МАРГАРЕТ ОЛИФАНТ

MADAM

Маргарет Олифант

Madam

Олифант М. У.

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Mrs. Oliphant
Madam / A Novel

CHAPTER I

A large drawing-room in a country-house, in the perfect warmth, stillness, and good order of after-dinner, awaiting the ladies coming in; the fire perfection, reflecting itself in all the polished brass and steel and tiles of the fireplace; the atmosphere just touched with the scent of the flowers on the tables; the piano open, with candles lit upon it; some pretty work laid out upon a stand near the fire, books on another, ready for use, velvet curtains drawn. The whole softly, fully lighted, a place full of every gentle luxury and comfort in perfection—the scene prepared, waiting only the actors in it.

It is curious to look into a centre of life like this, all ready for the human affairs about to be transacted there. Tragedy or comedy, who can tell which? the clash of human wills, the encounter of hearts, or perhaps only that serene blending of kindred tastes and inclinations which makes domestic happiness. Who was coming in? A fair mother, with a flock of girls fairer still, a beautiful wife adding the last grace to the beautiful place? some fortunate man's crown of well-being and happiness, the nucleus of other happy homes to come?

A pause: the fire only crackling now and then, a little burst of flame puffing forth, the clock on the mantelpiece chiming softly. Then there entered alone a young lady about eighteen, in the simple white dinner dress of a home party; a tall, slight girl, with smooth brown hair, and eyes for the moment enlarged with anxiety and troubled meaning. She came in not as the daughter of the house in ordinary circumstances comes in, to take her pleasant place, and begin her evening occupation, whatever it may be. Her step was almost stealthy, like that of a pioneer, investigating anxiously if all was safe in a place full of danger. Her eyes, with the lids curved over them in an anxiety almost despairing, seemed to plunge into and search through and through the absolute tranquillity of this peaceful place. Then she said in a half-whisper, the intense tone of which was equal to a cry, "Mother!" Nothing stirred: the place was so warm, so perfect, so happy; while this one human creature stood on the threshold gazing—as if it had been a desert full of nothing but trouble and terror. She stood thus only for a moment, and then disappeared. It was a painful intrusion, suggestive of everything that was most alien to the sentiment of the place: when she withdrew it fell again into that soft beaming of warmth and brightness waiting for the warmer interest to come.

The doorway in which she had stood for that momentary inspection, which was deep in a solid wall, with two doors, in case any breath of cold should enter, opened into a hall, very lofty and fine, a sort of centre to the quiet house. Here the light was dimmer, the place being deserted, though it had an air of habitation, and the fire still smouldered in the huge chimney, round which chairs were standing. Sounds of voices muffled by closed doors and curtains came from the farther side where the dining-room was. The young lady shrank from this as if her noiseless motion could have been heard over the sounds of the male voices there. She hurried along to the other end of the hall, which lay in darkness with a glimmer of pale sky showing between the pillars from without. The outer doors were not yet shut. The inner glass door showed this paleness of night, with branches of trees tossing against a gray heaven full of flying clouds—the strangest weird contrast to all the warmth and luxury within. The girl shivered as she came in sight of that dreary outer world. This was the opening of the park in front of the house, a width of empty space, and beyond it the commotion of the wind, the stormy show of the coursing clouds. She went close to the door and gazed out, pressing her forehead against the glass, and searching the darkness, as she had done the light, with anxious eyes. She stood so for about five minutes, and then she breathed an impatient sigh. "What is the good?" she said to herself, half aloud.

Here something stirred near her which made her start, at first with an eager movement of hope. Then a low voice said—"No good at all, Miss Rosalind. Why should you mix yourself up with what's no concern of yours?"

Rosalind had started violently when she recognized the voice, but subdued herself while the other spoke. She answered, with quiet self-restraint: "Is it you, Russell? What are you doing here? You will make it impossible for me to do anything for you if you forget your own place!"

"I am doing what my betters are doing, Miss Rosalind—looking out for Madam, just as you are."

"How dare you say such things! I—am looking out to see what sort of night it is. It is very stormy. Go away at once. You have no right to be here!"

"I've been here longer than most folks—longer than them that has the best opinion of themselves; longer than—"

"Me perhaps," said Rosalind. "Yes, I know—you came before I was born; but you know what folly this is. Mamma," the girl said, with a certain tremor and hesitation, "will be very angry if she finds you here."

"I wish, Miss Rosalind, you'd have a little more respect for yourself. It goes against me to hear you say mamma. And your own dear mamma, that should have been lady of everything—"

"Russell, I wish you would not be such a fool! My poor little mother that died when I was born. And you to keep up a grudge like this for so many years!"

"And will, whatever you may say," cried the woman, under her breath; "and will, till I die, or till one of us—"

"Go up-stairs," said Rosalind, peremptorily, "at once! What have you to do here? I don't think you are safe in the house. If I had the power I should send you away."

"Miss Rosalind, you are as cruel as— You have no heart. Me, that nursed you, and watched over you—"

"It is too terrible a price to pay," cried the girl, stamping her foot on the floor. "Go! I will not have you here. If mamma finds you when she comes down-stairs—"

The woman laughed. "She will ask what you are doing here, Miss Rosalind. It will not be only me she'll fly out upon. What are you doing here? Who's outside that interests you so? It interests us both, that's the truth; only I am the one that knows the best."

Rosalind's white figure flew across the faint light. She grasped the shoulder of the dark shadow, almost invisible in the gloom. "Go!" she cried in her ear, pushing Russell before her; the onslaught was so sudden and vehement that the woman yielded and disappeared reluctantly, gliding away by one of the passages that led to the other part of the house. The girl stood panting and excited in the brief sudden fury of her passion, a miserable sense of failing faith and inability to explain to herself the circumstances in which she was, heightening the fervor of her indignation. Were Russell's suspicions true? Had she been in the right all along? Those who take persistently the worst view of human nature are, alas! so often in the right. And what is there more terrible than the passion of defence and apology for one whom the heart begins to doubt? The girl was young, and in her rage and pain could scarcely keep herself from those vehement tears which are the primitive attribute of passion. How calm she could have been had she been quite, quite sure! How she had laughed at Russell's prejudices in the old days when all was well. She had even excused Russell, feeling that after all it was pretty of her nurse to return continually to the image of her first mistress—Rosalind's own mother—and that in the uneducated mind the prepossession against a stepmother, the wrath with which the woman saw her own nursling supplanted, had a sort of feudal flavor which was rather agreeable than otherwise.

Rosalind had pardoned Russell as Mrs. Trevanion herself had pardoned her. So long as all was well: so long as there was nothing mysterious, nothing that baffled the spectator in the object of Russell's animadversions. But now something had fallen into life which changed it altogether. To defend those we love from undeserved accusations is so easy. And in books and plays, and every

other exhibition of human nature in fiction, the accused always possesses the full confidence of those who love him. In ordinary cases they will not even hear any explanation of equivocal circumstances —they know that guilt is impossible: it is only those who do not know him who can believe anything so monstrous. Alas! this is not so in common life—the most loving and believing cannot always have that sublime faith. Sometimes doubt and fear gnaw the very souls of those who are the champions, the advocates, the warmest partisans of the accused. This terrible canker had got into Rosalind's being. She loved her stepmother with enthusiasm. She was ready to die in her defence. She would not listen to the terrible murmur in her own heart; but yet it was there. And as she stood and gazed out upon the park, upon the wild bit of stormy sky, with the black tree-tops waving wildly against it, she was miserable, as miserable as a heart of eighteen ever was. Where had Madam gone, hurrying from the dinner-table where she had smiled and talked and given no sign of trouble? She was not in her room, nor in the nursery, nor anywhere that Rosalind could think of. It was in reality a confession of despair, a sort of giving up of the cause altogether, when the girl came to spy out into the wintry world outside and look for the fugitive there.

Rosalind had resisted the impulse to do so for many an evening. She had paused by stealth in the dark window above in the corridor, and blushed for herself and fled from that spy's place. But by force of trouble and doubt and anguish her scruples had been overcome, and now she had accepted for herself this position of spy. If her fears had been verified, and she had seen her mother cross that vacant space and steal into the house, what the better would she have been? But there is in suspicion a wild curiosity, an eagerness for certainty, which grows like a fever. She had come to feel that she must know—whatever happened she must be satisfied—come what would, that would be better than the gnawing of this suspense. And she had another object too. Her father was an invalid, exacting and fretful. If his wife was not ready at his call whenever he wanted her, his displeasure was unbounded; and of late it had happened many times that his wife had not been at his call. The scenes that had followed, the reproaches, the insults even, to which the woman whom she called mother had been subjected, had made Rosalind's heart sick. If she could but see her, hasten her return, venture to call her, to bid her come quick, quick! it would be something. The girl was not philosopher enough to say to herself that Madam would not come a moment the sooner for being thus watched for. It takes a great deal of philosophy to convince an anxious woman of this in any circumstances, and Rosalind was in the pangs of a first trouble, the earliest anguish she had ever known. After she had driven Russell away, she stood with her face pressed against the glass and all her senses gone into her eyes and ears. She heard, she thought, the twitter of the twigs in the wind, the sharp sound now and then of one which broke and fell, which was like a footstep on the path; besides the louder sweep of the tree-tops in the wind, and on the other hand the muffled and faint sound of life from the dining-room, every variation in which kept her in alarm.

But it was in vain she gazed; nothing crossed the park except the sweep of the clouds driven along the sky; nothing sounded in the air except the wind, the trees, and sometimes the opening of a distant door or clap of a gate; until the dining-room became more audible, a sound of chairs pushed back and voices rising, warning the watcher. She flew like an arrow through the hall, and burst into the still sanctuary of domestic warmth and tranquillity as if she had been a hunted creature escaping from a fatal pursuit with her enemies at her heels. Her hands were like ice, her slight figure shivering with cold, yet her heart beating so that she could scarcely draw her breath. All this must disappear before the gentlemen came in. It was Rosalind's first experience in that strange art which comes naturally to a woman, of obliterating herself and her own sensations; but how was she to still her pulse, to restore her color, to bring warmth to her chilled heart? She felt sure that her misery, her anguish of suspense, her appalling doubts and terrors, must be written in her face; but it was not so. The emergency brought back a rush of the warm blood tingling to her fingers' ends. Oh never, never, through her, must the mother she loved be betrayed! That brave impulse brought color to her cheek and strength to her heart. She made one or two of those minute changes in the room which a woman

always finds occasion for, drawing the card-table into a position more exactly like that which her father approved, giving an easier angle to his chair, with a touch moving that of Madam into position as if it had been risen from that moment. Then Rosalind took up the delicate work that lay on the table, and when the gentlemen entered was seated on a low seat within the circle of the shaded lamp, warm in the glow of the genial fireside, her pretty head bent a little over her pretty industry, her hands busy. She who had been the image of anxiety and unrest a moment before was now the culminating-point of all the soft domestic tranquillity, luxury, boundless content and peace, of which this silent room was the home. She looked up with a smile to greet them as they came in. The brave girl had recovered her sweet looks, her color, and air of youthful composure and self-possession, by sheer force of will, and strain of the crisis in which she stood to maintain the honor of the family at every hazard. She had been able to do that, but she could not yet for the moment trust herself to speak.

CHAPTER II

The gentlemen who came into the drawing-room at Highcourt were four in number: the master of the house, his brother, the doctor, and a young man fresh from the university, who was a visitor. Mr. Trevanion was an invalid; he had been a tall man, of what is called aristocratic appearance; a man with fine, clearly cut features, holding his head high, with an air "as if all the world belonged to him." These fine features were contracted by an expression of fastidious discontent and dissatisfaction, which is not unusually associated with such universal proprietorship, and illness had taken the flesh from his bones, and drawn the ivory skin tightly over the high nose and tall, narrow forehead. His lips were thin and querulous, his shoulders stooping, his person as thin and angular as human form could be. When he had warmed his ghostly hands at the fire, and seated himself in his accustomed chair, he cast a look round him as if seeking some subject of complaint. His eyes were blue, very cold, deficient in color, and looked out from amid the puckers of his eyelids with the most unquestionable meaning. They seemed to demand something to object to, and this want is one which is always supplied. The search was but momentary, so that he scarcely seemed to have entered the room before he asked, "Where is your mother?" in a high-pitched, querulous voice.

Mr. John Trevanion had followed his brother to the fire, and stood now with his back to the blaze looking at Rosalind. His name was not in reality John, but something much more ornamental and refined; but society had availed itself of its well-known propensity in a more judicious manner than usual, and rechristened him with the short and manly monosyllable which suited his character. He was a man who had been a great deal about the world, and had discovered of how little importance was a Trevanion of Highcourt, and yet how it simplified life to possess a well-known name. One of these discoveries without the other is not improving to the character, but taken together the result is mellowing and happy. He was very tolerant, very considerate, a man who judged no one, yet formed very shrewd opinions of his own, upon which he was apt to act, even while putting forth every excuse and acknowledging every extenuating circumstance. He looked at Rosalind with a certain veiled anxiety in his eyes, attending her answer with solicitude; but to all appearance he was only spreading himself out as an Englishman loves to do before the clear glowing fire. Dr. Beaton had gone as far away as possible from that brilliant centre. He was stout, and disapproved, he said, "on principle," of the habit of gathering round the fireside. "Let the room be properly warmed," he was in the habit of saying, "but don't let us bask in the heat like the dogues," for the doctor was Scotch, and betrayed now and then in a pronunciation, and always in accent, his northern origin. He had seated himself on the other side of the card-table, ready for the invariable game. Young Roland Hamerton, the Christchurch man, immediately gravitated towards Rosalind, who, to tell the truth, could not have given less attention to him had he been one of the above-mentioned "dogues."

"Where is your mother?" Mr. Trevanion said, looking round for matter of offence.

"Oh!" said Rosalind, with a quick drawing of her breath; "mamma has gone for a moment to the nursery—I suppose." She drew breath again before the last two words, thus separating them from what had gone before—a little artifice which Uncle John perceived, but no one else.

"Now this is a strange thing," said Mr. Trevanion, "that in my own house, and in my failing state of health, I cannot secure my own wife's attention at the one moment in the day when she is indispensable to me. The nursery! What is there to do in the nursery? Is not Russell there? If the woman is not fit to be trusted, let her be discharged at once and some one else got."

"Oh! it is not that there is any doubt about Russell, papa, only one likes to see for one's self."

"Then why can't she send you to see for yourself. This is treatment I am not accustomed to. Oh, what do I say? Not accustomed to it! Of course I am accustomed to be neglected by everybody. A brat of a child that never ailed anything in its life is to be watched over, while I, a dying man, must take my chance. I have put up with it for years, always hoping that at last— But the worm

will turn, you know; the most patient will break down. If I am to wait night after night for the one amusement, the one little pleasure, such as it is— Night after night! I appeal to you, doctor, whether Mrs. Trevanion has been ready once in the last fortnight. The only thing that I ask of her—the sole paltry little complaisance—"

He spoke very quickly, allowing no possibility of interruption, till his voice, if we may use such a word, overran itself and died away for want of breath.

"My dear sir," said the doctor, taking up the cards, "we are just enough for our rubber; and, as I have often remarked, though I bow to the superiority of the ladies in most things, whist, in my opinion, is altogether a masculine game. Will you cut for the deal?"

But by this time Mr. Trevanion had recovered his breath. "It is what I will not put up with," he said; "everybody in this house relies upon my good-nature. I am always the *souffre-douleur*. When a man is too easy he is taken advantage of on all hands. Where is your mother? Oh, I mean your stepmother, Rosalind; her blood is not in your veins, thank Heaven! You are a good child; I have no reason to find fault with you. Where is she? The nursery? I don't believe anything about the nursery. She is with some of her low friends; yes, she has low friends. Hold your tongue, John; am I or am I not the person that knows best about my own wife? Where is your mistress? Where is Madam? Don't stand there looking like a stuck pig, but speak!"

This was addressed to an unlucky footman who had come in prowling on one of the anonymous errands of domestic service—to see if the fire wanted looking to—if there were any coffee-cups unremoved—perhaps on a mission of curiosity, too. Mr. Trevanion was the terror of the house. The man turned pale and lost his self-command. "I—I don't know, sir. I—I think, sir, as Madam—I—I'll send Mr. Dorrington, sir," the unfortunate said.

John Trevanion gave his niece an imperative look, saying low, "Go and tell her." Rosalind rose trembling and put down her work. The footman had fled, and young Hamerton, hurrying to open the door to her (which was never shut) got in her way and brought upon himself a glance of wrath which made him tremble. He retreated with a chill running through him, wondering if the Trevanion temper was in her too, while the master of the house resumed. However well understood such explosions of family disturbance may be, they are always embarrassing and uncomfortable to visitors, and young Hamerton was not used to them and did not know what to make of himself. He withdrew to the darker end of the room, where it opened into a very dimly lighted conservatory, while the doctor shuffled the cards, letting them drop audibly through his fingers, and now and then attempting to divert the flood of rising rage by a remark. "Bless me," he said, "I wish I had been dealing in earnest; what a bonnie thing for a trump card!" and, "A little farther from the fire, Mr. Trevanion, you are getting overheated; come, sir, the young fellow will take a hand to begin with, and after the first round another player can cut in." These running interruptions, however, were of little service; Mr. Trevanion's admirable good-nature which was always imposed upon; his long-suffering which everybody knew; the advantage the household took of him; the special sins of his wife for whom he had done everything—"Everything!" he cried; "I took her without a penny or a friend, and this is how she repays me"—afforded endless scope. It was nothing to him in his passion that he disclosed what had been the secrets of his life; and, indeed, by this time, after the perpetual self-revelation of these fits of passion there were few secrets left to keep. His ivory countenance reddened, his thin hands gesticulated, he leaned forward in his chair, drawing up the sharp angles of his knees, as he harangued about himself and his virtues and wrongs. His brother stood and listened, gazing blankly before him as if he heard nothing. The doctor sat behind, dropping the cards from one hand to another with a little rustling sound, and interposing little sentences of soothing and gentle remonstrance, while the young man, ashamed to be thus forced into the confidence of the family, edged step by step farther away into the conservatory till he got to the end, where was nothing but a transparent wall of glass between him and the agitations of the stormy night.

Rosalind stole out into the hall with a beating heart. Her father's sharp voice still echoed in her ears, and she had an angry and ashamed consciousness that the footman who had hurried from the room before her, and perhaps other servants, excited by the crisis, were watching her and commenting upon the indecision with which she stood, not knowing what to do. "Go and tell her." How easy it was to say so! Oh, if she but knew where to go, how to find her, how to save her not only from domestic strife but from the gnawing worm of suspicion and doubt which Rosalind felt in her own heart! What was she to do? Should she go up-stairs again and look through all the rooms, though she knew it would be in vain? To disarm her father's rage, to smooth over this moment of misery and put things back on their old footing, the girl would have done anything; but as the moments passed she became more and more aware that this was not nearly all that was wanted, that even she herself, loving Mrs. Trevanion with all her heart, required more. Her judgment cried out for more. She wanted explanation; a reason for these strange disappearances. Why should she choose that time of all others when her absence must be so much remarked; and where, oh, where did she go? Rosalind stood with a sort of stupefied sense of incapacity in the hall. She would not go back. She could not pretend to make a search which she knew to be useless. She could not rush to the door again and watch there, with the risk of being followed and found at that post, and thus betray her suspicion that her mother was out of the house. She went and stood by one of the pillars and leaned against it, clasping her hands upon her heart and trying to calm herself and to find some expedient. Could she say that little Jack was ill, that something had happened? in the confusion of her mind she almost lost the boundary between falsehood and truth; but then the doctor would be sent to see what was the matter, and everything would be worse instead of better. She stood thus against the pillar and did not move, trying to think, in a whirl of painful imaginations and self-questionings, feeling every moment an hour. Oh, if she could but take it upon herself, and bear the weight, whatever it might be; but she was helpless and could do nothing save wait there, hidden, trembling, full of misery, till something should happen to set her free.

Young Hamerton in the conservatory naturally had none of these fears. He thought that old Trevanion was (as indeed everybody knew) an old tyrant, a selfish, ill-tempered egoist, caring for nothing but his own indulgences. How he did treat that poor woman, to be sure! a woman far too good for him whether it was true or not that he had married her without a penny. He remembered vaguely that he had never heard who Madam Trevanion was before her marriage. But what of that? He knew what she was: a woman still full of grace and charm, though she was no longer in her first youth. And what a life that old curmudgeon, that selfish old skeleton, with all his fantastical complaints, led her! When a young man has the sort of chivalrous admiration for an elder woman which Roland Hamerton felt for the mistress of this house, he becomes sharp to see the curious subjection, the cruelty of circumstances, the domestic oppressions which encircle so many. And Madam Trevanion was more badly off, more deeply tried, than any other woman, far or near. She was full of spirit and intelligence, and interest in the higher matters of life; yet she was bound to this fretful master, who would not let her out of his sight, who cared for nothing better than a society newspaper, and who demanded absolute devotion, and the submission of all his wife's wishes and faculties to his. Poor lady! no wonder if she were glad to escape now and then for a moment, to get out of hearing of his sharp voice, which went through your ears like a skewer.

