

JOYCE

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'THE SECOND SON,' 'A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN,'
'THE WIZARD'S SON,' ETC.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

HALLIDAY was both gloomy and angry when he left home, full of that sense of unappreciated merit which cuts with peculiar keenness into the minds of those who entertain no doubt as to their own superiority over the ordinary level ; but the influence of external things and the distraction of travel soon succeeded in clearing to a great degree his mental firmament. The bustle of the great station at Edinburgh, the care of selecting a comfortable corner for his journey, the hurrying and rush of less fortunate persons hampered by luggage and children, amused his mind and distracted his thoughts. He travelled, as a matter of course, in the third class ; and, equally as a matter of course, he regarded with a dignified derision the stalwart young men in deer-stalking coats, and

with every superfluity imaginable in the way of wraps and sticks and dressing-cases, who indulged themselves in the luxury of sleeping-carriages. Sybarites he called them in his mind, with a half-contemptuous, half-indulgent smile — frivolous creatures, altogether unaware that in a corner of a third-class carriage a man so much their superior in everything was calmly regarding them, making the inevitable comparison between folly and its comfortable cushions, and wisdom, which, if it did not trudge afoot, yet used only such conveniences as dignified necessity required. The deer-stalking young men, who never thought of the matter, would indeed have been highly surprised had they known how they were set down at their proper value by their travelling companion. The comparison did Andrew good : it made him feel his own dignity, his superiority to the external, yet made his breast swell with a pathetic wonder. Was it perhaps possible that Joyce, after three months' experience of luxury, should prefer these brainless ones, so much lower in the intellectual scale ? Surely, surely that could not

be possible. He saw with a smile that they took copies of the *Field* and the *Sporting News* into their luxurious carriages with them. He himself had the *Saturday Review*. There is nothing so sustaining as this sense of being better than one's neighbours. It comforted poor Andrew, and kept him warm during his journey. The gentlemen in the sleeping-carriages might rest better, but they did not, nay could not, feel half the moral elevation of the school-master in his corner of the third-class.

London, too, veiled in a gray-and-yellow fog, through which the lamps, not yet extinguished, and a line of dusky sunrise among the clouds, looked red, brought an excitement to his mind which few perhaps of the companions of his journey shared. Andrew greeted the great city as people greet it in books,—as adventurers in the days of Dr. Johnson saluted that centre of the world. He thought with a tingle of strange emotion in his breast that the great roar of humanity might become familiar to his ears ere long. He rose to the sound and commotion with a sense of predestined greatness. The people

in the sleeping-carriages tumbled out drowsily, rubbing their eyes in the midst of a dream. But Andrew stepped forth inspired by the recollection of many a great man who had arrived like himself, not knowing what might befall him. His hopes, his courage rose more and more as he felt where he was—in a great place where he was sure to be understood, and where the human mind was in a perpetual progress, not stagnant as in the country. He felt, indeed, not as he had done when he left home, as if his mission were a forlorn-hope, but rather as if he were coming like a conqueror to see and to vanquish. It wanted only, he said to himself, that touch of reality to chase all the chimeras away. He would, he must, find Joyce faithful as ever, keeping silence only because her plans were not yet ripened for his advancement. He would find her father full of that respect which the man of action feels for the man of mind. He would be received as an honoured guest; he would be admitted into their confidence, and made acquainted with their hopes. Visions of a noble old house in some sort of cloistered dig-

nified centre of learning rose again before his eyes—A. Halliday, Headmaster. He did not definitely fix upon Eton or Harrow, having no actual knowledge of either of those places; but something exhilarating, sweet, a strong yet soft delusion, stole into his being. He was so entirely inexperienced and full of the ignorance of his class (although a man so well instructed), that he was not aware of any restriction upon such appointments that could not be got over by sufficiently powerful influence. Influence could do everything, Halliday thought.

He got a bath and breakfast at the nearest hotel, undiscouraged even by its grim and chill nakedness, and feeling a wonderful freedom and elation in the consciousness of thus doing what the best people did, and being waited upon, served by a man-servant (if you liked to put it in that way) like the best. It cost a good deal, but it was worth the expenditure. The fog cleared off as the morning advanced, and it was in the sunshine of a bright hazy morning that he set off on the final stage of his journey. He had dressed himself with the

utmost care and all the resources of his wardrobe. His tie was blue, his coat a frock-coat of extreme solemnity, which he usually wore at funerals. He thought, as he was a traveller, that it was the right thing to wear with this a round hat such as he wore in the country. He had a pair of lavender gloves, his umbrella was very neatly rolled up—in short, at half a mile off you recognised his unquestionable character and doubtful gentility with as much ease as if he had written Andrew Halliday, schoolmaster at Comely Green, upon his manly breast; but he had not the least idea of that. His clear and ruddy complexion was a little paled by the night's journey, and by the mixture of agitation and excitement which he could not but feel as the moment of meeting approached. He looked a most respectable young man, very respectable, honest as the day. You would scarcely have suspected, however, to see him, how superior he felt to the people in the sleeping-carriages, and how, when they got the *Field* and the *Sporting Times* at the bookstalls, he had bought the *Saturday Review*.

He went by the railway from Waterloo admiring the river which ran glistening gray, like a great worm, under the shining of the wintry sun—and got out with a great heart-beat at the station. How near he was now! He felt inclined to take a walk, to see the place and look at the view, pushing off the decision for a time, the certainty—for he had so little doubt by this time that it was a certainty—of the happy meeting. To see Joyce in perhaps a few minutes; to hear her cry of astonishment and delight; to have her come up to him in her shy way, never demonstrative, unless perhaps the long separation might have made her so. ‘Oh, Andrew! and I was just going to write to tell you——’ He would not wait till she said ‘about the headmastership.’ He would take her in his arms, whoever was there (for had he not the right?), and say, ‘About yourself, my dearest—that’s what I want to hear about.’ He thought he would take a walk first to *savourer* a little this delightful scene, and think how she would look and what he would say. It was so near, so very near! He would keep it at arm’s-

length a little in order to enjoy it the more.

It sobered him, however, to hear that Colonel Hayward's house was some distance off, and to receive confused instructions which he could not follow. As a matter of fact, the instructions were not at all confused, they were only too rapid and clear. 'First turning to the right, second turning to the left; then go straight on till you pass the church; then first turning, second turning.' How could he keep all that in his mind? It was he that was confused, not the direction. If they had said, turn to the west and then a little to the north—— He stumbled along, forgetting whether it was the first, second, or third turning he ought to take, till he came to a church, which was not the church to which he had been directed; and from thence he stumbled on again by a great many roads clothed with pretty houses, which bewildered him. He stopped finally to ask his way of a brisk little lady, who cried, 'Oh, Colonel Hayward's!' her eyes dancing with instant interest, and a look full of interrogations, as if she would have liked to ask him a hundred

things. Andrew could scarcely restrain himself from asking, 'Do you know Joyce?' He felt at once that this eager little lady jumped at some conclusion about himself, and was eager to ask who he was—perhaps whether he was the lover of whom Joyce must have spoken to everybody with whom she was intimate. And Andrew's instinct was indeed not far wrong: for Mrs. Sitwell immediately divined him to be somebody out of the mysterious past life of which none of the Haywards spoke, and wondered whether, perhaps, he was some one with whom Joyce had got 'entangled' in these dark ages. She stood and looked after him when she had given him his instructions, with curious eyes, noting his long frock-coat and his low hat. How dreadful! she said to herself, and could scarcely contain the curiosity that filled her. Should she make a hurried round through the district, and then approach the Haywards' on the other side, so as to catch him there, and see with her own eyes the position of affairs? Mrs. Sitwell knew that Joyce would be just going in with her father from their morning walk, and would be caught

by the visitor, and would be unable to escape.

Certainly she must know Joyce : she must divine who he was : Andrew said this to himself, and was further exhilarated and strengthened by the idea. Of course, Joyce must have told her friends. He went on with better success this time, inspired by the little active lady with those eager eyes, who must know—and at last got to the very door. His heart was beating now very quickly indeed. Joyce's door—so different from the cottage where he used to find her. There she had always been shy, keeping behind old Janet, never willing to permit any demonstration. Would things be different now? Would she rush to him after his long separation, laying her head upon his shoulder? This image filled Andrew's face with light and colour as he knocked at her father's door.

‘Is Miss Hayward at home?’ The appearance of Baker gave him a distinct sensation of pleasure—Colonel Hayward's butler or upper servant, a domestic of a high class. Andrew would have liked to see a footman

or two behind, but pleased himself with the thought that this must be considered higher *ton*. 'Is Miss Hayward at home?'

'Miss Hayward? well, I can't say. She's been out walking with the Colonel, and whether they've come back or not, I can't tell you. Mrs. Hayward is in,' Baker said. He was not impressed by the appearance of the visitor. He thought it must be some man from a shop, or a person about a subscription, at the best.

'It is not Mistress Hayward but Miss Hayward I want.'

'Very well,' said Baker—'I hear you. If you'll wait a bit, I'll go and see.'

And Andrew had to wait, sadly against his will, outside the door. 'You'll excuse me, but Missis's charges are as the door is always to be shut,' Baker said, with a restrained chuckle, instinctively delighted to do his duty in a way that was offensive to the newcomer, whom he saw to be of inferior condition, and likely to be an undesirable guest. Andrew's sensations when he was left outside his love's door were not pleasant. He ceased to think of the butler as a high-

class domestic, and called him in his mind a pampered menial, but consoled himself with the thought of the downfall that would happen to Baker when he knew who it was whom he had shut out. It was, however, a disagreeable moment of suspense. He tried to distract his mind by an examination of the great flower-vases at the door, the shrubs in their winter green, the perfectly swept and close-cut turf, all the careful surroundings of the place, not imposing or vast, but so exquisitely kept,—more perfect even than Bellendean. To think that he should have time to investigate all this, while she sat within with a beating heart, divining—would she divine?—his approach. When the butler described him, she would know, and come rushing out. She would rush to him, and the pampered menial would see—— At this moment the door opened quickly, and Baker said, ‘Hi! Missis will be obliged if you’ll send in your name.’

This unceremonious address startled Andrew. He said, ‘My name?’ arrested in the middle of his thoughts.

‘I suppose you’ve got one?’ Baker said.

Though this was so far from the reception he expected, he was not unprepared. He took his card-case out of his pocket, partially restored to himself by the pleasure of using it, which was a thing that did not occur often, and gave the pampered menial a card. He stepped briskly inside as he did so, resolved to bear no more of this, and followed the man as he returned to the drawing-room with the card in his hand. Andrew's heart beat very quickly now,—his tranquillity was considerably disturbed. The moment had come : another instant and Joyce would be in his arms putting all pampered menials to scorn——

The door opened. There was a faint rustle of ladies' dresses, a glow of softened light, the sound of his own name, 'Mr. Andrew 'Alliday,' and then a cry. She did not rush into his arms. He came to himself after that interval of excitement, and saw Joyce standing, her hands clasped, her eyes with a look of horror in them, drawing back as if she would have fled, with her face turned towards the door. He put down his hat upon the nearest chair, and crying 'Joyce!' went forward with outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JOYCE had just come in from her morning walk. She was standing in the middle of the room with her hat, which she had just taken off, in her hand. And Mrs. Hayward had been making some remarks to her, such as mothers often, and stepmothers in some cases, feel it their duty to make. It was on the subject of the Sitwells, whom Mrs. Hayward regarded in their poverty (notwithstanding that the parsonage-house had been begun, and things were on the whole going well with them) with a certain contempt.

‘I think, indeed, you prefer such people to those of our own class.’

This was what Mrs. Hayward was saying when Baker, still more contemptuous of the inferior world than she, opened the door.

‘There is a person,’ he said, ‘asking for Miss Hayward.’

‘A person—one of your district people, no doubt. They come at all hours. There really must be a stop put to this, Joyce.’

‘Well, ma’am, it’s a male person, with a haccent,’ said Baker—‘not one from these parts.’

‘Miss Hayward can’t see every idler who chooses to ask for her: inquire his name,’ said the mistress of the house.

And no premonition crossed the mind of Joyce. She stood to receive the interrupted lecture, with her head a little bent, and her hat in her hand. She never made any stand for herself on such occasions, nor said a word in self-defence—probably afraid to trust her voice, and too proud to squabble. This made her, it need scarcely be said, very provoking to her stepmother, and aggravated any original offence in the most insufferable way. She stood quite silent now, waiting till she should be dismissed. And to tell the truth, Joyce, in the multitude of her thoughts, was very sick of everything about her, and of the friends for whom she was incurring reproof,

and of the petty fault-finding which seemed to surround her steps wherever she went. Mrs. Hayward did not resume her lecture. She sat down, slightly flushed and angry, expectant to see what new visitor might betray Joyce's inclination towards shabby persons. 'Mr. Andrew 'Alliday,' said Baker, reading from the card. And then Joyce uttered that cry—her hat fell out of her hand upon the floor. She started violently, gave a hurried glance round as if looking for some way of escape, then turned a pale and terrified countenance towards the door.

'Joyce!'

The man was quite respectable ; his frock-coat made him look like a Dissenting minister, or perhaps a commercial traveller, or something of that kind. This was Mrs. Hayward's bewildered reflection. She sat and looked on as if it had been a scene in a play.

'Oh!' Joyce said, clasping her hands. Then with a great effort she held out one hesitatingly to the newcomer, and said, 'Andrew!' her voice dying away in her throat.

He seized her hand in both his. Though he loved Joyce, and his heart bounded at

the sight of her, he was also anxious to impress the pampered menial with a sense of the hideous mistake he had made. 'My darling!' he cried.

Baker did hear, and grew purple with horror, and lingered about the door after he had reluctantly closed it, to hear more if possible. But Joyce retreated before the ardent advance of her lover. The light began to fail in her eyes. She put up her hands faintly to keep him back. 'Oh, Andrew! what has brought you here?' she cried.

'Who is this—person?' said Mrs. Hayward, rising from her chair.

Andrew turned round upon her with a smile. 'It is a long time since we have met,' he said. 'She is a little agitated. She was always very shy. Another man who did not understand might think this was a cold reception. But I know her better. You will be Mrs. Hayward, ma'am, without doubt?'

'Yes, I am Mrs. Hayward; but what have you to do with Joyce? and how do you dare to call Miss Hayward by her Christian name?' cried the lady of the house.

Andrew smiled again—he was prepared even for this emergency. ‘My name,’ he said, smiling with a complacency which diffused itself all over him, and shone even in the glister of his well-blacked boots, ‘should be sufficient passport for me in this house. But perhaps you did not properly catch my name, for English servants clip the consonants in a surprising manner. Allow me——’ He had taken out the card-case, that infallible mark of gentility, and here handed her a card with an ease and grace to which he felt no objection could be made. Mrs. Hayward, confounded, read out aloud, ‘Mr. Andrew Halliday.’ Underneath, in very small letters, was written, ‘*Schoolhouse, Comely Green.*’

‘You will at once perceive, ma’am,’ said Andrew, ‘that if I ask to be left for a little alone with Joyce, I am asking no more than my right.’

‘Alone with Joyce! You want—what do you want? ME to take myself out of your way! Oh, this is too much!’ Mrs. Hayward cried.

‘It is not too much, madam,’ said

Andrew, increasing in dignity, 'if you consider the circumstances. It is surely no more than any man in my position has a right to ask.'

'Joyce, who is this man? Joyce, do you hear that he wants to turn me out of my own drawing-room? For goodness' sake——! Oh, I must call Colonel Hayward.'

'That will be just in every sense the best way. The Cornel knows me, and he will at once understand,' said Andrew, with the blindest self-possession. He opened the door for Mrs. Hayward, which he knew was the right thing to do; and it was sweet to him to feel that he was acting as a gentleman should from every point of view.

'Joyce!' he cried—'my Joyce! now we are really alone, though perhaps only for a moment—one sweet look, my own dear!'

Joyce drew back from him, shrinking to the very wall. 'Don't,' she said, 'don't!' retreating before him. Then, with some-think of her old authority, 'Sit down there; sit down and tell me, has anything happened? What has brought you here?'

'Oh, is that what is wrong?' he said.

‘I’ve frightened you, my dear one. No, no —no reason to be frightened. They are all well, and sent every message. Joyce, can you ask why I came? Because I could do without you no longer—because I was just longing for a look, for a kind word——’

‘Sit down,’ she said in peremptory tones, ‘sit down!’ She herself kept standing, leaning upon the glass door which led out to the verandah, her slender figure standing dark against the light. Her heart beat so, that there was a thrill and tremble all over her, visible against that background to which she clung. But it gave her a little relief when he obeyed her, and deposited himself upon a chair.

‘I am very sorry to have alarmed you, my dear. I thought that when you heard my name, your first thought would be for me. It was not too much to expect, was it, after being engaged—for more than a year?’

‘Andrew,’ she said, with a shiver—‘Andrew.’

‘What, my dearest? I know you’re very shy—very, very diffident—far more than you ought to be. If ever girl should have a little

assurance, a little confidence, surely it would be you with me.'

He could not but be superior still—trying to reassure her, to give her a little boldness, smiling upon her in his most protecting, encouraging way.

'Andrew,' she said again. And then Joyce's courage failed her altogether. She seized on any, the first expedient that occurred to her to postpone all personal questions. 'You are sure they are well,' she said tremulously. 'Granny—and my grandfather—and all; and not missing me—not too much—not breaking their hearts——'

'Breaking their hearts! But why should they, poor old bodies?—the feelings get blunted at that time of life. So long as they have their porridge and their broth, and plenty of good cakes—and a cup of tea. It is me you should ask that question. Do you know you have used me ill, Joyce? You have written oftener to them than to me—though it is me,' Halliday said, 'with whom you have to spend your life—I am not saying at Comely Green. No doubt you've got different notions in a house like this. It's

always difficult to go back, and I would not wish it—I would not ask it. But in some more refined, more cultivated place—in some position like what we read of—like what able men are securing every day——’ He rose as he spoke, inspired by this conviction, and approached her once more with outstretched arms.

Mrs. Hayward could not find her husband upstairs or down. He went to his library invariably after his walk, but he was not there to-day. He had not gone to his room upstairs. He was not among his flower-seeds in the closet, where he had at the present season a great deal to do, arranging and naming these treasures. At last she met him coming in, in his tranquil way, from the garden, a pot of flowers in his hand.

‘Look at these begonias, my dear. Now isn’t it worth while to take a little trouble when one gets a result like this? I am carrying it in for your own little table.’

‘It is a fine time to talk of begonias,’ she cried, pushing away the plant which he held out to her. ‘Henry, for goodness’ sake hurry into the drawing-room and put a stop

to it at once! That man is there with Joyce.'

'That man!' cried the Colonel, astounded. 'What man? Bellendean?'

'Oh, how can you talk! What objections could there be to—— Henry, wake yourself up, for goodness' sake! It is the man—the man you would never tell me of—the school-master—the Scotchman. Go, go! and put a stop to it. I have been hunting for you high and low. Who can tell what they are settling all by themselves? Henry, I tell you go and put a stop to it!'

The Colonel put down the pot upon the hall table. He was quite bewildered. 'The Scotchman?' he said; 'the—the—school-master?—with Joyce? I suppose, my dear, it must be one of her old friends?'

'I suppose, my dear, it is the man you—never told me of,' cried Mrs. Hayward fiercely. 'The man she was to marry. Go, I tell you, and put a stop to it, Henry!'

'I put a stop to it!' he said. The Colonel grew red like a girl—he grew pale—he wrung his hands. 'Elizabeth, my dear, you know all about that better than I ever could

do ; you understand — such things. How could I—put a stop to it ?' In his trouble he paced up and down the hall, and knocked against Baker, who was hanging about in the hope of hearing something, and ordered him off in a stentorian voice. 'What are you doing here, sir? Be off, sir, this moment!' cried the Colonel. Then he added, apologetic yet angry, 'These servants take a great deal upon them. You should teach them their proper place.'

'Henry,' cried Mrs. Hayward, 'it is not like you to save yourself behind the servants. You must come with me, at least. I insist upon it. What authority have I over her? If I must interfere, it can only be as representing you. They may have settled everything by this time,' she cried, and seized her husband's arm. It was not to support him, as he very well knew, but to drag him to the sacrifice.

Andrew had risen : he had gone towards his love, holding out his arms. His figure, not graceful in itself, with the long frock-coat coming down a little too low, and putting him out of drawing, showed against the light ;

while Joycé, trembling, pressed against the window, shrinking from his advance, seemed to stand on the defensive, with a pale and panic-stricken face. When the Colonel saw this scene, he no longer needed any stimulant. He dropped his wife's arm, and, stepping forward quickly, put his hand upon the intruder's shoulder. 'Hey, sir! don't you see the young lady is afraid of you?' he cried.

Andrew turned round at once with a quick recovery, and instantly extended his hand. He required not a moment to recover himself, being primed and ready for whatever might happen. 'How do you do, Cornel?' he said; 'I'm extremely glad to see you. I was telling Mrs. Hayward—as I presume that lady is, though Joyce, being so shy, did not introduce me,—I was telling her that this happy meeting would be incomplete without a sight of you.'

'What do you want here, sir?' cried the Colonel. 'What have you to do with my daughter?' Then Colonel Hayward's natural courtesy checked him in spite of himself. 'I—I beg your pardon,' he said, after a

moment. 'Perhaps I'm making a mistake, —perhaps it's me you want, and not my daughter. Joyce, no need to be frightened, my love, when your father's here.'

Andrew had not given way an inch. He had no want of courage. He confronted the angry warrior without flinching. 'What do I want here, Cornel?' he said. 'I see you have forgotten me. I have just come to see *her*. It is natural I should want to see the young lady I am engaged to. You took her away in such a hurry, I had no time to make any arrangement. But nobody will doubt my right to come and see her, I suppose. Joyce, my dear one——'

'Be silent, sir!' the angry Colonel cried.

Andrew shrugged his shoulders. 'Silent or not, it makes little difference. Words between you and me, Cornel, will change nothing,' he said.

'Joyce,' cried the Colonel, with a gasp, 'what does this fellow mean? You are almost fainting with terror. Go away, and leave me to deal with this man.'

'She'll not do that,' said Andrew calmly.

'She'll not do that? She shall do what I

wish, sir, I can tell you, and nobody shall interfere with her actions in her father's house.'

'She'll not do that, Cornel, for this good reason, that Joyce will never give up her word pledged and her promise given. If you think so, it is clear you know very little of Joyce, Colonel Hayward, though you are her father,' Halliday said.

He did not look at Joyce to intimidate her. He held up his commonplace head; and though he was of unimposing stature, and his frock-coat was too long, the school-master looked every inch a man. His homely features grew dignified, his attitude fine. The Colonel stared at him, silent, not comprehending the transformation; while Joyce, roused too by this subtle change in the air, stood upright apart from the window on which she had been leaning, and turned to her father with a steadiness which was given at once by the sudden stimulus and by the rising despair.

'Father,' she said, it is quite true. 'I—did not expect him—and it gave me a shock. I thought perhaps—he might be bringing ill

news. 'It is true,' she said, after a pause; 'I am engaged—to Andrew Halliday. He has a right to come—for me——' Her voice stopped again. She stood quite still for a moment, then flinging herself suddenly on the Colonel's shoulder, 'Oh, *father!* FATHER!' she cried.

'What do you think of this, sir?' cried the Colonel, clasping her fast with one arm, holding out the other with an oratorical wave.

'I think just what she has said herself, that she is excited and overdone. I am very sorry I did not write and tell her I was coming. It would have saved her all this. But her nerves were not in this agitated state in the old days. I would like to know what you have been doing to my betrothed among you in England,' the schoolmaster said, 'to make her like this.'

Colonel Hayward was too angry, too much bewildered and agitated, to reply. He took Joyce to the sofa, and made her sit down. 'My dear child,' he said, 'you must not let yourself be intimidated,—you mustn't give way. You may be sure you are quite

safe. Nobody shall bully you or put forth a false claim upon you here.'

Mrs. Hayward had not said a word all this time, her husband having unexpectedly risen to the height of the occasion. Elizabeth knew how to hold her tongue. But she intervened now with calm authority. 'We've no right to say it is a false claim,' she said, 'till we know more about it; but you can see for yourself, Mr.—Mr. Halliday, that she is not in a state now to have it proved. Come back later; nothing can be done now. Come back in the evening, and my husband will see you finally.'

'Finally!' said Andrew. 'You will see me finally, ma'am, when I take away my wife—but not till then. After that, you may be sure I will have little temptation to show myself in this house.'

The schoolmaster was roused. All that was best in him—his real love, his true independence, his sense of manhood, all came to his aid. He knew his rights and his power, and that no father could crush a lover so determined. But though he said these words with genuine and indignant feeling, the utter-

ance of them brought another side of the question back to his mind. If it came to that—yes; he was man enough to carry his love away, herself alone, as he had wooed her for herself alone. But nobody but he knew how many glorious visions, how many hopes, would be cut off if he shook the dust from off his feet and resolved to cross that threshold no more. He would not give up Joyce, but he as good as gave up the headmastership—that dream of glory. He saw it melt away in the air, the baseless fabric of a vision. He felt himself come down, with a giddy sense of descent and failure, and become once more Andrew Halliday, schoolmaster, Comely Green. He had even perhaps a little neglected Comely Green for the sake of that too sweet, too tempting illusion. And now he must resign all thought of it, all hope. The renunciation thrilled through all his nerves, as he stood there facing the prejudiced and foolish people who did not perceive what it was they were throwing away. But even this did not shake his faith in himself and his confidence in his rights. He cast a glance which was full of

compassion yet disapproval at the group on the sofa. 'I can see,' he said, 'that Joyce is too much agitated to be responsible, and that the Cornel is excited and unable to see the rights of the situation. Therefore, ma'am, I will take your advice. It is not the reception I had a right to expect; but nevertheless I have full faith in Joyce when she comes to herself. I will withdraw till this evening. No ceremony, I beg,' cried Andrew hurriedly. 'I will find my way out—there's no need for any one to open the door.' Even in the midst of questions so much more serious, he remembered that it would be bitter indeed to show his discomfiture to the pampered menial who had admitted him. That at least he would not endure.

Mrs. Hayward followed him out of the room, sparing him this indignity. Perhaps the sight of Joyce leaning upon her father, absorbing his every thought, was as little agreeable to her as to Andrew. If Joyce was in trouble, it was at least her own making, whereas the innocent people whom she dragged into it had done nothing to deserve it. Mrs. Hayward regarded Andrew

with angry contempt, but she was not without a certain fellow-feeling for him as a sufferer from the same cause. His air of terrible respectability, his coat, his hat, his gloves, everything about him, were so many additions to the sins of Joyce. And yet she felt herself more or less, as against Joyce, on Andrew's side. She stood behind him while he opened the door, grimly watching all his imperfections. The back-door, she said to herself, the servants' hall, would have been his right place. And yet, if the man spoke the truth, he was quite a fit and proper match for Joyce!

CHAPTER XXXV

FROM August to November the time had gone very slowly and very hardly for Joyce.

After that glowing afternoon, when she had heard from Norman Bellendean words which she could never forget, not another sign or token from him had reached her. It is not an unprecedented thing that a gap like this should happen in the midst of a love-tale. A declaration interrupted, a question unanswered, may expose any pair of lovers to such a blank. The man may be kept back by many reasons; the woman on her side cannot gather up the broken threads. Joyce, above all, had no initiative to take. He had said he would come back, but he had not come back; and thus the story of her awakened heart had seemed to close, as it began, in agitation and shame. It had been

wrong to listen to him, wrong to allow the thought of him to enter into her heart. She had not intended it, she said to herself, as is always said. The strong new tide which she did not understand, the character of which she had begun to suspect too late, had carried her away. What defence could she have put up against it when she never suspected it,—when it was to her a surprise most painful, though so intoxicating? Who is there guilty of such infidelity, forsaking an old love for a new, who cannot excuse herself in such words? And of many such it is true, as with Joyce, that the first love had been a mere name, a something not understood, an acquiescence—no more. If she had sinned against Andrew in accepting the love which was true enough on his side, without any real response, it had been done without guile, with no knowledge of any harm. Joyce had been conscious that it was not the love of which her beloved poets had sung; but how could she tell? As there was no second Shakespeare, so perhaps that love of the poets had died away into something calm and poor, like the dull prose of to-day; and when

the dulness about her had burst asunder like a husk, and flowers had come forth, and a blossoming and brightness indescribable, the girl, bewildered, had tried to attribute that illumination to other causes, to give it other names.

The revelation, when it came, lasted but for a moment. Before she had been able to realise the sunshine that suddenly blazed upon her life, there had as suddenly followed a blank. The bewilderment and confusion of all things, which had been great enough before, were by this brought to a climax. Norman's declaration or half-declaration completed the cutting off of her heart and existence from every ancient tie. She dared not seek light in the chaos of her mind from any one near her. She dared not betray it to the tender ears of the old people who would not understand, to whom she could not say all. To whom could she say all?—to no one, no one on earth. She had to fall back upon herself, a creature straying about in worlds not realised. Andrew appeared to her through the mists like the vision of a nightmare, whose approach would

be death. Never, even when no distraction was in her mind, when he was the most near and the most natural of all companions, had she been able to tolerate the idea of a closer union. She had vaguely looked for something to happen, to prevent any further *rapprochement*. She had surrounded herself with reasons why no further step should be taken. But she had never felt as now the horror of the bond which held her like iron—which she had escaped from, yet from which she never could escape. And, on the other hand, scarcely less terrible was the brighter vision which had burst upon her in one dazzling, bewildering blaze—the revelation which at first seemed to be that of Norman Bellendean's love for her, but which soon settled into a shameful, terrible consciousness of her love for him. He had lighted up that blaze, and then he had disappeared out of her life, leaving her to contend alone with this discovery and consciousness. He had not asked for an answer from her—he had only asked to come back. And he had not come back; he had disappeared as if he had never existed, only leaving this revelation,

this overturn of everything—the glory, the horror, the shame.

Joyce, it is true, had been absent for a great part of this blank period of darkness through which no word or sign of life had come. She had been taken away into new scenes, into a new world, the novelty and delight of which might have saved her had she ever remained long enough in one place to realise and understand it. But it was only to her of all her party that Switzerland was a novelty. Her father and his wife were accustomed to travel. They moved from one tourist centre to another carrying all their usual habits with them, possessing a terrible monotony of acquaintance with everything there was to do and to see. Mrs. Hayward took Mont Blanc as calmly as she did the river of which she felt her own lawn and trees to be one of the great charms. The Colonel thought more of the occasional old Indian comrade whom he would meet in one of the big noisy hotels, than of all the mysteries of the Alps.

Joyce had therefore little aid in healing her wounds herself, as she might have done,

by that strong fascination of nature to which her spirit was so open. The mountains were not still to her, nor was there solitude to be found in the wildest ravine. She was taken there in the midst of a party which discussed their usual concerns, and were intent upon luncheon at the usual hour. The snowy peaks only formed a new background for the prattle of common life, for talk about St. Augustine and the new parsonage. The new world was to her like the old, only more bewildering—a phantasmagoria in which the great and the petty were jumbled together,—the great too cold and unfamiliar to reach her soul, the petty like a babbling torrent carrying her away. Oh for the crags of Arthur's Seat and the sea coming in ayont them! Oh for the quiet where thought is possible! But then with a shiver poor Joyce felt that there was nothing for her but flight from the dear familiar scenes, and from the very stillness for which her heart craved. For the one was full of conflicting passions and the other of conflicting thoughts. Of all places in the world, that place which, with the obstinacy of the heart, she still called

home was the most impossible to her. She dared not even turn her face in that direction, lest the subdued struggle within her might become a real conflict. For there was all that she dreaded as well as all that she loved.

