



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY
1207 EAST 58TH STREET
CHICAGO, ILL. 60637

h

9-

BRACKEN

JOHN TREVENA'S DARTMOOR TRILOGY

FURZE THE CRUEL

The Daily Mail says:—"Dartmoor has inspired many good novels, but never before, we think, one quite so good as this. What it is that makes a novel great is difficult to say, but though it be a quality that we cannot define, we always know when it is present. It is in 'Furze the Cruel'—a something that makes us read without questioning the matter or the manner . . . To understand the full meaning of 'Furze the Cruel' we must make a note of the little foreword in which Mr Trevena explains that this novel is the first of a trilogy. It is his intention to follow the present book, in which is worked out the idea that furze is typical of cruelty, with a second in which the heather will typify endurance, and a third with the strength of the granite for its theme. . . . There is a vigorous, virile mind behind 'Furze the Cruel,' and we rest assured that Mr Trevena will carry to a successful issue the trilogy which he has begun so well."

HEATHER

The Daily Chronicle says:—" 'Furze the Cruel' was the first of a moorland trilogy, and Mr Trevena has now published the second of the three promised volumes, 'Heather.' Let it be said without further preamble that 'Heather' is the best book that the author has written, and if he never improves on this work—though doubtless, as he gains experience, he will—he will yet have made a name for himself for which the majority of his fellow-craftsmen may well bear him envy. . . . Must conclude with a hearty recommendation to all who love good literature to read 'Heather.' With each succeeding book Mr Trevena has acquired a broader grasp and a firmer touch, and we await with interest the next work of this author, which will be, it is understood, the final volume of the trilogy, 'Granite.'"

GRANITE

The Westminster Gazette says:—"Mr Trevena has, without doubt, written a very fine book, full of life, atmosphere, and purpose. He has a rare gift of language, and an unusual power of conveying description in the fewest possible words. He has come, now, to a full understanding of his own methods, and has adapted his construction to the uses of his style. . . . We must remember that it is only some four or five years ago that Mr Trevena published his first novel, and in these few years he has exhibited qualities which put him in the very first rank of modern writers of fiction. Indeed, in his own field as a student of purely country life and character, we know of no writer of the present day—Thomas Hardy having abandoned fiction—who can at all compare with him for insight, true knowledge of nature, power of vigorous writing."

Price Six Shillings each



BRACKEN

BY

JOHN TREVENA

AUTHOR OF "FURZE THE CRUEL," "HEATHER,"
"GRANITE," "A PIXY IN PETTICOATS," "ARMINEL
OF THE WEST," ETC.



LONDON: ALSTON RIVERS, LTD.
BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN BARS, E.C.

1910

CONTENTS

THE PROLOGUE

CHAP.	PAGE
1. CRYPTOGAMOUS	I
2. AMATORY	18
3. LICENTIOUS	32

THE STORY

1. DREAMY	43
2. PENSIVE	56
3. POETICAL	70
4. LUNARY	85
5. STARRY	97
6. VAGRANT	114
7. GLOOMY	128
8. MYSTICAL	137
9. MUTABLE	159
10. FIXED	178
11. ERRATIC	191
12. SEARCHING	209
13. WHIRLING	219

CHAP.	PAGE
14. QUIESCENT	234
15. CARDINAL	254
16. COWARDLY	274
17. RAVENOUS	288
18. TEMPESTUOUS	307
19. BIOGENETIC	326
20. PASSIONLESS	345
21. MELANCHOLIC	358
22. PENULTIMATE	371
23. FINAL	387

BRACKEN

THE PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

CRYPTOGAMOUS

IN the centre was a brake ; on the south side a school-house ; on the north hills ; in the west the same old descending sun. In the east, almost invisible because he walked in the way of that sun which covered him about with glory, a man in academic gown, a handsome man without a physical flaw, with childlike blue eyes hardly kind enough then for purposes of pity ; and perhaps a conceited man, for as he walked he often pressed a richly-coloured beard between his hands to shape it to his fancy, and he caught the gown about him as though imagining it to be the toga of free citizenship.

He was a classical master, vain enough to compare himself with the gods and heroes of his text-books. That golden beard suited him, made him think of Apollo and sun-myths, helped him to form a wild idea that there might be something in him, not developed yet, which in time would lift him out of the rut of humanity, make him a being half-divine, and surrender to him the secret of the miracles. A mad idea, even for one steeped in classics, who made a living by teaching heroic verse, and telling of the days when gods wore cloaks and breeches ; and yet it came. He was known as Jasper Ramrige.

The brake was a patch of moorland, too rough and stony

to pay for clearing, and Jasper supposed he was alone, as the place was out of bounds for the schoolboys. It was a sun-trap haunted by vipers. The sun was low enough to dazzle him, and he saw nothing except a confusion of outlines, until he came round a tangle of brambles. A boy, thin and pale, was kneeling, muttering to himself, looking down. In the strong light of the setting sun he looked a fragment, like a piece of cloud which had broken off and dropped, and would dissolve when the night came. Jasper hardly needed to look at him, except to discover what he was doing, knowing that the only boy who would break bounds under a master's eye must be Cuthbert Orton, the boy who defied authority, his own pupil who never worked, who had hovered about the bottom of the form for two years, and only brightened up when the subject of study was congenial, the boy who ought to have been expelled and was only spared because the school was in difficulties and could not afford to lose the money paid for that education which he would not accept.

"Are you really interested, Orton?" said Jasper, speaking sarcastically, a trick he was fond of, as it frightened those who were dull or inclined to rebel. He had said of Cuthbert "He won't work, yet I like him"; but sometimes he almost hated the boy, stormed at him, came near to cursing him, piling punishments upon him, glad to see him kick and plunge with temper: while at other times he had a longing to approach the boy, place a hand upon his shoulder and say, "Come, we are friends. I am your master and must lead you."

That feeling was with him then. Jasper would have scoffed had anyone called him a mystic; and as for Cuthbert with his gloomy smile, hopeless idleness, and lack of morality, Cuthbert, the bad character of the school, what was he but so much matter? Jasper was still young: he had not learnt to regard the body as a cylinder filled with fire: he could not guess at the presence of a magnet there

wrapped up within a schoolboy's shabby clothing, dragging out what was best or worst, drawing the lives of others to be held and burnt against him like martyrs at the stake. A thin and pale-faced boy : an ignorant creature, they said in the common-room, and a disgrace to the school : he had been kneeling upon the peat, his fingers were sticky with a green and bloody slime. It was blood, and Jasper had caused it to flow.

"I know I'm out of bounds, sir. I'll come here if I like. You can report me."

There was no sarcasm about Cuthbert. It was all defiance, rebellion against law, hatred of those appointed to enforce it. Bitterness was on his face, his sticky hands were clenched, and he crouched as if about to run at Jasper and hit him.

The master caressed his beard and rejected the idea which authority suggested. It was the time of good-feeling, there was something congenial in the wildness of the brake, the stones and brambles of which had never been subdued. The boy seemed in place there, and he too was not easily to be subdued. Jasper had the sense to know it was not possible. He turned from the sun, noticing that his shadow was enormous—the idea pleased him—and said in a natural voice, "I am glad to find you interested in anything. You will not learn during school hours. Yet when it is a matter of general knowledge you are always the only one to answer. Perhaps you teach yourself?"

"I read an awful lot," said Cuthbert, with an awkward movement.

"I know you spend much of your time in the library. You are fond of books. I have noticed how carefully you handle them. What do you read chiefly? Is it history? That seems to be your subject," said the master gently. "Every history lesson you go to the top and stay there, while you are dumb on other subjects."

"No sir, I don't read much history. I don't need to. I know it," said the boy loftily.

"How do you know?"

"By instinct, I suppose," said Cuthbert, with the same conceit.

"Or memory," Jasper muttered, and then scolded himself, for mysticism was suggested, a thing with which he had nothing to do. "Tell me what you read," he went on in his tenderest manner.

"A heap of things," replied the boy, who could be pleasant when no opposition was shown him. "There's one book I'm always looking at—an old one on the second shelf at the right-hand side of the door as you go in. It wants binding. There are a lot of pictures in it, imaginary landscapes, sir," said Cuthbert eagerly, "pictures of sea-coasts and forests during the Coal Age and all those periods before man appeared. I seem to know more about those times than I ought—I have queer dreams, sir," he added hurriedly.

"Then science is your subject. It's a pity we don't teach it," began Jasper, but the boy broke in with his silly pride, "I don't want to be taught. I know enough. My dreams are bad enough as it is—a poor little monkey being dragged off a branch by one of those long-necked reptiles. I feel the breath of the brute, all hot and stinking—but perhaps it's only an escape of gas in the dormitory."

"Instinct," said Jasper quietly. "It is instinct which leads you here among the stones and the brambles and the bracken."

"I like the bracken, sir," said Cuthbert. "It reminds me of the pictures and dreams—the forest of fern, so quiet, and the hills all green and waving, and they smell, sir——"

"You cannot smell the pictures, Orton."

"I can smell the fern, anyhow," said Cuthbert doggedly. "You can't mistake the smell of fern. It's so strong and peculiar, and it gets overpowering when you smash the stuff down. A great brute like a mastodon crashing through would make the fern smell like anything. If it

wasn't for the window being open at the head of my bed, I think I should choke sometimes."

"Now you are getting back into the dreams," said Jasper, pulling at his glowing beard. He was getting nearer to the boy, understanding him less, but feeling somehow that he wouldn't live long.

"You can smell it now. I'm sure it's strong enough. Some ass has been along here knocking off their heads," said Cuthbert angrily.

The master flushed a little, for he was the malefactor, and he knew that Cuthbert was aware of it, as the mischief had been done recently and there was still a wet splash upon his stick. Young bracken is a brittle and full-blooded thing, and while the master walked he had swung his stick about, cutting the fleshy stems, decapitating the dainty curved coronals of immature fronds, and now the stumps were bleeding with a horrible profuseness, pouring out blood which would have been invisible to the ordinary passer-by simply because it was not red. Cuthbert's hands were sticky with it, and the same slimy stuff was dripping upon the peat.

"They will soon grow again, Orton," said Jasper.

"Not so strong, sir, and they won't grow to any height this year. If you keep on cutting bracken down every spring, it gets gradually smaller, and at last it dies because you have bled all its life away."

"There is plenty of it," said the master.

"Not too much, sir. I like it."

"It has no pleasant smell, and no flower."

"It goes back a long way. It is a survival from the very beginning of things. I know that's right," said the boy defiantly.

"What does it suggest to you, Orton?"

"There's another book in the library I'm fond of. It's a book of folk-lore, and it seems to fit in with the other, the book with the pictures of imaginary landscapes. I read them together sometimes, think about them, and then they

get mixed up with the dreams. There are a lot of stories about ferns and their seed—but I don't think they mean the bracken. They mention that big fern with roots like a tree and long waving fronds which grows in bogs, and has a sort of green flower and golden dust for seed."

"The king fern, *Osmunda regalis*," murmured the master pedantically.

"Yes sir, it's as old as any of them," said Cuthbert eagerly. "You find it in lumps of coal. I've read all the stories I can find, and those about the ferns are the strangest. Look there, sir, what you've done. I know you did it. You have been murdering mysteries."

"Come, come, Orton, remember yourself," said Jasper, restraining himself, or rather that necessary authority, with an effort.

"The fern survives because it suggests mysteries. The book of science hints at that too. Our life is nothing but a mystery from beginning to end, and there's another mystery before it begins, and another after it ends; and we must have the ferns to remind us of it."

"You have sat for two years at the bottom of the form," said the master, again sarcastically. "Boys who are mere parrots have passed through in a term. He will write books some day," Jasper muttered.

"I can't think it out now. I will write it down for you if you like, sir—if you aren't humbugging me," said the boy, with his usual flush of temper; and then he turned as if he would leave the forbidden brake and hurry towards the library: while Jasper noticed that his shadow had disappeared with the sun and he began to feel small again, and to wonder what he was, whether master or pupil, giver or receiver: which of them in years to come would stand the first, the scholar or the dunce.

"When you have finished what you propose to write, bring it to me. I shall be in my room." He added, "Come and have tea with me."

"Thank you, sir. I should like to," said Cuthbert, astonished at the invitation which had never come his way before. "But if you are going to report me——"

"I shall not. What is the use?"

"I should come here just the same," said the boy; and then he began to move away in a happy frame of mind.

"Orton," called Jasper.

"Yes sir," said Cuthbert, stopping, then returning slowly; and presently, when no other sound came, he added, "You called me, sir."

"Orton," said Jasper again; and laughed and said, "Why, this is a kind of revolution. I felt I wanted to attract your attention to something, and now it has gone."

He glanced quickly at the sky, to where the moorland heaved and twisted, where the white clouds seemed to kiss the brown earth, and felt relieved when he saw nothing there; but as he went away he murmured, shaping again that glorious beard, "The evening is upon us," wondering perhaps, when alone again, whether any power was present in the dark which could not work its charm in sunshine.

He watched the departing Cuthbert until the slim figure flitted through one of the arches of the corridor. He was at peace with the boy then: next week he would be fighting him, while Cuthbert would snarl back, and would make jeering remarks to his school-fellows concerning the antique name of Jasper. There was no friendship between them, for in Cuthbert burnt some stuff too hot to meddle with, something incomprehensible and unpleasant like the boy's own dreams of fern-forests and reptiles. Yet Jasper's nature was affectionate: small and pretty boys he loved because of their shapeliness and beauty: such he had often in his room, chatting with them idly and fondling them, not grossly, but with the passion of a father, as if they were his and would not have been without him. Of women he knew too little: his own sex was enough: the academic life and the beauty of boys made up his world during that

period—at least he thought so, and did not ask why he walked in that direction, through the dimness, towards the chapel, looking for that silence which he could not find in his silent rooms.

“Mystic!” That word muttered at his ear would have made him start. He was a materialist, he glorified the power and energy of matter: the body was everything, one and undivided so far as the present life was concerned, and nothing else was of much account till death. Even the higher passions were so intimately connected with the body as to end with it. Death wiped the record clean as a wet sponge across a blackboard cleared it of chalked figures. Then was the time for mysteries, after death, when the soul could assert itself and claim its own life, knowing nothing of the other existence it had parted from; and Jasper Ramrige went on towards the chapel, one hand grasping his beard, the other holding his cloak about him, thinking of high-priests and ceremonies and a spiral thread of incense going up.

Not a mystic, assuredly. Any one of his colleagues would have agreed to that. Jasper could laugh louder than any of them, drink as much wine, tell as good a story, sing as hearty a song. His hobby was photography, he had no strange books, knew no occult slang, darkened his belief with no strange words, shuddered at the idea of spiritism. His God was a man like himself, and perhaps too much like, a hairy God and somewhat simple.

Still he walked towards the deserted chapel instead of to his rooms. So easy was it to act without reasoning. Nothing short of a loud voice from the clouds would have convinced him what a child he was, able to walk without assistance, able to think that Cuthbert was one of those queer youths who burnt up and went out in a flash, and were something of a nuisance while they did live; but unable to know that it is not mysticism to sit grouped about a table in a darkened room and feel it tilting, it is not mysticism to raise a ghost,

terrify the senses, and pass an idle hour in playing with things that stupefy ; unable to know that mysticism is a holy thing, a sacred sense added, a thing which cannot be forced or brought by a spell, but must come unsought, a thing which does enter into every life and is at its greatest distance near.

The darkness had reached a stage which contented Jasper as he entered the chapel, the stage when outlines were suggestive. An advanced ritual was observed, and those adjuncts to religion, suggesting terror to some and a sense of mystery to others, heavy draperies, painted figures, candles like a forest of birch trees, and a strong odour, were liberally supplied. Before the altar hung a lamp showing, but not giving, a red light, the tiny flame throbbing like a feeble heart, and Jasper stood with his arms folded and his eyes fixed upon it in that sleepy sense of being called satisfaction. The lamp was his gift. He had presented it to the sanctuary because—well, it was the right thing to be there, and he wanted to come in the dark and see the red light flickering.

The same instinct which had drawn Cuthbert to the place where the bracken grew led Jasper to the chapel. With both, it was the natural unreasoning impulse which guides animals, that mystic flash of clear intelligence, whatever other name it may be called, which causes even the lowest grub to imitate exactly the parents it has no knowledge of. With both it was a desire to find spiritual enjoyment. They travelled apart, but met in a sense at the turnings. Cuthbert hated the chapel with the services he was compelled to attend, and sought the brake where he was out of bounds : Jasper had no object in going to the brake except to take exercise. The master was happy in the empty chapel : he could dream and let his mind wander : more than that, his body could be thrilled and exalted by delicious acts of reverence, by passing to and fro before the altar, turning, bending, and bowing again and again. He was doing what was

right, an act of true religion, and satisfying himself at the same time, for it was pleasant, better to Jasper than a virgin's kiss ; but, even while he made the act of homage, and watched the red heart writhing in the oil, he questioned whether any man had a richer beard than his.

Cuthbert was waiting, not outside on the stairway, but taking his ease in the master's room, sitting in the most comfortable chair, scornful as usual. No other boy would have ventured to enter during the master's absence. There was enough light, supplied by a small lamp, not unlike that one in the chapel, to reveal the coloured bindings of books, the pictures and ornaments ; old things dug out of Syrian tombs, rings, bracelets, cinerary urns, statuettes of animal-headed deities, interesting to Jasper because of their classical associations, not because they were suggestive of mysticism ; but the pictures satisfied something more than the classical leaning, and gave a key to character as pictures often will : prints fairly modern, dealing generally with the wild wonders of imaginary architecture, castles upon crags ascending out of surprising forests, a spiral stairway open to the moonlight, breaking off abruptly and on the topmost step a delirious pilgrim tottering ; old altars wreathed with brambles, and a ruined corridor choked with weeds. There were no pictures of women. Only these overwrought scenes of broken castles rising out of stagnant water, or balanced impossibly upon crumbling cliffs with towers and open stairways washed in moonlight. It was not a room of daylight, but of night and the thoughts which come then.

"The kettle is boiling, sir," said Cuthbert. "I thought you would want your tea."

"It is very good of you," the master said sarcastically, but changed his note when he saw the effect of it. Another such remark, and the boy would leave the room and quite possibly throw a stone at the window. "Have you worked out your problem ?" he went on in his best manner, be-

ginning to light another lamp, one to be of use and not an ornament, although he turned the flame low so that corners of the room might be in pleasant darkness.

"Oh yes, sir," came the confident answer. "It was easy with the books. Oh sir, books are grand things!"

"Well, we will have tea. Then you shall teach me science. How much have I taught you these last two years, Orton?" the master asked, almost wistfully.

"Nothing, sir. It's my own fault, though. If you taught what I wanted to learn, and if I might choose my own hours for lessons, it might be different. I work as hard as any boy in the school," said Cuthbert defiantly.

"But not at Latin, Greek, and mathematics, the principal subjects of study."

"I have no taste for them."

"During the hours of preparation you write poetry, I am told?"

"Yes sir," said the boy complacently. "Tragic poetry, and it's not bad. I'm writing a story and a play. The story deals with the fall of Plataea and the Athenian supremacy. It's a grand period," said the boy in a patronising way. "The play is founded on the old tale of Valentine and Orson. I hope to get them all done by the end of the Christmas term."

"It comes to this," said the wondering master, "you are actually engaged in trying to earn a living while you are supposed to be receiving the education which is to enable you to do so. This is a method of confusion, Orton."

"I can teach myself," said the boy gloomily. "The headmaster told me plainly I was the laziest boy he had ever known, and I answered that I'd won more prizes than anyone else in the school. That shut him up. If he had said another word, I should have run at him and kicked him," he muttered.

"Prizes won without work are prizes stolen from others," said Jasper gently, then hurried on to avoid an outbreak,

"In English literature and history no one in the school can approach you."

"Divinity too," added Cuthbert coolly.

"Yes, divinity," said Jasper, looking at his pictures.

Cuthbert was constantly punished for bad behaviour in chapel, for evading the services, sometimes for acts of blasphemy; and yet no one could wrest the prizes for theological knowledge from him, not because he cared for religion, but because the subject came under the head of literature.

"When you go out into the world——" began Jasper, but Cuthbert broke in upon him eagerly, "I'm going to be a writer, sir. Latin, Greek, and mathematics won't be of any use to me. I'm not wasting time now. I'm working at my profession, and trying to improve myself. If I fail as a writer I can always be a clergyman," he said scornfully.

"Orton, you must not speak in that way," said Jasper sternly.

"It's all right, sir. I shan't fail."

The master went to the window, feeling uneasy, drew up the blind, watched the depths of the sky, and muttered as he felt the keen air forcing its way in, "He won't live. He is too dangerous to me and to others. Only seventeen, but he's older than I am. A few more years will see him out. Now Orton," he went on, turning to face the rebel, "let me hear your arguments. You told me you could put science and folk-lore together, and breed some theory about the age of vegetation."

"I said I could prove that the fern survives to remind us that life is a mystery," said Cuthbert.

"Very well, then. Do so."

Cuthbert drew out a crumpled sheet of paper, and began to talk like a professor. Sometimes he stumbled over words, giving them a pronunciation all his own, and the meaning was often obscure; possibly he did not know himself quite what he meant to say, and he wandered astray

into the depths of fern-forests and was lost ; but the sum of his argument was sound for his age, and amounted to this :

The first of all plants, those which flourished during the earliest geologic period, were flowerless : by developing leaves and stems they became ferns, living and growing in the sea out of which all life proceeded : they increased both in size and number to reach their zenith in the Carboniferous Period, when the world was either ocean or fern-forest. There were no grazing animals and no men. The splendid vegetation was useless for the support of mammalian life : anything in the nature of a fern was never edible : it was of no use to the animals, so it came first.

There was a wonderful method in this work of creation. Neither sheep nor cattle, nor even man himself, could have existed in those magnificent and strongly-smelling forests of the Coal Age. The ferns merely succumbed because it was necessary, so that room might be made for man and the beasts he fed on, so that there might be ground where the grasses and the flora and the corn-bearing plants necessary for the new development of life might grow and flourish. Blind chance would not have introduced into the world sheep and goats together with the plants they fed on ; would not, on the eve of man's arrival to the form he now bears, have stocked the forests with those things necessary for his existence, things which had no place during the long reign of the ferns, fruits from the apple to the blackberry and flowers from the rose to the daisy, one order to be of use, the other a pleasure ; would not have removed those giant ferns which were symbols of starvation. And even now the bracken and other ferns which grow high in the woods, or cover the slopes of the hills, and look so green and succulent and make a pretty picture for the eye, remain as they were before man came driving his goats along. They cannot supply the smallest need of man, beast, or insect. They rise in the spring,

grow into forms of beauty, turn yellow, and die down year after year and age after age, untouched and uneaten ; and not a single creature has ever lived amongst them. The ferns have always been ornaments, forming the richest and grandest vegetation that the world has ever known, although men have never looked upon them in their perfection, and they have only justified their existence by their departure from it, and have died so that they might make coal with their remains.

Why then were these forms of vegetation made since they are useless to man and his creatures ? Cuthbert thought he could answer that. Those growths, which were tossed by the currents of that first warm sea, and felt at low tide the pressure of those first soothing mists, were a covering to the rocks—preparations for the great drama were going on, the stage was being set in order, scenery was being made—and they perform that function still, covering and beautifying, lying like a mantle upon moorland and wastes, waving in the depths of the wood, struggling from the crevice in the rock, clinging to decayed timber, hanging over the waterfall, and, finding their perfection of growth in the bog because they love the moisture, remember it, and how they were produced by the sea at the beginning of time : not useless therefore, but beautiful, not a necessity but a luxury, not forgotten, for everyone loves the flowerless plants which were the first things seen when the mists cleared. They are sold from door to door ; they will grow anywhere being so used to the world ; the maidenhair which springs from the wet cliff finds its way into the bridal bouquet, the tree of the same name flourishes under water, the polypodies wither in dry weather : they cannot get away from the memory of the primeval sea, and they seem to long for its wash again. They go into the wreaths which mean sadness, softening that as they softened the rocks. The ferns have their place. The world would be less green without them.

"This is good prose for a boy, but it is not argument," said Jasper. "You have not made your point."

"I have come to it," said Cuthbert. He stood beneath the shade of the lamp, his face hot, his eyes darker than usual, and hurried to his conclusion:

The ferns were allowed to survive, not because of their beauty alone, for if fossils did not lie the finer forms were lost. One-half of that dense vegetation which made the world a mass of greenstuff was composed of ferns, and of these but a few remained, to remind men that ferns were the first of living things, that they existed alone when that horror of great mystery called chaos brooded, that they met the spirit of life passing over the face of the waters, hiding from the fierce sun then, and trembling at the convulsion which broke off a continent to form the moon, seeing the wonders of the universe lighten one by one: to convince him that there was a time when the earth did not bring forth grass, nor fruit-tree, nor pot-herb, but only those things which were pleasant to the eye: to show him that the beginning and present are linked together by many a form of life, that the darkness and light are both alike, and the darkness may return again and life return to the sea whence it came: to tell him of the beginning one mystery, the present another mystery, the future another, and his own life the greatest mystery of all, and of the mysteries of space which beat upon his life as they beat upon chaos, altering him, bending him, drifting him here and there, guiding him by what is called coincidence, and, if he is worth it, leading him into some fair haven at last.

"It is not clear," said the master deeply. "There is no sound argument. A scientist would blow it all away. But it is good."

"Have you ever dug up ferns, sir?" asked Cuthbert eagerly. "Go into the brake and try to dig up a root of bracken. You can't do it. The roots are round and

black. They are like limbs, and they snap and bleed. Ferns have enormous roots, sir."

Jasper was leaning by the window. Buildings were all round except on one side, and here the sky was clear. The prospect was moorland, and the faint sky seemed to reach the ground with a shock. Never had he felt so drawn to the boy who was at that period of his life the master. Jasper knew it then. Cuthbert was putting something into him, reaching out a root, snake-like, and forcing it into his soul, causing him to see the lamp, his gift, flickering before the altar, giving light a new and different meaning. If he had been the slave of that lamp, he was now the slave of the boy. This tenderness could not last, the alliance would soon be broken, but on that night a new and subtle influence was at work.

"What is the date, Orton?"

"May the tenth, sir."

"The year is 1887," said Jasper deliberately. "The date seems to me important. I confess I don't know why. When were you born?"

"On December the fourteenth, 1870, sir. It was a jolly cold winter, I believe, and Paris was besieged by the Prussians."

"Yes, you are good at history," said Jasper absently. "What time were you born?"

"I don't know, sir, but I could find out."

"Do so. I have a fancy to know. Orton, don't work too hard."

It was a strange thing to say to a boy who never worked at all, but the master spoke without sarcasm. He was feeling that influence still, and was looking out into the darkness towards the brake, then a blot of blackness, where the stems of bracken would be still bleeding, and perhaps in some way suffering; and he felt sorry he had swung his stick so carelessly.

"I must get on, sir. I want to get through a lot of writing this term."

Not listening, this impertinence was lost upon the master. "Come to the window, Orton," he said.

The boy came, and both looked out into the blackness which belonged to the world and the illuminated sky which covered it.

"I have an impression of something there, I should say which ought to be there, between the corner of the building and those larches."

"Scotch fir, you mean," said Cuthbert. "There is nothing to be seen, sir."

"I am glad there is nothing. Still, open the window."

"What for, sir?"

"Do as I tell you," said Jasper sharply. "Open it."

"All right," said the boy gloomily, and obeyed.

"It is nearly chapel time," said the master, half turning towards the door. Then he returned, placed a hand firmly upon Cuthbert's shoulder, gripped it, and stood still.

"Orton," he said presently. "I should like to know the future. Not all of it, but a glimpse here and there. I should like to know what you will be doing twenty years hence."

"I shall be a big man by then, sir, or I shall be dead," said Cuthbert.

The master removed his hand and went to put on his surplice, as he was a member of the choir; but a voice called him, and he returned to the room in his white robe and silken hood, with his rich beard glowing in the lamp-light.

"The new moon, sir. It has just appeared round the corner of the school-house."

CHAPTER II

AMATORY

SMALL matters live long : a child ill-treated by a man with a cigar in his mouth will, at certain moments of life years afterwards, be troubled by the smell of tobacco smoke. These memories persist sometimes as a warning that more ill-treatment, either by man or Nature, is not far away. While Cuthbert stood in a weedy garden, waiting for one who represented to him the whole of magic and religion, he thought, not of her, but of architecture and landscape. Fifteen periods, each twelve months long, stretched between him and his school-days : his age was thirty-two, he had forgotten, not what he had learnt at school, for that was little, but the days of that life, and the master who had been drawn to him more than once by affection, and as often had turned against him in hatred. Cuthbert had forgotten, and yet, as he stood face to face with the luxuriant growth in that garden of the valley, and saw the wet fronds of ferns, long grasses, herbs, and fruit-trees, he thought of ruined castles and broken turret-stairs winding to the heights from stagnant water and black forests ; and did not know he was thinking of the pictures on the walls of Jasper's room.

The cottage was a poor place, the garden a tangle of weeds because its tenant was too poor to have it seen to and could not afford the time himself. He was only an artist without inspiration, one who could draw a tree as Nature

made it and suggest no thought beyond it, and the world does not ask for men like him, and looks the other way when he is hungry. He was ill, and she who represented magic and religion had come to visit him, very possibly to leave a basket ; and Cuthbert waited outside, too sensitive to enter, for he was like that artist in the cottage and would not acknowledge it. He, too, had a stall in the market-place, and sold little because he offered what was not wanted and dear at any price. The inspiration which had visited him during those school-days seemed to have departed. He would not own he had driven it away. Those wild dreams had become strangers ; they could not find the way to him. His mind was torpid, and he had made it so with low passion and drunkenness. At school he had rebelled, had refused to be taught, had insisted on his own course ; but in the world rebellion is useless, education had been forced upon him, and his masters were not the philosophers but the dancing dervishes of low living.

The last ten years, which should have been among the most fruitful, had yielded nothing. They had been spent in a prison, a place of lichen, where there was no landscape and no background except that of the storm-cloud, where no moss was green, a great distance from the clear hill-top, the voice of the river, and the religious muttering of the wood. That had been Cuthbert's stone-age, the period of his education, the school of mysticism ; and now he was out of it, for Ethel had come and touched his chains and made them fall, had put the watchers to sleep, and brought him out through gate after gate, each opening before her, for that was her magic ; and when they had come out into the open space, into the brake where the bracken grew, where clear water dashed through washing the dirt away, she had bound him again, more tightly than ever, but the chains were golden ones, light as gossamers, and were not upon his hands and feet, where enemies could get at them and remove them, but wound about his heart, for they were mystic

chains; and the religion which she gave him was herself.

And there she was coming from the porch, only a girl, only Ethel: not beautiful, but smiling and radiant: his landscape, his background to all the loveliness that the world knew, his science and his mysticism: she was the root-growth which made the frond and the yellow seed also which when shaken casts a spell.

"Have I been long?" she said.

"Yes," he answered. "Fifteen years": for the pictures were still in his memory, the ruined altars troubled him, and he remembered their connection with his youth.

"Then a little bird has been singing, or you have trodden on something powerful."

"Better than treading on the mud," he answered.

"Don't talk of that. Forget it," she said brightly. "Think of the present, the future, but let the past go. For that is dead."

"No," said Cuthbert gloomily. "It is alive and trying always to struggle back. It is stronger than the present: it makes a deeper impression. It is the future which is dead, because the breath of life has not reached it yet. Tomorrow is more mysterious to me than the day of my birth."

"When it comes how commonplace it will be," laughed Ethel. "You will get up, bow seven times to the sun, or abuse the rain as the case may be. You will work, read, write your letters, take a walk. Perhaps you will even visit me."

"Is that commonplace? Every time I see you the rainbow has a colour added," said Cuthbert, with a tinge of melancholy as if conscious that the most beautiful growth would turn yellow some time, and the rose could not last beyond its day. As a lover he canonised what was trivial, but he remained the spectator of love rather than the reveller in it. Joy spread the feast, but melancholy kept him back from it, saying, "One has been invited, but not you."

"We are the only ones to see these new colours," she said. "If only others could see them too, how real they would be to us."

"They are real," he insisted. "Nothing that is made can die."

"It can change."

"It remains the same whatever form it takes. True love is like a rose, fragrant and beautiful in its flower, retaining in a withered state its odour, holding in its root the power of restoring the bloom again. If love can come to an end, death ends all."

They were walking along a road which was straight and appeared to have no end, but there were trees far ahead, and here stood a sign-post pointing to another road; and this was well. The end was a change of direction merely.

"Cuthbert," she said, folding her arm in his, "do you suppose we had to meet, that it was necessary for some reason which we don't understand?"

"I think so," he answered.

"That you and I were born for no other purpose but to come together, love, and go on somewhere else?"

"I believe we have come from somewhere else together. We grew out of the same sea, Ethel. We have come along side by side, even when we could not see each other. We have a long way to go yet. It is the only explanation of perfect love."

"Suppose we had missed each other?" she murmured.

"Impossible," said Cuthbert strongly. "The influences free in space about our tiny world are almighty. If we had been at opposite ends of the earth, something would have called me to you, what is known as coincidence would have brought us together, a sign would have been given."

"Do we live only for love? Is work nothing?" she said.

"Nothing in comparison. What is the work of a poet or philosopher? Nothing but an attempt to lift others to

his own level. What is the motive of the man who goes about doing good, sacrificing himself for others? It is love, and a desire to teach it. The greatest works are only shadows cast by love, and if the shadows are immortal, what of the love which caused them?"

"But Nature," cried Ethel joyously. "Do we not live for that? You do, for you can scarcely pass a shrub without caressing its leaves, and your little garden is made up of ferns and running water."

"I tear them sometimes," said Cuthbert gloomily. "It is brutal, for they are so weak: like ourselves. Sensitive to every breath of wind: as we are. I can strip off the fronds, crush them in my hand, break the stem, leave nothing. I am allowed to do so, I have the privilege; the plant is helpless before me; I am its tyrant holding the power of life and death over it. And over me——"

"Myself," she whispered sweetly. "I have the privilege."

"Over us," he said, "for we are two from one root; over us are the things that rule, and they are like ourselves a part of Nature, her children possibly, but older than ourselves, and entitled therefore to the largest share of the Father's property."

"Who are they, Cuthbert?"

"Laws we call them. Influences we call them: they pass like the scythe through grass. We do not know when they are approaching, or when they have gone, and often do not feel them when they come, unless they crush and break and leave nothing. Do we live for Nature, Ethel? Do we live for each other and ourselves? Nothing that has a name, or must not be named, or that can form an idea and bring an image to the mind, can be outside the mother of life whose womb is the world we live in. The ancient Egyptians who, in spite of their priesthood, came nearer to the heart of religion than any other race before or since, called Nature Isis, and they did well to cover her face with a veil. No man living or dead has ever lifted it. No

man has ever found her heart. No man has ever received an answer to his question when he asks why she devours her own children. When shall we be old enough to do without her? Ah, Ethel, you have shown me your heart, but you cannot show me hers."

"By the same way, Cuthbert," she murmured.

"You are with me, and a part of me. Nature is near and beyond my reach. She can come to me with flower for face, and mosses for feet, and garments made of fern-fronds, or she may send a dream for kindness, one cold star for a sign, a flash of spiritual insight to keep me sane, but she is not with me. She remains at an eternity's distance, while she is around, behind, above."

"But we love, Cuthbert. We have learnt our lesson. We have conquered, and our future is assured," she said triumphantly.

"It is not," came the unhappy answer. "What we have in us now is not life. It is the mark of life only. We are still vegetable growths. We may be split up into new forms at almost any hour. There is no real individuality in us: we are perfect beings imperfectly constructed, we change our views, do not know what we want, aspire one time to what we despised at another. Even our passionate love will turn into hatred as violent. Every man harbours in himself all the angels and all the devils, and between them he is torn into a multitude of personalities. The saint has a fornicator in him somewhere. The drunkard——"

"He has a dignity and nobleness in him, and they will appear at last," she broke in. "You are thinking of those ten years, boy dear. I have put them into ten vaults, and sealed each one with my own heart. There they shall lie without hope of resurrection, and memory shall not snatch them out."

"One has escaped, Ethel. It came back to me and greeted me with a name which was once my own. When I heard it I forgot you."

"Oh no, no! You did not forget," she cried piteously.

"I did forget you. I woke in the morning, very early, and said, 'Drunkard, John Mason the drunkard, you're a scoundrel.'"

They had left the road and were crossing fields, bare and open, and around them lapwings were ascending and descending, crying pitifully.

"I got up, saw your letter which helps the sun to rise, but it did not bring back my memory. You had gone out of my mind."

"Oh Cuthbert!" she said faintly.

"I went out, and as I walked I said, 'Drunkard and scoundrel! You have evil designs upon some woman.'"

"It was only a bad dream, Cuthbert."

"Presently I came to your home, saw you, and remembered; and then that year went back into its vault."

"You had not forgotten. I knew it," she said.

"I had forgotten, but you had not. You led me. Your heart was like a lantern to my night."

"What made you like that?" she cried. "I will cast such a spell upon that vault that the year shall not walk again."

"I took the name of John Mason once, when I sank to the depths of which I have told you, desiring for the sake of others not to stain my own. When I awoke that morning the past had come back in the shape of another man, and I was occupied for the time by the brute that I was in the life that must live because I made it."

"Not a brute. Only that part which lives when a man is young, and dies when he loves. He is dead really, and just seemed to you to live in the dream. Now you shall dream of me alone."

They passed on without speaking much, rather frightened because of all the cloudy space around, and of their habit of connecting Nature with themselves. The painted world was a landscape of inarticulate realities. All things

were visible in mass, not individually. One leaf might be selected, handled, pondered over, warmed with joy, or damped with sorrow, fixed upon the brain—a step aside, and where was that leaf then? It was gone, search would not reveal it, eyes would not recognise it because it was the same as others, it was part of the mass, it had no individuality, its real presence was a mystery; and yet to the eye of Nature that leaf was possibly unlike all others. endowed with a personality of its own by some deep principle of life which had marked its surface with peculiar veins, jagged its edges with a form unlike others, given it a certain texture or shade of colour not found elsewhere. Such matters were beyond human sight and intellect. Nature, lashing Cuthbert into a passion for her, left him blind, seeing more than most and yet so little, seeing the mystery of so many million leaves and grass-blades lost among others, and lost as he was in the immensity of distance between the beginning and the present, between the earth and nearest star, seeing only the helplessness of a small man shivering at the prospect of those distances, crushed by those influences which passed unseen. Nothing then seemed real but melancholy. The golden air was a counterfeit, the sunset of the stuff that a soap-bubble is made of. Nature was not then a mother but a brawling actress, and the landscape and the sky were scene-cloths; and behind an awful Someone laughing in an awful darkness.

All this was premonition, although useless and therefore cruel. Cuthbert could not understand, nor was it his fault that the message conveyed no meaning. The influences of Nature tell nothing clearly: they simply strike and stun, then ironically mock the man whose mind is torpid, whose body is like a log, because he could not see what was set before him. He is blinded, then told to read, and tortured when he cannot.

“Ethel,” he said, as they were about to part. She stood by the door, and dark bushes made her background. “There

is something which you have not given me, and that is your happiness."

"Cuthbert," she answered, with the same sweet smile which he was to take away with him if he could. "There is one thing which you will not let me give you, and that is my happiness."

They were to be married at the end of the year, upon Cuthbert's birthday—it was to be her present to him—during the time when Nature is at full strength, for in summer-time she rests, and in December she fights. Winds and waters are in full roar then, work is at high pressure, preparations must be hurried forward for the throwing open of the landscape on May day. Life is mighty then, for it resists and struggles free again: autumn having thrown the old leaves upon the soil to do their duty, winter is studding all the branches with brown points and placing a little crown-bud of triumph upon every plant. The dust of August is the death of things, and in the slime of December all are born.

It was October and Cuthbert walked in Wales, taking a holiday between sea and mountains, hearing every day from Ethel, who was also from home wandering in another part with her relations. He was more settled in his mind, even happy for it was a kind of pleasure to be parted from Ethel, since he could form a better image of her in her absence and could paint his pictures of the next glad meeting. The sea air suited him, gave him a good colour and fine health. Every day he walked long distances, climbing the stony hills bronzed with the rusty red of withering fern, striding along the winding roads, always alone and yet in good company, for he had many healthy thoughts and talked about them as he walked along.

