

GEORGE GISSING

A LIFE'S
MORNING

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CHAPTER I

AN UNDERGRADUATE AT LEISURE

Wilfrid Athel went down invalided a few days after the beginning of Trinity term. The event was not unanticipated. At Christmas it had been clear enough that he was overtaxing himself; his father remarked on the fact with anxiety, and urged moderation, his own peculiar virtue. Wilfrid, whose battle with circumstances was all before him, declined to believe that the body was anything but the very humble servant of the will. So the body took its revenge.

He had been delicate in childhood, and the stage of hardy naturalism which interposes itself between tender juvenility and the birth of self-consciousness did not in his case last long enough to establish his frame in the vigour to which it was tending. There was nothing sickly about him; it was only an excess of nervous vitality that would not allow body to keep pace with mind. He was a boy to be, intellectually, held in leash, said the doctors. But that was easier said than done. What system of sedatives could one apply to a youngster whose imagination wrought him to a fever during a simple walk by the seashore, who if books were forcibly withheld consoled himself with the composition of five-act tragedies, interspersed with lyrics to which he supplied original strains? Mr. Athel conceived a theory that such exuberance of emotionality might be counterbalanced by studies of a strictly positive nature; a tutor was engaged to ground young Wilfrid in mathematics and the physical sciences. The result was that the tutor's enthusiasm for these pursuits communicated itself after a brief repugnance to the versatile pupil; instincts of mastery became as vivid in the study of Euclid and the chemical elements as formerly in the humaner paths of learning; the plan had failed. In the upshot Wilfrid was sent to school; if that did not develop the animal in him, nothing would.

He was not quite three-and-twenty when the break-down removed him from Oxford. Going to Balliol with a scholarship, he had from the first been marked for great things, at all events by the measure of the schools. Removal from the system of home education had in truth seemed to answer in some degree the ends aimed at; the lad took his fair share of cricket and football, and kept clear of nervous crises. At the same time he made extraordinary progress with his books. He acquired with extreme facility, and his ambition never allowed him to find content in a second place; conquest became his habit; he grew to deem it the order of nature that Wilfrid Athel's name should come first in the list. Hence a reputation to support. During his early terms at Balliol he fagged as hard as the mere dullard whose dear life depended upon a first class and a subsequent tutorship. What he would make of himself in the end was uncertain; university distinctions would probably be of small moment to him as soon as they were achieved, for already he spent the greater portion of his strength in lines of study quite apart from the curriculum, and fate had blessed him with exemption from sordid cares. He led in a set devoted to what were called advanced ideas; without flattering himself that he was on the way to solve the problem of the universe, he had satisfaction in reviewing the milestones which removed him from the unconscious man, and already clutched at a measure of positive wisdom in the suspicion that he might shortly have to lay aside his school-books and recommence his education under other teachers. As yet he was whole-hearted in the pursuit of learning. The intellectual audacity which was wont to be the key-note of his conversation did not, as his detractors held, indicate mere bumptiousness and defect of self-measurement; it was simply the florid redundancy of a young mind which glories in its strength, and plays at victory in anticipation. It was true that he could not brook the semblance of inferiority; if it were only five minutes' chat in the Quad, he must come off with

a phrase or an epigram; so those duller heads who called Athel affected were not wholly without their justification. Those who shrugged their shoulders with the remark that he was overdoing it, and would not last out to the end of the race, enjoyed a more indisputable triumph. One evening, when Athel was taking the brilliant lead in an argument on 'Fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,' his brain began to whirl, tobacco-smoke seemed to have dulled all the lights before his eyes, and he fell from his chair in a fainting-fit.

He needed nothing but rest; that, however, was imperative. Mr. Athel brought him to London, and the family went down at once to their house in Surrey. Wilfrid was an only son and an only child. His father had been a widower for nearly ten years; for the last three his house had been directed by a widowed sister, Mrs. Rossall, who had twin girls. Mr. Athel found it no particular hardship to get away from town and pursue his work at The Firs, a delightful house in the midst of Surrey's fairest scenery, nor would Mrs. Rossall allow that the surrender of high season cost her any effort. This lady had just completed her thirty-second year; her girls were in their tenth. She was comely and knew it, but a constitutional indolence had preserved her from becoming a woman of fashion, and had nurtured in her a reflective mood, which, if it led to no marked originality of thought, at all events contributed to an appearance of culture. At the time of her husband's death she was at the point where graceful inactivity so often degenerates into slovenliness. Mrs. Rossall's homekeeping tendencies and the growing childhood of her twins tended to persuade her that her youth was gone; even the new spring fashions stirred her to but languid interest, and her music, in which she had some attainments, was all but laid aside. With widowhood began a new phase of her life. Her mourning was unaffected; it led her to pietism; she spent her days in religious observance, and her nights in the study of the gravest literature. She would have entered the Roman Church but for her brother's interposition. The end of this third year of discipline was bringing about another change, perhaps less obvious to herself than to those who marked her course with interest, as several people did. Her reading became less ascetic, she passed to George Herbert and the 'Christian Year,' and by way of the decoration of altars proceeded to thought for her personal adornment. A certain journal of society which she had long ago abandoned began to show itself occasionally in her rooms, though only as yet by oversight left to view. She spoke with her brother on the subject of certain invitations, long neglected, and did not seem displeased when he went beyond her own motion to propose the issuing of cards for a definite evening. Then came Wilfrid's break-down. There was really no need, said Mr. Athel, that she should transfer herself immediately to the country, just when everybody was well settled in town. But Mrs. Rossall preferred to go; she was not sure that the juncture had not some connection with her own spiritual life. And she maintained, on the whole, a seemly cheerfulness.

Mr. Athel was an Egyptologist of some distinction. Though not in person or manner suggestive of romantic antecedents, he had yet come by this taste in a way which bordered on romance. Travelling in Southern Europe at about the age which Wilfrid had now reached, he had the good fortune to rescue from drowning an Italian gentleman then on a tour in Greece. The Italian had a fair daughter, who was travelling with him, and her, after an acquaintance of a few weeks, Athel demanded by way of recompense. Her father was an enthusiastic student of Egyptian antiquities; the Englishman plied at one and the same time his wooing and the study of hieroglyphics, with marked success in both directions. The Mr. Athel who at that time represented parental authority, or at all events claimed filial deference, was anything but pleased with the step his son had taken; he was a highly respectable dealer in grain, and, after the manner of highly respectable men of commerce, would have had his eldest son espouse some countrywoman yet more respectable. It was his opinion that the lad had been entrapped by an adventurous foreigner. Philip Athel, who had a will of his own, wedded his Italian maiden, brought her to England, and fought down prejudices. A year or two later he was at work in Egypt, where he remained for some twelve months; his studies progressed. Subsequently he published certain papers which were recognised as valuable. Wilfrid found the amusement of his childhood in his father's pursuit; he began to decipher hieratic not much later than he learned to read

English. Scarabs were his sacred playthings, and by the time of his going to school he was able to write letters home in a demotic which would not perhaps have satisfied Champollion or Brugsch, but yet was sufficiently marvellous to his schoolfellows and gratifying to his father.

For the rest, Philip Athel was a typical English gentleman. He enjoyed out-of-door sports as keenly as he did the pursuit of his study; he had scarcely known a day's illness in his life, owing, he maintained, to the wisdom with which he arranged his day. Three hours of study was, he held, as much as any prudent man would allow himself. He was always in excellent spirits, ever ready to be of service to a friend, lived with much moderation on victuals of the best quality procurable, took his autumnal holiday abroad in a gentlemanly manner. With something of theoretic Radicalism in his political views, he combined a stout respect for British social institutions; affecting to be above vulgar prejudices, he was in reality much prepossessed in favour of hereditary position, and as time went on did occasionally half wish that the love he had bestowed on his Italian wife had been given to some English lady of 'good' family. He was liberal, frank, amiably autocratic in his home, apt to be peppery with inferiors who missed the line of perfect respect, candid and reasonable with equals or superiors. For his boy he reserved a store of manly affection, seldom expressing itself save in bluff fashion; his sister he patronised with much kindness, though he despised her judgment. One had now and then a feeling that his material circumstances aided greatly in making him the genial man he was, that with beef and claret of inferior quality he might not have been altogether so easy to get along with. But that again was an illustration of the English character.

We find the family assembling for breakfast at The Firs one delightful morning at the end of July. The windows of the room were thrown open, and there streamed in with the sunlight fresh and delicious odours, tonics alike of mind and body. From the Scotch firs whence the dwelling took its name came a scent which mingled with wafted breath from the remoter heather, and the creepers about the house-front, the lovely bloom and leafage skirting the lawn, contributed to the atmosphere of health and joy. It was nine o'clock. The urn was on the gleaming table, the bell was sounding, Mr. Athel stepped in straight from the lawn, fresh after his ten minutes' walk about the garden. Wilfrid Athel appeared at the same moment; he was dark-complexioned and had black, glossy hair; his cheeks were hollower than they should have been, but he had not the aspect of an invalid. Mrs. Rossall glided into the room behind him, fresh, fair, undemonstrative. Then came the twins, by name Patty and Minnie, delicate, with promise of their mother's English style of beauty; it was very hard to distinguish them, their uncle had honestly given up the pretence long ago, and occasionally remonstrated with his sister on the absurdity of dressing them exactly alike. The last to enter the room was the governess, Miss Emily Hood.

Mr. Athel, having pronounced a grace, mentioned that he thought of running up to town; did anybody wish to give him a commission? Mrs. Rossall looked thoughtful, and said she would make a note of two or three things.

'I haven't much faith in that porridge regimen, Wilf,' remarked the master of the house, as he helped himself to chicken and tongue. 'We are not Highlanders. It's dangerous to make diet too much a matter of theory. Your example is infectious; first the twins; now Miss Hood. Edith, do you propose to become a pervert to porridge?'

'I have no taste for it,' replied his sister, who had become absent-minded.

'There's a certain dishonesty about it, moreover,' Mr. Athel pursued. 'Porridge should be eaten with salt. Milk *and* sugar—didn't I hear a suggestion of golden syrup, more honestly called treacle, yesterday? These things constitute evasion, self-deception at the least. In your case, Miss Hood, the regimen is clearly fruitful of ill results.'

'Of what kind, Mr. Athel?'

'Obviously it leads to diminution of appetite. You were in the habit of eating a satisfactory breakfast; at present some two ounces of that farinaceous mess—'

'My dear Philip!' interposed Mrs. Rossall, still absently.

I hold that I am within my rights,' asserted her brother. 'If Miss Hood goes down into Yorkshire in a state of emaciation—'

Wilfrid and the twins showed amusement.

'To begin with,' pursued Mr. Athel, 'I hold that sweet food the first thing in the morning is a mistake; the appetite is checked in an artificial way, and impaired. Even coffee—'

'You would recommend a return to flagons of ale?' suggested Wilfrid.

'I am not sure that it wasn't better dietetically.'

Mrs. Rossall had taken an egg, but, after fruitlessly chipping at the shell throughout this conversation, put down her spoon and appeared to abandon the effort to commence her meal. Presently she broke silence, speaking with some diffidence.

'I really think I will go to town with you, Philip,' she said. 'I want some things you can't very well get me, and then I ought to go and see the Redwings. I might persuade Beatrice to come to us for a day or two.'

'Do so by all means. You're quite sure,' he added with a smile, 'that I couldn't save you the trouble of the journey? I have no objection to visiting the Redwings.'

'I think it will be better if I go myself,' replied Mrs. Rossall, with a far-off look. 'I might call on one or two other people.'

Having decided this point, she found herself able to crack the egg. The anticipation of her day in London made her quite gay throughout the meal.

The carriage was at the door by ten o'clock, to drive to Dealing, the nearest station, some four miles away. The twins had gone upstairs with Miss Hood to their lessons, and Wilfrid was sauntering about the hall. His father paused by him on the way to the carriage.

'What do you propose to do with yourself, Wilf?' he asked.

'Ride, I think.'

'Do. Go over to Hilstead and lunch there. Capital lunch they give you at the inn; the last time I was there they cooked me one of the best chops I ever ate. Oberon wants exercise; make a day of it.'

'Very well.'

'You're not looking quite so well, I'm afraid,' remarked his father, with genuine solicitude in his tone. 'Haven't been reading, have you?'

'No.'

'No imprudences, mind. I must stop that porridge regimen; it doesn't suit you. Ready, Edith?' he shouted heartily at the foot of the stairs.

Mrs. Rossall came down, buttoning her gloves.

'If I were you, Wilf,' she said, 'I'd go off somewhere for the day. The twins will only worry you.' Wilfrid laughed.

'I am going to eat unexampled chops at the "Waggoner" in Hilstead,' he replied.

'That's right. Good-bye, my dear boy. I wish you'd get fatter.'

'Pooh, I'm all right.'

The landau rolled away. Wilfrid still loitered in the hall, a singular look of doubt on his face. In a room above one of the twins was having a music lesson; a certain finger-exercise was being drummed with persistent endeavour at accuracy.

'How can she bear that morning after morning?' the young man murmured to himself.

He took his straw hat and went round to the stables. Oberon was being groomed. Wilfrid patted the horse's sleek neck, and talked a little with the man. At length he made up his mind to go and prepare for riding; Oberon would be ready for him in a few minutes.

In the porch Patty ran to meet him.

'Truant!' Wilfrid exclaimed. 'Have I caught you in the act of escape?'

'I was going to look for you,' said the child, putting her arm through his and swinging upon him. 'We want to know if you'll be back for lunch.'

'Who wants to know?'

'I and Minnie and Miss Hood.'

'Oh, you are Patty, then, are you?'

This was an old form of joke. The child shook her dark curls with a half-annoyed gesture, but still swung on her cousin as he moved into the house. Wilfrid passed his arm about her playfully.

'Can't you make up your mind, Wilf?' she asked.

'Oh yes, my mind is quite made up,' he replied, with a laugh.

'And won't you tell me?'

'Tell you? Ah, about lunch. No, I shall not be back.'

'You won't? Oh, I am sorry.'

'Why are you sorry, indistinguishable little maiden?' he asked, drawing out one of her curls between his fingers, and letting it spring back again into its circling beauty.

'We thought it would be so nice, we four at lunch.'

'I am warned to avoid you. The tone of conversation would try my weak head; I am not capable yet of intellectual effort.'

The little girl looked at him with puzzled eyes.

'Well, it can't be helped,' she said. 'I must go back to my lessons.'

She ran off, and Wilfrid went up to his dressing-room. When he came down, Oberon was pawing the gravel before the door. He mounted and rode away.

His spirits, which at first seemed to suffer some depression, took vigour once more from the air of the downs. He put Oberon at a leap or two, then let the breeze sing in his ears as he was borne at a gallop over the summer land, golden with sunlight. In spite of his still worn look, health was manifest in the upright vigour of his form, and in his eyes gleamed the untroubled joy of existence. Hope just now was strong within him, a hope defined and pointing to an end attainable; he knew that henceforth the many bounding and voiceful streams of his life would unite in one strong flow onward to a region of orient glory which shone before him as the bourne hitherto but dimly imagined. On, Oberon, on! No speed that would not lag behind the fore-flight of a heart's desire. Let the stretch of green-shadowing woodland sweep by like a dream; let the fair, sweet meadow-sides smile for a moment and vanish; let the dark hill-summits rise and sink. It is the time of youth and hope, of boundless faith in the world's promises, of breathless pursuit.

Hilstead was gained long before lunch could be thought of. Wilfrid rode on, and circled back towards the hostelry famous for chops about the hour of noon. He put up his horse, and strayed about the village till his meal was ready; after he had eaten it he smoked a cigar among hollyhocks and sunflowers. Then impatience possessed him. He looked at his watch several times, annoyed to find that so little of the day was spent. When he at last set forth again, it was to ride at walking pace in the direction of home. He reached a junction of roads, and waited there for several minutes, unable to decide upon his course. He ended by throwing the reins on Oberon's neck.

'Go which way you will,' he said aloud.

Oberon paced forward to the homeward route.

'So be it. On, then! An hour will bring us to The Firs.'

The house was all but reached, when Wilfrid caught a glimpse of a straw hat moving into a heath-clad hollow a hundred yards from the road. He pressed on. At the gate stood a gardener.

'James,' he cried, leaping down, 'take the horse to the stable, will you?'

And, instead of going up to the house, he walked back in the direction he had come till he reached the hollow in which the straw hat had disappeared. Miss Hood sat on the ground, reading. She was about to rise, but Wilfrid begged her not to move, and threw himself into a reclining posture.

'I saw you as I rode past,' he said, in a friendly way. 'I suppose the twins are straying?'

'They are at Greenhaws,' was the reply, 'Mrs. Winter called for them immediately after lunch. She will bring them back early in the evening.'

'Ah!'

He plucked sprigs of heather. Miss Hood turned to her book.

'I've had a magnificent ride,' Wilfrid began again. 'Surely there is no country in England so glorious as this. Don't you enjoy it?'

'Very much.'

'I have never seen the Yorkshire moors. The scenery, of course, is of a much wilder kind?'

'I have not seen them myself,' said the governess.

'I thought you might have taken your holidays sometimes in that direction.'

'No. We used to go to a seaside place in Lincolnshire called Cleethorpes. I suppose you never heard of it?'

'I think not.'

Wilfrid continued to pluck heather, and let his eyes catch a glimpse of her face now and then. Miss Hood was a year younger than himself, and had well outgrown girlishness. She was of very slight build, looked indeed rather frail; but her face, though lacking colour, had the firmness of health. It was very broad at the forehead, and tapered down into narrowness; the eyes seemed set at an unusual distance from each other, though the nose was thin and of perfect form, its profile making but a slight angle away from the line of the brows. Her lips were large, but finely curved; the chin was prominent, the throat long. She had warm brown hair.

Few would at first sight have called her face beautiful, but none could deny the beauty of her hands. Ungloved at present, they lay on the open pages of the book, unsurpassable for delicate loveliness. When he did not venture to look higher, Wilfrid let his eyes feed on the turn of the wrist, the faint blue lines and sinuous muscles, the pencilling about the finger-joints, the delicate white and pink nails.

Miss Hood was habitually silent when in the company of others than the children. When she replied to a question it was without timidity, but in few, well-chosen words. Yet her manner did not lack cheerfulness; she impressed no one as being unhappy, and alone with the twins she was often gay enough. She was self-possessed, and had the manners of a lady, though in her position this was rather to be observed in what she refrained from doing than in what she did. Wilfrid had, on first meeting her, remarked to himself that it must imply a Certain force of individuality to vary so distinctly from the commonplace even under the disadvantage of complete self-suppression; he had now come to understand better the way in which that individuality betrayed itself.

'Shall you go to Cleethorpes this year?' was his next question.

'I think not. I shall most likely pass the holidays at home.'

'And study electricity?'

In a former conversation she had surprised him by some unexpected knowledge of the principles of electricity, and explained the acquirement by telling him that this subject was her father's favourite study. Wilfrid put the question now with a smile.