And even when the travelling was over things did not mend. Summer was gone, and all its events. She came back to a blank, to the level of an existence no longer new to her, but which she had never learned to love. The sudden blaze of awakening, of enlightenment, of delight and misery, had ceased as suddenly as it rose. She never now heard Norman Bellendean's name. He did not come, he gave no sign : he might be dead, or gone back to India, or in the farthest part of the earth, for anything she knew. He had disappeared as if he never had been, leaving in her heart and mind only the miserable consciousness that she loved him—oh, shame to think of ! She so proud in her reserve and maidenly withdrawal ! she affianced to another man ! she, Joyce, who had been so proud ! She felt herself, she who had been a kind of princess in her own thoughts, reduced to the humble state of the Eastern

handmaiden, waiting till perhaps some token of favour might be shown to her,—some word upon which she could build her hopes. It is rare that any shame, real and deserved, is felt with the same sting of suffering and self-horror as attends the altogether fantastic shame of a sensitive girl, when she finds that she has given her love unsought. It was torture and misery to Joyce. To allow to herself that she was disappointed—that her ear was always intent on every coming step, her heart ready to beat loudly for every sudden call, filled her with a bitterness of humiliation such as crime itself would scarcely bring. But nobody had any clue to these thoughts. Her father saw nothing but that his daughter became every day more delightful to him, more indispensable. Mrs. Hayward, with a faint disdain which it pleased her to be able to entertain for her husband's daughter, concluded that Joyce, whom everybody thought so clever, was in reality dull. She had not shown any appreciation of Switzerland. She was a girl who might know books, perhaps, but nothing else. She had not cared for the mountains. It was

impossible not to allow that Mrs. Hayward was rather satisfied on the whole that this should be. Perhaps only old Janet, with a sore and sad heart, felt that something was amiss. She did not know what it was that was wanting, but something was wanting. The letters which Peter found an inexhaustible source of happiness were to her dark. She could not see her child through them. 'There is something the maitter,' Janet said to herself. But nobody else divined, and to no one did Joyce breathe a word.

It was in this condition that she had begun the sunshiny, hazy, November day. It was Friday, the Friday of the winter Preachings, the Fast-day in Bellendean. She had remembered this when she set out with Colonel Hayward for their morning walk, with a tender thought of Janet in her great shawl, and Peter in his Sunday clothes, sitting in the kirk in rustic state and religious *recueillement*. And now the blank was broken, the silence disturbed, but not as she thought.

'My dear, don't you be afraid—I am here to protect you, Joyce; your father is surely good for that. This man can do nothing,

nothing. Thank God that you don't love him—that there is not *that* to struggle against.'

'Father, it is quite true. Oh, I have behaved badly—I am not fit to be among honourable folk. I have not respected my word.'

'Stuff and nonsense, my dear. What did a girl like you know? He took advantage of your ignorance. You could never have—cared for that fellow, Joyce.' The Colonel himself blushed at the thought.

Joyce made no reply.

'He took advantage of your inexperience—he never could have been a match for you. I remember—he was there that afternoon in the cottage. He tried to thrust his claims upon me, but Norman Bellendean took him off me. Ah, Norman Bellendean!'

The Colonel broke off quickly. He was not clear about it at all, but he remembered that Elizabeth—that there was something about Bellendean. He stopped confused; and, with a sudden start, Joyce raised herself from the sofa. He had brought her to life, though he did not know it, by that violent

stimulant. 'I must not,' she said, in a broken voice, 'go back from my word.'

'I set you free from it,' said the Colonel. 'You were under age; you had no right to bind yourself. I set you free from it.'

She shook her head at him with a wistful smile. 'It was once thought a priest could do that,' she said.

'I am not a priest, but I am your father, Joyce. I set you free from it. It is in the Bible—you know your Bible better than I do. I set you free from it. You had no right to bind yourself.'

She shook her head still. 'I cannot get any comfort out of that. I was a woman, well knowing what I was doing.'

'My dear, you are not of age even now.'

'Oh, father,' she cried, 'don't say anything to me. I cannot go back from my word.'

'Joyce, I hear my wife coming back. I am not clever, I know. Elizabeth is the one to tell us what to do. If she will only take it up—if you will let her take it up.'

Joyce rose quickly to her feet. 'Not now—not now. I couldn't speak to any one. Father, you must let me settle it by myself.'

‘Joyce! Oh, have confidence in us both, Joyce!’

Joyce escaped from his restraining hand and imploring look. She hastened out of one door while Mrs. Hayward entered by the other, and, with her limbs trembling under her, got to the refuge of her own room, where at least there was no one to question her, and tell her what she ought to do. She was not capable of any more. She threw herself down in a chair, and did not move for hours, turning it over and over—helplessly over and over in her mind. It was all she could do. The scene through which she had just passed repeated itself before her—every word that had been said, every look. When she was called to go downstairs for lunch, she made excuses for herself she knew not what, and sat there with a sort of helpless craving only to be alone—to be left to herself—through all the daylight hours. It seemed to Joyce that everything else had disappeared for ever, that every vision of her soul was gone,—that Andrew alone stood before her, the only stable and stedfast thing. She saw him before her eyes

all the time, with all his imperfections. There had never been any glamour in her eyes to blind her to these. His familiar aspect, with which she had grown unfamiliar, came back to her with all the force at once of recollection and of new discovery. He had come to claim her, and he had a right to claim her; and how could she resist that claim? He had not hesitated, nor had he been cowed even by her dread of him, by her father's vehemence. He had stood for his rights like a man. A respect for the man at whom she shuddered, whose approach was dreadful to her, had come into Joyce's mind: even with strange inconsistency she was half proud of him in his immovableness—in the resolution and force he had shown. She tried to face it all calmly, to contemplate her fate,—to ask herself whether, perhaps, her old life, the duties to which she had been born, were not after all the best, the only existence for her? There would be plenty to do, there would not be much time to think. The clamour of the school, and all the old emulations, and the ambitions which had once seemed enough to fill any mind, would shut out all echoes

and banish all ghosts. Only for a few months had she been absent—not enough to change her habits, to change the fashion of her mind. Why should she resist and strive against her fate?

She tried to soothe and put away other visions by that—the school, the children's looks of interest, the clinging of the girls about her, the books in which she could always escape from all that troubled her. With her trembling hands clasped, with her eyes in an abstract gaze, she saw all these things again, and for a moment her heart beat calm. But then once more, with a sudden flash, with a start, with a cry of horror, she recognised in front of all, him—Andrew—as he had stood before her to-day, as she remembered him, as he was and had always been. Joyce sprang to her feet to escape that steady, calm, immovable image. She put her hands over her hot eyes, but could not shut it out. She paced about her room, but could not get beyond the place in which he stood. He filled all the sphere of her vision, as he would fill her whole life. Oh, how to escape—how to escape! Oh for

the wings of a dove!—but where to fly? She flung herself down on her knees by the side of her bed. Sometimes in that attitude merely there is a relief. She was not praying, but laying her heart with all its confusions, its whirl of contradictory thoughts, its wild longings for escape, open where God could see it, calling wistfully His attention to it as human creatures will, in human forgetfulness that everywhere and in all attitudes He sees, and does not neglect.

Later in the afternoon Joyce stole out to seek counsel from the evening breeze and the cold flow of the river. She was afraid to go beyond the limits of the garden and grounds lest she should meet him alone, and forestall the decision of her fate. The November evening was chill with cold dews falling, the grass penetrated with wet, the half-naked trees all heavy with moisture, sprinkling cold showers over her when the breeze moved them. She went down to the river-edge, and looked out upon it in the gray of the twilight, flowing, glistening, giving back the little light there was. A boat was drawn up here and there on the bank, but

there was none on the stream, which, swollen with early rains, and bearing on its dark clear surface specks of the leaves that every air swept off the overhanging trees, flowed on through the darkness, a ceaseless wayfarer. The willows, still in ragged robes of pale yellow, gave a faint light to the darkling scene. Joyce leant over, almost feeling the sweep of the stream, and there came upon her a strong temptation to detach the boat that lay within her reach, and trust herself to the flowing water and the night. The possibilities of that flight came before her instantaneously like a picture. The stream itself would carry her along; the movement itself would soothe her troubled spirit. She seemed to feel the rush of the water under the bridge, to see the lights of the town twinkling reflected on the water, the opening of the dim evening skies beyond, the dark shadows of barges and ships as the widening stream flowed on. She saw in a moment all the dark panorama float past her, the increasing rush of the Thames, the sound of its gurgle in her ears, the growing dangers of the darkness, and the crowded ways. The

little boat might go down under the bows of some monster in the dark, and no one ever know what young despairing heart was in it. She saw, too, the dark mass heaving up high above, the frail little vessel turning over, the choking inky stream, and drew back with a low cry of terror. It was indeed a kind of despair which was closing round her, but she wanted to escape and not to die—not yet to die.

The shuddering of that sensation brought her back slowly away from the dark fascination of the flowing water. She came back picking her steps across the wet grass, chilled by the damp and the dark, the cold rain-drops suspended on the branches coming down upon her in an icy shower as she passed under the trees. The lights in the windows, the warmth of the house, shone through the twilight, attracting her, putting forth a strong appeal. But what was warmth and shelter to freedom, if she could but get her freedom and escape from it all? Joyce had got beyond all power of thinking. Her mind saw pictures, visions of what might be, as more reasonable people see the motives

and arguments which tell for or against every course of action. As she turned her face from the river and reached the gravel path, there suddenly came before her a vision of a still and quiet country road, such as she had seen in her walks, leading far away into far level distances, the long perspective of the low-lying country. She bethought herself of a dozen turns and byways, all leading into the unknown. She saw them stretching for miles and miles, leading the wayfarer far out of sight of every one who knew her, and the dark line of the hedgerows that would keep her from straying, and the sleeping villages she would pass through. There would be no dangers in a country road, and she was strong: she could go a long way without requiring to pause. There would be ten hours of darkness in which she could walk on. She was not afraid of her strength failing. And at the end surely there would be some quiet place where nobody would ever think of finding a strayed creature. It would be like falling and disappearing through Mirza's bridge. Joyce stood still for a moment, moved by a wild prick of that

unreasoning impulse which was in her blood. By the side of the house was a dim opening which admitted to that world, strange, dark, and cold, in which a poor girl could lose herself who had no true place, no natural nest in the other. She paused for a moment, clasping her hands, appealing to she knew not what—not God this time : there are moments when the bewildered soul becomes pagan in its broken faith—to something, she knew not what, above, around.

The lamp had been lighted in the drawing-room, but no curtains drawn or shutters closed. Another picture, a real one, caught her eyes there as she hesitated, standing on the edge. She was close to the verandah upon which the window opened, and she heard the sound of the voices within, now raised, now sinking low. The sudden spell of a stronger interest seized upon Joyce. She came forward a few steps at a time, unwilling and yet eager, until she commanded a full view of the party within. Her father stood facing the window. He was talking with much vehemence, referring occasionally to his wife, who sat in her usual place, a very

watchful spectator—now and then breaking off with a flourish of his hand, as a man does when he has said something unanswerable. With his back towards the window, Andrew sat squarely on a chair, his hat at his feet. There came upon Joyce an impulse of painful laughter in the midst of her misery. It was a look, an attitude she knew so well—ludicrously, horribly familiar in this crisis of her fate,—for it was her fate, her life or death, they were deciding, while he sat there like a rock, unconvincible, immovable, as he had sat through many a discussion that mattered nothing. For who could ever convince Andrew? She drew closer in the sudden smart of the recollection, the keen sense of incongruity, the reality of this scene dispersing every vision. The living drama, in which she was herself the chief figure, had a stronger force than any imagination. She went into the verandah, to the window against which, on the other side, she had leant in the morning. It was not fastened, and yielded to her touch. They all turned upon her at the sound of the faint cry she gave.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE light dazzled her as she came into the warm room, in the midst of this conference. Colonel Hayward started forward to meet her, and his wife rose from her chair. But Andrew did not budge. In his world no such respectful movement was thought of; and in times of excitement he had not leisure to think, nor note what others did.

‘Joyce, why are you here?’ her father said hastily.

‘Joyce, you will come with me,’ said Mrs. Hayward. ‘Let the gentlemen settle this matter. Come with me.’

‘Joyce,’ said Andrew, ‘in justice to me you will remain here.’

She stood looking from one to another with eyes still wild with her secret dreams and projects, which no one suspected, and

the drops of cold dew glittering in her hair. 'Father,' she said, 'you know I must stay. I cannot leave it to you, as if—as if—you had known it all the time.'

'Joyce sees what is just,' said Andrew. 'There was neither father nor mother between us. She decided for herself, and she will have to decide for herself again. Cornel, leave her alone.' He spoke with great composure, in his ordinary tone. 'I will take no answer from you, but I'll abide by what she says.'

'She is under age,' said Colonel Hayward. 'Sir, if you were a little better acquainted with ordinary rules, you would know it is her father only who has the right to reply to you.'

'And how do you know, Cornel, that she is under age? Were you there when she was born? Were you near at hand to see your child? What do you know about her more than any passer-by?'

'Sir!' cried Colonel Hayward, stammering with indignation, 'you presume upon the shelter of my roof, and on being beneath—beneath my notice.'

‘Not beneath being your son-in-law,’ Andrew said.

‘Joyce,’ said Mrs. Hayward angrily, ‘either put a stop to this at once, or come with me and let your father settle it. You make everything worse by being here.’

Joyce stood between them trembling, unable to command, as she had once so vainly thought she could, the situation in which she found herself. Oh, how much easier to fly, either by the dark river or the darker country! ‘I will respect my father,’ she said, ‘in everything—in everything—but——’

The last word did not reach the Colonel’s ear. He drew her hand within his arm. ‘Thank you, my dear,’ he said. ‘Then it is all right. Mr. Halliday, or whatever your name is, there must be no more of this. I might lose my temper. I might forget that you are under my roof. Don’t you hear what my daughter has said? In such a matter a gentleman gives way at once. It’s no question of love.’ He pressed Joyce’s trembling hand in his arm. ‘If you’ve any regard for her, sir, or for your own character, you’ll go away and disturb her no more.’

Andrew had risen slowly to his feet. He came forward with his hand raised, as if he were about to address a class. 'You'll observe,' he said, 'that the circumstances only, and not the persons, are changed. It was a question of love six months ago. I was a man in a good position, my father very respectable, a little money in the family. And she was Joyce, a female teacher, with nobody to stand for her but Peter Matheson, a ploughman.'

'You insult me, sir,' cried Colonel Hayward—'you insult my daughter!' He held her hand close, pressing it in his to console her. 'My poor Joyce, my poor child!' he exclaimed.

'Nevertheless,' said Andrew, with composure, 'it is true. Joyce knows that it is true. My mother, who expresses herself strongly, put it in other words: it was said I was throwing myself away. I did not think so; but that being the case, Cornel, you need not think I will be daunted because she is your daughter, or any man's daughter. She's Joyce—and engaged to me.'

'Leave my house, sir,' cried the Colonel.

‘You have insulted my child. For that there is no excuse and no pardon. Leave my house.’

‘Father,’ said Joyce, ‘it’s no insult—it is all true. I am always Joyce, whatever I am besides. And when I was poor, it was thought a—credit to me. He should not have said it, but it’s true. I never thought of that, and he should not have said it: but it’s true. He held out his hand to me when I was—beneath him.’

‘Joyce!’

‘Yes, I see it all, though I did not think of it then. Oh, excuse him! he does not know a man should never say that! They do it and think no harm where we come from. We were common folk. He did me honour, and am I to do him discredit? I cannot, I cannot. I must keep to my word.’

‘Joyce, for heaven’s sake, don’t act like a mad woman! Come away with me and let them settle it,’ cried Mrs. Hayward, seizing her arm on the other side.

‘Joyce behaves just as I should have expected from her,’ said Andrew, facing this agitated group with his own supreme self-

possession and calm. 'I knew I could not be deceived. I am willing to make every allowance for your feelings, Cornel. You naturally look for a richer man than me to be your daughter's husband. I respect even the prejudices of a man like you. But there is no real reason to be disturbed about that. I am a young man. I have always been successful, so far as has been in my power. There is no need for me to remain in the humble place I now fill. With your interest and my own merits——'

'Good Lord!' the Colonel cried. He dropped his daughter's arm in his consternation, and stood with his lips apart, with a stare of horror.

'My own merits,' repeated Andrew, 'I think we might soon so modify the circumstances that you need object no longer. I am not afraid of the circumstances,' he said, with a smile of complacency. 'You can tell your father, Joyce, what testimonials——'

'Father,' said Joyce eagerly, with a burning blush, 'he is to be excused. That is how they think where——where we came from. He is—not a gentleman: we were——common

folk. Father, he means it all right, though he does not know. He's good, though—though he speaks another language.' Her own horror and dismay took the form of apology. She was roused by her consternation into full and eager life.

'And you hold by this man, Joyce, and you plead for him!' Colonel Hayward cried.

'You will understand, Cornel,' said Andrew, who had drawn himself up indignantly, and sacrificed all the advantage of his self-possession in sudden discomposure and resentment, 'that I ask nobody to plead for me. Joyce has been carried away with trying to please both parties. She is sacrificing me to soothe you down. Women will do such things ; they will not learn. But for my part, I reject her excuses. I'll have no forbearance on that score,' cried Andrew, holding up his head and throwing back his shoulders. 'I stand upon my own merits, as between man and man.'

Then the Joyce of other days found words—not the tremulous girl, all strange in strange places, who was Colonel Hayward's

daughter, but the swift-speaking, high-handed Joyce, the possible princess, the lady born of Janet's cottage. 'Oh,' she cried, her words pouring forth on a sudden passionate breath, 'how dare you bring up your merits here, and all your worldly thoughts! My old grandfather was but a ploughman, but he was a gentleman like my father. He would have put you to the door if you had said all that to him. And you stand before a man that has fought, and has the Queen's medals on his breast—that has been wounded in battle, and faced cannon and sword; and before a lady that has no knowledge of the ways of common folk; and before me, that you said you loved; and you stand up and tell them of the female teacher that you held out your hand to, and of your merits, that make you good enough for the best—for Colonel Hayward's daughter, that is a great soldier, a great captain, far too noble and great to put you to the door like Peter Matheson. Oh, Andrew Halliday, for shame, for shame!—you, after all the books you have read, and all the fine words you have said. I am ashamed myself,' said

Joyce, turning from him with a proud despair, 'for I thought that Shakespeare and all the poets would make a gentleman even out of the commonest clay.'

Andrew bore this without quailing, with a smile on his face. When she stopped, he drew a long breath, and turned with an explanatory air to Colonel Hayward. 'That is just one of her old tirades,' he said.

The Colonel paid him no attention: he put his arm round his daughter, as tremulous as she was. 'Joyce,' he said, faltering—'Joyce, my dear child, you see it all. You see through him, and—and all of us. Thank God that it's all over now!'

Joyce drew back from him, trembling with the reaction from her own excitement. The flush that had given her a temporary brilliancy and force faded away. 'But yet that alters nothing,' she said.

Mrs. Hayward put her hand upon the girl's arm with an impatient pressure. 'Do you mean that you are going to marry that man, Joyce?'

'Mr. Halliday,' said the Colonel, 'I hope, after what my daughter has said, that you

will see the inexpediency of—of continuing this discussion. She has her ideas of honour, which are a little overstrained—overstrained, as is perhaps natural; but she sees all the discrepancies—all the—— You know, you must see that it's quite impossible. My consent you will never get—never! and as for Joyce, she will not—you can see by what she has said—go against me.'

'She will never go against her word.'

'Oh, this is endless!' the Colonel cried. 'We may go on contradicting each other till doomsday. You understand that I will hear no more, and that Joyce, as she has told you, will hear no more.'

'She may object to my manners, Cornel, but she will keep her word to me,' said Andrew, regaining all the force of his conviction. 'But, as you say, it is little use bandying words. I will withdraw. I have made a long journey for very little—not half a dozen words by ourselves with the young lady to whom I am engaged to be married. But I will not keep up a needless discussion. She understands me, and you understand. If you meet me in a friendly spirit, every-

thing may yet be arranged for the best ; if not, she will be of age at least in a year, and we will have no need of your consent. Joyce,' he said, suddenly, making a quick step towards her, seizing her hand, ' I'll bid you good-bye, my dearest. You'll mind your honour and duty to me. Rich or poor, high or low, makes no difference. You have my word, and I have yours. Have you any message for the old folk.'

' Andrew !' she said, trembling. She had shrunk back for the first moment, but now held herself upright, very tremulous, leaving her hand in his, with an evident great exertion of her will. Her lips quivered, too, and she said no more.

' I understand,' he said, in a soothing tone, putting his other hand for a moment over hers. ' Well, if that's all, it will have to do. Good-bye, Joyce—but not for long. I have learned the road to you, and it shall not be untrodden. We'll meet soon—without other eyes always on us. Good-bye. I put my full trust in you. You will mind your word and your duty, Joyce. Good evening,

madam. Cornel, you will understand that we are agreed, she and I.'

'I understand nothing of the sort, sir! On the contrary, I forbid you my house, sir! I will give orders——'

'Good-bye, Cornel,' said Andrew, with a smile. He gathered up his hat from the floor, waved his hand with a general leave-taking, and walked to the door. 'You will hear from me very soon, Joyce, my dear,' he said, looking round before he finally disappeared. He went out, he felt, with all the honours of war.

It was very near the dinner hour, and Baker was busy in the dining-room. Andrew had to let himself out. He did so with a reflection that to have been asked to stay to dinner, as was his due, would have been much more agreeable; yet with another reflection following, that probably in this house they went through the somewhat mysterious ceremony called dressing for dinner, and that he had no means of altering his costume. The odour that filled the house was very agreeable; and however unhappy or even tragical this interview had been to the others, it was

not so to Andrew. He had calculated upon opposition. He had calculated, too, with certainty upon Joyce's fidelity to her word. There had been, it was true, that tirade—which did not in the least surprise him—which was quite natural, much more like the Joyce he knew than was the dignified silent young lady who had first appeared to him. He could forgive her the tirade. Otherwise he felt that he had lost nothing. He knew exactly the position the parents would take up, and he did not even despair that when they fully saw the situation, they would be moved to make the best of it, and that even the headmastership might still be within reach. He went out, carefully closing the door behind him, a little disgusted about the dinner, not discouraged about anything else, and met at the gate, coming in, the lady who had directed him, so clearly that he could not miss it, to Colonel Hayward's door. There was a lamp not far from the gate, and some light came from the gaslight in the hall, which revealed him to her before he could close the door.

‘Oh!’ she cried, in a breathless, rapid way; ‘so you found the place.’

‘Yes, madam,’ said Andrew, mindful of his p’s and q’s. He felt that in addressing a lady, especially one whom he did not know, it was the safest course to err by a little more, not less, respect. ‘Yes, thanks to you.’

‘And you found them—you found her? It was Joyce you wanted, I feel sure.’

‘Yes, it was Joyce I wanted.’

‘Oh! this is so interesting,’ Mrs. Sitwell cried—‘*so* interesting! I know her very well, and I take the greatest interest in her. You are—an old friend, I am sure?’

‘Yes, an old friend—a very old friend,’ said Andrew,—‘a very warm friend; something—something more than a friend, if the truth were known.’

‘Oh!’ cried the little lady, clasping her hands together, ‘this is more interesting than I can say. Let me go back with you a little, Mr.—Mr.——’

‘Halliday—my name is Halliday. She has spoken of me, no doubt.’

‘I am so glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Halliday. I really must walk with you a little way. I was going to see Joyce,

but I am sure she has something else to think of, and it is a little too late. By the way, I suppose you are going back there to dinner?’

‘It is natural to think so,’ said Andrew, with a grim little laugh, ‘but no.’

‘No?’ cried Mrs. Sitwell. Her curiosity, her interest in this drama, her determination to know everything, rose to fever-heat. She had taken him all in at the first glance, when she had met him in the morning: his long—too long—coat, his round hat, the colour of his gloves. Her eyes danced with eagerness and interest. She could scarcely contain herself.

‘No,’ he said; ‘I am not good enough for Cornel Hayward’s daughter. You may be surprised—but, so far as lies with the old people, I am sent away.’

‘Sent away!’ she repeated, with a little shriek. (‘And not much wonder!’ she said to herself.) ‘You must not think it mere curiosity,’ she cried; ‘I am so interested in dear Joyce. Ah, please tell me. I shall see her to-morrow, and if I can be of any use, or take her any message——’

‘It is unnecessary,’ said Andrew, with a wave of his hand. ‘I know Joyce, and she understands me.’

‘I can’t tell you,’ said Mrs. Sitwell, ‘how interesting all this is to me. Though I have never seen you before, Mr. Halliday, I feel that I know you through dear Joyce. I wonder, as you are not dining at the Haywards’, if you would come and take your evening meal with my husband and me—Rev. Austin Sitwell, St. Augustine’s. You must have heard of my husband; he would be charmed to make your acquaintance. We don’t say we dine, you know; we are quite poor people, and don’t make any fuss; but we will give you something to eat—and true sympathy,’ cried the parson’s wife, with a little friendly touch of her hand upon his arm.

‘I am sure you are exceedingly kind,’ said Andrew. He was a little alarmed, if truth must be told. Had it happened in London, he would at once have understood that a snare of some sort was being laid for him; but as he was at some distance from London, he was only doubtful, slightly alarmed, and

uneasy. He reflected, however, that he had all his wits about him, and was not a man to be led into a snare; and he did not know (though he had heard of a place called the Star and Garter) where to go for a dinner; and he had great need of some one to speak to—to open his heart to. And certainly she had been going to Colonel Hayward's when he met her, and knew Joyce, and therefore was a person who could be trusted. He thought, on the whole, he might venture to accept the invitation, secure of being able to take care of himself, whatever happened. 'You are exceedingly kind,' he said again; 'I should be very glad, ma'am, to make your husband's acquaintance. He will be of the Established Church, no doubt? It would be a pleasure to compare experience, especially in the way of schools.'

'Have you to do with schools?' she asked.

Andrew turned in the lamplight to cast a glance of inquiry at the ignorant little person beside him. 'Surely,' he said, in a tone of suppressed surprise,—'what else? as my poor Joyce was, too, before it all came out.

You speak of poverty, which I don't doubt is a figure of speech so far as you are concerned—but Joyce was in a very humble position, though always above it in her mind, before the Cornel came.'

'This is more interesting than ever,' cried the parson's wife, clasping her hands.

'My only trouble was that my family were not very well content, constantly throwing it in my teeth that I might have done better,' said Andrew; 'which makes it the more wonderful,' he added, with a faint laugh, 'to be put to the door as it were, and told I am not good enough for the Cornel's daughter! It is a turning of the tables which I never looked to see.'

'But nothing will shake Joyce—Joyce will always be faithful,' Mrs. Sitwell cried.

'Oh yes, Joyce—Joyce has a high sense of duty; and besides, she knows my position, which an ignorant officer and his wife are not likely to do. I am not afraid of Joyce,' he added, with sedate self-confidence. 'She is a good girl. She knows what she owes to me.'

'This way, Mr. Halliday,' cried Mrs. Sitwell. 'Ours is only a little place, but

you will have a warm welcome. I must hear all about you and Joyce.'

He was a stranger, and she took him in—there could not have been a more Christian act. And such acts often have their recompense here, without waiting for that final reward which is promised. Andrew became very watchful and suspicious when he found himself face to face with a clerical person in a coat much longer than his own, and a costume which recalled in a general way what he had heard of Jesuits—a name of terror. He was much on his guard for the first hour. But after supper Mrs. Sitwell's magic began to tell. Notwithstanding his self-control, he could not but be sore and injured, and to be able to speak and unburden himself was a relief indescribable. He fell into the snare delicately arranged around his feet. Mrs. Sitwell's keen little eyes danced with delight. She wiped off a tiny fictitious tear when she had drawn it all out, one detail after another. 'I shall go and see her to-morrow,' she cried. 'I will give her a kiss and say, You dear girl, now I know all.'

‘It is all to her credit—nothing but to her credit,’ said Andrew.

The Rev. Austin had a meeting on his hands, and had been obliged to go out, leaving the new acquaintance to be dissected at his wife’s pleasure. He was uneasy about the adventure altogether. ‘A fellow like that,’ he cried,—‘would you let him marry one of your sisters, Dora?’

‘Yes, dear, if he were rich enough,’ cried his wife. ‘But to think what a romance it has been all the time. How astonished everybody will be. I am not going to publish it abroad——’

‘I hope not, I hope not, Dora.’

‘But naturally I will tell the people who are most interested in her,’ Mrs. Sitwell said.

Mrs. Sitwell took charge of Andrew as if he had been a respectable tramp. She procured him a lodging for the night, having got every detail out of him that it was possible to gather. He had to leave early the next morning, which was a relief; and she could scarcely sleep all night for excitement and satisfaction. She felt like the

finder of a treasure—like a great inventor or poet. To whom should she communicate first this wonderful piece of news? It would act as a stimulant in the dull season all over the place. ‘Don’t talk of it?’ she said to her husband, who acted his usual part of wet blanket to subdue her ardour; ‘oh no, not in society generally—I hope you know me better than that, Austin. I will only tell a few of her friends—her friends ought to know. What a showing up it will be of those Haywards! I never liked that woman. I see now why she has been so anxious to keep everything quiet. No, I shall not talk of it—except to Joyce’s friends; for it is all to Joyce’s credit,—all, all!’ Mrs. Sitwell said.

CHAPTER XXXVII

‘CANON, what does this story mean which I meet wherever I go? I heard it at the St. Clairs’ yesterday, but took no notice, and to-day there’s poor Lady Thompson bursting and panting—what does it all mean?’

‘I should be better able to answer if you told me what it was.’

‘That is just like a man,’ cried Mrs. Jenkinson, ‘as if you did not know! When any gossip is going it always gets here first of all. I believe you have a telephone, or whatever you call them. Is there anything in it? What is the meaning of it? You have always had a fancy for the girl, more than I saw any reason for—but that’s your way.’

‘The girl,’ said the Canon. ‘I suppose you mean old Hayward’s girl. Well, and what do they say?’

‘I am very surprised that you should ask me; and now I feel sure there must be something in it,’ Mrs. Jenkinson cried.

‘That she was a schoolmistress, or something of that sort? I always suspected as much. The mother was a governess—and if Hayward left her, as he seems to have done, with poor relations—and what then, my dear?’ said the Canon briskly. ‘Eh? that doesn’t alter the fact that she’s a very nice girl.’

‘It alters the situation,’ said the Canon’s wife. ‘Miss Beachey is a very nice girl; but I should not ask her to meet the St. Clairs, for example, in my drawing-room.’

‘Empty-headed noodles,’ said the Canon. ‘Miss Beachey is worth the whole bundle of them; but I hope you don’t compare Miss Beachey with Joyce.’

‘If that were all!’ said the lady, shaking her head. ‘I hear now that’s not half. They say she’s nothing to the Haywards at all—only a girl that took their fancy, and that they took her out of her natural position——’

‘I’ll swear she never took Mrs. Hayward’s fancy, Charlotte!’

‘Well, well. Mrs. Hayward is a woman of sense; she knows it is vain to go against a man when he has taken a notion in his head. The Colonel saw her, it appears, and thought her like his first wife. These romantic plans never succeed. It appears she was engaged to a man in her own class, and he has been here making a disturbance. I am very distressed for these poor people. Well? You know all about it, of course, a great deal better than I do.’

‘My dear, I think that notion of yours about a telephone is quite just. Of course I have heard it all—first, that she had been a schoolmarm, as these troublesome Americans say (we’ll all find ourselves speaking American one of these days), then a board schoolmistress, additional horror! Yesterday, however, nobody had any doubt she was old Hayward’s daughter. The other thing has come up to-day. I don’t believe a word of it, if that’s any satisfaction to you.’

‘It is very little satisfaction to me, Canon,’ said Mrs. Jenkinson, shaking her head, ‘for I know how you are swayed by your feelings.

You like her, therefore nothing that tells against her can be true. But unfortunately I can't give up my judgment in that way.'

'What has your judgment got to do with it? That's a big thing to be put in movement for such a small matter,' said the Canon, pushing his chair from the table. The rotundity of the vast black-silk waistcoat burst forth from under that shadow with an imposing air. He crossed one leg over the other, filling half the vacant space with a neat foot in a black gaiter and well-brushed shoe.

'I don't call it a small matter. I am very surprised that you should think so. A Scotch country girl, with a pupil-teacher's training, brought among us—presented to us all as a young lady!'