While these thoughts went through young Hamerton's mind he had gradually made his way through the conservatory, in which there was but one dim lamp burning, to the farther part, which projected out some way with a rounded end into the lawn which immediately surrounded the house. He was much startled, as he looked cautiously forth, without being aware that he was looking, to see something moving, like a repetition of the waving branches and clouds above close to him upon the edge of a path which led through the park. At first it was but movement and no more, indistinguishable among the shadows. But he was excited by what he had been hearing, and his attention was aroused. After a time he could make out two figures more or less distinct, a man he thought and a woman, but both so dark that it was only when by moments they appeared out of the tree-shadows, with which

they were confused, against the lighter color of the gravel that he could make them out. They parted while he looked on; the man disappeared among the trees; the other, he could see her against the faint lightness of the distance, stood looking after the retreating figure; and then turned and came towards the house. Young Hamerton's heart leaped up in his breast. What did it mean? Did he recognize the pose of the figure, the carriage of the head, the fine movement, so dignified yet so free? He seized hold on himself, so to speak, and put a violent stop to his own thoughts. She! madness! as soon would he suppose that the queen could do wrong. It must be her maid, perhaps some woman who had got the trick of her walk and air through constant association: but she—

Just then, while Hamerton retired somewhat sick at heart, and seated himself near the door of the conservatory to recover, cursing as he did so the sharp, scolding tones of Mr. Trevanion going on with his grievances, Rosalind, standing against the pillar, was startled by something like a step or faint stir outside, and then the sound, which would have been inaudible to faculties less keen and highly strung, of the handle of the glass door. It was turned almost noiselessly and some one came in. Some one. Whom? With a shiver which convulsed her, Rosalind watched: this dark figure might be any one —her mother's maid, perhaps, even Russell, gone out to pry and spy as was her way. Rosalind had to clutch the pillar fast as she watched from behind while the new-comer took a shawl from her head, and, sighing, arranged with her hands her head-dress and hair. Whatever had happened to her she was not happy. She sighed as she set in order the lace upon her head. Alas! the sight of that lace was enough, the dim light was enough: no one else in the house moved like that. It was the mother, the wife, the mistress of Highcourt, Madam Trevanion, whom all the country looked up to for miles and miles around. Rosalind could not speak. She detached her arms from the pillar and followed like a white ghost as her stepmother moved towards the drawing-room. In the night and dark, in the stormy wind amid all those black trees, where had she been?

CHAPTER III

"I married her without a penny," Mr. Trevanion was saying. "I was a fool for my pains. If you think you will purchase attention and submission in that way you are making a confounded mistake. Set a beggar on horseback, that's how it ends. A duke's daughter couldn't stand more by her own way; no, nor look more like a lady," he added with a sort of pride in his property; "that must be allowed her. I married her without a penny; and this is how she serves me. If she had brought a duchy in her apron, or the best blood in England, like Rosalind's mother, my first poor wife, whom I regret every day of my life— O-h-h!—so you have condescended, Madam, to come at last."

She was a tall woman, with a figure full of dignity and grace. If it was true that nobody knew who she was, it was at least true also, as even her husband allowed, that she might have been a princess so far as her bearing and manners went. She was dressed in soft black satin which did not rustle or assert itself, but hung in long sweeping folds, here and there broken in outline by feathery touches of lace. Her dark hair was still perfect in color and texture. Indeed, she was still under forty, and the prime of her beauty scarcely impaired. There was a little fitful color on her cheek, though she was usually pale, and her eyes had a kind of feverish, suspicious brightness like sentinels on the watch for danger signals. Yet she came in without hurry, with a smile from one to another of the group of gentlemen, none of whom showed, whatever they may have felt, any emotion. John Trevanion, still blank and quiet against the firelight; the doctor, though he lifted his eyes momentarily, still dropping through his hands, back and forwards, the sliding, smooth surfaces of the cards. From the dimness in the background Hamerton's young face shone out with a sort of Medusa look of horror and pain, but he was so far out of the group that he attracted no notice. Mrs. Trevanion made no immediate reply to her husband. She advanced into the room, Rosalind following her like a shadow. "I am sorry," she said calmly, "to be late: have you not begun your rubber? I knew there were enough without me."

"There's never enough without you," her husband answered roughly; "you know that as well as I do. If there were twice enough, what has that to do with it? You know my play, which is just the one thing you do know. If a man can't have his wife to make up his game, what is the use of a wife at all? And this is not the first time, Madam; by Jove, not the first time by a dozen. Can't you take another time for your nap, or your nursery, or whatever it is? I don't believe a word of the nursery. It is something you don't choose to have known, it is some of your low—"

"Rosalind, your father has no footstool," said Mrs. Trevanion. She maintained her calm unmoved. "There are some fresh cards, doctor, in the little cabinet."

"And how the devil," cried the invalid, in his sharp tones, "can I have my footstool, or clean cards, or anything I want when you are away—systematically away? I believe you do it on purpose to set up a right—to put me out in every way, that goes without saying, that everybody knows, is the object of your life."

Still she did not utter a word of apology, but stooped and found the footstool, which she placed at her husband's feet. "This is the one that suits you best," she said. "Come, John, if I am the culprit, let us lose no more time."

Mr. Trevanion kicked the footstool away. "D'ye think I am going to be smoothed down so easily?" he cried. "Oh, yes, as soon as Madam pleases, that is the time for everything. I shall not play. You can amuse yourselves if you please, gentlemen, at Mrs. Trevanion's leisure, when she can find time to pay a little attention to her guests. Give me those newspapers, Rosalind. Oh, play, play! by all means play! don't let me interrupt your amusement. A little more neglect, what does that matter? I hope I am used to— Heaven above! they are not cut up. What is that rascal Dorrington about? What is the use of a pack of idle servants? never looked after as they ought to be; encouraged, indeed, to neglect and ill-use the master that feeds them. What can you expect? With a mistress who is shut up half her time, or out of the way or—What's that? what's that?"

It was a singular thing enough, and this sudden exclamation called all eyes to it. Mrs. Trevanion, who had risen when her husband kicked his footstool in her face, and, turning round, had taken a few steps across the room, stopped with a slight start, which perhaps betrayed some alarm in her, and looked back. The train of her dress was sweeping over the hearthrug, and there in the full light, twisted into her lace, and clinging to her dress, was a long, straggling, thorny branch, all wet with the damp of night. Involuntarily they were all gazing— John Trevanion looking down gravely at this strange piece of evidence which was close to his feet; the doctor, with the cards in his hand, half risen from his seat stooping across the table to see; while Rosalind, throwing herself down, had already begun to detach it with hands that trembled.

"Oh, mamma!" cried the girl, with a laugh which sounded wild, "how careless, how horrid of Jane! Here is a thorn that caught in your dress the last time you wore it; and she has folded it up in your train, and never noticed. Papa is right, the servants are—"

"Hold your tongue, Rose," said Mr. Trevanion, with an angry chuckle of satisfaction; "let alone! So, Madam, this is why we have to wait for everything; this is why the place is left to itself; and I—I—the master and owner, neglected. Good heavens above! while the lady of the house wanders in the woods in a November night. With whom, Madam? With whom?" he raised himself like a skeleton, his fiery eyes blazing out of their sockets. "With whom, I ask you? Here, gentlemen, you are witnesses; this is more serious than I thought. I knew my wishes were disregarded, that my convenience was set at naught, that the very comforts that are essential to my life were neglected, but I did not think I was betrayed. With whom, Madam? Answer! I demand his name."

"Reginald," said John Trevanion, "for God's sake don't let us have another scene. You may think what you please, but we know all that is nonsense. Neglected! Why she makes herself your slave. If the other is as true as that! Doctor, can't you put a stop to it? He'll kill himself—and her."

"Her! oh, she's strong enough," cried the invalid. "I have had my suspicions before, but I have never uttered them. Ah, Madam! you thought you were too clever for me. A sick man, unable to stir out of the house, the very person, of course, to be deceived. But the sick man has his defenders. Providence is on his side. You throw dust in the eyes of these men; but I know you; I know what I took you from; I've known all along what you were capable of. Who was it? Heaven above! down, down on your knees, and tell me his name."

Mrs. Trevanion was perfectly calm, too calm, perhaps, for the unconsciousness of innocence; and she was also deadly pale. "So far as the evidence goes," she said quietly, "I do not deny it. It has not been folded up in my train, my kind Rosalind. I have been out of doors; though the night, as you see, is not tempting; and what then?"

She turned round upon them with a faint smile, and took the branch out of Rosalind's hand. "You see it is all wet," she said, "there is no deception in it. I have been out in the park, on the edge of the woods. Look, I did not stop even to change my shoes, they are wet too. And what then?"

"One thing," cried the doctor, "that you must change them directly, before another word is said. This comes in my department, at least. We don't want to have you laid up with congestion of the lungs. Miss Rosalind, take your mamma away, and make her, as we say in Scotland, change her feet."

"Let her go altogether, if she pleases," said the invalid; "I want to see no more of her. In the park, in the woods—do you hear her, gentlemen? What does a woman want in the woods in a winter night? Let her have congestion of the lungs, it will save disgrace to the family. For, mark my words, I will follow this out. I will trace it to the foundation. Night after night she has done it. Oh, you think I don't know? She has done it again and again. She has been shameless; she has outraged the very house where— Do you hear, woman? Who is it? My God! a groom, or some low fellow—"

The doctor grasped his arm with a hand that thrilled with indignation as well as professional zeal, while John Trevanion started forward with a sudden flush and menace—

"If you don't respect your wife, for God's sake think of the girl—your own child! If it were not for their sakes I should not spend another night under this roof—"

"Spend your night where you please," said the infuriated husband, struggling against the doctor's attempt to draw him back into his chair. "If I respect her? No, I don't respect her. I respect nobody that ill-uses me. Get out of the way, Rosalind! I tell you I'll turn out that woman. I'll disgrace her. I'll show what she's made of. She's thrown dust in all your eyes, but never in mine. No, Madam, never in mine; you've forgotten, I suppose, what you were when I took you and married you, like a fool—but I've never forgotten; and now to break out at your age? Who do you suppose can care for you at your age? It is for what he can get, the villain, that he comes over an old hag like you. Oh, women, women! that's what women are. Turn out on a winter's night to philander in the woods with some one, some—"

He stopped, incapable of more, and fell back in his chair, and glared and foamed insults with his bloodless lips which he had not breath to speak.

Mrs. Trevanion stood perfectly still while all this was going on. Her face showed by its sudden contraction when the grosser accusations told, but otherwise she made no movement. She held the long, dangling branch in her hand, and looked at it with a sort of half-smile. It was so small a matter to produce so much—and yet it was not a small matter. Was it the hand of fate! Was it Providence, as he said, that was on his side! But she did not say another word in self-defence. It was evident that it was her habit to stand thus, and let the storm beat. Her calm was the resignation of long usage, the sense that it was beyond remedy, that the only thing she could do was to endure. And yet the accusations of this evening were new, and there was something new in the contemplative way in which she regarded this piece of evidence which had convicted her. Hitherto the worst accusations that had rained upon her had been without evidence, without possibility—and everybody had been aware that it was so. Now there was something new. When she had borne vituperation almost as violent for her neglect, for her indifference, sometimes for her cruelty, the wrong had been too clear for any doubt. But now: never before had there even been anything to explain. But the bramble was a thing that demanded explanation. Even John Trevanion, the just and kind, had shown a gleam of surprise when he caught sight of it. The good doctor, who was entirely on her side, had given her a startled look. Rosalind, her child, had put forth a hesitating plea—a little lie for her. All this went to her heart with a wringing of pain, as if her very heart had been crushed with some sudden pressure. But the habit of endurance was unbroken even by these secret and novel pangs. She did not even meet the eyes directed to her with any attempt at self-defence. But yet the position was novel; and standing still in her old panoply of patience, she felt it to be so, and that former expedients were inadequate to the occasion. For the first time it would have better become her to speak. But what? She had nothing to say.

The scene ended as such scenes almost invariably ended here—in an attack of those spasms which were wearing Mr. Trevanion's life away. The first symptoms changed in a moment the aspect of his wife. She put down the guilty bramble and betook herself at once to her oft-repeated, well-understood duty. The room was cleared of all the spectators, even Rosalind was sent away. It was an experience with which the house was well acquainted. Mrs. Trevanion's maid came noiselessly and swift at the sound of a bell, with everything that was needed; and the wife, so angrily vituperated and insulted, became in a moment the devoted nurse, with nothing in her mind save the care of the patient who lay helpless in her hands. The doctor sat by with his finger on the fluttering pulse—while she, now fanning, now bathing his forehead, following every variation and indication of the attack, fulfilled her arduous duties. It did not seem to cross her mind that anything had passed which could slacken her vigilance or make her reluctant to fulfil those all-absorbing duties; neither when the patient began to moan did there seem any consciousness in him that the circumstances were anyhow changed. He began to scold in broken terms almost before he had recovered consciousness, demanding to know why he was there, what they were doing to him, what was the occasion of the appliances they had been using. "I'm all right," he stammered, before he could speak, pushing away the fan she was using. "You want to kill me. Don't let her kill me, doctor; take that confounded thing away. I'm—I'm—all right; I—I want to get to bed. You are keeping me out of bed, on purpose—to kill me!" he cried with a new outburst. "That is all right; he'll do now," said the doctor, cheerfully. "Wait a moment, and

we'll get you to bed—" The peaceful room had changed in the most curious way while all these rapid changes had gone on. The very home of tranquillity at first, then a stage of dramatic incident and passion, now a scene in which feeble life was struggling with the grip of death at its throat. Presently all this commotion and movement was over, and the palpitations of human existence swept away, leaving, indeed, a little disorder in the surroundings; a cushion thrown about, a corner of the carpet turned up, a tray with water-bottles and essences on the table: but nothing more to mark the struggle, the conflicts which had been, the suffering and misery. Yes; one thing more: the long trail of bramble on another table, which was the most fatal symbol of all.

When everything was quiet young Hamerton, with a pale face, came out of the conservatory. He had again retreated there when Mrs. Trevanion came in, and the husband had begun to rage. It pained him to be a party to it; to listen to all the abuse poured upon her was intolerable. But what was more intolerable still was to remember what he had seen. That woman, standing so pale and calm, replying nothing, bearing every insult with a nobleness which would have become a saint. But, oh heavens! was it her he had seen—her—under shelter of the night? The young man was generous and innocent, and his heart was sick with this miserable knowledge. He was in her secret. God help her! Surely she had excuse enough; but what is to become of life or womanhood when such a woman requires an excuse at all?

CHAPTER IV

The hall was dimly lighted, the fire dying out in the great fireplace, everything shadowy, cold, without cheer or comfort. Mr. Trevanion had been conveyed to his room between the doctor and his valet, his wife following, as usual, in the same order and fashion as was habitual, without any appearance of change. Rosalind, who was buried in a great chair, nothing visible but the whiteness of her dress in the imperfect light, and John Trevanion, who stood before the fire there as he had done in the drawing-room, with his head a little bent, and an air of great seriousness and concern, watched the little procession without a word as it went across the hall. These attacks were too habitual to cause much alarm; and the outburst of passion which preceded was, unfortunately, common enough also. The house was not a happy house in which this volcano was ready to burst forth at any moment, and the usual family subterfuges to conceal the family skeleton had become of late years quite impossible, as increasing weakness and self-indulgence had removed all restraints of self-control from the master of the house. They were all prepared for the outbreak at any moment, no matter who was present. But yet there were things involved which conveyed a special sting to-night. When the little train had passed, the two spectators in the hall remained for some time quite silent, with a heaviness and oppression upon them which, perhaps, the depressing circumstances around, the want of light and warmth and brightness, increased. They did not, as on ordinary occasions, return to the drawing-room. For some time they said nothing to each other. By intervals a servant flitted across the hall, from one room to another, or the opening of a door roused these watchers for a moment; but presently everything fell back into stillness and the chill of the gathering night.

"Rosalind, I think you should go to bed—"

"Oh, Uncle John, how can I go to bed? How can any one in this house rest or sleep?"

"My dear, I admit that the circumstances are not very cheerful. Still, you are more or less accustomed to them; and we shall sleep all the same, no doubt, just as we should sleep if we were all to be executed to-morrow."

"Should we? but not if some one else, some one we loved—was to be—executed, as you say."

"Perhaps that makes a little difference: while the condemned man sleeps, I suppose his mother or his sister, poor wretches, are wakeful enough. But there is nothing of that kind in our way, my little Rose. Come! it is no worse than usual: go to bed."

"It is worse than usual. There has never before—oh!" the girl cried, clasping her hands together with a vehement gesture. Her misery was too much for her: and then another sentiment came in and closed her mouth. Uncle John was very tender and kind, but was he not on *the other side*?

"My dear," he said gently, "I think it will be best not to discuss the question. If there is something new in it, it will develop soon enough. God forbid! I am little disposed, Rosalind, to think that there is anything new."

She did not make any reply. Her heart was sore with doubt and suspicion; the more strange these sentiments, all the more do they scorch and sting. In the whirl which they introduced into her mind she had been trying in vain to get any ground to stand upon. There might have been explanations; but then how easy to give them, and settle the question. It is terrible, in youth, to be thrown into such a conflict of mind, and all the more to one who has never been used to think out anything alone, who has shared with another every thought that arose in her, and received on everything the interchanged ideas of a mind more experienced, wiser, than her own. She was thus suddenly cut off from her anchors, and felt herself drifting on wild currents unknown to her, giddy, as if buffeted by wind and tide—though seated there within the steadfast walls of an old house which had gone through all extremities of human emotion, and never quivered, through hundreds of troublous years.

"I think," said John Trevanion, after a pause, "that it would be good for you to have a little change. Home, of course, is the best place for a girl. Still, it is a great strain upon young nerves. I

wonder we none of us have ever thought of it before. Your aunt Sophy would be glad to have you, and I could take you there on my way. I really think, Rosalind, this would be the best thing you could do. Winter is closing in, and in present circumstances it is almost impossible to have visitors at Highcourt. Even young Hamerton, how much he is in the way; though he is next to nobody, a young fellow! Come! you must not stay here to wear your nerves to fiddlestrings. I must take you away."

She looked up at him with an earnest glance which he was very conscious of, but did not choose to meet. "Why at this moment above all others?" she said.

"Why? that goes without saying, Rosalind. Your father, to my mind, has never been so bad; and your— I mean Madam—"

"You mean my mother, Uncle John. Well! is she not my mother? I have never known any other. Poor dear little mamma was younger than I am. I never knew her. She is an angel in heaven, and she cannot be jealous of any one on earth. So you think that because papa has never been so ill, and my mother never had so much to bear, it would be the right thing for me, the eldest, the one that can be of most use, to go away?"

"She has her own children, Rosalind."

"Yes, to be sure. Rex, who is at school, and knows about as much of what she needs as the dogs do; and little Sophy, who is barely nine. You must think very little of Rosalind, uncle, if you think these children can make up for me."

"I think a great deal of Rosalind; but we must be reasonable. I thought a woman's own children, however little worth they may be in themselves, were more to her than any one else's. Perhaps I am wrong, but that's in all the copybooks."

"You want to make me believe," said Rosalind, with passion, "that I am nobody's child, that I have no right to love or any home in all the world!"

"My dear! this is madness, Rose. There is your father: and I hope even I count for something; you are the only child I shall ever love. And your aunt Sophy, for whom, in fact, I am pleading, gives you a sort of adoration."

She got up hastily out of the great gloomy house of a chair and came into the dim centre of light in which he stood, and clasped his arm with her hands. "Uncle John," she said, speaking very fast and almost inarticulately, "I am very fond of you. You have always been so good and kind; but I am her, and she is me. Don't you understand? I have always been with her since I was a child. Nobody but me has seen her cry and break down. I know her all through and through. I think her thoughts, not my own. There are no secrets between us. She does not require even to speak, I know what she means without that. There are no secrets between her and me—"

"No secrets," he said; "no secrets! Rosalind, are you so very sure of that—now?"

Her hands dropped from his arm: she went back and hid herself, as if trying to escape from him and herself in the depths of the great chair; and then there burst from her bosom, in spite of her, a sob—suppressed, restrained, yet irrestrainable—the heaving of a bosom filled to overflowing with unaccustomed misery and pain.

John Trevanion did not take advantage of this piteous involuntary confession. He paused a little, being himself somewhat overcome. "My dear little girl," he said at last, "I am talking of no terrible separation. People who are the most devoted to each other, lovers even, have to quit each other occasionally, and pay a little attention to other ties. Come! you need not take this so tragically. Sophy is always longing for you. Your father's sister, and a woman alone in the world; don't you think she has a claim too?"

Rosalind had got herself in check again while he was speaking. "You mean a great deal more than that," she said.

Once more he was silent. He knew very well that he meant a great deal more than that. He meant that his niece should be taken away from the woman who was not her mother, a woman of whom he himself had no manner of doubt, yet who, perhaps—how could any one tell?—was getting

weary of her thankless task, and looking forward to the freedom to come. John Trevanion's mind was not much more at rest than that of Rosalind. He had never been supposed to be a partisan of his brother's wife, but perhaps his abstention from all enthusiasm on this subject was out of too much, not too little feeling. He had been prejudiced against her at first; but his very prejudice had produced a warm revulsion of feeling in her favor, when he saw how she maintained her soul, as she went over the worse than red-hot ploughshares of her long ordeal. It would have injured, not helped her with her husband, had he taken her part; and therefore he had refrained with so much steadiness and gravity, that to Rosalind he had always counted as on the other side. But in his heart he had never been otherwise than on the side of the brave woman who, whether her motives had been good or bad in accepting that place, had nevertheless been the most heroic of wives, the tenderest of mothers. It gave him a tender pleasure to be challenged and defied by the generous impetuosity of Rosalind, all in arms for the mother of her soul. But—there was a but, terrible though it was to acknowledge it—he had recognized, as soon as he arrived on this visit, before any indication of suspicion had been given, that there was some subtile change in Madam Trevanion—something furtive in her eye, a watchfulness, a standing on her guard, which had never been there before. It revolted and horrified him to doubt his sister-in-law; he declared to himself with anxious earnestness that he did not, never would or could doubt her; and yet, in the same breath, with that terrible indulgence which comes with experience, began in an under-current of thought to represent to himself her terrible provocations, the excuses she would have, the temptations to which she might be subject. A man gets his imagination polluted by the world even when he least wishes it. In the upper-current of his soul he believed in her with faith unbounded; but underneath was a little warping eddy, a slimy under-draught which brought up silently the apologies, the reasons, the excuses for her. And if, by any impossibility, it should be so, then was it not essential that Rosalind, too pure to imagine, too young to know any evil or what it meant, or how it could be, should be withdrawn? But he was no more happy than Rosalind was, in the conflict of painful thoughts.

"Yes; I mean more than that," he resumed, after an interval. "I mean that this house, at present, is not a comfortable place. You must see now that even you cannot help Mrs. Trevanion much in what she has to go through. I feel myself entirely *de trop*. No sympathy I could show her would counter-balance the pain she must feel in having always present another witness of your father's abuse—"

"Sympathy!" said Rosalind, with surprise. "I never knew you had any sympathy. I have always considered you as on the other side."

