

The Adventures Harry Richmond — Volume 5 eBook

The Adventures Harry Richmond — Volume 5 by George Meredith

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WHAT CAME OF A SHILLING

The surgeon, who attended us both, loudly admired our mutual delicacy in sparing arteries and vital organs: but a bullet cuts a rougher pathway than the neat steel blade, and I was prostrate when the prince came to press my hand on his departure for his quarters at Laibach. The utterly unreasonable nature of a duel was manifested by his declaring to me, that he was now satisfied I did not mean to insult him and then laugh at him. We must regard it rather as a sudorific for feverish blood and brains. I felt my wound acutely, seeing his brisk step when he retired. Having overthrown me bodily, it threw my heart back to its first emotions, and I yearned to set eyes on my father, with a haunting sense that I had of late injured him and owed him reparation. It vanished after he had been in my room an hour, to return when he had quitted it, and incessantly and inexplicably it went and came in this manner. He was depressed. I longed for drollery, relieved only by chance allusions to my beloved one, whereas he could not conceal his wish to turn the stupid duel to account.

'Pencil a line to her,' he entreated me, and dictated his idea of a moving line, adding urgently, that the crippled letters would be affecting to her, as to the Great Frederick his last review of his invalid veterans. 'Your name—the signature of your name alone, darling Richie,' and he traced a crooked scrawl with a forefinger,—“, Still, dearest angel, in contempt of death and blood, I am yours to eternity, Harry Lepel Richmond, sometimes called Roy—a point for your decision in the future, should the breath everlastingly devoted to the most celestial of her sex, continue to animate the frame that would rise on wings to say adieu! adieu!”—Richie, just a sentence?'

He was distracting.

His natural tenderness and neatness of hand qualified him for spreading peace in a sick-room; but he was too full of life and his scheme, and knowing me out of danger, he could not forbear giving his despondency an outlet. I heard him exclaim in big sighs: 'Heavens! how near!' and again, 'She must hear of it!' Never was man so incorrigibly dramatic.

He would walk up to a bookcase and take down a volume, when the interjectional fit waxed violent, flip the pages, affecting a perplexity he would assuredly have been struck by had he perused them, and read, as he did once,—'Italy, the land of the sun! and she is to be hurried away there, and we are left to groan. The conspiracy is infamous! One of the Family takes it upon himself to murder us! and she is to be hurried out of hearing! And so we are to have the blood of the Roys spilt for nothing?—no!' and he shut up the book with a report, and bounded to my side to beg pardon of me. From his particular abuse of the margravine, the iteration of certain phrases, which he uttered to denounce and defy them, I gathered that an interview had passed

between the two, and that she had notified a blockade against all letters addressed to the princess. He half admitted having rushed to the palace on his road to me.

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'But, Richie,' said he, pressing me again to write the moving line, 'a letter with a broad black border addressed by me might pass.' He looked mournfully astute. 'The margravine might say to herself, "Here's Doctor Death in full diploma come to cure the wench of her infatuation." I am but quoting the coarse old woman, Richie; confusion on her and me! for I like her. It might pass in my handwriting, with a smudge for paternal grief—it might. "To Her Serene Highness the Margravine of Rippau, *etc., etc., etc.*, in trust for the Most Exalted the Princess of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld." I transpose or omit a title or so. "Aha!" says she, "there's verwirrung in Roy's poor head, poor fellow; the boy has sunk to a certainty. Here (to the princess), it seems, my dear, this is for you. Pray do not communicate the contents for a day or so, or a month.'"

His imitation of the margravine was the pleasantest thing I heard from him. The princess's maid and confidante, he regretted to state, was incorruptible, which I knew. That line of Ottilia's writing, 'Violets are over,' read by me in view of the root-mountain of the Royal House of Princes, scoffed at me insufferably whenever my father showed me these openings of his mind, until I was dragged down to think almost that I had not loved the woman and noble soul, but only the glorified princess—the carved gilt frame instead of the divine portrait! a shameful acrid suspicion, ransacking my conscience with the thrusting in of a foul torch here and there.

For why had I shunned him of late? How was it that he tortured me now? Did I in no degree participate in the poignant savour of his scheme? Such questionings set me flushing in deadly chills. My brain was weak, my heart exhausted, my body seemed truthful perforce and confessed on the rack. I could not deny that I had partly, insensibly clung to the vain glitter of hereditary distinction, my father's pitfall; taking it for a substantial foothold, when a young man of wit and sensibility and, mark you, true pride, would have made it his first care to trample that under heel. Excellent is pride; but oh! be sure of its foundations before you go on building monument high. I know nothing to equal the anguish of an examination of the basis of one's pride that discovers it not solidly fixed; an imposing, self-imposing structure, piled upon empty cellarage. It will inevitably, like a tree striking bad soil, betray itself at the top with time. And the anguish I speak of will be the sole healthy sign about you. Whether in the middle of life it is advisable to descend the pedestal altogether, I dare not say. Few take the precaution to build a flight of steps inside—it is not a labour to be proud of; fewer like to let themselves down in the public eye—it amounts to a castigation; you must, I fear, remain up there, and accept your chance in toppling over. But in any case, delude yourself as you please, your

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lofty baldness will assuredly be seen with time. Meanwhile, you cannot escape the internal intimations of your unsoundness. A man's pride is the front and headpiece of his character, his soul's support or snare. Look to it in youth. I have to thank the interminable hours on my wretched sick-bed for a singularly beneficial investigation of the ledger of my deeds and omissions and moral stock. Perhaps it has already struck you that one who takes the trouble to sit and write his history for as large a world as he can obtain, and shape his style to harmonize with every development of his nature, can no longer have much of the hard grain of pride in him. A proud puppet-showman blowing into Pandæan pipes is an inconceivable object, except to those who judge of characteristics from posture.

It began to be observed by others that my father was not the most comforting of nurses to me. My landlady brought a young girl up to my room, and introduced her under the name of Lieschen, saying that she had for a long time been interested in me, and had been diligent in calling to inquire for news of my condition. Commanded to speak for herself, this Lieschen coloured and said demurely, 'I am in service here, sir, among good-hearted people, who will give me liberty to watch by you, for three hours of the afternoon and three of the early part of the night, if you will honour me.'

My father took her shoulder between finger and thumb, and slightly shook her to each ejaculation of his emphatic 'No! no! no! no! What! a young maiden nurse to a convalescent young gentleman! Why, goodness gracious me! Eh?'

She looked at me softly, and I said I wished her to come.

My father appealed to the sagacity of the matron. So jealous was he of a suggested partner in his task that he had refused my earnest requests to have Mr. Peterborough to share the hours of watching by my side. The visits of college friends and acquaintances were cut very short, he soon reduced them to talk in a hush with thumbs and nods and eyebrows; and if it had not been so annoying to me, I could have laughed at his method of accustoming the regular visitors to make ready, immediately after greeting, for his affectionate dismissal of them. Lieschen went away with the mute blessing of his finger on one of her modest dimples; but, to his amazement, she returned in the evening. He gave her a lecture, to which she listened attentively, and came again in the morning. He was petrified. 'Idiots, insects, women, and the salt sea ocean!' said he, to indicate a list of the untameables, without distressing the one present, and, acknowledging himself beaten, he ruefully accepted his holiday.

The girl was like sweet Spring in my room. She spoke of Sarkeld familiarly. She was born in that neighbourhood, she informed me, and had been educated by a dear great lady. Her smile of pleasure on entering the room one morning, and seeing me dressed and sitting in a grand-fatherly chair by the breezy window, was like a salutation of

returning health. My father made another stand against the usurper of his privileges; he refused to go out.

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'Then must I go,' said Lieschen, 'for two are not allowed here.'

'No! don't leave me,' I begged of her, and stretched out my hands for hers, while she gazed sadly from the doorway. He suspected some foolishness or he was actually jealous. 'Hum-oh!' He went forthwith a murmured groan.

She deceived me by taking her seat in perfect repose.

After smoothing her apron, 'Now I must go,' she said.

'What! to leave me here alone?'

She looked at the clock, and leaned out of the window.

'Not alone; oh, not alone!' the girl exclaimed. 'And please, please do not mention me—presently. Hark! do you hear wheels? Your heart must not beat. Now farewell. You will not be alone: at least, so I think. See what I wear, dear Mr. Patient!' She drew from her bosom, attached to a piece of blue ribbon, the half of an English shilling, kissed it, and blew a soft farewell to me:

She had not been long gone when the Princess Ottilia stood in her place.

A shilling tossed by an English boy to a couple of little foreign girls in a woodman's hut!—you would not expect it to withstand the common fate of silver coins, and preserve mysterious virtues by living celibate, neither multiplying nor reduced, ultimately to play the part of a powerful magician in bringing the boy grown man to the feet of an illustrious lady, and her to his side in sickness, treasonably to the laws of her station. The little women quarrelled over it, and snatched and hid and contemplated it in secret, each in her turn, until the strife it engendered was put an end to by a doughty smith, their mother's brother, who divided it into equal halves, through which he drove a hole, and the pieces being now thrown out of the currency, each one wore her share of it in her bosom from that time, proudly appeased. They were not ordinary peasant children, and happily for them they had another friend that was not a bird of passage, and was endowed by nature and position to do the work of an angel. She had them educated to read, write, and knit, and learn pretty manners, and in good season she took one of the sisters to wait on her own person. The second went, upon her recommendation, into the household of a Professor of a neighbouring University. But neither of them abjured her superstitious belief in the proved merits of the talisman she wore. So when they saw the careless giver again they remembered him; their gratitude was as fresh as on that romantic morning of their childhood, and they resolved without concert to serve him after their own fashion, and quickly spied a way to it. They were German girls.

You are now enabled to guess more than was known to Ottilia and me of the curious agency at work to shuffle us together. The doors of her suite in the palace were barred



against letters addressed to the princess; the delivery of letters to her was interdicted, she consenting, yet she found one: it lay on the broad walk of the orange-trees, between the pleasure and the fruit-gardens, as if dropped by a falcon in mid air. Ottilia beheld it, and started. Her little maid walking close by, exclaimed, scuttling round in front of her the while like an urchin in sabots,

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'Ha! what is it? a snake? let me! let me !' The guileless mistress replied, 'A letter!' Whereupon the maid said: 'Not a window near! and no wall neither! Why, dearest princess, we have walked up and down here a dozen times and not seen it staring at us! Oh, my good heaven!' The letter was seized and opened, and Ottilia read:

'He who loves you with his heart has been cruelly used. They have shot him. He is not dead. He must not die. He is where he has studied since long. He has his medicine and doctors, and they say the bullet did not lodge. He has not the sight that cures. Now is he, the strong young man, laid helpless at anybody's mercy.'

She supped at her father's table, and amused the margravine and him alternately with cards and a sonata. Before twelve at midnight she was driving on the road to the University, saying farewell to what her mind revered, so that her lover might but have sight of her. She imagined I had been assassinated. For a long time, and most pertinaciously, this idea dwelt with her. I could not dispossess her of it, even after uttering the word 'duel' I know not how often. I had flatly to relate the whole-of the circumstances.

'But Otto is no assassin,' she cried out.

What was that she revered? It was what she jeopardized—her state, her rank, her dignity as princess and daughter of an ancient House, things typical to her of sovereign duties, and the high seclusion of her name. To her the escapades of foolish damsels were abominable. The laws of society as well as of her exalted station were in harmony with her intelligence. She thought them good, but obeyed them as a subject, not slavishly: she claimed the right to exercise her trained reason. The modestest, humblest, sweetest of women, undervaluing nothing that she possessed, least of all what was due from her to others, she could go whithersoever her reason directed her, putting anything aside to act justly according to her light. Nor would she have had cause to repent had I been the man she held me to be. Even with me she had not behaved precipitately. My course of probation was severe and long before she allowed her heart to speak.

Pale from a sleepless night and her heart's weariful eagerness to be near me, she sat by my chair, holding my hand, and sometimes looking into my eyes to find the life reflecting hers as in a sunken well that has once been a spring. My books and poor bachelor comforts caught her attention between-whiles. We talked of the day of storm by the lake; we read the unsigned letter. With her hand in mine I slept some minutes, and awoke grasping it, doubting and terrified, so great a wave of life lifted me up.

'No! you are not gone,' I sighed.

'Only come,' said she.

The nature of the step she had taken began to dawn on me.

'But when they miss you at the palace? Prince Ernest?'



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'Hush! they have missed me already. It is done.' She said it smiling.

'Otilia, will he take you away?'

'Us, dear, us.'

'Can you meet his anger?'

'Our aunt will be the executioner. We have a day of sweet hours before she can arrive.'

'May I see her first?'

'We will both see her as we are now.'

'We must have prompt answers for the margravine.'

'None, Harry. I do not defend myself ever.'

Distant hills, and folds of receding clouds and skies beyond them, were visible from my window, and beyond the skies I felt her soul.

'Otilia, you were going to Italy?'

'Yes: or whither they please, for as long as they please. I wished once to go, I have told you why. One of the series' (she touched the letter lying on a reading-table beside her) 'turned the channel of all wishes and intentions. My friends left me to fall at the mercy of this one. I consented to the injunction that I should neither write nor receive letters. Do I argue ill in saying that a trust was implied? Surely it was a breach of the trust to keep me ignorant of the danger of him I love! Now they know it. I dared not consult them—not my dear father! about any design of mine when I had read this odd copybook writing, all in brief sentences, each beginning "he" and "he." It struck me like thrusts of a sword; it illuminated me like lightning. That "he" was the heart within my heart. The writer must be some clever woman or simple friend, who feels for us very strongly. My lover assassinated, where could I be but with him?'

Her little Ann coming in with chocolate and strips of fine white bread to dip in it stopped my efforts to explain the distinction between an assassination and a duel. I noticed then the likeness of Aennchen to Lieschen.

'She has a sister here,' said Otilia; 'and let her bring Lieschen to visit me here this afternoon.'

Aennchen, with a blush, murmured, that she heard and would obey. I had a memorable pleasure in watching my beloved eat and drink under my roof.

The duel remained incomprehensible to her. She first frightened me by remarking that duels were the pastime of brainless young men. Her next remark, in answer to my repeated attempts to shield my antagonist from a capital charge: 'But only military men and Frenchmen fight duels!' accompanied by a slightly investigating glance of timid surprise, gave me pain, together with a flashing apprehension of what she had forfeited, whom offended, to rush to the succour of a duellist. I had to repeat to her who my enemy was, so that there should be no further mention of assassination. Prince Otto's name seemed to entangle her understanding completely.

'Otto! Otto!' she murmured; 'he has, I have heard, been obliged by some so-called laws of honour once or twice to—to—he is above suspicion of treachery! To my mind it is one and the same, but I would not harshly exclude the view the world puts on things; and I use the world's language in saying that he could not do a dishonourable deed. How far he honours himself is a question apart. That may be low enough, while the world is full of a man's praises.'

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She knew the nature of a duel. 'It is the work of soulless creatures!' she broke through my stammered explanations with unwonted impatience, and pressing my hand: 'Ah! You are safe. I have you still. Do you know, Harry, I am not yet able to endure accidents and misadventures: I have not fortitude to meet them, or intelligence to account for them. They are little ironical laughter. Say we build so high: the lightning strikes us:—why build at all? The Summer fly is happier. If I had lost you! I can almost imagine that I should have asked for revenge. For why should the bravest and purest soul of my worship be snatched away? I am not talking wisdom, only my shaken self will speak just now! I pardon Otto, though he has behaved basely.'

'No, not basely,' I felt bound to plead on his behalf, thinking, in spite of a veritable anguish of gathering dread, that she had become enlightened and would soon take the common view of our case; 'not basely. He was excessively irritated, without cause in my opinion; he simply misunderstood certain matters. Dearest, you have nations fighting: a war is only an exaggerated form of duelling.'

'Nations at war are wild beasts,' she replied. 'The passions of these hordes of men are not an example for a living soul. Our souls grow up to the light: we must keep eye on the light, and look no lower. Nations appear to me to have no worse than a soiled mirror of themselves in mobs. They are still uncivilized: they still bear a resemblance to the old monsters of the mud. Do you not see their claws and fangs, Harry? Do you find an apology in their acts for intemperate conduct? Men who fight duels appear in my sight no nobler than the first desperate creatures spelling the cruel A B C of the passions.'

'No, nor in mine,' I assented hastily. 'We are not perfect. But hear me. Yes, the passions are cruel. Circumstances however—I mean, there are social usages—Ay, if one were always looking up to. But should we not be gentle with our comparisons if we would have our views in proportion?'

She hung studiously silent, and I pursued:

'I trust you so much as my helper and my friend that I tell you what we do not usually tell to women—the facts, and the names connected with them. Sooner or later you would have learnt everything. Beloved, I do not wait to let you hear it by degrees, to be reconciled to it piecemeal.'

'And I forgive him,' she sighed. 'I scarcely bring myself to believe that Harry has bled from Otto's hand.'