There was not a dark cloud to trouble him. True he had done little so far; he was not the great writer he had thought to be, but that was because of the life he had led. The inspiration which had come to him as a boy would return

when he was married to Ethel. She would bring it back : she who had done so much could do more. She would draw out of him all the knowledge which his own ignorance could not find.

The last day of Cuthbert's holiday arrived, wet and misty in the morning before the sun appeared in a glorious haze. It was Wednesday, and as Cuthbert was dressing the idle thought occurred that had he been a school-boy he would have a half-holiday before him upon which he could do as he liked, enter the brake and wander among the bracken. It had been pleasant to disregard authority, and to treat the law as a dead letter ; and even now he wished to find a place where it was forbidden to walk, so that he might go there ; and a master who might order him out and threaten to report him.

All the day he wandered, going far, and towards evening descended the crag of Penmaenmawr in the direction of the town of that name, seeing only a few sheep but none of his fellow-creatures, and at last he reached the road where it made a sharp bend between the base of the mountain and the sea. He was tired, almost exhausted, and in that condition all things appeared more clearly defined and stronger in colour, and the atmosphere was charged with that feeling of mystery which comes so often to the weary and sensitive body at the close of day ; and the wash of the sea sent its murmur into the pass and met the wind which crossed there ; and the two elements seemed to converse together upon magic and religion.

Cuthbert seated himself upon a stone with the whole mountain to lean against and listened. The sounds were pleasant : he had never felt more contented in his mind. Ethel was right : those ten years had been locked safely into graves, and as for the years before them, they were more than buried, for they had become as though they had never been. The sun was falling and the evening rising, and between the two was a gentle hum of music. The red bracken was

drooping. A gust of wind crossed, answered below by a soothing rush of pebbles, and then a shock as a big wave struck the cliff; and then a figure came along without a sound.

A cloak was wound about it like a sacrificial robe, and one white hand held it in its place. The other hand was swinging, Cuthbert noticed. Two clear eyes looked at him. The figure was erect, but signs of autumn were not wanting, for the rich beard had thinned and was growing white, the face was more ascetic, as if materialism had lost its last grip, and the spirit was now assertive. They recognised one another, but Cuthbert did not rise, and the master did not stop, though he hesitated and then went on with light in both his eyes and his head no lower than it had been.

It seemed to have become dark and cold so suddenly. The master had taken sun, light, and warmth away with him, and dropped a haunting shadow as he passed. Cuthbert sprang up and hurried to the bend. The road was empty, but rocks jutted out ahead: he had not the courage to see what was beyond them. It was not the body of Jasper Ramrige he had seen, for the body would have stopped and spoken; and if the spirit, how strange for it to carry such impediments as clothes, boots stained with mud, and the cloak with a brown smear near the shoulder, and to present the body as it would be then, not as Cuthbert remembered it.

Then he awoke and stood laughing at the folly of being frightened by coincidence. It was no strange thing that he should be in that pass between the mountain and the sea, nor was it more unnatural that he should find Jasper there spending a holiday in good air. And yet that pause, those eyes upon him, that kind of shudder. Why had he not stayed to ask how the world and his old pupil were going on together? Had he come with a message which he could not deliver, or had he delivered it by merely coming?

“An old man now. He liked me in his heart,” said Cuthbert. “He came upon me by chance, and did not dare to speak because he was afraid of me: afraid to hear I had done badly.” He added, almost fiercely, “Perhaps he knows.”

A few steps brought him round the rocks where he could see the road descending towards heather-painted hills and the town of Penmaenmawr; and the master was there ascending, coming back ashamed of his weakness, but his head was down as if he too was tired of carrying something in his mind too heavy for it. Cuthbert ran back, climbed the rocks, fell flat upon the grass, covering himself with bracken, no longer full of blood, but dry and dusty like the master’s beard, and there he hid himself for shame. He could not stand upon the road and say, “Of those fifteen years I have lost ten.”

When Cuthbert looked up at last he was not alone. The master had gone, but there came a bent thing rising from the sea, a two-horned thread of silver like a bow prepared to drive an arrow through him, a piece of light too young to make a beam, but old enough for memories; and this filament like a fairy’s skiff seemed to ride on a wave and be tossed to the sky, and to fade before the last strong flush with which the day departed. It was the new moon assurgent.

The master and Ethel! What had he to do with her, the being he had never seen, whose very existence he could not guess at? Cuthbert he knew, and Cuthbert he was bound to by a cord let down from heaven. All that he had been told to do was done unwittingly, for he was not to know he had been told. The lamp before the altar suggests a mystery, but the mystery is not in the lamp: it is in the mind of him who looks at the lamp. Jasper could not say, “I have a message for you, Orton,” for his own body walking through the pass was the message, and their meeting and their parting saw it given.

But not received. One mind was dumb, the other deaf, and both were ignorant. It was pathetic that the work should be in vain, that Nature's well-meant effort should be wasted. Jasper and Cuthbert had been two bodies in space passing, one to influence the other for some purpose incomprehensible to both. Perhaps the human mind was once more sensitive: perhaps its time has not come yet, and more progress must be made before it can read the language of those letters of the law.

Before December Cuthbert had forgotten. On the eve of his birthday he had no thought for that strange meeting with the master: on the birthday itself, when he should have been married, he saw no rocky pass between sea and mountain, and no figure passing through. All that he saw was a garden, blacker than a garden underground except in one direction where one thin shaft of light descended from a window set in ivy, a shaft to him all stinking with strong drugs; and for the rest a silence except in the blackest part where owls were screaming. He did not think, could not, for he was out of the world, ascending to find some pity and a God dispensing it, or a Mother, surely more merciful than any father; and descending, plunging into the bushes and large ferns to find her, and catching in his hands a toad and snails instead. In earth and space that same mocking silence, and all things helpless, hopeless, waiting to be crushed: all the world upheaved, for the Father and the Mother were dead, and there was nothing left but madness.

"Here," he cried, staggering among the trees, thinking he had heard at last an answer. "Give me something, a flower or a leaf, nothing heavy, to lay upon her lips. There is time to-night. To-morrow she may be altered."

"Cuthbert!" the sad voice called. "Cuthbert Orton!"

"Where? I have looked for you among the trees and behind the bushes. Come out, if you can face your creatures. Are you ashamed of a man who cannot alter the

shape of one of your blades of grass ? Maker and Nature, coward and tyrant, they are afraid. They can only slink in the dark and murder. One makes that the other may kill. They are gods of passion."

The shaft of light was cut off, and there was nothing but blackness : and the mournful voice was still calling, " Cuthbert Orton ! "

He was found on the grass. There was no appeal from the sentence, no court to hear it, no life to be spared when there was so much of it unwanted, no breath for Ethel who had been dragged away resisting to the end, throttled by the unnatural Mother who was Cuthbert's mother also, and the mother of the ferns.

" There are ten of you ! Ten years escaped, ten devils ! "

" No. "

" There are two of you ! Two murdering tyrants ! "

" I am alone, " called a pitiful voice ; and it was Ethel's father, who was a victim too.

CHAPTER III

LICENTIOUS

SEVEN years had gone since what was best in Ethel had been dissolved into mist too fine to be visible. Cuthbert had cast back again, had become material, larger to the eye but much less spiritual. That illness, which the master had dimly foreseen and had prophesied would be fatal, came, was fought against for three years, was conquered ; and from the bed, which in a sense was that of death, a new man arose, apparently younger, more handsome, no longer pale and thin, but of a good size, ruddy, a strong man whose shoulders when he walked were square, but he was not Cuthbert who had loved Nature, he was the new cell broken off from the old one ; and the poetry had departed from him. The lyrical days were over : to tell the truth, they had never existed save as reflected images like trees and clouds cast upon still waters. The savage prose of his works depicted Nature indeed, but in a wanton form : the sunrise lighting up licentiousness and passion—the art of landscape was still with him—the sweet woods as the haunts of vice, the bracken-covered hills for intrigue.

The boy who had rebelled against discipline was the father of the man in revolt against Nature. She was his servant, and he would treat her as such. He had practised the religion of love, and had found nothing except a form of art ; and all other religions were simply hero-worship, the conventions were symbols and trade-marks. Life was

like a Grecian temple, made up of cold straight lines, and if the world was a garden around the temple there was nothing in it but illusion. The masked figures were trying to play at spring-tide, and doing it sadly because the background was continually illuminated with lightning. Indifference followed, artificial excitement, and a longing to forget what had happened yesterday. The chanting in the temple turned to a drinking-song, and the eyes of the worshippers, or revellers, as they moved about the garden, were abysmal depths of unhealthy passion.

Cuthbert refused to accept his lot, forgetting that when a man mutinies he must be put in chains. If he was a man, he was also a brute; and so he led the double life: one time the animal bound by no law, feeding on the food which gratified it, prowling in search of prey, knowing no religion: at another time the scholar, the thinker at work in his study pointing out to other men their faults and follies, accusing them of being animals. The effort failed since the two lives could not be ruled apart. While the thinker worked the beast entered with its unmorality; and, while the animal prowled, the thinker went with it giving it a touch of humanism.

Cuthbert's power of attracting others remained, yet he seemed friendless, for he would not accept those who tried to reach him. He frightened them with his absolute independence, which seemed to them rather fearful. From the depths of his landscape he looked out upon his fellow-creatures and regarded them as a lower order of creation. The fall was bound to come. That life could not continue in a state where discipline must be maintained. The man of forty who thought himself so wise was still a schoolboy, still an idler, and he had then to learn or not at all.

Coincidence did it: every happening is coincidence, the law of blind chance is uppermost. Is it coincidence which causes one planet to approach another, or is there a law behind? Influences, stronger than the sun, guide a man,

bring him to another of his species, lead them to work out the purpose for which they were brought together. There is no chance in this. A mere caprice, thought Cuthbert, tempted him to take a day-trip somewhere. A small thing, but the cause of it, like the result, was a matter of mystery: it had its origin in something great, it led to education. It opened the way back to school and term-time.

It happened that the day was a holiday, and the train was crowded. Cuthbert could only find standing-room, leaning against a window, jostled by others, and forced to mutter a few words of apology to a young woman in the corner when he was forced against her knees.

She looked up and smiled, then fell to playing with a long white glove, while Cuthbert watched her movements. She was tall and sinuous, her hair a crisp black, a tangle of natural curls, and her skin very dark, almost swarthy, but not too much so, richly dark and tinted. She was attractive, her white clothes made her more so; she was desirable, she was good food. Cuthbert was leaning towards her, his knees touching hers sometimes, not seeing her face but feeling the warmth of her blood, discerning the odour of her hair and the perfume of her clothing, and playing in his fancy with her hands and feet which were marvellously small. Ethel was hardly a memory then, and yet he had been mad for her and had lost his senses when she died; and now she was nothing, at the moment he did not want her, if she had appeared he might not have turned his eyes from those black curls and sensuous lineaments.

The girl appeared indifferent. Around them passed the idle chatter of good-humoured holiday-makers. The train jolted, those who were standing swayed, and as they recovered Cuthbert felt a pressure upon his hand, a touch light and mocking, an invitation, an act of consent: enough to send a thrill of passion through him.

He looked down, saw the outline of a sinuous limb beneath white clothing, saw tiny maddening fingers catch these light draperies at the knee and lift them slightly, saw an ankle which was to be bought and sold appearing like a Venus out of foam, a shoe too trifling for such things as weights and measures ; and this brushed against his leg once and twice with an eager passion which made him gasp, and the pretty snake-like limb was quiet again.

They were hidden in the corner as a large man standing had his back towards them, unable to see himself, and cutting them off from others. The sweet and poisoned honey did its work. Cuthbert put his hand down to her lap, took the end of the glove, she pulled at it with a little movement of vexation, he worked his way along it, reached her hand and bent his fingers in a soft warm palm ; and it seemed to him there was nothing else in life much better.

The girl did not mind, for this was to her the way of living. She welcomed Cuthbert's hand and twisted her fingers about his until he could see the dots of shining nails and the supple wrist where the pulse was throbbing fast. This was not magic, not the charm of Ethel in the golden light, but it was religion, the worshipping of Circe of the flesh, the cult of rapturous moments. The girl was fascinating. So is the kingfisher as it cuts a streak of gorgeous blue above the stream flying home to a stinking hole of fish-bones.

They talked in whispers, foolish words, monosyllables and exclamations, sounds merely, nothing sensible.

"Where are you going ? "

"Anywhere. Tired of life."

"What's your name ? "

"Celia."

"Let's get out."

"What for ? I'm all right."

"Come out with me when the train stops,"

"I like your face. I like your hair,"

"Then come with me."

She bent her head lower, put a finger of his into her mouth, bit it, played with it, wetted it with a soft tongue. Sensuous ecstasy ! Cuthbert had become one of the Circean swine.

They got out when the train stopped, Cuthbert almost dragging the lithe creature from the seat in his eagerness to have her. They found themselves in country, wild, broken with rocks, among sheep and birds, and all things unmoral and lawless, where the virtues seemed too dismal and the sky was nothing but a sheet let down to cover them. Bracken was high there and abundant : they hid themselves in it. They even talked a little, though it was not necessary, since one was male, the other female. What more was there to learn ?

"Who are you ? Where have you come from ?" he asked.

"They called me a nigger at home. Girls call me nigger here. They hate me ; they are jealous—they have nothing like this."

She drew off a shoe, slipped her foot into his hand, as small and fragile as a new-born thing.

"I have never seen such feet : nor such beauty. It is a luxury to look at you."

"Men love me. They say I'm black. I know I'm beautiful."

"You are not black. It is a shadow across pink skin. It is transparent, a veil thrown over you by the sun."

"You talk queer, don't you ?" she laughed, and rubbed her face against his, murmuring, "It's soft. I like to feel it, and your neck, along here where the hair stops growing. I love you, for you are gentle, a great golden gentle thing. What a lot of girls you must have loved."

"None like you," he said easily.

There was no remembrance, no thought of the open fields where he had walked with Ethel, no memory of his solemn

vows, of her answer, or even of herself ; no recollection of the mystic meeting with the master : nothing but this form of living, this shape of happiness which seemed beautiful, as the funereal urn is beautiful, painted all round with half-clad women and containing a few grey ashes once a man.

"Where are you going ?" she asked, when it was getting late and time to leave those bruised and crumpled ferns. "I am coming with you. I will. I will."

"You cannot," he said, tired and satisfied.

"Then you must come with me. Come, come, don't talk. I'll give you my feet to play with, I will make a big baby of you, I'll be your mother and warm you in my arms. Look at them, child !"

Here was at least one way of meeting Nature : struggling to the heart of her by passion. The Mother had taken away what had once, and only seven years ago, seemed the one life necessary, though it was not so as she knew. This girl was giving all she had and taking nothing : not then, but in the end how much ? Nature knew : she let him go to learn. Wisdom is the sediment precipitated by experience. Nature knows the way.

"I whispered to myself, 'That man, that golden man, strong and tall, I shall love him, I will tell him so,' " she said. "You big strong men when you see my feet, your hands begin to shake. But I hate most of 'em, with their black hair, I hate the smell of the brutes. You are like a woman with your skin and eyes" ; and she came at him writhing and laughing with passion.

This man had loved Ethel.

Such fire could not burn long clearly. A week they spent together, then the feet disappeared, a tail seemed to come, and Cuthbert knew he was the traveller who had been caught in the whirlpool and driven upon the island which was covered with bones. The beauty had looked real, the music had sounded sweet, and both were false. Celia lived on blood. She would have handsome men rather than

others for her food, but ugly ones rather than none. She could not control her passions, nor yet her tongue.

He left her, and she followed, found, and curled herself about him weeping piteously. "I love you, love you. The others are nothing. I must be with you, I cannot live without you. It was my jealousy, because I was afraid of losing you, cruel, cold, indifferent man. I could have killed you because I love you so."

It was no use resisting, for she clung to him, and he could not move without dragging her along; and having been away from her for a time she seemed beautiful again, and those feet maddened him as at first: so he gave way and consented, left his home and work, and went to another place with this dark-skinned daughter of Nature whom he had chosen to comfort him, whom he was ready to cherish and keep alive rather than the memory of fair-haired Ethel, and the solemn creed which he had recited to her: Celia the man-eater rather than the spirit of Ethel, because one was visible and the other was not.

They went to a town where Cuthbert heard music sometimes, saw women with tired earnest faces working honestly submitting to the law, and men plodding to and fro, like patient beasts of burden obeying Nature. The sights and sounds touched and made him restless. He observed how people glanced at Celia when they were out together: women scornfully, men coarsely. They knew all about her: the life she had chosen, or been forced into, or appointed to, was written upon her. They knew all about him too. Those passing eyes were eloquent—that handsome couple walking together, thinking they were going along the streets this way and that for exercise, but actually walking hand in hand towards perdition.

They went into the country where every deed is public, and Cuthbert was astonished to find himself shunned and insulted because Celia had that mark upon her. There seemed to be no place for them together. They became

wanderers seeking to escape from the burden they had laid upon each other. Cuthbert departed to escape from Celia, yet took her with him, and she clung to him like a ruling passion or a scar upon the flesh, hateful but impossible to leave behind, with the pathos of a woman seeking for a home.

"Marry me," she prayed. "Do marry me. You say you love me, you think me beautiful. A wife can only be a woman. What more do you want?"

None of the other things entered Cuthbert's mind as she hung to him like the snake about Laocoön. A wife with one idea, one set of phrases, a woman in form only; while there were women still like Ethel who could forget the flesh in that sweet comradeship which builds up life and the success of it: women who would not be sneered at but admired, women to be envied, not for feet and hands nor for any particular colouring of the skin, but for the virtues and those tender words which only a woman knows: women who would say, 'We will work together, rise and go forward together,' women whose kiss would have the dew of heaven upon it.

While life with Celia was malarial like life in the heat of the sun over poisonous vegetation and steaming mud-flats, life of a wormwood kind. Nothing but sensation and oblivion. The life of exhausted sleep among sensual perfumes and the dream of those who extend their vision by the use of opium; and yet to Cuthbert it was good enough, not always, not often, but at certain moments when he could have cried, "the blood conquers," and during those moments he was ready to yield, to speak the word and do the deed which would have joined him for life and death to this singer on the island of dry bones.

Skilfully the quadroon fed that fire, neglecting nothing, keeping her temper out of sight as best she could, nursing the man, lulling him, keeping him asleep, singing her weird songs with her face near his and those tiny fingers paddling his neck, half-suffocating him with perfumed hair. If he

tried to rise, she drew him down again. When he would have resisted she flung herself upon him with the constant cry, "I love you, love you. What more could any man want?"

At last Cuthbert rose early and went out into the morning among the mists, and watched the golden light upon the trees, the wet ferns shaking, and heard the birds, and saw a butterfly crushed upon the pathway. He stood and said, "So I have found you again. Here is the Mother dressing for the day, and she is holy, good, and pure. Ethel is here, Ethel is alive, but she has a veil upon her face."

He walked a long distance, then returned and said, "Celia, it is all over. You are ruining me, I have spent my money, done no work, and we must part."

He went, but she followed, and he could not baffle her. She had a right to him since he had taken her into his life and made a wife of her in all but name. They had sworn devotion to each other with old lies, and such things bind as firmly as a vow. She found him in his lodgings and flung herself upon him in the same wild way: "Cuthbert, you are mine. Cruel brute to torture me when I love you so. You will kill me if you leave me, you will break my heart. Look at my eyes—they are sore with crying. I will kill myself and you, I hate you and I love you, I am mad for you. Keep me and love me, marry me, eat me. Let me put you to sleep with my eyes near yours."

The fatal face did its work once more, those burning eyes were irresistible, and Cuthbert went back to the slumber which would lead to the sleep of death; and no way seemed open to the woods and rivers and the bracken on the hills.

"I will marry her," he said at last. "I will tell her so to-night."

But when the time came he could not. There was a weight upon his tongue suppressing it. To-morrow he would speak, at sunset: he would make an evening sacrifice of himself. It seemed a duty, a necessity even. There might

be a kind of love born of the union, not the real thing but something strong enough to awake an inspiration. Already he felt easier in his mind. It was a sign, he thought, of the awakening.

One walk before he spoke that word : a little exercise to breathe good air and get some life back ; and then he would sit with Celia, speak calmly, and teach her lessons of another life. She insisted on coming with him, afraid that he might leave her. Together they went out. She looked beautiful when the tigress in her was at rest : tall and slender, graceful in every movement, light-footed, swaying, clinging. There was no woman on those streets her match, and that dark skin was like the evening coming on.

They were in Buxton town. The streets were crowded because it was Sunday. The atmosphere was close and humid without wind, and the leaves on the trees looked heavy like fruit. They came to a church, the bells of which were ringing for evensong, turned from it, passed along a road which was almost deserted. It brought to a theatre where a play was announced during the forthcoming week, a lurid thing dealing with women and murder : Cuthbert passed the poster with a shiver, Celia clinging to his arm, walking so lightly that she appeared to be blown along. They entered a wide road. It led into a residential quarter.

Trees before the houses were hanging over the walls and darkening the footways. Two dogs were quarrelling, two lovers strolled along, and behind them a quiet and gentle figure noticing nothing, with its head down, and a cloak wrapped round its shoulders ; and it advanced steadily without looking about, but lifting up its face, revealing a white beard very long, and quiet kind eyes before it passed without a pause and vanished round a corner with its head held down again.

" Who's that ? " asked Celia, looking at her companion who had broken away and was standing and staring back.

" You saw him—the old man with the long white beard ? "

"Of course I saw him. He grinned at me," she said coarsely.

"He did not know me. He made no sign as he did before. He does not come back," Cuthbert muttered.

"Was he your father?"

"Celia! Go home."

"I won't."

"Go home," he repeated. "I must be by myself. Here, take my purse."

He left her and ran, out of the town and into the country, and did not rest until he found himself in fields. The master had come to him again, as a sign and a warning, brought to him for that purpose, compelled to pass his pupil without even recognising him, merely acting as an unconscious messenger and as the dumb minister of the influences upon them. Cuthbert saw it then. One thing could save him, open his eyes, complete his education, and that one thing had happened. The first message had been, "Sorrow is coming upon you. Be strong or you will fail," and he had missed it. And now the message was, "Escape before destruction comes upon you." This warning he would not miss: it was too clear. It was the voice of Nature.

THE STORY

CHAPTER I

DREAMY

CHILDREN of the last century were allowed to play with boxes curiously shaped and prettily lacquered. Upon lifting the lid they would be mystified at seeing another box within, and inside that another, and so on, box within box, each smaller than the last, until the tiny one in the centre was reached ; and this would perhaps contain some treasure, a jewel, a ring, or something precious for affection's sake such as a lock of hair. In any case, all that the big outer box really contained was the little thing in the centre, something unimportant in size and weight, but of more value than all the wood and lacquer which encompassed it.

Children of the present century may also play this game.

Travellers who saw the outside of our big box for the first time called it rough, wet, and stony ; and in a storm it did look somewhat knocked about, but when the sun fell slanting the lacquer was bright in spite of splinters and ragged edges, for it was an old box and had been handed on from one family to another until royalty claimed it, and the king permitted his brother to play with it, and the brother's son had it for a toy until he became a king himself, and then he gave it to his son ; but, although the box does belong to royalty, anyone may open it and look inside ; nor is there any likelihood of the king's son ordering it to be removed and put away among other curiosities, because the man who is to remove Dartmoor must have a large spade.

So much for the outer box. The second had a queer pattern, something after the style of an old china plate: rustic bridges, toy trees, a river which had never learnt how to take short cuts since it ran half a mile to cover a distance of two hundred yards, large rocks which had been whitened to show the way in the dark, a road which was no wiser than the river, and was at times in danger of mingling with it, an old sign-post which kept its knowledge to itself, and one fair thing, a lane of greenstuff bringing out into a fine wild moor, a prickly place to walk in for it contained thickets of brambles and large furze-bushes; perilous also, for the feet sank fast through the vivid mosses which were merely cushions upon bogs. The casket containing these things was known as Rockside.

The third box was plain and straightforward. A cleave had been scooped a long time ago, and quite recently as time goes a shower of houses had fallen. At least it appeared so from a peep inside, for all the little dwelling-places were mixed together untidily, some clinging to the sides of the cleave, others getting in the way of the road, one staring at the back of another, just as they had dropped there. This was the village of Summerland which was little honoured, not allowed to be a separate parish, but joined by the big word ecclesiastical to another seven miles away by stony lanes. There were water-works in this box, hurrying leats, wheels humming out of sight, forge-fires gasping, and hammers ringing changes on hot iron. It was a musical box. So was the next, though it bore the name of garden, but was surely a place of business, a manufacturing centre producing confectionery, where factory girls sang at their work, dusty dealers in farina and syrups, while gentlemen of their acquaintance went roistering. Limes and honeysuckles were wet and dripping with ambrosial stickiness—Nature seemed too lavish—and the drones were only human after all. This box was filled with the windy murmur of bees: something like a gale in the early morning,

and towards evening subsiding. The box was in two compartments, proved so by two gates, squat things made of iron, and so low that for a long-legged person who wore no skirts it was easier to step over than to open them, since the iron catch of each had a trick of sticking. But the garden was in common, both to right and left of the line of division which was a pathway of flat stones, some rounded at one end and bearing no mark except the scratches of nailed boots because the inscriptions were underneath, "Beneath this stone," and so on: the words were unseen, the dates worn out like the bodies which those stones had covered long ago. Who would rob a grave made yesterday? But a little moss and much forgetfulness make all things common; and the tombstone is a useful shape for pathways.

The next box, made of different materials and much younger than Dartmoor and Rockside, and the same age as the bee-garden, though it looked older, was small in comparison, and was indeed a box since it was made up of four sides and a lid, could be opened or closed, had lock and key; and, apart from such matters as chimneys and windows, did bear some outward resemblance in shape—size not being contemplated—to those convenient articles of travel in which ladies transfer curiosities of personal adornment from one place to another. Compared with the others it was also ridiculous in size, but the garden-box required plenty of space, the flowers would else have been crushed and there might have been no room for the bales of pollen. It was an old box for a building, if young to the rocks: its sides or walls had stood upright for perhaps a matter of a thousand years, not long when one considers how Januaries and Junes become intermingled while a man works, but a fair period for mud. Chopped straw, pebbles, and a mess of clay: these things began, the builder and the sunshine finished, and the house would be a pretty place when the clay was red. The idea of a mud hut was borrowed doubt-

less from the bee, and, let architecture say what it will, mud walls are the best: they see the cathedrals crumbling and the stone circles falling, they are warm and dry. Old Æschylus was not wrong when he swelled into a pompous panegyric to "thirsty Dust, near-dwelling brother of Mud." With thatch on the top and stones below the mud would last: its enemies were damp and rats, and who can exclude them for ever?

One thing might be noticed, a small matter, proving man to be an imitative animal. There were walls hard by not made of cob, recent walls of solid stone: each of these was crested on the top with thatch and some with crinkled iron; and wherefore? Because it was the custom. Cob walls had to be protected to keep the damp off: for the same reason cob walls had to be whitewashed. When the builders had created their walls of stone they needlessly whitewashed them and placed thatch upon them. The originality of these workmen became a thing to search for.

One more box, the last little one which contained the treasure hidden out of sight, and so well hidden sometimes as to become forgotten: the withered flower, the sole remaining pearl of a much-loved necklet, the talisman from a rifled grave, a consecrated trifle in gold or ivory made holy by the touch of love—for we are all of that race—something of pretty shape or colour. This box shall be opened tenderly: a pleasant odour, a breath of warm air, a white room, very small as befitted the central box, and all wrapped in white like cotton-wool the treasure upon a bed: not a withered flower but a Rose in bloom, not an old pearl but a Margaret glowing. A child by the face and the hair which was lying round about, but there was more than one might think: much was hidden by white wrappings. There was a foot some distance away, and lines near the eyes not made in childhood. More than twenty years had been required to paint that picture of Margaret Rose Vipont.

Who has not in some such small and hitherto silent bed-chamber marked the entry of a large social and conceited humble-bee? One came then, after a prayerful hovering at the window, passed forward peeling processional music like a small winged organ, turned aside, descended, seeing a bed and knowing by the scent that flowers grew there. The music became triumphant, a march of Apis : devotional, a hymn to Flora ; and then a somewhat vulgar and a greedy guzzling-muttering as the big bee wobbled across white mountains towards that crevassed region of red lips where by all the tokens of sweet breath honey was abundant.

Margaret stirred. She heard the humming, the presence of the bee made her almost conscious, but she was loved by the god who drowned poor Palinurus, and he caught her in his arms, enticed her with a story, kissed her on both eyes again. The trumpets sounded a second time—the bee-organ had blown the first blast—and there were footsteps in the garden which had changed. It looked a square enclosure, very sunny and full of flowers : with seats made of turf and a place for bowls : there were knotted beds and mounds crowned with arbors, and small trees clipped into shapes of birds and animals.

Nothing seemed unreal to Margaret. It was her aunt's garden, she could recognise the flowers, and if it was not modern all the better. Even the man walking there appeared no stranger although she was irritated to find him dressed in black. He would not wear bright colours until she and all the world were kind. Never, Master Giles, never, thought the dreamer. Poet without favour or patronage, what chance have you? He was walking towards the bogs and furze-bushes of Rockside, anxious to escape from company, for the garden was filling fast. Successful men were there and he could not bear them. The country was full of singing-birds and there was no room in the nest for him.

More music but poor stuff, broken and despondent, yet

the merry folk were not drawn by that. They had come to delight in the flimsy chariots drawn by strange beasts, to see the liveries and armour, the moving statues, baboons in foolish jackets, and all the acting of the Masque. It was very artificial, yet it pleased ; but wisdom was there as well.

" Love wisely, Mistress Alice," a grave voice was saying between the topiary peacocks. " Not one much older than yourself : it leads to sadness. Not a handsome wandering poet : it ends in madness."

" The philosophy of a white head fails with a woman. It is the young heart that guides."

" The young eyes, mistress."

" Ever the way, master."

" It is ill for a maid to love a melancholy face or a white beard."

" There is no wisdom in a heart of love : it is a simple thing. You must humour it lest it die. I would rather a foolish passion than a dead heart. 'Tis a tyrant but I love it, for it makes me a queen and gives me a kingdom. It makes me a goddess and gives me a world."

Here was Master Giles returning, his hat beneath his arm : he walked firmly, and pausing at the end of the avenue of yew set his eyes towards the house. The Masque was over. The last drugged bear had stumbled off the scene, the pipes were silent, and the liveries were dulled by twilight. Candle-light was below and one blue star above. Through the sea-green garden a lady passed, her white hands gleaming, the light in her eyes that light which shines from the heart, her hair quite golden. Margaret had seen that lady in a glass. She was seeking all that she desired, stealing two centuries as Eve stole apples : and he, the poet, bent to sing the one strong song of all the world. There was no Masque here, neither acting nor dancing, and if the music was broken it was sweet : two voices of love and all there ever was in poetry : two personalities and one passion beside the hedge of yew.

"Let it last," the dreamer sighed; but it could not, for out of the twilight came the white head and forced itself between them. The poet raised her hand. She turned away, the head of knowledge frightened her, so white and severe. He thrust out his roll of poetry, but she did not take it. He tore it into fragments, cast them at her feet, himself upon them; and the candles went out, Mistress Alice became white roses; and a voice was calling at the door, "Sacharissa, my darling, the sunshine is waiting for you."

Margaret was awake, the dream had departed. A brown face appeared at the door: brown fingers held out a coin, a letter, a bunch of daisies, and the curious chirping voice went on: "The daisies were lying beside the wall, wet as if they had been dipped in the leat, and their stems are fastened together by green cotton, as usual, Crispiana of the curly hair. I reasoned with myself, 'Daisies, Theodore, cannot be meant for you. Daisies and you are not full cousins. Sir Galahad of the Green Cotton is on the quest.' So I picked them up."

They were large moon-daisies, wild chrysanthemums, like birds with white pinions fluttering lightly from golden bodies. There were not more than a dozen, and they were surrounded with maidenhair gathered from the damp clefts of Rockside.

"The tip of one finger came against something hard," went on the dry voice. "Small and round, said the finger-tip. A coin, said the brain. Somewhat worn, said the finger-tip: antique, said the brain. These finger-tips have made only one mistake—when they released their hold of that rare China vase."

A few mornings back the speaker had discovered a flint arrow-head in precisely the same spot. "These things are worked to the surface. Worms and moles throw them up," he said. But Margaret guessed that daisies and old Roman coin had dropped upon the grass together.

"Returning, I encountered lame Mercury hobbling along

with the aid of an ash-caduceus, and he handed me a penny-worth of literature for you. Letters sting, Melissa. Take care how you handle it. There is your Aunt Hortensia already in the garden fantastically dressed with flowers."

"I am awake, father," said the girl.

"Awake with her eyes shut!"

"Stupid with dreams."

"Flowers," twittered the dry voice. "You should not have so many in your chamber: lilac, syringa, bog-myrtles; and the breeze coming in at the window passes over them, carries their perfume to a certain rosebud among noses, and suffocates it with sweetness. Phyllis of the green branches, the garden has been humming like a small revolving wheel for six good hours, and your window has been glowing, and the priceless golden sun has been burning while you have dreamed among the flowers. I smell the odour of coffee in the refectory, fragrant beans of Arabia. Come, Sacharissa!"

Theodore Vipont departed without any noise for all his chirping chatter which was in a manner professional. He was an antiquary, a terror to those who dwelt in cottages, the persecutor of those who made excavations. His eager feet were as certain as vulture's wings whenever any relic was discovered. Men would be accosted in lanes and questioned as to coins and pottery. Not a farm-house within twenty miles was safe from that lean figure and bird-like head: the chirping tongue and ten infallible finger-tips opened secrets and darkest cupboards. Nothing could be hidden from those moistureless eyes. When a cottage door was closed against him he would force it open had he once caught the smell of an old oak-chest or pewter on the other side. He would fling himself upon such things and refuse to be separated from them. People would get angry, but the antiquary knew how to turn aside their wrath with a pleasantry or some old riddle which made their heads ache.

After thirty years' work as clerk in a warehouse release

for the small man came by way of goodwill and legal process. One Ephraim Sims bequeathed to his nephew James five thousand pounds, one half of his fortune: the other half went to his good niece Jane. Money changed the manner of Jimmy's living. It also changed his name. The signature Jim Sims became obsolete: the antiquary, happy and free, sought in crypts and graveyards for a brand-new name. Stone slabs and brasses offered many a resounding title containing last letters of the alphabet and a fine flavour of the past: one such, Quintin Quivil, tempted him, but Margaret would not have it. "Who would be James when he might be Quintin?" her father murmured; and the girl answered, "Who would squint when he can see straight?" This search for a name among the cypresses did not please Miss Margaret.

One day the dry little man entered a quiet cold building which was a brooding place of bishops. He went there to escape from modernism carried to excess: an election was taking place, a brass band split the atmosphere into scarlet prisms, men were talking very wildly, the god of truth had his neck broken; and James Sims went into the cathedral which was of no account upon that day. Through a world of stone he wandered and reached a dark niche full of holy dust and a sacred spider or two; and here was an altar surrounded with carved work and upon it reclined a figure in canonicals with a pathetic face—zealots had hammered his nose flat—staring into cobwebs, and the one stone ear remaining was open towards the choir and fretted by four centuries of magnificats; and the man in the flesh looked at the stone one, muttering, "A bishop, a spiritual peer who had his deer-forest once, who would cut off a poacher's right hand with all serenity. Where are your own hands, my lord Non-Placet? Your stone arms are stumps, your stone mitre is much the worse for Puritans, the fingers that you blessed with are less than claw-prints of birds in the dust. Here I perceive a name: Theodore Vipont. Come, my lord,

shall we exchange? And here! Why, the right hand itself, broken off, wanting the two fingers of benediction but otherwise complete, huddled beneath a rigid fold of cope like a draggled sparrow under the edge of the roof. Allow me, my lord! We are not permitted to have a conscience in these matters. My lord, your hand!"

Taking the stone relic he forced it into the baggy pocket which no antiquary can afford to be without, and there it stuck like a wedge in wood and thumped his leg after the manner of a tolling bell as he went out into the four winds of electioneering tempest. James Sims had entered the cathedral: as Theodore Vipont he came out; and the stone bishop was none the worse for being robbed of his name and hand.

Margaret remarked that her new surname sounded vicious, but accepted it. An objection came from her aunt, who was content to be called Jane Sims, feeling that it suited her: whereas Hortensia Vipont was a signature which used up ink, and made her think of a newly discovered botanical species, especially so when her brother, in his passion for titles, would add the adjectives *gracilis*, *spectabilis*, *floribunda*, with others less complimentary when she became cross after much weed-pulling; for Hortensia *exaltata*, as her brother fairly called her when the fortune was divided, had long ago discovered that best of human pleasures, the planting of a garden. Hence her new name. As for her niece, *Rosa singularis*, she would not change the names which her mother had given her, although she had to submit to Sacharissa and Melissa, and all the other syllables of affection with which her father pelted her. Her mother had been removed by one of those November winds which darkened the oak-woods with brown showers of leaves—it was a pity, needless destruction again, because her husband and daughter required her—and although Theodore might say pityingly, "She was but a child in the matter of china: she could not tell Leeds from Lowestoft," he missed her;

there was a corner in his dusty mind, not filled with holy webs and spiders but with her, and he would often go out early to pick a flower or two, if there were none a few berries or a bunch of foliage, for "the missis"—no grandiloquence there, no Theodore and Theodosia, but James and Mary—to put beside her plate at breakfast time. But the wind would come along, cousin-german of that November blast, tugging at the little tribute in his hand, and he would lose it, murmuring, "Old oak never appealed to her, and pewter she abhorred."

It's a mysterious world about sunrise, and few see it: birds and insects trespass and feed then, and in the distressing way of things those which have just eaten are themselves condemned to fill the bellies of others: yet it is not day, just as the wind-time of twilight is not night. Only those are out who must be: the rest lie abed and struggle. Consciousness returns slowly, accompanied by pageants blending history with modern life, dragging the future sometimes out of its shell and rubbing its yolk into the brain. Dreams they call this stuff which the day begins with. Margaret in her struggle to get her eyes open had seen the Masque, the young girl, the pale poet, the white wise man. Her self had added something, her own existence, her mind, brain, heart, could not be excluded from the scene in the garden, for she had been after all the principal character though only a looker-on, and these dead folk had played by the things she lived on.

"He says submit," she murmured, when she had read the letter. "Don't struggle, go into the wind, for if you turn against it you will walk in a circle and come out finally in that place where the wind would have taken you. He believes in giving way."

She was sitting on the bed, the open letter in one hand, the moon-daisies in the other. There was no connection between them, for the letter-writer had reached far beyond the time of life which does such tricks of love with posies.

Yet Margaret held them both, for they were influences, one for the heart, the other for the mind : the letter was joined to the dream, the wild flowers to her life.

“ But the other old man, the one beside the hedge—how black the yew-trees were while I was waking !—he did not say submit. Fight against your heart. Conquer that. I believe he was right.” Then she began to rub her eyes and to cry, “ I want to wake up. I have been asleep all my life.”

Margaret went to the window. She looked nervous and very delicate, much too weak to fight any of those blasts which came so often over Rockside. Even at the window she was shaken like a flower-head by the gentle breeze, and every small sound reached her : a heron flapping behind the house, the sluggish winding of a water-wheel, a fly buzzing in a spider’s web from a distant corner of the garden. They all reached her, and she responded like an instrument which receives impressions because it has to.

There was still some mist remaining, lengthening into a bar nebuly where the top of the moor cut blue notches out of the sky, diffused matter representing the earliest stage in the formation of a planet, the only mystery remaining of the dawn ; and to that the girl responded, for in a hollow beyond that cloud stuff was a building which loneliness had condemned to emptiness ; and it was called Windwhistle. It was a place oppressed by shadows, the sun could not get there, and in the evening and the morning it was blotted out by mist.

Margaret drew away from the window, not with a start, but slowly, moving back, keeping her eyes fixed upon the diamond-shaped panes of glass until they melted together into a kind of sunset glow. “ I feel he is going to wake me up,” she said. “ The dream was to prepare me. This is the day he comes to Windwhistle, and I was thinking of him. He is so real.”

