

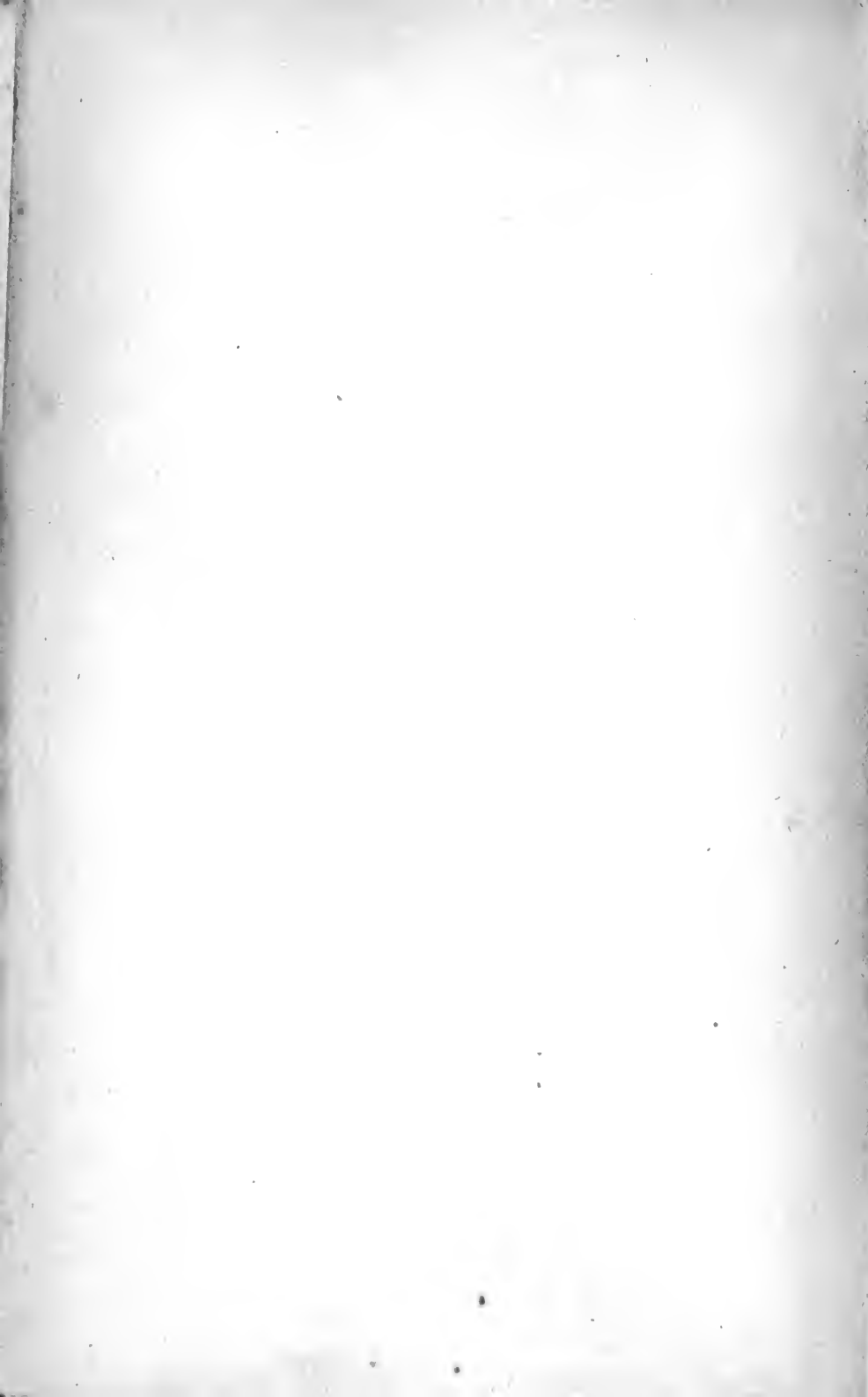
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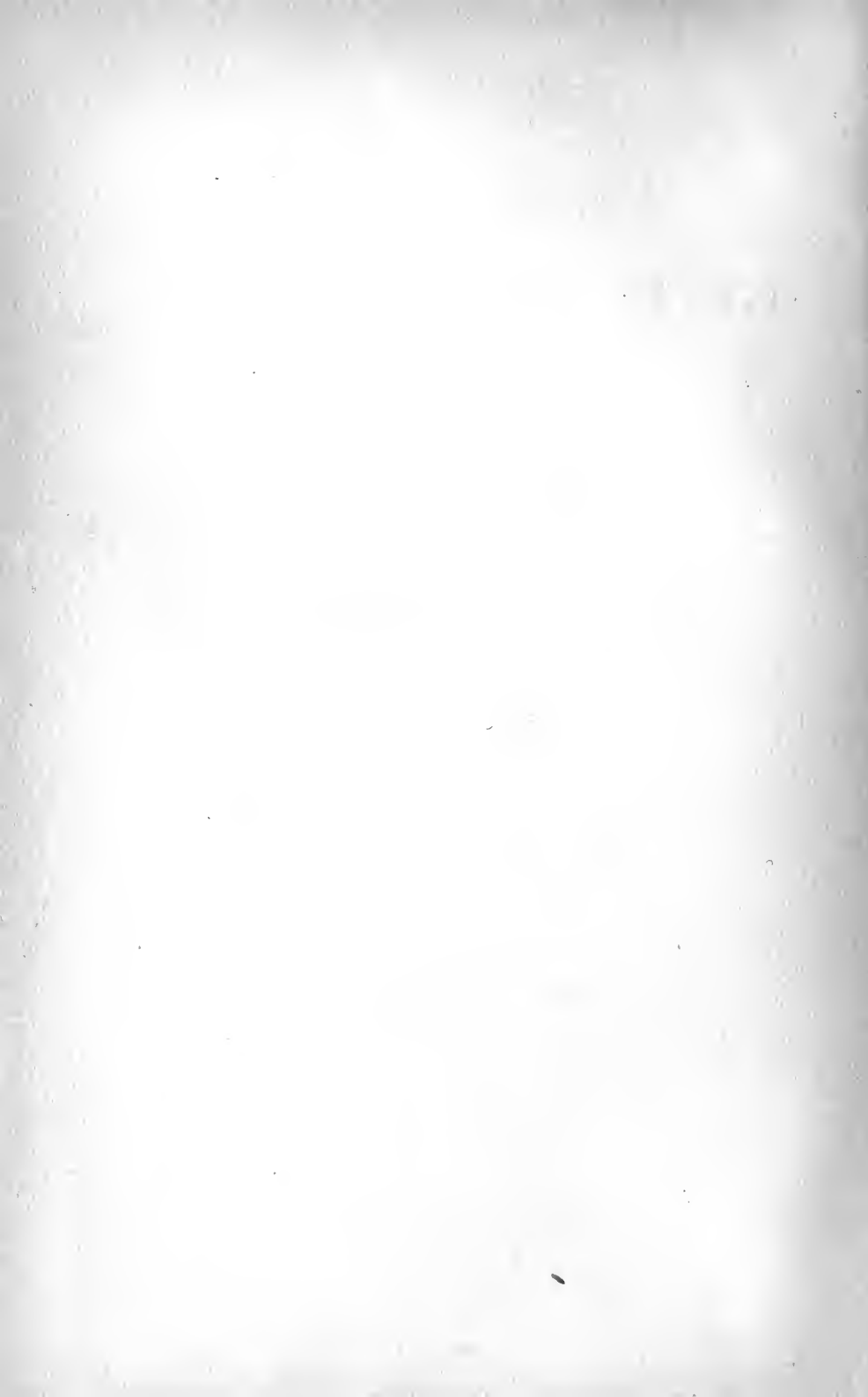
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THE WORKS OF
GEORGE MEREDITH

DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS

II



THE WORKS OF
GEORGE MEREDITH

VOLUME XVIII



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DIANA OF
THE CROSSWAYS

A NOVEL

VOLUME

II

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CHAPTER XXII

Between Diana and Dacier: The Wind East over Bleak Land

On the third day of the Easter recess Percy Dacier landed from the Havre steamer at Caen and drove straightway for the sandy coast, past fields of colza to brine-blown meadows of coarse grass, and then to the low dunes and long stretching sands of the ebb in semicircle: a desolate place at that season; with a dwarf fishing-village by the shore; an East wind driving landward in streamers every object that had a scrap to fly. He made head to the inn, where the first person he encountered in the passage was Diana's maid Danvers, who relaxed from the dramatic exaggeration of her surprise at the sight of a real English gentleman in these woebegone regions, to inform him that her mistress might be found walking somewhere along the sea-shore, and had her dog to protect her. They were to stay here a whole week, Danvers added, for a conveyance of her private sentiments. Second thoughts however whispered to her shrewdness that his arrival could only be by appointment. She had been anticipating something of the sort for some time.

Dacier butted against the stringing wind, that kept him at a rocking incline to his left for a mile. He



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then discerned in what had seemed a dredger's dot on the sands, a lady's figure, unmistakably she, without the corroborating testimony of Leander paw-deep in the low-tide water. She was out at a distance on the ebb-sands, hurtled, gyred, beaten to all shapes, in rolls, twists, volumes, like a blown banner-flag, by the pressing wind. A kerchief tied her bonnet under her chin. Bonnet and breast-ribands rattled rapidly as drummer-sticks. She stood near the little running ripple of the flat sea-water, as it hurried from a long streaked back to a tiny imitation of spray. When she turned to the shore she saw him advancing, but did not recognize; when they met she merely looked with wide parted lips. This was no appointment.

'I had to see you,' Dacier said.

She coloured to a deeper red than the rose-conjuring wind had whipped in her cheeks. Her quick intuition of the reason of his coming barred a mental evasion, and she had no thought of asking either him or herself what special urgency had brought him.

'I have been here four days.'

'Lady Esquart spoke of the place.'

'Lady Esquart should not have betrayed me.'

'She did it inadvertently, without an idea of my profiting by it.'

Diana indicated the scene in a glance. 'Dreary country, do you think?'

'Anywhere!'—said he.

They walked up the sand-heap. The roaring Easter with its shrieks and whistles at her ribands was not favourable to speech. His 'Anywhere!' had a penetrating significance, the fuller for the break that left it vague.

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Speech between them was commanded; he could not be suffered to remain. She descended upon a sheltered pathway running along a ditch, the border of pastures where cattle cropped, raised heads, and resumed their one comforting occupation.

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Diana gazed on them, smarting from the buffets of the wind she had met.

'No play of their tails to-day'; she said, as she slackened her steps. 'You left Lady Esquart well?'

'Lady Esquart . . . I think was well. I had to see you. I thought you would be with her in Berkshire. She told me of a little seaside place close to Caen.'

'You had to see me?'

'I miss you now if it's a day!'

'I heard a story in London . . .'

'In London there are many stories. I heard one. Is there a foundation for it?'

'No.'

He breathed relieved. 'I wanted to see you once before . . . if it was true. It would have made a change in my life—a gap.'

'You do me the honour to like my Sunday evenings?'

'Beyond everything London can offer.'

'A letter would have reached me.'

'I should have had to wait for the answer. There is no truth in it?'

Her choice was to treat the direct assailant frankly or imperil her defence by the ordinary feminine evolutions, which might be taken for inviting: poor pranks always.

'There have been overtures,' she said.

'Forgive me; I have scarcely the right to ask . . . speak of it.'

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'My friends may use their right to take an interest in my fortunes.'

'I thought I might, on my way to Paris, turn aside . . . coming by this route.'

'If you determined not to lose much of your time.'

The coolness of her fencing disconcerted a gentleman conscious of his madness. She took instant advantage of any circuitous move; she gave him no practicable point. He was little skilled in the arts of attack, and felt that she checked his impetuosity; respected her for it, chafed at it, writhed with the fervours precipitating him here, and relapsed on his pleasure in seeing her face, hearing her voice.

'Your happiness, I hope, is the chief thought in such a case,' he said.

'I am sure you would consider it.'

'I can't quite forget my own.'

'You compliment an ambitious hostess.'

Dacier glanced across the pastures, 'What was it that tempted you to this place?'

'A poet would say it looks like a figure in the shroud. It has no features; it has a sort of grandeur belonging to death. I heard of it as the place where I might be certain of not meeting an acquaintance.'

'And I am the intruder.'

'An hour or two will not give you that title.'

'Am I to count the minutes by my watch?'

'By the sun. We will supply you an omelette and piquette, and send you back sobered and friarly to Caen for Paris at sunset.'

'Let the fare be Spartan. I could take my black broth with philosophy every day of the year under your auspices. What I should miss . . .'

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‘You bring no news of the world or the House?’

‘None. You know as much as I know. The Irish agitation is chronic. The Corn-Law threatens to be the same.’

‘And your Chief—in personal colloquy?’

‘He keeps a calm front. I may tell you:—there is nothing I would not confide to you: he has let fall some dubious words in private. I don’t know what to think of them.’

‘But if he should waver?’

‘It’s not wavering. It’s the openness of his mind.’

‘Ah! the mind. We imagine it free. The House and the country are the sentient frame governing the mind of the politician more than his ideas. He cannot think independently of them:—nor I of my natural anatomy. You will test the truth of that after your omelette and piquette, and marvel at the quitting of your line of route for Paris. As soon as the mind attempts to think independently, it is like a kite with the cord cut, and performs a series of darts and frisks, that have the look of wildest liberty till you see it fall flat to earth. The openness of his mind is most honourable to him.’

‘Ominous for his party.’

‘Likely to be good for his country.’

‘That is the question.’

‘Prepare to encounter it. In politics I am with the active minority on behalf of the inert but suffering majority. That is my rule. It leads, unless you have a despotism, to the conquering side. It is always the noblest. I won’t say, listen to me; only do believe my words have some weight. This is a question of bread.’

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'It involves many other questions.'

'And how clearly those leaders put their case! They are admirable debaters. If I were asked to write against them, I should have but to quote them to confound my argument. I tried it once, and wasted a couple of my precious hours.'

'They are cogent debaters,' Dacier assented. 'They make me wince now and then, without convincing me:—I own it to you. The confession is not agreeable, though it's a small matter.'

'One's pride may feel a touch with the foils as keenly as the point of a rapier,' said Diana.

The remark drew a sharp look of pleasure from him.

'Does the Princess Egeria propose to dismiss the individual she inspires, when he is growing most sensible of her wisdom?'

'A young Minister of State should be gleaning at large when holiday is granted him.'

Dacier coloured. 'May I presume on what is currently reported?'

'Parts, parts; a bit here, a bit there,' she rejoined. 'Authors find their models where they can, and generally hit on the nearest.'

'Happy the nearest!'

'If you run to interjections I shall cite you a sentence from your latest speech in the House.'

He asked for it, and to school him she consented to flatter with her recollection of his commonest words: "Dealing with subjects of this nature emotionally does not advance us a calculable inch."

'I must have said that in relation to hard matter of business.'

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'It applies. There is my hostelry, and the spectral form of Danvers, utterly *dépaysée*. Have you spoken to the poor soul? I can never discover the links of her attachment to my service.'

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'She knows a good mistress.—I have but a few minutes, if you are relentless. May I . . . shall I ever be privileged to speak your Christian name?'

'My Christian name! It is Pagan. In one sphere I am Hecate. Remember that.'

'I am not among the people who so regard you.'

'The time may come.'

'Diana!'

'Constance!'

'I break no tie. I owe no allegiance whatever to the name.'

'Keep to the formal title with me. We are Mrs. Warwick and Mr. Dacier. I think I am two years younger than you; socially therefore ten in seniority; and I know how this flower of friendship is nourished and may be withered. You see already what you have done? You have cast me on the discretion of my maid. I suppose her trusty, but I am at her mercy, and a breath from her to the people beholding me as Hecate queen of Witches! . . . I have a sensation of the scirocco it would blow.'

'In that event, the least I can offer is my whole life.'

'We will not conjecture the event.'

'The best I could hope for!'

'I see I shall have to revise the next edition of THE YOUNG MINISTER, and make an emotional curate of him. Observe Danvers. The woman is wretched; and now she sees me coming she pretends to be

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using her wits in studying the things about her, as I have directed. She is a riddle. I have the idea that any morning she may explode; and yet I trust her and sleep soundly. I must be free, though I vex the world's watchdogs.—So, Danvers, you are noticing how thoroughly Frenchwomen do their work.'

Danvers replied with a slight mincing: 'They may, ma'am; but they chatter chatter so.'

'The result proves that it is not a waste of energy. They manage their fowls too.'

'They've no such thing as mutton, ma'am.'

Dacier patriotically laughed.

'She strikes the apology for wealthy and leisurely landlords,' Diana said.

Danvers remarked that the poor fed meagrely in France. She was not convinced of its being good for them by hearing that they could work on it sixteen hours out of the four and twenty.

Mr. Percy Dacier's repast was furnished to him half an hour later. At sunset Diana, taking Danvers beside her, walked with him to the line of the country road bearing on Caen. The wind had sunk. A large brown disk paused rayless on the western hills.

'A Dacier ought to feel at home in Normandy; and you may have sprung from this neighbourhood,' said she, simply to chat. 'Here the land is poorish, and a mile inland rich enough to bear repeated crops of colza, which tries the soil, I hear. As for beauty, those blue hills you see, enfold charming valleys. I meditate an expedition to Harcourt before I return. An English professor of his native tongue at the Lycée at Caen told me on my way here that for twenty shillings a week you may live in royal ease

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round about Harcourt. So we have our bed and board in prospect if fortune fails us, Danvers.'

'I would rather die in England, ma'am,' was the maid's reply.

Dacier set foot on his carriage-step. He drew a long breath to say a short farewell, and he and Diana parted.

They parted as the plainest of sincere good friends, each at heart respecting the other for the repression of that which their hearts craved; any word of which might have carried them headlong, bound together on a Mazeppa-race, with scandal for the hounding wolves, and social ruin for the rocks and torrents.

Dacier was the thankfuller, the most admiring of the two; at the same time the least satisfied. He saw the abyss she had aided him in escaping; and it was refreshful to look abroad after his desperate impulse. Prominent as he stood before the world, he could not think without a shudder of behaving like a young frenetic of the passion. Those whose aim is at the leadership of the English people know, that however truly based the charges of hypocrisy, soundness of moral fibre runs throughout the country and is the national integrity, which may condone old sins for present service, but will not have present sins to flout it. He was in tune with the English character. The passion was in him nevertheless, and the stronger for a slow growth that confirmed its union of the mind and heart. Her counsel fortified him, her suggestions opened springs; her phrases were golden-lettered in his memory; and more, she had worked an extraordinary change in his views of life and aptitude for social converse: he acknowledged it with genial

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candour. Through her he was encouraged, led, excited to sparkle with the witty, feel new gifts, or a greater breadth of nature; and thanking her, he became thirstily susceptible to her dark beauty; he claimed to have found the key of her, and he prized it. She was not passionless: the blood flowed warm. Proud, chaste, she was nobly spirited; having an intellectual refuge from the besiegings of the blood; a rock-fortress. The 'wife no wife' appeared to him, striking the higher elements of the man, the commonly masculine also.—Would he espouse her, had he the chance?—to-morrow! this instant! With her to back him, he would be doubled in manhood, doubled in brain and heart-energy. To call her wife, spring from her and return, a man might accept his fate to fight Trojan or Greek, sure of his mark on the enemy.

But if, after all, this imputed Helen of a decayed Paris passed, submissive to the legitimate solicitor, back to her husband?

The thought shot Dacier on his legs for a look at the blank behind him. He vowed she had promised it should not be. Could it ever be, after the ruin the meanly suspicious fellow had brought upon her?—Diana voluntarily reunited to the treacherous cur?

He sat, resolving sombrely that if the debate arose he would try what force he had to save her from such an ignominy, and dedicate his life to her, let the world wag its tongue. So the knot would be cut.

Men unaccustomed to a knot in their system, find the prospect of cutting it an extreme relief, even when they know that the cut has an edge to wound mortally as well as pacify. The wound was not heavy payment for the rapture of having so incomparable a

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woman his own. He reflected wonderingly on the husband, as he had previously done, and came again to the conclusion that it was a poor creature, abjectly jealous of a wife he could neither master, nor equal, nor attract. And thinking of jealousy, Dacier felt none; none of individuals, only of facts: her marriage, her bondage. Her condemnation to perpetual widowhood angered him, as at an unrighteous decree. The sharp sweet bloom of her beauty, fresh in swarthinness, under the whipping Easter, cried out against that loathed inhumanity. Or he made it cry.

Being a stranger to the jealousy of men, he took the soft assurance that he was preferred above them all. Competitors were numerous: not any won her eyes as he did. She revealed nothing of the same pleasures in the shining of the others touched by her magical wand. Would she have pardoned one of them the 'Diana!' bursting from his mouth?

She was not a woman for trifling, still less for secrecy. He was as little the kind of lover. Both would be ready to take up their burden, if the burden was laid on them.—Diana had thus far impressed him.

Meanwhile he faced the cathedral towers of the ancient Norman city, standing up in the smoky hues of the West; and a sentence out of her book seemed fitting to the scene and what he felt. He rolled it over luxuriously as the next of delights to having her beside him.—She wrote of; *'Thoughts that are bare dark outlines, coloured by some old passion of the soul, like towers of a distant city seen in the funeral waste of day.'*—His bluff English anti-poetic training would have caused him to shrug at the stuff coming from another

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pen: he might condescendingly have criticized it, with a sneer embalmed in humour. The words were hers; she had written them; almost by a sort of anticipation, he imagined; for he at once fell into the mood they suggested, and had a full crop of the 'bare dark outlines' of thoughts coloured by his particular form of passion.

Diana had impressed him powerfully when she set him swallowing and assimilating a sentence ethereally thin in substance, of mere sentimental significance, that he would antecedently have read aloud in a drawing-room, picking up the book by hazard, as your modern specimen of romantic vapouring. Mr. Dacier however was at the time in observation of the towers of Caen, fresh from her presence, animated to some conception of her spirit. He drove into the streets, desiring, half determining, to risk a drive back on the morrow.

The cold light of the morrow combined with his fear of distressing her to restrain him. Perhaps he thought it well not to risk his gains. He was a northerner in blood. He may have thought it well not further to run the personal risk immediately.

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Records a Visit to Diana from one of the World's Good Women

Pure disengagement of contemplativeness had selected Percy Dacier as the model of her YOUNG MINISTER OF STATE, Diana supposed. Could she otherwise have

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dared to sketch him? She certainly would not have done it now.

That was a reflection similar to what is entertained by one who has dropped from a precipice to the mid-way ledge over the abyss, where caution of the whole sensitive being is required for simple self-preservation. How could she have been induced to study and portray him! It seemed a form of dementia.

She thought this while imagining the world to be interrogating her. When she interrogated herself, she flew to Lugano and her celestial Salvatore, that she might be defended from the charge of the dreadful weakness of her sex. Surely she there had proof of her capacity for pure disengagement. Even in recollection the springs of spiritual happiness renewed the bubbling crystal play. She believed that a divineness had wakened in her there, to strengthen her to the end, ward her from any complicity in her sex's culprit blushing.

Dacier's cry of her name was the cause, she chose to think, of the excessive circumspection she must henceforth practise; precariously footing, embracing hardest earth, the plainest rules, to get back to safety. Not that she was personally endangered, or at least not spiritually; she could always fly in soul to her heights. But she had now to be on guard, constantly in the fencing attitude. And watchful of herself as well. That was admitted with a ready frankness, to save it from being a necessitated and painful confession: for the voluntary acquiescence, if it involved her in her sex, claimed an individual exemption. 'Women are women, and I am a woman: but I am I, and unlike them: I see we are weak, and weakness

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tempts: in owning the prudence of guarded steps, I am armed. It is by dissembling, feigning immunity, that we are imperilled.' She would have phrased it so, with some anger at her feminine nature as well as at the subjection forced on her by circumstances.

Besides, her position and Percy Dacier's threw the fancied danger into remoteness. The world was her stepmother, vigilant to become her judge; and the world was his taskmaster, hopeful of him, yet able to strike him down for an offence. She saw their situation as he did. The course of folly must be bravely taken, if taken at all. Disguise degraded her to the reptiles.

This was faced. Consequently there was no fear of it.

She had very easily proved that she had skill and self-possession to keep him rational, and therefore they could continue to meet. A little outburst of frenzy to a reputedly handsome woman could be treated as the froth of a passing wave. Men have the trick, infants their fevers.

Diana's days were spent in reasoning. Her nights were not so tuneable to the superior mind. When asleep she was the sport of elves that danced her into tangles too deliciously unravelled, and left new problems for the wise-eyed and anxious morning. She solved them with the thought that in sleep it was the mere ordinary woman who fell a prey to her tormentors; awake, she dispersed the swarm, her sky was clear. Gradually the persecution ceased, thanks to her active pen.

A letter from her legal adviser, old Mr. Braddock, informed her that no grounds existed for apprehending

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marital annoyance, and late in May her household had resumed its customary round.

She examined her accounts. The Debit and Credit sides presented much of the appearance of male and female in our jog-trot civilization. They matched middling well; with rather too marked a tendency to strain the leash and run frolic on the part of friend Debit (the wanton male), which deepened the blush of the comparison. Her father had noticed the same funny thing in his effort to balance his tugging accounts: 'Now then for a look at Man and Wife': except that he made Debit stand for the portly frisky female, Credit the decorous and contracted other half, a prim gentleman of a constitutionally lean habit of body, remonstrating with her. 'You seem to forget that we are married, my dear, and must walk in step or bundle into the Bench,' Dan Merion used to say.

Diana had not so much to rebuke in Mr. Debit; or not at the first reckoning. But his ways were curious. She grew distrustful of him, after dismissing him with a quiet admonition and discovering a series of ambush bills, which he must have been aware of when he was allowed to pass as an honourable citizen. His answer to her reproaches pleaded the necessitousness of his purchases and expenditure: a capital plea; and Mrs. Credit was requested by him, in a courteous manner, to drive her pen the faster, so that she might wax to a corresponding size and satisfy the world's idea of fitness in couples. She would have costly furniture, because it pleased her taste; and a French cook, for a like reason, in justice to her guests; and trained servants; and her tribe of pensioners; flowers she would have profuse and fresh at her windows and

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over the rooms; and the pictures and engravings on the walls were (always for the good reason mentioned) choice ones; and she had a love of old lace, she loved colours as she loved cheerfulness, and silks, and satin hangings, Indian ivory carvings, countless mirrors, Oriental woods, chairs and desks with some feature or a flourish in them, delicate tables with antelope legs, of approved workmanship in the chronology of European upholstery, and marble clocks of cunning device to symbol Time, mantelpiece decorations, illustrated editions of her favourite authors; her bed-chambers, too, gave the nest for sleep a dainty cosiness in aërial draperies. Hence, more or less directly, the peccant bills. Credit was reduced to reckon to a nicety the amount she could rely on positively: her fixed income from her investments and the letting of The Crossways: the days of half-yearly payments that would magnify her to some proportions beside the alarming growth of her partner, who was proud of it, and referred her to the treasures she could summon with her pen, at a murmur of dissatisfaction. His compliments were sincere; they were seductive. He assured her that she had struck a rich vein in an inexhaustible mine; by writing only a very little faster she could double her income; counting a broader popularity, treble it; and so on a tide of success down the widening river to a sea sheer golden. Behold how it sparkles! Are we then to stint our winged hours of youth for want of courage to realize the riches we can command? Debit was eloquent, he was unanswerable.

Another calculator, an accustomed and lamentably-scrupulous arithmetician, had been at work for some

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time upon a speculative summing of the outlay of Diana's establishment, as to its chances of swamping the income. Redworth could guess pretty closely the cost of a household, if his care for the holder set him venturing on averages. He knew nothing of her ten per cent. investment and considered her fixed income a beggarly regiment to marshal against the invader. He fancied however, in his ignorance of literary profits, that a popular writer, selling several editions, had come to an El Dorado. There was the mine. It required a diligent working. Diana was often struck by hearing Redworth ask her *when* her next book might be expected. He appeared to have an eagerness in hurrying her to produce, and she had to say that she was not a nimble writer. His flattering impatience was vexatious. He admired her work, yet he did his utmost to render it little admirable. His literary taste was not that of young Arthur Rhodes, to whom she could read her chapters, appearing to take counsel upon them while drinking the eulogies: she suspected him of prosaically wishing her to make money, and though her exchequer was beginning to know the need of it, the author's lofty mind disdained such sordidness:—to be excused, possibly, for a failing productive energy. She encountered obstacles to imaginative composition. With the pen in her hand, she would fall into heavy musings; break a sentence to muse, and not on the subject. She slept unevenly at night, was drowsy by day, unless the open air was about her, or animating friends. Redworth's urgency to get her to publish was particularly annoying when she felt how greatly THE YOUNG MINISTER OF STATE would have been improved had she retained the work to

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brood over it, polish, re-write passages, perfect it. Her musings embraced long dialogues of that work, never printed; they sprang up, they passed from memory; leaving a distaste for her present work: THE CANTATRICE: far more poetical than the preceding, in the opinion of Arthur Rhodes; and the story was more romantic; modelled on a Prima Donna she had met at the musical parties of Henry Wilmers, after hearing Redworth tell of Charles Rainer's quaint passion for the woman, or the idea of the woman. Diana had courted her, studied and liked her. The picture she was drawing of the amiable and gifted Italian, of her villain Roumanian husband, and of the eccentric, high-minded, devoted Englishman, was good in a fashion; but considering the theme, she had reasonable apprehension that her CANTATRICE would not repay her for the time and labour bestowed on it. No clever transcripts of the dialogue of the day occurred; no hairbreadth 'scapes, perils by sea and land, heroisms of the hero, fine shrieks of the heroine; no set scenes of catching pathos and humour; no distinguishable points of social satire—equivalent to a smacking of the public on the chaps, which excites it to grin with keen discernment of the author's intention. She did not appeal to the senses nor to a superficial discernment. So she had the anticipatory sense of its failure; and she wrote her best, in perverseness; of course she wrote slowly; she wrote more and more realistically of the characters and the downright human emotions, less of the wooden supernumeraries of her story, labelled for broad guffaw or deluge tears—the grappling natural links between our public and an author. Her feelings were aloof. They flowed

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at a hint of a scene of *THE YOUNG MINISTER*. She could not put them into *THE CANTATRICE*. And Arthur Rhodes pronounced this work poetical beyond its predecessors, for the reason that the chief characters were alive and the reader felt their pulses. He meant to say, they were poetical inasmuch as they were creations.

The slow progress of a work not driven by the author's feelings necessitated frequent consultations between Debit and Credit, resulting in altercations, recriminations, discord of the yoked and divergent couple. To restore them to their proper trot in harness, Diana reluctantly went to her publisher for an advance item of the sum she was to receive, and the act increased her distaste. An idea came that she would soon cease to be able to write at all. What then? Perhaps by selling her invested money, and ultimately *The Crossways*, she would have enough for her term upon earth. Necessarily she had to think that short, in order to reckon it as nearly enough. 'I am sure,' she said to herself, 'I shall not trouble the world very long.' A strange languor beset her; scarcely melancholy, for she conceived the cheerfulness of life and added to it in company; but a nervelessness, as though she had been left by the stream on the banks, and saw beauty and pleasure sweep along and away, while the sun that primed them dried her veins. At this time she was gaining her widest reputation for brilliancy of wit. Only to welcome guests were her evenings ever spent at home. She had no intimate understanding of the deadly wrestle of the conventional woman with her nature which she was undergoing below the surface.

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Perplexities she acknowledged, and the prudence of guardedness. 'But as I am sure not to live very long, we may as well meet.' Her meetings with Percy Dacier were therefore hardly shunned, and his behaviour did not warn her to discountenance them. It would have been cruel to exclude him from her select little dinners of eight. Whitmonby, Westlake, Henry Wilmers and the rest, she perhaps aiding, schooled him in the conversational art. She heard it said of him, that the courted discorder of the sex, hitherto a mere politician, was wonderfully humanized. Lady Pennon fell to talking of him hopefully. She declared him to be one of the men who unfold tardily, and only await the mastering passion. If the passion had come, it was controlled. His command of himself melted Diana. How could she forbid his entry to the houses she frequented? She was glad to see him. He showed his pleasure in seeing her. Remembering his tentative indiscretion on those foreign sands, she reflected that he had been easily checked: and the like was not to be said of some others. Beautiful women in her position provoke an intemperateness that contrasts touchingly with the self-restraint of a particular admirer. Her 'impassioned Caledonian' was one of a host, to speak of whom and their fits of lunacy even to her friend Emma, was repulsive. She bore with them, foiled them, passed them, and recovered her equanimity; but the contrast called to her to dwell on it, the self-restraint whispered of a depth of passion. . . .

She was shocked at herself for a singular tremble she experienced, without any beating of the heart, on hearing one day that the marriage of Percy Dacier

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and Miss Asper was at last definitely fixed. Mary Paynham brought her the news. She had it from a lady who had come across Miss Asper at Lady Wathin's assemblies, and considered the great heiress extraordinarily handsome.

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'A golden miracle,' Diana gave her words to say. 'Good looks and gold together are rather superhuman. The report may be this time true.'

Next afternoon the card of Lady Wathin requested Mrs. Warwick to grant her a private interview.

Lady Wathin, as one of the order of women who can do anything in a holy cause, advanced toward Mrs. Warwick, unabashed by the burden of her mission, and spinally prepared, behind benevolent smiles, to repay dignity of mien with a similar erectness of dignity. They touched fingers and sat. The preliminaries to the matter of the interview were brief between ladies physically sensible of antagonism and mutually too scornful of subterfuges in one another's presence to beat the bush.

Lady Wathin began. 'I am, you are aware, Mrs. Warwick, a cousin of your friend Lady Dunstane.'

'You come to me on business?' Diana said.

'It may be so termed. I have no personal interest in it. I come to lay certain facts before you which I think you should know. We think it better that an acquaintance, and one of your sex, should state the case to you, instead of having recourse to formal intermediaries, lawyers . . .'

'Lawyers?'

'Well, my husband is a lawyer, it is true. In the course of his professional vocations he became acquainted with Mr. Warwick. We have latterly seen

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a good deal of him. He is, I regret to say, seriously unwell.'

'I have heard of it.'

'He has no female relations, it appears. He needs more care than he can receive from hirelings.'

'Are you empowered by him, Lady Wathin?'

'I am, Mrs. Warwick. We will not waste time in apologies. He is most anxious for a reconciliation. It seems to Sir Cramborne and to me the most desirable thing for all parties concerned, if you can be induced to regard it in that light. Mr. Warwick may or may not live; but the estrangement is quite undoubtedly the cause of his illness. I touch on nothing connected with it. I simply wish that you should not be in ignorance of his proposal and his condition.'

Diana bowed calmly. 'I grieve at his condition. His proposal has already been made and replied to.'

'Oh, but, Mrs. Warwick, an immediate and decisive refusal of a proposal so fraught with consequences . . .!'

'Ah, but, Lady Wathin, you are now outstepping the limits prescribed by the office you have undertaken.'

'You will not lend ear to an intercession?'

'I will not.'

'Of course, Mrs. Warwick, it is not for me to hint at things that lawyers could say on the subject.'

'Your forbearance is creditable, Lady Wathin.'

'Believe me, Mrs. Warwick, the step is—I speak in my husband's name as well as my own—strongly to be advised.'

'If I hear one word more of it, I leave the country.'

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'I should be sorry indeed at any piece of rashness depriving your numerous friends of your society. We have recently become acquainted with Mr. Redworth, and I know the loss you would be to them. I have not attempted an appeal to your feelings, Mrs. Warwick.'

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'I thank you warmly, Lady Wathin, for what you have not done.'

The aristocratic airs of Mrs. Warwick were annoying to Lady Wathin when she considered that they were borrowed, and that a pattern morality could regard the woman as ostracized: nor was it agreeable to be looked at through eyelashes under partially lifted brows. She had come to appeal to the feelings of the wife; at any rate, to discover if she had some and was better than a wild adventuress.

'Our life below is short!' she said. To which Diana tacitly assented.

'We have our little term, Mrs. Warwick. It is soon over.'

'On the other hand, the platitudes concerning it are eternal.'

Lady Wathin closed her eyes, that the like effect might be produced on her ears. 'Ah! they are the truths. But it is not my business to preach. Permit me to say that I feel deeply for your husband.'

'I am glad of Mr. Warwick's having friends; and they are many, I hope.'

'They cannot behold him perishing, without an effort on his behalf.'

A chasm of silence intervened. Wifely pity was not sounded in it.

'He will question me, Mrs. Warwick.'

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'You can report to him the heads of our conversation, Lady Wathin.'

'Would you—it is your husband's most earnest wish; and our house is open to his wife and to him for the purpose; and it seems to us that . . . indeed it might avert a catastrophe you would necessarily deplore:—would you consent to meet him at my house?'

'It has already been asked, Lady Wathin, and refused.'

'But at my house—under our auspices!'

Diana glanced at the clock. 'Nowhere.'

'Is it not—pardon me—a wife's duty, Mrs. Warwick, at least to listen?'

'Lady Wathin, I have listened to you.'

'In the case of his extreme generosity so putting it, for the present, Mrs. Warwick, that he asks only to be heard personally by his wife! It may preclude so much.'

Diana felt a hot wind across her skin.

She smiled and said: 'Let me thank you for bringing to an end a mission that must have been unpleasant to you.'

'But you will meditate on it, Mrs. Warwick, will you not? Give me that assurance!'

'I shall not forget it,' said Diana.

Again the ladies touched fingers, with an interchange of the social grimace of cordiality. A few words of compassion for poor Lady Dunstane's invalidated state covered Lady Wathin's retreat.

She left, it struck her ruffled sentiments, an icy libertine, whom any husband caring for his dignity and comfort was well rid of; and if only she could have contrived allusively to bring in the name of Mr.

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Percy Dacier, just to show these arrant coquettes, or worse, that they were not quite so privileged to pursue their intrigues obscurely as they imagined, it would have soothed her exasperation.

She left a woman the prey of panic.

Diana thought of Emma and Redworth, and of their foolish interposition to save her character and keep her bound. She might now have been free! The struggle with her manacles reduced her to a state of rebelliousness, from which issued vivid illuminations of the one means of certain escape: an abhorrent hissing cavern, that led to a place named Liberty, her refuge, but a hectic place.

Unable to write, hating the house which held her a fixed mark for these attacks, she had an idea of flying straight to her beloved Lugano lake, and there hiding, abandoning her friends, casting off the slave's name she bore, and living free in spirit. She went so far as to reckon the cost of a small household there, and justify the violent step by an exposition of retrenchment upon her large London expenditure. She had but to say farewell to Emma, no other tie to cut! One morning on the Salvatore heights would wash her clear of the webs defacing and entangling her.

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The month was August, four days before the closing of Parliament, and Diana fancied it good for Arthur Rhodes to run down with her to Copsley. He came

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to her invitation joyfully, reminding her of Lady Dunstane's wish to hear some chapters of *THE CANTATRICE*, and the MS. was packed. They started, taking rail and fly, and winding up the distance on foot. August is the month of sober maturity and majestic foliage, songless, but a crowned and royal-robed queenly month; and the youngster's appreciation of the homely scenery refreshed Diana; his delight in being with her was also pleasant. She had no wish to exchange him for another; and that was a strengthening thought.

At Copsley the arrival of their luggage had prepared the welcome. Warm though it was, Diana perceived a change in Emma, an unwonted reserve, a doubtfulness of her eyes, in spite of tenderness; and thus thrown back on herself, thinking that if she had followed her own counsel (as she called her impulse) in old days, there would have been no such present misery, she at once, and unconsciously, assumed a guarded look. Based on her knowledge of her honest footing, it was a little defiant. Secretly in her bosom it was sharpened to a slight hostility by the knowledge that her mind had been straying. The guilt and the innocence combined to clothe her in mail, the innocence being positive, the guilt so vapoury. But she was armed only if necessary, and there was no requirement for armour. Emma did not question at all. She saw the alteration in her Tony: she was too full of the tragic apprehensiveness overmastering her to speak of trifles. She had never confided to Tony the exact nature and the growth of her malady, thinking it mortal, and fearing to alarm her dearest.

A portion of the manuscript was read out by Arthur

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Rhodes in the evening; the remainder next morning. Redworth perceptibly was the model of the English hero; and as to his person, no friend could complain of the sketch; his clear-eyed heartiness, manliness, wholesomeness—a word of Lady Dunstane's regarding him,—and his handsome braced figure, were well painted. Emma forgave the insistence on a certain bluntness of the nose, in consideration of the fond limning of his honest and expressive eyes, and the 'light on his temples,' which they had noticed together. She could not so easily forgive the realistic picture of the man: an exaggeration, she thought, of small foibles, that even if they existed, should not have been stressed. The turn for 'calculating' was shown up ridiculously; Mr. Cuthbert Dering was calculating in his impassioned moods as well as in his cold. His head was a long division of ciphers. He had statistics for spectacles, and beheld the world through them, and the mistress he worshipped.

'I see,' said Emma, during a pause; 'he is a Saxon. You still affect to have the race *en grippe*, Tony.'

'I give him every credit for what he is,' Diana replied. 'I admire the finer qualities of the race as much as any one. You want to have them presented to you in enamel, Emmy.'

But the worst was an indication that the mania for calculating in and out of season would lead to the catastrophe destructive of his happiness. Emma could not bear that. Without asking herself whether it could be possible that Tony knew the secret, or whether she would have laid it bare, her sympathy for Redworth revolted at the exposure. She was chilled. She let it pass; she merely said: 'I like the writing.'

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Diana understood that her story was condemned.

She put on her robes of philosophy to cloak discouragement. 'I am glad the writing pleases you.'

'The characters are as true as life!' cried Arthur Rhodes. 'The Cantatrice drinking porter from the pewter at the slips after harrowing the hearts of her audience, is dearer to me than if she had tottered to a sofa declining sustenance; and because her creatrix has infused such blood of life into her that you accept naturally whatever she does. She was exhausted, and required the porter, like a labourer in the cornfield.'

Emma looked at him, and perceived the poet swamped by the admirer. Taken in conjunction with Mr. Cuthbert Dering's frenzy for calculating, she disliked the incident of the porter and the pewter.

'While the Cantatrice swallowed her draught, I suppose Mr. Dering counted the cost?' she said.

'It really might be hinted,' said Diana.

The discussion closed with the accustomed pro and con upon the wart of Cromwell's nose, Realism rejoicing in it, Idealism objecting.

Arthur Rhodes was bidden to stretch his legs on a walk along the heights in the afternoon, and Emma was further vexed by hearing Tony complain of Redworth's treatment of the lad, whom he would not assist to any of the snug little posts he was notoriously able to dispense.

'He has talked of Mr. Rhodes to me,' said Emma. 'He thinks the profession of literature a delusion, and doubts the wisdom of having poets for clerks.'

'John-Bullish!' Diana exclaimed. 'He speaks contemptuously of the poor boy.'

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'Only inasmuch as the foolishness of the young man in throwing up the Law provokes his practical mind to speak.'

'He might take my word for the "young man's" ability. I want him to have the means of living, that he may write. He has genius.'

'He may have it. I like him, and have said so. If he were to go back to his law-stool, I have no doubt that Redworth would manage to help him.'

'And make a worthy ancient Braddock of a youth of splendid promise! Have I sketched him too Saxon?'

'It is the lens, and not the tribe, Tony.'

THE CANTATRICE was not alluded to any more; but Emma's disapproval blocked the current of composition, already subject to chokings in the brain of the author. Diana stayed three days at Copsley, one longer than she had intended, so that Arthur Rhodes might have his fill of country air.

'I would keep him, but I should be no companion for him,' Emma said.

'I suspect the gallant squire is only to be satisfied by landing me safely,' said Diana, and that small remark grated, though Emma saw the simple meaning. When they parted, she kissed her Tony many times. Tears were in her eyes. It seemed to Diana that she was anxious to make amends for the fit of alienation, and she was kissed in return warmly, quite forgiven, notwithstanding the deadly blank she had caused in the imagination of the writer for pay, distracted by the squabbles of Debit and Credit.

Diana chatted spiritedly to young Rhodes on their drive to the train. She was profoundly discouraged

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by Emma's disapproval of her work. It wanted but that one drop to make a recurrence to the work impossible. There it must lie! And what of the aspects of her household?—Perhaps, after all, the Redworths of the world are right, and Literature as a profession is a delusive pursuit. She did not assent to it without hostility to the world's Redworths.—‘They have no sensitiveness, we have too much. We are made of bubbles that a wind will burst, and as the wind is always blowing, your practical Redworths have their crow of us.’

She suggested advice to Arthur Rhodes upon the prudence of his resuming the yoke of the Law.

He laughed at such a notion, saying that he had some expectations of money to come.

‘But I fear,’ said he, ‘that Lady Dunstane is very very ill. She begged me to keep her informed of your address.’

Diana told him he was one of those who should know it whithersoever she went. She spoke impulsively, her sentiments of friendliness for the youth being temporarily brightened by the strangeness of Emma's conduct in deputing it to him to fulfil a duty she had never omitted. ‘What can she think I am going to do!’

On her table at home lay a letter from Mr. Warwick. She read it hastily in the presence of Arthur Rhodes, having at a glance at the handwriting anticipated the proposal it contained and the official phrasing.

