

Woolson Constance Fenimore

Jupiter Lights



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I

“IT’S extraordinary navigation, certainly,” said Miss Bruce.

“Oh, mem, if you please, isn’t it better than the hother?” answered Meadows, respectfully.

Meadows was Miss Bruce’s maid; one could have told that she was English (even if one had not heard her speak) from her fresh, rosy complexion, her smooth hair put plainly and primly back from her forehead, her stiff-backed figure with its elbows out, and her large, thick-soled boots.

“I don’t mind being ’umped-up on the bank, miss, if you please,” she went on in her sweet voice, dropping her h’s (and adding them, too) in unexpected places. “It’s those great waves we ’ad last week, mem, if you please, that seemed so horful.”

“I am sorry you will have to see them again so soon,” Miss Bruce answered, kindly.

For Meadows was to return to England immediately; she was accompanying the American lady for the journey only. Miss Bruce was not rich; in her own land she did not intend to give herself the luxury of a lady’s-maid – an indulgence more unusual in the great Republic (at least the northern half of it) than fine clothes, finer houses, or the finest diamonds.

The little steamboat which carried these travellers was aground in a green plain, a grassy, reedy prairie, which extended unbroken as far as the eye could reach on all sides save one; here there was, at some distance, a bank or shore of dark land, dark in comparison with the green. Beyond this shore – and one could easily see over it – stretched the sea, “the real sea,” as Miss Bruce called it, “and not all this grass!” It was this remark of hers which had drawn out the protest of poor Meadows.

Miss Bruce had crossed from England to New York; she had then journeyed southward, also by sea, to Savannah, and from that leafy town, as fair as is its name, she had continued her voyage in this little boat, the *Altamaha*, by what was called the Inland Route, a queer, amusing passage, winding in and out among the sounds and bays, the lagoons and marsh channels of the coast, the ocean almost always in sight on the left side, visible over the low islands which constantly succeeded each other, and which formed the barrier that kept out the “real sea,” that ravaging, ramping, rolling, disturbing surface upon whose terrific inequalities the Inland Route relied for its own patronage. There were no inequalities here, certainly, unless one counted as such the sensation which Meadows had described as “being ’umped up.” The channel was very narrow, and as it wound with apparent aimlessness hither and thither in the salt-marsh, it made every now and then such a short turn, doubling upon itself, that the steamer, small as she was, could only pass it by running ashore, and then allowing her bows to be hauled round ignominiously by the crew in a row-boat; while thus ashore, one side half out of water, her passengers, sitting on that side, had the sensation which the English girl had pictured. At present the *Altamaha* had not run herself aground purposely, but by accident; the crew did not descend to the row-boat this time, but, coming up on deck, armed with long poles, whose ends they inserted in the near bank with an air of being accustomed to it, they shoved the little craft into deep water with a series of pushes which kept time to their chorus of

“Ger-long! Ger-long! Mo-ses!”

“I don’t see how we are to get on here at all at night,” said Miss Bruce.

But before night the marsh ended as suddenly as it had begun, and the *Altamaha* was gliding onward again between banks equally low and near, but made of solid earth, not reeds. The sun sank in the west, the gorgeous colors of the American sunset flamed in the sky. The returning American

welcomed them. She was not happy; she was as far as possible from being what is called amiable; but for the moment she admired, forgetting her own griefs. Then the after-glow faded; Meadows brought a shawl from their tiny cabin and folded it round her mistress; it was the 23d of December, and the evening air was cool, but not cold. By-and-by in the dusky twilight a gleam shone out ahead, like an immense star.

“What is that, captain?” Miss Bruce asked, as this official happened to pass near her chair.

“That? Jupiter Light.”

“Then we must be near Warwick?” She gave to the name its English pronunciation, the only one she knew.

The captain declined to say whether they were near it or not, as it was a place he had never heard of. “The next landing is War-wick,” he announced, impersonally, pronouncing the name according to its spelling.

“So near?” said Miss Bruce, rising.

“No hurry. Ain’t there yet.”

And so it proved. A moon rose, and with it a mist. The *Altamaha*, ceasing her nosing progress through the little channels, turned sharply eastward, and seemed suddenly to have entered the ocean, for great waves began to toss her and knock her about with more and more violence, until at last the only steady thing in sight was the blazing star of Jupiter Light, which still shone calmly ahead. After half an hour of this rough progress a low beach presented itself through the mist, and the blazing star disappeared, its place being taken by a spectral tower, tall and white, which stood alone at the end of a long curving tongue of sand. The steamer, with due caution, drew near a lonely little pier.

“It isn’t much of a place, then?” said Miss Bruce, as the captain, in the exigencies of making a safe landing with his cockle-shell, again paused for a moment near her chair.

“Place? Post-office and Romney; that’s all. Slacken off that line there – you hear? Slacken, I tell you!”

A moment later the traveller, having made her way with difficulty through the little boat’s dark, wet, hissing lower regions, emerged, and crossed a plank to the somewhat safer footing beyond.

“Is this Cicely?” she asked, as a small figure came to meet her.

“Yes, I am Cicely.”

Eve Bruce extended her hand. But Cicely put up her face for a warmer greeting.

“Are those your trunks? Oh, you have brought some one with you?”

“It’s only Meadows, my maid; she goes back to-morrow when the boat returns.”

“There’s room for her, if you mean that; the house is large enough for anything. I was only wondering what our people would make of her; they have never seen a white servant in their lives.”

“You didn’t bring – the baby?” asked Eve Bruce.

“Jack? Oh, no; Jack’s asleep.”

Eve quivered at the name.

“Are you cold?” said Cicely. “We’ll start as soon as that hissing boat gets off. I hope you don’t mind riding behind a mule? Oh, look!” and she seized her companion’s arm. “Uncle Abram is shocked that your maid – what did you call her – Fields? – should be carrying anything – a white lady, as he supposes; and he is trying to take the bag away from her. She’s evidently frightened; Pomp and Plato haven’t as many clothes on as they might have, I acknowledge. Oh, do look!”

Eve, still quivering, glanced mechanically in the direction indicated.

A short negro, an old man with abnormally long arms, was endeavoring to take from Meadows’s grasp a small hand-bag which she was carrying. Again and again he tried, and the girl repulsed him. Two more negroes approached, and lifted one of the trunks which she was guarding. She followed the trunk; and now Uncle Abram, coming round on the other side, tried to get possession of a larger bag which she held in her left hand. She wrenched it from him several times desperately, and then, as he still persisted, she used it as a missile over the side of his head, and began to shriek and run.

The noise of the hissing steam prevented Miss Bruce from calling to her distracted handmaid. Cicely laughed and laughed. "I didn't expect anything half so funny," she said.

The little *Altamaha* now backed out from the pier into rough water again, and the hissing ceased. Besides the dark heaving waves, the tall light-house, and the beach, there was now nothing to be seen but a row of white sand-hills which blocked the view towards the north.

"This is the sea-shore, isn't it?" said Eve. As she asked her question her voice had in her own ears a horribly false sound; she was speaking merely for the sake of saying something; Cicely's "I didn't expect anything half so funny" had hurt her like the edge of a knife.

"Oh, no; this isn't the sea; this is the Sound," Cicely answered. "The sea is round on the other side. You will hear it often enough at Romney; it booms dreadfully after a storm."

Plato and Pomp now emerged from the mist, each leading a mule; one of these animals was attached to a wagon which had two seats, and the other to a rough cart.

"Will you get in, please?" said Cicely, going towards the wagon. "I reckon your maid had better come with us."

"Meadows! Meadows!" called Miss Bruce. "Never mind the luggage; it is quite safe. You are to come with us in this wagon."

"Yes, mem," responded the English voice. The girl had ceased running; but she still stood guard over the trunks. "And shall I bring the dressing-bags with me, mem?" she added.

"She is bringing them whether or no," said her mistress; "I knew she would. She likes to pretend that one contains a gold-mounted dressing-case and the other a jewel-casket; she is accustomed to such things, and considers them the proper appendages of a lady." Her voice still had to herself a forced sound. But Cicely noticed nothing.

The two ladies climbed into the wagon and placed themselves on the back seat; Meadows, still hugging the supposed treasures, mounted gingerly to her place beside Uncle Abram, disarmed a little by his low brows; and then, after some persuasion, the mule was induced to start, the cart with the luggage following behind, Plato and Pomp beside it. The road was deeply covered with sand; both mules could do no more than walk. At last, after passing the barrier of sand-hills, they came to firmer ground; bushes began to appear, and then low trees. The trees all slanted westward.

"The wind," Cicely explained.

The drive lasted half an hour. "Meadows, put down those bags," said Eve; "they are too heavy for you. But not too near Mrs. Bruce – to trouble her."

The wagon was passing between two high gate-posts (there was no gate); it entered an avenue bordered with trees whose boughs met overhead, shutting out the moonlight. But Uncle Abram knew the way; and so did the mule, who conducted his wagon over the remaining space, and up to the porch of a large low house, in a sudden wild gallop. "Hi-yi!" said Uncle Abram, warningly; "All ri', den, ef yer wanten," he added, rattling the reins. "Lippity-clip!"

The visitor's eyes perceived lights, an open door, and two figures waiting within. The wagon stopped, and Meadows dismounted from her perch. But Cicely, before following her, put her face close to Eve's, and whispered: "I'd better tell you now, so that you won't call me that again – before the others: I'm not Mrs. Bruce any longer; my name is Morrison. I married Ferdinand Morrison six months ago." After this stupefying declaration she pressed Eve's hand, and, jumping lightly to the ground, called out, "Bring the steps, some of you."

There was a sudden dispersion of the group of negroes near the porch; a horse-block with a flight of steps attached was brought, and placed in position for the visitor's descent. It appeared that she needed this assistance, for she had remained motionless in the wagon, making no effort to follow Cicely's example. Now she descended, jealously aided by Meadows, who had retained but one clear idea amid all these bewilderments of night-drives with half-dressed blacks and mad mules through a desert of sand, and that was to do all in her power for the unfortunate lady whom for the moment she was serving; for what must her sufferings be – to come from Hayling Hall to this!

“Here is Eve,” Cicely said, leading the visitor up the steps.

The white-haired man and the tall woman who had been waiting within, came forward.

“Grandpa,” said Cicely, by way of introduction. “And Aunt Sabrina.”

“My father, Judge Abercrombie,” said the tall lady, correctingly. Then she put her arms round Eve and kissed her. “You are very welcome, my dear. But how cold your hands are, even through your gloves! Dilsey, make a fire.”

“I am not cold,” Eve answered.

But she looked so ill that the judge hastily offered her his arm.

She did not accept it. “It is nothing,” she said. Anger now came to her aid, Cicely’s announcement had stunned her. “I am perfectly well,” she went on, in a clear voice. “It has been a long voyage, and that, you know, is tiresome. But now that it is over, I shall soon be myself again, and able to continue my journey.”

“Continue! Are you going any further, then?” inquired Miss Abercrombie, mildly. “I had hoped – we have all hoped – that you would spend a long time with us.” Miss Abercrombie had a soft voice with melancholy cadences; her tones had no rising inflections; all her sentences died gently away.

“You are very kind. It will be impossible,” Miss Bruce responded, briefly.

While speaking these words they had passed down the hall and entered a large room on the right. A negro woman on her knees was hastily lighting a fire on the hearth, and, in another moment, the brilliant blaze, leaping up, made a great cheer. Cicely had disappeared. Judge Abercrombie, discomfited by the visitor’s manner, rolled forward an arm-chair vaguely, and then stood rubbing his hands by the fire, while his daughter began to untie Miss Bruce’s bonnet strings.

“Thanks; I will not take it off now. Later, when I go to my room.” And the visitor moved away from the friendly fingers. Miss Sabrina was very near-sighted. She drew her eye-glasses furtively from her pocket, and, turning her back for an instant, put them on; she wished to have a clearer view of John Bruce’s sister. She saw before her a woman of thirty (as she judged her to be; in reality Eve was twenty-eight), tall, broad-shouldered, slender, with golden hair and a very white face. The eyes were long and rather narrow; they were dark blue in color, and they were not pleasant eyes – so Miss Sabrina thought; their expression was both angry and cold. The cheeks were thin, the outline of the features bold. The mouth was distinctly ugly, the full lips prominent, the expression sullen. At this moment Cicely entered, carrying a little child, a boy of two years, attired only in his little white night-gown; his blue eyes were brilliant with excitement, his curls, rumped by sleep, was flattened down on one side of his head and much fluffed up on the other. The young mother came running across the slippery floor, and put him into Miss Bruce’s arms. “There he is,” she said – “there’s your little Jack. He knows you; I have talked to him about you scores of times.”

The child, half afraid, put up a dimpled hand and stroked Eve’s cheek. “Auntie?” he lisped, inquiringly. Then, after inspecting her carefully, still keeping up the gentle little stroke, he announced with decision, “Ess; Aunty Eve!”

Eve drew him close, and hid her face on his bright hair. Then she rose hurriedly, holding him in her arms, and, with an involuntary motion, moved away from Cicely, looking about the room as if in search of another place, and finally taking refuge beside Miss Sabrina, drawing a low chair towards her with the same unseeing action and sinking into it, the baby held to her breast.

Tall Miss Sabrina seemed to understand; she put one arm round their guest. Cicely, thus deserted, laughed. Then she went to her grandfather, put her arm in his, and they left the room together. When the door had closed after them, Eve raised her eyes. “He is the image of Jack!” she said.

“Yes, I know it,” answered Miss Sabrina. “And I knew how it would affect you, my dear. But I think it is a comfort that he does look like him; don’t you? And now you must not talk any more about going away, but stay here with us and love him.”