She glanced at some books at the head of her bed. They should not have been there.

“ And the master says submit.”

She took the bunch of daisies and tried to draw one out. It would not come—that cotton had been tied around with ardour—so she broke it off, and the stem seemed to break with the noise of a string snapping ; and then at last she laughed quite naturally.

“ It is foolish to think so much of simple love. But perhaps we know ourselves that way.”

So she pulled off a petal and said ashamedly, “ He will love me.”

“ My dear Hortensia,” came a chirp from the garden, “ I am firmly persuaded that these worms of ours have a sense of humour.”

Margaret went on uprooting tiny petals one by one until one or two remained upon the golden pad like nervous fly-wings.

“ If I hurt you, daisy, you must not hate me.”

“ These worms,” sang on the voice below, “ they erect dead leaves all about the flower-beds like so many tombstones. That, I conceive, is dry humour. And if you cut a lonely worm in half you straightway provide him with a partner, which to my mind suggests a ready wit. If you could only find a worm’s face, little sister, you would, I am sure, encounter a very cheerful countenance.”

There was only a single petal left. “ It is a large one,” said Margaret.

She split it delicately with a finger-nail, making two out of one, in order that she might get the answer which seemed best, or force it, as the daisy refused to give it by fair play.

“ He will. He must,” said Margaret.

CHAPTER II

PENSIVE

THE double cottage occupied by the Viponts was named Cob Court. It had been Moor View, though it didn't look on the moor : it had also been The Firs, although the only trees of that species grew in the adjoining burying-ground ; and once upon a time it had been known as Hill View, which was an appropriate name, but was altered for this reason :

The owner employed an illiterate stonemason to inscribe the name upon the granite gate-posts, Hill to be cut upon the one, and View upon the other. By an unhappy slip, common to so many lapidary inscriptions where it is not easy to delete a letter or correct an error, the stonemason rendered the vowel in Hill as an *e*. Perhaps the work was done on a Monday morning, and he had not completely shaken off memories of the previous night's sermon : possibly it was done with intention, but as an old inhabitant, who knew the man well, had declared he was never known to make another joke, this would appear unlikely. The mistake could not be corrected, and soon afterwards the owner of the cottage, who lived far away, was astonished to receive a letter from one Jabez Bone threatening an action for slander. He owned the hill and fields opposite, a very pretty little property too, he mentioned, and if it was going to be called out of its name in such a very public and offensive manner, not to dwell upon the insinuation regarding himself as the master of the place, he should certainly expect to be awarded

damages. The end of the matter was that the stone posts were rooted up, iron ones were substituted, the cottage was renamed The Firs, and Jabez Bone was left to continue his search for a missing sense of humour.

When the Viponts came into possession Views and Firs were done away, and the decree of Theodore went forth that the cottage should henceforth be known as Cob Court. "Our pride," said he, "shall be leavened with humility. Kings occupy courts of stone. We dwell in a court of mud." Miss Hortensia would have liked a more fanciful name for the division which she occupied, such as the Pixy House, but her brother trampled her under foot at the mere suggestion, saying, "Your mind, little sister, has hardly yet emerged from the pound a week stage. You would be bucolic in your nomenclature. You would call our home The Gables, and give the number, although there are none. Such a title as The Inebriated Gardener by Jane Sims would not strike you unpleasantly. The prostitution of art is the easiest of all vices. I require for you the dignity of the antique as implied by the title of the Lady Hortensia of Cob Court."

The cottages were one in appearance, but each had its own entrance, nor was it possible to enter one from the other. That occupied by Hortensia was by far the smaller. She said it consisted of two rooms: her brother maintained there were six: Polly Pedrack the domestic, referred to by Theodore as the damosel, put the number at four. It should not have been a difficult matter to decide, but nothing short of a definition of the word room acceptable to all parties could have settled it. According to Polly, a room was a place where you "did something," that is to say where you worked, ate, slept: consequently the smaller cottage consisted of living-room, kitchen, and two bedrooms. Theodore sought to expose the weakness of this argument. If the damosel chose to make a fire in the garden and cook the dinner there, would the garden there-

upon become a room by the mere fact that she was performing domestic duties in it? Polly could only meet such subtlety by the remark that master's tongue passed all understanding. Theodore developed his argument: a room, he explained, was a space enclosed within walls, not necessarily rectangular, nor circular, nor even octangular, simply an enclosed space, entry to which was obtained by a door: nor was a window required: nor was the circumference of the space within the walls of any account: even if it was possible to stand upon the threshold and with an outstretched hand to scrabble upon the wall opposite, the truth of his definition would not be disturbed. Furthermore, he continued, the cottage had six windows: it was easy to prove that no room possessed more than one. Therefore the number of the rooms must be six.

Theodore would have dismissed the case without calling upon Hortensia to reply, but she insisted upon her right to answer. A room, she maintained, was a place where a person of moderate height and width could stand erect with arms outstretched, and not be incommoded by timber on the head and plaster at the finger tips: any enclosed space which failed to come within this definition was not a room but a cupboard. A kitchen, she added, was also no room but a domestic office like a coal-shed; and when, as in her case, it had to be entered by means of a steep flight of steps which twisted first to the right and then to the left, it ceased to be even a domestic office and became a cellar. Not that Hortensia was grumbling. Her brother was too assertive, she thought, and it was good for him to be opposed sometimes. Her living-room, she admitted, was a very elegant apartment, twenty feet long and eight wide, though miserably lighted by a single window, and at one end was a cupboard, not five feet square, which made her dining-room: she had used the word square for want of a better, but as a matter of fact the shape of this cupboard could not be described by any rule of geometry: the architect had

allowed it to get quite out of his control : there seemed to be a dozen walls, it was a nightmare of boundaries, and a different one disturbed her with every mouthful of food. It would be insulting a noble science to call that place a room. Upstairs there was her bedroom, where it was at least possible to keep the walls off, but the one occupied by Polly much resembled a shell about a snail, and as for what was known as the spare bedroom a small single bed filled it, and even so a guest would have been compelled to sleep with his head out of the window and his feet in the landing. Therefore Hortensia claimed she possessed two rooms, and as for the rest she lived in cupboards.

Nobody agreed with her. Margaret was too sleepy and full of her own music ; while Theodore discovered fallacy after fallacy, and even Polly Pedrack crossed the floor when she heard her own kitchen dismissed as a domestic office, and condemned as a cellar, that kitchen which was the only room in the house of the slightest influence, even if there was a risk of breaking her leg and a certainty of bumping her head while descending to it. The problem remained insoluble. According to Hortensia there were two rooms, one cellar, and three cupboards ; Polly arrived at the result of four rooms and two cupboards, her mistress insisting upon having her meals in the living-room, and as nothing was " done " in the dining-room, it ceased automatically to be a room and became a cupboard ; while Theodore asserted there were six rooms and no cupboards. He annoyed his sister sometimes by telling her that the house required some.

Cob Court the greater was spacious in comparison, with its five large rooms, two smaller ones, the same number of kitchens, and various outbuildings. There would have been no accommodation for Hortensia because the place was choked with all the ancient furniture and other stuff collected so greedily by Theodore : besides, he did not like the idea of having his sister to dwell with him. They would always have been in each other's way : near relations were

less liable to quarrel when they had a partition-wall between them : she didn't like his antiques, and he took no interest in her bulbs and tubers. They did not even eat together. Polly did the work of both houses and carried smoking dishes to and fro, using either kitchen, but preferring her own because it was free from "master's smelly things," and there was less chance of being astonished by a handful of bones or a few old flints when she opened the tea-canister.

In any case Hortensia would have declined living with her brother for a reason which had nothing to do with him and was unknown to him. She was afraid of her niece. It is possible that women as a rule do not understand each other : it is certain that the ordinary matter-of-fact woman is repelled by the one who is mystically inclined. Hortensia often shuddered at the mere sight of Margaret. She hated the thought of it because she loved the girl, and would have made a sacrifice for her ; yet when her niece sometimes touched her while walking in the garden of an evening, or when Margaret looked down upon her with sleepy eyes from her bed-chamber in the morning, Hortensia would shrink. Not that there was any mystery about Margaret that either of them was conscious of. It was a weakness, nothing more, perhaps also a suggestion of a second being, another personality beside her, not Margaret, but another without any of Margaret's sweetness. They had nothing in common, this quiet little lady of fifty wrapped up in her garden and the young girl who looked so pretty sometimes, so nervous always, and terrified by harsh sounds, wedded to her music, dreaming, trembling, rubbing her eyes as if she wanted to clear the mist out of them and see those mysteries which had been suggested to her. They were as far apart as women could be ; and yet Hortensia was the only one to be afraid of Margaret. She had confessed to herself, "I could not sleep in the same house with her. I should be afraid she might come to my room in the night." Imagina-

tion carried her no further; she scolded herself for letting it carry her so far. Whether she feared the girl might murder her in the night, or transform herself like Melusina, or merely terrify her, Hortensia could not say. She only told herself she was not to speak of this fear to anyone.

Life at Cob Court was not the sluggish thing that it looked. Theodore was on his feet all day, fussing about trifles in the house, trotting up and down the garden, kicking the big stones over in the hope of finding some old relic underneath, or rambling about the country poking his head into cottages. After dark he read old reviews or chirped cheerfully at Margaret, never noticing any change in her, except that she had a trick of growing prettier; but when the girl had gone to bed, he often wandered from room to room with a lamp, if not actually looking for "the missis," at least thinking of her. He would not have been surprised to find her, sitting upright in one of those stiff Chippendale chairs, shaking her head at him and saying, "James, you have been buying more china and we haven't paid the rent." It was only when Margaret was asleep he seemed to feel the presence of his wife, not that her unconsciousness had anything occult in it, but perhaps the child's mind was restless and affected him at that time, between darkness and midnight when most men are susceptible to influences and loneliness becomes a creative power.

As for Margaret her life was music, or had been until recently. She was not so much a composer as a recorder of those sounds which she heard in the garden and during her walks among the fern. She thought it was the voice of Nature singing to her, and if she went on listening season after season the harmonies would be hers and at last she would compose great music. The mistake was natural for a weak and nervous girl. Those melodies reached her ears as if she herself had sung them: they were her own, proceeding out of her personality, she would have heard them

had she been stone-deaf. Her entire being was like a harp-string which had been struck and could not cease vibrating.

She had never been happy, her health was too bad, but until recently she had been satisfied with her lot ; until among the books received by her aunt was one by Cuthbert Orton.

Hortensia looked into it, flung it aside like a poisonous weed, warned her niece against it as the sort of book which would make " a decent person afraid to live or die." Margaret reclaimed it, read a few pages, then went quietly up to her bedroom with the volume in her hand. She had found the mind which was capable of affecting hers. She sent for the other books : they came, and she read until she could quote pages of them. They remained at the head of her bed : in the dead of night sometimes she would take one down, turn to the most morbid parts, delight in some pitiless analysis of the human mind ; and then to sleep again, to dream, and perhaps to wake her father with a scream.

Then began the longing to get her eyes open and to see the hidden forces at work, to get at her own mind and dissect it, to cut it up and pull it about like some botanical specimen to find out what it was made of. Margaret was too serious to regard the experiment as a game, and too weak to suspect danger. Having been told so much she must learn more ; and if there was another being inside her, she must get at this stranger and drag her out. She might discover a genius hidden away in those wonderful depths. Night after night she went on reading, thinking, straining, dreaming : naturally disposed to be morbid, the state increased and with it nervousness, and that idealism of a perfect self which she had set before her in the days when she had never heard of Cuthbert Orton, that perfect creature who would become predominant when the body had been conquered and the mind fully understood. It was a desire to bring out all that was best and brightest in herself by a process of imagina-

tive treatment, which regarded everything as absolutely real and endowed with a personality, just as the ancients believed that every tree was a conscious being, made so by the dryad which possessed it : her own mind was one distinct personality, her brain another. Was it not common knowledge that people were continually struggling with themselves, doing things against their better judgment, hating the evil nature which made them do harm, grateful to the kindly instinct which guided them to do good ?

That Margaret's health should improve while she practised this treatment of concentration upon self was not to be looked for. The first symptom of breaking down appeared in the form of extreme exhaustion after a walk. She returned so tired and weak she could hardly reach her bedroom, but immediately she fell upon the bed reward came by way of trance, visions of landscape, and pleasant sounds of music. The personality of Cuthbert was always there : he was manager of these ceremonies, master of the Masque, it was he who passed these pictures before her eyes and gave her the sensation of perfect rest. The second symptom was a horror of being alone in any vast space. She could not walk upon the moor, or upon any of the roads which overlooked a wide expanse of country. There was no dread of being alone, that she preferred and was happiest when in her own small bedroom, and in the garden she was not afraid for it was surrounded with trees. It was the contemplation of space which terrified her, possibly because it suggested a mystery which she might see, much as some people dread passing through a graveyard by night, afraid of mysteries and incapable of reasoning that if ghosts could be wandering there they could also wander elsewhere. The third symptom was a painful shudder whenever she saw a human being or an animal yawn. This also she could not explain, though the idea was suggested that some being was trying to force its way into freedom by means of the yawning mouth.

A further indication of the disturbed state of her mind, stirred into activity by her own conduct, was bodily restlessness, a longing to get far away from the open spaces, to be hidden in a town where houses on every side would shut out the prospect. While desiring to find herself she was trying to escape from herself. Whether she could hear that music in a town was doubtful, but she might at least find appreciation, perhaps recognition. In that lonely country talents were buried. Her father and aunt were merely astronomical companions, always at a distance, visible, but never approaching. Theodore was the earth, and she a cold moon which had broken apart from his system, far removed and shining upon him. There was a certain amount of attraction but no real sympathy. The only voice which could help her at all, the voice of her one visible friend, the mysterious white figure which walked among the ferns, counselled subjection, resignation, patience: it was not a clear voice, it reached her dully because the speaker was a mystery: she had only spoken to him a few times, and his voice had always sounded unreal, a sort of echo from a shrine, and she hardly knew whether the oracle was true or false. That voice had come into her life suddenly less than a year ago. Margaret was walking in the uphill path between the ferns—great waving growths ten feet high—and beneath the oaks which made a wood upon the tremendous slope of the cleave of Summerland. It was not evening but morning, very early, the time of hope, and all the ferns were wet. The may-bushes were covered with bloom and the world seemed very white: though the trees and ferns were green there was not green enough. Then the voice spoke, but did not frighten her, for it was calm and gentle like the sunrising.

“You see I am old,” it said, and at the same time Margaret saw still more whiteness in the midst of the may-bushes. “I have watched you walking here,” the voice went on. “I was looking down from my secret path, and you could not

see me. I wished to speak to you because I knew you were thinking of the roots."

"What roots?" said Margaret, not in the least afraid of the white figure. A fillet would have looked well around his head, and in his long hands might have been a harp gleaming with silver strings in the gold of the sunrise. He moved like a wandering priest, and white petals seemed to drop from him while he walked.

"The roots of the fern," he answered. "Shall we call them stories?"

Somehow she understood him, for she too was proud, reserved and philosophic like the white figure, and so she answered, "Are they not all alike?"

"In a manner they are. They remain beneath, in the dark, and out of sight. They remind us of things we are not accustomed to see, of phantoms from another state. When they heave out of the earth in a kind of twisted agony we do not like to see them, we are almost afraid, and are anxious to throw a little earth over them. We do not like to watch the struggles of the root, just as we should be sorry to see our own heart beating or our brain throbbing. Yet we like to think of them, for we know that the roots are drawing life out of the soil, as we draw the joy and inspiration of life from old tales."

"I was not thinking of the roots," said Margaret.

"Ah, but you were," he answered. "I have watched your face as you passed between the ferns. Only you did not call them roots. You called them stories."

"No," said Margaret, "I was thinking of myself."

"Are you not a mysterious story?"

"If I am one there must be many; and you have said that all roots are in a manner alike."

"The stories are very few," he answered. "When God made a garden——"

"Ah," she interrupted gently. "Are you not Mr Ramrige of God's Garden?"

"I am known so little by my name," he said.

"They call you the old master."

"Will you also call me master?"

"Yes, gladly," she said.

"When God made the garden of the world," he went on, "it was at first barren, but the seeds had been planted, only a few, and the early wanderers were astonished at the mysterious little growths which sprang about them. Such flowers seemed hardly worth plucking, so they were left till seed-time, and the winds of heaven scattered the seeds broadcast so that the growths increased upon the world, and yet they were the same growths, only the soil which grew them and the atmosphere which surrounded them were different; and people of all nations went on cultivating them, and age followed age of story-makers all seeking to add perfume and beauty, sometimes poison and thorns; but the original tale is there always, and every hybrid among them casts back to its origin in the fern-forest. There has been a wonderful order of poet-gardeners tilling and tending these old plants: the same roots, over them the same sun, around them the same air and rain; but what a mass of bloom from a plant or two!"

"The same wind, master," said Margaret.

"The same, sighing with dreams, singing a ballad, murmuring folk-lore."

"There it is shaking the ferns."

"Carrying the seed to drop into our hands, making us invisible to the world."

"You are right, master," said Margaret. "I was thinking of the roots."

"When life ceases to be a story, a root-growth," he answered her, "then happiness ends. We have cast our seed into the wind, or are doing it now, we have fulfilled the duty for which we were grown, or we must do so: then there is nothing left but what is called death. Well done, tale-makers!" cried the master. "Nothing has escaped you."

He pulled at a green stick of bracken, and the stem came out of the peat ending in a black and charred-like point, and it looked as if he had rooted it up ; but the great roots had not been disturbed. Deep down they went into the obscurity of the earth, and the fern came away where growth touched the root, at the point where the outward life ended and the unrevealed began : the body was in his hand, but the complex source of life was out of sight.

This meeting with the mystic in the wood was no good thing for Margaret. She failed to regard the master as a man, but heard him as a voice which reached her ears not from the midst of the ferns but out of the pages of her favourite books. Jasper was the interpreter of Cuthbert, and in a sense his herald. His message was mistaken, his voice of warning reached that portion of her mind which was already passing beyond control. She saw little of the master and did not require him much because she had the books which contained, she believed, that teaching which he would have impressed upon her ; and she was not to know then that he lived to save her from that teaching, and to warn her of the peril of trying to drag out those roots which must grow to supply life and make up the mystery of existence, but must be left untouched and out of sight.

Margaret never felt surprised. It seemed to her natural when she heard that Cuthbert was coming to Windwhistle. Of course he would come some time : the master was awaiting him. She would see them both walking among the ferns, two bodies and one mind linked together by mystery, and she felt they would work out her destiny for her. She had nothing to do now but submit, resign herself to the antique gambols of her father and the horticultural instincts of her aunt. They would weave a web of happiness for her : she would draw music out of them. The master knew nothing of those books at her bedside, he had never mentioned Cuthbert's name to her, and yet she was sure the one

was coming to Windwhistle because the other was at God's Garden.

She knew the day, even the hour, and she counted and reckoned till she was ill. Great matters were of no importance : trifles became of vast significance. She must see him pass, know what vehicle would carry him : she must see his face : she worried about the colour of his eyes, his complexion, height, attitude. She became so nervous that the buzzing of a fly tormented her ; and so the hours piled up and went by as days, the last night came, and she tossed and moaned all through the dark hours, and at last the morning came, and she slept, then woke, with the dream of two centuries ago. He might have sent her a better dream than that. It was like harsh music at a wedding, unsuitable as if the player was a misanthrope who did not like to see a happiness which he could not join in.

" Angelica, my lovely child ! " said her father, " you are dull to-day. I wish you would leave your music and show a zeal for pewter. I believe you would find happiness in pewter."

It showed how little he was capable of observing her, for Margaret was not dull. She was eager and excited, and most of the evening remained in the front garden trying to restore the yew-hedges and the pathways of her dream, but generally looking along the road, while Theodore remained near trying to cheer her up.

" A stranger, one Peregrine ! " he called at last ; and Margaret hurried to his side. " See, Adelia ! a new being enters the realm of our imagination. There is a romance in strangers."

There was nothing but the figure of a working-man advancing along the middle of the road, a man new to the district but without interest, and Margaret wasted no more glances until her father called again, " Another stranger, Crispiana ! "

A woman hurrying after the man who had disappeared

round the bend of the road. She paused and asked if she was on the right way to Windwhistle.

"As you stand the house is on a line with your left eye," replied Theodore. "It is invisible and will remain so until you are near it, for it stands in a hollow and we are on the mountain side. You will have to make five turnings before you come to it, and my impression is you will require to ask five questions, though I greatly doubt whether you will find five answerers. For the present you will proceed along this road, you will take the second turning to the left, and if your lucky star shines brightly you will then find some other person of whom to inquire."

"Never mind, sir," was the woman's vague answer to the equally vague information; and then she hurried on, while Theodore turned to his daughter to remark, "These strangers are the servants of another stranger. There is old oak in Windwhistle," he said greedily. "Fine black stuff full of worms."

Theodore continued to chirp about the garden or hop to the hedge which separated it from the road, and turn his face, which was as dry as a piece of stale brown bread, to stare along the road. Nobody came for a long time. Margaret still strolled nervously up and down finding it difficult to breathe. There was a good deal of wind and dust was being blown along the road.

"Father," she said suddenly, "I left my book upon the sofa. Get it for me."

Theodore trotted off. A moment later an open carriage passed driven by a fresh-faced boy. Beside him sat a man with a tired face and eyes half-closed; his hair was almost grey. He was leaning forward, his hands were clasped, he looked ill and discontented. Opposite the hedge he turned.

"Euphemia, my darling, I can't find the book," called her father.

"I saw nothing but his eyes," she murmured.

CHAPTER III

POETICAL

DURING that shower of cottages which made Summerland some fell at a distance from Rockside. They splashed indeed all over the place, but many hut-drops had been wiped out and others had dried up : one or two looked as if they might have fallen upon the road and rebounded, rolling and bumping down the steep slope to find rest in a field out of the way of man and beast and rumbling weights on wheels.

One such cottage was the home, or at least the sheltering-place, of Claud Yalland. It had evidently jumped about in an eccentric fashion before settling in the corner of a field, close under the hedge which no doubt had hindered it from rolling any further : some distance from the nearest right of way which was neither road nor lane but a kind of cart-track which carts avoided, and around it spread a bramble-garden which was by no means all brambles. It was a garden also of docks, nettles, goosegrass and groundsel : it was extraordinary how well the groundsel grew there, and the tenant of the cottage, who had also fallen and bounded and rolled about in his life as his little house must have done during the great shower upon Summerland, was proud of his groundsel, declaring it to be the best in the world. The rest of the produce was not quite so fine, although Claud had an idea that his goosegrass possessed adhesive qualities superior to any he had found elsewhere.

Not that he walked much in his weed-patch : he had the

fields and the whole moor beyond to ramble over ; and a maze of lanes behind, very narrow and deserted, twisting all ways, one opening out of another, so that he could walk the whole day and never get far from his home ; and they carried him between steep hedges, the trees of which met overhead and were tied together with honeysuckle-ropes, and into copses of larch and coppices of oak, and across little streams of carillon-water. Claud knew them all and gave them names like another Father Adam : Bluebell-time Lane and Primrose Lane because the spring blooms were earlier there than elsewhere, and Full Moon Lane where the great yellow lamp of the night looked splendid many times a year glowing at the end of a long corridor, and Suicide Lane where he walked when depressed, which was not often, but Nature rose up sometimes and apologised for making him. There was a big oak in this lane and it stretched a long crooked bough across, and the wind made the bough rise and fall with a creaking sound. Claud walked often in these lanes of his, at midday or midnight, such pieces of mechanism as clocks having nothing to do with him, searching for three things, romance, fame, and money, knowing all three were there—possibly all together in the same lane—there were so many, and one day he would come upon them suddenly, for he knew that fortune has a trick of withholding everything for many years, and then stunning a man with the abundance of her favours while he is contemplating throwing a rope round the branch of the oak-tree.

Look at Claud Yalland striding along his lanes during the dead of night, throwing his arms about, reciting Shakespeare, going faster while the words run away with him. Look at him in the cottage cooking his various messes. Happy ? Why, he must have been, seeing that he had refused a position and plenty of money that he might come to this : a little three-roomed hovel poorly furnished, food sometimes, clothes occasionally, and the most congenial of work with him always. Look at him puffing and blowing as he swept

his floor : not often : four times a year. Darning his socks with big clumsy fingers, muttering quaintly, " Christmas Roses ! " or " Ecclesiastical Functions ! " for oaths when the needle drew blood. Washing his under-garments in a small hip-bath. What happiness could there be in this ? The man was free, he was fighting his way along, choosing his own methods, using the srip and staff he had himself selected. That was the secret of his happiness : he could do his own work in his own time and in his own way. He was a poet.

Father Yalland was a man of some lustre in a world of smells. He manufactured varnish, turpentine, oils, and colours, anything that smelt and stuck : he also manufactured two sons, of whom Claud was the younger ; and he was prepared to do his duty by both if both did their duty by him. His duty towards them did not include culture, which was a thing that stank in the nostrils of Father Yalland. Quite unnecessarily he alluded to the fact that he was himself an uneducated man : he knew how to sign his name with flourishes, he could dictate a letter to his secretary, or at least he could give the young woman the radix of his meaning, and it was for her to build up sentences and to spell the words : he could read his newspaper with comments, and he could tot up a row of figures ; and no man who ever wore chain of office in a manufacturing town needed any accomplishment higher. So Henry and Claud were sent to a grammar-school, a cheap one because money was not made to waste upon trifles, and Henry did well, remaining vacant and foolish, learning nothing but writing, reading, and the ordinary rules of arithmetic, without any such pedantic additions as correct spelling, or power of reasoning beyond the " you too " stage. The father felt proud of Henry. Very different was it with Claud. The boy showed signs of intellect, he was praised by his teachers, he won prizes ; and would soon have been at the top of the school had his father not taken him away while the elder

brother was still seething in his own dulness, adding figures in a solemn monotone with the aid of his fingers.

"If you know enough for the business 'tis time you came out of it," said the wise merchant; and when Claud referred to his extreme youth, mentioned a base longing for a better school, and even hinted at a university career, the father found language which showed that he had at least educated himself in a downward sense. "You have plenty of money," said the boy. "Why can't you give me a decent education?"

Father Yalland spoke about ingratitude, prodigal sons, and grey hairs being brought to the grave; dragged the stubborn youth into the reeking atmosphere of oil, thrust him upon a high stool, pushed a pen into his hand, reminded him of the folly of outraging the susceptibilities of a devoted parent, and advised him thus, "The lad who begins by wasting time ends on a rope. If I had been idle when I was a lad there wouldn't have been no Yalland and Sons in this here city of Birmingham to-day. 'Ard work, my lad. That's what made me. 'Ard work will make you too."

This was sound argument, and as it would have been useless to try and convince Father Yalland that a boy cannot work hard at an occupation which he hates, Claud said nothing and honestly did his best to become a respectable man. It was an effort which could not be maintained, and when Henry entered the office Claud ceased to struggle. At the same time his imagination began to burn: it carried him away from the atmosphere of bad smells into the poet's unprofitable paradise; and one bad day his father passing snatched at the sheet of notepaper on which he was engaged and found thereon none of the formulæ of decent business but insane utterances about dewy roses, lovely maidens, and ruddy sunsets, all very good things in their way, but of no account in the world of commerce. Claud flushed, Henry grinned, the father raved; and to shame his son called in a number of assistants and read aloud the poet's work.

There was war that night when father and son came together. Had the merchant been able to reason he would have known that the boy could not help writing what he was pleased to call poetry. The stuff born in him was bound to trickle out. How it had been born in him was a puzzle beyond any man ; and his own ignorance increased the manufacturer's wrath. Claud had disgraced his family, threatened to bring discredit upon the name of Yalland by becoming a "common writing chap": having been offered a splendid if somewhat greasy future, he turned from it and desired the meanness and hunger of a poet's career.

"You never got it from me, nor yet from your mother," the merchant shouted. "You come of sober respectable folk, and you write poetry. Next thing will be drink. Then you'll be taking my money to back 'orses. I'll tell you what it is, Claud: when I go to your poor mother and tell her you've gone to the bad, you her youngest son, she'll never smile again."

"I'm not suited to the business. I told you I wasn't," Claud answered.

"What can a lad want better than a start in varnish?" cried Father Yalland. "Look at 'Enery! Why can't you take after him? 'Enery is the industrious apprentice, and you're the idle one. It's enough to break a man's 'eart to see a lad bent on going to the dogs, and when that boy is 'is son, 'is youngest son, 'tis enough to—I can't find the words, Claud, I can't find 'em."

"There's money to be made in poetry," the boy stammered, too young to know how he was lying.

"Make it then; go and make it," shouted the man of varnish. "If you ain't sorry for yourself in a year's time, and if you don't begin then to take an intelligent interest in turps, I'll subscribe a guinea to some charity."

So the war began: other skirmishes followed, and at last Claud scraped the varnish from his boots, left the establishment of Yalland and Sons, and went out into the world in

the good old poverty-stricken way to find a nest for himself free from bad smells, where he could sit and sing and win himself an audience. In his calmer moments the merchant felt sorry for his son, though he refused to help the prodigal until he should be driven to return, own that he had sinned against the varnish, and his hands were unworthy to smell of turpentine: he was convinced that time would come, ignorant that Claud was afflicted with a malignant growth which could not be cured. The merchant believed in homeopathic remedies: if a child stole jam let him be fed on jam until his soul loathed the stuff. In the same way let Claud be relegated to some subaerial locality, there to live on poetry and feed upon starvation until his spirit should abhor the labour and his body cry out for comforts; and then he would long to set his foot again upon the paths of commerce and desire to attain happiness through the agency of varnish. But as the years went by, and Claud did not return, the merchant was forced to admit that of his two sons one was somehow a madman.

Romance, therefore, had driven Claud into the world, equipped like most poets with nothing at all save a buzzing brain. A poor education, much walking in search of odd jobs, several attempts to sing without much musical accompaniment or the least applause, were the simple factors which made up his personal equation; poverty doubled, plus liberty doubled, equalled Claud plus poetry, Claud minus parents: to represent it algebraically. At the outset he felt very content to dream and loll with his mouth open, trusting that some of life's ripe fruit might drop therein; but, feeling at last a man's strength and a man's passions, he bestirred himself to perform a man's work, or rather a poet's work, which is very simple at the start and merely consists in plucking up a mountain from one place and planting it securely in another; but even in the bee-world of a poet breadstuffs are necessary, and such are not now to be obtained by walking about the country with a

harp and a stock of rhapsodies ; and, as Claud was ashamed to blacken his face, and knew no vulgar songs, his chance of collecting coins became contemptible and one which a performing monkey might have sniffed at. So he was driven to write a letter of business, addressed to Father Yalland, pointing out that even poets had a claim upon the authors of their being, and requesting a sum of money in lieu of a partnership.

His father's reply was typical of a mind in oil. It was manifestly absurd to imagine that a parent suffering from broken heart could be in a position to sign cheques. Thereupon Claud tried his mother, enclosing a specimen of poetry, and succeeded. Even uneducated women have souls capable of being tickled with poetry, and these particular verses, although not printed, were paid for out of all reasonable scale or proportion to their merits : fifty pounds were sent with a request that the head of the house should be kept in ignorance, a considerable sum for a poem which had no pretensions to rank with works less remunerative, such as " Paradise Lost " ; but motherhood most likely had something to do with it.

Half a hundred pounds might sound little to a manufacturer, but it was four times more than wealth to the struggler : an empire may be built up on a ten-pound note. Claud had learnt one lesson : to be practical concerning money. He had also come to realise the joy of poverty, for there is a joy beyond all spending in arranging that little pocketful of silver and copper—not the gold pieces, for they are wrapped away very safely, and there is no need to count them—to shuffle the coins carefully, and to say, " this for rent," and " that for food," and " these coppers for tobacco," and then to discover an independent shilling rolling about for luxuries. Claud had all his money reckoned to the *n*th. His plans were synclinal with his reckoning. Being full of delusions concerning Devonshire, regarding it also as a country of sunshine, he departed in

that direction, dropped into Summerland, found the little cottage in the corner of the field, fitted himself into it at a rental of eighteenpence a week, and there discovered happiness while he warbled like a blackbird, and with very much the bird's reward ; for poetry, it was made known to him, was nothing like so necessary as oils and grease. He was soon forced into prose and collected a few guineas that way.

No less than twenty years were blown over the thatch, removing it bit by bit, and still those fifty pounds were not exhausted ; and nobody had ever heard of Claud Yalland, yet he lived somehow, always on the border line, never advancing, and still happy. Father Yalland was alive, Henry was middle-aged and prosperous, his sons were revelling in turps and taking the place which their uncle should have occupied. Claud had never been back to see them, his mother was dead, all his vulgar sisters were married. Sometimes a letter came from his father full of threats ; the merchant, like many old men when their minds begin to fail, had become miserly, fearful of being robbed, and he was afraid his younger son might appear at any time and attempt his life—possibly conscience was working there—while Henry encouraged him, having no desire to see Claud returning to take a half-share in the business. So the poor old man was constrained by son and terror to write to Claud and declare that he would shoot him if he came near the house, and the son smiled sadly at the letters and destroyed them. He had no desire to revisit the place of smells, nor was there money to waste upon a railway journey ; but he understood what was taking place in the merchant's mind and possibly was none too sorry, because Father Yalland deserved to suffer a little for having in some wonderful way brought a man into the world with a poet's curse upon him.

This big man with the bushy black beard and head nearly bald did not look like a poet, nor was he one : he was rather

a man impelled to imitate poets—and to think of love. The rub was there, poor Claud, but it didn't make him miserable. He thought upon the ideal state, and the idea alone was sufficient. Imagination, as a form of anticipation, gave him nearly as much pleasure as realisation. Margaret had been the inspiration of many a sonnet; she had even brought him a half-guinea or two. Soon after the Viponts came to Summerland, Claud, passing the garden, saw Margaret, and after that day his lanes were much neglected. Acquaintanceship followed, long talks with Theodore, gifts to him of fossils, chats with Hortensia, and in his pocket sometimes a root of fern which she desired, and monosyllables with Margaret; not much else. Claud would often pass that way at night and toss over the hedge a bunch of wild flowers with any little picked-up trifle, always dreading discovery and being compelled to own that Margaret was an inspiration. He did not want her to find out who had tossed those posies into the garden. It was a matter between his own queer heart and himself. It did not concern Margaret in the least.

Those twenty years finished one volume of his life, and another was opened by the coming of a far greater poet than himself, in act and word, but not in deed. Claud, like Margaret, met the great white figure in the wood; and the voice came to him as to her, but less suddenly, for it was time of autumn and the figure was not hidden by the may in bloom.

"If this had been my father!" Claud murmured as the master, white and shaggy, accosted him, desiring to know something of his life and art, catechising him in the Socratic manner with subtle questions.

"Your name, Claud, has a sound of history," said the master. "Yet I do not like it, for it signifies a man who is lame, one who must lean upon a crutch or rely upon another if he would make good progress. Do not give a child the name of Job and hint to him of sorrow. Call him

Richard and make him strong. A Richard shall come out of you to conquer the Claud. Walk a little way, and let me ask you what the office of a poet is."

Claud was thrilling. This was what he had longed for, companionship of a mind, one of those good things of the imagination with which he had surrounded himself. He sought wisdom with which to answer the pedagogue of Nature, but found himself confronted by a barrier set up by that presence, and all the wisdom that he required was upon the other side of the barrier. He realised then that he was a fellow of the simpler sort.

"A poet should appeal to that which is best," he answered presently. "He should put questions to the heart, and sing of the truth. The greatest truth is the power of love. I think he should try always to strike the note of hope. He is not to make any effort to reach the ideal state——"

"So he will fail," broke in the master gently. "Friend, you are still in unconsciousness. You would expose the sensitive film of your brain upon this scene, then develop what has been recorded into an idyll of the hills, dragging into your picture the god Hope by the very hair of his head. Better to bite in your figures with the acid called sorrow: by taking the broken column, a faded wreath beneath a vacant pew, a pair of stained white gloves, and weaving out of these some tragic tale. He who sings simply must expect the reward of simplicity. He who describes those scenes which surround him, and are as obvious to others as to himself, fails to prove himself a poet of true vision. The surface of the pool records more faithfully than he."

"A man may be a poet," said Claud, "but the poet must remain a man."

"A nightingale is a bird," replied the master, "but while he sings we forget he is a bird. We hear a sound which suggests that the singer is conscious of something in the far distance which he is striving to reach during the trance state of his song. So with the poet. While he sings he

must make us forget that he is a man. He must feel the existence of the unattainable, and strive towards it, guiding himself by a light, a sunbeam or a moon-mist, by a colour, fragrance, or a face that he loves, until he finds himself in the midst of the elements of immortality. Then let him write, return, and win his seat on Mount Parnassus."

"You are speaking of the great poets: the divine half-dozen," said poor Claud, feeling his stature diminish one cubit. "May I say what I have in my mind?" he asked timidly.

"Have I not insulted you? Insult me," said the master, smiling.

"Do you not regard the poet as a being rather lower than a man? A voice and nothing else, an instrument, an Æolian harp made to sound by the wind? What is a violin without the maestro?"

"Or the man without God?" added the master. "The maestro plays upon the violin, but who plays upon the maestro? What was the name of that singer who enchanted the protoplasm into life? You and I are wind instruments. Our greatest hope is that some master shall draw music out of us. Sometimes the desire is granted to our glory; sometimes to our shame. It may be a demon tunes us to his hand, and then it is bad for the crowd which follows our music, ignorant that it is being drawn aside by the piping of a fiend."

"Have you anyone in your mind?" Claud asked, for there was something in the master's voice and manner which made him expect the answer, "Yes."

"You make me almost glad I am not famous," said the poet; and then earnestly, "What would you have me do? I am only forty. It is not too late."

"That is very true. It is not too late, but the time. You are at the season of life when the intellect should be ripening: all before middle-age is blossom and green fruit. You shall listen. You will hear the birds and the wind, and one day,

if there are strings in your heart which can be struck, you will sing yourself. The greatest is he who listens best. The sublimest thinker is but a scribe, the divinest poet a secretary of God. But remember," said the master, smiling, "whether you are great, or whether you are small, you are not wanted. The poet is the least of all luxuries, but if he be made of the true elements, and his heart throws back the master's voice, they shall kneel to him at last."

"I am no poet," said Claud sadly.

"Do not despair. You are not yet conscious. The song may come suddenly, strike you as you walk or rest. For years you may hear nothing, feel the ordinary emotions only; and then, when least expecting it, when perhaps you have resigned yourself to failure—ah, then! A gust of wind, a flash of lightning, a woman's kiss; and it is there!"

"Tell me," said Claud enviously, "who taught you these things?"

"An old master. He who comes by way of the cleave between the hills: storm-wind you call him. He teaches me new philosophy each year. Here we part, for in the cottage yonder lies an old man near his end, and he loves to hear me read a simple tale. Go your way, and listen. Remember a woman, if you will, but forget ambition. Do not lose the evening, or you may lose all. Climb the moor, set your face towards the west, and test yourself. Prove yourself in tune. Listen, and tell me when we meet again whether you have heard the song."

Claud did not hear it, nor was he disappointed, having expected nothing, for he perceived that the wonderful white figure which had accosted him so gently was a creature of mysticism. But he rejoiced to think there were such beings in the flesh, real priests, pointing out and pursuing ideals, spiritual before their time.

"Thank God for him," cried the poet of the bramble-patch as he climbed the moor. A wave of joy surged over and drowned his poverty, and made him rich. It was

grand to be a free poet breathing the mountain air, it was grand to be alive at all, with a beautiful night coming on and the prospect of a fine white moon and a walk in the twisting lanes. Thank God again for poverty and those nights of mist, with talent enough to string a verse or two together. Who would want a name of noise when he had the earth to roll on and plenty of space to roam in when he died ?

" I am a happy man. I love my home, I love my life." It was a good honest voice that went out into the west.