'It was the accident of the case, Ottilia. We had to meet.'

'To meet?'

'There are circumstances when men will not accept apologies; they—we— heaven knows, I was ready to do all that a man could do to avoid this folly—wickedness; give it the worst of titles!'

'It did not occur accidentally?' she inquired. Her voice sounded strange, half withheld in the utterance.

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'It occurred,' said I, feeling my strength ebb and despair set in, 'it occurred—the prince compelled me to the meet him.'

'But my cousin Otto is no assassin?

'Compelled, I say: that is, he conceived I had injured him, and left me no other way of making amends.'

Her defence of Otto was in reality the vehement cherishing of her idea of me. This caused her bewilderment, and like a barrier to the flowing of her mind it resisted and resisted. She could not suffer herself to realize that I was one of the brainless young savages, creatures with claws and fangs.

Her face was unchanged to me. The homeliness of her large mild eyes embraced me unshadowed, and took me to its inner fire unreservedly. Leaning in my roomy chair, I contemplated her at leisure while my heart kept saying 'Mine! mine!' to awaken an active belief in its possession. Her face was like the quiet morning of a winter day when cloud and sun intermix and make an ardent silver, with lights of blue and faint fresh rose; and over them the beautiful fold of her full eyebrow on the eyelid like a bending upper heaven. Those winter mornings are divine. They move on noiselessly. The earth is still, as if awaiting. A wren warbles, and flits through the lank drenched brambles; hill-side opens green; elsewhere is mist, everywhere expectancy. They bear the veiled sun like a sangreal aloft to the wavy marble flooring of stainless cloud.

She was as fair. Gazing across her shoulder's gentle depression, I could have desired to have the couchant brow, and round cheek, and rounding chin no more than a young man's dream of woman, a picture alive, without the animating individual awful mind to judge of me by my acts. I chafed at the thought that one so young and lovely should meditate on human affairs at all. She was of an age to be maidenly romantic: our situation favoured it. But she turned to me, and I was glad of the eyes I knew. She kissed me on the forehead.

'Sleep,' she whispered.

I feigned sleep to catch my happiness about me.

Some disenchanting thunder was coming, I was sure, and I was right. My father entered.

'Princess !' He did amazed and delighted homage, and forthwith uncontrollably poured out the history of my heroism, a hundred words for one;—my promptitude in picking the prince's glove up on my sword's point, my fine play with the steel, my scornful magnanimity, the admiration of my fellow-students;—every line of it; in stupendous language; an artillery celebration of victory. I tried to stop him. Ottilia rose, continually

assenting, with short affirmatives, to his glorifying interrogations—a method he had of recapitulating the main points. She glanced to right and left, as if she felt caged.

'Is it known?' I heard her ask, in the half audible strange voice which had previously made me tremble.

'Known? I certify to you, princess,'—the unhappy man spouted his withering fountain of interjections over us anew; known in every Court and garrison of Germany! Known by this time in Old England! And, what was more, the correct version of it was known! It was known that the young Englishman had vanquished his adversary with the small sword, and had allowed him, because he had raged demoniacally on account of his lamed limb, to have a shot in revenge.

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'The honour done me by the princess in visiting me is not to be known,' I summoned energy enough to say.

She shook her head.

My father pledged himself to the hottest secrecy, equivalent to a calm denial of the fact, if necessary.

'Pray be at no trouble,' she addressed him.

The 'Where am I?' look was painful in her aspect.

It led me to perceive the difference of her published position in visiting a duellist lover instead of one assassinated. In the latter case, the rashness of an hereditary virgin princess avowing her attachment might pass condoned or cloaked by general compassion. How stood it in the former? I had dragged her down to the duellist's level! And as she was not of a nature to practise concealments, and scorned to sanction them, she was condemned, seeing that concealment as far as possible was imperative, to suffer bitterly in her own esteem. This, the cruellest, was the least of the evils. To keep our names disjoined was hopeless. My weakened frame and mental misery coined tears when thoughts were needed.

Presently I found the room empty of our poor unconscious tormentor. Ottilia had fastened her hand to mine again.

'Be generous,' I surprised her by saying. 'Go back at once. I have seen you! Let my father escort you the road. You will meet the margravine, or some one. I think, with you, it will be the margravine, and my father puts her in good humour. Pardon a wretched little scheme to save you from annoyance! So thus you return within a day, and the margravine, shelters you. Your name will not be spoken. But go at once, for the sake of Prince Ernest. I have hurt him already; help me to avoid doing him a mortal injury. It was Schwartz who drove you? our old Schwartz ! Old Warhead! You see, we may be safe; only every fresh minute adds to the danger. And another reason for going-another—'

'Ah!' she breathed, 'my Harry will talk himself into a fever.'

'I shall have it if the margravine comes here.'

'She shall not be admitted.'

'Or if I hear her, or hear that she has come! Consent at once, and revive me. Oh! I am begging you to leave me, and wishing it with all my soul. Think over what I have done. Do not write to me. I shall see the compulsion of mere kindness between the lines. You consent. Your wisdom I never doubt—I doubt my own.'

'When it is yours you would persuade me to confide in?' said she, with some sorrowful archness.

Wits clear as hers could see that I had advised well, except in proposing my father for escort. It was evidently better that she should go as she came.

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I refrained from asking her what she thought of me now. Suing for immediate pardon would have been like the applying of a lancet to a vein for blood: it would have burst forth, meaning mere words coloured by commiseration, kindness, desperate affection, anything but her soul's survey of herself and me; and though I yearned for the comfort passion could give me, I knew the mind I was dealing with, or, rather, I knew I was dealing with a mind; and I kept my tongue silent. The talk between us was of the possible date of my recovery, the hour of her return to the palace, the writer of the unsigned letters, books we had read apart or peeped into together. She was a little quicker in speech, less meditative. My sensitive watchfulness caught no other indication of a change.

My father drove away an hour in advance of the princess to encounter the margravine.

'By,' said he, rehearsing his exclamation of astonishment and delight at meeting her, 'by the most miraculous piece of good fortune conceivable, dear madam. And now comes the question, since you have condescended to notice a solitary atom of your acquaintance on the public highroad, whether I am to have the honour of doubling the freight of your carriage, or you will deign to embark in mine? But the direction of the horses' heads must be reversed, absolutely it must, if your Highness would repose in a bed to-night. Good. So. And now, at a conversational trot, we may happen to be overtaken by acquaintances.'

I had no doubt of his drawing on his rarely-abandoned seven-league boots of jargon, once so delicious to me, for the margravine's entertainment. His lack of discernment in treating the princess to it ruined my patience.

The sisters Aennchen and Lieschen presented themselves a few minutes before his departure. Lieschen dropped at her feet.

'My child,' said the princess, quite maternally, 'could you be quit of your service with the Mahrlens for two weeks, think you, to do duty here?'

'The Professor grants her six hours out of the twenty-four already,' said I.

'To go where?' she asked, alarmed.

'To come here.'

'Here? She knows you? She did not curtsy to you.'

'Nurses do not usually do that.'

The appearance of both girls was pitiable; but having no suspicion of the cause for it, I superadded,



'She was here this morning.'

'Ah! we owe her more than we were aware of.'

The princess looked on her kindly, though with suspense in the expression.

'She told me of my approaching visitor,' I said.

'Oh! not told!' Lieschen burst out.

'Did you,'—the princess questioned her, and murmured to me, 'These children cannot speak falsehoods,' they shone miserably under the burden of uprightness 'did you make sure that I should come?'

Lieschen thought—she supposed. But why? Why did she think and suppose? What made her anticipate the princess's arrival? This inveterate why communicated its terrors to Aennchen, upon whom the princess turned scrutinizing eyes, saying, 'You write of me to your sister?'

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'Yes, princess.'

'And she to you?'

Lieschen answered: 'Forgive me, your Highness, dearest lady!'

'You offered yourself here unasked?'

'Yes, princess.'

'Have you written to others besides your sister?'

'Seldom, princess; I do not remember.'

'You know the obligation of signatures to letters?'

'Ah!'

'You have been remiss in not writing to me, child.'

'Oh, princess! I did not dare to.'

'You have not written to me?'

'Ah! princess, how dared I?'

'Are you speaking truthfully?'

The unhappy girls stood trembling. Otilia spared them the leap into the gulfs of confession. Her intuitive glance, assisted by a combination of minor facts, had read the story of their misdeeds in a minute. She sent them down to the carriage, suffering her culprits to kiss her fingers; while she said to one: 'This might be a fable of a pair of mice.'

When she was gone, after many fits of musing, the signification of it was revealed to my slower brain. I felt that it could not but be an additional shock to the regal pride of such a woman that these little maidens should have been permitted to act forcibly on her destiny. The mystery of the letters was easily explained as soon as a direct suspicion fell on one of the girls who lived in my neighbourhood and the other who was near the princess's person. Doubtless the revelation of their effective mouse plot had its humiliating bitterness for her on a day of heavy oppression, smile at it as she subsequently might. The torture of heart with which I twisted the meaning of her words about the pair of mice to imply that the pair had conspired to make a net for an eagle and had enmeshed her, may have struck a vein of the truth. I could see no other antithesis to the laudable performance of the single mouse of fable. Lieschen, when



she next appeared in the character of nurse, met my inquiries by supplicating me to imitate her sister's generous mistress, and be merciful.

She remarked by-and-by, of her own accord: 'Princess Ottilia does not regret that she had us educated.'

A tender warmth crept round me in thinking that a mind thus lofty would surely be, however severe in its insight, above regrets and recantations.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I GAIN A PERCEPTION OF PRINCELY STATE

I had a visit from Prince Ernest, nominally one of congratulation on my escape. I was never in my life so much at any man's mercy: he might have fevered me to death with reproaches, and I expected them on hearing his name pronounced at the door. I had forgotten the ways of the world. For some minutes I listened guardedly to his affable talk. My thanks for the honour done me were awkward, as if they came upon reflection. The prince was particularly civil and cheerful. His relative, he said, had written of me in high terms—the very highest, declaring that I was blameless in the matter, and that, though he had sent the horse back to my stables, he fully believed in the fine qualities of the animal, and acknowledged his fault in making it a cause of provocation. To all of which I assented with easy nods.

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'Your Shakespeare, I think,' said the prince, 'has a scene of young Frenchmen praising their horses. I myself am no stranger to the enthusiasm: one could not stake life and honour on a nobler brute. Pardon me if I state my opinion that you young Englishmen of to-day are sometimes rather overbearing in your assumption of a superior knowledge of horseflesh. We Germans in the Baltic provinces and in the Austrian cavalry think we have a right to a remark or two; and if we have not suborned the testimony of modern history, the value of our Hanoverian troopers is not unknown to one at least of your Generals. However, the odds are that you were right and Otto wrong, and he certainly put himself in the wrong to defend his ground.'

I begged him to pass a lenient sentence upon fiery youth. He assured me that he remembered his own. Our interchange of courtesies was cordially commonplace: we walked, as it were, arm-in-arm on thin ice, rivalling one another's gentlemanly composure. Satisfied with my discretion, the prince invited me to the lake-palace, and then a week's shooting in Styria to recruit. I thanked him in as clear a voice as I could command:

'Your Highness, the mine flourishes, I trust?'

'It does; I think I may say it does,' he replied. 'There is always the want of capital. What can be accomplished, in the present state of affairs, your father performs, on the whole, well. You smile—but I mean extraordinarily well. He has, with an accountant at his elbow, really the genius of management. He serves me busily, and, I repeat, well. A better employment for him than the direction of Court theatricals?'

'Undoubtedly it is.'

'Or than bestriding a bronze horse, personifying my good ancestor! Are you acquainted with the Chancellor von Redwitz?'

'All I know of him, sir, is that he is fortunate to enjoy the particular confidence of his master.'

'He has a long head. But, now, he is a disappointing man in action; responsibility overturns him. He is the reverse of Roy, whose advice I do not take, though I'm glad to set him running. Von Redwitz is in the town. He shall call on you, and amuse an hour or so of your convalescence.'

I confessed that I began to feel longings for society.

Prince Ernest was kind enough to quit me without unmasking. I had not to learn that the simplest visits and observations of ruling princes signify more than lies on the surface. Interests so highly personal as theirs demand from them a decent insincerity.

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Chancellor von Redwitz called on me, and amused me with secret anecdotes of all the royal Houses of Germany, amusing chiefly through the veneration he still entertained for them. The grave senior was doing his utmost to divert one of my years. The immoralities of blue blood, like the amours of the Gods, were to his mind tolerable, if not beneficial to mankind, and he presumed I should find them toothsome. Nay, he besought me to coincide in his excuses of a widely charming young archduchess, for whom no estimable husband of a fitting rank could anywhere be discovered, so she had to be bestowed upon an archducal imbecile; and hence—and hence—Oh, certainly! Generous youth and benevolent age joined hands of exoneration over her. The princess of Sattenberg actually married, under covert, a colonel of Uhlans at the age of seventeen; the marriage was quashed, the colonel vanished, the princess became the scandalous Duchess of Ilm-Ilm, and was surprised one infamous night in the outer court of the castle by a soldier on guard, who dragged her into the guard-room and unveiled her there, and would have been summarily shot for his pains but for the locket on his breast, which proved him to be his sovereign's son.—A perfect romance, Mr. Chancellor. We will say the soldier son loved a delicate young countess in attendance on the duchess. The countess spies the locket, takes it to the duchess, is reprimanded, when behold! the locket opens, and Colonel von Bein appears as in his blooming youth, in Lancer uniform.—Young sir, your piece of romance has exaggerated history to caricature. Romances are the destruction of human interest. The moment you begin to move the individuals, they are puppets. 'Nothing but poetry, and I say it who do not read it'— (Chancellor von Redwitz is the speaker) 'nothing but poetry makes romances passable: for poetry is the everlastingly and embracingly human. Without it your fictions are flat foolishness, non-nourishing substance—a species of brandy and gruel!—diet for craving stomachs that can support nothing solidier, and must have the weak stuff stiffened. Talking of poetry, there was an independent hereditary princess of Leiterstein in love with a poet!—a Leonora d'Este!—This was no Tasso. Nevertheless, she proposed to come to nuptials. Good, you observe? I confine myself to the relation of historical circumstances; in other words, facts; and of good or bad I know not.'

Chancellor von Redwitz smoothed the black silk stocking of his crossed leg, and set his bunch of seals and watch-key swinging. He resumed, entirely to amuse me,

'The Princess Elizabeth of Leiterstein promised all the qualities which the most solicitous of paternal princes could desire as a guarantee for the judicious government of the territory to be bequeathed to her at his demise. But, as there is no romance to be extracted from her story, I may as well tell you at once that she did not espouse the poet.'

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'On the contrary, dear Mr. Chancellor, I am interested in the princess. Proceed, and be as minute as you please.'

'It is but a commonplace excerpt of secret historical narrative buried among the archives of the Family, my good Mr. Richmond. The Princess Elizabeth thoughtlessly pledged her hand to the young sonneteer. Of course, she could not fulfil her engagement.'

'Why not?'

'You see, you are impatient for romance, young gentleman.'

'Not at all, Mr. Chancellor. I do but ask a question.'

'You fence. Your question was dictated by impatience.'

'Yes, for the facts and elucidations!

'For the romance, that is. You wish me to depict emotions.'

Hereupon this destroyer of temper embrowned his nostrils with snuff, adding,—'I am unable to.'

'Then one is not to learn why the princess could not fulfil her engagement?'

'Judged from the point of view of the pretender to the supreme honour of the splendid alliance, the fault was none of hers. She overlooked his humble, his peculiarly dubious, birth.'

'Her father interposed?'

'No.'

'The Family?'

'Quite inefficacious to arrest her determinations.'

'What then—what was in her way?'

'Germany.'

'What?'

'Great Germany, young gentleman. I should have premised that, besides mental, she had eminent moral dispositions,—I might term it the conscience of her illustrious rank. She would have raised the poet to equal rank beside her had she possessed the power. She could and did defy the Family, and subdue her worshipping father, the most

noble prince, to a form of paralysis of acquiescence—if I make myself understood. But she was unsuccessful in her application for the sanction of the Diet.'

'The Diet?'

'The German Diet. Have you not lived among us long enough to know that the German Diet is the seat of domestic legislation for the princely Houses of Germany? A prince or a princess may say, "I will this or that." The Diet says, "Thou shalt not"; pre-eminently, "Thou shalt not mix thy blood with that of an impure race, nor with blood of inferiors." Hence, we have it what we see it, a translucent flood down from the topmost founts of time. So we revere it. "Qua man and woman," the Diet says, by implication, "do as you like, marry in the ditches, spawn plentifully. Qua prince and princess, No! Your nuptials are nought. Or would you maintain them a legal ceremony, and be bound by them, you descend, you go forth; you are no reigning sovereign, you are a private person." His Serene Highness the prince was thus prohibited from affording help to his daughter. The princess was reduced to the decision either that she, the sole child born of him in legal wedlock, would render him qua prince childless, or that she would—in short, would have her woman's way. The sovereignty of Leiterstein continued uninterruptedly with the elder branch. She was a true princess.'