“Stay!” said Eve. She rose, and made a motion as if she were going to give the child to her companion. But little Jack put up his hand again, and stroked her cheek; he was crooning meanwhile to himself composedly a little song of his own invention; it was evident that he would never be afraid of her again. Eve kissed him. “Do you think she would give him to me?” she asked, hungrily. “She cannot care for him – not as I do.”

Miss Sabrina drew herself up (in the excess of her sympathy, as well as near-sightedness, she had been leaning so far forward that her flat breast had rested almost on her knees). “Give up her child – her own child? My niece? I think not; I certainly think not.” She took off her glasses and put them in her pocket decisively.

“Then I shall take him from her. And you must help me. What will she care in a month from now – a year? She has already forgotten his father.”

Miss Sabrina was still angry. But she herself had not liked her niece’s second marriage. “The simplest way would be to stay here for the present,” she said, temporizing.

“Stay here? Now? How can you ask it?”

Tears rose in the elder lady’s eyes; she began to wipe them away clandestinely one by one with her long taper finger. “It’s a desolate place now, I know; but it’s very peaceful. The garden is pretty. And we hoped that you wouldn’t mind. We even hoped that you would like it a little – the child being here. We would do all we could. Of course I know it isn’t much.”

These murmured words in the melancholy voice seemed to rouse in Eve Bruce an even more stormy passion than before. She went to Miss Sabrina and took hold of her shoulder. “Do you think I can stand seeing *him*,” she demanded – “here – in Jack’s place? If I could, I would go to-night.” Turning away, she broke into tearless sobs. “Oh Jack – Jack – ”

Light dawned at last in Sabrina Abercrombie’s mind. “You mean Mr. Morrison?” she said, hurriedly rising. “You didn’t know, then? Cicely didn’t tell you?”

“She told me that she had married again; nothing more. Six months ago. She let me come here – you let me come here – without knowing it.”

“Oh, I thought you knew it,” said Miss Sabrina, in distress. “I did not like the marriage myself, Miss Bruce; I assure you I did not. I was very fond of John, and it seemed too sudden. If she had only waited the year – and two years would have been so much more appropriate. I go there very often – to John’s grave – indeed I do; it is as dear to me as the graves of my own family, and I keep the grass cut very carefully; I will show you. You remember when I wrote you that second time? I feared it then, though I was not sure, and I tried to prepare you a little by saying that the baby was now your chief interest, naturally. And *he* wasn’t going to be married,” she added, becoming suddenly incoherent, and taking hold of her throat with little rubs of her thumb and forefinger as Eve’s angry eyes met hers; “at least, not that we knew. I did not say more, because I was not sure, Miss Bruce. But after it had really happened, I supposed of course that Cicely wrote to you.”

“She!”

“But Mr. Morrison is not here; he is not here, and never has been. She met him in Savannah, and married him there; it was at a cousin’s. But she only stayed with him for a few months, and we fear that it is not a very happy marriage. He is in South America at present, and you know how far away that is. I haven’t the least idea when he is coming back.”

The door at the end of the room opened. Cicely’s little figure appeared on the threshold. Miss Sabrina, who seemed to know who it was by intuition, as she could see nothing at that distance, immediately began to whisper. “Of course we don’t *know* that it is an unhappy marriage; but as she came back to us so soon, it struck us so – it made that impression; wouldn’t it have made the same upon you? She must have suffered extremely, and so we ought to be doubly kind to her.” And she laid her hand with a warning pressure on Eve’s arm.

“I am not likely to be unkind as long as there is the slightest hope of getting this child away from her,” answered Eve. “For she is the mother, isn’t she? She couldn’t very well have palmed off

some other baby on you, for Jack himself was here then, I know. Oh, you needn't be afraid, I shall defer to her, yield to her, grovel to her!" She bent her head and kissed the baby's curls. But her tone was so bitter that poor Miss Sabrina shrank away.

Cicely had called to them, "Supper is ready." She remained where she was at the end of the long room, holding the door open with her hand.

II

THE father of John and Eva Bruce was an officer in the United States army. His wife had died when Eve was born. Captain Bruce brought up his children as well as he could; he would not separate himself from them, and so he carried them about with him to the various military stations to which he was ordered. When his boy was sixteen, an opportunity presented itself to him: an old friend, Thomas Ashley, who was established, and well established, in London, offered to take the lad, finish his education, and then put him into the house, as he called it, the house being the place of business of the wealthy English-American shipping firm to which he had the good-fortune to belong.

Captain Bruce did not hesitate. Jack was sent across the seas. Eve, who was then ten years old, wept desperately over the parting. Six years later she too went to England. Her father had died, and, young as she was, her determination to go to her brother was so strong that nothing could stand against it. During the six years of separation Jack had returned to America twice to see his father and sister; the tie between the three had not been broken by absence, but only made stronger. The girl had lived a concentrated life, therefore an isolated one. She had had her own way on almost all occasions. It was said of her, "Any one can see that she has been brought up by a man!" In reality there were two men; for Jack had seemed to her a man when he was only twelve years old. Her father gone, her resolve to go to Jack was, as has been said, so strong that nothing could stand against it. But in truth there was little to oppose to it, and few to oppose her; no one, indeed, who could set up anything like the force of will which she was exhibiting on the other side. She had no near relatives; as for her father's old friends, she rode over them.

"You'll have to let her go; she puts out her mouth so!" said Mrs. Mason, the colonel's wife, at last. The remark, as to its form, was incoherent; but everybody at the post understood her. At sixteen, then, Eve Bruce was sent to England. As soon as she was able she took a portion of the property which came to her from her mother, to make a comfortable home for Jack. For Jack had only his salary, and it was not a large one. He had made himself acceptable in the house, and in due time he was to have a small share of the profits; but the due time was not yet, and would not be for some years. His father's old friend, who had been his friend also, as well as his sponsor in the firm, had died. But his widow, who liked the young American – she was an American herself, though long expatriated – continued to extend to him much kindness; and, when his sister came over, she included her in the invitations. Eve did not care much for these opportunities, nor for the other opportunities that followed in their train; occasionally she went to a dinner; but she found her best pleasure in being with her brother alone. They remained in London all the year round, save for six weeks in August and September. Eve could have paid many a visit in the country during the autumn and winter; but their small, ugly house near Hans Place was more beautiful in her eyes, Jack being there, than the most picturesque cottage with a lawn and rose garden, or even than an ivy-grown mansion in a deer-haunted park.

Thus brother and sister lived on for eight years. Then one morning, early in 1864, Jack, who had chafed against his counting-house chains ever since the April of Sumter, broke them short off; he too had a determined mouth. "I can't stand it any longer, Eve; I am going home. Fortunately you are provided for, or I couldn't. I shall lose my place here, of course; but I don't care. Go I must." A week later he sailed for New York. And he was soon in the army. "Blood will tell," said his father's regimental companions – the few who were left.

Eve, in London, now began to lead that life of watching the telegraphic despatches and counting the days for letters which was the lot of American women during those dark times of war. She remained in London, because it was understood between them that Jack was to return. But she rented their house, and lived in lodgings near by, so as to have all the more money ready for him when he should come back.

But Jack did not come back. When the war reached its end, he wrote that he was going to be married; she was a Southern girl – he was even particular as to her name and position: Cicely Abercrombie, the granddaughter of Judge Abercrombie of Abercrombie’s Island. Eve scarcely read these names; she had stopped at “marry.”

He did marry Cicely Abercrombie in October of that year, 1865.

He wrote long letters to his sister; he wished her to come out and join them. He had leased two of the abandoned cotton plantations – great things could be done in cotton now – and he was sure that he should make his fortune. Eve, overwhelmed with her disappointment and her grief, wrote and rewrote her brief replies before she could succeed in filling one small sheet without too much bitterness; for Jack was still Jack, and she loved him. He had never comprehended the exclusiveness, the jealousy of her affection; he had accepted her devotion and enjoyed it, but he had believed, without thinking much about it at any time, that all sisters were like that. In urging her, therefore, to join them, he did not in the least suspect that the chief obstacle lay in that very word “them,” of which he was so proud. To join “them,” to see some one else preferred; where she had been first, to take humbly a second place! And who could tell whether this girl was worthy of him? Perhaps the bitterest part of the suffering would be to see Jack himself befooled, belittled. The sister, wretchedly unhappy, allowed it to be supposed, without saying so – it was Jack who suggested it – that she would come later; after she had disposed of the lease of their house, and sold their furniture to advantage. In time the furniture was sold, but not to advantage. The money which she had taken from her capital to make a comfortable home for her brother was virtually lost.

Presently it was only a third place that could be offered to her, for, during the next winter, Jack wrote joyfully to announce the birth of a son. He had not made his fortune yet; but he was sure to do so the next year. The next year he died.

Then Eve wrote, for the first time, to Cicely.

In reply she received a long letter from Cicely’s aunt, Sabrina Abercrombie, giving, with real grief, the particulars of Jack’s last hours. He had died of the horrible yellow-fever. Eve was ill when the letter reached her; her illness lasted many months, and kind-hearted Mrs. Ashley took her, almost by force, to her place in the country, beautiful Hayling Hall, in Warwickshire. When at last she was able to hold a pen, Eve wrote again to Cicely; only a few lines (her first epistle had not been much longer); still, a letter. The reply was again from Miss Abercrombie, and, compared with her first communication, it was short and vague. The only definite sentences were about the child; “for *he* is the one in whom you are most interested, *naturally*,” she wrote, under-scoring the “he” and the “naturally” with a pale line; the whole letter, as regards ink, was very pale.

And now Eve Bruce had this child. And she determined, with all the intensity of her strong will, of her burning, jealous sorrow, that he should be hers alone. With such a mother as Cicely there was everything to hope.

III

WHILE the meal, which Cicely had announced as supper, was going on in the dining-room, Meadows was occupying herself in her accustomed evening effort to bring her mistress's abiding-place for the night, wherever it might happen to be, into as close a resemblance to an English bedroom as was, under the circumstances, possible. The resemblance had not been striking, so far, with all her toil, there having been something fundamentally un-English both in the cabins of the *Ville de Havre* and in the glittering salons which served as bedrooms in the Hotel of the Universe in New York. The Savannah boat had been no better, nor the shelf with a roof over it of the little *Altamaha*; on the steamer of the Inland Route her struggle had been with an apartment seven feet long; here at Romney it was with one which had six times that amount of perspective.

A fire, freshly lighted, flared on the hearth, the spicy odor of its light wood still filling the air. And there was air enough to fill, for not one of the doors nor of the row of white windows which opened to the floor fitted tightly in its casing; there were wide cracks everywhere, and Meadows furthermore discovered, to her horror, that the windows had sashes which came only part of the way down, the lower half being closed by wooden shutters only. She barred these apertures as well as she could (some of the bars were gone), and then tried to draw the curtains; but these muslin protections, when they reached the strong current of air which came through the central crack of the shutters, were blown out towards the middle of the room like so many long white ghosts. Meadows surveyed them with a sigh; with a sigh she arranged the contents of Miss Bruce's dressing-bag on the outlandish bare toilet-table; she placed the slippers by the fire and drew forward the easiest chair. But when all was done the room still remained uncomfortably large, and uncomfortably empty. Outside, the wind whistled, the near sea gave out a booming sound; within, the flame of the candle flared now here, now there, in the counter-draughts that swept the room.

"It certainly is the farawayest place!" murmured the English girl.

There came a sound at the door; not a knock, but a rub across the panels. This too was alarming. Meadows kept the door well bolted, and called fearfully, "Who's there?"

"It's ony me – Powlyne," answered a shrill voice. "It's come wid de wines; Miss S'breeny, she sont me."

The tones were unmistakably feminine; Meadows drew back the bolt and peeped out. A negro girl of twelve stood there, bearing a tray which held a decanter and wineglass; her wool was braided in little tails, which stood out like short quills; her one garment was a calico dress, whose abbreviated skirt left her bare legs visible from the knees down-ward.

"Do you want to come in?" said Meadows. "I can take it." And she stretched out her hand for the tray.

"Miss S'breeny she done tole me to put 'em myse'f on de little table close ter der bed," answered Powlyne, craning her neck to look into the room.

Meadows opened the door a little wider, and Powlyne performed her office. Seeing that she was very small and slight, the English girl recovered courage.

"I suppose you live here?" she suggested.

"Yass, 'm."

"And when there isn't any one else 'andy, they send you?"

"Dey sonds me when dey wanster, I's Miss S'breeny's maid," answered Powlyne, digging her bare heel into the matting.

"Her maid? – for gracious sake! What can *you* do?"

"Tuckenoffener shoes. *En* stockin's."

"Tuckenoffener?"

"Haul'em off. Yass, 'm."

“Well, if I hever!” murmured Meadows, surveying this strange coadjutor, from the erect tails of wool to the bare black toes.

There was a loud groan in the hall outside. Meadows started.

“Unc’ Abram, I spec, totin’ up de wood,” said Powlyne.

“Is he ill?”

“Ill!” said the child, contemptuously. “He’s dat dair sassy ter-night!”

“Is he coming in here? Oh, don’t go away!” pleaded Meadows. She had a vision of another incursion of black men in bathing costumes.

But Uncle Abram was alone, and he was very polite; he bowed even before he put the wood down, and several times afterwards. “Dey’s cookin’ suppah for yer, miss,” he announced, hospitably. “Dey’ll be fried chickens en fixin’s; en hot biscuits; en jell; en coffee.”

“I should rather have tea, if it is equally convenient,” said Meadows, after a moment’s hesitation.