The drums and trumpets rolled and pealed by famous folk sent no echo into Claud's lonely cottage, but a name or two were stamped upon his mind, and the first of these was Cuthbert Orton : partly because he owned Windwhistle, chiefly because the poet loved originality, having little of it himself. The master lent him two books, but refused the others, giving no reason ; but Claud understood when he had read the two, and for the first time in his life felt really miserable. Men and women were not made like that : beauty and goodness were in the world, and had only to be searched for : the human heart and soul could triumph sometimes over animalism. So Claud persuaded himself, though unable to shake off the doubts which perplexed and the horrors which appalled after reading those pitiless analyses of the mind.

" To anyone weak," he murmured, shaking his big head, " to anyone morbid, to anyone nervous——" He left the sentence unfinished and thought of the lane which was crossed by the creaking bough. " The writing is marvellous. It has the effect of a drug. It sends one into a trance," he went on ; and then, " Where does it come from ? Is it the inspiration of a god, or of a devil ? " Slowly he repeated the master's words, " ' When it is a demon who tunes us to his hand . . . it is bad for those who follow us.' No, no, Mr Orton. I will not follow you. I will keep my mind and body sane."

Still Claud asked himself whether Cuthbert would sink to his level, whether his reception would be kind if he ventured to call at Windwhistle. Several times he walked in that direction, but courage failed when he saw the dark walls of that misty house. He had been told that Cuthbert was a recluse, snarling at anyone who dared to come near him : he pictured the great writer as a dark and dreadful personage full of strange words. Claud was a simple creature and had a terror of anything unnatural. At last he visited the master by night.

The great white figure was resting close to the open window with his hands folded upon a book.

“ You know Mr Orton ? ” said Claud presently.

Was the master deaf ? Other questions he had answered. He did not stir, nor did he glance towards Claud. At last he said :

“ There is a comet known as Halley’s which visits our system about once a century. At aphelion it reaches a distance from this world which mere figures are unable to express to our small minds. Yet, even in the greatest depths of space, it never escapes from the influence of the planet Jupiter.”

He paused and fell again to musing, as if he had forgotten the poet’s presence. Claud waited a few moments, came a step nearer, and said, “ Mr Orton has been here for nearly a month. Have you seen him yet ? ”

Again that unquiet movement, again the white head came up, and again the tongue answered indirectly :

“ If a planet can exert such an almighty influence over a red-hot mass of gas at the other end of space, what must be the influence of God upon us ? What must be the influence even of our small minds upon those we love or hate ? ”

Claud did not know that he was being answered. He imagined that the master was deep in thought and had not heard him : he was an old man, and perhaps his ears were

dull. He went nearer the chair, stood close beside it, and prompted by his mind exclaimed, "I want to visit Mr Orton! Would you advise me to do so?"

For the third time that pause, so long continued that Claud stepped back, believing his presence was not wanted, and as he did so the deep voice reached his ears:

"Of this I am sure: we know little of the influence which mind is able to exert upon mind. As the whole of the celestial system is bound together in a wonderful way by a bond which space cannot sever, so are we held together. We cannot express a wish without causing good or evil. When we bless a friend we help him: when we curse an enemy we harm him. We are sent to help—sent to help, and we must. Some of us can read, for it is written: the story of love, of the awful bondage to the soul of another. Do not stay with me now," said the master, turning. "May the influence of my blessing help you on."

CHAPTER IV

LUNARY

ONE of those wonderfully calm evenings which bless the mind which is peaceful—unquiet souls are suited by the wind—and Hortensia was watering tender plants, singing while she bathed her babies and put them to bed ; when her antique brother bounded across the grass, light with his trifling troubles, and brimming over as usual with quaint language.

“ Little sister of the seedlings,” he called. “ I protest against the plum-jam.”

Hortensia took no notice, understanding Theodore very well. Had he been attacked simultaneously by a mastodon and a mosquito, he would have complained bitterly of the insect and have ignored the mammal. She continued her rain-making, turning after a time to ask, “ How is Margaret ? ”

“ You are a person, my dear Hortensia, of superfluous interrogatories. Also of general exclamations. There is a redundancy in your good-mornings and good-nights. You draw my attention towards the nebulous condition of the atmosphere, or to the radiant heat. Why do you inquire about your niece ? She is always with us, sweet, serene and curly-haired. I approach you with a grievance of long standing, and you receive me on the point of a foolish question.”

“ I have not seen Margaret all day,” said Hortensia, not

troubling to hide her face. Theodore would not notice anything.

"I also have not seen her, at least not since the morning, but I ask no question. If she desired my presence she would call. Sacharissa is a genius: she is to make the name of Vipont famous. I live in my world, she in hers, and you, Hortensia the frivolous one, play in yours. Last night she screamed and awoke me. She dreams—'tis a pretty trick of hers. Her symphonies and sonatas beat upon her bed. I called out to reassure her, and a voice answered, 'It's only Lucy,' so I laughed and went to sleep again. Sacharissa has some very funny dreams."

"What was she thinking about?" Hortensia murmured, sprinkling her brother's boots and making him jump.

"The wonderful world of fancy. Are you not sometimes a little maid called Flora dancing round a maypole when morning breaks upon your eyelids?" said Theodore. "Do not I sometimes clutch a precious pot, all shining blue, Hortensia, blue as lapis-lazuli, to my breast, and roll with it down precipices, smashing my vile body all to fragments while I retain the priceless pot intact? We get into strange latitudes and longitudes when we go to bed. But what has Sacharissa and her dreams, or ours, to do with this question of plum-jam?"

"I have nothing to do with your domestic matters," said his sister. "Take your troubles to Polly."

"The damosel flouts me," said Theodore gloomily. "You repel me. Sacharissa dreams at me. In this matter of plum-jam the world is against me. Little sister of the golden daffadowndillies, I request your sympathy."

"My thirsty plants want it the most. The garden is so dry."

Theodore advanced, took her arm, removed her with jerks from the flower-bed, saying, "Three turns across this patch of sward, with a motion or two of womanly pity, if

you please, Hortensia. This lust for tending plants stiffens the mind."

"You make such a fuss about small things," said Hortensia, sighing and yielding. "If you don't like the jam, try something else."

"Humour me, sister," pleaded Theodore. "Treat the matter less violently. I cannot change my jam. I have a weakness for plum-jam, and in the preparation of this particular condiment all dealers are dishonest. They include the stones."

"You have only to pick them out," said Hortensia wearily.

"I cannot approach the breakfast table in that fantastic mood. The morning meal is a time of resolutions. I seat myself at the refectory-table, Sacharissa pours me out a dish of tea: I am content. I ladle upon my plate a sufficiency of plum-jam, take my knife, elevate a square of toast with the first three fingers of my left hand, my eye catches sight of a rich delicious blob, I bite with a natural eagerness, and my teeth are on the rocks. Plum-stones are large, Hortensia. I wrote to the manufacturer recently, but have received no reply. I have cursed the grocer and been answered with a tradesman's smile. I have left no stone unturned——" He broke off, then added gloomily, "We are now in danger of a joke. Every morning when I see a heap of stones lying upon my plate, as if left there for road-mending purposes, I find my lips moving and my tongue murmuring, 'this year, next year,' and so on in the idiotic manner of childhood. Advise me, Hortensia."

"Give up the jam," she said. "If you will be a child——"

"Never," he interrupted. "I am a poor man no longer. I will indulge myself. If these disreputable people refuse to remove the stones I will maliciously break a tooth, then sue them at the law for it. Why may I not eat my jam in peace?"

"Theodore," his sister whispered. "Look towards the mountains, not at the worm casts on the grass."

"I will do nothing of the kind," he said crossly. "I refuse to be patient. To-morrow I will curse the grocer for the second time."

Theodore went towards his own section, grumbling bitterly. His door, like that of the temple of Janus, had a tale to tell: it was open in time of play and closed in time of work. Unless a person of moderate height bowed his head as he passed through the beam above made him suffer. Theodore forgot to be humble as he entered; the melancholy chiming of a clock reached his ears, his mind was still fuming against the whole race of jam-makers; and straightway a modern bump appeared upon his antique forehead. Brought up and dazed for a moment, he stood rubbing his head, and presently exclaiming, "Wonderful wood! three hundred years old, and as sound as ever."

This blow upon the head knocked out the plum-stones and introduced thoughts of Margaret; nothing of an unpleasant kind, but he remembered she had been shut up all day, he desired to see her, and tell her she mustn't work so hard. Standing at the foot of the stairs, he chirped a long string of wonderful names, translating them all, and when there was no immediate answer he went through the list again in a higher key. Then he put a hand to his head which was beginning to throb.

Something was bumping darkly from stair to stair; at first deliberately, then, lighting upon an extreme edge it bounded out, and immediately a brown apple hit Theodore on the knee and settled near his boot.

Margaret was descending slowly; half-way she stopped and fastened her eyes upon the apple at her father's feet. She looked very pretty, but frightened. She wore a plain white dress, an apron over it, and a large kiss-me hat unadorned with any strange device. In her right hand she held a key.

"Why did you throw an apple at me, darling?" chirped Theodore.

"I didn't," she murmured. "It fell out of my hand. I can't hold things."

As she spoke the key fell and clattered upon the stairs. Margaret stared at it, trembling with nervousness.

"What key is it, Melissa?"

"My room. I don't know what I was going to do with it."

She came down towards him with a groping movement of the hands.

"Were you going out with an apple in one hand, a key in the other, and an apron over your frock?"

"Am I wearing an apron? I didn't know. I'll take it off now," she said simply.

Theodore looked at her as well as he could, but saw nothing to make him uneasy. Margaret was obviously in her normal state of health, for there was colour on her face. Theodore could not see beyond that. If her cheeks were pink she was well. He knew what was the matter with the child, as he drew her hand within his arm and took her out into the garden to scold her tenderly.

"Dominica, my Sunday-child, we must be stern. We must issue a decree which shall not be broken. Work when it is a hobby becomes too tempting. It seduces us from other occupations, and has a tendency to make us one-sided. It is a fault I have noticed in myself, and in a future state I hope to correct it. I have walked thirty miles pursuing one pewter pot. You will work thirty hours trying to capture some light and airy symphony which flutters like a butterfly just beyond your reach."

"Most of the time I am half-asleep," she said.

"Nevertheless it is work. In these arts the brain is busy while the hands are folded. This evening the decree issues under the hand of your father and the great seal of

the Viponts. Our well-beloved daughter shall not henceforward occupy more than three hours of her leisure daily over musical dreams. Such three hours may be taken either from the morning or from the evening, but if she takes more she shall incur the risk of our displeasure. It pleases us that she should walk in our demesne, and join with our dear sister Hortensia in the healthy labour of plant-production; or she shall ramble with us in the quest of ancient furniture. Little sister of the gilly-flowers, trip hither and witness our signature," he chirped blithely.

"I have no time for nonsense," called the busy gardener.

"We should have a farm," Theodore went on. "It would bring us out of our dusty corners to feed the chickens and call the cattle home. There would be the merry clink of milk-pails in the kitchen, while I would crack a whip and wear a flower in my hat. And you, Corinna, would make a tender milkmaid."

"I must put on my thick boots," said Margaret.

"Why, child, you have them on."

"Then I must go. What is the matter with the sky over there?"

"The sky! Why, nothing. 'Tis as clear as a sheet of water."

"Don't you see anything?"

"Not a cloud, not a speck. What new symphony is this, my musical Melissa? Do you search for harps in the sky?"

"I feel it there," she said dreamily. "I don't know what it is. I'll walk that way."

"I will walk with you. We will tramp up the wood and look for the end of a rainbow in the valley."

"I will go by myself," she said decidedly. "I hear a sound like the hum in the core of a shell."

"Darling," said Theodore, becoming suddenly practical,

"I believe you have eaten nothing all day. To-morrow," he muttered, "I have to take strong action with the grocer."

"I will come back hungry," she promised, with one of those mechanical smiles which seemed to imply that she knew not what she said; and then she walked away slowly at first, soon hurriedly, not towards the wood where she wanted to go, but towards Windwhistle. There was only a slight breeze, and yet she was blown about: at one turning shy, trembling Margaret in horror at the thought of going where that will was: at another a bold woman longing to laugh all morals out of life. She went to and fro, making little progress, one influence urging her onward, her own nervous self holding her back; and all the time she could not see. The hills and the fields were there: she recognised them with her eyes but her mind was blind: no sort of vision within allowed her to see her thoughts. She merely walked and strained, and sometimes tried to remember names and facts.

"My own," she murmured, "it was Sims before father changed it into Quivil—no, into Vipont. Mary—wasn't I called that? or was it the name mother wanted me to have, and then it was changed into—Rose, I am sure it was, but I am not called by that name."

"Margaret!" a voice called.

"Margaret, of course. That is my name," she said. "I had forgotten."

Twilight was beginning, but the sky remained clear. One side of the landscape spread beneath warm light, the other side was already dark with shadows; and from that side came the master, no longer stately, but half-running and distressed. He had never called her Margaret before: he had never run after her. She did not like to see him, closed her eyes, and he came up to her breathing hard.

"Thank you," she said, "for telling me my name."

She opened her eyes, and as the shrinking maid Margaret saw the white head and felt for it a love which was new, not the love of woman for a man—was not the master old?—but that affection entertained by the artist for the great good work he sees before him finished, the love of the soul for strength, of the being for the power that creates. It was not the face of a man, but a marvellous living thing worked upon the sky speaking at her from a height, looking back for inspiration to the centre of life, then delivering the message thus received.

“Will you come with me, Margaret?”

“Yes, master, because I must.”

“Not because you would?”

“My feet would come with you, but not my mind.”

“I have watched for you all day.”

“Did you know I should come this way?”

“I feared it.”

He held her hand, and drew her in the direction of that great wood of oaks and ferns where she had seen him first. It spread ahead, all the fronds and leaf-clusters shivering gently in invitation to a cool green bath. Already a grey moth flickered. The air was sweet.

“It is my temple,” said the master, removing his hat.

“Let me go,” said Margaret almost sharply.

The path went upward until the wood ended upon open moor. Large rocks, worn smooth by centuries of rain, were flung among the ferns. Upon one of these the master seated himself, looking upon her earnestly.

“Child,” he said. “Will you be my pupil?”

She gazed at him so steadily, with such pathos, that he turned his head aside.

“I believe there is something in me which wants to spoil my life,” she answered. “If you can teach me how to get rid of that, I will be your pupil.”

“I would try to raise up in you another who shall conquer

what you fear. Do you wonder that I saw you on the road ? ”

“ I cannot think,” she said. “ When I try it is clear for a moment, and suddenly all dark.”

“ This is a day I have been dreading,” he went on ; while Margaret cried in a frightened voice, “ What do you see in me ? ”

“ We are not born by chance,” said the master. “ He who believes that may as well fling the letters of the alphabet at his feet and expect them to settle in the order of his name. Was it by chance that the atoms which compose your body gathered together into the form of a maid ? We are all at school, teacher and pupil alike, and if we master the alphabet of existence we do well : the grammar of life awaits us in another place : the literature of it is very far off.”

The ferns shook while he spoke, and down the steep path passed the sound of harp-strings vibrating delicately. Out of the stillness came the song and back into stillness it went. It was Nature’s evening hymn of wind among the trees.

“ Hear it ? ” whispered the old master. “ I pray you, hear it.”

“ I hear nothing,” she answered. “ Even your voice sounds a long way off.”

He sighed and lifted the white hair from his eyes : then drew her down beside him on the stone.

“ I have tried to compose your mind. Resign yourself and listen. These last few hours you have been in misery. These last few days a mind has been heavy upon yours. To-day the call has become intolerable : this evening you wandered out prepared to obey. Shy and reserved girl though you are, a plan which even a bold woman would have shrunk from was before you.”

“ I should have done it,” she said, waking up.

“ So I watched for you.”

"How did you know? It is not natural. You can read me."

"Not you," he said. "I read another—your master."

He looked up the path to where the trees fell apart and made a clearing: then he touched Margaret and said, "Will you walk to yonder stone, stand upon it, and look towards the sky? Tell me what you see."

She might have refused for her mood was stubborn, but there was in his words yet another suggestion of enchantment: so she went forward, and stood upon the stone, but saw nothing.

"Go again," he urged.

"I tell you I saw nothing, except the new moon."

"Nothing," said the master, smiling. "The moon in the seventh house. It is the reason I have watched for you. It is the reason you came out to-night."

"I think you are talking great nonsense," she said in a manner so unlike herself that she started while she spoke.

"Come to my side," he said gently. "Let me mention that name at last—the name of Cuthbert Orton. Yes, shudder. I would have you shudder spiritually as well. He and I have not spoken for more than twenty years, but we have met, once only, and then we looked into each other's eyes but could not break down a barrier which was between us. His life and mine are joined together. He cannot break from me, nor I from him. Into my life he has brought nothing but sorrow. Into your life he would bring shame."

"Nonsense! what does he know of me? I am nothing to him."

"Yet you would have gone to him. He is a being whom at certain seasons few women can resist. He has been endowed with powers for good, almighty powers, and he has used them for evil. He is a man who has rebelled against Nature, and she has yet to punish him. But I love

him because I must, because our lives have been twisted together like two strands of a rope. Margaret," he said, standing over her. "Choose. Which will you have—Cuthbert Orton, or the master? I implore you think, if you can. This way peace: that way shame. He cannot love. He is incapable of love. And his mind is so strangely cast it has no scruples."

"What do you mean?" she murmured.

"Windwhistle or God's Garden. You are to make your choice between one who will try to bring your restless and unsettled mind into tune with these things of beauty, who will attempt to train your senses so that they may hear the music of the universe, who will watch over you and care for you as a master should a pupil, and one who will dissect your very being, who will rend your mind into a thousand doubts and fears, who will bring images of horror into your life, and will make you wish for death at last. Choose, Margaret. Choose between day and night."

"Do you love me, master?" she asked wonderingly.

"Yes, I love you. I love him. With the help of God I would love everyone. Speak the word, Margaret, speak." He went upon his knees. "Do not mistake my words. I do not seek you as a wife, for I am old and you are a child. I seek you for my pupil. There is the song in the wind again. It comes for you, Margaret. I would keep you, child, give you those lessons which your mind requires, suck out the poison which he has instilled into you, protect you from him—remember that I love him—purge your mind and make it strong until you could stand by yourself, and I could look upon you as Margaret my own, saved by me. Choose, Margaret. Listen to the wind urging you on. Turn your face—there. Listen! Put out your hand if you are mine."

"I cannot," she screamed, with a sudden passion.

"Margaret! The peace of heaven——"

She screamed again and cried, "There is no peace."

She fled away down the dark wood, crying and sobbing. She seemed strong again.

"Pale moon," said Jasper Ramrige. "Yours is a dead body, for God has cursed you."

CHAPTER V

STARRY

It was night when the master reached Windwhistle, not dark, merely haunted with gloom and given over to sleep. One owl answered another, a sheep was coughing very humanly in some field : there was no other suggestion of life, not even in the house, which was as silent as a ruin, overgrown with brambles, barely visible because of the gloom and the thin fog which hung about it like a corporal. Trees surrounded it and narrow paths here and there led either into the garden or away, making it simple for the stranger to go wrong. Twice the master found himself led aside : the third attempt brought him out. His hands were scratched, his long cloak was snatched at, and once drawn half off his shoulders. The brambles in the mist were spiteful. It seemed to the master as if malicious satellites of Cuthbert were around, sent out to persecute and turn him back.

Reaching the open door Jasper paused to bring his nerves into subjection. That fog dried the mist from his face. Not a gleam of light was showing, and yet the door stood open as if some visitor was expected, one who was not to knock. The mist was going in and out, soft healthy stuff smelling of earth and mountains, not the unpleasant vapour which rises from rivers, but clouds of the heights ; for though Windwhistle stood in a tree-encircled hollow it was upon a plateau quite a thousand feet above the sea.

The house was old, not large but high, and of an ecclesias-

tical design : the greater part had been removed or had fallen, and what remained had the appearance of a church without nave or aisles, a prison-like place without symmetry : three-quarters of the whole having been lost, the fourth remaining part had been thrown out of proportion. At one end were two decorated windows, one ancient, the other fairly modern, the first perfect in outline and delicate tracery, the other clumsy and of an independent design. The cusps of the medieval window were small ; the upper tracery was formed of three sets of segmentary circles, each set within an entire circle, making the window stare with nine stony eyes. The later work was coarse, having large cusps placed much too high above the impost of the arch, giving the window an uncouth appearance : the tracery was angular, the lines not the apertures were dominant, the mouldings were so heavy that they cast heavy shadows obliterating the details. The ancient window was spiritual, its segmentary circles suggested mystery : the modern work was material, suggesting a practical body which had neither time nor inclination to practise the religion which it sought to teach.

Jasper lifted his hand but let it drop. Was he to ring and knock his way into the mind of Cuthbert Orton ? He was master still, Cuthbert the school-boy : if youth had yielded to maturity how much more would manhood bow down before old age ? The space of time between remained unaltered : more than three hundred moons divided them then as upon that day when they had stood together in the fern-brake, and the mystical boy had looked upon the man who called himself material. No servant should be brought between them. So the master walked into the free and open church-like place as a parishioner entering of right to find the incumbent. His feet made no sound because he trod upon carpet. His eyes saw a dim light proceeding from another door left open at the end of the passage. He gathered his cloak about him tightly, the great white head

was sunk, the nostrils were dilated, he had a feeling of thirst. He smelt a strong stupefying odour. He went on, forgetting time and place, thinking he was returning to his own room in the schoolhouse, and the boy who was so brilliant and would not work was waiting to be punished ; reached that threshold where the light was ghastly, passed in noticing a screen curiously painted with flying serpents : the chancel-like interior appeared before him many-coloured, in one corner a kind of altar where a red lamp was gleaming, on each side of a large fireplace a tall candlestick, between them a sun-dial, its style removed, pastilles smoking upon it. The two candles gave the only light, falling upon the bizarre furniture, suggesting the unpleasant nature of the pictures, revealing a face somewhat white, of a feminine type of beauty, intellectual, pure, ardent, religious, everything it was not, which looked up without a smile or any suggestion of surprise from a pile of cushions on a long low lounge where Cuthbert was lying, watching the door and tickling the ears of a small dog stone blind and deaf with age.

"Come in," he said. "You see I left the doors open for you."

The master went forward. His mind at that moment was weak when he perceived that all the years between them would serve him no longer, that his fight for the mastership must now be stern, that the will in front of him was greater than his own.

"You thought you would surprise me," the lazy voice went on. How hard and cynical it was, how utterly at variance with the calm religious face ! It was as if a blasphemer spoke through the white mask of a saint. "Last night I felt you making up your mind, and this evening, lying here, I listened to your steps along the road and through my little tangle of wood. Those queer senses which you found in me once have developed. I have a right to call myself the most sensitive man alive."

"This is a cold greeting, Orton," said the master tremulously.

"Did you look for me to rise and embrace you in oriental style to suit the furniture? Did you think I should hasten to place myself at your feet, and look up to your face, and beg to be taught a lesson? If you are going to teach me you must find a large book. You have gone forward, Ramrige, but not much. I have passed beyond you altogether. Even as a child I knew more about you than you did yourself. Jasper Ramrige, the practical man of the world, teaching Latin and Greek, posing as a demi-god, loving the brain, despising the mind—I knew better even then. Let me talk. I lie here and think day after day, wonderfully deep thoughts, old master, and I have kept my tongue pointed for you. I used to watch that stately figure, bowing to the altar, its eyes riveted upon the smoke of candles, and that calm serious face lifted in adoration of a bunch of flowers if they were only in a holy place. 'He doesn't know what he is,' I used to say, 'but it will come out.' And now I hear of you: Jasper Ramrige, the mystic."

He paused for a reply; but the master was reserving himself.

"Here is the schoolboy," Cuthbert went on, "the boy who would not work, could not submit to discipline, the boy called sullen because he was too clever. The boy horribly troubled with dreams and ideas of apparitions. He was beyond his masters, one of his eyes was better than all their brains, he was a mystic though he did not understand the meaning of the word, at new moon he would walk the dormitory and talk in his sleep. As a mystic he went into the world and found for a long time no place for himself, until he threw off the mysticism and became a sheer materialist, until he got rid of those longings for the spiritual state, for communion with the dead, for the development of self by concentration upon a higher condition, and

devoted himself instead to physical nature, to the study of the mind, to the study of lust, and by such methods to success. Here, old mystic, you see him—Cuthbert Orton, the materialist.”

The master had not seated himself. He stood at the foot of the lounge, his head still down. He released his cloak, and it fell with a gentle rustling to his feet.

“I accept your challenge,” he answered gently. “Spiritualism against materialism, with Nature intervening. I come to you as a friend, but I come to fight, to conquer you if I can. What do these things mean? That blasphemous altar, those great candlesticks, the dark hangings, this incense? Are these the surroundings of a materialist?”

“Read the titles of those books; look at the pictures,” said the cynical voice. “I revel in this atmosphere. I may preserve a taste for mystery and remain an animal. These things satisfy me, and if I am inconsistent in bringing two extremes together, in having a love for religion and living what you would call an unmoral life, I am no more so than most men who possess a mind at all. While I enjoy these tales of Balzac I can lift up my eyes to that altar and enjoy a dream of purity in love. While I write what you may please to call lascivious details, I am often thinking of and sighing for the quiet sweet fields and hills of pastoral tales. Examine me, if you can, master.”

“Orton,” came the answer in a steady voice. “The mountain road of Penmaenmawr.”

Cuthbert turned and beat about the cushions behind him. “You came to me,” he muttered, “as a devil.”

“Did it seem to you for evil?”

“It was for evil. She died.”

“She died,” the master repeated, perceiving he had for the moment the upper hand. “I was a warning spirit. Do not doubt, Orton, but that I was brought to you. I saw you, recognised you: that instant I understood. I had been the master of your boyhood. I was to be the master

of your life. Already I had discovered that some being, much older than yourself, must enter your life as a part of it, as a controlling agency, whether man or woman I did not know, and as I looked upon you the knowledge came. It was myself. I could not speak, neither could you. The mystery of two worlds divided us. I went on."

"You came back."

"When my senses returned I did come back, looking for you."

"I saw you."

"Thank God," cried the master triumphantly, seeing he had a victory. "You were afraid. You could not face me. The work was well done."

"It was many years ago. I was in my weakness then," Cuthbert muttered; and he added, "I still believe it was coincidence."

"You do not believe that. The lower part of your being may, but not the better part."

Cuthbert rose impatiently, and taking the master by the arm led him to a chair, saying in a kindly voice, "You look tired."

"Let me stand. Give me the master's privilege of looking down upon you," said Jasper, finding words with difficulty. Easy enough to advise the poet Claud, and not so hard to reason with Margaret, but Cuthbert was made of stubborn metal: words would not mould him: he must be beaten with a hammer, worn down by elements, influenced by those things which he professed to have abjured.

"The second time you were an angel of light. I had almost forgotten that I owe you gratitude," said Cuthbert.

"The second time," Jasper repeated, lifting his white head.

"At Buxton."

"Now more strongly than ever do I believe in these forces," cried the master, making a quick movement across the floor, and turning with an arm outstretched. "I

thought I had been led to you once only. I went to Buxton for my health, I thought, though when I departed it was with a feeling that something had been accomplished, not for you, Orton, but for myself."

"You saved me. Had you not come——"

"You would have gone down?" cried the master, his great eyes shining, his beard like silver in the candlelight.

"Into the lowest depth. I had not then this will."

"Listen, Orton! I begin to see. A street planted on each side with trees; at a turning a man—he wore a beard?"

"I did."

"A young woman, handsome, very dark, a mulatto?"

"Yes—poor little Celia!"

"Myself passing, not knowing why, not recognising you with my eyes; and yet saving you. Is it not terrible to think how any petty action of our lives may be an instrument of the influences upon us? How an evening walk may make or mar a fellow-creature?"

"What you call the working of an influence is the action of your own mind or brain."

"Why am I here? What chance has bound up this old life with yours? What chance led me to Penmaenmawr to warn you of evil to come, evil which you were to avert by my warning."

"Stop," cried Cuthbert, upon his feet, white and trembling, wounded through and through. "You may lecture, but you shall not torture me. Her name is on my lips, every day and night, name above every name."

"I am here to wound," said the master. "If your will can be broken by sorrow it shall be broken. I was on the road of Penmaenmawr to warn you of what must happen if you had not courage or goodness to avert it. You could not understand, or you would not. You let her die. You killed her. Groan for your lost life, for your lost heaven."

The master stood near the pile of cushions towering to a great height, looking down upon the figure which writhed

in pain, crying out, "Ethel! Ethel!" There was no likeness to that calm cynical man who had waited for the master with wide-open doors, and yet he was more of a man then. "She was everything. When she died I rebelled, cursed all the powers of light and darkness, threw morality out. I did try to become spiritual," he cried. "I would climb the wall of the cemetery at night and lie upon her grave."

"She was not there."

"She was—all I wanted, her body, her face, her eyes, her hands, her little teeth."

"The things unnecessary."

"The devil take your cold philosophy. She was under that horrible dirt, my Ethel: not in the air, or she would have come to me, touched me, kissed me. I tried to believe that, and found it a fable. I wandered in the fields where we had been so often, in the sweet hay-fields after sunset, and would hold up my mad face and pray her to come down and kiss me. I went to fools who said they could raise the dead for half-a-guinea. I went into dirty houses and paid money to be shown my Ethel, I went into dens which she could not have breathed in, and gave gold to malformed men who smelt of onions to be taken for a moment into heaven. And still every day I pray to Ethel. That altar is Ethel's."

"These pictures?" said the master.

"Mine. May I not feed swine and still have Ethel?"

"This will work," the master murmured.

"Why could you not speak in that mountain road, and tell me what would happen—no, it was bound to happen."

"My presence and my manner made the message. No words were in my mouth. I was not to know why I had been sent."

"Nor was I to know."

"You did, darkly, not clearly. You felt: you received what I discharged: it worked in you, it rose up before your eyes as a warning written upon the roads you walked on.

You would not see because you did not love in a spiritual way. The animal was between you and her. Do not answer me," said the master firmly. "What chance led me to Buxton, saving you there from destroying yourself by lust? What chance has brought me here to Summerland?"

"You knew that Windwhistle belonged to me."

"I did not know. I was led here by the same combination of forces which made me appear before you twice in the past. Wherever I had gone you would have followed. I came here, waited for you, knowing that you must be drawn to me: you have come."

"This is opposition. You will find me too strong."

"I know that strength. You may resist, but the effort will exhaust your mind. I have a key to those elements which influence it. Your power is not with men: you may terrify them, but your power is with women; and upon such a night as this, when the image of some woman rises before your eyes, the body of that woman is in peril."

"You speak like a magician," said Cuthbert, struggling back to his earlier mood. "Why on this night?"

"It is new moon. Laugh if you will, but remember."

"I often laugh at fools, but you are wise. I will concede some truth to your belief. At new moon I have a power over certain women. It is an hypnotic power possessed by others."

"Hypnotism has little to do with it. Others might use the word, not knowing a better. The direct power comes from a region beyond. It is occult."

"Here is an astrologer!" exclaimed Cuthbert lightly. "That long cloak, my venerable master, is it stamped with the signs of the zodiac? Does that reverend white beard wag in a laboratory of love-philtres? Happiness would find you, I think, more easily with Homer and common-sense."

"The science I have taught myself has nothing to do with stars, but concerns this system only: nor have I worked out

more than two horoscopes, as they are called, your own and mine. Let fools laugh in the dark, Orton. Our small intelligences can only grope towards light. Not even a fool could deny the existence of great influences upon us, influences we may fight against and subdue if we have courage and strength enough. Whence do they proceed? Is it unreasonable to suppose that the mighty system of which you and I are but two particles may be responsible for much? Consider the power of the earth. No day passes without some impulse from its mass. Consider the overwhelming influence of the sun, the strange and lesser force of moonlight. We start with the knowledge that our own planet, the great central body, and the cold world, our satellite, all influence our lives most mightily. Then we are forced upon assumption, reasoning that if certain bodies of this system influence our lives and characters, it is not mad logic to assume that others may do likewise. Astronomy, clear and definite, guides us well, shows us that these interplanetary forces are indeed enormous, extended even to vagrant bodies moving through realms of unknown space millions of miles away. If I speak like a pedant, pardon me. If I speak like a fool, remember the same folly has enabled me to discover what you are, what you might be, and has enabled me to learn your character——”

“One moment. You studied me as a boy. You learnt me then.”

“I do not say we rightly read these signs,” the master continued, not noticing the comment. “To assert that one planet influences the heart, another the brain, a third our good or evil fortune, is mere guesswork. Sun and moon we may in a manner understand, because they are strong, but the planets are obscured. Still I believe that while a man works knowledge comes by way of inspiration, as it comes to the poet who appears to strike aside with magic the barrier between life and death and lets the light through; and after the same manner we may have been allowed to guess the

riddles of the planets. As I have read I know and pity you, for I am well aware your life has not been cast in easy places, the world outside has not been merciful, and your character is deeply scarred by outside influences. I would help you, Orton, not only because I must, for you and I can never be separated while life exists under any form and time endures, but because I have a desire towards you, and however you may be hated, despised and trodden under foot, there is for you in this great system of sun and planets under heaven one cylinder filled with fire and love, one being with a hope of immortality, one friend nearer than a father, who can never forget that what is best in the mystery of his being is joined to what is best in yours, who will raise on your behalf the voice of love, even if sometimes sternly as the voice of duty—the man who was once your master.”

“I understand,” said Cuthbert slowly, with some irritation. “I am your creature, the slave of your lamp.”

“You do not understand.”

“Your book then, your picture, your statue, the work of your genius? I am grateful for your help once in the past, for your kindly feeling now, but you sling your affection at me like a stone.”

“I come to you as wind that is violent sometimes,” the master answered. “I come to play upon you, like the breeze which ruffles the water and makes music out of organ-pipes. You cannot always resist for your body is still sensitive, cast as it was in the mould of Aquarius which was the rising sign of your nativity, the airy element endowing you with that delicacy of face, your force of intellect, your love for the study of human nature.”

Cuthbert laughed loudly, raised himself upon an elbow, and said, “Has my old master come to this? Must I cross his palm with a piece of silver and listen to a future influenced by maidens dark and fair?”

“By these signs I have learnt you,” said Jasper quietly.

“Something I owe to my father, a little to my mother,

but nothing at all to the celestial sign Aquarius," laughed Cuthbert.

"You were born upon a Friday," the master went on. "Saturn is the ruler of your life; therefore your progress has been long delayed, your powers could not mature until life was well advanced, the early years were full of obstacles. As a compensation you should live long, and it is for you to decide whether in happiness or in sorrow, and all your work when there is heart in it should be enduring."

"Let us say true to that: but you might have known," said Cuthbert.

"As you grow older your mind will become more powerful, more interested in science, philosophy, and religion. It is evident to me that you might have become a great divine."

"I perceive you are a magician," Cuthbert said. "It is the last thing any other man would have said about me. You are turning me inside out, master. Take care you don't frighten yourself."

"I know what is there."

"By instinct," Cuthbert muttered.

"Concentration had to be practised," said Jasper. "It was impossible to succeed during those early years because you had not then the strength to control yourself. There was a hard struggle, but necessity helped you to win: that and ill-health, for the sign Aquarius gives a weak body with strong soul. You retired from the world and in solitude found your powers. It was a great victory, even if the fight was forced upon you by lack of means. You fought with the desperation of fear, and conquered."

"All this," said Cuthbert, "implies a very excellent imagination."

"Your life must be affected in an uncommon manner by romance. You will be visited by strange dreams which will help you, and what I may call spiritual vibrations will always attend you. A belief arises in you sometimes of the possibility of communicating with the spirit-world, and in

your lonely home you will occasionally practise that magic which some affirm will make these forms apparent. Leanings towards occultism will be spasmodic, but the longing to employ your powers in this direction will at times be overwhelming. I desire you to conquer all such inclinations, for they lead to madness."

"Someone has told you I was once a medium," Cuthbert muttered.

"The planet Neptune and the influence of Uranus over the sign Aquarius told me. Remember your visions," said the master. "They will affect your life. I am to warn you against fire and fire-arms, against knives and operations; beware also of being brought into contact with large and secret buildings; and above all beware of your will. A great danger is shown here: if the desires are persisted in——"

"The large building looms upon my horizon as a Bedlam?" Cuthbert suggested.

"Actual insanity is not shown, but, what is perhaps worse, melancholia."

"You are persuading me to practise astrology," said Cuthbert cynically.

"I am no astrologer," the master answered, as strongly as in the old days he had denied being a mystic. "I have merely attempted to record the influences of surrounding space upon my life and yours. The predominating influence——"

"The moon in my case. It is an easy guess."

"On every side you are under the spell of the moon in its relations to the atmospheric conditions around you. That spell is favourable to your work, to your affairs of the heart, to your friendships, if you would use it in the right way, which you have not done. The moon in the seventh house brings you friends, forces them to you at your wish. Her influence entangles my life with yours. It endows you with an acute and active brain, quickens your perception,

gives you a fine memory : but there is another aspect. The moon in the house of love threatens your whole career because of the influence of your ruler Saturn. So far you have succumbed."

"Admitting there is some truth in your dark science, who am I that I should fight against fate ? "

"This is not fate. These atmospheric influences may be conquered, as we defeat the rain and frost by protecting our bodies against them. The book of the future is closed but not sealed : we may force it open, I believe, and catch a message here and there, though the language as a whole defies us. I will not weary you with details concerning your career which I have drawn out of the depths of space, but this I must say : in you I find the possibility of greatness. I watched you as a boy, idle, insolent, passionate, and guessed even then it was fire of genius burning in your body. I was drawn to you by the mystic influence of the moon. I loved you, Orton. You passed into the world, but not out of my control. I would have let you go, fearing you would spoil what was left to me of life, but I could not. I struggled for a time to free myself, then yielded, and flung my whole being heavenward to find the secret of your life."

"Did you ? " asked a mocking voice.

"I found it. If you could conquer yourself you would be great. Sorrow was sent to test you ; the great grief of your life was to make you strong. It made you weaker. I was sent to warn you, and after me ill-health. You conquered one phase of your weakness, and that only for a time. You rose above the influences of your birth, and advanced, but you took the wrong direction. Each of your later books has been a wound to me."

"You are not compelled to read them."

"Your great intellect has been prostituted," the master went on. "Your mind is like a beautiful woman who walks the streets for sale. Cynical and contemptuous you may, and perhaps must be, but you have yielded

at the point of least resistance: you were not meant to be vile. The influences upon you direct towards goodness and chastity; and you have turned your back upon them and chosen vice. You may say you are strong, but no man is strong enough to trifle with disease, and if you harp incessantly upon lust you must think about it, and if you think long enough——”

“Stop, stop!” said Cuthbert irritably, getting up and beginning to walk about. “You go too far.”

“The arrow which wounds does go too far. You are vicious in your work, and you are vicious in your life. You began by poisoning others, and now you have poisoned yourself.”

“I have done no harm—none at all.”

“On this very night of new moon you are doing harm, though you may be hardly conscious of it, knowing little of the awful wings attached to the thoughts which leave you. The greatest possibilities of good are in you, for you are one of those rare beings whom simple folk pursue because they must; and instead of leading them upward towards light and hope you guide them with an infernal piping into darkness. Orton!” cried the master in a loud voice. “The future is always near.”

“My dear old Ramrige,” said Cuthbert sharply, “oblige me by not practising enchantments here.”

“I will cast one spell before I go,” came the gentle answer. “The strongest influence in this system of ours is that of Jupiter, and this planet in your fourth house promises you happiness, if you will have it, promises you a peaceful home, the love of wife and children, an honoured old age and a happy ending. All are there for you to take or to reject. You are coming near the time when you must choose. A few hours ago I implored another to choose well; now I implore you. Which will you take, the new path or the old?”

“I made the choice years ago, over Ethel’s grave. I

determined then to expose the vice and humbug of this world."

"Your own?"

"If you like. I suppose I am a callous sort of creature. If the powers above strike at me, I strike back."

"Fly on the axle!" exclaimed Jasper. "It is you who raise the dust, not the wheel and the wind. Your life is your own because you made it, as much yours as the nose upon your face, and yet your knowledge fails to tell you that the nose is not your own, you do not even hold it upon a long tenure, and you cannot make another with all the earth and water under heaven."

He paused and drew the cloak about his shoulders, while Cuthbert rose, came towards him, and held his arm.