Her gallant squire was invited to dine with her that evening, costume excused.

They conversed of Literature as a profession, of poets dead and living, of politics, which he abhorred

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and shied at, and of his prospects. He wrote many rejected pages, enjoyed an income of eighty pounds per annum, and eked out a subsistence upon the modest sum his pen procured him; a sum extremely insignificant; but great Nature was his own, the world was tributary to him, the future his bejewelled and expectant bride. Diana envied his youthfulness. Nothing is more enviable, nothing richer to the mind, than the aspect of a cheerful poverty. How much nobler it was, contrasted with Redworth's amassing of wealth!

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When alone, she went to her bedroom and tried to write, tried to sleep. Mr. Warwick's letter was looked at. It seemed to indicate a threat; but for the moment it did not disturb her so much as the review of her moral prostration. She wrote some lines to her lawyers, quoting one of Mr. Warwick's sentences. That done, his letter was dismissed. Her intolerable languor became alternately a defeating drowsiness and a fever. She succeeded in the effort to smother the absolute cause: it was not suffered to show a front; at the cost of her knowledge of a practised self-deception. 'I wonder whether the world is as bad as a certain class of writers tell us!' she sighed in weariness, and mused on their soundings and probings of poor humanity, which the world accepts for the very bottom-truth if their dredge brings up sheer refuse of the abominable. The world imagines those to be at our nature's depths who are impudent enough to expose its muddy shallows. She was in the mood for such a kind of writing: she could have started on it at once but that the theme was wanting; and it may count on popularity, a great repute for penetration.

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It is true of its kind, though the dredging of nature is the miry form of art. When it flourishes we may be assured we have been over-enamelling the higher forms. She felt, and shuddered to feel, that she could draw from dark stores. Hitherto in her works it had been a triumph of the good. They revealed a gaping deficiency of the subtle insight she now possessed. 'Exhibit humanity as it is, wallowing, sensual, wicked, behind the mask,' a voice called to her; she was allured by the contemplation of the wide-mouthed old dragon Ego, whose portrait, decently painted, establishes an instant touch of exchange between author and public, the latter detected and confessing. Next to the pantomime of Humour and Pathos, a cynical surgical knife at the human bosom seems the surest talisman for this agreeable exchange; and she could cut. She gave herself a taste of her powers. She cut at herself mercilessly, and had to bandage the wound in a hurry to keep in life.

Metaphors were her refuge. Metaphorically she could allow her mind to distinguish the struggle she was undergoing, sinking under it. The banished of Eden had to put on metaphors, and the common use of them has helped largely to civilize us. The sluggish in intellect detest them, but our civilization is not much indebted to that major faction. Especially are they needed by the pedestalled woman in her conflict with the natural. Diana saw herself through the haze she conjured up. 'Am I worse than other women?' was a piercing twi-thought. Worse, would be hideous isolation. The not worse, abased her sex. She could afford to say that the world was bad: not that women were.

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Sinking deeper, an anguish of humiliation smote her to a sense of drowning. For what if the poetic ecstasy on her Salvatore heights had not been of origin divine? had sprung from other than spiritual founts? had sprung from the reddened sources she was compelled to conceal? Could it be? She would not believe it. But there was matter to clip her wings, quench her light, in the doubt.

She fell asleep like the wrecked flung ashore.

Danvers entered her room at an early hour for London to inform her that Mr. Percy Dacier was below, and begged permission to wait.

Diana gave orders for breakfast to be proposed to him. She lay staring at the wall until it became too visibly a reflection of her mind.

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The suspicion of his having come to impart the news of his proximate marriage ultimately endowed her with sovereign calmness. She had need to think it, and she did. Tea was brought to her while she dressed; she descended the stairs revolving phrases of happy congratulation and the world's ordinary epigrams upon the marriage-tie, neatly mixed.

They read in one another's faces a different meaning from the empty words of excuse and welcome. Dacier's expressed the buckling of a strong set purpose; but, grieved by the look of her eyes, he wasted

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a moment to say: 'You have not slept. You have heard . . .?'

'What?' said she, trying to speculate; and that was a sufficient answer.

'I hadn't the courage to call last night; I passed the windows. Give me your hand, I beg.'

She gave her hand in wonderment, and more wonderingly felt it squeezed. Her heart began the hammer-thump. She spoke an unintelligible something; saw herself melting away to utter weakness—pride, reserve, simple prudence, all going; crumbled ruins where had stood a fortress imposing to men. Was it love? Her heart thumped shiveringly.

He kept her hand, indifferent to the gentle tension.

'This is the point: I cannot live without you. I have gone on . . . Who was here last night? Forgive me.'

'You know Arthur Rhodes.'

'I saw him leave the door at eleven. Why do you torture me? There's no time to lose now. You will be claimed. Come, and let us two cut the knot. It is the best thing in the world for me—the only thing. Be brave! I have your hand. Give it for good, and for heaven's sake don't play the sex. Be yourself. Dear soul of a woman! I never saw the soul in one but in you. I have waited: nothing but the dread of losing you sets me speaking now. And for you to be sacrificed a second time to that——! Oh, no! You know you can trust me. On my honour, I take breath from you. You are my better in everything—guide, goddess, dearest heart! Trust me; make me master of your fate.'

'But my friend!' the murmur hung in her throat.

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He was marvellously transformed; he allowed no space for the arts of defence and evasion.

'I wish I had the trick of courting. There's not time; and I'm a simpleton at the game. We can start this evening. Once away, we leave it to them to settle the matter, and then you are free, and mine to the death.'

'But speak, speak! What is it?' Diana said.

'That if we delay, I'm in danger of losing you altogether.'

Her eyes lightened: 'You mean that you have heard he has determined . . .?'

'There's a process of the law. But stop it. Just this one step, and it ends. Whether intended or not, it hangs over you, and you will be perpetually tormented. Why waste your whole youth?—and mine as well! For I am bound to you as much as if we had stood at the altar—where we will stand together the instant you are free.'

'But where have you heard . . .?'

'From an intimate friend. I will tell you—sufficiently intimate—from Lady Wathin. Nothing of a friend, but I see this woman at times. She chose to speak of it to me—it doesn't matter why. She is in his confidence, and pitched me a whimpering tale. Let those people chatter. But it's exactly for those people that you are hanging in chains, all your youth shrivelling. Let them shout their worst! It's the bark of a day; and you won't hear it; half a year, and it will be over, and I shall bring you back—the husband of the noblest bride in Christendom! You don't mistrust me?'

'It is not that,' said she. 'But now drop my hand. I am imprisoned.'

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'It's asking too much. I've lost you too many times. I have the hand and I keep it. I take nothing but the hand. It's the hand I want. I give you mine. I love you. Now I know what love is!—and the word carries nothing of its weight. Tell me you do not doubt my honour.'

'Not at all. But be rational. I must think, and I cannot while you keep my hand.'

He kissed it. 'I keep my own against the world.'

A cry of rebuke swelled to her lips at his conqueror's tone. It was not uttered, for directness was in his character and his wooing loyal—save for bitter circumstances, delicious to hear; and so narrow was the ring he had wound about her senses, that her loathing of the circumstances pushed her to acknowledge within her bell of a heart her love for him.

He was luckless enough to say: 'Diana!'

It rang horridly of her husband. She drew her hand to loosen it, with repulsing brows. 'Not that name!'

Dacier was too full of his honest advocacy of the passionate lover to take a rebuff. There lay his unconscious mastery, where the common arts of attack would have tripped him with a quick-witted woman, and where a man of passion, not allowing her to succumb in dignity, would have alarmed her to the breaking loose from him.

'Lady Dunstane calls you Tony.'

'She is my dearest and oldest friend.'

'You and I don't count by years. You are the dearest to me on earth, Tony!'

She debated as to forbidding that name.

The moment's pause wrapped her in a mental

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hurricane, out of which she came with a heart stopped, her olive cheeks ashen-hued. She had seen that the step was possible.

'Oh! Percy, Percy, are we mad?'

'Not mad. We take what is ours. Tell me, have I ever, ever disrespected you? You were sacred to me; and you are, though now the change has come. Look back on it—it is time lost, years that are dust. But look forward, and you cannot imagine our separation. What I propose is plain sense for us two. Since Rovio, I have been at your feet. Have I not some just claim for recompense? Tell me! Tony!'

The sweetness of the secret name, the privileged name, in his mouth stole through her blood, melting resistance.

She had consented. The swarthy flaming of her face avowed it even more than the surrender of her hand. He gained much by claiming little: he respected her, gave her no touches of fright and shame; and it was her glory to fall with pride. An attempt at a caress would have awakened her view of the whitherward: but she was treated as a sovereign lady rationally advised.

'Is it since Rovio, Percy?'

'Since the morning when you refused me one little flower.'

'If I had given it, you might have been saved!'

'I fancy I was doomed from the beginning.'

'I was worth a thought?'

'Worth a life! worth ten thousand!'

'You have reckoned it all like a sane man:—family, position, the world, the scandal?'

'All. I have long known that you were the mate

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for me. You have to weather a gale, Tony. It won't last. My dearest! it won't last many months. I regret the trial for you, but I shall be with you, burning for the day to reinstate you and show you the queen you are.'

'Yes, we two can have no covert dealings, Percy,' said Diana. They would be hateful—baseness! Rejecting any baseness, it seemed to her that she stood in some brightness. The light was of a lurid sort. She called on her heart to glory in it as the light of tried love, the love that defied the world. Her heart rose. She and he would at a single step give proof of their love for one another: and this kingdom of love—how different from her recent craven languors!—this kingdom awaited her, was hers for one word; and beset with the oceans of enemies, it was unassailable. If only they were true to the love they vowed, no human force could subvert it: and she doubted him as little as of herself. This new kingdom of love, never entered by her, acclaiming her, was well-nigh unimaginable, in spite of the many hooded messengers it had despatched to her of late. She could hardly believe that it had come.

'But see me as I am,' she said; she faltered it through her direct gaze on him.

'With chains to strike off? Certainly; it is done,' he replied.

'Rather heavier than those' of the slave-market! I am the deadeast of burdens. It means that your enemies, personal—if you have any, and political—you have numbers, will raise a cry. . . . Realize it. You may still be my friend. I forgive the bit of wildness.'

She provoked a renewed kissing of her hand; for

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magnanimity in love is an overflowing danger; and when he said: 'The burden you have to bear outweighs mine out of all comparison. What is it to a man—a public man or not! The woman is always the victim. That's why I have held myself in so long:—' her strung frame softened. She half yielded to the tug on her arm.

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'Is there no talking for us without foolishness?' she murmured. The foolishness had wafted her to sea, far from sight of land. 'Now sit, and speak soberly. Discuss the matter.—Yes, my hand, but I must have my wits. Leave me free to use them till we choose our path. Let it be the brains between us, as far as it can. You ask me to join my fate to yours. It signifies a sharp battle for you, dear friend; perhaps the blighting of the most promising life in England. One question is, can I countervail the burden I shall be, by such help to you as I can afford. Burden, is no word—I rake up a buried fever. I have partially lived it down, and instantly I am covered with spots. The old false charges and this plain offence make a monster of me.'

'And meanwhile you are at the disposal of the man who falsely charged you and armed the world against you,' said Dacier.

'I can fly. The world is wide.'

'Time slips. Your youth is wasted. If you escape the man, he will have triumphed in keeping you from me. And I thirst for you; I look to you for aid and counsel; I want my mate. You have not to be told how you inspire me? I am really less than half myself without you. If I am to do anything in the world, it must be with your aid, you beside me. Our hands

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are joined: one leap! Do you not see that after . . . well, it cannot be friendship. It imposes rather more on me than I can bear. You are not the woman to trifle; nor I, Tony, the man for it with a woman like you. You are my spring of wisdom. You interdict me altogether—can you?—or we unite our fates, like these hands now. Try to get yours away!’

Her effort ended in a pressure. Resistance, nay, to hesitate at the joining of her life with his after her submission to what was a scorching fire in memory, though it was less than an embrace, accused her of worse than foolishness.

‘Well, then,’ said she, ‘wait three days. Deliberate. Oh! try to know yourself, for your clear reason to guide you. Let us be something better than the crowd abusing us, not simple creatures of impulse—as we choose to call the animal. What if we had to confess that we took to our heels the moment the idea struck us! Three days. We may then pretend to a philosophical resolve. Then come to me: or write to me.’

‘How long is it since the old Rovio morning, Tony?’

‘An age.’

‘Date my deliberations from that day.’

The thought of hers having to be dated possibly from an earlier day, robbed her of her summit of feminine isolation, and she trembled, chilled and flushed; she lost all anchorage.

‘So it must be to-morrow,’ said he, reading her closely, ‘not later. Better at once. But women are not to be hurried.’

‘Oh! don’t class me, Percy, pray! I think of you, not of myself.’

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'You suppose that in a day or two I might vary?'

She fixed her eyes on him, expressing certainty of his unalterable stedfastness. The look allured. It changed: her head shook. She held away and said: 'No, leave me; leave me, dear, dear friend. Percy, my dearest! I will not "play the sex." I am yours if . . . if it is your wish. It may as well be to-morrow. Here I am useless; I cannot write, not screw^{up} a thought from my head. I dread that "process of the Law" a second time. To-morrow, if it must be. But no impulses. Fortune is blind; she may be kind to us. The blindness of Fortune is her one merit, and fools accuse her of it, and they profit by it! I fear we all of us have our turn of folly: we throw the stake for good luck. I hope my sin is not very great. I know my position is desperate. I feel a culprit. But I am sure I have courage, perhaps brains to help. At any rate, I may say this: I bring no burden to my lover that he does not know of.'

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Dacier pressed her hand. 'Money we shall have enough. My uncle has left me fairly supplied.'

'What would he think?' said Diana, half in a glimpse of meditation.

'Think me the luckiest of the breeched. I fancy I hear him thanking you for "making a man" of me.'

She blushed. Some such phrase might have been spoken by Lord Dannisburgh.

'I have but a poor sum of money,' she said. 'I may be able to write abroad. Here I cannot—if I am to be persecuted.'

'You shall write, with a new pen!' said Dacier. 'You shall live, my darling Tony. You have been

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held too long in this miserable suspension, neither maid nor wife, neither woman nor stockfish. Ah! shameful. But we'll right it. The step, for us, is the most reasonable that could be considered. You shake your head. But the circumstances make it so. Courage, and we come to happiness! And that, for you and me, means work. Look at the case of Lord and Lady Dulac. It's identical, except that she is no match beside you: and I do not compare her antecedents with yours. But she braved the leap, and forced the world to swallow it, and now, you see, she's perfectly honoured. I know a place on a peak of the Maritime Alps, exquisite in summer, cool, perfectly solitary, no English, snow round us, pastures at our feet, and the Mediterranean below. There! my Tony. To-morrow night we start. You will meet me—shall I call here?—well, then at the railway station, the South-Eastern, for Paris: say, twenty minutes to eight. I have your pledge? You will come?'

She sighed it, then said it firmly, to be worthy of him. Kind Fortune, peeping under the edge of her bandaged eyes, appeared willing to bestow the beginning of happiness upon one who thought she had a claim to a small taste of it before she died. It seemed distinguishingly done, to give a bite of happiness to the starving!

'I fancied when you were announced that you came for congratulations upon your approaching marriage, Percy.'

'I shall expect to hear them from you to-morrow evening at the station, dear Tony,' said he.

The time was again stated, the pledge repeated.

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He forbore entreaties for privileges, and won her gratitude.

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They named once more the place of meeting and the hour: more significant to them than phrases of intensest love and passion. Pressing hands sharply for pledge of good faith, they sundered.

She still had him in her eyes when he had gone. Her old world lay shattered; her new world was up without a dawn, with but one figure, the sun of it, to light the swinging strangeness.

Was ever man more marvellously transformed? or woman more wildly swept from earth into the clouds? So she mused in the hum of her tempest of heart and brain, forgetful of the years and the conditions preparing both of them for this explosion.

She had much to do: the arrangements to dismiss her servants, write to house-agents and her lawyer, and write fully to Emma, write the enigmatic farewell to the Esquarts and Lady Pennon, Mary Paynham, Arthur Rhodes, Whitmonby (stanch in friendship, but requiring friendly touches), Henry Wilmers, and Redworth. He was reserved to the last, for very enigmatical adieux: he would hear the whole story from Emma; must be left to think as he liked.

The vague letters were excellently well composed: she was going abroad, and knew not when she would return; bade her friends think the best they could of her in the meantime. Whitmonby was favoured with an anecdote, to be read as an apologue by the light of subsequent events. But the letter to Emma tasked Diana. Intending to write fully, her pen committed the briefest sentences: the tenderness she felt for Emma wakening her heart to sing that she was loved,

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loved, and knew love at last; and Emma's foreseen antagonism to the love and the step it involved rendered her pleadings in exculpation a stammered confession of guiltiness, ignominious, unworthy of the pride she felt in her lover. 'I am like a cartridge rammed into a gun, to be discharged at a certain hour to-morrow,' she wrote; and she sealed a letter so frigid that she could not decide to post it. All day she imagined hearing a distant cannonade. The light of the day following was not like earthly light. Danvers assured her there was no fog in London.

'London is insupportable; I am going to Paris, and shall send for you in a week or two,' said Diana.

'Allow me to say, ma'am, that you had better take me with you,' said Danvers.

'Are you afraid of travelling by yourself, you foolish creature?'

'No, ma'am, but I don't like any hands to undress and dress my mistress but my own.'

'I have not lost the art,' said Diana, chafing for a magic spell to extinguish the woman, to whom, immediately pitying her, she said: 'You are a good faithful soul. I think you have never kissed me. Kiss me on the forehead.'

Danvers put her lips to her mistress's forehead, and was asked: 'You still consider yourself attached to my fortunes?'

'I do, ma'am, at home or abroad; and if you will take me with you . . .'

'Not for a week or so.'

'I shall not be in the way, ma'am.'

They played at shutting eyes. The petition of Danvers was declined; which taught her the more;

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and she was emboldened to say: 'Wherever my mistress goes, she ought to have her attendant with her.' There was no answer to it but the refusal.

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The hours crumbled slowly, each with a blow at the passages of retreat. Diana thought of herself as another person, whom she observed, not counselling her, because it was a creature visibly pushed by the Fates. In her own mind she could not perceive a stone of solidity anywhere, nor a face that had the appearance of our common life. She heard the cannon at intervals. The things she said set Danvers laughing, and she wondered at the woman's mingled mirth and stiffness. Five o'clock struck. Her letters were sent to the post. Her boxes were piled from stairs to door. She read the labels, for her good-bye to the hated name of Warwick:—why ever adopted! Emma might well have questioned why! Women are guilty of such unreasoning acts! But this was the close to that chapter. The hour of six went by. Between six and seven came a sound of knocker and bell at the street-door. Danvers rushed into the sitting-room to announce that it was Mr. Redworth. Before a word could be mustered, Redworth was in the room. He said: 'You must come with me at once!'

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Dacier waited at the station, a good figure of a sentinel over his luggage and a spy for one among the inpour-

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ing passengers. Tickets had been confidently taken, the private division of the carriages happily secured. On board the boat she would be veiled. Landed on French soil, they threw off disguises, breasted the facts. And those? They lightened. He smarted with his eagerness.

He had come well in advance of the appointed time, for he would not have had her hang about there one minute alone.

Strange as this adventure was to a man of prominent station before the world, and electrical as the turning-point of a destiny that he was given to weigh deliberately and far-sightedly, Diana's image strung him to the pitch of it. He looked nowhere but ahead, like an archer putting hand for his arrow.

Presently he compared his watch and the terminus clock. She should now be arriving. He went out to meet her and do service. Many cabs and carriages were peered into, couples inspected, ladies and their maids, wives and their husbands—an August exodus to the Continent. Nowhere the starry she. But he had a fund of patience. She was now in some block of the streets. He was sure of her, sure of her courage. Tony and recreancy could not go together. Now that he called her Tony, she was his close comrade, known; the name was a caress and a promise, breathing of her, as the rose of sweetest earth. He counted it to be a month ere his family would have wind of the altered position of his affairs, possibly a year to the day of his making the dear woman his own in the eyes of the world. She was dear past computation, womanly, yet quite unlike the womanish

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women, unlike the semi-males courteously called dashing, unlike the sentimental. His present passion for her lineaments declared her surpassingly beautiful, though his critical taste was rather for the white statue that gave no warmth. She had brains and ardour, she had grace and sweetness, a playful petulance enlivening our atmosphere, and withal a refinement, a distinction, not to be classed; and justly might she dislike the being classed. Her humour was a perennial refreshment, a running well, that caught all the colours of light; her wit studded the heavens of the recollection of her. In his heart he felt that it was a stepping down for the brilliant woman to give him her hand; a condescension and an act of valour. She who always led or prompted when they conversed, had now in her generosity abandoned the lead and herself to him, and she deserved his utmost honouring.

But where was she? He looked at his watch, looked at the clock. They said the same: ten minutes to the moment of the train's departure.

A man may still afford to dwell on the charms and merits of his heart's mistress while he has ten minutes to spare. The dropping minutes, however, detract one by one from her individuality and threaten to sink her in her sex entirely. It is the inexorable clock that says she is as other women. Dacier began to chafe. He was unaccustomed to the part he was performing:—and if she failed him? She would not. She would be late, though. No, she was in time! His long legs crossed the platform to overtake a tall lady veiled and dressed in black. He lifted his hat; he heard an alarmed little cry and retired. The clock

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said, Five minutes: a secret chiromancy in addition indicating on its face the word Fool. An odd word to be cast at him! It rocked the icy pillar of pride in the background of his nature. Certainly standing solus at the hour of eight P.M., he would stand for a fool. Hitherto he had never allowed a woman the chance to posture him in that character. He strode out, returned, scanned every lady's shape, and for a distraction watched the veiled lady whom he had accosted. Her figure suggested pleasant features. Either she was disappointed or she was an adept. At the shutting of the gates she glided through, not without a fearful look around and at him. She disappeared. Dacier shrugged. His novel assimilation to the rat-rabble of amatory intriguers tapped him on the shoulder unpleasantly. A luckless member of the fraternity too! The bell, the clock and the train gave him his title. 'And I was ready to fling down everything for the woman!' The trial of a superb London gentleman's resources in the love-passion could not have been much keener. No sign of her.

He who stands ready to defy the world, and is baffled by the absence of his fair assistant, is the fool doubled, so completely the fool that he heads the universal shout; he does not spare himself. The sole consolation he has is to revile the sex. Women! women! Whom have they not made a fool of! His uncle as much as any—and professing to know them. Him also! the man proud of escaping their wiles. 'For this woman . . .!' he went on saying after he had lost sight of her in her sex's trickeries. The nearest he could get to her was to conceive that the arrant coquette was now laughing at her utter sub-

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jugation and befooling of the man popularly supposed invincible. If it were known of him! The idea of his being a puppet fixed for derision was madly dis-tempering. He had only to ask the affirmative of Constance Asper to-morrow! A vision of his determining to do it, somewhat comforted him.

Dacier walked up and down the platform, passing his pile of luggage, solitary and eloquent on the barrow. Never in his life having been made to look a fool, he felt the red heat of the thing, as a man who has not blessedly become acquainted with the swish in boyhood finds his untempered blood turn to poison at a blow; he cannot healthily take a licking. But then it had been so splendid an insanity when he urged Diana to fly with him. Any one but a woman would have appreciated the sacrifice.

His luggage had to be removed. He dropped his porter a lordly fee and drove home. From that astonished solitude he strolled to his Club. Curiosity mastering the wrath it was mixed with, he left his Club and crossed the park southward in the direction of Diana's house, abusing her for her inveterate attachment to the regions of Westminster. There she used to receive Lord Dannisburgh; innocently, no doubt—assuredly quite innocently; and her husband had quitted the district. Still it was rather childish for a woman to be always haunting the seats of Parliament. Her disposition to imagine that she was able to inspire statesmen came in for a share of ridicule; for when we know ourselves to be ridiculous, a retort in kind, unjust upon consideration, is balm. The woman dragged him down to the level of common men; that was the peculiar injury, and it

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swept her undistinguished into the stream of women. In appearance, as he had proved to the fellows at his Club, he was perfectly self-possessed, mentally distracted and bitter, hating himself for it, snapping at the cause of it. She had not merely disappointed, she had slashed his high conceit of himself, curbed him at the first animal dash forward, and he champed the bit with the fury of a thwarted racer.

Twice he passed her house. Of course no light was shown at her windows. They were scanned malignly.

He held it due to her to call and inquire whether there was any truth in the report of Mrs. Warwick's illness. Mrs. Warwick! She meant to keep the name.

A maid-servant came to the door with a candle in her hand revealing red eyelids. She was not aware that her mistress was unwell. Her mistress had left home some time after six o'clock with a gentleman. She was unable to tell him the gentleman's name. William, the footman, had opened the door to him. Her mistress's maid Mrs. Danvers had gone to the Play—with William. She thought that Mrs. Danvers might know who the gentleman was. The girl's eyelids blinked, and she turned aside. Dacier consoled her with a piece of gold, saying he would come and see Mrs. Danvers in the morning.

His wrath was partially quieted by the new speculations offered up to it. He could not conjure a suspicion of treachery in Diana Warwick; and a treachery so foully cynical! She had gone with a gentleman. He guessed on all sides; he struck at walls, as in complete obscurity.

The mystery of her conduct troubling his wits for

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the many hours was explained by Danvers. With a sympathy that she was at pains to show, she informed him that her mistress was not at all unwell, and related of how Mr. Redworth had arrived just when her mistress was on the point of starting for Paris and the Continent; because poor Lady Dunstane was this very day to undergo an operation under the surgeons at Copsley, and she did not wish her mistress to be present, but Mr. Redworth thought her mistress ought to be there, and he had gone down thinking she was there, and then came back in hot haste to fetch her, and was just in time, as it happened, by two or three minutes.

Dacier rewarded the sympathetic woman for her intelligence, which appeared to him to have shot so far as to require a bribe. Gratitude to the person soothing his unwontedly ruffled temper was the cause of the indiscretion in the amount he gave.

It appeared to him that he ought to proceed to Copsley for tidings of Lady Dunstane. Thither he sped by the handy railway and a timely train. He reached the park-gates at three in the afternoon, telling his flyman to wait. As he advanced by short cuts over the grass, he studied the look of the rows of windows. She was within, and strangely to his clouded senses she was no longer Tony, no longer the deceptive woman he could in justice abuse. He and she, so close to union, were divided. A hand resembling the palpable interposition of Fate had swept them asunder. Having the poorest right—not any—to reproach her, he was disarmed, he felt himself a miserable intruder; he summoned his passion to excuse him, and gained some unsatisfied repose of

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mind by contemplating its devoted sincerity; which roused an effort to feel for the sufferer—Diana Warwick's friend. With the pair of surgeons named, the most eminent of their day, in attendance, the case must be serious. To vindicate the breaker of her pledge, his present plight likewise assured him of that, and nearing the house he adopted instinctively the funeral step and mood, just sensible of a novel smallness. For the fortifying testimony of his passion had to be put aside, he was obliged to disavow it for a simpler motive if he applied at the door. He stressed the motive, produced the sentiment, and passed thus naturally into hypocrisy, as lovers precipitated by their blood among the crises of human conditions are often forced to do. He had come to inquire after Lady Dunstane. He remembered that it had struck him as a duty, on hearing of her dangerous illness.

The door opened before he touched the bell. Sir Lukin knocked against him and stared.

'Ah!—who?—you?' he said, and took him by the arm and pressed him on along the gravel. 'Dacier, are you? Redworth's in there. Come on a step, come! It's the time for us to pray. Good God! There's mercy for sinners. If ever there was a man! . . . But, oh, good God! she's in their hands this minute. My saint is under the knife.'

Dacier was hurried forward by a powerful hand. 'They say it lasts about five minutes, four and a half—or more! My God! When they turned me out of her room, she smiled to keep me calm. She said: "Dear husband":—the veriest wretch and brutallest husband ever poor woman . . . and a saint! a saint on earth! Emmy!' Tears burst from him.

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He pulled forth his watch and asked Dacier for the time.

‘A minute’s gone in a minute. It’s three minutes and a half. Come faster. They’re at their work! It’s life or death. I’ve had death about me. But for a woman! and your wife! and that brave soul! She bears it so. Women *are* the bravest creatures afloat. If they make her shriek, it’ll be only if she thinks I’m out of hearing. No: I see her. She bears it!—They mayn’t have begun yet. It may all be over! Come into the wood. I must pray. I must go on my knees.’

Two or three steps in the wood, at the mossed roots of a beech, he fell kneeling, muttering, exclaiming.

The tempest of penitence closed with a blind look at his watch, which he left dangling. He had to talk to drug his thoughts.

‘And mind you,’ said he, when he had rejoined Dacier and was pushing his arm again, rounding beneath the trees to a view of the house, ‘for a man steeped in damnable iniquity! She bears it all for me, because I begged her, for the chance of her living. It’s my doing—this knife! Macpherson swears there *is* a chance. Thomson backs him. But they’re at her, cutting! . . . The pain must be awful—the mere pain! The gentlest creature ever drew breath! And women fear blood—and her own!—And a head! She ought to have married the best man alive, not a——! I can’t remember her once complaining of me—not once. A common donkey compared to her! All I can do is to pray. And she knows the beast I am, and has forgiven me. There isn’t a blessed text of

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Scripture that doesn't cry out in praise of her. And they cut and hack . . .!' He dropped his head. The vehement big man heaved, shuddering. His lips worked fast.

'She is not alone with them, unsupported?' said Dacier.

Sir Lukin moaned for relief. He caught his watch swinging and stared at it. 'What a good fellow you were to come! Now's the time to know your friends. There's Diana Warwick, true as steel. Redworth came on her tiptoe for the Continent; he had only to mention . . . Emmy wanted to spare her. She would not have sent—wanted to spare her the sight. I offered to stand by . . . Chased me out. Diana Warwick's there:—worth fifty of me! Dacier, I've had my sword-blade tried by Indian horsemen, and I know what true as steel means. She's there. And I know she shrinks from the sight of blood. My oath on it, she won't quiver a muscle! Next to my wife, you may take my word for it, Dacier, Diana Warwick is the pick of living women. I could prove it. They go together. I could prove it over and over. She's the loyallest woman anywhere. Her one error was that marriage of hers, and how she ever pitched herself into it, none of us can guess.' After a while, he said: 'Look at your watch.'

'Nearly twenty minutes gone.'

'Are they afraid to send out word? It's that window!' He covered his eyes, and muttered, sighed. He became abruptly composed in appearance. 'The worst of a black sheep like me is, I'm such an infernal sinner, that Providence! . . . But both surgeons gave me their word of honour that there *was* a chance. A

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chance! But it's the end of me if Emmy——. Good God! no! the knife's enough; don't let her be killed! It would be murder. Here am I talking! I ought to be praying. I should have sent for the parson to help me; I can't get the proper words—bellow like a rascal trooper strung up for the cat. It must be twenty-five minutes now. Who's alive now!

Dacier thought of the Persian Queen crying for news of the slaughtered, with her mind on her lord and husband: 'Who is *not* dead?' Diana exalted poets, and here was an example of the truth of one to nature, and of the poor husband's depth of feeling. They said not the same thing, but it was the same cry de profundis.

He saw Redworth coming at a quick pace.

Redworth raised his hand. Sir Lukin stopped. 'He's waving!'

'It's good,' said Dacier.

'Speak! are you sure?'

'I judge by the look.'

Redworth stepped unfalteringly.

'It's over, all well,' he said. He brushed his forehead and looked sharply cheerful.

'My dear fellow! my dear fellow!' Sir Lukin grasped his hand. 'It's more than I deserve. Over? She has borne it! She would have gone to heaven and left me——! Is she safe?'

'Doing well.'

'Have you seen the surgeons?'

'Mrs. Warwick.'

'What did she say?'

'A nod of the head.'

'You saw her?'

'She came to the stairs.'

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'Diana Warwick never lies. She wouldn't lie, not with a nod! They've saved Emmy—do you think?'

'It looks well.'

'My girl has passed the worst of it?'

'That's over.'

Sir Lukin gazed glassily. The necessity of his agony was to lean to the belief, at a beckoning, that Providence pardoned him, in tenderness for what would have been his loss. He realized it, and experienced a sudden calm: testifying to the positive pardon.

'Now, look here, you two fellows, listen half a moment,' he addressed Redworth and Dacier; 'I've been the biggest scoundrel of a husband unhung, and married to a saint; and if she's only saved to me, I'll swear to serve her faithfully, or may a thunderbolt knock me to perdition! and thank God for his justice! Prayers are answered, mind you, though a fellow may be as black as a sweep. Take a warning from me. I've had my lesson.'

Dacier soon after talked of going. The hope of seeing Diana had abandoned him, the desire was almost extinct.

Sir Lukin could not let him go. He yearned to preach to him or any one from his personal text of the sinner honourably remorseful on account of and notwithstanding the forgiveness of Providence, and he implored Dacier and Redworth by turns to be careful when they married of how they behaved to the sainted women their wives; never to lend ear to the devil, nor to believe, as he had done, that there is no such thing as a devil, for he had been the victim of him, and he knew. The devil, he loudly proclaimed, has a multiplicity of lures, and none more deadly than

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when he baits with a petticoat. He had been hooked, and had found the devil in person. He begged them urgently to keep his example in memory. By following this and that wildfire he had stuck himself in a bog—a common result with those who would not see the devil at work upon them; and it required his dear suffering saint to be at death's doors, cut to pieces and gasping, to open his eyes. But, thank heaven, they were opened at last! Now he saw the beast he was: a filthy beast! unworthy of tying his wife's shoestrings. No confessions could expose to them the beast he was. But let them not fancy there was no such thing as an active DEVIL about the world.

Redworth divined that the simply sensational man abased himself before Providence and heaped his gratitude on the awful Power in order to render it difficult for the promise of the safety of his wife to be withdrawn.

He said: 'There is good hope'; and drew an admonition upon himself.

'Ah! my dear good Redworth,' Sir Lukin sighed from his elevation of outspoken penitence: 'you will see as I do some day. It *is* the devil, think as you like of it. When you have pulled down all the Institutions of the Country, what do you expect but ruins? That Radicalism of yours has its day. You have to go through a wrestle like mine to understand it. You say, the day is fine, let's have our game. Old England pays for it! Then you'll find how you love the old land of your birth—the noblest ever called a nation!—with your Corn Law Repeals!—eh, Dacier?—You'll own it was the devil tempted you. I hear you apologizing. Pray God, it mayn't be too late!'

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He looked up at the windows. 'She may be sinking!' 'Havest no fears,' Redworth said; 'Mrs. Warwick would send for you.'

'She would. Diana Warwick would be sure to send. Next to my wife, Diana Warwick's . . . she'd send, never fear. I dread that room. I'd rather go through a regiment of sabres—though it's over now. And Diana Warwick stood it. The worst is over, you told me. By heaven! women are wonderful creatures. But she hasn't a peer for courage. I could trust her—most extraordinary thing, that marriage of hers!—not a soul has ever been able to explain it:—trust her to the death.'

Redworth left them, and Sir Lukin ejaculated on the merits of Diana Warwick to Dacier. He laughed scornfully: 'And that's the woman the world attacks for want of virtue! Why, a fellow hasn't a chance with her, not a chance. She comes out in blazing armour if you unmask a battery. I don't know how it might be if she were in love with a fellow. I doubt her thinking men worth the trouble. I never met the man. But if she *were* to take fire, Troy'd be nothing to it. I wonder whether we might go in: I dread the house.'

Dacier spoke of departing.

'No, no, wait,' Sir Lukin begged him. 'I was talking about women. They *are* the devil—or he makes most use of them: and you must learn to see the cloven foot under their petticoats, if you're to escape them. There's no protection in being in love with your wife; I married for love; I am, I always have been, in love with her; and I went to the deuce. The music struck up and away I waltzed. A woman like Diana

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Warwick might keep a fellow straight, because she's all round you; she's man and woman in brains; and legged like a deer, and breasted like a swan, and a regular sheaf of arrows in her eyes. Dark women—ah! But she has a contempt for us, you know. That's the secret of her.—Redworth's at the door. Bad? Is it bad? I never was particularly fond of that house—hated it. I love it now for Emmy's sake. I couldn't live in another—though I should be haunted. Rather her ghost than nothing—though I'm an infernal coward about the next world. But if you're right with religion you needn't fear. What I can't comprehend in Redworth is his Radicalism, and getting richer and richer.'

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'It's not a vow of poverty,' said Dacier.

'He'll find they don't coalesce, or his children will. Once the masses are uppermost! It's a bad day, Dacier, when we've no more gentlemen in the land. Emmy backs him, so I hold my tongue. To-morrow's a Sunday. I wish you were staying here; I'd take you to church with me—we shirk it when we haven't a care. It couldn't do you harm. I've heard capital sermons. I've always had the good habit of going to church, Dacier. Now's the time for remembering them. Ah, my dear fellow, I'm not a parson. It would have been better for me if I had been.'

And for you too! his look added plainly. He longed to preach; he was impelled to chatter.

Redworth reported the patient perfectly quiet, breathing calmly.

'Laudanum?' asked Sir Lukin. 'Now there's a poison we've got to bless! And we set up in our wisdom for knowing what is good for us!'

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He had talked his hearers into a stupefied assent to anything he uttered.

'Mrs. Warwick would like to see you in two or three minutes; she will come down,' Redworth said to Dacier.

'That looks well, eh? That looks bravely,' Sir Lukin cried. 'Diana Warwick wouldn't leave the room without a certainty. I dread the look of those men; I shall have to shake their hands! And so I do, with all my heart: only—— But God bless them! But we must go in, if she's coming down.'

They entered the house, and sat in the drawing-room, where Sir Lukin took up from the table one of his wife's Latin books, a Persius, bearing her marginal notes. He dropped his head on it, with sobs.

The voice of Diana recalled him to the present. She counselled him to control himself; in that case he might for one moment go to the chamber-door and assure himself by the silence that his wife was resting. She brought permission from the surgeons and doctor, on his promise to be still.

Redworth supported Sir Lukin tottering out.

Dacier had risen. He was petrified by Diana's face, and thought of her as whirled from him in a storm, bearing the marks of it. Her underlip hung for short breaths; the big drops of her recent anguish still gathered on her brows; her eyes were tearless, lustreless; she looked ancient in youth, and distant by a century, like a tall woman of the vaults, issuing white-ringed, not of our light.

She shut her mouth for strength to speak to him.

He said: 'You are not ill? You are strong?'

'I? Oh, strong. I will sit. I cannot be absent

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longer than two minutes. The trial of her strength is to come. If it were courage, we might be sure. The day is fine?’

‘A perfect August day.’

‘I held her through it. I am thankful to heaven it was no other hand than mine. She wished to spare me. She was glad of her Tony when the time came. I thought I was a coward—I could have changed with her to save her; I am a strong woman, fit to submit to that work. I should not have borne it as she did. She expected to sink under it. All her dispositions were made for death—bequests to servants and to . . . to friends: every secret liking they had, thought of!’

Diana clenched her hands.

‘I hope!’ Dacier said.

‘You shall hear regularly. Call at Sir William’s house to-morrow. He sleeps here to-night. The suspense must last for days. It is a question of vital power to bear the shock. She has a mind so like a flying spirit that, just before the moment, she made Mr. Lanyan Thomson smile by quoting some saying of her Tony’s.’

‘Try by-and-by to recollect it,’ said Dacier.

‘And you were with that poor man! How did he pass the terrible time? I pitied him.’

‘He suffered; he prayed.’

‘It was the best he could do. Mr. Redworth was as he always is at the trial, a pillar. Happy the friend who knows him for one! He never thinks of himself in a crisis. He is sheer strength to comfort and aid. They will drive you to the station with Mr. Thomson. He returns to relieve Sir William to-morrow. I have learnt to admire the men of the knife! No profession

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equals theirs in self-command and beneficence. Dr. Bridgenorth is permanent here.'

'I have a fly, and go back immediately,' said Dacier.

'She shall hear of your coming. Adieu.'

Diana gave him her hand. It was gently pressed.

A wonderment at the utter change of circumstances took Dacier passingly at the sight of her vanishing figure.

He left the house, feeling he dared have no personal wishes. It had ceased to be the lover's hypocrisy with him.

The crisis of mortal peril in that house enveloped its inmates, and so wrought in him as to enshroud the stripped outcrying husband, of whom he had no clear recollection, save of the man's agony. The two women, striving against death, devoted in friendship, were the sole living images he brought away; they were a new vision of the world and our life.

He hoped with Diana, bled with her. She rose above him high, beyond his transient human claims. He envied Redworth the common friendly right to be near her. In reflection, long after, her simplicity of speech, washed pure of the blood-emotions, for token of her great nature, during those two minutes of their sitting together, was dearer, sweeter to the lover than if she had shown by touch or word that a faint allusion to their severance was in her mind; and this despite a certain vacancy it created.

He received formal information of Lady Dunstane's progress to convalescence. By degrees the simply official tone of Diana's letters combined with the ceasing of them and the absence of her personal charm to make a gentleman not remarkable for

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violence in the passion so calmly reasonable as to think the dangerous presence best avoided for a time. Subject to fits of the passion, he certainly was, but his position in the world was a counselling spouse, jealous of his good name. He did not regret his proposal to take the leap; he would not have regretted it if taken. On the safe side of the abyss, however, it wore a gruesome look to his cool blood.

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Among the various letters inundating Sir Lukin Dunstane upon the report of the triumph of surgical skill achieved by Sir William Macpherson and Mr. Lanyan Thomson, was one from Lady Wathin, dated Adlands, an estate of Mr. Quintin Manx's in Warwickshire, petitioning for the shortest line of reassurance as to the condition of her dear cousin, and an intimation of the period when it might be deemed possible for a relative to call and offer her sincere congratulations: a letter deserving a personal reply, one would suppose. She received the following, in a succinct female hand corresponding to its terseness; every *t* righteously crossed, every *i* punctiliously dotted, as she remarked to Constance Asper, to whom the communication was transferred for perusal:—

'DEAR LADY WATHIN,

'Lady Dunstane is gaining strength. The measure of her pulse indicates favourably. She shall be informed in good time of your solicitude for her

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recovery. The day cannot yet be named for visits of any kind. You will receive information as soon as the house is open.

‘I have undertaken the task of correspondence, and beg you to believe me,

‘Very truly yours,

‘D. A. WARWICK.’

Miss Asper speculated on the handwriting of her rival. She obtained permission to keep the letter, with the intention of transmitting it per post to an advertising interpreter of character in caligraphy.

Such was the character of the fair young heiress, exhibited by her performances much more patently than the run of a quill would reveal it.

She said, ‘It is rather a pretty hand, I think.’

‘Mrs. Warwick is a practised writer,’ said Lady Wathin. ‘Writing is her profession, if she has any. She goes to nurse my cousin. Her husband says she is an excellent nurse. He says what he can for her. But you must be in the last extremity, or she is ice. His appeal to her has been totally disregarded. Until he drops down in the street, as his doctor expects him to do some day, she will continue her course; and even then . . .’ An adventuress desiring her freedom! Lady Wathin looked. She was too devout a woman to say what she thought. But she knew the world to be very wicked. Of Mrs. Warwick, her opinion was formed. She would not have charged the individual creature with a criminal design; all she did was to stuff the person her virtue abhorred with the wickedness of the world, and that is a common process in antipathy.

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She sympathized, moreover, with the beautiful devotedness of the wealthy heiress to her ideal of man. It had led her to make the acquaintance of old Lady Dacier, at the house in town, where Constance Asper had first met Percy; Mrs. Grafton Winstanley's house, representing neutral territory or debateable land for the occasional intercourse of the upper class and the climbing in the professions or in commerce; Mrs. Grafton Winstanley being on the edge of aristocracy by birth, her husband, like Mr. Quintin Manx, a lord of fleets. Old Lady Dacier's bluntness in speaking of her grandson would have shocked Lady Wathin as much as it astonished, had she been less of an ardent absorber of aristocratic manners. Percy was plainly called a donkey, for hanging off and on with a handsome girl of such expectations as Miss Asper. 'But what you can't do with a horse, you can't hope to do with a donkey.' She added that she had come for the purpose of seeing the heiress, of whose points of person she delivered a judgement critically appreciative as a horse-fancier's on the racing turf. 'If a girl like that holds to it, she's pretty sure to get him at last. It's no use to pull his neck down to the water.'

Lady Wathin delicately alluded to rumours of an entanglement, an admiration he had, ahem.

'A married woman,' the veteran nodded. 'I thought that was off? She must be a clever intriguer to keep him so long.'

'She is undoubtedly clever,' said Lady Wathin, and it was mumbled in her hearing: 'The woman seems to have a taste for our family.'

They agreed that they could see nothing to be done.

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The young lady must wither, Mrs. Warwick have her day. The veteran confided her experienced why to Lady Wathin: 'All the tales you tell of a woman of that sort are sharp sauce to the palates of men.'

They might be, to the men of the dreadful gilded idle class!