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‘A true woman,’ said I, thinking the sneer weighty.

The Chancellor begged me to recollect that he had warned me there was no romance to be expected.

I bowed; and bowed during the remainder of the interview.

Chancellor von Redwitz had performed his mission. The hours of my convalescence were furnished with food for amusement sufficient to sustain a year’s blockade; I had no further longing for society, but I craved for fresh air intensely.

Did Ottilia know that this iron law, enforced with the might of a whole empire, environed her, held her fast from any motion of heart and will? I could not get to mind that the prince had hinted at the existence of such a law. Yet why should he have done so? The word impossible, in which he had not been sparing when he deigned to speak distinctly, comprised everything. More profitable than shooting empty questions at the sky was the speculation on his project in receiving me at the palace, and that was dark. My father, who might now have helped me, was off on duty again.

I found myself driving into Sarkeld with a sense of a whirlwind round my head; wheels in multitudes were spinning inside, striking sparks for thoughts. I met an orderly in hussar uniform of blue and silver, trotting on his errand. There he was; and whether many were behind him or he stood for the army in its might, he wore the trappings of an old princely House that nestled proudly in the bosom of its great jealous Fatherland. Previously in Sarkeld I had noticed members of the diminutive army to smile down on them. I saw the princely arms and colours on various houses and in the windows of shops. Emblems of a small State, they belonged to the history of the Empire. The Court-physician passed with a bit of ribbon in his buttonhole. A lady driving in an open carriage encouraged me to salute her. She was the wife of the Prince’s Minister of Justice. Upon what foundation had I been building?

A reflection of the ideas possessing me showed Riversley, my undecorated home of rough red brick, in the middle of barren heaths. I entered the palace, I sent my respects to the prince. In return, the hour of dinner was ceremoniously named to me: ceremony damped the air. I had been insensible to it before, or so I thought, the weight was now so crushing. Arms, emblems, colours, liveries, portraits of princes and princesses of the House, of this the warrior, that the seductress, burst into sudden light. What had I to do among them?

The presence of the living members of the Family was an extreme physical relief.

For the moment, beholding Ottilia, I counted her but as one of them. She welcomed me without restraint.

We chattered pleasantly at the dinner-table.

‘Ah! You missed our French troupe,’ said the margravine.’

‘Yes,’ said I, resigning them to her. She nodded:

‘And one very pretty little woman they had, I can tell you—for a Frenchwoman.’

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'You thought her pretty? Frenchwomen know what to do with their brains and their pins, somebody has said.'

'And exceedingly well said, too. Where is that man Roy? Good things always remind me of him.'

The question was addressed to no one in particular. The man happened to be my father, I remembered. A second allusion to him was answered by Prince Ernest:

'Roy is off to Croatia to enrol some dozens of cheap workmen. The strength of those Croats is prodigious, and well looked after they work. He will be back in three or four or more days.'

'You have spoilt a good man,' rejoined the margravine; 'and that reminds me of a bad one—a cutthroat. Have you heard of that creature, the princess's tutor? Happily cut loose from us, though! He has published a book—a horror! all against Scripture and Divine right! Is there any one to defend him now, I should like to ask?'

'I,' said Ottilia.

'Gracious me! you have not read the book?'

'Right through, dear aunt, with all respect to you.'

'It 's in the house?'

'It is in my study.'

'Then I don't wonder! I don't wonder!' the margravine exclaimed.

'Best hear what the enemy has to say,' Prince Ernest observed.

'Excellently argued, papa, supposing that he be an enemy.'

'An enemy as much as the fox is the enemy of the poultry-yard, and the hound is the enemy of the fox!' said the margravine.

'I take your illustration, auntie,' said Ottilia. 'He is the enemy of chickens, and only does not run before the numbers who bark at him. My noble old Professor is a resolute truth-seeker: he raises a light to show you the ground you walk on. How is it that you, adoring heroes as you do, cannot admire him when he stands alone to support his view of the truth! I would I were by him! But I am, whenever I hear him abused.'

'I daresay you discard nothing that the wretch has taught you!'

‘Nothing! nothing!’ said Ottilia, and made my heart live.

The grim and taciturn Baroness Turckems, sitting opposite to her, sighed audibly.

‘Has the princess been trying to convert you?’ the margravine asked her.

‘Trying? no, madam. Reading? yes.’

‘My good Turckems! you do not get your share of sleep?’

‘It is her Highness the princess who despises sleep.’

‘See there the way with your free-thinkers! They commence by treading under foot the pleasantest half of life, and then they impose their bad habits on their victims. Ottilia! Ernest! I do insist upon having lights extinguished in the child’s apartments by twelve o’clock at midnight.’

‘Twelve o’clock is an extraordinary latitude for children,’ said Ottilia, smiling.

The prince, with a scarce perceptible degree of emphasis, said,

‘Women born to rule must be held exempt from nursery restrictions.’

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Here the conversation opened to let me in. More than once the margravine informed me that I was not the equal of my father.

'Why,' said she, 'why can't you undertake this detestable coal-mine, and let your father disport himself?'

I suggested that it might be because I was not his equal. She complimented me for inheriting a spark of Roy's brilliancy.

I fancied there was a conspiracy to force me back from my pretensions by subjecting me to the contemplation of my bare self and actual condition. Had there been, I should have suffered from less measured strokes. The unconcerted design to humiliate inferiors is commonly successfuller than conspiracy.

The prince invited me to smoke with him, and talked of our gradual subsidence in England to one broad level of rank through the intermixture by marriage of our aristocracy, squirearchy, and merchants.

'Here it is not so,' he said; 'and no democratic rageings will make it so. Rank, with us, is a principle. I suppose you have not read the Professor's book? It is powerful—he is a powerful man. It can do no damage to the minds of persons destined by birth to wield authority—none, therefore, to the princess. I would say to you—avoid it. For those who have to carve their way, it is bad. You will enter your Parliament, of course? There you have a fine career.'

He asked me what I had made of Chancellor von Redwitz.

I perceived that Prince Ernest could be cool and sagacious in repairing what his imprudence or blindness had left to occur: that he must have enlightened his daughter as to her actual position, and was most dexterously and devilishly flattering her worldly good sense by letting it struggle and grow, instead of opposing her. His appreciation of her intellect was an idolatry; he really confided in it, I knew; and this reacted upon her. Did it? My hesitations and doubts, my fantastic raptures and despair, my loss of the power to appreciate anything at its right value, revealed the madness of loving a princess.

There were preparations for the arrival of an important visitor. The margravine spoke of him emphatically. I thought it might be her farcically pompous way of announcing my father's return, and looked pleased, I suppose, for she added, 'Do you know Prince Hermann? He spends most of his time in Eberhardstadt. He is cousin of the King, a wealthy branch; tant soit peu philosophe, a ce qu'on dit; a traveller. They say he has a South American complexion. I knew him a boy; and his passion is to put together what Nature has unpieced, bones of fishes and animals. Il faut passer le temps. He adores the Deluge. Anything antediluvian excites him. He can tell us the "modes" of those



days; and, if I am not very much misinformed, he still expects us to show him the very latest of these. Happily my milliner is back from Paris. Ay, and we have fossils in our neighbourhood, though, on my honour, I don't know where—somewhere; the princess can guide him, and you can help at the excavations. I am told he would go through the crust of earth for the backbone of an idio—ilio-something-saurus.'

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I scrutinized Prince Hermann as rarely my observation had dwelt on any man. He had the German head, wide, so as seemingly to force out the ears; honest, ready, interested eyes in conversation; parched lips; a rather tropically-coloured skin; and decidedly the manners of a gentleman to all, excepting his retinue of secretaries, valets, and chasseurs—his ‘blacks,’ he called them. They liked him. One could not help liking him.

‘You study much?’ he addressed the princess at table.

She answered: ‘I throw aside books, now you have come to open the earth and the sea.’

From that time the topics started on every occasion were theirs; the rest of us ran at their heels, giving tongue or not.

To me Prince Hermann was perfectly courteous. He had made English friends on his travels; he preferred English comrades in adventure to any other: thought our East Indian empire the most marvellous thing the world had seen, and our Indian Government cigars very smokeable upon acquaintance. When stirred, he bubbled with anecdote. ‘Not been there,’ was his reply to the margravine’s tentatives for gossip of this and that of the German Courts. His museum, hunting, and the Opera absorbed and divided his hours. I guessed his age to be mounting forty. He seemed robust; he ate vigorously. Drinking he conscientiously performed as an accompanying duty, and was flushed after dinner, burning for tobacco and a couch for his length. Then he talked of the littleness of Europe and the greatness of Germany; logical postulates fell in collapse before him. America to America, North and South; India to Europe. India was for the land with the largest sea-board. Mistress of the Baltic, of the North Sea and the East, as eventually she must be, Germany would claim to take India as a matter of course, and find an outlet for the energies of the most prolific and the toughest of the races of mankind,—the purest, in fact, the only true race, properly so called, out of India, to which it would return as to its source, and there create an empire magnificent in force and solidity, the actual wedding of East and West; an empire firm on the ground and in the blood of the people, instead of an empire of aliens, that would bear comparison to a finely fretted cotton-hung palanquin balanced on an elephant’s back, all depending on the docility of the elephant (his description of Great Britain’s Indian Empire). ‘And mind me,’ he said, ‘the masses of India are in character elephant all over, tail to proboscis! servile till they trample you, and not so stupid as they look. But you’ve done wonders in India, and we can’t forget it. Your administration of Justice is worth all your battles there.’

This was the man: a milder one after the evaporation of his wine in speech, and peculiarly moderate on his return, exhaling sandal-wood, to the society of the ladies.

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Ottilia danced with Prince Hermann at the grand Ball given in honour of him. The wives and daughters of the notables present kept up a buzz of comment on his personal advantages, in which, I heard it said, you saw his German heart, though he had spent the best years of his life abroad. Much court was paid to him by the men. Sarkeld visibly expressed satisfaction. One remark, 'We shall have his museum in the town!' left me no doubt upon the presumed object of his visit: it was uttered and responded to with a depth of sentiment that showed how lively would be the general gratitude toward one who should exhilarate the place by introducing cases of fish-bones.

So little did he think of my presence, that returning from a ride one day, he seized and detained the princess's hand. She frowned with pained surprise, but unresistingly, as became a young gentlewoman's dignity. Her hand was rudely caught and kept in the manner of a boisterous wooer— a Harry the Fifth or lusty Petruchio. She pushed her horse on at a bound. Prince Hermann rode up head to head with her gallantly, having now both hands free of the reins, like an Indian spearing the buffalo— it was buffalo courtship; and his shout of rallying astonishment at her resistance, 'What? What?' rang wildly to heighten the scene, she leaning constrained on one side and he bending half his body's length; a strange scene for me to witness.

They proceeded with old Schwartz at their heels doglike. It became a question for me whether I should follow in the bitter track, and further the question whether I could let them escape from sight. They wound up the roadway, two figures and one following, now dots against the sky, now a single movement in the valley, now concealed, buried under billows of forest, making the low noising of the leaves an intolerable whisper of secrecy, and forward I rushed again to see them rounding a belt of firs or shadowed by rocks, solitary on shorn fields, once more dipping to the forest, and once more emerging, vanishing. When I had grown sure of their reappearance from some point of view or other, I spied for them in vain. My destiny, whatever it might be, fluttered over them; to see them seemed near the knowing of it, and not to see them, deadly. I galloped, so intent on the three in the distance, that I did not observe a horseman face toward me, on the road: it was Prince Hermann. He raised his hat; I stopped short, and he spoke:

'Mr. Richmond, permit me to apologize to you. I have to congratulate you, it appears. I was not aware.—However, the princess has done me the favour to enlighten me. How you will manage, I can't guess, but that is not my affair. I am a man of honour; and, on my honour, I conceived that I was invited here to decide, as my habit is, on the spot, if I would, or if I would not. I speak clearly to you, no doubt. There could be no hesitation in the mind of a man of sense. My way is prompt and blunt; I am sorry I gave you

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occasion to reflect on it. There! I have been deceived—deceived myself, let's say. Sharp methods play the devil with you now and then. To speak the truth,—perhaps you won't care to listen to it,—family arrangements are the best; take my word for it, they are the best. And in the case of princesses of the Blood!—Why, look you, I happen to be suitable. It's a matter of chance, like your height, complexion, constitution. One is just what one is born to be, eh? You have your English notions, I my German; but as a man of the world in the bargain, and “gentleman,” I hope, I should say, that to take a young princess's fancy, and drag her from her station is not—of course, you know that the actual value of the title goes if she steps down? Very well. But enough said; I thought I was in a clear field. We are used to having our way cleared for us, nous autres. I will not detain you.'

We saluted gravely, and I rode on at a mechanical pace, discerning by glimpses the purport of what I had heard, without drawing warmth from it. The man's outrageously royal way of wooing, in contempt of minor presences and flimsy sentiment, made me jealous of him, notwithstanding his overthrow.

I was in the mood to fall entirely into my father's hands, as I did by unbosoming myself to him for the first time since my heart had been under the charm. Fresh from a rapid course of travel, and with the sense of laying the prince under weighty obligations, he made light of my perplexity, and at once delivered himself bluntly: 'She plights her hand to you in the presence of our good Peterborough.' His plans were shaped on the spot. 'We start for England the day after to-morrow to urge on the suit, Richie. Our Peterborough is up at the chateau. The Frau Feldmarschall honours him with a farewell invitation: you have a private interview with the princess at midnight in the library, where you are accustomed to read, as a student of books should, my boy at a touch of the bell, or mere opening of the door, I see that Peterborough comes to you. It will not be a ceremony, but a binding of you both by your word of honour before a ghostly gentleman.' He informed me that his foresight had enlisted and detained Peterborough for this particular moment and identical piece of duty, which seemed possible, and in a singular manner incited me to make use of Peterborough. For the princess still denied me the look of love's intelligence, she avoided me, she still kept to the riddle, and my delicacy went so far that I was restrained from writing. I agreed with my father that we could not remain in Germany; but how could I quit the field and fly to England on such terms? I composed the flattest letter ever written, requesting the princess to meet me about midnight in the library, that I might have the satisfaction of taking my leave of her; and this done, my spirits rose, and it struck me my father was practically wise, and I looked on Peterborough as an almost supernatural being. If Ottilia refused to come, at least I should know my fate. Was I not bound in manly honour to be to some degree adventurous?

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So I reasoned in exclamations, being, to tell truth, tired of seeming to be what I was not quite, of striving to become what I must have divined that I never could quite attain to. So my worthier, or ideal, self fell away from me. I was no longer devoted to be worthy of a woman's love, but consenting to the plot to entrap a princess. I was somewhat influenced, too, by the consideration, which I regarded as a glimpse of practical wisdom, that Prince Ernest was guilty of cynical astuteness in retaining me as his guest under manifold disadvantages. Personal pride stood up in arms, and my father's exuberant spirits fanned it. He dwelt loudly on his services to the prince, and his own importance and my heirship to mighty riches. He made me almost believe that Prince Ernest hesitated about rejecting me; nor did it appear altogether foolish to think so, or why was I at the palace? I had no head for reflections.

My father diverted me by levelling the whole battery of his comic mind upon Peterborough, who had a heap of manuscript, directed against heretical German theologians, to pack up for publication in his more congenial country: how different, he ejaculated, from this nest—this forest of heresy, where pamphlets and critical essays were issued without let or hindrance, and, as far as he could see, no general reprobation of the Press, such as would most undoubtedly, with one voice, hail any strange opinions in our happy land at home! Whether he really understood the function my father prepared him for, I cannot say. The invitation to dine and pass a night at the lake-palace flattered him immensely.

We went up to the chateau to fetch him.

A look of woe was on Peterborough's countenance when we descended at the palace portals: he had forgotten his pipe.

'You shall smoke one of the prince's,' my father said. Peterborough remarked to me,—
'We shall have many things to talk over in England.'

'No tobacco allowed on the premises at Riversley, I 'm afraid,' said I.

He sighed, and bade me jocosely to know that he regarded tobacco as just one of the consolations of exiles and bachelors.

'Peterborough, my good friend, you are a hero!' cried my father. 'He divorces tobacco to marry!'

'Permit me,' Peterborough interposed, with an ingenuous pretension to subtle waggery, in itself very comical,—'permit me; no legitimate union has taken place between myself and tobacco!'

'He puts an end to the illegitimate union between himself and tobacco that he may marry according to form!' cried my father.

We entered the palace merrily, and presently Peterborough, who had worn a studious forehead in the midst of his consenting laughter, observed, 'Well, you know, there is more in that than appears on the surface.'