"We have not spoken for more than twenty years," he said. "Why should we struggle with each other? We were always flint and steel, even when you were school-master and I your pupil. 'How is it you haven't prepared the lesson, Orton?' you would ask, while I would kick and growl and curse beneath my breath. Now you come to me, an old man, to one middle-aged, and ask much the same question, 'How is it you will not learn?' You would not see in those days at school that I was working, but not at the tasks it was your duty to impose. You will not see now that I am working, and you must not blame me if I refuse to turn star-gazer, or if I do not respect the moods of your mysticism. You have never been my master."

"As a boy you would not learn what it was my duty to teach you. As a man you decline to be taught by Nature. Your books are false. If I believed that the human mind was as low as you would have it is, I should lift my hands to heaven and cry, 'God has failed.' You have created a new species out of the earth of your own self, and you call them human beings, but they are not. Call them rather demons of your own imagination, the fancies of a brain corrupted by a degraded life, and a mind distorted by

drugs. Here are the drugs," cried the master, pointing to the books and pictures, the tall candlesticks, and the scented smoke. "The corruption I know. I have dragged you from it once. The evil which you see in others is your own."

"And yours. Each of us has at least one devil dwelling in him: some keep the creature under, others let it rule. It has been my aim to study the human mind, to drag it out and find what it is made of. To do so I must have—shall we call them specimens?"

"Victims," Jasper muttered.

"Victims then. The botanist takes a plant and tears it into fragments: the anatomist selects some animal. I have dissected others and myself."

"What is the state of plant or animal when the seeker after knowledge has done with them?"

Cuthbert looked up as if to answer, but did not. The master moved towards the door, paused, put a second question:

"In these horrible researches, what have you done with the virtues which were there? Why have you thrown them aside as valueless?"

Cuthbert frowned and settled back on his pile of cushions as if he had not heard the question, and lovingly addressed his small blind dog.

The master was beside the door and hidden by the screen, but a gentle voice sounded as he went away:

"How many minds poisoned? How many lives spoilt?"

CHAPTER VI

VAGRANT

It had now come to late night and the sky was white with swan-clouds, mythological of maidens changing at will into birds, and sweet mist of the earth censed the threshold of Yalland's cottage where the poet sat, on the table, cross-legged like an eastern idol waiting for worshippers and offerings. What was the middle of the night to this great man-owl but a time to hoot in? Not a song of ripening corn, nor any ballad of green leaves and buds, but a hymn to liberty, a little nocturn of psalms chanted in thankfulness for this life in lanes.

And Claud sat upon the table with dilating eyes, purring like a prayer-mill :

"He who seeks for treasure shall find none. He who asks for nothing gets what he wants, which is nothing ; and that is his treasure. What have I asked for? Nothing. What have I got? Neither money, nor clothes, nor wife, nor success. I have a poet's licence, taken out, but not paid for : stolen's the word. I have a right to steal what few want. Sorrow is one thing, sickness is another : if I have nothing, I cannot have them. But you cannot have nothing : there is no such thing. Nothing in the larder, you say ; when it is full of air, dust, and light ; flies and small rodents. While you live you have life, which is the greatest something. Even when you cease to live you have death. Nothing is an ideal, and unattainable. We

fingered and footed beings are apt to exaggerate. When we have not enough we say we have nothing ; and as we never have enough we never have anything. How easy it is to think at midnight ! There go the owls, and yonder are two glow-worms blinking at Jupiter and Venus, and wondering what sort of beetles they are.

“ A little of everything,” he sang on. “ A little bit of home, not much, but good of its kind, and enough to keep warm in. Money, a few pieces to juggle with : hard coins are elastic in the hands of a poet ; he takes a shilling from a sovereign, and at his word the pound recovers its original form ; he takes five shillings, and draws out the remainder to the twenty mark : every one who has little is a magician. Clothes, a few, but it takes two bodies to wear two suits, and as one day is to one body so is one suit of clothes, and this shall be the proportion until two days fall on a Monday. A crumb of success, which, when it comes in a flood, washes a man from his nothing into something which is worse. I wish I could talk like this to old Ramrige. Wife ? why, your poor poet is the very Solomon of polygamists : there are the nine fair ladies of his art, the poet has none but goddesses ; queens and princesses he will spurn unless they can show a heavenly title ; he will take Flora queen of the earth with a fine condescension, and may even deign to admit into his palace of mud a troop of whirling dryads, oreads, nymphs and shepherdesses. Still there is sorrow : as nothing means a little of everything, there must be a little sorrow. A little imagination too, creating a longing for other little things : little sounds about the house, little movements overhead, little smiles and little kisses, and a little someone else to walk with. This is all rough logic, but midnight makes it sound.

“ Midnight ! ” he cried, leaping from the table with a frog-like action. “ It makes a man divine. The middle of the night is the time when he feels proud of his soul. Here is space all around me, not chaos, but a landscape. Every-

thing was created out of nothing : once there must have been a hole in the universe which this world now occupies. Still we start with something, an atmosphere, and forces of attraction—we must not think in that direction or we get paralysed. The poetic principle is this, poetic because I, Claud Yalland, by daylight long-eared and braying, but at night a fine ragged forty-year-old philosopher, am entertaining it : if the world was created out of nothing, and we cannot conceive a beginning which contained something, for even chaos must have its origin, then it should be possible for me to create my own world out of all these materials ready to my hand. Create, create ! Make something ! Isn't that the message of this midnight ? Life is given in order that it may make more life. Happiness must be joined to that life of ours canonically by a priestess, a virgin, a vestal who passes along singing, ' Out of my way, sorrow ; out of my way, sickness ; out of my way, death. I am everything.' When the priestess passes, nothing finds itself in a tight place. And she is for everyone, for everyone who has enough divine constructive skill to create his own world out of these materials. I will go and gather a few wet field-flowers and carry them to Summerland. A small thing, a very modest beginning, but even chaos was created out of nothing."

It was not an orthodox time to go flower-picking, but Claud was a heretic in all things. He lighted a lantern inexpressibly greasy, not wishing to disturb the pleasant gloom, but knowing the shy flowers would have their eyes shut and his own would not find them in the grass. Across the field he went, keeping near the hedge where he had a right to walk, and came out into Wood-Sorrel Lane, as he called it, because the banks were white all spring with tiny bitter-sweet blossoms. He flashed his lantern-light under the sprawling roots of oak-trees, bringing moths around : his hands passed over the large coarse flowers and sought for the small ones until he had enough ; and having a

grievance against this lane he addressed it while walking on :

“ You are barren from the turning at the larch-copse to the junction with the road. You are one of the brightest of the lanes, and yet all I have taken out of you are a few small flowers which I could very easily have obtained elsewhere. Primrose Lane owes me a guinea every year and pays promptly. When the first yellow spike appears I snatch him up with a crinkled leaf or two, I write an article to herald the coming of spring, and this I send to London into some foggy newspaper office, and sometimes I enclose primrose with manuscript to make my guinea sure. No man who lives in smoke and gas can resist the first pale primrose of the year. It is always the same article, but it never knows rejection ; it comes like Easter and a holiday ; and there is not a man in London who gets tired of spring, or remembers what he read last year. Bluebell-time Lane pays me a white rent, sometimes a golden one, but not often, for editors are shy of bluebells, and grow callous by May, for it is said there is sunshine in London then. Suicide Lane has filled me with inspiration, and has provoked two thousand lines of verses. But you, Wood-Sorrel Lane, have not done your duty : you pay no rent for the privilege of having me walk along you. What sonnets I have gathered here are of the kind we do not dignify with titles. There is no artistic feeling in you, Wood-Sorrel Lane. You are too straight, you want another turning or two, you are not suggestive. There is too much monotony in your hedges, and if you have a personality of your own you have not yet revealed it. You bring forth flowers, I know, but that is nothing to your credit, for every rubbish heap will do as much. I am displeased with you, Wood-Sorrel Lane. It may be I shall cease to walk in you.”

Claud passed slowly to his cottage revelling in the laziness of the poetical life and his ownership of the night. There were no metes and bounds for him, no such things as time-

tables, clocks, book of hours, or almanacks. To be out of the world, losing the good things, meant leaving the bad ones. He set the lantern upon the table and examined his booty like some highwayman just returned from the road, choosing certain flowers, rejecting others, plunging the accepted ones into water, arranging them in a posy, reciting as he worked, his head being stocked with ballads which he suited to his moods :

“ Marks she hath about her plenty ;
You may know her among twenty,
All her body is a fire,
And her breath a flame entire,
Which, being shot like lightning in,
Wounds the heart but not the skin.”

Had a stranger looked in he might have marvelled at beholding a big bearded half-dressed man making a posy of tiny flowers by the light of a lantern. Claud, who lived upon imagination, loved Margaret with it, and too often idled in it, could not have been persuaded this was folly, for it was made up of liberty and the poetic principle. He had a trick of intoning sentences, and as he fastened together the stalks of his simple flowers this was his song :

“ Once I saw her kiss the old brown man her father, making him rejoice and me consider how prettily and well she played the angel. She has placed me under a very considerable obligation by giving me the opportunity of being in love ; and when a man has this kind of debt to discharge to a maid all the laws which govern philosophy are apt to become confounded.”

He looked up. The door stood open, and outside it seemed as if the wind had suddenly descended with voices and murmurings and whisperings ; the atmosphere was filled with motion, restlessness stirred in the dark, and the swan-clouds had been driven out of the sky by raven-clouds, which seemed to be croaking hoarsely and calling, “ Claud Yalland, come out ! We have caught a swan-cloud. Come

and hold her, poet, so that we may peck her eyes out."

"And it came to pass in the middle of the night while all men slept except poets, that the fields and lanes were haunted," intoned Claud. "This is the spirit of pure enchantment."

"Claud Yalland! Claud Yalland!" called the wind.

"There are night-sports going on. All the trees and ferns have been turned into dancing-maidens. They are calling me out to have a frisk with them, but I won't go. I am a poet and I know the rascals. They will stuff my pocket with gold-pieces which by morning will be nothing but furze-blossoms. They love to fool a poet, the malicious toads, to drag him along with them through all the hedges, pinching and scratching him as they go. Run along home, rascals!" Claud shouted from the threshold, throwing his arms into the gloom and giving a great laugh. "It is too late in the day for these revels. The well of romance is nearly dry, and it is high time the last poet and the last pixy went away arm-in-arm. There is the king of the fairies himself running about over yonder, calling me:

"With counterfeiting voice he greets,
And calls me on with him to roam
Thro' woods, thro' lakes,
Thro' bogs, thro' brakes;
More swift than wind with him I go,
O'er hedge and lands,
Thro' pools and ponds,
I whirry laughing, ho, ho, ho!"

"By the brains of nightingales and the fat of snails the king of the fairies runneth like a man."

"Yalland! Claud Yalland!" and then came a snorting like a bullock, followed by a figure of great size to the eyes of the poet whose mind was set upon little folk. It was indeed a man running towards the cottage, and Claud drew back wishing for some defensive weapon; a peaceful visitor

by day would have been a marvel ; one running in his direction during fairy-time was impossible, a real man hot from the world, and yet it was happening because it was impossible.

" Yalland, I am ill. I have run and walked twenty miles since sunset."

" Does the man think his running and walking will convert a poet into a physician ? " Claud muttered, rubbing his eyes, losing fear in amazement when he discovered Theodore. " Telling me of twenty miles ! I could tell him about twenty years spent here and this is my first visitor."

" I have lost Margaret. Last evening, hours ago, she went out," Theodore panted. " She was looking for something in the sky."

Claud woke up. Practical man he could not be, but it was possible to get rid of the more clogging part of his imagination. Theodore was holding his arm, panting violently, his quaint face dry no longer but bubbling and yeasty. He saw the table like an altar fragrant with flowers, the neat bunch tied with green cotton, all the mighty preparations which had been made for the love token. Claud's secret was out ; it was a poor thing hardly worth preserving, yet the dim lantern-light made it religious, and Theodore was gratified, not in the least annoyed, because it was every man's duty to worship Margaret, poor and rich, old and young, poets and gentlemen : all were welcome so long as they did not steal her away.

" You have come to ask me to find her," said Claud, collecting his wits together.

" I have been wandering, running, calling," said Theodore. " At last I remembered these twisting lanes behind your cottage. Margaret may be walking in a maze, confused by the night, unable to find her way out."

" If she is in my lanes it is for me to find her," said Claud.

" She has lost her memory," Theodore went on. " That is not my idea ; Hortensia suggested it to me. I could not

believe my daughter would lose her memory, but Hortensia is sure of it. She may be walking away from me, looking for her home, and going further away at every step. My poor little Sacharissa! Every one loves her. There is perhaps a danger of love in excess."

"Have you been to God's Garden?"

"I climbed up there when I became alarmed. Mr Ramrige was not in. I waited until he returned, told him; he was distressed. He loves her too. He told me he had seen her before the light went, and had given her advice, good advice I know, for he is a gentle and a learned man."

"What did he tell you?"

"'Watch her carefully. Do not let her wander by herself. Her mind is in a disturbed condition, especially at this time. There are so many mysteries in life.' That was what he said. I could not understand him. Life is a plain straightforward kind of thing. 'There is an influence over her, not for good,' he said. He looks at the stars, they say. I reminded him of this and he did not answer until I pressed him, and then he lifted his hand to the sky and waved his fingers at the new moon, saying, 'The danger is there.' I cannot make anything out of moons, Claud Yalland."

"The master has a great mind. He gets nearer the heart of things than we can. I believe in the mysteries," said simple Claud. "I feel them around me here at night, and if I can't understand them it is no use trying to explain them away by declaring they don't exist. I will go out with my lantern into the lanes. I will take these flowers with me, and if I find Miss Margaret perhaps she will be pleased to accept of them. This is an affair of the imagination. We poets live on such as bees suck honey."

He swung the lantern from the table, stood by the door, a quaint night-watchman with a foolish bunch of flowers, and added mournfully, "I fear Miss Margaret may have gone upon the moor."

"That is what Hortensia said," chirped Theodore more

cheerfully. "Sacharissa is afraid of the moor and always walks away from it. She likes to be shut in. What made that light? I am certain my poor Adelia is lost in your lanes. Swing the lantern again. Oh Yalland, Claud Yalland, what have we here? Yellow, pure, lustrous—yellow, did I say? Golden, bright beautiful sunlit gold."

"Let it alone," said Claud.

"Early glass, a piece of the first made—to grace a monastic window or a king's chamber. Golden glass, perfect, hardly chipped, filled with the purest glow that ever fell from the brightest lamp of architecture. Twenty miles! I would have tramped forty with pebbles in my boots and blisters on my toes. Where did you find it? Claud Yalland, you stand yawning while there is golden glass of the purest, glass of the earliest period."

"Come out and look for Miss Margaret," called the poet scornfully. "What's a bit of rubbish picked up in a mine? The rocks outside are older."

"I am coming. I do not forget my troubles. There is no loss of memory, but I must first compose myself. Flash the lantern once again. Let me see the light playing through those liquid golden depths."

Claud had turned his back and was passing out. Theodore pounced upon the scrap of glass, secured it, and hurried out; but they had only made a few steps when the light flashed again upon the relic which the antiquary was jealously guarding with both hands. Then Claud woke up in a surprising fashion and cried, "Give me that bit of glass."

Theodore hung back like a frightened child, keeping just outside the ring of lantern-light, and at that distance his face looked ghastly.

"Let me have it, Yalland. I must have it. I'll give you money. Sell it me like a poem, a lyric of the golden days."

"Give it me. I value the thing," said Claud sullenly.

"Not as I do. Yalland, if you won't take money, I'll

give you an idol, a Burmese idol with two heads and as many legs as a spider."

Claud set down the lantern, turned and seized Theodore, who did not struggle but went on with his prayers. The poet had changed, the ordinary human devil was at work in him while he held the thief's hands, and pulled at the octopus-like tentacles which clung to the golden glass.

"You have no passion for the antique," whimpered Theodore. "This glass is not like one of your eyes; it is no more to you than a sherd in a rubbish heap. I have lost my daughter. I cannot lose the golden glass as well."

Claud's fingers, which were more like blacksmith's than a poet's, released the relic. He went back to the cottage, hid it, and returned to the unhappy Theodore who slunk by his side with respectful bleatings. He had discovered in Claud physical strength and firmness of mind, as well as a love for his own religion. Therefore he liked the poet none the less.

"I came near losing my temper. I am sorry," said Claud.

"I have lost the golden glass and I am sorry too," said Theodore in his whimsical way.

"I would have given it you gladly if I did not feel myself unable to part with it."

"Somebody gave it you," chirped Theodore. "Not Sacharissa? No, no. She would have brought it straight to me."

"I am made of the same stupid stuff as most," Claud went on. "I found that bit of glass ten years ago on a day when I was near starvation, and I picked it up because it was a pretty thing. Going to the post-office in Summerland, I found a letter for me containing money which I had ceased to hope for. I have not been starving since that day, but I have a feeling that if the golden glass was lost or broken I might have the bad time again. It's a foolish belief, if it is one, but it is a religion most of us practise with our

charms and signs to avert the evil eye, which is a power we don't believe in though we do our best to guard against it. I will apologise for the folly, and leave it to the wise to explain the cause."

"I will lend you the Burmese idol," carolled Theodore. "He, she, or it may bring a double portion of good-fortune upon you, and if that is so you shall keep the idol, which is not a genuine antique or I could not part with it, and give me the golden glass."

They had reached Wood-Sorrel Lane, and went along it quickly into that of the creaking oak-bough, and so down many another, seeing no sign of human life and hearing nothing but owls; until they came into a part more dark and chilly, where the track led down into stony depths, and they heard the drip of a stream with a mournful sighing of bushes; and here Theodore stopped and mopped his face.

"I have a horror upon me, poet. I will go no further."

"There is a black pond behind the trees."

"I cannot look at it. Even if my poor Melissa was floating upon its surface I could not go down," piped Theodore faintly. "I have an impression of something horribly gleaming."

"A birch tree. The light of the lantern caught its trunk. Miss Margaret is not in these lanes," said Claud. "I am the lord-warden. I know all who enter or come out."

"I shall have nightmares of these black lanes and the golden glass," said Theodore.

"I know of a small side-lane to Summerland," said the poet. "You must not mind wet feet for it is boggy."

"They will suit wet eyes," said Theodore.

They hurried towards the little village. It was then two o'clock in the morning but Margaret had not returned. Hortensia was in her sitting-room, trim and neat, almost pretty despite her fifty years, with plentiful white hair well arranged, flushed cheeks, and anxious eyes. She had a kettle boiling ready to make tea for her brother. Claud

entered with a bumped head, not having learnt the doors, and found himself wonderfully at home, although conscious that Hortensia did not love literary beings of any kind, and all the more grateful when she rose and placed a bowl of flowers beside him. She always put flowers near her guests, this being her way of showing hospitality; and the simple poet, who had still his lantern and little posy, thanked her and tried to find space where he could hide his great wet boots.

"Another cup and saucer, Theodore," she ordered. "In that cupboard."

"In the dining-room," said stubborn Theodore, going and discovering by many bumps that the room space there was limited; while Hortensia leaned forward to the guest, thanked him gently for his help, and added, "You will say nothing. Yes, I know, but this is the scandal which travels quickest."

"You think Miss Margaret has walked out and lost her memory?" Claud said.

"That was to satisfy Theodore. I do not think so. I am a religious woman, Mr Yalland, and I am old-fashioned enough to believe the Bible stories. Margaret has a devil," she whispered.

"Epilepsy," muttered the poet. "That is the explanation of possession by a devil."

Theodore returned, rattling a cup and saucer together, blinking his eyes mournfully, and tried to tell Hortensia about the golden glass, but she would not hear him.

The grandfather clock struck three. With the sound came a step in the garden, and Theodore rising hurriedly pulled the curtain, exclaiming joyfully, "It is Sacharissa! She has come back"; while Claud muttered, "Too heavy, too strong."

Hortensia screamed suddenly and covered her eyes.

"It is a ghost. So white and awful!"

"The master!" exclaimed Claud.

Jasper entered, looking very great, but very tired and haggard, and the beard over his black cloak was like white clematis upon the wall of some ancient building.

"Margaret is not here?" he said.

Hortensia answered, for Theodore could not. The sight of the figure frightened him, and he began all at once to sniff and shiver.

"I will wait a little. We shall hear of her soon," said the master.

"I know you have been looking for her," said Hortensia tenderly. "You are always helping others"; and then she whispered, "You knew where to look?"

"I did not find her."

"You know she will soon return?"

"I know she is not far away."

"Has not lost her memory?"

"Has not lost her memory."

"Is alive and well?"

"Is alive."

Hortensia strained her hands together and looked down upon them. Another half-hour went by.

"What are you doing, Claud Yalland?" asked the master almost roughly.

"I have been looking for Miss Margaret with her father. I came back with him," the poet answered nervously.

"The atmosphere to-night is in your favour," said Jasper in a low voice.

The old clock struck again. Dawn was beginning to break, though its influence was not felt in Cob Court; and then another footstep sounded, but still it was not Margaret. Seabroke, Cuthbert's man, came through the garden bringing a note to Theodore, and as he hurried out to take it Hortensia asked the master, "Is this what you expected?" and he answered, "What I knew."

There was in that note a disregard of the world, of family

ties, of all the lawful operations of life. It contained the message of a man who defied them all.

"Miss Vipont is with me. She is safe and happy. When she arrived she hardly knew what she was doing, but her mind is clear now. I send my man with this note to assure you she is in good hands. She will return when it is light."

Theodore raced away and Claud followed gradually, dropping his bunch of flowers in the garden in the usual place for Margaret to gather if she willed.

"Mr Ramrige," said Hortensia feebly. "What is the meaning of this?"

"I understand it, but you do not. And if I explained you would not," he answered. "This is a matter which goes deep."

"Is the worst over for poor Margaret?"

"It has hardly begun."

CHAPTER VII

GLOOMY

THEODORE went with the man Seabroke towards Wind-whistle. Claud followed a few paces until an idea possessed him he was not wanted, so he disappeared quietly into one of his twisting lanes happy to be alone and to listen to the sounds of the morning ; to obey the master and interpret those sounds if he could ; but after a little his tired body interfered and all that reached his mind was the hum and confusion of a day beginning.

Seabroke the servant was a two-hundred-word man, a good worker but silent ; he burrowed his own life out with two large hands, and had done so little with his tongue it had lost activity. Theodore dared not question him about Margaret ; if he had not seen her, any remark might be a spark upon the tinder of scandal ; if he had, the mischief was done ; but he ventured to suggest that Mr Orton kept late hours, adding, to explain his own night-tripping, " Business has made me run about since evening."

Seabroke gave no sign of astonishment, having been Cuthbert's man long enough to understand how certain venturesome folk so completely master the elements as to make night into day by the simple process of burning a lamp and calling it sunshine.

" Master lives all upside-down like, sir," he said respectfully ; with pride also at the knowledge that he had risen above his class ; he had been once like his workmen-

neighbours setting and rising with the sun and knowing little about night except that it was a time which sober folk avoided; but having eaten Cuthbert's bread for many years he could see through Nature's dark game of night and had discovered it was only a trick to deceive simplicity. Therefore Seabroke had a comfortable feeling for folk who walked at night and slept away mornings, because it made them like his master, or at least imitators and flatterers, for Cuthbert was great in his home and compelled hero-worship. Both Seabrokes worshipped him with willing attention and two hundred and fifty words, Mrs Seabroke having fifty more than her husband although in ordinary conversation she used only six.

"Master sends me out at night," the man went on. "I hear a knock, or master comes into the room and shakes me or Bessie, whichever comes first it don't matter, and says, 'Seabroke, go up on the moor and find out which way the wind blows.' Day or night, 'tis all the like to he."

"Your master is a learned man," said Theodore heavily.

"There ain't none like him. There ain't two things he don't know nor one he can't do."

"I must take care," thought the antiquary. "It will be necessary to keep my temper. This man would break my neck if his master said the word."

"Here, sir," said Seabroke, guiding him along the tangled pathway.

The door of Windwhistle was closed at last. Theodore felt himself breathing through his mouth as the man pulled it open with a grating sound as if wind had forced small pebbles underneath.

"I'll ask master if it pleases him to see you, sir."

"I must see him," said Theodore, chirping indignantly at the idea of his daughter being imprisoned, a thought which then occurred as he saw the carved stone-work of the church-like building and its modern glass behind red ancient

bars. Remembering himself, he muttered, "Say Mr Vipont is waiting here."

There was a movement at the end of the passage, a figure was suggested, and a voice said, "Go back to bed, Seabroke. Is that you, Mr Vipont? I had an idea you would come, but it is unnecessary. You are a lover of the antique, I believe. You will find old customs here."

"Mr Orton, where is my daughter?" cried Theodore.

Seabroke had gone, and they could hear the sound of his footsteps as he climbed an invisible stairway on his way back to bed.

"I wrote as plainly as I could that she is here," said Cuthbert.

"But it is terrible: I feel I might say damnable. You have my daughter here alone with you in this lonely house, you are detaining her—I don't know what to say. If that man of yours knows——"

"Seabroke is safer than you are. Your daughter has remarkably good ears. She may be listening to every word you speak."

At that Theodore bustled forward, crying out, "Sacharissa, my darling, where are you?"

Cuthbert let him pass, followed into the chancel-like room which was now lighted by a lamp in addition to the candles, and stood smiling at poor Theodore's horror at beholding Margaret lying upon a heap of cushions, playing with the ears of the small blind dog as if she had been mistress of the place, and looking down, not in shame, but rather as if she failed to recognise the visitor as her father.

"My darling! my little pink pearl!" cried Theodore. "I have come to take you home."

Margaret looked up, but towards Cuthbert, and said irritably, "Please take this man away."

The little antiquary shuddered, then darted round and sprang forward with his hands out, crying like a lunatic, "You have done it," to the master of the place, who stepped

aside quickly, and Theodore found himself standing alone near the screen, looking into the eyes of painted dragons, feeling small and impotent. Cuthbert's personality, the atmosphere of the place, Margaret's changed appearance, terrified him. He heard her speaking, looking up with a sweet and tender expression, speaking as she had never done to him, with her whole soul, "Go on with what you were saying about the highest perfection, the love for the best, the imaginative treatment of ourselves."

The heat of Theodore's indignation became chilled with terror. This was not Margaret; that girl lying there at her ease was more beautiful, much brighter and happier, far less weak and nervous, than his daughter; and yet it must be Margaret half-asleep and dreaming. Even then he was able to notice three things about her; they were so strongly marked he could not miss them. Pride was the first; an impression that she was one of the most perfect of living creatures, a feeling that she was beautiful and good above the common, a conviction that the art of music-making would die with her. Reserve was the second; she was holding back what was in her, listening to her companion, drawing all she could out of him, but ready to shrink if he asked her questions; had he approached, used any endearing term, attempted to show affection for her body, she would have been ready to die with horror. Love of wisdom was the third; she desired to act calmly and rationally, to acquire a knowledge of those laws of existence which govern first causes; she wanted to attain the philosophic gift of controlling the mind when developed. Nothing gross was suggested; in that atmosphere it seemed almost natural for Margaret to be lying there speaking so tenderly to that handsome grey-haired man as if she loved him, not with her heart, but with her mind. So far from being an unpleasant sight there was even beauty in this communion of mind with mind, without the slightest thought of sex or taint of passion; and yet it was terrible

to Theodore because Margaret would not know him, the little Sacharissa had requested a perfect stranger to remove him from her sight, and, what was worse, though she had never looked so well and happy lying there defended with her pride, philosophy, and reserve, she had been brought there. The weak and nervous Margaret, who shivered at the smallest sound, who dared not walk upon the moor because great spaces frightened her, who hardly glanced at people, could never have found courage to walk during the night into a man's house, recline upon a lounge in his secret chamber, and listen to him speaking, unless she had been compelled to do so by a mind too strong for her. And yet while Theodore went on looking at her bright, beautiful face, his anger kept decreasing, fear began to leave him, and the emotion which remained was pity. He was sorry for Margaret, feeling somehow Cuthbert was not altogether to be blamed; he had made no assignation with Margaret, nor had he tempted her into his house. She had come to him; she had set out walking, and had wandered into Windwhistle by a process of mind responding to mind just as a bird will rise in the air and fly towards its mate a long way off.

"Perhaps you had better go home now," said Cuthbert, looking down upon Margaret who did not move. "We can talk of our ideas another time. I had almost forgotten it was night outside. It is easy to shock the world with conversations then. This is your father. You will go with him?"

"My father," said she, gazing round with no interest. "Oh yes, I suppose he is. Mr James Sims, I believe."

"Vipont, darling. Theodore your father," said the antiquary, coming forward with his hands shaking. "Mr Orton," he went on, turning, "I am trying to be calm. I do not know yet what I ought to say, I shrink from expressing myself; but I am justified in saying you have magnetised my daughter."

"You may think so," said Cuthbert coldly. "If I possess the power I have never to my knowledge practised it. Do you consider you were brought here by any hypnotic influence?" he asked Margaret; and she replied at once, "Certainly not. I wanted to come, and I came."

"I do not understand it," Theodore muttered. "You are a gentleman, Mr Orton; you are also, I believe, famous in the world. I cannot easily believe you would encourage my daughter to come here and tempt the evil tongues to chatter."

"I wish you would not introduce your conventional poison here," said Cuthbert. "What has happened is this: I was sitting in this room engaged in thought, the door open as I like the moths and beetles to fly about the house, when your daughter walked in. She has honoured me with her company for some hours. I sent you a note, fearing you might be disturbed by her absence, and I did not wish it to be thought I was entertaining her secretly. Disbelieve me if you care to."

"I must believe you, Mr Orton," said Theodore humbly.

"He is one of those foolish men who make a ridiculous fuss over trifles. He has always hindered my progress," said Margaret bitterly.

"Don't say that. Don't look at me with eyes so cold, darling," implored Theodore. "You are not yourself, not my little Melissa, my humming-bee. I don't know what has come over you, unless it is you are so tired you don't know what you say. That's what it is, Mr Orton," he said, rejoicing to find any excuse. "She is thoroughly exhausted: she has been walking about half the night; even a little stroll in the garden tires her out. She is often a little funny when she gets tired. I do not blame you, Mr Orton. I am thankful my little girl came where she would be safe. You are a gentleman, and we can trust you."

"What is the fellow talking about?" asked Margaret despairingly. "Is he saying things about me?"

"My darling, if the neighbours found out what had happened there would be terrible scandal; we could not face it. They would say you had spent the night here with Mr Orton," said Theodore, trying painfully to make himself clear, and very much startled when he heard a scream and discovered Margaret standing before him white and trembling, her own nervous self again, longing to be alone in her room out of the sight of everyone.

"You blunderer," muttered Cuthbert, blowing out the lamp, leaving the room dimly lighted by the great candles that he might see as little as possible of Margaret's eyes. "You have spoilt it all."

Margaret walked forward slowly, always shivering, out of the room and the house into the morning mists; but Theodore turned back and brought his brown face up towards Cuthbert's, saying hoarsely, "What is the meaning of it—the whole thing from beginning to end? What do you mean? If you have not done evil to my daughter who has?"

"Ask your sister if she has ever thought her niece like other girls," Cuthbert answered. "The story begins a long way back. She has a remarkable mind which only asserts itself when the nervousness is kept under or is conquered by one stronger. She seemed free and happy, showed me her real self, which you have never seen. Perhaps I drew it out. This loss of memory is only a matter of nerves. Her mind works by fits and starts, flashing out then going back to sleep. A wonderful mind when wide awake—it has taught me. Now you come blundering in with your vile suggestions, you shock her, her mind closes up at once, the nervous debility returns. Go and look after her. She will need you now."

"Will she come to you again?"

"She is sure to."

"You will make her?"

"I am not the centre of the universe. She will come because her mind will force her here."

"She loves you."

"Nothing of the kind. You cannot understand. Think of a moth drawn towards a lamp."

"A flame, Mr Orton," corrected Theodore.

"It was not a happy comparison. Think rather of water seeking its own level."

"Running downhill," muttered Theodore.

"Minds do not love in your sense. They reason, strive to get out of the body, struggle towards ideals. Your daughter and I have much in common, but I am strong, she is weak; I am united, she is not. Go out; she will require you."

"We must meet again," Theodore murmured. "We must get to the bottom of this. I trust we shall not quarrel; I should not like to have you for an enemy, but my little girl must not be here again. A maid and her good name must cling together."

He went out with a bustling movement, glad to leave incense and breathe fresh air, while Cuthbert folded the shutters back admitting the first tinted light, murmuring, "A dry fool filled with copy-book platitudes. He will go to old Ramrige and pump the history of my life out. The master can play havoc with me if he likes, he can drive me about the world like wind blowing a cockleshell, but he won't; I am more to him than this generation of Viponts. I have only to mutter of new moons and bracken, and he'll throw his arms about my neck."

He blew out the candles, watched the smoke ascending from the wicks, glanced about the room, picked up a hairpin, smiled and tossed it into the fireplace; gathered the little dog into his arms, kissed it tenderly, murmuring, "Don't die yet, my precious," noticed that its head was scented, saying lightly, "All that I know about moons and the seventh house, according to the patter of old Ramrige, is

they have given me many a queer night—by chance"; walked up the stairs, banged open the door of the room where Seabroke and his wife lay slumbering, shouted the man's name, and when he stirred and asked what the master wanted, said, "I am going to bed. Call me at noon and tell Bessie to have breakfast ready by one o'clock. Get up whenever you like, and do what you like; but remember, nothing has happened to-night."

"That's right, sir," said Seabroke.

"That's right, sir," said Bessie.

And the honest couple went to sleep again.

CHAPTER VIII

MYSTICAL

“ REASON convinces me that great minds of the past are not silent now,” said the master, while rambling in his garden beside the stream, then a mere trickle, which he called his Euphrates river, dripping down between the ferns. “ What is the genius of Shakespeare doing now ? Where is the mind of Socrates ? Surely not rusty and idle but working still, perhaps upon these instruments we carry in us. I accept the teaching of reason. It shows me a way into the significance of the shape of things and I begin to comprehend the circle, symbol of life and of eternity since it knows no beginning nor ending. We understand the plain square, but in the simplest circle all are lost. We are flying in a circle about a circle, and at death are flung upon another also moving, and so we rise or fall in circles always whirling. This everlasting rotundity bewilders while it inspires. I would teach people theology with a cart-wheel. I would preach to them of the four elements ; of the earth and water out of which they were made, of the fire and air which they contain in the form of mind and spirit. I would tell them there are sounds for all ; whether it is an organ in some darkened church, a tempest in a wood, or a robin singing from a thorn-bush—there is a call if they can hear. Children listen best, answer best, but the years describe quick circles round them, they go out into the fields or streets, earth stiffens their hands, pleasures stop their ears : the fire dies

down, the light is quenched, and the call sounds for them in vain. All this is an allegory. We must approach the mystery of life by way of mysteries, not by the call of the excellent dull theologian from his praying-desk: "Here's a hymn with a good tune. Never mind the words for you won't understand them. Sing!"

The master was wont to preach while walking in his God's Garden. It was a steep place upon the side of the moor rising from the road in cunning terraces, some made by Nature, others by men; those made the first were the best; firmer, more boldly cut. On the heights was a house all alone in the wind, sturdy to defy the weather, blinking with rather small windows, not visible from the lower pathway where the master walked. Here the stream gurgled pleasantly downhill, the water sparkling beneath long fern-fronds, and overhead were branches of rowan, oak and birch shutting out the sunlight. God's path, God's water; everything was divine, though the garden was rough and had never been tamed. That was why it was worthy to be called God's; the hand of a human gardener might have spoilt it. Trees had been planted upon the slopes, sweet-smelling firs, and beeches that rattled dry brown leaves all winter, trees that grow well in pure air and are not afraid of storm-wind. It was a home of the upper atmosphere, and the windows let in starlight when the night was clear.

"How well I know him," the master murmured, smiling at the water, thinking of Cuthbert. "He sends a message promising to be with me at such a time. Had Vipont or Yalland said to me 'I will be with you at four,' I should not have looked for them. I know the disorderly nature of their minds; but when Orton says 'I will be with you at four,' then I know he will come at that time, not five minutes before nor five after. He would wait at my gate and not enter until the precise moment, allowing himself so many seconds to walk along this path and reach my side. He would ruin a woman's life, but he would not keep me waiting.

This tidiness of mind shows an attention to small things and a neglect of those that matter."

He descended towards the lower gate of the garden and paused beside a waterfall which fell thirty feet down, all white like his beard, saying sharply, "Whose genius is it? For there is genius. What mind in the past has spent its power in dragging out the vital parts and splitting them into personalities of evil? What genius planted that garden of poisonous growths into which Orton has wandered? I cannot give that man a name. He has left no record beyond an influence. I can imagine some sullen priest, devoted to the cult of Osiris, analysing those minds which it was his duty to commit to that God without a smile, then departing to his tomb unknown. His impressions would remain, for whatever a man thinks becomes a part of the life of the world; his most secret idea enters the common stock of human knowledge. It is a seed which must germinate and bring forth growths which another will gather in due season."

The gate swung open and Cuthbert was climbing upward, the blind dog close to his heels following the creature that he loved by the sense of smell. The master noticed that Cuthbert looked back often to see that the dog was safe, and he muttered, "He has it in him to make humanity suffer, but he would not hurt the feelings of a dog. I am here, Orton," he called in his stately manner.

"As conspicuous as a temple on a hill-top," Cuthbert answered. "I heard you muttering as I came up—but what a place to mutter in! I too should become prophet and planet-watcher if I lived alone here. God's Garden you call it."

"It has been so named for centuries. I could not have called it so."

"It suits. You look like Apollo grown old. Is this the way upward to the shrine where the pythoness squats with

her eyes gleaming through the smoke and one may hear voices and mutterings? It is more like Delphi than Dartmoor. I am afraid of you at last. I have a feeling you are about to lead me into the holy place and show me the future from to-morrow up to the last scene of a flat stone and some idle Orton of another day playing games of chance upon it. I come in a friendly mood after forty-eight hours' hard labour, confined to a gloomy candle-lit chamber which would have made your teeth chatter and your hands grope for a telescope."

"Walk beside my little Euphrates. There is room enough on the path for two," said the master.

"Will you be a prosaic gentleman with a scandal to tell me, and never a word about asteroids or constellations?"

"A scandal I will promise you," said Jasper. "I will also try to make you understand me."

"That you cannot do. Your religion is too dark for me. You are a priest in the old sense of the word, a juggling fellow who frightens his flock with miracles. You know me for a plain-speaker, I care very little for people's feelings, and besides," added Cuthbert with his cynical laugh, "I do not forget those half-holidays when you gated me. You were a bit of a brute to me, Ramrige."

"I was foolish to punish you," the master admitted. "I know now it was impossible for you to submit to discipline, while correction merely harmed you. You were an evil example; you made other boys lazy who could not afford to be. You did much mischief at school, though I perceive now you were even then working out your destiny and adding to your knowledge; but you harmed others, and you harmed me."

"How?" asked Cuthbert quickly.

"You entered so fiercely into my life. You became a familiar spirit, then a part of myself. You could not help it. You discovered something in me which you took and

in its place put something of your own. When you left school I wanted you, and every year I felt you calling me. You did not want me consciously."

"Not in the least."

"It was my wish to follow the academic life always," Jasper continued. "But your restless spirit forced me into the world, and another influence suggested I was to be your master still."

"Get rid of that idea," said Cuthbert. "I have not harmed you at all. If I have dragged you from that dusty school, where you were teaching boys after the manner of the amateur gardener putting in plants upside down and expecting them to grow, I have done you good. At the least I have enlarged your experience. You are still school-master; you always will be, but you are able now to practise in the world."

"This life, which you have compelled me into, is not the one I would have chosen," said Jasper. "I desired to remain at the school teaching boys, following them through their lives, helping them if they wanted my advice, remaining in one place that they might know where to come when in trouble, and in time teaching their sons. That was my ideal of the academic life, and I think a practical one; for he is a poor master who forgets his boys when they cease to be under his authority; he has moulded them, he knows them far better than their parents, he is responsible for so much that is in them, and it is his duty, and should be his pleasure, to assist their lives when they have passed into the world. I am explaining myself to you, Orton. I am no mystic. I declare myself a teacher."