“Dere, now, doan yer *like* coffee?” inquired Uncle Abram, looking at her admiringly. For it was such an extraordinary dislike that only very distinguished people could afford to have it. “Fer my part,” he went on, gazing meditatively at the fire which he had just replenished, “I ’ain’t nebber had ’nuff in all my borned days – no, not et one time. Pints wouldn’t do me. Ner yet kortts. I ’ain’t nebber had a gallion.”

Voices were now heard in the hall. Cicely entered, followed by Eve Bruce.

“All the darkies on the island will be coming to look at her to-morrow,” said Cicely, after Meadows had gone to her supper; “they’ll be immensely stirred up about her. She’s still afraid – did you see? – she kept as far away as she could from poor old Uncle Abram as she went down the hall. The field hands will be too much for her; some of the little nigs have no clothes at all.”

“She won’t see them; she goes to-morrow.”

“That’s as you please; if I were you, I would keep her. They will bring a mattress in here for her presently; perhaps she has never slept on the floor?”

“I dare say not. But she can for once.”

Cicely went to one of the windows; she opened the upper half of the shutter and looked out. “How the wind blows! Jupiter Light shines right into your room.”

“Yes, I can see it from here,” said Eve. “It’s a good companion – always awake.” She was speaking conventionally; she had spoken conventionally through the long supper, and the effort had tired her: she was not in the least accustomed to concealing her thoughts.

“Always awake. Are *you* always awake?” said Cicely, returning to the fire.

“I? What an idea!”

“I don’t know; you look like it.”

“I must look very tired, then?”

“You do.”

“Fortunately you do not,” answered Eve, coldly. For there was something singularly fresh about Cicely; though she had no color, she always looked fair and perfectly rested, as though she had just risen from a refreshing sleep. “I suppose you have never felt tired, really tired, in all your life?” Eve went on.

“N – no; I don’t know that I have ever felt *tired*, exactly,” Cicely answered, emphasizing slightly the word “tired.”

“*You* have always had so many servants to do everything for you,” Eve responded, explaining herself a little.

“We haven’t many now; only four. And they help in the fields whenever they can – all except Dilsey, who stays with Jack.”

Again the name. Eve felt that she must overcome her dread of it. “Jack is very like his father,” she said, loudly and decidedly.

“Yes,” answered Cicely. Then, after a pause, “Your brother was much older than I.”

“Oh, Jack was *young!*”

“I don’t mean that he was really old, he hadn’t gray hair. But he was thirty-one when we were married, and I was sixteen.”

“I suppose no one forced you to marry him?” said the sister, the flash returning to her eyes.

“Oh, yes.”

“Nonsense!”

“I mean he did – Jack himself did. I thought that perhaps you would feel so.”

“Feel how?”

“Why, that we made him – that we tried, or that I tried. And so I have brought some of his letters to show you.” She took a package from her pocket and laid it on the mantelpiece. “You needn’t return them; you can burn them after reading.”

“Oh, probably,” answered Eve, incoherently. She felt choked with her anger and grief.

There was a murmuring sound in the hall, and Miss Sabrina, pushing the door open with her foot, entered apologetically, carrying a jar of dark-blue porcelain, ornamented with vague white dragons swallowing their tails. The jar was large; it extended from her knees to her chin, which rested upon its edge with a singular effect. “My dear,” she said, “I’ve brought you some po-purry; your room hasn’t been slept in for some time, though I *hope* it isn’t musty.”

The jar had no handles; she had difficulty in placing it upon the high chest of drawers. Eve went to her assistance. And then Miss Sabrina perceived that their guest was crying. Eve changed the jar’s position two or three times. Miss Sabrina said, each time, “Yes, yes; it is much better so.” And, furtively, she pressed Eve’s hand.

Jack Bruce’s wife, meanwhile – forgotten Jack – stood by the hearth, gazing at the fire. She was a little creature, slight and erect, with a small head, small ears, small hands and feet. Yet somehow she did not strike one as short; one thought of her as having the full height of her kind, and even as being tall for so small a person. This effect was due, no doubt, to her slender lighthness; she was light and cool as the wind at dawn, untrammelled by too much womanhood. Her features were delicate; the oval of her face was perfect, her complexion a clear white without color. Her lustreless black hair, very fine and soft, was closely braided, the plaits arranged at the back of the head as flatly as possible, like a tightly fitting cap. Her great dark eyes with long curling lashes were very beautiful. They had often an absent-minded look. Under them were bluish rings. Slight and smooth as she was – the flesh of her whole body was extraordinarily smooth, as though it had been rubbed with pumice-stone – she yet seemed in one way strong and unyielding. She was quiet in her looks, in her actions, in her tones.

Eve had now choked down her tears.

“I sent Powlyne with some cherry-bounce,” said Miss Sabrina, giving Eve’s hand, secretly, a last pressure, as they came back to the hearth. “Your maid will find it – such a nice, worthy person as she seems to be, too; so generally desirable all round. If she is really to leave you to-morrow, you must have some one else. Let me see – ”

“I don’t want any one, thanks,” Eve answered. Two spots of color rose in her cheeks. “That is, I don’t want any one unless I can have Jack?” She turned to Cicely, who still stood gazing at the fire. “May Jack sleep here?”

“With Dilsey?” said Cicely, lifting her eyes with a surprised glance.

“Yes, with Dilsey. The room is large.”

“I am sure I don’t care; yes, if you like. He cries at night sometimes.”

“I hope he will,” responded Eve, and her tone was almost fierce. “Then I can comfort him.”

“Dilsey does that better than any one else; he is devoted to her; when he cries, I never interfere,” said Cicely, laughing.

Eve bit her lips to keep back the retort, “But *I* shall!”

“It is a sweet idea,” said Miss Sabrina, in her chanting voice. “It is sweet of Miss Bruce to wish to have him, and sweet of you, Cicely, to let him go. We can arrange a little nursery at the other

end of this room to-morrow; there's a chamber beyond, where no one sleeps, and the door could be opened through, if you like. I am sure it will be very nice all round."

Eve turned and kissed her. Cicely pushed back a burning log with her foot, and laughed again, this time merrily. "It seems so funny, your having the baby in here at night, just like a mother, when you haven't been married at all. Now I have been married twice. To be sure, I never meant to be!"

"My precious child!" Miss Sabrina remonstrated.

"No, auntie, I never did. It came about," Cicely answered, her eyes growing absent again and returning to the fire.

Meadows now came in with deferential step, and presently she was followed by her own couch, which Uncle Abram spread out, in the shape of a mattress, on the floor. The English girl looked on, amazed. But this was a house of amazements; it was like a Drury Lane pantomime.

Later, when the girl was asleep, Eve rose, and, taking the package of letters, which she had put under her pillow, she felt for a candle and matches, thrust her feet into her slippers, and, with her dressing-gown over her arm, stole to the second door; it opened probably into the unoccupied chamber of which Miss Sabrina had spoken. The door was not locked; she passed through, closing it behind her. Lighting her candle, she looked about her. The room was empty, the floor bare. She put her candle on the floor, and, kneeling down beside it, opened the letters. There were but four; apparently Cicely had thought that four would be enough to confirm what she had said. They were enough. More passionate, more determined letters man never wrote to woman; they did not plead so much as insist; they compelled by sheer force of persistent unconquerable love, which accepts anything, bears anything, to gain even tolerance.

And this was Jack, her brother Jack, who had thus prostrated himself at the feet of that indifferent little creature, that cold, small, dark girl who already bore another name! She was angry with him. Then the anger faded away into infinite pity. "Oh, Jack, dear old Jack, to have loved her so, she caring nothing for you! And I am to burn your poor letters that you thought so much about – your poor, poor letters." Sinking down upon the floor, she placed the open pages upon her knees, laying her cheek upon them as though they had been something human. "Some one cares for you," she murmured.

There was now a wild gale outside. One of the shutters was open, and she could see Jupiter Light; she sat there, with her cheek on the letters, looking at it.

Suddenly everything seemed changed, she no longer wept; she felt sluggish, cold. "Don't I care any more?" she thought, surprised. She rose and went back to her bed, glad to creep into its warmth, and leaving the letters on a chair by her bedside. Then, duly, she put them under her pillow again.

IV

ON Christmas Day, Eve was out with little Jack and Dilsey. Dilsey was a negro woman of sixty, small and thin, with a wise, experienced face; she increased her dignity as much as she could by a high stiff white turban, but the rest of her attire was poor and old, though she was not bare-legged like Powlyne; she wore stockings and shoes. Little Jack's wagon was a rude cart with solid wooden wheels; but the hoops of its hood had been twined with holly by the negroes, so that the child's face was enshrined in a bower of green.

"We will go to the sea," said Eve. "Unless it is too far for you and the wagon?"

"No, 'm; push 'em easy 'nuff."

The narrow road, passing between unbroken thickets of glittering evergreen bushes, breast-high, went straight towards the east, like an unroofed tunnel; in twenty minutes it brought them to the shore. The beach, broad, firm, and silver white, stretched towards the north and the south, dotted here and there with drift-wood; a breeze from the water touched their cheeks coolly; the ocean was calm, little foam-crested wavelets coming gurgling up to curl over and flatten themselves out on the wet sand. "Do you see it, Jack?" said Eve, kneeling down by the wagon. "It's the sea, the great big sea."

But Jack preferred to blow his whistle, and that done, he proceeded to examine it carefully, putting his little fat forefinger into all the holes. Eve sat down on the sand beside him; if he scorned the sea, for the moment she did too.

"I's des sauntered ober, Dilsey; dey 'ain't no hurry 'bout comin' back," said a voice. "En I 'low'd miss might be tired, so I fotched a cheer." It was old Temp'rance, the cook.

"Did you bring that chair all the way for me?" asked Eve, surprised.

"Yass, 'm. It's sut'ny pleasant here; it sut'ny is."

"I am much obliged; but I shall be going back soon."

The two old women looked at each other. "Dat dere ole wrack down der beach is moughty cu'us – ef yer like ter walk dat way en see 'em?" suggested Dilsey, after a pause.

"Too far," said Eve.

Both of the old women declared that it was very near. The wind freshened; Eve, who had little Jack in her arms, feared lest he might take cold, thinly clad as he was – far too thinly for her Northern ideas – with only one fold of linen and his little white frock over his breast. She drew the skirt of her dress over his bare knees. Then after a while she rose and put him in his wagon. "We will go back," she said.

Again the two old women looked at each other. But they were afraid of the Northern lady; the munificent presents which she had given them that morning did not bring them any nearer to her. Old Temp'rance, therefore, shouldered her chair again, Dilsey turned the wagon, and they entered the bush-bordered tunnel on their way home, walking as slowly as they could. In only one place was there an opening through the serried green; here a track turned off to the right. When Eve had passed its entrance the first time, there was nothing to be seen but another perspective of white sand and glittering foliage; but on their return her eyes, happening to glance that way, perceived a group of figures at the end. "Who are those people? – what are they doing?" she said, pausing.

"Oh, nutt'n," answered Temp'rance. "Des loungjun roun'."

As Eve still stood looking, Uncle Abram emerged from the bushes. "Shall I kyar your palasol fer yer, miss?" he asked, officiously. "Pears like yer mus' be tired; been so fur."

Eve now comprehended that the three were trying to keep something from her. "What has happened?" she said. "Tell me immediately."

"Dey' ain' nutt'n happen," answered Uncle Abram, desperately; "dey's too brash, dem two! Miss S'breeny she 'low'd dat yer moutn't like ter see her go a moanin', miss; en so she tole us not ter let

yer come dishyer way ef we could he’p it. But dem two – dey’s boun’ ter do some fool ting. It’s a cohesion of malice ’mong women – ’tis dat!”

“Does that road lead to the cemetery, too?” said Eve. “I went by another way. Take baby home, Dilsey” – she stooped and kissed him; “I will join Miss Abercrombie.” She walked rapidly down the side track; the three blacks stood watching her, old Temp’rance with the chair poised on her turban.

The little burying-ground was surrounded by an old brick wall; its high gate-posts were square, each surmounted by a clumsy funeral urn. The rusty iron gate was open, and a procession was passing in. First came Miss Sabrina in her bonnet, an ancient structure of large size, trimmed with a black ribbon; the gentle lady, when out-of-doors, was generally seen in what she called her “flat;” the presence of the bonnet, therefore, marked a solemn occasion. She likewise wore a long scarf, which was pinned, with two pins, low down on her sloping shoulders, its broché ends falling over her gown in front; her hands were encased in black kid gloves much too large for her, the kid wrists open and flapping. Behind her came Powlyne, Pomp, and Plato, carrying wreaths of holly. Eve drew near noiselessly, and paused outside. Miss Sabrina first knelt down, bowing her head upon her hands for a moment; then, rising, she took the wreaths one by one, and arranged them upon the graves, the three blacks following her. When she had taken the last, she signed to them to withdraw; they went out quietly, each turning at the gate to make a reverential bow, partly to her, partly to the circle of the dead. Eve now entered the enclosure, and Miss Sabrina saw her.

“Oh, my dear! I didn’t intend that *you* should come,” she said, distressed.

“And why not? I have been here before; and my brother is here.”

“Yes; but to-day – to-day is different.”

Eve looked at the graves; she perceived that three of them were decked with small Confederate flags.

“Our dear cousins,” said Miss Sabrina; “they died for their country, and on Memorial Day, Christmas Day, and Easter I like to pay them such small honor as I can. I am in the habit of singing a hymn before I go; don’t stay, my dear, if it jars upon you.”

“It doesn’t,” said Eve. She had seated herself on the grass beside her brother’s grave, with her arm laid over it.