Mrs. Warwick's day appeared indefinitely prolonged, judging by Percy Dacier's behaviour to Miss Asper. Lady Wathin watched them narrowly when she had the chance, a little ashamed of her sex, or indignant rather at his display of courtliness in exchange for her open betrayal of her preference. It was almost to be wished that she would punish him by sacrificing herself to one of her many brilliant proposals of marriage. But such are women!—precisely because of his holding back he tightened the cord attaching him to her tenacious heart. This was the truth. For the rest, he was gracefully courteous; an observer could perceive the charm he exercised. He talked with a ready affability, latterly with greater social ease; evidently not acting the indifferent conqueror, or so consummately acting it as to mask the air. And yet he was ambitious, and he was not rich. Notoriously was he ambitious, and with wealth to back him, a great entertaining house, troops of adherents, he would gather influence, be propelled to leadership. The vexation of a constant itch to speak to him on the subject, and the recognition that he knew it all as well as she, tormented Lady Wathin. He gave her comforting news of her dear cousin in the Winter.

'You have heard from Mrs. Warwick?' she said.

He replied, 'I had the latest from Mr. Redworth.'

'Mrs. Warwick has relinquished her post?'

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'When she does, you may be sure that Lady Dunstane is perfectly re-established.'

'She is an excellent nurse.'

'The best, I believe.'

'It is a good quality in sickness.'

'Proof of good all through.'

'Her husband might have the advantage of it. His state is really pathetic. If she has feeling, and could only be made aware, she might perhaps be persuaded to pass from the friendly to the wifely duty.'

Mr. Dacier bent his head to listen, and he bowed.

He was fast in the toils; and though we have assurance that evil cannot triumph in perpetuity, the aspect of it throning provokes a kind of despair. How strange if ultimately the lawyers once busy about the uncle were to take up the case of the nephew, and this time reverse the issue, by proving it! For poor Mr. Warwick was emphatic on the question of his honour. It excited him dangerously. He was long-suffering, but with the slightest clue terrible. The unknotting of the entanglement might thus happen:—and Constance Asper would welcome her hero still.

Meanwhile there was actually nothing to be done: a deplorable absence of motive villainy; apparently an absence of the beneficent Power directing events to their proper termination. Lady Wathin heard of her cousin's having been removed to Cowes in May, for light Solent and Channel voyages on board Lord Esquart's yacht. She heard also of heavy failures and convulsions in the City of London, quite unconscious that the Fates, or agents of the Providence she invoked to precipitate the catastrophe, were then

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beginning cavernously their performance of the part of villain in Diana's history.

Diana and Emma enjoyed happy quiet sailings under May breezes on the many-coloured South-western waters, heart in heart again; the physical weakness of the one, the moral weakness of the other, creating that mutual dependency which makes friendship a pulsating tie. Diana's confession had come of her letter to Emma. When the latter was able to examine her correspondence, Diana brought her the heap for perusal, her own sealed scribble, throbbing with all the fatal might-have-been, under her eyes. She could have concealed and destroyed it. She sat beside her friend, awaiting her turn, hearing her say at the superscription: 'Your writing, Tony?' and she nodded. She was asked: 'Shall I read it?' She answered: 'Read.' They were soon locked in an embrace. Emma had no perception of coldness through those brief dry lines; her thought was of the matter.

'The danger is over now?' she said.

'Yes, that danger is over now.'

'You have weathered it?'

'I love him.'

Emma dropped a heavy sigh in pity of her, remotely in compassion for Redworth, the loving and unbeloved. She was too humane and wise of our nature to chide her Tony for having her sex's heart. She had charity to bestow on women; in defence of them against men and the world, it was a charity armed with the weapons of battle. The wife madly stripped before the world by a jealous husband, and left chained to the rock, her youth wasting, her blood

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arrested, her sensibilities chilled and assailing her under their multitudinous disguises, and for whom the world is merciless, called forth Emma's tenderest commiseration; and that wife being Tony, and stricken with the curse of love, in other circumstances the blessing, Emma bled for her.

'But nothing desperate?' she said.

'No; you have saved me.'

'I would knock at death's doors again, and pass them, to be sure of that.'

'Kiss me; you may be sure. I would not put my lips to your cheek if there were danger of my faltering.'

'But you love him.'

'I do: and because I love him I will not let him be fettered to me.'

'You will see him.'

'Do not imagine that his persuasions undermined your Tony. I am subject to panics.'

'Was it your husband?'

'I had a visit from Lady Wathin. She knows him. She came as peacemaker. She managed to hint at his authority. Then came a letter from him—of supplication, interpenetrated with the hint: a suffused atmosphere. Upon that, unexpected by me, my—let me call him so once, forgive me!—lover came. Oh! he loves me, or did then. Percy! He had been told that I should be claimed. I felt myself the creature I am—a wreck of marriage. But I fancied I could serve him:—I saw golden. My vanity was the chief traitor. Cowardice of course played a part. In few things that we do, where self is concerned, will cowardice not be found. And the hallucination

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colours it to seem a lovely heroism. That was the second time Mr. Redworth arrived. I am always at crossways, and he rescues me; on this occasion unknowingly.'

'There's a divinity . . .' said Emma. 'When I think of it I perceive that Patience is our beneficent fairy godmother, who brings us our harvest in the long result.'

'My dear, does she bring us our labourers' rations, to sustain us for the day?' said Diana.

'Poor fare, but enough.'

'I fear I was born godmotherless.'

'You have stores of patience, Tony; only now and then fits of desperation.'

'My nature's frailty, the gap in it: we will give it no fine names—they cover our pitfalls. I am open to be carried on a tide of unreasonableness when the coward cries out. But I can say, dear, that after one rescue, a similar temptation is unlikely to master me. I do not subscribe to the world's decrees for love of the monster, though I am beginning to understand the dues of allegiance. We have ceased to write letters. You may have faith in me.'

'I have, with my whole soul,' said Emma.

So the confession closed; and in the present instance there were not any forgotten chambers to be unlocked and ransacked for addenda confessions.

The subjects discoursed of by the two endeared the hours to them. They were aware that the English of the period would have laughed a couple of women to scorn for venturing on them, and they were not a little hostile in consequence, and shot their epigrams profusely, applauding the keener that appeared to score

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the giant bulk of their intolerant enemy, who holds the day, but not the morrow. Us too he holds for the day, to punish us if we have temporal cravings. He scatters his gifts to the abject; tossing to us rebels bare dog-biscuit. But the life of the spirit is beyond his region; we have our morrow in his day when we crave nought of him. Diana and Emma delighted to discover that they were each the rebel of their earlier and less experienced years, each a member of the malcontent minor faction, the salt of earth, to whom their salt must serve for nourishment, as they admitted, relishing it determinedly, not without gratification.

Sir Lukin was busy upon his estate in Scotland. They summoned young Arthur Rhodes to the island, that he might have a taste of the new scenes. Diana was always wishing for his instruction and refreshment; and Redworth came to spend a Saturday and Sunday with them, and showed his disgust of the idle boy, as usual, at the same time consulting them on the topic of furniture for the Berkshire mansion he had recently bought, rather vaunting the Spanish pictures his commissioner in Madrid was transmitting. The pair of rebels, vexed by his treatment of the respectful junior, took him for an incarnation of their enemy, and pecked and worried the man astonishingly. He submitted to it like the placable giant. Yes, he was a Liberal, and furnishing and decorating the house in the stability of which he trusted. Why not? We must accept the world as it is, try to improve it by degrees.—Not so: humanity will not wait for you, the victims are shrieking beneath the bricks of your enormous edifice, behind the canvas of your

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pictures. 'But you may really say that luxurious yachting is an odd kind of insurgency,' avowed Diana. 'It's the tangle we are in.'

'It's the coat we have to wear; and why fret at it for being comfortable?'

'I don't half enough, when I think of my shivering neighbours.'

'Money is of course a rough test of virtue,' said Redworth. 'We have no other general test.'

Money! The ladies proclaimed it a mere material test; Diana, gazing on sunny sea, with an especial disdain. And name us your sort of virtue. There is more virtue in poverty. He denied that. Inflexibly British, he declared money, and also the art of getting money, to be hereditary virtues, deserving of their reward. The reward a superior wealth and its fruits? Yes, the power to enjoy and spread enjoyment: and let idleness envy both! He abused idleness, and by implication the dilettante insurgency fostering it. However, he was compensatingly heterodox in his view of the Law's persecution of women; their pertinacious harpings on the theme had brought him to that; and in consideration of the fact, as they looked from yacht to shore, of their being rebels participating largely in the pleasures of the tyrant's court, they allowed him to silence them, and forgave him.

Thoughts upon money and idleness were in confusion with Diana. She had a household to support in London, and she was not working; she could not touch THE CANTATRICE while Emma was near. Possibly, she again ejaculated, the Redworths of the world were right: the fruitful labours were with the mattock and hoe, or the mind directing them. It was a crushing

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invasion of materialism, so she proposed a sail to the coast of France, and thither they flew, touching Cherbourg, Alderney, Sark, Guernsey, and sighting the low Brittany rocks. Memorable days to Arthur Rhodes. He saw perpetually the one golden centre in new scenes. He heard her voice, he treasured her sayings; her gestures, her play of lip and eyelid, her lift of head, lightest movements, were imprinted on him, surely as the heavens are mirrored in the quiet seas, firmly and richly as earth answers to the sprinkled grain. For he was blissfully athirst, untroubled by a hope. She gave him more than she knew of: a present that kept its beating heart into the future; a height of sky, a belief in nobility, permanent through manhood down to age. She was his foam-born Goddess of those leaping waters; differently hued, crescented, a different influence. He had a happy week, and it charmed Diana to hear him tell her so. In spite of Redworth, she had faith in the fruit-bearing powers of a time of simple happiness, and shared the youth's in reflecting it. Only the happiness must be simple, that of the glass to the lovely face: no straining of arms to retain, no heaving of the bosom in vacancy.

His poverty and capacity for pure enjoyment led her to think of him almost clingingly when hard news reached her from the quaint old City of London, which despises poverty and authorcraft and all mean adventurers, and bows to the lordly merchant, the mighty financier, Redworth's incarnation of the virtues. Happy days on board the yacht Clarissa! Diana had to recall them with effort. They who sow their money for a promising high percentage have built their habitations on the sides of the most eruptive

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mountain in Europe. Ætna supplies more certain harvests, wrecks fewer vineyards and peaceful dwellings. The greed of gain is our volcano. Her wonder leapt up at the slight inducement she had received to embark her money in this Company: a South-American mine, collapsed almost within hearing of the trumpets of prospectus, after two punctual payments of the half-yearly interest. A Mrs. Ferdinand Cherson, an elder sister of the pretty Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett, had talked to her of the cost of things one afternoon at Lady Singleby's garden-party, and spoken of the City as the place to help to swell an income, if only you have an acquaintance with some of the chief City men. The great mine was named, and the rush for allotments. She knew a couple of the Directors. They vowed to her that ten per cent. was a trifle; the fortune to be expected out of the mine was already clearly estimable at forties and fifties. For their part they anticipated cent. per cent. Mrs. Cherson said she wanted money, and had therefore invested in the mine. It seemed so consequent, the cost of things being enormous! She and her sister Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett owned husbands who did their bidding, because of their having the brains, it might be understood. Thus five thousand pounds invested would speedily bring five thousand pounds per annum. Diana had often dreamed of the City of London as the seat of magic; and taking the City's contempt for authorcraft and the intangible as, from its point of view, justly founded, she had mixed her dream strangely with an ancient notion of the City's probity. Her broker's shaking head did not damp her ardour for shares to the full amount of her ability to purchase.

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She remembered her satisfaction at the allotment; the golden castle shot up from this fountain mine. She had a frenzy for mines and fished in some English with smaller sums. 'I am now a miner,' she had exclaimed, between dismay at her audacity and the pride of it. Why had she not consulted Redworth? He would peremptorily have stopped the frenzy in its first intoxicating effervescence. She, like Mrs. Cherson, like all women who have plunged upon the cost of things, wanted money. She naturally went to the mine. Address him for counsel in the person of dupe, she could not; shame was a barrier. Could she tell him that the prattle of a woman, spendthrift as Mrs. Cherson, had induced her to risk her money? Latterly the reports of Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett were not of the flavour to make association of their names agreeable to his hearing.

She had to sit down in the buzz of her self-reproaches and amazement at the behaviour of that reputable City, shrug, and recommence the labour of her pen. Material misfortune had this one advantage; it kept her from speculative thoughts of her lover, and the meaning of his absence and silence.

Diana's perusal of the incomplete CANTATRICE was done with the cold critical eye interpreting for the public. She was forced to write on nevertheless, and exactly in the ruts of the foregoing matter. It propelled her. No longer perversely, of necessity she wrote her best, convinced that the work was doomed to unpopularity, resolved that it should be at least a victory in style. A fit of angry cynicism now and then set her composing phrases as baits for the critics to quote, condemnatory of the attractiveness of the work. Her mood was bad. In addition, she

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found Whitmonby cool; he complained of the coolness of her letter of adieu; complained of her leaving London so long. How could she expect to be his Queen of the London Salon if she lost touch of the topics? He made no other allusion. They were soon on amicable terms, at the expense of flattering arts that she had not hitherto practised. But Westlake revealed unimagined marvels of the odd corners of the masculine bosom. He was the man of her circle the neatest in epigram, the widest of survey, an Oriental traveller, a distinguished writer, and if not personally bewitching, remarkably a gentleman of the world. He was wounded; he said as much. It came to this: admitting that he had no claims, he declared it to be unbearable for him to see another preferred. The happier was unmentioned, and Diana scraped his wound by rallying him. He repeated that he asked only to stand on equal terms with the others; her preference of one was past his tolerance. She told him that since leaving Lady Dunstane she had seen but Whitmonby, Wilmers, and him. He smiled sarcastically, saying he had never had a letter from her, except the formal one of invitation.

‘Powers of blarney, have you forsaken a daughter of Erin?’ cried Diana. ‘Here is a friend who has a craving for you, and I talk sense to him. I have written to none of my set since I last left London.’

She pacified him by doses of cajolery new to her tongue. She liked him, abhorred the thought of losing any of her friends, so the cajoling sentences ran until Westlake betrayed an inflammable composition, and had to be put out, and smoked sullenly. Her resources were tried in restoring him to reason.

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The months of absence from London appeared to have transformed her world. Tonans was moderate. The great editor rebuked her for her prolonged absence from London, not so much because it discredited her as Queen of the Salon, but candidly for its rendering her service less to him. Everything she knew of men and affairs was to him stale.

‘How do you get to the secrets?’ she asked.

‘By sticking to the centre of them,’ he said.

‘But how do you manage to be in advance and act the prophet?’

‘Because I will have them at any price, and that is known.’

She hinted at the peccant City Company.

‘I think I have checked the mining mania, as I did the railway,’ said he; ‘and so far it was a public service. There’s no checking of maniacs.’

She took her whipping within and without. ‘On another occasion I shall apply to you, Mr. Tonans.’

‘Ah, there was a time when you could have been a treasure to me,’ he rejoined; alluding of course to the Dannisburgh days.

In dejection, as she mused on those days, and on her foolish ambition to have a London house where her light might burn, she advised herself, with Redworth’s voice, to quit the house, arrest expenditure, and try for happiness by burning and shining in the spirit: devoting herself, as Arthur Rhodes did, purely to literature. It became almost a decision.

Percy she had still neither written to nor heard from, and she dared not hope to meet him. She fancied a wish to have tidings of his marriage: it would be peace, if in desolation. Now that she had

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confessed and given her pledge to Emma, she had so far broken with him as to render the holding him chained a cruelty, and his reserve whispered of a rational acceptance of the end between them. She thanked him for it; an act whereby she was instantly melted to such softness that a dread of him haunted her. Coward, take up your burden for armour! she called to her poor dungeoned self wailing to have common nourishment. She knew how prodigiously it waxed on crumbs; nay, on the imagination of small morsels. By way of chastizing it, she reviewed her life, her behaviour to her husband, until she sank backward to a depth deprived of air and light. That life with her husband was a dungeon to her nature deeper than any imposed by present conditions. She was then a revolutionary to reach to the breath of day. She had now to be only not a coward, and she could breathe as others did. 'Women who sap the moral laws pull down the pillars of the temple on their sex,' Emma had said. Diana perceived something of her personal debt to civilization. Her struggles passed into the doomed CANTATRICE occupying days and nights under pressure for immediate payment; the silencing of friend Debit, ridiculously calling himself Credit, in contempt of sex and conduct, on the ground that he was he solely by virtue of being she. He had got a trick of singing operatic solos in the form and style of the delightful tenor Tellio, and they were touching in absurdity, most real in unreality. Exquisitely trilled, after Tellio's manner,

'The tradesmen all beseech ye,
The landlord, cook, and maid,
Complete THE CANTATRICE,
That they may soon be paid,'

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provoked her to laughter in pathos. He approached, posturing himself operatically, with perpetual new verses, rhymes to Danvers, rhymes to Madame Sybille, the cook. Seeing Tellio at one of Henry Wilmers' private concerts, Diana's lips twitched to dimples at the likeness her familiar had assumed. She had to compose her countenance to talk to him; but the moment of song was the trial. Lady Singleby sat beside her, and remarked: 'You have always fun going on in you!' She partook of the general impression that Diana Warwick was too humourous to nurse a downright passion.

Before leaving, she engaged Diana to her annual garden-party of the closing season, and there the meeting with Percy occurred, not unobserved. Had they been overheard, very little to implicate them would have been gathered. He walked in full view across the lawn to her, and they presented mask to mask.

'The beauty of the day tempts you at last, Mrs. Warwick.'

'I have been finishing a piece of work.'

Lovely weather, beautiful dresses: agreed. Diana wore a yellow robe with a black bonnet, and he commented on the becoming hues; for the first time, he noticed her dress! Lovely women? Dacier hesitated. One he saw. But surely he must admire Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett? And who steps beside her, transparently fascinated, with visage at three-quarters to the rays within her bonnet? Can it be Sir Lukin Dunstane? and beholding none but his charmer!

Dacier withdrew his eyes thoughtfully from the spectacle, and moved to woo Diana to a stroll. She could not restrain her feet; she was out of the ring of

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her courtiers for the moment. He had seized his opportunity.

‘It is nearly a year!’ he said.

‘I have been nursing nearly all the time, doing the work I do best.’

‘Unaltered?’

‘A year must leave its marks.’

‘Tony!’

‘You speak of a madwoman, a good eleven months dead. Let her rest. Those are the conditions.’

‘Accepted, if I may see her.’

‘Honestly accepted?’

‘Imposed fatally, I have to own. I have felt with you: you are the wiser. But, admitting that, surely we can meet. I may see you?’

‘My house has not been shut.’

‘I respected the house. I distrusted myself.’

‘What restores your confidence?’

‘The strength I draw from you.’

One of the Beauties at a garden-party is lucky to get as many minutes as had passed in quietness. Diana was met and captured. But those last words of Percy’s renewed her pride in him by suddenly building a firm faith in herself. Noblest of lovers! she thought, and brooded on the little that had been spoken, the much conveyed, for a proof of perfect truthfulness.

The world had watched them. It pronounced them discreet if culpable; probably cold to the passion both. Of Dacier’s coldness it had no doubt, and Diana’s was presumed from her comical flights of speech. She was given to him because of the known failure of her other adorers. He in the front rank of politicians attracted her with the lustre of

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his ambition; she him with her mingling of talent and beauty. An astute world; right in the main, owing to perceptions based upon brute nature; utterly astray in particulars, for the reason that it takes no count of the soul of man or woman. Hence its glee at a catastrophe; its poor stock of mercy. And when no catastrophe follows, the prophet, for the honour of the profession, must decry her as cunning beyond aught yet revealed of a serpent sex.

Save for a word or two, the watchman might have overheard and trumpeted his report of their interview at Diana's house. After the first pained breathing, when they found themselves alone in that room where they had plighted their fortunes, they talked allusively to define the terms imposed on them by Reason. The thwarted step was unmentioned; it was a past madness. But Wisdom being recognized, they could meet. It would be hard if that were denied! They talked very little of their position; both understood the mutual acceptance of it; and now that he had seen her and was again under the spell, Dacier's rational mind, together with his delight in her presence, compelled him honourably to bow to the terms. Only, as these were severe upon lovers, the innocence of their meetings demanded indemnification in frequency.

'Come whenever you think I can be useful,' said Diana.

They pressed hands at parting, firmly and briefly, not for the ordinary dactylology of lovers, but in sign of the treaty of amity.

She soon learnt that she had tied herself to her costly household.

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An enamoured Egeria who is not a princess in her worldly state nor a goddess by origin has to play one of those parts which strain the woman's faculties past naturalness. She must never expose her feelings to her lover; she must make her counsel weighty; otherwise she is little his nymph of the pure wells, and what she soon may be, the world will say. She has also, most imperatively, to dazzle him without the betrayal of artifice, where simple spontaneousness is beyond conjuring. But feelings that are constrained becloud the judgement besides arresting the fine jet of delivery wherewith the mastered lover is taught through his ears to think himself prompted, and submit to be controlled, by a creature super-feminine. She must make her counsel so weighty in poignant praises as to repress impulses that would rouse her own; and her betraying impulsiveness was a subject of reflection to Diana after she had given Percy Dacier, metaphorically, the key of her house. Only as his true Egeria could she receive him. She was therefore grateful, she thanked and venerated this noblest of lovers for his not pressing to the word of love, and so strengthening her to point his mind, freshen his moral energies and inspirit him. His chivalrous acceptance of the conditions of their renewed intimacy

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was a radiant knightliness to Diana, elevating her with a living image for worship:—he so near once to being the absolute lord of her destinies! How to reward him, was her sole dangerous thought. She prayed and strove that she might give him of her best, to practically help him; and she had reason to suppose she could do it, from the visible effect of her phrases. He glistened in repeating them; he had fallen into the habit; before witnesses too; in the presence of Miss Paynham, who had taken earnestly to the art of painting, and obtained her dear Mrs. Warwick's promise of a few sittings for the sketch of a portrait, near the close of the season. 'A very daring thing to attempt,' Miss Paynham said, when he was comparing her first outlines and the beautiful breathing features. 'Even if one gets the face, the lips will seem speechless, to those who know her.'

'If they have no recollection,' said Dacier.

'I mean, the endeavour should be to represent them at the moment of speaking.'

'Put it into the eyes.' He looked at the eyes.

She looked at the mouth. 'But it is the mouth, more than the eyes.'

He looked at the face. 'Where there is character, you have only to study it to be sure of a likeness.'

'That is the task, with one who utters jewels, Mr. Dacier.'

'Bright wit, I fear, is above the powers of your art.'

'Still I feel it could be done. See—now—that!'

Diana's lips had opened to say: 'Confess me a model model: I am dissected while I sit for portrayal. I must be for a moment like the frog of the two

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countrymen who were disputing as to the manner of his death, when he stretched to yawn, upon which they agreed that he had defeated the truth for both of them. I am not quite inanimate.'

'Irish countrymen,' said Dacier.

'The story adds, that blows were arrested; so confer the nationality as you please.'

Diana had often to divert him from a too intent perusal of her features with sparkles and stories current or invented to serve the immediate purpose.

Miss Paynham was Mrs. Warwick's guest for a fortnight, and observed them together. She sometimes charitably laid down her pencil and left them, having forgotten this or that. They were conversing of general matters with their usual crisp precision on her return, and she was rather like the two countrymen, in debating whether it was excess of coolness or discreetness; though she was convinced of their inclinations, and expected love some day to be leaping up. Diana noticed that she had no reminder for leaving the room when it was Mr. Redworth present. These two had become very friendly, according to her hopes; and Miss Paynham was extremely solicitous to draw suggestions from Mr. Redworth and win his approval.

'Do I appear likely to catch the mouth now, do you think, Mr. Redworth?'

He remarked, smiling at Diana's expressive dimple, that the mouth was difficult to catch. He did not gaze intently. Mr. Redworth was the genius of friendship, 'the friend of women,' Mrs. Warwick had said of him. Miss Paynham discovered it, as regarded herself. The portrait was his commission to her,

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kindly proposed, secretly of course, to give her occupation and the chance of winning a vogue with the face of a famous Beauty. So many, however, were Mrs. Warwick's visitors, and so lively the chatter she directed, that accurate sketching was difficult to an amateurish hand. Whitmonby, Sullivan Smith, Westlake, Henry Wilmers, Arthur Rhodes, and other gentlemen, literary and military, were almost daily visitors when it became known that the tedium of the beautiful sitter required beguiling, and there was a certainty of finding her at home. On Mrs. Warwick's Wednesday numerous ladies decorated the group. Then was heard such a rillet of dialogue without scandal or politics, as nowhere else in Britain; all vowed it subsequently; for to the remembrance it seemed magical. Not a breath of scandal, and yet the liveliest flow. Lady Pennon came attended by a Mr. Alexander Hepburn, a handsome Scot, at whom Dacier shot one of his instinctive keen glances, before seeing that the hostess had mounted a transient colour. Mr. Hepburn, in settling himself on his chair rather too briskly, contrived the next minute to break a precious bit of China standing by his elbow; and Lady Pennon cried out, with sympathetic anguish: 'Oh, my dear, what a trial for you!'

'Brittle is foredoomed,' said Diana, unruffled.

She deserved compliments, and would have had them if she had not wounded the most jealous and petulant of her courtiers.

'Then the Turk is a sapient custodian!' said Westlake, vexed with her flush at the entrance of the Scot.

Diana sedately took his challenge. '*We*, Mr. Westlake, have the philosophy of ownership.'

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Mr. Hepburn penitentially knelt to pick up the fragments, and Westlake murmured over his head: 'As long as it is we who are the cracked.'

'Did we not start from China?'

'We were consequently precipitated to Stamboul.'

'You try to elude the lesson.'

'I remember my first pædagogue telling me so when he rapped the book on my cranium.'

'The mark of the book is not a disfigurement.'

It was gently worded, and the shrewder for it. The mark of the book, if not a disfigurement, was a characteristic of Westlake's fashion of speech. Whitmonby nodded twice, for signification of a palpable hit in that bout; and he noted within him the foolishness of obtruding the remotest allusion to our personality when crossing the foils with a woman. She is down on it like the lightning, quick as she is in her contracted circle; politeness guarding her from a riposte.

Mr. Hepburn apologized very humbly, after regaining his chair. Diana smiled and said: 'Incidents in a drawing-room are prize-shots at Dulness.'

'And in a dining-room too,' added Sullivan Smith. 'I was one day at a dinner-party, apparently of undertakers hired to mourn over the joints and the birds in the dishes, when the ceiling came down, and we all sprang up merry as crickets. It led to a pretty encounter and a real prize-shot.'

'Does that signify a duel?' asked Lady Pennon.

'T'would be the vulgar title, to bring it into discredit with the populace, my lady.'

'Rank me one of the populace then! I hate duelling and rejoice that it is discountenanced.'

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'The citizens, and not the populace, I think Mr. Sullivan Smith means,' Diana said. 'The citizen is generally right in morals. My father also was against the practice, when it raged at its "prettiest." I have heard him relate a story of a poor friend of his, who had to march out for a trifle, and said, as he accepted the invitation, "It's all nonsense!" and walking to the measured length, "It's all nonsense, you know!" and when lying on the ground, at his last gasp, "I told you it was all nonsense!"'

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Sullivan Smith leaned over to Whitmonby and Dacier amid the ejaculations, and whispered: 'A lady's way of telling the story!—and excuseable to her:—she had to *Jonah* the adjective. What the poor fellow said was . . .' he murmured the sixty-pounder adjective, as in the belly of the whale, to rightly emphasize his noun.

Whitmonby nodded to the superior relish imparted by the vigour of masculine veracity in narration. 'A story for its native sauce piquante,' he said.

'Nothing without it!'

They had each a dissolving grain of contempt for women compelled by their delicacy to spoil that kind of story which demands the piquant accompaniment to flavour it racily and make it passable. For to see insipid mildness complacently swallowed as an excellent thing, knowing the rich smack of savour proper to the story, is your anecdotal gentleman's annoyance. But if the anecdote had supported him, Sullivan Smith would have let the expletive rest.

Major Carew Mahoney capped Mrs. Warwick's tale of the unfortunate duellist with another, that con-

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fessed the practice absurd, though he approved of it; and he cited Lord Larrian's opinion: 'It keeps men braced to civil conduct.'

'I would not differ with the dear old lord; but no! the pistol is the sceptre of the bully,' said Diana.

Mr. Hepburn, with the widest of eyes on her in perpetuity, warmly agreed; and the man was notorious among men for his contrary action.

'Most righteously our Princess Egeria distinguishes her reign by prohibiting it,' said Lady Singleby.

'And how,' Sullivan Smith sighed heavily, 'how, I'd ask, are ladies to be protected from the bully?'

He was beset: 'So it was all for us? all in consideration for our benefit?'

He mournfully exclaimed: 'Why, surely!'

'That is the funeral apology of the Rod, at the close of every barbarous chapter,' said Diana.

'Too fine in mind, too fat in body; that is a consequence with men, dear madam. The conqueror stands to his weapons, or he loses his possessions.'

'Mr. Sullivan Smith jumps at his pleasure from the special to the general, and will be back, if we follow him, Lady Pennon. It is the trick men charge to women, showing that they can resemble us.'

Lady Pennon thumped her knee. 'Not a bit. There's no resemblance, and they know nothing of us.'

'Women are a blank to them, I believe,' said Whitmonby, treacherously bowing; and Westlake said: 'Traces of a singular scrawl have been observed when they were held in close proximity to the fire.'

'Once, on the top of a coach,' Whitmonby resumed, 'I heard a comely dame of the period when summers

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are ceasing threatened by her husband with a divorce, for omitting to put sandwiches in their luncheon-basket. She made him the inscrutable answer: "Ah, poor man! you will go down ignorant to your grave!" We laughed, and to this day I cannot tell you why.'

'That laugh was from a basket lacking provision;—and I think we could trace our separation to it,' Diana said to Lady Pennon, who replied: 'They expose themselves; they get no nearer to the riddle.'

Miss Courtney, a rising young actress, encouraged by a smile from Mrs. Warwick, remarked: 'On the stage, we have each our parts equally.'

'And speaking parts; not personae mutae.'

'The stage has advanced in verisimilitude,' Henry Wilmers added slyly; and Diana rejoined: 'You recognize a verisimilitude of the mirror when it is in advance of reality. Flatter the sketch, Miss Paynham, for a likeness to be seen. Probably there are still Old Conservatives who would prefer the personation of us by boys.'

'I don't know,' Westlake affected dubiousness. 'I have heard that a step to the riddle is gained by a serious contemplation of boys.'

'Serious?'

'That is the doubt.'

'The doubt throws its light on the step!'

'I advise them not to take any leap from their step,' said Lady Pennon.

'It would be a way of learning that we are no wiser than our sires; but perhaps too painful a way,' Whitmonby observed. 'Poor Mountford Wilts boasted of

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knowing women; and he married. To jump into the mouth of the enigma, is not to read it.'

'You are figures of conceit when you speculate on us, Mr. Whitmonby.'

'An occupation of our leisure, my lady, for your amusement.'

'The leisure of the humming-top, a thousand to the minute, with the pretence that it sleeps!' Diana said.

'The sacrilegious hand to strip you of your mystery is withered as it stretches,' exclaimed Westlake. 'The sage and the devout are in accord for once.'

'And whichever of the two I may be, I'm one of them, happy to do my homage blindfold!' Sullivan Smith waved the sign of it.

Diana sent her eyes over him and Mr. Hepburn, seeing Dacier. 'That rosy mediævalism seems the utmost we can expect.' An instant she saddened, foreboding her words to be ominous, because of suddenly thirsting for a modern cry from him, the silent. She quitted her woman's fit of earnestness, and took to the humour that pleased him. 'Aslauga's knight, at his blind man's buff of devotion, catches the hem of the tapestry and is found by his lady kissing it in a trance of homage five hours long! Sir Hilary of Agincourt, returned from the wars to his castle at midnight, hears that the châtellaine is away dancing, and remains with all his men mounted in the courtyard till the grey morn brings her back! Adorable! We had a flag flying in those days. Since men began to fret the riddle, they have hauled it down half-mast. Soon we shall behold a bare pole and hats on around it. That is their solution.'

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A smile circled at the hearing of Lady Singleby say: 'Well! I am all for our own times, however literal the men.'

'We are two different species!' thumped Lady Pennon, swimming on the theme. 'I am sure, I read what they write of women! And their heroines!'

Lady Esquart acquiesced: 'We are utter fools or horrid knaves.'

'Nature's original hieroglyphs—which have that appearance to the peruser,' Westlake assented.

'And when they would decipher us, and they hit on one of our "arts," the literary pirouette they perform is memorable.' Diana looked invitingly at Dacier. 'But I for one discern a possible relationship and a likeness.'

'I think it exists—behind a curtain,' Dacier replied.

'Before the era of the Nursery. Liberty to grow; independence is the key of the secret.'

'And what comes after the independence?' he inquired.

Whitmonby, musing that some distraction of an earnest incentive spoilt Mrs. Warwick's wit, informed him: 'The two different species then break their shallow armistice and join the shock of battle for possession of the earth, and we are outnumbered and exterminated, to a certainty. So I am against independence.'

'Socially a Mussulman, subject to explosions!' Diana said. 'So the eternal duel between us is maintained, and men will protest that they are for civilization. Dear me, I should like to write a sketch of the women of the future—don't be afraid!

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—the far future. What a different earth you will see!’

And very different creatures! the gentlemen un-animously surmised. Westlake described the fairer portion, no longer the weaker; frightful hosts.

Diana promised him a sweeter picture, if ever she brought her hand to paint it.

‘You would be offered up to the English national hangman, Jehoiachim Sneer,’ interposed Arthur Rhodes, evidently firing a gun too big for him, of premeditated charging, as his patroness perceived; but she knew him to be smarting under recent applications of the swish of Mr. Sneer, and that he rushed to support her. She covered him by saying: ‘If he has to be encountered, he kills none but the cripple,’ wherewith the dead pause ensuing from a dose of outlandish speech in good company was bridged, though the youth heard Westlake mutter unpleasantly: ‘Jehoiachim,’ and had to endure a stare of Dacier’s, who did not conceal his want of comprehension of the place he occupied in Mrs. Warwick’s gatherings.

‘They know nothing of us whatever!’ Lady Pennon harped on her dictum.

‘They put us in a case and profoundly study the captive creature,’ said Diana: ‘but would any *man* understand this?’ . . . She dropped her voice and drew in the heads of Lady Pennon, Lady Singleby, Lady Esquart and Miss Courtney: ‘Real woman’s nature speaks. A maid of mine had a “follower.” She was a good girl; I was anxious about her and asked her if she could trust him. “Oh, yes, ma’am,” she replied, “I can; he’s quite like a female.” I

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longed to see the young man, to tell him he had received the highest of eulogies.'

The ladies appreciatively declared that such a tale was beyond the understandings of men. Miss Paynham primmed her mouth, admitting to herself her inability to repeat such a tale: an act that she deemed not 'quite like a lady.' She had previously come to the conclusion that Mrs. Warwick, with all her generous qualities, was deficient in delicate sentiment—owing perhaps to her coldness of temperament. Like Dacier also, she failed to comprehend the patronage of Mr. Rhodes: it led to suppositions; indefinite truly, and not calumnious at all; but a young poet, rather good looking and well-built, is not the same kind of wing-chick as a young actress, like Miss Courtney—Mrs. Warwick's latest shieldling: he is hardly enrolled for the reason that was assumed to sanction Mrs. Warwick's maid in the encouragement of her follower. Miss Paynham sketched on, with her thoughts in her bosom: a damsel castigatingly pursued by the idea of sex as the direct motive of every act of every person surrounding her; deductively therefore that a certain form of the impelling passion, mild or terrible, or capricious, or it might be less pardonable, was unceasingly at work among the human couples up to decrepitude. And she too frequently hit the fact to doubt her gift of reading into them. Mr. Dacier was plain, and the state of young Mr. Rhodes; and the Scottish gentleman was at least a vehement admirer. But she penetrated the breast of Mr. Thomas Redworth as well, mentally tore his mask of friendship to shreds. He was kind indeed in commissioning her to do the portrait. His desire

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for it, and his urgency to have the features exactly given, besides the infrequency of his visits of late, when a favoured gentleman was present, were the betraying signs. Deductively, moreover, the lady who inspired the passion in numbers of gentlemen and set herself to win their admiration with her lively play of dialogue, must be coquettish; she could hold them only by coldness. Anecdotes, epigrams, drolleries, do not bubble to the lips of a woman who is under an emotional spell: rather they prove that she has the spell for casting. It suited Mr. Dacier, Miss Paynham thought: it was cruel to Mr. Redworth; at whom, of all her circle, the beautiful woman looked, when speaking to him, sometimes tenderly.

'Beware the silent one of an assembly!' Diana had written. She did not think of her words while Miss Paynham continued mutely sketching. The silent ones, with much conversation around them, have their heads at work, critically perforce; the faster if their hands are occupied; and the point they lean to do is the pivot of their thoughts. Miss Paynham felt for Mr. Redworth.

Diana was unaware of any other critic present than him she sought to enliven, not unsuccessfully, notwithstanding his English objection to the pitch of the converse she led, and a suspicion of effort to support it:—just a doubt, with all her easy voluble run, of the possibility of naturalness in a continuous cleverness. But he signified pleasure, and in pleasing him she was happy: in the knowledge that she dazzled, was her sense of safety. Percy hated scandal; he heard none. He wanted stirring, cheering; in her house he had it. He came daily, and as it was her

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wish that new themes, new flights of converse, should delight him and show her exhaustless, to preserve her ascendancy, she welcomed him without consulting the world. He was witness of Mr. Hepburn's presentation of a costly China vase, to repair the breach in her array of ornaments, and excuse a visit. Judging by the absence of any blow within, he saw not a sign of coquetry. Some such visit had been anticipated by the prescient woman, so there was no reddening. She brought about an exchange of sentences between him and her furious admirer, sparing either of them a glimpse of which was the sacrifice to the other, amusing them both. Dacier could allow Mr. Hepburn to outsit him; and he left them, proud of his absolute confidence in her.

She was mistaken in imagining that her social vivacity, mixed with comradeship of the active intellect, was the charm which kept Mr. Percy Dacier temperate when he well knew her to distinguish him above her courtiers. Her powers of dazzling kept him tame; they did not stamp her mark on him. He was one of the order of highly polished men, ignorant of women, who are impressed for long terms by temporary flashes, that hold them bound until a fresh impression comes, to confirm or obliterate the preceding. Affairs of the world he could treat competently; he had a head for high politics and the management of men; the feminine half of the world was a confusion and a vexation to his intelligence, characterless; and one woman at last appearing decipherable, he fancied it must be owing to her possession of character, a thing prized the more in women because of his latent doubt of its existence. Character, that was the mark he

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aimed at; that moved him to homage as neither sparkling wit nor incomparable beauty, nor the unusual combination, did. To be distinguished by a woman of character (beauty and wit for jewellery), was his minor ambition in life, and if Fortune now gratified it, he owned to the flattery. It really seemed by every test that she had the quality. Since the day when he beheld her by the bedside of his dead uncle, and that one on the French sea-sands, and again at Copsley, ghostly white out of her wrestle with death, bleeding holy sweat of brow for her friend, the print of her features had been on him as an index of depth of character, imposing respect and admiration—a sentiment imperilled by her consent to fly with him. Her subsequent reserve until they met—by an accident that the lady at any rate was not responsible for, proved the quality positively. And the nature of her character, at first suspected, vanquished him more, by comparison, than her vivid intellect, which he originally, and still lingeringly, appreciated in condescension, as a singular accomplishment, thrilling at times, now and then assailable feminine. But, after her consent to a proposal that caused him retrospective worldly shudders, and her composed recognition of the madness, a character capable of holding him in some awe was real majesty, and it rose to the clear heights, with her mental attributes for satellites. His tendency to despise women was wholesomely checked by the experience to justify him in saying, Here is a worthy one! She was health to him, as well as trusty counsel. Furthermore, where he respected, he was a governed man, free of the common masculine craze to scale fortresses for the

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sake of lowering flags. Whilst under his impression of her character, he submitted honourably to the ascendancy of a lady whose conduct suited him and whose preference flattered; whose presence was very refreshing; whose letters were a stimulant. Her letters were really running well-waters, not a lover's delusion of the luminous mind of his lady. They sparkled in review and preserved their integrity under critical analysis. The reading of them hurried him in pursuit of her from house to house during the autumn; and as she did not hint at the shadow his coming cast on her, his conscience was easy. Regarding their future, his political anxieties were a mountainous defile, curtaining the outlook. They met at Lockton, where he arrived after a recent consultation with his Chief, of whom, and the murmurs of the Cabinet, he spoke to Diana openly, in some dejection.

'They might see he has been breaking with his party for the last four years,' she said. 'The plunge to be taken is tremendous.'

'But will he? He appears too despondent for a header.'

'We cannot dance on a quaking floor.'

'No; it's exactly that quake of the floor which gives "much qualms," to me as well,' said Dacier.

'A treble Neptune's power!' she rejoined, for his particular delectation. 'Enough if he hesitates. I forgive him his nausea. He awaits the impetus, and it will reach him, and soon. He will not wait for the mob at his heels, I am certain. A Minister who does that, is a post, and goes down with the first bursting of the dam. He has tried compromise and discovered that it does not appease the Fates; is not even a

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makeshift-mending at this hour. He is a man of nerves, very sensitively built; as quick—quicker than a woman, I could almost say, to feel the tremble of the air—forerunner of imperative changes.'

Dacier brightened fondly. 'You positively describe him; paint him to the life, without knowing him!'

'I have seen him; and if I paint, whose are the colours?'

'Sometimes I repeat you to him, and I get all the credit,' said Dacier.

'I glow with pride to think of speaking anything that you repeat,' said Diana, and her eyes were proudly lustreful.

Their love was nourished on these mutual flatteries. Thin food for passion! The innocence of it sanctioned the meetings and the appointments to meet. When separated they were interchanging letters, formally worded in the apostrophe and the termination, but throbbingly full: or Diana thought so of Percy's letters, with grateful justice; for his manner of opening his heart in amatory correspondence was to confide important secret matters, up to which mark she sprang to reply in counsel. He proved his affection by trusting her; his respect by his tempered style:—'A Greenland style of writing,' she had said of an unhappy gentleman's epistolary compositions resembling it; and now the same official baldness was to her mind Italianly rich; it called forth such volumes.

Flatteries that were thin food for passion appeared the simplest exchanges of courtesy, and her meetings with her lover, judging by the nature of the discourse they held, so consequent to their joint interest in the great crisis anticipated, as to rouse her indignant

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surprise and a turn for downright rebellion when the Argus world signified the fact of its having one eye, or more, wide open.

Debit and Credit, too, her buzzing familiars, insisted on an audience at each ear, and at the house-door, on her return to London.

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There was not much talk of Diana between Lady Dunstane and her customary visitor Tom Redworth now. She was shy in speaking of the love-stricken woman, and more was in his mind for thought than for speech. She sometimes wondered how much he might know, ending with the reflection that little passing around was unknown to him. He had to shut his mind against thought, against all meditation upon Mrs. Warwick; it was based scientifically when speculating and calculating, on the material element—a talisman. Men and women crossing the high seas of life he had found most readable under that illuminating inquiry, as to their means. An inspector of seaworthy ships proceeds in like manner. Whence would the money come? He could not help the bent of his mind; but he could avoid subjecting her to the talismanic touch. The girl at the Dublin Ball, the woman at the fire-grate of The Crossways, both in one were his Diana. Now and then, hearing an ugly whisper, his manful sympathy with the mere woman in her imprisoned liberty,

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defended her desperately from charges not distinctly formulated within him:—‘She’s not made of stone.’ That was a height of self-abnegation to shake the poor fellow to his roots; but, then, he had no hopes of his own; and he stuck to it. Her choice of a man like Dacier, too, of whom Redworth judged highly, showed nobility. She irradiated the man; but no baseness could be in such an alliance. If allied, they were bound together for good. The tie—supposing a villain world not wrong—was only not the sacred tie because of impediments. The tie!—he deliberated, and said stoutly No. Men of Redworth’s nature go through sharp contests, though the duration of them is short, and the tussle of his worship of this woman with the materialistic turn of his mind was closed by the complete shutting up of the latter under lock and bar; so that a man, very little of an idealist, was able to sustain her in the pure imagination—where she did almost belong to him. She was his, in a sense, because she might have been his—but for an incredible extreme of folly. The dark ring of the eclipse cast by some amazing foolishness round the shining crescent perpetually in secret claimed the whole sphere of her, by what might have been, while admitting her lost to him in fact. To Thomas Redworth’s mind the lack of perfect sanity in his conduct at any period of manhood, was so entirely past belief that he flew at the circumstances confirming the charge, and had wrestles with the angel of reality, who did but set him dreaming backward, after flinging him.