Cuthbert laughed somewhat scornfully, and putting up a hand, for the master was very tall and massive, he placed it upon the mountainous shoulder, saying, "Where is that lamp, Ramrige?"

"What lamp?"

"The lamp of religion."

"It burns. It has the same light."

"The mystic light."

"Religion is a mystery. If man is a mystic for believing in God then we are all mystics."

"The matter-of-fact person believes but does not require lamp, misty altar, candlelight, mutterings, tabernacles," said Cuthbert tauntingly.

"A spiritual being can only be worshipped in a spiritual way. Remove the lamp and your misty altar, and you will introduce materialism which is the enemy of religion. You shall not prove me a mystic so."

"Your language, your astrology!" exclaimed Cuthbert.

"I talk like a master sometimes, but I can also speak, as now, in the practical manner of the world. When I take you into my house presently you will find no scrying-chamber; you will see an ordinary country home and a commonplace old gentleman pouring out tea for you. I claim nothing in a general sense for this astrology, as you call it wrongly; and a learned man like yourself will hardly scoff at a belief which has received a partial acceptance by the inhabitants of the world in every age. All men have believed that phantoms of the dead are sometimes seen, and yet the belief has never become an article of faith. The evidence in favour of telepathy is overwhelming, yet it is not an article of faith. That we are surrounded by influences, direct and indirect, no man would deny; but who is required to believe in them or even to think of them? It is true I have discovered facts concerning my life and yours according to the positions of the planets, but I have worked in a practical fashion without the aid of charms or incantations. It is working in the dark, I own, and to that extent you may call it mysticism, though you would not apply that epithet to a chemist trying to liquefy a gas. We cannot be certain that the planet Mars influences life in this direction and the planet Venus in that. We only know that every body in space exerts an influence. Every science has been built

up largely upon guesswork, and no man is made a mystic by mere guessing."

"We have not changed," said Cuthbert. "You do not trust yourself while I rely upon myself. I have learnt more than you, Ramrige, and now there is only one great thing left for me to learn. That you will never teach me, and now I am advanced in life, and remain still ignorant, I am almost too old to learn—the power of love."

"You cannot get nearer the sky by walking downhill," the master answered. "But in truth you are not made to love; you attract, but give nothing; you fascinate, only to strike. You have sought the Mountain of Venus for your lessons in love and you have tried to write of purity out of passion. You have been spirited away by the woman who from her waist downwards is a serpent, and you have not been able to escape from those vaults of pleasure into the fresh breezes of earth, or feel the sunshine, or tell the difference between flowers made of paper and those of flesh and blood. No man can love until he has set his heart in order. You might as well look to find young wheat sprouting from the crevice of this granite rock."

"I cannot tolerate you in the pulpit," said Cuthbert. "Come out of it, let us leave the temple altogether, shut up our missals, and go a-fairing. I came out to see you this afternoon at your command, quite in the old style, 'Come to my room at four, Orton,' knowing I was to be lectured, but not for idleness; that was in the old days. Now it is the wrong kind of industry, a lack of morality, or too much of the wrong kind of morality. Did you expect me?"

"You promised, therefore I knew you would come. It is wonderful how you retain your boyishness, or rather how you are able to reproduce it. While you were speaking then twenty years departed. It was a boy's face, a boy's manner."

Cuthbert was playing his part. He did not wish to offend the master, feeling that another crisis of his life was near, and fearing the old man's knowledge of his past made public. Neither could the master want to oppose him and drive him out of Windwhistle, for it would mean his leaving God's Garden and following.

"Show me your house. I am free now," Cuthbert went on, in the same light-hearted way. "I shall do no more work for a week, and can devote myself to that life of unbridled licence which stinks in your religious nostrils like toad's flesh. If I was only half as wicked as my words, what a villain I should be!"

"You have been working," said the master quietly. "Seabroke told me you had shut yourself up."

"This is my method; I have a study from which all daylight is excluded; a bath-room opens out of it; there is a bed handy. I imprison myself and work, roll on the bed when my hand or brain aches, bathe occasionally; food is passed in through a trap in the wall. My faithful Cerberus Seabroke growls at any mortal rash enough to attempt the descent into Hades. When the well is exhausted, or I begin to see dark spots leaping up and down, the doors are thrown open, and I go out into the sunlight or the midnight as the case may be."

"Unhealthy in everything," the master murmured.

"My good man, would you deny me all liberty of action? I do my best that way. I have attempted the usual professional method of seating myself in a fertilising ray of sunlight every morning and measuring out the portion for the day; but it leads to failure, to mere mechanical utterances and pen-tricks. I do not get into the vein of thought until it is time to stop. So I take a long debauch by candlelight, write myself blind and dizzy, then rest and revel for a week or two. No one writes what is worth reading until he has worked himself into a kind of delirium. It is when he begins to shiver and to imagine new worlds

and to cast glances over his shoulder to be sure he is alone, that the stuff which lasts comes."

"Your health is bad," was the master's comment.

"Nothing improves it more than a spell of thinking. You know the secret—the influence of Aquarius which thins my blood, affects my eyesight, gives me weak lungs," laughed Cuthbert. "All that jargon is ready to slip off your tongue."

They had reached the last terrace, and the solid box of a house rose near. The path was narrow, and the great figure of the master who walked in front filled it. Without turning his head he asked, "Have you had visitors?"

"The little antiquary hopped up on one leg and hooted, Seabroke tells me. The young lady has not honoured me again. You heard about it?"

"I believe, Orton," said Jasper in a deep voice, "if all the secrets of life and death were committed to your charge, you would accept them with a laugh."

"Very likely," said the cynic.

They went into the house; it was as the owner had said a conventional home, better than most, being finely furnished with thousands of books, and the walls were covered with engravings.

"The story of Undine," muttered Cuthbert as he walked round, "the intrigues of Schelsemnihar and the Prince of Persia, the Knight Faithful at Vanity's Fair, Sintram in old Biron's hall, the same hero and the little master snail-hunting, Piranesi ascending the endless stairs, the quest of the Sangreal—a sort of nursery for mystic babies. You are rich, Ramrige?" he suggested indifferently. "You were not a pedagogue for lucre."

"I have sufficient," the master answered. "It was always my pleasure to teach, as it was to learn."

A quiet elderly woman with a priestly face entered and spread a tea-table. Cuthbert noticed how assiduous she was in her attention to the master, how earnestly she asked

him if all things were to his liking, and how carefully she placed beside him a loose coat and pair of slippers that he might take his ease. He realised that everyone loved the master. Seabroke had told him that the neighbourhood blessed the name of Jasper Ramrige, for he would go to any that were sick with a book of fairy-tales and would read about the Piper of Hamlin, the Fortunate Isles, and the Knight of the Swan, teaching as well as entertaining, and filling pleasantly what might otherwise have been an hour of pain.

"She has been with me a long time," the master said when the housekeeper withdrew, "and has studied me so closely that she has come actually to resemble me in face."

The meal was over—Jasper had drunk much tea but eaten little—and Cuthbert placed himself in an easy chair with his head low down, conscious of a dark cloud coming on. The master rose, closed the window cutting off the supply of eager moorland wind, then began to walk up and down the room with his eyes upon his books.

"Will you do your old master a kindness?" he asked presently.

"Certainly," said Cuthbert.

"Will you come with me presently to Summerland?"

"To the Viponts? I will not."

"Which of your answers am I to accept?"

"The last. Why should I go to prostrate myself before that little brown man and implore forgiveness for ruining the reputation of his daughter?"

"Let me tell you what has happened," said the master gently. "Since that night the poor child has repeatedly attempted to reach you. Her father and aunt have been compelled to make a prisoner of her."

"I am not responsible."

"Think again, Orton."

"Well, hardly at all. I have been working."

"If you strike a note upon that piano the sound will ring in my ears. Every time you think of that girl she seems to hear you calling. You have established a complete mastery over her mind. To do so you must have made an effort. She was in harmony with you to a certain extent before you came, through your books which she ought never to have looked at. You saw her—I know your power, Orton—and placed yourself in communication with her."

"I did—mentally."

"She is in a pitiable condition," the master went on in his quiet deep voice. "Her nervousness has increased to such an extent that she will scream if a gnat buzzes near her. She sits in her room crying very gently, in a heart-breaking fashion. Unless a change takes place, and soon, she will become insane."

"A change! What do you mean?" asked Cuthbert, looking up with a frowning face.

"I have added another life to yours and mine, the life of Margaret. I have looked for her path in this system of ours, and have found it, like that of a comet, erratic and driven here and there by other lives," said Jasper. "It is not like mine circling with steady movements round the central light; but it proceeds out of the depths of space, its motion increasing as it nears perihelion, then losing speed as it passes from this system and recedes into the unknown universe."

"Translated into plain language?" said Cuthbert.

"You are the sun towards which this erratic life is struggling; and its course is influenced mightily by my ruling planet Jupiter."

"You mean my attraction is greater than yours?"

"It is a difficult life to follow. If it passes safely round the sun it may be safe. If it strikes the sun the usual process of disintegration must follow, and the body will be split up into meteorites which will flash across the scene and vanish one by one. It may be already too late, the contact

may have taken place, and if so I do not know the influence which can restore that life to its former path. If it has not happened, if the attraction of the sun has been conquered, a happy course is marked out, not a lengthy one, not altogether peaceful, because its ruling planet Neptune will always bring the clouds of dreams about its path, but in the main fortunate and serene."

"You are trying to disturb me with this occultism. I wish I had left the girl alone," said Cuthbert.

"You have followed me?"

"If I withdraw myself Margaret will be happy. If I continue to exert my influence——"

"You will kill her," said the master.

There was silence for a few moments. Cuthbert kept his eyes fixed upon an engraving of a girl standing in twilight making her choice, beneath clouds forming on one side a convent, on the other the shape of a man. "Suppose it is too late?" he muttered.

The master made a step forward, checked himself, passed to the window and gazed upon the rocks. "I cannot tell—not yet," he said, with a quivering voice.

"It is," said Cuthbert. "I cannot get rid of her now. It is no use trying to withdraw because I have entered. To use your own expression, she has borrowed her light and heat from me. She approached and struck me. It was her own fault," he said crossly. "These women are so weak. She came to me, not altogether of her own free will I daresay, and I entered into her as I have never done to any woman—you understand my language as I understand yours. I never came within a yard of her, never touched her hand even, had I kissed her she would have screamed and run and been safe from me for ever—I wish I had done so—but I got her eyes open and went in that way, and put myself in her mind. It made a wonderful change in her. She became a different being, happy, full of life and imagination. A beautiful creature too, burning with genius, until

her father blundered in and destroyed the connection. You ought to have seen her, Ramrige. She was perfect. You would have said I had made an injection into her with my soul."

The master put out his hand and drew a curtain darkening the room; and then he said quietly, "Let me put a question to you, Orton; and I implore you to think deeply before you answer. Will you marry Margaret?"

Cuthbert looked up, smiled, and shook his head.

"Pass the night in thought and give me your answer in the morning."

"I know what you and the world would say," Cuthbert went on. "I have compromised this girl, I have entered into her mind, absorbed her personality; I have spoilt her life. Apparently the remedy for every evil is matrimony. But my dear Ramrige, I have never considered the sex of her mind; in my house we were not man and woman. I saw before me something new in the form of spirit which was trying to seek out mine. You can unite a pair of bodies easily enough, but you can't force a mind to live with a mind when there is no agreement between the bodies. Margaret is as cold and chaste as that most potent influence of the moon which brought her to me. Even if married, the modest suggestion of an embrace would frighten her; and if I did marry a woman now it would be for the sake of her body, not for her soul. I cannot love, I have no heart for that, for I loved once with my whole being, and I buried it, I had to bury it with Ethel, and I cannot desecrate her grave by trying to dig it out."

Here was a lie; the master knew that Cuthbert had never loved, that he would never become capable of real love until he had cleared his mind of pride and its delusions, but he did not express his thoughts; he could not then.

"I might reply to your argument, but will not, since I can foresee how you would answer. Orton, have you the smallest feeling of affection for any human being in this

world? Is there man or woman who occupies in your heart the same place as that dog?"

"Not one," replied Cuthbert frankly. "I would lose any man or woman in this world rather than my dog. He is old and blind, but he loves me; and when I find a woman who can love me like a dog, then I will transfer my affections to her."

"You would prefer the life of that dog to my life?"

"I would."

"You have then no feeling of regard for me at all?"

"We are old friends," Cuthbert answered slowly. "You have tried to control my life, but except in one instance you have failed. I am grateful to you for the one instance, and that will give you the opportunity of replying that it would have been better for me had I succumbed to you always. Oh yes, I like you, Ramrige, in my own abstracted way, but I don't make friends, I don't require them. I know what the human mind is, my own included—we are all wolves longing to tear each other in pieces, and you would try to persuade me we are turtle-doves cooing softly at one another."

"You have a certain feeling of regard for me because I rescued you from the Venusberg," said Jasper firmly. "Will you marry Margaret for my sake?"

"To discharge my obligation?"

"No man demands payment for doing his duty. I ask you to marry Margaret for her own sake, your own, and for mine. Do not answer me yet," said the master, returning into the darkened corner. "Let me be a prophet now and bring the future down. There is happiness for you, Orton, if you will fight for it, not unless; it will not be forced upon you, for real happiness was never attained without a sacrifice. There is happiness for Margaret, but it must be brought to her; she cannot find it alone. There is peace for her, but that too must be brought by another." He passed a hand across his face as if he was removing a

veil which hung before it. "Now it is clear," he said. "The future is like a field covered with sunshine where all things are visible, trees and flowers, rocks, rivers, pathways ; it is a field without a background. You are there, Cuthbert, and Margaret is with you. I see you walking together across the grass ; I see you, I say, from this distant horizon, for I am not in the field. I have opened the gate for both of you and then have gone. You are both happy, both beloved, you are man and wife, and there are little children also running about the field plucking daisies and bringing them to you. I see Margaret inclining her head to listen to the breezes and that song of the wind in the trees which she will take and weave into music for you. She is weak and nervous no longer, for you have given her your strength. I see you clean and purged, a scholar of Nature, an analyst of the spirit of beauty, a teacher of love. Look upon that picture, Cuthbert. It is yours.

"I see a ravine, a dark chasm of perpetual twilight, and in the depths a man searching for a place to hide himself, running from a woman's body, and beside it I see myself praying that lightning may be sent to strike you. It is Margaret's body and you have murdered her. Look upon that picture, Cuthbert. It may be yours."

The younger man rose, nervous and uneasy, for the note of inspiration was ringing in his ears, and there was upon the master's face a light he had not seen before. "No more of that," he muttered. "You make me chilly."

"Will you have the first picture ?"

"I have already answered you ; I cannot. I do not love Margaret, nor does she love me."

"I will promise you the love. Will you marry her and cherish her for my sake ?"

"Why for your sake ?"

The master shrank back into the corner. "Because I love Margaret," he said. "Teacher as I am, there is a

wiser here. The heart does not grow white ; it is always a child and sings like one. Was there ever a man who implored another to marry the woman that he loved because he loved her? I love Margaret," he repeated ; " but I am an old man, and she but a child, my pupil. I long to take her, preserve her, plant a small garden of wisdom round her. When I see her looking up with that tender and sweet expression of helplessness, I could take her in these arms of mine, still strong, and carry her home and breathe an old man's peace into her young soul, her master and her friend. That cannot be. There is a bridge of years between us. Old men and children must not rise from the schoolroom and go to the altar. I implore you to marry Margaret, because I see with a clearness which you cannot comprehend that it is the only way by which she can obtain happiness, and the only way by which she can escape death. You have wrung this confession from me. I do not make it willingly."

" Can I induce her to love you ? " asked Cuthbert in a low and shaking voice, for he was awed by the master's manner.

" You cannot."

" If I have nothing more to do with her ? If I speak to her harshly ? "

" After what you have told me it is too late."

" I could not be false to Ethel," muttered Cuthbert, then checked himself and was sorry he had spoken, since he had been more than false ; but no retort came ; the master spared him knowing he was master still.

" I wish I had known of this. I am sorry she came across my books," Cuthbert went on. " She is a beautiful girl, I ought to want her, but there is something in her which repels."

" Which you put into her," the master added in a gentle voice.

" Well, if you like. I will admit anything now you have

me humbled. You have been talking over things with Vipont ? ”

“ I explained matters as well as I could. He is more sorry for his daughter than angry with you, because he cannot comprehend the influence of mind upon mind, and he believes that Margaret went to you out of sheer infatuation. He is shocked and miserable, poor dried-up little man.”

“ He thinks evil of Margaret ? ”

“ He takes the ordinary view, as a blind mole of the world,” said Jasper somewhat bitterly.

“ I will marry her, then,” said Cuthbert. “ I’ll take Margaret if she will have me. I won’t let the girl be accused of vice by her own father. I’ll go with you to Summerland, and swear I love her before them all. Come along, before my love cools,” he said cynically. “ I’ll consent to everything. You have made me learn at last, old master. You have beaten me on every point.”

It was early evening, somewhat dull, for clouds were blowing up across the sun with a black promise of rain. Jasper put his cloak about him and they set forth like friends who had agreed to forget all differences, not like two forces in opposition. As they went down towards the scattered group of houses, half a mile away from God’s Garden, the clouds increased, grew darker, a muttering of thunder was heard, and from time to time they felt a few hot drops of rain.

“ An uneasy feeling,” the master murmured. “ The atmosphere is wrathful.”

They reached Cob Court by the back way, descending the side of the moor, crossing the shallow river which bounded the garden by stepping-stones, and began to ascend towards the cottages. Hortensia was there, not working, but walking to and fro with short steps, pausing at every turn to listen.

“ Miss Vipont,” said the master, as he and Cuthbert

emerged from the dense pergola. "This is Mr Orton, my old pupil—a celebrated man."

She started, turned a highly flushed face towards the master, taking no notice whatever of his companion. "I am glad you have come. I am thankful. Did you see Theodore? No, of course not, by the way you have come. Mr Ramrige, listen! listen! Do you hear it?"

"I hear nothing," said Jasper.

"Then it has stopped for a minute. I suppose the echo is ringing in my ears. You will hear it soon. I have sent Polly out to get her away. Do you hear, Mr Ramrige?"

"That was thunder, my dear lady. Cuthbert! Cuthbert!" he murmured to his companion. "It is breaking upon us."

"Theodore has gone along the road. He could not bear it—and his fingers were bleeding. He had bitten them so. We were such cowards, both of us. We dare not go up, and see—and find out who it is Margaret has with her."

Cuthbert turned away feeling a greater coward, caught at the master, and whispered, "We are too late."

"Stay!" said Jasper. "We must have you near. I order you to stay."

He went up to Hortensia, who stood a little way off all quivering, and that instant a loud unpleasant laugh came ringing from the house. Hortensia put her fingers to her ears. Never had the master looked so white, so old. He made a tottering movement towards the house, then returned, gently removed Hortensia's hands as a sign that the noise had stopped, and said, "Tell me what has happened."

"We have both been to her door, Theodore and I. We dared not unlock it or even to speak. The creature in there has murdered Margaret; we heard her cursing at dear Margaret, and she was dressing herself in Margaret's clothes and laughing over Margaret's letters. Thank God you

have come, Mr Ramrige. You will dare to face her, drag her out, make her confess—there it is again! Here he comes—Theodore! you will go with Mr Ramrige.”

The little brown man crossed the grass with the dragging motions of a wounded beast. “I am a coward,” he quavered. “I never knew until this evening what a coward I could be. I dare not enter my own home. I believe my little Sacharissa has been strangled, but I dare not go. I cannot face a horror, that living creature, the unknown.”

“Where did you see Margaret last? Tell me quickly,” said the master.

“She came down to tea. She had been crying. She wanted to go to you, Mr Orton; you are her god; it is her madness, poor child, for she is good in her dear soul. Good and pure, but I believe you have cast some spell upon her. I don’t say that you meant to, or tried to, but if this is not witchcraft what is it? She is good, the best and holiest of sweet maidens——”

“There it is! There it is!” screamed poor Hortensia.

“Quiet, little sister,” said the shivering Theodore. “She came down to tea, but she would take nothing. We had tea out of doors, and she sat there, and she kept on rubbing her dear little face and crying, ‘I can’t get out. I must get out.’ She meant she must go to Windwhistle.”

“She meant nothing of the kind,” said the master in his deep voice; and again Cuthbert turned away.

“What did she mean?”

“I know, I know,” sobbed Hortensia.

“It is all horror and darkness. I am afraid of the thunder, Mr Ramrige. I am afraid of everything. Margaret went back to her room. I did not take her there, but I slipped up and locked the door because I feared she might run out; and then we heard a cry, not like Margaret, and a strange voice and a strange laugh, and—Mr Ramrige, it would be possible to climb in at her window. Do you know anything, Mr Orton? Is there any woman, any

fiend, who could have climbed in? It is not Margaret in that room. It is a blasphemous horrible woman, but I cannot go, I cannot face the inside of the house, the gloom of the stairs, and the sight of that door. I tried to look up at the window, but this creature has pulled the blind down."

"She has stopped laughing. Oh, brother!" screamed Hortensia, as a great cloud overhead seemed to be smashed to fragments.

"My dear lady, do not be disturbed at a little thunder or a lightning flash. These forces of Nature will not harm us," said the master. "I will go for what was Margaret. I will bring her out into the air."

"She is breaking down the house," cried Hortensia.

Cuthbert had walked to the other side of the grass, close to the ivy which covered the whole of the back. He turned to them and said in a low voice, "She is bursting open her door."

"It's a weak flimsy lock," shivered Theodore. "Anyone could force it off except my poor little weak Melissa."

"It is open," muttered Cuthbert, walking back quickly.

"Go! She must not see you—not yet. We do not know what form this takes, what creature this may be," said the master; and Cuthbert hurried down the garden, crossed the river, and went among the tall ferns and oaks.

"She is coming," panted Theodore.

"She is on the stairs," gasped Hortensia.

"Promise me you will stay here, and I will go to meet her," said the master.

"We will stay"; and they stood near one another with two frightened faces set towards the corner of the house and the path which curved around it.

"She will have reached the door," whispered Hortensia.

"It is getting dark and dreadful. We have been so happy, little sister, so peaceful, and now——"

"She is laughing again."

"They are coming. They are beside the water-butt."

"They are underneath the wistaria. Oh, the voice!"

"It is not Margaret, not my little girl."

"She is swearing. Theodore! Theodore!"

"Sacharissa is dead; dead and done for. We are all cursed. Hortensia, I cannot look."

"They are near the bed of pelargoniums."

"They will appear round the corner in one moment. My little missis, I have lost our baby. I could not face you."

A young woman appeared; not Margaret, and yet of the same height, shape, and figure, the same hair, the same eyes as to colour, but not the same expression; the same face, and yet a different one. But she did not carry herself like Margaret; she was much stronger, far bolder, not in the least shrinking or nervous, but full of self-confidence; a material looking young person, a cold and vindictive young person, a common vulgar young person; and she had discovered some of Margaret's clothes which had been discarded as rather too showy; she gathered her frock up to display a bright red petticoat, she had put on a blouse of yellow silk, she had stuck a red rose in her hair. She came round the corner like a creature of the street plying for hire. Behind her walked the master, his arms swaying loosely, his head down.

"What the devil do you mean by locking me in?" shouted this young woman. "I've kicked the old door to blazes, and knocked out one of the rotten panels. If you try any larks with me, you'll get it back, I tell you, or my name ain't Lucy."

"Margaret! Margaret!" wailed Hortensia, Theodore being dumb and paralysed. "Where are you, darling?"

"Darling," cried the girl mockingly. "I'll darling the little — if I catch hold of her. I'd like to get my hands round her neck and squeeze until her eyes came out of her head. The rotten toad, to try and keep me shut up all my blooming life. This is the first fling I've had, and by heaven I'll make the dust fly."

"Master," wailed Theodore with a bitter cry. "Where is my little sweetheart, my Adelia?"

"In hell, I hope," cried the young woman violently. "Anyhow, it's no use asking old Father Christmas. He ain't God Almighty."

CHAPTER IX

MUTABLE

SILENCE returned to Cob Court. The new woman who called herself Lucy had gone out shouting—open spaces had no terror for her—while those who were related to her took counsel with the master. Hortensia in her own flower-decked room was cool ; but Theodore was in a heat, desiring to do something violent, hunt this wild creature down, and make her confess what she had done with his daughter. The words of his sister, "She is Margaret," brought no meaning to him then.

"The child will return and be the same when this other creature becomes exhausted. She is too fierce to last long, and when we have Margaret again she must be kept," said the master.

"What can we do ?" asked Hortensia earnestly.

"Humour her, let her do what she likes. Opposition has hurried on this crisis. She must be allowed to take her own course now."

"To go to Windwhistle ! I do not like these poets and philosophers," cried the little lady. "Claud Yalland I can stand sometimes, but as for this Orton I hate him. I loathe the man's eyes and mouth."

"We are all perfect in our own sight. Other men and women are mysteries because they seem unlike ourselves," the master answered. "No harm shall happen to Margaret. What was she like as a child ?"

"Dreamy, thoughtful, very sensitive. She would not play with other children."

"Too good for them," moaned Theodore. "Too beautiful and holy. Crispiana of the curly hair. And now she's dead."

"Where are you going, Theodore?" asked his sister.

"To put on my black coat."

She went to the door and brought him back. He huddled in a chair swallowing pieces of sorrow in his throat.

"For years I have felt all was not right with Margaret," Hortensia went on. "She was always sweet and yet she frightened me, and I have seen a look in her eyes as if she hated me. A long struggle has been going on within her; those dreams, her screams at night, and she would cry out sometimes, 'I must get out, I will be free.' When I have mentioned this to her she had no recollection of saying anything. Now I know. It was this devil in her."

"Do not speak so harshly," said Jasper. "Perhaps you and I have a devil too. We succeed in keeping it hidden; but if it was to come forth and walk beside us we might be frightened. Our faces may be pleasant to others but the crude elements are in us all."

"The whole neighbourhood will know that Margaret is——"

"Mentally afflicted. Let that be known. Insanity is common, the people comprehend it, and they will sympathise with you and her. Tell them her health has broken down, that she has become liable to fits. Insanity gives no cause for scandal. Look after him," he whispered, indicating Theodore. "Silence and sorrow are dangerous together."

The master went out and took the road of many turns to Windwhistle, musing as he went.

"Master, sir?" said Seabroke, who was uprooting large roots of bracken and finding it no child's play. "Behind you, sir."

Jasper looked back, and there was Cuthbert not a dozen

yards away, following him along the path, watching him, hoping he would go away as he did not want to speak.

"Seabroke," he said. "You and Bessie are the best servants in the world. You have learnt to be blind and dumb. Now I wish you to be deaf as well."

"That's right, sir," the man answered, and resumed his wrestling with the long black roots.

Cuthbert passed with the master into the little path of woodland which surrounded the house upon three sides; and the younger man remarked at once, "It is done, you see. We were a day too late."

"If the girl was dead it would not trouble you," said Jasper more angrily than he had ever spoken since that man had been a child.

"I am not emotional. I do not shout when I am glad nor howl when I am sorry. I stand detached from others and regard things with a critical eye. Here is a new experience, a fresh field of thought for me to roam in. That is the form my demonstration takes."

"I too possess the gift of self-control. I do not hold out my heart and bid you note that it is bleeding," said the master. "Where is an end to this? What do your researches into the human mind tell you?"

"You inquire of me! Sun, moon, and planets are eclipsed," cried Cuthbert. "A new personality has come to the surface. It will swallow up Margaret altogether. Its arrival also frees me from my promise. I would have married her if by doing so I could have kept this creature under."

"Your own creation. This blasphemous young woman who hates her own better self, who would kill Margaret if she could merely because Margaret is good and pure, is the mind which you have made. If you had never lived and written, or if you had devoted your genius to a good and healthy cause, this personality would not have arisen. It

should have been a light and airy creature full of pure life and love, a living instrument of music."

"My dear Ramrige," laughed Cuthbert, "you are as flowery as an Elizabethan poet. I shall see you hurry home presently eager to throw off a sonnet to Julia or a night-ode to Chloe. I follow the line of thought which suits me," he went on. "I give of the best I have, and if young men and maidens are disturbed by my thoughts, that is a matter between their constitutions and themselves. If a woman commits suicide after reading one of my books, blame her weak nature, not my influence upon her. Weak natures are not wanted in the world. It is idle to suppose I could have drawn an angel out of Margaret, and it is equally foolish to imagine that I am responsible for producing a devil. If you continue arguing upon these lines we will shake hands, if you please, and part."

"I asked you," said the master, "where is the end?"

"Consult your stars. I am a materialist; I decline to make my head ache by dashing it against the wall which divides to-day from to-morrow. Margaret and this other being—has it a name?"

"Lucy," said Jasper in a low voice.

"Margaret and her girl-enemy Lucy will fight together until the stronger wins. That will be Lucy."

"Ethel has been killed again. Celia, from whom I rescued you at Buxton, lives again. You have spoken the truth; Lucy will prevail for a time but her reign shall be short. I have comforted the Viponts with hollow words, assuring them Margaret will return, that we will keep her. I know we cannot. Lucy must triumph over the goodness of Margaret, until I can bring down from that atmosphere beyond another influence, stronger than yours——"

"Don't put me and the moon upon our mettle," said Cuthbert jeeringly.

"You thought it was Margaret who came to you that night. So it was, but Lucy's feet brought her. You were

speaking into Lucy's ears, looking into Lucy's eyes, communing with Lucy's filthy mind which is your own. But Margaret is still there, and she and I will strive against Lucy and you, and beat you in the end. We will create as you have done, we will draw down another, we will drive you out, all you sons and daughters of darkness and lust," cried Jasper passionately.

"Evidently the moon affects you too," said Cuthbert coldly. "An hour ago you were all kindness; now you are frenzied. Ramrige, you are much too old to fancy yourself in love."

With that taunt Cuthbert went towards stolid Seabroke, who was as deaf as a statue; but the master rose up against him, and lifted a long black shape which the man had thrown upon the brambles, a root of bracken, and held it out as if it had been a snake he had caught and killed.

"Look at this, Orton. The roots of your mind draw their nourishment out of the dirt. The roots of life are not below, but above, and the flowers and fruit grow downwards."

He went, unable to restrain himself longer; and as the great figure passed along the path, Cuthbert addressed Seabroke in his sneering way:

"What do you think of that old gentleman?"

"Well, sir," said the man deliberately, "what do you want me to think?"

"An excitable old gentleman?"

"That's right, sir"; and Seabroke fell again to his root-grubbing, while Cuthbert walked indoors smiling in a satisfied way, and observing, "He says I can't create good work, when I have converted that thing which was meant to be a free-thinking man into a most excellent automaton."

The master was right. The wild being who possessed the body of Margaret brought it back exhausted, and complained that she had been unable to find her way about; she had meant to go in one direction, and had taken

another ; she was not used to her eyes, and the roads were strange to her. She was so subdued that not an evil word escaped her ; and she kissed Theodore, saying he was a bit of a guy but she fancied she would have to put up with him. Hortensia she would not look at, and once indeed pushed the little lady violently into a flower-bed. Both were careful not to mention the name of Margaret.

Theodore was accustomed to read prayers of an evening. His father had always done so, and as it was an old-fashioned custom it appealed to the antiquary, so he ventured to bring out the books as usual ; but when the girl saw what was contemplated she went into a rage, snatched the Bible from him, flung it out of the window, and said fiercely, " Look here, little man. None of that. You can pray for yourself in private if you want to, but you ain't going to pray for me." Then she flung herself out of the room and went up laughing to bed.

Theodore did not sleep. He sat for hours close beside the wall with his ear to the plaster listening to all the troubled sounds in his daughter's room. The girl was asleep, but babbling incoherently, tossing and making the bed creak ; sometimes she cried out ; once Theodore heard her swear, using one of those obscene words which are terrible even when spoken by a low-down man. How did Margaret know of such a word ? Poor Theodore heard and sweated.

Dawn came, and the first ray of white light broke through and forced its way into his room—with a scream. A movement followed as if Margaret was leaving her bed ; and then a voice—how Theodore started when he heard—the old voice, the sweet and gentle voice again asking a question. The father's soul awoke and swept the dust away, his mind struggled clear of old china and yearned for his daughter, and prayed for his child that she might remain herself and happy ; and as the voice spoke again saying, as he thought, " Father," he ran to his daughter's room.

Margaret was sitting on the bed gazing around with wondering eyes soft and dreamy, a vision of whiteness with her hair tumbling on her shoulders. The light was increasing rapidly, and already bee-trumpets were sounding the *réveillé*, and the flowers were being shaken by the morning.

"Darling, Sacharissa, Angelica—back again!" cried Theodore, throwing his arms round her, kissing her misty hair and dreamy eyes. "I shall hold you, child. You shall never go again. Thank God you have come back."

"Where have I been?" asked Margaret.

"A long walk, pearl-child."

"My body aches so."

"Lie down, Melissa. Lie down, my humming-bee, my sweetheart!" cried the excited Theodore. "Let me cover you over and hold you, hold you for evermore."

"I called you when I woke. Who has been here?"

"Nobody, dear heart; nobody but your own sweet self. This is your own bower, the nest of my flower-maiden, Adelia's boudoir."

"Somebody has been here pulling all my things about," she said pathetically. "Look at my clothes all over the floor, things that I never wear. Who took that yellow blouse out of the box?"

"Darling, you must have done it yourself with your own tiny transparent bits of fingers. Do you remember you were a little, just a little bit, excited last night?" said poor clumsy Theodore.

"I cannot remember anything since yesterday afternoon. We had tea in the garden; I—I can't think of anything since then."

"You were excited, sweetheart, and you went for a walk. It is all over now, and you must rest while I sit here and hold your hand. Do you remember, when you were a little tiny angel-child, how I used to sing you to sleep? You would go off so sweetly, your pretty face all covered with

little laughs like bubbles on water. 'Three blind mice,' I would sing, 'See how they run,' he piped in his foolish falsetto, anxious to divert her mind from that disordered room.

"Oh look, father!" she cried as the light grew stronger. "That box has been turned upside down and all my things tumbled out."

"Go to sleep, darling," piped eager happy Theodore. "You are a baby again now, and daddy is singing you to sleep. 'Sleep baby, sleep,' he sang with a ridiculous noise, folding her in his arms, shaking her gently. 'Father shakes the dreamland tree, Down drops a little dream for thee, Sleep, baby, sleep.'"

Margaret resisted him, fought herself upright. There was a text fastened to the wall near her bed, the simple text, "God is Love." Her eyes had fallen upon it, seen something. Under these simple words was written in her own handwriting a horrible, an unspeakable, expression.

She never saw what it was. Theodore's eyes travelled in the same direction, his hand was hardly less rapid; he snatched the text down and tore it to pieces, shuddering at the same time; and Margaret not only saw but felt that shudder.

"You let somebody in here," she said faintly. "Some brute, a vile creature. Tell me, father. My head aches, and my whole body is one big pain. Tell me what has happened, or I shall worry myself sick."

Then Theodore gathered himself together, set his wits to work, and the idea came to him at once like a ray of sunshine.

"I'll tell you, my singing-bird. You shall hear just exactly what happened last night. Aunt Hortensia and I didn't want you to know because we thought you might worry that little curly head, and—and to tell you the truth, darling, we really hadn't the time to get your room put tidy

before you came back. This is what took place—now you must be a good little princess and lie quiet, and shut your pretty eyes, and look lovely. That's right. Now one small smile, a little fairy on each side of your mouth. That's beautiful, darling. Yes, Angelica, you came out to tea, and afterwards you got a wee bit excited; you declared you had been kept at home so long you were perfectly tired of it, and you must have some exercise; and before Aunt Hortensia or I could say a word off you went with all your loveliness and super-naughtiness over the hills and far away. Of course you don't remember anything about that, because you know, sweetheart, you never do remember things when you have been and tired yourself out; and when you did come back last night you were so dreadful weary it was as much as Polly and I could manage to get you up here to your room."

"I think you are telling me a very funny story," Margaret murmured, but in a more contented voice.

"Dearest Dominica, here are your very own tiny sandals as evidence," cried Theodore triumphantly, producing Margaret's boots which were at the side of her bed. "Look at these little muddy witnesses. You may open those two eyes two seconds to look at these two atomies of shoe-leather, and then you will own that my story is too too utterly truly true, as you used to say when you were tiny. Bits of mud stuck in the lace-holes; therefore you wandered in your favourite wood. Bog-mud upon the soles, mud such as is found only upon the moor. Close those curtains again; your little protest is done for. Truth is mighty and has prevailed."

"I never walk upon the moor," said Margaret.

"Ah, but you did last night, darling. All over the place you went, tripping and trotting everywhere, and you came back with not enough breath to blow a candle out. But not long after you had gone a woman came along the road and stopped to speak to Aunt Hortensia."

"What sort of a woman?"

"Well, I did not notice her very particularly, but a youngish woman and well-dressed, rather showily dressed perhaps."

"A stranger?"

"A Peregrine from her first pose; an absolute stranger. I hope we shall never set eyes upon her again."

"What did she say to aunt?"

"The usual wicked rubbish, I suppose. Wanted to tell her fortune."

"A gypsy?"

"Something of that breed; one of the worst of the last of the gypsies."

"They don't dress well."

"But she wasn't well dressed."

"You said she was."

"No, no, showily dressed; well-dressed for her station in life. All sorts of colours, a yellow blouse——"

"What?" cried Margaret.

"Green—I remember distinctly how green it was. Aunt Hortensia remarked upon it. I was looking at that yellow blouse on the floor. You mustn't interrupt, darling. It confuses me. Well, we got rid of her, as we thought. Aunt and I went into the back garden and were busy covering up the strawberries and driving out the black-birds, when we heard a laugh up here. This is quite true, we distinctly heard a laugh, and aunt said to me, 'Theodore, there is someone in Margaret's bedroom.' You know, darling, we always leave the front door wide open as we know the people around here are honest."

"That woman was up here. How old was she?" asked Margaret suspiciously.

"Oh, I really hardly know. I didn't ask her age. I didn't really see her properly, but she was not what you would call old, a vigorous active woman she was, the sort of woman who would have killed and eaten you, sweet-

heart ; a detestable creature altogether. I did just see her face, and I heard her swear at aunt when she refused to have her fortune told."

"Where was Polly ? "

"Out in the village. She knows nothing of this woman ; never saw her."

"Why was the woman laughing ? "

"That is the funny part of the story," said Theodore uneasily, becoming conscious that this was an incident which should have been expurgated. "She was a wild, careless sort of creature ; didn't care whether she was caught or not. Very likely she laughed at that text and at what she scribbled on it."

"In my handwriting," murmured Margaret faintly.

"My sweet child, don't be so utterly ridiculous. It was no more your writing than it was mine. Is it likely you would scribble blasphemy on a text, even in your sleep ? Your mind would reject any such suggestion. Well, I ran into the house when we heard this creature laugh and locked her in. Then I went into the village, to see if I could find the policeman, and while I was gone the woman broke open the door and kicked a hole in that lower panel and got away. Your aunt was standing at the foot of the stairs, and she pushed her ; she did really, darling, gave her a great big push out of her way. Aunt will tell you all about it. I don't think she took anything ; in fact I'm sure she didn't, for aunt saw her run off empty-handed. You see we surprised her while she was turning your things upside down, and she knew well enough it wouldn't do for her to be caught with stolen property. There, pretty pearl, that's what happened. I am so sorry we did not put the room straight before you came back."

The story served well enough for that occasion although it could not be repeated, and was therefore of little use beyond giving Margaret a few more hours of a mind at ease.

She dropped off to sleep presently, Theodore remaining by the bedside holding her hand, stroking it softly, blinking at the bees, for he was very tired. When she withdrew her hand with one of the spasmodic movements of sleep he rose noiselessly and tiptoed about putting the room in order.

The day went by without incident. Margaret was a little startled at the tenderness of her aunt's greeting; but her father, who was always near, explained busily that she had been so excited during the previous evening that Hortensia had been alarmed. Margaret was also astonished by the manner with which Jasper regarded her when he came during the afternoon; but her mind received no shock. Her body was very weary, she felt as if it had been stretched upon a rack, but otherwise she was composed. No voice was calling her, no influence stirred leading her towards Windwhistle. Lifting her gentle eyes to the master, she said, "I fear I shall be an invalid always. I am not made for living"; but he answered her strongly, "You were not born for death." Still he went away with sorrow upon one side and fear on the other, while the long white hand which held the cloak around him trembled.