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His sweet simpleton air of profundity convulsed me. I handed my father the letter addressed to the princess to entrust it to the charge of one of the domestics, thinking carelessly at the time that Ottilia now stood free to make appointments and receive communications, and moreover that I was too proud to condescend to subterfuge, except this minor one, in consideration for her, of making it appear that my father, and not I, was in communication with her. My fit of laughter clung. I dressed chuckling. The margravine was not slow to notice and comment on my hilarious readiness.

'Roy,' she said, 'you have given your son spirit. One sees he has your blood when you have been with him an hour.'

'The season has returned, if your Highness will let it be Spring,' said my father.

'Far fetched!—from the Lower Danube!' she ejaculated in mock scorn to excite his sprightliness, and they fell upon a duologue as good as wit for the occasion.

Prince Hermann had gone. His departure was mentioned with the ordinary commonplaces of regret. Ottilia was unembarrassed, both in speaking of him and looking at me. We had the Court physician and his wife at table, Chancellor von Redwitz and his daughter, and General Happenwyll, chief of the prince's contingent, a Prussian at heart, said to be a good officer on the strength of a military book of some sort that he had full leisure to compose. The Chancellor's daughter and Baroness Turckems enclosed me.

I was questioned by the baroness as to the cause of my father's unexpected return. 'He is generally opportune,' she remarked.

'He goes with me to England,' I said.

'Oh! he goes,' said she; and asked why we were honoured with the presence of Mr. Peterborough that evening. There had always been a smouldering hostility between her and my father.

To my surprise, the baroness spoke of Ottilia by her name.

'Ottilia must have mountain air. These late hours destroy her complexion. Active exercise by day and proper fatigue by night time— that is my prescription.'

'The princess,' I replied, envying Peterborough, who was placed on one side of her, 'will benefit, I am sure, from mountain air. Does she read excessively? The sea—'

'The sea I pronounce bad for her—unwholesome,' returned the baroness. 'It is damp.'

I laughed.



'Damp,' she reiterated. 'The vapours, I am convinced, affect mind and body. That excursion in the yacht did her infinite mischief. The mountains restored her. They will again, take my word for it. Now take you my word for it, they will again. She is not too strong in constitution, but in order to prescribe accurately one must find out whether there is seated malady. To ride out in the night instead of reposing! To drive on and on, and not reappear till the night of the next day—I ask you, is it sensible? Does it not approach mania?'

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'The princess—?' said I.

'Otilia has done that.'

'Baroness, can I believe you?—and alone?'

A marvellous twinkle of shuffle appeared in the small slate-coloured eyes I looked at under their roofing of thick black eyebrows.

'Alone,' she said. 'That is, she was precautious to have her giant to protect her from violence. There you have a glimmering of reason in her; and all of it that I can see.'

'Old Schwartz is a very faithful servant,' said I, thinking that she resembled the old Warhead in visage.

'A dog's obedience to the master's whims you call faithfulness! Hem!' The baroness coughed dryly.

I whispered: 'Does Prince Ernest—is he aware?'

'You are aware,' retorted the baroness, 'that what a man idolizes he won't see flaw in. Remember, I am something here, or I am nothing.'

The enigmatical remark was received by me decorously as a piece of merited chastisement. Nodding with gravity, I expressed regrets that the sea did not please her, otherwise I could have offered her a yacht for a cruise. She nodded stiffly. Her mouth shut up a smile, showing more of the door than the ray. The dinner, virtually a German supper, ended in general conversation on political affairs, preceded and supported by a discussion between the Prussian-hearted General and the Austrian-hearted margravine. Prince Ernest, true to his view that diplomacy was the weapon of minor sovereigns, held the balance, with now a foot in one scale, now in the other; a politic proceeding, so long as the rival powers passively consent to be weighed.

We trifled with music, made our bow to the ladies, and changed garments for the smoking-room. Prince Ernest smoked his one cigar among guests. The General, the Chancellor, and the doctor, knew the signal for retirement, and rose simultaneously with the discharge of his cigar-end in sparks on the unlit logwood pile. My father and Mr. Peterborough kept their chairs.

There was, I felt with relief, no plot, for nothing had been definitely assented to by me. I received Prince Ernest's proffer of his hand, on making my adieux to him, with a passably clear conscience.

I went out to the library. A man came in for orders; I had none to give. He saw that the shutters were fixed and the curtains down, examined my hand-lamp, and placed lamps



on the reading-desk and mantel-piece. Bronze busts of sages became my solitary companions. The room was long, low and dusky, voluminously and richly hung with draperies at the farther end, where a table stood for the prince to jot down memoranda, and a sofa to incline him to the relaxation of romance-reading. A door at this end led to the sleeping apartments of the West wing of the palace. Where I sat the student had ranges of classical volumes in prospect and classic heads; no other decoration to the walls. I paced to and fro and should have flung myself on

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the sofa but for a heap of books there covered from dust, perhaps concealed, that the yellow Parisian volumes, of which I caught sight of some new dozen, might not be an attraction to the eyes of chance-comers. At the lake-palace the prince frequently gave audience here. He had said to me, when I stated my wish to read in the library, 'You keep to the classical department?' I thought it possible he might not like the coloured volumes to be inspected; I had no taste for a perusal of them. I picked up one that fell during my walk, and flung it back, and disturbed a heap under cover, for more fell, and there I let them lie.

Otilia did not keep me waiting.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SCENE IN THE LAKE-PALACE LIBRARY

I was humming the burden of Gothe's Zigeunerlied, a favourite one with me whenever I had too much to think of, or nothing. A low rush of sound from the hall-doorway swung me on my heel, and I saw her standing with a silver lamp raised in her right hand to the level of her head, as if she expected to meet obscurity. A thin blue Indian scarf mufed her throat and shoulders. Her hair was loosely knotted. The lamp's full glow illumined and shadowed her. She was like a statue of Twilight.

I went up to her quickly, and closed the door, saying, 'You have come'; my voice was not much above a breath.

She looked distrustfully down the length of the room; 'You were speaking to some one?'

'No.'

'You were speaking.'

'To myself, then, I suppose.'

I remembered and repeated the gipsy burden.

She smiled faintly and said it was the hour for Anna and Ursel and Kith and Liese to be out.

Her hands were gloved, a small matter to tell of.

We heard the portico-sentinel challenged and relieved.

'Midnight,' I said.

She replied: 'You were not definite in your directions about the minutes.'

'I feared to name midnight.'

'Why?'

'Lest the appointment of midnight—I lose my knowledge of you!—should make you reflect, frighten you. You see, I am inventing a reason; I really cannot tell why, if it was not that I hoped to have just those few minutes more of you. And now they're gone. I would not have asked you but that I thought you free to act.'

'I am.'

'And you come freely?'

'A "therefore" belongs to every grant of freedom.'

'I understand: your judgement was against it.'

'Be comforted,' she said; 'it is your right to bid me come, if you think fit.'

One of the sofa-volumes fell. She caught her breath; and smiled at her foolish alarm.

I told her that it was my intention to start for England in the morning; that this was the only moment I had, and would be the last interview: my rights, if I possessed any, and I was not aware that I did, I threw down.

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'You throw down one end of the chain,' she said.

'In the name of heaven, then,' cried I, 'release yourself.'

She shook her head. 'That is not my meaning.'

Note the predicament of a lover who has a piece of dishonesty lurking in him. My chilled self-love had certainly the right to demand the explanation of her coldness, and I could very well guess that a word or two drawn from the neighbourhood of the heart would fetch a warmer current to unlock the ice between us, but feeling the coldness I complained of to be probably a suspicion, I fixed on the suspicion as a new and deeper injury done to my loyal love for her, and armed against that I dared not take an initiative for fear of unexpectedly justifying it by betraying myself.

Yet, supposing her inclination to have become diverted, I was ready frankly to release her with one squeeze of hands and take all the pain of she pain, and I said: 'Pray, do not speak of chains.'

'But they exist. Things cannot be undone for us two by words.'

The tremble as of a strung wire in the strenuous pitch of her voice seemed to say she was not cold, though her gloved hand resting its finger-ends on the table, her restrained attitude, her very calm eyes, declared the reverse. This and that sensation beset me in turn.

We shrank oddly from uttering one another's Christian name. I was the first with it; my 'Ottilia !' brought soon after 'Harry' on her lips, and an atmosphere about us much less Arctic.

'Ottilia, you have told me you wish me to go to England.'

'I have.'

'We shall be friends.'

'Yes, Harry; we cannot be quite divided; we have that knowledge for our present happiness.'

'The happy knowledge that we may have our bone to gnaw when food's denied. It is something. One would like possibly, after expulsion out of Eden, to climb the gates to see how the trees grow there. What I cannot imagine is the forecasting of any joy in the privilege.'

'By nature or system, then, you are more impatient than I, for I can,' said Ottilia. She added: 'So much of your character I divined early. It was part of my reason for wishing

you to work. You will find that hard work in England—but why should I preach to you Harry, you have called me here for some purpose?’

‘I must have detained you already too long.’

‘Time is not the offender. Since I have come, the evil——’

‘Evil? Are not your actions free?’

‘Patience, my friend. The freer my actions, the more am I bound to deliberate on them. I have the habit of thinking that my deliberations are not in my sex’s fashion of taking counsel of the nerves and the blood.

In truth, Harry, I should not have come but for my acknowledgement of your right to bid me come.’

‘You know, princess, that in honouring me with your attachment, you imperil your sovereign rank?’

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'I do.'

'What next?'

'Except that it is grievously in peril, nothing!'

'Have you known it all along?'

'Dimly-scarcely. To some extent I knew it, but it did not stand out in broad daylight. I have been learning the world's wisdom recently. Would you have had me neglect it? Surely much is due to my father? My relatives have claims on me. Our princely Houses have. My country has.'

'Oh, princess, if you are pleading——'

'Can you think that I am?'

The splendour of her high nature burst on me with a shock.

I could have fallen to kiss her feet, and I said indifferently: 'Not pleading, only it is evident the claims—I hate myself for bringing you in antagonism with them. Yes, and I have been learning some worldly wisdom; I wish for your sake it had not been so late. What made me overleap the proper estimate of your rank! I can't tell; but now that I know better the kind of creature—the man who won your esteem when you knew less of the world!'—

'Hush! I have an interest in him, and do not suffer him to be spurned,' Ottilia checked me. 'I, too, know him better, and still, if he is dragged down I am in the dust; if he is abused the shame is mine.' Her face bloomed.

Her sweet warmth of colour was transfused through my veins.

'We shall part in a few minutes. I have a mind to beg a gift of you.'

'Name it.'

'That glove.'

She made her hand bare and gave me, not the glove, but the hand.

'Ah! but this I cannot keep.'

'Will you have everything spoken?' she said, in a tone that would have been reproachful had not tenderness melted it. 'There should be a spirit between us, Harry, to spare the task. You do keep it, if you choose. I have some little dread of being taken for a

madwoman, and more—an actual horror of behaving ungratefully to my generous father. He has proved that he can be indulgent, most trusting and considerate for his daughter, though he is a prince; my duty is to show him that I do not forget I am a princess. I owe my rank allegiance when he forgets his on my behalf, my friend! You are young. None but an inexperienced girl hoodwinked by her tricks of intuition, would have dreamed you superior to the passions of other men. I was blind; I am regretful—take my word as you do my hand—for no one's sake but my father's. You and I are bound fast; only, help me that the blow may be lighter for him; if I descend from the place I was born to, let me tell him it is to occupy one I am fitted for, or should not at least feel my Family's deep blush in filling. To be in the midst of life in your foremost England is, in my imagination, very glorious. Harry, I remember picturing to myself when I reflected upon your country's history—perhaps a year after I had seen the two “young English gentlemen,” that you touch the morning and evening star, and wear them in your coronet, and walk with the sun West and East! Child's imagery; but the impression does not wear off. If I rail at England, it is the anger of love. I fancy I have good and great things to speak to the people through you.'

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There she stopped. The fervour she repressed in speech threw a glow over her face, like that on a frosty bare autumn sky after sunset.

I pressed my lips to her hand.

In our silence another of the fatal yellow volumes thumped the floor.

She looked into my eyes and asked,

'Have we been speaking before a witness?'

So thoroughly had she renovated me, that I accused and reproved the lurking suspicion with a soft laugh.

'Beloved! I wish we had been.'

'If it might be,' she said, divining me and musing.

'Why not?'

She stared.

'How? What do you ask?'

The look on my face alarmed her. I was breathless and colourless, with the heart of a hawk eyeing his bird—a fox, would be the truer comparison, but the bird was noble, not one that cowered. Her beauty and courage lifted me into high air, in spite of myself, and it was a huge weight of greed that fell away from me when I said,

'I would not urge it for an instant. Consider—if you had just plighted your hand in mine before a witness!'

'My hand is in yours; my word to you is enough.'

'Enough. My thanks to heaven for it! But consider—a pledge of fidelity that should be my secret angel about me in trouble and trial; my wedded soul! She cannot falter, she is mine for ever, she guides me, holds me to work, inspirits me!—she is secure from temptation, from threats, from everything—nothing can touch, nothing move her, she is mine! I mean, an attested word, a form, that is—a betrothal. For me to say—my beloved and my betrothed! You hear that? Beloved! is a lonely word:— betrothed! carries us joined up to death. Would you?—I do but ask to know that you would. Tomorrow I am loose in the world, and there 's a darkness in the thought of it almost too terrible. Would you?—one sworn word that gives me my bride, let men do what they may! I go then singing to battle—sure!—Remember, it is but the question whether you would.'

'Harry, I would, and will,' she said, her lips shuddering—'wait'—for a cry of joy escaped me—I will look you me in the eyes and tell me you have a doubt of me.'

I looked: she swam in a mist.

We had our full draught of the divine self-oblivion which floated those ghosts of the two immortal lovers through the bounds of their purgatorial circle, and for us to whom the minutes were ages, as for them to whom all time was unmarked, the power of supreme love swept out circumstance. Such embraces cast the soul beyond happiness, into no known region of sadness, but we drew apart sadly, even as that involved pair of bleeding recollections looked on the life lost to them. I knew well what a height she dropped from when the senses took fire. She raised me to learn how little of fretful thirst and its reputed voracity remains with love when it has been met midway in air by a winged mate able to sustain, unable to descend farther.

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And it was before a witness, though unviewed by us.

The farewell had come. Her voice was humbled.

Never, I said, delighting in the now conscious bravery of her eyes engaging mine, shadowy with the struggle, I would never doubt her, and I renounced all pledges. To be clear in my own sight as well as in hers, I made mention of the half-formed conspiracy to obtain her plighted troth in a binding manner. It was not necessary for me to excuse myself; she did that, saying, 'Could there be a greater proof of my darling's unhappiness? I am to blame.'

We closed hands for parting. She hesitated and asked if my father was awake; then promptly to my answer:

'I will see him. I have treated you ill. I have exacted too much patience. The suspicion was owing to a warning I had this evening, Harry; a silly warning to beware of snares; and I had no fear of them, believe me, though for some moments, and without the slightest real desire to be guarded, I fancied Harry's father was overhearing me. He is your father, dearest: fetch him to me. My father will hear of this from my lips—why not he? Ah! did I suspect you ever so little? I will atone for it; not atone, I will make it my pleasure; it is my pride that has hurt you both. O my lover! my lover! Dear head, dear eyes! Delicate and noble that you are! my own stronger soul! Where was my heart? Is it sometimes dead, or sleeping? But you can touch it to life. Look at me—I am yours. I consent, I desire it; I will see him. I will be bound. The heavier the chains, oh! the better for me. What am I, to be proud of anything not yours, Harry? and I that have passed over to you! I will see him at once.'

A third in the room cried out, 'No, not that—you do not!'

The tongue was German and struck on us like a roll of unfriendly musketry before we perceived the enemy. 'Princess Ottilia! you remember your dignity or I defend you and it, think of me what you will!'

Baroness Turckems, desperately entangled by the sofa-covering, rushed into the ray of the lamps and laid her hand on the bell-rope. In a minute we had an alarm sounding, my father was among us, there was a mad play of chatter, and we stood in the strangest nightmare-light that ever ended an interview of lovers.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOMEWARD AND HOME AGAIN

The room was in flames, Baroness Turckems plucking at the bell-rope, my father looking big and brilliant.

'Hold hand!' he shouted to the frenzied baroness.

She counter-shouted; both of them stamped feet; the portico sentinel struck the butt of his musket on the hall-doors; bell answered bell along the upper galleries.

'Foolish woman, be silent!' cried my father.

'Incendiary!' she half-shrieked.

He turned to the princess, begging her to retire, but she stared at him, and I too, after having seen him deliberately apply the flame of her lamp to the curtains, deemed him mad. He was perfectly self-possessed, and said, 'This will explain the bell!' and fetched a deep breath, and again urged the princess to retire.

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Peterborough was the only one present who bethought him of doing fireman's duty. The risk looked greater than it was. He had but to tear the lighted curtains down and trample on them. Suddenly the baroness called out, 'The man is right! Come with me, princess; escape, your Highness, escape! And you,' she addressed me—'you rang the bell, you!'