'Well, wasn't she a young lady? What fault have you to find with her? She puts me to my p's and q's, I can tell you, with what you call her pupil-teacher's——' The Canon changed his position impatiently, bringing his other foot into that elevated position. 'It's all a horrid nuisance!' he cried. 'I don't know when I've been more vexed. Hayward's an old fool—I always

knew it. I wish they had never settled here.'

'I knew you'd think so, Canon,' Mrs. Jenkinson cried.

'What was the good, if you knew I'd think so, of aggravating everything? I'll tell you what it is,—it's those pernicious people at St. Augustine's. That woman *must* be in mischief. I told you so. She can't keep out of it. And to fall foul of the people who have been her best friends! But for that poor girl, whom she's fixing her fangs in, neither old Sam nor I would have moved a step. I've a great mind to go and stop the building. It would serve them right.'

'I don't defend Dora Sitwell, Canon; but if there had been nothing wrong she could not have made a story. It is the people who shock all the instincts of society and break its rules—as the Haywards have done——'

'Well, I said he was an old fool,' said the Canon, getting up and marching about the room, which shook and creaked under him—the windows rattling, the boards bending. 'I give him up to you—flay him alive, if you like—— Still, at the same time,' he added,

stopping in front of her, with his long coat swinging, and his thumbs in the armholes of his waiscoat, 'if a man should happen by any misfortune to find his own child in an inferior position—suppose she had been a housemaid instead of a board schoolmistress—should he have left her there? is that what you ladies think the right thing to do? Respect the delicate breeding of girls who have run about town for two or three seasons, and don't bring the rustic Una here.'

'The Una!' said Mrs Jenkinson. 'Canon, when you are very excited, you always become extravagant. Una was a princess, not a schoolmistress. Oh yes, of course, it's all one in a fairy tale; but a Una, with a lover who comes and makes a disturbance——! And besides, everybody says she's not their daughter—only a country girl to whom they took a fancy.'

'A strange fancy on the wife's part!'

'I do wish you would be reasonable. The wife, of course, saw the difficulties, poor woman! Very likely she disapproved of all that romantic nonsense, adopting a stranger—if it had been a child even! but a grown-

up girl with a lover. It has not been for her happiness either, poor thing. To have been left in her own sphere, and married, as she would naturally have done, would have been far better. I am sorry for her, and I am sorry for Mrs. Hayward. As for him, it is all his fault, and I have no patience with him,' cried Mrs. Jenkinson. 'You are quite right, Canon ; he is an old fool.'

'Still, I don't see, if he had been Solomon, how he was to have left the poor little girl behind him when he had once found her. Do you?'

'Canon,' said Mrs. Jenkinson, with a dignified look of reproach, 'I allow that you may be a partisan ; but don't keep up that transparent fiction with me.'

The Canon said, 'By !' in an access of feeling, and with a fling which made the rectory ring. It is not permitted to a Churchman to swear : even *By Jove* ! comes amiss with a clerical coat and gaiters ; but the use of that innocent monosyllable can be forbidden to no one—the wealthy English language would fall to pieces without it. He said 'By !' making a fling round the room which caused

every window in the old house to tremble, and then he came to a sudden stop in front of his wife, like a ship arrested in full sail. 'Fiction!' he said; 'the girl's the image of her mother. My brother Jim was in Hayward's regiment. I remember the poor thing, and the marriage, and all about it. Hayward behaved like a fool in that business too—he'll probably wreck his daughter's happiness now,—but mind you, Charlotte, there's no fiction about it. You can say I said so. I mean to say so myself till I make the welkin ring—whatever that may be,' he added, with a short laugh.

'Oh, you'll make the welkin ring, I don't doubt, anyhow: but, of course, that's strong evidence, Canon—if you stick to it.'

'I'll stick to it,' Dr. Jenkinson said. 'Poor little girl! I knew she'd get into trouble; but, my dear, if I were you, I'd go forth to all the tea-parties and sweep these cobwebs away.'

'My dear, if I were you, I'd do it myself,' said the lady. 'You had better go now, while you are so hot, to Lady St. Clair's.'

The Canon flung himself down in his

study chair, once more making the rectory ring. He said something about tabbies and old cats, which a clerical authority ought not to have said, and then he informed his wife that he was writing his sermon—the sermon which she knew he had to preach before a Diocesan Conference. ‘I felt very much in the vein before you came in. I must try to gather together my scattered ideas.’

‘You don’t seem to have made much progress,’ said Mrs. Jenkinson, looking severely at a blank sheet of paper on the writing-table. The Canon uttered a low chuckle of conscious guilt, and drew it towards him.

‘I’ll tell you what—I’ll give them a good rousing sermon on scandal and tea-parties.’

‘Oh, tea-parties! your clubs and things are worse than all the tea-parties in the world,’ said Mrs. Jenkinson, rising with dignity. The rectory was an old house, and very ready to creak and rattle; but scarcely a window moved in its frame, or a board vibrated under her movements. The Canon’s lightest gesture, when he threw himself back in his chair, or pulled it forward in the heat of composition, made every timber thrill.

Mrs. Jenkinson took her way with dainty steps along the road, where there were puddles, for it had been raining, to Lady St. Clair's. Now that the days were closing in, and winter approaching, the season of tea-parties had set in. The gardens were all bare and desolate, not as much as a belated red geranium left in the beds. Everything naked and sodden with autumn rains. But in Lady St. Clair's, who followed the fashion even in flowers, there was a sort of supernatural summer in the conservatory, a many-coloured glow of chrysanthemums which lit up one side of her drawing-room. The day was mild, the fire was hot, and so was the tea; and the crowd of people in the warm room were hot too, in their unnecessary furs and wrappings, and disposed to be sour and out of temper. Lady Thompson had got a seat near the fire; she had a cup of tea in her hand; she was being served with hot tea-cake and muffins, and she wore a sealskin cloak trimmed with deep borders of another and still more costly fur. Her good-humoured countenance was crimson, her breath came in gasps. By her side sat Mrs. Sitwell, busy

and eager. 'Of course I was interested,' said the parson's wife. 'A tale of true love. We ought all to do what we can for them. You, dear Lady Thompson, that have so much influence——'

'I don't think,' said Lady St. Clair, with emphasis, 'that anything of the kind should be asked from us. We have been made to receive a girl on false pretences, who should never have been admitted among us. I always had a feeling about that girl. She was so *gauche*. One could see she had been accustomed to *no* society. And my girls had quite the same feeling. It was instinctive; one has a sort of creepy sensation just as when one rubs against some one in a crowd—some one who is not of one's own class.'

'I was always fond of 'er,' said Lady Thompson, in the middle of her muffin. 'I never 'ad no creepy feeling. If you ask my opinion, she's a pretty dear.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Sitwell, clasping her hands with enthusiasm, 'everything, everything that has come out has been favourable to Joyce!'

'Not to thrust herself into society on false pretences,' said the eldest Miss St. Clair.

‘I really know nothing of her. I have been from home most of the summer ; but to push her way among gentlepeople—a little school-mistress ! Why, Dolly and Daisy were very nearly making a *friend* of her !—a girl with these antecedents !’

‘It was dreadful cheek,’ said Dolly aforesaid.

Miss Marsham, who had been pulling the lace round her thin wrists into tatters, here put forward a timid plea. ‘Oh, I am sure there was no thrusting herself forward ! If there was anything, she was too shy—dear Joyce ! She always said it was the schools she was interested in—from the first. Mrs. Sitwell, you remember, in Wombwell’s field.’

‘Oh,’ cried Mrs. Sitwell, ‘I never have said anything but praise of her. I think it is noble to work like that,—to exert yourself for your people. Her poor old parents were so poor, living in a wretched cottage upon oatmeal and I don’t know what messes, as the Scotch do. And she occupied herself to get them a little comfort in their old days. It was noble of her ; everything is to Joyce’s credit—everything ! Wild horses would not have drawn it out of me but for that.’

‘I never ’ad no creepy feeling,’ said Lady Thompson, pulling at the velvet strings of her bonnet (which had been carefully pinned, poor woman, by a careful maid). ‘She’s always been as nice as nice to me.’

‘What seems very strange,’ said another of the company, ‘is that the Bellendean, really nice people, who must have known all about it, should have countenanced such an imposition; and your little cousin, Lady St. Clair.’

‘Oh, Greta’s a mere child,—and you know the silly ways some girls have. They think it’s fine to take up people, and have a *protégée* out of their own class—bringing the rich and poor together, don’t you know—that’s what they say.’

‘They are so silly, all those revolutionary ways!’

‘And then Captain Bellendean, who should have known better, dangling after her everywhere—compromising the girl, I always said.’

‘Oh, we always knew,’ said Lady St. Clair, with a smile, ‘that nothing would come of *that*. A young man, of course, will take

his amusement where he can find it—and if a girl allows herself to be compromised it is her own fault.'

'The parents are most to blame, I think,' another lady said.

'The parents!' said Miss St. Clair, with a laugh.

'My dear Mrs. John—a mere matter of adoption, and not a successful one. Mrs. Hayward, I believe, never approved of it. It was all the Colonel's doing—a foolish fancy about a resemblance.'

'And who was she, then, to begin with?'

'A foundling—picked up by the roadside—adopted by some cottagers—the lowest of the low.'

'Oh!' cried Miss Marsham, behind backs, with a cry of pain. 'Poor child, poor dear!—if it is so, it's not her fault.'

Mrs. Sitwell had grown pale. She was not done up in velvet strings like Lady Thompson, who sat gasping, making vain efforts to release herself, unable to speak. 'I don't think it is so bad as that. I never said—I was never told—Only poor people, that was all—poor village people—very re-

spectable. And everything to Joyce's credit, or I never should have said a word.'

Mr. Sitwell and Mr. Bright had come in from one of their many services in the pause of awe which followed the severe statement of Joyce's fabulous origin. 'Who was that?' said the curate, in Miss Dolly's ear.

'Oh, the girl at the Haywards'—don't you know? You ought to know, for you saw a great deal of her in the summer. You ought to have found out all her secrets.'

'I never pry into a lady's secrets,' said the curate.

'Oh, don't you just! But she turns out to be nothing and nobody, though they took her everywhere. Did you ever hear such awful cheek?'

'I always tell you, Miss Dolly, human nature is so depraved—except in some exceptional cases,' Mr. Bright said, with an ingratiating smile, bending over the young lady's chair.

Mr. Sitwell asked the same question of the elder circle, standing up in the severity of his clerical coat amid the group of ladies. Two or three people answered him at once.

‘It is Joyce, Austin,’ his wife said, in a faint voice.

‘It is Miss Hayward.’

‘It is,’ said Lady St. Clair, emphatically, ‘the young person—Colonel Hayward’s *protégée*—whose appearance has always been such a wonder to us.’

‘Dora,’ the parson said, in consternation, ‘you never told me this.’

‘Oh no—oh no. I told Lady St. Clair so. It was not half so much, not half so much! only that they were poor people, quite respectable; and that Colonel Hayward recognised her directly. Didn’t I say so? I never, never meant it to be understood——’

‘Mrs. Sitwell evidently thinks—which is a pity—that all my information on the subject is derived from her,’ Lady St. Clair said. ‘She forgets that my husband is Scotch, and that we have many connections about the country. The story is no novelty to me.’

Lady Thompson could bear her dreadful position no longer. She stumbled from her seat, a mass of hot furs, and thrust her teacup into Mr. Sitwell’s hand. ‘Then how was it that Miss Dolly was nearly making a friend

of 'er?' she cried. 'Oh, let me get away from the fire!—there's a dear!'

This cry of anguish took something from the force of the strong point which the homely lady had made. A little bustle ensued, and general changing of places, in the midst of which Mrs. Jenkinson came in, full of the important contribution which her husband had made to the evidence on the subject. But she found the conclave breaking up, and had no opportunity of putting forth her testimony. It was still discussed in corners. Mrs. Sitwell, quite pale, and very eager and demonstrative, stood under her husband's shadow, who looked exceedingly severe and grave, making explanations to two ladies aside; and Lady Thompson had been led into the conservatory to recover, where she had been joined by Miss Marsham. These two poor women were in a great state of emotion and excitement. It was not tears, indeed, which the soap-boiler's wife was wiping from her crimson forehead. Yet she was all but crying, too.

'I took a fancy to 'er the first day. If she ain't a lady, Miss Marsham, dear, I don't

know when I 'ave seen one,' Lady Thompson said.

'Oh, poor dear! poor dear! If she has made a sacrifice for the sake of her people, who could blame her?' the other gentle creature cried, with sniffs and sobs. They were the helpless ones who could not affect society—even the suburban society which was led by Lady St. Clair.

Lady Thompson had loosed her great cloak: the coolness of the conservatory gave her courage. 'How can we help 'er?' she said. 'Me and Sir Sam would do anything. And I don't believe—not one word. Not one word!' she repeated with emphasis—'as them cats says.' She was vulgar, it could not be denied, but her heart was in the right place.

Miss Marsham, poor lady, was not vulgar at all. She could not refuse to believe what was told her, being incapable of understanding how anybody could, as she said, 'look her in the face' and tell a lie—a characteristic which the school children and the people in her district knew and worked pitilessly. 'Oh, poor dear! poor dear!' she said, 'I for

one would never, never blame her. There is nothing in the world so natural as to sacrifice yourself, if it's to do anybody any good. I understand her,' said the good woman. 'I am sure there's been nothing wrong in it. But, oh, I don't know in the least what to do.'

Lady St. Clair, however, was talking of other things among her guests, who had begun to disperse, and there was no opportunity for Mrs. Jenkinson. This roused that lady to a wholesome sense of opposition, and a growing determination to interfere.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE storm subsided which had raged around Joyce for that long and miserable day. When a few others had passed in their usual calm, the Colonel, who had elaborately refrained from all allusion to what had occurred, saying even from time to time, 'We must not speak of that,' made up his mind with great satisfaction that Joyce had dismissed it from her mind. 'She is so full of sense,' he said to his wife; 'she doesn't go fretting and worrying about a thing as I do. When she knows that there is nothing to be done, she just puts it aside. I wish we were all as sensible as Joyce.'

'Then take care you don't remind her of it,' said Mrs. Hayward.

'I—remind her! Why, I have said from the first—We'll say nothing of that. Time

will settle it. I have said it every day. And you think I would remind her !’

‘Well, Henry, I would not say even that if I were you. I have given Baker his orders never to let that man in again. I hate to take servants into my confidence, but still —— Fortunately nobody has seen him or knows anything about him,’ said the deceived woman, with mistaken calm. She was not so sure about Joyce’s good sense as her husband was ; but even in the midst of her annoyance a certain compassion for Joyce had awakened in her mind. Poor thing ! to feel herself bound to such a man. ‘And we are not done with him,’ Mrs. Hayward said to herself. She sighed for the calm of those days when there were no complications—when it was quite unnecessary to give Baker any instructions as to who should be admitted—when a disturbance and angry controversy in her pretty drawing-room would have been a thing inconceivable. She thought she could decipher a trace of Andrew’s country boots on the Persian rug, a delightful specimen, upon which (she had remarked at the time) he had placed his chair. The Colonel

in his anger had crushed up between his hands a piece of fine embroidery, and unravelled out some of the gold thread which formed the exquisite pattern. In spite of these things Mrs. Hayward, for the first time, was sorry for Joyce. She felt with an impatient vexation that if Captain Bellendean had but 'spoken' when she thought he did, all this might have been avoided. There would no doubt still have been a struggle. The school-master would not have given in without a fight ; but Mrs. Hayward knew human nature well enough to be sure that with a man behind her whom she loved, Joyce would have felt her bond to the man whom she did not love to be still more impossible. In such a case fidelity was no longer a virtue but a crime.

But Bellendean had gone, and had not spoken. Mrs. Hayward had been both angry and disappointed by this failure. She had blamed Joyce for it, and she had blamed the Colonel for it. That a man should *afficher* himself and then go away was a thing not to be endured, according to her ideas. And now she was really sorry for Joyce, in both

these aspects of her case. If Joyce had but known how much her stepmother divined, all her troubles would have been increased tenfold. But fortunately she did not know, although the additional kindness of Mrs. Hayward's manner gave her now and then a thrill of fear.

She was walking with her father in the park one morning, not long after these events. Winter was coming on with great strides, and the leaves fell in showers before every breath of wind. Some of the trees were already bare. Some stood up all golden yellow against the background of bare boughs, lighting up the landscape. The grass was all particoloured with the sprinklings of the fallen leaves. Under the hill the river flowed down the valley, coming out of distances unseen. The Colonel and his daughter paused at a favourite point of theirs to look at the prospect. The wide vault of firmament above and the great breadth of air and space beyond were always a refreshment and consolation. 'O Thames! flow softly while I sing my song,' Joyce said, under her breath.

‘Eh?—what were you saying, Joyce?’

‘Nothing,’ she said, with a smile; ‘only a line out of a poem.’

‘Ah! you know so much more about books, my dear, than I have ever done. You must get that turn in your education early, or you never take it of yourself. I have never asked you, Joyce, though it has often been on the tip of my tongue, How do you like the place, now you know it? I hope you like your home.’

‘It is very—bonnie. I use that word,’ said Joyce, ‘because it means the most. Pretty would be impertinent to the Thames—and beautiful——’

‘Do you think beautiful’s too much? Well, my dear, tastes differ; but I never saw anything that pleased me like the course of the river and the splendid trees. You should have lived in a hot climate to appreciate fully English trees.’

‘Oh, but I do,’ cried Joyce. ‘They are finer than we have—in Scotland,’ she said, after a pause. It had been on her lips to say ‘at home.’

‘Much finer,’ said the Colonel, with

conviction; 'but that is not exactly an answer to my question. I asked if you liked it—as your home.'

Joyce raised her eyes to him, moist and shining. 'Father,' she said, 'it is you who are my home.'

'My love!' the Colonel stammered and faltered, in unexpected emotion. The water came to his eyes and blotted out the landscape. 'You make me very happy and very proud, Joyce. This is more, much more than I had any right to.' He took her hand in his and drew it within his arm. 'I have wanted,' he said, 'to surround you with everything that your poor mother did not have—to make you happy if I could, my dear; but I scarcely expected such a return as this. God bless you, Joyce! Still,' said the pertinacious inquirer, caressing the hand upon his arm, 'that's not quite what I asked, my dear.'

Joyce had twice avoided the direct response he demanded. She paused before she replied. 'Some,' she said, 'father, are happy enough never to need to think, or ask such a question. I wish I had been always

where you were, and never to have had any life but yours: or else——’ Colonel Hayward fortunately did not remark these two syllables, which were very softly said, and breathed off into a sigh.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘under the best of circumstances that could never have been, for you know the most of my life has been spent in India. The worst of India is, that parents must part with their children. We should not really have known very much more of each other if—if you had been born, as you should have been, in your father’s house.’

‘Then there is little harm done,’ said Joyce, this time with a smile.

‘Not if you trust us fully, my dear, and love your home.’ He patted her hand again, then moved on unsatisfied. ‘I think, however, you are beginning to like the people, and feel at home among them. And they like you. I am sure they like you—and admire you, Joyce, and feel that you are—— There is Lady St. Clair, my dear, with all her bevy of girls. You will want to stop and speak to them. My wife says they’re

the best people, but I'm not myself very fond—— How do you do?' cried the Colonel cheerily, taking off his hat with a flourish. 'Lovely morning! How do you do?'

The old soldier stood the image of good-humour and cheerful courtesy, holding his hat in his hand. There were so many ladies to share his bow that it was longer than usual, and gave the wind time to blow about a little the close curly locks, touched with gray, which covered the Colonel's head with all the vigour of youth. His countenance beamed with kindness and that civility of the heart which made the fact that he was not himself very fond of this group inoperative. But when Lady St. Clair, picking her steps to the other side of the road, delivered in return the most chilling of faint bows, while her daughters hurried like a flock of birds across the park to avoid the encounter, Colonel Hayward stood dumb with consternation in the middle of the path. His under lip dropped in his astonishment; he forgot to put on his hat. He turned to Joyce, holding it in his hand, with dismay in

his face. 'What—what,' he cried, 'is the meaning of that?'

'Indeed I don't know,' said Joyce. She was not aroused to the importance of the action. Unfortunately she did not care, nor did it seem to her that so slight a matter was worth noticing. 'They were perhaps in a hurry,' she said.

'In a hurry! They meant to avoid us. They would rather not have seen us. What does it mean, Joyce? They consulted together, and the girls rushed off, and their mother—I am utterly astounded, Joyce.'

'But,' said Joyce, very calmly, 'if they did not wish to speak to us, why should they? I do not think I care.'

The Colonel put on his hat. He had grown a little pale. 'Elizabeth will not like it,' he said. 'She will not like it at all. For a long time she would not go into society, because of—— But now that she does she likes to know all the best people. I am not myself fond of those St. Clairs. But any unpleasantness, I am sure, would make her unhappy. Can I have done anything, I

wonder? I am a blundering old fellow,—I may have neglected some etiquette——’

‘Perhaps it would be better to say nothing about it,’ said Joyce.

‘Much better!’ cried the Colonel. ‘That’s the right way—take no notice. I am glad you are of that opinion. But I’m very bad at keeping a secret, Joyce. Probably I’ll blurt it out.’

‘No, father. I will look at you when I see you approaching the subject,’ said Joyce. She was quite unconscious of any seriousness in the matter. Lady St. Clair and her girls seemed incapable of any influence on her fate. She even laughed, looking up at him with a lightness quite unusual to her. ‘It will be a little secret between us,’ she said.

‘So it will,’ said the Colonel, brightening; ‘but you must keep your eyes upon me, Joyce. I never could keep a thing to myself in my life, particularly from Elizabeth. But this cannot be of any importance after all, can it? No, I don’t think it can be of any importance. Lady St. Clair may be vexed with me perhaps for the moment. I may have done some silly thing or other. I

would not for the world have a secret from Elizabeth—but such a trifle as this.’

‘It cannot be of the least importance,’ said Joyce. She was more confident of being right than he had ever known her before.

‘Well, my dear: but you must keep your eyes upon me,’ Colonel Hayward said.

He came back to the subject several times as they went on, and worked out the shock, so that by the time they reached home, he himself had come to regard Lady St. Clair’s incivility as a matter of little importance. ‘Perhaps she had something on her mind, my dear; their eldest boy, I believe, gives them a great deal of trouble. And I know they are not rich—and with that large family. People are not always in the mood for a conversation on the roadside. You are quite right, Joyce. I daresay it meant just nothing at all but the humour of the moment. It will be a little secret between you and me—but you must keep your eyes upon me. Give a little cough, or put your hand up to your brooch, or some

sign I shall know—for I am an old goose, I know it : I can keep nothing to myself.'

When they reached home, however, the incident and the secret were both forgotten in the surprise which awaited them. They found Mrs. Hayward in the drawing-room entertaining Mrs. Bellendean. Joyce, though she had always been more shy of her dear lady since she had discovered how much Mrs. Bellendean's behaviour to herself was influenced by her change of circumstances, was startled out of all her preventions by this unexpected visit. But the sight of the woman to whom she had looked up with such sincere reverence, and admired before everybody in the world, was not now to her so simple a matter as it had once been : after the first burst of pleasure it was impossible to forget how closely associated she was both with the old life and the new. And Mrs. Bellendean herself was changed. There were lines of anxiety and care in her face. She was no longer the calm queen in her own circle, the centre of pleasure and promotion she had once appeared to Joyce. The peace of the old life was gone from her,

and something of its largeness and dignity. She talked of her present plans and purposes in such a way that Joyce, though little accustomed to the subtleties of conventional life, slowly came to perceive that the object of Mrs. Belleandean's visit was not that which it professed to be. She explained to them that she was about to leave England with her husband for Italy, and that she had come to take leave of her friends—but this was not all. Joyce's training in the network of motives which lie under the surface was very imperfect. She wondered, without at all divining, what the other object was.

'Things have changed very much since Belleandean ceased to be our headquarters,' she said, with a smile which was not a very cheerful one. 'You remember how much I threw myself into it, Joyce. After having nothing particular to do, to come into that full life with so many things to look after was delightful to me. But my husband never liked it,' she added quickly. 'He dislikes the worry and the responsibility. He thinks it worry : you know I never did.'

'My friend Norman,' said the Colonel,

‘will be lost without you. It must have been such a thing for him.’

‘Oh, Norman has been very good,’ Lines came out on Mrs. Bellendean’s brow which had not been there before. ‘You saw something of him during the summer?’

‘Something—oh, a great deal! We got quite used to see him appearing in his flannels. Fine exercise for a young fellow: It helped him to support London,’ said the guileless Colonel. ‘I think he found us very handy here.’

‘Old fellows, I suspect, think more of exercise than young fellows,’ said Mrs. Hayward; ‘and London is very supportable in Captain Bellendean’s circumstances—but we did see a little of him from time to time.’

Joyce said nothing at all. She kept a little behind, away from Mrs. Bellendean’s anxious eyes. She could not prevent the colour from deepening in her face, or her heart from beating high and loud in her breast—so loud that she felt it must be heard by others as well as herself, the most distinct sound in the room.

‘He has not been here very lately, I suppose?’ Mrs. Bellendean said.

‘Oh no, not since August—when he came to bid us good-bye.’

‘As I am doing now,’ said Mrs. Bellendean. She could not see Joyce, who was behind her, but she was noting, with the intensest observation, every movement and word. She was on a voyage of discovery, not quite knowing what she expected, almost too eager to distinguish what she imagined from what she saw.

‘Shooting, I suppose,’ said the Colonel. ‘I hope he has had good sport. There was some talk of his coming back, but I never expected him for my part, until the moors began to pall ; and that doesn’t happen soon, your first year at home. You preserved, of course, at Bellendean.’

‘There are always plenty of partridges—nothing more exciting. He has been up in the Highlands, coming and going. I think he has thoroughly enjoyed himself—as you say, the first year at home.’

These words were all very simple and natural ; but there was a little emphasis here and there, which betrayed a meaning more than met the ear. Joyce felt them fall upon

her heart like so many stones, thrown singly, resolutely, with intention. It had never occurred to her before that any one could wish to give her pain: and that her own lady should do it—her model of all that was greatest and sweetest! The cruel boys throw stones at wounded, helpless things. She remembered suddenly, with that quickness of imagination which enhances every impression, a scene which detached itself from the past—a boy in the village aiming steadily at a lame dog, and how she had flung herself upon him in a blaze of indignation, to his supreme astonishment. Why this should come into her head she could not tell. The dog could yelp at least, but Joyce could not cry out. It seemed to her that it was Mrs. Bellendean, in her mature, middle-aged beauty, tall, dignified, and serene, who stood and took aim. It was all new to Joyce—the covert blow, the deliberate intention, the strong necessity of keeping still, uttering no sound, giving no look even of consciousness. Nothing in her past experience had prepared her for this.

‘I have more sympathy with your plans than with Captain Bellendean’s amusements,’

said Mrs. Hayward. 'Sport's monotonous, at least to women who only look on. But to get away for the winter is always delightful. Oh, not to you, Henry, I know! You like your walks. And he tells me it is so English, so like home. Very English indeed, and pleasant, for girls who skate, and all that; but when one begins to get old and go about in a shawl!'

'I would willingly compound for the shawl,' said the visitor. 'It is cold enough at Belvedere; but there one had both duties and pleasures. I hate to be one of a useless crowd, drifting about pleasure-places. When it's health it is dismal enough; but at least there is some meaning in that.'

'Oh, there is a great deal of meaning in being warm,' cried Mrs. Hayward, with a little shiver, 'in seeing sunshine and the blue sky instead of universal grayness and fogs. The Colonel takes a pleasure in it, even in east wind; but so do not I.'

'My dear,' cried Colonel Hayward anxiously, 'if you really do feel so strongly about it, you don't think that I would ever object? I like my own country, I confess;

and to understand what everybody's saying—but if you feel the cold so much——'

It was not much wonder that he should not understand; but Joyce, for whom the thing was done, knew almost as little as he did that this diversion was for her benefit. A half-forlorn wonder arose in her mind that so much useless, aimless talk should mingle with the torture through which she was going. Better that the stones should all be thrown, and the victim left in peace. But this was not how it was to be. The gong sounded, beaten by Baker's powerful hand, and the little procession went in to luncheon. Joyce had to expose her face, with all its clouds, the burning red which she felt on her cheek, the heavy shadow about her eyes, to the full daylight and Mrs. Bellendean's searching gaze. Nobody could help her now.

CHAPTER XXXIX

‘AT last I can get a word with yourself, Joyce!’

Mrs. Bellendean led her out under the verandah to the garden path beyond with an anxiety and eagerness which startled Joyce. She half enveloped the girl in the warmth of her cloak and of the caressing arm which held hers. It was a caressing hold, but very firm, not leaving any possibility of escape. More than an hour had passed slowly in the usual vague interchanges of drawing-room conversation, when there is nothing particular to talk about on either side; but the visitor had said nothing about going—had not even mentioned, as such visitors are bound to do, the train by which she intended to leave. She had kept a furtive watch upon Joyce, following all her movements, but she had not

transgressed against decorum and domestic rule by asking to speak with her alone. Accident, however, had done what Mrs. Bellendean did not venture to do. Mrs. Hayward had been called away for some domestic consultation, the Colonel had gone out, and Joyce was left with her visitor alone.

‘Are you afraid of the cold?—but it isn’t cold—and I do want to say a dozen words, where no one can possibly hear. Joyce, my dear girl, do let me speak to you while there is time. Joyce—I don’t know how to open the subject—I would not venture if I were less anxious. Joyce, you heard what I was saying about Norman, my stepson?’

‘Yes.’ Joyce did not look up, nor did she feel herself able to say more.

‘You used to be—devoted to me, Joyce; as I always was very fond of you. A little cloud has come between us somehow—I can’t tell how—but it has made no difference to my feelings.’ Mrs. Bellendean was a little short of breath. She paused, pressing Joyce’s arm with hers, leaning over her, with anxious eyes upon her face. But something pre-

vented Joyce from making any response—that cloud was still between them, whatever it was.

‘You know very well the interest I have always taken in you from the very beginning, before any one suspected—— And Greta—Greta was always fond of you. You have not met much lately.’

‘No.’ Nothing would come but monosyllables.

‘I want to speak to you of Greta, Joyce. She is younger than you are, though you are young enough. She has never been crossed or disappointed in her life. I can’t think of *that* for her without a shudder. She would die. It would break her heart.’

‘What?’ said Joyce.

‘Joyce, I am going to take you into our confidence—to tell you our secret; you will never betray us. If things should happen so that what we wish never came to pass, you would not betray us?’

For the first time Joyce raised her eyes to Mrs. Bellendean’s face.

‘I know—I know—I never doubted for a moment. It will rest with you to decide.’

Joyce, you have got Greta's life in your hands.'

'I! in my hands.' She looked up again into the face which was bending so closely with such an anxious look over hers. The lace of Mrs. Bellendean's veil swept her forehead. The breath, which came so quick, breathed upon her cheek.

'Joyce,' said the lady again, 'I know that it was not a little that you saw Norman. I know that he was here day after day. I know that he was—in love with you.'

Joyce detached herself suddenly from that close enlacement. She drew her arm away, shook off the draperies which half enveloped her. 'I do not think you have any right—to say that to me,' she said.

'If I did not know it to be true—and you know it's true. He came here day after day till he imagined—he was in love with you. And then he came to Bellendean. All this time he has been seeing Greta every day. He has made her believe that it is she whom he loves.'

The heart of Joyce gave one bound as if it would have burst out of her breast.

‘And she believes it,’ said Mrs. Bellendean. ‘She is a tender little flower ; she has never been crossed in her life. She believes that it is she whom he loves—and she loves him.’

There was a momentary silence, complete and terrible. A little gust of wind burst forth suddenly, and sent a small shower of leaves at their feet. They both started, as if these had been the footsteps of some intruder.

‘It has always been our desire :’—the visitor began again in a low voice, as if she were afraid of being overheard—‘everybody has wished and expected it. They suit each other in every way. She has been brought up for him. She has always thought of Norman all her life. Poor little Greta ! she is so young—not strong either ; her mother died quite young. And she doesn’t know what disappointment is. We are all to blame ; we have petted her and made her think there was nothing but happiness before her. And she was always fond of you, Joyce. You, too’—Mrs. Bellendean added, after a pause—‘you were devoted to her.’