"Does she think so?" he asked quickly, with a sharp sound of pain in his voice; then recollected himself in another moment. "Ah, well," he said, "that's natural, I suppose; the husband's family are on his side—yes, yes, no doubt she has thought so: the more right am I in my feeling that my presence just now must be very distasteful. And even you, Rosalind; think what she must feel to have all that dirt thrown at her in your presence. Do you think the privilege of having a good cry, as you say, when you are alone together, makes up to her for the knowledge that you are hearing every sort of accusation hurled at her head? I believe in my heart," he added hurriedly, with a fictitious fervor, "that it would be the greatest relief possible to her to have the house to herself, and see us all, you included, go away."

Rosalind did not make any reply. She gazed at him from her dark corner with dilated eyes, but he did not see the trouble of her look, nor divine the sudden stimulus his words had given to the whirl of her miserable thoughts. She said to herself that her mother would know, whoever doubted her, that Rosalind never would doubt; and at the same time there came a wondering horror of a question whether indeed her mother would be glad to be rid of her, to have her out of the way, to keep her at least unconscious of the other thing, the secret, perhaps the wrong, that was taking place in those dark evening hours? Might it be, as Uncle John said, better to fly, to turn her back upon any revelation, to refuse to know what it was. The anguish of this conflict of thought tore her unaccustomed heart in twain. And then she tried to realize what the house would be without her, with that profound yet

perfectly innocent self-importance of youth which is at once so futile and so touching. So sometimes a young creature dying will imagine, with far more poignant regret than for any suffering of her own, the blank of the empty room, the empty chair, the melancholy vacancy in the house, when she or he has gone hence and is no more. Rosalind saw the great house vacant of herself with a feeling that was almost more than she could bear. When her mother came out of the sick-room, to whom would she go for the repose, the soothing of perfect sympathy—upon whom would she lean when her burden was more than she could bear? When Sophy's lessons were over, where would the child go? Who would write to Rex, and keep upon the schoolboy the essential bond of home? Who would play with the babies in the nursery when their mother was too much occupied to see them? Mamma would have nobody but Russell, who hated her, and her own maid Jane, who was like her shadow, and all the indifferent servants who cared about little but their own comfort. As she represented all these details of the picture to herself, she burst forth all at once into the silence with a vehement "No, no!" John Trevanion had fallen into thought, and the sound of her voice made him start. "No, no!" she cried, "do you think, Uncle John, I am of so little use? Everybody, even papa, would want me. Sometimes he will bid me sit down, that I am something to look at, something not quite so aggravating as all the rest. Is not that something for one's father to say? And what would the children do without me, and Duckworth, who cannot always see mamma about the dinner? No, no, I am of use here, and it is my place. Another time I can go to Aunt Sophy—later on, when papa is—better—when things are going smoothly," she said, with a quiver in her voice, holding back. And just then the distant door of Mr. Trevanion's room opened and closed, and the doctor appeared, holding back the heavy curtains that screened away every draught from the outer world.

CHAPTER V

"Well," said Dr. Beaton, rubbing his hands as he came forward, "at last we are tolerably comfortable. I have got him to bed without much more difficulty than usual, and I hope he will have a good night. But how cold it is here! I suppose, however careful you may be, it is impossible to keep draughts out of an apartment that communicates with the open air. If you will take my advice, Miss Rosalind, you will get to your warm room, and to bed, while your uncle and I adjourn to the smoking-room, where there are creature comforts—"

The doctor was always cheerful. He laughed as if all the incidents of the evening had been the most pleasant in the world.

"Is papa better, doctor?"

"Is Mrs. Trevanion with my brother?"

These two questions were asked together. The doctor answered them both with a "Yes—yes—where would she be but with him? My dear sir, you are a visitor, you are not used to our ways. All that is just nothing. He cannot do without her. We know better, Miss Rosalind; we take it all very easy. Come, come, there is nothing to be disturbed about. I will have you on my hands if you don't mind. My dear young lady, go to bed."

"I have been proposing that she should go to her aunt for a week or two for a little change."

"The very best thing she could do. This is the worst time of the year for Highcourt. So much vegetation is bad in November. Yes—change by all means. But not," said the doctor, with a little change of countenance, "too long, and not too far away."

"Do you think," said Rosalind, "that mamma will not want me to-night? then I will go as you say. But if you think there is any chance that she will want me—"

"She will not leave the patient again. Good-night, Miss Rosalind, sleep sound and get back your roses—or shall I send you something to make you sleep? No? Well, youth will do it, which is best."

She took her candle, and went wearily up the great staircase, pausing, a white figure in the gloom, to wave her hand to Uncle John before she disappeared in the gallery above. The two men stood and watched her without a word. A tender reverence and pity for her youth was in both their minds. There was almost an oppression of self-restraint upon them till she was out of sight and hearing. Then John Trevanion turned to his companion:

"I gather by what you say that you think my brother worse to-night."

"Not worse to-night; but only going the downhill road, and now and then at his own will and pleasure putting on a spurt. The nearer you get to the bottom the greater is the velocity. Sometimes the rate is terrifying at the last."

"And you think, accordingly, that if she goes away it must not be too far; she must be within reach of a hasty summons?"

Dr. Beaton nodded his head several times in succession. "I may be mistaken," he said, "there is a vitality that fairly surprises me; but that is in any other case what I should say."

"Have these outbursts of temper much to do with it? Are they accelerating the end?"

"That's the most puzzling question you could ask. How is a poor medical man, snatching his bit of knowledge as he can find it, to say yea or nay? Oh yes, they have to do with it; everything has to do with it either as cause or effect? If it were not perhaps for the temper, there would be less danger with the heart; and if it were not for the weak heart, there would be less temper. Do ye see? Body and soul are so jumbled together, it is ill to tell which is which. But between them the chances grow less and less. And you will see, by to-night's experience, it's not very easy to put on the drag."

"And yet Mrs. Trevanion is nursing him, you say, as if nothing had happened."

The doctor gave a strange laugh. "A sick man is a queer study," he said, "and especially an excitable person with no self-control and all nerves and temper, like—if you will excuse me for saying

so—your brother. Now that he needs her he is very capable of putting all this behind him. He will just ignore it, and cast himself upon her for everything, till he thinks he can do without her again. Ah! it is quite a wonderful mystery, the mind of a sick and selfish man."

"I was thinking rather of her," said John Trevanion.

"Oh! her?" said the doctor, waving his hand; "that's simple. There's nothing complicated in that. She is the first to accept that grand reason as conclusive, just that he has need of her. There's a wonderful philosophy in some women. When they come to a certain pitch they will bear anything. And she is one of that kind. She will put it out of her mind as I would put a smouldering bombshell out of this hall. At least," said the doctor, with that laugh which was so inappropriate, "I hope I would do it, I hope I would not just run away. The thing with women is that they cannot run away."

"These are strange subjects to discuss with—pardon me—a stranger; but you are not a stranger—they can have no secrets from you. Doctor, tell me, is the scene to-night a usual one? Was there nothing particular in it?"

John Trevanion fixed very serious eyes—eyes that held the person they looked on fast, and would permit no escape—on the doctor's face. The other shifted about uneasily from one foot to the other, and did his utmost to avoid that penetrating look.

"Oh, usual enough, usual enough; but there might be certain special circumstances," he said.

"You mean that Mrs. Trevanion—"

"Well, if you will take my opinion, she had probably been to see the coachman's wife, who is far from well, poor body; I should say that was it. It is across a bit of the park, far enough to account for everything."

"But why then not give so simple a reason?"

"Ah! there you beat me; how can I tell? The way in which a thing presents itself to a woman's mind is not like what would occur to you and me."

"Is the coachman's wife so great a favorite? Has she been ill long, and is it necessary to go to see her every night?"

"Mr. Trevanion," said the doctor, "you are well acquainted with the nature of evidence. I cannot answer all these questions. There is no one near Highcourt, as you are aware, that does not look up to Madam; a visit from her is better than physic. She has little time, poor lady, for such kindness. With all that's exacted from her, I cannot tell, for my part, what other moment she can call her own."

John Trevanion would not permit the doctor to escape. He held him still with his keen eyes. "Doctor," he said, "I think I am as much concerned as you are to prove her in the right, whatever happens; but it seems to me you are a special pleader—making your theory to fit the circumstances, ingenious rather than certain."

"Mr. John Trevanion," said the doctor, solemnly, "there is one thing I am certain of, that yon poor lady by your brother's bedside is a good woman, and that the life he leads her is just a hell on earth."

After this there was a pause. The two men stood no longer looking at each other: they escaped from the scrutiny of each other, which they had hitherto kept up, both somewhat agitated and shaken in the solicitude and trouble of the house.

"I believe all that," said John Trevanion at last. "I believe every word. Still— But yet—"

Dr. Beaton made no reply. Perhaps these monosyllables were echoing through his brain too. He had known her for years, and formed his opinion of her on the foundation of long and intimate knowledge. But still—and yet: could a few weeks, a few days, undo the experience of years? It was no crime to walk across the park at night, in the brief interval which the gentlemen spent over their wine after dinner. Why should not Madam Trevanion take the air at that hour if she pleased? Still he made no answer to that breath of doubt.

The conversation was interrupted by the servants who came to close doors and windows, and perform the general shutting-up for the night. Neither of the gentlemen was sorry for this interruption.

They separated to make that inevitable change in their dress which the smoking-room demands, with a certain satisfaction in getting rid of the subject, if even for a moment. But when Dr. Beaton reached, through the dim passages from which all life had retired, that one centre of light and fellowship, the sight of young Hamerton in his evening coat, with a pale and disturbed countenance, brought back to him the subject he had been so glad to drop. Hamerton had forgotten his dress-coat, and even that smoking-suit which was the joy of his heart. He had been a prisoner in the drawing-room, or rather in the conservatory, while that terrible scene went on. Never in his harmless life had he touched the borders of tragedy before, and he was entirely unmanned. The doctor found him sitting nervously on the edge of a chair, peering into the fire, his face haggard, his eyes vacant and bloodshot. "I say, doctor," he said, making a grasp at his arm, "I want to tell you; I was in there all the time. What could I do? I couldn't get out with the others. I had been in the conservatory before—and I saw—Good gracious, you don't think I wanted to see! I thought it was better to keep quiet than to show that I had been there all the time."

"You ought to have gone away with the others," said the doctor, "but there is no great harm done; except to your nerves; you look quite shaken. He was very bad. When a man lets himself go on every occasion, and does and says exactly what he has a mind to, that's what it ends in at the last. It is, perhaps, as well that a young fellow like you should know."

"Oh, hang it," said young Hamerton, "that is not the worst. I never was fond of old Trevanion. It don't matter so much about him."

"You mean that to hear a man bullying his wife like that makes you wish to kill him, eh? Well, that's a virtuous sentiment; but she's been long used to it. Let us hope she is like the eels and doesn't mind—"

"It's not that," said the youth again. John Trevanion was in no hurry to appear, and the young man's secret scorched him. He looked round suspiciously to make sure there was no one within sight or hearing. "Doctor," he said, "you are Madam's friend. You take her side?"

Dr. Beaton, who was a man of experience, looked at the agitation of his companion with a good deal of curiosity and some alarm. "If she had a side, yes, to the last of my strength."

"Then I don't mind telling you. When he began to swear— What an old brute he is!"

"Yes? when he began to swear—"

"I thought they mightn't like it, don't you know? We're old friends at home, but still I have never been very much at Highcourt; so I thought they mightn't like to have me there. And I thought I'd just slip out of the way into the conservatory, never thinking how I was to get back. I went right in to the end part where there was no light. You can see out into the park. I never thought of that. I was not thinking anything: when I saw—"

"Get it out, for Heaven's sake! You had no right to be there. What did you see? Some of the maids about—"

"Doctor, I must get it off my mind. I saw Madam Trevanion parting with—a man. I can't help it, I must get it out. I saw her as plainly as I see you."

The doctor was very much disturbed and pale, but he burst into a laugh. "In a dark night like this! You saw her maid I don't doubt, or a kitchen girl with her sweetheart. At night all the cats are gray. And you think it is a fine thing to tell a cock-and-bull story like this—you, a visitor in the house?"

"Doctor, you do me a great deal of injustice." The young man's heart heaved with agitation and pain. "Don't you see it is because I feel I was a sort of eavesdropper against my will, that I must tell you? Do you think Madam Trevanion could be mistaken for a maid? I saw her—part from him and come straight up to the house—and then, in another moment, she came into the room, and I—I saw all that happened there."

"For an unwilling witness, Mr. Hamerton, you seem to have seen a great deal," said the doctor, with a gleam of fury in his eyes.

"So I was—unwilling, most unwilling: you said yourself my nerves were shaken. I'd rather than a thousand pounds I hadn't seen her. But what am I to do? If there was any trial or anything, would they call me as a witness? That's what I want to ask. In that case I'll go off to America or Japan or somewhere. They sha'n't get a word against her out of me."

The moral shock which Dr. Beaton had received was great, and yet he scarcely felt it to be a surprise. He sat for some moments in silence, pondering how to reply. The end of his consideration was that he turned round upon the inquirer with a laugh. "A trial," he said, "about what? Because Mr. Trevanion is nasty to his wife, and says things to her a man should be ashamed to say? Women can't try their husbands for being brutes, more's the pity! and she is used to it; or because (if it was her at all) she spoke to somebody she met—a groom most likely—and gave him his orders! No, no, my young friend, there will be no trial. But for all that," he added, somewhat fiercely, "I would advise you to hold your tongue on the subject now that you have relieved your mind. The Trevanions are kittle customers when their blood's up. I would hold my tongue for the future if I were you."

And then John Trevanion came in, cloudy and thoughtful, in his smoking-coat, with a candle in his hand.

CHAPTER VI

Reginald Trevanion of Highcourt had made at thirty a marriage which was altogether suitable, and everything that the marriage of a young squire of good family and considerable wealth ought to be, with a young lady from a neighboring county with a pretty face and a pretty fortune, and connections of the most unexceptionable kind. He was not himself an amiable person even as a young man, but no one had ever asserted that his temper or his selfishness or his uneasy ways had contributed to bring about the catastrophe which soon overwhelmed the young household. A few years passed with certain futile attempts at an heir which came to nothing; and it was thought that the disappointment in respect to Rosalind, who obstinately insisted upon turning out a girl, notwithstanding her poor young mother's remorseful distress and her father's refusal to believe that Providence could have played him so cruel a trick, had something to do with the gradual fading away of young Madam Trevanion. She died when Rosalind was but a few weeks old, and her husband, whom all the neighborhood credited with a broken heart, disappeared shortly after into that vague world known in a country district as "Abroad;" where healing, it is to be supposed, or at least forgetfulness, is to be found for every sorrow. Nothing was known of him for a year or two. His brother, John Trevanion, was then a youth at college, and, as Highcourt was shut up during its master's absence, disposed of his vacation among other branches of the family, and never appeared; while Sophy, the only sister, who had married long before, was also lost to the district. And thus all means of following the widower in his wanderings were lost to his neighbors. When Mr. Trevanion returned, three years after his first wife's death, the first intimation that he had married again was the appearance of the second Madam Trevanion by his side in the carriage. The servants, indeed, had been prepared by a letter, received just in time to enable them to open hurriedly the shut-up rooms, and make ready for a lady; but that was all. Of course, as everybody allowed, there was nothing surprising in the fact. It is to be expected that a young widower, especially if heartbroken, will marry again; the only curious thing was that no public intimation of the event should have preceded the arrival of the pair. There had been nothing in the papers, no intimation "At the British Embassy—," no hint that an English gentleman from one of the Midland counties was about to bring home a charming wife. And, as a matter of fact, nobody had been able to make out who Mrs. Trevanion was. Her husband and she had met abroad. That was all that was ever known. For a time the researches of the parties interested were very active, and all sorts of leading questions were put to the new wife. But she was of force superior to the country ladies, and baffled them all. And the calm of ordinary existence closed over Highcourt, and the questions in course of time were forgot. Madam Trevanion was not at all of the class of her predecessor. She was not pretty like that gentle creature. Even those who admired her least owned that she was striking, and many thought her handsome, and some beautiful. She was tall; her hair and her eyes were dark; she had the wonderful grace of bearing and movement which is associated with the highest class, but no more belongs to it exclusively than any other grace or gift. Between Madam Trevanion and the Duchess of Newbury, who was herself a duke's daughter, and one of the greatest ladies in England, no chance spectator would have hesitated for a moment as to which was the highest; and yet nobody knew who she was. It was thought by some persons that she showed at first a certain hesitation about common details of life which proved that she had not been born in the purple. But, if so, all that was over before she had been a year at Highcourt, and her manners were pronounced by the best judges to be perfect. She was not shy of society as a novice would have been, nor was her husband diffident in taking her about, as a proud man who has married beneath him so generally is. They accepted all their invitations like people who were perfectly assured of their own standing, and they saw more company at Highcourt than that venerable mansion had seen before for generations. And there was nothing to which society could take exception in the new wife. She had little Rosalind brought home at once, and was henceforth as devoted as any young mother could be to the lovely little plaything

of a three-years-old child. Then she did her duty by the family as it becomes a wife to do. The first was a son, as fine a boy as was ever born to a good estate, a Trevanion all over, though he had his mother's eyes—a boy that never ailed anything, as robust as a young lion. Five or six others followed, of whom two died; but these were ordinary incidents of life which establish a family in the esteem and sympathy of its neighbors. The Trevanions had fulfilled all that was needed to be entirely and fully received into the regard of the county when they "buried," as people say, their two children. Four remained, the first-born, young Reginald, and his next sister, who were at the beginning of this history fourteen and nine respectively, and the two little ones of five and seven, who were also, to fulfil all requirements, girl and boy.

But of all these Rosalind had remained, if that may be said of a step-child when a woman has a family of her own, the favorite, the mother's constant companion, everything that an eldest girl could be. Neither the one nor the other ever betrayed a consciousness that they were not mother and daughter. Mr. Trevanion himself, when in his capricious, irritable way he permitted any fondness to appear, preferred Reginald, who was his heir and personal representative. But Rosalind was always by her mother's side. But for Russell, the nurse, and one or two other injudicious persons, she would probably never have found out that Madam was not her mother; but the discovery had done good rather than harm, by inspiring the natural affection with a passionate individual attachment in which there were all those elements of choice and independent election which are the charm of friendship. Mrs. Trevanion was Rosalind's example, her heroine, the perfect type of woman to her eyes. And, indeed, she was a woman who impressed the general mind with something of this character. There are many good women who do not do so, who look commonplace enough in their life, and are only known in their full excellence from some revelation afterwards of heroism unknown. But Mrs. Trevanion carried her diploma in her eyes. The tenderness in them was like sunshine to everybody about her who was in trouble. She never was harsh, never intolerant, judged nobody—which in a woman so full of feeling and with so high a standard of moral excellence was extraordinary. This was what gave so great a charm to her manners. A well-bred woman, even of an inferior type, will not allow a humble member of society to feel himself or herself *de trop*; but there are many ways of doing this, and the ostentatious way of showing exaggerated attention to an unlucky stranger is as painful to a delicate mind as neglect. But this was a danger which Mrs. Trevanion avoided. No one could tell what the rank was of the guests in her drawing-room, whether it was the duchess or the governess that was receiving her attentions. They were all alike gentlewomen in this gracious house. The poor, who are always the hardest judges of a new claimant of their favor, and who in this case were much set on finding out that a woman who came from "abroad" could be no lady, gave in more reluctantly, yet yielded too like their betters—with the exception of Russell and the family in the village to which she belonged. These were the only enemies, so far as any one was aware, whom Madam possessed, and they were enemies of a visionary kind, in no open hostility, receiving her favors like the rest, and kept in check by the general state of public opinion. Still, if there was anything to be found out about the lady of Highcourt, these were the only hostile bystanders desirous of the opportunity of doing her harm.

But everything had fallen into perfect peace outside the house for years. Now and then, at long intervals, it might indeed be remarked in the course of a genealogical conversation such as many people love, that it was not known who Mrs. Trevanion the second had been. "His first wife was a Miss Warren, one of the Warrens of Warrenpoint. The present one—well, I don't know who she was; they married abroad." But that was all that now was ever said. It would be added probably that she was very handsome, or very nice, or quite *comme il faut*, and so her defect of parentage was condoned. Everything was harmonious, friendly, and comfortable outside. The county could not resist her fine manners, her looks, her quiet assumption of the place that belonged to her. But within doors Mrs. Trevanion soon came to know that no very peaceful life was to be expected. There were people who said that she had not the look of a happy woman even when she first came home. In repose her face was rather sad than otherwise at all times. Mr. Trevanion was still in the hot fit of a bridegroom's

enthusiasm when he brought her home, but even then he was the most troublesome, the most exacting, the most fidgety of bridegrooms. Her patience with all his demands was boundless. She would change her dress half a dozen times in an evening to please him. She would start off with him on a sudden wild expedition at half an hour's notice, without a word or even look of annoyance. And when the exuberance of love wore off, and the exactions continued, with no longer caresses and sweet words, but blame and reproach and that continual fault-finding which it is so hard to put up with amiably, Mrs. Trevanion still endured everything, consented to everything, with a patience that would not be shaken. It was now nearly ten years since the heart-disease which had brought him nearly to death's door first showed itself. He had rheumatic fever, and then afterwards, as is so usual, this terrible legacy which that complaint leaves behind it. From that moment, of course, the patience which had been so sweetly exercised before became a religious duty. It was known in the house that nothing must cross or agitate or annoy Mr. Trevanion. But, indeed, it was not necessary that anything should annoy him; he was his own chief annoyance, his own agitator. He would flame up in sudden wrath at nothing at all, and turn the house upside down, and send everybody but his wife flying, with vituperations which scarcely the basest criminal could have deserved. And his wife, who never abandoned him, became the chief object of these passionate assaults. He accused her of every imaginable fault. He began to talk of all she owed him, to declare that he married her when she had nothing, that he had taken her out of the depths, that she owed everything to him; he denounced her as ungrateful, base, trying to injure his health under pretence of nursing him, that she might get the power into her own hands. But she would find out her mistake, he said; she would learn, when he was gone, the difference between having a husband to protect her and nobody. To all these wild accusations and comments the little circle round Mrs. Trevanion had become familiar and indifferent. "Pegging away at Madam, as usual," Mr. Dorrington, the butler, said. "Lord, I'd let him peg! I'd leave him to himself and see how he likes it," replied the cook and housekeeper. No one had put the slightest faith in the objurgations of the master. To Rosalind they were the mere extravagances of that mad temper which she had been acquainted with all her life. What her father said about his wife was about as reasonable as his outburst of certainty that England was going to the devil when the village boys broke down one of the young trees. She did not judge papa for such a statement. She cried a little at his vehemence, which did himself so much harm, and laughed a little secretly, with a heavy sense of guilt, at his extravagance and exaggerations. Poor papa! it was not his fault, it was because he was so ill. He was too weak and ailing to be able to restrain himself as other people did. But he did not mean it—how could he mean it? To say that mamma wanted to break his neck if she did not put his pillow as he liked it, to accuse her of a systematic attempt to starve him if his luncheon was two minutes late or his soup not exactly to his taste—all that was folly. And no doubt it was also folly, all that about raising her from nothing and taking her without a penny. Rosalind, though very much disturbed when she was present at one of these scenes, yet permitted herself to laugh at it when it was over or she had got away. Poor papa! and then when he had raged himself into a fit of those heart-spasms he was so ill; how sad to see him suffering so terribly, gasping for breath! Poor papa! to think that he did so much to bring it on himself was only a pity the more.