'To repair your error, baroness,' said my father.

'I have my conscience pure; have you?' she retorted.

He bowed and said, 'The fire will also excuse your presence on the spot, baroness.'

'I thank my God I am not so cool as you,' said she.

'Your warmth'—he bent to her—'shall always be your apology, baroness.'

Seeing the curtains extinguished, Ottilia withdrew. She gave me no glance.

All this occurred before the night-porter, who was going his rounds, could reach the library. Lacqueys and maids were soon at his heels. My father met Prince Ernest with a florid story of a reckless student, either asleep or too anxious to secure a particular volume, and showed his usual consideration by not asking me to verify the narrative. With that, and with high praise of Peterborough, as to whose gallantry I heard him deliver a very circumstantial account, he, I suppose, satisfied the prince's curiosity, and appeased him, the damage being small compared with the uproar. Prince Ernest questioned two or three times, 'What set him ringing so furiously?' My father made some reply.

Ottilia's cloud-pale windows were the sole greeting I had from her on my departure early next morning, far wretchered than if I had encountered a misfortune. It was impossible for me to deny that my father had shielded the princess: she would never have run for a menace. As he remarked, the ringing of the bell would not of itself have forced her to retreat, and the nature of the baroness's alarm demanded nothing less than a conflagration to account for it to the household. But I felt humiliated on Ottilia's behalf, and enraged on my own. And I had, I must confess, a touch of fear of a man who could unhesitatingly go to extremities, as he had done, by summoning fire to the rescue. He assured me that moments such as those inspired him and were the pride of his life, and he was convinced that, upon reflection, 'I should rise to his pitch.' He deluded himself with the idea of his having foiled Baroness Turckems, nor did I choose to contest it, though it struck me that she was too conclusively the foiler. She must have intercepted the letter for the princess. I remembered acting carelessly in handing it to my father for him to consign it to one of the domestics, and he passed it on with a flourish. Her place of concealment was singularly well selected under the sofa-cover, and the little heaps of paper-bound volumes. I do not fancy she meant to rouse the household; her notion



probably was to terrorize the princess, that she might compel her to quit my presence. In rushing to the bell-rope, her impetuosity sent her stumbling on it with force, and while threatening to ring, and meaning merely to threaten, she rang; and as it was not a retractable act, she continued ringing, and the more violently upon my father's appearance. Catching sight of Peterborough at his heels, she screamed a word equivalent to a clergyman. She had lost her discretion, but not her wits.

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For any one save a lover—thwarted as I was, and perturbed by the shadow falling on the princess—my father's Aplomb and promptness in conjuring a check to what he assumed to be a premeditated piece of villany on the part of Baroness Turckems, might have seemed tolerably worthy of admiration. Me the whole scene affected as if it had burnt my skin. I loathed that picture of him, constantly present to me, of his shivering the glass of Ottilia's semi-classical night-lamp, gravely asking her pardon, and stretching the flame to the curtain, with large eyes blazing on the baroness. The stupid burlesque majesty of it was unendurable to thought. Nevertheless, I had to thank him for shielding Ottilia, and I had to brood on the fact that I had drawn her into a situation requiring such a shield. He, meanwhile, according to his habit, was engaged in reviewing the triumphs to come. 'We have won a princess!' And what England would say, how England would look, when, on a further journey, I brought my princess home, entirely occupied his imagination, to my excessive torture—a state of mind for which it was impossible to ask his mercy. His sole link with the past appeared to be this notion that he had planned all the good things in store for us. Consequently I was condemned to hear of the success of the plot, until—for I had not the best of consciences—I felt my hand would be spell-bound in the attempt to write to the princess; and with that sense of incapacity I seemed to be cut loose from her, drifting back into the desolate days before I saw her wheeled in her invalid chair along the sands and my life knew sunrise.

But whatever the mood of our affections, so it is with us island wanderers: we cannot gaze over at England, knowing the old country to be close under the sea-line, and not hail it, and partly forget ourselves in the time that was. The smell of sea-air made me long for the white cliffs, the sight of the white cliffs revived pleasant thoughts of Riversley, and thoughts of Riversley thoughts of Janet, which were singularly and refreshingly free from self-accusations. Some love for my home, similar to what one may have for Winter, came across me, and some appreciation of Janet as well, in whose society was sure to be at least myself, a creature much reduced in altitude, but without the cramped sensations of a man on a monument. My hearty Janet! I thanked her then for seeing me of my natural height.

Some hours after parting with my father in London, I lay down to sleep in my old home, feeling as if I had thrown off a coat of armour. I awoke with a sailor's song on my lips. Looking out of window at the well-known features of the heaths and dark firs, and waning oak copses, and the shadowy line of the downs stretching their long whale backs South to West, it struck me that I had been barely alive of late. Indeed one who consents to live as I had done, in a hope and a retrospect, will find his life slipping between the two, like the ships

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under the striding Colossus. I shook myself, braced myself, and saluted every one at the breakfast table with the frankness of Harry Richmond. Congratulated on my splendid spirits, I was confirmed in the idea that I enjoyed them, though I knew of something hollow which sent an echo through me at intervals. Janet had become a fixed inmate of the house. 'I've bought her, and I shall keep her; she's the apple of my eye,' said the squire, adding with characteristic scrupulousness, 'if apple's female.' I asked her whether she had heard from Temple latterly. 'No; dear little fellow!' cried she, and I saw in a twinkling what it was that the squire liked in her, and liked it too. I caught sight of myself, as through a rift of cloud, trotting home from the hunt to a glad, frank, unpretending mate, with just enough of understanding to look up to mine. For a second or so it was pleasing, as a glance out of his library across hill and dale will be to a strained student. Our familiarity sanctioned a comment on the growth of her daughter-of-the-regiment moustache, the faintest conceivable suggestion of a shadow on her soft upper lip, which a poet might have feigned to have fallen from her dark thick eyebrows.

'Why, you don't mean to say, Hal, it's not to your taste?' said the squire.

'No,' said I, turning an eye on my aunt Dorothy, 'I've loved it all my life.'

The squire stared at me to make sure of this, muttered that it was to his mind a beauty, and that it was nothing more on Janet's lip than down on a flower, bloom on a plum. The poetical comparisons had the effect of causing me to examine her critically. She did not raise a spark of poetical sentiment in my bosom. She had grown a tall young woman, firmly built, light of motion, graceful perhaps; but it was not the grace of grace: the grace of simplicity, rather. She talked vivaciously and frankly, and gave (to friends) her whole eyes and a fine animation in talking; and her voice was a delight to friends; there was always the full ring of Janet in it, and music also. She still lifted her lip when she expressed contempt or dislike of persons; nor was she cured of her trick of frowning. She was as ready as ever to be flattered; that was evident. My grandfather's praise of her she received with a rewarding look back of kindness; she was not discomposed by flattery, and threw herself into no postures, nor blushed very deeply. 'Thank you for perceiving my merits,' she seemed to say; and to be just I should add that one could fancy her saying, you see them because you love me. She wore her hair in a plain knot, peculiarly neatly rounded away from the temples, which sometimes gave to a face not aquiline a look of swiftness. The face was mobile, various, not at all suggestive of bad temper, in spite of her frowns. The profile of it was less assuring than the front, because of the dark eyebrows' extension and the occasional frown, but that was not shared

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by the mouth, which was, I admitted to myself, a charming bow, running to a length at the corners like her eyebrows, quick with smiles. The corners of the mouth would often be in movement, setting dimples at work in her cheek, while the brows remained fixed, and thus at times a tender meditative air was given her that I could not think her own. Upon what could she possibly reflect? She had not a care, she had no education, she could hardly boast an idea—two at a time I was sure she never had entertained. The sort of wife for a fox-hunting lord, I summed up, and hoped he would be a good fellow.

Peterborough was plied by the squire for a description of German women. Blushing and shooting a timid look from under his pendulous eyelids at my aunt, indicating that he was prepared to go the way of tutors at Riversley, he said he really had not much observed them.

‘They’re a whitey-brown sort of women, aren’t they?’ the squire questioned him, ‘with tow hair and fish eyes, high o’ the shoulder, bony, and a towel skin and gone teeth, so I’ve heard tell. I’ve heard that’s why the men have all taken to their beastly smoking.’

Peterborough ejaculated: ‘Indeed! sir, really!’ He assured my aunt that German ladies were most agreeable, cultivated persons, extremely domesticated, retiring; the encomiums of the Roman historian were as well deserved by them in the present day as they had been in the past; decidedly, on the whole, Peterborough would call them a virtuous race.

‘Why do they let the men smoke, then?’ said the squire. ‘A pretty style o’ courtship. Come, sit by my hearth, ma’am; I ’ll be your chimney— faugh! dirty rascals!’

Janet said: ‘I rather like the smell of cigars.’

‘Like what you please, my dear—he’ll be a lucky dog,’ the squire approved her promptly, and asked me if I smoked.

I was not a stranger to the act, I confessed.

‘Well’—he took refuge in practical philosophy—‘a man must bring some dirt home from every journey: only don’t smoke me out, mercy’s sake.’

Here was a hint of Janet’s influence with him, and of what he expected from my return to Riversley.

Peterborough informed me that he suffered persecution over the last glasses of Port in the evening, through the squire’s persistent inquiries as to whether a woman had anything to do with my staying so long abroad. ‘A lady, sir?’ quoth Peterborough. ‘Lady, if you like,’ rejoined the squire. ‘You parsons and petticoats must always mince the

meat to hash the fact.' Peterborough defended his young friend Harry's moral reputation, and was amazed to hear that the squire did not think highly of a man's chastity. The squire acutely chagrined the sensitive gentleman by drawling the word after him, and declaring that he tossed that kind of thing into the women's wash-basket. Peterborough, not without signs of indignation, protesting, the squire asked him point-blank if he supposed that

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Old England had been raised to the head of the world by such as he. In fine, he favoured Peterborough with a lesson in worldly views. 'But these,' Peterborough said to me, 'are not the views, dear Harry—if they are the views of ladies of any description, which I take leave to doubt—not the views of the ladies you and I would esteem. For instance, the ladies of this household.' My aunt Dorothy's fate was plain.

In reply to my grandfather's renewed demand to know whether any one of those High-Dutch women had got hold of me, Peterborough said: 'Mr. Beltham, the only lady of whom it could be suspected that my friend Harry regarded her with more than ordinary admiration was Hereditary-Princess of one of the ancient princely Houses of Germany.' My grandfather thereupon said, 'Oh!' pushed the wine, and was stopped.

Peterborough chuckled over this 'Oh!' and the stoppage of further questions, while acknowledging that the luxury of a pipe would help to make him more charitable. He enjoyed the Port of his native land, but he did, likewise, feel the want of one whiff or so of the less restrictive foreigner's pipe; and he begged me to note the curiosity of our worship of aristocracy and royalty; and we, who were such slaves to rank, and such tyrants in our own households,—we Britons were the great sticklers for freedom! His conclusion was, that we were not logical. We would have a Throne, which we would not allow the liberty to do anything to make it worthy of rational veneration: we would have a peerage, of which we were so jealous that it formed almost an assembly of automats; we would have virtuous women, only for them to be pursued by immoral men. Peterborough feared, he must say, that we were an inconsequent people. His residence abroad had so far unhinged him; but a pipe would have stopped his complainings.

Moved, perhaps, by generous wine, in concert with his longing for tobacco, he dropped an observation of unwonted shrewdness; he said: 'The squire, my dear Harry, a most honourable and straightforward country gentleman, and one of our very wealthiest, is still, I would venture to suggest, an example of old blood that requires—I study race—varying, modifying, one might venture to say, correcting; and really, a friend with more privileges than I possess, would or should throw him a hint that no harm has been done to the family by an intermixture . . . old blood does occasionally need it—you know I study blood—it becomes too coarse, or, in some cases, too fine. The study of the mixture of blood is probably one of our great physical problems.'

Peterborough commended me to gratitude for the imaginative and chivalrous element bestowed on me by a father that was other than a country squire; one who could be tolerant of innocent habits, and not of guilty ones— a further glance at the interdicted pipe. I left him almost whimpering for it.

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The contemplation of the curious littleness of the lives of men and women lived in this England of ours, made me feel as if I looked at them out of a palace balcony-window; for no one appeared to hope very much or to fear; people trotted in their different kinds of harness; and I was amused to think of my heart going regularly in imitation of those about me. I was in a princely state of mind indeed, not disinclined for a time to follow the general course of life, while despising it. An existence without colour, without anxious throbbing, without salient matter for thought, challenged contempt. But it was exceedingly funny. My aunt Dorothy, the squire, and Janet submitted to my transparent inward laughter at them, patiently waiting for me to share their contentment, in the deluded belief that the hour would come. The principal items of news embraced the death of Squire Gregory Bulsted, the marriage of this and that young lady, a legal contention between my grandfather and Lady Maria Higginson, the wife of a rich manufacturer newly located among us, on account of a right of encampment on Durstan heath, my grandfather taking side with the gipsies, and beating her ladyship—a friend of Heriot's, by the way. Concerning Heriot, my aunt Dorothy was in trouble. She could not, she said, approve his behaviour in coming to this neighbourhood at all, and she hinted that I might induce him to keep away. I mentioned Julia Bulsted's being in mourning, merely to bring in her name tentatively.

'Ay, mourning's her outer rig, never doubt,' said the squire. 'Flick your whip at her, she's a charitable soul, Judy Bulsted! She knits stockings for the poor. She'd down and kiss the stump of a sailor on a stick o' timber. All the same, she oughtn't to be alone. Pity she hasn't a baby. You and I'll talk it over by-and-by, Harry.'

Kiomi was spoken of, and Lady Maria Higginson, and then Heriot.

'M-m-m-m rascal!' hummed the squire. 'There's three, and that's not enough for him. Six months back a man comes over from Surreywards, a farm he calls Dipwell, and asks after you, Harry; rigmaroles about a handsome lass gone off . . . some scoundrel ! You and I'll talk it over by-and-by, Harry.'

Janet raised and let fall her eyebrows. The fiction, that so much having been said, an immediate show of reserve on such topics preserved her in ignorance of them, was one she subscribed to merely to humour the squire. I was half in doubt whether I disliked or admired her want of decent hypocrisy. She allowed him to suppose that she did not hear, but spoke as a party to the conversation. My aunt Dorothy blamed Julia. The squire thundered at Heriot; Janet, liking both, contented herself with impartial comments.

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'I always think in these cases that the women must be the fools,' she said. Her affectation was to assume a knowledge of the world and all things in it. We rode over to Julia's cottage, on the outskirts of the estate now devolved upon her husband. Irish eyes are certainly bewitching lights. I thought, for my part, I could not do as the captain was doing, serving his country in foreign parts, while such as these were shining without a captain at home. Janet approved his conduct, and was right. 'What can a wife think the man worth who sits down to guard his house-door?' she answered my slight innuendo. She compared the man to a kennel-dog. 'This,' said I, 'comes of made-up matches,' whereat she was silent.

Julia took her own view of her position. She asked me whether it was not dismal for one who was called a grass widow, and was in reality a salt-water one, to keep fresh, with a lapdog, a cook, and a maid-servant, and a postman that passed the gate twenty times for twice that he opened it, and nothing to look for but this disappointing creature day after day! At first she was shy, stole out a coy line of fingers to be shaken, and lisped; and out of that mood came right-about-face, with an exclamation of regret that she supposed she must not kiss me now. I projected, she drew back. 'Shall Janet go?' said I. 'Then if nobody's present I'll be talked of,' said she, moaning queerly. The tendency of her hair to creep loose of its bands gave her handsome face an aspect deliriously wild. I complimented her on her keeping so fresh, in spite of her salt-water widowhood. She turned the tables on me for looking so powerful, though I was dying for a foreign princess.

'Oh! but that'll blow over,' she said; 'anything blows over as long as you don't go up to the altar'; and she eyed her ringed finger, woebegone, and flashed the pleasantest of smiles with the name of her William. Heriot, whom she always called Walter Heriot, was, she informed me, staying at Durstan Hall, the new great house, built on a plot of ground that the Lancashire millionaire had caught up, while the squire and the other landowners of the neighbourhood were sleeping. 'And if you get Walter Heriot to come to you, Harry Richmond, it'll be better for him, I'm sure,' she added, and naively:

'I 'd like to meet him up at the Grange.' Temple, she said, had left the Navy and was reading in London for the Bar—good news to me.

'You have not told us anything about your princess, Harry,' Janet observed on the ride home.

'Do you take her for a real person, Janet?'

'One thinks of her as a snow-mountain you've been admiring.'

'Very well; so let her be.'

'Is she kind and good?'

'Yes.'

'Does she ride well?'

'She rides remarkably well.'

'She 's fair, I suppose?'

'Janet, if I saw you married to Temple, it would be the second great wish of my heart.'

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'Harry, you're a bit too cruel, as Julia would say.'

'Have you noticed she gets more and more Irish?'