Joyce's voice sounded harsh and hoarse. After the silence it came out quite suddenly, all the music and softness gone out of it: 'What have I to do with all this? What has it to say to me?'

'Joyce! do you think I would come to you without strong reason—betraying Greta?'

'This has nothing to do with me,' said Joyce again.

'It has everything to do with you. So long as he has been at home all has been well. He has seen her every day. He has got to appreciate her, and to see that she is the right wife for him, his own class, his own kind, fit to take her place in the county, and help him to his right position. But he is coming up to town. He will be coming here,' and Mrs. Bellendean, putting her hand again upon the girl's arm. 'Oh, Joyce, Joyce——'

'I have nothing to do with it,' said Joyce. 'What—what do you think I can do?'

'He—can be nothing to you,' said the visitor tremulously. 'You—you're engaged already. You've given your word to a—good

respectable man. Norman is only a stranger to you.'

Joyce did not reply. She drew herself away a little, but could not escape the pressure of that eager, persuasive hand.

'I understand it all,' said Mrs. Bellen-dean. 'He is not clever, but he has the manners of a man that knows the world, and he has been very much struck with you. And you have been—flattered. You have liked to have him come, even though he could never be anything to you.'

She had got Joyce's arm again in her close clasp, and she felt the strong pulsations, the resistance, the movements of agitation, which, with all her power of self-control, the girl could not restrain.

'Oh, think, Joyce, before it goes any further! Will you for simple vanity—or like one of the flirts that would have every one at their feet—will you break Greta's heart, and make a desert of both their lives? All for what—for a brag,—for a little pleasure to your pride,—for it can be nothing else, seeing you're engaged to another man?'

The woman was cruel, remorseless,—for

she felt Joyce's arm vibrate in her clasp, which she could not loosen,—and thus commanded her secrets, and forced her to betray herself. The girl felt herself driven to bay.

‘I don't understand—the things you say,’ she answered slowly at last. ‘You speak as if I had a power—a power—that I know nothing about. And oh, you're cruel, cruel! to put all that in my mind. What—do you think I can do?’

‘Oh, Joyce, I knew you would never fail me. You have such a generous heart. Let him see, only let him see, that between him and you there can be nothing. He will accept it quickly enough. A man's pride is soon up in arms. It has only been a passing fancy, and he will soon see that everything is against it; while everything is in favour of the other. If you will only be firm, and let him see—oh, Joyce, you who are so clever! dear Joyce!’

Joyce's heart swelled almost to bursting. ‘You call me clever, and dear,’ she cried; ‘and you tell me I must save Greta's heart from breaking; but what if I were to break

mine,—and what if I were to hurt his,—and what if I were to make three miserable instead of one? You never think of that.'

'No,' cried Mrs. Bellendean, with a tone of indignation; 'because I would never do you that wrong, Joyce,—you that are honour itself and the soul of truth,—to believe that you had even a thought of Norman, being engaged to another man.'

Joyce shrank as if she had received a blow. 'Oh,' she cried, in a broken voice, 'you never ceased to say that I had done wrong—that it was not a fit thing for me—that I would change, that I would find it not possible to keep my word. You said so—not I.'

'My dear! my dear!' cried Mrs. Bellendean.

'No,' said Joyce, 'don't call me so. I am not dear any more. You know that there was a time when Joyce would do what you said, if it was small or great, if it was to give you a flower or to give you her heart; and then you changed, and that ceased to be; and we got all wrong because I was Colonel Hayward's daughter. And now you come

and put me back again in my old place, but far, far lower—the girl engaged to Andrew Halliday, whom you never could bear to hear of—and bid me do what may be, perhaps, for all you know, a heartbreak to me——’

‘No, Joyce—no, dear Joyce!’

‘For what?’ she said sadly—‘that you may call me *that*—you that raised me up to your arms, for being not myself but my father’s daughter—and now drop me down, down again, for fear I should come in your way. And why should I break my heart more than Greta? why should I be disappointed and not she? why should I give up my hope to save her—if it was so?’

‘But, Joyce, Joyce!—it is not so!’

Joyce made no reply.

The two figures moved on together slowly in silence, with the autumn leaves dropping over them, and the afternoon growing gray. Mrs. Bellendean felt upon her arm the strong beating of the girl’s heart, and the tremor that went through her; and her own heart smote her for what she was doing: but not for so little as that did she give up the work which was already more than half done. She

followed all the movements of the girl's mind with an extraordinary sympathy, even while she set herself to the task of overcoming them; for she was not the less fond of Joyce, and scarcely felt with her less, for this determination to subdue her. She was conscious of the commotion, the revolt, the sense of personal wrong, yet underneath all the strong fidelity and loyalty of the spirit over which she was exercising a tyrannical power. She let her own influence work in the silence, without saying a word, with an assurance of victory. The only thing that lessened the cruelty of the undertaking was that she did not really know whether Joyce's heart was or was not engaged—even now she could not fathom that—but was able to persuade herself that the girl's protest was one of indignation only, not of outraged love; and that the sacrifice, if she made it, would only be a sacrifice of her pleasure in a conquest and of her vanity, not of any real happiness or hope.

Mrs. Bellendean's confidence was justified. After a minute or two, which had seemed hours, Joyce spoke again. 'There is no need to tell you,' she said, very low, so that

the lady had to stoop to hear her—for Joyce's head was bent, and her voice scarcely audible,—‘there is no need to tell you—that as far as in me lies I will do what you say.’

‘My dearest, kind girl—my own Joyce!’

‘No,’ she said, with a shudder, drawing away her arm, ‘not that—never that. It is all changed and different, Mrs. Bellendean. I am not even Joyce, your schoolmistress, that was so proud to please you; but in another parish, with another name—as you think best for me.’

‘Oh, Joyce,’ said Mrs. Bellendean, with real pain, ‘don’t say that! I only think so because you yourself thought so; and with your father’s help and that of your friends, it need not be another parish, nor any parish. He is a most respectable, clever man. We will find him something far better, something more worthy of *you*.’

Joyce said nothing more. She turned round and led the way back to the house, keeping apart from her companion, walking with a new-born dignity and pride. There was not another word said as they returned to the verandah, from which Mrs. Hayward

was looking out, looking for them. She had a shawl wrapped close round her, yet shivered a little in the early falling twilight. 'You will both get your death of cold,' she cried. 'Come in, come in, and have some tea. Joyce, you really carry rashness too far: you must be chilled to death.'

'I am afraid it is my fault,' said Mrs. Bellendean. 'I forgot she had no wrap. It was such a pleasure to have a little talk with her'—the lady hesitated for a moment, then added with a tremble in her voice—'as in the old days.'

As in the old days!—a pleasure to talk! 'Yes, it is very cold,' said Joyce, holding her hands to the fire. She stood up there, a dark shadow against the warm glow. A strange fascination kept her in the presence of the woman whom she had so loved, who had turned her love to such account. She stood there without moving, trembling with the cold, and something more than the cold. So long as these entreaties were not repeated here! so long as her stepmother was not taken into the lady's confidence too. Nothing was further from Mrs. Bellendean's

mind. She took with pleasure the warm cup of tea, which, and the warm air of the fire-lighted room, brought back a genial heat all over her. She was a little tremulous, yet satisfied, feeling that she had done all for which she had come. And no harm had been done to Joyce—no harm. She wished the girl would not stand there, cold, reproaching her by the silent shiver with which she held her hands to the fire. But that was all. What is a little cold at her age?—no more than the little puncture of her vanity, the little salutary wound which was all, Mrs. Bellendean persuaded herself, that she had given.

‘It was foolish of me to forget that Joyce had no shawl. She has always been so hardy, I hope it will not matter. It is such a long time since I have seen her.’ It seemed impossible to change the subject, to get out of these *banalities* which meant so much worse than nothing, which conveyed so false a sense to Joyce’s keen ear. Mrs. Bellendean was embarrassed, but she was not conscious of being false. She added, ‘And it will be a long time before we meet again. I shall

have to try and dismiss all my anxieties about my friends from my mind. Joyce is one whom I can always trust not to misunderstand me, not to forget anything,' Mrs. Bellendean said.

Joyce heard everything, even the rustle of Mrs. Bellendean's gown, the movement of her arm as she lifted her teacup to her lips, but could not move or say a word. She stood still, warming herself, while the two ladies carried out the usual little interchange of nothings. All they said entered into her brain, and remained in her memory like something of importance. But it was of no importance. Presently Mrs. Bellendean remembered that she must go by a certain train, and a cab had to be sent for. There was a little bustle of leave-taking. Joyce felt herself enclosed in a warm embrace, tenderly kissed, still more tenderly said farewell to. 'I don't say, Remember, for I am sure you will not forget me, Joyce,' were Mrs. Bellendean's last words, 'nor what I have said.' But to this also Joyce replied nothing.

'I thought she was never going away,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'She must have had

something very particular to say to you, Joyce.'

Joyce was walking across the hall towards the stair without any response. Mrs. Hayward stood still under the light and cried impatiently, 'You don't seem to have heard me. You look dazed. What had she to say to you, Joyce?'

Joyce turned half round, holding by the banister of the stair. She said, 'Nothing—it was I myself——' then paused. 'She was telling me about Greta. Greta—has never been disappointed—not like—like other folk.'

'Never disappointed!' cried Mrs. Hayward. 'Do they think she can get through life like that? And was this all Mrs. Bellen-dean came to say? I think she might have saved herself the trouble. I would let Miss Greta look after her own affairs.'

CHAPTER XL

NEVER had been disappointed — never crossed!

Perhaps that is as real a claim upon human compassion as is the claim of the long-suffering and much-tried. Perhaps it is even a stronger claim. It is the claim of a child. Who would be the one to open the doors of human trouble to a child?—to give the first blow?—to begin the disenchantment which is the rule of life? People get used to disappointments as to the other burdens of human existence; but to snatch the first light away and replace it by darkness, who would do that willingly? to change the firmament and eclipse the sunshine, where all had been brightness and hope! There had been a sombre anger roused in Joyce's heart by that appeal. She had said, Why

should one be spared by the pain of another? Why should her heart break, that Greta's should be saved from aching? But she no longer asked herself that question. She said to herself that it was just. There are some that must be saved while the others go bleeding. It is the rule of life—not justice, perhaps, but something that is above justice. Some must have flowers strewn upon their path, while others walk across the burning ploughshares. There was no reason in it, perhaps, no logic, but only truth: for some object unknown, which God had made a law of life. Greta had been the idol of her family all her life. Everybody had loved her, and cared for her. She had been sheltered from every wind that blew. Joyce was only a little older, but already had passed through so many experiences. *She* knew what it was to be disappointed, to have all her dreams cut short, and the current of her being changed. Another pang to her, who was accustomed to it, would not be half so much as the first pang of wounding misery to Greta. Poor little Greta! fed on the roses, and laid in the lilies of life, to give her

all at once the apples of Gomorrah, to wrap her in the poisoned robe. Oh no! oh no! It was a just plea. Let the heart that is used to it go on breaking; let the child's heart go free.

Joyce's room was the one full of thoughts in the middle of that peaceful house. In all the others was the regular breathing of quiet sleepers—the rest of the undisturbed. She alone waked, with her little light burning, throwing a faint gleam across the invisible river-banks, on the dark stream floating unseen. Had there been any wayfarer belated, any boat floating down-stream, the gleam from that window would have given cheer in the middle of the darkness and night. But there was not much cheer in it. The room it lighted was full of thoughts and cares, and sheltered a human creature facing a sea of troubles, doing her best to keep afloat—sometimes almost submerged by these rising waves: and there is this additional pang in the troubles of a woman—of a girl like Joyce—that there is no motive to strive against them. The Hamlets of existence have a great life and great possi-

bilities before them ; but what profit is there to the world in one poor girl the more or less ? If she is glad or sad—a victim or a conqueror—what matter ? Her poor old people were separated from her. They would never know. Her father would not suffer, and no one else in the world would care. There was no mother, no sister, to wish her woes their own—not even a friend—not a friend ! for Mrs. Bellendean and Greta were those who had been most dear. There would be some use in her suffering, but none in her happiness—none at all : rather evil to all concerned. A selfish good purchased by others' disadvantage. No good—no good to any one in the world.

Joyce said to herself, in her profound discouragement, that after all Mrs. Bellendean's prayer had made no change in anything. She had already made up her mind. Happiness was a very doubtful thing in any case, everybody said. It was not the end of existence—it was a chimera that flew from you the more you sought it. But your honour was your life. To be faithful and true, to be worthy of trust, to stand to your

word whatever happened, that was the best thing in the world, the only thing worth living and dying for. Even if you could not keep your word to the letter, she said to herself with a shudder, at least to do nothing against it, not to contradict it before earth and heaven! No human creature but can do that. She would never, never turn her back upon her pledge. What was the need of invoking another motive, of adjuring her by Greta's happiness, by Norman's advantage? This was only to irritate, to import into the question a sense of injustice and wrong. It had been decided before there was a word of all that. Everything that Mrs. Bellendean had said had been an irritation to Joyce. To take it for granted that her happiness should yield to that of Greta,—that Norman's interests should be considered before hers,—that she would be a burden, a disadvantage to Norman, while Greta would be nothing but good and happiness:—and finally to thrust her back to what they considered her own place, into the arms of the man whom they all had thought unworthy of Joyce in Joyce's humblest days,

—to thrust her back into his arms, to speak of promotion for him, of humble advancement, comfort which would make him a match for her!

Mrs. Bellendean's appeal had only brought a succession of irritations, one more keen than the other. Joyce felt herself angered, wounded, driven to bay. She had not needed any inducement to do what she felt to be right; but now it required an effort to return to the state in which she had been when she had renewed her pledge and promised to keep to her word. She would stand by that resolution whatever might be said; but she was angry, offended, wounded in her deepest heart. Her friends, her own friends, those who were most dear, had torn away all veils from the helpless and shrinking soul. She had been Joyce, their handmaiden—oh, eager to do their will; ready to spend her life for them, in proud yet perfect humility. And then they had lifted her up, called her their equal, pretended to treat her as such, because of the change—though there was no change in her. And yet again, last phase of all, they had flung her down from

that fictitious position, and shown her that to them in truth she never had been more than a handmaiden, a being without rights or feelings, born only to yield to them. And these were her dearest friends, the friends of her whole life, whose affection had elevated her above herself! Joyce hid her face, that she might not see the thoughts that rent her heart. Her friends, her familiar friends, in whom she had trusted; her dear lady, who had been to her like the saints in heaven; her Greta, whom she had thought like an angel. They had betrayed her, and after this, what did it matter what man or woman could do?

The night was half over before the little light in the window disappeared from the darkling world through which the Thames flowed unseen. It disappeared, and all was black and invisible, the dark sky and the darker earth lost in the night and the blackness of the night and its silence. No such watch had ever been kept in that peaceful house before.

Next morning, when Joyce came downstairs, looking very pale and sleepless, with

dark lines under her eyes, she found her stepmother standing in the hall, turning over a letter, with great surprise in her face. 'It is inconceivable,' she was saying.

'It must be a mistake,' said the Colonel; 'depend upon it, it must be a mistake.'

'To ask you and me, and not Joyce,—I cannot understand it. Can Joyce have done anything to offend them? Why should I be asked to a ball but for Joyce? We are not dancing people, you and I. I might have gone for Joyce, and Joyce is left out. What can it mean? She must have done something to offend them.'

'That reminds me, my dear,' said the Colonel, 'of something that happened yesterday. We met the St. Clairs, that huge regiment. I took off my hat—oh!' said the Colonel suddenly, beholding Joyce with her finger up, standing behind Mrs. Hayward.

'What do you mean by breaking off like this? What happened?' cried his wife.

'Oh, nothing, nothing, my dear,' said the veteran, with confusion and dismay.

'Nothing, Henry? you change your tone very quickly. You spoke as if it had some

bearing upon this strange invitation, which wants explanation very much.'

'No, my dear, no. I was mistaken ; it couldn't have anything to do with that. In short, it was nothing—nothing—only a piece of nonsense—one of my mistakes.' He looked piteously at Joyce, standing behind, who had dropped her hand, as if abandoning the warning which she had given him. Joyce, in the extremity of her trouble, had fallen into that quiescence which comes with the failure of hope. She remembered the bargain that had been made between them at the instant, but that and everything else seemed of too little importance now to move her beyond a moment. Mrs. Hayward, however, turned round, following her husband's look.

'Oh, it is you, Joyce! You wish your father not to tell me.'

'The fact is,' said the Colonel, eager to speak, 'we thought it might annoy you, Elizabeth.'

'You are taking the best way to annoy me,' she cried. 'What is this you have been making up between you? Henry, I have a right at least to the truth from you.'

‘The truth!’ he said; ‘surely, my dear, the truth, if it was of any consequence. Joyce will tell you what happened. It was of no importance. Most likely Lady St. Clair is short-sighted. Many ladies are, you know. Most likely she didn’t make out who we were. That was your opinion, Joyce, wasn’t it?’ The Colonel felt that the best thing he could do, as Joyce did not help him out in safety, was to drag her into her share of the danger.

‘There might be many reasons. I did not think it mattered at all,’ said Joyce.

‘Reasons for what?’ said Mrs. Hayward, stamping her foot on the ground. ‘I think between you, you will drive me mad.’

‘My dear! for nothing at all, Elizabeth. She scarcely returned my salutation. The girls all scuttled off across the park like so many rabbits. They are not unlike rabbits,’ the Colonel said, with an ingratiating smile. ‘But we agreed it was of no importance, and that it was useless to speak to you of it, as it might annoy you: we agreed——’

‘You agreed!’ Mrs. Hayward gave Joyce an angry look. ‘I wish in such matters, Henry, you would act from your own impulse,

and never mind any one else.' She swept in before the others into the dining-room, where it was the wont of the household that the Colonel every morning should read prayers. But it is to be feared that these prayers were not so composing to the soul of the mistress of the house as might have been wished. 'We agreed'—these words kept ringing through the devotions of the family, as if some sprite of mischief had thrown them, a sort of demoniac squib or cracker through the quiet air. To have her husband consult with his daughter as to what should or should not be told to her was more than she could bear.

Mrs. Hayward went out in the afternoon alone to make a call at a much frequented house, where she hoped to discover what was the cause of Lady St. Clair's rudeness and Mrs. Morton's strange invitation. She met a great many acquaintances, as was natural in a small place, where all 'the best people' knew each other. Among them was Lady St. Clair, who, instead of avoiding her as she had done the Colonel, came forward with *empressement*, showing the most sympathetic

civility. 'How are you, dear Mrs. Hayward? I hope you are well. I do hope you are bearing—the beginning of the severe weather,' that lady said, shaking her hand warmly, and looking with tender meaning in her eyes.

'I don't pay much attention to the weather, thank you,' said Mrs. Hayward, 'and we can't complain of it so far. I am glad to see *you* so well. My husband thought he saw you yesterday, and that you were put out about something.'

'Put out! I did see Colonel Hayward,' said Lady St. Clair, with dignity; 'but I am sure you will understand, dear Mrs. Hayward, that charming as he is, and much as we all like him, there are circumstances——'

'Circumstances!' cried Mrs. Hayward. 'I don't know indeed any circumstances which can possibly affect my husband. None, certainly, that don't affect me.'

'Oh, we all feel for you,' said the leader of society, pressing Mrs. Hayward's hand.

She had to pass on, fuming with indignation and astonishment, and next minute it was her fortune to meet the lady who had sent her

the invitation of the morning : for Mrs. Hayward had by chance stumbled into a tea-party specially convoked for the purpose of talking over the last great piece of news. Though she had as yet no clue to what it was, she felt there was something in the air, and that both in the salutations and the silence of those about her, and the evidently startling effect of her unexpected appearance, there was a secret meaning which was at once perplexing and exasperating. The mere fact of a tea-party of which she knew nothing, in a house so familiar, was startling in the highest degree. She went up eagerly to Mrs. Morton, with a belligerent gaiety. 'How kind of you,' she said, 'to ask me to your ball, the Colonel and *me* ! It is very flattering that you should think me the young person—unless it was all a mistake, as I am obliged to believe.'

'Oh, no mistake,' said the lady, a little tremulous. 'I hope you can come.'

'I—come ? But you must be laughing at me,' cried Mrs. Hayward, with a little burst of gaiety. 'Of course I go everywhere as Joyce's chaperon : but to ask *me*, at my

age, to *a dance*! My dear Mrs. Morton, you must think me an old fool.'

'Oh, indeed, I should have liked to ask—indeed, if it hadn't been for what was said,—but I hope, I do hope you will come. I am sure I did not mean any—any disrespect——'

'Disrespect! oh, flattery I call it! to think a dance was just the thing for me. My stepdaughter will be asked to the dinner-parties, I suppose, now that it is evident the balls are for a young creature like me.'

This lady, who could not conduct matters with so high a hand as Lady St. Clair, slid away behind backs, and concealed herself from those severe yet laughing looks. She had thought it would please Mrs. Hayward to be the one chosen, while the other was left out. Presently Mrs. Hayward fell into the hands of the lady of the house, who led her aside a little. 'I am so glad,' said this friendly person, 'to see you here by yourself. It is so lucky. Of course I should have asked you to come if it had not been—many of us, you know, don't think we would be doing right if we were to countenance——'

‘To countenance—what?’ Mrs. Hayward grew pale with astonishment and wrath.

‘But I assure you,’ cried this lady, ‘no one blames *you*. We quite understand how you have been led to do it to please him and for the sake of peace. We don’t think one bit the less of you, dear.’

‘The less—of me!’

‘Rather the more,’ said the mistress of the house, giving her bewildered guest a hasty kiss; and then she was hurried off to receive some newcomers. Mrs. Hayward stood and stared round her for a minute or two, neglecting several kind advances that were made to her, and then, without any leave-taking, she walked out of the room and out of the house. She was in a whirl of anger and astonishment. ‘Don’t blame—me! don’t think the less—of me!’ This was the most astounding deliverance that had ever come to Elizabeth’s ear. She was not in the habit of supposing that any one could think less than the highest of her. The assertion was the profoundest offence. And what could it mean? What was the cause?

Coming down the hill she was met by the Thompsons' big resplendent carriage, which stopped as she drew near, and Lady Thompson leant out, holding forth both hands. 'Oh, how is the poor dear?' said Lady Thompson, beginning to cry: 'I'm sure you 'ave too much heart to forsake 'er whatever happens. Oh, how is the poor dear?'

'I don't know whom you mean, Lady Thompson. I never forsake anybody I am interested in—but I don't know what you mean.'

'Oh, I'm sure you're a good woman. I'm sure you're a real lady,' Lady Thompson cried.

Mrs. Hayward walked away from the side of the carriage. Her head seemed turning round. What did it mean? *She*? Who was *she*? Utter perplexity took possession of her. She was so angry she could scarcely think: and Lady Thompson, notwithstanding that warm unnecessary expression of confidence, was, with her blurred eyes and eager tone, almost more incomprehensible than the rest. She walked quickly home to avoid any further insinuated con-

fidence, to think it over, to make out what it meant. Who could tell her what it meant? She saw Mrs. Sitwell at a little distance, and concluded that she would be the most fit interpreter; but the parson's wife saw her too, and quickened her steps, hurrying away. 'It is her doing,' Mrs. Hayward said to herself. At last she came to her own door. Some one was there before her, standing in the porch waiting till the door should be opened. He turned round at the sound of her step, and stood aside to let her pass, holding out at the same time his hand.

'Captain Bellendean! it is a long time since we have seen you.'

'Yes, a long time. I have been a fool. I mean I have been—busy. I hope you are all well, Mrs. Hayward. My dear old Colonel, and——'

'He is quite well—but I fear you will not find him at home. This is not his hour for being at home.' She stood between him and the open door, barring his passage, as it seemed. It was a way of working off the disturbance and trouble in her mind.

'I hope you will let me in,' he said

humbly. 'It is not a mere call. I could wait till he came back. I—I have something important to say to him: and—and—I hope you will let me come in and wait.'

'That is a modest prayer. I cannot refuse it,' she said, leading the way.

CHAPTER XLI

JOYCE had to come to a resolution at which she herself wondered, in forlorn helplessness, as if some other being within her had decided upon it and not she. That she, all shy, shrinking, reticent as she was, with the limitations of her peasant pride and incapacity for self-revelation, should attach a last desperate hope to the possibility of enlightenment from some one else's judgment, was wonderful to herself. For how could she lay that tangled question before any one, or unfold her soul? how could any stranger know what her perplexity was, between the claims of the old tranquil yet enthusiastic affections of her youth, and the strange unconfessed dream of absorbing feeling which had swept her soul of late—between the pledges of her tender ignorance,

and the fulfilments of a life to which fuller knowledge had come? She did not herself understand how she had come to stand at this terrible turning-point, or why she should thus be summoned to decide not only her own fate, but that of others; and how could she explain it to strangers who knew nothing, neither how she was bound, nor wherein she was free? And yet there came a longing over her which could not be silenced—to ask some one—to make a tribunal for herself, and plead her cause before it, and hear what the oracle would say. Perhaps it was because all her lights had failed her, and all her faculties contradicted each other, that this despairing thought suggested itself—to discover an oracle, and to find out what it would say.

Of whom could she ask, and who could fill this place to her? Not her father. Joyce did not say to herself that the good Colonel was not a wise man, though he was so kind. Had he been the wisest of men, she would have shrunk from placing her heart unveiled in his hand. For to the father everything must be said. He is no

oracle ; he is a sovereign judge : that was not the help her case required. Her step-mother was more impossible still. If not to him, still less to her, could the girl so cruelly wounded, so torn in divers directions, lay open her misery and difficulty. Not to any one could she lay them open. It was an oracle she wanted—something to which a half-revelation, an enigmatical confession would suffice—who would understand before anything was spoken, and give a deliverance which, perhaps, would be capable of various interpretations, which should not approach too closely to the facts. This was what she wanted without knowing what she wanted, with only a strong longing to have light—light such as was not in her own troubled self-questionings and thoughts.

Joyce had not many friends among the people who surrounded Mrs. Hayward with a flutter of society and social obligations. Indeed Mrs. Hayward herself had not many friends, and it is doubtful whether she would have found one to whose judgment she could resort for advice, as Joyce meant to do. But the girl was perhaps more discriminating by

a natural instinct as to who was to be trusted—perhaps in her far higher ideality more trustful. At all events, there were two very different persons to whom, after much tossing about on the dark sea of her distress, her thoughts turned. A little light might come from them; she might unfold herself to them partially, fancifully, leaving them to guess the word of the enigma, finding some comfort in what they said, even if it should fall wide of the mark. When Mrs. Hayward set out to pay her visits in the afternoon, Joyce stole forth almost furtively, though all the world might have seen her going upon her innocent search after wisdom; but the world, even as represented in a comparatively innocent suburban place, would have been at once startled and amused to note at what shrine it was that Joyce sought wisdom and the teaching of the oracle. She went not to any of the notable people, not to the clergy, or even to Mrs. Sitwell, who was supposed to be her friend, and who was known to be so clever. Joyce did not at all know that the parson's wife had played her false, and she had seen more of that lady than of any one else in the

place. But this was not because of any innate sympathy, but because of the pertinacity with which Mrs. Sitwell had seized upon Joyce as a useful auxiliary in the carrying out of her own ends—and the girl's instinct rejected that artificial bond, and put no faith in the cleverness which she acknowledged, nor even in the goodness after its kind, which Joyce's mind was large enough to acknowledge too. She went not to Mrs. Sitwell, nor to the parson, Mrs. Sitwell's husband, but she threaded through many lanes and devious ways until she came to a door in a wall with a little bright brass knocker, and a grating, and great thorny branches of a bare rose-tree straggling over. Within was a small neat green garden, and a little house looking out upon it with shining windows. And within that, coming hastily to the door to meet her, was Miss Marsham, whom everybody knew to be as good as gold, but nobody imagined to be wise or instructive in any way. Joyce had come to find her oracle here.

The room was small and low, full of old china, old pictures, a little collection of relics,

in the midst of which their gentle mistress, a mild spirit clad with only as much body as was strictly essential, and with an old gown constructed on the same principles, with just as much old and somewhat faded silk as was strictly necessary, appeared in perfect harmony, the soul of the little dainty place. She received Joyce with the tenderest welcome, in which there was something more than her usual kindness, and an anxiety which Joyce, full of her own thoughts, never perceived. Miss Marsham was ready and prepared to be confided in. She was prepared for the story of Joyce's youth, for the revelation of her peasant parents, and how for their good she had sacrificed herself to Colonel Hayward's fancy—ready to understand at half a word, to condone and to condole, to give praise for the noble motive, the self-sacrifice, and only gently—very gently—to touch upon the deception, which the severest critic could not consider to be Joyce's fault. She kissed her and said, 'My dear child, my poor Joyce,' with a tender pity which forestalled every explanation. Did she then already know Joyce's trouble and sore perplexity? but

how was it possible that she should know?

‘You must not think I have come just to call,’ Joyce said.

‘No, dear? but why shouldn’t you come just to call? There will never, never be any circumstances in which I shall not be glad to have you come. My dear, circumstances don’t matter at all to me when I know any one as I know you!’

Joyce was a little bewildered by this effusion. She said, with a faint smile, ‘And yet you don’t know me well. I have been here just five months, and part of that away——’

‘My love, when you understand a person and love a person, as I do you, the time does not count by months.’

‘That is what I feel: and I have nobody—nobody to look to:—you will say my father, Miss Marsham. He is kind, kind—but oh, I have not been brought up with him nor used to open my heart,—and in some things he knows only one language and me another; and besides, if I were to tell him everything, he would say what I was to do,

and I would have to obey. And Mrs. Hayward with him, they would settle it all,—and I am not used to it, and I cannot——’

‘No, Joyce, I understand—it is they who have led you into it,—you can’t ask advice from them.’

‘They did not lead me into it,’ said Joyce. ‘It was just nature led me into it, and the perversity of things. Will you ever have noticed in your life how things go wrong? Nobody means any harm, and all you do is innocent; and even if you were very prudent and weighed everything beforehand, there would not be one step that you could say afterwards—This was wrong. And yet things all turn wrong, and your heart is broken, and nothing is to blame.’

‘Oh, Joyce, words cannot say how sorry I am! There was one thing perhaps, my dear, a little wrong—for to deceive in any way, even if it seems to do no harm and is with the best motive—the highest motive, to help those you love——’

Joyce sighed softly to herself, no longer asking how Miss Marsham could know, then shook her head. ‘I wish it had been for

that motive ; but there was no love, no love, —I,' with a sudden blush, 'did not know what love meant.'

Miss Marsham looked up with an exclamation of astonishment on her lips, but stopped with her mouth open, wondering. Joyce, whose eyes were cast down, did not see the impulse at all.

'He had read a great deal—a great deal,' said the girl. 'I have never met any one—oh, not here nor anywhere—so well instructed. I thought then that there was nothing so grand as that. He had read a great deal more than I!—he was my—superior in that. It is true, I always knew all the time that I was not—what seemed—— But that might never have come to anything, and besides, I would have thought shame. For I thought that to know the poets, and all that has been written—that was what made a gentleman. Oh, I think shame to say such a thing,—it doesn't—— how can I say it? It seems there must be something more.'

Miss Marsham remained silent in simple bewilderment. Joyce was now talking her own language, which nobody understood.

‘You may say it was deceiving to let him think I cared for him, but that was never what I intended. He said at first, it was enough for him to care for me. Oh, but that is nothing, nothing!’ cried Joyce suddenly, ‘that is only the beginning. Though I cannot keep my word to him, I need not break it,—that would have been easy. It is far, far worse what is to come.’

Miss Marsham took Joyce’s hands into hers. She was lost in amazement, and felt herself swimming, floating wildly, at sea, among things altogether strange and incomprehensible. She could not reply, but there is always sympathy in a pressure of the hands.