Thus things had gone on for years. When Dr. Beaton came to live in the house there had been a temporary amendment. The presence of a stranger, perhaps, had been a check upon the patient; and perhaps the novelty of a continual and thoroughly instructed watcher—who knew how to follow the symptoms of the malady, and foresaw an outburst before it came—did something for him; and certainly there had been an amendment. But by and by familiarity did away with these advantages. Dr. Beaton exhausted all the resources of his science, and Mr. Trevanion ceased to be upon his guard with a man whom he saw every day. Thus the house lived in a forced submission to the feverish vagaries of its head; and he himself sat and railed at everybody, pleased with nothing, claiming every thought and every hour, but never contented with the service done him. And greater and greater became the force of his grievances against his wife and his sense of having done everything for her; how he had stood

by her when nobody else would look at her, how he had lifted her out of some vague humiliation and abandonment, how she owed him everything, yet treated him with brutal carelessness, and sought his death, were the most favorite accusations on his lips. Mrs. Trevanion listened with a countenance that rarely showed any traces of emotion. She had shrunk a little at first from these painful accusations; but soon had come to listen to them with absolute calm. She had borne them like a saint, like a philosopher; and yet within the last month everybody saw there had been a change.

CHAPTER VII

When Mrs. Trevanion came to Highcourt, she brought with her a maid who had, during all the sixteen years of her married life, remained with her without the slightest breach of fidelity or devotion. Jane was, the household thought, somewhat like her mistress, a resemblance in all likelihood founded upon the constant attendance of the one upon the other, and the absorbing admiration, rising almost to a kind of worship, with which Jane regarded her lady. After all, it was only in figure and movement, not in face, that the resemblance existed. Jane was tall like Mrs. Trevanion. She had caught something of that fine poise of the head, something of the grace, which distinguished her mistress; but whereas Mrs. Trevanion was beautiful, Jane was a plain woman, with somewhat small eyes, a wide mouth, and features that were not worth considering. She was of a constant paleness and she was marked with smallpox, neither of which are embellishing. Still, if you happened to walk behind her along one of the long passages, dressed in one of Madam's old gowns, it was quite possible that you might take her for Madam. And Jane was not a common lady's maid. She was entirely devoted to her mistress, not only to her service, but to her person, living like her shadow—always in her rooms, always with her, sharing in everything she did, even in the nursing of Mr. Trevanion, who tolerated her presence as he tolerated that of no one else. Jane sat, indeed, with the upper servants at their luxurious and comfortable table, but she did not live with them. She had nothing to do with their amusements, their constant commentary upon the family. One or two butlers in succession—for before Mr. Trevanion gave up all active interference in the house there had been a great many changes in butlers—had done their best to make themselves agreeable to Jane; but though she was always civil, she was cold, they said, as any fish, and no progress was possible. Mrs. Jennings, the cook and housekeeper, instinctively mistrusted the quiet woman. She was a deal too much with her lady that astute person said. That was deserting her own side: for do not the masters form one faction and the servants another? The struggle of life may be conducted on more or less honorable terms, but still a servant who does not belong to his own sphere is unnatural, just as a master is who throws himself into the atmosphere of the servants' hall. The domestics felt sure that such a particular union between the mistress and the maid could not exist in the ordinary course of affairs, and that it must mean something which was not altogether right. Jane never came, save for her meals, to the housekeeper's room. She was always up-stairs, in case, she said, that she should be wanted. Why should she be wanted more than any other person in her position? When now and then Mrs. Trevanion, wearied out with watching and suffering, hurried to her room to rest, or to bathe her aching forehead, or perhaps even to lighten the oppression of her heart by a few tears, Jane was always there to soothe and tend and sympathize. The other servants knew as well as Jane how much Madam had to put up with, but yet they thought it very peculiar that a servant should be so much in her mistress's confidence. There was a mystery in it. It had been suspected at first that Jane was a poor relation of Madam's; and the others expected jealously that this woman would be set over their heads, and themselves humiliated under her sway. But this never took place, and the household changed as most households change, and one set of maids and men succeeded each other without any change in Jane. There remained a tradition in the house that she was a sort of traitor in the camp, a servant who was not of her own faction, but on the master's side; but this was all that survived of the original prejudice, and no one now expected to be put under the domination of Jane, or regarded her with the angry suspicion of the beginning, or supposed her to be Madam's relation. Jane, like Madam, had become an institution, and the present generation of servants did not inquire too closely into matters of history.

This was true of all save one. But there was one person in the house who was as much an institution as Jane, or even as Jane's mistress, with whom nobody interfered, and whom it was impossible to think of as dethroned or put aside from her supreme place. Russell was in the nursery what Madam herself was in Highcourt. In that limited but influential domain she was the mistress,

and feared nobody. She had been the chosen of the first Mrs. Trevanion, and the nurse of Rosalind, with whom she had gone to her Aunt Sophy's during Mr. Trevanion's widowhood, and in charge of whom she had returned to Highcourt when he married. Russell knew very well that the estates were entailed and that Rosalind could not be the heir, but yet she resented the second marriage as if it had been a wrong done at once to herself and her charge. If Jane was of Madam's faction, Russell was of a faction most strenuously and sternly antagonistic to Madam. The prejudice which had risen up against the lady who came from abroad, and whom nobody knew, and which had died away in the course of time, lived and survived in this woman with all the force of the first day. She had been on the watch all these years to find out something to the discredit of her mistress, and no doubt the sentiment had been strengthened by the existence of Jane, who was a sort of rival power in her own sphere, and lessened her own importance by being as considerable a person as herself. Russell had watched these two women with a hostile vigilance which never slackened. She was in her own department the most admirable and trustworthy of servants, and when she received Mrs. Trevanion's babies into her charge, carried nothing of her prejudice against their mother into her treatment of them. If not as dear to her as her first charge, Rosalind, they were still her children, Trevanions, quite separated in her mind from the idea of their mother. Perhaps the influence of Russell accounted for certain small griefs which Madam had to bear as one of the consequences of her constant attendance on her husband, the indifference to her of her little children in their earlier years. But she said to herself with a wonderful philosophy that she could expect no less; that absorbed as she was in her husband's sick-room all day, it was not to be expected that the chance moments she could give to the nursery would secure the easily diverted regard of the babies, to whom their nurse was the principal figure in earth and heaven. And that nurse was so good, so careful, so devoted, that it would have been selfishness indeed to have deprived the children of her care because of a personal grievance of this kind. "Why should Russell dislike me so much?" she would say sometimes to Rosalind, who tried to deny the charge, and Jane, who shook her head and could not explain. "Oh, dear mamma, it is only her temper. She does not mean it," Rosalind would say. And Madam, who had so much to suffer from temper in another quarter, did not reject the explanation. "Temper explains a great many things," she said, "but even that does not quite explain. She is so good to the children and hates their mother. I feel I have a foe in the house so long as she is here." Rosalind had a certain love for her nurse, notwithstanding her disapproval of her, and she looked up with some alarm. "Do you mean to send her away?"

"Miss Rosalind," said Jane, "my lady is right. It is a foe and nothing less, a real enemy she has in that woman; if she would send Russell away I'd be very glad for one."

"You need not fear, my love," Madam said. "Hush, Jane, if she is my foe, you are my partisan. I will never send Russell away, Rosalind; but when the children are grown up, if I live to see it, or if she would be so kind as to marry, and go off in a happy way, or even if when *you* are married she preferred to go with you— I think I should draw my breath more freely. It is painful to be under a hostile eye."

"The nurse's eye, mamma, and you the mistress of the house!"

"It does not matter, my dear. I have always had a sympathy for Haman, who could not enjoy his grandeur for thinking of that Jew in the gate that was always looking at him so cynically. It gets unendurable sometimes. You must have a very high opinion of yourself to get over the low view taken of you by that sceptic sitting in the gate. But now I must go to your father," Mrs. Trevanion said. She had come up-stairs with a headache, and had sat down by the open window to get a little air, though the air was intensely cold and damp. It was a refreshment, after the closeness of the room in which the invalid sat with an unvarying temperature and every draught shut out. Rosalind stood behind her mother's chair with her hands upon Mrs. Trevanion's shoulders, and the tired woman leaned back upon the girl's young bosom so full of life. "But you will catch cold at the window, my Rose! No, it does me good, I want a little air, but it is too cold for you. And now I must go back to your father," she said, rising. She stooped and kissed the cheek of the girl she loved, and went away with a smile to her martyrdom. These moments of withdrawal from her heavy duties were the consolations of her life.

"Miss Rosalind," said Jane, "that you should love your old nurse I don't say a word against it—but if ever there is a time when a blow can be struck at my lady that woman will do it. She will never let the little ones be here when their mamma can see them. They're having their sleep, or they're out walking, or they're at their lessons; and Miss Sophy the same. And if ever she can do us an ill turn—"

"How could she do you an ill turn? That is, Jane, I beg your pardon, she might, perhaps, be nasty to *you*—but, mamma! What blow, as you call it, can be struck at mamma?"

"Oh, how can I tell?" said Jane; "I never was clever; there's things happening every day that no one can foresee; and when a woman is always watching to spy out any crevice, you never can tell, Miss Rosalind, in this world of trouble, what may happen unforeseen."

This speech made no great impression on Rosalind's mind at the time, but it recurred to her after, and gave her more trouble than any wickedness of Russell's had power to do. In the meantime, leaving Jane, she went to the nursery, and with the preoccupation of youth carried with her the same subject, heedless and unthinking what conclusions Russell, whose faculties were always alert on this question, might draw.

"Russell," she said, after a moment, "why are you always so disagreeable to mamma?"

"Miss Rosalind, I do hate to hear you call her mamma. Why don't you say 'my stepmother,' as any other young lady would in your place?"

"Because she is not my stepmother," said the girl, with a slight stamp on the floor. "Just look at little Johnny, taking in all you say with his big eyes. She is all the mother I have ever known, and I love her better than any one in the world."

"And just for that I can't bear it," cried the woman. "What would your own dear mamma say?"

"If she were as jealous and ill-tempered as you I should not mind what she said," said the girl. "Don't think, if you continue like this, you will ever have any sympathy from me."

"Oh, Miss Rosalind, what you are saying is as bad as swearing; worse, it's blasphemy; and the time will come when you'll remember and be sorry. No, though you think I'm a brute, I sha'n't say anything before the children. But the time will come—"

"What a pity you are not on the stage, Russell! You would make a fine Meg Merrilies, or something of that kind; the old woman that is always cursing somebody and prophesying trouble. That is just what you are suited for. I will come and see you your first night."

"Me! on the stage!" cried Russell, with a sense of outraged dignity which words cannot express. Such an insult had never been offered to her before. Rosalind went out of the room quickly, angry but laughing when she had given this blow. She wanted to administer a stinging chastisement, and she had done so. Her own cleverness in discovering what would hit hardest pleased her. She began to sing, out of wrathful indignation and pleasure, as she went down-stairs.

"Me! on the stage!" Russell repeated to herself. A respectable upper servant in a great house could not have had a more degrading suggestion made to her. She could have cried as she sat there gnashing her teeth. And this too was all on account of Madam, the strange woman who had taken her first mistress's place even in the heart of her own child. Perhaps if Rosalind had treated her stepmother as a stepmother ought to be treated, Russell would have been less antagonistic; but Mrs. Trevanion altogether was obnoxious to her. She had come from abroad; she had brought her own maid with her, who was entirely unsociable, and never told anything; who was a stranger, a foreigner perhaps, for anything that was known of her, and yet was Russell's equal, or more, by right of Madam's favor, though Russell had been in the house for years. What subtle antipathy there might be besides these tangible reasons for hating them, Russell did not know. She only knew that from the first moment she had set eyes upon her master's new wife she had detested her. There was something about her that was not like other women. There must be a secret. When had it ever been known that a maid gave up everything—the chat, the game at cards, the summer stroll in the park, even the elegant civilities of a handsome butler—for the love of her mistress? It was unnatural; no one had ever heard of such a thing. What could it be but a secret between these women which held them together, which

it was their interest to conceal from the world? But the time would come, Russell said to herself. If she watched night and day she should find it out; if she waited for years and years the time and opportunity would come at last.

CHAPTER VIII

This conversation, or series of conversations, took place shortly before the time at which this history begins, and it was very soon after that the strange course of circumstances commenced which was of so much importance in the future life of the Trevanions of Highcourt. When the precise moment was at which the attention of Rosalind was roused and her curiosity excited, she herself could not have told. It was not until Madam Trevanion had fallen for some time into the singular habit of disappearing after dinner, nobody knew where. It had been very usual with her to run up to the nursery when she left the dining-room, to see if the children were asleep. Mr. Trevanion, when he was at all well, liked to sit, if not over his wine, for he was abstemious by force of necessity, yet at the table, talking with whomsoever might be his guest. Though his life was so little adapted to the habits of hospitality, he liked to have some one with whom he could sit and talk after dinner, and who would make up his rubber when he went into the drawing-room. He had been tolerably well, for him, during the autumn, and there had been a succession of three-days' visitors, all men, succeeding each other, and all chosen on purpose to serve Mr. Trevanion's after-dinner talk and his evening rubber. And it was a moment in which the women of the household felt themselves free. As for Rosalind, she would establish herself between the lamp and the fire and read a novel, which was one of her favorite pastimes; while Mrs. Trevanion, relieved from the constant strain of attendance, would run up-stairs, "to look at the children," as she said. Perhaps she did not always look long at the children, but this served as the pretext for a moment of much-needed rest, Rosalind had vaguely perceived a sort of excitement about her for some time—a furtive look, an anxiety to get away from the table as early as possible. While she sat there she would change color, as was not at all her habit, for ordinarily she was pale. Now flushes and pallor contended with each other. When she spoke there was a little catch as of haste and breathlessness in her voice, and when she made the usual little signal to Rosalind her hand would tremble, and the smile was very uncertain on her lip. Nor did she stop to say anything, but hurried up-stairs like one who has not a moment to lose. And it happened on several occasions that Mr. Trevanion and the guest and the doctor were in the drawing-room, however long they sat, before Madam had returned. For some time Rosalind took no notice of this. She did not indeed remark it. It had never occurred to her to watch or to inspect her stepmother's conduct. Hitherto she had been convinced that it was right always. She read her novel in her fireside corner, and never discovered that there was any break in the usual routine. When the first painful light burst upon her she could not tell. It was first a word from Russell, then the sight of Jane gazing out very anxiously upon the night, when it rained, from a large staircase window, and then the aspect of affairs altogether. Mr. Trevanion began to remark very querulously on his wife's absence. Where was she? What did she mean by always being out of the way just when he wanted her? and much more of the same kind. And when Madam came in she looked flushed and hurried, and brought with her a whole atmosphere of fresh out-door air from the damp and somewhat chilly night. It was the fragrance and sensation of this fresh air which roused Rosalind the most. It startled her with a sense of something that was new, something that she did not understand. The thought occurred to her next morning when she first opened her eyes, the first thing that came into her mind. That sudden gush of fresh air, how did it come? It was not from the nursery that one could bring an atmosphere like that.

And thus other days and other evenings passed. There was something new altogether in Mrs. Trevanion's face, a sort of awakening, but not to happiness. When they drove out she was very silent, and her eyes were watchful as though looking for something. They went far before the carriage, before the rapid horses, with a watchful look. For whom could she be looking? Rosalind ventured one day to put the question. "For whom—could I be looking? I am looking for no one," Mrs. Trevanion said, with a sudden rush of color to her face; and whereas she had been leaning forward in the carriage, she suddenly leaned back and took no more notice, scarcely speaking again till they returned home.

Such caprice was not like Madam. She did everything as usual, fulfilled all her duties, paid her calls, and was quite as lively and interested as usual in the neighbors whom she visited, entering into their talk almost more than was her habit. But when she returned to the society of her own family she was not as usual. Sometimes there was a pathetic tone in her voice, and she would excuse herself in a way which brought the tears to Rosalind's eyes.

"My dear," she would say, "I fear I am bad company at present. I have a great deal to think of."

"You are always the best of company," Rosalind would say in the enthusiasm of her affection, and Mrs. Trevanion looked at her with a tender gratitude which broke the girl's heart.

"When I want people to hear the best that can be said of me, I will send them to you, Rosalind," she said. "Oh, what a blessing of God that you should be the one to think most well of me! God send it may always be so!" she added, with a voice full of feeling so deep and anxious that the girl did not know what to think.

"How can you speak so, mamma? Think well! Why, you are my mother; there is nobody but you," she said.

"Do you know, Rosalind," said Mrs. Trevanion, "that the children who are my very own will not take me for granted like you."

"And am not I your very own? Whom have I but you?" Rosalind said.

Mrs. Trevanion turned and kissed her, though it was in the public road. Rosalind felt that her cheek was wet. What was the meaning of it? They had always been mother and daughter in the fullest sense of the word, unconsciously, without any remark, the one claiming nothing, the other not saying a word of her devotion. It was already a painful novelty that it should be mentioned between them how much they loved each other, for natural love like this has no need of words.

And then sometimes Madam would be severe.

"Mamma," said little Sophy on one of these drives, "there is somebody new living in the village —a gentleman—well, perhaps not a gentleman. Russell says nobody knows who he is. And he gets up in the middle of the day, and goes out at night."

"I should not think it could be any concern of yours who was living in the village," Mrs. Trevanion said, far more hastily and hotly than her wont.

"Oh, but mamma, it is so seldom any one comes; and he lives at the Red Lion; and it is too late for sketching, so he can't be an artist; and, mamma, Russell says—"

"I will not have Russell fill your head with the gossip of the village," said Madam, with a flush of anger. "You are too much disposed to talk about your neighbors. Tell Russell I desire you to have nothing to do with the village news—"

"Oh, but mamma, it isn't village news, it's a stranger. Everybody wants to find out about a stranger; and he is so—"

Mrs. Trevanion gave a slight stamp of impatience and anger. "You have still less to do with strangers. Let me hear no more about this," she said. She did not recover from the thrill of irritation during the whole course of the drive. Sophy, who was unused to such vehemence, retired into sulkiness and tears, while Rosalind, wounded a little to see that her mother was fallible, looked on, surprised. She who was never put out! And then again Madam Trevanion came down from her eminence and made a sort of excuse which troubled her young adorer almost more than the fact. "I am afraid I am growing irritable. I have so much to think of," she said.

What was it she had to think of now above other times? Mr. Trevanion, for him, was well. They had people staying in the house who amused him; and John Trevanion was coming, Uncle John, whom everybody liked. And the children were all well; and nothing wrong, so far as any one was aware, in the business matters which Mrs. Trevanion bore the weight of to serve her husband; the farms were all let, there was nothing out of gear anywhere. What had she to think of? Rosalind was greatly, painfully puzzled by this repeated statement. And by degrees her perplexity grew. It got into the air, and seemed to infect all the members of the household. The servants acquired a watchful air.

The footman who came in to take away the teacups looked terribly conscious that Madam was late. There was a general watchfulness about. You could not cross the hall, or go up-stairs, or go through a corridor from one part of the house to another, without meeting a servant who would murmur an apology, as if his or her appearance was an accident, but who were all far too wide awake and on the alert to have come there accidentally. Anxiety of this kind, or even curiosity, is cumulative, and communicates itself imperceptibly with greater and greater force as it goes on. And in the midst of the general drama a curious side-scene was going on always between the two great antagonists in the household—Russell and Jane. They kept up a watch, each on her side. The one could not open her door or appear upon the upper stairs without a corresponding click of the door of the other; a stealthy inspection behind a pillar, or out of a corner, to see what was going on; and both of them had expeditions of their own which would not bear explanation, both in the house and without. In this point Jane had a great advantage over her adversary. She could go out almost when she pleased, while Russell was restrained by the children, whom she could not leave. But Russell had other privileges that made up for this. She had nursery-maids under her orders; she had spies about in all sorts of places; her relations lived in the village. Every piece of news, every guess and suspicion, was brought to her. And she had a great faculty for joining her bits of information together. By and by Russell began to wear a triumphant look, and Jane a jaded and worn one; they betrayed in their faces the fact that whatever their secret struggle was, one was getting the better of the other. Jane gave Rosalind pathetic looks, as if asking whether she might confide in her, while Russell uttered hints and innuendoes, ending, indeed, as has been seen, in intimations more positive. When she spoke so to Rosalind it may be supposed that she was not silent to the rest of the house; or that she failed, with the boldness of her kind, to set forth and explain the motives of her mistress. For some time before the incident of the bramble, every one in the house had come to be fully aware that Madam went out every evening, however cold, wet, and miserable it might be. John Trevanion acquired the knowledge he could not tell how; he thought it was from that atmosphere of fresh air which unawares she brought with her on those occasions when she was late, when the gentlemen had reached the drawing-room before she came in. This was not always the case. Sometimes they found her there, seated in her usual place, calm enough, save for a searching disquiet in her eyes, which seemed to meet them as they came in, asking what they divined or knew. They all knew—that is to say, all but Mr. Trevanion himself, whose vituperations required no particular occasion, and ran on much the same whatever happened, and the temporary three-days' guest, who at the special moment referred to was young Hamerton. Sometimes incidents would occur which had no evident bearing upon this curious secret which everybody knew, but yet nevertheless disturbed the brooding air with a possibility of explosion. On one occasion little Sophy was the occasion of a thrill in this electrical atmosphere which nobody quite understood. The child had come in to dessert, and was standing by her father's side, consuming all the sweetmeats she could get.