'Perhaps she finds it is liked. Some women can adapt themselves . . . they 're the happiest. All I meant to ask you is, whether your princess is like the rest of us?'

'Not at all,' said I, unconscious of hurting.

'Never mind. Don't be hard on Julia. She has the making of a good woman—a girl can see that; only she can't bear loneliness, and doesn't understand yet what it is to be loved by a true gentleman. Persons of that class can't learn it all at once.'

I was pained to see her in tears. Her figure was straight, and she spoke without a quaver of her voice.

'Heriot's an excellent fellow,' I remarked.

'He is. I can't think ill of my friends,' said she.

'Dear girl, is it these two who make you unhappy?'

'No; but dear old grandada! . . .'

The course of her mind was obvious. I would rather have had her less abrupt and more personal in revealing it. I stammered something.

'Heriot does not know you as I do,' she said, strangling a whimper. 'I was sure it was serious, though one's accustomed to associate princesses with young men's dreams. I fear, Harry, it will half break our dear old grandada's heart. He is rough, and you have often been against him, for one unfortunate reason. If you knew him as I do you would pity him sincerely. He hardly grumbled at all at your terribly long absence. Poor old man! he hopes on.'

'He's incurably unjust to my father.'

'Your father has been with you all the time, Harry? I guessed it.'

'Well?'

'It generally bodes no good to the Grange. Do pardon me for saying that. I know nothing of him; I know only that the squire is generous, and *that* I stand for with all my might. Forgive me for what I said.'

'Forgive you—with all my heart. I like you all the better. You 're a brave partisan. I don't expect women to be philosophers.'

'Well, Harry, I would take your side as firmly as anybody's.'

'Do, then; tell the squire how I am situated.'

'Ah!' she half sighed, 'I knew this was coming.'

'How could it other than come? You can do what you like with the squire. I'm dependent on him, and I am betrothed to the Princess Ottilia. God knows how much she has to trample down on her part. She casts off—to speak plainly, she puts herself out of the line of succession, and for whom? for me. In her father's lifetime she will hardly yield me her hand; but I must immediately be in a position to offer mine. She may: who can tell? she is above all women in power and firmness. You talk of generosity; could there be a higher example of it?'

'I daresay; I know nothing of princesses,' Janet murmured. 'I don't quite comprehend what she has done. The point is, what am I to do?'

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'Prepare him for it. Soothe him in advance. Why, dear Janet, you can reconcile him to anything in a minute.'

'Lie to him downright?'

'Now what on earth is the meaning of that, and why can't you speak mildly?'

'I suppose I speak as I feel. I'm a plain speaker, a plain person. You don't give me an easy task, friend Harry.'

'If you believe in his generosity, Janet, should you be afraid to put it to proof?'

'Grandada's generosity, Harry? I do believe in it as I believe in my own life. It happens to be the very thing I must keep myself from rousing in him, to be of any service to you. Look at the old house!' She changed her tone. 'Looking on old Riversley with the eyes of my head even, I think I'm looking at something far away in the memory. Perhaps the deep red brick causes it. There never was a house with so many beautiful creepers. Bright as they are, you notice the roses on the wall. There's a face for me forever from every window; and good-bye, Riversley ! Harry, I'll obey your wishes.'

So saying, she headed me, trotting down the heath-track.

CHAPTER XXXVII

JANET RENOUNCES ME

An illness of old Sewis, the butler,—amazingly resembling a sick monkey in his bed,—kept me from paying a visit to Temple and seeing my father for several weeks, during which time Janet loyally accustomed the squire to hear of the German princess, and she did it with a decent and agreeable cheerfulness that I quite approved of. I should have been enraged at a martyr-like appearance on her part, for I demanded a sprightly devotion to my interests, considering love so holy a thing, that where it existed, all surrounding persons were bound to do it homage and service. We were thrown together a great deal in attending on poor old Sewis, who would lie on his pillows recounting for hours my father's midnight summons of the inhabitants of Riversley, and his little Harry's infant expedition into the world. Temple and Heriot came to stay at the Grange, and assisted in some rough scene-painting—torrid colours representing the island of Jamaica. We hung it at the foot of old Sewis's bed. He awoke and contemplated it, and went downstairs the same day, cured, he declared: the fact being that the unfortunate picture testified too strongly to the reversal of all he was used to in life, in having those he served to wait on him. The squire celebrated his recovery by giving a servants' ball. Sewis danced with the handsomest lass, swung her to supper, and delivered an extraordinary speech, entirely concerning me, and rather to my discomposure, particularly so when it was my fate to hear that the old man had made

me the heir of his savings. Such was his announcement, in a very excited voice, but incidentally upon a solemn adjuration to the squire to beware of his temper—govern his temper and not be a turncoat.

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We were present at the head of the supper-table to hear our healths drunk. Sewis spoke like a half-caste oblivious of his training, and of the subjects he was at liberty to touch on as well. Evidently there was a weight of foreboding on his mind. He knew his master well. The squire excused him under the ejaculation, 'Drunk, by the Lord!' Sewis went so far as to mention my father 'He no disgrace, sar, he no disgrace, I say! but he pull one way, old house pull other way, and 'tween 'em my little Harry torn apieces, squire. He set out in the night "You not enter it any more!" Very well. I go my lawyer next day. You see my Will, squire. Years ago, and little Harry so high. Old Sewis not the man to change. He no turncoat, squire. God bless you, my master; you recollect, and ladies tell you if you forget, old Sewis no turncoat. You hate turncoat. You taught old Sewis, and God bless you, and Mr. Harry, and British Constitution, all Amen!'

With that he bounded to bed. He was dead next morning.

The squire was humorous over my legacy. It amounted to about seventeen hundred pounds invested in Government Stock, and he asked me what I meant to do with it; proposed a Charity to be established on behalf of decayed half-castes, insisting that servants' money could never be appropriated to the uses of gentlemen. All the while he was muttering, 'Turncoat! eh? turncoat?'—proof that the word had struck where it was aimed. For me, after thinking on it, I had a superstitious respect for the legacy, so I determined, in spite of the squire's laughter over 'Sixty pounds per annum!' to let it rest in my name: I saw for the first time the possibility that I might not have my grandfather's wealth to depend upon. He warned me of growing miserly. With my father in London, living freely on my property, I had not much fear of that. However, I said discreetly, 'I don't mind spending when I see my way.'

'Oh! see your way,' said he. 'Better a niggard than a chuckfist. Only, there 's my girl: she 's good at accounts. One 'll do for them, Harry?— ha'n't been long enough at home yet?'

Few were the occasions when our conversation did not diverge to this sort of interrogation. Temple and Heriot, with whom I took counsel, advised me to wait until the idea of the princess had worn its way into his understanding, and leave the work to Janet. 'Though,' said Heriot to me aside, 'upon my soul, it's slaughter.' He believed that Janet felt keenly. But then, she admired him, and so they repaid one another.

I won my grandfather's confidence in practical matters on a trip we took into Wales. But it was not enough for me to be a man of business, he affirmed; he wanted me to have some ambition; why not stand for our county at the next general election? He offered me his Welsh borough if I thought fit to decline a contest. This was to speak as mightily as a German prince. Virtually, in wealth and

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power, he was a prince; but of how queer a kind! He was immensely gratified by my refraining to look out for my father on our return journey through London, and remarked, that I had not seen him for some time, he supposed. To which I said, no, I had not, He advised me to let the fellow run his length. Suggesting that he held it likely I contributed to 'the fellow's' support: he said generously, 'Keep clear of him, Hal: I add you a thousand a year to your allowance,' and damned me for being so thoughtful over it. I found myself shuddering at a breath of anger from him. Could he not with a word dash my hopes for ever? The warning I had taken from old Sewis transformed me to something like a hypocrite, and I dare say I gave the squire to understand, that I had not seen my father for a very long period and knew nothing of his recent doings.

'Been infernally quiet these last two or three years,' the squire muttered of the object of his aversion. 'I heard of a City widow last, sick as a Dover packet-boat 'bout the fellow! Well, the women are ninnies, but you're a man, Harry; you're not to be taken in any longer, eh?'

I replied that I knew my father better now, and was asked how the deuce I knew him better; it was the world I knew better after my stay on the Continent.

I contained myself enough to say, 'Very well, the world, sir.'

'Flirted with one of their princesses?' He winked.

'On that subject I will talk to you some other time,' said I.

'Got to pay an indemnity? or what?' He professed alarm, and pushed for explanations, with the air of a man of business ready to help me if need were. 'Make a clean breast of it, Harry. You 're not the son of Tom Fool the Bastard for nothing, I'll swear. All the same you're Beltham; you're my grandson and heir, and I'll stand by you. Out with 't! She's a princess, is she?'

The necessity for correcting his impressions taught me to think the moment favourable. I said, 'I am engaged to her, sir.'

He returned promptly: 'Then you'll break it off.'

I shook my head.

'Why, you can't jilt my girl at home!' said he.

'Do you find a princess objectionable, sir?'

'Objectionable? She's a foreigner. I don't know her. I never saw her. Here's my Janet I've brought up for you, under my own eyes, out of the way of every damned soft-sawderer, safe and plump as a melon under a glass, and you fight shy of her, and go and engage yourself to a foreigner I don't know and never saw! By George, Harry, I'll call in a parson to settle you soon as ever we sight Riversley. I'll couple you, by George, I will! 'fore either of you know whether you're on your legs or your backs.'

We were in the streets of London, so he was obliged to moderate his vehemence.

'Have you consulted Janet?' said I.

'Consulted her? ever since she was a chick with half a feather on.'

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'A chick with half a feather on,' I remarked, 'is not always of the same mind as a piece of poultry of full plumage.'

'Hang your sneering and your talk of a fine girl, like my Janet, as a piece of poultry, you young rooster! You toss your head up like a cock too conceited to crow. I'll swear the girl's in love with you. She does you the honour to be fond of you. She's one in a million. A handsome girl, straight-backed, honest, just a dash, and not too much, of our blood in her.'

'Consult her again, sir,' I broke in. 'You will discover she is not of your way of thinking.'

'Do you mean to say she's given you a left-hander, Harry?'

'I have only to say that I have not given her the option.'

He groaned going up the steps of his hotel, faced me once or twice, and almost gained my sympathy by observing, 'When we're boys, the old ones worry us; when we're old ones, the boys begin to tug!' He rarely spoke so humanely,—rarely, at least, to me.

For a wonder, he let the matter drop: possibly because he found me temperate. I tried the system on him with good effect during our stay in London; that is, I took upon myself to be always cool, always courteous, deliberate in my replies, and not uncordial, though I was for representing the reserved young man. I obtained some praise for my style and bearing among his acquaintances. To one lady passing an encomium on me, he said, 'Oh, some foreign princess has been training him,' which seemed to me of good augury.

My friends Temple and Heriot were among the Riversley guests at Christmas. We rode over to John Thresher's, of whom we heard that the pretty Mabel Sweetwinter had disappeared, and understood that suspicion had fallen upon one of us gentlemen. Bob, her brother, had gone the way of the bravest English fellows of his class—to America. We called on the miller, a soured old man. Bob's evasion affected him more than Mabel's, Martha Thresher said, in derision of our sex. I was pained to hear from her that Bob supposed me the misleader of his sister; and that he had, as she believed, left England, to avoid the misery of ever meeting me again, because he liked me so much. She had been seen walking down the lanes with some one resembling me in figure. Heriot took the miller's view, counting the loss of one stout young Englishman to his country of far greater importance than the escapades of dozens of girls, for which simple creatures he had no compassion: he held the expression of it a sham. He had grown coxcombical. Without talking of his conquests, he talked largely of the ladies who were possibly in the situation of victims to his grace of person, though he did not do so with any unctuous boasting. On the contrary, there was a rather taking undertone of regret that his enfeebled over-fat country would give her military son no worthier occupation. He laughed at the mention of Julia Bulsted's name. 'She proves, Richie, marriage is the best of all receipts for women, just as it's the worst for men. Poor Billy

Bulsted, for instance, a first-rate seaman, and his heart's only half in his profession since he and Julia swore their oath; and no wonder,—he made something his own that won't go under lock and key. No military or naval man ought ever to marry.'

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‘Stop,’ said Temple, ‘is the poor old country----- How about continuing the race of heroes?’

Heriot commended him to rectories, vicarages, and curates’ lodgings for breeding grounds, and coming round to Julia related one of the racy dialogues of her married life. ‘The saltwater widow’s delicious. Billy rushes home from his ship in a hurry. What’s this Greg writes me?—That he ‘s got a friend of his to drink with him, d’ ye mean, William?— A friend of yours, ma’am.—And will you say a friend of mine is not a friend of yours, William?—Julia, you’re driving me mad!—And is that far from crazy, where you said I drove you at first sight of me, William? Back to his ship goes Billy with a song of love and constancy.’

I said nothing of my chagrin at the behaviour of the pair who had furnished my first idea of the romantic beauty of love.

‘Why does she talk twice as Irish as she used to, Heriot?’

‘Just to coax the world to let her be as nonsensical as she likes. She’s awfully dull; she has only her nonsense to amuse her. I repeat: soldiers and sailors oughtn’t to marry. I’m her best friend. I am, on my honour: for I ‘m going to make Billy give up the service, since he can’t give her up. There she is!’ he cried out, and waved his hat to a lady on horseback some way down the slope of a road leading to the view of our heathland:

‘There’s the only girl living fit to marry a man and swear she ‘ll stick to him through life and death.’

He started at a gallop. Temple would have gone too at any possible speed, for he knew as well as I did that Janet was the girl alone capable of winning a respectful word from Heriot; but I detained him to talk of Ottilia and my dismal prospect of persuading the squire to consent to my proposal for her, and to dower her in a manner worthy a princess. He doled out his yes and no to me vacantly. Janet and Heriot came at a walking pace to meet us, he questioning her, she replying, but a little differently from her usual habit of turning her full face to the speaker. He was evidently startled, and, to judge from his posture, repeated his question, as one would say, ‘You did this?’ She nodded, and then uttered some rapid words, glanced at him, laughed shyly, and sank her features into repose as we drew near. She had a deep blush on her face. I thought it might be, that Janet and her loud champion had come to particular terms, a supposition that touched me with regrets for Temple’s sake. But Heriot was not looking pleased. It happened that whatever Janet uttered struck a chord of opposition in me. She liked the Winter and the Winter sunsets, had hopes of a frost for skating, liked our climate, thought our way of keeping Christmas venerable, rejoiced in dispensing the squire’s bounties—called them bounties, joined Heriot in abusing foreign countries to

the exaltation of her own: all this with 'Well, Harry, I'm sorry you don't think as we do. And we do, don't we?' she addressed him.

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'I reserve a point,' he said, and not playfully.

She appeared distressed, and courted a change of expression in his features, and I have to confess that never having seen her gaze upon any one save myself in that fashion, which was with her very winning, especially where some of her contralto tones of remonstrance or entreaty aided it, I felt as a man does at a neighbour's shadow cast over his rights of property.

Heriot dropped to the rear: I was glad to leave her with Temple, and glad to see them canter ahead together on the sand of tie heaths.

'She has done it,' Heriot burst out abruptly. 'She has done it!' he said again. 'Upon my soul, I never wished in my life before that I was a marrying man: I might have a chance of ending worth something. She has won the squire round with a thundering fib, and you're to have the German if you can get her. Don't be in a hurry. The squire 'll speak to you to-night: but think over it. Will you? Think what a girl this is. I believe on my honour no man ever had such an offer of a true woman. Come, don't think it's Heriot speaking—I've always liked her, of course. But I have always respected her, and that's not of course. Depend upon it, a woman who can be a friend of men is the right sort of woman to make a match with. Do you suppose she couldn't have a dozen fellows round her at the lift of her finger? the pick of the land! I'd trust her with an army. I tell you, Janet Ilchester 's the only girl alive who'll double the man she marries. I don't know another who wouldn't make the name of wife laugh the poor devil out of house and company. She's firm as a rock; and sweet as a flower on it! Will that touch you? Bah! Richie, let's talk like men. I feel for her because she's fond of you, and I know what it is when a girl like that sets her heart on a fellow. There,' he concluded, 'I 'd ask you to go down on your knees and pray before you decide against her!'

Heriot succeeded in raising a certain dull indistinct image in my mind of a well-meaning girl, to whom I was bound to feel thankful, and felt so. I thanked Heriot, too, for his friendly intentions. He had never seen the Princess Ottilia. And at night I thanked my grandfather. He bore himself, on the whole, like the good and kindly old gentleman Janet loved to consider him. He would not stand in my light, he said, recurring to that sheet-anchor of a tolerant sentence whenever his forehead began to gather clouds. He regretted that Janet was no better than her sex in her preference for rakes, and wished me to the deuce for bringing Heriot into the house, and not knowing when I was lucky. 'German grandchildren, eh!' he muttered. No Beltham had ever married a foreigner. What was the time fixed between us for the marriage? He wanted to see his line safe before he died. 'How do I know this foreign woman'll bear?' he asked, expecting an answer. His hand was on the back of a chair, grasping and rocking it; his eyes bent stormily on the carpet; they were set blinking rapidly after a glance at me. Altogether his self-command was creditable to Janet's tuition.