‘There was nothing wrong in meeting another man that was my father’s friend, that was my dear lady’s son,’ said Joyce, very low; ‘how was I to know that he and me would see each other different from—common folk? How was I to know that they had made it up for him to be the love of—of another girl? And now here I stand,’ she cried, rising up holding out her hands in piteous explanation, ‘pledged to one, and caring nothing for him, harming another that

but for me would do what was meant for him, would do—would do well—with a lady bred like himself, born like himself, not one that had been abandoned like me. Tell me what you would do if you were me! The lady comes and asks me—she has no right. She says that I know trouble and sorrow, but Greta never a disappointment, never a thing that was not happy—and that she'll break her heart; and nobody cares for mine. And she says I should keep my word, though she was the first to say he was not the one for me. And oh, what am I to do—what am I to do?'

Joyce sank down again upon the seat, and covered her face with her hands.

'Oh, my poor Joyce—my dear Joyce!' Miss Marsham cried.

Her head was not very clear at any time—it was apt to get confused with a very small matter. And Joyce's story was confusion worse confounded to the anxious hearer. Even what she thought to be her knowledge of the circumstances deepened Miss Marsham's bewilderment. She knew of the man to whom Joyce was engaged,

from whom all the information came: but the after episode—half told, hurried over, which Joyce had no mind to explain fully, which she addressed to the oracle—was as a veil thrown over poor Miss Marsham's understanding. She knew none of these people; the name of Greta brought no enlightenment to her, nor did she know who the lady was, nor who the man was who was mixed up inextricably in this strange imbroglio. She drew Joyce's hands from her face, and laid that hidden face upon her own kind breast, kneeling down to caress and to soothe the poor girl in her trouble. But what to say or what to do Miss Marsham knew not. She did not understand the delicate case upon which her advice was required. And the oracle was mute. There was no response to give. 'Oh, my poor child, my dear child, my poor dear love!' Miss Marsham cried.

After a minute Joyce raised her head and looked at her friend in whom she trusted. She was very pale, her eyes were wet with tears, and looked large and liquid in caves of trouble,—her mouth quivered a little, like the mouth of a child when its passion-fit is over,

and there was a pathetic little break in her voice. 'Tell me,' she said, with a look that searched the very soul, 'tell me what you would do—if you were me.'

'Oh, my pretty Joyce—my poor dear!'

'Tell me,' the girl said, 'would you break *her* heart and wound *him*, all for yourself? Would you break your word and your pledge that you gave when you were poor, all for yourself? as if you had to be happy whatever happened—you! And what right had you to be happy, any more than Greta—or Greta more than you?'

The question, heaven knows, was vague enough—but the oracle was no longer mute. The pilgrim at the shrine had touched the true chord, and at last the priestess spoke. She had a moment of that ecstasy, of that semi-trance of mingled reluctance and eagerness, which makes those pause who have the response of the unseen to give forth to feeble men. Her gentle eyes lit up, then dimmed again; a brightness came over her faded face, giving it a momentary gleam of eternal youth, then disappeared. She trembled a little as she held the votary to her breast.

‘Oh Joyce! my darling Joyce! I don’t know that I quite understand you, dear. It is all so mixed up. Things that I have heard and that you tell me are so different. I don’t know what to think—but if it’s a question between you and another, which is to take the happiness and let the other suffer—oh, my child, my dear! do I need to say it to you—do I need to tell you? Joyce, your heart tells you—it’s like a, b, c, to a woman. You know——’

‘I thought,’ said Joyce, with that sob in her throat, following with intent eyes every little movement of her agitated instructor—
‘I thought that was what you would say.’

‘Yes,’ said the vestal, the priestess of this new Dodona, ‘it is not in our will to choose or to change. You can’t leave the heartbreak to another. You have to take it, though your spirit may cry out and refuse. I am not wise to give you advice, oh my darling! but I know this, and every woman knows it. Oh, it isn’t all that do it, I know, for it’s not an easy thing. But when you have strength from above, you can do it. And what is more, it is not in your nature to do

anything else. So don't ask me what I would do. You could not—do—any other thing: being you and nobody else: Joyce, *that* I know.'

'No,' said Joyce, stumbling, rising to her feet, meeting with a solemn look the wet and weeping eyes of her oracle, 'no, not any other thing.'

'Not any other thing.' Miss Marsham would have kept her in her arms, would have wooed her to further speech, would have wept over her and caressed her, and expended all the treasures of her heart in soothing the martyr whom she had thus consecrated. But of this Joyce was not capable. She had got her oracle, and it was clear. It was what she had wanted, not advice, but that divine and vague enigma which corresponded with the enigma of her confession. She resisted gently the softness of her friend's clinging embrace. Her eyes were full of the awe of the victim who consents and accepts, and is restrained by every solemnity of her religion from any struggle—but who already feels herself to be outside this world of secondary consolations, face to face with the awful realities of the

sacrifice. 'Don't keep me,' she said faintly, putting away the thin kind hands that would have held her, 'I must go—I must go.'

'Oh Joyce,' cried Miss Marsham, stricken with a secret terror, 'I hope I have said right!'

'I am sure you have said right; it is what I knew. I could not—do—any other thing. Let me go, Miss Marsham, let me go, for more I cannot bear.'

'Oh, my dearest, I hope I have done right! Oh, stay a little and tell me more! Oh Joyce, God bless you, God bless you, my dear, if you must go!'

She followed the girl to the little door, so flowery and embowered in summer, now overshadowed by those straggling bare branches of the rose-tree, which were good for nothing but to make, had that been wanted, a sharp garland of thorns. Joyce scarcely turned to answer her blessings and good-byes, but went on straight from the door as if hurrying to the place of sacrifice. The thought was folly, Miss Marsham said to herself, and yet it went with a chill to her heart and would not be chased away.

CHAPTER XLII

You could not do—any other thing. If there could be a proof of the divinity of the oracle it was this. It addressed that something within which is more than any external hearing. ‘When thou wast under the fig-tree.’ Who could tell what was in the spirit in secret but the perfect Teacher, who saw all? Joyce received in something of the same way the utterance which had been given in such darkness on the part of its exponent, as is the way of oracles. She felt that it was the true and only revelation. She hurried along in the wintry twilight, her head bent down, avoiding the cold night wind; her heart beating loudly; her eyes hot and suffused with scalding tears, which did not fall; her feet cold, stumbling over every little stone. The certainty which had replaced her doubts

and conflicts of mind were scarcely less confusing than they : it did not inspire her as in the procession to the place of sacrifice. Ah ! had she to do that boldly in the face of man for a great cause, Joyce knew how high she could have carried her head, and marched with what steady force and triumph. But the way was dark and tortuous, and full of fears, —the wind in her face so cold, the sensation in her heart so full of misery. The oracle had spoken right. It had been what she wanted. It had made her see clearly, driving from her eyes those films of weakness that come up upon the wind and obscure the vision, even when it is most clear. She remembered now that there never could have been any doubt, that she was even pledged to that sole course. Had she not said, ‘ I will do as you wish ? ’ and had not she been blessed and thanked for her resolution ? and yet it had failed, and she had sought the oracle—to have it confirmed, as it was right it should be.

Ah ! but the oracle is pitiless too. It has no regard for the weakness of—common folk. Joyce was one who had held her

head very high, who never in her consciousness had been one of the common folk. But now, in her despair, consenting to the sacrifice demanded of her, yet with partial revulsions of her mind against it, she took refuge in that common strain of humanity. Those oracles which spoke out of the veiled heights, from which the votaries with bleeding hearts, all torn with special wounds, received such stern and abstract answers—they were right, but they were remorseless. They took nothing into consideration, not the weakness of the victim, nor that bewildering way in which, though cleared off for a moment, doubts and mists would rise again, obscuring, confusing the most certain truth. They had no pity. The devotee, indeed, went to them only for that—to have the support of a certain reply, to hear what, beyond all control of circumstances, was just and right. And for a moment there would be a great calm after the reply had come. But then there would start into the aching heart this complaint: It was remorseless that reply, there was no pity in it. You could not—do any other thing. It was true, true!

and yet there were so many other things that could be done ; and it was hard, hard for flesh and blood to conform to that pitiless abstract law : it had no regard for the weakness of—common folk. And what was Joyce, after all, but a girl like another?—very little different from Greta, who had to be shielded from trouble : just like the rest— young, fragile, like the girls whom everybody took care of. Oh, the oracle was hard ! it had no pity. It never took into account how much or how little a girl could bear !

This murmur in the heart growing louder as she went on, with strange additions and exasperations from the cold, and the dark, and the physical discomfort around, at last roused Joyce to a kind of despairing rebellion. After you have made your *sortes* and read your fate, does it ever happen that you do not try, or wish to try, another time ? Open the book again—be it Virgil, be it the Bible, be it anything, at haphazard, from which superstition or fancy can take a fancied guidance. Try the oracle again. It was the suggestion of despair. But Joyce had always thought of two from whom she might seek

the direction she could no longer give herself. She reminded herself now, stopping in her hurried walk towards home, saying with natural sophistry that her consultation of fate was incomplete, that she had always meant the trial to be double. She had always intended it. She had meant to lay her case before him too. He was very unlike the other—the priestess, the vestal, whose decisions Joyce felt in her despair no one could have doubted for a moment. He was very, very different. It was only just that he too should give his verdict. They were the two sides which ought to stand in every question, which see the matter from different points, which balance and temper each other. Joyce's heart beat very high; the blood again began to run warm in her veins, reaching her feet, her hands, which were so cold. She turned and hastened back to the rectory, which she had passed.

It was dark by this time, and the lamps were being lighted, coming into life one by one along the darkling way. And the house was half dark, the lights dazzling her in the hall, while there was nothing but soft fire-

light in the drawing-room, which she passed hastily, telling the servant that it was the Canon she came to see. The Canon was seated at his table writing, or pretending to himself to write, his sermon. He bounded up from his seat with a violent convulsion through all the house, making the windows ring and the boards creak, and the very walls shake, when with some difficulty he realised who his visitor was. 'Joyce!' he cried, with a roll of mild thunder in his voice, and took her by the hand and placed her in a chair. He was much astonished by her visit, yet felt that he knew what had brought her here. The poor girl had heard what was being said about her, and she had come perhaps to confess, if there was anything in that story, that she was a mere foundling, and not Hayward's daughter (but the Canon knew there was nothing in that)—perhaps to ask him for his help, for his advice. And he was pleased beforehand, before she opened her mouth, that she should come to him—not to that man at St. Augustine's, though she had been so much with those Sitwells, but to himself, a much better guide,

whom she had said she liked best. Jealousies do not exist between man and man, we know, as they do between woman and woman—and especially not between clergyman and clergyman—but yet the Canon was pleased that it was to him Joyce had come.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘here you are, and I’m delighted to see you. It is not often you go about paying visits, Joyce.’

‘Oh no,’ she said, ‘never.’ The shock of finding herself here, opposite to him, in the place of a penitent, come to tell her tale, brought the colour to Joyce’s face. She gave him one look, and then turned her eyes away. He was very, very different from Miss Marsham. To sit there and tell him everything struck Joyce as impossible. She had never intended to tell everything. She had meant that the oracle should half divine, should understand before she spoke.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘don’t lose courage now you are here. You’ve come to tell me all about it, Joyce.’

Joyce only looked at him again, her eyes enlarged with alarm and terror, wondering

after all, she who desired to be understood without speaking, what and how he knew. She said under her breath, her eyes being the chief speakers, the words seeming nothing, 'I want you to tell me what to do.'

'You want me——? What are you saying, Joyce? Come, you're not afraid of me. I'm your father's old friend, you know. I don't believe any of that nonsense, and I'm your friend against the world, my dear. Come, speak out, don't be afraid of me.'

He drew his chair nearer hers, once more making the house quiver, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, patted it encouragingly. 'Come, Joyce, be a man,' the Canon said, with the little tremble of a laugh in his big voice.

Joyce answered him only with her eyes. They seemed to grow bigger and bigger in her pale face, telling him a hundred things; but she could not find her voice. She had meant to tell him as much at least as she had told Miss Marsham; but when she found herself before him, a man, with that confused story of hers which was not for a man's ears, Joyce was struck dumb. She made an

effort to say something, but failed again. He kept his hand on her shoulder, patting it, encouraging her as if she had been a child. 'Come, Joyce, tell me all about it. You are not afraid of me.'

Her voice burst forth suddenly, as if she had forced it, or rather as if it had forced an outlet for itself from some place where it had been pent up. 'Oh, sir!' Joyce cried, 'I cannot speak; but tell me one thing,—if there are two and one must suffer, and you are one of them—must you never make a question, but consent and accept that it shall be you?'

The Canon was altogether taken by surprise. The burst of the voice, hoarse at first, afterwards clearing and quickening in its passionate strain, the question that had nothing to do with what he had expected to hear, but was an abstract question, startled him beyond expression. 'Why, Joyce, Joyce—what is this?' he said.

She turned to him, growing bolder. 'If you are one of two, and one of them must break her heart—and you are the one that is used to that, and the other has known no

trouble. Do not ask me what I mean,' said Joyce, 'but oh, you that are a minister, you that have to guide those that are wandering and lost, tell me! They say that is like a, b, c, and every woman knows; but you are not a woman, you are a man. You will not be carried away by feeling as they are. You will be more just. You will know.'

'My poor child,' said the Canon. He too, like Miss Marsham, took her hand, in utter failure of any other way to help her, and held it, patting it softly between his. 'Joyce,' he said, 'my dear, you're right. I am only a man; I can't divine what you mean unless you tell me. As far as I can make out, somebody has been talking nonsense to you. What is this a, b, c that every woman knows? If you'll believe me, Joyce, a woman is just like a man so far as duty goes. There's no law for one more than the other. Tell me what it is, seriously, Joyce.'

She looked up at him once more and opened her lips to speak; but again the impossibility of telling that tale to him closed her lips. Joyce was nearly in despair, and she had a clinging to him as to her

friend, one who would help her if he could, one who knew many things and might understand. But when she looked up at the Canon's middle-aged countenance and at his large prosperous person, and the capacious round of his black silk waiscoat, and the air about him of a man who had everything and abounded, her courage and confidence failed her. She was dumb. To tell her youthful trouble to him, all mixed up as it was with love and lovers and trifling things, though so great to her, a matter of life and death—to him, who would be moved by none of these matters—how could she do it? She drew a long breath, which ended in something like a sob—‘It is—it is a case of conscience,’ she said, with her wistful eyes fixed upon him, making revelations which he could not understand.

‘A case of conscience!’ he said; ‘this is one of your evasions not to speak out. You’re like other women, Joyce, which is no shame to you; you would like me to be at all the expense of the talk, my dear, and give you my advice without any knowledge of the circumstances. Let us see what premisses

we've got. If I were one of two and knew that one must suffer, would I take it upon me without question that the sufferer must be I—is that what you call the a, b, c that every woman knows? A great many women are fools, my dear, but not such fools as that. No, Joyce! I should take up no such idea. I should say, let him suffer who deserved it, who had brought it on himself.'

'No,' said Joyce very low. 'She has not done that: we are not ill-deserving—it's no—no wrong—oh, neither her nor me!'

'It is something between two women,' said the clear-sighted Canon. 'It is love then, and there is a man in the question too.'

She made him no reply; but she turned away her face from him, and the Canon saw the colour rise like a fire over her cheek from throat to brow.

'And somebody has put it into your head that the easy way out of it—the fairest way—is to sacrifice yourself? It was a woman that said that, and told you it was the a, b, c. I shouldn't wonder if it was that old fool Cissy Marsham, it would be just like her. Now, Joyce listen to me——'

‘She is not a fool,’ said Joyce, turning her face to him again.

‘Don’t tell me! She’s worth a dozen of any of us, but she may be a fool for all that. Now listen to me, Joyce. I say no: do you hear? There’s no a, b, c, but plain right and wrong. As for self-sacrifice, in the majority of cases it’s a mere silly, idiotic, if not horrible, mistake. Generally it does good to nobody. You fling your own happiness away, and you don’t secure any one else’s. My dear girl, to consider other people first is in some cases not only uncalled for but wrong.’

Joyce had kept her eyes fixed upon his face. At this there came over hers a faint smile, and she softly shook her head.

‘She doesn’t believe me,’ said the Canon, —‘none of them do; on this point good women are all fools, and the better they are the greater fools they are. God bless my soul!—who made you your brother’s keeper? How do you know what’s best for him? Who gave you the right to humiliate him by sacrificing yourself to him—or her? what does it matter? it’s all the same, him or her. I tell you,’ cried the Canon, jumping up

suddenly, walking round to the fireplace, and standing up against the glow of the fire, his large person rising like a mountain, flinging over Joyce a great shadow, 'women like Cissy Marsham are a pest; they're a plague in the place, with their a, b, c, and their creed for a woman. Nonsense, my dear! that's all nonsense, my dear! What's law for a man is law for a woman. There's no other. Don't break anybody's heart if you can help it; but in the name of common-sense, go your own way and take what God gives you, and have the courage to be happy if He puts happiness into your hands!' The Canon puffed out a hot breath of impatience, and shook himself in his easy large garments as if to settle them all into their places, shaking the house at the same time and making everything ring—'whatever Cissy Marsham may say, the old fool, God bless her!' he cried, with a laugh, throwing himself down again into a big easy-chair.

But Joyce made no reply. It is in the nature of an oracle to divine what is congenial to the nature of the devotee—to give a deliverance which, however confusing, will have

something in it which will carry out its natural tendencies, and agree with his inner sense. But to Joyce this voice brought no such message. To be bidden to be happy was no part of her requirements. She did not understand what happiness in the abstract was. According to her austere peasant training, it was so far from being the object of life, that to seek it was an unworthy and undignified, even wrong thing. She had been happy all her life without knowing ; but to look for happiness, to seek it, to make it the object of every exertion, was incompatible with all the rules of life which she knew. 'Happy! you will just do your work and your duty, and be thankful for what the Lord sends ye,' Janet Matheson would have said. What the Canon said was not very different: 'Go your own way and take what God gives.' But the meaning was different ; oh, the meaning was different ! Don't break anybody's heart if you can help it ; but if you do, never mind—have the courage to be happy all the same. This oracle spoke too loudly, too plainly, with too distinct a note. It found no echo in her heart. It was not the guidance for which she craved.

The Canon saw perhaps that he had not been successful. He tried to draw her into conversation of a less momentous kind. 'I hear you've had some visitors from your old home, Joyce. I fear they've been injudicious visitors, talking a great deal of nonsense; but I hope they brought you good news at least of your people—old people, weren't they, that brought you up? I'm ready to give them a certificate of success in that line,' the Canon added in his fine bass, which lent itself very tenderly to those paternal words, and with a pleasant laugh.

Joyce looked up at him with a startled glance. She had, indeed, put no question to Andrew as to the beloved old people. There had not been a word about them, or any other question of life—nothing but his claim, and her resistance yet acknowledgment, and all the confused miserable discussions. She seemed to fall into a slough of despond, the miry pit and the horrible clay of the Scriptures, when her heart went back, sick, to that visit. Ah! she thought, had that been all—had there been nothing but Andrew! But with the instinct of her natural reticence she

only replied, 'They are well—they always write that they are well.'

'That's good.' Dr. Jenkinson meant to take advantage of the opportunity to ask further questions, to elicit, if he could, something of the true story upon which Mrs. Sitwell had built her romance; but when he looked at Joyce's pale and musing face, and saw that the girl could scarcely withdraw herself from the consideration of her perplexity, whatever it was, to answer him, and that she had no attention to give to other matters, his heart smote him. He could not question her, force her out of herself, to satisfy his curiosity. He said nothing more for a whole minute; but the silence did not frighten Joyce nor force her to speak. She sat lost in her own problem, to which he felt his energetic counsel had brought no light. The Canon had been impatient; he had thought it best to crush these foolish womanish thoughts on the threshold of her mind; but he had not succeeded. What he had said had been a disappointment and confusion only—no enlightenment to Joyce.

'Come,' he said, 'we can't sit silent like

this and look at the fire. When you and me get together we want to talk, Joyce. Give me some of your opinions. You're not satisfied with mine, I can see.'

She looked up at him without any smile and shook her head.

'Out with it!' cried the Canon. 'We always do have a little fight. Let me hear where I am wrong. That's the worst of your Saint Cissy, and other such. They don't say a word for themselves; they're only meekly obstinate after the manner of saints. Come! out with it, Joyce!'

'Oh,' said Joyce, 'I cannot speak! My heart says no to you, but I can't give a reason—it's because it's far too serious. I thought of her and of you, that are so different, that might give me a light where all is dark—but I can give no reason. I must just go on till the moment, and then do—what is put into my heart.'

'My poor child!' cried the Canon, alarmed, 'can't you tell me what is wrong? Do nothing rash, whatever it is—do nothing that can't be undone. Joyce, I am afraid of you. You are not like the rest of them:

never mind any nonsense I have said, but tell me, tell me sincerely, what is wrong. Don't shake your head. You have come to consult me of your own free will—tell me what it is——'

'I cannot,' she said piteously; 'I cannot!—oh, I would if I could: it's maybe nothing at all—I cannot speak. It's—it's love that is stronger than death,' cried the girl, 'and love that is nothing, that is but fancy, and a dream—— I'll think nothing more of it. I'll think nothing! The moment may never come, and if it comes, no one can help me. I must do—what is in my heart——'

The Canon drew his chair in front of her with a look that was more searching than his questions, and which she could not support save for a second. 'Mind what I say, Joyce. Nobody made you your brother's keeper. If it's beautiful to make a sacrifice, as you women think, it's shameful to accept one. Remember that. You've no right to put a shame and humiliation upon another. It's a humiliation—you would yourself refuse it and scorn it. Joyce, whatever you may be tempted to do, remember what I say——'

She tried to speak, struggling with tears. 'The greatest of all—was a sacrifice, a sacrifice——'

'Hush!' he said imperatively. 'When there is One to be found in His conditions there need be no discussion. And that one man should die for the people, I allow—and that you should die physically rather than let another die, if it is in your heart to do it, that I allow. But that you should make yourself the judge in other circumstances, and shame another by suffering for him when you know neither his heart, nor what is best for him, nor anything but your own wild enthusiasm—that I forbid, Joyce. I forbid it, being your priest, to whom you have come for light.'

Joyce raised her wistful eyes, which were wet with tears hanging on the lashes. But she shook her head. She was a little Presbyterian, as he had said. Perhaps the name of the priest lessened instead of strengthening his power.

CHAPTER XLIII

CAPTAIN BELLENDEAN followed Mrs. Hayward into the house. It was unusually silent, no one stirring, not even a dog. The air was very warm and soft inside, the fire having the room to itself, and burning in a quiet genial way to keep itself company, with a clear red glow that lighted up everything. The tea-table stood untouched—the curtains drawn a little more than usual over the sides of the windows to keep out the cold, and making a still earlier twilight than that outside. The emptiness and silence and vacancy of that warm and luxurious room, so softly carpeted, curtained, cushioned, so evidently expectant of inhabitation, with all its certain signs and marks of habitual tenancy, yet all empty and silent, were more impressive almost than the emptiness of real abandonment. Mrs. Hay-

ward opened the door of the room for her visitor, and bade him go in while she herself looked for the others. 'I'll see if they are in,' she said; and her heart gave a little jump of expectation as she said it. If she had found Joyce, she would have sent the girl into the drawing-room, while she herself took off her 'things' in the most leisurely way upstairs; and she would not have pursued her researches with any idea of finding the Colonel. It annoyed her very much to find Joyce's room empty, and no trace of her visible. She went over every room where her step-daughter could be before she gave up the search, asking the maids, and finally Baker, though she had no desire to take that personage into her confidence. Colonel Hayward's lamp was already burning in the library. It was his hour for reading the rest of the paper left unfinished in the morning, and sometimes for a doze; but Joyce was not there.

'Miss Hayward have gone out, ma'am,' Baker said.

'Oh, has she? I had something to say to her. (She would not have Baker think that

it was because of Captain Bellendean's visit that she wanted Joyce.) Ask her to come to me in the drawing-room the moment she comes in.'

'I will, ma'am,' said Baker, with stolid gravity; but he chuckled when his mistress, much put out, turned towards the drawing-room door. *He* knew very well why Joyce was so urgently wanted. 'He 'ave come up to the scratch at last,' Baker said to himself.

Captain Bellendean stood by himself upon the Persian rug before the fire. He was in a very restless mood. There was something in this warm, soft afternoon atmosphere, the sense of domestic calm, the composure of settled life, which was like an insufficient opiate, exciting instead of calming. He was not in a comfortable or happy state of mind. The last time he had been here he was at the height of warm and spontaneous love, bewitched by the presence of the girl who had transported him out of all his bachelor reluctances and defences. This is perhaps a strange way in which to speak of the lover. It is the woman who is supposed to defend herself, to hold back with reluctance, either

real or assumed. However, it is one of the enlightenments of our age to recognise that there are two sides to that question. Norman Bellendean had not made up his mind to marry when he took possession of his estate. He did not want even to take possession of his estate; he would have preferred that his father should have held it in his place a few years longer, until he felt more disposed to settle down. But that had not suited Mr. Bellendean's ideas or plans : and Norman, fresh from India, and with a natural desire after the pleasant experiences of a rich young man's untrammelled career at home, found himself at once introduced into the responsibilities of an estate and the bondage of a conspicuous position much against his will. But he had set his face against the natural results. He knew that it was expected of him that he should marry and 'settle down.' He had an idea even that his neighbours had kindly selected for him a certain number of eligible young ladies among whom he would be expected to make his choice. To be sure, nobody could force him to make any such choice. He was free as the air to choose

elsewhere, or not to choose at all. But the consciousness that this was what was expected of him chafed the young man. He was coy at first like a girl, on his defence, yet sometimes, with laughter and shame, became conscious of his own little coquetries, and felt how ludicrous was the situation altogether. And then he fled to town, to the excitements of the season, to take his share, for the first time, in that whirl and hurry of entertainment and assembling together which we call society. And then—but this was the thing unaccountable in the midst of so many things which he saw through and understood—he fell in love; and before he knew, was on the eve of asking to share his fortunes, and to ‘settle down’ with him at Bellendean, the girl who had been, a few months before, the village schoolmistress there.

Norman had fallen in love honestly, spontaneously, without any preparation or *arrière-pensée*. He had neither said to himself that this was the one woman for him, or that she was altogether out of the question for him being what she was. Before he had begun to suspect it, the thing was done. He

had thought it was the river, the rowing, the greater simplicity and freedom of the merry party, something in the summer air that was itself delicious as an escape out of London, before he found out that it was Joyce. He had indeed just found out that it was Joyce on the last occasion, when he walked with her home from the garden-party at Sir Sam's. He had found it out, and in the rush and flood of feeling had told her—he scarcely knew what. He tried to recollect after what he had said, and he could not. He knew that she had not responded ; that she had kept him at arm's-length ; and that when he had rushed away, unable to bear the constraint of other people's society while it was she—she only—whom he wanted, he had said he would come back. The recollection was all confused, disturbed, made uncertain even by excessive thinking over and attempts to remember every detail. And then he had been called away, and it was not possible for him to go back ; and then cold afterthought had seized upon him in his heat of love. She had made no reply—what she had said had been 'No,' though he did not

believe that she meant the final 'No' which would annihilate all his pretensions. He had known that she did not mean that : he had seen in her something of the flood of feeling which had overwhelmed himself. He had gone up to town with his heart throbbing and his head swimming, in anticipation of what would happen when he went back. That was not how a man felt when he expected the 'No' which would make an end of all.

But he did not come back—for the moment could not, being called back to Bellendean ; and then—did not. Why ? Because of the chill of the afterthought which took possession of him ; because he remembered, not immediately but after a time, who Joyce was. She was his old Colonel's daughter, it was true, who was a match for any gentleman. Yes, a match for any gentleman. Colonel Hayward's daughter, a distinguished soldier, a man who was as good as the best. Under royalty, Colonel Hayward's daughter might have married any one—no man daring to have said that it was a *mésalliance*. But then at Bellendean she

was the village schoolmistress. Nobody knew much about Colonel Hayward, though they had all heard the story; but everybody knew Joyce. He was aware, for he had heard it talked of, that for Joyce herself it was hard to throw off the habits of her previous existence; and that she was wounded even when told that she must no longer say Miss Greta, and must submit to be treated on a footing of equality by the lady to whom she had looked up. He remembered all this with an acute sense of pain, when he had time to think. That his wife should still have these instincts of inferiority; that she should wish to say Miss Greta; that she should look up to his step-mother as to a being of a superior kind—he grew hot and red at the thought. His wife! It was impossible—it could not be.

These thoughts chilled him to his very heart, and stopped the flood of love which was carrying him away. And many other thoughts came in to add to them. Norman himself was not well known in his country. There was a slight feeling against him as a man who had (though quite innocently on

his part) supplanted his own father. He wanted a wife who should be unquestionable, who should be popular—able to help him to the full acquisition of his proper standing in the place. And if he were to bring home to be the mistress of Bellendean a girl whom everybody knew indeed, but knew as Joyce the schoolmistress!—his heart sank within him at that thought, which was suggested by several concurring things ; by his stepmother, who, without mentioning Joyce, had laid the state of affairs very clearly before him, and by other incidental remarks and occurrences which supported her view. All these things disturbed his mind greatly. And he had occupations, perhaps arranged for the purpose, to keep him at home. And Greta's home was at hand, where there was always a sympathetic listener for everything he wanted to say. He did not speak to Greta of Joyce, but Greta spoke of her freely, always with love and admiration, which soothed him, yet at the same time diverted his thoughts a little in affectionate gratitude and approval of this generous little creature, who combined everything that was most desirable in a wife,

just as Joyce combined everything that was least desirable. And then there were the poor couple in the village, whom Norman went religiously to see at first, to tell them about their lost child ; then with a hunger of the heart that could not be satisfied, to talk about her. He never asked himself how he would like to have this old couple, so excellent, so blameless—worthy of all respect, and more than respect—at Bellendean, calling it's mistress J'yce, and weeping over her ; but the thought, of which he was ashamed, shot across his mind like lightning every time he heard their name.

These things worked in his mind and made him miserable. His stepmother talked to him of marrying, and of the necessity of making a wise choice to establish his position ; and Greta met him at every corner—either he was invited to her father's house, or she came to see her dear aunt Margaret. The girl was entirely innocent of any conspiracy in the matter ; but Norman was her hero, and it was scarcely possible for her to conceal her interest in him—her joy when he came, her regret when he went away. It

was not difficult for him to discover that in everybody's opinion Greta was the fittest of wives for him. He could not shut his eyes to the fact that it was so. If he had never seen Joyce, if he had never entered that enchanted country in which she dwelt, never floated on that magic river, never strayed in that garden of dreams—never met and parted—then Greta would have been his bride. She would have come to Bellendean so naturally and simply, with such a carrying out of all good wishes for its new lord, that the marriage would have been pronounced by all to be one of those made in heaven.

But now another image had come in. Sometimes he would wish in his distress that it had never done so—that he had never seen her: but that did not change the fact that she had come in and changed everything. The conflict had grown harder every day. Then he had gone to the Highlands, to the moors, and there the struggle took another form. His demon, his other self, who maintained the controversy with him, began to put it before Norman that he had 'behaved badly' to Joyce. Perhaps—we

know so little about these demons or dæmons, who are continually interfering in our affairs, making and meddling, and have so little light as to their motives—perhaps that most secret of companions meant to deter him by the shame of that bad behaviour from going near Joyce again. But if so, he calculated without his host. For Norman, in a blaze of shame and self-indignation which drove him like a fiery wind, hurried straight off to London, on the spot, to see Joyce instantly and put himself right.