"Oh, mamma!" Sophy said suddenly and loudly, addressing her mother across the table; "you know that gentleman at the Red Lion I told you about?"

"What gentleman at the Red Lion?" said her father, who had a keen ear for gossip.

"Do not encourage her, Reginald," said Madam from the other end of the table; "I cannot let her bring the village stories here."

"Let us hear about the gentleman from the Red Lion," he said; "perhaps it is something amusing. I never am allowed to hear what is going on. Come, Sophy, what's about him? We all want to know."

"Oh, but mamma will be so cross if I tell you! She will not let me say a word. When I told her before she stamped her foot—"

"Ha, Madam!" said the husband, "we've caught you. I thought you were one that never lost your temper. But Sophy knows better. Come, what of this gentleman—"

"I think, Rosalind, we had better go," said Mrs. Trevanion, rising. "I do not wish the child to bring tales out of the village. Sophy!" The mother looked at her with eyes of command. But the little girl felt herself the heroine of the occasion, and perfectly secure, held in her father's arm.

"Oh, it is only that nobody knows him!" she said in her shrill little voice; "and he gets up in the middle of the day, and never goes out till night. Russell knows all about him. Russell says he is here for no good. He is like a man in a story-book, with such big eyes. Oh! Russell says she would know him anywhere, and I think so should I—"

Mrs. Trevanion stood listening till all was said. Her face was perfectly without color, her eyes blazing upon the malicious child with a strange passion. What she was doing was the most foolish thing a woman could do. Her anger succeeded by so strange a calm, the intense seriousness with which she regarded what after all was nothing more than a childish disobedience, gave the most exaggerated importance to the incident. Why should she take it so seriously, everybody asked? What was it to her? And who could hinder the people who were looking on, and knew that Madam was herself involved in something unexplainable, something entirely new to all her habits, from receiving this new actor into their minds as somehow connected with it, somehow appropriated by her? When the child stopped, her mother interfered again with the same exaggeration of feeling, her very voice thrilling the tranquillity of the room as she called Sophy to follow her. "Don't beat her," Mr. Trevanion called out, with a chuckling laugh. "Sophy, if they whip you, come back to me. Nobody shall whip you for answering your father. Come and tell me all you hear about the gentleman, and never mind what Madam may say."

Sophy was frightened, however, there could be no doubt, as she followed her mother. She began to cry as she crept through the hall. Mrs. Trevanion held her head high; there was a red spot on each of her cheeks. She paused for a moment and looked at Rosalind, as if she would have spoken; then hurried away, taking no notice of the half-alarmed, half-remorseful child, who stood and gazed after her, at once relieved and disappointed. "Am I to get off?" Sophy whispered, pulling at Rosalind's dress. And then she burst into a sudden wail of crying: "Oh, Rosalind, mamma has never said good-night!"

"You do not deserve it, after having disobeyed her," said Rosalind. And with her young mind all confused and miserable, she went to the drawing-room to her favorite seat between the fire and the lamp; but though her novel was very interesting, she did not read it that night.

CHAPTER IX

Next day, as they drove out in the usual afternoon hour while Mr. Trevanion took his nap after luncheon, a little incident happened which was nothing, yet gave Rosalind, who was alone with her stepmother in the carriage, a curious sensation. A little way out of the village, on the side of the road, she suddenly perceived a man standing, apparently waiting till they should pass. Madam had been very silent ever since they left home, so much more silent than it was her habit to be that Rosalind feared she had done something to incur Mrs. Trevanion's displeasure. Instead of the animated conversations they used to have, and the close consultations that were habitual between them, they sat by each other silent, scarcely exchanging a word in a mile. Rosalind was not herself a great talker, but when she was with this other and better self, she flowed forth in lively observation and remark, which was not talk, but the involuntary natural utterance which came as easily as her breath. This day, however, she had very little to say, and Madam nothing. They leaned back, each in her corner, with a blank between them, which Rosalind now and then tried to break with a wistful question as to whether mamma was cold, whether she did not find the air too keen, if she would like the carriage closed, etc., receiving a smile and a brief reply, but no more. They had fallen into silence almost absolute as they passed through the village, and it was when they emerged once more into the still country road that the incident which has been referred to took place. Some time before they came up to him, Rosalind remarked the man standing under one of the hedgerow trees, close against it, looking towards them, as if waiting for the carriage to pass. Though she was not eager for the tales of the village like Sophy, Rosalind had a country girl's easily roused curiosity in respect to a stranger. She knew at once by the outline of him, before she could make out even what class he belonged to, that this was some one she had never seen before. As the carriage approached rapidly she grew more and more certain. He was a young man, a gentleman—at least his dress and attitude were like those of a gentleman; he was slim and straight, not like the country louts. As he turned his head towards the carriage, Rosalind thought she had never seen a more remarkable face. He was very pale; his features were large and fine, and his pallor and thinness were made more conspicuous by a pair of very large, dreamy, uncertain dark eyes. These eyes were looking so intently towards the carriage that Rosalind had almost made up her mind that there was to be some demand upon their sympathy, some petition or appeal. She could not help being stirred with all the impetuosity of her nature, frank and warm-hearted and generous, towards this poor gentleman. He looked as if he had been ill, as if he meant to throw himself upon their bounty, as if— The horses sped on with easy speed as she sat up in the carriage and prepared herself for whatever might happen. It is needless to say that nothing happened as far as the bystander was concerned. He looked intently at them, but did no more. Rosalind was so absorbed in a newly awakened interest that she thought of nothing else, till suddenly, turning round to her companion, she met—not her stepmother's sympathetic countenance, but the blackness of a veil in which Mrs. Trevanion had suddenly enveloped herself. "That must surely be the gentleman Sophy was talking of," she said. Madam gave a slight shiver in her furs. "It is very cold," she said; "it has grown much colder since we came out."

"Shall I tell Robert to close the carriage, mother?"

"Oh, no, it is unnecessary. You can tell him to go home by the Wildwood gate. I should not have come out if I had known it was so cold."

"I hope you have not taken cold, mamma. To me the air seems quite soft. I suppose," Rosalind said, in that occasional obtuseness which belongs to innocence, "you did not notice, as you put down your veil just then, that gentleman on the road? I think he must be the gentleman Sophy talked about —very pale, with large eyes. I think he must have been ill. I feel quite interested in him too."

"No, I did not observe—"

"I wish you had noticed him, mamma. I should know him again anywhere; it is quite a remarkable face. What can he want in the village? I think you should make the doctor call, or send papa's card. If he should be ill—"

"Rosalind, you know how much I dislike village gossip. A stranger in the inn can be nothing to us. There is Dr. Smith if he wants anything," said Madam, hurriedly, almost under her breath. And she shivered again, and drew her furred mantle more closely round her. Though it was November, the air was soft and scarcely cold at all, Rosalind thought in her young hardiness; but then Mrs. Trevanion, shut up so much in an overheated room, naturally was more sensitive to cold.

This was in the afternoon; and on the same evening there occurred the incident of the bramble, and all the misery that followed, concluding in Mr. Trevanion's attack, and the sudden gloom and terror thrown upon the house. Rosalind had no recollection of so trifling a matter in the excitement and trouble that followed. She saw her stepmother again only in the gray of the winter morning, when waking suddenly, with that sense of some one watching her which penetrates the profoundest sleep, she found Mrs. Trevanion seated by her bedside, extremely pale, with dark lines under her eyes, and the air of exhaustion which is given by a sleepless night.

"I came to tell you, dear, that your father, at last, is getting a little sleep," she said.

"Oh, mamma— But you have had no sleep—you have been up all night!"

"That does not much matter. I came to say also, Rosalind, that I fear my being so late last night and his impatience had a great deal to do with bringing on the attack. It might be almost considered my fault."

"Oh, mamma! we all know," cried Rosalind, inexpressibly touched by the air with which she spoke, "how much you have had to bear."

"No more than what was my duty. A woman when she marries accepts all the results. She may not know what there will be to bear, but whatever it is it is all involved in the engagement. She has no right to shrink—"

There was a gravity, almost solemnity, in Madam's voice and look which awed the girl. She seemed to be making a sort of formal and serious explanation. Rosalind had seen her give way under her husband's cruelty and exactions. She had seen her throw herself upon the bed and weep, though there had never been a complaint in words to blame the father to the child. This was one point in which, and in which alone, the fact that Rosalind was his daughter, and not hers, had been apparent. Now there was no accusation, but something like a statement, formal and solemn, which was explained by the exhaustion and calm as of despair that was in her face.

"That has been my feeling all through," she said. "I wish you to understand it, Rosalind. If Reginald were at home—well, he is a boy, and I could not explain to him as I can to you. I want you to understand me; I have had more to bear, a great deal more, than I expected. But I have always said to myself it was in the day's work. You may perhaps be tempted to think, looking back, that I have had, even though he has been so dependent upon me, an irritating influence. Sometimes I have myself thought so, and that some one else— But if you will put one thing to another," she added, going on in the passionless, melancholy argument, "you will perceive that the advantage to him of my knowledge of all his ways counter-balances any harm that might arise from that; and then there is always the doubt whether any one else would not have been equally irritating after a time."

"Mother," cried Rosalind, who had raised herself in her bed and was gazing anxiously into the pale and worn-out face which was turned half away from her, not looking at her; "mother! why do you say all this to me? Do I want you to explain yourself, I who know that you have been the best, the kindest—"

Mrs. Trevanion did not look at her, but put up her hand to stop this interruption.

"I am saying this because I think your father is very ill, Rosalind."

"Worse, mamma?"

"I have myself thought that he was growing much weaker. We flattered ourselves, you know, that to be so long without an attack was a great gain; but I have felt he was growing weaker, and I see now that Dr. Beaton agrees with me. And to have been the means of bringing on this seizure when he was so little able to bear it—"

"Oh, mamma! how can you suppose that any one would ever blame—"

"I am my own judge, Rosalind. No, you would not blame me, not now at least, when you are entirely under my influence. I think, however, that had it not been this it would have been something else. Any trifling matter would have been enough. Nothing that we could have done would have staved it off much longer. That is my conviction. I have worked out the question, oh, a hundred times within myself. Would it be better to go away, and acknowledge that I could not— I was doing as much harm as good—"

Rosalind here seized upon Mrs. Trevanion's arm, clasping it with her hands, with a cry of "Go away! leave us, mother!" in absolute astonishment and dismay.

"And so withdraw the irritation. But then with the irritation I should have deprived him of a great deal of help. And there was always the certainty that no other could do so much, and that any other would soon become an irritation too. I have argued the whole thing out again and again. And I think I am right, Rosalind. No one else could have been at his disposal night and day like his wife. And if no one but his wife could have annoyed him so much, the one must be taken with the other."

"You frighten me, mamma; is it so very serious? And you have done nothing—nothing?"

Here Mrs. Trevanion for the first time turned and looked into Rosalind's face.

"Yes," she said. There was a faint smile upon her lips, so faint that it deepened rather than lightened the gravity of her look. She shook her head and looked tenderly at Rosalind with this smile. "Ah, my dear," she said, "you would willingly make the best of it; but I have done something. Not, indeed, what he thinks, what perhaps other people think, but something I ought not to have done." A deep sigh followed, a long breath drawn from the inmost recesses of her breast to relieve some pain or pressure there. "Something," she continued, "that I cannot help, that, alas! I don't want to do; although I think it is my duty, too."

And then she was silent, sitting absorbed in her own thoughts by Rosalind's bed. The chilly winter morning had come in fully as she talked till now the room was full of cold daylight, ungenial, unkindly, with no pleasure in it. Rosalind in her eager youth, impatient of trouble, and feeling that something must be done or said to make an end of all misery, that it was not possible there could be no remedy, held her mother's hand between hers, and cried and kissed it and asked a hundred questions. But Madam sat scarcely moving, her mind absorbed in a labyrinth from which she saw no way of escape. There seemed no remedy either for the ills that were apparent or those which nobody knew.

"You ought at least to be resting," the girl said at last; "you ought to get a little sleep. I will get up and go to his room and bring you word if he stirs."

"He will not stir for some time. No, I am not going to bed. After I have bathed my face Jane will get me a cup of tea, and I shall go down again. No, I could not sleep. I am better within call, so that if he wants me— But I could not resist the temptation of coming in to speak to you, Rosalind. I don't know why—just an impulse. We ought not to do things by impulse, you know, but alas! some of us always do. You will remember, however, if necessary. Somehow," she said, with a pathetic smile, her lips quivering as she turned to the girl's eager embrace, "you seem more my own child, Rosalind, more my champion, my defender, than those who are more mine."

"Nothing can be more yours, mother, all the more that we chose each other. We were not merely compelled to be mother and child."

"Perhaps there is something in that," said Mrs. Trevanion.

"And the others are so young; only I of all your children am old enough to understand you," cried Rosalind, throwing herself into her stepmother's arms. They held each other for a moment closely in that embrace which is above words, which is the supreme expression of human emotion and

sympathy, resorted to when all words fail, and yet which explains nothing, which leaves the one as far as ever from understanding the other, from divining what is behind the veil of individuality which separates husband from wife and mother from child. Then Mrs. Trevanion rose and put Rosalind softly back upon her pillow and covered her up with maternal care as if she had been a child. “I must not have you catch cold,” she said, with a smile which was her usual motherly smile with no deeper meaning in it. “Now go to sleep, my love, for another hour.”

In her own room Madam exchanged a few words with Jane, who had also been up all night, and who was waiting for her with the tea which is a tired watcher’s solace. “You must do all for me to-day, Jane,” she said; “I cannot leave Mr. Trevanion; I will not, which is more. I have been, alas! partly the means of bringing on this attack.”

“Oh, Madam, how many attacks have there been before without any cause!”

“That is a little consolation to me; still, it is my fault. Tell him how unsafe it is to be here, how curious the village people are, and that I implore him, for my sake, if he thinks anything of that, and for God’s sake, to go away. What can we do more? Tell him what we have both told him a hundred times, Jane!”

“I will do what I can, Madam; but he pays no attention to me, as you know.”

“Nor to any one,” said Madam, with a sigh. “I have thought sometimes of telling Dr. Beaton everything; he is a kind man, he would know how to forgive. But, alas! how could I tell if it would do good or harm?”

“Harm! only harm! He would never endure it,” the other said.

Again Mrs. Trevanion sighed; how deep, deep down was the oppression which those long breaths attempted to relieve. “Oh,” she said, “how happy they are that never stray beyond the limits of nature! Would not poverty, hard work, any privation, have been better for all of us?”

“Sixteen years ago, Madam,” Jane said.

CHAPTER X

Mr. Trevanion's attack wore off by degrees, and by and by he resumed his old habits, appearing once more at dinner, talking as of old after that meal, coming into the drawing-room for his rubber afterwards. Everything returned into the usual routine. But there were a few divergences from the former habits of the house. The invalid was never visible except in the evening, and there was a gradual increase of precaution, a gradual limitation of what he was permitted or attempted to do, which denoted advancing weakness. John Trevanion remained, which was another sign. He had made all his arrangements to go, and then after a conversation with the doctor departed from them suddenly, and announced that if it did not interfere with any of Madam's arrangements he would stay till Christmas, none of his engagements being pressing. Other guests came rarely, and only when the invalid burst forth into a plaint that he never saw any one, that the sight of the same faces day by day was enough to kill a man. "And every one longer than the other," he cried. "There is John like a death's head, and the doctor like a grinning waxwork, and Madam—why, she is the worst of all. Since I interfered with her little amusements, going out in the dark like one of her own housemaids, by Jove, Madam has been like a whipped child. She that had always an argument ready, she has taken up the submissive *rôle* at last. It's a new development. Eh? don't you think so? Did you ever see Madam in the *rôle* of Griselda before? I never did, I can tell you. It is a change! It won't last long, you think, John? Well, let us get the good of it while we can. It is something quite novel to me."

"I said nothing on the subject," said John, "and indeed I think it would be better taste to avoid personal observations."

"Especially in the presence of the person, eh? That's not my way. I say the worst I have to say to your face, so you need not fear what is said behind your back— Madam knows it. She is so honest; she likes honesty. A woman that has set herself to thwart and cross her husband for how many—sixteen years, she can't be in much doubt as to his opinion of her, eh? What! will nothing make you speak?"

"It is time for this tonic, Reginald. Dr. Beaton is very anxious that you should not neglect it."

"Is that all you have got to say? That is brilliant, certainly; quinine, when I want a little amusement. Bitter things are better than sweet, I suppose you think. In that case I should be a robust fox-hunter instead of an invalid, as I am—for I have had little else all my life."

"I think you have done pretty well in your life, Reginald. What you have wanted you have got. That does not happen to all of us. Except health, which is a great deduction, of course."

"What I have wanted! I wanted an heir and a family like other men, and I got a poor little wife who died at nineteen, and a useless slip of a girl. Then my second venture—perhaps you think my second venture was very successful—a fine robust wife, and a mischievous brat like Rex, always in scrapes at school, besides that little spiteful minx Sophy, who would spite her own mother if she could, and the two imps in the nursery. What good are they to me? The boy will succeed me, of course, and keep you out. I had quite as lief you had it, John. You are my own brother, after all, and that boy is more his mother's than mine. He has those eyes of hers. Lord! what a fool a young fellow is! To imagine I should have given up so much when I ought to have known better, and taken so many burdens on my shoulders for the sake of a pair of fine eyes. They are fine eyes still, but I know the meaning of them now."

"This is simply brutal, Reginald," said his brother, in high indignation. He got up to go away, but a sign from Mrs. Trevanion, behind her husband's back, made him pause.

"Brutal, is it? which means true. Give me some of that eau-de-Cologne. Can't you be quick about it? You take half an hour to cross the room. I've always meant to tell you about that second marriage of mine. I was a fool, and she was— Shall I tell him all about it, Madam? when we met, and how you led me on. By Jove! I have a great mind to publish the whole business, and let everybody know who you are and what you are—or, rather, were when I married you."

"I wish you would do so, Reginald. The mystery has never been my doing. It would be for my happiness if you would tell John."

The sick man looked round upon her with a chuckling malice. "She would like to expose herself in order to punish me," he said. "But I sha'n't do it; you may dismiss that from your mind. I don't wish the country to know that my wife was—" Then he ended with a laugh which was so insulting that John Trevanion involuntarily clinched his fist and made a step forward; then recollected himself, and fell back with a suppressed exclamation.

"It is quite natural you should take her part, Jack. She's a fine woman still of her years, though a good bit older than you would think. How old were you, Madam, when I married you? Oh, old enough for a great deal to have happened—eight-and-twenty or thereabouts—just on the edge of being *passée* then, the more fool I! Jove! what a fool I was, thrusting my head into the bag. I don't excuse myself. I posed myself in those days as a fellow that had seen life, and wasn't to be taken in. But you were too many for me. Never trust to a woman, John, especially a woman that has a history and that sort of thing. You are never up to their tricks. However knowing you may be, take my word for it, they know a thing or two more than you."

"If you mean to do nothing but insult your wife, Reginald—"

"John, for Heaven's sake! What does it matter? You will think no worse of me for what he says, and no better. Let him talk!" cried Madam, under her breath.

"What is she saying to you—that I am getting weak in my mind and don't know what I am saying? Ah! that's clever. I have always expected something of the sort. Look here, Madam! sit down at once and write to Charley Blake, do you hear? Charley—not the old fellow. Ask him to come here from Saturday to Monday, I want to have a talk with him. You are not fond of Charley Blake. And tell him to bring all his tools with him. He will know"—with a significant laugh—"what I mean."

She went to the writing-table without a word, and wrote the note. "Will you look at it, Reginald, to see if it is what you wish."

The patient snarled at her with his laugh. "I can trust you," he said, "and you shall see when Blake comes."

"What do you want with Blake, Reginald? Why should you trouble yourself with business in your present state of health? You must have done all that is necessary long ago, I wish you would keep quiet and give yourself a chance."

"A chance! that's Beaton's opinion, I suppose—that I have more than a chance. That's why you all gather round me like a set of crows, ready to pounce upon the carcass. And Madam, Madam here, can scarcely hold herself in, thinking how soon she will be free." He pushed back his chair, and gazed from one to another with fiery eyes which seemed ready to burst from their sockets. "A chance! that's all I've got, is it? You needn't wait for it, John; there's not a penny for you."

"Reginald, what the doctor says is that you must be calm, that nothing must be done to bring on those spasms that shake you so. Never mind what John says; he does not know."

"Oh, you!" cried the sick man; "you—you've motive enough. It's freedom to you. I don't tell you to scheme for it, I know that's past praying for. Nobody can doubt it's worth your while—a good settlement, and freedom to dance on my grave as soon as you like, as soon as you have got me into it. But John has got no motive," he said again, with a sort of garrulous pathos; "he'll gain nothing. He'll rather lose something perhaps, for he couldn't have the run of the house if it were yours, as he has done all his life. Yours!" the sick man added, with concentrated wrath and scorn; "it shall never be yours; I shall see to that. Where is the note to Charley—Charley Blake? John, take charge of it for me; see that it's put in the post. She has the bag in her hands, and how can I tell whether she will let it go? She was a great deal too ready to write it, eh? don't you think, knowing it was against herself?"