He heard at Lady Wathin’s that Mrs. Warwick was in town for the winter. ‘Mr. Dacier is also in town,’ Lady Wathin said, with an acid indication of the need-

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less mention of it. 'We have not seen him.' She invited Redworth to meet a few friends at dinner. 'I think you admire Miss Asper: in my idea a very saint among young women;—and you know what the young women of our day are. She will be present. She is, you are aware, England's greatest heiress. Only yesterday, hearing of that poor man Mr. Warwick's desperate attack of illness—heart!—and of his having no relative or friend to soothe his pillow,—he is lying in absolute loneliness,—she offered to go and nurse him! Of course it could not be done. It is not her place. The beauty of the character of a dear innocent young girl, with every gratification at command, who could make the offer, strikes me as unparalleled. She was perfectly sincere—she *is* sincerity. She asked at once, Where is he? She wished me to accompany her on a first visit. I saw a tear.'

Redworth had called at Lady Wathin's for information of the state of Mr. Warwick, concerning which a rumour was abroad. No stranger to the vagrant compassionateness of sentimentalists;—rich, idle, conscience-pricked or praise-catching;—he was unmoved by the tale that Miss Asper had proposed to go to Mr. Warwick's sick-bed in the uniform of a Sister of Charity:—'Speaking French!' Lady Wathin exclaimed; and his head rocked, as he said: 'An Englishman would not be likely to know better.'

'She speaks exquisite French—all European languages, Mr. Redworth. She does not pretend to *wit*. To my thinking, depth of sentiment is a far more feminine accomplishment. It assuredly will be found a greater treasure.'

The modest man (modest in such matters) was led

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by degrees to fancy himself sounded regarding Miss Asper: a piece of sculpture glacially decorative of the domestic mansion in person, to his thinking; and as to the nature of it—not a Diana, with all her faults!

If Diana had any faults, in a world and a position so heavily against her! He laughed to himself, when alone, at the neatly implied bitter reproach cast on the wife by the forsaken young lady, who proposed to nurse the abandoned husband of the woman bereaving her of the man she loved. Sentimentalists enjoy these tricks, the conceiving or the doing of them—the former mainly, which are cheaper, and equally effective. Miss Asper might be deficient in wit; this was a form of practical wit, occasionally exhibited by creatures acting on their instincts. Warwick he pitied, and he put compulsion on himself to go and see the poor fellow, the subject of so sublime a generosity. Mr. Warwick sat in an arm-chair, his legs out straight on the heels, his jaw dragging hollow cheeks, his hands loosely joined; improving in health, he said. A demure woman of middle age was in attendance. He did not speak of his wife. Three times he said disconnectedly, 'I hear reports,' and his eyelids worked. Redworth talked of general affairs, without those consolatory efforts, useless between men, which are neither medicine nor good honest water:—he judged by personal feelings. In consequence, he left an invalid the sourer for his visit.

Next day he received a briefly-worded summons from Mrs. Warwick.

Crossing the park on the line to Diana's house, he

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met Miss Paynham, who grieved to say that Mrs. Warwick could not give her a sitting; and in a still mournfuller tone, imagined he would find her at home, and alone by this time. 'I left no one but Mr. Dacier there,' she observed.

'Mrs. Warwick will be disengaged to-morrow, no doubt,' he said consolingly.

Her head performed the negative. 'They talk politics, and she becomes animated, loses her pose. I will persevere, though I fear I have undertaken a task too much for me.'

'I am deeply indebted to you for the attempt.' Redworth bowed to her and set his face to the Abbey-towers, which wore a different aspect in the smoked grey light since his two minutes of colloquy. He had previously noticed that meetings with Miss Paynham produced a similar effect on him, a not so very impressionable man. And how was it done? She told him nothing he did not know or guess.

Diana was alone. Her manner, after the greeting, seemed feverish. She had not to excuse herself for abruptness when he heard the nature of the subject. Her counsellor and friend was informed, in feminine style, that she had requested him to call, for the purpose of consulting him with regard to a matter she had decided upon; and it was, the sale of The Crossways. She said that it would have gone to her heart once; she supposed she had lost her affection for the place, or had got the better of her superstitions. She spoke lamely as well as bluntly. The place was hers, she said; her own property. Her husband could not interdict a sale.

Redworth addressed himself to her smothered anta-

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gonism. 'Even if he had rights, as they are termed . . . I think you might count on their not being pressed.'

'I have been told of illness.' She tapped her foot on the floor.

'His present state of health is unequal to his ordinary duties.'

'Emma Dunstane is fully supplied with the latest intelligence, Mr. Redworth. You know the source.'

'I mention it simply . . .'

'Yes, yes. What I have to protest is, that in this respect I am free. The Law has me fast, but leaves me its legal view of my small property. I have no authority over me. I can do as I please in this, without a collision, or the dread of one. It is the married woman's perpetual dread when she ventures a step. Your Law originally presumed her a China-footed animal. And more, I have a claim for maintenance.'

She crimsoned angrily.

Redworth showed a look of pleasure, hard to understand. 'The application would be sufficient, I fancy,' he said.

'It should have been offered.'

'Did you not decline it?'

'I declined to apply for it. I thought—But Mr. Redworth, another thing, concerning us all: I want very much to hear your ideas of the prospects of the League; because I know you have ideas. The leaders are terrible men; they fascinate me. They appear to move with an army of facts. They are certainly carrying the country. I am obliged to think them sincere. Common agitators would not hold together, as they do. They gather strength each year. If their

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statistics are not illusory—an army of phantoms instead of one of facts;—and they knock at my head without admission, I have to confess;—they must win.'

'Ultimately, it is quite calculable that they will win,' said Redworth; and he was led to discourse of rates and duties and prohibitive tariffs to a woman surprisingly athirst, curious for every scrap of intelligence relating to the power, organization, and schemes of the League. 'Common sense is the secret of every successful civil agitation,' he said. 'Rap it unremittingly on crowds of the thickest of human heads, and the response comes at last to sweep all before it. You may reckon that the country will beat the landlords—for that is our question. Is it one of your political themes?'

'I am not presumptuous to such a degree:—a poor scholar,' Diana replied. 'Women striving to lift their heads among men deserve the sarcasm.'

He denied that any sarcasm was intended, and the lesson continued. When she had shaped in her mind some portion of his knowledge of the subject, she reverted casually to her practical business. Would he undertake to try to obtain a purchaser of *The Crossways*, at the price he might deem reasonable? She left the price entirely to his judgement. And now she had determined to part with the old place, the sooner the better! She said that smiling; and Redworth smiled, outwardly and inwardly. Her talk of her affairs was clearer to him than her curiosity for the mysteries of the League. He gained kind looks besides warm thanks by the promise to seek a purchaser; especially by his avoidance of prying queries.

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She wanted just this excellent automaton fac-totum; and she referred him to Mr. Braddock for the title-deeds, et cætera—the chirping phrase of ladies happily washing their hands of the mean details of business.

‘How of your last work?’ he asked her.

Serenest equanimity rejoined: ‘As I anticipated, it is not popular. The critics are of one mind with the public. You may have noticed, they rarely flower above that rocky surface. THE CANTATRICE sings them a false note. My next will probably please them less.’

Her mobile lips and brows shot the faint upperwreath of a smile hovering. It was designed to display her philosophy.

‘And what is the name of your next?’ said he.

‘I name it THE MAN OF TWO MINDS, if you can allow that to be in nature.’

‘Contra-distinguished from the woman?’

‘Oh! you must first believe the woman to have one.’

‘You are working on it?’

‘By fits. And I forgot, Mr. Redworth: I have mislaid my receipts, and must ask you for the address of your wine-merchant;—or, will you? Several dozen of the same wines. I can trust him to be in awe of you, and the good repute of my table depends on his honesty.’

Redworth took the definite order for a large supply of wine.

She gave him her hand: a lost hand, dear to hold, needing to be guided, he feared. For him, it was merely a hand, cut off from the wrist; and he had

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performed that executive part! A wiser man would now have been the lord of it. . . . So he felt, with his burning wish to protect and cherish the beloved woman, while saying: 'If we find a speedy bidder for The Crossways, you will have to thank our railways.'

'You!' said Diana, confident in his ability to do everything of the practical kind.

Her ingenuousness tickled him. He missed her comic touches upon men and things, but the fever shown by her manner accounted for it.

As soon as he left her, she was writing to the lover who had an hour previously been hearing her voice; the note of her theme being Party; and how to serve it, when to sacrifice it to the Country. She wrote, carolling bars of the Puritani marches; and such will passion do, that her choice of music was quite in harmony with her theme. The martially-amorous melodies of Italian Opera in those days fostered a passion challenged to intrepidity from the heart of softness; gilding at the same time, and putting warm blood even into dull arithmetical figures which might be important to her lover, her hero fronting battle. She condensed Redworth's information skilfully, heartily giving it and whatever she had imbibed, as her own, down to the remark: 'Common sense in questions of justice, is a weapon that makes way into human heads and wins the certain majority, if we strike with it incessantly.' Whether anything she wrote was her own, mattered little: the savour of Percy's praise, which none could share with her, made it instantly all her own. Besides she wrote to strengthen him; she naturally laid her friends and

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the world under contribution; and no other sort of writing was possible. Percy had not a common interest in fiction; still less for high comedy. He liked the broad laugh when he deigned to open books of that sort; puns and strong flavours and harlequin surprises; and her work would not admit of them, however great her willingness to force her hand for his amusement: consequently her inventiveness deadened. She had to cease whipping it. 'My poor old London cabhorse of a pen shall go to grass!' she sighed, looking to the sale of *The Crossways* for money; looking no farther.

Those marshalled battalions of Debit and Credit were in hostile order, the weaker simply devoted to fighting for delay, when a winged messenger bearing the form of old Mr. Braddock descended to her with the reconciling news that a hermit bachelor, an acquaintance of Mr. Redworth's—both of whom wore a gloomy hue in her mind immediately—had offered a sum for the purchase of *The Crossways*. Considering the out-of-the-way district, Mr. Braddock thought it an excellent price to get. She thought the reverse, but confessed that double the sum would not have altered her opinion. Double the sum scarcely counted for the service she required of it for much more than a year. The money was paid shortly after into her Bank, and then she enjoyed the contemptuous felicity of tossing meat to her lions, tigers, wolves, and jackals, who, but for the fortunate intervention, would have been feeding on her. These menagerie beasts of prey were the lady's tradesmen, Debit's hungry brood. She had a rapid glimpse of a false position in regarding that legitimate band so scorn-

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fully: another glimpse likewise of a day to come when they might not be stopped at the door. She was running a race with something;—with what? It was unnamed; it ran in a shroud.

At times she surprised her heart violently beating when there had not been a thought to set it in motion. She traced it once to the words, 'next year,' incidentally mentioned. 'Free,' was a word that checked her throbs, as at a question of life or death. Her solitude, excepting the hours of sleep, if then, was a time of irregular breathing. The something unnamed, running beside her, became a dreadful familiar; the race between them past contemplation for ghastliness. 'But this is your Law!' she cried to the world, while blinding her eyes against a peep of the shrouded features.

Singularly, she had but to abandon hope, and the shadowy figure vanished, the tragic race was ended. How to live and think, and not to hope: the slave of passion had this problem before her.

Other tasks were supportable, though one seemed hard at moments and was not passive; it attacked her. The men and women of her circle derisively, unanimously, disbelieved in an innocence that forfeited reputation. Women were complimentarily assumed to be not such gaping idiots. And as the weeks advanced, a change came over Percy. The gentleman had grown restless at covert congratulations, hollow to his knowledge, however much caressing vanity, and therefore secretly a wound to it. One day, after sitting silent, he bluntly proposed to break 'this foolish trifling'; just in his old manner, though not so honourably; not very definitely either. Her hand was taken.

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‘I feared that dumbness!’ Diana said, letting her hand go, but keeping her composure. ‘My friend Percy, I am not a lion-tamer, and if you are of those animals, we break the chapter. Plainly you think that where there appears to be a choice of fools, the woman is distinctly designed for the person. Drop my hand, or I shall repeat the fable of the Goose with the Golden Eggs.’

‘Fables are applicable only in the schoolroom,’ said he; and he ventured on ‘Tony!’

‘I vowed an oath to my dear Emma—as good as to the heavens! and that of itself would stay me from being insane again.’ She released herself. ‘Signor Percy, you teach me to suspect you of having an idle wish to pluck your plaything to pieces:—to boast of it? Ah! my friend, I fancied I was of more value to you. You must come less often; even to not at all, if you are one of those idols with feet of clay which leave the print of their steps in a room; or fall and crush the silly idolizer.’

‘But surely you know . . .’ said he. ‘We can’t have to wait long.’ He looked full of hopeful meanings.

‘A reason . . .!’ She kept down her breath. A long-drawn sigh followed, through parted lips. She had a sensation of horror. ‘And I cannot propose to nurse him—Emma will not hear of it,’ she said. ‘I dare not. Hypocrite to that extreme? Oh, no! But I must hear nothing. As it is, I am haunted. Now let this pass. Tony me no Tonies; I am *atony* to such whimpering business now we are in the van of the struggle. All round us it sounds like war. Last night I had Mr. Tonans dining here; he wished to meet you

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and you must have a private meeting with Mr. Whitmonby: he will be useful; others as well. You are wrong in affecting contempt of the Press. It perches you on a rock; but the swimmer in politics knows what draws the tides. Your own people, your set, your class, are a drag to you, like inherited superstitions to the wakening brain. The greater the glory! For you see the lead you take? You are saving your class. They should lead, and will if they prove worthy in the crisis. Their curious error is to believe in the stability of a monumental position.'

'Perfectly true!' cried Dacier; and the next minute, heated by approbation, was begging for her hand earnestly. She refused it.

'But you say things that catch me!' he pleaded. 'Remember, it was nearly mine. It soon will be mine. I heard yesterday from Lady Wathin . . . well, if it pains you!'

'Speak on,' said Diana, resigned to her thirsty ears.

'He is not expected to last through the autumn.'

'The calculation is hers?'

'Not exactly:—judging from the symptoms.'

Diana flashed a fiery eye into Dacier's, and rose. She was past danger of melting, with her imagination darkened by the funeral image; but she craved solitude, and had to act the callous, to dismiss him.

'Good. Enough for the day. Now leave me, if you please. When we meet again, stifle that raven's croak. I am not a "Sister of Charity," but neither am I a vulture hovering for the horse in the desert to die. A poor simile!—when it is my own and not another's breath that I want. Nothing in nature, only gruesome German stories will fetch comparisons for

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the yoke of this Law of yours. It seems the nightmare dream following an ogre's supper.'

She was not acting the shiver of her frame.

To-morrow was open to him, and prospect of better fortune, so he departed, after squeezing the hand she ceremoniously extended.

But her woman's intuition warned her that she had not maintained the sovereign impression which was her security. And hope had become a flame in her bosom that would no longer take the common extinguisher. The race she ran was with a shrouded figure no more, but with the figure of the shroud; she had to summon paroxysms of a pity hard to feel, images of sickness, helplessness, the vaults, the last human silence—for the stilling of her passionate heart. And when this was partly effected, the question, Am I going to live? renewed her tragical struggle. Who was it under the vaults, in the shroud, between the planks? and with human sensibility to swell the horror! Passion whispered of a vaster sorrow needed for herself; and the hope conjuring those frightful complexities was needed to soothe her. She pitied the man, but she was an enamoured woman. Often of late she had been sharply stung, relaxed as well, by the observations of Danvers assisting at her toilette. Had she beauty and charm, beauty and rich health in the young summer blooming of her days?—and all doomed to waste? No insurgency of words arose in denunciation of the wrong done to her nature. An undefined heavy feeling of wrong there was, just perceptive enough to let her know, without gravely shaming, that one or another must be slain for peace to come; for it is the case in which the world of the

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Laws overloading her is pitiless to women, deaf past ear-trumpets, past intercession; detesting and reviling them for a feeble human cry, and for one apparent step of revolt piling the pelted stones on them. It will not discriminate shades of hue, it massacres all the shadowed. They are honoured, after a fashion, at a certain elevation. Descending from it, and purely to breathe common air (thus in her mind), they are scourged and outcast. And alas! the very pleading for them excites a sort of ridicule in their advocate. How? She was utterly, even desperately, nay personally, earnest, and her humour closed her lips; though comical views of the scourged and outcast coming from the opposite party—the huge bully world—she would not have tolerated. Diana raged at a prevailing strength on the part of that huge bully world, which seemed really to embrace the atmosphere. Emma had said: ‘The rules of Christian Society are a blessed Government for us women. We owe it so much that there is not a brick of the fabric we should not prop.’ Emma’s talk of obedience to the Laws, being Laws, was repeated by the rebel, with an involuntary unphrased comparison of the vessel in dock and the vessel at sea.

When Dacier next called to see Mrs. Warwick, he heard that she had gone to Copsley for a couple of weeks. The lesson was emphasized by her not writing:—and was it the tricky sex, or the splendid character of the woman, which dealt him this punishment? Knowing how much Diana forfeited for him, he was moved to some enthusiasm, despite his inclination to be hurt.

She, on her return to London, gained a considerable

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increase of knowledge as to her position in the eye of the world; and unlike the result of her meditations derived from the clamouring tradesmen, whom she could excuse, she was neither illuminated nor cautioned by that dubious look; she conscientiously revolted. Lady Pennon hinted a word for her government. 'A good deal of what you so capitally call "Green tea talk" is going on, my dear.' Diana replied, without pretending to misunderstand: 'Gossip is a beast of prey that does not wait for the death of the creature it devours. They are welcome to my shadow, if the liberty I claim casts one, and it feeds them.' To which the old lady rejoined: 'Oh! I am with you through thick and thin. I presented you at Court, and I stand by you. Only, walk carefully. Women have to walk with a train. You are too famous not to have your troops of watchers.'

'But I mean to prove,' said Diana, 'that a woman can walk with her train independent of the common reserves and artifices.'

'Not on highways, my dear!'

Diana, praising the speaker, referred the whole truth in that to the material element of her metaphor.

She was more astonished by Whitmonby's candid chiding; but with him she could fence, and men are easily diverted. She had sent for him, to bring him and Percy Dacier together to a conference. Unaware of the project, he took the opportunity of their privacy to speak of the great station open to her in London being imperilled; and he spoke of 'tongues,' and ahem! A very little would have induced him to fill that empty vocable with a name.

She had to pardon the critic in him for an un-

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pleasant review of her hapless CANTATRICE; and as a means of evasion, she mentioned the poor book and her slaughter of the heroine, that he had complained of.

‘I killed her; I could not let her live. You were unjust in accusing the authoress of heartlessness.’

‘If I did, I retract,’ said he. ‘She steers too evidently from the centre of the vessel. She has the organ in excess.’

‘Proof that it is not squandered.’

‘The point concerns direction.’

‘Have I made so bad a choice of my friends?’

‘It is the common error of the sprightly to suppose that in parrying a thrust they blind our eyes.’

‘The world sees always what it desires to see, Mr. Whitmonby.’

‘The world, my dear Mrs. Warwick, is a blundering machine upon its own affairs, but a cruel sleuth-hound to rouse in pursuit.’

‘So now you have me chased by sight and scent. And if I take wing?’

‘Shots! volleys! — You are lawful game. The choice you have made of your friends, should oblige you to think of them.’

‘I imagine I do. Have I offended any, or one?’

‘I will not say that. You know the commotion in a French kitchen when the guests of the house declined a particular dish furnished them by command. The cook and his crew were loyal to their master, but, for the love of their Art, they sent him notice. It is ill serving a mad sovereign.’

Diana bowed to the compact little apologue.

‘I will tell you another story, traditional in our family from my great-grandmother, a Spanish woman,’

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she said. 'A cavalier serenaded his mistress, and rascal mercenaries fell upon him before he could draw sword. He battered his guitar on their pates till the lattice opened with a cry, and startled them to flight. "Thrice blessed and beloved!" he called to her above, in reference to the noise, "it was merely a diversion of the accompaniment." Now there was loyal service to a sovereign!'

'You are certainly an angel!' exclaimed Whitmonby. 'I swallow the story, and leave it to digestion to discover the appositeness. Whatever tuneful instrument one of your friends possesses shall solace your slumbers or batter the pate of your enemy. But discourage the habitual serenader.'

'The musician you must mean is due here now, by appointment to meet you,' said Diana, and set him momentarily agape with the name of Mr. Percy Dacier.

That was the origin of the alliance between the young statesman and a newspaper editor. Whitmonby, accepting proposals which suited him, quitted the house, after an hour of political talk, no longer inclined to hint at the 'habitual serenader,' but very ready to fall foul of those who did, as he proved when the numbers buzzed openly. Times were masculine; the excitement on the eve of so great a crisis, and Diana's comprehension of it and fine heading cry, put that weak matter aside. Moreover, he was taught to suppose himself as welcome a guest as Dacier; and the cook could stand criticism; the wines—wonderful to say of a lady's table—were trusty; the talk, on the political evenings and the social and anecdotal supper-nights, ran always in perfect accord with his

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ideal of the conversational orchestra: an improvised harmony, unmatched elsewhere. She did not, he considered, so perfectly assort her dinner-guests; that was her one fault. She had therefore to strain her adroitness to cover their deficiencies and fuse them. But what other woman could have done it! She led superbly. If an Irishman was present, she kept him from overflowing, managed to extract just the flavour of him, the smack of salt. She did even, at Whitmonby's table, on a red-letter Sunday evening, in concert with him and the Dean, bring down that cataract, the Bodleian, to the levels of interchanging dialogue by seasonable touches, inimitably done, and never done before. Sullivan Smith, unbridled in the middle of dinner, was docile to her. 'Irishmen,' she said, pleading on their behalf to Whitmonby, who pronounced the race too raw for an Olympian feast, 'are invaluable if you hang them up to smoke and cure'; and the master of social converse could not deny that they were responsive to her magic. The supper-nights were mainly devoted to Percy's friends. He brought as many as he pleased, and as often as it pleased him; and it was her pride to provide Cleopatra banquets for the lover whose anxieties were soothed by them, and to whom she sacrificed her name willingly in return for a generosity that certain chance whispers of her heart elevated to the pitch of measureless.

So they wore through the Session and the Autumn, clouds heavier, the League drumming, the cry of Ireland 'ominously Banshee,' as she wrote to Emma.

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‘But Tony lives!’ Emma Dunstane cried, on her solitary height, with the full accent of envy marking the verb; and when she wrote enviously to her friend of the life among bright intelligences, and of talk worth hearing, it was a happy signification that health, frail though it might be, had grown importunate for some of the play of life. Diana sent her word to name her day, and she would have her choicest to meet her dearest. They were in the early days of December, not the best of times for improvised gatherings. Emma wanted, however, to taste them as they cropped; she was also, owing to her long isolation, timid at a notion of encountering the pick of the London world, prepared by Tony to behold ‘a wonder more than worthy of them,’ as her friend unadvisedly wrote. That was why she came unexpectedly, and for a mixture of reasons, went to an hotel. Fatality designed it so. She was reproached, but she said: ‘You have to write or you entertain at night; I should be a clog and fret you. My hotel is Maitland’s; excellent; I believe I am to lie on a pillow where a crowned head reposed! You will perceive that I am proud as well as comfortable. And I would rather meet your usual set of guests.’

‘The reason why I have been entertaining at night is, that Percy is harassed and requires enlivening,’

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said Diana. 'He brings his friends. My house is open to them, if it amuses him. What the world says, is past a thought. I owe him too much.'

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Emma murmured that the world would soon be pacified.

Diana shook her head. 'The poor man is better; able to go about his affairs; and I am honestly relieved. It lays a spectre. As for me, I do not look ahead. I serve as a kind of secretary to Percy. I labour at making abstracts by day, and at night preside at my supper-table. You would think it monotonous; no incident varies the course we run. I have not time to ask whether it is happiness. It seems to bear a resemblance.'

Emma replied: 'He may be everything you tell me. He should not have chosen the last night of the Opera to go to your box and sit beside you till the fall of the curtain. The presence at the Opera of a man notoriously indifferent to music was enough in itself.'

Diana smiled with languor. 'You heard of that? But the Opera was *The Puritani*, my favourite. And he saw me sitting in Lady Pennon's box alone. We were compromised neck-deep already. I can kiss you, my own Emmy, till I die; but what the world says, is what the wind says. Besides he has his hopes. . . . If I am blackened ever so thickly, he can make me white. Dear me! if the world knew that he comes here almost nightly! It will; and does it matter? I am his in soul; the rest is waste-paper—a half-printed sheet.'

'Provided he is worthy of such devotion!'

'He is absolute worthiness. He is the prince of men:—I dread to say, mine! for fear. But Emmy

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will not judge him to-morrow by contrast with more voluble talkers.—I can do anything but read poetry now. That kills me!—See him through me. In nature, character, intellect, he has no rival. Whenever I despond—and it comes now and then—I rebuke myself with this one admonition: Simply to have known him! Admit that for a woman to find one who is worthy among the opposite creatures, is a happy termination of her quest, and in some sort dismisses her to the Shades, an uncomplaining ferry-bird. If my end were at hand I should have no cause to lament it. We women miss life only when we have to confess we have never met the man to reverence.'

Emma had to hear a very great deal of Mr. Percy. Diana's comparison of herself to 'the busy bee at a window-pane,' was more in her old manner; and her friend would have hearkened to the marvels of the gentleman less unrefreshed, had it not appeared to her that her Tony gave in excess for what was given in return. She hinted her view.

'It is expected of our sex,' Diana said.

The work of busy bee at a window-pane had at any rate not spoiled her beauty, though she had voluntarily, profitlessly, become this man's drudge, and her sprightly fancy, her ready humour and darting look all round in discussion, were rather deadened.

But the loss was not perceptible in the circle of her guests. Present at a dinner little indicating the last, were Whitmonby, in lively trim for shuffling, dealing, cutting, trumping or drawing trumps; Westlake, polishing epigrams under his eyelids; Henry Wilmers, who timed an anecdote to strike as the

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passing hour without freezing the current; Sullivan Smith, smoked, cured and ready to flavour; Percy Dacier, pleasant listener, measured speaker; and young Arthur Rhodes, the neophyte of the hostess's training; of whom she had said to Emma, 'The dear boy very kindly serves to frank an unlicensed widow'; and whom she prompted and made her utmost of, with her natural tact. These she mixed and leavened. The talk was on high levels and low; an enchantment to Emma Dunstane: now a story; a question opening new routes; sharp sketches of known personages; a paradox shot by laughter as soon as uttered; and all so smoothly; not a shadow of the dominant holder-forth or a momentary prospect of dead flats; the mellow ring of appositeness being the concordant note of deliveries running linked as they flashed, and a tolerant philosophy of the sage in the world recurrently the keynote.

Once only had Diana to protect her nurseling. He cited a funny line from a recent popular volume of verse, in perfect *à propos*, looking at Sullivan Smith; who replied, that the poets had become too many for him, and he read none now. Diana said: 'There are many Alexanders, but Alexander of Macedon is not dwarfed by the number.' She gave him an opening for a smarter reply, but he lost it in a comment—against Whitmonby's cardinal rule: 'The neatest turn of the wrist that ever swung a hero to crack a crown!' and he bowed to young Rhodes: 'I'll read your versicler to-morrow morning early.' The latter expressed a fear that the hour was too critical for poetry.

'I have taken the dose at a very early hour,' said

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Whitmonby, to bring conversation to the flow again,
'and it effaced the critical mind completely.'

'But did not silence the critical nose,' observed
Westlake.

Wilmers named the owner of the longest nose in
Europe.

'Potentially, indeed a critic!' said Diana.

'Nights beside it must be fearful, and good matter
for a divorce, if the poor dear lady could hale it to
the doors of the Vatican!' Sullivan Smith exclaimed.
'But there's character in noses.'

'Calculable by inches?' Dacier asked.

'More than in any other feature,' said Lady Dun-
stane. 'The Riffords are all prodigiously gifted and
amusing: *suspendens omnia naso*. It should be prayed
for in families.'

'Totum ut te faciant, Fabulle, nasum,' rejoined
Whitmonby. 'Lady Isabella was reading the tale
of the German princess, who had a sentinel stationed
some hundred yards away to whisk off the flies, and
she owned to me that her hand instinctively travelled
upward.'

'Candour is the best concealment, when one has
to carry a saddle of absurdity,' said Diana. 'Touch-
stone's "poor thing, but mine own," is godlike in its
enveloping fold.'

'The most comforting sermon ever delivered on
property in poverty,' said Arthur Rhodes.

Westlake assented. 'His choice of Audrey strikes
me as an exhibition of the sure instinct for pasture
of the philosophical jester in a forest.'

'With nature's woman, if he can find her, the urban
seems equally at home,' said Lady Dunstane.

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'Baron Pawle is an example,' added Whitmonby. 'His cook is a pattern wife to him. I heard him say at table that she was responsible for all except the wines. "I wouldn't have them on my conscience, with a Judge!" my lady retorted.'

'When poor Madame de Jacquières was dying,' said Wilmers, 'her confessor sat by her bedside, prepared for his ministrations. "*Pour commencer, mon ami, jamais je n'ai fait rien hors nature.*"'

Lord Wadaster had uttered something tolerably similar: 'I am a sinner, and in good society.' Sir Abraham Hartiston, a minor satellite of the Regent, diversified this: 'I am a sinner, and go to good society.' Madame la Comtesse de la Roche-Aigle, the cause of many deaths, declared it unwomanly to fear anything save '*les revenants.*' Yet the countess could say the pretty thing: 'Foot on a flower, then think of me!'

'Sentimentality puts up infant hands for absolution,' said Diana.

'But tell me,' Lady Dunstane inquired generally, 'why men are so much happier than women in laughing at their spouses?'

They are humaner, was one dictum; they are more frivolous, ironically another.

'It warrants them for blowing the bugle-horn of masculine superiority night and morning from the castle-walls,' Diana said.

'I should imagine it is for joy of heart that they still have cause to laugh!' said Westlake.

On the other hand, are women really pained by having to laugh at their lords? Curious little speeches flying about the great world, affirmed the contrary.

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But the fair speakers were chartered libertines, and their laugh admittedly had a biting acid. The parasite is concerned in the majesty of the tree.

‘We have entered Botany Bay,’ Diana said to Emma; who answered: ‘A metaphor is the *Deus ex machinâ* of an argument’; and Whitmonby, to lighten a shadow of heaviness, related allusively an anecdote of the Law-Courts. Sullivan Smith begged permission to ‘black cap’ it with Judge FitzGerald’s sentence upon a convicted criminal: ‘Your plot was perfect but for One above.’ Dacier cited an execrable impromptu line of the Chief of the Opposition in Parliament. The Premier, it was remarked, played him like an angler his fish on the hook; or say, Mr. Serjeant Rufus his witness in the box.

‘Or a French journalist an English missionary,’ said Westlake; and as the instance was recent it was relished.

The talk of Premiers offered Whitmonby occasion for a flight to the Court of Vienna and Kaunitz. Wilmers told a droll story of Lord Busby’s missing the Embassy there. Westlake furnished a sample of the tranquil sententiousness of Busby’s brother Robert during a stormy debate in the House of Commons.

‘I remember,’ Dacier was reminded, ‘hearing him say, when the House resembled a Chartist riot, “Let us stand aside and meditate on Life. If Youth could know, in the season of its reaping of the Pleasures, that it is but sowing Doctor’s bills!”’

Latterly a malady had supervened, and Bob Busby had retired from the universal to the special;—his mysterious case.

‘Assure him, that is endemic. He may be cured

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of his desire for the exposition of it,' said Lady Dunstane.

Westlake chimed with her: 'Yes, the charm in discoursing of one's case is over when the individual appears no longer at odds with Providence.'

'But then we lose our Tragedy,' said Whitmonby.

'Our Comedy too,' added Diana. 'We must consent to be Busbied for the sake of the instructive recreations.'

'A curious idea, though,' said Sullivan Smith, 'that some of the grand instructive figures were in their day colossal bores!'

'So you see the marvel of the poet's craft at last?' Diana smiled on him, and he vowed: 'I'll read nothing else for a month!' Young Rhodes bade him beware of a deluge in proclaiming it.

They rose from table at ten, with the satisfaction of knowing that they had not argued, had not wrangled, had never stagnated, and were digestingly refreshed; as it should be among grown members of the civilized world, who mean to practise philosophy, making the hour of the feast a balanced recreation and a regeneration of body and mind.

'Evenings like these are worth a pilgrimage,' Emma said, embracing Tony outside the drawing-room door. 'I am so glad I came: and if I am strong enough, invite me again in the Spring. To-morrow early I start for Copsley, to escape this London air. I shall hope to have you there soon.'

She was pleased by hearing Tony ask her whether she did not think that Arthur Rhodes had borne himself well; for it breathed of her simply friendly soul.

The gentlemen followed Lady Dunstane in a troop,

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Dacier yielding perforce the last adieu to young Rhodes.

Five minutes later Diana was in her dressing-room, where she wrote at night, on the rare occasions now when she was left free for composition. Beginning to dwell on *THE MAN OF TWO MINDS*, she glanced at the woman likewise divided, if not similarly; and she sat brooding. She did not accuse her marriage of being the first fatal step: her error was the step into Society without the wherewithal to support her position there. Girls of her kind, airing their wings above the sphere of their birth, are cryingly adventuresses. As adventuresses they are treated. Vain to be shrewish with the world! Rather let us turn and scold our nature for irreflectively rushing to the cream and honey! Had she subsisted on her small income in a country cottage, this task of writing would have been holiday. Or better, if, as she preached to Mary Paynham, she had apprenticed herself to some productive craft. The simplicity of the life of labour looked beautiful. What will not look beautiful contrasted with the fly in the web? She had chosen to be one of the flies of life.

Instead of running to composition, her mind was eloquent with a sermon to Arthur Rhodes, in Redworth's vein; more sympathetically, of course. 'For I am not one of the lecturing Mammonites!' she could say.

She was far from that. Penitentially, in the thick of her disdain of the arrogant money-getters, she pulled out a drawer where her bank-book lay, and observed it contemplatively; jotting down a reflection before the dread book of facts was opened:

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'Gaze on the moral path you should have taken, you are asked for courage to commit a sanctioned suicide, by walking back to it stripped—a skeleton self.' She sighed forth: 'But I have no courage: I never had!'

The book revealed its tale in a small pencilled computation of the bank-clerk's, on the peccant side. Credit presented many pages blanks. She seemed to have withdrawn from the struggle with such a partner.

It signified an immediate appeal to the usurers, unless the publisher could be persuaded, with three parts of the book in his hands, to come to the rescue. Work! roared old Debit, the sinner turned slavedriver.

Diana smoothed her wrists, compressing her lips not to laugh at the simulation of an attitude of combat. She took up her pen.

And strange to think, she could have flowed away at once on the stuff that Danvers delighted to read!—wicked princes, rogue noblemen, titled wantons, daisy and lily innocents, traitorous marriages, murders, a gallows dangling a corpse dotted by a moon, and a woman bowed beneath. She could have written, with the certainty that in the upper and the middle as well as in the lower classes of the country, there would be a multitude to read that stuff, so cordially, despite the gaps between them, are they one in their literary tastes. And why should they not read it? Her present mood was a craving for excitement; for incident, wild action, the primitive machinery of our species; any amount of theatrical heroics, pathos, and clown-gabble. A panorama of scenes came sweeping round her.

She was, however, harnessed to a different kind of

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vehicle, and had to drag it. The sound of the house-door shutting, imagined perhaps, was a fugitive distraction. Now to animate *The Man of Two Minds*!

He is courting, but he is burdened with the task of tasks. He has an ideal of womanhood and of the union of couples: a delicacy extreme as his attachment: and he must induce the lady to school herself to his ideal, not allowing her to suspect him less devoted to her person; while she, an exacting idol, will drink any quantity of idealization as long as he starts it from a full acceptance of her acknowledged qualities. Diana could once have tripped the scene along airily. She stared at the opening sentence, a heavy bit of moralized manufacture, fit to yoke beside that on her view of her bank-book.

'It has come to this—I have no head,' she cried.

And is our public likely to muster the slightest taste for comic analysis that does not tumble to farce? The doubt reduced her whole MS. to a leaden weight, composed for sinking. Percy's addiction to burlesque was a further hindrance, for she did not perceive how her comedy could be strained to gratify it.

There was a knock, and Danvers entered.

'You have apparently a liking for late hours,' observed her mistress. 'I told you to go to bed.'

'It is Mr. Dacier,' said Danvers.

'He wishes to see me?'

'Yes, ma'am. He apologized for disturbing you.'

'He must have some good reason.'

What could it be! Diana's glass approved her appearance. She pressed the black swell of hair above her temples, rather amazed, curious, inclined to a beating of the heart.

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CHAPTER XXXI

A Chapter containing Great Political News and therewith an Intrusion of the Love-God

Dacier was pacing about the drawing-room, as in a place too narrow for him.

Diana stood at the door. 'Have you forgotten to tell me anything I ought to know?'

He came up to her and shut the door softly behind her, holding her hand. 'You are near it. I returned . . . But tell me first:—You were slightly under a shadow this evening, dejected.'

'Did I show it?'

She was growing a little suspicious, but this cunning touch of lover-like interest dispersed the shade.

'To me you did.'

'It was unpardonable to let it be seen.'

'No one else could have observed it.'

Her woman's heart was thrilled; for she had concealed the dejection from Emma.

'It was nothing,' she said; 'a knot in the book I am writing. We poor authors are worried now and then. But you?'

His face rippled by degrees brightly, to excite a reflection in hers.

'Shall I tune you with good news? I think it will excuse me for coming back.'

'Very good news?'

'Brave news, as far as it goes.'



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‘Then it concerns you!’

‘Me, you, the country.’

‘Oh! do I guess?’ cried Diana. ‘But speak, pray;

I burn.’

‘What am I to have for telling it?’

‘Put no price. You know my heart. I guess—or fancy. It relates to your Chief?’

Dacier smiled in a way to show the lock without the key; and she was insensibly drawn nearer to him, speculating on the smile.

‘Try again,’ said he, keenly appreciating the blindness to his motive of her studious dark eyes, and her open-lipped breathing.

‘Percy! I must be right.’

‘Well, you are. He has decided!’

‘Oh! that is the bravest possible. When did you hear?’

‘He informed me of his final decision this afternoon.’

‘And you were charged with the secret all the evening, and betrayed not a sign! I compliment the diplomatic statesman. But when will it be public?’

‘He calls Parliament together the first week of next month.’

‘The proposal is——? No more compromises!’

‘Total!’

Diana clapped hands; and her aspect of enthusiasm was intoxicating. ‘He is a wise man and a gallant Minister! And while you were reading me through, I was blind to you,’ she added meltingly.

‘I have not made too much of it?’ said he.

‘Indeed you have not.’

She was radiant with her dark lightnings, yet visibly subject to him under the spell of the news he had art-

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fully lengthened out to excite and overbalance her:—and her enthusiasm was all pointed to his share in the altered situation, as he well knew and was flattered in knowing.

‘So Tony is no longer dejected? I thought I could freshen you and get my excuse.’

‘Oh! a high wind will make a dead leaf fly like a bird. I soar. Now I do feel proud. I have longed for it—to have you leading the country: not tugged at like a waggon with a treble team uphill. We two are a month in advance of all England. You stand by him?—only to hear it, for I am sure of it!’

‘We stand or fall together.’

Her glowing look doated on the faithful lieutenant.

‘And if the henchman is my hero, I am but a waiting-woman. But I must admire his leader.’

‘Tony!’

‘Ah! no,’ she joined her hands, wondering whither her armed majesty had fled; ‘no softness! no payments! Flatter me by letting me think you came to a head—not a silly woman’s heart, with one name on it, as it has not to betray. I have been frank; you need no proofs . . .’ The supplicating hands left her figure an easy prey to the storm, and were crushed in a knot on her bosom. She could only shrink. ‘Ah! Percy . . . you undo my praise of you—my pride in receiving you.’

They were speechless perforce.

‘You see, Tony, my dearest, I am flesh and blood after all.’

‘You drive me to be ice and door-bolts!’

Her eyes broke over him reproachfully.

‘It is not so much to grant,’ he murmured.

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'It changes everything between us.'

'Not me. It binds me the faster.'

'It makes me a loathsome hypocrite.'

'But, Tony! is it so much?'

'Not if you value it low.'

'But how long do you keep me in this rag-puppet's state of suspension?'

'Patience.'

'Dangling and swinging day and night!'

'The rag-puppet shall be animated and repaid if I have life. I wish to respect my hero. Have a little mercy. Our day will come: perhaps as wonderfully as this wonderful news. My friend, drop your hands. Have you forgotten who I am? I want to think, Percy!'

'But you are mine.'

'You are abasing your own.'

'No, by heaven!'

'Worse, dear friend; you are lowering yourself to the woman who loves you.'

'You must imagine me superhuman.'

'I worship you—or did.'

'Be reasonable, Tony. What harm! Surely a trifle of recompense? Just to let me feel I live! You own you love me. Then I am your lover.'

'My dear friend Percy, when I have consented to be your paramour, this kind of treatment of me will not want apologies.'

The plain speaking from the wound he dealt her was effective with a gentleman who would never have enjoyed his privileges had he been of a nature unsusceptible to her distinct wish and meaning.

He sighed. 'You know how my family bother me.'

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The woman I want, the only woman I could marry, I can't have.'

'You have her in soul.'

'Body and soul, it must be! I believe you were made without fire.'

'Perhaps. The element is omitted with some of us: happily, some think. Now we can converse. There seems to be a measurement of distances required before men and women have a chance with their brains:—or before a man will understand that he can be advised and seconded. When will the Cabinet be consulted?'

'Oh, a few days. Promise me . . .'

'Any honourable promise!'

'You will not keep me waiting longer than the end of the Session?'

'Probably there will be an appeal to the country.'

'In any case, promise me: have some compassion.'

'Ah, the compassion! You do not choose your words, Percy, or forget who is the speaker.'

'It is Tony who forgets the time she has kept her lover dangling. Promise, and I will wait.'

'You hurt my hand, sir.'

'I could crack the knuckles. Promise!'

'Come to me to-morrow.'

'To-morrow you are in your armour—triple brass! All creation cries out for now. We are mounted on barbs and you talk of ambling.'

'Arthur Rhodes might have spoken that.'

'Rhodes!' he shook off the name in disgust. 'Pet him as much as you like; don't . . .' he was unable to phrase his objection.

She cooled him further with eulogies of the chevalier-

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A Chapter containing Great Political News and therewith an Intrusion of the Love-God

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esque manner of speaking which young Mr. Rhodes could assume; till for very wrath of blood—not jealousy: he had none of any man, with her; and not passion; the little he had was a fitful gust—he punished her coldness by taking what hastily could be gathered.

Her shape was a pained submission; and she thought: Where is the woman who ever knows a man!—as women do think when one of their artifices of evasion with a lover, or the trick of imposingness, has apparently been subduing him. But the pain was less than previously, for she was now mistress of herself, fearing no abysses.

Dacier released her quickly, saying: ‘If I come to-morrow, shall I have the promise?’

She answered: ‘Be sure I shall not lie.’

‘Why not let me have it before I go?’

‘My friend, to tell you the truth, you have utterly distracted me.’

‘Forgive me if I did hurt your hand.’

‘The hand? You might strike it off.’

‘I can’t be other than a mortal lover, Tony. There’s the fact.’

‘No; the fault is mine when I am degraded. I trust you: there’s the error.’

The trial for Dacier was the sight of her quick-lifting bosom under the mask of cold language: an attraction and repulsion in union; a delirium to any lover impelled to trample on weak defences. But the evident pain he inflicted moved his pity, which helped to restore his conception of the beauty of her character. She stood so nobly meek. And she was never prudish, only self-respecting. Although the

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great news he imparted had roused an ardent thirst for holiday and a dash out of harness, and he could hardly check it, he yielded her the lead.

'Trust me you may,' he said. 'But you know we are one. The world has given you to me, me to you. Why should we be asunder? There's no reason in it.'

She replied: 'But still I wish to burn a little incense in honour of myself, or else I cannot live. It is the truth. You make Death my truer friend, and at this moment I would willingly go out. You would respect me more dead than alive. I could better pardon you too.'

He pleaded for the red mouth's pardon, remotely irritated by the suspicion that she swayed him overmuch: and he had deserved the small benevolences and donations of love, crumbs and heavenly dews!

'Not a word of pardon,' said Diana. 'I shall never count an iota against you "in the dark backward and abysm of Time." This news is great, and I have sunk beneath it. Come to-morrow. Then we will speak upon whatever you can prove rational. The hour is getting late.'

Dacier took a draught of her dark beauty with the crimson he had kindled over the cheeks. Her lips were firmly closed, her eyes grave; dry, but seeming to waver tearfully in their heavy fulness. He could not doubt her love of him; and although chafing at the idea that she swayed him absurdly—beyond the credible in his world of wag-tongues—he resumed his natural soberness, as a garment, not very uneasily fitting: whence it ensued—for so are we influenced by the garb we put on us—that his manly sentiment of

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revolt in being condemned to play second, was repressed by the refreshment breathed on him from her lofty character, the pure jewel proffered to his inward ownership.

‘Adieu for the night,’ he said, and she smiled. He pressed for a pressure of her hand. She brightened her smile instead, and said only: ‘Good night, Percy.’

CHAPTER XXXII

Wherein we behold a Giddy Turn at the Spectral Crossways

Danvers accompanied Mr. Dacier to the house-door. Climbing the stairs, she found her mistress in the drawing-room still.