It was in this mood that he arrived, and found himself in the familiar scene of his summer romance, under gray twilight skies, and in the cosy empty room, lighted with the red firelight, silent, comfortable, full of the poetry of domestic life, which is different from the poetry of the river and the garden. He knew that Mrs. Hayward had gone to look for Joyce, and that she would not come back to disturb the *tête-à-tête*, but would leave them together, as mothers seemed to do, with an instinct of what is coming. He would rather have met Joyce unawares with-

out any warning, without any possibility of a concerted meeting of which the parents should be in the secret. It annoyed him to think that she would be warned, that along with the sudden intimation that he was there, there would be a word of advice or at least a look, to show her what was expected of her. This added to his restlessness as he stood before the red glow of the fire changing from one foot to the other, anxious, impatient, yet feeling that the chill fit, the mental ague which alternated with the fever, might be on its way. He heard little movements in the house—some one walking overhead—some one running upstairs—a voice sounding faintly calling some one. Was Joyce reluctant then to come? Was she angry with him for not returning sooner? Was she displeased with the warning given her, and unwilling to come down to him in the empty drawing-room while everybody knew what must take place there. It would be like her to refuse. It would be what he should expect of her; but in what a position would it place *him*!—a lover understood yet undeclared, whose object was unmistakable,

yet who was not to be allowed to carry it out. His heart began to beat, partly with anger, partly with suspense, partly with love. Would not she come? He was so impatient that he could have seized her and shaken her in exasperation and excitement: and yet he could not but grumble in his moustache, that by Jove she was right, and that it was just what he would have expected of Joyce.

Presently, however, the sounds outside became more audible, and he made out that it was the Colonel's step which was coming towards the drawing-room. 'Captain Belendean!' Colonel Hayward was saying; 'why didn't you bring him to the library? Why, Norman, my fine fellow! how do you do?—I'm delighted to see you; but why that ass should have sent you in here in the dark—I can't see you a bit—is more than any mortal could divine—when he knew the ladies were out, and I was sitting by myself.'

'I came in with Mrs. Hayward. I assure you it wasn't the man's fault.'

'Oh, well, if Elizabeth knows. She'll be

down immediately, no doubt. Bring us some light, Baker. Yes, yes, the firelight is very pretty, but I always like to see to talk. Come up about business, Bellendean ?'

'Yes,' said Norman, with a little hesitation. 'I may say it is business, though not quite what is usually called by that name.'

'I thought so. Nothing else would bring one of you young fellows to town at this time of the year. Tell your mistress, Baker, we are waiting for her to give us some tea. Mrs. Bellendean was here yesterday to bid us good-bye : or perhaps I should say to bid good-bye to Joyce : for I think we came a long way after Joyce in her estimation, my wife and I.'

'I hope,' said Bellendean, with a catch in his breath, 'that Miss Hayward—is quite well.'

'Oh yes, she is very well. I have thought sometimes that this air didn't suit her—it's a great change from the North. It gave me great pleasure, however, to find, when we were talking the other day, that she likes it on the whole. She has a wonderfully pretty way of expressing herself. I

should like to tell you a thing she said to me. I was questioning her on this subject, anxious to get her true sentiments. And she said, 'You are my home, father.'—Eh, don't you think it was pretty? Well, I'm an old fool—it brought the water to my eyes. Hush, here's Elizabeth; she says I am like a child with a new toy. I bore everybody with my stories of Joyce.'

'It would not be easy to bore me—on that subject.'

These last words were drowned by the entrance of Mrs. Hayward. She had taken off her things, leaving it to her husband to entertain the visitor. Joyce's absence annoyed her exceedingly. It was quite unusual, and seemed a sort of climax of misfortune—or perversity: perversity was the view to which Mrs. Hayward inclined.

'I don't know what can have become of Joyce,' she said, after she had poured out tea for the gentlemen. 'She is never out at this hour. It is getting dark, too late for her to be out.'

'Are you anxious, my dear?' cried the Colonel, rising. 'Bless me! it is always you

who think of everything. I'll go at once and bring her home.'

'Nonsense, Henry!—there is nothing to be anxious about. She has stayed somewhere for tea. Last time we saw you, Captain Bellendean, you expected to return to town—earlier than this. I suppose you had still a good deal to arrange before your father and Mrs. Bellendean left you to your own devices?'

'I have been very busy,' said Bellendean in a subdued tone, which the Colonel did not understand.

'He has come up about business now,' said Colonel Hayward; 'and very dull you will find it, Bellendean, I don't doubt, though I am told that more people come to London at this time of the year than used to do so. You must run down as often as you can and look us up—as you did in summer, you know——'

'Summer and winter are two very different things,' said Mrs. Hayward; 'and Captain Bellendean feels that, Henry. In summer there's the river, you know, and—other things.'

‘The other things,’ said Norman with an effort, ‘last all the year through; and they are more important even than the river.’

Captain Bellendean was very ill at ease. He had not thought of these surroundings at all, nor of any questions that might be put to him on the subject of his long delay, nor of anything indeed but Joyce. It had been comparatively easy in the outdoor summer life to secure an interview with her. Now as he looked round him, and saw Mrs. Hayward seat herself in her habitual chair by her habitual table, with that air of settled and permanent possession which the mistress of a house has in her own corner, and the Colonel thrown back in a larger chair on the other side, a sense of being surrounded and shut in came upon him. Joyce was not here, which took all the meaning out of his coming; but if she had been here between this pair to whom she belonged, what could he have said to her? Colonel Hayward’s daughter surrounded by all the fortifications of life, was a different thing from Joyce,—the girl whom to love and seek was a sort of social crime. There was no question here

of a tremendous social downfall, of the *mésalliance* and mistake against which he had been warned. He had fully understood that side of the question, and it had chilled him even in his heat of love. Now the tables were turned; it was he who was suspected and disapproved of, and from whom the parents were defending their daughter. This unexpected drawback chilled him still more.

Norman sat for a long time in that exceedingly comfortable, warm, beautifully furnished room, with his old colonel, for whom he had the greatest respect, and the Colonel's commander, the much-famed Elizabeth, over whose name he had jested, but of whose personality he had always been a little afraid. He sat and made conversation, or rather listened to that which went on across him, growing more and more embarrassed and uncomfortable. He seemed to hear doors opening and closing all over the house, but Joyce never appeared; and footsteps in the hall and on the stairs, but no sign of her coming. His head began to get confused with the contrariety and annoyance.

Fate and Mrs. Hayward seemed to have joined the conspiracy against him, in which everybody was at Bellendean—and, as he now blushed to think, he had not expected any contrariety here. He had thought—coxcomb that he was!—that here he would be master of the situation. He had thought he knew that Joyce would not say him nay. The shy glance, the rising colour, even the startled opposition to his half-spoken love-making on their last interview, had given him an assurance that Joyce was not indifferent. But even this assurance came back upon him with a keen sense of shame and wounded vanity. He had been a fool. How could he tell what she would say to him, while here were the father and mother talking, perhaps keeping her out of sight, at least securing that even if she came nothing could be said? And she did not come—though it seemed to Captain Bellendean that hours had elapsed since he entered the drawing-room in the firelight, and imagined to himself the little comedy, the mother seeking the daughter, hurrying her downstairs and into the arms of the waiting lover. He

realised with the most stinging shame that he had imagined that—though the reality was so different, so ludicrously different, he tried to say with a laugh at himself—so painfully different, as he felt in his heart.

After a long time he rose. ‘I am afraid it is getting late. I must not lose—the next train. I have—something to do in town,’ he said.

‘Go! without your dinner!’ said the Colonel, in his cheerful ignorance. ‘No, no, you must not think of that. And Joyce would be disappointed not to see you. Tell him, my dear, he must stay to dinner at least. We don’t let old friends go like this.’

‘I am afraid I must go,’ said Norman, with the stony air of a departing Englishman, always uneasy lest he should be made to change his resolution. He was offended, wounded, shamed by the difference between the reality and his imagination. ‘I—have a great deal to do in town—and little time——’

‘Then you are leaving again soon?’ Mrs. Hayward said. She had risen from

her chair at once as if to give him no excuse for changing his mind; though that was not what she meant.

‘But we must see him again, Elizabeth. No, no, I’ll take no denial. Why, Joyce will be distressed not to see you. You must come another day and stay to dinner. It is a long time since we have had a good talk,’ cried the Colonel. ‘I want to hear all your plans. Come, come, Bellendean, there’s no getting off it. You must come another day.’

He was turned all the wrong way. He had come with great strain of purpose, feeling all the magnitude of the step before him, knowing the sacrifice that was involved as well as the gain. And nothing at all had come of it, not even a recognition on the part of the spectators of the immense importance of what he had been about to do. ‘I am afraid it’s impossible,’ he said, with stony looks; and then there came over him a sudden vision of Joyce in all her sweetness. Joyce, the only poetry he had ever felt, the only romance that had ever revealed itself to him. Was he to give her up for this?

‘Perhaps,’ he added, ‘if you are disengaged on Thursday.’ His tone was ungracious, but his heart gave a leap, belying the outward stolidity of disappointment and half offence.

‘Thursday, or any day,’ cried the Colonel, in his hospitality. ‘You don’t think we should count any trumpery little engagement against a visit from you! Well, that’s better—that’s better, Bellendean; and good-bye, my dear fellow; you’ll have a run for the train, if you must go.’

The Colonel came out bareheaded to the door to hasten the departure of the guest to whom it was so indispensable not to lose the train. He stood there for a moment looking at his watch in the light of the lamp in the hall. ‘It is all he will do to catch it,’ he said; ‘but he has good long legs of his own, which is better than a cab when you’re in a hurry. Shut the door, Baker, there’s a dreadful draught. Why, Jenkinson, is that you? You’ve brought my girl home, like a good fellow. And, Joyce, my dear, you’ve come five minutes too late. Norman Bellendean has just darted off to catch his train.’

CHAPTER XLIV

THE Canon had brought Joyce home. He had tucked her hand under his arm, and led her through the dark as carefully as her father would have done, talking much, but getting very little response. He looked like a mountain moving along in the gloom, or like a big ship with a slim little yacht in tow; and other wayfarers could hear his voice coming out in the mist, with sometimes a faint note of reply. The Canon was not talking to her of moral difficulties or cases of conscience, but of a party which was to take place at the rectory, and at which he wished her to look her best. 'If you will do me a favour,' he said, 'you will put these questions all away, and put on the pretty looks with which you captivated me, Joyce. Eh? don't you remember? it's not so long

ago ; how you went and put yourself on the other side, and waved your flag in my face, you little—— But it was all in vain, my dear, for we fell in love with each other just the same.'

A smile came upon her face as she looked up at him through the fog and the faint lamp-light that streamed in distinct rays across that solid atmosphere. 'Yes,' she said.

'You can't deny it,' said the Canon ; 'for my part, it was at first sight. Well, Joyce, to please me, and your father—though I don't know that he has the same right—you will go back to that moment, and look your best. I want you to look very nice indeed—so does my wife. We mustn't give the adversary occasion to blaspheme.'

'But I have no adversary,' said Joyce, 'unless it were——'

'Eh ? I don't doubt you have somewhere, as all of us have, somebody you've been too good to. And keep away from that little parson woman, Joyce. I'm a parson myself, you will say ; but there are parsons and parsons. Is that some one leaving your house ? and there is your father standing out

in the night air without a hat; the most foolish thing he could do. You catch cold without any warning, and then there's no getting rid of it. Hey, Hayward! don't shut the door upon us, please; I've brought you home your little girl.'

The Colonel shouted, 'Why, Jenkinson, is it you?'—as we have seen—and stood in the doorway to greet his visitor. 'Come in,' he said, 'come in out of the fog. If you had been coming in the opposite direction you'd have run into Bellendean. He has not been five minutes gone.'

'I only wish we had run into him,' said the Canon in his rolling bass; 'it might have cleared up some things.'

'What do you mean, Canon? He's a nice fellow, but not particularly clever. Come in, and don't stand out in the fog.'

'Go in yourself, and don't catch cold. I've done my duty now; I've brought you home, Joyce. Take care of her, Hayward,' said the Canon, as he strode away, marching like a regiment, with his long coat swinging, and the black silk waistcoat charging the heavy air. Colonel Hayward withdrew with-

in the shelter of the door, putting up his hand to his head, which was his vulnerable point.

‘Take care of her!’ he said; ‘my own girl! I should think I would take care of her. These parsons take a great deal upon them. They think they always know better than other people though they have neither chick nor child.’ The Colonel repeated these words to himself with a little chuckle, as he went back to his library to finish something he had been reading in the paper before dinner. The Canon looked very big and imposing, and took a great deal of authority upon himself, but he was wholly without experience in the point upon which he presumed to lecture his old friend. Take care of her—his own little girl! a pretty thing for a man to say who had never succeeded in securing anything of the kind for himself.

Joyce went into the drawing-room with her heart beating, sick and faint. She seemed to feel in the air that he had been there. There was something of him still about the room—the mark of his elbow on a cushion, the sensation of his breath. He had come after all. She wanted to stand where he had

stood, to breathe the same air, and then—and then—to fly where she could never see him—where it should be impossible to be tempted to his destruction. No, no; and to break Greta's heart. Her own throbbed quick but low. There had been a momentary spring, but only for a moment. No, no, not for his harm, and the breaking of Greta's heart. His coming seemed to have precipitated and brought near what was so far off a little while ago. She was on the edge of the precipice now—and there was something in the sense of the giddy vacancy before her that seemed to sweep and suck her towards the edge. She went in—and found Mrs. Hayward standing waiting for her in the middle of the room.

‘Where have you been, Joyce? where have you been?—to-day of all days? Captain Bellendean has been here——’

She said, ‘Yes, I heard,’ almost under her breath.

‘And why were you not here to meet him? I don't suppose it was your fault. It could not be your fault. But why, why were you not here? It is like a bad fate.’

‘It would be rather a providence,’ said Joyce, in her subdued voice—‘for it’s better; oh, it’s better not. I am—glad—I wasn’t here.’

Mrs. Hayward grasped her hand with an impatient exasperation. ‘Glad—you weren’t here—glad to have driven him almost frantic—and me too!’

Joyce looked at her stepmother, wondering. She was so forlorn that any sympathetic tone, even though it was angry, caught her ear. And she felt the circumstances to be so desperate that she was no longer afraid. ‘You?—are you caring—any way?’

‘Am I caring! You mean, do I care? Yes, I care. Joyce!’ cried Mrs. Hayward, gripping her hands tightly, then loosing them with a little impatient gesture, as if she had flung them away, ‘you are a strange girl—you have never tried to make me love you. And I don’t know that I do. It was a great change to me, that had been everything to my husband, to have you a stranger brought in: and you never tried to make me care——’

‘I was bewildered,’ the girl said. ‘I was—like a creature astray——’

‘Very likely. I am not asking the cause; I am only telling you. But now there’s something got up that we must stand against. They’ve got to know about that man—and that you were—only a poor girl before. They are making a stand against you.’

Joyce stood up against the glow of the fire listening, yet only half roused. She was taller than Mrs. Hayward, and the energetic, almost impassioned little woman looked up at her pale face, and thought it like a face in a dream. It was abstracted, the eyes veiled, as if they were looking inward. And neither to have thus lost her lover’s visit, nor to be threatened with a conspiracy against her, awakened her out of the mist of her own thoughts. Mrs. Hayward put her hand on Joyce’s arm with the quick impatience of her nature—‘Wake up,’ she said. ‘I don’t know what you have in your mind: but give your attention to what I am saying. Wake up! it is of the greatest importance, if not to yourself, to your father and to me——’

‘Yes,’ said Joyce, with a little start; ‘I am hearing every word you say, and minding. Oh, don’t think I’ve a cold heart. I

am only just all astray—since ever I came. I was a stranger, as you say. And I might learn better—if there was time.'

'There is plenty of time,' said Mrs. Hayward, with a little moisture in her eyes. 'Men never see it—but it was a great trial for you and me. Yes, yes, for both of us. I always saw that. But we must make a stand now, and do it together. They say you're not your father's daughter, but a foundling—and they say you've got a man coming after you that made a disturbance—a low man. Don't contradict me or put my temper up! He was not a low man, but quite respectable, I know that—but all the same a man to be put a stop to. Joyce! don't you understand what a vexation it is that you were not here? He came with his heart in his mouth to lay everything at your feet. And the triumph it would have been for us all to have faced them, with you engaged to Norman Bellen-dean!'

A colour like the flash of a light passed over Joyce's face. Her eyes filled suddenly with large hot tears. She shook her head, with a trembling going over her like the sud-

den shiver of ague. 'No,' she said, 'no—never that ; oh, never that !'

'Why never that ? Don't be a fool, Joyce, don't be a fool. Though he's an excellent match, there's nobody near, nobody anywhere that would suit you so well. You understand each other. For goodness' sake,' cried Mrs. Hayward, exasperated and anxious, 'don't spoil your life with any romantic nonsense ! Why, even his people like you and seek you. Mrs. Bellendean——'

'I must tell you the truth,' said Joyce, 'for oh, I am in a great strait, and I know not what to do. Mrs. Bellendean would rather I were dead than that. There is one he should marry that would break her heart—and there is one I should marry : *that* I will not do ; but I will marry nobody nor think of anything that could hurt her—or him. No, not for all the world.'

Mrs. Hayward clapped her hands together in the wild impatience and rage which could not find utterance in mere words. 'Oh, that was it !' she cried. 'I thought there was something treacherous in it. I thought she did not come for nothing, that woman !'

I never liked her, for all her show of kindness. I never put any faith in her. And she came to take advantage of your simplicity, you poor thing—you poor innocent thing!’ Elizabeth’s temper was warm, but her heart no less. She caught Joyce suddenly in her arms, and gave her a quick kiss, which was like a soft little blow—and the girl felt that the cheek which touched hers was wet. But it was only a momentary touch, and Mrs. Hayward was half ashamed of her emotion. She gave an imperative grasp to Joyce’s arms as she let her go, and added, with a little laugh, ‘But let us stand together, Joyce—you and me! and we’ll be too many for them. I don’t mind how strong they are—we’ll be too many for them yet—you and me!’

Colonel Hayward coming in at this moment, with his newspaper in his hand to read something aloud to his wife (who had seen it before breakfast), found them standing very close together, and heard the sound of his wife’s laugh, which sounded to him more like crying than laughing. And he knew that the sound meant a good deal of

commotion in Elizabeth's mind. He did not know what might have been going on ; and while he was eager to interfere, his better angel kept him back by means of that prejudice against prying, which is a happy part of English training. Accordingly he did not come near, but pretended it was necessary to hold up his paper to the lamp. ' My dear, I just wished to read you this little bit,' he said, turning his shoulder to the pair. Mrs. Hayward could scarcely restrain the exclamation of impatience on her lips ; but perhaps it was well that so exciting an interview should thus be brought to a simple and unconcerted end.

After this there followed two uneventful days—uneventful to the rest of the world ; not quite so to Mrs. Hayward, who was employed in searching out all the ramifications of the social conspiracy against her husband and Joyce, with a warmth of defensive feeling and determination to support and vindicate what was her own side and her own belongings, which roused every amiable sentiment—and there were many—in her heart. She was kept in a subdued fever of expectation at the same time, looking almost every

hour for the arrival of Norman Bellendean, who would not, she believed, keep to the invitation given him for Thursday, but might at any moment burst in upon them and set everything right. She did not believe that he would have the coolness to wait till that appointed time, and her devices for retaining Joyce within reach were manifold and sometimes very amusing, had there been any one with a mind free to observe the situation. Colonel Hayward, without having any reason given, was charged to be punctual in bringing her back from the morning walk at a certain hour—and Elizabeth herself took the direction of affairs in the afternoon, taking Joyce with her when she herself went out, and regulating a succession of returns which made it impossible that any visitor could have very long to wait. It must be allowed that this extreme care was harassing to Joyce, unaccustomed to so numerous a round of little engagements, and who hitherto had been free to follow her own devices and think her own thoughts. These thoughts, it was true, could be carried on anywhere, and were as possible in the drawing-room under her

stepmother's eyes as when alone ; but they were confused and weakened by the sense of some one near—by the interruption of questions which she had to answer, and remarks to which she was supposed to pay attention.

The gathering web of purpose and meaning was thus confused into a sort of cobweb maze, like the threads of a spider twisted with everything they encountered ; and Joyce felt herself thus held in suspense, still with that sweep and suction in the air which betrayed the precipice close by—but rather with the sensation of one who lay upon the edge bound and helpless, perhaps to be swept over by the first gale, but in herself quiescent, capable of no movement—than of the despairing agent of her own fate, by whose action alone the end could be accomplished. She lay there still, listening for the hurricane that must sweep her away—not taking, as she must do, that tremendous step for herself. But the closeness of it half stupefied, half paralysed her. The moment would come when she must wake, when the step would have to be taken ; but what if in the meantime some celestial storm, some great heavenly chance

impulse might burst in and carry her away? This happens sometimes—so that a man who intended to kill himself dies innocently in the meantime, and is saved all that trouble and pain. No one can tell what a day or an hour may bring forth. ‘Perhaps the world may end to-night,’ as the poet has said. But Joyce was not in hourly expectation like Mrs. Hayward. She accepted Thursday as the limit of her suspense. Before Thursday it must be done: but in the meantime, and for these two days, quiescence—something that, in the pause of despair, looked almost like peace.

This was not, however, undisturbed. There came a little note from Mrs. Belendean with a final good-bye:—

‘Just my love to my dear Joyce before I go away. Wishing her every good, and very confident that she will never forget me, nor all that has passed between us for long years; and that I am always her affectionate friend
M. B.’

All that had passed between them—for long years! No, Joyce would not forget.

There was also a letter from Andrew, announcing, as if nothing particular had happened, his return home.

‘And though my visit was not all that could be desired, yet I am glad that I made it, for it lets us both see, my dear Joyce, what is before us, and forewarned is forearmed. Also, I am anxious to let you know that I made acquaintance with a very respectable lady, the wife of a minister, who was most kind, so kind, indeed, that it was a difficulty to accept her attentions without the power of making any return. But I thought it my duty, as she seemed to be a friend of yours, to speak freely to her, so that you might find a support in her, as one lady can with another, and a person to whom, being unfortunately not at ease at home in that respect, you could talk freely of me.’

It was a pity that nobody save Joyce saw this effusion of the schoolmaster's genius. She was not capable of seeing the humour in it. It was so wonderful that her dreamy eyes opened wide with mingled consternation

and astonishment. That he should speak so calmly of the tragic episode which had first opened to her the mystery of dreadful life which lay before her ! That he should be so little capable of understanding what were the contradictions and the miserable limits of humanity ! But she was too deep in that mystery to think of it. The two letters were found folded together afterwards.

And the evening and the morning made another day. It was Wednesday, the day of the party at the rectory, which had been turned into an opportunity for magnifying and exhibiting Joyce. The Jenkinsons and Mrs. Hayward had put their heads together for this object. That they thus acted together was due to Mrs. Hayward, who in the heat of her indignation and agitation had hurried to the rectory, on the morning after her enlightenment, to demand, not apologetically but passionately—‘Have you heard what they are saying about *our* Joyce ? Do you believe it ?’ Do you dare to believe it ? was what Elizabeth’s tone said. ‘She is a little hoity-toity,’ said Mrs. Jenkinson afterwards ; ‘but you know, Canon, I have always said

she was a good woman.' The Canon, who did nothing but walk about the house over-seeing (as he pretended) the preparations and making all the glass and the silver ring again, agreed in the judgment. 'But I think it was I that always upheld Elizabeth,' he said. Anyhow, whoever was in the right or wrong, these three people were agreed. If the rectory was of any weight in society, and Mrs. Jenkinson's accent in pronouncing that *If* was a model of polished sarcasm, then there could be no further doubt as to the opinion of the place. Everybody was coming—indeed one person was coming of whom no one knew, no, not even the Canon, excepting Mrs. Jenkinson and Mrs. Hayward alone. 'You could not ask him, I allow—but there can be no possible reason why I should not ask him. I will say I heard he was in town. I might have heard that from any one, from the St. Clairs themselves. No doubt they must know.' The knowledge of this secret invitation made Mrs. Hayward feel guilty when she confronted her husband and Joyce, of whom she now spoke as 'my daughter' to all her friends. But neither of these innocent

persons observed her look of guilt: the Colonel, because he knew nothing at all about it, neither the conspiracy to shame Joyce, nor that which had been formed for her vindication; and Joyce, partly for this same reason, partly because she was paralysed, lying on the edge of that precipice, waiting for the cyclone, and that everything outside passed over her like a dream.

Mrs. Hayward herself superintended Joyce's dressing for this party. She came into the girl's room carrying a small miniature in an old-fashioned gold mount, to which was attached a knot of ribbon. 'I wish you to wear this,' she said—'your father sends it to you, Joyce. Look at the name upon the back, and you will see why I am going to pin it where it may be well seen. And if any one asks you who it is, say it is your mother.'

'Is it my mother—was she like that?' said Joyce, taking the miniature in her hand with a great tremor. It seemed to send some strange magnetism into her, tingling from the finger-points over her whole frame.

'She must have been like that, for it is the image of you,' said Mrs. Hayward; 'people

will think it is your own picture you are wearing—but if you like, Joyce, you can let them see the inscription on the back. It is exactly you—but I think there is something more deep and steadfast in your eyes,’ she said, looking at her earnestly. Mrs. Hayward was greatly stirred and excited. Perhaps it was this more than any warm impulse of feeling which made her give Joyce a sudden kiss after she had inspected her. She was pleased with her ‘daughter’s’ appearance. Joyce wore a dress of soft white Indian silk, made very simply, with little ornament. It suited her slim youthful figure, which wanted no elaborate drapings or loopings. The miniature with its bow of dark-blue ribbon was pinned on her breast. It was a curious ornament. The Joyce in the picture had her hair arranged in curls which fell upon her shoulders, and her dress was of the fashion of twenty-five years before—otherwise it was precisely like the Joyce who wore it now, only—and this thought pleased Mrs. Hayward, and gave a little outlet to feelings less admirable—there was something ‘more deep and steadfast’ in the eyes. Mrs.

Hayward herself pinned the ribbon upon the girl's breast. 'I was always very sorry for her,' she said in a low tone; 'but she made great misery by disappearing like that. I hope, I believe, you have more stuff in you. Now, are you ready?'

The Colonel was standing in the hall waiting for his ladies, pleased and proud, and somehow more happy than usual in the conviction that at last Elizabeth had thoroughly 'taken to' Joyce. The thorn among his roses had been the absence of sympathy between those two. He said to himself, twinkling his eyes to get rid of a little moisture, that no mother could be more anxious about a girl's appearance than was his wife about Joyce. She gave those little pats and pinches to her dress as they came downstairs which happy girls sometimes resent, but which come only from the mother's hand. Now the crown of his happiness had come, for Elizabeth certainly at last had taken to Joyce. How could she have stood out against her, the Colonel thought, looking with pride at his child; and yet even as this proud thought passed through his mind, a little ac-

companying chill came with it. For she was pale, she was very quiet. There was little expectation of pleasure, of conquest, of admiration in her. Perhaps she had always been too grave and a little frightened in society, though with gleams of brightness. She was very quiet to-night.

Mrs. Hayward did not remark this. She was herself much excited, tremulous with feeling both belligerent and tender. Joyce had become the heroine of the most agitating romance—a romance in which she herself was too much involved to be calm. That guilty secret made her heart flutter. What if it might be thought to be her fault? What if Joyce should think her dignity compromised? She was so strange a girl, so little moved by ordinary motives. Mrs. Hayward took a little comfort from the fact that Joyce was not at all suspicious, and would never think of the possibility of a plot to bring her lover to her side—which partially reassured her; but still there was a flutter at her heart.

They were late of entering the rectory, and the rooms were full. Everybody was there. Mrs. Jenkinson received her friends

rarely, and, when she did so, invited all 'the best people.' It was a little difficult to make the entrance which Mrs. Hayward had intended, so as to strike all objectors dumb. Mrs. Jenkinson, however, at the door of the room took Joyce in her arms in the sight of everybody with an unusual demonstration of delight. She held her at arm's-length for a moment and looked at her with admiring criticism. 'You are looking very nice—very nice indeed, my dear!' she said very audibly, as if she had been a niece at least. There is nothing like being a partisan. She had never perceived Joyce's beauty before, and that curious dignity—which came of the girl's shyness, and ignorance of social rules, and anxiety not to put her father to shame. 'I don't think there is any one here to compare with her,' she said to the Colonel, with a conviction which was dogmatic, and at once made a different opinion heresy.

Mrs. Sitwell, very ill at ease, had been hanging about the door until the Haywards appeared. She made an instant effort to secure Joyce's attention. 'Oh, Joyce, let me speak to you—I have a great deal to say to

you!’ she cried, in a shrill whisper through the curious crowd. Mrs. Hayward confronted the parson’s wife with an impulse of war which tingled through and through her, and raised her stature and brightened into fierce splendour her always bright eyes. ‘Perhaps I will do as well as Joyce,’ she said grimly, facing the traitor. What happened in that corner afterwards, we dare not pause to tell.

In the meantime the Canon appeared, with his big round black silk waistcoat, like a battering-ram cleaving the press before him, and held out his arm, bent to receive hers, almost over the heads of the wondering ladies. ‘Come and take a turn with me, Joyce,’ he cried, his large mellow voice rolling like the pervasive and melodious bass it was, making a sort of background to all the soprano chatter. He too paused to look at her when he had led her through the line of the new arrivals. ‘Yes,’ he said approvingly, ‘you are looking very well and handsome; but not as you used to do—I miss my little enemy. There’s neither war in your eye nor fun to-night. Come, Joyce, not so

serious! We've met to enjoy ourselves. What's that you are wearing on your breast? Bless my soul!' The Canon paused, drawing a quick breath. 'Who put this upon you? It's your mother's picture!' He had turned so quickly to look at it, that her hand was disengaged from his arm. He took it in his own and held it while he gazed, and it became very evident to the circle about that the Canon was winking his eyes suspiciously as if to get rid of a little moisture there. 'Poor little Joyce!' he said. 'Where did you find it? I remember her exactly like that; and you are exactly like it. You can never deny your parentage, my dear, as long as you wear that.'

It was not intended, nor in the programme; but the little surprise was very effectual. It collected a little crowd round the pair. The people who had been so deeply impressed by the imposture practised upon them in respect to Joyce, and even Lady St. Clair herself, were drawn into that circle by the strong inducement of something to see which is so potent in an evening party. It had not been in the programme,

it had all the force of an accident. It brought spectators from all the corners of the room to see what it was. 'The most extraordinary resemblance,' people said. 'A very pretty portrait; no one could have thought it was meant for anybody but Joyce Hayward; but it appears it is her mother.' 'With curls and an old-fashioned dress.' 'The dress we all wore in those days.' 'Then that story about her that she was a foundling, etc., etc.' 'It was a cruel bad story,' cried Lady Thompson, crying with pleasure and kindness, and the heat of the room which upset her nerves. 'I always knew it wasn't true.' Lady St. Clair and her little coterie retired into a corner, and there seemed to laugh and nod their heads among themselves, commenting on the scene; but their discomfiture was clear.

All this that was passing round her was uncomprehended by Joyce. She was aware neither of the gossip nor of her own triumph. She stood by the Canon's side, confused with the flutter about her, the exclamations, the many looks that passed from her to the portrait, from the portrait to herself back

again. The Canon had again drawn her hand within his arm, and she stood silent, patient, with a faint smile, pleased enough to find nothing more was required of her, leaning a little weight upon his fatherly arm, a slim white figure against his substantial bulk of black. Her other hand hung by her side amid the white folds of her dress. As she stood thus quietly, subdued, her attention not lively for anything, Joyce felt her hand suddenly taken and warmly, passionately pressed, with a touch which was most unlike the usual shaking of hands. There must have been something magnetic in it, for she started, and a sudden flood of hot colour poured over her from head to foot. She turned her head almost reluctantly yet quickly, and met, burning upon her in the heat of feeling long restrained, the eyes of Norman Bellendean.

CHAPTER XLV

‘JOYCE! Joyce!’

That seemed all she understood of what he said. The Canon had disappeared, leaving them together—and other faces appeared and disappeared as through a hot mist, which opened to show them for a moment, then closed up again—everything seemed to say, Joyce, Joyce! Her name seemed to breathe about her in a hundred tones—in warning, in reproof, in astonishment, in low murmuring passion. They seemed to be all speaking to her, calling to her, together: Mrs. Bellendean and Mrs. Hayward, and Andrew and her father, and a soft, half-audible murmur from Greta. And then this voice close by in her ear—Joyce, Joyce! Would they but be silent! Could she but hear!