After this cheerful morning's talk, which was the ordinary kind of conversation that went on in Mr. Trevanion's room, from which John Trevanion could escape and did very shortly, but Madam could not and did not, the heavy day went on, little varied. Mrs. Trevanion appeared at

lunch with a sufficiently tranquil countenance, and entered into the ordinary talk of a family party with a composure or philosophy which was a daily miracle to the rest. She checked little Sophy's impertinences and attended to the small pair of young ones like a mother embarrassed with no cares less ignoble. There was an air of great gravity about her, but not more than the critical condition of her husband's health made natural. And the vicar, who came in to lunch to ask after the squire, saw nothing in Madam's manner that was not most natural and seemly. He told his wife afterwards that she took it beautifully; "Very serious, you know, very anxious, but resigned and calm." Mrs. Vicar was of opinion that were she Mrs. Trevanion she would be more than resigned, for everybody knew that Madam had "a great deal to put up with." But from her own aspect no one could have told the continual flood of insult to which she was exposed, the secret anxiety that was gnawing at her heart. In the evening, before dinner, she met her brother-in-law by accident before the great fireplace in the hall. She was sitting there, thrown down in one of the deep chairs, like a worn-out creature. It was rare to see her there, though it was the common resort of the household, and so much, in spite of himself, had John Trevanion been moved by the sense of mystery about, and by his brother's vituperations, that his first glance was one of suspicion. But his approach took her by surprise. Her face was hidden in her hands, and there was an air of abandon in her attitude and figure as if she had thrown herself, like a wounded animal, before the fire. She uncovered her face, and, he thought, furtively, hastily dried her eyes as she turned to see who was coming. Pity was strong in his heart, notwithstanding his suspicion, he came forward and looked down upon her kindly. "I am very glad," he said, "to see that you are able to get a moment to yourself."

"Yes," she said, "Reginald seems more comfortable to-night."

"Grace," said John Trevanion, "it is beyond human patience. You ought not to have all this to bear."

"Oh, nothing is beyond human patience," she said, looking up at him suddenly with a smile. "Never mind, I can bear it very well. After all, there is no novelty in it to wound me. I have been bearing the same sort of thing for many years."

"And you have borne it without a murmur. You are a very wonderful woman, or—"

"What do you mean? Do you think me a bad one? It would not be wonderful after all you have heard. But I am not a bad woman, John. I am not without blame; who is? But I am not what he says. This is mere weakness to defend myself; but when one has been beaten down all day long by one perpetual flood like a hailstorm— What was that? I thought I heard Reginald's voice."

"It was nothing; some of the servants. I am very sorry for you, Grace. If anything can be done to ease you—"

"Nothing can be done. I think talking does him good; and what is the use of a man's wife if not to hear everything he has to say? It diverts the evil from others, and I hope from himself too. Yes, I do think so; it is an unpleasant way of working it out, and yet I think, like the modes they adopt in surgery sometimes, it relieves the system. So let him talk," she went on with a sigh. "It will be hard, though, if I am to lose the support of your good opinion, John."

To this he made no direct answer, but asked, hurriedly, "What do you suppose he wants with Charley Blake? Charley specially, not his father, whom I have more faith in?"

"Something about his will, I suppose. Oh, perhaps not anything of consequence. He tries to scare me, threatening something—but it is not for that that I am afraid."

"We shall be able to do you justice in that point. Of what are you afraid?"

She rose with a sudden impulse and stood by him in the firelight, almost as tall as he, and with a certain force of indignation in her which gave her an air of command and almost grandeur beside the man who suspected and hesitated. "Nothing!" she said, as if she flung all apprehension from her. John, whose heart had been turned from her, felt himself melting against his will. She repeated after a time, more gently, "I know that if passion can suggest anything it will be done. And he will not have time to reconsider, to let his better nature—" (here she paused, and in spite of herself a faint smile,

in which there was some bitterness, passed over her face) “his better nature speak,” she said, slowly; “therefore I am prepared for everything and fear nothing.”

“This sounds not like courage, but despair.”

“And so it is. Is it wonderful that it should be despair rather than courage after all these years? I am sure there is something wrong. Listen; don’t you hear it? That is certainly Reginald’s voice.”

“No, no, you are excited. What could it be? He wants something, perhaps, and he always calls loudly for whatever he wants. It is seldom I can see you for a moment. I want to tell you that I will see Blake and find out from him—”

“I must go to Reginald, John.”

She was interrupted before she had crossed the hall by the sudden appearance of Russell, who pushed through the curtain which hung over the passage leading to Mr. Trevanion’s room, muffling herself in it in her awkwardness. The woman was scared and trembling. “Where’s Madam, Madam?” she said. “She’s wanted; oh, she’s wanted badly! He’s got a fit again.”

Mrs. Trevanion flew past the trembling woman like a shadow. “It is your doing,” she said, with a voice that rung into Russell’s heart. The intruder was entirely unhinged. “I never saw him in one before. It’s dreadful; oh, it’s dreadful! Doctor! doctor! oh, where’s the doctor?” she cried, losing all command of herself, and shrieking forth the name in a way which startled the house. The servants came running from all sides; the children, terror-stricken, half by the cry, half by the sound of Russell’s voice, so familiar to them, appeared, a succession of little wistful faces, upon the stair, while the doctor himself pushed through, startled, but with all his wits about him. “How has it happened? You’ve been carrying your ill-tempered chatter to him. I’ll have you tried for manslaughter,” the doctor said.

CHAPTER XI

Rosalind Trevanion was a girl who had never had a lover—at least, such was her own conviction. She even resented the fact a little, thinking it wonderful that when all the girls in novels possessed such interests she had none. To attain to the mature age of eighteen, in a wealthy and well-known house where there were many visitors, and where she had all the advantages that a good position can give, without ever having received that sign of approbation which is conveyed by a declaration of love, was very strange in the point of view of fiction. And as she had few friends of her own age at hand to consult with, and an absorbing attachment and friendship for an older woman to fill up the void, novels were her chief informants as to the ordinary events of youthful life. It is an unfortunate peculiarity of these works that their almost exclusive devotion to one subject is too likely to confuse the ideas of young women in this particular. In old-fashioned English fiction, and in the latest American variety of the art, no girl who respected herself could be satisfied with less than half a dozen proposals: which is a circumstance likely to rouse painful questionings in the hearts of our young contemporaries. Here was a girl not unconscious that she was what is generally known as “a nice girl,” with everything favorable in her circumstances; and yet she had not as yet either accepted or refused anybody! It was curious. Young Hamerton, who had been staying at Highcourt at the uncomfortable moment already described, was indeed prone to seek her society, and unfolded himself rashly to her in talk, with that indescribable fatuity which young men occasionally show in presence of girls, moved perhaps by the too great readiness of the kind to laugh at their jokes and accept their lead. Rosalind, protected by her knowledge of minds more mature, looked upon Hamerton with a kind of admiring horror, to think how wonderful it was that a man should be a man, and superior to all women, and have an education such as women of ambition admired and envied, and yet be such a –. She did not say fool, being very courteous, and unused to strong language. She only said such a –; and naturally could no more take him into consideration as a lover than if he had been one of the footmen. It was not beyond her consciousness either, perhaps, that Charley Blake, the son and partner of the family lawyer, whom business often brought to Highcourt, contemplated her often with his bold black eyes in a marked and unmistakable way. But that was a piece of presumption which Miss Trevanion thought of as a princess royal might regard the sighs of a courtier. Rosalind had the eclectic and varying political views held by young women of intelligence in the present time. She smiled at the old Toryism about her. She chose her men and her measures from both parties, and gave her favorites a hot but somewhat fluctuating support. She felt very sure that of all things in the world she was not an aristocrat, endeavoring to shut the gates of any exclusive world against success (which she called genius); therefore it could not be this thoroughly old-world feeling which prompted her disdain of Charley Blake. She was of opinion that a poor man of genius struggling upward towards fame was the sublimest sight on earth, and that to help in such a struggle was a far finer thing for a woman to do than to marry a duke or a prince. But no such person had ever come in her way, nor any one else so gifted, so delightful, so brilliant, and so tender as to merit the name of a lover. She was a little surprised, but referred the question to statistics, and said to herself that because of the surplus of women those sort of things did not happen nowadays: though, indeed, this was a theory somewhat invalidated by the fact that most of the young ladies in the county were married or about to be so. The position altogether did not convey any sense of humiliation to Rosalind. It gave her rather a sense of superiority, as of one who lifts her head in native worth superior to the poor appreciation of the crowd. How the sense of being overlooked should carry with it this sense of superiority is for the philosopher to say.

These thoughts belonged to the lighter and happier portion of her life, and were at present subdued by very sombre reflections. When she walked out in the morning after these events there was, however, a certain sense of emancipation in her mind. Her father had again been very ill—so ill that during the whole night the house had been on the alert, and scarcely any one had ventured to go to

bed. Rosalind had spent half the night in the hall with her uncle, expecting every moment a summons to the sick-room, to what everybody believed to be the deatbed of the sufferer; and there had crept through the house a whisper, how originating no one could tell, that it was after an interview with Russell that the fit had come on, and that she had carried him some information about Madam which had almost killed him. Nobody had any doubt that it was to Madam that Russell's report referred, and there were many wonderings and questions in the background, where the servants congregated, as to what it was. That Madam went out of nights; that she met some one in the park, and there had long and agitated interviews; that Jane knew all about it, more than any one, and could ruin her mistress if she chose to speak; but that Russell too had found out a deal, and that it had come to master's ears through her; and full time it did, for who ever heard of goings-on like this in a gentleman's house?—this is what was said among the servants. In superior regions nothing was said at all. Rosalind and her uncle kept together, as getting a vague comfort in the universal dreariness from being together. Now and then John Trevanion stole to the door of his brother's room, which stood open to give all the air possible, to see or hear how things were going. One time when he did so his face was working with emotion.

"Rosalind," he said, in the whisper which they spoke in, though had they spoken as loudly as their voices would permit no sound could have reached the sick-room; "Rosalind, I think that woman is sublime. She knows that the first thing he will do will be to harm and shame her, and yet there she is, doing everything for him. I don't know if she is a sinner or not, but she is sublime—"

"Who are you speaking of as that woman?—of MY MOTHER, Uncle John?" cried Rosalind, expanding and growing out of her soft girlhood into a sort of indignant guardian angel. He shook his head impatiently and sat down; and nothing more was said between them till the middle of the night, when Dr. Beaton coming in told them the worst was over, and for the moment the sick man would "pull through." "But I'll have that nurse in confinement. I'll send her to the asylum. It is just manslaughter," he said. Russell, very pale and frightened, was at her door when Rosalind went upstairs.

"The doctor says he will have you tried for manslaughter," Rosalind said, as she passed her. "No, I will not say good-night. You have all but killed papa."

"It is not I that have killed him," said Russell; "it's those that do what they didn't ought to."

Rosalind, in her excitement, stamped her foot upon the floor.

"He says you shall be sent to the asylum; and I say you shall be sent away from here. You are a bad woman. Perhaps now you will kill the children to complete your work. We are none of us safe so long as you are here."

At this Russell gave a bitter cry and threw up her hands to heaven.

"The children," she cried, "that I love like my own—that I give my heart's blood for—not safe! Oh, Miss Rosalind! God forgive you!—you, that I have loved the best of all!"

"How should I forgive you?" cried Rosalind, relentless. "I will never forgive you. Hate me if you please, but never dare to say you love me. Love!—you don't know what it is. You should go away to-night if it were I who had the power and not mamma."

"She has the power yet. She will not have it long," the woman cried, in her terror and passion. And she shut herself up in her room, which communicated with the children's, and flung herself on the floor in a panic which was perhaps as tragical as any of the other sensations of this confused and miserable house.

And yet when Rosalind went out next morning she was able to withdraw herself, in a way inconceivable to any one who has not been young and full of imaginations, from the miseries and terrors of the night. Mr. Trevanion was much exhausted, but living, and in his worn-out, feeble state required constant care and nursing, without being well enough to repay that nursing with abuse, as was his wont. Rosalind, with no one to turn to for companionship, went out and escaped. She got clear of that small, yet so important, world, tingling with emotion, with death and life in the balance, and

everything that is most painful in life, and escaped altogether, as if she had possessed those wings of a dove for which we all long, into another large and free and open world, in which there was a wide, delightful air which blew in her face, and every kind of curiosity and interest and hope. How it was she fell to thinking of the curious fact that she had not, and had never had, a lover, at such a moment, who can tell? Perhaps because it occurred to her at first that it would be well to have something, somebody, to escape to and take comfort in, when she was so full of trouble, without knowing that the wide atmosphere and fresh sky and bare trees, that discharged, whenever the breath of the wind touched them, a sharp little shower of rain-drops, were enough at her age to woo her out of the misery which was not altogether personal, though she was so wound up in the lives of all the sufferers. She escaped. That thought about the lover, which was intended to be pathetic, beguiled her into a faint laugh under her breath; for indeed it was amusing, if even only ruefully amusing, to be so unlike the rest of the young world. That opened to her, as it were, the gate; and then her imagination ran on, like the lawless, sweet young rover it was, to all kinds of things amusing and wonderful. Those whose life is all to come, what a playground they have to fly into when the outside is unharmonious! how to fill up all those years; what to do in the time that is endless, that will never be done; how to meet those strange events, those new persons, those delights and wonders that are all waiting round the next and the next corner! If she had thought of it she would have been ashamed of herself for this very amusement, but fortunately she did not think of it, and so let herself go, like the child she was. She took her intended walk through the park, and then, as the morning was bright, after lingering at the gate a little, went out into the road, and turned to the village without any particular intention, because it was near and the red roofs shone in the light. It was a fresh, bright morning, such as sometimes breaks the dulness of November. The sky was as blue as summer, with wandering white cloudlets, and not a sign of any harm, though there had been torrents of rain the night before. Indeed, no doubt it was the pouring down of those torrents which had cleared away the tinge of darkness from the clouds, which were as innocent and filmy and light as if it had been June. Everything was glistening and gleaming with wet, but that only made the country more bright, and as Rosalind looked along the road, the sight of the red village with its smoke rising ethereal into air so pure that it was a happiness to gaze into its limpid, invisible depths, or rather heights, ending in heavens, was enough to cheer any young soul. She went on, with a little sense of adventure, for though she often went to the village, it was rare to this girl to have the privilege of being absolutely alone. The fresh air, the glistening hedgerows, the village roofs, in all the shining of the sunshine, pleased her so much that she did not see till she was close to it a break in the road, where the water which had submerged the low fields on either side had broken across the higher ground, finding a sort of channel in a slight hollow of the road. The sight of a laborer plashing through it, with but little thought, though it came up to the top of his rough boots, arrested Rosalind all at once. What was she to do? *Her* boots, though with the amount of high heel which only a most independent mind can escape from, were clearly quite unequal to this crossing. She could not but laugh to herself at the small matter which stopped progress, and stood on the edge of it measuring the distance with her eye, and calculating probabilities with a smiling face, amused by the difficulty. While she stood thus she heard a voice behind her calling to the laborer in front. “Hi!” some one said; “Hallo, you there! help me to lift this log over the water, that the lady may cross.” The person appealed to turned round, and so did Rosalind. And then she felt that here was indeed an adventure. Behind her, stooping over some large logs of wood on the side of the pathway, was the man who had looked so intently at the carriage the other day when she passed with her stepmother. Before she saw his face she was sure, with a little jump of her heart, that it was the same man. He was dressed in dark tweed clothes, somewhat rough, which might have been the garb of a gentleman or of a gamekeeper, and did not fit him well, which was more like the latter than the former. She could see, as he stooped, his cheek and throat reddened as with the unusual exertion.

“Oh, please do not take the trouble,” she cried; “it is of no consequence. I have nothing to do in the village.”

“It is no trouble,” he said; and in a minute or two the logs were rolled across the side path so that she could pass. The man who had been called upon to help was one of the farm-laborers whom she knew. She thanked him cheerfully by name, and turned to the stranger, who stood with his hat off, his pale face, which she remembered to have been so pale that she thought him ill, now covered with a brilliant flush which made his eyes shine. Rosalind was startled by the beauty of the face, but it was not like that of the men she was accustomed to see. Something feminine, something delicate and weak, was in it.

“You are very kind to take so much trouble; but I am afraid you have over-exerted yourself,” she cried.

This made the young man blush more deeply still.

“I am not very strong,” he said half indignantly, “but not so weak as that.” There was a tone of petulance in the reply; and then he added, “Whatever trouble it might be is more than repaid,” with a somewhat elaborate bow.

What did it mean? The face was refined and full of expression, but then probably he was not a gentleman, Rosalind thought, and did not understand. She said hurriedly again, “I am very much obliged to you,” and went on, a little troubled by the event. She heard him make a few steps after her. Was he going to follow? In her surprise it was almost on her lips to call back William from the farm.

“I beg your pardon,” said the stranger, “but may I take the liberty of asking how is Mr. Trevanion? I heard he was worse last night.”

Rosalind turned round, half reassured.

“Oh, do you know papa?” she said. “He has been very ill all night, but he is better, though terribly exhausted. He has had some sleep this morning.”

She was elevated upon the log, which she had begun to cross, and thus looked down upon the stranger. If he knew her father, that made all the difference; and surely the face was one with which she was not unfamiliar.

“I do not know Mr. Trevanion, only one hears of him constantly in the village. I am glad he is better.”

He hesitated, as if he too was about to mount the log.

“Oh, thank you,” said Rosalind, hurrying on.

CHAPTER XII

"To whom were you talking, Rosalind?"

"To—nobody, Uncle John!" she said, in her surprise at the sudden question which came over her shoulder, and, turning round, waited till he joined her. She had changed her mind and come back after she had crossed the water upon the impromptu bridge, with a half apprehension that her new acquaintance intended to accompany her to the village, and had, to tell the truth, walked rather quickly to the park gates.

"But I met the man—a young fellow—whose appearance I don't know."

"Oh! I don't know who it was either; a gentleman; at least, I suppose he was a gentleman."

"And yet you doubt. What cause had you to doubt?"

"Well, Uncle John, his voice was nice enough, and what he said. The only thing was, he paid me a sort of a—compliment."

"What was that?" said John Trevanion, quickly.

"Oh, nothing," said Rosalind, inconsistently. "When I said I was sorry he had taken the trouble, he said, 'Oh, if it was any trouble it was repaid.' Nothing at all! Only a gentleman would not have said that to a girl who was—alone."

"That is true; but it was not very much after all. Fashions change. A few generations ago it would have been the right thing." Then he dropped the subject as a matter without importance, and drew his niece's arm within his own. "Rosie," he said, "I am afraid we shall have to face the future, you and I. What are we to do?"

"Are things so very bad, Uncle John?" she cried, and the tears came welling up into her eyes as she raised them to his face.

"Very bad, I fear. This last attack has done him a great deal of harm, more than any of the others; perhaps, because, as the doctor says, the pace is quicker as he gets near the end, perhaps because he is still as angry as ever, though he is not able to give it vent. I wonder if such fury may not have some adequate cause."

"Oh, Uncle John!" Rosalind cried; she clasped her hands upon his arm, looking up at him through her tears. He knew what was the meaning in her tone, though it was a meaning very hard to put into words. A child cannot say of her father when he is dying that his fury has often been without any adequate cause.

"I know," he said, "and I acknowledge that no one could have a more devoted nurse. But whether there have not been concealments, clandestine acts, things he has a right to find fault with—"

"Even I," said Rosalind, hastily, "and I have nothing to hide—even I have had to make secrets from papa."

"That is the penalty, of course, of a temper so passionate. But she should not have let you do so, Rosalind."

"It was not she. You think everything is her fault; oh, how mistaken you are! My mother and I," cried the girl, impetuously, "have no secrets from each other."

John Trevanion looked into the young, ingenuous countenance with anxiety: "Then, Rosalind," he said, "where is it that she goes? Why does she go out at that hour of all others, in the dark? Whom does she meet? If you know all this, I think there cannot be another word to say; for nothing that is not innocent would be intrusted to you."

Rosalind was silent. She ceased to look at him, and even withdrew her clasping hands from his arm.

"You have nothing to say? There it is: she has no secrets from you, and yet you can throw no light on this one secret. I have always had a great admiration and respect for your stepmother, Rosalind."

"I wish you would not call her my stepmother! It hurts me. What other mother have I ever known?"

"My dear, your love for her is a defence in itself. But, Rosalind, forgive me, there is some complication here. If she will not explain, what are we to do? A mystery is always a sign of something wrong; at least, it must be taken for something wrong if it remains unexplained. I am, I hope, without passion or prejudice. She might have confided in me—"

"If there was anything to confide," Rosalind said under her breath. But he went on.

"And now your father has sent for his lawyer—to do something, to change something. I can't tell what he means to do, but it will be trouble in any case. And you, Rosalind—I said so before, you—must not stay here."

"If you mean that I am to leave my mother, Uncle John—"

"Hush! not your mother. My dear, you must allow others to judge for you here. Had you been her child it would have been different: but we must take thought for your best interests. Who is that driving in at the gate? Why, it is Blake already. I wonder if a second summons has been sent. He was not expected till to-morrow. This looks worse and worse, Rosalind."

"Uncle John, if you will let me, I will run in another way. I—don't wish to meet Mr. Blake."

"Hallo, Rosalind! you don't mean to say that Charley Blake has ever presumed— Ah! this comes of not having a mother's care."

"It is nothing of the kind," she cried, drawing her hand violently from his arm. "He hates her because she never would— Oh, how can you be so cruel, so prejudiced, so unjust?" In her vehemence Rosalind pushed him away from her with a force which made his steady, middle-aged figure almost swerve, and darted across the park away from him just in time to make it evident to Mr. Blake, driving his dog-cart quickly to make up to the group in advance, that it was to avoid him Miss Trevanion had fled.

"How is he?" was the eager question he put as he came up to John Trevanion. "I hope I am not too late."

"For what? If it is my brother you mean, I hear he is a little better," said John, coldly.

"Then I suppose it is only one of his attacks," the new-comer said, with a slight tone of disappointment; not that he had any interest in the death of Mr. Trevanion, but that the fall from the excitement of a great crisis to the level of the ordinary is always disagreeable. "I thought from the telegram this morning there was no time to lose."