Miss Sabrina turned her back and put on her glasses. Then, resuming her original position, she took a small prayer-book from her pocket, opened it, and, after an apologetic cough, began:

“Rise, my soul, and stretch thy wings,
Thy better portion trace.”

Eve, sitting there, looked at her. Miss Sabrina was tall and slender; she had once been pretty, but now her cheeks were wan, her eyes faded, her soft brown hair was very thin. She had but a thread of a voice.

“There is everlasting peace,
Rest, enduring rest, in heaven,”

she sang in her faint, sweet tones; and when she came to the words, “There will sorrows ever cease,” she raised her poor dim eyes towards the sky with such a beautiful expression of hope in them that the younger woman began to realize that there might be acute griefs even when people were so mild and acquiescent, so dimly hued and submissive, as was this meek Southern gentlewoman.

The hymn finished, Miss Sabrina put her prayer-book in her pocket, and came forward. “My mother,” she said, touching one of the tombs. “My grandfather and grandmother. My brother Marmaduke, Cicely’s father. Cicely’s mother; she was a Northerner, and we have sometimes thought Cicely rather Northern.”

“Oh, no!”

“Well, her grandmother was from Guadeloupe. So perhaps that balances it.”

The older tombs were built of brick, each one covered with a heavy marble slab, upon which were inscribed, in stately old-fashioned language, and with old-fashioned arrangement of lines and capitals, the names, the virtues, and the talents of the one who lay beneath. The later graves were simple grassy mounds.

“My brother Augustus; my great-uncle William Drayton; my aunt Pamela,” Miss Sabrina continued, indicating each tomb as she named its occupant, much as though she were introducing them. “My own place is already selected; it is here,” she went on, tapping a spot with her slender foot. “It seems to me a good place; don’t you think so? And I keep an envelope, with directions for everything, on top of my collars, where any one can find it; for I do so dislike an ill-arranged funeral. For instance, I particularly desire that there should be fresh water and glasses on the hall-table, where every one can get them without asking; so much better than hidden in some back room, with every one whispering and hunting about after them. I trust you don’t mind my saying,” she concluded, looking at Eve kindly, “that I hope you may be here.”

They left the cemetery together.

“I suppose it was a shock to you that your niece should marry a Union officer?” Eve said, as they took the shorter path towards the house.

“Ye-es, I cannot deny it; and to my father also. But we liked John for himself very much; and Cicely felt – ”

But John’s sister did not care to hear what Cicely felt! “And was it on this island that he expected to make his fortune – in cotton?”

“No; these are rice lands, and they are worthless now that the dikes are down.”

“And the slaves gone.”

“Yes. But we never had many slaves; we were never rich. Now we are very poor, my dear; I don’t know that any one has mentioned it to you.”

“And yet you keep on all these infirm old negroes – those who would be unable to get employment anywhere else.”

“Oh, we should never turn away our old servants,” replied Miss Sabrina, with confidence.

That evening, at the judge’s suggestion, Cicely took her guitar. “What do you want me to sing, grandpa?”

“Sweet Afton.”

So Cicely sang it. Then the judge himself sang, to Cicely’s accompaniment, “They may rail at this life.” He had made a modest bowl of punch: it was Christmas night, and every one should be merry. So he sang, in his gallant old voice:

“They may rail at this life; from the hour I began it
I’ve found it a life full of kindness and bliss;
And until they can show me some happier planet,
More social, more gay, I’ll content me with this.”

He was contented with it – this life “full of kindness and bliss,” on his lonely sea-island, with its broken dikes and desolated fields, in his half-ruined old house, with its wooden walls vibrating, with more than one pane of glass gone, more than one floor whose planks were loosened so that they must walk carefully. At any rate, he trolled out his song as though he were: it was Christmas night, and every one should be merry.

There was one person who really was merry, and that was Master Jack, who sat on the lap of his Northern aunt, laughing and crowing, and demanding recognition of his important presence from each in turn, by the despotic power of his eye. In truth, it was this little child who held together the

somewhat strangely assorted group, Miss Sabrina in an ancient white lace cape, with flowers in her hair; the old judge in a dress-coat and ruffled shirt, Cicely in a gay little gown of light-blue tint (taken probably, so Eve thought, from her second trousseau), and Eve herself in her heavy black crape; she alone had made no concessions to Christmas; her mourning attire was unlightened by any color, or even by white.

“Macgregor’s Gathering,” called the judge.

Cicely sang it. After finishing the song, she began the lament a second time, changing the words:

“We’re niggerless, niggerless, niggerless, Gregorlach!
Niggerless, niggerless, nig-ig-ig-gerless!”

she sang. “For we’re not ‘landless’ at all; we’ve got miles and miles of land. It’s niggers that are lacking.”

The judge laughed, patting her little dark head as she sat on a stool beside him. “Let us go out to the quarters, grandpa; they will be dancing by now. And Jack must go too.”

The judge lifted his great-grandson to his shoulder. Eve had already noticed that Cicely never took the child from her with her own hands; she let some one else do it. When the door was opened, distant sounds of the thrumming of banjos could be heard. Seeing a possible intention on Eve’s face, Cicely remarked, in her impersonal way, “Are you coming? They won’t enjoy it, they are afraid of you.”

“I don’t see why they should be,” said Eve, when she and Miss Sabrina were left alone.

“You are a stranger, my dear; it is only that. And they are all so fond of Cicely that it wouldn’t be Christmas to them if she did not pay them a visit; they worship her.”

“And after she has sung that song!”

“That song?”

“Niggerless,” quoted Eve, indignantly.

“Well, we are niggerless, or nearly so,” said Miss Sabrina, mystified.

“It’s the word, the term.”

“Oh, you mean nigger? It is very natural to us to say so. I suppose you prefer negroes? If you like, I will try to call them so hereafter. Negroes; yes, negroes.” She pronounced it “nig-roes.” “I don’t know whether I have told you,” she went on, “how much Cicely dislikes dreams?”

“Well she may!” was the thought of Jack Bruce’s sister. What she said, with a short laugh, was, “You had better tell her to be careful about eating hot breads.”

“Would you have her eat *cold* bread?” said Miss Sabina, in surprise. “I didn’t mean that her nights were disturbed; I only meant that she dislikes the *telling* of dreams – a habit so common at breakfast, you know. I thought I would just mention it.”

Eve gave another abrupt laugh. “Do you fear I am going to tell her mine? She would not find them all of sugar.”

“I did not mean yours especially. She has such a curious way of shutting her teeth when people begin – such pretty little white teeth as they are, too, dear child! And she doesn’t like reading aloud either.”

“That must be a deprivation to you,” said Eve, her tone more kindly.

“It is. I have always been extremely fond of it. Are you familiar with Milton? His ‘Comus’?”

“Sabrina fair, listen where thou art sitting?” quoted Eve, smiling.

“Yes.

”Sabrina fair, listen where thou art sitting,
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting – ”

said the Southern lady in her murmurous voice. "You don't know what a pleasure it has always been to me that I am named Sabrina. The English originated 'Comus;' I like the English, they are so cultivated."

"Do you see many of them here?"

"Not many. I am sorry to say my father does not like them; he thinks them affected."

"That is the last thing I should call them."

"Well, those who come here really do say 'serpents' and 'crocodiles.'"

"Do you mean as an oath?" said Eve, thinking vaguely of "Donner und blitzen."

"As an oath? I have never heard it used in that way," answered Miss Sabrina, astonished. "I mean that they call the snakes serpents, and the alligators crocodiles; my father thinks that so very affected."

Thus the wan-cheeked mistress of Romney endeavored to entertain their guest.

That night Eve was sitting by her fire. The mattress of Meadows was no longer on the floor; the English girl had started on her return journey the day before, escorted to the pier by all the blacks of the island, respectful and wondering. The presence of little Jack asleep in his crib behind a screen, with Dilsey on her pallet beside him, made the large wind-swept chamber less lonely; still its occupant felt overwhelmed with gloom. There was a light tap at the door, and Cicely entered; she had taken off her gay blue frock, and wore a white dressing-gown. "I thought I'd see if you were up." She went across and looked at Jack for a moment; then she came back to the fire. "You haven't touched your hair, nor unbuttoned a button; are you always like that?"

"Like what?"

"Trim and taut, like a person going out on horse-back. I should love to see you with your hair down; I should love to see you run and shriek!"

"I fear you are not likely to see either."

Cicely brought her little teeth together with a click. "I've got to get something over in the north wing; will you come? The wind blows so, it's splendid!"

"I will go if you wish," said Eve.

They went down the corridor and turned into another, both of them lighted by the streaks of moonlight which came through the half-closed or broken shutters; the moon was nearly at its full, and very brilliant; a high wind was careering by outside – it cried at the corner of the house like a banshee. At the end of the second hall Cicely led the way through a labyrinth of small dark chambers, now up a step, now down a step, hither and thither; finally opening a door, she ushered Eve into a long, high room, lighted on both sides by a double row of windows, one above the other. Here there were no shutters, and the moonlight poured in, making the empty space, with its white walls and white floor, as light as day. "It's the old ballroom," said Cicely. "Wait here; I will be back in a moment." She was off like a flash, disappearing through a far door.

Eve waited, perforce. If she had felt sure that she could find her way back to her room, she would have gone; but she did not feel sure. As to leaving Cicely alone in that remote and disused part of the house, at that late hour of the night, she cared nothing for that; Eve was hard with people she did not like; she did not realize herself how hard she was. She went to one of the windows and looked out.

These lower windows opened on a long veranda. The veranda was only a foot above the ground; any one, Eve reflected, could cross its uneven surface and look in; she almost expected to see some one cross, and peer in at her, his face opposite hers on the other side of the pane. The moonlight shone on the swaying evergreens; within sight were the waters of the Sound. Presently she became conscious of a current of wind blowing through the room, and turned to see what caused it. There had been no sound of an opening door, or any other sound, but a figure was approaching, coming down the moonlit space rapidly with a waving motion. It was covered with something transparent that glittered and shone; its outlines were vague. It came nearer and nearer, without a sound. Then a mass

of silvery gauze was thrown back, revealing Cicely attired in an old-fashioned ball dress made of lace interwoven with silver threads and decked with little silvery stars; there was a silver belt high up under her arms, and a wreath of the silvery stars shone in her hair. She stood a moment; then snatching up the gauze which had fallen at her feet, she held one end of it, and let the other blow out on the strong cold wind which now filled the room. With this cloudy streamer in her hand, she began lightly and noiselessly to dance, moving over the moonlit floor, now with the gauze blowing out in front of her, now waving behind her as she flew along. Suddenly she let it drop, and, coming to Eve, put her arms round her waist and forced her forward. Eve resisted. But Cicely's hands were strong, her hold tenacious; she drew her sister-in-law down the room in a wild gallopade. In the midst of it, giving a little jump, she seized Eve's comb. Eve's hair, already loosened, fell down on her shoulders. Cicely clapped her hands, and began to take little dancing steps to the tune of "Niggerless, niggerless, nig-ig-ig-gerless!" chanted in a silvery voice. When she came to "less," she held out her gleaming skirt, and dipped down in a wild little courtesy.

Eve picked up her comb and turned back towards the door.

Cicely danced on ahead, humming her song; they passed through the labyrinth of dark little rooms, the glimmering dress acting as guide through the dimness. Cicely went as far as the second hall; here she stopped.

"It's the wind, you know," she said, in her usual voice; "when it blows like this, I always have to do something; sometimes I call out and shout. But I don't care for it, really; I don't care for anything!" Her face, as she spoke, looked set and melancholy. She opened a door and disappeared.

The next day there was nothing in her expression to indicate that there had been another dance at Romney the night before, besides the one at the negro quarters.

Eve was puzzled. She had thought her so unimaginative and quiet; "a passionless, practical little creature, cool and unimpulsive, whose miniature beauty led poor Jack astray, and made him believe that she had a soul!" This had been her estimate. She was alone with the baby; she took him to the window and looked at him earnestly. The little man smiled back at her, playing with the crape of her dress. No, there was nothing of Cicely here; the blue eyes, golden hair, and frank smile – all were his father over again.

"We'll make that Mr. Morrison come back, baby; and then you and I will go away together," she whispered, stroking his curls.

"Meh Kiss'm," said Jack. It was as near as he could come to "Merry Christmas."

"Before another Christmas I'll get you away from her *forever!*" murmured the aunt, passionately.

V

“OUT rowing? If you are doing it to entertain me – ” said Eve.

“I should never think of that; there’s only one thing here that entertains you, and that’s baby,” Cicely answered. She spoke without insistence; her eyes had their absent-minded expression.

“Cicely, give him to me,” Eve began. She must put her wish into words some time. “If I could only make you feel how much I long for it! I will devote my life to him; and it will be a pleasure to me, a charity, because I am so alone in the world. You are not alone; you have other ties. Listen, Cicely, I will make any arrangement you like; you shall always have the first authority, but let me have him to live with me; let me take him away when I go. I will even acknowledge everything you have said: my brother *was* much older than you were; it’s natural that those months with him should seem to you now but an episode – something that happened at the beginning of your life, but which need not go on to its close.”

“I *was* young,” said Cicely, musingly.

“Young to marry – yes.”

“No; I mean young to have everything ended.”

“But that is what I am telling you, it must not be ended; Mr. Morrison must come back to you.”

“He may,” answered Cicely, looking at her companion for a moment with almost a solemn expression.

“Then give baby to me now, and let me go away – before he comes.”

Cicely glanced off over the water; they were standing on the low bank above the Sound. “He could not go north now, in the middle of the winter,” she answered, after a moment.

“In the early spring, then?”