Presently there seemed a movement in

the scene, the figures around her streaming away, but always his voice in her ears saying she knew not what except her name. And after a while she found herself standing outside the rectory under a great blue vault of sky all tingling with stars. To her excited fancy they seemed to project out of the dark blueness above, as if to take part in this scene.

‘We are going to walk home,’ said Mrs. Hayward, ‘it is such a lovely night, and only a little way.’

‘And I am going with you,’ said Captain Bellendean. ‘Yes, Colonel, I have plenty of time for the train.’

‘Well, perhaps yes,—enough, but not too much,—but we all go the same way.’

Something like this came to Joyce through the keen night air: and while the voices were still ringing, her arm was within his, and they were walking together as if it had been a dream.

‘Joyce: I don’t know if you hear me or not, but you make me no reply.’

Then all at once she seemed to come to herself and to a consciousness of all around

her : the hard dry road which rang underfoot, the great vibrating stars above, intense with frost, with human interest (was it possible?), with something which had never been in them before. She was warmly cloaked and wrapped up, a fleecy scarf over her head, her arm held closely in his, his face bending towards her. It seemed to be her first moment of full consciousness since that time when all the ladies were gathering round her looking at the miniature on her breast.

‘Captain Bellendean, it is all very strange to me. I don’t understand what is happening,’ she said.

‘I thought it was so : the noise and the chatter of these people, and the agitation—for you *were* agitated, Joyce.’

‘I did not expect to see you. I was surprised to see you.’

‘I startled you—I know I did. Didn’t you hear that I had come and waited on Monday—waited and waited in vain. I do not know what you can have thought of me, Joyce. I should have come back months ago.’

She said nothing, and he thought he

understood why, and it made him feel more deeply guilty than ever.

‘Some time when we are at our ease I will tell you everything and why I did not come ; but now I am here, and I want your answer, Joyce, the answer you would not give me that summer evening. Don’t turn your head away. You have scarcely spoken to me to-night. Don’t punish me so for my delay. If I have been long of coming, it was not altogether my fault. And now that I am here, and we are together——’

‘I know,’ she said, ‘why you have not come back, Captain Bellendean ; and your staying away was right, quite right, but not your coming. I heard of it, and I approved’—she made a little pause, and added fervently, using all her breath to say it—‘with all my heart!’

‘What do you mean?’ he cried. ‘Joyce, you are vexed and angry : perhaps you have reason ; but not, not as you seem to think. How did you hear of it ? and what did you hear?’

‘Captain Bellendean,’ she said again, ‘we have two different ways in this world. If I

were to say what would please you, I would be mansworn. And even with that, it might not please you long. And for you to speak as you are doing may be true; but it's not well for either you or me.'

'Joyce,' he cried, 'it is not natural to speak to me like that. Have you no feeling for me? Is it all a dream that has been passing in the summer, on the river, in the garden, the hours we have been together,—all that time was it nothing, did it mean nothing? It did to me. I ceased to think of anything but you—you swept away everything else, every other thought. If we had not been interrupted that day—would you have answered me as you are answering me now?'

She said nothing to this; and it was hard upon Joyce that while this momentous conversation was going on her arm was linked in his, she was close to him, her figure lost in his shadow, and all her resolution unable to keep from him the sensation of the heavy beating of her heart.

'You must have felt something for me then?' he said. 'It is dark now and I can-

not see you ; but I saw your face then : Joyce, don't be hard upon me. I have taken a long time to think, for there were many things involved, but here I am ; and if I've been long of coming, it shows the more the force that's brought me. Joyce, if you had not been the only woman for me I should not have been here.'

'It is a mistake,' she said—'it is a mistake,' scarcely able to command her voice ; 'there is another woman. And there is—another man! Oh, hold your peace, Captain Bellendean! you and me, we have nothing to do with each other. You would repent it all your life long. And I would be mansworn.'

'Are you thinking of that man? Joyce, you never loved that man—loved him!—he is not fit to tie your shoes : he is not worthy to be named or thought of, or—— Joyce, throw me off if you like—break my heart—but don't tell me you are going to make yourself miserable for the sake of a childish promise. No, no! You shall not do it. I'll go if I must, but not to leave you to that fellow—— Joyce!'

His tone of alarm and indignation went

through and through her ; her heart seemed to melt, and sink down in softness and weakness and ineffable yielding. He was ready to put himself aside and think only of her ; anxious only to save her, not thinking of himself. He held her arm close to his side, and his heart throbbed against it, not in heavy beatings like hers, but leaping, bounding, in all the force of passion. The woman in her was roused to wonder and awe of the superior excitement of the man—and that it should be for her, to save her. But then, with the wildest inconsistency, he began to pour out his love, forgetting that he had said she was to throw him off if she liked, as she too forgot and never saw the inconsistency, nor was aware that he had changed from that tone of generous determination to save her into the broken rapid flow of his own confessions and pleading. Joyce was altogether carried away by this warm and impassioned tide. She said not a word, but listened, drawn along upon his arm, close to him, swallowed up in his shadow, to the mingled sounds of his voice and his heart beating against her—a second voice, almost

more potent than the first. She listened and felt the mingled sounds with a growing self-abandonment, a loss of all her powers of resistance, beginning at last to draw her own breath hard, to sob, with her heart in her throat, in sympathy rather than response. He was still pouring these words into her ear, still affecting all her pulses by that throbbing, when suddenly they arrived at the door of her father's house. Joyce was altogether inarticulate, incapable of disengaging herself or raising her face to the light, and he made no attempt to let her go. She could hear him say, 'Let me come in for a second,' in a strange interruption to the other words, and felt herself hurried in swiftly upon his arm, through the hall where the others were standing, to the softly-lighted room. There they stood together one long quiet moment, their hearts beating together; and Joyce heard herself sob; and he took her into his arms and kissed her, with a little cry of triumph. 'This time,' he said, 'there is no mistake! And there shall be none—never more.'

· Why shouldn't I go in, Elizabeth? My

dear, I must tell Bellendean he must not think he has too much time—and this is the last train. Of course I know you could put him up if he would stay all night. But he has no clothes. A man may dine in his morning coat, but he cannot put on his dress clothes in the morning—eh? He will think it very queer to be left only with Joyce.'

'Oh, for heaven's sake, Henry, hold your tongue, and let them alone!'

'Why, I should have thought you would be the first person to object to that,' the Colonel said, bewildered. He gave himself up to Baker to be helped with his coat, while his wife hung about restlessly in a state of excitement, for which the Colonel saw no reason. The door of the drawing-room had been left slightly open, and no sound came from it as if the young people were talking. Young people, who have been together to an evening party, generally talk and laugh over its humours. Colonel Hayward felt that Joyce was not entertaining the guest, and that it was his own duty to remind Bellen-dean of that imminent train. And why his wife should hold him back he could not

divine. Presently, however, Captain Bellen-dean appeared radiant, looking exceedingly nervous and excited, with moisture in his eyes, and even on one cheek, to Colonel Hayward's great astonishment. 'I know,' he cried, 'you're in trouble about my train. I know I must fly. Mrs. Hayward, give me joy : *you* divine it all. And, Colonel, I must speak to you to-morrow.'

'Yes, yes, delighted! as long as you please; but if you are to catch that train,' the Colonel cried, having already flung open the door. 'To-morrow, my dear fellow! all right—as long as you please; but we must speed the parting guest! Good night, good night! God bless you!' he shouted with his cheerful voice out into the night.

Such a night! every star throbbing, vibrating, as if it knew—the dry frost-bound road giving forth a triumphant ring of sound wherever his foot fell. He seemed to himself to fly against the keen exhilarating air, which filled his breast like a spiritual wine. Perhaps there might come a cold fit after; but at present he was warm with love and enthusiasm and excitement and triumph. As

he hurried along to the train, about which the Colonel was so concerned, Norman Belendean sent out into the air a laugh of pleasure and delight. Whenever he should be hurried for a train, that vulgarest matter of every day, he thought to himself, in the triumphant satisfaction of his heart, that it would recall to him this night—the brightest moment, the sweetest recollection of his life.

Mrs. Hayward still stood in the hall—stood as nearly still as a woman in the highest excitement, scarcely able to speak for the whirl of suspense and expectation in her mind, could stand. She had taken off the white Shetland shawl which she had worn upon her head, but was still in her warm cloak, pulling her gloves in her hands, scarcely able to contain herself. She wanted to dispose of her husband before she herself flew to share, as she hoped, the happiness, the agitation of Joyce. ‘Where are you going, Henry? not into the drawing-room at this hour? It’s quite late; go and have your cigar, and I’ll send Joyce off to bed.’

‘It’s not so very late’ said the Colonel.

‘I thought you would like a chat by the fire-side.’

‘A chat! Go, my dear, and have your cigar. I know Joyce is very tired; it’s been an exciting evening for her. I’ll go and look after her, and get her off to bed. You must not disturb her, Henry. I’ll come in and let you know that all’s right.’

‘What could be wrong?’ said the innocent old soldier; ‘and why should she be so tired? Well, Elizabeth, of course I will go away if you tell me; but I don’t see——’ He made a few steps towards his library, which Baker, much more in the secret of the evening than he, had thrown invitingly open, showing the cheerful glow of the fire; and then another thought seized him. ‘My love,’ he said, coming back, putting his arm round her, ‘it gives me more pleasure than I can say, to see that you are really and truly taking to Joyce.’

‘Oh, for heaven’s sake, Henry, go and have your cigar!’ was his Elizabeth’s unsympathetic reply, shaking herself free from him. She added, with a nervous laugh, ‘Yes, yes;

it's all right ; but there's a dear, leave us alone now.'

Even when, with wondering looks, he had obeyed her, Mrs. Hayward lingered a moment longer. She was tingling with excitement and satisfaction and triumph. She had defeated the miserable conspiracy against Joyce, routing all her enemies, rank and file. She had secured such a triumph over Lady St. Clair and her 'set' as goes to any woman's heart, carrying off, under her very eyes, a prize such as rarely appeared in such suburban latitudes, not only the most excellent match that had been heard of there for many a day, but the fit hero of a romantic story, and a real lover—connected with the St. Clairs too, to make the triumph sweeter, and carried over under their very nose. This was the vulgarer part of Mrs. Hayward's elation : but underneath was something truer, that genuine sympathy for a motherless girl, which is never far from a good woman's heart. She must miss her mother to-night, if never before. She must want some woman to take her into her arms, to hear her story. Elizabeth's heart had been touched the moment

she had become Joyce's partisan and taken up the office of her defender and protector against all the world. It was touched still more tenderly now, as she thought to herself what a moment it was, the turning-point of the girl's life. The moisture came to her eyes only with thinking of it. She was ready to take Joyce in her arms, and cry over her, as if she had been her very own.

When she went into the room she found Joyce sunk down upon her knees by the side of the fire, her face covered in her hands. She lay there like one overwhelmed under a burden she could not bear—no light, no happiness, no elation in her. 'Joyce!' she cried, 'Joyce!' half alarmed, half irritated—for what did the girl mean, what did she want more than she had got? Mrs. Hayward was almost angry in the height of her excitement, though something in the utter despondency of the white figure sunk down upon itself restrained her. 'Joyce!' she repeated, laying a hand upon her shoulder——

'They all call me by my name,' said Joyce, 'you, and he—and the lady, and all——'

‘What should we call you by, you silly girl? Joyce, you’ve made me quite happy to-night. Get up and let me give you a kiss, and tell you how pleased I am. There’s nothing to cry about now—though I can understand,’ she added quickly, ‘that it’s all gone to your heart.’

Joyce rose up slowly to her feet. She did not resist the quick embrace into which her stepmother took her. ‘I know, my dear!’ cried Mrs. Hayward, in the transport of her quick feelings, ‘what you’ve had to bear. I know you’ve had a great deal to bear—all this waiting and uncertainty, and the cold chill—oh, my dear, I know!’ She pressed her cheek against Joyce’s, and it was wet with lively generous emotion. ‘But all is well that ends well, and now I am sure you will be as happy as any woman in the world.’

‘No,’ said Joyce, ‘no;’ but her stepmother, in her elation and excitement, did not hear that low-toned negative. Mrs. Hayward held the girl against her breast, patting her shoulder with one hand.

‘This has been a trying night,’ she said.

‘ You’ve had a great deal to go through : but I understand it all. And you’ve done exactly as I should have wished you, Joyce. Everything went as I could have wished. Captain Bellendean’s arrival like that, unexpected,’—Mrs. Hayward drew a long breath, in which there was an internal prayer that she might be forgiven for so very white, so very innocent a lie—not a lie, only a fib, the very worst that could be said of it : ‘ his arrival unexpected, gave a sort of tone to the whole—a tone. And I suppose, in the thought of that you forgot everything else. But apart from him altogether—if you can think of anything apart from him—all went just as I should have wished. You conducted yourself just as I could have wished. And everything is as it should be, Joyce.’

Joyce said, ‘ No, no,’ again, with a shiver. She stood scarcely responsive in Mrs. Hayward’s embrace—making an effort to yield to it, to return the warm pressure a little, to lean upon the new prop so suddenly put up for her. But, happily, Mrs. Hayward felt too strongly herself, and was too much absorbed in her own quite unusual emotions to be sen-

sible of the absence of response. She was occupied in feeling and expressing her feeling, not in studying that of another. She wanted to say a great many things; she wanted to prove to Joyce her motherly sympathy. That Joyce should only listen and say nothing did not occur to her as strange. Even when she left the girl in her own room, going in to poke the fire and make everything comfortable, Mrs. Hayward's sensation was that she had been made Joyce's confidante, and that all the love-tale had been poured into her warmly sympathetic ear. She kissed Joyce and bade her good-night with all the fervour of a trusted friend. 'To-morrow we must return to prose a little,' she said—'to-morrow will be a good settling day. He is coming to talk to your father, and everything will be arranged. But for the present, good-night, my dear, and I hope you will sleep. Anyhow, whether you do or not, you'll be happy, Joyce. Good-night, my dear, good-night.'

Mrs. Hayward herself was so happy that she could not contain herself. It was nearly midnight, but she did not want to sleep.

She had routed the enemy all round, and triumphed and brought home her spoil. To think that Joyce, who had at one time vexed her so much, should have been the occasion of this triumph! Poor Joyce, poor little Joyce! with this working in her mind all the time, poor dear, and making her abstracted and silent! And that man on the other side, and Mrs. Bellendean, who no doubt was trying all the time to put things wrong between them! A generous partisanship was in Mrs. Hayward's mind—a generous compunction for injustice done to Joyce—a generous wish to get everything for her that heart could desire—all enhanced by a far-off anticipation perhaps not so generous, a glimmer far distant in the recesses of her soul, that by and by Joyce, in the manner happiest for herself, would be taken away! But Mrs. Hayward felt that she loved Joyce, and would do anything for her in the strong and delightful exhilaration of the triumph of to-night.

CHAPTER XLVI

WHEN Joyce was left quite alone, and felt the shelter of the silence and solitude, she dropped again, as she had done in the room downstairs, upon the rug before the fire. Great distress and trouble are chilling things ; they make the sick heart creep to the fire—the warmth gives a little forlorn comfort when all is low and ice-bound in the soul. She dropped there like a child—half seated, half on her knees. There was a kind of luxury in the feeling that no one could see or interrupt or sympathise with her—that she was safe for the long hours of the winter night, safe and alone.

What had she done ? She had listened when she could not silence him. She had lost herself in listening, feeling his heart beat against her and his voice in her ears. She seemed to hear them now as soon as other people

had left her—as soon as she was free from interrupting, unintelligible voices of others. He had told her, over and over again, what she knew—nothing but what she knew ; and he must have felt her heart beating too, though not like his—beating heavily, loudly,—beating like a thing half stifled in bonds and ligatures—for he had not waited for any answer. He had taken her to himself when the climax came, and between them there could be no more said. Joyce recognised that there could have been no more said. She remembered that she was sobbing, unable to draw her breath, and that his breath too was exhausted, and all the words that could be used. She was not angry with him for taking her consent for granted—it was all that remained to be done. Their marriage and their long life together, and the height and crown of mortal existence, were all summed up in that moment. It had been, it was, and now it was past. She sat sunk upon herself by the fire and went over everything. That was the only way it could have been. She had for a time held him apart from her with good reasons, telling him

how it could not be. And then she had been silenced ; the words might have been withstood, but the throbbing of the heart (she could feel it still against her arm)—how could that be withstood ? That was something more than words ; and her own, so heavily throbbing, had sprung for a moment into the same measure, like something Joyce had never heard of nor read of—something that made an end of time and space and all limits. It had been too bewildering, too transporting, to think of. It was for a moment only ; and whether it ought to have been or not was a different question. It had been, and nothing could undo it. And it was past. That was the one thing of which she was sure.

She had never consented, she had said nothing, she had not deceived him. Though she might have deceived others, him she had not deceived. So long as she could speak to him, she had said No. Afterwards, when her voice failed her, when she could only sob, that moment had been—not by her will, but by his will—by something which was inevitable and could not be resisted. But now it was all over and past. Now she was separ-

ated from him as far as if worlds lay between them. There was no longer any time to hesitate. It was all fixed and settled, like the laws of the Medes and Persians. She had seen him for the last time. It was not on that subject that she had any further conflict with herself. The question was not that—not that any longer. The question was, What must be done? what in the few hours that remained to her she must do?

She lay there for a long time where she had sunk down, quite still and motionless, notwithstanding that she had so little time, not even thinking at all. Things flitted across her brain, but scarcely moved her—broken scenes, broken words, a look there, an exclamation here. Oftenest in her confusion it was her own name she seemed to hear—Joyce! Joyce!—called out by everybody in turn, as everybody had appealed to her. Andrew whom she had deceived—he had the most right to blame her. She had never said that she loved him, but he had believed it. Poor Andrew! It would not be any gain to him though she lost. And her lady, who had been so dear, and then

had changed—to whom she had said that Joyce would do what was wished of her. And then the oracle—the oracle that had said, ‘You could do—no other thing.’ No, she could do no other thing. That was settled. It was not to be discussed; there was no change possible in that. The only thing was what to do—oh, what to do!

Joyce never thought of taking away her own life. She would have given it joyfully for any of them to save them a pang; but take it away at her own caprice, no. She did not consciously reject this way, for she never took it into consideration. It was not among the things that were possible. And though she roused herself now and then at the end of a long discursive round of imaginations, some of them having no connection at all with what had happened, or was about to happen, to ask herself what she was to do, for a long time she did not think at all. Her candles burned, showing a light at her window long after every other light was out. In the barges lying about the bridge some way down the river, there were people who saw it shining, as was reported afterwards,

through all the night. But Joyce was not even thinking. What roused her at last was the chill creeping over her—the cold of the deep night : her fire had fallen low, almost to nothing, a faint little red glow all blackening into darkness, and she shivered, and felt in her uncovered arms and shoulders the creeping dead cold, as if the frost had got in. This physical sensation, the shivering chillness, and ague of the cold, roused her when her trouble did not rouse her. She rose benumbed, her limbs stiff, and her heart sore, and wrapped a shawl round her, drawing it close for warmth. How grateful warmth is, when everything else has gone ! It is the one thing in which there seems a little comfort. It brought her to life again, and the necessary movement helped that good effect. But bringing her back to life was to bring her back to thought ; and she became conscious that time was running on, and that she had not yet decided what to do.

Time was running on. It was long past midnight, it was morning—the black morning of winter when everything is at its coldest, and all the world is desolate. Folding her

arms in her shawl over her bosom to keep warm, her hand encountered the little frame of the miniature pinned on her breast. The touch woke her up with a keen prick of reality—as if it had been a sharp cold steel that had touched her. She unpinned it from her breast, and held it in her hand, and looked at it. There must have been magnetism in it. It seemed to bring a new flood of feeling, and will, and impulse over her. She had felt that strange inspiration in her veins before, that desire to arise and flee, she knew not whither. Her mother's inheritance left behind her when she had fled—where no one could follow. It was a sad inheritance to come into the world with, but it was the only one that Joyce had. She looked at the pictured face so like her own, and that brief long-ended tragedy became clear to Joyce. The other Joyce had endured as long as she could, and then there had come upon her that irrestrainable despairing desire to fly and be seen no more. Oh that I had wings like a dove! It had not perhaps in some ways been so difficult for her as for the second Joyce it would be. There was nobody to go

after her, to move heaven and earth to find her — there were perhaps, Joyce thought, confusedly exaggerating the time, and its changes, as youth is so apt to do—no telegraphs, no railways then—at least there was no father, no lover, no friends ready to put all modes of discovery in motion. For a moment she envied her mother; but then said to herself, with a sudden warm flush all over her, No, no! Thank God, in her case there was no second life involved; nobody to come into the world as she herself had done, in confusion and trouble, with all the lines of her life wrong from her birth, and this tragic conclusion always coming! The touch of the cold little miniature seemed to send thrills and icy touches through her veins. The eyes had a strange look in them, like the eyes of a hunted creature. Mrs. Hayward had said that her own eyes were more deep and true. She rose up to look at herself, to see if perhaps that look had come to her too. A girl does not think what is the expression in her eyes; but they had always been quiet eyes, she thought—not with that look. She went to the glass, with the

miniature in her hand, to see. But when she stood before the glass, it was not her own expression, but the strange world of darkness and vacancy beyond, which caught Joyce's confused and troubled intelligence. She remembered all the fanciful superstitions, half poetry, half mirth, of the countryside. How some one would come behind you and look over your shoulder, and you would see in the mirror the man you were to marry,—your fate; or how perhaps it might be a white-robed ghost, or a death's-head that would advance out of the unseen and look over your shoulder; or how in that strange fathomless darkness of the mirror there might rise before you scenes—of what was going on among those you loved, or what was to happen in the future, shadows of the real. She could not see her own eyes for the wonder which carried her beyond them, which made her look into the reflected air as if it were another world.

What a waste of time it was, and how the time was running on! Only a few hours now before the step must be taken, and as as yet no decision come to as to what it was

to be ! She went and sat down at the table where were her writing things, and in her writing-case the letters—Mrs. Bellendean's note of farewell, and Andrew's—poor Andrew's ! Even now she could not think, but only look at these two momentous bits of paper, and wonder what *they* would think, how they would feel, whether they would blame themselves. She even smiled to herself at the astonishment, the incredulity that would come over Andrew's face, and his conviction that whoever she had fled from it could not be from him. The lady would know better—it would give her a pang—but so long as everything came as she wished, the pang would not hurt her, it would go away. And then the wonder, and the questions, and the strong feelings would widen out and die away like circles in the water, and Joyce would go down and disappear like a stone.

Again this vague round of thought and nothing decided on, nothing done—and the time was running on. Twelve hours hence it would be the afternoon of the November day, and *he* would be here. And before then

all must be settled and done. And in the meantime the glow of the fire had gone out in the blackness of the night, and it was cold—cold—a cold that went to the heart.

At breakfast next morning Joyce showed little trace of a sleepless night ; her eyes were quite clear, her colour varying, but sometimes bright, her aspect not radiant as might become a girl in her position, yet very clear, like a sky that has cleared after rain. Thinking it all over in the light of after events, no one could recollect anything about her that had called for special notice. She was grave, yet not without a smile : and a girl on the eve of the greatest change in her life, though she may be very gay if she is happy, has reason to be grave as well. Joyce was always thoughtful, and there was nothing wonderful in the fact that underneath the soft smile with which she responded to what was said to her there should be a gravity quite natural in the circumstances. No doubt there was a great deal to think about—the opposition that might be raised, the difficulties she would have to encounter. It would not be all plain sailing. Mrs. Hayward, a little anxious in

the strength of her newly awakened sympathies, thought that she quite understood. Joyce went out for her usual morning walk with her father, just as usual so far as the Colonel could see. She talked a little more than usual, perhaps to prevent him talking of the great subject of the moment. He for his part was much excited with the information his wife had given. He was full of enthusiasm for Norman. 'If I had chosen the whole world through I could not have found a man whom I should have liked better,' he said. 'I always liked Norman Bellendean. I never could have imagined when we first came in contact in India, he a young sub and I his commanding officer, that he would ever be my son-in-law. How could I, not even knowing I had—what good fortune was in store for me in finding you, my dear? But he was always a capital fellow. I liked him from the very first—fond of his profession and always ready for whatever was wanted—as good a fellow as ever lived,' cried the Colonel, as he had done on his first introduction into these pages, taking upon him to answer to all the neighbours and tenants for

the excellences of Captain Bellendean. Joyce listened very gravely, very sweetly, with a little inclination of her head in assent to all these praises. It pleased her to hear them, even though it was no business of hers.

‘But you must remember,’ she said, ‘always—that if there’s a pain in it, it’s leaving you. You’ve been good, good to me. I never knew what it was——’

‘Good!’ cried the Colonel, ‘there’s no credit in being good to you—and as for pain, my dear, no doubt we’ll miss you dreadfully, but it’s not as if he had to go away with the regiment to the end of the world. We’ll come and see you at Bellendean, and you’ll come to see us. I scarcely consider, with a man I like so thoroughly as Bellendean, that it will be leaving me.’

‘I was very ignorant when I came here,’ said Joyce; ‘I did not know what a father was. I was shy—shy to call you so. My old grandfather was so different. But, father, you have always understood, never discouraged me when I was most cast down, never lost patience. And I wish I could make you always mind that, when perhaps you

may think of me—differently from what you do now.'

'Why should I think of you differently? I may grudge a little to see my pretty Joyce marrying so soon, when I would have liked to keep her to myself: but it is the course of nature, my dear, and what parents must expect.'

'I will always think upon you like this,' she said: 'the river flowing, and the banks green even though it's winter, and the red oak-leaves stiff on the branches, and all the other big trees bare. And the sky blue, with white clouds flitting, and with a little cheerful wind, and the shining sun.'

'Why in winter, Joyce?' he said, smiling. 'You might as well put me in a summer landscape if you are so fanciful: but you need not speak as if we were to be parted for ages, or as if you might not see me again. I'm not so dreadfully old, if that is what you mean.'

'You will not be angry, father, if I speak to you of my old grandfather at home. When I saw him last he did not see me. He was walking through the corn, with his head

bent and his heart sore. It was a bonnie summer day, and the corn all rustling in the wind, and high, almost up to his old bent shoulders. But he saw nothing, for he was thinking of poor little Joyce that he had bred up from a baby, and that was going away. I have been a great trouble to everybody that has cared for me.'

'I am afraid I did not think enough of what it was to these old people, Joyce. To be sure, it was a loss never to be made up; but then when they knew it was for your good——'

'It is for our good,' said Joyce, 'when we die: but it's hard, hard to take comfort in that. I have never had that to bear, but I've seen it; and though a poor woman will believe that her little child has become one of the angels and will never have any trouble more, yet her heart will break just the same.'

'That's true, that's true,' he said: 'but it's not a cheerful subject, my dear, and just when your life is at its happiest——'

'Don't you think, father,' said Joyce, 'that when you are at your happiest it is like

coming to an end—for it seems as if heaven itself couldn't do any more for you, and the next step must just be coming down among common folk.'

'Don't say that to Bellendean,' cried the Colonel, 'for you may be sure he thinks that heaven can do a good deal more for him, and you too.'

But it was always an effort on the Colonel's part to bring her back to the contemplation of more cheerful prospects. She came in, however, freshened by the lively wind, her colour raised, her hair playing about her forehead in little rings, disentangled by the breeze, and was cheerful at luncheon, responding to all that was said. When they had left the table, she drew Mrs. Hayward aside for a moment, and asked if she might keep the miniature which had been given her to wear the previous night.

'I think so, Joyce: you have the best right to it. Ask your father, if you have any doubt on the subject.'

'I would rather ask you. It was kind, kind to bring it to me: nobody else would have had that thought.'

‘I have always wanted to be kind,’ Mrs. Hayward said, moved by an emotion which surprised her. ‘We may not always have understood each other, Joyce. I may have been sometimes not quite just, and you were not responsive. It was neither your fault nor mine. The circumstances were hard upon us : but in the future——’

‘I cannot call you mother,’ said Joyce. ‘You would maybe not like it, and I’m slow, slow to move, and I could not. But I would like to call you a true friend. Im sure you are a true friend. And we will never misunderstand each other again.’

‘My dear, there’s a kiss to that bargain,’ said Elizabeth, with her eyes full of tears. She said after a moment, with a tremulous laugh, ‘But we’ll misunderstand each other a hundred times, only after this it will always come right.’

There were no tears in Joyce’s eyes, but there was something in them which was not usually there. Mrs. Hayward, after she had kissed her, looked at her again with mingled anxiety and curiosity. ‘Joyce,’ she said, ‘you are tired out. I don’t think you can

have slept last night. Go and lie down and rest a little. You have got that look that is in your mother's eyes.'

When Joyce had gone upstairs, Mrs. Hayward went to the library, where the Colonel was seated with his paper. She said to him that she was not half so sure as she had been that Joyce was happy. 'I thought there could be no doubt about it. If ever two people were in love with each other, I thought these two were : but I don't feel so comfortable about it now.'

'Nonsense, my dear!' said the Colonel, who was a little drowsy. The room was warm, and the paper not interesting, and he had been proposing to himself to have a doze before Bellendean came to talk business and settlements. Mrs. Hayward did not disturb him further, but she was uneasy and restless. Some time after, she heard the outer door close, and came out into the hall with a little unexplainable anxiety to know who it was. 'It was Miss Hayward, ma'am, a-going out for a walk,' Baker said. Mrs. Hayward thought it was strange that Joyce should choose that time for going out, when Captain

Bellendean might arrive at any moment. And then she suggested to herself that perhaps Joyce had gone to meet her lover —— ‘Anyhow, a little walk in the fresh air will do her good,’ she said to herself.

Norman arrived about half an hour afterwards, and was astonished and evidently annoyed that Joyce was not there to receive him. He went into the library, and had a long talk with the Colonel, and he came out again to the drawing-room where the tea-table was set out ; but no Joyce.

‘Send up one of the maids to see if Miss Hayward is in her room,’ Mrs. Hayward said.

‘Miss Hayward have never come in, ma’am,’ said Baker ; ‘for she never takes no latch-key, and nobody but me has answered the door.’

‘It is quite extraordinary. I cannot understand it,’ cried the mistress of the house. And then the usual excuses were suggested. She must have walked too far ; she must have been detained. She had not taken her watch, and did not know how late it was. Norman said nothing, but his looks were

dark ; and thus the early evening passed. The dinner-hour approached, and they all went upstairs somewhat silently to dress. Mrs. Hayward was pale with fright, though she did not know of what she was afraid. She had already sent off her own maid to go to Miss Marsham's, to Mrs. Sitwell's, to the rectory, to inquire if Joyce was at either of these places. But the answer was No ; she had not been seen by any one. What did it mean ? They met in the drawing-room—Mrs. Hayward more scared and pale, Captain Bellendean more dark and angry, than before.

‘Where is Joyce ?’ said the Colonel. ‘You don’t mean to say she has never come back ! Then there must be something wrong.’

‘If she is staying away on account of me ——’ said Bellendean, looking almost black, with his eyebrows curved over his eyes, and his moustache closing sternly over his mouth.

‘On account of you ! My dear fellow, what a strange idea ! It’s only because of you that I’m surprised at all,’ said the Colonel,

as if it had been the most ordinary thing in the world that Joyce should not come home to dinner. Mrs. Hayward said nothing, but she was very pale ; though why Joyce should absent herself, or what was the meaning of it, she could not guess. ‘ Let us go in to dinner,’ said the Colonel. ‘ If anything had happened to her we must have heard at once. Probably she is dressing in a hurry now, knowing that we will all fall upon her as soon as she shows. Give my wife your arm, Bellendean.’ He was quite cheerful and at ease now that there was really, as Mrs. Hayward reflected, something to be anxious about ; and he continued to talk and keep up the spirits of the party throughout dinner ; but it was a lugubrious meal.