"Who sent you the telegram this morning?"

"Madam Trevanion, of course," said the young man.

This reply took John Trevanion so much by surprise that he went on without a word.

She knew very well what Blake's visit portended to herself. But what a strange, philosophical stoic was this woman, who did not hesitate herself to summon, to hasten, lest he should lose the moment in which she could still be injured, the executioner of her fate. A sort of awe came over John. He begun to blame himself for his miserable doubts of such a woman. There was something in this silent impassioned performance of everything demanded from her that impressed the imagination. After a few minutes' slow pacing along, restraining his horse, Blake threw the reins to his groom, and, jumping down, walked on by John Trevanion's side.

"I suppose there is no such alarming hurry, then," he said. "Of course you know what's up now?"

"If you mean what are my brother's intentions, I know nothing about them," John said.

"No more do I. I can't think what he's got in his mind; though we have been very confidential over it all." Mr. Blake elder was an old-fashioned and polite old gentleman, but his son belonged to another world, and pushed his way by means of a good deal of assurance and no regard to any one's feelings. "It would be a great assistance to me," he said, "if he's going to tamper with that will again, to know how the land lies. What is wrong? There must have been, by all I hear, a great flare-up."

"Will you remember, Blake, that you are speaking of my brother's affairs? We are not in the habit of having flares-up here."

"I mean no offence," said the other. "It's a lie, then, that is flying about the country."

"What is flying about the country? If it is about a flare-up you may be sure it is a lie."

"I don't stand upon the word," said Blake. "I thought I might speak frankly to you. Rumors are flying everywhere—that Mr. Trevanion is out of one fit into another—dying of it—and that Madam —"

"What of Madam?" said John Trevanion, firmly.

"I have myself the greatest respect for Mrs. Trevanion," said the lawyer, making a sudden pause.

"You would be a bold man if you expressed any other sentiment here; but rumor has not the same reverential and perfectly just feeling, I suppose. What has it ventured to say of my sister?"

John Trevanion, with all his gravity, was very impulsive; and the sense that her secret, whatever it was, had been betrayed, bound him at once to her defence. He had probably never called her his sister before.

"Of course it is all talk," said Blake. "I dare say the story means nothing; but knowing as I do so much about the state of affairs generally—a lawyer, you know, like a doctor, and people used to say a clergyman—"

"Is bound to hold his tongue, is he not?" John Trevanion said.

"Oh, as for that, a member of the family is not like a stranger. I took it for granted you would naturally be on the injured husband's side."

"Mr. Blake," said John, "you make assumptions which would be intolerable even to a stranger, and to a brother and friend, understanding the whole matter, I hope, a little better than you do, they are not less so, but more. Look here; a lawyer has this advantage, that he is sometimes able to calm the disordered fancy of a sick man, and put things in a better light. Take care what you do. Don't let the last act of his life be an injustice if you can help it. Your father—if your father were here—"

"Would inspire Mr. John Trevanion with more confidence," said the other, with a suppressed sneer. "It is unfortunate, but that is not your brother's opinion. He has preferred the younger man, as some do."

"I hope you will justify his choice," said John Trevanion, gravely. "It is a great responsibility. To make serious changes in a moment of passion is always dangerous—and, remember, my brother will in all probability have no time to repent."

"The responsibility will be Mr. Trevanion's, not mine," said Blake. "You should warn him, not me. His brother must have more constant access to him than even his family lawyer, and is in a better position. I am here to execute his wishes; that is all that I have to do with it."

John Trevanion bowed without a word. It was true enough. The elder Blake would perhaps have been of still less use in stemming the passionate tide of the sick man's fury, but at least he would have struggled against it. They walked up to the house almost without exchanging another word. In the hall they were met by Madam Trevanion, upon whom the constant watching had begun to tell. Her eyes were red, and there were deep lines under them. All the lines of her face were drawn and haggard. She met the new-comer with an anxious welcome, as if he had been a messenger of good and not of evil.

"I am very glad you have come, Mr. Blake. Thank you for being so prompt. My husband perhaps, after he has seen you, will be calmer and able to rest. Will you come to his room at once?"

If he had been about to secure her a fortune she could not have been more anxious to introduce him. She came back to the hall after she had led him to Mr. Trevanion's room.

"I am restless," she said; "I cannot be still. Do you know, for the first time he has sent me away. He will not have me with him. Before, whatever he might have against me was forgotten when he needed me. God grant that this interview he is so anxious for may compose him and put things on their old footing."

Perhaps it was only her agitation and distress, but as she spoke the tears came and choked her voice. John Trevanion came up to her, and laying his hands upon her shoulders gazed into her face.

“Grace,” he said, “is it possible that you can be sincere?”

“Sincere!” she cried, looking at him with a strange incomprehension. She had no room in her mind for metaphysical questions, and she was impatient of them at such a crisis of fate.

“Yes, sincere. You know that man has come for some evil purpose. Whatever they say or do together it will be to your hurt, you know; and yet you hasten his coming, and tell him you are glad when he arrives—”

“And you think it must be false? No, it is not false, John,” she said, with a faint smile. “So long as he does it and gets it off his mind, what is it to me? Do you know that he is perhaps dying? I have nursed him and been the only one that he would have near him for years. Do you think I care what happens after? But I cannot bear to be put out of my own place now.”

“Your own place! to bear all his caprices and abuse!”

“My own place, by my husband’s bedside,” she said with tears. “When he has done whatever he wants to do his mind will be relieved. And I can do more for him than any one. He shortens his own life when he sends me away.”

CHAPTER XIII

The house was in a curious commotion up-stairs. The nursery apartments were at the end of a passage, but on the same level with those of Mrs. Trevanion, in which Jane, Madam's attendant and anxious maid, was watching—coming out now and then to listen, or standing within the shelter of the half-closed door. Mrs. Trevanion's room opened into the gallery to which the great staircase led, and from which you could look down into the hall. The nursery was at the end of a long passage, and, when the door was open, commanded also a view of the gallery. There many an evening when there was fine company at Highcourt had the children pressed to see the beautiful ladies coming out in their jewels and finery, dressed for dinner. The spectacle now was not so imposing, but Russell, seated near the door, watched it with concentrated interest. She was waiting too to see what would happen, with excitement indescribable and some terror and sense of guilt. Sometimes Jane would do nothing more than open her mistress's door, and wait within for any sound or sight that might be possible. Sometimes she would step out with a furtive, noiseless step upon the gallery, and cast a quick look round and below into the hall, then return again noiselessly. Russell watched all these evidences of an anxiety as intense as her own with a sense of relief and encouragement. Jane was as eager as she was, watching over her mistress. Why was she thus watching? If Madam had been blameless, was it likely that any one would be on the alert like this? Russell herself was very sure of her facts. She had collected them with the care which hatred takes to verify its accusations; and yet cold doubts would trouble her, and she was relieved to see her opponent, the devoted adherent of the woman whose well-being was at stake, in a state of so much perturbation and anxiety. It was another proof, more potent than any of the rest. The passage which led to Russell's domain was badly lighted, and she could not be seen as she sat there at her post like a spy. She watched with an intense passion which concentrated all her thoughts. When she heard the faint little jar of the door she brightened involuntarily. The figure of Jane—slim, dark, noiseless—standing out upon the gallery was comfort to her very soul. The children were playing near. Sophy, perched up at the table, was cutting out pictures from a number of illustrated papers and pasting them into a book, an occupation which absorbed her. The two younger children were on the floor, where they went on with their play, babbling to each other, conscious of nothing else. It had begun to rain, and they were kept indoors perforce. A more peaceful scene could not be. The fire, surrounded by the high nursery fender, burned warmly and brightly. In the background, at a window which looked out upon the park, the nursery-maid—a still figure, like a piece of still life but for the measured movement of her hand—sat sewing. The little ones interchanged their eager little volleys of talk. They were "pretending to be" some of the actors in the bigger drama of life that went on over their heads. But their little performance was only Comedy, and it was Tragedy incarnate, with hands trembling too much to knit the little sock which she held, with dry lips parted with excitement, eyes feverish and shining, and an impassioned sense of power, of panic, and of guilt, that sat close to them in her cap and apron at the open door.

When Rosalind's figure flitted across the vacant scene, which was like the stage of a theatre to Russell, her first impulse was to start up and secure this visitor from the still more important field of battle below, so as to procure the last intelligence how things were going; and it was with a deepened sense of hostility, despite, and excitement that she now saw her approached by the rival watcher. Jane arrested the young lady on her way to her room, and they had an anxious conversation, during which first one and then both approached the railing of the gallery and looked over. It was all that the woman could do to restrain herself. What were they looking at? What was going on? It is seldom that any ordinary human creature has the consciousness of having set such tremendous forces in motion. It might involve ruin to her mistress, death to her master. The children whom she loved might be orphaned by her hand. But she was not conscious of anything deeper than a latent, and not painful, though exciting, thrill of guilt, and she was very conscious of the exultation of feeling herself an

important party in all that was going on. What had she done? Nothing but her duty. She had warned a man who was being deceived; she had exposed a woman who had always kept so fair an appearance, but whom she, more clear-sighted than any one, had suspected from the first. Was she not right in every point, doing her duty to Mr. Trevanion and the house that had sheltered her so long? Was not she indeed the benefactor of the house, preserving it from shame and injury? So she said to herself, justifying her own actions with an excitement which betrayed a doubt; and in the meantime awaiting the result with passionate eagerness, incapable of a thought that did not turn round this centre— What was to happen? Was there an earthquake, a terrible explosion, about to burst forth? The stillness was ominous and dreadful to the watching woman who had put all these powers in motion. She feared yet longed for the first sound of the coming outburst; and yet all the while had a savage exultation in her heart in the thought of having been able to bring the whole world about her to such a crisis of fate.

Jane in the meantime had stopped Rosalind, who was breathless with her run across the park. The woman was much agitated and trembling. “Miss Rosalind,” she said, with pale lips, “is there something wrong? I see Madam in the hall; she is not with master, and he so ill. Oh! what is wrong —what is wrong?”

“I don’t know, Jane; nothing, I hope. Papa is perhaps asleep, and there is some one— Mr. Blake —come to see him. My mother is waiting till he is gone.”

“Oh! that is perhaps why she is there,” said Jane, with relief; then she caught the girl timidly by the arm. “You will forgive me, Miss Rosalind; she has enemies—there are some who would leave nothing undone to harm her.”

“To harm mamma!” said Rosalind, holding her head high; “you forget yourself, Jane. Who would harm her in this house?”

Jane gave the girl a look which was full of gratitude, yet of miserable apprehension. “You will always be true to her, Miss Rosalind,” she said; “and oh, you have reason, for she has been a good mother to you.”

Rosalind looked at the woman somewhat sternly, for she was proud in her way. “If I did not know how fond you are of mamma,” she said, “I should be angry. Does any one ever talk so of mother and daughter? That is all a matter of course; both that she is the best mother in the world, and that I am part of herself.”

Upon this Jane did what an Englishwoman is very slow to do. She got hold of Rosalind’s hand, and made a struggle to kiss it, with tears. “Oh, Miss Rosalind, God bless you! I’d rather hear that than have a fortune left me,” she cried. “And my poor lady will want it all; she will want it all!”

“Don’t be silly, Jane. My mother wants nothing but that we should have a little sense. What can any one do against her, unless it is you and the rest annoying her by foolish anxiety about nothing. Indeed, papa is very ill, and there is reason enough to be anxious,” the girl added, after a pause.

In the meantime Madam Trevanion sat alone in the hall below. She received Blake, when he arrived, as we have seen, and she had a brief conversation with her brother-in-law, which agitated her a little. But when he left her, himself much agitated and not knowing what to think, she sat down again and waited, alone and unoccupied; a thing that scarcely ever in her full life happened to her. She, too, felt the stillness before the tempest. It repeated itself in her mind in a strange, fatal calm, a sort of cessation of all emotion. She had said to John Trevanion that she did not care what came after; and she did not; yet the sense that something was being done which would seriously affect her future life, even though she was not susceptible of much feeling on the subject, made the moment impressive. Calm and strong, indeed, must the nerves be of one who can wait outside the closed door of a room in which her fate is being decided, without a thrill. But a sort of false tranquillity—or was it perhaps the calmest of all moods, the stillness of despair?—came on her as she waited. There is a despair which is passion, and raves; but there is a different kind of despair, not called forth by any great practical danger, but by a sense of the impossibilities of life, the powerlessness of human thought or action, which is very still and says little. The Byronic desperation is very different from that which comes

into the heart of a woman when she stands still amid the irreconcilable forces of existence and feels herself helpless amid contending wills, circumstances, powers, which she can neither harmonize nor overcome. The situation in which she stood was impossible. She saw no way out of it. The sharp sting of her present uselessness, and the sense that she had been for the first time turned away from her husband's bedside, had given a momentary poignancy to her emotions which roused her, but as that died away she sat and looked her position in the face with a calm that was appalling. This was what she had come to at the end of seventeen years—that her position was impossible. She did not know how to turn or what step to take. On either side of her was a mind that did not comprehend and a heart that did not feel for her. She could neither touch nor convince the beings upon whom her very existence depended. Andromeda, waiting for the monster to devour her, had at least the danger approaching but from one quarter, and, on the other, always the possibility of a Perseus in shining armor to cleave the skies. But Madam had on either side of her an insatiable fate, and no help, she thought, on earth or in heaven. For there comes a moment in the experience of all who have felt very deeply, when Heaven, too, seems to fail. Praying long, with no visible reply, drains out the heart. There seems nothing more left to say even to God, no new argument to employ with him, who all the while knows better than he can be told. And there she was, still, silent in her soul as well as with her lips, waiting, with almost a sense of ease in the thought that there was nothing more to be done, not even a prayer to be said, her heart, her thoughts, her wishes, all standing arrested as before an impenetrable wall which stopped all effort. And how still the house was! All the doors closed, the sounds of the household lost in the distance of long passages and shut doors and curtains; nothing to disturb the stillness before the tempest should burst. She was not aware of the anxious looks of her maid, now and then peering over the balustrade of the gallery above, for Jane's furtive footstep made no sound upon the thick carpet. Through the glass door she saw the clear blue of the sky, radiant in the wintry sunshine, but still, as wintry brightness is, without the flickers of light and shadow. And thus the morning hours went on.

A long time, it seemed a lifetime, passed before her repose was disturbed. It had gradually got to be like an habitual state, and she was startled to be called back from it. The heavy curtain was lifted, and first Mr. Blake, then Dr. Beaton, came forth. The first looked extremely grave and disturbed, as he came out with a case of papers which he had brought with him in his hand. He looked at Mrs. Trevanion with a curious, deprecating air, like that of a man who has injured another unwillingly. They had never been friends, and Madam had shown her sentiments very distinctly as to those overtures of admiration which the young lawyer had taken upon himself to make to Rosalind. The politeness he showed to her on ordinary occasions was the politeness of hostility. But now he looked at her alarmed, as if he could not support her glance, and would fain have avoided the sight of her altogether. Dr. Beaton, on the other hand, came forward briskly.

"I have just been called in to our patient," he said, "and you are very much wanted, Mrs. Trevanion."

"Does he want me?" she said.

"I think so—certainly. You are necessary to him; I understand your delicacy in being absent while Mr. Blake—"

"Do not deceive yourself, doctor; it was not my delicacy."

"Come, please," said the doctor, almost impatiently; "come at once."

Blake stood looking after them till both disappeared behind the curtain, then drew a long breath, as if relieved by her departure. "I wonder if she has any suspicion," he said to himself. Then he made a long pause and walked about the hall, and considered the pictures with the eye of a man who might have to look over the inventory of them for sale. Then he added to himself, "What an old devil!" half aloud. Of whom it was that he uttered this sentiment no one could tell, but it came from the bottom of his heart.

Madam did not leave the sick-chamber again that day. She did not appear at luncheon, for which perhaps the rest were thankful, as she was herself. How to look her in the face, with this mingled doubt of her and respect for her, nobody knew. Rosalind alone was disappointed. The doctor took everything into his own hands. He was now the master of the situation, and ruled everybody. “She is the best woman I ever knew,” he said, with fervor. “I would rather trust her with a case than any Sister in the land. I said to her that I thought she would do better to stay. Mr. Trevanion was very glad to get her back.”

CHAPTER XIV

As so often happens when all is prepared and ready for the catastrophe, the stroke of fate was averted. That night proved better than the last, and then there passed two or three quiet days. It was even possible, the doctor thought, that the alarm might be a false one, and the patient go on, if tranquil and undisturbed, until, in the course of nature, another crisis prepared itself or external commotion accelerated nature. He had received his wife back after her few hours' banishment with a sort of chuckling satisfaction, and though even his reduced and enfeebled state did not make him incapable of offence, the insulting remarks he addressed to her were no more than his ordinary method. Madam said nothing of them; she seemed, strangely enough, glad to return to her martyrdom. It was better, it appeared, than the sensation of being sent away. She was with him, without rest or intermission, the whole day and a great portion of the night. The two or three hours allowed her for repose were in the middle of the night, and she never stirred abroad nor tasted the fresh air through this period of confinement. The drives which had been her daily refreshment were stopped, along with every other possibility of freedom. In the meantime there appeared something like a fresh development of confidence and dependence upon her, which wrung the heart of the enemy in her stronghold, and made Russell think her work had been all in vain. Mr. Trevanion could not, it was said, bear his wife out of his sight.

It is a mistake when a dying person thus keeps all his world waiting. The sympathetic faculties are worn out. The household in general felt a slight sensation of resentment towards the sick man who had cheated them into so much interest. It was not as if he had been a man whom his dependents loved, and he had defrauded them of that profound and serious interest with which the last steps of any human creature—unless in a hospital or other agglomeration of humanity, where individual characteristics are abolished—are accompanied. The servants, who had with a little awe attended the coming of death, were half disappointed, half disgusted by the delay. Even John Trevanion, who had made up his mind very seriously and somewhat against his own convictions to wait "till all was over," had a sensation of annoyance: he might go on for weeks, perhaps for months, all the winter —"thank God!" they said, mechanically; but John could not help thinking how inconvenient it would be to come back—to hang on all the winter, never able to go anywhere. It would have been so much more considerate to get it over at once, but Reginald was never one who considered other people's convenience. Dr. Beaton, who had no desire to leave Highcourt, and who, besides, had a doctor's satisfaction in a successful fight with disease, took it much more pleasantly. He rubbed his hands and expressed his hopes of "pulling" his patient through, with much unnecessary cordiality. "Let us but stave off all trouble till spring, and there is no saying what may happen," he said, jauntily. "The summer will be all in his favor, and before next winter we may get him away." The younger members of the family took this for granted. Reginald, who had been sent for from school, begged his mother another time to be sure there was some real need for it before summoning a fellow home in the middle of the half; and Rosalind entirely recovered her spirits. The cloud that had hung over the house seemed about to melt away. Nobody was aware of the agitating conferences which Jane held with her mistress in the few moments when they saw each other; or the miserable anxiety which contended in Madam's mind with her evident and necessary duties. She had buried her troubles too long in her own bosom to exhibit them now. And thus the days passed slowly away; the patient had not yet been allowed to leave his bed, and, indeed, was in a state of alarming feebleness, but that was all.

Rosalind was left very much to herself during these days. She had now no longer any one to go out with. Sometimes, indeed, her uncle would propose a walk, but that at the most occupied but a small part of the day, and all her usual occupations had been suspended in the general excitement. She took to wandering about the park, where she could stray alone as much as pleased her, fearing no intrusion. A week or ten days after the visit of Mr. Blake, she was walking near the lake which

was the pride of Highcourt. In summer the banks of this piece of water were a mass of flowering shrubs, and on the little artificial island in the middle was a little equally artificial cottage, the creation of Rosalind's grandmother, where still the children in summer would often go to have tea. One or two boats lay at a little landing-place for the purpose of transporting visitors, and it was one of the pleasures of the neighborhood, when the family were absent, to visit the Bijou, as it was called. At one end of the little lake was a road leading from the village, to which the public of the place had a right. It was perhaps out of weariness with the monotony of her lonely walks that Rosalind directed her steps that way on an afternoon when all was cold and clear, an orange-red sunset preparing in the west, and indications of frost in the air. The lake caught the reflection of the sunset blaze and was all barred with crimson and gold, with the steely blue of its surface coming in around and intensifying every tint. Rosalind walked slowly round the margin of the water, and thought of the happy afternoons when the children and their mother had been rowed across, she herself and Rex taking the control of the boat. The water looked tempting, with its bars of color, and the little red roof of the Bijou blazed in the slanting light. She played with the boats at the landing-place, pushing one into the water with a half fancy to push forth into the lake, until it had got almost too far off to be pulled back again, and gave her some trouble, standing on the edge of the tiny pier with an oar in her hand, to bring it back to its little anchorage. She was standing thus, her figure relieved against the still, shining surface of the water, when she heard a footstep behind her, and thinking it the man who had charge of the cottage and the boats, called to him without turning round, "Come here, Dunmore; I have loosed this boat and I can't get it back—"

The footstep advanced with a certain hesitation. Then an unfamiliar voice said, "I am not Dunmore—but if you will allow me to help you—"

She started and turned round. It was the same stranger whom she had already twice seen on the road. "Oh! pray don't let me trouble you. Dunmore will be here directly," she said.

This did not, however, prevent the young man from rendering the necessary assistance. He got into one of the nearer boats, and stretching out from the bow of it, secured the stray pinnace. It was not a dangerous act, nor even one that gave the passer-by much trouble, but Rosalind, partly out of a sense that she had been ungracious, partly, perhaps—who can tell—out of the utter monotony of all around her, thanked him with eagerness. "I am sorry to give you trouble," she said again.

"It is no trouble, it is a pleasure." Was he going to be so sensible, so judicious, as to go away after this? He seemed to intend so. He put on his hat after bowing to her, and turned away, but then there seemed to be an after-thought which struck him. He turned back again, took off his hat again, and said: "I beg your pardon, but may I ask for Mr. Trevanion? The village news is so uncertain."

"My father is still very ill," said Rosalind, "but it is thought there is now some hope."