'Yes, very likely,' she replied, smiling also, but faintly. 'It gives my father pleasure when I do so.'

'You have not a keen interest in the subject yourself?'

'I try to have.'

Her voice was of singular quality; if she raised it the effect was not agreeable, owing possibly to its lack of strength, but in low tones, such as she employed at present, it fell on the ear with a peculiar sweetness, a natural melody in its modulation.

'The way in which you speak of your father interests me,' said Wilfrid, leaning his chin upon his hand, and gazing at her freely. 'You seem so united with him in sympathy.'

She did not turn her eyes to him, but her face gathered brightness.

'In sympathy, yes,' she replied, speaking now with more readiness. 'Our tastes often differ, but we are always at one in feeling. We have been companions ever since I can remember.'

'Is your mother living?'

'Yes.'

Something in the tone of the brief affirmative kept Wilfrid from further questioning.

'I wonder,' he said, 'what you think of the relations existing between myself and my father. We are excellent friends, don't you think? Strange—one doesn't think much about such things till some occasion brings them forward. Whether there is deep sympathy between us, I couldn't say. Certainly there are many subjects on which I should not dream of speaking to him unless necessity arose; partly, I suppose, that is male reserve, and partly English reserve. If novels are to be trusted, French parents and children speak together with much more freedom; on the whole that must be better.'

She made no remark.

'My father,' he continued, 'is eminently a man of sense if I reflect on my boyhood, I see how admirable his treatment of me has always been. I fancy I must have been at one time rather hard to manage; I know I was very passionate and stubbornly self-willed. Yet he neither let me have my own way nor angered me by his opposition. In fact, he made me respect him. Now that we stand on equal terms, I dare say he has something of the same feeling towards myself. And so it comes that we are excellent friends.'

She listened with a scarcely perceptible smile.

'Perhaps this seems to you a curiously dispassionate way of treating such a subject,' Wilfrid added, with a laugh. 'It illustrates what I meant in saying I doubted whether there was deep sympathy between us. Your own feeling for your father is clearly one of devotedness. You would think no sacrifice of your own wishes too great if he asked it of you.'

'I cannot imagine any sacrifice, which my father could ask, that I should refuse.'

She spoke with some difficulty, as if she wished to escape the subject.

'Perhaps that is a virtue that your sex helps to explain,' said Wilfrid, musingly.

'You do not know,' he added, when a bee had hummed between them for half a minute, 'how constant my regret is that my mother did not live till I was old enough to make a friend of her. You know that she was an Italian? There was a sympathy taken out of my life. I believe I have more of the Italian nature than the English, and I know my mother's presence would be priceless to me now that I could talk with her. What unsatisfactory creatures we are as children, so imperfect, so deficient! It is worse with boys than with girls. Compare, for instance, the twine with boys often. What coarse, awkward, unruly lumps of boisterousness youngsters mostly are at that age! I dislike boys, and more than ever when I remember myself at that stage. What an insensible, ungrateful, brainless, and heartless brat I was!'

'You must be wrong in one respect,' she returned, watching a large butterfly. 'You could not have been brainless.'

'Oh, the foundation of tolerable wits was there, no doubt; but it is just that undeveloped state that irritates me. Suppose I were now ten years old, and that glorious butterfly before me; should I not leap at it and stick a pin through it—young savage? Precisely what a Hottentot boy would do, except that he would be free from the apish folly of pretending a scientific interest, not really existing. I rejoice to have lived out of my boyhood; I would not go through it again for anything short of a thousand years of subsequent maturity.'

She just glanced at him, a light of laughter in her eyes. She was abandoning herself to the pleasure of hearing him speak.

'That picture of my mother,' he pursued, dropping his voice again, 'does not do her justice. Even at twelve years old—(she died when I was twelve)—I could not help seeing and knowing how beautiful she was. I have thought of her of late more than I ever did; sometimes I suffer a passion of grief that one so beautiful and lovable has gone and left a mere dumb picture. I suppose even my memory of her will grow fainter and fainter, founded as it is on imperfect understanding, dim appreciation. She used to read Italian to me—first the Italian, then the English—and I thought it, as

often as not, a bore to have to listen to her! Thank Heaven, I have the book she used, and can now go over the pieces, and try to recall her voice.'

The butterfly was gone, but the bee still hummed about them. The hot afternoon air was unstirred by any breeze.

'How glad I am,' Wilfrid exclaimed when he had brooded for a few moments, 'that I happened to see you as I rode past! I should have wandered restlessly about the house in vain, seeking for some one to talk to. And you listen so patiently. It is pleasant to be here and talk so freely of things I have always had to keep in my own mind. Look, do look at that bastion of cloud over the sycamore! What glorious gradation of tints! What a snowy crown!'

'That is a pretty spray,' he added, holding to her one that he had plucked.

She looked at it; then, as he still held it out, took it from him. The exquisite fingers touched his own redder and coarser ones.

'Have you friends in Dunfield?' he asked.

'Friends?'

'Any real friend, I mean—any girl who gives you real companionship?'

'Scarcely that.'

'How shall you spend your time when you are not deep in electrics? What do you mean to read these holidays?'

'Chiefly German, I think. I have only just begun to read it.'

'And I can't read it at all. Now and then I make a shot at the meaning of a note in a German edition of some classical author, every time fretting at my ignorance. But there is so endlessly much to do, and a day is so short.'

'Isn't it hateful,' he broke forth, 'this enforced idleness of mine? To think that weeks and weeks go by and I remain just where I was, when the loss of an hour used to seem to me an irreparable misfortune. I have such an appetite for knowledge, surely the unhappiest gift a man can be endowed with it leads to nothing but frustration. Perhaps the appetite weakens as one grows in years; perhaps the sphere of one's keener interests contracts; I hope it may be so. At times I cannot work—I mean, I could not—for a sense of the vastness of the field before me. I should like you to see my rooms at Balliol. Shelves have long since refused to take another volume; floor, tables, chairs, every spot is heaped. And there they lie; hosts I have scarcely looked into, many I shall never have time to take up to the end of my days.'

'You have the satisfaction of being able to give your whole time to study.'

'There is precisely the source of dissatisfaction My whole time, and that wholly insufficient. I have a friend, a man I envy intensely; he has taken up the subject of Celtic literature; gives himself to it with single-heartedness, cares for nothing that does not connect itself therewith; will pursue it throughout his life; will know more of it than any man living. My despair is the universality of my interests. I can think of no branch of study to which I could not surrender myself with enthusiasm; of course I shall never master one. My subject is the history of humanity; I would know everything that man has done or thought or felt. I cannot separate lines of study. Philology is a passion with me, but how shall I part the history of speech from the history of thought? The etymology of any single word will hold me for hours; to follow it up I must traverse centuries of human culture. They tell me I have a faculty for philosophy, in the narrow sense of the word; alas! that narrow sense implies an exhaustive knowledge of speculation in the past and of every result of science born in our own time. Think of the sunny spaces in the world's history, in each of which one could linger for ever I Athens at her fairest, Borne at her grandest, the glorious savagery of Merovingian courts, the kingdom of Frederick II., the Moors in Spain, the magic of Renaissance Italy—to become a citizen of any one age means a lifetime of endeavour. It is easy to fill one's head with names and years, but that only sharpens my hunger. Then there is the world of art; I would know every subtlest melody of verse in every tongue, enjoy with perfectly instructed taste every form that man has carved or painted. I

fear to enter museums and galleries; I am distracted by the numberless desires that seize upon me, depressed by the hopelessness of satisfying them. I cannot even enjoy music from the mere feeling that I do not enjoy it enough, that I have not had time to study it, that I shall never get at its secret.... And when is one to live? I cannot lose myself in other men's activity and enjoyments. I must have a life of my own, outside the walls of a library. It would be easy to give up all ambition of knowledge, to forget all the joy and sorrow that has been and passed into nothingness; to know only the eternity of a present hour. Might one not learn more in one instant of unreflecting happiness than by toiling on to a mummied age, only to know in the end the despair of never having lived?"

He again raised his eyes to her face. It was fixed in a cold, absent gaze; her lips hardened into severity, the pose of her head impressive, noble. Athel regarded her for several moments; she was revealing to him more of her inner self than he had yet divined.

'What are your thoughts?' he asked quietly.

She smiled, recovering her wonted passiveness.

'Have you not often much the same troubles?'

'They are only for the mind which is strong enough to meet and overcome them,' she replied.

'But look, my mind has given way already! I am imbecile. For ever I shall be on the point of a break-down, and each successive one will bring me nearer to some final catastrophe—perhaps the lunatic asylum—who knows?'

'I should think,' she said gravely, 'that you suggested a truth. Very likely your mind will contract its range and cease to aim at the impossible.'

'But tell me, have you not yourself already attained that wisdom? Why should you make pretences of feebleness which does not mark you? You have a mind as active as my own; I know that perfectly well. What is your secret of contentment? Won't you help me in this miserable plight?'

'No, Mr. Athel, I have none but very ordinary powers of mind, and perhaps it is my recognition of that which keeps me contented. There is indeed one principle of guidance which I have worked out for myself—'

'Ah! And that?'

'It will not enlighten you, for it is only the choice of a natural and easy course, seeing that difficult ones are closed. The literature of learning is out of my reach, so I limit myself to the literature of beauty, and in this I try to keep to the best.'

'You are right, you are right! To know the masterpieces of literature, pure literature, poetry in its widest sense; that is the wise choice. Think; we feed ourselves with the secondhand wisdom of paltry philosophisers and critics, and Shakespeare waits outside the door with the bread of life. From Homer—Alas! you do not read Greek?'

She shook her head.

'And you work at German! In Heaven's name change your language forthwith! Why should you not know Greek? You *must* know Greek! I will give you books, I will advise you, show you the essentials to begin with. There are still a few days before you go into Yorkshire; you can work during the holidays on lines I shall set you; you can write and tell me your—'

He paused, for her face had lost its smile, and wore again that coldly respectful look which she seldom put off save in her privacy with the children. For the last quarter of an hour he had marked in her quite another aspect; the secret meanings of her face had half uttered themselves in eye and lip. His last words seemed to recall her to the world of fact. She made a slight movement and closed the book on her lap.

'Greek is more than I can undertake, Mr. Athel,' she said in a quietly decided tone. 'I must be content with translations.'

'Translations You would not say that so calmly if you knew what you were renouncing. Everything, everything in literature, I would give up to save my Greek. You will learn it, I know you

will; some day I shall hear you read the hexameters as beautifully as you read English poetry to the girls. Will you not begin if I beg you to?'

The elbow on which he rested moved a few inches nearer to her. He saw the pearly shadows waver upon her throat, and her lips tremble into rigidity.

'My time in the holidays will be very limited,' she said. 'I have undertaken to give some help to a friend who is preparing to become a teacher, and'—she tried to smile—'I don't think I must do more work whilst at home than is really necessary.'

'No, that is true,' Wilfrid assented unwillingly. 'Never mind, there is plenty of time. Greek will be overcome, you will see. When we are all back in town and the days are dull, then I shall succeed in persuading you.'

She looked about her as if with thought of quitting her place. Her companion was drawn into himself; he stroked mechanically with his finger-tips the fronds of bracken near him.

'I suppose I shall go up again in October,' he began. 'I wish there were no necessity for it.'

'But surely it is your one desire?' the other replied in genuine surprise.

'Not to return to Oxford. A few months ago it would have been, but this crisis in my life has changed me. I don't think I shall adapt myself again to those conditions. I want to work in a freer way. I had a positive zeal even for examinations; now that seems tame—well, boyish. I believe I have outgrown that stage; I feel a reluctance to go back to school. I suppose I must take my degree, and so on, but it will all be against the grain.'

'Your feeling will most likely alter when you have thoroughly recovered your health.'

'No, I don't think it will. Practically my health is all right. You don't,' he added with a smile, 'regard me as an irresponsible person, whose feeble remarks are to be received with kind allowance?'

'No, I did not mean that.'

He gazed at her, and his face showed a growing trouble.

'You do not take too seriously what I said just now about the weakness of my mind? It would be horrible if you thought I had worked myself into a state of amiable imbecility, and was incapable henceforth of acting, thinking, or speaking with a sound intellect. Tell me, say in plain words that is not your way of interpreting me.'

He had become very much in earnest. Raising himself to a position in which he rested on one hand, he looked straight into her face.

'Why don't you reply? Why don't you speak?'

'Because, Mr. Athel, it is surely needless to say that I have no such thought.'

'No, it is not needless; and even now you speak in a way which troubles me. Do not look away from me. What has my aunt told you about me?'

She turned her face to him. Her self-command was so complete that not a throb of her leaping heart betrayed itself in vein or muscle. She even met his eyes with a placid gaze which he felt as a new aspect of her countenance.

'Mrs. Rossall has never spoken to me of your health,' she said.

'But my father's jokes; he has a way of humorous exaggeration. You of course understand that; you don't take seriously all he says?'

'I think I can distinguish between jest and earnest.'

'For all that, you speak of the recovery of my health as if I were still far from the wholly rational stand-point. So far from my being mentally unsound, this rest has been a growing-time with me. Before, I did nothing but heap my memory with knowledge of hooks; now I have had leisure to gather knowledge of a deeper kind. I was a one-sided academical monster; it needed this new sense to make me human. The old college life is no longer my ideal; I doubt if it will be possible. At any rate, I shall hurry over the rest of my course as speedily as may be, that I may begin really to live. You must credit what I am saying; I want you to give me distinct assurance that you do so. If I have the least doubt, it will trouble my mind in earnest.'

Miss Hood rose to her feet in that graceful effortless way of which girls have the secret.

'You attribute a meaning to my words that I never thought of,' she said, again in the distant respectful manner.

Wilfrid also rose.

'And you give me credit for understanding myself, for being as much master of my mind as I am of my actions?'

'Surely I do, Mr. Athel.'

'You are going to the house? It is nearly five o'clock your conscience tells you that a civilised being must drink tea. I think I shall walk over to Greenhaws; I may as well save Mrs. Winter the trouble of bringing back the children.'

He hesitated before moving away.

'How little that cloud has changed its form! I should like to stay here and watch it till sunset. In a week I suppose I shall be looking at some such cloud over Mont Blanc. And you, in Dunfield.'

'No, there we have only mill-smoke.'

She smiled, and passed from the hollow to the road.

CHAPTER II

BEATRICE REDWING

Midway in breakfast next morning, at a moment when Mrs. Rossall was describing certain originalities of drawing-room decoration observed on the previous day at a house in town, the half-open door admitted a young lady who had time to glance round the assembled family before her presence was observed. In appearance she was very interesting. The tints of her fine complexion were warmed by exercise in the morning air, and her dark eyes brightened by pleasurable excitement; she carried her hat in her hand, and seemed to have been walking bare-headed, for there were signs of wind-play in her abundant black hair. But neither face nor attire suggested rusticity: the former was handsome, spirited, with a hint of uncommon things in its changeful radiance; the latter was the result of perfect taste choosing at will among the season's costumes. At her throat were fastened two blossoms of wild rose, with the dew still on them, and the hand which held her lace-trimmed sunshade carried also a spray of meadow-sweet.

Mr. Athel, looking up from the end of the table, was the first to perceive her.

'*Guardami ben: ben son, ben son Beatrice!*' he exclaimed, rising and moving from his place. 'But how in the world has she got here?'

'Beatrice!' cried Mrs. Rossall, following the general direction of eyes. 'Here already! But you surely haven't come from town this morning?'

'But indeed I have,' was the reply, in a joyous voice, whose full, rich quality took the ear captive. 'Will you let me sit down just as I am? Patty, here's a rose for you, and, Minnie, another for you.' She took them from her dress. 'How do you do, Mr. Wilfrid?'

The governess was mentioned to her by name; Beatrice looked at her steadfastly for a moment.

'But how have you got here?' inquired Mrs. Rossall. 'You must have left London at an unheard-of hour; and how have you come from Dealing?'

'Clearly she has walked,' said Mr. Athel. 'Don't you see the spoils of her progress?'

'Oh yes, I have walked,' replied the girl. 'I suppose I'm in a dreadful state towards the end I almost ran. I was so afraid lest I should miss breakfast, and you can't imagine how hungry I am. Is that oatmeal porridge you are eating, Mr. Wilfrid? Oh, do let me have some; how delicious it will be!'

'Nonsense, Beatrice,' interposed Mrs. Rossall. 'Let Mr. Athel give you some of that pate, or will you have—'

'I've been a vegetarian for a month,' was the reply.

'You don't mean it?'

'Most strictly. No—eggs are not permitted; only the feeble school allows them. You can't think how much better I have been in body and mind since I adopted the new diet.'

'But Whatever train did you start by?' pressed Mrs. Rossall.

'Half-past six. I never can sleep these short summer nights. I was up about five o'clock, and just as I was going to read I saw the railway time-table. I looked for the first train and determined to come by it. I wrote a short note to let mother know what had become of me, then in a minute or two I got my things packed, and last of all stole out of the house to find a cab. Luckily, a policeman was just passing the door; he found one for me in no time. Not a soul was up, so I dragged the trunk out on to the landing, and then made the cabman creep upstairs like a burglar to fetch it. Of course he thought I was running away; he enjoyed the joke wonderfully; you should have seen his smile when I paid him at the station. Perhaps you'll let them fetch my luggage before lunch?'

'But won't your mother be alarmed?' asked Mrs. Rossall.

'Why should she? She knows I am very capable of taking care of myself. I wouldn't have missed this walk for anything. I only lost my way once, and then, luckily, a farmer came driving along: he told me I had half a mile more. I trebled his distance, which made it about right.'

'It's a good four miles from the station,' remarked Mr. Athel.

'Is it? If I hadn't been so hungry I shouldn't have minded as much again. You're not angry with me, Mrs. Rossall, for coming before I was expected?'

A curious note of irresponsible childishness came out now and then in her talk, as in this last question; it was the more noticeable for the air of maturity and self-possession which on the whole characterised her. She continued to talk with much vivacity, making at the same time a hearty meal. Her place at the table was between Wilfrid and Patty; on the opposite side sat Miss Hood and Minnie. As often as her eyes fell upon the governess's face, they rested there for a moment, searchingly, as if with endeavour to recall some memory.

'Who is responsible for your vegetarianism?' Wilfrid asked. 'Is Mr. Cresset preaching the doctrine?'

'No, Mr. Cresset is not preaching the doctrine,' was the reply, in a tone which evidently contained reference to previous dissensions.

'Surely there is nothing offensive in the suggestion?' remarked the young man mildly.

'Yes, there is something offensive. Your references to Mr. Cresset are always offensive.'

'You do me injustice. Aunt, I take you to witness, didn't I praise ungrudgingly a sermon of his we heard last Christmas?'

'I remember quite well,' said Beatrice; 'you regarded it as extraordinary that anything good could come from that source, Mr. Athel, I take you to witness, wasn't that his tone?'