Mrs. Hayward ran upstairs to Joyce’s room as soon as she was free. She made a hurried survey of her tables and drawers, where nothing seemed to be wanting. She stood bewildered in the orderly silent room, where nothing had been disturbed since the morning—no signs of usage about, no ribbon or brooch on the table, or disarray of any kind. How cold it looked, how dead !—

like a place out of which the inhabitant had gone. It exercised a kind of weird influence upon her mind. She stood back in alarm from the glass before which Joyce had stood last night, gazing into the unknown. Mrs. Hayward was not at all superstitious, but it frightened her to see the blank of the reflected vacancy, as if something might come into it. It could not be more blank than the vacant room, which threw no light whatever on the mystery. Where had she gone? There could not be anything in those suggestions which she had made, not without a chill of doubt, in the afternoon. Joyce could not be detained anywhere all this time, could not have taken too long a walk, or mistaken the time. It was impossible to believe in any such simple solution now : nearly nine o'clock—and she knew that her lover was to be here ; and all the decorums of the dinner-hour and the regulations of the house. No, no, that was impossible. Could she be ill?—could she——

Mrs. Hayward started violently, though it was only a soft knock at the door. ‘If you please, Miss Marsham is downstairs

wishing to see you.' Ah, it was that then! she cried to herself, her heart giving a bound of relief. She was ill. Something had happened—a sprained ankle, or some easy matter of that kind. She ran downstairs relieved, almost gay. It might be a troublesome business, but so long as that was all——

Miss Marsham was standing in front of the fire with a large black veil tied over her hat. She was one of the feeble sisters who are always taking cold. She came forward quickly, holding out cold hands without gloves. 'Oh!' she cried, 'has Joyce come back? is it all right? is there anything wrong?'

'Do you mean,' cried Mrs. Hayward harshly, 'that you've only come to ask me questions—not to tell me anything?'

'Oh!' cried Miss Marsham, clasping her thin hands, 'then she must have done it, though I did not advise her to do it: I did not understand——'

'What?' cried Mrs. Hayward, darting upon her, seizing her arm.

Miss Marsham told her story incohe-

rently, as well as in her agitation she could tell it. 'She asked my advice. There was some lady whose heart would be broken—who had never suffered, never been disappointed, and who had to be saved. And there were two gentleman—— I cannot tell you any more—indeed, I cannot ; I only half understood her. I told her—that to sacrifice one's self was always the easiest.'

The gentlemen came in while Miss Marsham was speaking. The Colonel, still quite cheerful, saying, 'Depend upon it, we shall find her in the drawing-room.' Captain Bellendean was as dark as night. 'I told her—that to sacrifice one's self was always the easiest,' were the words they heard as they came into the room ; the sound of voices had made their hearts jump. Norman had taken a quick step forward when he saw that Mrs. Hayward was not alone. This strange figure was not like Joyce, but who could tell?——

'I told her that it came easiest to women—that to sacrifice one's self——'

'To whom did you say that?'

‘Oh, Captain Bellendean! if I said what was wrong. I did not understand her. There was some one whose heart would be broken, a girl who had never been disappointed. I said to sacrifice one’s self——’

‘To sacrifice one’s self!’ cried Captain Bellendean, with a roll of low sound like the roar of an animal in pain.

‘I said it was the easiest—rather than to let some one else suffer, whoever it might be. Oh, God forgive me—God forgive me—if I said wrong!’

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Hayward’s maid came in. ‘If you please, ma’am,’ she said.

‘What is it? Miss Hayward has come back?’

‘If you please, ma’am,’ said the maid, ‘some of her clothes are—not there. And Mr. Baker says she sent away a box this morning.’

‘Where is Baker?’ said the Colonel.

He was not far off, but at the door, fully prepared for the emergency. He did not wait to be questioned. ‘It was a box,’ he

said, 'like as Miss Hayward have sent off before,—I didn't take particular notice. The baker took it to the station. He had his cart at the door.'

'What do you mean by a box?' said the Colonel, to whom they all left this examination, and who asked the question without excitement, as only partially understanding the importance of it.

'A box, Colonel!—well, just a common sort of a box—like the ladies sent to the 'Ospital Christmas-time—like Miss Hayward have sent off before——'

'Did you see the address?'

'You see, ma'am, the baker, his cart was at the door,—and he ups and says, if the young lady had no objection, he'd take it and welcome. So I gives him a hand up with it, and never see the address—except just London.'

'You are sure it was London?'

'Oh yes, Colonel—at least, I wouldn't like to take nothing in the nature of an oath : but so far as being sure——'

'That will do,' said Mrs. Hayward quickly. 'Now, you may go.' She burst

forth as soon as the door was closed, 'She has done what her mother did; but why—but why?'

A little later, before this mournful company separated, Joyce's little writing-case was brought downstairs, and in it was found Andrew's letter and Mrs. Bellendean's folded together. On a piece of paper separate—which, however, had no appearance of being intended for a letter—Joyce had written something in a large straggling hand, very different from her usual neat writing. It was this—

'I can do no other thing. To him I would be mansworn—and to her no true friend. And what I said was, Joyce will do—what is wanted of her. I can do no other thing.'

CHAPTER XLVII

NEARLY twenty-four hours later the chill of the wintry night had closed over the village of Bellendean. The frosty weather had gone, and was replaced by the clammy dampness and heavily charged atmosphere of a thaw. There had been showers during the day, and a Scotch mist had set in with the falling of the night. Janet Matheson and her old husband were sitting on either side of the fire. Peter had got to feel the severity of the winter weather, and though he still did his day's work, he was heavy and tired, and sat stretching his long limbs across the hearth with that desire for more rest which shows the flagging of the strength and spirit. Janet on the other side of the fire was knitting the usual dark-gray stocking with yards of leg, which it was astonishing to

think could be always wanted by one man. They were talking little. An observation once in half an hour or so, a little stir of response, and then the silence would fall over them again, unbroken by anything but the fall of the ashes from the grate, or the ticking of the clock. Sometimes Janet would carry on a little monologue for a few minutes, to which Peter gave here and there a deep growl of reply; but there was little that could be called conversation between the old pair, who knew all each other's thoughts, and were 'company' to each other without a word said. There were few sounds even outside: now and then a heavy foot going by: now and then a boy running in his heavy shoes on some cold errand. The cold and the rain had sent indoors all the usual stragglers of the night.

'Yon letter's near a week auld,' said Peter. They had not been talking of Joyce; but a quarter of an hour before had briefly, with a few straggling remarks at long intervals, discussed the crop which 'the maister' had settled upon for the Long Park, a selection of which Peter did not

approve ; but no explanation was needed for this introduction of a new subject. There could be no doubt between them as to what 'yon letter' meant.

'There'll be anither the morn,' said Janet, 'when she has passed the Thursday, it aye comes on the Saturday. She will have been thrang with something or other. It's the time coming on for a' thae pairties and balls.'

Peter gave a long low subterraneous laugh. 'It would be a queer thing,' he said, 'for you and me to see oor Joyce at ane o' thae grand balls.'

'And wherefore no ?' said Janet. 'Take you my word for't, she'll aye be ane o' the bonniest there.'

'I'm no doubtin' that,' he said ; and silence fell again over the cottage kitchen—silence broken only after a long time by an unpatient sigh from Janet, who had just cast off her stocking, rounding the ample toe.

'Eh,' she said, 'just to hae ae glimpse of her ! I would ken in a moment.'

'What are ye wantin' to ken ?'

‘Oh, naething,’ said Janet, putting down the finished stocking after pulling it into shape and smoothing it with her hand. She took up her needles again and pulled out a long piece of worsted to set on the other, with again a suppressed sigh.

‘Siching and sabbing never mean naething,’ said Peter oracularly.

‘Weel, weel! I would like to see in her bonnie face that she’s happy among thae strange folk. If ye maun ken every thocht that comes into a body’s heart——’

‘Hae ye ony reason——’ said Peter, and then paused with a ghost of his usual laugh. ‘Ye’re just that conceited, ye think she canna be happy but with you and me.’

‘It’s maybe just that,’ said Janet.

‘It’s just that. She has mair to mak’ her happy than the like of us ever heard tell of. I wouldna wonder if ye were just jealous—o’ a’ thae enterteenments.’

‘I wouldna wonder,’ Janet said. And then there was a long silence again.

Presently a faint sound of footsteps approaching from a distance came muffled from the silence outside. The old people,

with their rural habit of attention to all such passing sounds, listened unawares each on their side. Light steps in light shoes, not any of the heavy walkers of Bellendean. Would it be somebody from the Manse coming from the station? or maybe one of the maids from the House? They both listened without any conscious reason, as village people do. At last Peter spoke—

‘If she wasna hunders o’ miles away, I would say that was her step.’

‘Dinna speak such nonsense,’ said Janet. Then suddenly throwing down her needles with a cry, ‘It’s somebody coming here!—whisht, whisht,’ she added to herself, ‘that auld man’s blethers puts nonsense in a body’s heed.’ Janet rose up to her feet with an agitated cry. Some one had touched the latch. She rushed to the door and turned the key—‘We were just gaun to oor beds,’ she cried, in a tone of apology.

And then the door was pushed open from without. The old woman uttered a shriek of wonder and joy, yet alarm, and with a great noise old Peter stumbled to his feet.

It was *her* or her ghost. The rain glistening upon her hat and her shoulders—her eyes shining like brighter drops of dew—a colour on her cheeks from the outdoor air, a gust of the fragrance of that outdoor atmosphere—the ‘caller air’ that had always breathed about Joyce—coming in with her. She stood and smiled and said, ‘It’s me,’ as if she had come home after a day’s absence, as if no chasm of time and distance had ever opened between.

No words can ever describe the agitated moment of such a return, especially when so unexpected and strange, exciting feelings of fear as well as delight. They took her in, they brought her to the fire, they took off her cloak which was wet, and the hat that was ornamented like jewels with glistening drops of the Scotch mist. They made her sit down, touching her shoulders, her hair, her arms, the very folds of her dress, with fond caressing touches, laughing and crying over her. Poor old Peter was inarticulate in his joy and emotion. Nothing but a succession of those low rolling laughs would come from him, and great lakes of moisture

were standing under the furrows of his old eyebrows. He sat down opposite to her, and did nothing but gaze at her with a tenderness unspeakable, the ecstasy which was beyond all expression. Janet retained her power of movement and of speech.

‘Eh, my bonnie lamb! eh, my ain bairn! you’ve come back to see your auld folk. And the Lord bless you, my darlin’! it’s an ill nicht for the like of you—but we’ll warm you and dry you if we can do naething mair: and there’s your ain wee room aye ready, and oh, a joyfu’ welcome, a joyfu’ welcome!’

‘No, granny, I cannot go back to my own room. I’ve come but for a moment. I’m going away on a journey, and there’s little time, little time. But I couldn’t pass by——’

‘Pass by—— No, that would ha’ been a bonny business,’ said Peter, with his laugh—‘to have passed by.’

Joyce told them an incoherent story about a ship that was to sail to-night. ‘I am going from Leith—and there was just an hour or two—and I must be back by the nine o’clock train. It’s not very long, but I must not lose my ship.’

‘And are they with you, Joyce, waitin’ for you? and whatfor did ye no bring the Cornel? The Cornel wasna proud—he didna disdain the wee bit place. And no even a maid with ye to take care of ye! Oh ay, my bonnie woman, weel I understand that—you would have naeboddy with ye to disturb us, but just a’ to oorsels——’

‘Ony fuil,’ said Peter, ‘would see that.’

‘We’re a’ just fuils,’ said Janet, ‘for weel I see that, and yet I’m no sure I’m pleased that she’s let to come her lane—for I would have her guarded that nae strange wind, no, nor the rain, should touch her. I’m wantin’ twa impossible things—that she should be attendit like a princess, and yet that we should have her her lane, a’ to you and me.’

‘It’s very cold outside,’ said Joyce, ‘and oh, so warm and cosy here! I have never seen a place so warm nor so like home since I went away. Granny, will you mask some tea though it’s so late? I think I would like a cup of tea.’

‘That will I!’ cried Janet, with a sense of pleasure such as a queen might feel when

her most beloved child asked her for a duchy or a diamond. Her face shone with pure satisfaction and delight, and her questions ran on as she moved to and fro, making the kettle boil (which was always just on the eve of boiling), getting out her china teapot, her best things, 'for we maun do her a' honour, like a grand visitor, though she's our ain bairn, and no the least changed ——' These observations Janet addressed to Peter, though they were mingled with a hundred tender things to Joyce, and so mixed that the change of the person was hard to follow.

'Whatfor should she be changed?' said Peter, with his tremulous growl of happiness. The old man sat, with an occasional earthquake of inward laughter passing over him, never taking his eyes from her. He was less critical than Janet; no suspicions or fears were in his mind. He took her own account of herself with profound faith. Whatfor should she be changed? Whatfor should she be otherwise than happy? She had come to see them in the moment she had in the middle of her journey, alone, as was

natural—for anybody with her would have made a different thing of it altogether, and weel did Joyce ken that. He was thoroughly satisfied, and more blessed than words could say. He sat well pleased and listened, while Janet told her everything that had passed. Although it had been told in letters, word of mouth was another thing, and Joyce had a hundred questions to put. She was far more concerned to hear everything that could be told her than to tell about herself; but if Peter remarked this at all, it was only as a perfection the more in his ‘bonnie woman’—his good lassie that never thought of herself.

‘And oh, but the Captain was kind, kind!’ said Janet. ‘He came and sat where ye are sittin’, my bonnie doo, and just tauld me everything I wanted to ken—how ye were looking, and the way ye were speaking, and that you and the Cornel were great friends, and the very things ye were dressed in, Joyce. He must have taken an awfu’ deal of notice to mind everything. He would just come and sit for hoors——’

Joyce moved her seat a little farther from

the fire. The heat was great, and had caught her cheek and made it flush. It grew white again when she withdrew from that glow, but she smiled and said in a low tone, 'He is very kind: and you would see the lady, granny, and Miss Greta.'

'No for a long time. You had always a great troke with them, Joyce, and they with you, but when once my bonnie bird was flown, it's little they thought of your old granny. There was a great steer about the Captain and her, but I kenna if it was true. There's aye a talk aboot something, but the half o't is lees. He's owre good for her, it's my opinion. I've a real soft corner for the Captain.'

'He kent the way to get roond ye,' said Peter, 'aye flatterin' aboot that bit lassie there.'

'He was real kind. He would just sit for hours, and mind everything.'

'Granny,' cried Joyce, interrupting hastily, 'you have told me nothing about the new mistress, and how she took up my place.'

'But I wrote it a' down in my letters,' said Janet. 'That's no like word of mouth,

you're thinking? Well, you see, Joyce'—and Janet went over the whole career of the new schoolmistress, who had not given entire satisfaction. 'As wha could?' said the old woman. 'Ye just spoiled them; they could get nobody that would have pleased them after you.'

'You're no asking about Andrew,' said Peter.

'Eh, poor lad!' cried Janet, 'I wouldna have wondered if he had come ower the nicht: but now it's too late.'

'Granny,' cried Joyce, with a little cry of alarm, 'you'll say nothing to Andrew? Oh, not a word! Never let him know I was here. I would fain, fain not be unkind—but there are some things that cannot be. Oh, I was very silly, I should have known. You'll tell him to think of me no more—that I'm not worthy of it; but, oh, never tell I've been here.'

'No, my bonny lamb, no, my ain dear. He never was worthy o' you. He shall hear not a word—nor nae ither person, if that's your pleasure, Joyce.'

'Oh, granny dear! but it's time now, and I must go.'

Janet's heart was very heavy ; but there was no time for questions, and she saw that Joyce was little disposed to explain. 'We'll go with her to the station, and see her off,' she said, taking her big shawl out of the aumrie. 'I'm laith, laith to part with you, Joyce : but it would be nae kindness to make ye late, and they'll be meeting you at the train.'

'I must not be late,' Joyce replied. She looked round with a faint smile, and tears were in her eyes, and her lips moved as if she were saying something. Janet's heart was sore for her child. Why was she left to travel all alone in a wild and dark night like this ? Why should she say nothing of her father, or of any one that was with her ? Janet's mind misgave her—she was full of fears : Joyce was 'no hersel'.' She was very loving, very tender, and smiled, and tried to look at ease ; but she could not deceive the old woman whom love enlightened, who knew all her ways and her looks. There was something in her eyes which Janet did not know. She did not understand what it meant, but it meant trouble. There was

trouble written all over Joyce. Her fond old guardian knew not what it was, only knew it was there.

The two old people went to the station with her through the windy, weeping night, saying little on either side. Joyce clasped her old grandmother's arm tightly in hers, but scarcely spoke, and Peter stalked beside them, half exhilarated, half heart-broken—he did not know which. To have had her for a little was sweet, but then to see her go away—She clung to them, crying quietly under her veil, as they put her into a corner of a vacant carriage—not without a forlorn pride that it was first class—and wrapped her cloak round her. They had no fine phrases, but to smooth the folds of her dress, to tuck the cloak round her, was always some faint satisfaction. ‘I’ll write,’ she said, ‘as soon as I can, but it may be long. You’ll not lose heart, only wait, wait, and I’ll write——’

‘Oh, my darlin’, we’ll wait—but, Joyce, where are you goin’, where are you goin’, that you speak like that?’

‘Good - bye, grandfather, — good - bye, granny, dear granny!’

Janet clutched Peter with a grasp that hurt even that old arm of his, all muscle and sinew. 'Noo,' she said, in an imperative whisper, 'gang hame to your bed : I'm goin' after her. Dinna say a word to me, but gang hame to your bed. I'll come back the morn's morning, or as soon as I can.'

'Gaun after her ! and what good will that do her ?' cried Peter in consternation.

'At least, I'll see her safe,' said Janet, clambering into a third-class carriage. The train was almost in motion, and carried her off before her astonished husband could say another word. The old man stood bewildered, and looked after the train which carried them both from him. But he had that inexhaustible rural patience which makes so many things supportable. After a few minutes he went away, slowly shaking his head. 'She has nae ticket,' he said to himself, 'and little money in her pooch, and what guid can she do in ony case ?' But after a while he obeyed Janet's injunction, and went slowly home.

It was hard work for Janet to keep sight of Joyce when they came to the great Edin-

burgh station : she was little accustomed to crowds—to be hustled and pushed about as a poor old woman getting out of a third-class carriage so often is : but fortunately her eyes had kept the long sight of youth, and she managed to trace the movements of her child. One thing was sure, that nobody was there to meet Joyce, not even a maid. The girl made her way by dark passages and corners to the place where another little train was starting for Leith, where Janet followed her breathless. It was very raw and cold, windy and gusty, the wind blowing about the light of the lamps, driving wild clouds across the sky, dashing rain from time to time against the carriage windows, and the atmosphere was dreary with a sense of the wilder darkness of the approaching sea. Presently they came to the port and to the quay, where a confused mass of vessels, made half visible by the flaring melancholy lights, lay together, with lamps swinging at their masts. The pavement was wet and slippery, the wind was keen and cold, and blew blasts of stinging rain like tears over her face as she toiled along. But she never lost sight of

Joyce. The Firth was tumbling in dark waves, faintly visible in a liquid line, apparent at least so far that it was not solid earth, but something wilder, more dreadful, insecure—and it raved and dashed against the pier and the sides of the ships, sometimes sending up a leaping white vision of spray like something flying at your throat, and always a sound as of contending voices, the shout of oncoming, the long grinding drag of the withdrawal as wave followed wave. The boats moved and creaked at anchor, the lamps and dim masts and funnels rising and falling. There were gangways, each with its little coloured smoky lamp, from one steamboat to another, lying ready to start, three or four deep against the pier. Janet saw the solitary figure which she had tracked so long pause, as if with a moment's hesitation at the first of these gangways, and she made a rush forward at the last after this long course, to grip her child by the dress, by whatever thing she could clutch and hold, and cry 'No, no ; you'll gang no further ! oh, Joyce, my bairn, you'll gang no further !' But she slipped and fell, being exhausted with the long and weary walk, and,

breathless with labour and fatigue, could get nothing out but a panting No, no, which had no meaning. When she got to her feet again the slim figure was gone. She thought she could trace it on the farthest point, standing upon the paddle-box of the steamer, and ever after believed that the speck of whiteness in the dark was Joyce's face turned back towards home. That was the last she saw.

The old woman stood upon the pier for long after. She stood and watched while a few other passengers arrived, talking dolefully about the stormy night, and tried to take a little comfort thinking that perhaps 'the Cornel' might be among them, and Joyce after all have a protector and companions. There was one tall man, indeed, speaking 'high English,' whom Janet almost made up her mind, with an unspeakable lightening of her heart, must be 'the Cornel.' Her old eyes could not trace him through the maze of the steamboats to the one upon which she had kept a despairing watch : but fatigue and misery had by this time dimmed her faculties. Then that farthest boat, the

one that held her child, with shouts and shrieks of steam, and lights wavering through the gloom, and every dreadful noise, got into motion, and went out upon the tumbling, stormy sea. Janet watched the light rising and sinking, the only thing visible, till that too disappeared in the darkness. And then all was quiet but the booming of the Firth against the piers, and the creak and jar of the other steamboats preparing to follow. She withdrew a little and leant against a post, and dried her eyes with a trembling hand. 'Oh, my bairn! my bairn!' she said to herself.

'What ails the woman?' said the watchman on the pier. 'There's naething to make a wark about; they'll get a bit heezy, but nae danger. It'll be a son or a daughter ye've been seeing off.'

'Oh, man, I'm thankful to you!' said Janet. 'Are they a' for the same airt.'

'They're a' for the far north,' said the watchman, continuing his heavy march.

CHAPTER XLVIII

JANET had scarcely recovered the use of her tired limbs next morning and begun languidly to 'redd up' the cottage, with many anxious thoughts in her breast, when an unusual sound of masculine footsteps attracted her attention. She was in a very nervous, vigilant state, expecting she knew not what, although it had seemed as if everything had happened that could happen, now that Joyce had come—and gone so mysteriously : that she should come had always been a possibility before, but now was so no longer. The tramp of these imperative feet, not the slow tread of labouring men, attracted her anxious ear some distance off. She put away her brush and listened. The door stood open though the morning was cold, and a ray of pale and watery sunshine came in. Janet was

afraid to look out, with an instant swift intuition and alarm lest somehow her child's interest might be involved, and she could scarcely be said to be surprised when she saw the Captain, accompanied by an older gray-haired man whom she at once recognised as 'the Cornel.' 'Eh, but I must be careful. She wasna with him after a',' said Janet to herself. She had been very tremulous and shaken with fatigue and anxiety, but she braced herself up in a moment and stood firmly on the defensive, whatever might be about to happen. The two gentlemen looked harassed and anxious. They came straight to the cottage door without any pause or hesitation. 'Is Miss Joyce here?' the Captain asked breathless, without even mainners to say good morning, as Janet remarked.

'Na, Captain, she's no here.'

'My good woman,' said the Colonel, breathless too, 'don't be unkind, but tell us where my daughter is. We've come from London. I never denied your interest in her — never opposed her love for you. Bellendean will tell you. Let me see Joyce, for God's sake!'

‘Colonel,’ said Janet, with a little tremble, ‘you should see her if she was in my keeping without such a grand plea. But she’s no here. I thought till this moment she was with—her ain folk.’

‘Don’t try to deceive us,’ cried Captain Bellendean, ‘we have traced her here.’ He was very much agitated to have forgotten his mainners in this wonderful way.

‘Track or no track,’ said Janet, ‘you’ll get no lies frae me. Yes, she’s been here. There’s the chair she sat upon only yestreen and late at nicht wi’ Peter and me.’

The Colonel came in and looked at the chair with the instinct of a simple mind. It seemed to throw a certain light upon Joyce’s disappearance. ‘Then where is she now?’ he said, with a sigh of impatience and disappointment. ‘Let me sit down, if you please, for all my strength seems to have gone out of me. Where is she now?’

‘That’s mair than I can tell,’ said Janet with the fervour of undeniable truth.

‘We are in great trouble,’ said Captain Bellendean. ‘She has gone away—in a mistake. Janet, you’re very fond of her, I know.

She has been troubled about Halliday the schoolmaster, and—and some one else. She has thought the best thing was to go away—and it's the worst thing. It's misery to everybody. I know you're fond of her.'

'Fond of her!' said Janet. She said to herself that it was a bonnie question to be asked of her that would give her last drop of blood for Joyce. 'Ay, ye may say I'm fond of her,' she replied grimly.

'And it is all a mistake. She's taken up a mistaken idea. Halliday had no such claim upon her—nor had—any other. It was altogether a false fear. I would never—for pity's sake, if you can tell us anything. You know me! She would never be forced to anything. She might have been sure of that,' the Captain added hurriedly, with a flush of forlorn pride.

'Eh, Captain,' said Janet, 'I would be far, far happier if I kent where she was. She just said, "I'm goin' on a voyage, and that she had come to see us." And it was in belief that the Cornel and his lady were just waiting upon her at Leith.'

'At Leith!' they both exclaimed. Then

Colonel Hayward turned to the Captain with an air of relief. 'It's but a little port, isn't it? We'll soon be on the track now.'

'At least,' said Janet, 'I'm thinking it was Leith, for where else would she gang to join a ship? but I thought naething but that the Cornel and his lady were waiting upon her—for ane o' your toors, or whatever you ca' them,' she added, with a certain tone of disdain.

'And she said she was going—where?'

'She said it would be a long voyage. Ye needna think to trap me, Captain—it's no like you—as if I was speaking a falsehood with your "Where?" Na; she said not a word to me, but just a long voyage. I would gie my little finger to ken,' cried Janet, with tears; 'but she said not a word to me.'

'Are there boats for America at Leith? God bless my soul! poor little trading things—not even a mail-boat where she could have been comfortable,' cried the Colonel. And then he added, 'You must think we've been cruel to her to drive her away; but it's not so—it's not so. Bellendean will tell you.'

Janet remained grimly silent, offering no contradiction.

As for the Captain, he turned his back upon them both before he gave the called-for testimony. 'She is flying from love,' he said, in a choked voice. 'And to sacrifice herself for—us : and to make us all miserable !' If he was angry as well as unhappy, there was perhaps little wonder.

'That's a' I can tell ye,' said Jane. 'We saw her off from the station, Peter and me. I had nae thought but that her father—her father that she belonged to, that took her from me—would be waitin' for her at the other end. I never said a word to keep her from her duty to her ain folk ; but if I had kent she was her lane, going forth upon the wide world and the sea, on a wild night—lord ! I would have followed her to the ends o' the earth,' cried Janet, with hot fervour and tears.

But she said nothing of how far she had followed. How did she know that it might not be prejudicial to Joyce ? If Joyce had left them it could not be without reason. No doubt she had kept secret about her destina-

tion lest it should be found out by her pursuers. 'She might have kent me better, that I would have stood for her against all the land and never let on I kent,' the old woman said to herself. But it was no doubt better that within the strict boundaries of truth she could thus baffle the pursuit and confuse all researches. But what had the Captain to do with it? and what did they mean by flying from love? This gave Janet a cold thrill for many a day.

The search was long, and extended over many seas. Though there was no mail-boat for America, there were, as the Colonel divined, 'trading things,' but no trace in any of them of Joyce; and there were ships for the Mediterranean and many other places. Half a dozen times at least they thought they were on her track, but failed and failed again. She had but little money for a long voyage. All indeed was darkness from the time when they traced her to the station at Bellendean. A young lady in company with an old woman had been seen at Leith; but Janet, who alone could have thrown any light on this, remained silent. Indeed, she had no confession to make, for

she had only been with Joyce as a watcher is with the object of his stealthy pursuit. And Janet was all the more safe a guardian that she knew absolutely nothing. There never departed from her old eyes the vision of the lamp upon the mast, tossing with the movement of the waves, disappearing into the blackness of the night, a forlorn spark in the immeasurable vacancy of invisible sky and sea. Where had that symbol of humanity gone? what fathomless gloom had it penetrated with its faint coloured gleam of living? All her superiority over the others lay in the image of that tossing light, and the faint spars it illuminated for a moment in the black gulf of the unknown.

So Joyce disappeared and was seen no more.

Miss Marsham never forgot nor could think, without a sinking of the heart, of that unfortunate night when the oracle had spoken by her mouth, all unaware of the nature of the being addressed, or the tragical matters involved. For the consequences of that self-sacrifice were disastrous all round. The Haywards' pleasant house was shut up, while

they travelled the world, looking for the lost girl. Mrs. Hayward was the most energetic in the pursuit—for the Colonel, though he missed her more, and was more ‘fond’ of Joyce, had neither any sense of wrong to move him, nor any prick of the intolerable such as wrings the heart of an impatient woman, half thinking herself to blame. Canon Jenkinson, though so much less concerned, would probably not have gone to America at all on that famous expedition of his, about which his well-known book was written, had it not been for a hope that in some American school or lecture-hall he would find her, though everybody else failed. Norman Bellendean was affected most of all. He had a dreadful scene with his stepmother, from which that poor lady did not recover for a long time; and instead of going home, and finally allowing himself to be drawn into the natural circle of county politics and relationships, with Greta for his pretty and happy wife, as had been desired and hoped—he went back, sullen and wretched, a misanthrope and woman-hater, to his regiment in India, leaving his estate in the hands of an

agent, the house shut up and uninhabited. Greta married after a while, and was just as comfortable as if she had attained the man of her first choice, whose loss it was believed would break her heart. She was the only one quite unaffected by all that had taken place, although her comfort was the one prevailing cause of all this trouble. Mrs. Bellendean was severed once for all from Bellendean and everything near. And yet she could say to herself truly that she meant no harm, that she had never expected serious harm to follow. All she meant was to avert an unsuitable marriage, which it is every woman's duty to do, by encouraging a girl, who was already engaged, and had no right to accept another man's attentions, to keep to her plighted word. Perhaps it was hard upon her to suffer so much for so little—and almost harder, seeing that Greta, in whose interests she had acted, did not suffer at all.

Andrew Halliday, who also was, so far as he was aware, perfectly innocent, and who never knew what harm he had done by betraying Joyce's story to the very respect-

able lady, the minister's wife, who had been so kind to him—came through the trial as a man of native worth and respectability was likely to do. He waited for some time hoping to hear from Joyce, who, he felt sure, even if circumstances separated her from her family, would communicate with him. He thought the step she had taken ill-judged and excessive, even though it was in consequence of their opposition to the wishes of her heart in respect to himself. 'These hasty steps are always to be regretted,' Andrew said, 'especially as no doubt the Cornel would have been brought to see what was best for her interest if she had but given him a little time.' But when months came and brought no sign, Andrew's dignified disapproval changed into a judicial anger. 'Poor thing,' he said, 'she never had any real perception of her own best interests.' And in course of time he married a very respectable lady with a little money, and was much happier than he could have been with Joyce.

And silence closed over Joyce and all her ways: she sank out of sight as if she had

never been. Her name and image lingered in some faithful recollections, then in mystery and silence disappeared, and was seen and heard no more.

It was curious, however, that within a year Janet and Peter Matheson disappeared also from their cottage. They sold their few goods, 'no able to bide the place after what had happened,' Janet said. But Peter, instead of echoing this judgment, shook with a long low subterranean laugh, such as used to mark his enjoyment of Joyce's remarks and pleasant ways. They disappeared and nobody ever knew where they had gone. 'To their friends in the North,' the village people said, but nobody before had ever heard of these friends.

It was not till years after that there came a curious rumour to the mainland far away at the most distant point of Scotland, of a great transformation that had been going on in one of the most remote and inaccessible of the isles. Whether it was St. Kilda or the Fair Isle, or some other scrap of rock and mountain in the middle of the wild northern

seas, this chronicler has no information. But the legend ran that suddenly, upon a wild wintry afternoon, a lady had landed on that island. Whether her wealth was boundless and her power miraculous, as some said, could not be proved save by rare visitors to the islands. But at all events, there seemed no reason to doubt that she had acquired a wonderful ascendancy, and made many extraordinary changes among the primitive people. She taught them many things, among others what domestic comfort and cleanliness and beneficent learning meant, and knew everything, according to the story. The few sportsmen who touched upon these wild shores were not, however, ever gratified with a sight of this Princess of the Isle. They heard of the lady, but never saw her, and from their wondering accounts and conjectures, it appeared that she was young, and considered by her subjects beautiful. But no stranger nor Englishman, nor any wandering visitor, has ever found out more than this respecting the Lady of the Isle.

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