‘You must be cold, ma’am,’ she said, glancing at the fire-grate.

‘Is it a frost?’ said Diana.

‘It’s midnight and midwinter, ma’am.’

‘Has it struck midnight?’

The mantelpiece clock said five minutes past.

‘You had better go to bed, Danvers, or you will lose your bloom. Stop; you are a faithful soul. Great things are happening and I am agitated. Mr. Dacier has told me news. He came back purposely.’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Danvers. ‘He had a great deal to tell?’

‘Well, he had.’ Diana coloured at the first tentative impertinence she had heard from her maid.

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'What is the secret of you, Danvers? What attaches you to me?'

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'I'm sure I don't know, ma'am. I'm romantic.'

'And you think me a romantic object?'

'I'm sure I can't say, ma'am. I'd rather serve you than any other lady; and I wish you was happy.'

'Do you suppose I am unhappy?'

'I'm sure—but if I may speak, ma'am: so handsome and clever a lady! and young! I can't bear to see it.'

'Tush, you silly woman. You read your melting tales, and imagine. I must go and write for money: it is my profession. And I haven't an idea in my head. This news disturbs me. Ruin if I don't write; so I must.—I can't!'

Diana beheld the ruin. She clasped the great news for succour. Great indeed: and known but to her of all the outer world. She was ahead of all—ahead of Mr. Tonans!

The visionary figure of Mr. Tonans petrified by the great news, drinking it, and confessing her ahead of him in the race for secrets, arose toweringly. She had not ever seen the Editor in his den at midnight. With the rumble of his machinery about him, and fresh matter arriving and flying into the printing-press, it must be like being in the very furnace-hissing of Events: an Olympian Council held in Vulcan's smithy. Consider the bringing to the Jove there news of such magnitude as to stupefy him! He, too, who had admonished her rather sneeringly for staleness in her information. But this news, great though it was, and throbbing like a heart plucked out of a breathing body, throbbed but for



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a brief term, a day or two; after which, great though it was, immense, it relapsed into a common organ, a possession of the multitude, merely historically curious.

'You are not afraid of the streets at night?' Diana said to her maid, as they were going upstairs.

'Not when we're driving, ma'am,' was the answer.

THE MAN OF TWO MINDS faced his creatrix in the dressing-room, still delivering that most ponderous of sentences—a smothering pillow!

I have mistaken my vocation, thought Diana: I am certainly the flattest proser who ever penned a line.

She sent Danvers into the bedroom on a trifling errand, unable to bear the woman's proximity, and oddly unwilling to dismiss her.

She pressed her hands on her eyelids. Would Percy have humiliated her so if he had respected her? He took advantage of the sudden loss of her habitual queenly initiative at the wonderful news to debase and stain their intimacy. The lover's behaviour was judged by her sensations: she felt humiliated, plucked violently from the throne where she had long been sitting securely, very proudly. That was at an end. If she was to be better than the loathsome of hypocrites, she must deny him his admission to the house. And then what was her life!

Something that was pressing her low, she knew not how, and left it unquestioned, incited her to exaggerate the indignity her pride had suffered. She was a dethroned woman. Deeper within, an unmasked actress, she said. Oh, she forgave him! But clearly he took her for the same as other women

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consenting to receive a privileged visitor. And sounding herself to the soul, was she so magnificently better? Her face flamed. She hugged her arms at her breast to quiet the beating, and dropped them when she surprised herself embracing the memory. He had brought political news, and treated her as—name the thing! Not designedly, it might be: her position invited it. 'The world had given her to him.' The world is always a prophet of the mire; but the world is no longer an utterly mistaken world. She shook before it.

She asked herself why Percy or the world should think highly of an adventuress, who was a denounced wife, a wretched author, and on the verge of bankruptcy. She was an adventuress. When she held The Crossways she had at least a bit of solid footing: now gone. An adventuress without an idea in her head: witness her dullard, The Man of Two Minds, at his work of sermonizing his mistress.

The tremendous pressure upon our consciousness of the material cause, when we find ourselves cast among the breakers of moral difficulties and endeavour to elude that mud-visaged monster, chiefly by feigning unconsciousness, was an experience of Diana's, in the crisis to which she was wrought. Her wits were too acute, her nature too direct, to permit of a lengthened confusion. She laid the scourge on her flesh smartly.—I gave him these privileges because I am weak as the weakest, base as my enemies proclaim me. I covered my woman's vile weakness with an air of intellectual serenity that he, choosing his moment, tore away, exposing me to myself, as well as to him, the most ordinary of reptiles. I kept up a costly

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household for the sole purpose of seeing him and having him near me. Hence this bitter need of money!—Either it must be money or disgrace. Money would assist her quietly to amend and complete her work. Yes, and this want of money, in a review of the last two years, was the material cause of her recklessness. It was, her revived and uprising pudency declared, the principal, the only cause. Mere want of money.

And she had a secret worth thousands! The secret of a day, no more: anybody's secret after some four and twenty hours.

She smiled at the fancied elongation and stare of the features of Mr. Tonans in his editorial midnight den.

What if he knew it and could cap it with something novel and stranger? Hardly. But it was an inciting suggestion.

She began to tremble as a lightning-flash made visible her fortunes recovered, disgrace averted, hours of peace for composition stretching before her: a summer afternoon's vista.

It seemed a duel between herself and Mr. Tonans, and she sure of her triumph—Diana victrix!

'Danvers!' she called.

'Is it to undress, ma'am?' said the maid, entering to her.

'You are not afraid of the streets, you tell me. I have to go down to the City, I think. It is urgent. Yes, I must go. If I were to impart the news to you, your head would be a tolling bell for a month.'

'You will take a cab, ma'am.'

'We must walk out to find one. I must go, though I should have to go on foot. Quick with bonnet and

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shawl; muffle up warmly. We have never been out so late: but does it matter? You're a brave soul, I'm sure, and you shall have your fee.'

'I don't care for money, ma'am.'

'When we get home you shall kiss me.'

Danvers clothed her mistress in furs and rich wrappings: Not paid for! was Diana's desperate thought, and a wrong one; but she had to seem the precipitated bankrupt and succeeded. She was near being it. The boiling of her secret carried her through the streets rapidly and unobservantly except of such small things as the glow of the lights on the pavements and the hushed cognizance of the houses, in silence to a thoroughfare where a willing cabman was met. The destination named, he nodded alertly: he had driven gentlemen there at night from the House of Commons, he said.

'*Our* Parliament is now sitting, and you drive ladies,' Diana replied.

'I hope I know one, never mind the hour,' said he of the capes.

He was bidden to drive rapidly.

'Complexion a tulip: you do not often see a pale cabman,' she remarked to Danvers, who began laughing, as she always expected to do on an excursion with her mistress.

'Do you remember, ma'am, the cabman taking us to the coach, when you thought of going to the continent?'

'And I went to The Crossways? I have forgotten him.'

'He declared you was so beautiful a lady he would drive you to the end of England for nothing.'

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'It must have been when I was paying him. Put it out of your mind, Danvers, that there are individual cabmen. They are the painted flowers of our metropolitan thoroughfares, and we gather them in rows.'

'They have their feelings, ma'am.'

'Brandied feelings are not pathetic to me.'

'I like to think kindly of them,' Danvers remarked, in reproof of her inhumanity; adding: 'They may overturn us!' at which Diana laughed.

Her eyes were drawn to a brawl of women and men in the street. 'Ah! that miserable sight!' she cried. 'It is the everlasting nightmare of London.'

Danvers humped, femininely injured by the notice of it. She wondered her mistress should deign to.

Rolling on between the blind and darkened houses, Diana transferred her sensations to them, and in a fit of the nerves imagined them beholding a funeral convoy without followers.

They came in view of the domed cathedral, hearing, in a pause of the wheels, the bell of the hour. 'Faster! faster! my dear man,' Diana murmured, and they entered a small still square of many lighted windows.

'This must be where the morrow is manufactured,' she said. 'Tell the man to wait.—Or rather it's the mirror of yesterday: we have to look backward to see forward in life.'

She talked her cool philosophy to mask her excitement from herself.

Her card, marked: '*Imperative—two minutes,*' was taken up to Mr. Tonans. They ascended to the editorial ante-room. Doors opened and shut, hasty

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feet traversed the corridors, a dull hum in dumbness told of mighty business at work. Diana received the summons to the mighty head of the establishment. Danvers was left to speculate. She heard the voice of Mr. Tonans: 'Not more than two!' This was not a place for compliments. Men passed her, hither and yonder, cursorily noticing the presence of a woman. She lost, very strangely to her, the sense of her sex, and became an object—a disregarded object. Things of more importance were about. Her feminine self-esteem was troubled; all idea of attractiveness expired. Here was manifestly a spot where women had dropped from the secondary to the cancelled stage of their extraordinary career in a world either blowing them aloft like soap-bubbles or quietly shelving them as supernumeraries. A gentleman—sweet vision!—shot by to the editor's door, without even looking cursorily. He knocked. Mr. Tonans appeared and took him by the arm, dictating at a great rate; perceived Danvers, frowned at the female, and requested him to wait in the room, which the gentleman did, not once casting eye upon a woman. At last her mistress returned to her, escorted so far by Mr. Tonans, and he refreshingly bent his back to bow over her hand: so we have the satisfaction of knowing that we are not such poor creatures after all! Suffering in person, Danvers was revived by the little show of homage to her sex.

They descended the stairs.

'You are not an Editor of a paper, but you may boast that you have been near the nest of one,' Diana said, when they resumed their seats in the cab. She breathed deeply from time to time, as if under a

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weight, or relieved of it, but she seemed animated, and she dropped now and again a funny observation of the kind that tickled Danvers and caused the maid to boast of her everywhere as better than a Play.

At home, Danvers busied her hands to supply her mistress a cup of refreshing tea and a plate of biscuits. Diana had stunned herself with the strange weight of the expedition, and had not a thought. In spite of tea at that hour, she slept soundly through the remainder of the night, dreamlessly till late into the morning.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Exhibits the Springing of a Mine in a Newspaper Article

The powers of harmony would seem to be tried to their shrewdest pitch when Politics and Love are planted together in a human breast. This apparently opposite couple can nevertheless chant a very sweet accord, as was shown by Dacier on his homeward walk from Diana's house. Let Love lead, the God will make music of any chamber-comrade. He was able to think of affairs of State while feeling the satisfied thirst of the lover whose pride, irritated by confidential wild eulogies of the beautiful woman, had recently clamoured for proofs of his commandership. The impression she stamped on him at Copsley remained, but it could not occupy the foreground for ever. He did not object to play second to her sprightly wits in converse, if he had some warm testimony to his mastery over her blood. For the world had given

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her to him, enthusiastic friends had congratulated him: she had exalted him for true knightliness; and he considered the proofs well earned, though he did not value them low. They were little by comparison. They lighted, instead of staining, her unparalleled high character.

She loved him. Full surely did she love him, or such a woman would never have consented to brave the world; once in their project of flight, and next, even more endearingly when contemplated, in the sacrifice of her good name; not omitting that fervent memory of her pained submission, but a palpitating submission, to his caress. She was in his arms again at the thought of it. He had melted her, and won the confession of her senses by a surprise, and he owned that never had woman been so vigilantly self-guarded or so watchful to keep her lover amused and aloof. Such a woman deserved long service. But then the long service deserved its time of harvest. Her surging look of reproach in submission pointed to the golden time, and as he was a man of honour, pledged to her for life, he had no remorse, and no scruple in determining to exact her dated promise, on this occasion deliberately. She was the woman to be his wife; she was his mind's mate: they had hung apart in deference to mere scruples too long. During the fierce battle of the Session she would be his help, his fountain of counsel; and she would be the rosy gauze-veiled more than cold helper and adviser, the being which would spur her womanly intelligence to acknowledge, on this occasion deliberately, the wisdom of the step. They had been so close to it! She might call it

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madness then: now it was wisdom. Each had complete experience of the other, and each vowed the step must be taken.

As to the secret communicated, he exulted in the pardonable cunning of the impulse turning him back to her house after the guests had gone, and the dexterous play of his bait on the line, tempting her to guess and quit her queenly guard. Though it had not been distinctly schemed, the review of it in that light added to the enjoyment. It had been dimly and richly conjectured as a hoped result. Small favours from her were really worth, thrice worth, the utmost from other women. They tasted the sweeter for the winning of them artfully—an honourable thing in love. Nature, rewarding the lover's ingenuity and enterprise, inspires him with old Greek notions of right and wrong: and love is indeed a fluid mercurial realm, continually shifting the principles of rectitude and larceny. As long as he means nobly, what is there to condemn him? Not she in her heart. She was the presiding divinity.

And she, his Tony, that splendid Diana, was the woman the world abused! Whom will it not abuse?

The slough she would have to plunge in before he could make her his own with the world's consent, was already up to her throat. She must, and without further hesitation, be steeped, that he might drag her out, washed of the imputed defilement, and radiant as she was in character. Reflection now said this; not impulse.

Her words rang through him. At every meeting she said things to confound his estimate of the wits

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of women, or be remembered for some spirited ring they had:—*A high wind will make a dead leaf fly like a bird.* He murmured it and flew with her. She quickened a vein of imagination that gave him entrance to a strangely brilliant sphere, above his own, where, she sustaining, he too could soar; and he did, scarce conscious of walking home, undressing, falling asleep.

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The act of waking was an instantaneous recovery of his emotional rapture of the overnight; nor was it a bar to graver considerations. His Chief had gone down to a house in the country; his personal business was to see and sound the followers of their party—after another sight of his Tony. She would be sure to counsel sagaciously; she always did. She had a marvellous intuition of the natures of the men he worked with, solely from his chance descriptions of them: it was as though he started the bird and she transfixed it. And she should not have matter to ruffle her smooth brows: that he swore to. She should sway him as she pleased, be respected after her prescribed manner. The promise must be exacted; nothing besides the promise.—You see, Tony, you cannot be less than Tony to me now, he addressed the gentle phantom of her. Let me have your word, and I am your servant till the Session ends.—Tony blushes her swarthy crimson: Diana, fluttering, rebukes her; but Diana is the appeasable Goddess; Tony is the woman, and she loves him. The glorious Goddess need not cut them adrift; they can show her a book of honest pages.

Dacier could truthfully say he had worshipped, done knightly service to the beloved woman, homage to the

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aureole encircling her. Those friends of his, covertly congratulating him on her preference, doubtless thought him more privileged than he was; but they did not know Diana; and they were welcome, if they would only believe, to the knowledge that he was at the feet of this most sovereign woman. He despised the particular Satyr-world which, whatever the nature or station of the woman, crowns the desecrator, and bestows the title of Fool on the worshipper. He could have answered veraciously that she had kept him from folly.

Nevertheless the term to service must come. In the assurance of the approaching term he stood braced against a blowing world; happy as men are when their muscles are strung for a prize they pluck with the energy and aim of their whole force.

Letters and morning papers were laid for him to peruse in his dressing-room. He read his letters before the bath. Not much public news was expected at the present season. While dressing, he turned over the sheets of Whitmonby's journal. Dull comments on stale tidings. Foreign news, Home news, with the leaders on them, identically dull. Behold the effect of Journalism: a witty man, sparkling overnight, gets into his pulpit and proses; because he must say something, and he really knows nothing. Journalists have an excessive overestimate of their influence. They cannot, as Diana said, comparing them with men on the Parliamentary platform, cannot feel they are aboard the big vessel; they can only strive to raise a breeze, or find one to swell; and they cannot measure the stoutness or the greatness of the good ship England. Dacier's personal ambition was inferior

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to his desire to extend and strengthen his England. Parliament was the field, Government the office. How many conversations had passed between him and Diana on that patriotic dream! She had often filled his drooping sails; he owned it proudly:—and while the world, both the hoofed and the rectilinear portions, were biting at her character! Had he fretted her self-respect? He blamed himself, but a devoted service must have its term.

The paper of Mr. Tonans was reserved for perusal at breakfast. He reserved it because Tonans was an opponent, tricky and surprising now and then, amusing too; unlikely to afford him serious reflections. The recent endeavours of his journal to whip the Government-team to a right-about-face were annoying, preposterous. Dacier had admitted to Diana that Tonans merited the thanks of the country during the discreditable Railway mania, when his articles had a fine exhortative and prophetic twang, and had done marked good. Otherwise, as regarded the Ministry, the veering gusts of Tonans were objectionable: he 'raised the breeze' wantonly as well as disagreeably. Any one can whip up the populace if he has the instruments; and Tonans frequently intruded on the Ministry's prerogative to govern. The journalist was bidding against the statesman. But such is the condition of a rapidly Radicalizing country! We must take it as it is.

With a complacent, What now, Dacier fixed his indifferent eyes on the first column of the leaders.

He read, and his eyes grew horny. He jerked back at each sentence, electrified, staring. The article was shorter than usual. Total Repeal was named; the

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precise date when the Minister intended calling Parliament together to propose it. The 'Total Repeal' might be guesswork—an editor's bold stroke; but the details, the date, were significant of positive information. The Minister's definite and immediate instructions were exactly stated.

Where could the fellow have got hold of that? Dacier asked the blank ceiling.

He frowned at vacant corners of the room in an effort to conjure some speculation indicative of the source.

Had his Chief confided the secret to another and a traitor? Had they been overheard in his library when the project determined on was put in plain speech?

The answer was no, impossible, to each question.

He glanced at Diana. She? But it was past midnight when he left her. And she would never have betrayed him, never, never. To imagine it a moment was an injury to her.

Where else could he look? It had been specially mentioned in the communication as a secret by his Chief, who trusted him and no others. Up to the consultation with the Cabinet, it was a thing to be guarded like life itself. Not to a soul except Diana would Dacier have breathed syllable of any secret—and one of this weight!

He ran down the article again. There were the facts; undeniable facts; and they detonated with audible roaring and rounding echoes of them over England. How did they come there? As well inquire how man came on the face of the earth.

He had to wipe his forehead perpetually. Think as he would in exaltation of Diana to shelter himself, he

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was the accused. He might not be the guilty but he had opened his mouth; and though it was to her only, and she, as Dunstane had sworn, true as steel, he could not escape condemnation. He had virtually betrayed his master. Diana would never betray her lover, but the thing was in the air as soon as uttered: and off to the printing press! Dacier's grotesque fancy under annoyance pictured a stream of small printer's devils in flight from his babbling lips.

He consumed bits of breakfast, with a sour confession that a newspaper article had hit him at last, and stunningly.

Hat and coat were called for. The state of aimlessness in hot perplexity demands a show of action. Whither to go first was as obscure as what to do. Diana said of the Englishman's hat and coat, that she supposed they were to make him a walking presentment of the house he had shut up behind him. A shot of the eye at the glass confirmed the likeness, but with a ruefully wry-faced repudiation of it internally:—Not so shut up! the reverse of that—a common babbler.

However, there was no doubt of Diana. First he would call on her. The pleasantest dose in perturbations of the kind is instinctively taken first. She would console, perhaps direct him to guess how the secret had leaked.—But so suddenly, immediately! It was inexplicable.

Sudden and immediate consequences were experienced. On the steps of his house his way was blocked by the arrival of Mr. Quintin Manx, who jumped out of a cab, bellowing interjections and interrogations in a breath. Was there *anything* in

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that article? He had read it at breakfast, and it had choked him. Dacier was due at a house and could not wait: he said, rather sharply, he was not responsible for newspaper articles. Quintin Manx, a senior gentleman and junior landowner, vowed that no Minister intending to sell the country should treat him as a sheep. The shepherd might go; he would not carry his flock with him. But was there a twinkle of probability in the story? . . . that article! Dacier was unable to inform him; he was very hurried, had to keep an appointment.

'If I let you go, will you come and lunch with me at two?' said Quintin.

To get rid of him, Dacier nodded and agreed.

'Two o'clock, mind!' was bawled at his heels as he walked off with his long stride, unceremoniously leaving the pury gentleman of sixty to settle with his cabman far to the rear.

CHAPTER XXXIV

In which it is darkly seen how the Criminal's
Judge may be Love's Criminal

When we are losing balance on a precipice we do not think much of the thing we have clutched for support. Our balance is restored and we have not fallen; that is the comfortable reflection: we stand as others do, and we will for the future be warned to avoid the dizzy stations which cry for resources beyond a common equilibrium, and where a slip precipitates us to ruin.

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When, further, it is a woman planted in a burning blush, having to idealize her feminine weakness, that she may not rebuke herself for grovelling, the mean material acts by which she sustains a tottering position are speedily swallowed in the one pervading flame. She sees but an ashen curl of the path she has traversed to safety, if anything.

Knowing her lover was to come in the morning, Diana's thoughts dwelt wholly upon the way to tell him, as tenderly as possible without danger to herself, that her time for entertaining was over until she had finished her book; indefinitely, therefore. The apprehension of his complaining pricked the memory that she had something to forgive. He had sunk her in her own esteem by compelling her to see her woman's softness. But how high above all other men her experience of him could place him notwithstanding! He had bowed to the figure of herself, dearer than herself, that she set before him: and it was a true figure to the world; a too fictitious to any but the most knightly of lovers. She forgave; and a shudder seized her.—Snake! she rebuked the delicious run of fire through her veins; for she was not like the idol woman of imperishable type, who are never for a twinkle the prey of the blood: statues created by man's common desire to impress upon the sex his possessing pattern of them as domestic decorations.

When she entered the room to Dacier and they touched hands, she rejoiced in her coolness, without any other feeling or perception active. Not to be unkind, not too kind: this was her task. She waited for the passage of commonplaces.

'You slept well, Percy?'

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'Yes; and you?'

'I don't think I even dreamed.'

They sat. She noticed the cloud on him and waited for his allusion to it, anxious concerning him simply.

Dacier flung the hair off his temples. Words of Titanic formation were hurling in his head at journals and journalists. He muttered his disgust of them.

'Is there anything to annoy you in the papers to-day?' she asked, and thought how handsome his face was in anger.

The paper of Mr. Tonans was named by him. 'You have not seen it?'

'I have not opened it yet.'

He sprang up. 'The truth is, those fellows can now afford to buy right and left, corrupt every soul alive! There must have been a spy at the keyhole. I'm pretty certain—I could swear it was not breathed to any ear but mine; and there it is this morning in black and white.'

'*What* is?' cried Diana, turning to him on her chair.

'The thing I told you last night.'

Her lips worked, as if to spell the thing. 'Printed, do you say?' she rose.

'Printed. In a leading article, loud as a trumpet; a hue and cry running from end to end of the country. And my Chief has already had the satisfaction of seeing the secret he confided to me yesterday roared in all the thoroughfares this morning. They've got the facts: his decision to propose it, and the date—the whole of it! But who could have betrayed it?'

For the first time since her midnight expedition she felt a sensation of the full weight of the deed. She heard thunder.

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She tried to disperse the growing burden by an inward summons to contempt of the journalistic profession, but nothing would come. She tried to minimize it, and her brain succumbed. Her views of the deed last night and now throttled reason in two contending clutches. The enormity swelled its dimensions, taking shape, and pointing magnetically at her. She stood absolutely, amazedly, bare before it.

‘Is it of such very great importance?’ she said, like one supplicating him to lessen it.

‘A secret of State? If you ask whether it is of great importance to me, relatively it is of course. Nothing greater. Personally my conscience is clear. I never mentioned it—couldn’t have mentioned it—to any one but you. I’m not the man to blab secrets. He spoke to me because he knew he could trust me. To tell you the truth, I’m brought to a dead stop. I can’t make a guess. I’m certain, from what he said, that he trusted me only with it: perfectly certain. I know him well. He was in his library, speaking in his usual conversational tone, deliberately, not over-loud. He stated that it was a secret between us.’

‘Will it affect him?’

‘This article? Why, naturally it will. You ask strange questions. A Minister coming to a determination like that! It affects him vitally. The members of the Cabinet are not so devoted. . . . It affects us all—the whole Party; may split it to pieces! There’s no reckoning the upset right and left. If it were false, it could be refuted; we could despise it as a trick of journalism. It’s true. There’s the mischief. Tonans did not happen to call here last night?—absurd! I left later than twelve.’

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'No, but let me hear,' Diana said hurriedly, for the sake of uttering the veracious negative and to slur it over. 'Let me hear . . .' She could not muster an idea.

Her delicious thrilling voice was a comfort to him. He lifted his breast high and thumped it, trying to smile. 'After all, it's pleasant being with you, Tony. Give me your hand—you may: I'm bothered—confounded by this morning surprise. It was like walking against the muzzle of a loaded cannon suddenly unmasked. One can't fathom the mischief it will do. And I shall be suspected, and can't quite protest myself the spotless innocent. Not even to one's heart's mistress! to the wife of the bosom! I suppose I'm no Roman. You won't give me your hand? Tony, you might, seeing I am rather . . .'

A rush of scalding tears flooded her eyes.

'Don't touch me,' she said, and forced her sight to look straight at him through the fiery shower. 'I have done positive *mischief*?'

'You, my dear Tony?' He doated on her face. 'I don't blame you, I blame myself. These things should never be breathed. Once in the air, the devil has hold of them. Don't take it so much to heart. The thing's bad enough to bear as it is. Tears! Let me have the hand. I came, on my honour, with the most honest intention to submit to your orders: but if I see you weeping in sympathy!'

'Oh! for heaven's sake,' she caught her hands away from him, 'don't be generous. Whip me with scorpions. And don't touch me,' cried Diana. 'Do you understand? You did not name it as a secret. I did not imagine it to be a secret of immense, *immediate* importance.'

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‘But—*what?*’ shouted Dacier, stiffening.

He wanted her positive meaning, as she perceived, having hoped that it was generally taken and current, and the shock to him over.

‘I had . . . I had not a suspicion of doing harm, Percy.’

‘But what harm have you done? No riddles!’

His features gave sign of the break in their common ground, the widening gulf.

‘I went . . . it was a curious giddiness: I can’t account for it. I thought . . .’

‘*Went?* You went where?’

‘Last night. I would speak intelligibly: my mind has gone. Ah! you look. It is not so bad as my feeling.’

‘But where did you go last night? What!—to Tonans?’

She drooped her head: she saw the track of her route cleaving the darkness in a demoniacal zig-zag and herself in demon’s grip.

‘Yes,’ she confronted him. ‘I went to Mr. Tonans.’

‘Why?’

‘I went to him——’

‘You went alone?’

‘I took my maid.’

‘Well?’

‘It was late when you left me . . .’

‘Speak plainly!’

‘I am trying: I will tell you all.’

‘At once, if you please.’

‘I went to him—why? There is no accounting for it. He sneered constantly at my stale information.’

‘You gave him constant information?’

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'No: in our ordinary talk. He railed at me for being "out of it." I must be childish: I went to show him—oh! my vanity! I think I must have been possessed.'

She watched the hardening of her lover's eyes. They penetrated, and through them she read herself insufferably.

But it was with hesitation still that he said: 'Then you betrayed me?'

'Percy! I had not a suspicion of mischief.'

'You went straight to this man?'

'Not thinking . . .'

'You sold me to a journalist!'

'I thought it was a secret of a day. I don't think you—no, you did not tell me to keep it secret. A word from you would have been enough. I was in extremity.'

Dacier threw his hands up and broke away. He had an impulse to dash from the room. To get a breath of different air. He stood at the window, observing tradesmen's carts, housemaids, blank doors, dogs, a beggar fifer. Her last words recurred to him. He turned: 'You were in extremity, you said. What is the meaning of that? What extremity?'

Her large dark eyes flashed powerlessly; her shape appeared to have narrowed; her tongue, too, was a feeble penitent.

'You ask a creature to recall her acts of insanity.'

'There must be some signification in your words, I suppose.'

'I will tell you as clearly as I can. You have the right to be my judge. I was in extremity—that is, I saw no means . . . I could not write: it was ruin coming.'

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'Ah?—you took payment for playing spy?'

'I fancied I could retrieve . . . Now I see the folly, the baseness. I was blind.'

'Then you sold me to a journalist for money?'

The intolerable scourge fetched a stifled scream from her and drove her pacing, but there was no escape; she returned to meet it.

The room was a cage to both of them, and every word of either was a sting.

'Percy, I did not imagine he would use it—make use of it as he has done.'

'Not? And when he paid for it?'

'I fancied it would be merely of general service—if any.'

'Distributed; I see: not leading to the exposure of the communicant!'

'You are harsh; but I would not have you milder.'

The meekness of such a mischief-doer was revolting and called for the lash.

'Do me the favour to name the sum. I am curious to learn what my imbecility was counted worth.'

'No sum was named.'

'Have I been bought for a song?'

'It was a suggestion—no definite . . . nothing stipulated.'

'You were to receive money!'

'Leave me a bit of veiling! No, you shall behold me the thing I am. Listen . . . I was poor. . . .'

'You might have applied to me.'

'For money! That I could not do.'

'Better than betraying me, believe me.'

'I had no thought of betraying. I hope I could have died rather than consciously betray.'

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'Money! My whole fortune was at your disposal.'

'I was beset with debts, unable to write, and, last night when you left me, abject. It seemed to me that you disrespected me . . .'

'Last night!' Dacier cried with lashing emphasis.

'It is evident to me that I have the reptile in me, Percy. Or else I am subject to lose my reason. I went . . . I went like a bullet: I cannot describe it; I was mad. I need a strong arm, I want help. I am given to think that I do my best and can be independent; I break down. I went blindly—now I see it—for the chance of recovering my position, as the gambler casts; and he wins or loses. With me it is the soul that is lost. No exact sum was named; thousands were hinted.'

'You are hardly practical on points of business.'

'I was insane.'

'I think you said you slept well after it,' Dacier remarked.

'I had so little the idea of having done evilly, that I slept without a dream.'

He shrugged:—the consciences of women are such smooth deeps, or running shallows.

'I have often wondered how your newspaper men got their information,' he said, and muttered: 'Money—women!' adding: 'Idiots to prime them! And I one of the leaky vessels! Well, we learn. I have been rather astonished at times of late at the scraps of secret knowledge displayed by Tonans. If he flourishes his thousands! The wonder is, he doesn't corrupt the Ministers' wives. Perhaps he does. Marriage will become a danger-sign to Parliamentary members. Foreign women do these tricks . . . women

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of a well-known stamp. It is now a full year, I think, since I began to speak to you of secret matters—and congratulated myself, I recollect, on your thirst for them.'

'Percy, if you suspect that I have uttered one word before last night, you are wrong. I cannot paint my temptation or my loss of sense last night. Previously I was blameless. I thirsted, yes; but in the hope of helping you.'

He looked at her. She perceived how glitteringly loveless his eyes had grown. It was her punishment; and though the enamoured woman's heart protested it excessive, she accepted it.

'I can never trust you again,' he said.

'I fear you will not,' she replied.

His coming back to her after the departure of the guests last night shone on him in splendid colours of single-minded loverlike devotion. 'I came to speak to my own heart. I thought it would give you pleasure; thought I could trust you utterly. I had not the slightest conception I was imperilling my honour . . . !'

He stopped. Her bloodless fixed features revealed an intensity of anguish that checked him. Only her mouth, a little open for the sharp breath, appeared dumbly beseeching. Her large eyes met his like steel to steel, as of one who would die fronting the weapon.

He strangled a loathsome inclination to admire.

'So good-bye,' he said.

She moved her lips.

He said no more. In half a minute he was gone.

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To her it was the plucking of life out of her breast.

She pressed her hands where heart had been. The pallor and cold of death took her body.

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Reveals how the True Heroine of Romance comes finally to her Time of Triumph

The shutting of her house-door closed for Dacier that woman's history in connection with himself. He set his mind on the consequences of the act of folly—the trusting a secret to a woman. All were possibly not so bad: none should be trusted.

The air of the street fanned him agreeably as he revolved the horrible project of confession to the man who had put faith in him. Particulars might be asked. She would be unnamed, but an imagination of the effect of naming her placarded a notorious woman in fresh paint: two members of the same family her victims!

And last night, no later than last night, he had swung round at this very corner of the street to give her the fullest proof of his affection. He beheld a dupe trotting into a carefully-laid pitfall. She had him by the generosity of his confidence in her. Moreover, the recollection of her recent feeble phrasing, when she stood convicted of the treachery, when a really clever woman would have developed her resources, led him to doubt her being so finely gifted. She was just clever enough to hoodwink. He attributed the

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dupery to a trick of imposing the idea of her virtue upon men. Attracted by her good looks and sparkle, they entered the circle of her charm, became delightfully intimate, suffered a rebuff, and were from that time prepared to serve her purpose. How many other wretched dupes had she dangling? He spied at Westlake, spied at Redworth, at old Lord Larrian, at Lord Dannisburgh, at Arthur Rhodes, dozens. Old and young were alike to her if she saw an end to be gained by keeping them hooked. Tonans too, and Whitmonby. Newspaper editors were especially serviceable. Perhaps 'a young Minister of State' held the foremost rank in that respect: if completely duped and squeezeable, he produced more substantial stuff.

The background of ice in Dacier's composition was brought to the front by his righteous contempt of her treachery. No explanation of it would have appeased him. She was guilty, and he condemned her. She stood condemned by all the evil likely to ensue from her misdeed. Scarcely had he left her house last night when she was away to betray him!—He shook her from him without a pang. Crediting her with the one merit she had—that of not imploring for mercy—he the more easily shook her off. Treacherous, she had not proved theatrical. So there was no fuss in putting out her light, and it was done. He was justified by the brute facts. Honourable, courteous, kindly gentleman, highly civilized, an excellent citizen and a patriot, he was icy at an outrage to his principles, and in the dominion of Love a sultan of the bow-string and chopper period, sovereignly endowed to stretch a finger for the scimitared Mesroure to make the erring woman head and trunk with one blow: and away with those

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remnants! This internally he did. Enough that the brute facts justified him.

St. James's park was crossed, and the grass of the Green park, to avoid inquisitive friends. He was obliged to walk; exercise, action of any sort, was imperative, and but for some engagement he would have gone to his fencing-rooms for a bout with the master. He remembered his engagement and grew doubly embittered. He had absurdly pledged himself to lunch with Quintin Manx; that was, to pretend to eat while submitting to be questioned by a political dullard strong on his present right to overhaul and rail at his superiors. The house was one of a block along the North-Western line of Hyde Park. He kicked at the subjection to go there, but a promise was binding, though he gave it when stunned. He could have silenced Mr. Manx with the posing interrogation: Why have I so long consented to put myself at the mercy of a bore? For him, he could not answer it, though Manx, as leader of the Shipping interest, was influential. The man had to be endured, like other doses in politics.

Dacier did not once think of the great shipowner's niece till Miss Constance Asper stepped into her drawing-room to welcome him. She was an image of repose to his mind. The calm pure outline of her white features refreshed him as the Alps the Londoner newly alighted at Berne; smoke, wrangle, the wrestling city's wickedness, behind him.

'My uncle is very disturbed,' she said. 'Is the news—if I am not very indiscreet in inquiring?'

'I have a practice of never paying attention to newspaper articles,' Dacier replied.

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'I am only affected by living with one who does,' Miss Asper observed, and the lofty isolation of her head above politics gave her a moral attractiveness in addition to physical beauty. Her water-colour sketches were on her uncle's walls: the beautiful in nature claimed and absorbed her. She dressed with a pretty rigour, a lovely simplicity, picturesque of the nunnery. She looked indeed a high-born young lady-abbess.

'It's a dusty game for ladies,' Dacier said, abhorring the women defiled by it.

And when one thinks of the desire of men to worship women, there is a pathos in a man's discovery of the fair young creature undefiled by any interest in public affairs, virginal amid her bower's environments.

The angelical beauty of a virgin mind and person captivated him, by contrast. His natural taste was to admire it, shunning the lures and tangles of the women on high seas, notably the married: who, by the way, contrive to ensnare us through wonderment at a cleverness caught from their traffic with the masculine world: often—if we did but know!—a parrot-repetition of the last male visitor's remarks. But that which the fair maiden speaks, though it may be simple, is her own.

She too is her own: or vowed but to one. She is on all sides impressive in purity. The world worships her as its perfect pearl: and we are brought refreshfully to acknowledge that the world is right.

By contrast, the white radiation of Innocence distinguished Constance Asper celestially. As he was well aware, she had long preferred him—the reserved

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among many pleading pressing suitors. Her steady faithfulness had fed on the poorest crumbs.

He ventured to express the hope that she was well.

'Yes,' she answered, with eyelids lifted softly to thank him for his concern in so humble a person.

'You look a little pale,' he said.

She coloured like a sea-water shell. 'I am inclined to paleness by nature.'

Her uncle disturbed them. Lunch was ready. He apologized for the absence of Mrs. Markland, a maternal aunt of Constance, who kept house for them. Quintin Manx fell upon the meats, and then upon the Minister. Dacier found himself happily surprised by the accession of an appetite. He mentioned it, to escape from the worrying of his host, as unusual with him at mid-day: and Miss Asper, supporting him in that effort, said benevolently: 'Gentlemen should eat; they have so many fatigues and troubles.' She herself did not like to be seen eating in public. Her lips opened to the morsels, as with a bird's bill, though with none of the pecking eagerness we complacently observe in poultry.

'But now, I say, positively, how about that article?' said Quintin.

Dacier visibly winced, and Constance immediately said: 'Oh! spare us politics, dear uncle.'

Her intercession was without avail, but by contrast with the woman implicated in the horrible article, it was a carol of the seraphs.

'Come, you can say whether there's anything in it,' Dacier's host pushed him.

'I should not say it if I could,' he replied.

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The mild sweetness of Miss Asper's look encouraged him.

He was touched to the quick by hearing her say: 'You ask for Cabinet secrets, uncle. All secrets are holy, but secrets of State are under a seal next to divine.'

Next to divine! She was the mouthpiece of his ruling principle.

'I'm not prying into secrets,' Quintin persisted; 'all I want to know is, whether there's any foundation for that article—all London's boiling about it, I can tell you—or it's only newspaper's humbug.'

'Clearly the oracle for you is the Editor's office,' rejoined Dacier.

'A pretty sort of answer I should get.'

'It would at least be complimentary.'

'How do you mean?'

'The net was cast for you—and the sight of a fish in it!'

Miss Asper almost laughed. 'Have you heard the choir at St. Catherine's?' she asked.

Dacier had not. He repented of his worldliness, and drinking persuasive claret, said he would go to hear it next Sunday.

'Do,' she murmured.

'Well, you seem to be a pair against me,' her uncle grumbled. 'Anyhow I think it's important. People have been talking for some time, and I don't want to be taken unawares; I won't be a yoked ox, mind you.'

'Have you been sketching lately?' Dacier asked Miss Asper.

She generally filled a book in the autumn, she said.

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'May I see it?'

'If you wish.'

They had a short tussle with her uncle and escaped. He was conducted to a room midway upstairs: an heiress's conception of a saintly little room; and more impressive in purity, indeed it was, than a saint's, with the many crucifixes, gold and silver emblems, velvet prie-Dieu chairs, jewel-clasped sacred volumes: every invitation to meditate in luxury on an ascetic religiousness.

She depreciated her sketching powers. 'I am impatient with my imperfections. I am therefore doomed not to advance.'

'On the contrary, that is the state guaranteeing ultimate excellence,' he said, much disposed to drone about it.

She sighed: 'I fear not.'

He turned the leaves, comparing her modesty with the performance. The third of the leaves was a subject instantly recognized by him. It represented the place he had inherited from Lord Dannisburgh.

He named it.

She smiled: 'You are good enough to see a likeness? My aunt and I were passing it last October, and I waited for a day, to sketch.'

'You have taken it from my favourite point of view.'

'I am glad.'

'How much I should like a copy!'

'If you will accept that?'

'I could not rob you.'

'I can make a duplicate.'

'The look of the place pleases you?'

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'Oh! yes; the pines behind it; the sweet little village church; even the appearance of the rustics;—it is all impressively old English. I suppose you are very seldom there?'

'Does it look like a home to you?'

'No place more!'

'I feel the loneliness.'

'Where I live I feel no loneliness!'

'You have heavenly messengers near you.'

'They do not always come.'

'Would you consent to make the place less lonely to me?'

Her bosom rose. In deference to her maidenly understanding, she gazed inquiringly.

'If you love it!' said he.

'The place?' she said, looking soft at the possessor.

'Constance!'

'Is it true?'

'As you yourself. Could it be other than true? This hand is mine?'

'Oh! Percy.'

Borrowing the world's poetry to describe them, the long prayed-for Summer enveloped the melting snows.

So the recollection of Diana's watch beside his uncle's death-bed was wiped out. Ay, and the hissing of her treachery silenced. This maidenly hand put him at peace with the world, instead of his defying it for a worthless woman—who could not do better than accept the shelter of her husband's house, as she ought to be told, if her friends wished her to save her reputation.

Dacier made his way downstairs to Quintin Manx,

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by whom he was hotly congratulated and informed of the extent of the young lady's fortune : on the strength of which it was expected that he would certainly speak a private word in elucidation of that newspaper article.

'I know nothing of it,' said Dacier, but promised to come and dine.

Alone in her happiness Constance Asper despatched various brief notes under her gold-symbolled crest to sisterly friends ; one to Lady Wathin, containing the single line :

'Your prophecy is confirmed.'

Dacier was comfortably able to face his Club after the excitement of a proposal, with a bride on his hands. He was assaulted concerning the article, and he parried capitally. Say that her lips were rather cold : at any rate, they invigorated him. Her character was guaranteed—not the hazy idea of a dupe. And her fortune would be enormous : a speculation merely due to worldly prudence and prospective ambition.

At the dinner-table of four, in the evening, conversation would have seemed dull to him, by contrast, had it not been for the presiding grace of his bride, whose habitually eminent feminine air of superiority to the repast was throned by her appreciative receptiveness of his looks and utterances. Before leaving her, he won her consent to a very early marriage ; on the plea of a possibly approaching Session, and also that they had waited long. The consent, notwithstanding the hurry of preparations it involved, besides the annihilation of her desire to meditate on so solemn a change in her life and savour the congratulation of her friends and have the choir of St. Catherine's

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rigorously drilled in her favourite anthems, was beautifully yielded to the pressure of circumstances.

There lay on his table at night a letter: a bulky letter. No need to tear it open for sight of the signature: the superscription was redolent of that betraying woman. He tossed it unopened into the fire.

As it was thick, it burned sullenly, discolouring his name on the address, as she had done, and still offering him a last chance of viewing the contents. She fought on the consuming fire to have her exculpation heard.

But was she not a shameless traitor? She had caught him by his love of his country and hope to serve it. She had wound into his heart to bleed him of all he knew and sell the secrets for money. A wonderful sort of eloquence lay there, on those coals, no doubt. He felt a slight movement of curiosity to glance at two or three random sentences: very slight. And why read them now? They were valueless to him, mere outcries. He judged her by the brute facts. She and her slowly-consuming letter were of a common blackness. Moreover, to read them when he was plighted to another woman would be senseless. In the discovery of her baseness, she had made a poor figure. Doubtless during the afternoon she had trimmed her intuitive Belial art of making 'the worse appear the better cause': queer to peruse, and instructive in an unprofitable department of knowledge—the tricks of the sex.

He said to himself, with little intuition of the popular taste: She wouldn't be a bad heroine of Romance! He said it derisively of the Romantic. But the right worshipful heroine of Romance was the

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front-face female picture he had won for his walls. Poor Diana was the flecked heroine of Reality: not always the same; not impeccable; not an ignorant-innocent, nor a guileless: good under good leading; devoted to the death in a grave crisis; often wrestling with her terrestrial nature nobly; and a growing soul; but not one whose purity was carved in marble for the assurance to an Englishman that his possession of the changeless thing defies time and his fellows, is the pillar of his home and universally enviable. Your fair one of Romance cannot suffer a mishap without a plotting villain, perchance many of them, to wreak the dread iniquity: she cannot move without him; she is the marble block, and if she is to have a feature, he is the sculptor; she depends on him for life, and her human history at least is married to him far more than to the rescuing lover. No wonder, then, that men should find her thrice cherishable featureless, or with the most moderate possible indication of a countenance. Thousands of the excellent simple creatures do; and every reader of her tale. On the contrary, the heroine of Reality is that woman whom you have met or heard of once in your course of years, and very probably despised for bearing in her composition the motive principle; at best, you say, a singular mixture of good and bad; anything but the feminine ideal of man. Feature to some excess, you think, distinguishes her. Yet she furnishes not any of the sweet sensual excitement pertaining to her spotless rival pursued by villany. She knocks at the doors of the mind, and the mind must open to be interested in her. Mind and heart must be wide open to excuse her sheer descent from the pure ideal of man.

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Dacier's wandering reflections all came back in crowds to the judicial Bench of the Black Cap. He felt finely, apart from the treason, that her want of money degraded her: him too, by contact. Money she might have had to any extent: upon application for it, of course. How was he to imagine that she wanted money! Smilingly as she welcomed him and his friends, entertaining them royally, he was bound to think she had means. A decent propriety bound him not to think of the matter at all. He naturally supposed she was capable of conducting her affairs. And—money! It soiled his memory: though the hour at Rovio was rather pretty, and the scene at Copsley touching: other times also, short glimpses of the woman, were taking. The flood of her treachery effaced them. And why reflect? Constance called to him to look her way.