'Patty,' interposed Mrs. Rossall, 'do change your place and sit between those two; they never can be next each other without quarrelling.'

Breakfast drew out to unusual length. Miss Redwing was full of the season's news, and Mrs. Rossall's reviving interest in such vanities scarcely affected concealment. Mr. Athel, too, though he supported a jesting tone, clearly enjoyed listening to the girl's vivacious comments on the world which amuses itself. Wilfrid talked less than usual.

He and his father strolled together into the garden an hour later, and found Beatrice reclining in a hammock which had recently been suspended in a convenient spot. She had one hand beneath her head, the other held a large fan, with which she warded off stray flakes of sunlight falling between the leaves.

'Isn't this exquisite?' she cried. 'Let no one hint to me of stirring before lunch-time. I am going to enjoy absolute laziness.'

'I thought you would have preferred a gallop over the downs,' said Mr. Athel.

'Oh, we'll have that this afternoon; you may talk of it now, and I shall relish it in anticipation. Or, better still, sit down and tell us old stories about Egypt, and let us forget the age we live in.'

'What is amiss with the age?' inquired Mr. Athel, who stood smoking a cigar and was in his wonted state of satisfaction with himself and the universe.

'Everything is amiss. If you had been with me yesterday in a street I was visiting, not a quarter of a mile from home—But I'm going to forget all that now. How deliciously warm it is here in the shade! I must have a hammock in our garden at Cowes.'

'When do you go back?' Mr. Athel asked.

'In about a fortnight. It has done mother no end of good; don't you think she looks remarkably well, Mrs. Rossall? I'm afraid she finds it a little dull though.'

When his father had returned to the house, Wilfrid sat on the grass and rested his head against the arm of the low garden chair in which Mrs. Rossall was reclining. The sound of a grass-cutter alone mingled with the light rustling of the trees. It was one of those perfect summer mornings when the sun's rays, though streaming from a cloudless sky, are tempered by a gentle haze in the upper

regions of the air, when the zenith has a tinge of violet and on the horizon broods a reddish mist. From this part of the garden only a glimpse of the house was visible; an upper window with white curtains, cool, peaceful. All else on every side was verdure and bloom.

'Is it possible,' Beatrice asked, when there had been silence for a few moments, 'that I can have met Miss Hood anywhere before to-day? Her face is strangely familiar to me.'

'She has never been in London before she came to us,' said Mrs. Rossall.

'But you have relatives in Dunfield, I think?' remarked Wilfrid.

'To be sure,' said his aunt; 'she comes from Dunfield, in Yorkshire. Do you think you can have met her there?'

'Ah, that explains it,' Beatrice cried eagerly. 'I knew I had seen her, and I know now where it was. She gave lessons to my uncle's children. I saw her when I was staying there the last time, three—no, four years ago. I can't recall her by her name, but her face, oh, I remember it as clearly as possible.'

'What a memory you have, Beatrice!' said Mrs. Rossall.

'I never forget a face that strikes me.'

'In what way did Miss Hood's face strike you?' Wilfrid asked, as if in idle curiosity, and with some of the banter which always marked his tone to Beatrice.

'You would like some deep, metaphysical reason, but I am not advanced enough for that. I don't suppose I thought much about her at the time, but the face has stayed in my mind. But how old is she?'

'Two-and-twenty,' said Mrs. Rossall, smiling.

'A year older than myself; my impression was that she was more than that. I think I only saw her once; she was with us at lunch one day. We spoke of her shyness, I remember; she scarcely said a word all the time.'

'Yes, she is very shy,' assented Mrs. Rossall.

'That's a mistake, I think, aunt,' said Wilfrid; 'shyness is quite a different thing from reticence.'

'Reticent, then,' conceded the lady, with a smile to Beatrice. 'At all events, she is very quiet and agreeable and well-bred. It is such a good thing to have a governess who really seems well-bred; it does make it so much easier to treat her with consideration.'

'Do the children like her?' Beatrice asked.

'Very much indeed. And it's wonderful how she controls them; they are scatter-brained little creatures.'

'Will she go abroad with you?'

'Oh, no, I don't think that necessary.'

Wilfrid presently left the two to their gossip. The conversation naturally turned to him.

'How is his health?' Beatrice asked.

'He seems quite recovered. I don't think there was ever anything to occasion much alarm, but his father got frightened. I expect we shall bring him back from Switzerland as well as ever he was.'

'What ever has he done with himself the last two months?' mused the girl.

'Well, it has been rather hard to keep him occupied away from books. He has been riding a good deal, and smoking a good deal.'

'And talking a good deal?'

'Well, yes, Wilf is fond of talking,' admitted Mrs. Rossall, 'but I don't think he's anything like as positive as he was. He does now and then admit that other people may have an opinion which is worth entertaining. Celia Dawlish was with us a fortnight ago; she declared him vastly improved.'

'She told him so?'

'No, that was in private to me.'

'But I think Celia and he always got on well together,' said Beatrice in an idly meditative tone, moving the edge of her fan backwards and forwards a few inches above her face.

A few minutes later, after a silence, she said—

'Do you know what I am thinking?'

'What?' asked Mrs. Rossall, with an air of interest.

'That if I were to close my eyes and keep quiet I should very soon be fast asleep.'

The other laughed at the unexpected reply.

'Then why not do so, dear? It's warm enough; you couldn't take any harm.'

'I suppose the walk has tired me.'

'But if you had no sleep last night? How is it you can't sleep, I wonder? Is it the same when you are at Cowes?'

'No, only in London. Something troubles me; I feel that I have neglected duties. I hear voices, as distinct as yours now, reproving me for my idle, frivolous life.'

'Nonsense! I am sure you are neither idle nor frivolous. Do doze off, if you can, dear; I'll go and get something to read.'

'You won't be angry with me?' the girl asked, in the tone of an affectionate weary child.

'I shall if you use ceremony with me.'

Beatrice sighed, folded her hands upon the fan, and closed her lids. When Mrs. Rossall returned from the house with a magazine and a light shawl, the occupant of the hammock was already sound asleep. She threw the shawl with womanly skill and gentleness over the shapely body. When she had resumed her seat, she caught a glimpse of Wilfrid at a little distance; her beckoned summons brought him near.

'Look,' she whispered, pointing to the hammock. 'When did you see a prettier picture?'

The young man gazed with a free smile, the expression of critical appreciativeness. The girl's beauty stirred in him no mood but that. She slept with complete calm of feature the half-lights that came through the foliage made an exquisite pallor on her face, contrasting with the dark masses of her hair. Her bosom rose and fell in the softest sighing; her pure throat was like marble, and her just parted lips seemed to need a protector from the bees....

While she sleeps, let us learn a little more of her history. Some five-and-twenty years previously, Alfred Redwing was a lecturer on Greek and Latin at a small college in the North of England, making shift to live on a beggarly stipend. Handsome, pleasing, not quite thirty, he was well received in such semblance of society as his town offered, and, in spite of his defects as a suitor, he won for his wife a certain Miss Baxendale, the daughter of a well-to-do manufacturer. She brought him at once a few hundreds a year, and he pursued his college work in improved spirits. His wife had two brothers; one had early gone to America, the other was thriving as a man of business in the town of Dunfield. With Laurence Baxendale, who dated his very occasional letters from various parts of the United States, the family might be said to have parted for good; before leaving England he had got on ill terms with his father and brother, and it was only a persistent affection for his sister that caused him to give any sign of himself year after year. When this sister had been Mrs. Redwing for about two years, she one day received an intimation from solicitors that Laurence was dead and had left her the whole of a very considerable fortune, the product, mainly, of dealings in lumber. Mr. and Mrs. Redwing in fact found themselves possessed of nearly fourteen thousand a year, proceeding from most orderly investments. This would naturally involve a change in their mode of life. In the first place they paid a visit to America; then they settled in London, where, about the same time, their only child, Beatrice was born. A month after the child's coming into the world, the father withdrew from it—into a private lunatic asylum. He had not been himself from the day when he heard of the fortune that had come to him; such an access of blessedness was not provided for in the constitution of his mind. Probably few men of his imaginative temperament and hard antecedents could have borne the change without some little unsettling of mental balance; we are framed to endure any amount of ill, but have to take our chance in the improbable event of vast joy befalling us. Poor Redwing conceived a suspicion that his wife desired to murder him; one night as she was following him into their bedroom, he suddenly turned round, caught hold of her with violence, and flung her to the ground, demanding the knife

which he protested he had seen gleam in her hand. It was no longer safe to live with him; he was put under restraint, and never again knew freedom. In less than a year he died, a moping maniac.

Mrs. Redwing was an invalid thenceforth; probably it was only the existence of her child that saved her life. An affection of the heart in course of time declared itself, but, though her existence was believed to hang on a thread, she lived on and on, lived to see Beatrice grow to womanhood. She kept a small house in London, but spent the greater part of the year at home or foreign health-resorts. Her relatives had supposed that she would return to her own country, but Mrs. Redwing had tastes which lacked gratification in a provincial manufacturing town. Without having achieved much positive culture, she had received from her husband an impulse towards the development of certain higher possibilities in her nature, and she liked the society of mentally active people. The state of her health alone withheld her from a second marriage; she was not a very patient invalid, and suffered keenly in the sense of missing the happiness which life had offered her. In the matter of her daughter's education she exercised much care. Doctrinal religion had a strong hold upon her, and it was her solicitude that Beatrice should walk from the first in the ways of Anglican salvation. She dreaded the 'spirit of the age.' With a better judgment in pure literature than falls to the lot of most women—or men either—she yet banished from her abode, wherever it might be anything that remotely savoured of intellectual emancipation; her aesthetic leanings she deemed the great temptation of her life, for she frankly owned to her friends that many things powerfully attracted her, which her conscience bade her shun as dangerous. Her generosity made her a shining light in the world which busies itself in the dispensing or receiving of ecclesiastical charity. The clerical element was very strong in the circle that surrounded her. At the same time her worldly tastes did not go altogether ungratified. She was very fond of music, and her unlimited powers in the provision of first-rate musical entertainment brought to her house acquaintances of a kind that would not otherwise have been found there. The theatre she tabooed, regarding this severity as an acceptable sacrifice, and not troubling to reflect what share her ill-health had in rendering it a fairly easy one. In brief, she was a woman of a genial nature, whose inconsistencies were largely due to her inability to outgrow early conditions.

Beatrice inherited her mother's mental restrictions, but was endowed with a subtlety of nature, which, aided by her circumstances, made her yet more a being of inconsistencies and contradictions. Religion it was not enough for her to conform; zeal drove her into the extremest forms of ritualistic observance. Nor did care for her personal salvation suffice; the logic of a compassionate nature led her on to various forms of missionary activity; she haunted vile localities, ministering alike to soul and body. At the same time she relished keenly the delights of the masquerading sphere, where her wealth and her beauty made her doubly welcome. From praying by the bedside of a costermonger's wife, she would speed away to shine among the brightest in phantasmagoric drawing-rooms; her mother could seldom accompany her, but there was always some one ready to chaperon Beatrice Redwing. Once in the world from which thought is banished, she seemed as thoughtless as any. Her spiritual convictions put no veto even upon dancing. Yet her mood at such times was not the entire self-abandonment of the girl who is born but to waltz. In spite of the sanction of custom, she could not wholly suppress her virginal instincts, and, however unconsciously, something in her nature held itself aloof. She led a life of indecision. Combining in herself such contradictory elements, she was unable to make close friendships. Her intimacy with Mrs. Rossall, which dated from her late childhood, was not the perfect accord which may subsist between women of very different characters, yet here she gave and received more sympathy than elsewhere. It was her frequent saying that she came to Mrs. Rossall's house when she wanted to rest. Here she could be herself, could pass without interval from pietistic argument to chatter about her neighbours, could indulge in impulses of confession as with no one else, could put off the strain of existence which was the result of her conflicting impulses. But it was only during a portion of the year that she could have Mrs. Rossall's society at other times, though no one suspected it, she suffered much from loneliness. With her mother she was in accord on the subjects of religion and music, but even natural affection, blending with these sympathies, could

not bring about complete unity in her home there was the same lack that she experienced in the outer world. For all her versatility, she was not in appearance emotional; no one seemed less likely to be overcome by passion. Her enthusiasms fell short of the last note of sincerity. Perhaps it was on this account that she produced no strong impression, in spite of her beauty. Her personality suffered on acquaintance from defect of charm. Was it a half-consciousness of this that led her now and then into the curious affectation of childishness already remarked? Did she feel unable to rely for pleasing upon those genuine possessions which for sonic reason could never advantageously display themselves?....

For more than an hour she slept. At her waking she found Minnie standing by her side.

'Are your lessons over?' she asked, passing at once into full consciousness, without sign of having slept.

The child replied that they were.

'Where is Miss Hood?'

'In the summer-house.'

Beatrice rose, and they walked towards the summer-house together. It was in a corner of the garden, hidden among acacias and laurels, a circular hut in the ordinary style. Patty and the governess were seated within. Beatrice entered, and took a seat with them.

'Is your memory as good as my own, Miss Hood?' she said pleasantly. 'Do you remember our meeting four years ago?'

The other regarded her with quiet surprise, and said she had no recollection of the meeting.

'Not at Mr. Baxendale's, my uncle's, one day that you lunched with us when I was staying there?'

Miss Hood had wholly forgotten the circumstance. It served, however, for the commencement of a conversation, which went on till Mrs. Rossall, finding the hammock deserted, was guided by the sound of voices to where the two girls and the children sat.

In the afternoon there was a setting forth into the country. Mr. Athel drove his sister and the children; Wilfrid and Beatrice accompanied them on horseback. The course to be pursued having been determined, the riders were not at pains to keep the carriage always within sight.

'Why did Miss Hood decline to come?' Mr. Athel inquired, shortly after they had started.

She gave no reason, Mrs. Rossall replied. 'It was her choice to stay at home.'

'Of course you asked her in a proper way?'

'Why, Philip, of course I did.'

'Miss Hood never alters her mind,' remarked Patty.

'Never,' exclaimed the other twin with decision.

'An admirable characteristic,' commented their uncle, 'provided her decision is right to begin with.'

Beatrice had just led off at a gallop; Wilfrid necessarily followed her. When the pace slackened they began to talk of Indifferent things. On the crest of a hill, whence the carriage could be seen far away on the white road, the girl reined in, and, turning to her companion, asked abruptly—

'What is your opinion of Miss Hood?'

'Why do you ask such a question?'

'Because I should like to know. She interests me, and you must have had opportunities enough lately of studying her character?'

'Why does she interest you?'

'I can't say. I thought you might help me to discover the reason. You have often said that you liked women of strongly marked character.'

'How do you conclude that she is one?'

'I feel it; we were talking together before lunch. I don't think I like her; I don't think she has principles.'

Wilfrid laughed.

'Principles! The word is vague. You mean, no doubt, that she doesn't seem to have commonplace prejudices.'

'That's just what I wanted you to say.'

She let her horse move on. The young man followed, his eyes gazing absently before him, a smile fixed upon his lips.

Beatrice looked over her shoulder.

'Does she read the same kind of books that you do?'

'Unfortunately I read no books at all.'

She paused again to let him get to her side.

'What a pity it can't continue!'

'What?'

'Your inability to read.'

'That is the kindest remark I have heard for a long time!' exclaimed Wilfrid with a good-natured laugh.

'Very likely it is, though you don't mean it. When you read, you only poison your mind. It is your reading that has made you what you are, without faith, without feeling. You dissect everything, you calculate motives cynically, you have learnt to despise everyone who believes what you refuse to, you make your own intellect the centre of the world. You are dangerous.'

'What a character! To whom am I dangerous?'

'To anyone whom it pleases you to tempt, in whom you find the beginnings of disbelief.'

'In brief, I have no principles?'

'Of course you have none.'

'In other words, I am selfish?'

'Intensely so.'

It was hard to discover whether she were in earnest. Wilfrid examined her for a moment, and concluded that she must be. Her eyes were gleaming with no mock seriousness, and there was even a slight quiver about her lips. In all their exchanges of banter he had never known her look and speak quite as she did now. As he regarded her there came a flush to her cheek. She turned her head away and rode on.

'And what moves you to visit me with this castigation at present, Miss Redwing?' he asked, still maintaining his jesting tone.

'I don't know,' she answered carelessly. 'I felt all at once able to say what I thought.'

'Then you do really think all this?'

'Assuredly I do.'

He kept silence a little.

'And you can't see,' he began, rather more seriously, 'that you are deplorably lacking in the charity which surely should be among *your* principles?'

'There are some things to which charity must not be extended.'

'Let us say, then, discretion, insight.' He spoke yet more earnestly. 'You judge me, and, in truth, you know as little of me as anyone could. The attitude of your mind prevents you from understanding me in the least; it prevents you from understanding any human being. You are consumed with prejudice, and prejudice of the narrowest, most hopeless kind. Am I too severe?'

'Not more so than you have often been. Many a time you have told me how you despised me.'

He was silent, then spoke impulsively.

'Well, perhaps the word is not too strong; though it is not your very self that I despise, but the ignorance and bigotry which possess you. It is a pity; I believe you might be a woman of quite a different kind.'

'Of pronounced character?'

'Precisely. You are neither one thing nor another. You have told me what you think of me; shall I be equally frank and speak as if you were a college friend? For at all events we *are* friends.'

'I am not sure of that.'

'Oh, but I am; and we shall be friends none the worse for ingenuousness on both sides. Look at the position in which you stand. One moment you are a woman of the world, the next you run frantic with religious zeal, another turn and you are almost an artist, at your piano; when you are tired of all these you become, or try to become, a sort of *ingenue*. In the name of consistency, be one thing or another. You are quite mistaken in thinking that I despise religious enthusiasm in itself. Become a veritable Beatrice, and I will venerate you infinitely. Give up everything to work in London slums, and you shall have my warmest admiration. But you are not sincere.'

'I am sincere!' she broke in, with more passion than he had ever imagined her capable of uttering.

'I cannot call it sincerity. It is impossible that you should be sincere; you live in the latter end of the nineteenth century; the conditions of your birth and education forbid sincerity of this kind.'

'I am sincere,' she repeated, but in a low voice, without looking at him.

'On the other hand,' lie proceeded, 'surrender yourself entirely to the life of society, and I will still respect you. You are a beautiful woman; you might be inexpressibly charming. Frankly recognise your capabilities, and cultivate your charm. Make a study of your loveliness; make it your end to be a queen in drawing-rooms.'

'You insult me.'

'I can't see that I do. There is nothing contemptible in such an aim; nothing is contemptible that is thorough. Or you have the third course. Pursue music with seriousness. Become a real artist; a public singer, let us say. No amateur nonsense; recognise that you have a superb voice, and that by dint of labour you may attain artistic excellence. You talk of getting up concerts in low parts of London, of humanising ruffians by the influence of music. Pshaw! humanise humanity at large by devotion to an artistic ideal; the other aim is paltry, imbecile, charlatan.'