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Janet met me next day, saying with some insolence (so it struck me from her liveliness): 'Well, it's all right, Harry? Now you'll be happy, I hope. I did not shine in my reply. Her amiable part appeared to be to let me see how brilliant and gracious the commonplace could be made to look. She kept Heriot at the Grange, against the squire's remonstrance and her mother's. 'It 's to keep him out of harm's way: the women he knows are not of the best kind for him,' she said, with astounding fatuity. He submitted, and seemed to like it. She must be teaching Temple to skate figures in the frost, with a great display of good-humoured patience, and her voice at musical pitches. But her principal affectation was to talk on matters of business with Mr. Burgin and Mr. Trewint, the squire's lawyer and bailiff, on mines and interest, on money and economical questions; not shrinking from politics either, until the squire cries out to the males assisting in the performance, 'Gad, she 's a head as good as our half-dozen put together,' and they servilely joined their fragmentary capitals in agreement. She went so far as to retain Peterborough to teach her Latin. He was idling in the expectation of a living in the squire's gift.

The annoyance for me was that I could not detach myself from a contemplation of these various scenes, by reverting to my life in Germany. The preposterous closing of my interview with Otilia blocked the way, and I was unable to write to her—unable to address her even in imagination, without pangs of shame at the review of the petty conspiracy I had sanctioned to entrap her to plight her hand to me, and without perpetually multiplying excuses for my conduct. So to escape them I was reduced to study Janet, forming one of her satellites. She could say to me impudently, with all the air of a friendly comrade, 'Had your letter from Germany yet, Harry?' She flew—she was always on the chase. I saw her permit Heriot to kiss her hand, and then the squire appeared, and Heriot and she burst into laughter, and the squire, with a puzzled face, would have the game explained to him, but understood not a bit of it, only growled at me; upon which Janet became serious and chid him. I was told by my aunt Dorothy to admire this behaviour of hers. One day she certainly did me a service: a paragraph in one of the newspapers spoke of my father, not flatteringly: 'Richmond is in the field again,' it commenced. The squire was waiting for her to hand the paper to him. None of us could comprehend why she played him off and denied him his right to the first perusal of the news; she was voluble, almost witty, full of sprightly Roxalana petulance.

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'This paper,' she said, 'deserves to be burnt,' and she was allowed to burn it—money article, mining column as well—on the pretext of an infamous anti-Tory leader, of which she herself composed the first sentence to shock the squire completely. I had sight of that paper some time afterwards. Richmond was in the field again, it stated, with mock flourishes. But that was not the worst. My grandfather's name was down there, and mine, and Princess Ottilia's. My father's connection with the court of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld was alluded to as the latest, and next to his winning the heiress of Riversley, the most successful of his ventures, inasmuch as his son, if rumour was to be trusted, had obtained the promise of the hand of the princess. The paragraph was an excerpt from a gossiping weekly journal, perhaps less malevolent than I thought it. There was some fun to be got out of a man who, the journal in question was informed, had joined the arms of England and a petty German principality stamped on his plate and furniture.

My gratitude to Janet was fervent enough when I saw what she had saved me from. I pressed her hand and held it. I talked stupidly, but I made my cruel position intelligible to her, and she had the delicacy, on this occasion, to keep her sentiments regarding my father unuttered. We sat hardly less than an hour side by side—I know not how long hand in hand. The end was an extraordinary trembling in the limb abandoned to me. It seized her frame. I would have detained her, but it was plain she suffered both in her heart and her pride. Her voice was under fair command—more than mine was. She counselled me to go to London, at once. 'I would be off to London if I were you, Harry,'—for the purpose of checking my father's extravagances,—would have been the further wording, which she spared me; and I thanked her, wishing, at the same time, that she would get the habit of using choicer phrases whenever there might, by chance, be a stress of emotion between us. Her trembling, and her 'I'd be off,' came into unpleasant collision in the recollection.

I acknowledge to myself that she was a true and hearty friend. She listened with interest to my discourse on the necessity of my being in Parliament before I could venture to propose formally for the hand of the princess, and undertook to bear the burden of all consequent negotiations with my grandfather. If she would but have allowed me to speak of Temple, instead of saying, 'Don't, Harry, I like him so much!' at the very mention of his name, I should have sincerely felt my indebtedness to her, and some admiration of her fine spirit and figure besides. I could not even agree with my aunt Dorothy that Janet was handsome. When I had to grant her a pardon I appreciated her better.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MY BANKERS' BOOK

The squire again did honour to Janet's eulogy and good management of him.

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'And where,' said she, 'would you find a Radical to behave so generously, Harry, when it touches him so?'

He accorded me his permission to select my side in politics, merely insisting that I was never to change it, and this he requested me to swear to, for (he called the ghost of old Sewis to witness) he abhorred a turncoat.

'If you're to be a Whig, or a sneaking half-and-half, I can't help you much,' he remarked. 'I can pop a young Tory in for my borough, maybe; but I can't insult a number of independent Englishmen by asking them to vote for the opposite crew; that's reasonable, eh? And I can't promise you plumpers for the county neither. You can date your Address from Riversley. You'll have your house in town. Tell me this princess of yours is ready with her hand, and,' he threw in roughly, 'is a respectable young woman, I'll commence building. You'll have a house fit for a prince in town and country, both.'

Temple had produced an effect on him by informing him that 'this princess of mine' was entitled to be considered a fit and proper person, in rank and blood, for an alliance with the proudest royal Houses of Europe, and my grandfather was not quite destitute of consolation in the prospect I presented to him. He was a curious study to me, of the Tory mind, in its attachment to solidity, fixity, certainty, its unmatched generosity within a limit, its devotion to the family, and its family eye for the country. An immediate introduction to Otilia would have won him to enjoy the idea of his grandson's marriage; but not having seen her, he could not realize her dignity, nor even the womanliness of a 'foreign woman.'

'Thank God for one thing,' he said: 'we shan't have that fellow bothering—shan't have the other half of your family messing the business. You'll have to account for him to your wife as you best can. I've nothing to do with him, mind that. He came to my house, stole my daughter, crazed her wits, dragged us all . . .'

The excuse to turn away from the hearing of abuse of my father was too good to be neglected, though it was horribly humiliating that I should have to take advantage of it—vexatious that I should seem chargeable with tacit lying in allowing the squire to suppose the man he hated to be a stranger to the princess. Not feeling sure whether it might be common prudence to delude him even passively, I thought of asking Janet for her opinion, but refrained. A stout deceiver has his merits, but a feeble hypocrite applying to friends to fortify him in his shifts and tergiversations must provoke contempt. I desired that Janet might continue to think well of me. I was beginning to drop in my own esteem, which was the mirror of my conception of Otilia's view of her lover.

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Now, had I consulted Janet, I believe the course of my history would have been different, for she would not then, I may imagine, have been guilty of her fatal slip of the tongue that threw us into heavy seas when we thought ourselves floating on canal waters. A canal barge (an image to me of the most perfect attainable peace), suddenly, on its passage through our long fir-woods, with their scented reeds and flowing rushes, wild balsam and silky cotton-grass beds, sluiced out to sea and storm, would be somewhat in my likeness soon after a single luckless observation had passed at our Riversley breakfast-table one Sunday morning.

My aunt Dorothy and Mr. Peterborough were conversing upon the varieties of Christian sects, and particularly such as approached nearest to Anglicanism, together with the strange, saddening fact that the Christian religion appeared to be more divided than, Peterborough regretted to say, the forms of idolatry established by the Buddha, Mahomet, and other impostors. He claimed the audacious merit for us, that we did not discard the reason of man we admitted man's finite reason to our school of faith, and it was found refractory. Hence our many divisions.

'The Roman Catholics admit reason?' said Janet, who had too strong a turn for showing her keenness in little encounters with Peterborough.

'No,' said he; 'the Protestants.' And, anxious to elude her, he pressed on to enchain my aunt Dorothy's attention. Janet plagued him meanwhile; and I helped her. We ran him and his schoolboy, the finite refractory, up and down, until Peterborough was glad to abandon him, and Janet said, 'Did you preach to the Germans much?' He had officiated in Prince Ernest's private chapel: not, he added in his egregious modesty, not that he personally wished to officiate.

'It was Harry's wish?' Janet said, smiling.

'My post of tutor,' Peterborough hastened to explain, 'was almost entirely supernumerary. The circumstances being so, I the more readily acquiesced in the title of private chaplain, prepared to fulfil such duties as devolved upon me in that capacity, and acting thereon I proffered my occasional services. Lutheranism and Anglicanism are not, doubtless you are aware, divided on the broader bases. We are common Protestants. The Papacy, I can assure you, finds as little favour with one as with the other. Yes, I held forth, as you would say, from time to time. My assumption of the title of private chaplain, it was thought, improved the family dignity—that is, on our side.'

'Thought by Harry?' said Janet; and my aunt Dorothy said, 'You and Harry had a consultation about it?'

'Wanted to appear as grand as they could,' quoth the squire.

Peterborough signified an assent, designed to modify the implication. 'Not beyond due bounds, I trust, sir.'

'Oh! now I understand,' Janet broke out in the falsetto notes of a puzzle solved in the mind. 'It was his father! Harry proclaiming his private chaplain!'

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'Mr. Harry's father did first suggest—' said Peterborough, but her quickly-altered features caused him to draw in his breath, as she had done after one short laugh.

My grandfather turned a round side-eye on me, hard as a cock's.

Janet immediately started topics to fill Peterborough's mouth: the weather, the walk to church, the probable preacher. 'And, grandada,' said she to the squire, who was muttering ominously with a grim under-jaw, 'His private chaplain!' and for this once would not hear her, 'Grandada, I shall drive you over to see papa this afternoon.' She talked as if nothing had gone wrong. Peterborough, criminal red, attacked a jam-pot for a diversion. 'Such sweets are rare indeed on the Continent,' he observed to my aunt Dorothy. 'Our homemade dainties are matchless.'

'Private chaplain!' the squire growled again.

'It's you that preach this afternoon,' Janet said to Peterborough. 'Do you give us an extempore sermon?'

'You remind me, Miss Ilchester, I must look to it; I have a little trimming to do.'

Peterborough thought he might escape, but the squire arrested him. 'You'll give me five minutes before you're out of the house, please. D' ye smoke on Sundays?'

'Not on Sundays, sir,' said Peterborough, openly and cordially, as to signify that they were of one mind regarding the perniciousness of Sunday smoking.

'See you don't set fire to my ricks with your foreign chaplain's tricks. I spied you puffing behind one t' other day. There,' the squire dispersed Peterborough's unnecessary air of abstruse recollection, 'don't look as though you were trying to hit on a pin's head in a bushel of oats. Don't set my ricks on fire—that 's all.'

'Mr. Peterborough,' my aunt Dorothy interposed her voice to soften this rough treatment of him with the offer of some hot-house flowers for his sitting-room.

' Oh, I thank you!' I heard the garlanded victim lowing as I left him to the squire's mercy.

Janet followed me out. 'It was my fault, Harry. You won't blame him, I know. But will he fib? I don't think he's capable of it, and I'm sure he can't run and double. Grandada will have him fast before a minute is over.'

I told her to lose no time in going and extracting the squire's promise that Peterborough should have his living,—so much it seemed possible to save.

She flew back, and in Peterborough's momentary absence, did her work. Nothing could save the unhappy gentleman from a distracting scene and much archaic English. The



squire's power of vituperation was notorious: he could be more than a match for roadside navvies and predatory tramps in cogency of epithet. Peterborough came to me drenched, and wailing that he had never heard such language,—never dreamed of it. And to find himself the object of it!—and, worse, to be unable to conscientiously defend himself! The pain to him was in the conscience,—which

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is, like the spleen, a function whose uses are only to be understood in its derangement. He had eased his conscience to every question right out, and he rejoiced to me at the immense relief it gave him. Conscientiously, he could not deny that he knew the squire's objection to my being in my father's society; and he had connived at it 'for reasons, my dearest Harry, I can justify to God and man, but not—I had to confess as much—not, I grieve to say, to your grandfather. I attempted to do justice to the amiable qualities of the absent. In a moment I was assailed with epithets that . . . and not a word is to be got in when he is so violent. One has to make up one's mind to act Andromeda, and let him be the sea-monster, as somebody has said; I forget the exact origin of the remark.'

The squire certainly had a whole ocean at command. I strung myself to pass through the same performance. To my astonishment I went unchallenged. Janet vehemently asserted that she had mollified the angry old man, who, however, was dark of visage, though his tongue kept silence. He was gruff over his wine-glass the blandishments of his favourite did not brighten him. From his point of view he had been treated vilely, and he was apparently inclined to nurse his rancour and keep my fortunes trembling in the balance. Under these circumstances it was impossible for me to despatch a letter to Ottilia, though I found that I could write one now, and I sat in my room writing all day,—most eloquent stuff it was. The shadow of misfortune restored the sense of my heroic situation, which my father had extinguished, and this unlocked the powers of speech. I wrote so admirably that my wretchedness could enjoy the fine millinery I decorated it in. Then to tear the noble composition to pieces was a bitter gratification. Ottilia's station repelled and attracted me mysteriously. I could not separate her from it, nor keep my love of her from the contentions into which it threw me. In vain I raved, 'What is rank?' There was a magnet in it that could at least set me quivering and twisting, behaving like a man spellbound, as madly as any hero of the ballads under a wizard's charm.

At last the squire relieved us. He fixed that side-cast cock's eye of his on me, and said, 'Where 's your bankers' book, sir?'

I presumed that it was with my bankers, but did not suggest the possibility that my father might have it in his custody; for he had a cheque-book of his own, and regulated our accounts. Why not? I thought, and flushed somewhat defiantly. The money was mine.

'Any objection to my seeing that book?' said the squire.

'None whatever, sir.'

He nodded. I made it a point of honour to write for the book to be sent down to me immediately.

The book arrived, and the squire handed it to me to break the cover, insisting, 'You're sure you wouldn't rather not have me look at it?'

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'Quite,' I replied. The question of money was to me perfectly unimportant. I did not see a glimpse of danger in his perusing the list of my expenses.

"Cause I give you my word I know nothing about it now," he said.

I complimented him on his frank method of dealing, and told him to look at the book if he pleased, but with prudence sufficiently awake to check the declaration that I had not once looked at it myself.

He opened it. We had just assembled in the hall, where breakfast was laid during Winter, before a huge wood fire. Janet had her teeth on her lower lip, watching the old man's face. I did not condescend to be curious; but when I turned my head to him he was puffing through thin lips, and then his mouth crumpled in a knob. He had seen sights.

'By George, I must have breakfast 'fore I go into this!' he exclaimed, and stared as if he had come out of an oven.

Dorothy Beltham reminded him that Prayers had not been read.

'Prayers!' He was about to objurgate, but affirmated her motion to ring the bell for the servants, and addressed Peterborough: 'You read 'em abroad every morning?'

Peterborough's conscience started off on its inevitable jog-trot at a touch of the whip. 'A-yes; that is—oh, it was my office.' He had to recollect with exactitude:

'I should specify exceptions; there were intervals . . .'

'Please, open your Bible,' the squire cut him short; 'I don't want a damned fine edge on everything.'

Partly for an admonition to him, or in pure nervousness, Peterborough blew his nose monstrously: an unlucky note; nothing went well after it. 'A slight cold,' he murmured and resumed the note, and threw himself maniacally into it. The unexpected figure of Captain Bulsted on tiptoe, wearing the ceremonial depressed air of intruders on these occasions, distracted our attention for a moment.

'Fresh from ship, William?' the squire called out.

The captain ejaculated a big word, to judge of it from the aperture, but it was mute as his footing on the carpet, and he sat and gazed devoutly toward Peterborough, who had waited to see him take his seat, and must now, in his hurry to perform his duty, sweep the peccant little redbound book to the floor. 'Here, I'll have that,' said the squire. 'Allow me, sir,' said Peterborough; and they sprang into a collision.



'Would you jump out of your pulpit to pick up an old woman's umbrella?' the squire asked him in wrath, and muttered of requiring none of his clerical legerdemain with books of business. Tears were in Peterborough's eyes. My aunt Dorothy's eyes dwelt kindly on him to encourage him, but the man's irritable nose was again his enemy.

Captain Bulsted chanced to say in the musical voice of inquiry: 'Prayers are not yet over, are they?'

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'No, nor never will be with a parson blowing his horn at this rate,' the squire rejoined. 'And mind you,' he said to Peterborough, after dismissing the servants, to whom my aunt Dorothy read the morning lessons apart, 'I'd not have had this happen, sir, for money in lumps. I've always known I should hang the day when my house wasn't blessed in the morning by prayer. So did my father, and his before him. Fiddle! sir, you can't expect young people to wear decent faces when the parson's hopping over the floor like a flea, and trumpeting as if the organ-pipe wouldn't have the sermon at any price. You tried to juggle me out of this book here.'