Diana's letter died hard. The corners were burnt to black tissue, with an edge or two of discoloured paper. A small frayed central heap still resisted, and in kindness to the necessity for privacy, he impressed the fire-tongs to complete the execution. After which he went to his desk and worked, under the presidency of Constance.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Is conclusive as to the Heartlessness of Women with Brains

Hymenaeal rumours are those which might be backed to run a victorious race with the tale of evil fortune; and clearly for the reason that man's livelier half

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the True
Heroine of
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comes finally
to her Time of
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is ever alert to speed them. They travel with an astonishing celerity over the land, like flames of the dry beacon-faggots of old time in announcement of the invader or a conquest, gathering as they go: wherein, to say nothing of their vastly wider range, they surpass the electric wires. Man's nuptial half is kindlingly concerned in the launch of a new couple; it is the business of the fair sex: and man himself (very strangely, but nature quickens him still) lends a not unfavouring eye to the preparations of the matrimonial vessel for its oily descent into the tides, where billows will soon be rising, captain and mate soon discussing the fateful question of who is commander. We consent, it appears, to hope again for mankind; here is another chance! Or else, assuming the happiness of the pair, that pomp of ceremonial, contrasted with the little wind-blown candle they carry between them, catches at our weaker fibres. After so many ships have foundered, some keel up, like poisoned fish, at the first drink of water, it is a gallant spectacle, let us avow; and either the world perpetuating it is heroic or nature incorrigible in the species. Marriages are unceasing. Friends do it, and enemies; the unknown contractors of this engagement, or armistice, inspire an interest. It certainly is both exciting and comforting to hear that man and woman are ready to join in a mutual affirmative, say Yes together again. It sounds like the end of the war.

The proclamation of the proximate marriage of a young Minister of State and the greatest heiress of her day;—notoriously '*The young Minister of State*' of a famous book written by the beautiful, now

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writhing, woman madly enamoured of him—and the heiress whose dowry could purchase a Duchy; this was a note to make the gossips of England leap from their beds at the midnight hour and wag tongues in the market-place. It did away with the political hubbub over the Tonans article, and let it noise abroad like nonsense. The Hon. Percy Dacier espouses Miss Asper; and she rescues him from the snares of a siren, he her from the toils of the Papists. She would have gone over to them, she was going when, luckily for the Protestant Faith, Percy Dacier intervened with his proposal. Town and country buzzed the news; and while that dreary League trumpeted about the business of the nation, a people suddenly become Oriental chattered of nothing but the blissful union to be celebrated in princely state, with every musical accessory, short of Operatic.

Lady Wathin was an active agent in this excitement. The excellent woman enjoyed marriages of High Life: which, as there is presumably wealth to support them, are manifestly under *sanction*: and a marriage that she could consider one of her own contrivance, had a delicate flavour of a marriage in the family; not quite equal to the seeing a dear daughter of her numerous progeny conducted to the altar; but excelling it in the pomp that bids the heavens open. She and no other spread the tidings of Miss Asper's debating upon the step to Rome at the very instant of Percy Dacier's declaration of his love;—and it was a beautiful struggle, that of the half-dedicated nun and her deep-rooted earthly passion, love prevailing! She sent word to Lady Dunstane: 'You know the interest I have always taken

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in dear Constance Asper,' etc.; inviting her to come on a visit a week before the end of the month, that she might join in the ceremony of a wedding 'likely to be the grandest of our time.' Pitiful though it was, to think of the bridal pair having but eight or ten days at the outside, for a honeymoon, the beauty of their 'mutual devotion to duty' was urged by Lady Wathin upon all hearers.

Lady Dunstane declined the invitation. She waited to hear from her friend, and the days went by; she could only sorrow for her poor Tony, divining her state. However little of wrong in the circumstances, they imposed a silence on her decent mind, and no conceivable shape of writing would transmit condolences. She waited, with a dull heartache: by no means grieving at Dacier's engagement to the heiress; until Redworth animated her, as the bearer of rather startling intelligence, indirectly relating to the soul she loved. An accident in the street had befallen Mr. Warwick. Redworth wanted to know whether Diana should be told of it, though he had no particulars to give; and somewhat to his disappointment, Lady Dunstane said she would write. She delayed, thinking the accident might not be serious; and the information of it to Diana surely would be so. Next day at noon her visitor was Lady Wathin, evidently perturbed and anxious to say more than she dared: but she received no assistance. After beating the air in every direction, especially dwelling on the fond reciprocal affection of the two devoted lovers, to be united within three days' time, Lady Wathin said at last: 'And is it not shocking! I talk of a marriage and am appalled by a death. That poor man died last night in the

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hospital. I mean poor Mr. Warwick. He was recovering, getting strong and well, and he was knocked down at a street-crossing and died last night. It is a warning to us!

'Mr. Redworth happened to hear of it at his Club, near which the accident occurred, and he called at the hospital. Mr. Warwick was then alive,' said Lady Dunstane; adding: 'Well, if prevention is better than cure, as we hear! Accidents are the specific for averting the maladies of age, which are a certain crop!'

Lady Wathin's eyelids worked and her lips shut fast at the coldhearted remark void of meaning.

She sighed. 'So ends a life of misery, my dear!'

'You are compassionate.'

'I hope so. But . . . Indeed I must speak, if you will let me. I think of the living.'

Lady Dunstane widened her eyes. 'Of Mrs. Warwick?'

'She has now the freedom she desired. I think of others. Forgive me, but Constance Asper is to me as a daughter. I have perhaps no grounds for any apprehension. Love so ardent, so sincere, was never shown by bridegroom elect: and it is not extraordinary to those acquainted with dear Constance. But one may be a worshipped saint and experience defection. The terrible stories one hears of a power of fascination almost . . . !' Lady Wathin hung for the word.

'Infernal,' said Lady Dunstane, whose brows had been bent inquiringly. 'Have no fear. The freedom you allude to will not be used to interfere with any entertainment in prospect. It was *freedom* my friend desired. Now that her jewel is restored to her, she is

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not the person to throw it away, be sure. And pray, drop the subject.'

'One may rely . . . you think?'

'Oh! Oh!'

'This release coming just before the wedding . . .!'

'I should hardly suppose the man to be the puppet you depict, or indicate.'

'It is because men—so many—are not puppets that one is conscious of alarm.'

'Your previous remark,' said Lady Dunstane, 'sounded superstitious. Your present one has an antipodal basis. But, as for your alarm, check it: and spare me further. My friend has acknowledged powers. Considering that she does not use them, you should learn to respect her.'

Lady Wathin bowed stiffly. She refused to partake of lunch, having, she said, satisfied her conscience by the performance of a duty and arranged with her flyman to catch a train. Her cousin Lady Dunstane smiled loftily at everything she uttered, and she felt that if a woman like this Mrs. Warwick could put division between blood-relatives, she could do worse, and was to be dreaded up to the hour of the nuptials.

'I meant no harm in coming,' she said, at the shaking of hands.

'No, no; I understand,' said her hostess: 'you are hen-hearted over your adopted brood. The situation is perceptible and your intention creditable.'

As one of the good women of the world, Lady Wathin in departing was indignant at the tone and dialect of a younger woman not modestly concealing her possession of the larger brain. Brains in women she both dreaded and detested; she believed them

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to be devilish. Here were instances:—they had driven poor Sir Lukin to evil courses, and that poor Mr. Warwick straight under the wheels of a cab. Sir Lukin's name was trotting in public with a naughty Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett's: Mrs. Warwick might still trim her arts to baffle the marriage. Women with brains, moreover, are all heartless: they have no pity for distress, no horror of catastrophes, no joy in the happiness of the deserving. Brains in men advance a household to station; but brains in women divide it and are the wrecking of society. Fortunately Lady Wathin knew she could rally a powerful moral contingent, the aptitude of which for a one-minded cohesion enabled it to crush those fractional daughters of mischief. She was a really good woman of the world, heading a multitude; the same whom you are accustomed to hear exalted; lucky in having had a guided girlhood, a thick-curtained prudence; and in having stock in the moral funds, shares in the sentimental tramways. Wherever the world laid its hoards or ran its lines, she was found, and forcible enough to be eminent; though at fixed hours of the day, even as she washed her hands, she abjured worldliness: a performance that cleansed her. If she did not make morality appear loveable to the objects of her dislike, it was owing to her want of brains to see the origin, nature and right ends of morality. But a world yet more deficient than she, esteemed her cordially for being a bulwark of the present edifice; which looks a solid structure when the microscope is not applied to its components.

Supposing Percy Dacier a dishonourable tattler as well as an icy lover, and that Lady Wathin, through

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his bride, had become privy to the secret between him and Diana? There is reason to think that she would have held it in terror over the baneful woman, but not have persecuted her: for she was by no means the active malignant of theatrical plots. No, she would have charged it upon the possession of brains by women, and have had a further motive for inciting the potent dignitary her husband to employ his authority to repress the sex's exercise of those fell weapons, hurtful alike to them and all coming near them.

So extreme was her dread of Mrs. Warwick, that she drove from the London railway station to see Constance and be reassured by her tranquil aspect.

Sweet Constance and her betrothed Percy were together, examining a missal.

Lady Dunstane despatched a few words of the facts to Diana. She hoped to hear from her; rather hoped, for the moment, not to see her. No answer came. The great day of the nuptials came and passed. She counted on her husband's appearance the next morning, as the good gentleman made a point of visiting her, to entertain the wife he adored, whenever he had a wallet of gossip that would overlay the blank of his absence. He had been to the church of the wedding—he did not say with whom:—all the world was there; and he rapturously described the ceremony, stating that it set women weeping and caused him to behave like a fool.

‘You are impressionable,’ said his wife.

He murmured something in praise of the institution of marriage—when celebrated impressively, it seemed.

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'Tony calls the social world "the theatre of appetites," as we have it at present,' she said; 'and the world at a wedding is, one may reckon, in the second act of the hungry tragi-comedy.'

'Yes, there's the breakfast,' Sir Lukin assented. Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett was much more intelligible to him: in fact, quite so, as to her speech.

Emma's heart now yearned to her Tony. Consulting her strength, she thought she might journey to London, and on the third morning after the Dacier-Asper marriage, she started.

Diana's door was open to Arthur Rhodes when Emma reached it.

'Have you seen her?' she asked him.

His head shook dolefully. 'Mrs. Warwick is unwell; she has been working too hard.'

'You also, I'm afraid.'

'No.' He could deny that, whatever the look of him.

'Come to me at Copsley soon,' said she, entering to Danvers in the passage.

'My mistress is upstairs, my lady,' said Danvers. 'She is lying on her bed.'

'She is ill?'

'She has been lying on her bed ever since.'

'Since what?' Lady Dunstane spoke sharply.

Danvers retrieved her indiscretion. 'Since she heard of the accident, my lady.'

'Take my name to her. Or no: I can venture.'

'I am not allowed to go in and speak to her. You will find the room quite dark, my lady, and very cold. It is her command. My mistress will not let me light the fire; and she has not eaten or drunk of anything

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since. . . She will die, if you do not persuade her to take nourishment: a little, for a beginning. It wants the beginning.'

Emma went upstairs, thinking of the enigmatical maid, that she must be a good soul after all. Diana's bedroom door was opened slowly.

'You will not be able to see at first, my lady,' Danvers whispered. 'The bed is to the left, and a chair. I would bring in a candle, but it hurts her eyes. She forbids it.'

Emma stepped in. The chill thick air of the unlighted London room was cavernous. She almost forgot the beloved of her heart in the thought that a living woman had been lying here more than two days and nights, fasting. The proof of an uttermost misery revived the circumstances within her to render her friend's presence in this desert of darkness credible. She found the bed by touch, silently, and distinguished a dark heap on the bed; she heard no breathing. She sat and listened; then she stretched her hand and met her Tony's. It lay open. It was the hand of a drowned woman.

Shutters and curtains and the fireless grate gave the room an appalling likeness to the vaults.

So like to the home of death it seemed, that in a few minutes the watcher had lost count of time and kept but a wormy memory of the daylight. She dared not speak, for some fear of startling; for the worse fear of never getting answer. Tony's hand was lifeless. Her clasp of it struck no warmth.

She stung herself with bitter reproaches for having let common mundane sentiments, worthy of a Lady Wathin, bar her instant offer of her bosom to the

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beloved who suffered in this depth of mortal agony. Tony's love of a man, as she should have known, would be wrought of the elements of our being: when other women named Happiness, she said Life; in division, Death. Her body lying still upon the bed here was a soul borne onward by the river of Death.

The darkness gave sight after a while, like a curtain lifting on a veil: the dead light of the underworld. Tony lay with her face up, her underlip dropped; straight from head to feet. The outline of her face, without hue of it, could be seen: sign of the hapless women that have souls in love. Hateful love of men! Emma thought, and was moved to feel at the wrist for her darling's pulse. He has killed her! the thought flashed, as, with pangs chilling her frame, the pressure at the wrist continued insensible of the faintest beat. She clasped it, trembling, in pain to stop an outcry.

'It is Emmy,' said the voice.

Emma's heart sprang to heaven on a rush of thanks.

'My Tony,' she breathed softly.

She hung for a further proof of life in the motionless body. 'Tony!' she said.

The answer was at her hand, a thread-like return of her clasp.

'It is Emmy come to stay with you, never to leave you.'

The thin still answer was at her hand a moment; the fingers fell away. A deep breath was taken twice to say: 'Don't talk to me.'

Emma retained the hand. She was warned not to press it by the deadness following its effort to reply.

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But Tony lived; she had given proof of life. Over this little wavering taper in the vaults Emma cowered, cherishing the hand, silently hoping for the voice.

It came: 'Winter.'

'It is a cold winter, Tony.'

'My dear will be cold.'

'I will light the fire.'

Emma lost no time in deciding to seek the match-box. The fire was lit and it flamed; it seemed a revival in the room. Coming back to the bedside, she discerned her Tony's lack-lustre large dark eyes and her hollow cheeks: her mouth open to air as to the drawing-in of a sword; rather as to the releaser than the sustainer. Her feet were on the rug her maid had placed to cover them. Emma leaned across the bed to put them to her breast, beneath her fur mantle, and held them there despite the half-animate tug of the limbs and the shaft of iciness they sent to her very heart. When she had restored them to some warmth, she threw aside her bonnet and lying beside Tony, took her in her arms, heaving now and then a deep sigh.

She kissed her cheek.

'It is Emmy.'

'Kiss her.'

'I have no strength.'

Emma laid her face on the lips. They were cold; even the breath between them cold.

'Has Emmy been long . . .?'

'Here, dear? I think so. I am with my darling.'

Tony moaned. The warmth and the love were bringing back her anguish.

She said: 'I have been happy. It is not hard to go.'

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Emma strained to her. 'Tony will wait for her soul's own soul to go, the two together.'

There was a faint convulsion in the body. 'If I cry, I shall go in pain.'

'You are in Emmy's arms, my beloved.'

Tony's eyes closed for forgetfulness under that sensation. A tear ran down from her, but the pain was lax and neighboured sleep, like the pleasure.

So passed the short winter day, little spoken.

Then Emma bethought her of a way of leading Tony to take food, and she said: 'I shall stay with you; I shall send for clothes; I am rather hungry. Don't stir, dear. I will be mistress of the house.'

She went below to the kitchen, where a few words in the ear of a Frenchwoman were sufficient to waken immediate comprehension of what was wanted, and smart service: within ten minutes an appetizing bouillon sent its odour over the bedroom. Tony, days back, had said her last to the act of eating; but Emma sipping at the spoon and expressing satisfaction, was a pleasant picture. The bouillon smelt pleasantly.

'Your servants love you,' Emma said.

'Ah, poor good souls.'

'They crowded up to me to hear of you. Madame of course at the first word was off to her pots. And we English have the habit of calling ourselves the practical people!—This bouillon is consummate.—However, we have the virtues of barbarians; we can love and serve for love. I never tasted anything so good. I could become a glutton.'

'Do,' said Tony.

'I should be ashamed to "drain the bowl" all to

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myself: a solitary toper is a horrid creature, unless he makes a song of it.'

'Emmy makes a song of it to me.'

'But "pledge me" is a noble saying, when you think of humanity's original hunger for the whole. It is there that our civilizing commenced, and I am particularly fond of hearing the call. It is grandly historic. So pledge me, Tony. We two can feed from one spoon: it is a closer bond than the loving cup. I want you just to taste it and excuse my gluttony.'

Tony murmured, 'No.' The spoon was put to her mouth. She sighed to resist. The stronger will compelled her to move her lips. Emma fed her as a child, and nature sucked for life.

The first effect was a gush of tears.

Emma lay with her that night, when the patient was the better sleeper. But during the night at intervals she had the happiness of feeling Tony's hand travelling to make sure of her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

An Exhibition of Some Champions of the Stricken Lady

Close upon the hour of ten every morning the fortuitous meeting of two gentlemen at Mrs. Warwick's hosedoor was a signal for punctiliously stately greetings, the salutation of the raised hat and a bow of the head from a position of military erectness, followed by the remark: 'I trust you are well, sir':

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to which the reply: 'I am very well, sir, and trust you are the same,' was deemed a complimentary fulfilment of their mutual obligation in presence. Mr. Sullivan Smith's initiative imparted this exercise of formal manners to Mr. Arthur Rhodes, whose renewed appearance, at the minute of his own arrival, he viewed, as he did not conceal, with a disappointed and a reproving eye. The inquiry after the state of Mrs. Warwick's health having received its tolerably comforting answer from the footman, they left their cards in turn, then descended the doorsteps, faced for the performance of the salute, and departed their contrary ways.

The pleasing intelligence refreshed them one morning, that they would be welcomed by Lady Dunstane. Thereupon Mr. Sullivan Smith wheeled about to Mr. Arthur Rhodes and observed to him: 'Sir, I might claim, by right of seniority, to be the foremost of us two in offering my respects to the lady, but the way is open to you.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Arthur Rhodes, 'permit me to defer to your many superior titles to that distinction.'

'The honour, sir, lies rather in the bestowing than in the taking.'

'I venture to think, sir, that though I cannot speak pure Castilian, I require no lesson from a Grandee of Spain in acknowledging the dues of my betters.'

'I will avow myself conquered, sir, by your overpowering condescension,' said Mr. Sullivan Smith; 'and I entreat you to ascribe my acceptance of your brief retirement to the urgent character of the business I have at heart.'

He laid his fingers on the panting spot, and bowed.

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Mr. Arthur Rhodes, likewise bowing, deferentially fell to rearward.

'If I mistake not,' said the Irish gentleman, 'I am indebted to Mr. Rhodes; and we have been joint participators in the hospitality of Mrs. Warwick's table.'

The English gentleman replied: 'It was there that I first had the pleasure of an acquaintance which is graven on my memory, as the words of the wise king on tablets of gold and silver.'

Mr. Sullivan Smith gravely smiled at the unwonted match he had found in ceremonious humour, in Saxonland, and saying: 'I shall not long detain you, Mr. Rhodes,' he passed through the doorway.

Arthur waited for him, pacing up and down, for a quarter of an hour, when a totally different man reappeared in the same person, and was the Sullivan Smith of the rosy beaming features and princely heartiness. He was accosted: 'Now, my dear boy, it's your turn to try if you have a chance, and good luck go with ye. I've said what I could on your behalf, for you're one of ten thousand in this country, you are.'

Mr. Sullivan Smith had solemnified himself to proffer a sober petition within the walls of the newly widowed lady's house; namely, for nothing less than that sweet lady's now unfettered hand: and it had therefore been perfectly natural to him, until his performance ended with the destruction of his hopes, to deliver himself in the high Castilian manner. Quite unexpected, however, was the reciprocal loftiness of tone spontaneously adopted by the young English squire, for whom, in consequence, he con-

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ceived a cordial relish; and as he paced in the footsteps of Arthur, anxious to quiet his curiosity by hearing how it had fared with one whom he had to suppose the second applicant, he kept ejaculating: 'Not a bit! The fellow can't be Saxon! And she had a liking for him. She's nigh coming of the age when a woman takes to the chicks. Better he than another, if it's to be any one. For he's got fun in him; he carries his own condiments, instead of borrowing from the popular castors, as is their way over here. But I might have known there's always sure to be salt and savour in the man she covers with her wing. Excepting, if you please, my dear lady, a bad shot you made at a rascal cur, no more worthy of you than Beelzebub of Paradise. No matter! The daughters of Erin must share the fate of their mother Isle, that their tears may shine in the burst of sun to follow. For personal and patriotic motives, I would have cheered her and been like a wild ass combed and groomed and tamed by the adorable creature. But her friend says there's not a whisk of a chance for me, and I must roam the desert, kicking up, and worshipping the star I hail brightest. They know me not, who think I can't worship. Why, what were I without my star? At best a pickled porker.'

Sullivan Smith became aware of a ravishing melodiousness in the soliloquy, as well as a clean resemblance in the simile. He would certainly have proceeded to improvize impassioned verse, if he had not seen Arthur Rhodes on the pavement. 'So, here's the boy. Query, the face he wears.'

'How kind of you to wait,' said Arthur.

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'We'll call it sympathy, for convenience,' rejoined Sullivan Smith. 'Well, and what next?'

'You know as much as I do. Thank heaven, she is recovering.'

'Is that all?'

'Why, what more?'

Arthur was jealously inspected.

'You look open-hearted, my dear boy.' Sullivan Smith blew the sound of a reflective ahem. 'Excuse me for cornemusing in your company,' he said. 'But seriously, there was only one thing to pardon your hurrying to the lady's door at such a season, when the wind tells tales to the world. She's down with a cold, you know.'

'An influenza,' said Arthur.

The simplicity of the acquiescence was vexatious to a champion desirous of hostilities, to vindicate the lady, in addition to his anxiety to cloak her sad plight.

'She caught it from contact with one of the inhabitants of this country. 'Tis the fate of us Irish, and we're condemned to it for the sin of getting tired of our own. I begin to sneeze when I land at Holyhead. Unbutton a waistcoat here, in the hope of meeting a heart, and you're lucky in escaping a pulmonary attack of no common severity, while the dog that infected you scampers off, to celebrate his honeymoon mayhap. Ah, but call at her house in shoals, the world 'll soon be saying it's worse than a coughing cold. If you came to lead her out of it in triumph, the laugh 'd be with you, and the lady well covered. D'ye understand?'

The allusion to the dog's honeymoon had put

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Arthur Rhodes on the track of the darting cracker-metaphor.

'I think I do,' he said. 'She will soon be at Copsley—Lady Dunstane's house, on the hills—and there we can see her.'

'And that's next to the happiness of consoling—if only it had been granted! She's not an ordinary widow, to be caught when the tear of lamentation has opened a practicable path or water-way to the poor nightcapped jewel within. So, and you're a candid admirer, Mr. Rhodes! Well, and I'll be one with you; for there's not a star in the firmament more deserving of homage than that lady.'

'Let's walk in the park and talk of her,' said Arthur. 'There's no sweeter subject to me.'

His boyish frankness rejoiced Sullivan Smith. 'As long as you like!—nor to me!' he exclaimed. 'And that ever since I first beheld her on the night of a Ball in Dublin: before I had listened to a word of her speaking: and she bore her father's Irish name:—none of your Warwicks and your . . . But let the cur go barking. He can't tell what he's lost; perhaps he doesn't care. And after inflicting his hydrophobia on her tender fame! Pooh, sir; you call it a civilized country, where you and I and dozens of others are ready to start up as brothers of the lady, to defend her, and are paralyzed by the Law. 'Tis a law they've instituted for the protection of dirty dogs—their majority!'

'I owe more to Mrs. Warwick than to any soul I know,' said Arthur.

'Let's hear,' quoth Sullivan Smith; proceeding: 'She's the Arabian Nights in person, that's sure; and

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Shakespeare's Plays, tragic and comuc; and the Book of Celtic History; and Erin incarnate—down with a cold, no matter where; but we know where it was caught. So there's a pretty library for who's to own her now she's enfranchized by circumstances;—and a poetical figure too!

He subsided for his companion to rhapsodize.

Arthur was overcharged with feeling, and could say only: 'It would be another world to me if I lost her.'

'True; but what of the lady?'

'No praise of mine could do her justice.'

'That may be, but it's negative of yourself, and not a portrait of the object. Hasn't she the brain of Socrates—or better, say Minerva, on the bust of Venus, and the remainder of her finished off to an exact resemblance of her patronymic Goddess of the bow and quiver?'

'She has a wise head and is beautiful.'

'And chaste.'

Arthur reddened: he was prepared to maintain it, could not speak it.

'She is to us in this London, what the run of water was to Theocritus in Sicily: the nearest to the visibly divine,' he said, and was applauded.

'Good, and on you go. Top me a few superlatives on that, and I'm your echo, my friend. Isn't the seeing and listening to her like sitting under the silvery canopy of a fountain in high Summer?'

'All the comparisons are yours,' Arthur said enviously.

'Mr. Rhodes, you are a poet, I believe, and all you require to loosen your tongue is a drop of Bacchus,

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so if you will do me the extreme honour to dine with me at my Club this evening, we'll resume the toast that should never be uttered dry. You reprove me justly, my friend.'

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Arthur laughed and accepted. The Club was named, and the hour, and some items of the little dinner: the birds and the year of the wines.

It surprised him to meet Mr. Redworth at the table of his host. A greater surprise was the partial thaw in Redworth's bearing toward him. But, as it was partial, and he a youth and poor, not even the genial influences of Bacchus could lift him to loosen his tongue under the repressing presence of the man he knew to be his censor, though Sullivan Smith encouraged him with praises and opportunities. He thought of the many occasions when Mrs. Warwick's art of management had produced a tacit harmony between them. She had no peer. The dinner failed of the pleasure he had expected from it. Redworth's bluntness killed the flying metaphors, and at the end of the entertainment he and Sullivan Smith were drumming upon politics.

'Fancies he has the key of the Irish difficulty!' said the latter, clapping hand on his shoulder, by way of blessing, as they parted at the Club-steps.

Redworth asked Arthur Rhodes the way he was going, and walked beside him.

'I suppose you take exercise; don't get colds and that kind of thing,' he remarked in the old bullying fashion; and changed it abruptly. 'I am glad to have met you this evening. I hope you'll dine with me one day next week. Have you seen Mrs. Warwick lately?'

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'She is unwell; she has been working too hard,' said Arthur.

'Seriously unwell, do you mean?'

'Lady Dunstane is at her house, and speaks of her recovering.'

'Ah. You've not seen her?'

'Not yet.'

'Well, good night.'

Redworth left him, and only when moved by gratitude to the lad for his mention of Mrs. Warwick's 'working too hard,' as the cause of her illness, recollected the promised dinner and the need for having his address.

He had met Sullivan Smith accidentally in the morning and accepted the invitation to meet young Rhodes, because these two, of all men living, were for the moment dearest to him, as Diana Warwick's true and simple champions; and he had intended a perfect cordiality toward them both; the end being a semi-wrangle with the patriot, and a patronizing bluntness with the boy; who, by the way, would hardly think him sincere in the offer of a seat at his table. He owned himself incomplete. He never could do the thing he meant, in the small matters not leading to fortune. But they led to happiness! Redworth was guilty of a sigh: for now Diana Warwick stood free; doubly free, he was reduced to reflect in a wavering dubiousness. Her more than inclination for Dacier, witnessed by him, and the shot of the world, flying randomly on the subject, had struck this cuirassier, making light of his armour, without causing any change of his habitual fresh countenance. As for the scandal, it had never shaken his faith in her nature. He thought of the passion.

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His heart struck at Diana's, and whatever might by chance be true in the scandal affected him little, if but her heart were at liberty. That was the prize he coveted, having long read the nature of the woman and wedded his spirit to it. She would complete him.

Of course, infatuated men argue likewise, and scandal does not move them. At a glance, the lower instincts and the higher spirit appear equally to have the philosophy of overlooking blemishes. The difference between appetite and love is shown when a man, after years of service, can hear and see, and admit the possible, and still desire in worship; knowing that we of earth are begrimed and must be cleansed for presentation daily on our passage through the miry ways, but that our souls, if flame of a soul shall have come of the agony of flesh, are beyond the baser mischances: partaking of them indeed, but sublimely. Now Redworth believed in the soul of Diana. For him it burned, and it was a celestial radiance about her, unquenched by her shifting fortunes, her wilfulnesses and, it might be, errors. She was a woman and weak; that is, not trained for strength. She was a soul; therefore perpetually pointing to growth in purification. He felt it, and even discerned it of her, if he could not have phrased it. The something sovereignly characteristic that aspired in Diana enchained him. With her, or rather with his thought of her soul, he understood the right union of women and men, from the roots to the flowering heights of that rare graft. She gave him comprehension of the meaning of love: a word in many mouths, not often explained. With her, wound in his idea of her, he perceived it to

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signify a new start in our existence, a finer shoot of the tree stoutly planted in good gross earth; the senses running their live sap, and the minds companioned, and the spirits made one by the whole-natured conjunction. In sooth, a happy prospect for the sons and daughters of Earth, divinely indicating more than happiness: the speeding of us, compact of what we are, between the ascetic rocks and the sensual whirlpools, to the creation of certain nobler races, now very dimly imagined.

Singularly enough, the man of these feelings was far from being a social rebel. His Diana conjured them forth in relation to her, but was not on his bosom to enlighten him generally. His notions of citizenship tolerated the female Pharisees, as ladies offering us an excellent social concrete where quicksands abound, and without quite justifying the Lady Wathins and Constance Aspers of the world, whose virtues he could set down to accident or to acid blood, he considered them supportable and estimable where the Mrs. Fryar-Gunnetts were innumerable, threatening to become a majority; as they will constantly do while the sisterhood of the chaste are wattled in formalism and throned in sourness.

Thoughts of Diana made phantoms of the reputable and their reverse alike. He could not choose but think of her. She was free; and he too; and they were as distant as the horizon sail and the raft-floating castaway. Her passion for Dacier might have burnt out her heart. And at present he had no claim to visit her, dared not intrude. He would have nothing to say if he went, save to answer questions upon points of business: as to which, Lady

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Dunstane would certainly summon him when he was wanted.

Riding in the park on a frosty morning, he came upon Sir Lukin, who looked gloomy and inquired for news of Diana Warwick, saying that his wife had forbidden him to call at her house just yet. 'She's got a cold, you know,' said Sir Lukin; adding, 'confoundedly hard on women!—eh? Obligated to keep up a show. And I'd swear, by all that's holy, Diana Warwick hasn't a spot, not a spot, to reproach herself with. I fancy I ought to know women by this time. And look here, Redworth, last night—that is, I mean, yesterday evening, I broke with a woman—a lady of my acquaintance, you know, because she would go on scandal-mongering about Diana Warwick. I broke with her. I told her I'd have out any man who abused Diana Warwick, and I broke with her. By Jove! Redworth, those women can prove spitfires. They've bags of venom under their tongues, barley-sugar though they look—and that's her colour. But I broke with her for good. I doubt if I shall ever call on her again. And in point of fact, I won't.'

Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett was described in the colouring of the lady.

Sir Lukin, after some further remarks, rode on, and Redworth mused on a moral world that allows a woman of Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett's like to hang on to it, and to cast a stone at Diana; forgetful, in his championship, that Diana was not disallowed a similar licence.

When he saw Emma Dunstane, some days later, she was in her carriage driving, as she said, to Lawyer-

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land, for an interview with old Mr. Braddock, on her friend's affairs. He took a seat beside her. 'No, Tony is *not* well,' she replied to his question, under the veil of candour. 'She is recovering, but she—you can understand—suffered a shock. She is not able to attend to business, and certain things have to be done.'

'I used to be her man of business,' Redworth observed.

'She speaks of your kind services. This is mere matter for lawyers.'

'She is recovering?'

'You may see her at Copsley next week. You can come down on Wednesdays or Saturdays?'

'Any day. Tell her I want her opinion upon the state of things.'

'It will please her; but you will have to describe the state of things.'

Emma feared she had said too much. She tried candour again for concealment. 'My poor Tony has been struck down low. I suppose it is like losing a diseased limb:—she has her freedom, at the cost of a blow to the system.'

'She may be trusted for having strength,' said Redworth.

'Yes.' Emma's mild monosyllable was presently followed by an exclamation: 'One has to experience the irony of Fate to comprehend how cruel it is!' Then she remembered that such language was peculiarly abhorrent to him.

'Irony of Fate!' he echoed her. 'I thought you were above that literary jargon.'

'And I thought I was: or thought it could be put in

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a dialect practically explicable,' she answered, smiling at the lion roused.

'Upon my word,' he burst out, 'I should like to write a book of Fables, showing how donkeys get into grinding harness, and dogs lose their bones, and fools have their sconces cracked, and all run jabbering of the irony of Fate, to escape the annoyance of tracing the causes. And what are they? nine times out of ten, plain want of patience, or some debt for indulgence. There's a subject:—let some one write Fables in illustration of the irony of Fate: and I'll undertake to tack-on my grandmother's maxims for a moral to each of 'em. We prate of that irony when we slink away from the lesson—the rod we conjure. And you to talk of Fate! It's the seed we sow, individually or collectively. I'm bound-up in the prosperity of the country, and if the ship is wrecked, it ruins my fortune, but not me, unless I'm bound-up in myself. At least I hope that's my case.'

He apologized for intruding Mr. Thomas Redworth.

His hearer looked at him, thinking he required a more finely pointed gift of speech for the ironical tongue, but relishing the tonic directness of his faculty of reason while she considered that the application of the phrase might be brought home to him so as to render 'my Grandmother's moral' a conclusion less comfortingly, if quite intelligibly, summary. And then she thought of Tony's piteous instance; and thinking with her heart, the tears insisted on that bitter irony of the heavens, which bestowed the long-withheld and coveted boon when it was empty of value or was but as a handful of spices to a shroud.

Perceiving the moisture in her look, Redworth

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understood that it was foolish to talk rationally. But on her return to her beloved, the real quality of the man had overcome her opposing state of sentiment, and she spoke of him with an iteration and throb in the voice that set a singular query whirring round Diana's ears. Her senses were too heavy for a suspicion.

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From an abandonment that had the last pleasure of life in a willingness to yield it up, Diana rose with her friend's help in some state of fortitude, resembling the effort of her feet to bear the weight of her body. She plucked her courage out of the dust to which her heart had been scattered, and tasked herself to walk as the world does. But she was indisposed to compassionate herself in the manner of the burdened world. She lashed the creature who could not raise a head like others, and made the endurance of torture a support, such as the pride of being is to men. She would not have seen any similarity to pride in it; would have deemed it the reverse. It was in fact the painful gathering of the atoms composing pride. For she had not only suffered; she had done wrongly: and when that was acknowledged, by the light of her sufferings the wrong-doing appeared gigantic, chorusing eulogies of the man she had thought her lover: and who was her lover once, before the crime against him. In the opening of her bosom to Emma, he was painted a noble figure; one of those that

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Romance delights to harass for the sake of ultimately the more exquisitely rewarding. He hated treachery: she had been guilty of doing what he most hated. She glorified him for the incapacity to forgive; it was to her mind godlike. And her excuses of herself?

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At the first confession, she said she had none, and sullenly maintained that there was none to exonerate. Little by little her story was related—her version of the story: for not even as woman to woman, friend to great-hearted friend, pure soul to soul, could Diana tell of the state of shivering abjection in which Dacier had left her on the fatal night; of the many causes conducing to it, and of the chief. That was an unutterable secret, bound by all the laws of feminine civilization not to be betrayed. Her excessive self-abasement and exaltation of him who had struck her down, rendered it difficult to be understood; and not till Emma had revolved it and let it ripen in the mind some days could she perceive with any clearness her Tony's motives, or mania. The very word Money thickened the riddle: for Tony knew that her friend's purse was her own to dip in at her pleasure; yet she, to escape so small an obligation, had committed the enormity for which she held the man blameless in spurning her.

'You see what I am, Emmy,' Diana said.

'What I do not see, is that he had grounds for striking so cruelly.'

'I proved myself unworthy of him.'

But does a man pretending to love a woman cut at one blow, for such a cause, the ties uniting her to him? Unworthiness of that kind, is not commonly the capital offence in love.—Tony's deep prostration



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and her resplendent picture of her judge and executioner, kept Emma questioning within herself. Gradually she became enlightened enough to distinguish in the man a known, if not common, type of the externally soft and polished, internally hard and relentless, who are equal to the trials of love only as long as favouring circumstances and seemings nurse the fair object of their courtship.

Her thoughts recurred to the madness driving Tony to betray the secret; and the ascent unhelped to get a survey of it and her and the conditions, was mountainous. She toiled up but to enter the regions of cloud; sure nevertheless that the obscurity was penetrable and excuses to be discovered somewhere. Having never wanted money herself, she was unable perfectly to realize the urgency of the need: she began however to comprehend that the very eminent gentleman, before whom all human creatures were to bow in humility, had for an extended term considerably added to the expenses of Tony's household, by inciting her to give those little dinners to his political supporters, and bringing comrades perpetually to supper-parties, careless of how it might affect her character and her purse. Surely an honourable man was bound to her in honour? Tony's remark: 'I have the reptile in me, dear,'—her exaggeration of the act, in her resigned despair,—was surely no justification for his breaking from her, even though he had discovered a vestige of the common 'reptile,' to leave her with a stain on her name?—There would not have been a question about it if Tony had not exalted him so loftily, refusing, in visible pain, to hear him blamed.

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Danvers had dressed a bed for Lady Dunstane in her mistress's chamber, where often during the night Emma caught a sound of stifled weeping or the long falling breath of wakeful grief. One night she asked whether Tony would like to have her by her side.

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'No, dear,' was the answer in the dark; 'but you know my old pensioners, the blind fifer and his wife; I've been thinking of them.'

'They were paid as they passed down the street yesterday, my love.'

'Yes, dear, I hope so. But he flourishes his tune so absurdly. I've been thinking, that is the part I have played, instead of doing the female's duty of handing round the tin-cup for pennies. I won't cry any more.'

She sighed and turned to sleep, leaving Emma to disburden her heart in tears.

For it seemed to her that Tony's intellect was weakened. She not merely abased herself and exalted Dacier preposterously, she had sunk her intelligence in her sensations: a state that she used to decry as the sin of mankind, the origin of error and blood.

Strangely too, the proposal came from her, or the suggestion of it, notwithstanding her subjectedness to the nerves, that she should show her face in public. She said: 'I shall have to run about, Emmy, when I can fancy I am able to rattle up to the old mark. At present, I feel like a wrestler who has had a fall. As soon as the stiffness is over, it's best to make an appearance, for the sake of one's backers, though I shall never be in the wrestling ring again.'

'That is a good decision—when you feel quite yourself, dear Tony,' Emma replied.

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'I dare say I have disgraced my sex, but not as they suppose. I feel my new self already, and can make the poor brute go through fire on behalf of the old. What is the task?—merely to drive a face!'

'It is not known.'

'It will be known.'

'But this is a sealed secret.'

'Nothing is a secret that has been spoken. It's in the air, and I have to breathe to live by it. And I would rather it were out. "She betrayed him." Rather that, than have them think—anything! They will exclaim, How could she! I have been unable to answer it to you—my own heart. How? Oh! our weakness is the swiftest dog to hunt us; we cannot escape it. But I have the answer for them, that I trust with my whole soul none of them would have done the like.'

'None, my Tony, would have taken it to the soul as you do.'

'I talk, dear. If I took it honestly, I should be dumb, soon dust. The moment we begin to speak, the guilty creature is running for cover. She could not otherwise exist. I am sensible of evasion when I open my lips.'

'But Tony has told me all.'

'I think I have. But if you excuse my conduct, I am certain I have not.'

'Dear girl, accounting for it, is not the same as excusing.'

'Who can account for it! I was caught in a whirl—Oh! nothing supernatural: my weakness; which it pleases me to call a madness—shift the ninety-ninth! When I drove down that night to Mr. Tonans, I am

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certain I had my clear wits, but I felt like a bolt. I saw things, but at too swift a rate for the conscience of them. Ah! let never Necessity draw the bow of our weakness: it is the soul that is winged to its perdition. I remember I was writing a story, named THE MAN OF TWO MINDS. I shall sign it, *By the Woman of Two Natures*. If ever it is finished. Capacity for thinking should precede the act of writing. It should; I do not say that it does. Capacity for assimilating the public taste and reproducing it, is the commonest. The stuff is perishable, but it pays us for our labour, and in so doing saves us from becoming tricksters. Now I can see that Mr. Redworth had it in that big head of his—the authoress outliving her income!’

‘He dared not speak.’

‘Why did he not dare?’

‘Would it have checked you?’

‘I was a shot out of a gun, and I am glad he did not stand in my way. What power charged the gun, is another question. Dada used to say, that it is the devil’s masterstroke to get us to accuse him. “So fare ye well, old Nickie Ben.” My dear, I am a black sheep; a creature with a spotted reputation; I must wash and wash; and not with water—with sulphur-flames.’ She sighed. ‘I am down there where they burn. You should have let me lie and die. You were not kind. I was going quietly.’

‘My love!’ cried Emma, overborne by a despair that she traced to the woman’s concealment of her bleeding heart,—‘you live for me. Do set your mind on that. Think of what you are bearing, as your debt to Emma. Will you?’

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Tony bowed her head mechanically.

‘But I am in love with King Death, and must confess it,’ she said. ‘That hideous eating you forced on me, snatched me from him. And I feel that if I had gone, I should have been mercifully forgiven by everybody.’

‘Except by me,’ said Emma, embracing her. ‘Tony would have left her friend for her last voyage in mourning. And my dearest will live to know happiness.’

‘I have no more belief in it, Emmy.’

‘The mistake of the world is to think happiness possible to the senses.’

‘Yes; we distil that fine essence *through* the senses; and the act is called the pain of life. It is the death of them. So much I understand of what our existence must be. But I may grieve for having done so little.’

‘That is the sound grief, with hope at the core—not in love with itself and wretchedly mortal, as we find self is under every shape it takes; especially the chief one.’

‘Name it.’

‘It is best named Amor.’

There was a writhing in the frame of the hearer, for she did want Love to be respected; not shadowed by her misfortune. Her still-flushed senses protested on behalf of the eternalness of the passion, and she was obliged to think Emma’s cold condemnatory intellect came of the no-knowledge of it.

A letter from Mr. Tonans, containing an enclosure, was a sharp trial of Diana’s endurance of the irony of Fate. She had spoken of the irony in allusion to her freedom. Now that, according to a communication from her lawyers, she was independent of the task of

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writing, the letter which paid the price of her misery bruised her heavily.

'Read it and tear it all to strips,' she said in an abhorrence to Emma, who rejoined: 'Shall I go at once and see him?'

'Can it serve any end? But throw it into the fire. Oh! no simulation of virtue. There was not, I think, a stipulated return for what I did. But I perceive clearly—I can read only by events—that there was an understanding. You behold it. I went to him to sell it. He thanks me, says I served the good cause well. I have not that consolation. If I had thought of the cause—of anything high, it would have arrested me. On the fire with it!'

The letter and square slip were consumed. Diana watched the blackening papers.

'So they cease their sinning, Emmy; and as long as I am in torment, I may hope for grace. We talked of the irony. It means, the pain of fire.'

'I spoke of the irony to Redworth,' said Emma; 'incidentally, of course.'

'And he fumed?'

'He is really not altogether the Mr. Cuthbert Dering of your caricature. He is never less than acceptably rational. I won't repeat his truisms; but he said, or I deduced from what he said, that a grandmother's maxims would expound the enigma.'

'Probably the simple is the deep, in relation to the mysteries of life,' said Diana, whose wits had been pricked to a momentary activity by the letter. 'He behaves wisely; so perhaps we are bound to take his words for wisdom. Much nonsense is talked and written, and he is one of the world's reserves, who

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need no more than enrolling, to make a sturdy phalanx of common sense. It's a pity they are not enlisted and drilled to express themselves.' She relapsed. 'But neither he nor any of them could understand my case!'

'He puts the idea of an irony down to the guilt of impatience, Tony.'

'Could there be a keener irony than that? A friend of Dada's waited patiently for a small fortune, and when it arrived, he was a worn-out man, just assisted to go decently to his grave.'

'But he may have gained in spirit by his patient waiting.'

'Oh! true. We are warmer if we travel on foot sunward, but it is a discovery that we are colder if we take to ballooning upward. The material good reverses its benefits the more nearly we clasp it. All life is a lesson that we live to enjoy but in the spirit. I will brood on your saying.'

'It is your own saying, silly Tony, as the only things worth saying always are!' exclaimed Emma, as she smiled happily to see her friend's mind reviving, though it was faintly and in the dark.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Of Nature with one of her Cultivated Daughters and a Short Excursion in Anti-Climax

A mind that after a long season of oblivion in pain returns to wakefulness without a keen edge for the

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world, is much in danger of souring permanently. Diana's love of nature saved her from the dire mischance during a two months' residence at Copsley, by stupefying her senses to a state like the barely conscious breathing on the verge of sleep. February blew South-west for the pairing of the birds. A broad warm wind rolled clouds of every ambiguity of form in magnitude over peeping azure, or skimming upon lakes of blue and lightest green, or piling the amphitheatre for majestic sunset. Or sometimes those daughters of the wind flew linked and low, semi-purple, threatening the shower they retained and teaching gloom to rouse a songful nest in the bosom of the viewer. Sometimes they were April, variable to soar with rain-skirts and sink with sun-shafts. Or they drenched wood and field for a day and opened on the high South-western star. Daughters of the wind, but shifty daughters of this wind of the dropping sun, they have to be watched to be loved in their transformations.