He tried to see her face; she rode on, holding it averted.

'Follow any one of these courses, and you will make of yourself a true woman. By trying to be a bit of everything you become insignificant. Napoleon the Great was a curse to mankind, but one thinks more of him than of Napoleon the Little, who wasn't quite sure whether to be a curse or a blessing. There is a self in every one of us; the end of our life is to discern it, bring it out, make it actual. You don't yet know your own self; you have not the courage to look into your heart and mind; you keep over your eyes the bandage of dogmas in which you only half believe. Your insincerity blights the natural qualities of your intellect. You have so long tried to persuade yourself of the evil of every way of thinking save ecclesiastical dogmatism, that you cannot judge fairly even those to whom you are most friendly. Cannot you see that the world has outgrown the possibility of one universal religion? For good or for evil, each of us must find a religion in himself, and you have no right whatever to condemn before you have understood.'

'You cannot say that you have any religion,' she said, facing him. He saw to his astonishment that there had been tears in her eyes.

'You cannot say that I have none. The radical fault of your uninstructed way of looking at things is that you imagine mankind and the world to be matters of such simple explanation. You learn by heart a few maxims, half a dozen phrases, and there is your key to every mystery. That is the child's state of mind. You have never studied, you have never thought. Your self-confidence is ludicrous; you and such as you do not hesitate to judge offhand men who have spent a long life in the passionate pursuit of wisdom. You have no reverence. It is the fault you attribute to me, but wrongly; if you had ever brought an open mind to our conversations, you would have understood that my reverence even for your ideal is not a wit less than your own; it is only that I see it in another light. You say that I have no religion: what if I have not? Are one's final conclusions to be achieved in a year or

two of early manhood? I have my inner voices, and I try to understand them. Often enough they are ambiguous, contradictory; I live in hope that their bidding will become clearer. I search for meanings, try to understand myself, strive after knowledge.'

'You might as well have been born a pagan. One voice has spoken; its bidding is the sufficient and only guide.'

'Say rather that so it seems to you. Your inheritance of conviction is not mine; your mode of reasoning and my own have nothing in common. We inhabit different worlds.'

Beatrice let her eyes turn slowly to his face. The smile with which he met her found no reflection on her countenance; her look was that of one who realises a fatality.

'Shall we join them?' she asked in a moment, nodding towards the far-off carriage which was about to hide itself among trees.

Wilfrid mused instead of answering. She began to ride on.

'Stay one minute,' he said. 'I have been anything but courteous in my way of speaking to you, but it was better to put off idle forms, was it not?'

'Yes; I shall know henceforth what you think of me.'

'Not from this one conversation, if you mean that.'

'Well, it does not matter.'

'Perhaps not. Difference of opinion has fortunately little to do with old-standing kindness.'

'I am not sure that you are right, at all events when it has expressed itself in words of contempt.'

It was not resentment that her voice conveyed, but some thing which Wilfrid found it harder to bear. Her drooped eyelids and subdued tone indicated a humble pride, which the protest of her beauty made pathetic.

'We will never speak of such things again,' he said gently. 'Let me have your forgiveness. When we join them down there, they will laugh at us and say we have been quarrelling as usual; in future I think we mustn't quarrel, we are both of us getting too old for the amusement. When you sing to us to-night, I shall remember how foolish I was even to pretend contempt.'

'You will be thinking,' she said, 'that I am a mere amateur.'

'If I do, I shall be an ungrateful wretch—and an insensible one, to boot.'

She rode down the hill without replying.

CHAPTER III

LYRICAL

Miss Hood did not, of course, dine with the family. Though, as Mrs. Rossall said, it was a distinct advantage to have in the house a governess whom one could in many respects treat as an equal, yet there was naturally a limit, in this as in all other matters. We have not yet, either in fact or in sentiment, quite outgrown the social stage in which personal hiring sets on the hired a stigma of servitude. Mrs. Rossall was not unaware that, in all that concerned intellectual refinement, her governess was considerably superior to herself, and in personal refinement not less a lady; but the fact of quarterly payments, spite of all this, inevitably indicated a place below the salt. Mr. Athel, though, as we have seen, anxious to indulge himself in humane regard whenever social regulations permitted, was the last man to suffer in his household serious innovations upon traditional propriety.

So Miss Hood—Emily, as she was called by the little group of people away in Yorkshire, to whom she was other than a governess; Emily; as we will permit ourselves to call her henceforth—always had the meal of tea with the children. After that the evening was her own, save that the twins kept her company until their hour of bedtime. The school-room was also her sitting-room. After half-past eight in the evening she had it to herself, and there she passed many an hour of quiet content, playing softly on the piano, reading, dreaming. In the matter of books she was well off; Mr. Athel and his sister had subscriptions at several London libraries, and of these the governess was invited to make free use. It was some restraint upon her that her choice of reading always passed under Mrs. Bossall's eyes, but not so much after the first few weeks. The widow was by this time well advanced in the resumption of purely mundane literature, and the really liberal tone which prevailed in the house removed apprehension in the pursuit of modern studies. For it was rather an ideal towards which she was working than an attainment in fact, that eclecticism of which she spoke to Wilfrid Athel. The monthly library lists which came under her eyes offered many a sore temptation. She was true on the whole to her system; she did not read at random, and never read frivolously; but a taste strongly directed to the best in literature will find much in the work of our day, especially its criticism, which is indispensable as guidance, or attractive by its savour. This was not Emily's first access, fortunately, to the streams of contemporary thought; already she had enjoyed and largely used opportunities of the most various reading. She was able now to choose with discretion, and in a great degree to make her study serve directly the scheme of culture which she had devised for herself.

Few governesses had so pleasant a life. Mrs. Rossall, supported by her brother's views, imposed on her children a minimum of brain-work. Bodily health was after all the first thing, especially in the case of girls. A couple of hours' school in the morning, one hour given to preparation of lessons after tea—this for the present was deemed quite enough. 'Your companionship throughout the day will always be forming their minds,' Mrs. Rossall said in one of her earliest conversations with Emily; it was pleasantly put, and truer than it would have been in the case of many instructresses. The twins were not remarkably fond of their lessons, but in Emily's hands they became docile and anxious to please. She had the art of winning their affection without losing control over them; had Mrs. Bossall's rather languid habits of mind allowed her to give attention to the subject, she would have been struck with the singular combination of tenderness and reverence which the two entertained towards their teacher. Little laxities of behaviour arid phrase upon which their mother's presence would be no check, they did not venture to allow themselves when with Emily; her only reproof was a steady gaze, eloquent of gentleness, but it proved quite sufficient. The twins were in truth submitting to the force of character. They felt it without understanding what it meant; one ether person in the house experienced the same influence, but in his case it led to reflection.

Wilfrid was at Balliol when Miss Hood first arrived; he saw her for the first time when he came to town after his collapse. All hastened away to The Firs together. Wilfrid suffered no positive illness; he shared in the amusements of the family, and, with the exception of a good deal of pishing and pshawing at the restraints put upon him, had the appearance of one taking an ordinary holiday. There was undeniable truth in Beatrice Redwing's allusion to his much talking; without social intercourse he would soon have become ill in earnest; association with intelligent—all the better if argumentative—people was an indispensable condition of his existence. In his later school, and early college, days this tendency to give free utterance to his thoughts made him not altogether the most delightful of companions to such as were older than himself; his undeniable cleverness and the stores of knowledge he had already acquired needed somewhat more of the restraint of tact than his character at that time supplied. People occasionally called him a prig; now and then he received what the vernacular of youth terms 'a sitting upon.' The saving feature of his condition was that he allowed himself to be sat upon gracefully; a snub well administered to him was sure of its full artistic, and did not fail in its moral, effect: there was no vulgar insolence in the young fellow. What he received he could acknowledge that he deserved. A term or two at Balliol put this right; in mingling with some that were his equals, and one or two who were his superiors, he learned prudence in the regulation of his speech.

For a brief time he perhaps talked not quite so much. When his 'set' was formed, the currents of argument and rhetoric had once more free course, but they were beginning to flow less turbidly. His nature, as we know, was not merely vehement; he had the instincts of a philosophical inquirer, and his intellect speedily outgrew the stage of callowness. When he came down for his first 'long' the change in him was so marked that it astonished all who met him; that he appeared wholly unconscious of the ripening he had undergone only made his development more impressive. He had gone away a boy, and returned a man. He talked no less than ever, but in a markedly improved tone. He was graver, more seemly in the buoyant outbreaks in which he still occasionally indulged. One reason of his rapid maturing no doubt lay in the fact that he was already working too hard; his sprightliness was in a measure subdued by wear of tissue. His father was shrewd enough to suspect something of this, but it was difficult to interfere in any way. A month in Switzerland seemed to set things right. On the present more serious occasion, it had been deemed better not to set forth on a journey forthwith; perfect repose at the house in Surrey was all that was advised in the first instance. But it was clear that Wilfrid must have some one to talk with. A succession of visits from such friends as were available was speedily arranged. By the end of the first week, Wilfrid had accommodated himself to his circumstances. His fretting at the regulations imposed for his health almost ceased. At first this change was viewed with suspicion, especially when he became more absorbed in reflectiveness, and seemed to have less taste for conversation. However, he was perfectly cheerful; there were no further symptoms to excite alarm. Nor did the brooding period last very long. The only permanent change was that he ceased to grumble at his hard lot, and appeared to find his position very tolerable.

'It is the physical reaction,' observed Mr. Athel to his sister. 'The body is indulging itself; recovery of health absorbs his energies.'

Opportunities for anything like sustained converse with Miss Hood, Wilfrid found very few and far between; only once before the long talk in the hollow had he been able to gratify his curiosity—perhaps already some other feeling—in a dialogue of any intimacy. In a situation such as this, delicacy prescribed a very rigid discretion; Emily, moreover, was not facile of approach. Throughout the day she was scarcely away from the children; of course he could and did often exchange words with her in the presence of the twins, but he felt himself held at a distance by a tact which was perfect; without undue reserve, without a shadow of unrefined manoeuvring, Emily limited their intercourse in precisely the way that Mr. Athel or Mrs. Rossall would have deemed becoming. Then there were almost always guests at the house. With prudent regard to the character of these visitors, Mrs. Rossall chose opportunities for inviting the governess to the drawing-room during the evening, but Emily was not wholly at her ease under such conditions, and Wilfrid was withheld by only half-conscious

motives from talking with her at these times. He shrank from subjecting himself to examination whilst encouraging her to speak on the subjects he would naturally choose; he felt, too, that she desired him not to address her, though this perception came to him in subtle ways of which he could render to himself no account. For all this, their acquaintance, nay their intimacy, grew. If ever eyes habitually expressed a self-respecting frankness, if ever any were incapable of ignoble artifice, they were Emily's; yet as time went on Wilfrid began to long for the casual meeting with her glance for the mere reason that he felt it as an exchange of words between her and himself. Thus it was that, when at length the first real conversation came, it seemed the sequel of many others, seemed so to both of them. They had divined each other; speech did but put the seal of confirmation on knowledge gained by mutual sympathy.

It may be presumed that neither Mr. Athel nor Mrs. Rossall was altogether regardless of possibilities suggested by the abiding beneath the same roof of an impetuous young man, forced into idleness, and a girl who was above the average in mental endowments, whilst, on the whole, she might be considered interesting in appearance. They exchanged no remark on the subject; it was scarcely likely they should; but during the first few weeks both were observant. Their observations were reassuring to them. And indeed they had not anticipated trouble, for the simple reason that both believed Wilfrid's affections to tend already in a marked direction, and one of which they altogether approved. That he would some day take for his wife Beatrice Redwing was a conclusion upon which father and aunt had settled their minds; the conclusion was reasonable enough, and well supported by such evidence as the ease admitted. Mr. Athel had at an earlier period entertained certain misgivings as to the desirability of such a marriage; misgivings which had reference to the disastrous story of the Redwing household; the conception of hereditary tendencies has become a strong force in our time, and pronounced madness in a parent cannot as easily be disregarded as it once was. But the advantages of the alliance were so considerable, its likelihood so indisputable, that prudence had scarcely fair play; besides, Beatrice had reached her twenty-first year without any sign of mental trouble, and seemed as sound a girl as could anywhere be discovered. The habitual sword-crossing between her and Wilfrid was naturally regarded as their mode of growing endeared to each other; their intellectual variances could not, by a sober gentleman of eight-and-forty and by a young widow whose interest in the world was reviving, be regarded as a bar to matrimony. 'Family,' Beatrice would not bring, but she was certain to inherit very large fortune, which, after all, means more than family nowadays. On the whole it was a capital thing for Wilfrid that marriage would be entered upon in so smooth a way. Mr. Athel was not forgetful of his own course in that matter; he understood his father's attitude as he could not when resisting it, and was much disposed to concede that there might have been two opinions as to his own proceeding five-and-twenty years ago. But for Beatrice, the young man's matrimonial future would have been to his father a subject of constant apprehension; as it was, the situation lost much of its natural hazard.

In Emily there was nothing that suggested sentimentality; rather one would have thought her deficient in sensibility, judging from the tone of her conversation. She did not freely express admiration, even in the form of assent to what was said by others. To interpret her reticence as shyness was a misunderstanding, or a misuse of words, natural in the case of an inexact observer like Mrs. Rossall. Four years ago, when Beatrice met her in Dunfield, her want of self-confidence was pronounced enough; she had at that time never quitted her provincial home, and was in the anomalous position of one who is intellectually outgrowing very restricted social circumstances. The Baxendales were not wrong in discussing her as shy. But that phase of her life was now left far behind. Her extreme moderation was deliberate; it was her concession to the fate which made her a governess. Courtesy and kindness might lead those whose bread she ate to endeavour occasionally to remove all show of social distinction; neither her temperament nor her sense of comeliness in behaviour would allow her to shrink from such advances, but she could not lose sight of the unreality of the situations to which they led. Self-respect is conditioned by the influence of circumstance on character; in Emily

it expressed itself as a subtle sensitiveness to grades of sympathy. She could not shut her eyes to the actuality of things; sincerity was the foundation of her being, and delicate appreciation of its degrees in others regulated her speech and demeanour with an exactitude inappreciable by those who take life in a rough and ready way. When engaged in her work of teaching, she was at ease; alone in the room which had been set apart for her, she lived in the freedom of her instincts; but in Mrs. Rossall's drawing-room she could only act a part, and all such divergence from reality was pain. It was not that she resented her subordination, for she was almost devoid of social ambitions and knew nothing of vulgar envy; still less did it come of reasoned revolt against the artificial ordering of precedences; Emily's thoughts did not tend that way. She could do perfect justice to the amiable qualities of those who were set above her; she knew no bitterness in the food which she duly earned; but, by no one's fault, there was a vein of untruth in the life she had to lead. To remind herself that such untruth was common to all lives, was an outcome of the conditions of society, did not help her to disregard it; nature had endowed her with a stern idealism which would not ally itself with compromise. She was an artist in life. The task before her, a task of which in these days she was growing more and more conscious, was to construct an existence every moment of which should serve an all-pervading harmony. The recent birth within her of a new feeling was giving direction and vigour to the forces of her being; it had not as yet declared itself as a personal desire; it wrought only as an impassioned motive in the sphere of her intellectual aspirations. She held herself more persistently apart from conventional intercourse; she wished it had been possible to keep wholly to herself in the hours when her services were not demanded. Mr. Athel, who liked to express himself to young people with a sort of paternal geniality, rallied her one day on her excessive study, and bade her be warned by a notorious example. This had the effect of making her desist from reading in the presence of other people.

She had known much happiness during these two months at The Firs, happiness of a kind to dwell in the memory and be a resource in darker days. Though mere personal ease was little the subject of her thoughts, she prized for its effect upon her mind the air of graceful leisure, of urbane repose, which pervaded the house. To compare The Firs with that plain little dwelling on the skirts of a Yorkshire manufacturing town which she called her home, was to understand the inestimable advantage of those born into the material refinement which wealth can command, of those who breathe from childhood the atmosphere of liberal enjoyment, who walk from the first on clean ways, with minds disengaged from anxiety of casual soilure, who know not even by domestic story the trammels of sordid preoccupation. Thus it was with a sense of well-being that she stepped on rich carpets, let her eyes wander over the light and dark of rooms where wealth had done the bidding of taste, watched the neat and silent ministering of servants. These things to her meant priceless opportunity, the facilitating of self-culture. Even the little room in which she sat by herself of evenings was daintily furnished; when weary with reading, it eased and delighted her merely to gaze at the soft colours of the wall-paper, the vases with their growing flowers, the well-chosen pictures, the graceful shape of a chair; she nursed her appreciation of these Joys, resisted the ingress of familiarity, sought daily for novel aspects of things become intimately known. She rose at early hours that she might have the garden to herself in all its freshness; she loved to look from her window into the calm depth of the summer midnight. In this way she brought into consciousness the craving of her soul, made the pursuit of beauty a religion, grew to welcome the perception of new meaning in beautiful things with a spiritual delight. This was the secret of her life, which she guarded so jealously, which she feared even by chance to betray in the phrasings of common intercourse. Wilfrid had divined it, and it was the secret influence of this sympathy that had led her to such unwonted frankness in their latest conversation.

Mrs. Rossall had spoken to her of Beatrice Redwing's delightful singing, and had asked her to come to the drawing-room during the evening; having declined the afternoon's drive, Emily did not feel able to neglect this other invitation. The day had become sultry towards its close; when she joined the company about nine o'clock, she found Beatrice with Mrs. Rossall sitting in the dusk by

the open French windows, Mr. Athel in a chair just outside, and Wilfrid standing by him, the latter pair smoking. The sky beyond the line of dark greenery was still warm with after-glow of sunset.

Emily quietly sought a chair near Mrs. Rossall, from whom she received a kind look. Mr. Athel was relating a story of his early wanderings in Egypt, with a leisurely gusto, an effective minuteness of picturing, the result of frequent repetition. At the points of significance he would pause for a moment or two and puff life into his cigar. His anecdotes were seldom remarkable, but they derived interest from the enjoyment with which he told them; they impressed one with a sense of mental satisfaction, of physical robustness held in reserve, of life content among the good things of the world.

'Shall we have lights?' Mrs. Rossall asked, when the story at length came to an end.

'Play us something first,' said Beatrice. 'This end of twilight is so pleasant.'

Mrs. Rossall went to the piano, upon which still fell a glimmer from another window, and filled the room with harmony suiting the hour. Wilfrid had come in and seated himself on a couch in a dark corner; his father paced up and down the grass. Emily watched the first faint gleam of stars in the upper air.

Then lamps and candles were brought in. Beatrice was seen to be dressed in dark blue, her hair richly attired, a jewelled cross below her throat, her bosom and arms radiant in bare loveliness. Emily, at the moment that she regarded her, found herself also observed. Her own dress was of warm grey, perfectly simple, with a little lace at the neck and wrists. Beatrice averted her eyes quickly, and made some laughing remark to Mr. Athel.