'On my!—indeed, sir, no!' Peterborough proclaimed his innocence, and it was unlikely that the squire should have suspected him.

Captain Bulsted had come to us for his wife, whom he had not found at home on his arrival last midnight.

'God bless my soul,' said the squire, 'you don't mean to tell me she's gone off, William?'

'Oh! dear, no, sir,' said the captain, 'she's only cruising.'

The squire recommended a draught of old ale. The captain accepted it. His comportment was cheerful in a sober fashion, notwithstanding the transparent perturbation of his spirit. He answered my aunt Dorothy's questions relating to Julia simply and manfully, as became a gallant seaman, cordially excusing his wife for not having been at home to welcome him, with the singular plea, based on his knowledge of the sex, that the nearer she knew him to be the less able was she to sit on her chair waiting like Patience. He drank his ale from the hands of Sillabin, our impassive new butler, who had succeeded Sewis, the squire told him, like a Whig Ministry the Tory; proof that things were not improving.

'I thought, sir, things were getting better,' said the captain.

'The damndest mistake ever made, William. How about the Fall of Man, then? eh? You talk like a heathen Radical. It's Scripture says we're going from better to worse, and that's Tory doctrine. And stick to the good as long as you can! Why, William, you were a jolly bachelor once.'

'Sir, and ma'am,' the captain bowed to Dorothy Beltham, 'I have, thanks to you, never known happiness but in marriage, and all I want is my wife.'

The squire fretted for Janet to depart. 'I 'm going, grandada,' she said. 'You'll oblige me by not attending to any matter of business to-day. Give me that book of Harry's to keep for you.'

'How d' ye mean, my dear?'

'It 's bad work done on a Sunday, you know.'

'So it is. I'll lock up the book.'

'I have your word for that, grandada,' said Janet.

The ladies retired, taking Peterborough with them.

'Good-bye to the frocks! and now, William, out with your troubles,' said the squire.

The captain's eyes were turned to the door my aunt Dorothy had passed through.

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'You remember the old custom, sir!'

'Ay, do I, William. Sorry for you then; infernally sorry for you now, that I am! But you've run your head into the halter.'

'I love her, sir; I love her to distraction. Let any man on earth say she's not an angel, I flatten him dead as his lie. By the way, sir, I am bound in duty to inform you I am speaking of my wife.'

'To be sure you are, William, and a trim schooner-yacht she is.'

'She 's off, sir; she's off!'

I thought it time to throw in a word. 'Captain Bulsted, I should hold any man but you accountable to me for hinting such things of my friend.'

'Harry, your hand,' he cried, sparkling.

'Hum; his hand!' growled the squire. 'His hand's been pretty lively on the Continent, William. Here, look at this book, William, and the bundle o' cheques! No, I promised my girl. We'll go into it to-morrow, he and I, early. The fellow has shot away thousands and thousands—been gallivanting among his foreign duchesses and countesses. There 's a petticoat in that bank-book of his; and more than one, I wager. Now he's for marrying a foreign princess—got himself in a tangle there, it seems.'

'Mightily well done, Harry!' Captain Bulsted struck a terrific encomium on my shoulder, groaning, 'May she be true to you, my lad!'

The squire asked him if he was going to church that morning.

'I go to my post, sir, by my fireside,' the captain replied; nor could he be induced to leave his post vacant by the squire's promise to him of a sermon that would pickle his temper for a whole week's wear and tear. He regretted extremely that he could not enjoy so excellent a trial of his patience, but he felt himself bound to go to his post and wait.

I walked over to Bulsted with him, and heard on the way that it was Heriot who had called for her and driven her off. 'The man had been, I supposed,' Captain Bulsted said, 'deputed by some of you to fetch her over to Riversley. My servants mentioned his name. I thought it adviseable not to trouble the ladies with it to-day.' He meditated. 'I hoped I should find her at the Grange in the morning, Harry. I slept on it, rather than startle the poor lamb in the night.'

I offered him to accompany him at once to Heriot's quarters.

'What! and let my wife know I doubted her fidelity. My girl shall never accuse me of that.'

As it turned out, Julia had been taken by Heriot on a visit to Lady Maria Higginson, the wife of the intrusive millionaire, who particularly desired to know her more intimately. Thoughtless Julia, accepting the impudent invitation without scruple, had allowed herself to be driven away without stating the place of her destination. She and Heriot were in the Higginsons' pew at church. Hearing from Janet of her husband's arrival, she rushed home, and there, instead of having to beg forgiveness, was summoned to grant pardon. Captain Bulsted had drawn largely on Squire Gregory's cellar to assist him in keeping his post.

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The pair appeared before us fondling ineffably next day, neither one of them capable of seeing that our domestic peace at the Grange was unseated. 'We 're the two wretchedest creatures alive; haven't any of ye to spare a bit of sympathy for us?' Julia began. 'We 're like on a pitchfork. There's William's duty to his country, and there 's his affection for me, and they won't go together, because Government, which is that horrid Admiralty, fears pitching and tossing for post-captains' wives. And William away, I 'm distracted, and the Admiralty's hair's on end if he stops. And, 'deed, Miss Beltham, I'm not more than married to just half a husband.'

The captain echoed her, 'Half! but happy enough for twenty whole ones, if you'll be satisfied, my duck.'

Julia piteously entreated me, for my future wife's sake, not to take service under Government. As for the Admiralty, she said, it had no characteristic but the abominable one, that it hated a woman. The squire laid two or three moderately coarse traps for the voluble frank creature, which she evaded with surprising neatness, showing herself more awake than one would have imagined her. Janet and I fancied she must have come with the intention to act uxorious husband and Irish wife for the distinct purpose of diverting the squire's wrath from me, for he greatly delighted in the sight of merry wedded pairs. But they were as simple as possible in their display of happiness.

It chanced that they came opportunely. My bankers' book had been the theme all the morning, and an astonishing one to me equally with my grandfather: Since our arrival in England, my father had drawn nine thousand pounds. The sums expended during our absence on the Continent reached the perplexing figures of forty-eight thousand. I knew it too likely, besides, that all debts were not paid. Self—self—self drew for thousands at a time; sometimes, as the squire's convulsive forefinger indicated, for many thousands within a week. It was incomprehensible to him until I, driven at bay by questions and insults, and perceiving that concealment could not long be practised, made a virtue of the situation by telling him (what he in fact must have seen) that my father possessed a cheque-book as well as I, and likewise drew upon the account. We had required the money; it was mine, and I had sold out Bank Stock and Consols,—which gave very poor interest, I remarked cursorily—and had kept the money at my bankers', to draw upon according to our necessities. I pitied the old man while speaking. His face was livid; language died from his lips. He asked to have little things explained to him—the two cheque-books, for instance,—and what I thought of doing when this money was all gone: for he supposed I did not expect the same amount to hand every two years; unless, he added, I had given him no more than a couple of years' lease of life when I started for my tour. 'Then the money's gone!' he summed up; and this was the signal for redemanding explanations. Had he not treated me fairly and frankly in handing over my own to me on the day of my majority? Yes.

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'And like a fool, you think—eh?'

'I have no such thought in my head, sir.'

'You have been keeping that fellow in his profligacy, and you 're keeping him now. Why, you 're all but a beggar! . . . Comes to my house, talks of his birth, carries off my daughter, makes her mad, lets her child grow up to lay hold of her money, and then grips him fast and pecks him, fleeces him! . . . You 're beggared—d 'ye know that? He's had the two years of you, and sucked you dry. What were you about? What were you doing? Did you have your head on? You shared cheque-books? good! . . . The devil in hell never found such a fool as you! You had your house full of your foreign bonyrobers—eh? Out with it! How did you pass your time? Drunk and dancing?'

By such degrees my grandfather worked himself up to the pitch for his style of eloquence. I have given a faint specimen of it. When I took the liberty to consider that I had heard enough, he followed me out of the library into the hall, where Janet stood. In her presence, he charged the princess and her family with being a pack of greedy adventurers, conspirators with 'that fellow' to plunder me; and for a proof of it, he quoted my words, that my father's time had been spent in superintending the opening of a coal-mine on Prince Ernest's estate. 'That fellow pretending to manage a coal-mine!' Could not a girl see it was a shuffle to hoodwink a greenhorn? And now he remembered it was Colonel Goodwin and his daughter who had told him of having seen 'the fellow' engaged in playing Court-buffoon to a petty German prince, and performing his antics, cutting capers like a clown at a fair.

'Shame!' said Janet.

'Hear her!' The squire turned to me.

But she cried: 'Oh! grandada, hear yourself! or don't, be silent. If Harry has offended you, speak like one gentleman to another. Don't rob me of my love for you: I haven't much besides that.'

'No, because of a scoundrel and his young idiot!'

Janet frowned in earnest, and said: 'I don't permit you to change the meaning of the words I speak.'

He muttered a proverb of the stables. Reduced to behave temperately, he began the whole history of my bankers' book anew—the same queries, the same explosions and imprecations.

'Come for a walk with me, dear Harry,' said Janet.



I declined to be protected in such a manner, absurdly on my dignity; and the refusal, together possibly with some air of contemptuous independence in the tone of it, brought the squire to a climax. 'You won't go out and walk with her? You shall go down on your knees to her and beg her to give you her arm for a walk. By God! you shall, now, here, on the spot, or off you go to your German princess, with your butler's legacy, and nothing more from me but good-bye and the door bolted. Now, down with you!'

He expected me to descend.

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'And if he did, he would never have my arm.' Janet's eyes glittered hard on the squire.

'Before that rascal dies, my dear, he shall whine like a beggar out in the cold for the tips of your fingers!'

'Not if he asks me first,' said Janet.

This set him off again. He realized her prospective generosity, and contrasted it with my actual obtuseness. Janet changed her tactics. She assumed indifference. But she wanted experience, and a Heriot to help her in playing a part. She did it badly—overdid it; so that the old man, now imagining both of us to be against his scheme for uniting us, counted my iniquity as twofold. Her phrase, 'Harry and I will always be friends,' roused the loudest of his denunciations upon me, as though there never had been question of the princess, so inveterate was his mind's grasp of its original designs. Friends! Would our being friends give him heirs by law to his estate and name? And so forth. My aunt Dorothy came to moderate his invectives. In her room the heavily-burdened little book of figures was produced, and the items read aloud; and her task was to hear them without astonishment, but with a business-like desire to comprehend them accurately, a method that softened the squire's outbursts by degrees. She threw out hasty running commentaries: 'Yes, that was for a yacht'; and 'They were living at the Court of a prince'; such and such a sum was 'large, but Harry knew his grandfather did not wish him to make a poor appearance.'

'Why, do you mean to swear to me, on your oath, Dorothy Beltham,' said the squire, amazed at the small amazement he created 'you think these two fellows have been spending within the right margin? What'll be women's ideas next!'

'No,' she answered demurely. 'I think Harry has been extravagant, and has had his lesson. And surely it is better now than later? But you are, not making allowances for his situation as the betrothed of a princess.'

'That 's what turns your head,' said he; and she allowed him to have the notion, and sneer at herself and her sex.

'How about this money drawn since he came home?' the squire persisted.

My aunt Dorothy reddened. He struck his finger on the line marking the sum, repeating his demand; and at this moment Captain Bulsted and Julia arrived. The ladies manoeuvred so that the captain and the squire were left alone together. Some time afterward the captain sent out word that he begged his wife's permission to stay to dinner at the Grange, and requested me to favour him by conducting his wife to Bulsted: proof, as Julia said, that the two were engaged in a pretty hot tussle. She was sure her William would not be the one to be beaten.

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I led her away, rather depressed by the automaton performance assigned to me; from which condition I awoke with a touch of horror to find myself paying her very warm compliments; for she had been coquettish and charming to cheer me, and her voice was sweet. We reached a point in our conversation I know not where, but I must have spoken with some warmth. 'Then guess,' said she, 'what William is suffering for your sake now, Harry'; that is, 'suffering in remaining away from me on your account'; and thus, in an instant, with a skill so intuitive as to be almost unconscious, she twirled me round to a right sense of my position, and set me reflecting, whether a love that clad me in such imperfect armour as to leave me penetrable to these feminine graces—a plump figure, swinging skirts, dewy dark eyelids, laughing red lips—could indeed be absolute love. And if it was not love of the immortal kind, what was I? I looked back on the thought like the ship on its furrow through the waters, and saw every mortal perplexity, and death under. My love of Ottilia delusion? Then life was delusion! I contemplated Julia in alarm, somewhat in the light fair witches were looked on when the faggots were piled for them. The sense of her unholy attractions abased and mortified me: and it set me thinking on the strangeness of my disregard of Mdle. Jenny Chassediane when in Germany, who was far sprightlier, if not prettier, and, as I remembered, had done me the favour to make discreet play with her eyelids in our encounters, and long eyes in passing. I caught myself regretting my coldness of that period; for which regrets I could have swung the scourge upon my miserable flesh. Ottilia's features seemed dying out of my mind. 'Poor darling Harry!' Julia sighed. 'And d' ye know, the sight of a young man far gone in love gives me the trembles?' I rallied her concerning the ladder scene in my old schooldays, and the tender things she had uttered to Heriot. She answered, 'Oh, I think I got them out of poets and chapters about lovemaking, or I felt it very much. And that's what I miss in William; he can't talk soft nice nonsense. I believe him, he would if he could, but he 's like a lion of the desert—it 's a roar!'

I rejoiced when we heard the roar. Captain Bulsted returned to take command of his ship, not sooner than I wanted him, and told us of a fierce tussle with the squire. He had stuck to him all day, and up to 11 P.M. 'By George! Harry, he had to make humble excuses to dodge out of eyeshot a minute. Conquered him over the fourth bottle! And now all's right. He'll see your dad. "In a barn?" says the squire. "Here 's to your better health, sir," I bowed to him; "gentlemen don't meet in barns; none but mice and traps make appointments there." To shorten my story, my lad, I have arranged for the squire and your excellent progenitor to meet at Bulsted: we may end by bringing them over a bottle of old Greg's

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best. "See the boy's father," I kept on insisting. The point is, that this confounded book must be off your shoulders, my lad. A dirty dog may wash in a duck-pond. You see, Harry, the dear old squire may set up your account twenty times over, but he has a right to know how you twirl the coin. He says you don't supply the information. I suggest to him that your father can, and will. So we get them into a room together. I'll be answerable for the rest. And now top your boom, and to bed here: off in the morning and tug the big vessel into port here! And, Harry, three cheers, and another bottle to crown the victory, if you 're the man for it?"

Julia interposed a decided negative to the proposal; an ordinarily unlucky thing to do with bibulous husbands, and the captain looked uncomfortably checked; but when he seemed to be collecting to assert himself, the humour of her remark, 'Now, no bravado, William,' disarmed him.

'Bravado, my sweet chuck?'

'Won't another bottle be like flashing your sword after you've won the day?' said she.

He slung his arm round her, and sent a tremendous whisper into my ear— 'A perfect angel!'

I started for London next day, more troubled aesthetically regarding the effect produced on me by this order of perfect angels than practically anxious about material affairs, though it is true that when I came into proximity with my father, the thought of his all but purely mechanical power of making money spin, fly, and vanish, like sparks from a fire-engine, awakened a serious disposition in me to bring our monetary partnership to some definite settlement. He was living in splendour, next door but one to the grand establishment he had driven me to from Dipwell in the old days, with Mrs. Waddy for his housekeeper once more, Alphonse for his cook. Not living on the same scale, however, the troubled woman said. She signified that it was now the whirlwind. I could not help smiling to see how proud she was of him, nevertheless, as a god-like charioteer—in pace, at least.

'Opera to-night,' she answered my inquiries for him, admonishing me by her tone that I ought not to be behindhand in knowing his regal rules and habits. Praising his generosity, she informed me that he had spent one hundred pounds, and offered a reward of five times the sum, for the discovery of Mabel Sweetwinter. 'Your papa never does things by halves, Mr. Harry!' Soon after she was whimpering, 'Oh, will it last?' I was shown into the room called 'The princess's room,' a miracle of furniture, not likely to be occupied by her, I thought, the very magnificence of the apartment striking down hope in my heart like cold on a nerve. Your papa says the whole house is to be for you, Mr. Harry, when the happy day comes.' Could it possibly be that he had talked of the

princess? I took a hasty meal and fortified myself with claret to have matters clear with him before the night was over.

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ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Decent insincerity
Discreet play with her eyelids in our encounters
Excellent is pride; but oh! be sure of its foundations
I do not defend myself ever
Nations at war are wild beasts
Only true race, properly so called, out of India—German
Some so-called laws of honour
They are little ironical laughter—Accidents
War is only an exaggerated form of duelling
Winter mornings are divine. They move on noiselessly