Summerland was a quiet village; people appeared to talk in whispers; there was never any loud conversation, and whenever shouts were heard the inhabitants knew some roisterers must be passing. Whispers concerning Margaret had begun, for she had been seen and heard during that wild ramble, and they reached Cob Court, introduced there by a new expression upon the face of the postman, confirmed by the man who called with fish, and expressed openly by the baker who was caught and squeezed by Theodore.

"My daughter is not well," he explained with euphemistic emphasis. "She has become liable to—you will understand," tapping his brown forehead.

The baker comprehended only too well. Even in that bright healthy place few homes were free from the presence, memory, or anticipation, of that spectre. It was as common as good health, perhaps more so. He went away saying, "We thought it was that. We are very sorry for you, sir"; and the scandal was killed at once by the kindly hands of pity and the tongues whispered more gently still.

"Here is the gift of the morning, sweet child," chirped Theodore brightly, when another night had gone. "Ragged robins to-day. The knight has been down into the swamps, plunging into long grass and mud to find a few flowers at sunrise."

"Who is he?" asked Margaret, dreamily and without interest.

"Every heart must keep its secret," sang Theodore. "It is enough to know that you inspire. You make men think and dream. It is a happy state, my fortunate Faustina."

"Take them away. I don't like them. Don't kill the poor things, but throw them in the river."

"What, darling! Turning against the flowers, your playmates!" cried the astonished Theodore.

"Not the white ones, not the daisies," said Margaret. "Only those red ragged flowers."

Her father snatched them up and put them behind his back, reflecting to himself, "I must tell the unknown, no more red flowers; white ones or none at all. They are getting scarce in the heat of the year. He will have a long tramp to find them. Perhaps I had better tell him none at all." So he wrote off that day in his blundering fashion upon a postcard, "No more ragged-robins, poet. They have suggested things inside us torn and bleeding. We must have them white, all white, symmetrical, clean-edged; perhaps none—better none."

The postman gaped at this cryptic message. Claud read

through it, got behind it, tried to pluck out something which fluttered between his heart and his imagination, and went no more gathering flowers by lantern-light during the wet and mystical hour of midnight. But he missed his pleasure and gathered thoughts instead.

It was about noon. Margaret was sitting in a shadow playing with a sheet of music and feeling unusually well. Her body was restored, her mind was clear, only her eyes ached a little, as if she had been straining them trying to read small print or to look afar off. She felt in the mood for some change or excitement; weakness had left her, she could have walked a great distance; so she felt, and at last delighted her father, who seldom ventured more than a few yards away, by promising to go out with him that afternoon.

"Four miles away in a quiet farmhouse lurks a pewter chalice," said Theodore. "It belongs to an old man who is a miser and stubborn. Twice I have been on the quest, and twice I have been repulsed. We will go together this afternoon and win. The old farmer is held by his stubbornness, while on the other side his miserly nature tugs and strains. 'Keep your heirloom,' whispers stubbornness. 'Part with it for pieces of money,' shouts covetousness. A shout is mightier than a whisper. You and I will tug on the side of covetousness. We will gain the pewter chalice, and return to our home rejoicing."

He trotted across to Hortensia, delving as ever with worm-like eagerness, and murmured brightly, "Little sister, Sacharissa is more than herself. She is so bright and cheerful, and this afternoon is coming with me on a pewter-hunt."

"I hope she is not too well," came the answer.

"I will have no croakings," said Theodore sternly. "Here is my ointment of content brought before you, and into it you would tumble, not a small fly, but a huge black-beetle spoiling the potful. You women are so morbid.

You are ready to pull down the blinds if a person sneezes."

He went back to Margaret. Hortensia's cat, which had been curled up for several hours sleeping off a debauch of breakfast milk, rose, stretched itself, and went with him.

"Take away that cat, please," said Margaret with a shiver.

The animal stretched again and yawned in the thorough fashion of its race until its eyes disappeared. Theodore gaped too, making more noise than was necessary; then he picked up the cat, walked off with it—turned suddenly. Hortensia was screaming.

Theodore threw out his hands and groaned. Margaret passed him going towards her aunt; he caught a glimpse of her face and knew it was not Margaret's, and again he heard that voice:

"Oh, I'm not going to hit you, Jane Sims; I won't treat you as you deserve, and pull your beastly tongue out, so you needn't run; but let me tell you this, my old beauty, I'll drag you round the place by the hair of your head if you say anything more against me, I will as sure as my name's Lucy."

Hortensia stood white and trembling, a trowel in her hand, but wisely refrained from answering.

"It's you that makes all the trouble," the violent voice went out. "You damned old maids do nothing but talk scandal. I shall go and see Mr Orton as much as I like. Very likely I shall go and live with him. He's the sort of man that suits me, and it's far more sensible living with a man than having to divorce him. If you want to be pals with me, Jane dear, just learn to keep your mouth shut."

"Say nothing, Theodore," murmured Hortensia.

"Why shouldn't he speak? Let him alone, can't you? He's a good little man, not half a bad little man." She

ran up to Theodore and whirled him round. "Don't look sick, dad," she shouted. "Wake up and jump about a bit. I'm here to make things hum. I'm going to liven you out of this stick-in-the-mud life. We shall get along all right if you don't cross me. I do believe you think I'm dotty." She screamed with laughter. "It wouldn't be wonderful if I was, after being shut up all my life, but, by God, I'll make up for lost time now."

She gathered up her skirts and ran into the house laughing like a *mænad*, while brother and sister moved slowly across the grass towards each other.

"I was afraid of it. She was too well," Hortensia whispered.

"She is different ; not quite so bad," muttered Theodore.

"She happens to be in a good humour. Theodore, we shall have to obtain medical advice. If she is violent——"

"No," cried her brother strongly. "This is not insanity, though we must say it is. My little girl—it is my little girl's body still—she shall never go into an asylum. It would make her, make Margaret, mad indeed if she woke up there. I will watch over her day and night rather than let her go. This, this Lucy is not insane ; she is wild, wayward, full of elementary passion, does not know what is right. We can make her good."

"Here, old fogies!" shouted a fierce voice from the window of that sacred bedroom. "Where is that little ——, Margaret?"

"Oh, not that word. Don't let her use that word," cried Theodore.

"I say, dad! Come up here. I'm going to have a rare old lark. I've turned out Margaret's letters, and all the little things she's stuck on, and now I'm going to have a bonfire. Come along up and help us."

"Hortensia, little sister! Asking me, asking me!" moaned Theodore.

"Go up," she said. "Lock Margaret's room."

"She would force her way in. Look, Hortensia!"

Smoke was issuing from a chimney which had not been used for years; and soon a vindictive voice came down to them.

"This will make the little devil howl when she comes back. I've chucked the whole lot into the fire, all except the photos, yours and old dowdy auntie's, and this frump who I suppose was my mammy. I say, dad, where's her music? I've looked everywhere, but can't find the stuff."

"The work of her dear life," groaned Theodore.

"Where is it?" asked Hortensia.

"Under the bed; in a brown leather case."

"We must save it. Come with me, Theodore, and if we have to fight her for it we must."

"Can't you hear? Where does the little brute keep her music?" the voice shouted; and added in tones of satisfaction, "I've burnt everything else that will burn."

"It is downstairs," lied Theodore feebly. "Come down and I'll give it you."

"Right you are"; and the head disappeared.

"Hortensia, run up to the bedroom while I keep her in the sitting-room. Get the case from under the bed, take it to the passage window, and throw it down into the ivy. We can rescue it later."

Theodore went into the house and found Lucy as she called herself coming down the stairs with smoke-begrimed hands, hot and happy. She looked bright and handsome, though there was a hardness about her mouth, and her eyes were restless, so different from Margaret's which had always been fixed, and they were cold while Margaret's had been dreamy. Theodore realised that many men would not have looked twice at Margaret if Lucy had been near; she was a child of the world, a daughter of nature, a perfect animal.

"Come along," she said with impish malignancy. "Dig the old stuff out and let's burn it. I have said to

myself a thousand times, if I could only get my hands on her music I'd pay Margaret for all she's done to me."

She went with Theodore into the sitting-room. He shut the door and pretended to hunt for the music; and while he did so Hortensia passed quietly upstairs to make it safe.

"Why do you hate Margaret?" Theodore mumbled, keeping his back to the strange creature who called him father and was indeed his daughter.

"Wouldn't you hate anyone who had kept you shut up all your life?" she answered savagely. "She got hold of me when I was young, fought me, kept me under, tried to stifle all the energies out of me, and she pretty near succeeded. If it hadn't been for Mr Orton, who's the best and greatest man in the whole world, she would have killed me. I've got reason enough to hate Margaret. You're not looking for that music. Where is it?"

"Not here," said Theodore, with a wonderful boldness, for he was thinking of his daughter, and love of Margaret made him strong. "It is where you cannot find it."

"My God!" muttered the girl. "You've tricked me. It was in the bedroom all the time, and you got me down here while it was being cleared out. You—scoundrel! You call yourself my father——"

She stopped, for Theodore had stepped up to her with his brown hands uplifted, having no need to shake them in her face since they already shook with grief and nervousness; and then he cried, "Hold your tongue. I am your father, and you shall obey me. This is my house, I am master, and if you will not acknowledge me I will turn you out."

"Eh, what!" said the girl with a sneer, falling back. "If you want to be nasty you can be, damn you. I can be nasty too. I'll find that music somehow," she muttered.

It was a triumph for Theodore ; also a great discovery. This creature was a coward ; she had none of Margaret's moral courage ; she would give way when opposed with resolution, because though she could curse and swear and was very willing to wound, she lacked the nerve to strike.

CHAPTER X

FIXED

It was afternoon, the dangerous time, when the sun becomes a drug and every flower a poppy. Cuthbert was not asleep, but lying on his back along a slab of rock basking like a snake. Around him were furze-bushes covered with bloom filling the hot air with a sickly perfume, and sometimes a few old seed-pods, which had not exploded the year before, burst open then, flinging out seeds like grapeshot. Cuthbert was hidden by the warlike shrubs with their spears and daggers and miniature artillery; but the wonderful and mechanical Seabroke knew where his master was hidden, the brake not being more than a hundred yards from the house, and he came along thrusting himself carefully through the cheval-de-frise, picking out words from his vocabulary one by one.

"A young lady, sir."

Cuthbert lifted himself, regarded Seabroke, who was evidently astonished and somewhat shocked at not being able to hide it altogether, and asked, "Which?"

"Miss Sims. An old friend, sir. Miss Lucy Sims."

"An old friend! I have never heard of her."

"She might remind you of Miss Vipont, sir."

Cuthbert smiled at the furze-bushes, which glowed back, and one of them fired, the shot passing well above his head and bombarding the body of Seabroke who knew no botany.

"Not Miss Vipont?" he suggested, anxious to know how his automaton would answer.

"She's touched, sir, they say."

"Is that your opinion?"

The man looked frightened. His opinion was a thing he was not entitled to. There was, however, a side-track open to him, and this he entered.

"Bessie says, sir, it looks like liquor."

"Your wife's belief is simple. It has the merit of appealing to the meanest understanding," said Cuthbert. "You may call it liquor, Seabroke."

"Very good, sir."

"Where is the young lady?"

"Indoors, sir. When Bessie said you was out, she said, 'I'll come in and wait.' She won't go for Bessie, sir."

"Tell her I am here," said Cuthbert; and he rolled over on the slab and played with his dog until Seabroke had gone out of hearing. Then he sat up again, very wide-awake and excited, finding himself like his man without an opinion. Life was dull to Cuthbert when he was not at a working-bout, no hobbies engaged his attention, leisure time was a burden. Laziness set self clamouring and his condition then veered between melancholy and a desire for romance. He had not been settled in his mind for years, his happy days were as few as his friends, and yet he had the joy of life in him. Cuthbert had no scruples; that was where he broke down. He chose the easiest and pleasantest way, he never ran against his inclination which counselled him to give offence to his fellow-creatures by describing them as worse than they were, though he did not think them worse than himself. As for love, it was at the beginning a romance, and afterwards a passion; a seeking out for new and fascinating types of women, winning them somehow, dominating them, controlling their lives until the old longing for a new romance and a fresh type returned, and he wondered how he could ever have found

satisfaction in the one he was about to discard. Restless, melancholic, unscrupulous: these were the three factors which reduced Cuthbert to a mean proportion.

"I have shut myself up for years," he murmured. "I have worked hard, made a name for myself, and I have neglected the sunny side of life. I have denied myself all the ordinary pleasures. Since that affair with Celia I've been a monk. Hard work and abstinence deserve compensation. If I go too far," he mused, "if there is any danger, that old spirit of conscience up at God's Garden will descend like a meteorite and drive me into a safe course."

"I say, old man! Where the devil are you?" called a voice; and Cuthbert found it pleasant. It was bright and merry, full of that joy and excitement of life which were advising him to leave work for a season and roll in the fields of pleasure. It did not sound harsh. Cuthbert began to realise that in certain moods he preferred women who were free in voice and loose in morals. He liked to see them kick against convention, overturn the altars of propriety, and behave like animals. It was a pleasure to hear them swear, when it was done prettily and the words were not too coarse. The sweet and modest woman was also good in her way; but there was a time for her, as for the other kind. Ethel had suited one mood, Celia had been well adapted for another; and now a third was approaching, very different from either, the woman he had made himself.

"I am here," he answered in his lazy fashion, but turning round and looking between the golden bushes, conscious that his heart was beating quickly.

"How do you expect me to get through these prickles? My legs are being punished something cruel. These thorns go through everything. I say, this ain't half a bad place when you get to it. Christ! ain't it hot!"

"My dear child," said Cuthbert gravely, admiring this

fine creature, anxious to test her, and wondering lazily where in all the universe Margaret might be. "You're looking very pretty."

"Oh, thanks! It's something to get a compliment out of you. Here, shove up, and make room."

She came upon the slab of rock, pushed Cuthbert out of her way, placed herself beside him, then put her arm round his neck and pinched his ear.

"How's your liver, dear old boy?" she said lovingly. "We haven't met for I don't know how long. I came out t'other evening and tried to find you, but I got all hellishly mixed up, everything seemed new and queer, I couldn't find my way about, and when I asked some idiots they stared and ran away. Don't look humpy, my dear. Wake up and cuddle me a bit."

Cuthbert laughed outright. The idea that Margaret's tongue was being used amused him; Margaret's arm round his neck; Margaret's little shoe toying with his foot; and that she should be asking him for kisses. Margaret who would have died of shame had he put his arm round her.

"My dear child, I haven't kissed a girl for years," he said.

"That's nice. I'll have you fresh," she murmured, putting up her face, pressing his head to hers with both hot hands for a couple of hungry minutes.

"Who taught you how to kiss?" he muttered. "You make me dizzy."

"Lovely, ain't it? The only thing worth living for. Lie down and let me kiss you stupid."

"Wait a minute. I want to know something about you," said Cuthbert.

"Damn all history. Let's love. Do you know," she went on in a puzzled fashion, "I don't remember ever having kissed a man before. It's awful funny, seeing how fond of it I am."

"Who are you?"

"Who am I? Why, Lucy Sims, your old pal Lucy."

"Where have we met before?"

"I don't know. I can't remember things because of the little devil Margaret. She never would give me a chance until you came here. I did get out to you one evening, but it was a business. I thought I should never manage it. By God, I did try hard to come out then, but I couldn't see, or think, or speak. I was just tied up, but I'm free at last, and I came to you as quick as I could."

"Where is Margaret?"

"Do you know? I don't. I haven't the least idea where she is—the whining, canting, shivering toad. I can't find out where she's hidden herself; all I can do is to smash everything that belongs to her. Do you know where she is?"

Cuthbert shook his head, laughing again, and said, "Decidedly I don't know."

"If you and me could get hold of her," the girl went on, while Cuthbert wondered what made her slangy and ungrammatical, "we'd put her away in Windwhistle, starve her, torture her," she said fiercely. "I'd like to murder the white-faced kid, but I'd make her suffer first. I'd like to see her eyes looking at me while she whined, 'Oh Lucy, don't.' I've only two desires in life," she went on. "One is to have revenge on Margaret, and t'other is to be loved by you. I don't believe you can 'elp loving me," she said defiantly.

"I don't believe I can," he said. "Only don't drop your aspirates, please."

"I'm sorry. I ain't very well educated, Cuthbert. You'll have to teach me a lot. But there, I'm not crazy to learn. 'Tis love I want, love all the time, nothing else."

"Mine?" he asked.

"What else do you suppose?" she said violently. "There ain't another man in the whole blooming world so far as I'm concerned. You're mine and I'm yours. I love you with all my soul, and there's nothing to be ashamed

of, for love's the first thing there is, and I ain't going to leave you, Cuthbert, never, never again," she cried with that ominous light in her eyes. "You beat that—for me."

"Look here, Lucy," said Cuthbert crossly. "There are a few expressions of the gutter that I object to. They grate upon me, and I dislike you when I hear them."

"Sorry," she said penitently. "I hate Margaret so. You are getting beastly refined, ain't you, now?"

Her question, and the hungry kiss which accompanied it, made him laugh, for she spoke in a pretty and wheedling fashion and her bad grammar sounded well enough; for she was wonderfully handsome when her eyes were not too prominent. It was the sort of beauty which appealed to Cuthbert during that particular year of his life.

"I say, old man," she went on in a cunning voice, which made him wonder again how she had learnt these tricks, "they don't know where I am. I slipped out and walked all over the place, through dirty fields and along god-forsaken lanes, before I got here. I did get my ankles knocked about. Look at these dry furze-prickles sticking in my stockings—pull 'em out, there's a darling. I was afraid I'd see old Father Christmas," she went on, while Cuthbert did as he was asked. "He's always on the mouch after wicked men like you and bad little girls like me."

"Old Ramrige," said Cuthbert. "Do you like him?"

"Oh, I don't mind him a bit when he don't follow me. He's a fine 'andsome old chap, but Lord, he puts me in a blue funk sometimes. He was awful pals with Margaret, and I reckon he hates me, I feel he does anyhow, and I get a bit cheap when I see him. He might tie me up again, get rid of me somehow—I don't know. But I mean to keep out of his way."

"What do you think he would do?"

"He gets inside a person same as you do only in a different way. Gives you ideas which you don't want to

have. Makes you think about things you've no use for. He'd turn me inside out like a stocking—you too, old boy. He don't know I've got to you at last."

"He soon will," said Cuthbert.

"No, he won't. Not a soul knows. We won't let 'em know."

"You will be seen going home, or coming here."

"I'm not going home," she cried, in the most surprised fashion possible. "Good Lord, boy, do you imagine I'm going back to dear father James after taking all this trouble to get here? Where you are is my home. You belong to me, and I'm yours from the ends of my hair to the tips of my toe-nails. If you made love to another girl I'd kill her, as I'd kill Margaret if I could get hold of her. I have got to you without anyone knowing, and I shall stay with you, live with you, and never leave your side either day or night as long as I have a body to live in."

"And if I should get tired of you?" said Cuthbert uneasily.

"Tired of me!" she exclaimed. "Tired of me—don't be such a damned fool, Cuthbert. How the hell could you get tired of me? You would have to hate yourself and lose all your senses before you could have enough of me, after making me and setting me free, and getting rid of that whining cat, Margaret. If you could, if it was ever possible for you to have enough of me, I should very soon stick a knife into you, my dear, and I'd laugh a good bit while I was doing it."

A shadow had come across the scene and for the first time Cuthbert became sorry Margaret had departed; that dreamy philosophical maiden, who trembled when she was addressed, seemed somehow a superior being to this Lucy, who was filled with love one minute and ideas of vengeance the next. The shadow suggested trouble, difficulties which could not be avoided, a tragic ending to this new romance; but Cuthbert comforted himself with the weak-minded

thought that the master would never be far away and must come to his aid when wanted, at the moment when it was necessary to save him. He would be compelled to put out his hand, drag the fallen man up, and attempt to set him straight again. But what if the master should die? Where would be the influence then? Cuthbert decided that this question should be shelved.

It was impossible to know how disgrace could be avoided unless he married Lucy; but he could not marry her, even if he wanted to, until he had obtained Margaret's consent. Cuthbert had called Lucy into being, and it might end by her turning against him, and, like a mind which has been strained too much in the wrong direction, making him mad.

"My dear child," he said in a paternal fashion, remembering he was considerably her senior. "You cannot stay with me here."

"Cannot is a devil of a word. I will stay."

"There is something called propriety. We call it a hindrance; but it means in its strict sense you must not be detected doing those things which are especially agreeable," said Cuthbert.

"Who is to prevent us?" she snapped.

"Those who are in authority over us. The old master has a trick of preventing me. Your father prevents you."

"That little brown toad. I'd squash him."

"He has right on his side. He is scarcely a mile from here; you couldn't live at Windwhistle. Everybody in the neighbourhood would find out."

"I don't mean to live here. We're not going to stick in this miserable old wind-hole," she said. "I'm going to take you out of it; we will travel, knock about, have a rare old time."

"I have my work to think of; and my health."

"Blow the work, and as for your health I'll look after you. Look here, old man, father Jimmy won't worry about me, he'll be precious glad to get rid of me; he nearly

turned me out just now because I tried to burn the kid's music. Old Jim is dead stuck on Margaret, but he hates me. If he's an unnatural father, why shouldn't I be an unnatural daughter ? ”

“ What have you done with Margaret ? ” asked Cuthbert impatiently.

“ Me ! What the devil could I do with the kid when I haven't the faintest idea where she's got to ? ”

“ She kept you shut up.”

“ Never mind about that. I don't want to think about it now I'm free, and all the dirty things she made me do—listen to all sorts of sounds, stare at sunsets, scribble music, say prayers, talk the most frightful rot. I've wanted to clear out of this place for years, and now I'm going, but I can't without you, for I've no money, and you've got to keep me now, buy my clothes—I expect I'm fairly extravagant, but I'll be a good little woman if you make me free and happy.”

“ Do you want me to marry you ? ”

“ What ! Stick a ring on my finger and swear you'll have me ? You can if you like, but it seems rather unnecessary, as you've got to have me. I say, hadn't we better get indoors ? Somebody might stumble across us here, and this rock is getting a bit lumpy. Your man and woman are all right, I know, for you told me. They won't go shrieking all over the place, and telling every idiot where I am ? ”

“ When did I tell you ? ”

“ That night I came to see you ; when father rushed in and made an ass of himself.”

Another unpleasant idea thereupon suggested itself. Suppose that Margaret should creep back, when least wanted, like a thief in the night ? The shock at discovering herself wherever she might be would probably kill her ; at the least she would return home and confess where she had been. Cuthbert's difficulty was this ; he could not make Lucy understand who Margaret was ; Lucy had an idea of

Margaret as an implacable enemy, who for her own selfish purposes had kept her a prisoner until Cuthbert had managed to set her free; therefore she hated Margaret. It would have been useless for Cuthbert to explain that Lucy's body was also Margaret's body, that Lucy was alive when Margaret was uppermost, while Margaret became unconscious when Lucy was active. Lucy would have laughed such an idea to scorn. Being an incomplete personality, she had an incomplete understanding; she was in fact a simple child in many ways; she preferred doing what was wrong because it seemed pleasant and therefore natural. She was merely an animal who would steal like a cat or bite like a dog, following ordinary instincts. It would have been a waste of time therefore to explain propriety to Lucy, or to have told her what was implied by love and matrimony. Cuthbert was male, she was female; she desired no greater knowledge.

"I suppose we had better go in," he said somewhat fearfully, desiring Lucy but afraid of Margaret; and the girl who was all hot strength and activity jumped up, clung to him, caught up her skirts, Margaret's skirts, and danced along as bright as sunshine, and in a queer sort of way innocent.

"Cheer up, dear boy!" she cried. "They won't find out I'm with you, and if they do what's the odds? If father Jimmy and Auntie Jane live together, why shouldn't you and me?"

They entered the house; Cuthbert was glad to slam and lock the door. Lucy took possession like a bride, arranged the furniture to her liking, dragged Cuthbert upstairs to show him what she had brought. "Only a few things. I couldn't drag a great bundle along. You can buy me what I want directly we go away." She sat down and began to change her stockings before him, not knowing any harm, asking indeed for admiration; but Cuthbert went out, having seen in that warm flushed face a look of

Margaret. He closed the shutters downstairs, afraid of seeing some inquisitive face at the window, lighted the great candles, called for Bessie. She came, wiping her hands, full of suppressed eagerness and devotion for her master. She and Seabroke were bolt and lock to the door of Cuthbert's house; he was amazingly frank with both of them.

"Mrs Seabroke," he said. "The young lady proposes staying with me."

"Fancy, sir!" was the answer.

"I would rather she did not, but I cannot induce her to go."

"Never mind, sir," said Bessie.

"You and Seabroke will have to be very careful."

"That's right, sir."

These were the three expressions always to be found in her mouth, and conversation with the master usually consisted in ringing the changes upon them.

"Tell Seabroke to come to me in ten minutes," said Cuthbert; and the good woman hurried off to deliver the message, and then, being exceedingly well-trained, she carried a can of hot water upstairs for her mistress, who was not the first.

"There's only one way," said Cuthbert. "This girl is not the sort to play the fool with. I cannot kiss her to-day and throw her off to-morrow. I must send another note to Vipont telling him she is here, asking him to come for her. There will be a scene," he muttered. "They will have to carry her away by force, and she is strong."

He sat down to write, scribbled a line, then flung the pen aside.

"She's pretty. It would be good to have her here in the evenings. I don't change. I love having a girl companion, but I wish she had never been Margaret. This one is too dangerous, too much like one part of myself. I must send the note. Margaret might return."

He scribbled a few more lines, and then dreary Wind-whistle became filled with singing, and Lucy came down, her hair hanging to her waist, a free and joyous creature, exclaiming at the exclusion of daylight but appreciating the dim candles as giving, "enough light to cuddle in." She came forward swinging something; it was a tassel; she had put on Cuthbert's dressing-gown.

"I have to borrow a few things of you, old man. I've got precious few of my own at present. What are you writing?" she asked suspiciously, coming forward and looking over his shoulder.

"A letter to your father," he answered frankly, supposing she had seen it, and not knowing then that Lucy could only read and write with difficulty.

"Telling him I'm with you, and that he's to come and fetch me?"

"My dear child, I'd love to keep you," said Cuthbert in a boyish fashion, taking her hands and kissing them. "But it would lead to a fearful lot of trouble."

Lucy seemed to be more amused than angry. She seated herself on his knee, took the sheet of notepaper, destroyed it, and said with a sort of despair, "I can't think what's wrong with you. I might have thought you were stuck on Margaret if I didn't know you a jolly sight too well. You do all you can to set me free, and you try your hardest to make me come to you, and now you have me you say, 'Damned if I want you.' What's the matter, darling?"

"I don't know," said Cuthbert stupidly; for she was fascinating and scented.

"A bit dotty?" she suggested; and then deliberately, with slow movements of satisfaction, she pressed herself against him, placed her arms round his neck, and kissed his mouth with hungry sounds of joy.

"What do you say now?" she murmured, when they were both out of breath.

"Sacharissa," he answered, still thinking of Vipont.

"Blast Sacharissa," she said angrily. "Call me Lucy."

"If you please, sir," broke in a steady voice; and there at the door stood the wonderful man-machine waiting to be worked.

"I shall not require you, Seabroke," said Cuthbert.

CHAPTER XI

ERRATIC

NOBODY had seen or heard anything of Margaret ; and, what was more surprising, none of the under-currents of whispers could invent anything. She had disappeared, had deserted her father's house, and gone to Windwhistle ; the Viponts were sure of it, but hesitated to take action because the girl was of age and could do as she liked ; it was better to be free from her when she was not Margaret, and proceedings against Cuthbert would have aroused a scandal too serious to contemplate.

"It is far better for us, Theodore," said Hortensia snappishly. "We could not live with that wild devil."

"My head has lost all its coolness," lamented Theodore. "I must avoid excitement and take plenty of exercise. Walk as fast as possible," he went on, advising himself. "Keep your head thrown back and your mouth open to admit the fresh air into your lungs, stick your chest out, swing your arms. As for that music," he said wildly, "I wouldn't have anything more to do with it. I am thinking of my little girl that was, my pretty humming-bee. I am always thinking of her"; and then he broke off and said more sensibly, "The learned professions which might be of use are two, the legal and medical ; but I do not know how to approach either."

"The law is no use ; it never is," said Hortensia. "If Orton was keeping Margaret against her will it would be

different. If she insists on going to him we must be disgraced, and that's the end of it. He will soon have enough of her. We could have her removed if she was insane, but in that case we might be driven out of Cob Court and Summerland by the chattering tongues."

"You are a good little sister, a respectable maiden lady," her brother answered. "Things which arise to the mind of a man of the world do not trouble you."

"Yes, they do," she said more crossly than ever. "You men are always thinking old maids are not human. It is my consolation to remember that Orton is a gentleman, a man of gentle birth and some refinement—the master who has known him all his life says so—and I believe he would not take advantage of the girl. He has his own reputation to think of."

"Margaret would be safe, I think," said Theodore. "But this creature! I shall consult Dr Hele."

"He knows nothing, and he's a windbag. He would spread the tale all over the country. Why don't you go to Windwhistle?"

"How can I bring her back? She is strong and violent. She would lose her temper."

"Get that ass the poet to help you," she advised; and Theodore moved away to prepare for action, murmuring sadly, "I hardly know what I am doing, and the little sister has lost her senses too."

Claud was in bed when Theodore reached the cottage and rattled upon the door. A bushy head soon appeared at the window, and the visitor began in a jerky style:

"Poet Yalland, Margaret has run away again and gone to Windwhistle; she is not Margaret now, she has turned into someone else, but she is not insane, the master says. Will you come with me?"

"Go in. The door is not locked," said Claud. "I will be dressed in five minutes."

Theodore went in and waited, nibbling his fingers, looking

about, moaning from time to time, very distressed and miserable ; but his little antique soul was much the same, and his conscience said nothing reproving when he saw the golden glass shining like a jewel upon the high mantelshelf. Theodore had his share of superstition, and was able to believe this glass had really brought good-fortune to the poet, and therefore he desired to have it more than ever, that it might be a totem of good-luck to him. It was a foolish thought, but men in trouble catch at trifles ; and when it became almost a duty to put forth his hand and steal, he removed the piece of glass, wrapped it in his handkerchief, and hid it safely in his pocket. The meanness of pilfering from a man who had so little did not occur to him.

Claud came blundering down strangely attired, and picked up a few sheets of manuscript which were blowing about the floor. " I wrote them last night," he explained. " I'm taking to prose, as the poetry won't do. One, three, five," he counted. " Two and four are missing. They will be about somewhere ; perhaps they have drifted out into the garden and crucified themselves upon the brambles. I lost a poem once and found it a week later in a lane nearly half a mile away. It had blown there, I suppose ; but it was safe enough. I can't lose my stuff," he said, buttoning his coat round his throat, muttering, " Art does not supply collars."

He followed Theodore, who was in a bustle to get away before the glass should be missed, and they began to cross the field, Claud devouring lumps of stuff which looked like charcoal. " I keep these baked crusts handy in my pocket," he said. " I have a liking for them, and they fill my belly when I have nothing else. It's grand to live like this."

A little stream crossed the first lane, and Claud stopped, going on his knees, saying, " I call this Moab. It's my wash-pot. The best water in the world. Golden and scented."

He drank, then washed his hairy face, wrung out his beard, and walked on allowing the sun to dry him. It was then he asked for news of Margaret, and Theodore told him what had happened, concluding with, "You have a feeling of tenderness for my little pearl-child, Yalland."

"Without presumption. With reverence," said the poet earnestly. "As I love my sun, my moon, and my lanes. They are mine because I have as much right to them as anyone. All beauty is mine for I have a right to look at it; and I make my title secure by writing; as Orton has made ugliness his. He has come to money and fame with his bad dreams; he wouldn't look at me, but I shall always enjoy my life, and he will go mad some day; and so things will be levelled up between us and I shall draw my balance."

Theodore did not understand much of this, and indeed he hardly listened. He was frightened at Cuthbert and shrank from the idea of approaching him.

"You will not mention this?" he begged.

"Not a word. Telling secrets to myself satisfies me. I don't speak to a fellow-creature more than once a week. I'm a deep well. Drop anything into me and it sinks out of sight at once, and you won't see even a bubble."

"My little girl has become insane. That is the story we have put about. I am about to consult Dr Hele."

"Go to the old master. It's a mind doctor you want, not a body doctor," said Claud. "If anyone can cure her he will. If he says it's not insanity it is not, and you would only make her worse by calling in an ignorant good-natured old thing like Hele, who would ask to see her tongue and give her a bottle or two of medicine. Does the master know?"

"Not yet. It only happened yesterday."

"Are you sure she is at Windwhistle?"

"Where else could she be?"

"She might be wandering in the country. I hope she

is," Claud muttered ; and after that he walked so fast that neither had more breath for talking.

Seabroke was engaged in his endless task of eradicating roots of bracken, throwing the black things into heaps ; and as the two men approached the quick-eyed Claud saw one of the roots strike a window which he guessed belonged to the kitchen. It looked like an accident, and it might have been one ; still Claud noted the incident and made up his mind it was meant to be a signal.

" Good-morning, gentlemen," said the workman, in his ordinary impenetrable way.

" I should like to see Mr Orton," said Theodore, drawing himself up and staring at the church-like windows.

" Master sees no one in the morning," came the hopeless answer.

" He will see me ; he must," said Theodore.

" Master is a hard man to say must to," said Seabroke. He went on digging, then looked up and asked simply, " Who dares ? "

Theodore felt his arm clutched ; at the same moment he heard a whisper, " Here he is."

Cuthbert was strolling towards them, an open book in his hand, the little dog at his heels. Without waiting for him to speak, Theodore stepped out and said in a shaking voice, " Mr Orton, what have you done with my daughter ? I know she has come here and you are keeping her."

" Claud Yalland, I believe," said Cuthbert, turning from the antiquary and shaking hands with the poet. " I have heard of you. Some day I shall hope to hear of your work. Only a hero would write poetry in these days."

" Thank you, Mr Orton. I do my best," said Claud.

" Would you like to see my house ? Mr Vipont, I know, wishes to search it thoroughly. The door is open as you see. You may go in and walk wherever you please. You may open every box and cupboard. Mrs Seabroke will conduct you."

"I don't wish to quarrel, Mr Orton," said Theodore miserably. "You know what trouble has fallen upon me; how my poor girl has lost her senses, or at least her own good self, and has become a very different being. I believe she is here with you, and I implore you to restore her or help me search for her. I will take her away from these parts and watch over her until my Margaret comes back or till she dies. I cannot bear to lose her, as I lost her mother, but I would rather she died at once than be as she was yesterday. If you have hidden her, Mr Orton, tell me where she is."

Cuthbert did not hesitate; he could not. With his whole heart he longed to take Theodore to that slab of rock in the midst of the furze-bushes where Lucy was reclining, having slipped out at the back directly the alarm was given, while Bessie was even then engaged in obliterating all traces of her; but he dared not, for he was already afraid of Lucy, and if he broke his promise to her, or she lost control over herself, his own life might not be worth much. If he gave her up she would not go, and if they dragged her away with violence she would certainly return at the first opportunity.

Theodore was faced with difficulties as great. If Lucy was back at Cob Court he could not control her, and if she refused to live at home he could do nothing except attempt to have her certified insane, which she was not. Doctors no doubt would declare that Lucy was a singularly sane and healthy young woman of a somewhat vulgar type, and would regard Theodore as an unnatural parent for wishing to be rid of her. It would be impossible for him to take her to another part of the country if she refused to go; and if she could be taken away as Margaret she would make off directly Lucy returned.

"Miss Vipont did come yesterday," Cuthbert said. "What time was it, Seabroke?"

"Twenty after three, sir."

"What time did she go?"

"Nine minutes to four, sir."

"He has it all too pat," Claud muttered; and Cuthbert knew what he was saying, so he called, "It was later than that."

"No sir, asking your pardon. I looked at my watch as she walked up the path. Between eight and nine minutes to four, it was."

"Did she speak to you?"

"Only called me a damned fool, sir."

Theodore groaned, for this sounded like the truth, and even Claud who was more keen-sighted wobbled.

"She came and went?" gasped Theodore. "Where is she now? What was she doing all night? My poor Margaret; it is her body."

Cuthbert turned away just in time to avoid the poet's eyes. Claud would have learnt something had he been a moment quicker.

"She told me how she longed to get away, to enjoy herself, see life," Cuthbert went on; and again Theodore believed, for Margaret had expressed such longings. "She declared she would never return home. She wanted to stay with me, but I pointed out it was impossible. Would you like to go over the house?"

"It is needless. I believe you, Mr Orton. You are a gentleman. I am sorry you ever came here and cast the influence of your mind over my daughter—it must be something like that—but the mischief has been done. I pray you now to bring her back to me if you can."

"I would if I could," said Cuthbert, with such earnestness that both men were astonished.

"We shall soon hear something. Plenty of people must have seen her if she walked away from here," said Claud cheerfully.

"The night," muttered Theodore. "Walking then;

no rest, no food, no shelter. My poor child was so quickly tired."

"Have you been to God's Garden?" Cuthbert asked, merely for the sake of breaking silence.

"She cannot be there. Mr Ramrige would have sent to me at once."

Theodore and Claud returned to Summerland, the poet's thoughts revolving like a wheel. Being a creature of the night, working, walking, thinking while others slept, he decided to watch that other night-man in his misty cage of Windwhistle; he would play the owl to Cuthbert's bat. If Margaret had been caught he would be sure to find her. Claud was not cowardly; as a boy he had been capable of calling his father an oil-barrel; and though Cuthbert and Yalland the elder were two very different personages, Claud knew he could tackle either and pay all debts.

Hortensia was in a worse temper than ever, yielding no courtesy to Claud beyond a nod, and snapping "The man's a liar" when Theodore acquainted her of the result of their mission. A strange dog had lately chased her cat over some of the flower-beds, which accounted for much ill-humour.

"The only thing which now suggests itself to me is to inform the police," said Theodore helplessly.

"First lawyers, then doctors, now the police," said Hortensia, who was very red about the face. "The girl is at Windwhistle, and she hid herself when she saw you coming, and made Orton promise not to give her away. Of course you stood passing compliments outside the house. I should have gone straight in and looked for signs of her. A woman can always tell if another woman has been using a house. Is it likely she could have walked away from the place? Twenty people would have been here before now to tell us they had seen her."

"Why didn't you come with me?" asked Theodore.

"Because I wouldn't be seen in or near an author's house," said Hortensia hotly. "I hate the whole tribe of them, novelists, essayists, poets, or whatever they like to call themselves. When I was a young girl there wasn't this silly craze for writing and reading, and there was very little education, and everybody was much happier. Men were made to work, and writing's only play. It's monstrous for a man to stick in a room on a summer's morning and scratch his head. More education, more madness; and asylums going up everywhere."

"You read a good deal yourself, Miss Vipont. You told me once you have the latest books," Claud reminded her gently.

"I can read if I like. What's that to you?" said Hortensia most rudely, making the poet shrink. "Folly is all I get out of these books. I can see more sober sense any minute of the day by standing near the hedge and looking along the road. What are these wonderful novels of Orton's? What is your poetry? What is writing generally? It is choosing a word out of the dictionary, and another, and then another, and setting them down with a punctuation mark here and there until you're tired of the game. Any fool can do it. Listen to people talking; write it down. Look out of the window and see a sunset; put it down. Watch a boy and girl kissing; put it down. Add a lot of disease, misery and death, and you've got a book. It's easier than pricking out seedlings, and it don't make your back ache. If you took down what I'm saying now you would have a page or two."

"You have ripened suddenly into a sour apple, little sister," said Theodore somewhat sharply.

"Hold your tongue," said the angry little lady. "I'll speak to this man as I would if he wasn't here. Who wants your poetry, Mr Yalland?"

"Nobody, Miss Vipont; not a soul, I do assure you," said the poet humbly.

"Of course they don't. If we want to read poetry there it is already written."

"Some of us have a desire to make a living," said Claud meekly.