Diana had Arthur Rhodes and her faithful Leander for walking companions. If Arthur said: 'Such a day would be considered melancholy by London people,' she thanked him in her heart, as a benefactor who had revealed to her things of the deepest. The simplest were her food. Thus does Nature restore us, by drugging the brain and making her creature confidently animal for its new growth. She imagined herself to have lost the power to think; certainly she had not the striving or the wish. Exercise of her limbs to reach a point of prospect, and of her ears and eyes to note what bird had piped, what flower was out on the banks, and the leaf of what tree it was that lay

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beneath the budding, satiated her daily desires. She gathered unknowingly a sheaf of landscapes, images, keys of dreamed horizons, that opened a world to her at any chance breath altering shape or hue: a different world from the one of her old ambition. Her fall had brought her renovatingly to earth, and the saving naturalness of the woman recreated her childlike, with shrouded recollections of her strange taste of life behind her; with a tempered fresh blood to enjoy aimlessly, and what would erewhile have been a barrenness to her sensibilities.

In time the craving was evolved for positive knowledge, and shells and stones and weeds were deposited on the library-table at Copsley, botanical and geological books comparingly examined, Emma Dunstane always eager to assist; for the samples wafted her into the heart of the woods. Poor Sir Lukin tried three days of their society, and was driven away headlong to Club-life. He sent down Redworth, with whom the walks of the zealous inquirers were profitable, though Diana, in acknowledging it to herself, reserved a decided preference for her foregone ethereal mood, larger, and untroubled by the presence of a man. The suspicion Emma had sown was not excited to an alarming activity; but she began to question: could the best of men be simply a woman's friend?—was not long service rather less than a proof of friendship? She could be blind when her heart was on fire for another. Her passion for her liberty, however, received no ominous warning to look to the defences. He was the same blunt speaker, and knotted his brows as queerly as ever at Arthur, in a transparent calculation of how this fellow meant

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to gain his livelihood. She wilfully put it to the credit of Arthur's tact that his elder was amiable, without denying her debt to the good man for leaving her illness and her appearance unmentioned. He forbore even to scan her features. Diana's wan contemplativeness, in which the sparkle of meaning slowly rose to flash, as we see a bubble rising from the deeps of crystal waters, caught at his heart while he talked his matter-of-fact. But her instinct of a present safety was true. She and Arthur discovered—and it set her first meditating whether she did know the man so very accurately—that he had printed, for private circulation, when at Harrow School, a little book, a record of his observations in nature. Lady Dunstane was the casual betrayer. He shrugged at the nonsense of a boy's publishing; anybody's publishing he held for a doubtful proof of sanity. His excuse was, that he had not published opinions. Let us observe, and assist in our small sphere; not come mouthing to the footlights!

'We retire,' Diana said, for herself and Arthur.

'The wise thing, is to avoid the position that enforces publishing,' said he, to the discomposure of his raw junior.

In the fields he was genially helpful; commending them to the study of the South-west wind, if they wanted to forecast the weather and understand the climate of our country. 'We have no Seasons, or only a shuffle of them. Old calendars give seven months of the year to the South-west, and that's about the average. Count on it, you may generally reckon what to expect. When you don't have the excess for a year or two, you are drenched the

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year following.' He knew every bird by its flight and its pipe, habits, tricks, hints of sagacity homely with the original human; and his remarks on the sensitive life of trees and herbs were a spell to his thirsty hearers. Something of astronomy he knew; but in relation to that science, he sank his voice, touchingly to Diana, who felt drawn to kinship with him when he had a pupil's tone. An allusion by Arthur to the poetical work of Aratus, led to a memorably pleasant evening's discourse upon the long reading of the stars by these our mortal eyes. Altogether the mind of the practical man became distinguishable to them as that of a plain brother of the poetic. Diana said of him to Arthur: 'He does not supply me with similes; he points to the source of them.' Arthur, with envy of the man of positive knowledge, disguised an unstrung heart in agreeing.

Redworth alluded passingly to the condition of public affairs. Neither of them replied. Diana was wondering how one who perused the eternal of nature should lend a thought to the dusty temporary of the world. Subsequently she reflected that she was asking him to confine his great male appetite to the nibble of bread which nourished her immediate sense of life. Her reflections were thin as mist, coming and going like the mist, with no direction upon her brain, if they sprang from it. When he had gone, welcome though Arthur had seen him to be, she rebounded to a broader and cheerfuller liveliness. Arthur was flattered by an idea of her casting off incubus—a most worthy gentleman, and a not perfectly sympathetic associate. Her eyes had their lost light in

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them, her step was brisker; she challenged him to former games of conversation, excursions in blank verse here and there, as the mood dictated. They amused themselves, and Emma too. She revelled in seeing Tony's younger face and hearing some of her natural outbursts. That Dacier never could have been the man for her, would have compressed and subjected her, and inflicted a further taste of bondage in marriage, she was assured. She hoped for the day when Tony would know it, and haply that another, whom she little comprehended, was her rightful mate.

March continued South-westerly and grew rainier, as Redworth had foretold, bidding them look for gales and storm, and then the change of wind. It came, after wettings of a couple scorning the refuge of dainty townfolk under umbrellas, and proud of their likeness to dripping wayside wildflowers. Arthur stayed at Copsley for a week of the crisp North-easter; and what was it, when he had taken his leave, that brought Tony home from her solitary walk in dejection? It could not be her seriously regretting the absence of the youthful companion she had parted with gaily, appointing a time for another meeting on the heights, and recommending him to repair idle hours with strenuous work. The fit passed and was not explained. The winds are sharp with memory. The hard shrill wind crowed to her senses of an hour on the bleak sands of the French coast: the beginning of the curtained misery, inscribed as her happiness. She was next day prepared for her term in London with Emma, who promised her to make an expedition at the end of it by way of holiday, to see The Crossways, which Mr. Redworth said was not tenanted.

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‘You won’t go through it like a captive?’ said Emma.

‘I don’t like it, dear,’ Diana put up a comic mouth.

‘The debts we owe ourselves are the hardest to pay.

That is the discovery of advancing age: and I used to

imagine it was quite the other way. But they are the

debts of honour, imperative. I shall go through it

grandly, you will see. If I am stopped at my first

recreancy and turned directly the contrary way, I

think I have courage.’

‘You will not fear to meet . . . any one?’ Emma

said.

‘The world and all it contains! I am robust, eager

for the fray, an Amazon, a brazen-faced hussy. Fear

and I have parted. I shall not do you discredit. Be-

sides you intend to have me back here with you?

And besides again, I burn to make a last brave appear-

ance. I have not outraged the world, dear Emmy,

whatever certain creatures in it may fancy.’

She had come out of her dejectedness with a

shrewder view of Dacier; equally painful, for it killed

her romance, and changed the garden of their com-

panionship in imagination to a waste. Her clearing

intellect prompted it, whilst her nature protested, and

reviled her to uplift him. He *had* loved her. ‘I shall

die knowing that a man did love me once,’ she said

to her widowed heart, and set herself blushing and

blanching. But the thought grew inveterate: ‘He

could not bear much.’ And in her quick brain it shot

up a crop of similitudes for the quality of that man’s

love. She shuddered, as at a swift cleaving of cold

steel. He had not given her a chance; he had not

replied to her letter written with the pen dipped in

her heart’s blood; he must have gone straight away

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to the woman he married. This after almost justifying the scandalous world:—after . . . She realized her sensations of that night when the house door had closed on him; her feeling of lost sovereignty, degradation, feminine danger, friendlessness: and she was unaware, and never knew, nor did the world ever know, what cunning had inspired the frosty Cupid to return to her and be warmed by striking a bargain for his weighty secret. She knew too well that she was not of the snows which do not melt, however high her conceit of herself might place her. Happily she now stood out of the sun, in a bracing temperature, Polar; and her compassion for women was deeply sisterly in tenderness and understanding. She spoke of it to Emma as her gain.

‘I have not seen that you required to suffer to be considerate,’ Emma said.

‘It is on my conscience that I neglected Mary Paynham, among others—and because you did not take to her, Emmy.’

‘The reading of it appears to me, that she has neglected you.’

‘She was not in my confidence, and so I construe it as delicacy. One never loses by believing the best.’

‘If one is not duped.’

‘Expectations dupe us, not trust. The light of every soul burns upward. Of course, most of them are candles in the wind. Let us allow for atmospheric disturbance. Now I thank you, dear, for bringing me back to life. I see that I was really a selfish suicide, because I feel I have power to do some good, and belong to the army. When we are beginning to reflect, as I do now, on a recovered basis of pure health, we

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have the world at the dawn and know we are young in it, with great riches, great things gained and greater to achieve. Personally I behold a queer little wriggling worm for myself; but as one of the active world I stand high and shapely; and the very thought of doing work, is like a draught of the desert-springs to me. Instead of which, I have once more to go about presenting my face to vindicate my character. Mr. Redworth would admit no irony in that! At all events, it is anti-climax.'

'I forgot to tell you, Tony, you have been proposed for,' said Emma; and there was a rush of savage colour over Tony's cheeks.

Her apparent apprehensions were relieved by hearing the name of Mr. Sullivan Smith.

'My poor dear countryman! And he thought me worthy, did he? Some day, when we are past his repeating it, I'll thank him.'

The fact of her smiling happily at the narration of Sullivan Smith's absurd proposal by mediatrix, proved to Emma how much her nature thirsted for the smallest support in her self-esteem.

The second campaign of London was of bad augury at the commencement, owing to the ridiculous intervention of a street-organ, that ground its pipes in a sprawling roar of one of the Puritani marches, just as the carriage was landing them at the door of her house. The notes were harsh, dissonant, drunken, interlocked and horribly torn asunder, intolerable to ears not keen to extract the tune through dreadful memories. Diana sat startled and paralyzed. The melody crashed a revival of her days with Dacier, as in gibes; and yet it reached to her heart. She imagined a Providence

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that was trying her on the threshold, striking at her feebleness. She had to lock herself in her room for an hour of deadly abandonment to misery, resembling the run of poison through her blood, before she could bear to lift eyes on her friend; to whom subsequently she said: 'Emmy, there are wounds that cut sharp as the enchanter's sword, and we don't know we are in halves till some rough old intimate claps us on the back, merely to ask us how we are! I have to join myself together again, as well as I can. It's done, dear; but don't notice the cement.'

'You will be brave,' Emma petitioned.

'I long to show you I will.'

The meeting with those who could guess a portion of her story, did not disconcert her. To Lady Pennon and Lady Singleby, she was the brilliant Diana of her nominal luminary issuing from cloud. Face and tongue, she was the same; and once in the stream, she soon gathered its current topics and scattered her arrowy phrases. Lady Pennon ran about with them, declaring that the beautiful speaker, if ever down, was up, and up to her finest mark. Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett had then become the blazing regnant antisocial star; a distresser of domesticity, the magnetic attraction in the spirituous flames of that wild snapdragon bowl, called the Upper class; and she was angelically blonde, a straw-coloured Beauty. 'A lovely wheatsheaf, if the head were ripe,' Diana said of her.

'Threshed, says her fame, my dear,' Lady Pennon replied, otherwise allusive.

'A wheatsheaf of contention for the bread of wind,' said Diana, thinking of foolish Sir Lukin; thoughtless of talking to a gossip.

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She would have shot a lighter dart, had she meant it to fly and fix.

Proclaim, ye classics, what minor Goddess, or primal, Iris or Ate, sped straight away on wing to the empty wheatsheaf-ears of the golden-visaged Amabel Fryar-Gunnett, daughter of Demeter in the field to behold, of Aphrodite in her rosy incendiarism for the many of men; filling that pearly concave with a perversion of the uttered speech, such as never lady could have repeated, nor man, if less than a reaping harvester: which verily for women to hear, is to stamp a substantial damnatory verification upon the delivery of the saying:—

‘Mrs. Warwick says of you, that you’re a bundle of straws for everybody and bread for nobody.’

Or, stranger speculation, through what, and what number of conduits, curious, and variously colouring, did it reach the fair Amabel of the infant-in-cradle smile, in that deformation of the original utterance! To pursue the thing, would be to enter the subter-sensual perfumed caverns of a Romance of Fashionable Life, with no hope of coming back to light, other than by tail of lynx, like the great Arabian seaman, at the last page of the final chapter. A prospectively popular narrative indeed! and coin to reward it, and applause. But I am reminded that a story properly closed on the marriage of the heroine Constance and her young Minister of State, has no time for conjuring chemists’ bouquet of aristocracy to lure the native taste. When we have satisfied English sentiment, our task is done, in every branch of art, I hear: and it will account to posterity for the condition of the branches. Those yet wakeful eccentrics interested

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in such a person as Diana, to the extent of remaining attentive till the curtain falls, demand of me to gather up the threads concerning her: which my gardener sweeping his pile of dead leaves before the storm and night, advises me to do speedily. But it happens that her resemblance to her sex and species of a civilized period plants the main threads in her bosom. Rogues and a policeman, or a hurried change of front of all the actors, are not a part of our slow machinery.

Nor is she to show herself to advantage. Only those who read her woman's blood and character with the head, will care for Diana of the Crossways now that the knot of her history has been unravelled. Some little love they must have for her likewise: and how it can be quickened on behalf of a woman who never sentimentalises publicly, and has no dolly-dolly compliance, and muses on actual life, and fatigues with the exercise of brains, and is in sooth an alien: a princess of her kind and time, but a foreign one, speaking a language distinct from the mercantile, trafficking in ideas:—this is the problem. For to be true to her, one cannot attempt at propitiation. She said worse things of the world than that which was conveyed to the boxed ears of Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett. Accepting the war declared against her a second time, she performed the common mental trick in adversity of setting her personally known innocence to lessen her generally unknown error: but anticipating that this might become known, and the other not; and feeling that the motives of the acknowledged error had served to guard her from being the culprit of the charge she writhed under, she rushed out of a meditation compounded of mind and

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nerves, with derision of the world's notion of innocence and estimate of error. It was a mood lasting through her stay in London, and longer, to the discomfort of one among her friends; and it was worthy of The Anti-climax Expedition, as she called it.

For the rest, her demeanour to the old monster world exacting the servility of her, in repayment for its tolerating countenance, was faultless. Emma beheld the introduction to Mrs. Warwick of his bride, by Mr. Percy Dacier. She had watched their approach up the Ball-room, thinking, how differently would Redworth and Tony have looked. Differently, had it been Tony and Dacier: but Emma could not persuade herself of a possible harmony between them, save at the cost of Tony's expiation of the sin of the greater heart in a performance equivalent to Suttee. Perfectly an English gentleman of the higher order, he seemed the effigy of a tombstone one, fixed upright, and civilly proud of his effigy bride. So far, Emma considered them fitted. She perceived his quick eye on her corner of the room; necessarily, for a man of his breeding, without a change of expression. An emblem pertaining to her creed was on the heroine's neck; also dependent at her waist. She was white from head to foot; a symbol of purity. Her frail smile appeared deeply studied in purity. Judging from her look and her reputation, Emma divined that the man was justly mated with a devious filmy sentimentalist, likely to '*fiddle harmonics on the sensual strings*' for him at a mad rate in the years to come. Such fiddling is indeed the peculiar diversion of the opulent of a fatly prosperous people; who take it, one may concede to them, for an inspired elimina-

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tion of the higher notes of life: the very highest. That saying of Tony's ripened with full significance to Emma now. Not sensualism, but sham spiritualism, was the meaning; and however fine the notes, they come skilfully evoked of the under-brute in us. Reasoning it so, she thought it a saying for the penetration of the most polished and deceptive of the later human masks. She had besides, be it owned, a triumph in conjuring a sentence of her friend's, like a sword's edge, to meet them; for she was boiling angrily at the ironical destiny which had given to those Two a beclouding of her beloved, whom she could have rebuked in turn for her insane caprice of passion.

But when her beloved stood up to greet Mrs. Percy Dacier, all idea save tremulous admiration of the valiant woman, who had been wounded nigh to death, passed from Emma's mind. Diana tempered her queenliness to address the favoured lady with smiles and phrases of gentle warmth, of goodness of nature; and it became a halo rather than a personal eclipse that she cast.

Emma looked at Dacier. He wore the prescribed conventional air, subject in half a minute to a rapid blinking of the eyelids. His wife could have been inimically imagined fascinated and dwindling. A spot of colour came to her cheeks. She likewise began to blink.

The happy couple bowed, proceeding; and Emma had Dacier's back for a study. We score on that flat slate of man, unattractive as it is to hostile observations, and unprotected, the device we choose. Her harshest, was the positive thought that he had taken

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the woman best suited to him. Doubtless, he was a man to prize the altar-candle above the lamp of day. She fancied the back-view of him shrunken and straitened: perhaps a mere hostile fancy: though it was conceivable that he should desire as little of these meetings as possible. Eclipses are not courted.

The specially womanly exultation of Emma Dunstane in her friend's noble attitude, seeing how their sex had been struck to the dust for a trifling error, easily to be overlooked by a manful lover, and had asserted its dignity in physical and moral splendour, in self-mastery and benignness, was unshared by Diana. As soon as the business of the expedition was over, her orders were issued for the sale of the lease of her house and all it contained. 'I would sell Danvers too,' she said, 'but the creature declines to be treated as merchandize. It seems I have a faithful servant; very much like my life, not quite to my taste; the one thing out of the wreck!—with my dog!'

Before quitting her house for the return to Copsley, she had to grant Mr. Alexander Hepburn, post-haste from his Caledonia, a private interview. She came out of it noticeably shattered. Nothing was related to Emma, beyond the remark: 'I never knew till this morning the force of No in earnest.' The weighty little word—woman's native watch-dog and guardian, if she calls it to her aid *in earnest*—had encountered and withstood a fiery ancient host, astonished at its novel power of resistance.

Emma contented herself with the result. 'Were you much supplicated?'

'An Operatic Fourth-Act,' said Diana, by no means feeling so flippantly as she spoke.

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She received, while under the impression of this man's honest, if primitive, ardour of courtship, or effort to capture, a characteristic letter from Westlake, choicely phrased, containing presumably an application for her hand, in the generous offer of his own. Her reply to a pursuer of that sort was easy. Comedy, after the barbaric attack, refreshed her wits and reliance on her natural fencing weapons. To Westlake, the unwritten No was conveyed in a series of kindly ironic subterfuges, that played it like an impish flea across the pages, just giving the bloom of the word; and rich smiles come to Emma's life in reading the dexterous composition: which, however, proved so thoroughly to Westlake's taste, that a second and a third exercise in the comedy of the negative had to be despatched to him from Copsley.

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On their way from London, after leaving the station, the drive through the valley led them past a field, where cricketers were at work bowling and batting under a vertical sun: not a very comprehensible sight to ladies, whose practical tendencies, as observers of the other sex, incline them to question the gain of such an expenditure of energy. The dispersal of the alphabet over a printed page is not less perplexing to the illiterate. As soon as Emma Dunstane dis-

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covered the Copsley head-gamekeeper at one wicket, and, actually, Thomas Redworth facing him, bat in hand, she sat up, greatly interested. Sir Lukin stopped the carriage at the gate, and reminded his wife that it was the day of the year for the men of his estate to encounter a valley Eleven. Redworth, like the good fellow he was, had come down by appointment in the morning out of London, to fill the number required, Copsley being weak this year. Eight of their wickets had fallen for a lamentable figure of twenty-nine runs; himself clean-bowled the first ball. But Tom Redworth had got fast hold of his wicket, and already scored fifty to his bat. 'There! grand hit!' Sir Lukin cried, the ball flying hard at the rails. 'Once a cricketer, always a cricketer, if you've legs to fetch the runs. And Pullen's not doing badly. His business is to stick. We shall mark them a hundred yet. I do hate a score on our side without the two 00's.' He accounted for Redworth's mixed colours by telling the ladies he had lent him his flannel jacket; which, against black trousers, looked odd but not ill.

Gradually the enthusiasm of the booth and bystanders converted the flying of a leather-ball into a subject of honourable excitement.

'And why are you doing nothing?' Sir Lukin was asked; and he explained:

'My stumps are down: I'm married.' He took his wife's hand prettily.

Diana had a malicious prompting. She smothered the wasp, and said: 'Oh! look at that!'

'Grand hit again! Oh! good! good!' cried Sir Lukin, clapping to it, while the long-hit-off ran

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spinning his legs into one for an impossible catch; and the batsmen were running and stretching bats, and the ball flying away, flying back, and others after it, and still the batsmen running, till it seemed that the ball had escaped control and was leading the fielders on a coltish innings of its own, defiant of bowlers.

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Diana said merrily: 'Bravo our side!'

'Bravo, old Tom Redworth'; rejoined Sir Lukin. 'Four, and a three! And capital weather, haven't we! Hope we shall have same sort day next month—return match, my ground. I've seen Tom Redworth score—old days—over two hundred t' his bat. And he used to bowl too. But bowling wants practice. And, Emmy, look at the old fellows lining the booth, pipe in mouth and cheering. They do enjoy a day like this. We'll have a supper for fifty at Copsley's:—it's fun. By Jove! we must have reached up to near the hundred.'

He commissioned a neighbouring boy to hie to the booth for the latest figures, and his emissary taught lightning a lesson.

Diana praised the little fellow.

'Yes, he's a real English boy,' said Emma.

'We've thousands of 'em, thousands, ready to your hand'; exclaimed Sir Lukin; 'and a confounded Radicalized country . . .' he muttered gloomily of 'lets us be kicked! . . . any amount of insult, meek as gruel! . . . making of the finest army the world has ever seen! You saw the papers this morning? Good heaven! how a nation with an atom of self-respect can go on standing that sort of bullying from foreigners! We do. We're insulted and we're threat-

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ened, and we call for a hymn!—Now then, my man, what is it?’

The boy had flown back. ‘Ninety-two marked, sir; ninety-nine runs; one more for the hundred.’

‘Well reckoned; and mind you’re up at Copsley for the return match.—And Tom Redworth says, they may bite their thumbs to the bone—they don’t hurt us. I tell him, he has no sense of national pride. He says, we’re not prepared for war. We never are! And whose the fault? Says, we’re a peaceful people, but ’ware who touches us! He doesn’t feel a kick.—Oh! clever snick! Hurrah for the hundred!—Two—three. No, don’t force the running, you fools!—though they’re wild with the ball: ha!—no!—all right!’ The wicket stood. Hurrah!

The heat of the noonday sun compelled the ladies to drive on.

‘Enthusiasm has the privilege of not knowing monotony,’ said Emma. ‘He looks well in flannels.’

‘Yes, he does,’ Diana replied, aware of the reddening despite her having spoken so simply. ‘I think the chief advantage men have over us is in their amusements.’

‘Their recreations.’

‘That is the better word.’ Diana fanned her cheeks and said she was warm. ‘I mean, the permanent advantage. For you see that age does not affect them.’

‘Tom Redworth is not a patriarch, my dear.’

‘Well, he is what would be called mature.’

‘He can’t be more than thirty-two or three; and that, for a man of his constitution, means youth.’

‘Well, I can imagine him a patriarch playing cricket.’

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'I should imagine you imagine the possible chances. He is the father who would play with his boys.'

'And lock up his girls in the nursery.' Diana murmured of the extraordinary heat.

Emma begged her to remember her heterodox views of the education for girls.

'He bats admirably,' said Diana. 'I wish I could bat half as well.'

'Your batting is with the tongue.'

'Not so good. And a solid bat, or bludgeon, to defend the poor stumps, is surer. But there is the difference of cricket:—when your stumps are down, you are idle, at leisure; not a miserable prisoner.'

'Supposing all marriages miserable.'

'To the mind of me,' said Diana, and observed Emma's rather saddened eyelids for a proof that schemes to rob her of dear liberty were certainly planned.

They conversed of expeditions to Redworth's Berkshire mansion, and to The Crossways, untenanted at the moment, as he had informed Emma, who fancied it would please Tony to pass a night in the house she loved; but as he was to be of the party she coldly acquiesced.

The woman of flesh refuses pliancy when we want it of her, and will not, until it is her good pleasure, be bent to the development called a climax, as the puppet-woman, mother of Fiction and darling of the multitude! ever amiably does, at a hint of the Nuptial Chapter. Diana in addition sustained the weight of brains. Neither with waxen optics nor with subservient jointings did she go through her pathways of the world. Her direct individuality rejected the

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performance of simpleton, and her lively blood, the warmer for its containment, quickened her to penetrate things and natures; and if as yet, in justness to the loyal male friend, she forbore to name him conspirator, she read both him and Emma, whose inner bosom was revealed to her, without an effort to see. But her characteristic chasteness of mind,—not coldness of the blood,—which had supported an arduous conflict, past all existing rights closely to depict, and which barbed her to pierce to the wishes threatening her freedom, deceived her now to think her flaming in blushes came of her relentless divination on behalf of her recovered treasure: whereby the clear reading of others distracted the view of herself. For one may be the cleverest alive, and still hoodwinked while blood is young and warm.

The perpetuity of the contrast presented to her reflections, of Redworth's healthy, open, practical, cheering life, and her own freakishly interwinding, darkly penetrative, simulacrum of a life, cheerless as well as useless, forced her humiliated consciousness by degrees, in spite of pride, to the knowledge that she was engaged in a struggle with him; and that he was the stronger;—it might be, the worthier: she thought him the handsomer. He throve to the light of day, and she spun a silly web that meshed her in her intricacies. Her intuition of Emma's wishes led to this; he was constantly before her. She tried to laugh at the image of the concrete cricketer, half-flannelled, and red of face: the 'lucky calculator,' as she named him to Emma, who shook her head, and sighed. The abstract, healthful and powerful man, able to play besides profitably working, defied those

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poor efforts. Consequently, at once she sent up a bubble to the skies, where it became a spherulic realm, of far too fine an atmosphere for men to breathe in it; and thither she transported herself at will, whenever the contrast, with its accompanying menace of a tyrannic subjugation, overshadowed her. In the above, the kingdom composed of her shattered romance of life and her present aspirations, she was free and safe. Nothing touched her there—nothing that Redworth did. She could not have admitted there her ideal of a hero. It was the sublimation of a virgin's conception of life, better fortified against the enemy. She peopled it with souls of the great and pure, gave it illimitable horizons, dreamy nooks, ravishing landscapes, melodies of the poets of music. Higher and more celestial than the Salvatore, it was likewise, now she could assure herself serenely, independent of the horrid blood-emotions. Living up there, she had not a feeling.

The natural result of this habit of ascending to a superlunary home, was the loss of an exact sense of how she was behaving below. At the Berkshire mansion, she wore a supercilious air, almost as icy as she accused the place of being. Emma knew she must have seen in the library a row of her literary ventures, exquisitely bound; but there was no allusion to the books. Mary Paynham's portrait of Mrs. Warwick hung staring over the fireplace, and was criticized, as though its occupancy of that position had no significance.

'He thinks she has a streak of genius,' Diana said to Emma.

'It may be shown in time,' Emma replied, for a

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comment on the work. 'He should know, for the Spanish pictures are noble acquisitions.'

'They are, doubtless, good investments.'

He had been foolish enough to say, in Diana's hearing, that he considered the purchase of the Berkshire estate a good investment. It had not yet a name. She suggested various titles for Emma to propose: 'The Funds'; or 'Capital Towers'; or 'Dividend Manor'; or 'Railholm'; blind to the evidence of inflicting pain. Emma, from what she had guessed concerning the purchaser of The Crossways, apprehended a discovery there which might make Tony's treatment of him unkind, seeing that she appeared actuated contrariwise; and only her invalid's new happiness in the small excursions she was capable of taking to a definite spot, of some homely attractiveness, moved her to follow her own proposal for the journey. Diana pleaded urgently, childishly in tone, to have Arthur Rhodes with them, 'so as to be sure of a sympathetic companion for a walk on the Downs.' At The Crossways, they were soon aware that Mr. Redworth's domestics were in attendance to serve them. Manifestly the house was his property, and not much of an investment! The principal bedroom, her father's once, and her own, devoted now to Emma's use, appalled her with a resemblance to her London room. She had noticed some of her furniture at 'Dividend Manor,' and chosen to consider it in the light of a bargain from a purchase at the sale of her goods. Here was her bed, her writing-table, her chair of authorship, desks, books, ornaments, water-colour sketches. And the drawing-room was fitted with her brackets and étagères, holding every knick-knack she

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had possessed and scattered, small bronzes, antiques, ivory junks, quaint ivory figures Chinese and Japanese, bits of porcelain, silver incense-urns, dozens of dainty sundries. She had a shamed curiosity to spy for an omission of one of them; all were there. The Crossways had been turned into a trap.

Her reply to this blunt wooing, conspired, she felt justified in thinking, between him and Emma, was emphatic in muteness. She treated it as if unobserved. At night, in bed, the scene of his mission from Emma to her under this roof, barred her customary ascent to her planetary kingdom. Next day she took Arthur after breakfast for a walk on the Downs and remained absent till ten minutes before the hour of dinner. As to that young gentleman, he was near to being caressed in public. Arthur's opinions, his good sayings, were quoted; his excellent companionship on really poetical walks, and perfect sympathy, praised to his face. Challenged by her initiative to a kind of language that threw Redworth out, he declaimed: 'We pace with some who make young morning stale.'

'Oh! stale as peel of fruit long since consumed,' she chimed.

And so they proceeded; and they laughed, Emma smiled a little, Redworth did the same beneath one of his questioning frowns—a sort of fatherly grimace.

A suspicion that this man, when infatuated, was able to practise the absurdest benevolence, the burlesque of chivalry, as a *man*-admiring sex esteems it, stirred very naughty depths of the woman in Diana, labouring under her perverted mood. She put him to proof, for the chance of arming her wickedest to

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despise him. Arthur was petted, consulted, cited, flattered all round; all but caressed. She played, with a reserve, the maturish young woman smitten by an adorable youth; and enjoyed doing it because she hoped for a visible effect—more paternal benevolence—and could do it so dispassionately. Coquetry, Emma thought, was most unworthily shown; and it was of the worst description. Innocent of conspiracy, she had seen the array of Tony's lost household treasures: she wondered at a heartlessness that would not even utter common thanks to the friendly man for the compliment of prizing her portrait and the things she had owned; and there seemed an effort to wound him.

The invalided woman, charitable with allowances for her erratic husband, could offer none for the woman of a long widowhood, that had become a trebly sensitive maidenhood; abashed by her knowledge of the world, animated by her abounding blood; cherishing her new freedom, dreading the menacer; feeling, that though she held the citadel, she was daily less sure of its foundations, and that her hope of some last romance in life was going; for in him shone not a glimpse. He appeared to Diana as a fatal power, attracting her without sympathy, benevolently overcoming: one of those good men, strong men, who subdue and do not kindle. The enthrallment revolted a nature capable of accepting subjection only by burning. In return for his moral excellence, she gave him the moral sentiments: esteem, gratitude, abstract admiration, perfect faith. But the man? She could not now say she had never been loved; and a flood of tenderness rose in her bosom, swelling from springs

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that she had previously reproved with a desperate severity: the unhappy, unsatisfied yearning to be more than loved, to love. It was alive, out of the wreck of its first trial. This, the secret of her natural frailty, was bitter to her pride: chastely-minded as she was, it whelmed her. And then her comic imagination pictured Redworth dramatically making love. And to a widow! It proved him to be senseless of romance. Poetic men take aim at maidens. His devotedness to a widow was charged against him by the widow's shudder at antecedents distasteful to her soul, a discoloration of her life. She wished to look entirely forward, as upon a world washed clear of night, not to be cast back on her antecedents by practical wooings or words of love; to live spiritually; free of the shower at her eyelids attendant on any idea of her loving. The woman who talked of the sentimentalist's 'fiddling harmonics,' herself stressed the material chords, in her attempt to escape out of herself and away from her pursuer.

Meanwhile she was as little conscious of what she was doing as of how she appeared. Arthur went about with the moony air of surcharged sweetness, and a speculation on it, alternately tiptoe and prostrate. More of her intoxicating wine was administered to him, in utter thoughtlessness of consequences to one who was but a boy and a friend, almost of her own rearing. She told Emma, when leaving The Crossways, that she had no desire to look on the place again: she wondered at Mr. Redworth's liking such a solitude. In truth, the look back on it led her to perceive that her husband haunted it, and disfigured the man, of real generosity, as her heart confessed, but whom she

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accused of a lack of prescient delicacy, for not knowing she would and must be haunted there. Blaming him, her fountain of colour shot up, at a murmur of her unjustness and the poor man's hopes.

A week later, the youth she publicly named 'her Arthur' came down to Copsley with news of his having been recommended by Mr. Redworth for the post of secretary to an old Whig nobleman famous for his patronage of men of letters. And besides, he expected to inherit, he said, and gazed in a way to sharpen her instincts. The wine he had drunk of late from her flowing vintage was in his eyes. They were on their usual rambles out along the heights. 'Accept, by all means, and thank Mr. Redworth,' said she, speeding her tongue to intercept him. 'Literature is a good stick and a bad horse. Indeed, I ought to know. You can always write; I hope you will.'

She stepped fast, hearing: 'Mrs. Warwick—Diana! May I take your hand?'

This was her pretty piece of work! 'Why should you? If you speak my Christian name, no: you forfeit any pretext. And pray, don't loiter. We are going at the pace of the firm of Potter and Dawdle, and you know they never got their shutters down till it was time to put them up again.'

Nimble-footed as she was, she pressed ahead too fleetly for amorous eloquence to have a chance. She heard 'Diana!' twice, through the rattling of her discourse and flapping of her dress.

'Christian names are coin that seem to have an indifferent valuation of the property they claim,' she said in the Copsley garden; 'and as for hands, at

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meeting and parting, here is the friendliest you could have. Only don't look rueful. My dear Arthur, spare me that, or I shall blame myself horribly.'

His chance had gone, and he composed his face. No hope in speaking had nerved him; merely the passion to speak. Diana understood the state, and pitied the naturally modest young fellow, and chafed at herself as a senseless incendiary, who did mischief right and left, from seeking to shun the apparently inevitable. A side-thought intruded, that he would have done his wooing poetically—not in the burly storm, or bull-Saxon, she apprehended. Supposing it imperative with her to choose? She looked up, and the bird of broader wing darkened the whole sky, bidding her know that she had no choice.

Emma was requested to make Mr. Redworth acquainted with her story, all of it:—'So that this exalted friendship of his may be shaken to a common level. He has an unbearably high estimate of me, and it hurts me. Tell him all; and more than even you have known:—but for his coming to me, on the eve of your passing under the surgeon's hands, I should have gone—flung the world my glove! A matter of minutes. Ten minutes later! The train was to start for France at eight, and I was awaited. I have to thank heaven that the man was one of those who can strike icily. Tell Mr. Redworth what I say. You two converse upon every subject. One may be too loftily respected—in my case. By-and-by—for he is a tolerant reader of life and women, I think—we shall be humdrum friends of the lasting order.'

Emma's cheeks were as red as Diana's. 'I fancy Tom Redworth has not much to learn concerning any

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person he cares for,' she said. 'You like him? I have lost touch of you, my dear, and ask.'

'I like him: that I can say. He is everything I am not. But now I am free, the sense of being undeservedly overesteemed imposes fetters, and I don't like them. I have been called a Beauty. Rightly or other, I have had a Beauty's career; and a curious caged beast's life I have found it. Will you promise me to speak to him? And also, thank him for helping Arthur Rhodes to a situation.'

At this, the tears fell from her. And so enigmatical had she grown to Emma, that her bosom friend took them for a confessed attachment to the youth.

Diana's wretched emotion shamed her from putting any inquiries whether Redworth had been told. He came repeatedly, and showed no change of face, always continuing in the form of huge hovering griffin; until an idea, instead of the monster bird, struck her. Might she not, after all, be cowering under imagination? The very maidenly idea wakened her womanliness—to reproach her remainder of pride, not to see more accurately. It was the reason why she resolved, against Emma's extreme entreaties, to take lodgings in the South valley below the heights, where she could be independent of fancies and perpetual visitors, but near her beloved at any summons of urgency; which Emma would not habitually send because of the coming of a particular gentleman. Dresses were left at Copsley for dining and sleeping there upon occasion, and poor Danvers, despairing over the riddle of her mistress, was condemned to the melancholy descent. 'It's my belief,' she confided

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to Lady Dunstane's maid Bartlett, 'she'll hate men all her life after that Mr. Dacier.'

If women were deceived, and the riddle deceived herself, there is excuse for a plain man like Redworth in not having the slightest clue to the daily shifting feminine maze he beheld. The strange thing was, that during her maiden time she had never been shifty or flighty, invariably limpid and direct.

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An afternoon of high summer blazed over London through the City's awning of smoke, and the three classes of the population, relaxed by the weariful engagement with what to them was a fruitless heat, were severally bathing their ideas in dreams of the contrast possible to embrace: breezy seas or moors, aerial Alps, cool beer. The latter, if confessedly the lower comfort, is the readier at command; and Thomas Redworth, whose perspiring frame was directing his inward vision to fly for solace to a trim new yacht, built on his lines, beckoning from Southampton Water, had some of the amusement proper to things plucked off the levels, in the conversation of a couple of journeymen close ahead of him, as he made his way from a quiet street of brokers' offices to a City Bank. One asked the other if he had ever tried any of that cold stuff they were now selling out of barrows, with cream. His companion answered, that he had not

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got much opinion of stuff of the sort; and what was it like?

‘Well, it’s cheap, it ain’t bad; it’s cooling. But it ain’t refreshing.’

‘Just what I reckoned all that newfangle rubbish.’

Without a consultation, the conservatives in beverage filed with a smart turn about, worthy of veterans at parade on the drill-ground, into a public-house; and a dialogue chiefly remarkable for absence of point, furnished matter to the politician’s head of the hearer. Provided that their beer was unadulterated! Beer they would have; and why not, in weather like this? But how to make the publican honest! And he was not the only trickster preying on the multitudinous poor copper crowd, rightly to be protected by the silver and the golden. Revelations of the arts practised to plump them with raw-earth and minerals in the guise of nourishment, had recently knocked at the door of the general conscience and obtained a civil reply from the footman. Repulsive as the thought was to one still holding to Whiggish Liberalism, though flying various Radical kites, he was caught by the decisive ultra-torrent, and whirled to admit the necessity for the interference of the State, to stop the poisoning of the poor. Upper classes have never legislated systematically in their interests; and quid . . . rabidae tradis ovile lupae? says one of the multitude. We may be seeing fangs of wolves where fleeces waxed. The State that makes it a vital principle to concern itself with the helpless poor, meets instead of waiting for Democracy; which is a perilous flood but when it is dammed. Or else, in course of time, luxurious yachting, my friend, will

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encounter other reefs and breakers than briny ocean's! Capital, whereat Diana Warwick aimed her superbest sneer, has its instant duties. She theorized on the side of poverty, and might do so: he had no right to be theorizing on the side of riches. Across St. George's Channel, the cry for humanity in Capital was an agony. He ought to be there, doing, not cogitating. The post of Irish Secretary must be won by real service founded on absolute local knowledge. Yes, and sympathy, if you like; but sympathy is for proving, not prating. . . .

These were the meditations of a man in love; veins, arteries, headpiece in love, and constantly brooding at a solitary height over the beautiful coveted object; only too bewildered by her multifarious evanescent feminine evasions, as of colours on a ruffled water, to think of pouncing: for he could do nothing to soften, nothing that seemed to please her: and all the while, the motive of her mind impelled him in reflection beyond practicable limits: even pointing him to apt quotations! Either he thought within her thoughts, or his own were at her disposal. Nor was it sufficient for him to be sensible of her influence, to restrain the impetus he took from her. He had already wedded her morally, and much that he did, as well as whatever he debated, came of Diana; more than if they had been coupled, when his downright practical good sense could have spoken. She held him suspended, swaying him in that posture; and he was not a whit ashamed of it. The beloved woman was throned on the very highest of the man.

Furthermore, not being encouraged, he had his peculiar reason for delay, though now he could offer her wealth. She had once in his hearing derided the

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unpleasant hiss of the ungainly English matron's title of Mrs. There was no harm in the accustomed title, to his taste; but she disliking it, he did the same, on her special behalf; and the prospect, funereally draped, of a title sweeter-sounding to her ears, was above his horizon. Bear in mind, that he underwent the reverse of encouragement. Any small thing to please her was magnified, and the anticipation of it nerved the modest hopes of one who deemed himself and any man alive deeply her inferior.

Such was the mood of the lover condemned to hear another malignant scandal defiling the name of the woman he worshipped. Sir Lukin Dunstane, extremely hurried, bumped him on the lower step of the busy Bank, and said: 'Pardon!' and 'Ha! Redworth! making money?'

'Why, what are you up to down here?' he was asked, and he answered: 'Down to the Tower, to an officer quartered there. Not bad quarters, but an infernal distance. Business.'

Having cloaked his expedition to the distance with the comprehensive word, he repeated it; by which he feared he had rendered it too significant, and he said: 'No, no; nothing particular'; and that caused the secret he contained to swell in his breast rebelliously, informing the candid creature of the fact of his hating to lie: whereupon thus he poured himself out, in the quieter bustle of an alley, off the main thoroughfare. 'You're a friend of hers. I'm sure you care for her reputation; you're an old friend of hers, and she's my wife's dearest friend; and I'm fond of her too; and I ought to be, and ought to know, and do know:—pure? Strike off my fist if there's a spot

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on her character! And a scoundrel like that fellow Wroxeter!—Damnedest rage I ever was in!—Swears . . . down at Lockton . . . when she was a girl. Why, Redworth, I can tell you, when Diana Warwick was a girl——!’

Redworth stopped him. ‘Did he say it in your presence?’

Sir Lukin was drawn-up by the harsh question. ‘Well, no; not exactly.’ He tried to hesitate, but he was in the hot vein of a confidence and he wanted advice. ‘The cur said it to a woman—hang the woman! And she hates Diana Warwick: I can’t tell why—a regular snake’s hate. By Jove! how women can hate!’

‘Who is the woman?’ said Redworth.

Sir Lukin complained of the mob at his elbows. ‘I don’t like mentioning names here.’

A convenient open door of offices invited him to drag his receptacle, and possible counsellor, into the passage, where immediately he bethought him of a postponement of the distinct communication; but the vein was too hot. ‘I say, Redworth, I wish you’d dine with me. Let’s drive up to my Club.—Very well, two words. And I warn you, I shall call him out, and make it appear it’s about another woman, who’ll like nothing so much, if I know the Jezebel. Some women are *hussies*, let ’em be handsome as houris. And she’s a fire-ship; by heaven, she is! Come, you’re a friend of my wife’s, but you’re a man of the world and my friend, and you know how fellows are tempted, Tom Redworth.—Cur though he is, he’s likely to step out and receive a lesson.—Well, he’s the favoured cavalier for the present . . . h’m . . . Fryar-Gunnett. Swears

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he told her, circumstantially; and it was down at Lockton, when Diana Warwick was a girl. Swears she'll spit her venom at her, so that Diana Warwick sha'n't hold her head up in London Society, what with that cur Wroxeter, old Dannisburgh, and Dacier. And it does count a list, doesn't it?—confound the handsome hag! She's jealous of a dark rival. I've been down to Colonel Hartswood at the Tower, and he thinks Wroxeter deserves horsewhipping, and we may manage it. I know you're dead against duelling; and so am I, on my honour. But you see there are cases where a lady must be protected; and anything new, left to circulate against a lady who has been talked of twice—Oh, by Jove! it must be stopped. If she has a male friend on earth, it must be stopped on the spot.'

Redworth eyed Sir Lukin curiously through his wrath.

'We'll drive up to your Club,' he said.

'Hartswood dines with me this evening, to confer,' rejoined Sir Lukin. 'Will you meet him?'

'I can't,' said Redworth, 'I have to see a lady, whose affairs I have been attending to in the City; and I'm engaged for the evening. You perceive, my good fellow,' he resumed, as they rolled along, 'this is a delicate business. You have to consider your wife. Mrs. Warwick's name won't come up, but another woman's will.'

'I meet Wroxeter at a gambling-house he frequents, and publicly call him cheat—slap his face, if need be.'

'Sure to!' repeated Redworth. 'No stupid pretext will quash the woman's name. Now, such a thing as a duel would give pain enough.'

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‘Of course; I understand,’ Sir Lukin nodded his clear comprehension. ‘But what is it you advise, to trounce the scoundrel, and silence him?’

‘Leave it to me for a day. Let me have your word that you won’t take a step: positively—neither you nor Colonel Hartswood. I’ll see you by appointment at your Club.’ Redworth looked up over the chimneys. ‘We’re going to have a storm and a gale, I can tell you.’

‘Gale and storm!’ cried Sir Lukin; ‘what has that got to do with it?’

‘Think of something else for a time.’