"That is good news indeed," the stranger said. Certainly he had a most interesting face. It could not be possible that a man with such a countenance was "not a gentleman," that most damning of all sentences. His face was refined and delicate; his eyes large, liquid, full of meaning, which was increased by the air of weakness which made them larger and brighter than eyes in ordinary circumstances. And certainly it was kind of him to be glad.

"Oh, yes, you told me before you knew my father," Rosalind said.

"I cannot claim to know Mr. Trevanion; but I do know a member of the family very well, and I have heard of him all my life."

Rosalind was no more afraid of a young man than of an old woman, and she thought she had been unjust to this stranger, who, after all, notwithstanding his rough dress, had nothing about him to find fault with. She said, "Yes; perhaps my Uncle John? In any case I am much obliged to you, both for helping me and for your interest in papa."

"May I sometimes ask how he is? The villagers are so vague."

"Oh, certainly," said Rosalind; "they have a bulletin at the lodge, or if you care to come so far as Highcourt, you will always have the last report."

"You are very kind, I will not come to the house. But I know that you often walk in the park. If I may ask you when we—chance to meet?"

This suggestion startled Rosalind. It awoke in her again that vague alarm—not, perhaps, a gentleman. But when she looked at the eyes which were searching hers with so sensitive a perception of every shade of expression, she became confused and did not know what to think. He was so quickly sensible of every change that he saw he had taken a wrong step. He ought to have gone further, and perceived what the wrong step was, but she thought he was puzzled and did not discover this instinctively, as a gentleman would have done. She withdrew a step or two involuntarily. "Oh, no," she said with gentle dignity, "I do not always walk the same way; but you may be sure of seeing the bulletin at the lodge." And with this she made him a courtesy and walked away, not hurrying, to show any alarm, but taking a path which was quite out of the way of the public, and where he could not follow. Rosalind felt a little thrill of agitation in her as she went home. Who could he be, and what did he do here, and why did he throw himself in her way? If she had been a girl of a vulgarly romantic imagination, she would no doubt have jumped at the idea of a secret adoration which had brought him to the poor little village for her sake, for the chance of a passing encounter. But Rosalind was not of this turn of imagination, and that undefined doubt which wavered in her mind did a great deal to damp the wings of any such fancy. What he had said was almost equal to asking her to meet him in the park. She blushed all over at the thought—at the curious impossibility of it, the want of knowledge. It did not seem an insult to her, but such an incomprehensible ignorance in him that she was ashamed of it; that he should have been capable of such a mistake. Not a gentleman! Oh, surely he could never, never— And yet the testimony of those fine, refined features—the mouth so delicate and sensitive, the eyes so eloquent—was of such a different kind. And was it Uncle John he knew? But Uncle John had passed him on the road and had not known him. It was very strange altogether. She could not banish the beautiful, pleading eyes out of her mind. How they looked at her! They were almost a child's eyes in their uncertainty and wistfulness, reading her face to see how far to go. And altogether he had the air of extreme youth, almost as young as herself, which, of course, in a man is boyhood. For what is a man of twenty? ten years, and more, younger and less experienced than a woman of that sober age. There was a sort of yearning of pity in her heart towards him, just tempered by that doubt. Poor boy! how badly he must have been brought up—how sadly ignorant not to know that a gentleman— And then she began to remember Lord Lytton's novels, some of which she had read. There would have been nothing out of place in them had such a youth so addressed a lady. He was, indeed, not at all unlike a young man in Lord Lytton. He interested her very much, and filled her mind as she went lightly home. Who could he be, and why so anxious about her father's health? or was that merely a reason for addressing her—a way, perhaps he thought, of securing her acquaintance, making up some sort of private understanding between them. Had not Rosalind heard somewhere that a boy was opt to select a much older woman as the object of his first admiration? Perhaps that might furnish an explanation for it, for he must be very young, not more than a boy.

When she got home her first step into the house was enough to drive every thought of this description out of her mind. She was aware of the change before she could ask—before she saw even a servant of whom to inquire. The hall, all the rooms, were vacant. She could find nobody, until, coming back after an ineffectual search, she met Jane coming away from the sick-room, carrying various things that had been used there. Jane shook her head in answer to Rosalind's question. "Oh, very bad again—worse than ever. No one can tell what has brought it on. Another attack, worse than any he has had. I think, Miss Rosalind," Jane said, drawing close with a tremulous shrill whisper, "it was that dreadful woman that had got in again the moment my poor lady's back was turned."

"What dreadful woman?"

"Oh, Russell, Miss Rosalind. My poor lady came out of the room for five minutes— I don't think it was five minutes. She was faint with fatigue; and all at once we heard a cry. Oh, it was not master, it was that woman. There she was, lying at the room door in hysterics, or whatever you call

them. And the spasms came on again directly. I pushed her out of my lady's way; she may be lying there yet, for anything I know. This time he will never get better, Miss Rosalind," Jane said.

"Oh, do not say so—do not say so," the girl cried. He had not been a kind father nor a generous master. But such was the awe of it, and the quivering sympathy of human nature, that even the woman wept as Rosalind threw herself upon her shoulder. The house was full of the atmosphere of death.

CHAPTER XV

Russell meant no harm to her master. In the curious confusion which one passionate feeling brings into an undisciplined mind, she had even something that might be called affection for Mr. Trevanion, as the victim of the woman she hated. Something that she called regard for him was the justification in her own mind of her furious antipathy to his wife. And after all her excitement and suspense, to be compelled to witness what seemed to her the triumph of Madam, the quieting down of all suspicions, and her return, as more than ever indispensable, to the bedside of her husband, drove the woman almost to madness. How she lived through the week and executed her various duties, as in ordinary times, she did not know. The children suffered more or less, but not so much as might be supposed. For to Russell's perverted perception the children were hers more than their mother's, and she loved them in her way, while she hated Mrs. Trevanion. Indeed, the absorption of Madam in the sick-room left them very much in Russell's influence, and, on the surface, more evidently attached to her than to the mother of whom they saw so little. If they suffered from the excitement that disturbed her temper, as well as other things, it was in a very modified degree, and they were indulged and caressed by moments, as much as they were hustled and scolded at others. The nursery-maids, indeed, found Russell unbearable, and communicated to each other their intention to complain as soon as Madam could be supposed able to listen to them; if not, to give notice at once. But they did not tell for very much in the house, and the nurse concealed successfully enough from all but them the devouring excitement which was in her. It was the afternoon hour, when nature is at its lowest, and when excitement and suspense are least supportable, that Russell found her next opportunity. She had gone down-stairs, seeking she knew not what—looking for something new—a little relief to the strain of suspense, when she suddenly saw the door of the sick-room open and Mrs. Trevanion come out. She did not stop to ask herself what she was to gain by risking an outbreak of fury from her master, and of blame and reproach from every side, by intruding upon the invalid. The temptation was too strong to be resisted. She opened the door without leaving herself time to think, and went in.

Then terror seized her. Mr. Trevanion was propped up in his bed, a pair of fiery, twinkling eyes, full of the suspicion and curiosity that were natural to him, peering out of the skeleton head, which was ghastly with illness and emaciation. Nothing escaped the fierce vitality of those eyes. He saw the movement of the door, the sudden apparition of the excited face, at first so eager and curious, then blanched with terror. He was himself comparatively at ease, in a moment of vacancy in which there was neither present suffering enough to occupy him, nor anything else to amuse his restless soul. "Hallo!" he cried, as soon as he saw her; "come in—come in. You have got something more to tell me? Faithful woman—faithful to your master! Come in; there is just time before Madam comes back to hear what you have to say."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the valet, who had taken Madam's place, "but the doctor's orders is—"

"What do I care for the doctor's orders? Get out of the way and let Russell in. Here, woman, you have got news for me. A faithful servant, who won't conceal from her master what he ought to know. Out, Jenkins, and let the woman come in."

He raised himself up higher in his bed; the keen angles of his knees seemed to rise to his chin. He waved impatiently his skeleton hands. The valet made wild signs at the intruder. "Can't you go away? You'll kill him!" he cried in a hoarse whisper. "Come in—come in!" shrieked the skeleton in the bed, in all the excitement of opposition. Then it was that Russell, terrified, helpless, distracted, gave that cry which echoed through all the house, and brought Dr. Beaton rushing from one side and Mrs. Trevanion from the other. The woman had fallen at the door of the room in hysterics, as Jane said, a seizure for which all the attendants, absorbed in a more immediate danger, felt the highest contempt. She was pushed out of the way, to be succored by the maids, who had been brought by

the cry into the adjacent passage, in high excitement to know what was going on. But Russell could not throw any light upon what had happened even when she came to herself. She could only sob and cry, with starts of nervous panic. She had done nothing, and yet what had she done? She had not said a word to him, and yet— It was soon understood throughout all the house that Mr. Trevanion had another of his attacks, and that Dr. Beaton did not think he could ever rally again.

The room where the patient lay was very large and open. It had once been the billiard-room of the house, and had been prepared for him when it was found no longer expedient that he should go up and down even the easy, luxuriously carpeted stairs of Highcourt. There was one large window filling almost one side of the room, without curtains or even blind, and which was now thrown open to admit the air fully. The door, too, was open, and the draught of fresh, cold, wintry air blowing through made it more like a hillside than a room in a sheltered house. Notwithstanding this, Mrs. Trevanion stood by the bed, waving a large fan, to get more air into the panting and struggling lungs. On the other side of the bed the doctor stood, with the bony wrist of the patient in his warm, living grasp. It seemed to be Death in person with whom these anxious ministrants were struggling, rather than a dying man. Other figures flitted about in the background, Jane bringing, with noiseless understanding, according to the signs the doctor made to her, the things he wanted—now a spoonful of stimulant, now water to moisten his lips. Dead silence reigned in the room; the wind blew through, fluttering a bit of paper on the table; the slight beat of the fan kept a vibration in the air. Into this terrible scene Rosalind stole trembling, and after her her uncle; they shivered with the chill blast which swept over the others unnoticed, and still more with the sight of the gasping and struggle. Rosalind, unused to suffering, hid her face in her hands. She could do nothing. Jane, who knew what was wanted, was of more use than she. She stood timidly at the foot of the bed, now looking up for a moment at what she could see of her dying father, now at the figure of his wife against the light, never intermitting for a moment her dreadful, monotonous exercise. Mr. Trevanion was seated almost upright in the midst of his pillows, laboring in that last terrible struggle for breath, for death, not for life.

He had cried out at first in broken gasps for “The woman—the woman! She’s got something —to tell me. Something more—to tell me. I’ll hear it— I’ll he-ar it— I’ll know—everything!” he now shrieked, waving his skeleton arms to keep them away, and struggling to rise. But these efforts soon gave way to the helplessness of nature. His cries soon sank into a hoarse moaning, his struggles to an occasional wave with his arms towards the door, an appeal with his eyes to the doctor, who stood over him inexorable. Every agitating movement had dropped before Rosalind came in into the one grand effort for breath. That was all that was left him in this world to struggle for. A man of so many passions, who had got everything he had set his heart on in life: a little breath now, which the November breeze, the winnowing of the air by the great fan, every aid that could be used, could not bring to his panting lungs. Who can describe the moment when nurses and watchers, and children and lovers stand thus awed and silent, seeing the struggle turn into a fight for death—not against it: feeling their own hearts turn, and their prayers, to that which hitherto they have been resisting with all that love and skill and patience can do? Nature is strong at such a time. Few remember that the central figure has been an unkind husband, a careless father; they remember only that he is going away from them into darkness unfathomable, which they can never penetrate till they follow; that he is theirs, but soon will be theirs no more.

Then there occurred a little pause; for the first moment Dr. Beaton, with a lifted finger and eyes suddenly turned upon the others, was about to say, “All is over,” when a faintly renewed throb of the dying pulse under his finger contradicted him. There was a dead calm for a few moments, and then a faint rally. The feverish, eager eyes, starting out of their sockets, seemed to calm, and glance with something like a dim perception at John Trevanion and Rosalind, who approached. Rosalind, entirely overcome by emotion and the terrible excitement of witnessing such an event, dropped down on her knees by the bedside, where with a slight flickering of the eyelids her father’s look seemed to follow her. But in the act that look was arrested by the form of his wife, standing always in the same

position, waving the fan, sending wafts of air to him, the last and only thing he now wanted. His eyes steadied then with a certain meaning in them—a last gleam which gradually strengthened. He looked at her fixedly, with what in a person less exhausted would have been a wave of the hand towards her. Then there was a faint movement of the lips. “John!” was it perhaps? or “Look!” Then the words became more audible. “She’s—good nurse—faithful— Air!—stands—hours—but—” Then the look softened a little, the voice grew stronger; “I’m—almost—sorry—” it said.

For what—for what? In the intense stillness every feeble syllable was heard. Only a minute or two more was left to make amends for the cruelty of a life. The spectators held their breath. As for the wife, whose life perhaps hung upon these syllables as much as his did, she never moved or spoke, but went on fanning, fanning, supplying to him these last billows of air for which he labored. Suddenly a change came over the dying face, the eyes with all their old eagerness turned to the doctor, asking pitifully—was it for help in the last miserable strain of nature, this terrible effort to die?

Mrs. Trevanion seemed turned into stone. She stood and fanned after all need was over, solemnly winnowing the cold, penetrating air, which was touched with the additional chill of night, in waves towards the still lips which had done with that medium of life. To see her standing there, as if she had fainted or become unconscious, yet stood at her post still exercising that strange mechanical office, was the most terrible of all. The doctor came round and took her by the arm, and took the fan out of her hand.

“There’s no more need for that,” he cried in a broken voice; “no more need. Let us hope he is gone to fuller air than ours.”

She was so strained and stupefied that she scarcely seemed to understand this. “Hush!” she said, pulling it from his hands, “I tell you it does him good.” She had recovered the fan again and begun to put it in motion, when her eyes suddenly opened wide and fixed upon the dead face. She looked round upon them all with a great solemnity, yet surprise. “My husband is dead!” she said.

“Grace,” said John Trevanion, “come away. You have done everything up to the last moment. Come, now, and rest for the sake of the living. He needs you no more.”

He was himself very much moved. That which had been so long looked for, so often delayed, came now with all the force of a surprise. Rosalind, in an agony of tears, with her face hidden in the coverlid; Madam standing there, tearless, solemn, with alas, he feared, still worse before her than anything she divined; the young fatherless children outside, the boy at school, the troubles to be gone through, all rushed upon John Trevanion as he stood there. In a moment he who had been the object of all thought had abdicated or been dethroned, and even his brother thought of him no more. “For the sake of the living,” he repeated, taking his sister-in-law by the arm. The touch of her was like death; she was cold, frozen where she stood—penetrated by the wintry chill and by the passing of that chiller presence which had gone by her—but she did not resist. She suffered him to lead her away. She sank into a chair in the hall, as if she had no longer any power of her own. There she sat for a little while unmoving, and then cried out suddenly, “For the living!—for which of the living? It would be better for the living if you would bury me with him, he and I in one grave.”

Her voice was almost harsh in this sudden cry. What was it—a lie, or the truth? That a woman who had been so outraged and tormented should wish to be buried with her husband seemed to John Trevanion a thing impossible; and yet there was no falsehood in her face. He did not know what to think or say. After a moment he went away and left her alone with her—what?—her grief, her widowhood, her mourning—or was it only a physical frame that could bear no more, the failure of nature, altogether exhausted and worn out?

CHAPTER XVI

"The mother might have managed better, Rosie—why wasn't I sent for? I'm the eldest and the heir, and I ought to have been here. Poor old papa—he would miss me, I know. He was fond of me because I was the biggest. He used to tell me things, I ought to have been sent for. Why didn't she send for me, Rosalind?"

"I have told you before, Rex. We did not know. When I went out in the afternoon he was better and all going well; and when I came back— I had only been in the park—he was dying. Oh, you should be rather glad you were not there. He took no notice of any one, and death is terrible. I never understood what it was—"

Reginald was silent for a little. He was sufficiently awestricken even now by the sensation of the closed shutters and darkened house. "That may be," he said, in a softened voice, "but though you did not know, she would know, Rosie. Do you think she wanted me not to be there? Russell says—"

"Don't speak to me of that woman, Rex. She killed my father—"

"Oh, come, Rosie, don't talk nonsense, you know. How could she kill him? She wanted to tell him something that apparently he ought to have known. It was *that* that killed him," said the boy, with decision.

They were sitting together in one of the dark rooms; Reginald in the restless state of querulous and petulant unhappiness into which enforced seclusion, darkness, and the cessation of all active occupation warp natural sorrow in the mind of a young creature full of life and movement; Rosalind in the partially soothed exhaustion of strong but simple natural feeling. When she spoke of her father the tears came; but yet already this great event was over, and her mind was besieged, by moments, with thoughts of the new life to come. There were many things to think of. Would everything go on as before under the familiar roof, or would there be some change? And as for herself, what was to be done with her? Would they try to take her from the side of her mother and send her away among strangers? Mrs. Trevanion had retired after her husband's death to take the rest she wanted so much. For twenty-four hours no one had seen her, and Jane had not allowed even Rosalind to disturb the perfect quiet. Since then she had appeared again, but very silent and self-absorbed. She was not less affectionate to Rosalind, but seemed further away from her, as if something great and terrible divided them. When even the children were taken to their mother they were frightened and chilled by the dark room and the cap which she had put on over her beautiful hair, and were glad when the visit was over and they could escape to their nursery, where there was light, and many things to play with. Sometimes children are the most sympathetic of all living creatures; but when it is not so, they can be the most hard-hearted. In this case they were impatient of the quiet, and for a long time past had been little accustomed to be with their mother. When she took the two little ones into her arms, they resigned themselves with looks half of fright at each other, but were very glad, after they had hugged her, to slip down and steal away. Sophy, who was too old for that, paced about and turned over everything. "Are those what are called widow's caps, mamma? Shall you always wear them all your life, like old Widow Harvey, or will it only be just for a little while?" In this way Sophy made herself a comfort to her mother. The poor lady would turn her face to the wall and weep, when they hurried away, pleased to get free of her. And when Reginald came home, he had, after the first burst of childish tears, taken something of the high tone of the head of the house, resentful of not having been called in time, and disposed to resist the authority of Uncle John, who was only a younger brother. Madam had not got much comfort from her children, and between her and Rosalind there was a distance which wrung the girl's heart, but which she did not know how to surmount.

"Don't you know," Reginald said, "that there was something that Russell had to tell him? She will not tell me what it was; but if it was her duty to tell him, how could it be her fault?"

"As soon as mamma is well enough to think of anything, Russell must go away."

"You are so prejudiced, Rosalind. It does not matter to me; it is a long time since I had anything to do with her," said the boy, who was so conscious of being the heir. "But for the sake of the little ones I shall object to that."

"You!" cried Rosalind, with amazement.

"You must remember," said the boy, "that things are changed now. The mother, of course, will have it all in her hands (I suppose) for a time. But it is I who am the head. And when she knows that I object—"

"Reginald," his sister cried; "oh, how dare you speak so? What have you to do with it?—a boy at school."

A flush came over his face. He was half ashamed of himself, yet uplifted by his new honors. "I may be at school—and not—very old; but I am Trevanion of Highcourt now. I am the head of the family, whatever Uncle John may say."

Rosalind looked at her young brother for some time without saying anything, with an air of surprise. She said at last with a sigh, "You are very disappointing, Rex. I think most people are. One looks for something so different. I thought you would be sorry for mamma and think of her above everything, but it is of yourself you are thinking. Trevanion of Highcourt! I thought people had the decency to wait at least until— Papa is in the house still," she added, with an overflow of tears.

At this Reginald, who was not without heart, felt a sudden constriction in his throat, and his eyes filled too. "I didn't mean," he said, faltering, "to forget papa." Then, after a pause, he added, "Mamma, after all, won't be so very much cut up, Rosie. He—bullied her awfully. I wouldn't say a word, but he did, you know. And so I thought, perhaps, she might get over it—easier—"

To this argument what could Rosalind reply? It was not a moment to say it, yet it was true. She was confused between the claims of veracity and that most natural superstition of the heart which is wounded by any censure of the dead. She cried a little; she could not make any reply. Mrs. Trevanion did not show any sign of taking it easily. The occupation of her life was gone. That which had filled all her time and thoughts had been removed entirely from her. If love had survived in her through all that selfishness and cruelty could do to destroy it, such miracles have been known. At all events, the change was one to which it was hard to adapt herself, and the difficulty, the pain, the disruption of all her habits, even, perhaps, the unaccustomed thrill of freedom, had such a confusing and painful effect upon her as produced all the appearances of grief. This was what Rosalind felt, wondering within herself whether, after all she had borne, her mother would in reality "get over it easier," as Reginald said—a suggestion which plunged her into fresh fields of unaccustomed thought when Reginald left her to make a half-clandestine visit to the stables; for neither grief nor decorum could quench in the boy's heart the natural need of something to do. Rosalind longed to go and throw herself at her mother's feet, and claim her old place as closest counsellor and confidante. But then she paused, feeling that there was a natural barrier between them. If it should prove true that her father's death was a relief to his oppressed and insulted wife, that was a secret which never, never could be breathed in Rosalind's ear. It seemed to the girl, in the absoluteness of her youth, as if this must always stand between them, a bar to their intercourse, which once had no barrier, no subjects that might not be freely discussed. When she came to think of it, she remembered that her father never had been touched upon as a subject of discussion between them; but that, indeed, was only natural. For Rosalind had known no other phase of fatherhood, and had grown up to believe that this was the natural development. When men were strong and well, no doubt they were more genial; but sick and suffering, what so natural as that wives and daughters, and more especially wives, should be subject to all their caprices? These were the conditions under which life had appeared to her from her earliest consciousness, and she had never learned to criticise them. She had been indignant at times and taken violently Mrs. Trevanion's side; but with the principle of the life Rosalind had never quarrelled. She had known nothing else. Now, however, in the light of these revelations, and the penetration of ordinary light into the conditions of her own existence, she had begun to understand

better. But the awakening had been very painful. Life itself had stopped short and its thread was broken. She could not tell in what way it was to be pieced together again.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.