'I know you always object to sing without some musical preparation,' said Mrs. Rossall, as she took a seat by the girl's side. 'I wonder whether we ought to close the windows; are you afraid of the air?'

'Oh, leave them open!' Beatrice replied. 'It is so close.'

Her cheeks had a higher colour than usual; she lay back in the chair with face turned upwards, her eyes dreaming.

'You are tired, I am afraid,' Mrs. Rossall said, 'in spite of your sleep in the hammock. The first day in the country always tires me dreadfully.'

'Yes, I suppose I am, a little,' murmured Beatrice.

'Not too tired, I hope, to sing,' said Wilfrid, coming from his couch in the corner to a nearer seat. His way of speaking was not wholly natural; like his attitude, it had something constrained; he seemed to be discharging a duty.

'Observe the selfishness of youth,' remarked Mr. Athel.

'Age, I dare say, has its selfishness too in the present instance,' was Mrs. Rossall's rejoinder.

'To whom does that refer?' questioned her brother, jocosely.

Beatrice turned her head suddenly towards Emily.

'Shall I sing, Miss Hood?' she asked, with a touch of her *ingenue* manner, though the playfulness of her words rang strangely.

'It will give me much pleasure to hear you,' was the sober reply, coming after an instant of embarrassment.

Beatrice rose. Her movement across the room had a union of conscious stateliness and virgin grace which became her style of beauty; it was in itself the introduction to fine music. Mrs. Rossall went to accompany. Choice was made of a solo from an oratorio; Beatrice never sang trivialities of the day, a noteworthy variance from her habits in other things. In a little while, Wilfrid stirred to enable himself to see Emily's face; it showed deep feeling. And indeed it was impossible to hear that voice and remain unmoved; its sweetness, its force, its skill were alike admirable. Beatrice conversing was quite other than Beatrice when she sang; music was her mode of self-utterance; from the first sustained note it was felt that a difficulty of expression had been overcome, and that she was saying things which at other times she could not, disclosing motives which as a rule the complexities of her character covered and concealed, which were not clear to her own consciousness till the divine

impulse gave them form. It was no shallow nature that could pour forth this flood of harmony. The mere gift of a splendid voice, wrought to whatever degree of perfection, would not invest with this rare power. In technical qualities she might have much still to learn, but the passionate poetry of her notes was what no training could have developed, and it would never evince itself with more impressiveness than to-night.

It seemed frivolous to speak thanks. Wilfrid gazed out into the dark of the garden; Emily kept her eyes bent downward. She heard the rustle of Beatrice's dress near her. Mr. Athel began to speak of the piece the sound of Beatrice's voice replying caused Emily at length to look up, and she met the dark eyes, still large with the joy of song. Her own gaze had a beautiful solemnity, a devout admiration, of which it was impossible to doubt the genuineness; Beatrice, observing it, smiled very slightly before turning away again.

A quarter of an hour after, Emily withdrew. Mrs. Rossall played a little, and talk of an idle kind followed. Wilfrid was not disposed to take his usual part in conversation, and his casual remarks were scarcely ever addressed to Beatrice. Presently Mrs. Rossall wished to refer to the 'Spectator,' which contained a criticism of a new pianist of whom there was much talk just then.

'Have you had it, Wilf?' Mr. Athel asked, after turning over a heap of papers in vain.

'Oh, the "Spectator,"' Wilfrid replied, rousing himself from absentness. 'Yes, I had it in the summer-house just before dinner; I believe I left it there. Shall I fetch it?'

'It would serve you right if I said yes,' admonished Mrs. Rossall. 'In the first place you had no business to be reading it—'

'I will go,' Wilfrid said, rising with an effort.

'No, no; it will do to-morrow.'

'May as well get it now,' he said indifferently, and went out by the window.

That part of the garden through which he walked lay in the shadow of the house; the sky was full of moonlight, but the moon itself was still low. A pathway between laurels led to the summer-house. Just short of the little building, he passed the edge of shade, and, before entering, turned to view the bright crescent as it hung just above the house-roof. Gazing at the forms of silvered cloud floating on blue depths, he heard a movement immediately behind him; he turned, to behold Emily standing in the doorway. The moon's rays shone full upon her; a light shawl which seemed to have covered her head had slipped down to her shoulders, and one end was held in a hand passed over her breast. There was something in the attitude which strikingly became her; her slight figure looked both graceful and dignified. The marble hue of her face, thus gleamed upon, added to the statuesque effect; her eyes had a startled look, their lids drooped as Wilfrid regarded her.

'You have been sitting here since you left us?' he asked, in a voice attuned to the night's hush.

'I was tempted to come out; the night is so beautiful.'

'It is.'

He uttered the assent mechanically; his eyes, like hers, had fallen, but he raised them again to her face. It seemed to him in this moment the perfect type of spiritual beauty; the brow so broad and pure, the eyes far-seeing in their maidenly reserve, the lips full, firm, of infinite refinement and sweetness. He felt abashed before her, as he had never done. They had stood thus but a moment or two, yet it seemed long to both. Emily stepped from the wooden threshold on to the grass.

'Somebody wants the "Spectator,"' he said hurriedly. 'I believe I left it here.'

'Yes, it is on the table.'

With a perfectly natural impulse, she quickly re-entered the house, to reach the paper she had seen only a minute ago. Without reflection, heart-beats stifling his thought, he stepped after her. The shadow made her turn rapidly; a shimmer of silver light through the lattice-work still touched her features; her lips were parted as if in fear.

'Emily!'

He did not know that he had spoken. The name upon his tongue, a name he had said low to himself often to-day and yesterday, was born of the throe which made fire-currents of his veins, the passion which at the instant seized imperiously upon his being. She could not see his face, and hers to him was a half-veiled glory, yet each knew the wild gaze, the all but terror, in the other's eyes, that anguish which indicates a supreme moment in life, a turning-point of fate.

She had no voice. Wilfrid's words at length made way impetuously.

'I thought I could wait longer, and try in the meanwhile to win your kind thoughts for me; but I dare not part from you for so long, leaving it a mere chance that you will come back. I must say to you what it means, the hope of seeing you again. All the other desires of my life are lost in that. You are my true self, for which I shall seek in vain whilst I am away from you. Can you give me anything—a promise of kind thought—a hope—to live upon till I see you?'

'I cannot come back.'

But for the intense stillness he could not have caught the words; they were sighed rather than spoken.

'Because I have said this?—Emily!'

He saw the white shape of her hand resting upon the table, and held it in his own, that exquisite hand which he had so often longed to touch; how cold it was! yet how soft, living! She made no effort to draw it away.

'I cannot say now what I wish to,' he spoke hurriedly. 'I must see you to-morrow—you will not refuse? *I must* see you! You are often out very early; I shall be at the hollow, where we talked yesterday, early, at seven o'clock—you will come? If the morning is not fine, then the day after. Emily, you will meet me?'

'I will meet you.'

He touched her fingers with his lips, took the paper, and hastened back to the house. His absence had not seemed long: it was only of five minutes. Reaching the open windows, he did not enter at once, but stood there and called to those within to come and admire the night; he felt his face hot and flushed.

'What is there remarkable about the night?' asked Mr. Athel, sauntering forwards.

'Come and look at this glorious moon, Miss Redwing,' Wilfrid exclaimed, once more with the natural friendliness of his habitual tone to her.

'It seems to have put you into excellent spirits,' remarked Mrs. Rossall, as, followed by Beatrice, she approached the window. 'Have you found the "Spectator?" that's the point.'

Wilfrid continued speaking in a raised voice, for it was just possible, he thought, that Emily might come this way round to enter, and he wished her to be apprised of their presence. All went back into the room after a few moments, and, as the air had grown cooler, the windows were closed. As Wilfrid seated himself in a dusky part of the room, he noticed that Beatrice was regarding him steadily. She had not spoken since his return, and did not do so till she presently rose to say good-night. To Wilfrid she used no form of words, merely giving him her hand; that other had been so cold, how hot this was!

She laughed as she turned from him.

'What is the source of amusement?' inquired Mr. Athel, who was standing by with his hands upon his hips.

'Indeed I don't know,' returned Beatrice, laughing again slightly. 'I sometimes laugh without cause.'

Emily had passed upstairs and gone to her bedroom but a moment before, treading with quick soundless steps. When Wilfrid left her in the summer-house, she stood unmoving, and only after a minute or two changed her attitude by putting her palms against her face, as if in the gloom she found too much light. It was a sensation of shame which came upon her, a tremor of maidenhood in re-living, swift instant by instant, all that had just passed. Had she in any way aided in bringing about

that confession? Had she done anything, made a motion, uttered a tone, which broke away the barrier between herself and him? When she could recover self-consciousness, disembarass herself of the phantom moments which would not fleet with the rest of time, it was scarcely joy which she read in her heart; apprehension, dismay, lack of courage to look forward beyond this night, these oppressed her. Then, close upon the haunting reality of his voice, his touch, came inability to believe what had happened. Had a transient dreamful slumber crept upon her as she sat here alone? So quickly had the world suffered re-creation, so magical the whelming of old days in a new order, so complete the change in herself. One word she knew which had power from eternity to do these things, and that word neither he nor she had uttered. But there was no need, when the night spoke it in every beat of time.

Fearful of being seen, she at length ventured to return to the house. Moonlight streamed full upon her bed; it would have irked her as yet to take off her clothes, she lay in the radiance, which seemed to touch her with warm influences, and let her eyes rest upon the source of light. Then at length joy came and throned in her heart, joy that would mate with no anxious thought, no tremulous brooding. This was *her* night! There might be other happy beings in the world to whom it was also the beginning of new life, but in *her* name was its consecration, hers the supremacy of blessedness. Let the morrow wait on the hour of waking, if indeed sleep would ever come; this moment, the sacred *now*, was all that she could comprehend.

She undressed at length, and even slept, fitfully, always to start into wakefulness with a sense of something to be thought upon, to be realised, to be done. The weariness of excitement perturbed her joy; the meeting which was to take place in a few hours became a nervous preoccupation. The moonlight had died away; the cold light of dawn began to make objects in the room distinct. Was it good to have consented so readily to meet him? Nay, but no choice had been left her; his eagerness would take no refusal; and it was impossible for things to remain as they were, without calmer talk between them. It was her resource to remember his energetic will, his force of character; the happiness of passively submitting to what he might dictate; sure of his scrupulous honour, his high ideal. Could she indeed have borne to go into exile from his presence, without a hope that this the noblest and most aspiring life that had ever approached her might be something more than a star to worship? If wealth comes, we wonder how we drew breath in poverty; yet we lived, and should have lived on. Let the gods be thanked, whom it pleases to clothe the soul with joy which is superfluous to bare existence. Might she not now hallow herself to be a true priestess of beauty? Would not life be vivid with new powers and possibilities? Even as that heaven was robing itself in glory of sunrise, with warmth and hue which strengthened her again to overcome anxieties. Was he waking? Was he impatient for the hour of his meeting with her? She would stand face to face with him in the full Sunlight this time, but with what deep humility! Should she be able to find words? She had scarcely spoken to him, ever, as yet, and now there was more to say than hours of solitude would leave time for. She knew not whether to bid the sun linger or speed.

There was nothing unusual in her rising and going forth early, though perhaps she had never issued from the house quite so early as this morning; it was not yet six o'clock when she gently closed the garden-gate behind her, and walked along the road which led on to the common. The sun had already warmed the world, and the sheen of earth and heaven was at its brightest; the wind sweeping from the downs was like the breath of creation, giving life to forms of faultless beauty. Emily's heart lacked no morning hymn; every sense revelled in that pure joy which is the poetry of praise. She wished it had been near the hour of meeting, yet again was glad to have time to prepare herself. Walking, she drank in the loveliness about her, marked the forms of trees, the light and shade of heavy leafage, the blendings of colour by the roadside, the grace of remote distances; all these things she was making part of herself, that in memory they might be a joy for ever. It is the art of life to take each moment of mental joy, of spiritual openness, as though it would never be repeated, to cling to it as a pearl of great price, to exhaust its possibilities of sensation. At the best, such moments will be few amid the fateful succession of common cares, of lassitudes, of disillusiones. Emily had gone

deep enough in thought already to understand this; in her rapture there was no want of discerning consciousness. If this morning were to be unique in her life, she would have gained from it all that it had to give. Those subtle fears, spiritual misgivings, which lurked behind her perceptions would again have their day, for it was only by striving that she had attained her present modes of thought; her nature concealed a darker strain, an instinct of asceticism, which had now and again predominated, especially in the period of her transition to womanhood, when the material conditions of her life were sad and of little hope. It was no spirit of unreflective joy that now dwelt within her, but the more human happiness extorted from powers which only yield to striving. Hitherto her life's morning had been but cold and grey; she had trained herself to expect no breaking forth of gleams from the sober sky. This sudden splendour might be transitory.

But who was that already standing by the hollow? Was it likely that he would be later than she at the place of meeting! Emily stood with a shock of life at the gates of her heart. She tried to keep her eyes raised to his as she approached slowly, he with more speed. Would she not after all find voice for the things she had to say?

Wilfrid came to her with bare head, and took her hand; no more than took her hand, for he was in awe of the solemn beauty of her countenance.

'You thought I should keep you waiting?' he asked in a low voice trembling with joy. 'I have watched the sun rise.'

'The door had not been opened—'

'My window is not high above the ground,' he answered, with an uncertain laugh.

They walked side by side over the heather, towards the beginning of a wood, young fir trees mingling with gorse and bracken. Beyond was the dense foliage of older growths. He had again taken one of her hands, and so led her on.

'Emily!'

She was able to look into his face for a moment, but the moving of her lips gave no sound.

'I could not sleep,' he went on, 'so I read of you till dawn in the *Knights Tale*. It is a name I have always loved, sweet, musical, but of deep meaning. Will you not let me hear you speak, Emily?'

She uttered a few timid words, then they passed on in silence till the wood was all about them.

'May I tell you the plan which I have made in the night?' he said, as they stood on a spot of smooth turf, netted with sunlight. 'You leave us in two days. Before we start for London, I shall speak with my father, and tell him what has come about. You remember what I was saying about him the day before yesterday; perhaps it was with a half-thought of this—so daring I was, you see! I have no fear of his kindness, his good sense. At the same time, it is right you should know that my independence is assured; my grandfather left me far more than enough for mere needs. By the summer of next year I shall be free of Oxford. I care little now for such honours as those; you have honoured me more than any other voice has power to do. But my father would be disappointed if I did not go on to the end, and do something of what is expected. Now you must tell me freely is there absolute necessity for your maintaining yourself in the meanwhile, for your leaving home?'

'There is,' she replied.

'Then will you continue to teach the children as usual?'

She was touched with apprehension.

'Gladly I would do so—but is it possible? Would you conceal from Mrs. Rossall—'

Wilfrid mused.

'I meant to. But your instincts are truer than mine; say what you think. I believe my father would countenance it, for it involves no real deceit.'

'If you wish it,' Emily said, after a silence, in a low voice.

'Of my aunt,' pursued Wilfrid, 'I have just this degree of doubt. She might make difficulties; her ways of thinking differ often from ours. Yet it is far better that you should continue to live with us. I myself shall scarcely ever be at home; it will not be as if I dwelt under the roof; I will make my

visits as short as possible, not to trouble you. I could not let you go to the house of other people—you to lack consideration, perhaps to meet unkindness! Rather than that, you shall stay in your own home, or I will not return to Oxford at all.'

Emily stood in anxious thought. He drew a step nearer to her; seemed about to draw nearer still, but checked himself as she looked up.

'I fear we must not do that,' she said. 'Mrs. Rossall would not forgive me.'

Woman's judgment of woman, and worth much more than Wilfrid's rough and ready scheming. Wilfrid smiled.

'Then she also shall know,' he exclaimed. 'She shall take nay view of this; I will not be gainsaid. What is there in the plan that common sense can object to? Your position is not that of a servant; you are from the first our friend you honour us by the aid you give, efficient as few could make it. Yes, there shall be no concealment far better so.'

'You have no fear of the views they will take?'

'None!' he said, with characteristic decision. 'If they are unreasonable, absurd, our course is plain enough. You will be my wife when I ask you to, Emily?'

She faltered, and held her hand to him.

'Is it worth while to go hack to Oxford?' he mused, caressing the fingers he had kissed.

'Oh, yes; you must,' Emily urged, with a sort of fear in her sudden courage. 'You must not disappoint them, your father, your friends.'

'My fair wise one!' he murmured, gazing rapturously at her. 'Oh, Emily, think what our life will be! Shall we not drain the world of its wisdom, youth of its delight! Hand in hand, one heart, one brain—what shall escape us? It was you I needed to give completeness to my thought and desire.'

The old dream, the eternal fancy. This one, this and no other, chosen from out the myriads of human souls. Individuality the servant of passion; mysteries read undoubtingly with the eye of longing. Bead perhaps so truly; who knows?

She came nearer, imperceptibly, her raised face aglow like the morning.

'Wilfrid—you believe—you know that I love you?'

The last word breathed out in the touching of lips with lips. What could he reply, save those old, simple words of tenderness, that small vocabulary of love, common to child and man? The goddess that made herself woman for his sake—see, did he not hold her clasped to him! But she was mute again. The birds sang so loudly round about them, uttered their hearts so easily, but Emily could only speak through silence. And afterwards she knew there was so much she should have said. What matter? One cannot find tongue upon the threshold of the holy of holies.

CHAPTER IV

A CONFLICT OF OPINIONS

Beatrice Redwing's visit only extended over the second day, and during that there was little, if any, separate conversation between her and Wilfrid. The change in her from the free gaiety and restfulness of the morning of her arrival could not escape notice, though she affected a continuance of the bright mood. Mr. Athel and his sister both observed her real preoccupation, as if of trouble, and mentally attributed it to something that had passed during the afternoon's ride. Mrs. Rossall did not look for confidences. Beatrice would gossip freely enough of trivial experiences, or of the details of faith and ritual, but the innermost veil of her heart was never raised; all her friends felt that, though they could not easily have explained in what way they became conscious of this reserve, she seemed so thoroughly open, not to say so shallow. She left The Firs to return to town, and thence in a week or two went to Cowes, a favourite abode of her mother's.

The next day, Emily also left, journeying to London on her way to the north, Wilfrid and she had no second meeting; their parting was formal, in the family circle. Mr. Athel displayed even more than his usual urbanity; Mrs. Rossall was genuinely gracious; the twins made many promises to write from Switzerland. Emily was self-possessed, but Wilfrid read in her face that she was going through an ordeal. He felt the folly of his first proposal, that she should play a part before Mrs. Rossall through the winter months. He decided, moreover, that no time should be lost in making the necessary disclosure to his father. Naturally it would be an anxious time with Emily till she had news from him. She had asked him to direct letters to the Dunfield post office, not to her home; it was better so for the present.