‘And that brute of a woman—deuced handsome she is!—if you care for fair women, Redworth:—she’s a Venus jumped slap out of the waves, and the Devil for sire—*that* you learn:—running about, sowing her lies. She’s a yellow witch. Oh! but she’s a shameless minx. And a blackleg cur like Wroxeter! Any woman intimate with a fellow like that, stamps herself. I loathe her. Sort of woman who swears in the morning you’re the only man on earth; and next day—that evening—engaged!—fee to Polly Hopkins—and it’s a gentleman, a nobleman, my lord!—been going on behind your back half the season!—and she isn’t hissed when she abuses a lady, a saint in comparison! You know the world, old fellow:—Brighton, Richmond, visits to a friend as deep in the bog. How Fryar-Gunnett—a man, after all—can stand it! And drives of an afternoon for an airing—by heaven! You’re out of that mess, Redworth: not much taste for the sex; and you’re right, you’re lucky. Upon my word, the corruption of society in the present day is awful; it’s appalling.—I rattled at her: and oh! dear me, perks on her hind heels and defies me to

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prove; and *she's* no pretender, but hopes she's as good as any of my "chaste Dianas." My dear old friend, it's when you come upon women of that kind you have a sickener. And I'm bound by the best there is in a man—honour, gratitude, all the list—to defend Diana Warwick.'

'So, you see, for your wife's sake, your name can't be hung on a woman of that kind,' said Redworth. 'I'll call here the day after to-morrow at three P.M.'

Sir Lukin descended and vainly pressed Redworth to run up into his Club for refreshment. Said he roguishly: 'Who's the lady?'

The tone threw Redworth on his frankness. 'The lady I've been doing business for in the City, is Miss Paynham.'

'I saw her once at Copsley; good-looking. Cleverish?'

'She has ability.'

Entering his Club, Sir Lukin was accosted in the reading-room by a cavalry officer, a Colonel Launay, an old Harrovian, who stood at the window and asked him whether it was not Tom Redworth in the cab. Another, of the same School, standing squared before a sheet of one of the evening newspapers, heard the name and joined them, saying: 'Tom Redworth is going to be married, some fellow told me.'

'He'll make a deuced good husband to any woman—if it's true,' said Sir Lukin, with Miss Paynham ringing in his head. 'He's a cold-blooded old boy, and likes women for their intellects.'

Colonel Launay hummed in meditative emphasis. He stared at vacancy with a tranced eye, and turning a similar gaze on Sir Lukin, as if through him, burst

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out: 'Oh, by George, I say, what a hugging that woman'll get!'

The cocking of ears and queries of Sir Lukin put him to the test of his right to the remark; for it sounded of occult acquaintance with interesting subterranean facts; and there was a communication, in brief syllables and the dot language, crudely masculine. Immensely surprised, Sir Lukin exclaimed: 'Of course! when fellows live quietly and are careful of themselves. Ah! you may think you know a man for years, and you don't: you don't know more than an inch or two of him. Why, of course, Tom Redworth 'd be uxorious—the very man! And tell us what has become of the Firefly now. One never sees her. Didn't complain?'

'Very much the contrary.'

Both gentlemen were grave, believing their knowledge in the subterranean world of a wealthy city to give them a positive cognizance of female humanity; and the substance of Colonel Launay's communication had its impressiveness for them.

'Well, it's a turn right-about-face for me,' said Sir Lukin. 'What a world we live in! I fancy I've hit on the woman he means to marry;—had an idea of another woman once; but he's one of your friendly fellows with women. That's how it was I took him for a fish. Great mistake, I admit. But Tom Redworth's a man of morals after all; and when those men do break loose for a plunge—ha! Have you ever boxed with him? Well, he keeps himself in training, I can tell you.'

Sir Lukin's round of visits drew him at night to Lady Singleby's, where he sighted the identical young

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lady of his thoughts, Miss Paynham, temporarily a guest of the house; and he talked to her of Redworth, and had the satisfaction to spy a blush, a raging blush: which avowal presented her to his view as an exceedingly good-looking girl; so that he began mentally to praise Redworth for a manly superiority to small trifles and the world's tattle.

'You saw him to-day,' he said.

She answered: 'Yes. He goes down to Copsley to-morrow.'

'I think not,' said Sir Lukin.

'I have it from him.' She closed her eyelids in speaking.

'He and I have some rather serious business in town.'

'Serious?'

'Don't be alarmed: not concerning him.'

'Whom, then? You have told me so much—I have a right to know.'

'Not an atom of danger, I assure you?'

'It concerns Mrs. Warwick!' said she.

Sir Lukin thought the guess extraordinary. He preserved an impenetrable air. But he had spoken enough to set that giddy head spinning.

Nowhere during the night was Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett visible. Earlier than usual, she was riding next day in the Row, alone for perhaps two minutes, and Sir Lukin passed her, formally saluting. He could not help the look behind him, she sat so bewitchingly on horseback! He looked, and behold, her riding-whip was raised erect from the elbow. It was his horse that wheeled; compulsorily he was borne at a short canter to her side.

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‘Your commands?’

The handsome Amabel threw him a sombre glance from the corners of her uplifted eyelids; and snakish he felt it; but her colour and the line of her face went well with sullenness; and, her arts of fascination cast aside, she fascinated him more in seeming homelier, girlish. If the trial of her beauty of a woman in a temper can bear the strain, she has attractive lures indeed; irresistible to the amorous idler: and when, in addition, being the guilty person, she plays the injured, her show of temper on the taking face pitches him into perplexity with his own emotions, creating a desire to strike and be stricken, howl and set howling, which is of the happiest augury for tender reconciliation, on the terms of the gentleman on his kneecap.

‘You’ve been doing a pretty thing!’ she said, and briefly she named her house and half an hour, and flew. Sir Lukin was left to admire the figure of the horsewoman. Really, her figure had an air of vindicating her successfully, except for the poison she spat at Diana Warwick. And what pretty thing had he been doing? He reviewed dozens of speculations until the impossibility of seizing one determined him to go to Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett at the end of the half-hour—‘Just to see what these women have to say for themselves.’

Some big advance drops of Redworth’s thunderstorm drawing gloomily overhead, warned him to be quick and get his horse into stables. Dismounted, the sensational man was irresolute, suspecting a female trap. But curiosity, combined with the instinctive turning of his nose in the direction of the

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lady's house, led him thither, to an accompaniment of celestial growls, which impressed him, judging by that naughty-girl face of hers and the woman's tongue she had, as a likely prelude to the scene to come below.

CHAPTER XLII

The Penultimate: showing a Final Struggle for Liberty and Run into Harness

The prophet of the storm had forgotten his prediction; which, however, was of small concern to him, apart from the ducking he received midway between the valley and the heights of Copsley; whither he was bound, on a mission so serious that, according to his custom in such instances, he chose to take counsel of his active legs: an adviseable course when the brain wants clearing and the heart fortifying. Diana's face was clearly before him through the deluge; now in single features, the dimple running from her mouth, the dark bright eyes and cut of eyelids, and nostrils alive under their lightning; now in her whole radiant smile, or musefully listening, nursing a thought. Or she was obscured, and he felt the face. The individuality of it had him by the heart, beyond his powers of visioning. On his arrival, he stood in the hall, adrip like one of the trees of the lawn, laughing at Lady Dunstane's anxious exclamations. His portmanteau had come and he was expected; she hurried out at the first ringing of the bell, to greet and reproach him for walking in such weather.

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'Diana has left me,' she said, when he reappeared in dry clothing. 'We are neighbours; she has taken cottage-lodgings at Selshall, about an hour's walk:—one of her wild dreams of independence. Are you disappointed?'

'I am,' Redworth confessed.

Emma coloured. 'She requires an immense deal of humouring at present. The fit will wear off; only we must wait for it. Any menace to her precious liberty makes her prickly. She is passing the day with the Pettigrews, who have taken a place near her village for a month. She promised to dine and sleep here, if she returned in time. What is your news?'

'Nothing; the world wags on.'

'You have nothing special to tell her?'

'Nothing'; he hummed; 'nothing, I fancy, that she does not know.'

'You said you were disappointed.'

'It's always a pleasure to see her.'

'Even in her worst moods, I find it so.'

'Oh! moods!' quoth Redworth.

'My friend, they are to be reckoned, with women.'

'Certainly; what I meant was, that I don't count them against women.'

'Good: but my meaning was . . . I think I remember your once comparing them and the weather; and you spoke of the "one point more variable in women." You may forestall your storms. There is no calculating the effect of a few little words at a wrong season.'

'With women! I suppose not. I have no pretension to a knowledge of the sex.'

Emma imagined she had spoken plainly enough, if

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he had immediate designs; and she was not sure of that, and wished rather to shun his confidences while Tony was in her young widowhood, revelling in her joy of liberty. By-and-by, was her thought: perhaps next year. She dreaded Tony's refusal of the yoke, and her iron-hardness to the dearest of men proposing it; and moreover, her further to be apprehended holding to the refusal, for the sake of consistency, if it was once uttered. For her own sake, she shrank from hearing intentions, that distressing the good man, she would have to discountenance. His candour in confessing disappointment, and his open face, his excellent sense too, gave her some assurance of his not being foolishly impetuous. After he had read to her for an hour, as his habit was on evenings and wet days, their discussion of this and that in the book lulled any doubts she had of his prudence, enough to render it even a dubious point whether she might be speculating upon a wealthy bachelor in the old-fashioned ultra-feminine manner; the which she so abhorred that she rejected the idea. Consequently, Redworth's proposal to walk down to the valley for Diana, and bring her back, struck her as natural when a shaft of western sunshine from a whitened edge of rain-cloud struck her windows. She let him go without an intimated monition or a thought of one; thinking simply that her Tony would be more likely to come, having him for escort. Those are silly women who are always imagining designs and intrigues and future palpitations in the commonest actions of either sex. Emma Dunstane leaned to the contrast between herself and them.

Danvers was at the house about sunset, reporting

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her mistress to be on her way, with Mr. Redworth. The maid's tale of the dreadful state of the lanes, accounted for their tardiness; and besides the sunset had been magnificent. Diana knocked at Emma's bedroom door, to say, outside, hurriedly in passing, how splendid the sunset had been, and beg for an extra five minutes. Taking full fifteen, she swam into the drawing-room, lively with kisses on Emma's cheeks, and excuses, referring her misconduct in being late to the seductions of 'Sol' in his glory. Redworth said he had rarely seen so wonderful a sunset. The result of their unanimity stirred Emma's bosom to matchmaking regrets; and the walk of the pair together, alone under the propitious flaming heavens, appeared to her now as an opportunity lost. From sisterly sympathy, she fancied she could understand Tony's liberty-loving reluctance: she had no comprehension of the backwardness of the man beholding the dear woman handsomer than in her maiden or her married time; and sprightlier as well. She chatted deliciously, and drew Redworth to talk his best on his choicer subjects, playing over them like a fire-wisp, determined at once to flounder him and to make him shine. Her tender esteem for the man was transparent through it all; and Emma, whose evening had gone happily between them, said to her, in their privacy before parting: 'You seemed to have been inspired by "Sol," my dear. You do like him, don't you?'

Diana vowed she adored him; and with a face of laughter in rosy suffusion, put Sol for Redworth, Redworth for Sol; but, watchful of Emma's visage, said finally: 'If you mean the mortal man, I think him up to almost all your hyperboles—as far as men

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go; and he departed to his night's rest, which I hope will be good, like a king. Not to admire him, would argue me senseless, heartless. I do; I have reason to.'

'And you make him the butt of your ridicule, Tony.'

'No; I said "like a king"; and he is one. He has, to me, morally the grandeur of your Sol sinking, Cæsar stabbed, Cato on the sword-point. He is Roman, Spartan, Imperial; English, if you like, the pick of the land. It is an honour to call him friend, and I do trust he will choose the pick among us, to make her a happy woman—if she's for running in harness. There, I can't say more.'

Emma had to be satisfied with it, for the present.

They were astonished at breakfast by seeing Sir Lukin ride past the windows. He entered with the veritable appetite of a cavalier who had ridden from London fasting; and why he had come at that early hour, he was too hungry to explain. The ladies retired to read their letters by the morning's post; whereupon Sir Lukin called to Redworth; 'I met that woman in the park yesterday, and had to stand a volley. I went beating about London for you all the afternoon and evening. She swears you rated her like a scullery wench, and threatened to ruin Wroxeter. Did you see him? She says, the story's true in one particular, that he did snatch a kiss, and got mauled. Not so much to pay for it! But what a ruffian—eh?'

'I saw him,' said Redworth. 'He's one of the new set of noblemen who take bribes to serve as baits for transactions in the City. They help to the ruin of their order, or are signs of its decay. We won't judge

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it by him. He favoured me with his "word of honour" that the thing you heard was entirely a mis-statement, and so forth:—apologized, I suppose. He mumbled something.'

'A thorough cur!'

'He professed his readiness to fight, if either of us was not contented.'

'He spoke to the wrong man. I've half a mind to ride back and have him out for that rascal "osculation"—and the lady unwilling!—and she a young one, a girl, under the protection of the house! By Jove! Redworth, when you come to consider the scoundrels men can be, it stirs a fellow's bile. There's a deal of that sort of villany going—and succeeding sometimes! He deserves the whip or a bullet.'

'A sermon from Lukin Dunstane might punish him.'

'Oh! I'm a sinner, I know. But, go and tell one woman of another woman, and that a lie! That's beyond me.'

'The gradations of the deeps are perhaps measurable to those who are in them.'

'The sermon's at me—pop!' said Sir Lukin. 'By the way, I'm coming round to think Diana Warwick was right when she used to jibe at me for throwing up my commission. Idleness is the devil—or mother of him. I manage my estates; but the truth is, it doesn't occupy my mind.'

'Your time.'

'My mind, I say.'

'Whichever you please.'

'You're crusty to-day, Redworth. Let me tell you, I *think*—and hard too, when the fit's on me. However, you did right in stopping—I'll own—a piece of

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folly, and shutting the mouths of those two; though it caused me to come in for a regular drencher. But a pretty woman in a right-down termagant passion is good theatre; because it can't last, at that pace; and you're sure of your agreeable tableau. Not that I trust her ten minutes out of sight—or any woman, except one or two; my wife and Diana Warwick. Trust those you've tried, old boy. Diana Warwick ought to be taught to thank you; though I don't know how it's to be done.'

'The fact of it is,' Redworth frowned and rose, 'I've done mischief. I had no right to mix myself in it. I'm seldom caught off my feet by an impulse; but I was. I took the fever from you.'

He squared his figure at the window, and looked up on a driving sky.

'Come, let's play open cards, Tom Redworth,' said Sir Lukin, leaving the table and joining his friend by the window. 'You moral men are doomed to be marrying men, always; and quite right. Not that one doesn't hear a roundabout thing or two about you: no harm. Very much the contrary:—as the world goes. But you're the man to marry a wife; and if I guess the lady, she's a sensible girl and won't be jealous. I'd swear she only waits for asking.'

'Then you don't guess the lady,' said Redworth.

'Mary Paynham?'

The desperate half-laugh greeting the name convinced more than a dozen denials.

Sir Lukin kept edging round for a full view of the friend who shunned inspection. 'But is it? . . . can it be? it must be, after all! . . . why, of course it is! But the thing staring us in the face is just what we

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never see. Just the husband for her!—and she's the wife! Why, Diana Warwick's the very woman, of course! I remember I used to think so before she was free to wed.'

'She is not of that opinion.' Redworth blew a heavy breath; and it should be chronicled as a sigh; but it was hugely masculine.

'Because you didn't attack, the moment she was free; that's what upset my calculations,' the sagacious gentleman continued, for a vindication of his acuteness: then seizing the reply: 'Refuses? You don't mean to say you're the man to take a refusal? and from a green widow in the blush? Did you see her cheeks when she was peeping at the letter in her hand? She colours at half a word—takes the lift of a finger for Hymen coming. And lots of fellows are after her; I know it from Emmy. But you're not the man to be refused. You're her friend—her champion. That woman Fryar-Gunnett would have it you were the favoured lover, and sneered at my talk of old friendship. Women are always down dead on the facts; can't put them off a scent!'

'There's the mischief!' Redworth blew again. 'I had no right to be championing Mrs. Warwick's name. Or the world won't give it, at all events. I'm a blundering donkey. Yes, she wishes to keep her liberty. And, upon my soul, I'm in love with everything she wishes! I've got the habit.'

'Habit be hanged!' cried Sir Lukin. 'You're in love with the woman. I know a little more of you now, Mr. Tom. You're a fellow in earnest about what you do. You're feeling it now, on the rack, by heaven! though you keep a bold face. Did she speak positively?'

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—sort of feminine of “you’re the monster, not the man?” or measured little doctor’s dose of pity?—worse sign! You’re not going?’

‘If you’ll drive me down in half an hour,’ said Redworth.

‘Give me an hour,’ Sir Lukin replied, and went straight to his wife’s blue-room.

Diana was roused from a meditation on a letter she held, by the entrance of Emma in her bed-chamber, to whom she said: ‘I have here the very craziest bit of writing!—but what is disturbing you, dear?’

Emma sat beside her, panting and composing her lips to speak. ‘Do you love me? I throw policy to the winds, if only I can batter at you for your heart and find it! Tony, do you love me? But don’t answer: give me your hand. You have rejected him!’

‘He has told you?’

‘No. He is not the man to cry out for a wound. He heard in London—Lukin has had the courage to tell me, after his fashion:—Tom Redworth heard an old story, coming from one of the baser kind of women: grossly false, he knew. I mention only Lord Wroxeter and Lockton. He went to man and woman both, and had it refuted, and stopped their tongues, on peril; as he of all men is able to do when he wills it.’

Observing the quick change in Tony’s eyes, Emma exclaimed: ‘How you looked disdain when you asked whether he had told me! But why are you the handsome tigress to him, of all men living! The dear fellow, dear to me at least! since the day he first saw you, has worshipped you and striven to serve you:—and harder than any Scriptural service to have the beloved woman to wife. I know nothing to compare

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with it, for he is a man of warmth. He is one of those rare men of honour who can command their passion; who venerate when they love: and those are the men that women select for punishment! Yes, you! It is to the woman he loves that he cannot show himself as he is, because he is at her feet. You have managed to stamp your spirit on him; and as a consequence, he defends you now, for flinging him off. And now his chief regret is, that he has caused his name to be coupled with yours. I suppose he had some poor hope, seeing you free. Or else the impulse to protect the woman of his heart and soul was too strong. I have seen what he suffered, years back, at the news of your engagement.'

'Oh, for God's sake, don't,' cried Tony, tears running over, and her dream of freedom, her visions of romance, drowning.

'It was like the snapping of the branch of an oak, when the trunk stands firm,' Emma resumed, in her desire to scourge as well as to soften. 'But similes applied to him will strike you as incongruous.' Tony swayed her body, for a negative, very girlishly and consciously. 'He probably did not woo you in a poetic style, or the courtly by prescription.' Again Tony swayed; she had to hug herself under the stripes, and felt as if alone at sea, with her dear heavens pelting. 'You have sneered at him for his calculating—to his face: and it was when he was comparatively poor that he calculated—to his cost!—that he dared not ask you to marry a man who could not offer you a tithe of what he considered fit for the peerless woman. Peerless, I admit. There he was not wrong. But if he had valued you half a grain less, he might have won you.

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You talk much of chivalry; you conceive a super-human ideal, to which you fit a very indifferent wooden model, while the man of all the world the most chivalrous . . .! He is a man quite other from what you think him: anything but a "Cuthbert Dering" or a "Man of Two Minds." He was in the drawing-room below, on the day I received your last maiden letter from The Crossways—now his property, in the hope of making it yours.'

'I behaved abominably there!' interposed Tony, with a gasp.

'Let it pass. At any rate, that was the prick of a needle, not the blow of a sword.'

'But marriage, dear Emmy! marriage! Is marriage to be the end of me?'

'What amazing apotheosis have you in prospect? And are you steering so particularly well by yourself?'

'Miserably! But I can dream. And the thought of a husband cuts me from any dreaming. It's all dead flat earth at once!'

'Would you have rejected him when you were a girl?'

'I think so.'

'The superior merits of another . . .?'

'Oh, no, no, no, *no!* I might have accepted him: and I might not have made him happy. I wanted a hero, and the jewelled garb and the feather did not suit him.'

'No; he is not that description of lay-figure. You have dressed it, and gemmed it, and—made your discovery. Here is a true man; and if you can find me any of your heroes to match him, I will thank you.

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He came on the day I speak of, to consult me as to whether, with the income he then had . . . Well, I had to tell him you were engaged. The man has never wavered in his love of you since that day. He has had to bear something.'

This was an electrical bolt into Tony's bosom, shaking her from self-pity and shame to remorseful pity of the suffering lover; and the tears ran in streams, as she said: 'He bore it, Emmy, he bore it.' She sobbed out: 'And he went on building a fortune and batting! Whatever he undertakes he does perfectly—approve of the pattern or not. Oh! I have no doubt he had his nest of wishes piping to him all the while: only it seems quaint, dear, quaint, and against everything we've been reading of lovers! Love was his bread and butter!' Her dark eyes showered. 'And to tell you what you do not know of him, his way of making love is really,' she sobbed, 'pretty. It . . . it took me by surprise; I was expecting a bellow and an assault of horns; and if, dear:—you will say, what boarding-school girl have you got with you! and I feel myself getting childish:—if Sol in his glory had not been so m . . . majestically m . . . magnificent, nor seemed to show me the king . . . kingdom of my dreams, I might have stammered the opposite word to the one he heard. Last night, when he took my hand kindly before going to bed, I had a fit for dropping on my knees to him. I saw him bleed, and he held himself right royally. I told you he did;—Sol in his moral grandeur! How infinitely above the physical monarch—is he not, Emmy? What one dislikes, is the devotion of all that grandeur to win a widow. It should

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be a maiden princess. You feel it so, I am sure. And here am I, as if a maiden princess were I, demanding romantic accessories of rubious vapour in the man condescending to implore the widow to wed him. But, tell me, does he know everything of his widow—everything? I shall not have to go through the frightful chapter?’

‘He is a man with his eyes awake; he knows as much as any husband could require to know,’ said Emma; adding: ‘My darling! he trusts you. It is the soul of the man that loves you, as it is mine. You will not tease him? Promise me. Give yourself frankly. You see it clearly before you.’

‘I see compulsion, my dear. What I see, is a regiment of Proverbs, bearing placards instead of guns, and each one a taunt at women, especially at widows. They march; they form square; they enclose me in the middle, and I have their inscriptions to digest. Read that crazy letter from Mary Paynham while I am putting on my bonnet. I perceive I have been crying like a raw creature in her teens. I don’t know myself. An advantage of the darker complexions is our speedier concealment of the traces.’

Emma read Miss Paynham’s letter, and returned it with the comment: ‘Utterly crazy.’ Tony said: ‘Is it not? I am to “Pause before I trifle with a noble heart too long.” She is to “have her happiness in the constant prayer for ours”; and she is “warned by one of those intimations never failing her, that he runs a serious danger.” It reads like a Wizard’s Almanack. And here: “Homogeneity of sentiment the most perfect, is unable to contend with the fatal

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charm, which exercised by an indifferent person, must be ascribed to original predestination." She should be under the wing of Lady Wathin. There is the mother for such chicks! But I'll own to you, Emmy, that after the perusal, I did ask myself a question as to my likeness of late to the writer. I have drivelled . . . I was shuddering over it when you came in. I have sentimentalized up to thin smoke. And she tells a truth when she says I am not to "count social cleverness"—she means volubility—"as a warrant for domineering a capacious intelligence":—because of the gentleman's modesty. Agreed: I have done it; I am contrite. I am going into slavery to make amends for presumption. Banality, thy name is marriage!

'Your business is to accept life as we have it,' said Emma; and Tony shrugged. She was precipitate in going forth to her commonplace fate, and scarcely looked at the man requested by Emma to escort her to her cottage. After their departure, Emma fell into laughter at the last words with the kiss of her cheeks: 'Here goes old Ireland!' But, from her look and from what she had said upstairs, Emma could believe that the singular sprite of girlishness invading and governing her latterly, had yielded place to the woman she loved.

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Emma watched them on their way through the park, till they rounded the beechwood, talking, it could be surmised, of ordinary matters; the face of the gentleman turning at times to his companion's, which steadily fronted the gale. She left the ensuing to a prayer for their good direction, with a chuckle at Tony's evident feeling of a ludicrous posture, and the desperate rush of her agile limbs to have it over. But her prayer throbbed almost to a supplication that the wrong done to her beloved by Dacier—the wound to her own sisterly pride rankling as an injury to her sex, might be cancelled through the union of the woman noble in the sight of God with a more manlike man.

Meanwhile the feet of the couple were going faster than their heads to the end of the journey. Diana knew she would have to hoist the signal—and how? The prospect was dumbfoundering. She had to think of appeasing her Emma. Redworth, for his part, actually supposed she had accepted his escorting in proof of the plain friendship offered him overnight.

‘What do your “birds” do in weather like this?’ she said.

‘Cling to their perches and wait patiently. It’s
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the bad time with them when you don't hear them chirp.'

'Of course you foretold the gale.'

'Oh, well, it did not require a shepherd or a skipper for that.'

'Your grand gift will be useful to a yachtsman.'

'You like yachting. When I have tried my new schooner in the Channel, she is at your command for as long as you and Lady Dunstane please.'

'So you acknowledge that birds—things of nature—have their bad time?'

'They profit ultimately by the deluge and the wreck. Nothing on earth is "tucked-up" in perpetuity.'

'Except the dead. But why should the schooner be at our command?'

'I shall be in Ireland.'

He could not have said sweeter to her ears or more touching.

'We shall hardly feel safe without the weatherwise on board.'

'You may count on my man Barnes; I have proved him. He is up to his work even when he's bilious: only, in that case, occurring about once a fortnight, you must leave him to fight it out with the elements.'

'I rather like men of action to have a temper.'

'I can't say much for a bilious temper.'

The weather to-day really seemed of that kind, she remarked. He assented, in the shrug manner—not to dissent: she might say what she would. He helped nowhere to a lead; and so quick are the changes of mood at such moments that she was now far from

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him under the failure of an effort to come near. But thoughts of Emma pressed.

‘The name of the new schooner? Her name is her picture to me.’

‘I wanted you to christen her.’

‘Launched without a name?’

‘I took a liberty.’

Needless to ask, but she did. ‘With whom?’

‘I named her *Diana*.’

‘May the Goddess of the silver bow and crescent protect her! To me the name is ominous of mischance.’

‘I would commit my fortunes and life . . .!’ He checked his tongue, ejaculating: ‘Omens!’

She had veered straight away from her romantic aspirations to the blunt extreme of thinking that a widow should be wooed in unornamented matter-of-fact, as she is wedded, with a ‘wilt thou,’ and ‘I will,’ and no decorative illusions. Downright, for the unpoetic creature, if you please! So she rejected the accompaniment of the silver Goddess and high seas for an introduction of the crisis.

‘This would be a thunderer on our coasts. I had a trial of my sailing powers in the Mediterranean.’

As she said it, her musings on him then, with the contrast of her position toward him now, fierily brushed her cheeks; and she wished him the man to make one snatch at her poor lost small butterfly bit of freedom, so that she might suddenly feel in haven, at peace with her expectant Emma. He could have seen the inviting consciousness, but he was absurdly watchful lest the flying sprays of border trees should strike her. He mentioned his fear, and it became an

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excuse for her seeking protection of her veil. 'It is our natural guardian,' she said.

'Not much against timber,' said he.

The worthy creature's anxiety was of the pattern of cavaliers escorting dames—an exaggeration of honest zeal; a present example of clownish goodness, it might seem; until entering the larch and firwood along the beaten heights, there was a rocking and straining of the shallow-rooted trees in a tremendous gust that quite pardoned him for curving his arm in a hoop about her and holding a shoulder in front. The veil did her positive service.

He was honourably scrupulous not to presume. A right good unimpulsive gentleman: the same that she had always taken him for and liked.

'These firs are not taproots,' he observed, by way of apology.

Her dress volumed and her ribands rattled and chirruped on the verge of the slope. 'I will take your arm here,' she said.

Redworth received the little hand, saying: 'Lean to me.'

They descended upon great surges of wind piping and driving every light surface-atom as foam; and they blinked and shook; even the man was shaken. But their arms were interlinked and they grappled; the battering enemy made them one. It might mean nothing, or everything: to him it meant the sheer blissful instant.

At the foot of the hill, he said: 'It's harder to keep to the terms of yesterday.'

'What were they?' said she, and took his breath more than the fury of the storm had done.

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'Raise the veil, I beg.'

'Widows do not wear it.'

The look revealed to him was a fugitive of the wilds, no longer the glittering shooter of arrows.

'Have you . . . ?' changed to me, was the signification understood. 'Can you?—for life! Do you think you can?'

His poverty in the pleading language melted her. 'What I cannot do, my best of friends, is to submit to be seated on a throne, with you petitioning. Yes, as far as concerns this hand of mine, if you hold it worthy of you. We will speak of that. Now tell me the name of the weed trailing along the hedge there.'

He knew it well; a common hedgerow weed; but the placid diversion baffled him. It was clematis, he said.

'It drags in the dust when it has no firm arm to cling to. I passed it beside you yesterday with a flaunting mind and not a suspicion of a likeness. How foolish I was! I could volubly sermonize; only it should be a young maid to listen. Forgive me the yesterday.'

'You have never to ask. You withdraw your hand—was I rough?'

'No,' she smiled demurely; 'it must get used to the shackles: but my cottage is in sight. I have a growing love for the place. We will enter it like plain people—if you think of coming in.'

As she said it she had a slight shock of cowering under eyes tolerably hawkish in their male glitter; but her coolness was not disturbed, and without any apprehensions she reflected on what has been written

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of the silly division and war of the sexes:—which two might surely enter on an engagement to live together amiably, unvexed by that barbarous old fowl and falcon interlude. Cool herself, she imagined the same of him, having good grounds for the delusion; so they passed through the cottage-garden and beneath the low porchway, into her little sitting-room, where she was proceeding to speak composedly of her preference for cottages, while untying her bonnet-strings:—‘If I had begun my life in a cottage!’—when really a big storm-wave caught her from shore and whirled her to mid-sea, out of every sensibility but the swimming one of her loss of self in the man.

‘You would not have been here!’ was all he said. She was up at his heart, fast-locked, undergoing a change greater than the sea works; her thoughts one blush, her brain a fire-fount. This was not like being seated on a throne.

‘There,’ said he, loosening his hug, ‘now you belong to me! I know you from head to foot. After that, my darling, I could leave you for years, and call you wife, and be sure of you. I could swear it for you—my life on it! That’s what I think of you. Don’t wonder that I took my chance—the first:—I have waited!’

Truer word was never uttered, she owned, coming into some harmony with man’s kiss on her mouth: the man violently metamorphozed to a stranger, acting on rights she had given him. And who was she to dream of denying them? Not an idea in her head! Bound verily to be thankful for such love, on hearing that it dated from the night in Ireland. . . . ‘So in

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love with you that, on my soul, your happiness was my marrow—whatever you wished; anything you chose. It's reckoned a fool's part. No, it's love: the love of a woman—the one woman! I was like the hand of a clock to the springs. I taught this old watch-dog of a heart to keep guard and bury the bones you tossed him.'

'Ignorantly, admit,' said she, and could have bitten her tongue for the empty words that provoked: 'Would you have flung him nothing?' and caused a lowering of her eyelids and shamed glimpses of recollections. 'I hear you have again been defending me. I told you, I think, I wished I had begun my girl's life in a cottage. All that I have had to endure! . . . or so it seems to me: it may be my way of excusing myself:—I know my cunning in that peculiar art. I would take my chance of mixing among the highest and the brightest.'

'Naturally.'

'Culpably.'

'It brings you to me.'

'Through a muddy channel.'

'Your husband has full faith in you, my own.'

'The faith has to be summoned and is buffeted, as we were just now on the hill. I wish he had taken me from a cottage.'

'You pushed for the best society, like a fish to its native sea.'

'Pray say, a salmon to the riverheads.'

'Better,' Redworth laughed joyfully, between admiration of the tongue that always outflowed him, and of the face he reddened.

By degrees her apter and neater terms of speech

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helped her to a notion of regaining some steps of her sunken ascendancy, under the weight of the novel masculine pressure on her throbbing blood; and when he bent to her to take her lord's farewell of her, after agreeing to go and delight Emma with a message, her submission and her personal pride were not so much at variance: perhaps because her buzzing head had no ideas. 'Tell Emma you have undertaken to wash the blackamoor as white as she can be,' she said perversely, in her spite at herself for not coming, as it were, out of the dawn to the man she could consent to wed: and he replied: 'I shall tell her my dark girl pleads for a fortnight's grace before she and I set sail for the West coast of Ireland': conjuring a picture that checked any protest against the shortness of time:—and Emma would surely be his ally.

They talked of the Dublin Ball: painfully to some of her thoughts. But Redworth kissed that distant brilliant night as freshly as if no belabouring years rolled in the chasm: which led her to conceive partly, and wonderingly, the nature of a strong man's passion; and it subjugated the woman knowing of a contrast. The smart of the blow dealt her by him who had fired the passion in her became a burning regret for the loss of that fair fame she had sacrificed to him, and could not bring to her truer lover: though it was but the outer view of herself—the world's view; only she was generous and of honest conscience, and but for the sake of the truer lover, she would mentally have allowed the world to lash and abuse her, without a plea of material purity. Could it be named? The naming of it in her clear mind lessened it to accidental:

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—By good fortune, she was no worse!—She said to Redworth, when finally dismissing him, ‘I bring no real disgrace to you, my friend.’—To have had this sharp spiritual battle at such a time, was proof of honest conscience, rarer among women, as the world has fashioned them yet, than the purity demanded of them.—His answer: ‘You are my wife!’ rang in her hearing.

When she sat alone at last, she was incapable, despite her nature’s imaginative leap to brightness, of choosing any single period, auspicious or luminous or flattering, since the hour of her first meeting this man, rather than the grey light he cast on her, promising helpfulness, and inspiring a belief in her capacity to help. Not the Salvatore high raptures nor the nights of social applause could appear preferable: she strained her shattered wits to try them. As for her superlunary sphere, it was in fragments; and she mused on the singularity, considering that she was not deeply enamoured. Was she so at all? The question drove her to embrace the dignity of being reasonable—under Emma’s guidance. For she did not stand firmly alone; her story confessed it. Marriage might be the archway to the road of good service, even as our passage through the flesh may lead to the better state. She had thoughts of the kind, and had them while encouraging herself to deplore the adieu to her little musk-scented sitting-room, where a modest freedom breathed, and her individuality had seemed pointing to a straighter growth.

She nodded subsequently to the truth of her happy Emma’s remark: ‘You were created for the world, Tony.’ A woman of blood and imagination in the

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warring world, without a mate whom she can revere, subscribes to a likeness with those independent minor realms between greedy mighty neighbours, which conspire and undermine when they do not openly threaten to devour. So, then, this union, the return to the wedding yoke, received sanction of grey-toned reason. She was not enamoured: she could say it to herself. She had, however, been surprised, both by the man and her unprotesting submission; surprised and warmed, unaccountably warmed. Clearness of mind in the woman chaste by nature, however little ignorant it allowed her to be in the general review of herself, could not compass the immediately personal, with its acknowledgement of her subserviency to touch and pressure—and more, stranger, her readiness to kindle. She left it unexplained. Unconsciously the image of Dacier was effaced. Looking backward, her heart was moved to her long-constant lover with most pitying tender wonderment—stormy man, as her threatened senses told her that he was. Looking at him, she had to mask her being abashed and mastered. And looking forward, her soul fell in prayer for this true man's never repenting of his choice. Sure of her now, Mr. Thomas Redworth had returned to the station of the courtier, and her feminine sovereignty was not ruffled to make her feel too feminine. Another revelation was his playful talk when they were more closely intimate. He had his humour as well as his hearty relish of hers.

'If all Englishmen were like him!' she chimed with Emma Dunstane's eulogies, under the influence.

'My dear,' the latter replied, 'we should simply

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march over the Four Quarters and be blessed by the nations! Only, avoid your trick of dashing headlong to the other extreme. He has his faults.'

'Tell me of them,' Diana cooed for an answer. 'Do. I want the flavour. A girl would be satisfied with superhuman excellence. A widow asks for feature.'

'To my thinking, the case is, that if it is a widow who sees the superhuman excellence in a man, she may be very well contented to cross the bridge with him,' rejoined Emma.

'Suppose the bridge to break, and for her to fall into the water, he rescuing her—then perhaps!'

'But it has been happening!'

'But piecemeal, in extension, so slowly. I go to him a derelict, bearing a story of the sea; empty of ideas. I remember sailing out of harbour passably well freighted for commerce.'

'When Tom Redworth has had command of the "derelict" a week, I should like to see her!'

The mention of that positive captaincy drowned Diana in morning colours. She was dominated, physically and morally, submissively too. What she craved, in the absence of the public whiteness which could have caused her to rejoice in herself as a noble gift, was the spring of enthusiasm. Emma touched a quivering chord of pride with her hint at the good augury, and foreshadowing of the larger Union, in the Irishwoman's bestowal of her hand on the open-minded Englishman she had learned to trust. The aureole glimmered transiently: she could neither think highly of the woman about to be wedded, nor poetically of the man; nor, therefore, rosily of the ceremony, nor

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other than vacuously of life. And yet, as she avowed to Emma, she had gathered the three rarest good things of life: a faithful friend, a faithful lover, a faithful servant: the two latter exposing an unimagined quality of emotion. Danvers, on the night of the great day for Redworth, had undressed her with trembling fingers, and her mistress was led to the knowledge that the maid had always been all eye; and on reflection to admit that it came of a sympathy she did not share.

But when Celtic brains are reflective on their emotional vessel they shoot direct as the arrow of logic. Diana's glance at the years behind lighted every moving figure to a shrewd transparency, herself among them. She was driven to the conclusion that the granting of any of her heart's wild wishes in those days would have lowered her—or frozen. Dacier was a coldly luminous image; still a tolling name; no longer conceivably her mate. Recollection rocked, not she. The politician and citizen was admired: she read the man;—more to her own discredit than to his, but she read him, and if that is done by the one of two lovers who was true to love, it is the God of the passion pronouncing a final release from the shadow of his chains.

Three days antecedent to her marriage, she went down the hill over her cottage chimneys with Redworth, after hearing him praise and cite to Emma Dunstane sentences of a morning's report of a speech delivered by Dacier to his constituents. She alluded to it, that she might air her power of speaking of the man coolly to him, or else for the sake of stirring

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afresh some sentiment he had roused; and he repeated his high opinion of the orator's political wisdom: whereby was revived in her memory a certain reprehensible view, belonging to her period of mock-girlish naughtiness—too vile!—as to his paternal benevolence, now to clear vision the loftiest manliness. What did she do? She was Irish; therefore intuitively decorous in amatory challenges and interchanges. But she was an impulsive woman, and foliage was thick around, only a few small birds and heaven seeing; and penitence and admiration sprang the impulse. It had to be this or a burst of weeping:—she put a kiss upon his arm.

She had omitted to think that she was dealing with a lover a man of smothered fire, who would be electrically alive to the act through a coat-sleeve. Redworth had his impulse. He kept it under,—she felt the big breath he drew in. Imagination began busily building a nest for him, and enthusiasm was not sluggish to make a home of it. The impulse of each had wedded; in expression and repression; her sensibility told her of the stronger.

She rose on the morning of her marriage day with his favourite Planxty Kelly at her lips, a natural bubble of the notes. Emma drove down to the cottage to breakfast and superintend her bride's adornment, as to which, Diana had spoken slightly; as well as of the ceremony, and the institution, and this life itself:—she would be married out of her cottage, a widow, a cottager, a woman under a cloud; yes, a sober person taking at last a right practical step, to please her two best friends. The change was marked. She wished to hide it, wished to confide it.

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Emma was asked: 'How is he this morning?' and at the answer, describing his fresh and spirited looks, and his kind ways with Arthur Rhodes, and his fun with Sullivan Smith, and the satisfaction with the bridegroom declared by Lord Larrian (invalided from his Rock and unexpectedly informed of the wedding), Diana forgot that she had kissed her, and this time pressed her lips, in a manner to convey the secret bridally.

'He has a lovely day.'

'And bride,' said Emma.

'If you two think so! I should like to agree with my dear old lord and bless him for the prize he takes, though it feels itself at present rather like a Christmas bon-bon—a piece of sugar in the wrap of a rhymed motto. He is kind to Arthur, you say?'

'Like a cordial elder brother.'

'Dear love, I have it at heart that I was harsh upon Mary Paynham for her letter. She meant well—and I fear she suffers. And it may have been a bit my fault. Blind that I was! When you say "cordial elder brother," you make him appear beautiful to me. The worst of that is, one becomes aware of the inability to match him.'

'Read with his eyes when you meet him this morning, my Tony.'

The secret was being clearly perceived by Emma, whose pride in assisting to dress the beautiful creature for her marriage with the man of men had a tinge from the hymenæal brand, exulting over Dacier, and in the compensation coming to her beloved for her first luckless footing on this road.

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‘How does he go down to the church?’ said Diana.

‘He walks down. Lukin and his Chief drive. He walks, with your Arthur and Mr. Sullivan Smith. He is on his way now.’

Diana looked through the window in the direction of the hill. ‘That is so like him, to walk to his wedding!’

Emma took the place of Danvers in the office of the robing, for the maid, as her mistress managed to hint, was too steeped ‘in the colour of the occasion’ to be exactly tasteful, and had the art, no doubt through sympathy, of charging permissible common words with explosive meanings:—she was in an amorous palpitation, of the reflected state. After several knockings and enterings of the bedchamber door, she came hurriedly to say: ‘And your pillow, ma’am? I had almost forgotten it!’ A question that caused her mistress to drop the gaze of a moan on Emma, with patience trembling. Diana preferred a hard pillow, and usually carried her own about. ‘Take it,’ she had to reply.

The friends embraced before descending to step into the fateful carriage. ‘And tell me,’ Emma said, ‘are not your views of life brighter to-day?’

‘Too dazzled to know! It may be a lamp close to the eyes or a radiance of sun. I hope they are.’

‘You are beginning to think hopefully again?’

‘Who can really *think*, and not think hopefully? You were in my mind last night, and you brought a little boat to sail me past despondency of life and the fear of extinction. When we despair or discolour things, it is our senses in revolt, and they have made

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the sovereign brain their drudge. I heard you whisper, with your very breath in my ear: "*There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by.*" That is Emma's history. With that I sail into the dark; it is my promise of the immortal: teaches me to see immortality for us. It comes from you, my Emmy.'

If not a great saying, it was in the heart of deep thoughts: proof to Emma that her Tony's mind had resumed its old clear high-aiming activity; therefore that her nature was working sanely, and that she accepted her happiness, and bore love for a dower to her husband. No blushing confession of the woman's love of the man would have told her so much as the return to mental harmony with the laws of life shown in her darling's pellucid little sentence.

She revolved it long after the day of the wedding. To Emma, constantly on the dark decline of the unilluminated verge, between the two worlds, those words were a radiance and a nourishment. Had they waned she would have trimmed them to feed her during her soul-sister's absence. They shone to her of their vitality. She was lying along her sofa, facing her South-western window, one afternoon of late November, expecting Tony from her lengthened honeymoon trip, while a sunset in the van of frost, not without celestial musical reminders of Tony's husband, began to deepen; and as her friend was coming, she mused on the scenes of her friend's departure, and how Tony, issuing from her cottage porch had betrayed her feelings in the language of her sex by stooping to lift above her head and kiss the smallest of her landlady's children ranged up the garden-path to bid her farewell over their strewing of flowers;—and of her murmur

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to Tony, entering the churchyard, among the grave-
mounds: 'Old Ireland won't repent it!' and Tony's
rejoinder, at the sight of the bridegroom advancing,
beaming: 'A singular transformation of Old England!'
—and how, having numberless ready sources of
laughter and tears down the run of their heart-in-
heart intimacy, all spouting up for a word in the happy
tremour of the moment, they had both bitten their lips
and blinked on a moisture of the eyelids. Now the
dear woman was really wedded, wedded and mated.
Her letters breathed, in their own lively or thoughtful
flow, of the perfect mating. Emma gazed into the
depths of the waves of crimson, where brilliancy of
colour came out of central heaven preternaturally
near on earth, till one shade less brilliant seemed an
ebbing away to boundless remoteness. Angelical and
mortal mixed, making the glory overhead a sign of the
close union of our human conditions with the ethereal
and psychically divined. Thence it grew that one
thought in her breast became a desire for such ex-
tension of days as would give her the blessedness to
clasp in her lap—if those kind heavens would grant
it!—a child of the marriage of the two noblest of
human souls, one the dearest; and so have proof at
heart that her country and our earth are fruitful in the
good, for a glowing future. She was deeply a woman,
dumbly a poet. True poets and true women have the
native sense of the divineness of what the world deems
gross material substance. Emma's exaltation in
fervour had not subsided when she held her beloved
in her arms under the dusk of the withdrawing
redness. They sat embraced, with hands locked,
in the unlighted room, and Tony spoke of the

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splendid sky. 'You watched it knowing I was on my way to you?'

'Praying, dear.'

'For me?'

'That I might live long enough to be a godmother.'

There was no reply: there was an involuntary little twitch of Tony's fingers.

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