“I don’t know; perhaps.”

Eve’s heart gave a bound. She was going to gain her point.

Having been brought up by a man, she had learned to do without the explanations, the details, which are dear to most feminine minds; so all she said was, “That’s agreed, then.” She was so happy that a bright flush rose in her cheeks, and her smile, as she spoke these last few words, was very sweet; those lips, which Miss Sabrina had thought so sullen, had other expressions.

Cicely looked at her. “You may marry too.”

Eve laughed. “There is no danger. To show you, to make you feel as secure as I do, I will tell you that there have been one or two – friends of Jack’s over there. Apparently I am not made of inflammable material.”

“When you are sullen – perhaps not. But when you are as you are now?”

“I shall always be sullen to that sort of thing. But we needn’t be troubled; there won’t be an army! To begin with, I am twenty-eight; and to end with, every one will know that I have willed my property to baby; and that makes an immense difference.”

“How does it make a difference?”

“In opportunities for marrying, if not also – as I really believe – for falling in love.”

“I don’t see what difference it makes.”

“True, you do not,” Eve replied; “you are the most extraordinary people in the world, you Southerners; I have been here nearly a month, and I am still constantly struck by it – you never think of money at all. And the strangest point is, that although you never think of it, you don’t in the least know how to get on without it; you cannot improve anything, you can only endure.”

“If you will tell Dilsey to get baby ready, I will see to the boat,” answered Cicely. She was never interested in general questions.

Presently they were afloat. They were in a large row-boat, with Pomp, Plato, Uncle Abram, and a field hand at the oars; Cicely steered; Eve and little Jack were the passengers. The home-island

was four miles long, washed by the ocean on one side, the Sound on the other; on the north, Singleton Island lay very near; but on the south there was a broad opening, the next island being six miles distant. Here stood Jupiter Light; this channel was a sea-entrance not only to the line of Sounds, but also to towns far inland, for here opened on the west a great river-mouth, through which flowed to the sea a broad, slow stream coming from the cotton country. They were all good sailors, as they had need to be for such excursions, the Sounds being often rough. The bright winter air, too, was sharp; but Eve was strong, and did not mind it, and the ladies of Romney, like true Southerners, never believed that it was really cold, cold as it is at the North. The voyages in the row-boat had been many; they had helped to fill the days, and the sisters-in-law had had not much else with which to fill them; they had remained as widely apart as in the beginning, Eve absorbed in her own plans, Cicely in her own indifference. Little Jack was always of the party, as his presence made dialogue easy. They had floated many times through the salt marshes between the rattling reeds, they had landed upon other islands, whose fields, like those of Romney, had once been fertile, but which now showed submerged expanses behind the broken dikes, with here and there an abandoned rice-mill. Sometimes they went inland up the river, rowing slowly against the current; sometimes, when it was calm, they went out to sea. To-day they crossed to the other side of the Sound.

“What a long house Romney is!” said Eve, looking back. She did not add, “And if you drop anything on the floor at one end it shakes the other.”

“Yes, it’s large,” Cicely answered. She perceived no fault in it.

“And the name; you know there’s a Romney in Kent?”

“Is there?”

“And your post-office, too; when I think of your Warwick, with its one wooden house, those spectral white sand-hills, the wind, and the tall light-house, and then when I recall the English Warwick, with its small, closely built streets, and the great castle looking down into the river Avon, I wonder if the first-comers here didn’t feel lost sometimes. All the rivers in central England, put together, would be drowned out of sight in that great yellow stream of yours over there.”

But Cicely’s imagination took no flight towards the first-comers, nor towards the English rivers; and, in another moment, Eve’s had come hastily homeward, for little Jack coughed. “He is taking cold!” she exclaimed. “Let us go back.”

“It’s a splendid day; he will take no cold,” Cicely answered. “But we will go back if you wish.” She watched Eve fold a shawl round the little boy. “You ought to have a child of your own, Eve,” she said, with her odd little laugh.

“And you ought never to have had one,” Eve responded.

As they drew near the landing, they perceived Miss Sabrina on the bank. “She has on her bonnet! Where can she be going?” said Cicely. “Oh, I know; she will ask you to row to Singleton Island, to return Mrs. Singleton’s call.”

“But Jack looks so pale – ”

“You’re too funny, Eve! How do you suppose we have taken care of him all this time – before you came?” Eve’s tone was often abrupt, but Cicely’s was never that; the worst you could say of it was that its sweetness was sometimes mocking.

When they reached the landing, Miss Sabrina proposed her visit; “that is, if you care to go, my dear. Dilsey told me that she saw you coming back, so I put on my bonnet on the chance.”

“Eve is going,” remarked Cicely, stepping from the boat; “she wants to see Rupert, he is such a sweet little boy.”

Dilsey took Jack, and presently Miss Sabrina and her guest were floating northward. Eve longed to put her triumph into words: “The baby is mine! In the spring I am to have him.” But she refrained. “When does your spring begin?” she asked. “In February?”

“In March, rather,” answered Miss Sabrina. “Before that it is dangerous to make changes; I myself have never been one to put on thin dresses with the pinguiculas.”

“What are pinguiculas? – Birds?”

“They are flowers,” responded Miss Sabrina, mildly.

“It will be six weeks, then; to-day is the fifteenth.”

“Six weeks to what?”

“To March; to spring.”

“I don’t know that it begins on the very first day,” remarked Miss Sabrina.

“Mine shall!” thought Eve.

Romney was near the northern end of the home-island; the voyage, therefore, was a short one. The chimneys of Singleton House came into view; but the boat passed on, still going northward. “Isn’t that the house?” Eve asked.

“Yes, but the landing is farther on; we always go to the landing, and then walk back through the avenue.”

But when the facade appeared at the end of the neglected road – a walk of fifteen minutes – there seemed to Eve hardly occasion for so much ceremony; the old mansion was in a worse condition than Romney; it sidled and leaned, and one of its wings was a roofless ruin, with the planking of the floor half tilted up, half fallen into the cellar. Miss Sabrina betrayed no perception of the effect of this upon a stranger; she crossed the veranda with her lady-like step, and said to a solemn little negro boy who was standing in the doorway: “Is Mrs. Singleton at home this evening, Boliver? Can she see us? – Miss Bruce and Miss Abercrombie.”

An old negro woman came round the corner of the house, and, cuffing the boy for standing there, ushered the visitors into a room on the right of the broad hall. The afternoon had grown colder, but the doors and windows all stood open; a negro girl, who bore a strong resemblance to Powlyne, entered, and chased out a chicken who was prowling about over the matted floor; then she knelt down, with her long thin black legs stretched out behind, and tried to light a fire on the hearth. But the wind was evidently in the wrong direction for the requirements of that chimney; white smoke puffed into the room in clouds.

“Let us go out on the veranda,” suggested Eve, half choked.

“Oh, but surely – When they have ushered us in here?” responded Miss Sabrina, remonstratingly, though she too was nearly strangled. “It will blow away in a few minutes, I assure you.”

Much of it still remained when Mrs. Singleton entered. She paid no more attention to it than Miss Sabrina had done; she welcomed her guests warmly, kissing Eve on both cheeks, although she had never seen her before. “I have been so much interested in hearing that you are from England, Miss Bruce,” she said, taking a seat beside her. “We always think of England as our old home; I reckon you will see much down here to remind you of it.”

Eve looked about her – at the puffing smoke, at the wandering chicken, who still peered through one of the windows. “I am not English,” she said.

“But you have lived there so long; ever since you were a child; surely it is the same thing,” interposed Miss Sabrina. A faint color rose in her cheeks for a moment. Eve perceived that she preferred to present an English rather than a Northern guest.

“We are all English, if you come to that,” said Mrs. Singleton, confidently. She was small, white-haired, with a sweet face, and a sweet voice that drawled a little.

“Eve is much interested in our nig-roes,” pursued Miss Sabrina; “you know to her they are a novelty.”

“Ah dear, yes, our poor, poor people! When I think of them, Miss Bruce, scattered and astray, with no one to advise them, it makes my heart bleed. For they must be suffering in so many ways; take the one instance of the poor women in their confinements; we used to go to them, and be with them to cheer their time of trial. But now, separated from us, from our care and oversight, what *can* they do? If the people who have been so rash in freeing them had only thought of even that one thing!

But I suppose they did not think of it, and naturally, because the abolitionist societies, we are told, were composed principally of old maids.”

Eve laughed. “Why can’t they have nurses, as other people do?”

“You don’t mean regular monthly nurses, of course?”

“Why not? – if they can afford to pay for them. They might club together to supply them.”

“Oh, I don’t think that would be at all appropriate, really. And Eve does not mean it, I assure you,” said Miss Sabrina, coming to the rescue; “her views are perfectly reasonable, dear Mrs. Singleton; you would be surprised.”

“You would indeed!” Eve thought.

But they talked no more of the nig-roes.

“How is Miss Hillsborough?” Miss Sabrina asked.

“Right well, I am glad to say. My dear Aunt Peggy, Miss Bruce; and what she is to me I can hardly tell you! You know I am something of a talker” – here Mrs. Singleton laughed softly. “And we are so much alone here now, that, were it not for Aunt Peggy, I should fairly have to talk to the chickens!” (One at least would be ready, Eve thought.) “Don’t you know that there are ever so many little things each day that we want to *say* to somebody?” Mrs. Singleton went on. “Thinking them is not enough. And these dear people, like Aunt Peggy, who sit still and listen; – it isn’t what they answer that’s of consequence; in fact they seldom say much; it’s just the chance they give us of putting our own thought into words and seeing how it looks. It *does* make such a difference.”

“You are fortunate,” Eve answered. “And then you have your little boy, too; Cicely has told me about him – Rupert; she says he is a dear little fellow.”

“Dear heart!” exclaimed Miss Sabrina, distressed. “Cicely is sometimes – yes – ”

But Mrs. Singleton laughed merrily. “I will show him to you presently,” she said.

“Mr. Singleton is so extraordinarily agreeable!” said Miss Sabrina, with unwonted animation.

“Oh yes, he is wonderful; and he is a statesman too, a second Patrick Henry. But then as regards the little things of each *day*, you know, we don’t go to our husbands with *those*.”

“What do you do, then? – I mean with the husbands,” Eve asked.

“I think we admire them,” answered Mrs. Singleton, simply.

Lucasta, the negro girl, now appeared with a tray. “Pray take some Madeira,” said their hostess, filling the tiny glasses. “And plum-cake.”

Eve declined. But Miss Sabrina accepted both refreshments, and Mrs. Singleton bore her company. The wine was unspeakably bad, it would have been difficult to say what had entered into its composition; but Madeira had formed part of the old-time hospitality of the house, and something that was sold under that name (at a small country store on the mainland opposite) was still kept in the cut-glass decanter, to be served upon occasion.

Presently a very tall, very portly, and very handsome old man (he well merited three verys) came in, leaning on a cane. “Miss Bruce – little Rupert; our dear little boy,” said Mrs. Singleton, introducing him. She had intended to laugh, but she forgot it; she gazed at him admiringly.

The master of the house put aside his cane, and looked about for a chair. As he stood there, helpless for an instant, he seemed gigantic.

Eve laughed.

Miss Sabrina murmured, “Pleasantry, dear Mr. Singleton; – our foolish pleasantry.”

After the old gentleman had found his chair and seated himself, and had drawn a breath or two, he gave a broad slow smile. “Nanny, are you in the habit of introducing me to your young lady friends as your dear little Rupert? – your little Rupe?”

“Rupe? Never!” answered Mrs. Singleton, indignantly.

“Only our foolish pleasantry,” sighed Miss Sabrina, apologetically.

“It was Cicely,” Eve explained.

“If it was Cicely, it was perfect,” the lame colossus answered, gallantly. “Cicely is heavenly. Upon my word, she is the most engaging young person I have ever seen in my life.”

He then ate some plum-cake, and paid Eve compliments even more handsome than these.

After a while he imparted the news; he had been down to the landing to meet the afternoon steamer, which brought tidings from the outside world. “Melton is dead,” he said. “You know whom I mean? Melton, the great stockbroker; one of the richest men living, I suppose.”

“Oh! where is his soul *now*?” said Mrs. Singleton. Her emotion was real, her sweet face grew pallid.

“Why, I have never heard that he was a bad man, especially,” remarked Eve, surprised.

“He was sure to be – making all that money; it could not be otherwise. Oh, what is his agony at this very moment!”

But Rupert did not sympathize with this mournfulness; when three ladies were present, conversation should be light, poetical. “Miss Bruce,” he said, turning towards Eve – he was so broad that that in itself made a landscape – “have you ever noticed the appropriateness of ‘County Guy’ to this neighborhood of ours?”

“No,” Eve answered. But the words brought her father to her mind with a rush: how often, when she was a child, had he beguiled a dull walk with a chant, half song, half declamation:

“Oh, County Guy, the hour is nigh,
The sun has left the lea.”

She looked at her host, but she did not hear him; a mist gathered in her eyes.

““Oh, County Guy, the hour is nigh,””

began the colossus, placing his plum-cake on his knee provisionally.

““The sun has left the lea;
The orange flower perfumes the bower,
The breeze is on the sea.
The lark his lay who trilled all day
Sits hushed his partner nigh.
Breeze, bird, and flower confess the hour;
But where is County Guy?’”

“The orange flower perfumes the bower; here we have the orange flower and the lea, the bower and the sea; and it’s very rarely that you find all four together. ‘The lark his lay who trilled all day’ – what music it is! There’s no one like Scott.”

His lameness prevented him from accompanying his guests on their walk back to the boat; he stood in the doorway leaning on his cane and waving a courtly farewell, while the chicken, with slowly considering steps, crossed the veranda and entered the drawing-room again.