Wilfrid, though anything but weakly nervous, was impatient of suspense, and, in face of a situation like the present, suffered from the excitability of an imaginative temperament. He had by no means yet outgrown the mood which, when he was a boy, made the anticipation of any delight a physical illness. In an essentially feeble nature this extreme sensibility is fatal to sane achievement; in Wilfrid it merely enforced the vigour of his will. As a child he used to exclaim that he *could* not wait; at present he was apt to say that he would not. He did not, in very truth, anticipate difficulties with his father, his conviction of the latter's reasonableness being strongly supported by immense confidence in his own powers of putting a case incontrovertibly. As he had said to Emily, he could scarcely allow that deep affection for his father dwelt within him, nor did the nature of the case permit him to feel exactly reverent; these stronger emotions were reserved for the memory of the parent who was long dead. He thought of his father with warm friendliness, that temper which is consistent with clear perception of faults and foibles, which makes of them, indeed, an occasion for the added kindness of indulgence, and which, on the other hand, leaves perfect freedom in judgment and action. We know that it is for the most part a misfortune to be the son of a really great man, and for the reason that nature, so indifferent to the individual, makes the well-being of each generation mainly consist in early predominance over the generation which gave it birth. Wilfrid suffered no such exceptional hardship. At three-and-twenty he felt himself essentially his father's superior. He would not have exposed the fact thus crudely, for he was susceptible to the comely order of things. The fact was a fact, and nature, not he, was responsible for it. That, and the circumstance of his material independence, would necessarily keep the ensuing interview well within the limits of urbane comedy. The young man smiled already at the suggested comparison with his father's own choice in matrimony. Wilfrid had never had the details of that story avowedly represented to him, but it was inevitable that he should have learnt enough to enable him to reconstruct them with tolerable accuracy.

Emily was gone long before the hour of luncheon. After that meal, Mr. Athel lit a cigar and went to a favourite seat in the garden. Mrs. Rossall was going with the twins to make a farewell call

on neighbouring friends. As soon as the carriage had left the house, Wilfrid sought his father, who was amusing himself with a review.

'I thought you would have gone with your aunt,' Mr. Athel remarked, after a glance to see who was approaching him.

'I had an object in remaining behind,' Wilfrid returned, composedly, seating himself on a camp-stool which he had brought out. 'I wished to talk over with you a matter of some importance.'

'Oh?'

Mr. Athel stroked his chin, and smiled a little. It occurred to him at once that something relative to Beatrice was about to be disclosed.

'What is it?' he added, throwing one leg over the other, and letting the review lie open on his lap.

'It concerns Miss Hood,' pursued the other, assuming the same attitude, save that he had nothing to lean back against. 'A day or two ago I asked her to engage herself to me, and she consented.'

Perhaps this was the simplest way of putting it. Wilfrid could not utter the words with complete calmness; his hands had begun to tremble a little, and his temples were hot. By an effort he kept his eyes steadily fixed on his father's face, and what he saw there did not supply encouragement to proceed in the genial tone with which he had begun. Mr. Athel frowned, not angrily, but as if not quite able to grasp what had been told him. He had cast his eyes down.

There was silence for a moment.

'I have chosen the earliest moment for telling you of this,' Wilfrid continued, rather hurriedly. 'It was of course better to leave it till Miss Hood had gone.'

On the father's face displeasure had succeeded to mere astonishment.

'You could have told me few things that I should be so sorry to hear,' were his first words, delivered in an undertone and with grave precision.

'Surely that does not express your better thought,' said Wilfrid, to whom a hint of opposition at once gave the firmness he had lacked.

'It expresses my very natural thought. In the first place, it is not pleasant to know that clandestine proceedings of this kind have been going on under my roof. I have no wish to say anything disrespectful of Miss Hood, but I am disposed to think that she has mistaken her vocation; such talents for dissimulation would surely have pointed to—'

Mr. Athel had two ways of expressing displeasure. Where ceremony was wholly unnecessary, he gave vent to his feelings in an outburst of hearty English wrath, not coarsely, for his instincts were invariably those of a gentleman, but in the cultivated autocratic tone; an offending groom, for instance, did not care to incur reproof a second time. Where this mode of utterance was out of place, he was apt to have recourse to a somewhat too elaborate irony, to involve himself in phrases which ultimately led to awkward hesitations, with the effect that he grew more heated by embarrassment. Had he been allowed to proceed, he would at present have illustrated this failing, for he had begun with extreme deliberation, smoothing the open pages with his right hand, rounding his words, reddening a little in the face. But Wilfrid interposed.

'I must not let you speak or think of Miss Hood so mistakenly,' he said firmly, but without unbecoming self-assertion. 'She could not possibly have behaved with more reserve to me than she did until, three days ago, I myself gave a new colour to our relations. The outward propriety which you admit has been perfectly genuine; if there is any blame in the matter—and how can there be any?—it rests solely upon me. I dare say you remember my going out to fetch the "Spectator," after Miss Redwing had been singing to us. By chance I met Miss Hood in the garden. I was led to say something to her which made a longer interview inevitable; she consented to meet me on the common before breakfast, the following morning. These are the only two occasions which can be called clandestine. If she has disguised herself since then, how could she have behaved otherwise? Disguise is too strong a word; she has merely kept silence. I need not inquire whether you fully believe what I say.'

'What you say, I believe, as a matter of course,' replied Mr. Athel, who had drummed with his fingers as he listened impatiently. 'It can scarcely alter my view of the position of things. Had you come to me before offering yourself to this young lady, and done me the honour of asking my advice, I should in all probability have had a rather strong opinion to express; as it is, I don't see that there is anything left to be said.'

'What would your opinion have been?' Wilfrid asked.

'Simply that for an idle fancy, the unfortunate result of unoccupied days, you were about to take a step which would assuredly lead to regret at least, very probably to more active repentance. In fact, I should have warned you not to spoil your life in its commencement.'

'I think, father, that you would have spoken with too little knowledge of the case. You can scarcely know Miss Hood as I do. I have studied her since we came here, and with—well, with these results.'

Mr. Athel looked up with grave sadness.

'Wilf, this is a deeply unfortunate thing, my boy. I grieve over it more than I can tell you. I am terribly disappointed. Your position and your hopes pointed to very different things. You have surprised me, too; I thought your mind was already made up, in quite a different quarter.'

'You refer to Miss Redwing?'

'Naturally.'

'You have, indeed, been mistaken. It was impossible that I should think of her as a wife. I must have sympathy, intellectual and moral. With her I have none. We cannot talk without flagrant differences—differences of a serious, a radical nature. Be assured that such a thought as this never occurred to Miss Redwing herself; her very last conversation with me forbids any such idea.'

Mr. Athel still drummed on the book, seemingly paying little heed to the speaker.

'You find sympathy in Miss Hood?' he asked suddenly, with a touch of sarcasm.

'The deepest. Her intellectual tendencies are the same as my own; she has a mind which it refreshes and delights me to discover. Of course that is not all, but it is all I need speak of. I know that I have chosen well and rightly.'

'I won't be so old-fashioned,' remarked Mr. Athel, still with subdued sarcasm, 'as to hint that some thought of me might have entered into your choosing' (did he consciously repeat his own father's words of five-and-twenty years back, or was it but destiny making him play his part in the human comedy?) 'and, in point of fact' (perhaps the parallel touched him at this point), 'you are old enough to judge the affair on its own merits. My wonder is that your judgment has not been sounder. Has it occurred to you that a young lady in Miss Hood's position would find it at all events somewhat difficult to be unbiassed in her assent to what you proposed?'

'Nothing has occurred to me,' replied Wilfrid, more shortly than hitherto, 'which could cast a shadow of suspicion on her perfect truth. I beg that you will not suggest these things. Some day you will judge her with better knowledge.'

'I am not sure of that,' was the rejoinder, almost irritably uttered.

'What do you mean by that, father?' Wilfrid asked in a lower tone.

'I mean, Wilf, that I am not yet in the frame of mind to regard the children's governess as my daughter-in-law. Miss Hood may be all you say; I would not willingly be anything but scrupulously just. The fact remains that this is not the alliance which it became you to make. It is, in a very pronounced sense, marrying beneath you. It is not easy for me to reconcile myself to that.'

It was Wilfrid's turn to keep silence. What became of his plans? They were hardly in a way to be carried out as he had conceived them. A graver uneasiness was possessing him. Resolve would only grow by opposition, but there was more of pain in announcing an independent course than he had foreseen.

'What are your practical proposals?' his father inquired, his mollified tone the result of observing that he had made a certain impression, for he was distinctly one of the men who are to be overcome by yielding.

'I had a proposal to make, but of such a kind that it is hardly worth while to speak of it. I shall have to reflect.'

'Let me hear what you were going to say. There's no harm in that, at all events.'

'My idea was, that, with your consent and my aunt's, Miss Hood should return just as if nothing had happened, and continue to teach the twins till next summer, when I should have done with Oxford. There appears to me to be nothing irrational or unseemly in such a plan. If she were our cook or housemaid, there might be reasonable objections. As it is, it would hardly involve a change even in your tone to her, seeing that you are in the habit of treating her as a lady, and with a certain degree of familiar kindness. I confess I had anticipated no difficulties. We are not a household of bigoted Conservatives; it is hard for me to imagine you taking any line but that of an enlightened man who judges all things from the standpoint of liberal reflection. I suppose my own scorn of prejudices is largely due to your influence. It is not easy to realise our being in conflict on any matter involving calm reasonableness.'

In another this would have been a shrewd speech. Wilfrid was incapable of conscious artifice of this kind; this appeal, the very strongest he could have made to his father, was urged in all sincerity, and derived its force from that very fact. He possessed not a little of the persuasive genius which goes to make an orator—hereafter to serve him in fields as yet undreamed of—and natural endowment guided his feeling in the way of most impressive utterance. Mr. Athel smiled in spite of himself.

'And what about your aunt?' he asked. 'Pray remember that it is only by chance that Miss Hood lives under my roof. Do you imagine your aunt equally unprejudiced?'

Mr. Athel was, characteristically, rather fond of side-glancings at feminine weaknesses. An opportunity of the kind was wont to mellow his mood.

'To be quite open in the matter,' Wilfrid replied, 'I will own that my first idea was to take you alone into my confidence; to ask you to say nothing to Aunt Edith. Miss Hood felt that that would be impossible, and I see that she was right. It would involve deceit which it is not in her nature to practise.'

'You and Miss Hood have discussed us freely,' observed the father, with a return to his irony.

'I don't reply to that,' said Wilfrid, quietly. 'I think you must give me credit for the usual measure of self-respect; and Miss Hood does not fall short of it.'

The look which Mr. Athel cast at his son had in it something of pride. He would not trust himself to speak immediately.

'I don't say,' he began presently, with balancing of phrase, 'that your plan is not on the face of it consistent and reasonable. Putting aside for the moment the wretchedly unsatisfactory circumstances which originate it, I suppose it is the plan which naturally suggests itself. But, of course, in practice it is out of the question.'

'You feel sure that aunt would not entertain it?'

'I do. And I don't see how I could recommend her to do so.'

Wilfrid reflected.

'In that case,' he said, 'I have only one alternative. I must give up my intention of returning to Oxford, and marry before the end of the year.'

The words had to his own ears a somewhat explosive sound. They were uttered, however, and he was glad of it. A purpose thus formulated he would not swerve from. Of that his father too was well aware.

Mr. Athel rose from his seat, held the rolled-up magazine in both hands behind his back, and took a turn across a few yards of lawn. Wilfrid sat still, leaning forward, watching his father's shadow. The shadow approached him.

'Wilf, is there no *via media*? Cannot Miss Hood remain at home for a while? Are you going to throw up your career, and lay in a stock of repentance for the rest of your life?'

'I don't think you quite understand me, father. I contemplate no career which could possibly be injured even by my immediate marriage. If you mean University honours—I care nothing about them. I would go through the routine just for the sake of completeness; it is her strong wish that I should. But my future, most happily, does not depend on success of that kind. I shall live the life of a student, my end will be self-culture. And Miss Hood is unfortunately not able to remain at home. I say unfortunately, but I should have regarded it as preferable that she should continue in her position with us. You and aunt Edith would come to know her, and the air of a home like ours would, I believe, suit her better than that of her own. There is nothing in her work that might not be performed by any lady.'

'What do you know of her people?'

'Nothing, except that her father has scientific interests. It is plain enough, though, that they cannot be without refinement. No doubt they are poor; we hardly consider that a crime.'

He rose, as if he considered the interview at an end.

'Look here,' said Mr. Athel, with a little bluntness, the result of a difficulty in making concessions; 'if Miss Hood returned to us, as you propose, should you consider it a point of honour to go on with your work at Balliol as if nothing had happened, and to abstain from communication with her of a kind which would make things awkward?'

'Both, undoubtedly. I could very well arrange to keep away from home entirely in the interval.'

'Well, I think we have talked enough for the present. I have no kind of sympathy with your position, pray understand that. I think you have made about as bad a mistake as you could have done. All the same, I will speak of this with your aunt—'

'I think you had better not do that,' interrupted Wilfrid, 'I mean with any view of persuading her. I am afraid I can't very well bring myself to compromises which involve a confession of childish error. It is better I should go my own way.'

'Well, well, of course, if you take the strictly independent attitude—'

Mr. Athel took another turn on the lawn, his brows bent. It was the first time that there had ever been an approach to serious difference between himself and his son. The paternal instinct was strong in him, and it was inevitable that he should be touched by sympathetic admiration of his past self as revived in Wilfrid's firm and dignified bearing. He approached the latter again.

'Come to me in the study about ten to-night, will you?' he said.

It was the end of the discussion for the present.

Shortly after dinner, when coffee had been brought to the drawing-room, Wilfrid wandered out to the summer-house. Emily would be home by this time. He thought of her....

'The deuce of it is,' exclaimed Mr. Athel, conversing with his sister, 'that it's so hard to find valid objections. If he had proposed to marry a barmaid, one's course would be clear, but as it is—'

Mrs. Rossall had listened in silence to a matter-of-fact disclosure of Wilfrid's proceedings. In the commencement her attention had marked itself by a slight elevation of the brows; at the end she was cold and rather disdainful. Observation of her face had the result of confirming her brother in the apologetic tone. He was annoyed at perceiving that Edith would justify his prediction.

'I am sorry to hear it, of course,' were her first words, 'but I suppose Wilfrid will act as he chooses.'

'Well, but this isn't all,' pursued Mr. Athel, laying aside an affectation of half-humorous indulgence which he had assumed. 'He has urged upon me an extraordinary proposal. His idea is that Miss Hood might continue to hold her position here until he has taken his degree.'

'I am not surprised. You of course told him that such a thing was out of the question?'

'I said that *you* would probably consider it so.'

'But surely—Do you hold a different view?'

'Really, I hold no views at all. I am not sure that I have got the right focus yet. I know that the plans of a lifetime are upset; I can't get much beyond that at present.'

Mrs. Rossall was deeply troubled. She sat with her eyes drooped, her lower lip drawn in.

'Do you refer to any plan in particular?' she asked next.

'Yes, I suppose I do.'

'I am very, very sorry for Beatrice,' she said, in a subdued voice.

'You think it will—'

Mrs. Rossall raised her eyebrows a little, and kept her air of pained musing.

'Well, what is to be done?' resumed her brother, always impatient of mere negatives. 'He has delivered a sort of ultimatum. In the event of this proposal—as to Miss Hood's return—being rejected, he marries at once.'

'And then goes back to Balliol?'

'No, simply abandons his career.'

Mrs. Rossall smiled. It was not in woman's nature to be uninterested by decision such as this.

'Do you despair of influencing him?' she asked.

'Entirely. He will not hear of her taking another place in the interval, and it seems there are difficulties in the way of her remaining at home. Of course I see very well the objections on the surface to her coming back—'

'The objections are not on the surface at all, they are fundamental. You are probably not in a position to see the ease as I do. Such a state of things would be ludicrous; we should all be playing parts in a farce. He cannot have made such a proposal to her; she would have shown him at once its absurdity.'

'But the fact of the matter is that she acceded to it,' said Mr. Athel, with a certain triumph over female infallibility.

'Then I think worse of her than I did, that's all.'

'I'm not at all sure that you are right in that,' observed her brother, with an impartial air. 'Pray tell me your serious opinion of Miss Hood. One begins, naturally, with a suspicion that she has not been altogether passive in this affair. What Wilf says is, of course, nothing to the point; he protests that her attitude has been irreproachable.'

'Especially in making assignments for six o'clock in the morning.'

'Well, well, that is merely granting the issue; you are a trifle' illogical, Edith.'

'No doubt I am. You, on the other hand, seem to be very much of Wilf's opinion. I am sorry that I can't do as you wish.'

'Well, we shall not gain anything by giving way to irritation. He must be told how matters stand, and judge for himself.'

As Mr. Athel was speaking, Wilfrid entered the room. Impatience had overcome him. He knew of course that a discussion was in progress between his father and his aunt, and calm waiting upon other people's decisions was not in his nature. He came forward and seated himself.

'I gather from your look, aunt,' he began, when the others did not seem disposed to break silence, 'that you take my father's view of what he has been telling you.'

'I am not sure what your father's view is,' was Mrs. Rossall's reply, given very coldly. 'But I certainly think you have proposed what is impossible.'

'Yes, you are right,' rejoined Wilfrid, to the surprise of both. 'The plan was not well considered. Pray think no more of it.'

'What do you substitute?' his father inquired, after another long silence.

'I cannot say.' He paused, then continued with some emotion, 'I would gladly have had your sympathy. Perhaps I fail to see the whole matter in the same light as yourselves, but it seems to me that in the step I have taken there is nothing that should cause lasting difference between us. I involve the family in no kind of disgrace—that, I suppose, you admit?'

Mrs. Rossall made no answer. Mr. Athel moved uneasily upon his chair, coughed, seemed about to speak, but in the end said nothing.

'I am afraid I shall not be able to leave England with you,' continued Wilfrid, rising. 'But that fortunately need cause no change in your plans.'

Mr. Athel was annoyed at his sister's behaviour. He had looked to her for mediation; clearly she would offer nothing of the kind. She was wrapping herself in a cloak of offended dignity; she had withdrawn from the debate.

'Come with me to my room,' he said moving from his chair.

'I think it will be better to have no further discussion, Wilfrid replied firmly, 'at all events to-night.'

'As you please,' said his father, shortly.

He went from the room, and Wilfrid, without further speech to his aunt, presently followed.

