begun to learn?"

"My dear, you have learnt everything that I can teach you, and, besides, I am going away the day after to-morrow."

"Going away!" and then and there, without the slightest warning, Angela—who, for all her beauty and learning, very much resembled the rest of her sex—burst into tears.

"Come, come, Angela," said Mr. Fraser, in a voice meant to be gruff, but only succeeding in being husky, for, oddly enough, it is trying even to a clergyman on the wrong side of middle-age to be wept over by a lovely woman; "don't be nonsensical; I am only going for a few months."

At this intelligence she pulled up a little.

"Oh," she said, between her sobs, "how you frightened me! How could you be so cruel! Where are you going to?"

"I am going for a long trip in southern Europe. Do you know that I have scarcely been away from this place for twenty years, so I mean to celebrate the conclusion of our studies by taking a holiday."

"I wish you would take me with you."

Mr. Fraser coloured slightly, and his eye brightened. He sighed as he answered—

"I am afraid, my dear, that it would be impossible."

Something warned Angela not to pursue the subject.

"Now, Angela, I believe that it is usual, on the occasion of the severance of a scholastic connection, to deliver something in the nature of a farewell oration. Well, I am not going to do that, but I want you to listen to a few words."

She did not answer, but, drawing a stool to a corner of the fireplace, she wiped her eyes and sat down almost at his feet, clasping her knees with her hands, and gazing rather sadly into the fire.

"You have, dear Angela," he began, "been educated in a somewhat unusual way, with the result that, after ten years of steady work that has been always interesting, though sometimes arduous, you have acquired information denied to the vast majority of your sex, whilst at the same time you could be put to the blush in many things by a school-girl of fifteen. For instance, though I firmly believe that you could at the present moment take a double first at the University, your knowledge of English literature is almost nil, and your history of the weakest. All a woman's ordinary accomplishments, such as drawing, playing, singing, have of necessity been to a great extent neglected, since I was not able to teach them to you myself, and you have had to be guided solely by books and by the light of Nature in giving to them such time as you could spare.

"Your mind, on the other hand, has been daily saturated with the noblest thoughts of the intellectual giants of two thousand years ago, and would in that respect be as much in place in a well-educated Grecian maiden living before the time of Christ as in an English girl of the nineteenth century.

"I have educated you thus, Angela, partly by accident and partly by design. You will remember when you began to come here some ten years since—you were a little thing then—and I had offered to give you some teaching, because you interested me, and I saw that you were running wild in mind and body. But, when I had undertaken the task I was somewhat puzzled how to carry it out. It is one thing to offer to educate a little girl, and another to do it. Not knowing where to begin, I fell back upon the Latin grammar, where I had begun myself, and so by degrees you slid into the curriculum of a classical and mathematical education. Then, after a year or two, I perceived your power of work and your great natural ability, and I formed a design. I said to myself, 'I will see how far a woman cultivated under favourable conditions can go. I will patiently teach this girl till the literature of Greece and Rome become as familiar to her as her mother-tongue, till figures and symbols hide no mysteries from her, till she can read the heavens like a book. I will teach her mind to follow the secret ways of knowledge, I will train it till it can soar above its fellows like a falcon above sparrows.' Angela, my proud design, pursued steadily through many years, has been at length accomplished; your bright intellect has risen to the strain I have put upon it, and you are at this moment one of the best all-round scholars of my acquaintance."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.