“Miss Sabrina, please tell me what you know of Ferdinand Morrison,” Eve began, as soon as a turn in the road hid the old house from their view.

Miss Sabrina had expected to talk about the Singletons. “Oh, Mr. Morrison? we did not see him ourselves, you know.”

“But you must have heard.”

“Certainly, we heard. The Singletons are delightful people, are they not? So cultivated! Their house has always been one of the most agreeable on the Sound.”

“I dare say. But about Ferdinand Morrison?” Eve went on. For it was not often that she had so good an opportunity; at Romney, if there was no one else present, there were always the servants, who came in and out like members of the family. “Cicely met him first in Savannah, didn’t she?”

“Yes,” answered Miss Sabrina (but giving up the Singletons with regret); “she went to pay a visit to our cousin Emmeline; and there she met him. From the very beginning he appeared to be much in love with her, Cousin Emmeline wrote. And Cicely too – so we heard – appeared to care for him from the first day. At least Cousin Emmeline received that impression; Cicely, of course, did not take her into her confidence.”

“Why of course?”

“At that early stage? But don’t you think that those first sweet uncertainties are always private? Mr. Morrison used to come every day, and take her out for a drive; I have been in Savannah myself, and I have often thought that probably they went to Bonaventure —*so* delightful! At last, one evening, Cicely told Cousin Emmeline that she was engaged. And the next day she wrote to us. She did not come home; they were married there at Emmeline’s.”

“And none of you went to the wedding?”

“There were only father and I to go; we have not always been able to do as we wished,” replied Miss Sabrina, gently.

“Mr. Morrison had money, I suppose?”

“I think not; we have never been told so.”

“Didn’t you ask?”

“That was for Cicely, wasn’t it? I dare say she knows. We could only hope, father and I, that she would be happy; but I fear that she has not been, ah no.” And Miss Sabrina sighed.

“But we must not give it up so, she is still so young. Why don’t you write to Mr. Morrison yourself, and tell him, command him, to come back?” suggested Eve, boldly.

“But – but I don’t know where he is,” answered Miss Sabrina, bewildered by this sudden attack.

“You said South America.”

“But I couldn’t write, ‘Ferdinand Morrison, Esquire, South America.’”

“Some one must know. His relatives.”

“Yes, there is his brother, and a most devoted brother, we are told,” responded Miss Sabrina, speaking more fluently now that she had launched upon family affection. “Yes, indeed – from all we have heard of Paul Tennant, we are inclined to think him a most excellent young man. He may not have Ferdinand’s beauty (we are told that Ferdinand is remarkably handsome); and it is probable, too, that he has not Ferdinand’s cultivation, for he is a business man, and has always lived at the North. – I beg your pardon, my dear, I am sure,” said the Southern lady, interrupting herself in confusion.

“It doesn’t matter; the North won’t die of it. If you know where this brother is – But why has he a different name?”

“The mother, Mrs. Tennant, who was a widow with this one boy, Paul, married one of the Maryland Morrisons – I reckon you know the family. Ferdinand is the child of this second marriage. His father and mother are dead; his only near relative is this half-brother, Paul.”

“Write to Paul, then, and find out where Ferdinand is.”

“This is a plot, isn’t it?” answered Miss Sabrina, smiling. “But I like it; it’s so sweet of you to plan for our poor Cicely’s happiness.”

“You needn’t thank me! Then you will write?”

“But I don’t know where Mr. Tennant is either. – I dare say Cicely knows.”

“But if you ask her, she will suspect something. And if I ask her, it will be worse still! Doesn’t anybody in the world know where this Paul Tennant is?” said Eve, irritably.

“I think we heard that it was some place where it is very cold – I remember that. It might have been Canada,” suggested Sabrina, reflectively.

“Canada and South America – what a family!” said Eve, in despair.

The wind had risen, the homeward voyage was rough. They reached Romney to find little Jack ill; before morning he was struggling with an attack of croup.

VI

“CICELY, what did you say to those people, that they stared at us so when they passed?”

“Oh, they asked me if you were the man who went round with the panorama – to explain it, you know. So I told them that you were the celebrated Jessamine family – you and Miss Leontine; and that you were going to give a concert in Gary Hundred to-night; I advised them to go.”

“Bless my soul! – the celebrated Jessamine family? What possessed you?”

“Well, they saw the wagon, and they thought it looked like a panorama. They seemed to want something, so I told them that.”

Eve broke into a laugh.

But the judge put on his spectacles, and walked round the wagon with indignant step. “It is an infernal color,” he declared, angrily.

“Our good Dickson had that paint on hand – he told me about it,” explained Miss Leontine. “It was left over” – here she paused. “I don’t know what you will think, but I believe it really was left over after a circus – or was it a menagerie? At any rate, the last thing that was exhibited here before the war.”

The vehicle in question was a long-bodied, two seated wagon, with a square box behind, which opened at the back like the box of a carrier’s cart; its hue was the liveliest pea green.

“Dickson had no business to give it to us; it was a damned impertinence!” said the judge, with a snort.

“Don’t spoil your voice, when you’ve got to sing to-night, grandpa,” remarked Cicely. “And you will have to lead out Miss Leontine – who will sing ‘Waiting.’”

The judge glanced at Miss Leontine. He could not repress a grin.

But tall Miss Leontine remained amiable, she had never heard of “Waiting.” In any case she seldom penetrated jokes; they seemed to her insufficiently explained; often, indeed, abstruse. She was fifty-two, and very maidenly; her bearing, her voice, her expression, were all timidly virginal, as were also the tints of her attire, pale blues and lavenders, and faint green. Her face bore a strong resemblance to the face of a camel; give a camel a pink-and-white complexion, blue eyes, and light-brown hair coming down in flat bands on each side of its long face, and you have Miss Leontine. She was extraordinarily tall – she attained a stature of nearly six feet. Her step, as if conscious of this, was apologetic; her long narrow back leaned forward as though she were trying to reduce her height in front as she came towards one. She wore no crinoline; her head was decked with a large gypsy hat, from which floated a blue tissue veil.

The little party of four – Eve, Cicely, the judge, and Miss Leontine – with Master Jack, had driven from Gary Hundred to Bellington; their hostess, Cousin Sarah Cray, had an old horse, and this wagon had been borrowed from Dickson, the village grainer (who had so mistakenly saved the circus paint); it would be a pleasant excursion in itself, and it would be good for Jack – which last was the principal point with them all.

For the much longer excursion from Abercrombie Island to this inland South Carolina village had been taken on Jack’s account; the attack of croup had left him with a harassing cough, a baby’s little cough, which is so distressing to the ears of those who love him. Eve had walked about, day and night, carrying him in her arms, his languid head on her shoulder; she could not bear to see how large his eyes looked in his little white face; she did not sleep; she could scarcely speak.

“We might go to Cousin Sarah Cray’s for a while, away from the coast,” Cicely suggested. She was always present when Eve walked restlessly to and fro; but she did not interfere, she let Eve have the child.

Eve had no idea who or where was Cousin Sarah Cray, but she agreed to anything that would take Jack away from the coast. It was very cold now at Romney; the Sound was dark and rough all

the time, the sea boomed, the winds were bitter. They had therefore journeyed inland, Jack and Eve, Cicely and her grandfather, leaving Miss Sabrina to guard the island-home alone.

When they reached Gary Hundred and the softer air, Jack began to revive; Eve too revived, she came back to daily life again. One of the first things she said was: "I ought not to be staying here, Cicely; you must let me go to the hotel; your cousin is not my cousin."

"She's Jack's."

"Do you mean by that that Jack must stay, and if he does, I shall? But it isn't decent; here we have all descended upon her at a moment's notice, and filled up her house, and tramped to and fro. She doesn't appear to be rich."

"We are all as poor as crows, but we always go and stay with each other just the same. As for Cousin Sarah Cray, she loves it. Of course we take her as we find her."

"We do indeed!" was Eve's thought. "It is all very well for you," she went on, aloud. "But I am a stranger."

"Cousin Sarah Cray doesn't think so; she thinks you very near – a sister of her cousin."

"If you count in that way, what families you must have! But why shouldn't we all go to the hotel, and take her with us? There's an idea."

"For one reason, there's no hotel to go to," responded Cicely, laughing.

They continued, therefore, to stay with Cousin Sarah Cray; they had been there ten days, and Jack was so much better that Eve gladly accepted her obligations, for the present. She accepted, too, the makeshifts of the rambling housekeeping. But if the housekeeping was of a wandering order, the welcome did not wander – it remained fixed; there was something beautiful in the boundless affection and hospitality of poverty-stricken Cousin Sarah Cray.

Bellington was a ruin. In the old days it had been the custom of the people of Gary Hundred, and the neighboring plantations, to drive thither now and then to spend an afternoon; the terraces and fish-ponds were still to be seen, together with the remains of the Dutch flower-garden, and the great underground kitchens of the house, which had been built of bricks imported from Holland a hundred and twenty years before. In the corner of one of the fields bordering the river were the earthworks of a Revolutionary fort; in a jungle a quarter of a mile distant there was a deserted church, with high pews, mouldering funeral hatchments, and even the insignia of George the Third in faded gilt over the organ-loft. Bellington House had been destroyed by fire, accidentally, in 1790. Now, when there were in the same neighborhood other houses which had been destroyed by fire, not accidentally, there was less interest in the older ruin. But it still served as an excuse for a drive, and drives were excellent for the young autocrat of the party, to whom all, including Miss Leontine, were shamelessly devoted.

The judge did his duty as guide; he had visited Bellington more times than he could count, but he again led the way (with appropriate discourse) from the fish-ponds to the fort, and from the fort to the church, Miss Leontine, in her floating veil, ambling beside him.

When the sun began to decline they returned to their pea-green wagon. The judge walked round it afresh. Then he turned away, put his head over a bush, and muttered on the other side of it.

"What is he saying?" Eve asked.

"I am afraid 'cuss words,' as the darkies call them," answered Cicely, composedly. "He is without doubt a very desperate old man."

Miss Leontine looked distressed, she made a pretext of gathering some leaves from a bush at a little distance; as she walked away, her skirt caught itself behind at each step upon the tops of her prunella boots, which were of the pattern called "Congress," with their white straps visible.

"She is miserable because I called him that," said Cicely; "she thinks him perfect. Grandpa, I have just called you a desperate old man."

But the judge had resumed his grand manner; he assisted the ladies in climbing to their high seats, and then, mounting to his own place, he guided the horse down the uneven avenue and into the broad road again. The cotton plantations of this neighborhood had suffered almost as much as

the rice fields of Romney: they had been flooded so often that much of the land was now worthless, disintegrated and overgrown with lespedeza. They crossed the river (which had done the damage) on – or rather in – a long shaking wooden bridge, covered and nearly dark, and guarding in its dusky recesses a strong odor of the stable. Beyond it the judge had an inspiration: he would go across the fields by one of the old cotton-tracks, thus shortening the distance by more than two miles.

“Because you’re ashamed of chanted Cicely on the back seat.

‘Our pea-green wagon, our wagon of green,
Lillibulero, bullen-a-la,’”

“Cecilia!” said the judge, with dignity.

Eve sat beside him; courteously he entertained her. “Have you ever reflected, Miss Bruce, upon the very uninteresting condition of the world at present? Everything is known. Where can a gentleman travel now, with the element of the unexpected as a companion? There are positively no lands left unvulgarized save the neighborhood of the Poles.”

“Central Africa,” Eve suggested.

“Africa? I think I said for gentlemen.”

“You turbulent old despot, curb yourself,” said Cicely, *sotto voce*.

“In the old days, Miss Bruce,” the judge went on, “we had Arabia, we had Thibet, we had Cham-Tartary; we could arrive on camels at Erzerum. Hey! what are you about there, boy? Turn out!”

“Turn out yourself.”

The track had passed down into a winding hollow between sloping banks about six feet high; on the other side of a curve they had come suddenly upon an empty hay-cart which was approaching from the opposite direction, drawn by two mules; the driver, an athletic young negro with an insolent face, was walking beside his team. His broad cart filled every inch of the track; it was impossible to pass it without climbing the bank. The judge, with his heavy wagon and one horse, could not do this; but it would have been easy for the mules to take their light cart up the slope, and thus leave room for the wagon.

The old planter could not believe that he had heard aright. “Turn out, boy!” he repeated, with the imperious manner which only a lifetime of absolute authority can give.

The negro brought his mules up until their noses touched the nose of the horse; then, putting his hands in his pockets, he planted himself, and called out, “W’at yer gwine ter do ’bout it?”

In an instant the judge was on his feet, whip in hand. But Cicely touched him. “You are not going to fight with him, grandpa?” she said, in a low tone. “For he will fight; he isn’t in the least afraid of you.”

The judge had now reached the ground. In his rage he was white, with his eyes blazing. Eve, greatly alarmed, clasped little Jack closer.

Cicely jumped lightly down. “Grandpa,” she said, under her breath, “he is a great deal stronger than you are, and after he has struck you down we shall be here alone with him – think of that. We will all get out, and then you can lead the horse up the bank, and go by him. Dear grandpa, it is the only way; this isn’t the island, this is South Carolina.”

Eve, seeing the speechless passion of the old man, had not believed that Cicely would prevail; she had closed her eyes with a shuddering, horrible vision of the forward rush, the wrested whip, and the silver-haired head in the dust. But, with a mighty effort, trembling like a leaf with his repressed rage, the judge put up his hand to help her in her descent. She accepted his aid hurriedly, giving Jack to Cicely; Miss Leontine had climbed down alone, the tears dropping on her cheeks behind her veil. The judge then led the horse up the bank and past the wagon, the negro keeping his position beside his mules; the ladies followed the wagon, and mounted to their places again when it had reached the

track, Cicely taking the seat by the side of her grandfather. Then they drove off, followed by the negro's jeering laughter.