CHAPTER V

THE SHADOW OF HOME

The house which was the end of Emily's journey was situated two miles outside the town of Dunfield, on the high road going southward, just before it enters upon a rising tract of common land known as the Heath. It was one of a row of two-storied dwellings, built of glazed brick, each with a wide projecting window on the right hand of the front door, and with a patch of garden railed in from the road, the row being part of a straggling colony which is called Banbrigg. Immediately opposite these houses stood an ecclesiastical edifice of depressing appearance, stone-built, wholly without ornament, presenting a corner to the highway, a chapel-of-ease for worshippers unable to go as far as Dunfield in the one direction or the village of Pental in the other. Scattered about were dwelling-houses old and new; the former being cottages of the poorest and dirtiest kind, the latter brick structures of the most unsightly form, evidently aiming at constituting themselves into a thoroughfare, and, in point of fact, already rejoicing in the name of Regent Street. There was a public-house, or rather, as it frankly styled itself in large letters on the window, a dram-shop; and there were two or three places for the sale of very miscellaneous articles, exhibiting the same specimens of discouraging stock throughout the year. At no season, and under no advantage of sky, was Banbrigg a delectable abode. Though within easy reach of country which was not without rural aspects, it was marked too unmistakably with the squalor of a manufacturing district. Its existence impressed one as casual; it was a mere bit of Dunfield got away from the main mass, and having brought its dirt with it. The stretch of road between it and the bridge by which the river was crossed into Dunfield had in its long, hard ugliness something dispiriting. Though hedges bordered it here and there, they were stunted and grimed; though fields were seen on this side and on that, the grass had absorbed too much mill-smoke to exhibit wholesome verdure; it was fed upon by sheep and cows, seemingly turned in to be out of the way till needed for slaughter, and by the sorriest of superannuated horses. The land was blighted by the curse of what we name—using a word as ugly as the thing it represents—industrialism.

As the cab brought her along this road from Dunfield station, Emily thought of the downs, the woodlands, the fair pastures of Surrey. There was sorrow at her heart, even a vague tormenting fear. It would be hard to find solace in Banbrigg.

Hither her parents had come to live when she was thirteen years old, her home having previously been in another and a larger manufacturing town. Her father was a man marked for ill-fortune: it pursued him from his entrance into the world, and would inevitably—you read it in his face—hunt him into a sad grave. He was the youngest of a large family; his very birth had been an added misery to a household struggling with want. His education was of the slightest; at twelve years of age he was already supporting himself, or, one would say, keeping himself above the point of starvation; and at three-and-twenty—the age when Wilfrid Athel is entering upon life in the joy of freedom—was ludicrously bankrupt, a petty business he had established being sold up for a debt something short of as many pounds as he had years. He drifted into indefinite mercantile clerkships, an existence possibly preferable to that of the fourth circle of Inferno, and then seemed at length to have fallen upon a piece of good luck, such as, according to a maxim of pathetic optimism wherewith he was wont to cheer himself, must come to every man sooner or later—provided he do not die of hunger whilst it is on the way. He married a schoolmistress, one Miss Martin, who was responsible for the teaching of some twelve or fifteen children of tender age, and who, what was more, owned the house in which she kept school. The result was that James Hood once more established himself in business, or rather in several businesses, vague, indescribable, save by those who are unhappy enough to understand such matters—a commission agency, a life insurance agency and a fire insurance ditto, I know not

what. Yet the semblance of prosperity was fleeting. As if connection with him meant failure, his wife's school, which she had not abandoned (let us employ negative terms in speaking of this pair), began to fall off; ultimately no school was left. It did in truth appear that Miss Martin had suffered something in becoming Mrs. Hood. At her marriage she was five-and-twenty, fairly good-looking, in temper a trifle exigent perhaps, sanguine, and capable of exertion; she could not claim more than superficial instruction, but taught reading and writing with the usual success which attends teachers of these elements. After the birth of her first child, Emily, her moral nature showed an unaccountable weakening; the origin was no doubt physical, but in story-telling we dwell very much on the surface of things; it is not permitted us to describe human nature too accurately. The exigence of her temper became something generally described by a harsher term; she lost her interest in the work which she had unwillingly entrusted for a time to an assistant; she found the conditions of her life hard. Alas, they grew harder. After Emily, two children were successively born; fate was kind to them, and neither survived infancy. Their mother fell into fretting, into hysteria; some change in her life seemed imperative, and at length she persuaded her husband to quit the town in which they lived, and begin life anew elsewhere. Begin life anew! James Hood was forty years old; he possessed, as the net result of his commercial enterprises, a capital of a hundred and thirty pounds. The house, of course, could be let, and would bring five-and-twenty pounds a year. This it was resolved to do. He had had certain dealings in Dunfield, and in Dunfield he would strike his tent—that is to say, in Banbrigg, whence he walked daily to a little office in the town. Rents were lower in Banbrigg, and it was beyond the range of certain municipal taxings.

Mrs. Hood possessed still her somewhat genteel furniture. One article was a piano, and upon this she taught Emily her notes. It had been a fairly good piano once, but the keys had become very loose. They were looser than ever, now that Emily tried to play on them, on her return from Surrey.

Business did not thrive in Dunfield; yet there was more than ever need that it should, for to neglect Emily's education would be to deal cruelly with the child—she would have nothing else to depend upon in her battle with the world. Poor Emily A feeble, overgrown child, needing fresh air, which she could not get, needing food of a better kind, just as unattainable. Large-eyed, thin-checked Emily; she, too, already in the clutch of the great brute world, the helpless victim of a civilisation which makes its food of those the heart most pities. How well if her last sigh had been drawn in infancy, if she had lain with the little brother and sister in that gaunt, grimy cemetery, under the shadow of mill chimneys! She was reserved for other griefs; for consolations, it is true, but—

Education she did get, by hook or by crook; there was dire pinching to pay for it, and, too well knowing this, the child strove her utmost to use the opportunities offered her. Each morning going into Dunfield, taking with her some sandwiches that were called dinner, walking home again by tea-time, tired, hungry—ah, hungry No matter the weather, she must walk her couple of miles—it was at least so far to the school. In winter you saw her set forth with her waterproof and umbrella, the too-heavy bag of books on her arm; sometimes the wind and rain beating as if to delay her—they, too, cruel. In summer the hot days tried her perhaps still more; she reached home in the afternoon well-nigh fainting, the books were so heavy. Who would not have felt kindly to her? So gentle she was, so dreadfully shy and timid, her eyes so eager, so full of unconscious pathos. 'Hood's little girl,' said the people on the way who saw her pass daily, and, however completely strangers, they said it with a certain kindness of tone and meaning. A little thing that happened one day—take it as an anecdote. On her way to school she passed some boys who were pelting a most wretched dog, a poor, scraggy beast driven into a corner. Emily, so timid usually she could not raise her eyes before a stranger, stopped, quivering all over, *commanded* them to cease their brutality, divine compassion become a heroism. The boys somehow did her bidding, and walked on together. Emily stayed behind, opened her bag, threw something for the dog to eat. It was half her dinner.

Her mind braced itself. She had a passionate love of learning; all books were food to her. Fortunately there was the library of the Mechanics' Institute; but for that she would have come short

of mental sustenance, for her father had never been able to buy more than a dozen volumes, and these all dealt with matters of physical science. The strange things she read, books which came down to her from the shelves with a thickness of dust upon them; histories of Greece and Rome ('Not much asked for, these,' said the librarian), translations of old classics, the Koran, Mosheim's 'Ecclesiastical History,' works of Swedenborg, all the poetry she could lay hands on, novels not a few. One day she asked for a book on 'Gymnoblastic Hydroids'; the amazing title in the catalogue had filled her with curiosity; she must know the meaning of everything. She was not idle, Emily.

But things in the home were going from bad to worse. When Emily was sixteen, her father scarcely knew where to look for each day's dinner. Something must be done. Activity took a twofold direction. First of all, Emily got work as a teacher in an infant's school. It was at her own motion; she could bear her mother's daily querulousness no longer; she must take some step. She earned a mere trifle; but it was earning, instead of being a source of expense. And in the meantime she worked on for certain examinations which it would benefit her to have passed. The second thing done was that her father abandoned his office, and obtained a place in the counting-house of a worsted-mill, under the firm of Dagworthy and Son. His salary was small, but the blessing of it was its certainty; the precariousness of his existence had all but driven poor Hood mad. There came a season of calm. Emily's sphere of work extended itself; the school only took her mornings, and for the afternoon there was proposed to her the teaching of the little Baxendales. The Baxendales were well-to-do people; the father was, just then, mayor of Dunfield, the mother was related to the member of Parliament for the town. We have had mention of them as connections of Beatrice Redwing.

At nineteen she for the first time left home. Through the Baxendales she obtained the position of governess in a family residing in Liverpool, and remained with them till she went to London, to the Athels. These three years in Liverpool were momentous for her; they led her from girlhood to womanhood, and established her character. Her home was in the house of a prosperous ship-owner, a Lancashire man, outwardly a blustering good-tempered animal, yet with an inner light which showed itself in his love of books and pictures, in his easy walking under the burden of self-acquired riches, in a certain generous freedom which marked his life and thoughts. His forename was Laurence: Emily, in letters to her father, used to call him Lorenzo the Magnificent, a title which became him well enough. In the collection of works of art he was really great; he must have spent appalling sums annually on his picture gallery and the minor ornaments scattered about his house. He had a personal acquaintance, through his pecuniary dealings, with the foremost artists of the day; he liked to proclaim the fact and describe the men. To Emily the constant proximity of these pictures was a priceless advantage; the years she spent among them were equivalent to a university course. Moreover, she enjoyed, as with the Athels later, a free command of books; here began her acquaintance with the most modern literature, which was needful to set her thoughts in order, to throw into right perspective her previous miscellaneous reading, and to mark out her way in the future. Her instinctive craving for intellectual beauty acquired a reflective consistency; she reformed her ideals, found the loveliness of much that in her immaturity had seemed barren, put aside, with gentle firmness, much that had appeared indispensable to her moral life. The meanings which she attached to that word 'moral' largely modified themselves, that they should do so was the note of her progress. Her prayer was for 'beauty in the inward soul,' which, if it grew to be her conviction, was greatly—perhaps wholly—dependent on the perception of external beauty. The development of beauty in the soul would mean a life of ideal purity; all her instincts pointed to such a life; her passionate motives converged on the one end of spiritual chastity.

One ever-present fear she had to strive with in her progress toward serene convictions. The misery of her parents' home haunted her, and by no effort could she expel the superstition that she had only escaped from that for a time, that its claws would surely overtake her and fix themselves again in her flesh. Analysing her own nature, she discerned, or thought she did, a lack of independent vigour; it seemed as if she were too reliant on external circumstances; she dreaded what might follow if their

assistance were withdrawn. To be sure she had held her course through the countless discouragements of early years; but that, in looking back, seemed no assurance for the future; her courage, it appeared to her, had been of the unconscious kind, and might fail her when she consciously demanded it. As a child she had once walked in her sleep, had gone forth from the house, and had, before she was awakened, crossed the narrow footing of a canal-lock, a thing her nervousness would not allow her to do at other times. This became to her a figure. The feat she had performed when mere vital instinct guided her, she would have failed in when attempting it with the full understanding of its danger. Suppose something happened which put an end to her independence—failure of health, some supreme calamity at home—could she hold on in the way of salvation? Was she capable of conscious heroism? Could her soul retain its ideal of beauty if environed by ugliness?

The vice of her age—nay, why call it a vice?—the necessary issue of that intellectual egoism which is the note of our time, found as good illustration in this humble life as in men and women who are the mouthpieces of a civilisation. Pre occupied with problems of her own relation to the world, she could not enjoy without thought in the rear, ever ready to trouble her with suggestions of unreality. Her distresses of conscience were all the more active for being purely human; in her soul dwelt an immense compassion, which, with adequate occasion, might secure to itself such predominance as to dwarf into inefficiency her religion of culture. It was exquisite misery to conceive, as, from inner observation, she so well could, some demand of life which would make her ideals appear the dreams of bygone halcyon days, useless and worse amid the threats of gathering tempest. An essentially human apprehension, be it understood. The vulgarities of hysterical pietism Emily had never known; she did not fear the invasion of such blight as that; the thought of it was noisome to her. Do you recall a kind of trouble that came upon her, during that talk in the hollow, when Wilfrid suggested the case of her being called upon to make some great sacrifice in her father's behalf? It was an instance of the weakness I speak of; the fact of Wilfrid's putting forward such a thought had in that moment linked her to him with precious bonds of sympathy, till she felt as if he had seen into the most secret places of her heart. She dreaded the force of her compassionateness. That dog by the roadside; how the anguish of its eyes had haunted her through the day! It was the revolt of her whole being against the cruelty inherent in life. That evening she could not read the book she had in hand; its phrases seemed to fall into triviality. Yet—she reasoned at a later time—it should not have been so; the haggard gaze of fate should not daunt one; pity is but an element in the soul's ideal of order, it should not usurp a barren sovereignty. It is the miserable contradiction in our lot that the efficiency of the instincts of beauty-worship waits upon a force of individuality attainable only by a sacrifice of sensibility. Emily divined this. So it was that she came to shun the thought of struggle, to seek an abode apart from turbid conditions of life. She was bard at work building for her soul its 'lordly pleasure-house,' its Palace of Art. Could she, poor as she was, dependent, bound by such obvious chains to the gross earth, hope to abide in her courts and corridors for ever?...

Friday was the day of her arrival at Banbrigg. On the Saturday afternoon she hoped to enjoy a walk with her father; he would reach home from the mill shortly after two o'clock, and would then have his dinner. Mrs. Hood dined at one, and could not bring herself to alter the hour for Saturday; it was characteristic of her. That there might be no culinary cares on Sunday morning, she always cooked her joint of meat on the last day of the week; partaking of it herself at one o'clock, she cut slices for her husband and kept them warm, with vegetables, in the oven. This was not selfishness in theory, however much it may have been so in practice; it merely meant that she was unable to introduce variation into a mechanical order; and, as her husband never dreamed of complaining, Mrs. Hood could see in the arrangement no breach of the fitness of things, even though it meant that poor Hood never sat down to a freshly cooked meal from one end of the year to the other. To Emily it was simply a detestable instance of the worst miseries she had to endure at home. Coming on this first day, it disturbed her much. She knew the uselessness, the danger, of opposing any traditional habit, but her appetite at one o'clock was small.

Mrs. Hood did not keep a servant in the house; she engaged a charwoman once a week, and did all the work at other times herself. This was not strictly necessary; the expense of such a servant as would have answered purposes could just have been afforded; again and again Emily had entreated to be allowed to pay a girl out of her own earnings. Mrs. Hood steadily refused. No, she had *once* known what it was to have luxuries about her (that was naturally before her marriage), but those days were gone by. She thus entailed upon herself a great deal of labour, at once repugnant to her tastes and ill-suited to the uncertainty of her health, but all this was forgotten in the solace of possessing a standing grievance, one obvious at all moments, to be uttered in a sigh, to be emphasised by the affectation of cheerfulness. The love which was Emily's instinct grew chill in the presence of such things.

Saturday was from of old a day of ills. The charwoman was in the house, and Mrs. Hood went about in a fatigued way, coming now and then to the sitting-room, sinking into a chair, letting her head fall back with closed eyes. Emily had, of course, begged to be allowed to give assistance, but her mother declared that there was nothing whatever she could do.

'Shut the door,' she said, 'and then you won't hear the scrubbing so plainly. I can understand that it annoys you; I used to have the same feeling, but I've accustomed myself. You might play something; it would keep away your thoughts.'

'But I don't want to keep away my thoughts,' exclaimed Emily, with a laugh. 'I want to help you so that you will have done the sooner.'

'No, no, my dear; you are not used to it. You'll tell me when you'd like something to eat if you get faint.'

'I am not likely to grow faint, mother, if I do nothing.'

'Well, well; I have a sinking feeling now and then, I thought you might be the same.'

Just when his dinner in the oven had had time to grow crusty, Mr. Hood arrived. He was a rather tall man, of sallow complexion, with greyish hair. The peculiarly melancholy expression of his face was due to the excessive drooping of his eyelids under rounded brows; beneath the eyes were heavy lines; he generally looked like one who has passed through a night of sleepless grief. He wore a suit of black, which had for several years been his reserve attire, till it grew too seamy for use on Sundays. The whole look of the man was saddening; to pass him in the street as a stranger was to experience a momentary heaviness of heart. He had very long slender fingers—Emily's matchless hand in a rudimentary form—and it seemed to be a particular solicitude to keep them scrupulously clean; he frequently examined them, and appeared to have a pleasure in handling things in a dainty way—the pages of a book, for instance. When he smiled it was obviously with effort—a painful smile, for all that an exceedingly gentle one. In his voice there was the same gentleness, a self-suppression, as it were; his way of speaking half explained his want of success in life.

Emily was standing at the window in expectation of his coming. As soon as he reached the iron gate in front of the house she ran to open the door for him. He did not quicken his step, even stopped to close the gate with deliberate care, but if his face could ever be said to light up, it did so as he bent to the girl's kiss. She took his hat from him, and went to see that his dinner was made ready.

'How fine it is!' he said in his subdued tone, when he came downstairs and stood by the table stroking his newly washed hands. 'Shall we have a walk before tea-time? Mother is too busy, I'm afraid.'

Mrs. Hood came into the room shortly, and seated herself in the usual way.

'Did you bring the cake?' she asked, when her presence had caused silence for a few moments.

'The cake?' he repeated in surprise.

'Didn't I ask you to bring a cake? I suppose my memory is going; I meant to, and thought I mentioned it at breakfast. I shall have nothing for Emily's tea.'

Emily protested that it was needless to get unusual things on her account.

'We must do what we can to make you comfortable, my dear. I can't keep a table like that you are accustomed to, but that I know you don't expect. Which way are you going to walk this afternoon? If you pass a shop you might get a cake, or buns, whichever you like.'

'Well, I thought we might have a turn over the Heath,' said Mr. Hood. 'However, we'll see what we can do.'

A thought of some anxious kind appeared suddenly to strike Mrs. Hood; she leaned forward in her chair, seemed to listen, then started up and out of the room.

Emily sat where she could not see her father eating; it pained, exasperated her to be by him whilst he made such a meal. He ate slowly, with thought of other things; at times his eye wandered to the window, and he regarded the sky in a brooding manner. He satisfied his hunger without pleasure, apparently with indifference. Shortly after three o'clock the two started for their walk. Not many yards beyond the house the road passed beneath a railway bridge, then over a canal, and at once entered upon the common. The Heath formed the long side of a slowly rising hill; at the foot the road divided itself into two branches, and the dusty tracks climbed at a wide angle with each other. The one which Emily and her father pursued led up to stone quarries, which had been for a long time in working, and, skirting these, to the level ground above them, which was the end of the region of furze and bracken. Here began a spacious tract of grassy common; around it were houses of pleasant appearance, one or two meriting the name of mansion. In one of them dwelt Mr. Richard Dagworthy, the mill-owner, in whose counting-house James Hood earned his living. He alone represented the firm of Dagworthy and Son; his father had been dead two years, and more recently he had become a widower, his wife leaving him one child still an infant.