The old planter remained perfectly silent. Eve believed that, after he had deposited them safely at home, he would go back in search of that negro without fail. She and Cicely tried to keep up a conversation; Miss Leontine joined them whenever she was able, but the tears constantly succeeded each other on her long face, and she was as constantly putting her handkerchief to her eyes in order to repress them, the gesture much involved with her blue veil. On the borders of the village they passed the little railway station. By the side of the station-house there was a new shop, which had a broad show-window filled with wooden wash-tubs.

"This is the shop of Thomas Scotts, the tar-and-turpentine man who is in love with Matilda Debbs," said Cicely. "How is that coming on now, Miss Leontine?"

Miss Leontine took down her handkerchief. "The family do not consent."

"But there's nothing against the man, is there?"

Miss Leontine took down the handkerchief again – she had already replaced it. "As regards his character, n-nothing. But he is a manufacturer of tubs. It appears that it is the business of the family; his father also manufactures them. In Connecticut."

"If Thomas Scotts should make a beautiful new tub for each of the Misses Debbs, it wouldn't be a bad idea; there are twelve or fourteen of them, aren't there?"

"Ner-nine," replied the afflicted maiden lady, with almost a convulsion of grief. "But two of them are yer-young yet."

"And seven are not. Now seven new tubs."

"Cecilia, let us have no more of this," said the judge.

It was the first time he had spoken; Cicely put her hand behind her and furtively pinched Eve's knee in token of triumph.

They came into the main street of Gary Hundred. It was a broad avenue, wandering vaguely onward amid four rows of trees; there was no pavement; the roadway was deeply covered with yellow sand; the spacious sidewalks which bordered it were equally in a state of nature. The houses, at some distance back from the street, were surrounded by large straggling gardens. Farther down were the shops, each with its row of hitching-posts across the front.

They left Miss Leontine at her own door, and went on towards the residence of Cousin Sarah Cray.

"Here comes Miss Polly's bread-cart, on the way back from Mellons," said Cicely. "Grandpa, wouldn't it be a good idea to buy some little cakes?"

The judge stopped the horse; Cicely beckoned to the old negro who was wheeling the covered hand-cart along the sandy road. "Uncle Dan, have you any cakes left?"

Uncle Dan touched his hat, and opened the lid of the cart; there, reposing on snowy napkins, were biscuit and bread, and little cakes of inviting aspect. While Cicely made her selection, Eve bent down and took one of the circulars which were lying, neatly piled, in a corner. It announced, not in print, but in delicate hand-writing, that at the private bakery, number ten Queen Street, Gary Hundred, fresh bread, biscuits, and rolls could be obtained daily; muffins, crumpets, and plum-cake to order. The circular was signed "Mary Clementina Diana Wingfield."

"They have names enough, those sisters," Eve commented. "Miss Leontine's is Clotilda Leontine Elizabeth; I saw it in her prayer-book."

Cousin Sarah Cray's residence was a large white house, with verandas encircling it both up stairs and down; the palings of the fence were half gone, the whole place looked pillaged and open. The judge drove up to the door and helped Cicely to descend; and then Eve, who had little Jack, fast asleep, in her arms. Cicely motioned to Eve to go into the house; she herself followed her grandfather as he led the horse round to the stables. Eve went in, carrying Jack and the cakes. Cousin Sarah Cray, hurrying down the stairs to meet her, took the child affectionately. "Dear little fellow, he begins to

look right rosy.” She was delighted with the cakes. “They will help out the tea be-u-tifully; we’ve only got waffles.”

Instead of going to her room, Eve took a seat at the window; she was anxious about the judge.

“Miss Polly’s cakes are always so light,” pursued Cousin Sarah Cray, looking at them; “she never makes a mistake, there’s never the tiniest streak of heaviness in *her* little pounds! And her breads are elegant, too; when one sees her beautiful hands, one wonders how she can do all the kneading.”

“Does she do it herself?”

“Every single bit; their old Susannah only heats the oven. It was a courageous idea, Miss Bruce, from the beginning; you know they are among our best people, and, after the war, they found themselves left with nothing in the world but their house. They could have kept school in it, of course, for they are accomplished beyond everything; Miss Leontine paints sweetly – she was educated in France. But there was no one to come to the school; the girls, of course, could not afford to go away.”

“You mean pupils? – to leave their homes and come here?”

“No, I mean the girls, Polly and Leontine; they could not open a school anywhere else – in Charleston, for instance; they had not money enough.”

“I beg your pardon – it was only that I did not recognize them as ‘the girls.’”

“Well, I suppose they really are not quite girls any longer,” responded Cousin Sarah Cray, thoughtfully. “Polly is forty-four and Leontine fifty-two; but I reckon they will always be ‘the girls’ to us, even if they’re eighty,” she added, laughing. “Well, Polly had this idea. And she has been so successful – you can’t think! Her bread-cart goes over to Mellons every day of your life, as regularly as the clock. And they buy a great deal.”

“It’s the camp, isn’t it? – Camp Mellons?”

“No; it has always been Mellons, Mellons Post-office. The camp is near there, and it has some Yankee name or other, I believe; but of course you know, my dear, that *we* never go there.”

“You only sell them bread. I am glad, at least, that they buy Miss Polly’s. And does Miss Leontine help?”

“I fancy not. Dear Miss Leontine is not as practical as Miss Polly; she has a soft poetical nature, and she makes beautiful afghans. But the judge prefers Miss Polly.”

“Does he really admire her?” said Eve, with a sudden inspiration.

“Beyond everything,” answered Cousin Sarah Cray, clasping her plump hands.

“Then will you please go out and tell him that she is coming here to tea, that she will be here immediately?”

“Mercy! But she won’t.”

“Yes, she will; I will go and ask her. Do please make haste, Mrs. Cray; we are so afraid, Cicely and I, that he will try to whip a negro.”

“Mercy!” said Cousin Sarah Cray again, this time in alarm; stout as she was, she ran swiftly through the hall and across the veranda, her cap strings flying, and disappeared on the way to the stables.

Eve carried little Jack up-stairs, and gave him to Deely, the house-maid; then, retracing her steps, she went out through the side-gate, and up the street to the home of the Misses Wingfield. The door stood open, Miss Polly was in the hall. She was a handsome woman, vigorous, erect, with clear blue eyes, and thick sandy hair closely braided round her well-shaped head. Eve explained her errand. “But perhaps Miss Leontine told you?” she added.

“No, Lonny told me nothing; she went straight to her room. I noticed that she had been crying; but she is so sweet that she cries rather easily. Whip, indeed! *I’d* rather shoot.”

“We must keep the *judge* from being whipped,” Eve answered.

“Yes, I suppose so; he is an old man, though he doesn’t look it. I will go with you, of course. Or rather I will follow you in a few moments.”

The post-office of Gary Hundred was opposite the Wingfield house; as Eve crossed the broad street on her way back, the postmaster appeared at his door, and beckoned to her mysteriously. He was a small elderly negro, with a dignified manner; he wore blue goggles; Eve knew him slightly, she had paid several visits to the office, and had been treated with deferential attention. When she reached the sidewalk, therefore, she paused.

“Would yer min’ droppin’ in fer one brief momen’, miss? ’Portant marter.”

Eve stepped over the low sill of the small building – it was hardly more than a shed, though smartly whitewashed, and adorned with bright green blinds – and the postmaster immediately closed the door. He then cautiously took from his desk a letter.

“Dere’s sump’n’ rudder quare ’bout dishyer letter, miss,” he said, glancing towards the window to see that no one was looking in. “Carn’t be too pertikler w’en it’s guv’ment business; en so we ’lowed to ax de favor ef you’d sorter glimpse yer eye ober it fer us.”

“Read a letter?” said Eve. “Whose letter?”

“Not de letter, but him *outside*, miss. Whoms is it? Dat’s de p’int. En I wouldn’t have you s’pose we ’ain’t guv it our bes’ consideration. We knows de looks ob mos’ ob ’em w’at comes yere; but dishyer one’s diffunt. Fuddermo’, de stamp’s diffunt too.”

The postmaster’s wife, a little yellow woman, was looking anxiously at them from the small window in the partition of the real post-office, a space six feet by three.

Eve took the letter. “It’s an English stamp. And the name is plainly written, ‘Henry Barker, Esquire; Gary Hundred.’”

“No sech pusson yere. Dat’s w’at I tol’ Mister Cotesworth,” said the yellow woman, triumphantly.

“Do you mean to tell me that you cannot read?” said Eve, surveying “Mister Cotesworth,” with astonishment.

The government official had, for the moment, an abashed look. “We ’lowed,” he began, “dat as you’s fum de Norf – ”

But his wife interrupted him. “He reads better’n mos’, miss, Mister Cotesworth does. But his eyes done got so bad lately – dat’s w’at. Take de letter, Mister Cotesworth, and doan’ trouble de lady no mo’. Fine wedder, miss.” She came round and opened the door officiously; “seem lak we ’ain’t nebber see finer.”

Miss Polly arrived at Cousin Sarah Cray’s; she walked with apparent carelessness round towards the stables, where the judge was superintending the rubbing down and the feeding of the horse. A saddle had been brought out, and was hanging on the fence; Cousin Sarah hovered anxiously near.

“Grandpa is going out for a ride,” explained Cicely. “But I told him that the poor horse must be fed first, in common charity; he has been so far already – to Bellington and back.”

“Oh, but the judge is not going, now that I have come,” said Miss Polly; “he wouldn’t be so uncivil.” She went up to him; smiling winningly, she put out her beautiful hand.

The judge was always gallant; he took the fair hand, and, bending his head, deposited upon it a salute.

Miss Polly smiled still more graciously. “And is a stable-yard a place for such courtesies, judge?” she said, in her rich voice, with her luscious, indolent, Southern pronunciation. “Oh, surely not – surely not. Let us go to Cousin Sarah Cray’s parlor; I have something to tell you; in fact, I came especially to see you.” Looking very handsome and very straight, she took his arm with a caressing touch.

The judge admired Miss Polly deeply.

And Miss Polly kept a firm hold upon his arm.

The judge yielded.

VII

“SEA-BEACHES,” said Eve, – “the minds of such people; you can trace the line of their last high tide, that is, the year when they stopped reading. Along the judge’s line, one finds, for instance, Rogers; he really has no idea that there have been any new poets since then.”

“Dear me! We have always thought Horatio remarkably literary,” protested Cousin Sarah Cray. “That’s his step now, I think.”

The judge came in, little Jack on his shoulder. “I believe he has dropped some – some portions of his clothing on the stairs,” he said, helplessly. “It’s astonishing – the facility he has.”

“And he has pulled off his shoes,” added Eve, taking the little reprobate and kissing him. “Naughty Jack. Tacks!”

“Esss, tacks!” repeated Jack, in high glee. “Dey gets in Jack’s foots.” That was all he cared for her warning legend.

The judge sat down and wiped his forehead. “I have received a shock,” he said.

“Pity’s sake! – what?” asked Cousin Sarah Cray, in alarm. Poor Cousin Sarah dealt in interjections. But it might be added that she had lived through times that were exclamatory.

“Our old friend, Roland Pettigru, is dead, Sarah; the news comes to us in this – this Sheet, which, I am told, is published here.” He drew a small newspaper from his pocket. “With your permission, ladies, I will read to you the opening sentence of an obituary notice which this – this Sheet – has prepared for the occasion.” He put on his spectacles, and, holding the paper off at a distance, read aloud, with slow, indignant enunciation, as follows: “The Great Reaper has descended amongst us. And this time he has carried back with him sadly brilliant sheaves; for his arrows have been shot at a shining mark’ (arrows for a reaper!” commented the judge, surveying his audience squintingly, over his glasses), “and the aim has been only too true. Gaunt Sorrow stalks abroad, we mourn with Pettigru Hill; we say – and we repeat – that the death of Roland Pettigru has left a vortex among us.’ Yes, vortex, ladies; – the death of a quiet, cultivated gentleman a vortex!”

At this moment Deely, the house-maid, appeared at the door; giving her calico skirt a twist by way of “manners,” she announced, “Miss Wungfy.”

Miss Leontine entered, carrying five books standing in a row upon her left arm as though it had been a shelf. She shook hands with Cousin Sarah Cray and Eve; then she went through the same ceremony with the judge, but in a confused, downcast manner, and seated herself on a slippery ottoman as near as possible to the door.

“I hope you liked the books? Pray let me take them,” said Eve, for Miss Leontine was still balancing them against her breast.

“Literature?” remarked the judge, who also seemed embarrassed. He took up one of the volumes and opened it. “Ah, a novel.”

“Yes, but one that will not hurt you,” Eve answered. “For Miss Leontine prefers those novels where the hero and heroine are married to begin with, and then fall in love with each other afterwards; everything on earth may happen to them during this process – poisonings and murders and shootings; she does not mind these in the least, for it’s sure in any case to be *moral*, don’t you see, because they were married in the beginning. And marriage makes everything perfectly safe; doesn’t it, Miss Leontine?”

“I am sure I don’t know,” answered Miss Leontine, still a prey to nervousness; “but – but I have always *supposed* so. Yes. We read them aloud,” she added, turning for relief to Cousin Sarah Cray; “that is, I read to Polly – in the evenings.”

“These modern novels seem to me poor productions,” commented the judge, turning over the pages of the volume he had taken.