At the head of the quarries the two paused to look back upon Dunfield. The view from this point was extensive, and would have been interesting but for the existence of the town itself. It was seen to lie in a broad valley, along which a river flowed; the remoter districts were pleasantly wooded, and only the murkiness in the far sky told that a yet larger centre of industry lurked beyond the horizon. Dunfield offered no prominent features save the chimneys of its factories and its fine church, the spire of which rose high above surrounding buildings; over all hung a canopy of foul vapour, heavy, pestiferous. Take in your fingers a spray from one of the trees even here on the Heath, and its touch left a soil.

'How I wish you could see the views from the hills in Surrey!' Emily exclaimed when they had stood in silence. 'I can imagine nothing more delightful in English scenery. It realises my idea of perfect rural beauty, as I got it from engravings after the landscape painters. Oh, you shall go there with me some day.'

Her father smiled and shook his head a little.

'Perhaps,' he said; and added a favourite phrase of his, 'while there is life there is hope.'

'Of course there is,' rejoined Emily, with gaiety which was unusual in her. 'No smoke; the hills blue against a lovely sky! trees covered to the very roots with greenness; rich old English homes and cottages—oh, you know the kind your ideal of a cottage—low tiled roofs, latticed windows, moss and lichen and climbing flowers. Farmyards sweet with hay, and gleaming dairies. That country is my home!'

With how rich a poetry it clothed itself in her remembrance, the land of milk and honey, indeed, her heart's home. It was all but impossible to keep the secret of her joy, yet she had resolved to do so, and her purpose held firm.

'I am very glad indeed that you are so happy there,' said her father, looking at her with that quiet absorption in another's mood of which he was so capable. 'But it will be London through the winter. You haven't told me much about London; but then you were there so short a time.'

'But I saw much. Mrs. Rossall could not have been kinder; for the first few days it was almost as if I had been a visitor; I was taken everywhere.'

'I should like to see London before I die,' mused her father. 'Somehow I have never managed to get so far.'

'Oh, we will see it together some day.'

'There's one thing,' said Mr. Hood, reflectively, 'that I wish especially to see, and that is Holborn Viaduct. It must be a wonderful piece of engineering; I remember thinking it out at the time it was constructed. Of course you have seen it?'

'I am afraid not. We are very far away from the City. But I will go and see it on the first opportunity.'

'Do, and send me a full description.'

His thoughts reverted to the views before them.

'After all, this isn't so bad. There's a great advantage in living so near the Heath. I'm sure the air here is admirable; don't you smell how fresh it is? And then, one gets fond of the place one's lived in for years. I believe I should find it hard to leave Dunfield.'

Emily smiled gently.

'I wonder,' he pursued, 'whether you have the kind of feeling that came to me just then? It struck me that, suppose anything happened that would enable us to go and live in another place, there would be a sort of ingratitude, something like a shabby action, in turning one's back on the old spot. I don't like to feel unkind even to a town.'

The girl glanced at him with meaning eyes. Here was an instance of the sympathetic relations of which she had spoken to Wilfrid; in these words was disclosed the origin of the deepest sensibilities of her own nature.

They pursued their walk, across the common and into a tree-shaded lane. Emily tried to believe that this at length was really the country; there were no houses in view, meadows lay on either hand, the leafage was thick. But it was not mere prejudice which saw in every object a struggle with hard conditions, a degeneration into coarseness, a blight. The quality of the earth was probably poor to begin with; the herbage seemed of gross fibre; one would not risk dipping a finger in the stream which trickled by the roadside, it suggested an impure source. And behold, what creatures are these coming along the lane, where only earth-stained rustics should be met? Two colliers, besmudged wretches, plodding homeward from the 'pit' which is half a mile away. Yes, their presence was in keeping with the essential character of the scene.

'One might have had a harder life,' mused Mr. Hood aloud, when the pitmen were gone by.

'I think there's a fallacy in that,' replied Emily. 'Their life is probably not hard at all. I used to feel that pity, but I have reasoned myself out of it. They are really happy, for they know nothing of their own degradation.'

'By the bye,' said her father presently, 'how is young Mr. Athel, the young fellow who had to come home from college?'

'He is quite well again, I think,' was Emily's reply.

'I suppose, poor fellow, he has a very weak constitution?'

'Oh no, I think not.'

'What is he studying for? Going into the Church?'

Emily laughed; it was a relief to do so.

'Isn't it strange,' she said, 'how we construct an idea of an unknown person from some circumstance or piece of description? I see exactly what your picture of Mr. Athel is: a feeble and amiable young man, most likely with the shocking voice with which curates sometimes read the lessons—'

She broke off and laughed again.

'Well,' said her father, 'I admit I thought of him a little in that way—I scarcely know why.'

'You could hardly have been further from the truth. Try to imagine the intellectual opposite of such a young man, and you—That will be far more like Mr. Athel.'

'He isn't conceited? My want of experience has an unfortunate tendency to make me think of young fellows in his position as unbearably vain. It must be so hard to avoid it.'

'Perhaps it is, if they have the common misfortune to be born without brains.'

Other subjects engaged their attention.

'When do you take your holiday, father?' Emily asked.

'I think about the middle of this month. It won't be more than a week or ten days.'

'Don't you think you ought to go to Cleethorpes, if only for a day or two?'

To suggest any other place of summer retreat would have been too alarming. Mr. Hood's defect of imagination was illustrated in this matter; he had been somehow led, years ago, to pay a visit to Cleethorpes, and since then that one place represented for him the seaside. Others might be just as accessible and considerably more delightful, but it did not even occur to him to vary. It would have cost him discomfort to do so, the apprehension of entering upon the unknown. The present was the third summer which had passed without his quitting home. Anxiety troubled his countenance as Emily made the proposal.

'Not this year, I think,' he said, as if desirous of passing the subject by.

'Father, what possible objection can there be to my bearing the expense of a week at Cleethorpes? You know how well I can afford it; indeed I should like to go; it is rather unkind of you to refuse.'

This was an old subject of discussion. Since Emily had lived away from home, not only her father, but her mother just as strenuously, had refused to take from her any of the money that she earned. It had been her habit at first indirectly to overcome this resistance by means of substantial presents in holiday time; but she found such serious discomfort occasioned by the practice that most reluctantly she had abandoned it. For the understanding of the Hoods' attitude in this matter, it must be realised how deeply their view of life was coloured by years of incessant preoccupation with pecuniary difficulties. The hideous conception of existence which regards each individual as fighting for his own hand, striving for dear life against every other individual, was ingrained in their minds by the inveterate bitterness of their own experience; when Emily had become a woman, and was gone forth to wrest from the adverse world her own subsistence, her right to what she earned was indefeasible, and affection itself protested against her being mulcted for their advantage. As for the slight additional expense of her presence at home during the holidays, she must not be above paying a visit to her parents; the little inconsistency was amiable enough. Father and mother both held forth to her in the same tone: 'You have the battle of life before you; it is a terrible one, and the world is relentless. Not only is it your right, but your very duty, to spare every penny you can; for, if anything happened to prevent your earning money, you would become a burden upon us—a burden we would gladly strive to bear, but the thought of which would be very hard for yourself. If, on the other hand, your mother were left a widow, think how dreadful it would be if you could give her no assistance. You are wrong in spending one farthing more than your absolute needs require; to say you do it in kindness to us is a mere mistake of yours.' The logic was not to be encountered; it was as irresistible as the social conditions which gave it birth. Emily had abandoned discussion on these points; such reasoning cost her sickness of heart. In practice she obeyed her parents' injunctions, for she herself was hitherto only too well aware of the fate which might come upon her in consequence of the most trifling mishap; she knew that no soul in the world save her parents would think it a duty to help her, save in the way of bare charity. Naturally her old point of view was now changed; it was this that led her to revive the discussion with her father, and to speak in a tone which Mr. Hood heard with some surprise.

'Next year, perhaps, Emily,' he said. 'After Surrey, I don't think you can really need another change. I am delighted to see how well you look. I, too, am remarkably well, and I can't help thinking your mother gets stronger. How do you find her looking?'

'Better than usual, I really think. All the same, it is clearly impossible for you and her to live on year after year without any kind of change.'

'Oh, my dear, we don't feel it. It's so different with older people; a change rather upsets us than otherwise. You know how nervous your mother gets when she is away from home.'

Their walk brought them round again to the top of the Heath. Mr. Hood looked at his watch, and found that it was time to be moving homewards. Tea was punctually at five. Mrs. Hood would take it ill if they were late, especially on Saturday.

As they walked across the smooth part of the upper common, looking at the houses around, they saw coming towards them a gentleman followed by three dogs. He was dressed in a light tweed suit, and brandished a walking-stick, as if animal spirits possessed him strongly.

'Why, here comes Mr. Dagworthy,' remarked Mr. Hood, in a low tone, though the other was still at a considerable distance. 'He generally goes off somewhere on Saturday afternoon. What a man he is for dogs! I believe he keeps twenty or thirty at the house there.'

Emily evinced just a little self-consciousness. It was possible that Mr. Dagworthy would stop to speak, for she had become, in a measure, acquainted with him in the preceding spring. She was at home then for a few weeks before her departure for London, and the Baxendales, who had always shown her much kindness, invited her to an evening party, at which Dagworthy was present. He had chatted with her on that occasion.

Yes, he was going to speak. He was a man of five-and-thirty, robust, rather florid, with eyes which it was not disagreeable to meet, though they gazed with embarrassing persistency, and a mouth which he would have done well to leave under the natural shelter of a moustache; it was at once hard and sensual. The clean-shaving of his face gave his appearance a youthfulness to which his tone of speech did not correspond.

'How do you do, Miss Hood? Come once more into our part of the world, then? You have been in London, I hear.'

It was the tone of a man long accustomed to have his own way in life, and not overmuch troubled with delicacies of feeling. His address could not be called disrespectful, but the smile which accompanied it expressed a sort of good-natured patronage, perhaps inevitable in such a man when speaking to his clerk's daughter. The presence of the clerk himself very little concerned him. He kept his eyes steadily on the girl's face, examining her with complete frankness. His utterance was that of an educated man, but it had something of the Yorkshire accent, a broadness which would have distressed the ear in a drawing-room.

Emily replied that she had been in London; it did not seem necessary to enter into details.

'Pleasant afternoon, isn't it? Makes one want to get away to the moors. I suppose you will be off somewhere soon with your family, Mr. Hood?'

He would not have employed the formal prefix to his clerk's name but for Emily's presence; the father knew that, and felt grateful.

'Not this year, I think, sir,' he replied, with perfect cheerfulness.

Of the three dogs that accompanied Dagworthy, one was a handsome collie. This animal came snuffing at Emily's hand, and involuntarily, glad perhaps to have a pretence for averting her face, she caressed the silky ears.

'Fine head, isn't it, Miss Hood?' said Dagworthy at once, causing her to remove her hand quickly. 'Ay, but I've a finer collie than that. Just walk in with me, will you?' he added, after a scarcely perceptible pause. 'I always like to show off my dogs. You're in no hurry, I suppose? Just come and have a look at the kennels.'

Emily was deeply annoyed, both because such a visit was in itself distasteful to her, and on account of the irritation which she knew the delay would cause her mother. She did not for a moment expect her father to refuse; his position would not allow him to do so. Mr. Hood, in fact, murmured

thanks, after a mere half glance at his daughter, and the three walked together to Dagworthy's house, the entrance to which was not fifty yards from where they were standing.

The dwelling was neither large nor handsome, but it stood in a fine garden and had an air of solid well-being. As soon as they had passed the gates, they were met by a middle-aged woman carrying a child of two years old, an infant of wonderfully hearty appearance. At the sight of its father it chuckled and crowed. Dagworthy took it from the woman's arms, and began a game which looked not a little dangerous; with surprising strength and skill, he tossed it up some feet into the air, caught it as it descended, tossed it up again. The child shrieked with delight, for all that the swift descent positively stopped its breath, and made a hiatus in the screaming.

'Theer, that's abaht enough, Mr. Richard,' said the woman, in broad dialect, when the child had gone up half a dozen times; she was nervous, and kept holding out her arms involuntarily. 'Ah doan't ovver much fancy that kind o' laakin. What's more, he's allus reight dahn fratchy after a turn o' that. See nah, he'll nivver want you to stop. Do a' done nah, Mr. Richard.'

'Here you are then; take him in, and tell them I want some tea; say I have friends with me.'

The child was carried away, roaring obstreperously, and Dagworthy, laughing at the vocal power displayed, led the way round to the back of the house. Here had been constructed elaborate kennels; several dogs were pacing in freedom about the clean yard, and many more were chained up. Much information was imparted to the visitors concerning the more notable animals; some had taken prizes at shows, others were warranted to do so, one or two had been purchased at fancy prices. Mr. Hood now and then put a question, as in duty bound to do; Emily restricted her speech to the absolutely necessary replies.

Dagworthy conducted them into the house. It appeared to be furnished in a solid, old-fashioned way, and the ornaments, though few, were such as might better have been dispensed with. Old Dagworthy had come to live here some five-and-twenty years previously, having before that occupied a small house in conjunction with his mill. He had been one of the 'worthies' of Dunfield, and in his time did a good deal of useful work for the town. Personally, he was anything but amiable, being devoid of education and refinement, and priding himself on his spirit of independence, which exhibited itself in mere boorishness. Though anything but miserly, he had, where his interests were concerned, an extraordinary cunning and pertinacity; he was universally regarded as one of the shrewdest men of business in that part of Yorkshire, and report credited him with any number of remarkable meannesses. It was popularly said that 'owd Dick Dagworthy' would shrink from no dirty trick to turn a sixpence, but was as likely as not to give it away as soon as he had got it. His son had doubtless advanced the character of the stock, and, putting aside the breeding of dogs, possessed many tastes of which the old man had no notion; none the less, he was credited with not a little of his father's spirit in business. In practical affairs he was shrewd and active; he never—as poor Hood might have testified—paid a man in his employ a penny more than there was need, and fell far short of the departed Dagworthy's generosity; to be at his mercy in a pecuniary transaction was to expect and to receive none. For all that, there was something in the man which hinted at qualities beneath the surface; a glance, a tone, now and then, which seemed on the point of revealing a hidden humanity.

When he chose, he could be courteous; he was so at present, as he requested Emily and her father to seat themselves in a large homely room which looked out upon the garden. The woman who had carried the child reappeared and poured out cups of tea. When she had left the room—

'I must ask you to excuse the roughness of my establishment, Miss Hood,' he said. 'I have to make shift for the resent with Mrs. Jenkins. She isn't as refined as she might e, but she's been with us here for more than twelve years, and I should be sorry to replace her with any other servant.'

Pieces of bread and butter of somewhat undue solidity were offered. Emily 'declined anything but the cup of tea. She was very ill at ease, though she succeeded in suppressing any manifestation of it; Dagworthy kept his gaze on her constantly.

'Now I know you didn't care very much about the dogs,' he said to her presently. 'I think I've got something here that will be rather more in your line.'

He brought from a corner of the room a large portfolio, set it upon a chair in front of Emily, and exposed its contents. These were a number of fine photographs of continental cathedrals and churches.

'I bought these when I took my run through France and Germany last year,' he explained. 'I've something of a turn for architecture, I believe; at all events, I know I like a fine building, and I like to find out all I can about it.'

He went through the collection, with remarks which proved that he had certainly attained a rudimentary knowledge of the subject, and that his appreciation was often keen when his technical understanding might be at fault.

'The worst of it is,' he said, at one point, with a modesty which was a new feature in his conversation, 'I can't pronounce the names properly. Now, how do you read that, Miss Hood? To be sure; I know it when I hear it. Have you ever been in France?'

The negative reply came.

'You'd like to see the old-fashioned streets in which some of these churches stand.'

As soon as it was possible to do so, Emily looked meaningfully at her father, and he, just as anxious to be on his way homeward, rose for leave-taking. Dagworthy offered no opposition; he went with them to the gates, and shook hands with both, then stood gazing after them as they walked across the common.

'Well, I never knew young Dagworthy anything like that before,' said Mr. Hood, when they were at some distance from the gate. 'I couldn't believe it when he asked us to go into the house.'

'I'm afraid mother will be very uneasy,' was Emily's reply.

'Yes, my dear, I'm afraid she will; let's walk sharply. But he was really uncommonly pleasant; I shall think a good deal better of him than I have done.'

This was the only aspect of the afternoon's adventure which presented itself to Mr. Hood. Emily was divided between relief at having got away from that persistent gaze and apprehension of what might meet them on their arrival at home. The latter feeling was only too well justified. Mrs. Hood sat in the kitchen, the window darkened. When speech was at length elicited from her, it appeared that a headache to which she was subject had come on in its severest form. Emily was at once active with remedies, not that any of those that she urged were likely to avail themselves, but because she was well aware that the more solicitude she showed the sooner her mother would resume her ordinary state. Mrs. Hood begged to be left to herself; let them have their tea and leave her in the kitchen, she was best there, out of people's way; it would soon be bedtime, the evening was practically gone. In the course of half an hour she was at length prevailed upon to come into the sitting-room, and even to taste a cup of tea. At first she had paid no attention to the reasons alleged for the unpunctuality; little by little she began to ask questions on her own account, petulantly but with growing interest. Still, the headache was not laid aside, and all spent a very dolorous evening.

In the relation these things have their humorous side; Emily may be excused if she was slow to appreciate it. She knew very well that the crisis meant for her father several days of misery, and perhaps in her youthful energy she was disposed to make too little allowance for her mother, whose life had been so full of hardship, and who even now was suffering from cares and anxieties the worst of which her daughter was not allowed to perceive. After the girl's early departure to her bedroom the other two sat talking drearily; after one of her headaches Mrs. Hood always dwelt in conversation on the most wretched features of her life, with despairing forecast. Poor woman, there was little of a brighter kind to occupy her thoughts. Two occasions of grave anxiety were at present troubling her, and, though he spoke of them less, her husband in no less a degree. It had just been announced to them that at the ensuing Christmas their rent would be raised, and at the same time the tenant who had for years occupied the house which they owned in the town of Barnhill had given notice of

departure. There was a certain grotesqueness in the fact of James Hood being a proprietor of real estate. Twice an attempt had been made to sell the house in question, but no purchaser could be found; the building was in poor repair, was constantly entailing expense to the landlord, and, in the event of its becoming unoccupied, would doubtless wait long for another tenant. This event had come about, or would in a couple of months, and the loss of that five-and-twenty pounds a year would make the difficulty of existence yet more desperate. Once more an attempt at sale must be made, in itself involving outlays which, however petty, could ill be borne; and to sell, even if it could be done, meant a serious loss of income.

'What did it mean, do you think?' Mrs. Hood asked, recurring to the subject of Dagworthy and his astonishing behaviour. She put the question dispiritedly, not venturing to hope for a solution that would help her to a more cheerful frame of mind.

Hood scarcely dared to utter the words which came into his mind.

'You remember that they met at the Baxendales'—'

'How did Emily behave?' the mother next inquired.

'She was very quiet. I don't think she liked it. We must bear in mind the kind of society she is used to. Young Dagworthy won't seem of much account to her, I fancy.'

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