“Naturally,” responded Eve.

“May I ask why ‘naturally’?”

“Oh, men who read their Montaigne year after year without change, and who quote Charles Lamb, never care for novels, unless, indeed, it may be ‘Tom Jones.’ Montaigne and Lamb, Latin quotations that are not hard, a glass of good wine with his dinner, and a convexity of person – these mark your non-appreciator of novels, from Warwickshire to Gary Hundred.”

“Upon my word, young lady – ” began the judge, laughing.

But Miss Leontine, by her rising, interrupted him. “I think I must go now. Yes. Thank you.”

“But you have only just come,” said Cousin Sarah Cray.

“I stopped to leave the books. Yes; really; that was all. Thanks, you are very kind. Yes; thank you.” She fumbled ineffectually for the handle of the door, and, when it was opened for her, with an embarrassed bow she passed out, her long back bent forward, her step hurried.

“I can’t imagine what is the matter with her,” said Cousin Sarah Cray, returning.

“I am afraid, Sarah, that I can inform you,” answered the judge gravely, putting down the volume. “I met her in her own garden about an hour ago, and we fell into conversation; I don’t know what possessed me, but in relating some anecdote of a jocular nature which happened to be in my mind at the time, by way of finish – I can’t imagine what I was thinking of – but I up and chucked her under the chin.”

“Chucked Miss Leontine!” exclaimed Cousin Sarah Cray, aghast, while Eve gave way to irrepressible mirth. “Was she – was she deeply offended?”

“She was simply paralyzed with astonishment. I venture to say” – here the judge sent an eye-beam towards the laughing Eve – “I venture to say that Miss Leontine has never been chucked under the chin in all her life before.”

“Certainly not,” answered Cousin Sarah Cray; “she is far too dignified.” Then, with a desire to be strictly truthful, she added, “Perhaps when she was a baby?”

But even this seemed doubtful.

Not long after this the Misses Wingfield (it was really Miss Polly) gave a party.

“Must we go?” said Eve.

“Why, it will be perfectly delightful!” answered Cousin Sarah Cray, looking at her in astonishment. “Every one will be there. Let me see: there will be ourselves, four; and Miss Polly and Miss Leontine, six; then the Debbses, thirteen – fourteen if Mrs. Debbs comes; the Rev. Mr. Bushey and his wife, sixteen. And perhaps there will be some one else,” she added, hopefully; “perhaps somebody has some one staying with them.”

“Thomas Scotts, the tub man, will not be invited,” remarked Cicely. “He will walk by on the outside. And look in.”

“There’s nothing I admire more than the way you pronounce that name Debbs,” observed Eve. “It’s plain Debbs; yet you call it Dessss – holding on to all the s’s, and hardly sounding the b at all – so that you almost make it rhyme with noblesse.”

“That’s because we like ’em, I reckon,” responded Cousin Sarah Cray. “They certainly are the *sweetest* family!”

“There’s a faint trace of an original theme in Matilda. The others are all variations,” said the caustic Miss Bruce.

They went to the party.

“Theme and variations all here,” said Cicely, as they passed the open door of the parlor on their way up-stairs to lay aside their wraps; “they haven’t spared us a trill.”

“Well, you won’t be spared either,” said Cousin Sarah Cray. “*You’ll* have to sing.”

She proved a true prophet; Cicely was called upon to add what she could to the entertainments of the evening. Her voice was slender and clear; to-night it pleased her to sing straight on, so rapidly that she made mince-meat of the words of her song, the delicate little notes almost seeming to come

from a flute, or from a mechanical music-bird screwed to a chandelier. Later, however, Miss Matilda Debbs supplied the missing expression when she gave them:

“Slee – ping, I *dreamed*, love,
Dreamed, love, of thee;
O’er – ther – bright *waves*, love,
Float – ing were we.”

Cicely seemed possessed by one of her wild moods. “I’ve been to the window; the tar-and-turpentine man is looking over the gate,” she said, in a low voice, to Eve. “I’m going out to say to him, ‘Scotts, wha hae! Send in a tub.’”

Presently she came by Eve’s chair again. “Have you seen the geranium in Miss Leontine’s hair? Let us get grandpa out on the veranda with her, alone; she has been madly in love with him ever since he chucked her under the chin. What’s more, grandpa knows it, too, and he’s awfully frightened; he always goes through the back streets now, like a thief.”

There was a peal at the door-bell. “Tar-and-turpentine man coming in,” murmured Cicely.

Susannah appeared with a letter. “Fer Mis’ Morrison,” she said.

There was a general laugh. For “Mister Cotesworth,” not sure that Eve would keep his secret, and alarmed for the safety of his official position, had taken to delivering his letters in person; clad in his best black coat, with a silk hat, the blue goggles, and a tasselled cane, he not only delivered them with his own hands, but he declaimed the addresses in a loud tone at the door. Not finding Cicely at home, he had followed her hither. “Fer Mis’ Fer’nen Morrison. A *ferwerded* letter,” he said to Susannah in the hall, at the top of his voice.

The judge had gone to the dining-room with Miss Polly, to see her little dog, which was ailing. Cicely put the letter in her pocket.

After a while she said to Eve, “I never have any letters, hardly.”

“But you must have,” Eve answered.

“No; almost never. I am going up-stairs for a moment, Eve. Don’t come with me.”

When she returned, more music was going on. As soon as she could, Eve said, inquiringly, “Well?”

“It was from Ferdie.”

“Is he coming back?”

“Yes,” responded Cicely, unmoved.

Eve’s thoughts had flown to her own plans. But she found time to think, “What a cold little creature it is, after all!”

At that moment they could say no more.

About midnight, when Eve was in her own room, undressing, there was a tap at the door, and Cicely entered. She had taken off her dress; a forlorn little blue shawl was drawn tightly round her shoulders.

She walked to the dressing-table, where Eve was sitting, took up a brush, and looked at it vaguely. “I didn’t mean to tell any one; but I have changed my mind, I am going to tell you.” Putting down the brush, she let the shawl fall back. There across her white breast was a long purple scar, and a second one over her delicate little shoulder. “He did it,” she said. Her eyes, fixed upon Eve’s, were proud and brilliant.

“You don’t mean – you don’t mean that your *husband*– ” stammered Eve, in horror.

“Yes, Ferdie. He did it.”

“Is he mad?”

“Only after he has been drinking.”

“Oh, you poor little thing!” said Eve, taking her in her arms protectingly. “I have been so hard to you, Cicely, so cruel! But I did not know – I did not know.” Her tears flowed.

“I am telling you on account of baby,” Cicely went on, in the same unmoved tone.

“Has he dared to touch baby?” said Eve, springing up.

“Yes, Eve; he broke poor baby’s little arm; of course when he did not know what he was doing. When he gets that way he does not know us; he thinks we are enemies, and he thinks it is his duty to attack us. Once he put us out-of-doors – baby and me – in the middle of the night, with only our night-dresses on; fortunately it wasn’t very cold. That time, and the time he broke baby’s arm (he seized him by the arm and flung him out of his crib), we were not in Savannah; we were off by ourselves for a month, we three. Baby was so young that the bone was easily set. Nobody ever knew about it, I never told. But – but it must not happen again.” She looked at Eve with the same unmoved gaze.

“I should rather think not! Give him to me, Cicely, and let me take him away – at least for the present. You know you said – ”

“I said ‘perhaps.’ But I cannot let him go now – not just now. I am telling you what has happened because you really seem to care for him.”

“I think I have showed that I care for him!”

“Well, I have let you.”

“What are we to do, then, if you won’t let me take him away?” said Eve, in despair. “Will that man come here?”

“He may. He will go to Savannah, and if he learns there that I am here, he may follow me. But he will never go to Romney, he doesn’t like Romney; even in the beginning, when I begged him to go, he never would. He – ” She paused.

“Jealous, I suppose,” suggested the sister, with a bitter laugh – “jealous of Jack’s poor bones in the burying-ground. Your two ghosts will have a duel, Cicely.”

“Oh, *Ferdie* isn’t dead!” said Cicely, with sudden terror. She grasped Eve’s arm. “Have you heard anything? Tell me – tell me.”

Eve looked at her.

“Yes, I love him,” said Cicely, answering the look. “I have loved him ever since the first hour I saw him. It’s more than love; it’s adoration.”

“You never said that of Jack.”

“No; for it wouldn’t have been true.”

The two women faced each other – the tall Eve, the dark little wife.

“Oh, if I could only get away from this hideous country – this whole horrible South!” said Eve, walking up and down the room like a caged tigress.

“You would like him if you knew him,” Cicely went on, gently. “It seldom happens – that other; and when it doesn’t happen, Eve – ”

Eve put out her hand with a repelling gesture. “Let me take baby and go.”

“Not now. But he will be safe at Romney.”

“In Heaven’s name, then, let us get him back to Romney.”

“Yes; to-morrow.”

Little Jack was asleep in his crib by the side of Eve’s bed, for she still kept him with her at night. Cicely went to the crib and looked at her child; Eve followed her.

The little boy’s night-dress had fallen open, revealing one shoulder and arm. “It was just here,” whispered Cicely, kneeling down and softly touching the baby-flesh. She looked up at Eve, her eyes thick with tears.

“Why, you care?” said Eve. “Care for him? – the baby, I mean.” She spoke her thoughts aloud, unwittingly.

“Did you think I didn’t care?” asked Cicely, with a smile.

It was the strangest smile Eve had ever seen.

VIII

EARLY spring at Romney. The yellow jessamine was nearly gone, the other flowers were coming out; Atamasco lilies shone whitely everywhere; the long line of the islands and the opposite mainland were white with blossoms, the salt-marshes were freshly green; shoals, which had wallowed under water since Christmas, lifted their heads; the great river came back within its banks again.

Three weeks had passed since their return to the island. They had made the journey without the judge, who had remained in South Carolina to give his aid to the widow of his old friend, Roland Pettigru, who had become involved in a lawsuit. The three weeks had been slow and anxious – anxious, that is, to Eve. Cicely had returned to her muteness. Once, at the beginning, when Eve had pressed her with questions, she said, as general answer, “In any case, Ferdie will not come here.” After that, when again – once or twice – Eve had asked, “Have you heard anything more?” Cicely had returned no reply whatever; she had let her passive glance rest upon Eve and then glide to something else, as though she had not spoken. Eve was proud, she too remained silent. She knew that she had done nothing to win Cicely’s confidence; women understand women, and Cicely had perceived from the first, of course, that Jack’s sister did not like her.

But since that midnight revelation at Cousin Sarah Cray’s, Eve no longer disliked Cicely; on the contrary, she was attracted towards her by a sort of unwilling surprise. Often, when they were with the others, she would look at her twenty times in a half-hour, endeavoring to fathom something of the real nature of this little girl (to Eve, Cicely always seemed a school-girl), who had borne a tragedy in silence, covering it with her jests, covering it also with her coldness. But was Cicely really cold to all the world but Ferdie? She was not so, at least, as regarded her child; no one who had seen her on her knees that night beside the crib could doubt her love for him. Yet she let Eve have him for hours at a time, she let her have him at night, without even Dilsey to look after him; she never interfered, constantly as Eve claimed him and kept him. In spite of her confidence in her own perceptions, in spite of her confidence, too, in her own will, which she believed could force a solution in almost every case, Eve Bruce was obliged to acknowledge to herself that she was puzzled.

Now and then she would be harassed by the question as to whether she ought not to tell Miss Sabrina what she knew, whether she ought not to tell the judge. But Cicely had spared them, and Cicely had asked her to be equally merciful. At night, when lying awake, the horror of the poor baby’s broken arm would sometimes come to her so vividly that she would light the candle in haste to see if he were safe. If Ferdie should come here, after all! Cicely had said that he would not; but who could trust Cicely, – loving the man as she did? To Eve, after all that had happened, Cicely’s love seemed a mania as insane as the homicidal deliriums of the husband.

As to these deliriums, she tried to picture what they must be: the baby hurled from his little crib – that made her shudder with rage; she should not be afraid of the madman, then; she should attack him in return! Sometimes it was Cicely whom she saw, Cicely, shrinking under blows; it must have been something heavy and sharp, a billet of wood, perhaps, that had caused the scars across her white breast. She remembered that once, when inwardly exasperated by Cicely’s fresh fairness, she had accused her of never having known what it was to be really tired in all her life. Cicely had answered, rather hesitatingly, “I don’t know that I have ever been *tired*, exactly.” She had not been tired – no. She had only been half killed.

The poor little girl’s muteness, her occasional outbursts of wild sport, her jests and laughter, her abstractions, and the coldness sometimes seen in her beautiful eyes, were these the results of suffering? She questioned Miss Sabrina a little.

“She has always been the same, except that since her second marriage she is much more quiet,” replied the unconscious aunt. “Until then she was like quicksilver, she used to run through the thickets

so swiftly that no one could follow her, and she used to play ball by the hour with – ” Here the speaker paused, disconcerted.

“With Jack,” Eve added, her face contracting with the old pain.

Miss Sabrina had at last perceived this pain, and the discovery had stopped her affectionate allusions. But she did not forget – Eve often found her carefully made wreaths laid upon Jack’s grave. As for Eve herself, she never brought a flower; she walked to and fro beside the mound, and the sojourn generally ended in angry thoughts. Why should other people keep their loved ones, and she be bereft? What had she done, what had Jack done, that was so wrong? God was not good, because He was not kind; people did not ask Him to create them, but when once He had done it for His own pleasure, and there they were, helpless, in His world, why should He torture them so? To make them better? Why didn’t He make them better in the beginning, when He was creating them? Or else not make them at all!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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