"Oh yes, I know that old excuse. You want to live unnatural lives. There is Orton shut up all day, stringing words together exactly as I'm doing now, only much slower——"

"And making a good deal of money," finished Claud.

"Out of filth which is called realism. In my young days that meant a grave-stone and a ghost sitting on it, with an owl flapping round, blue lights in the church windows, and a good dark windy night. Now we are given indigestion by reading about women who are vampires and men who are fiends. The whole world has got the horrors, and you writers are responsible. You people—you can't even be normal in your lives, you don't walk like ordinary folk. You come out, stare at a weed, go along a little further and stare at a tree, walk another few steps and stare at a cloud; and finish up by falling in a ditch. You call that thinking."

"Some of us walk out to enjoy the friendship of birds and flowers," said Claud bravely.

"You would be better employed cleaning out pigsties—at least Orton would," went on the furious Hortensia. "Think of your own wasted life, loafing here for more than twenty years in dirt and poverty, when you might have been wealthy, a respectable citizen, an employer of labour, and goodness knows what else."

"I will go," said Claud quietly. "I am sorry you despise me, Miss Vipont."

"Don't talk nonsense," cried the illogical little woman. "It's your calling I hate. A big strong man like you ought to work with something heavier than a pen. You should take a spade and plant trees"; and then Hortensia for some reason began to be distressed and to search for her handkerchief.

Theodore had gone away, disgusted at his sister's rudeness, which was yet more honourable than his purloining of the golden glass, and was moping and sniffing in the porch.

"You are worrying over your niece," said Claud gently.

"Yes, I am—and the dog breaking my geraniums. I think I should breathe a sigh of relief if I knew Margaret was dead. No, don't talk about her. I suppose some food will be ready presently, and heaven knows you want feeding. Your own larder is empty as a matter of course?" she said with a return of what seemed rudeness.

"My cottage had no larder," he answered.

"What food have you?"

"Half a rabbit. I'm a poacher," said Claud defiantly. "There are hundreds of rabbits about the fields, and I trap them. It means meat for me and loss to nobody."

"You will be trapped yourself some day and brought before the magistrates."

"It's all in the jolly game of life. I shall sing none the worse with a conviction for poaching against me."

"Would you like a few plants for your garden? I throw heaps away. Some of them may as well go to a poacher's garden as my bonfire."

"I have no garden. At least it is a garden of brambles and groundsel."

"What a man! what a mind!" said Hortensia. "Calling himself a poet, and growing weeds."

"My poems are also weeds," he reminded her.

"I read an essay of yours upon bluebells. It was pretty—I liked it. You worked out the idea of the blue mist very well. My love for flowers made me like it."

"I am very pleased," he said simply.

"How much money did you get for it?"

"One guinea—and with difficulty."

"Good heavens! How much money did you make last year?"

He started at the extraordinary question, but answered it, "Forty-three pounds. It was a good year."

"And you lived on that?"

"Many manage on less. I am not Cuthbert Orton who can ask what he likes."

"And he's a brute," she said decidedly.

Hortensia walked on a few steps and Claud followed.

"I am going to show you my herb-garden," she said.

They made a few more steps, then she stopped, turned, and asked sharply, "Where is Margaret?"

"I believe at Windwhistle," he answered at once.

"Not that creature—let her stay there and die there, for she's a devil—but Margaret herself?"

"I cannot tell you, Miss Vipont."

"You loved her. You came every night and threw a bunch of flowers over the hedge. You had no business to love her," she said angrily.

"She inspired me, helped me to write my little essays and the poems which nobody wants. I loved her in a religious sense," said Claud. "I would never have told her. Every man has a right to religion, and she was a great part of mine."

"You speak of her as if she were dead. She will come back, we shall see her again, once or twice, and then she will go for ever. I knew something would happen. When a girl can hear and shiver at the buzzing of a fly in some spider's web at the other end of the garden there must be something very unusual about her. What do you say?"

"You are appealing to an optimist," Claud answered.

"I say all will come right in the end."

"Then there must be a miracle."

"Perhaps there will be; and the master will perform it."

They made a few more steps, then Hortensia turned again and said, "That remark of yours will stick to me."

The herb-garden was some distance from the double cottage, on the lower ground near the river, sloping down

towards the oaks and ferns beyond. It was fenced off, and narrow pathways had been made through it. "It is my own work," said Hortensia, as she introduced Claud to the scented patch through a ridiculously small gate. "It is the finest herb-garden in this part of the country. You see I have a few vegetables as well, the sort which are too dignified to be planted in an ordinary kitchen-garden near vulgar turnips and carrots. Here is a large cardoon; it is the one vegetable which Margaret was really fond of. I ought not to grow the garlic so near it, because garlic taints everything, and I would like to root it out altogether, only my garden would not be complete without it. Garlic in a garden reminds me of the oldest inhabitant in a village; always self-assertive. This rocambole is the same sort of thing, but is rather uncommon now. The savory you know, this one in the corner, and here is the winter-savory. I use them a great deal in the kitchen. Take a pinch, but don't let your fingers touch the rocambole. These strongly-scented things are so affectionate."

Claud began to find it pleasant in that fragrant corner. Hortensia had changed out of all knowledge, had dropped her unpleasantness, and was living up to her name as the planter of a fair garden.

"Here, side by side, are aromatic hyssop and pot-marjoram, both out of date and forgotten by cooks," she went on. "This tansy is a friend of yours, for it grows along the lanes where you wander, generally in the moist places, though being a rank weed it will spread anywhere. One of the pleasures of a herb-garden is that you can't prevent the things from growing when once they are planted. Tansy is almost as strong as garlic, but much pleasanter, though I can't imagine it being used as a flavouring, and a pudding made of it must have scented the neighbourhood. They had a taste for pungent food in the old days. This tarragon is quite properly called the herb-dragon; if you put it in a sauce it swallows all the other spices. Clary you

find nowadays in the flower-garden, which is the wrong place for it. Burnet is another of the wild things and is here only for show, as in my opinion it ruins a salad, and we don't go in for cool tankards of ale which it is supposed to improve. Sorrel is hardly worth noticing, as it is the principal plant of this district. You have your Wood-Sorrel Lane."

"How do you know?" asked Claud.

"I am not always gardening; I have eyes and ears," she said.

"I pick and eat it. The acid leaves are pleasant when one is thirsty."

"All children eat it. I wonder the sorrel is not used now. No salad is complete without it, only you mustn't have too much. Rosemary and lavender, the two queens of the herb-garden. Have you noticed," asked Hortensia, "that people still grow them in the kitchen-garden? Most of the herbs have been dropped, but these two have never fallen out of favour. Whenever you see a very old bush, you may be sure it is the last survival of a herb-garden. I don't think they were ever used in the kitchen, although sprigs were placed in the various drinks which our ancestors passed most of their time swallowing; they were required chiefly in time of illness and death for purifying the houses and as a safeguard against infection. That is the reason why they came safely through the dull dead time of the nineteenth century. Here are baum, perslane, parsley, sage, mint, and all the usual lot of commoners which have lived through the deluge, and are usually grown in an unfrequented part of the garden where they have to fight a battle of life or death with the weeds. The hops make a pleasant background; the young tops used to be cooked and eaten. Theodore has the cones when they are ripe, dries them, and smokes them with his tobacco. So my hops are more useful than most of my herbs. Chervil is another pot-herb and is good in an omelette, which by the way you can make

without breaking eggs, for you can prick a hole in the shells and blow the contents out. Chive is a smelly thing which would ruin your breath for days. It is one of those oddities which cannot make up its mind whether to be a herb or a vegetable; like a tomato which tries hard to be a fruit, and rhubarb which tries to persuade us it was meant for a foliage plant: like some men also," added Hortensia slyly, "who wish to be poets and ought to be manufacturers."

"I will remember," said Claud. "Henceforth I am of the house and lineage of the Tomato."

"The beautiful borage is another survival, and has been left in the kitchen-garden borders because it is supposed to add a flavour to cool drinks, which is a fallacy, as heat is required to bring its virtues out. It is the herb beloved of bees, and that is really the reason why it has been retained; that and its own beauty. Bugloss is known profanely as a common weed in corn-fields; here it occupies the position to which it is entitled. Rape is a kind of turnip cultivated for its seed, and is here simply because a herb-garden must contain it. You made the acquaintance of pennyroyal when you were a baby. Basil, one of the most delicious of herbs, brings the flavour of romance. Marigold and nasturtium are two herbs which have been retained in the flower-garden, but the nasturtium is the finest flavouring I know of. Fennel and dill are old friends, though the dill is only here occasionally as I don't care for annuals in a herb-garden; corn-salads, for instance, I will not be bothered with. As for those great rude red-cabbages I hate and abhor them, but the herbals insist upon them, so here they are looking like prize-fighters. Horse-radish is another nuisance, ugly and untamable; it jumps the borders, gallops all over the place, tramples upon other things, and in every way deserves its name. Mustard and cress, of course! Now you are tired of herbs."

"You make me want to be a gardener," said Claud wistfully.

"It is worth while. Better than walking about with your hands in your pockets. And it's so easy. You dig, plant, weed; Nature does all the rest. The herb-garden is the easiest of all, and full of perfume every hour of the day; one scent in the early morning, another at noon, another at night; all different and all good. Everyone who has a piece of ground for his pleasure ought to set aside a portion for a herb-garden."

"I'll set to work," said Claud. "I'll root up the brambles, the nettles, and groundsel. I'll be a gardener."

"I will lend you the tools and give you plenty of plants. But you must lime the ground first."

They were both full of enthusiasm. The scent of the herb-garden was doing its work; making them forgetful of the duties of life.

"I'll have the finest flowers in the country. I'll beat you," cried Claud.

"You will have to get up before the birds," she laughed. "I will give you a nosegay; I made a little conceit t'other day; one must think of something while tearing the weeds up. I have nine flowers in my mind. I will refer to them one by one, and you shall guess what they are; and if you guess right you shall have them, and if you guess wrong you shall have none at all. This is the first; what is that which is the glory of creation and the staff of our daily life?"

"These are riddles."

"Nothing so vulgar. A posy of flowers, their stalks tied together with green cotton," she said archly. "Come now, the first flower is an easy one, though I would not include it in a nosegay, and indeed it is not yet in bloom."

"The glory of creation is the sun," said Claud.

"Right."

"And the staff of life is bread."

" Rightly reasoned but wrongly answered. What flower is called sun-bread ? I have punned you the answer, but one may be old-fashioned in a herb-garden."

" Sun-flower."

" Of course. What is the bird that flies high, lives low ; and what is that which gives speed to a horse ? "

" Larkspur ; the bird gave it me."

" What do the bees produce, and what is the employment of a nurse ? Oh, perhaps we had better not have this flower ; I forgot," said Hortensia nervously.

" I'll guess it. The first part is so easy. A nurse," muttered Claud. " She takes the baby out, watches it, sings to it, gives it baths."

" We will go on to the next," said Hortensia.

" Honeysuckle," cried Claud.

" What many of you men are, and what you all wear. That's the next," she hurried on, and murmured, " I think this one is all right."

" I'm beaten. Fools and coats are the only two words I can think of, and they don't make a flower. Poor and boots," he went on. " Tall and trousers ; I can't get it."

" Bachelor's Button. What is that you are never likely to ride in, and what it is certain you will never govern ? "

" I am not likely to ride in the Lord Mayor's coach, or to govern myself. You must give me a hint."

" The loveliest of all flowers with a delicious scent. Not a pink."

" Carnation."

" Certainly. What supports a house, and what makes a mill dusty ? "

" Wall-flower."

" Quite right. The best name for a woman, and, next to a good woman, the best thing to have ? "

" I am dull of comprehension," said Claud. " I cannot get it. There are too many best names and best things "

"It is in the herb-garden. There! Spelt in the old-fashioned way; the marygold."

"I would not have guessed it."

"Then this will bring you down too. Something which is in us all, and something we all desire? Another name for the pansy?"

"Heart's-ease."

"And here's the last. The husband of a good many wives, and what you fasten your letters with?"

"Solomon's seal," said Claud at once. "The flowers grow wild near one of my lanes."

"You shall have the plants, as on the whole you have guessed well," said Hortensia. "And now you shall eat a herb-omelette."

CHAPTER XII

SEARCHING

WHISPERING folk of Summerland brought their heads together when Claud passed through their midst on his way home with a burden of implements on his shoulder ; while the good fellow laughed back and told them he was going gardening. A new love at forty is a strong one. It was astonishing he had never thought of a garden before ; he had gone through those years exploring the avenues of work around him, supposing he had exhausted them all, and somehow had not discovered the most obvious and the best. He had looked upon quarter-of-an-acre of wilderness for twenty years and been satisfied ; and now at the word of a slender and sprightly old maid he was about to plant a garden where he would grow poetry and romance.

Reaching his own enchanted corner, Claud pulled off his coat, spat upon his hands—he determined to do the thing properly—rushed upon the groundsel, tore up handfuls ; attacked the nettles, which died valiantly, stinging with all their might ; fought with the brambles, which had done what they liked for so long, and as hardy veterans knew how to defend themselves. Claud's hands were soon mottled with nettle-stings and bleeding with scratches. He stopped to recover breath, dashed against the foe again. He had not the patience to work soberly. That garden must be made at once.

"Wonderful what a lot can be done in a few minutes," he gasped.

An hour of that furious labour and his aching body called a halt, so Claud dropped the borrowed mattock and tramped about, planning out the work, forgetting all else. "I'll cut paths and cover them with sand; there's plenty in Moab Lane after every rainfall. The kitchen-garden shall be there, where I can't see it from the window; under the hedge is a warm place, and the big hollies will keep the wind from the peas. I'll make an asparagus-bed and celery-trenches, and plant strawberries on the outside. I'll have the flower-garden in two large beds, one at each side of the entrance; and a fruit-garden over there, and a fine little herb-garden in the corner; *Hortensia* shall soon be blushing for hers. I'll be a market-gardener," he cried. "There shall be a few frames, and that room I don't use upstairs we will turn into a hot-house; I'll put a stove in it and grow all the wonders of the Indies. The heavenly muse shall dig instead of sing. I'll have a pergola and plenty of trellis-work to support creepers. The stones and rubbish will make a mound to break the flatness of the garden, and on top of the mound turf shall be spread and I'll build me a little arbour, and on the sides of the mound flowering-shrubs will flourish, and by the nine ladies of Mount Parnassus I'll divert the dirty stream t'other side of the hedge, make it wriggle through my blossoming Yallandry, dig a pond and create a bog-garden. I'll have a bowling-alley too, with a low hedge on each side, one of bay, the other of sweet brimmles. The mighty plan must be worked out slowly upon sheets of paper. It will take time and labour, the two things which are cheap; the third, money, it must not require. And when I've got my garden I'll write about it, words without end, tell others how 'twas done, and make it pay me back."

Claud went inside to prepare food and did not then

reflect how all his dreams had come to nothing. Those visions of poetry and a new style of prose had never quite faded, but the colour had gone out of them. This ideal of a perfect garden might be simply another dazzling meteor flashing into a mere pinch of dust, all that was left of a heavenly body, perhaps of a world in space. Some of Claud's zeal departed when he looked up and missed that little household god of good-fortune, his golden glass. It was foolish to be chilled, but solitude induces superstition, and the poet had lived so long in touch with the silent ways that silent things had helped him.

"A beastly trick," he muttered, knowing Theodore had succumbed to the temptation. "When I was helping him, getting up early, and going off with him. We are all selfish, though. I was thinking of Margaret, not of him. Well, he can have it—take the glass, Mr Vipont," said Claud boisterously. "I won't ask for it back. If a piece of stupid yellow glass can bring you happiness—it can't, you know," he said, smiling. "It's all folly. A rattle makes a child laugh; a charm pleases a man. This wood-work is getting rotten," he went on, trying to forget. "I wonder what Harry would say if I wrote and asked him for a pot of varnish."

Still Claud was depressed, feeling he had reached an unlucky number, and the new ideal lost some of its green colour. He professed scorn of Theodore, declined to mope over his loss, but he would have been happier in his mind had that piece of glass been shining on his mantel.

That night during the second hour of gloom Claud started off without his lantern, which was needless since he gathered flowers no longer, but in his pocket were two friendly articles, which he always carried, a knife and piece of rope. The night was not worthy of its name, for there was no actual darkness; even the clouds were white, and behind flashed a slice of moon sometimes, making the road beyond look like a river. Claud went by one of his

amazing short cuts, which took no account of obstacles such as hedges, to the hill above Windwhistle ; and there seated himself, looking down and waiting for the night to get on a little. This prying game was not much to his taste, but no other trick would serve.

Passing cautiously downwards he felt safe when among the trees, casting a darkness which the night could not manage, and saw the walls and windows of the house, but not a ray of light between the shutters. The spirit of adventure entered into Claud, and he felt a desire to break in boldly, rescue Margaret, and carry her home upon his shoulder. He had not seen Lucy, or his thoughts might not have run that way. Creeping along to the edge of the wood, he reached the bracken rising to the height of his shoulders, and looked out. Nobody was in sight ; not a sound came from the house, but the walls were very thick and the windows high. Claud advanced, walked carefully round the house, but without adding to his knowledge.

" I feel a fool," he muttered. " I have an idea someone is staring at me."

Again he stepped back and looked at the shuttered windows, especially at those of the east-end, the ones he believed which hid the secret from him. Taking his knife he cut a long stick, split one end, forced his rope into the cleft, approached one of the windows, and gently worked the rope behind the piping until it came down to him. Then he climbed to the window-ledge, his boots finding foothold upon the projecting stones. Still he heard nothing, and for a moment believed Cuthbert had spoken truly ; if Margaret and he were together surely there would not be this silence.

" What's the use [of] my sneaking here ? " he muttered. " Orton would foresee everything and lay his plans accordingly. He would guess Vipont would search by night to try and catch him. I'll get along home and dig brambles."

Cuthbert and Lucy were sitting in the subterranean region where he worked ; and all the noise they made was a lazy laughter which did not carry far. They looked a contented couple, there was not much of the outside world clinging to them then ; and the one had forgotten the name of Cob Court, while the other hardly remembered the name of Ramrige. Presently there came an interruption and the stolid voice of Seabroke sounded :

" Gentleman in the garden, sir. Name of Mr Yalland."

" What is the poet doing ? " said Cuthbert.

" Gone now, sir. I watched him off. He walked round the house, then climbed to the sitting-room window, and listened."

" Where were you ? "

" Sitting in the bracken where you told me to sit."

" You may go to bed now, Seabroke. We are not likely to have any more poets."

" Thank you, sir."

The door closed, and Cuthbert said to the lady upon his knees, " See how well I have organised my household."

" If I had seen the bounder," said she, " I'd have fetched him a back-hander in the eye which would have made him blink to-morrow. Look here, old man. We ain't going to be left in peace. Let's do a bunk."

" Go away to-night ? "

" We can't by day, that's certain. I can walk miles, and I'll get into a suit of your clothes and go as a boy."

" How about your hair ? "

" I can twist it up under a hat. I hate this place. It's too lonesome for this child. I want a great hot town all round me. Come on ! We'll have the devil of a time when we get out of this."

Claud did not return home, but went along secret ways to God's Garden, coming out on the moor above it, climbing to descend again, slipping over the rocks which looked like shadows in that dim light. The master had

not been heard of lately ; he might be ill, as it was not his way to keep himself shut up. Claud reached the rough wall, looked over, smelt the pines and saw a light. This was a good honest home and the windows were unshuttered. Windwhistle was like a pagan temple ; this was a lighthouse.

"The master is down below," said the woman with the priest-like face ; and Claud descended the terraces, until he came to the stream and the twisting path ; and there found the master sitting upon a rock, reading by a candle which was fastened into a cleft beside him.

"I had a feeling someone would visit me, but not you," he said. "Owls have been flapping here, and moths have sacrificed themselves at the flame of my candle. It is always calm down here, however the winds may blow around the house."

"We feared you might be ill," said Claud.

"Let me speak about yourself. You have grown since we last met," said the master.

"I am going to plant a garden," said the poet.

"That is good. It will teach you ; but there is something more. You propose to write a series of sonnets dealing with the life of the plant. Who has scattered this seed over you ?"

"Miss Vipont has promised me the roots. My garden will beat hers in time."

"Miss Hortensia's work ! Do not talk about roots, for the seed came first. When the garden is planted, write about life when blossom and plant are one ; do not write of the seed ; forget the roots. It is the blossom we desire ; the root is our destiny, the seed our future ; in the blossom we see ourselves as we would be."

"It is too deep for me," said simple Claud. "My garden is to be a commercial venture. I shall send my vegetables to market."

"You will never wake up," said Jasper. "I hoped you

had escaped from commerce. If you work for the market you will write no poetry, and if you write poetry for commerce you will fail. The only work that is well done is the work done for love. Plant your garden, Claud, and let the soul of it be like the sparrow of Eadwine's earldorman, entering at the door of spring, lingering in the light and heat, and passing forth into the wintry darkness whence it came. Do not seek to pursue it. Let your songs be of the light and heat, never of the darkness and storm beyond the door."

"What of the clearer light and the stronger heat, master?"

"Sing of them if you can. The greatest have tried and failed. No man has ever been inspired to describe any land of the future half as beautiful as this earth. A soul would rather roam beneath these oaks in the beauty of the twilight than inhabit the heaven of the churches. I confess I am impatient with religion, which seems to me always to neglect the best. 'Heaven is somewhere,' says the preacher. 'I don't know where; you don't either. It is a place where you will enjoy yourselves; plenty of singing and feasting, no rent to pay, no worry about the price of food. Do as I tell you, and you will go there, only ask no questions or you will find me as ignorant as you are.' Such is the teaching, and the people mistake the voice of fools for the voice of God, and shun their God because of fools. The teacher should speak with a sweet and mystic voice like the wind passing through these oaks. He should tell nothing; he should suggest."

"Are you speaking to me, master?" asked Claud; for Jasper had turned away from him, and his eyes were fixed upon the stream.

"Let us clearly understand," went on the master, rising and throwing the cloak from his great shoulders, "that our future state is not to be revealed. We may perceive the dim outline of life up to its close, but not

beyond. The one voice which might have spoken, the voice of suggestion, has always remained silent ; telling us indeed of the past, speaking to us of the lives of others, and of all the personalities bound up in the life of one, and unravelling these to their conclusion like the ends of a twisted skein ; teaching us about the mystery of ourselves, and revealing to us glimpses of Nature's wonders ; making a man a genius or a dullard, a hero or a poltroon ; playing with us like the wind with a heap of chaff ; but as to that mystery which we call the state of life beyond bodily death, it merely says, ' No man shall ever lift this veil.' Look around and notice the indifference of the world to all that is unattainable. Only the philosopher and poet strive to solve what cannot be solved, and prove what cannot be proved. By process of thought, they say, the voice of suggestion will give up its great secret at last. Suggestion ; it's the only way. The mind cannot be closed to it. The body may be flung into vice, humanity may be prostituted, lips meant to bless may curse, but the voice will be heard, and the voice will raise the dead to life again."

" You are thinking of your friend ? " Claud suggested.

" I am not. You ask if I am ill. You wonder why I stand here idle. It is not time for me yet. These bodies must run their course before they are drawn towards an influence which shall shatter them. When the time comes I shall be ready ; and then I will bring her back. Why have you come to me at midnight ? It is not to say that you are planting a garden."

" I have been to Windwhistle," Claud answered.

" It was a well-meant wasted effort. If you had obtained the knowledge which you went to seek, what would you have done ? "

" Told her father. If she is there, he has a right to know."

" Meddling makes madness," said the master. " It

would be his duty to remove her by violence, making her state far worse. He would go there with police and a search-warrant. I would go in gentleness. If I could find her alone," he murmured.

"What would you do?"

"I would get to Margaret. I might have to dig deep, but I would find her. I know the way."

"I believe the house is empty. There was no light and not a sound."

"They have not gone yet, but they are going. Life repeats itself," said the master. "If the girl Ethel had lived, the evil spirit Celia would not have entered into him; his mind might have been spiritual. Margaret would have been safe. He could have saved Ethel, and did not. She could have resisted death, but had no mind to help her. You do not understand these things, Claud. Go on with your gardening, but keep the earth out of your ears."

"I have a few poems. May I bring them to you?"

"Bring them soon," said the master. "I may be wanted elsewhere."

Claud descended by the lower path; the master ascended to the house. It was then midnight, and the stars were clear. He looked at an almanack, took out a chart and studied it, and presently passed a hand across his eyes.

"A change; a breaking up of existing conditions," he murmured.

It had been calm when he entered the house a few minutes before; and now the wind was raging.

"Orton requires me. I will go," said the master. "He is struggling. The change occurs at midnight, and it is now some minutes after."

He took his cloak and hat, and went out murmuring, "This is not knowledge. Here is nothing but a skinful of old words and phrases, a creature of rambling tongue susceptible to every change and current. The piper will

be wild for an hour to-night. This is the war-song and the water-carriers are coming up behind. At its fiercest the wind is in tune. At our best we are false instruments; and if we try to tune ourselves we break."

Windwhistle was still dark and silent, but the door was closed no longer. The master stood and knocked. Seabroke came down the passage carrying a lantern, his face as dull as ever. Jasper was not astonished to find him up so late.

"Tell Mr Orton it is necessary I should speak to him," he said in the voice of authority.

"The master has gone, sir."

"Tell Mr Orton I have a message for him," said Jasper, in the same voice, regarding Seabroke with the steady gaze which had twice moved Cuthbert.

"The master has gone, sir," said Seabroke loudly.

"The young lady with him?"

"Yes, sir."

That same instant Seabroke could have bitten his tongue off. The master had been looking into his eyes, and somehow had made him speak the truth.

CHAPTER XIII

WHIRLING

"FREE at last. I have a body of my own," cried Lucy, dancing and laughing about a room in a Bayswater lodging-house ; running to the window to shout at passers-by, encouraging street-organs to play their loudest, tossing pennies to the ragamuffins, and swearing at a professional beggar who claimed his share. "Cuthbert, we must begin to move. Come out and buy things. I've reached this world naked, but I don't mean to stay like that. I'll be the best-dressed girl in London. Come out and buy. Look at the women going along like birds and beasts carrying all they have about with them, and I'm the only one without anything at all but an old frock covered with oil-spots. Now's the time to shout and get drunk, old boy. I'm longing to get drunk."

She pulled at Cuthbert. His health was never good, travelling upset him, and he had been lying down with a headache ; heartache as well, for there was no seeing the end of this mad motion which was only beginning ; this flying through space round the sun and back towards earth, then forth again comet-fashion into new dark depths.

"I am tired." Go out by yourself," he said.

"You know I can't. When you are not with me I'm frightened and stupid."

She had a terror of something happening, of being lost in the crowd and forgetting who she was ; afraid perhaps

of having her identity taken away by the return of Margaret, whom she regarded as a separate being possessing some mysterious power over her. She dreaded Margaret as well as hated her.

"You are only tired because you are idle. I want to see the lamps lighted and people quarrelling and fighting under them, and women full of drink cursing in the gutter. There are fine things in the world, and I mean to have a look at them."

It was clear calm weather, and the streets were peaceful, yet Cuthbert felt as if he moved upon wheels. Lucy was making him dizzy, dragging him on, telling him to look this way and that, laughing so loudly that people stared at them. "Half-dead creatures," she called them. "I'd like to get hold of a few and drag them through their lives at twenty miles an hour."

"Slower," said Cuthbert. "I'm nearly twenty years older than you. Do you see that young man? He is handsome. Wouldn't you rather have him than me?"

"That skinny boy! I'd hang myself rather. There's only one man in the world for me, though he does make me want to torture him sometimes. I see only the women properly. The men are blurred; they pass like ghosts; they don't seem to have much existence. You are the only one alive and solid. Take me in here; this place smells nice."

She stopped Cuthbert beside the swing-door of a common beer-house.

"Come on," he said roughly. "Where do you get your tastes from?"

"From you, of course. I will go in. I want to drink something which will go to my head and make me feel light."

"If you must drink, we will at least go to a respectable place."

"This must be respectable, or it wouldn't be here. If

you won't take me in, I'll lie right down here and scream as loud as I can."

Cuthbert knew she would do so. There had been similar outbreaks in Windwhistle. So he gave way and entered the low-down place with her.

When they came out Lucy wiped her pretty mouth with the back of her hand, then spat into the gutter, saying, "It ain't so nice as I thought it would be. We'll try a better shop."

"Behave like a lady," said Cuthbert with a shiver. Lucy's action did not suit the face of Margaret.

"A lady. Oh, damn it! Ain't a lady to spit when she wants to? I say, mother," she called to a decent-looking woman who passed at that moment, "my bloke says I ain't a lady. What do you think?"

"Margaret," he exclaimed thoughtlessly; and the next instant she was at him.

"What the devil do you mean? Calling me Margaret, the one name that I—oh, my God, I could tear your eyes out! I'd rather you would call me all the filthy names you could put your tongue on. Calling me Margaret!" she screamed.

It was a bad moment for Cuthbert. Several people hesitated, errand-boys began to cross the road towards them, a policeman stepped forward and said quietly, "Better take her along home." Cuthbert hurried on, signalled a cab; and directly they were in it Lucy began to sob. "Hating me, insulting me, when I love you. Call me any sort of a brute you like, but if you call me Margaret you will make me mad. You crush me, knock all the life and strength out of me."

"Why didn't you let me finish?" said Cuthbert, recognising she must be quieted, and taking an easy way out. "I was going to say, 'Margaret would be shocked,' if you had given me time."

He had already discovered it was easy to please her;

she was of a credulous nature where he was concerned ; and to satisfy her it was only necessary to give way. She changed at once, became loving and amiable, and even promised to try and behave respectably, although decency, she explained, was merely another name for hypocrisy.

" Who told you that ? " he asked.

" You did. If you didn't tell me you wrote it somewhere. It's all the same."

So they went shopping, and after that they dined, and then they visited a music-hall, an entertainment which Cuthbert hated, but when he suggested a theatre the girl made ready to scream, and therefore he gave way.

" We can't walk about at a theatre. We have to sit still and stare at a stupid stage. I must be on the move."

Cuthbert, who was longing for rest, had to promenade for two hot hours, until the girl, whose vitality seemed inexhaustible, decided it was slow, there would be more motion outside, and she wanted to visit some place where it might be possible to see some wickedness. " I haven't seen any," she said mournfully. " There are some about here playing at it, but I want to see fights and a murder——"

" Stop it," he muttered.

" What's the matter, stupid ? It's quite natural."

" I can't think where you get your horrible notions from."

" Why, from you."

That was always her answer ; every unnatural idea, every bad thought that her mind was capable of, proceeded, " from you."

Cuthbert shuddered at the answer ; more so perhaps when he realised that Lucy was not a creature of wickedness ; she was by nature good, charitable, her heart was kind although her mind was hopelessly distorted. She was like an animal, fierce, cruel, eager to smell blood, and yet gentle to its own kind. An organ-grinder was playing beside the curb ; Lucy gave him money. An old man,

bent and withered, offered matches; Lucy gave him money. Upon the opposite side stood a woman with two ragged children; Lucy ran across, dodging the traffic, to give them money, returned to Cuthbert with a sweet and pitiful face saying, "Give me more money. They have no home, they are starving"; and Cuthbert seemed to hear the voice of the master speaking, "This is how men create; all that is good belongs to Nature, all that is bad is yours."

"Go home," she exclaimed, in amazement at the suggestion. "Back to our deadly rooms, while the streets are full of people, and there's the chance of seeing a fight. You would spend your life asleep, I think. Tired already when we are only just beginning. Here's a nice place, a lovely place; you shall sit down here."

"Lucy, I beg you," he said, "I implore you not to drink. It's the one thing I have a horror of."

"You are a funny youth," she said, laughing. "How often did you get drunk when you were my age?"

"You are a girl. It is so different," he said lamely.

"Oh, you ass," she cried happily; and pulled him in.

The streets were quiet enough when a cab took them home. Lucy had been noisy at first, but now she was hardly conscious, only murmuring and stammering and trying to say she was perfectly happy. Cuthbert carried her in, upstairs, placed her on the bed. Could he leave her? It would be easy to escape for she could not follow; but when she did find him? He was a public man, well-known, he could not easily hide; and just then he was exhausted. He turned on the light and looked down at the beautiful drunken girl lying there polluted by his body and his mind. Her features were at rest, the wild eyes were closed; it was the soft sweet face of innocent Margaret, the nervous mouth of Margaret, the hair of Margaret whose life he had crushed out.

"I should like her to die," he muttered, "to sleep herself away. I should like this story to end here."

The next scene was discontent. Ordinary apartments in a sour lodging-house for the famous Orton and his lady. It was not to be thought of. "A house," cried Lucy, "~~where~~ I can move about, with plenty of doors and windows, and looking over a park. Give me a home, Cuthbert, a nice large home of my own."

He gave way and promised her a flat, which kept her quiet for a time. She regarded him as an almighty being who had given her a separate existence, and she had only to pray to him for what she wanted; like some growth expecting rain and sunshine, looking for these things as a matter of right, and prepared to rebel in the only way possible if they were withheld. He took her to a furnished flat, and she would have none of it. "Other people's things. Why, I can't smash them," she cried. "It's a lodging-house over again."

So Cuthbert took rooms for her, ordered furniture, worried himself ill with details, sent for Mrs Seabroke. Lucy ceased to take any interest in the flat when it was taken. She had dragged Cuthbert to an hotel where they lived luxuriously; and at night she made him visit all manner of low haunts, and by day she forced him to attend race-meetings. The life was wearing Cuthbert out, but it suited Lucy. She seemed to become stronger and healthier; the pace did not kill her; the faster she moved the brighter she became. Her memory, however, was marvellously bad; she could seldom remember what had happened the day before; Summerland and her relations were simply names; only two persons had an active existence for her, Cuthbert whom she loved and Margaret whom she hated, that is to say the man who had made her and herself. The only other being she was able to recall with any clearness was the master. Somehow he had

made an impression upon her, possibly through Cuthbert's mind.

When Bessie arrived, Lucy had to think hard before acknowledging they had met before; and she was altogether puzzled by a letter from Theodore imploring her to return home.

"I am at home," she exclaimed. "What does the bounder mean? Appeals to my better nature. What is my better nature, Cuthbert? I say, ain't it funny?" she laughed. "Here's a man wants me to go and live with him. He must think me a dirty devil."

She destroyed the letter and prepared for another adventuresome flight. This time it was a boxing-match, and she hoped devoutly one at least of the combatants might be "knocked all bloody."

Bessie brought a letter for Cuthbert, written by the same hand, appealing also to his better nature. "It is impossible for me to control my daughter if she is sane. She is no longer a child, and if she will live with you I know not how to prevent it. To say what I think is useless. There are many ways of going to the devil, and you have chosen to go towards him at my expense. You have broken up my home, plunged us into misery. Margaret was the joy of my life, and you have taken her away."

Cuthbert divided himself from Lucy by means of a locked door and answered. It was a weak letter. He owned that he had lied to Theodore, pointed out why he had done so, explained that Lucy had fastened herself upon him and he could not get rid of her though he longed to; he would send her back at once if she would go; he would never have kept her had she not threatened his life. Even then he dared not tell Theodore where she was. "She would ruin you," he wrote. "She will soon ruin me. Marriage is impossible; for one thing she objects—I suppose, Margaret is still there, and her influence works somehow; other reasons will suggest themselves to you. Her tastes

are ruinous, her strength is inexhaustible ; she is about night and day dragging me with her. It cannot last. Be thankful she is not with you. I wish with all my heart you would take her away, but you could only do so at the risk of your life." Cuthbert declined to express sorrow, as penitence was not in his way, and he refused to believe that it was his life, his mind, and his work which had brought Lucy into being.

" How did they find out ? " he asked Bessie.

" Mr Ramrige came, sir, soon after you had gone, and asked Seabroke. He answered the first question all right, but at the second his tongue slipped. Seabroke don't know how it come about, sir, and he's very sorry."

" It makes no difference," Cuthbert answered. " The master is the only one who can save me now," he muttered as he turned away. " He has made no sign. If he should turn against me I am done."

Hard work, Bessie, and new furniture made the flat look nice. It was finished at last and Cuthbert brought Lucy to take possession, hoping she would be satisfied, settle down there, and allow him to resume his work. She looked around somewhat disdainfully, admitted it wasn't bad, some girls might be pleased with such a home no doubt, but she had no intention of living there. Then she became enthusiastic.

" I want a villa close beside the river. A house covered with creepers in a large garden, with a lawn sloping down to the water. I'm tired of the town. If I stay here much longer I shall get a regular drunkard. We'll go down the river to-day and choose a nice house. I'm quite ready. Come along."

" I took this flat and furnished it for you," said Cuthbert miserably.

" But I don't want it."

" Why did you ask for it ? "

"It was days ago. I have changed since then. Don't set me off screaming," she said ominously.

"Lucy," he said earnestly. "Do try and be satisfied, for my sake.

"I can't be. I must move. It is death for me to sit about and dream."

"You have got to stay. I won't indulge you any longer," he said angrily.

The next moment she was a *mænad*, tearing down pictures, breaking windows; she would soon have wrecked the whole place had not Cuthbert prevented her in the only way possible by yielding. She looked ugly then, there was no goodness of heart when she was opposed, but directly she had her way sweetness and smiles came back, she forgot all that she had done and said, and indeed asked Cuthbert what the devil he meant by smashing her furniture.

The riverside villa was found, but brought little satisfaction to either. Lucy declared the nights were dull, the country roads were impassable, the river was dirty, the garden did not come up to expectation; it was too small, and she was soon tired of roaming about the same piece of turf. While Cuthbert lived in a state of horror, because Lucy insisted upon dragging him into country beer-houses and making him drink in company with gaping rustics; and wherever they went curious eyes followed them, as the girl dressed outrageously in all manner of colours, and if she noticed either man or woman staring she would begin to swear.

"This is slow. We ain't half going it," she said. "Let's move on, old boy."

"Where do you want to go now?" he asked patiently.

"I have an idea I'd like to live in a lonely place for a bit. I'm sick of big houses and muddy roads and this old stinking river. I know what I want," she cried excitedly.

"A pine-wood."

"You wouldn't stay for two days."

"Don't talk to me like that—damn you. It's you that's always wanting to change. I am quite satisfied as long as we are together. You got me to come down here though I knew I should hate it. You made me leave our jolly flat——"

"My dear girl, do be reasonable."

"Hold your jaw," she cried angrily. "You oppose me whenever I speak. We must clear out of this smelly hole pretty quick, or I shall go dotty. We will find a wood and a little cottage, a very tiny one," she went on, quite happy again, "with one chimney, and thatch with moss on it, and a well in front. I'll let the bucket up and down. We won't have anything to worry us, and at night we can walk about the wood and make love. Don't it sound scrumptious, darling?"

"Would you be satisfied for a few weeks?" he asked despairingly.

"For ever and ever," she declared. "I am sure I never grumble."

On this occasion Cuthbert was glad to fall in with her wishes. A cottage such as she desired would be cheap; and if she gave him any peace he would be able to work. He advertised, found what they required in Warwickshire; it had to be furnished, but that was nothing to Lucy. The patient Bessie went to make all things ready and they followed her in due course, Cuthbert almost venturing to hope for a little rest when they arrived, and Lucy was delighted with the beauty and simplicity of her new home. "I hate people after all," she explained. "I love the trees and fields. We will walk twenty miles a day, and perhaps I shall get tired at last."

Finding her satisfied, Cuthbert tried to impress upon her the necessity of a still life as far as he was concerned; he was growing thin and worn-out; his was naturally an indolent disposition, and when not engaged in writing he

liked to loaf and take long rests. Lucy had changed all that and made work impossible. He attempted to point out to her that movement must cease, or she would have to be content with solitary rambles. She stared and then began to whine.

"You are always trying to make me hate you, but you can't do it, Cuthbert. I love you too much. Why do you want to get rid of me?"

"My dear girl, I have my living to make. Cannot you understand that?"

"No. We cannot make ourselves any more alive than we are."

"We must have money. To get money we have to work."

"I don't want money. I want love and you."

"But, dear Lucy, we have to pay for the food we eat and the clothes we wear."

"I am not going to lose you. I'd rather eat nothing and wear nothing."

"You are not going to lose me. I want you to amuse yourself alone while I sit indoors and work."

"I'll be damned if I will," she cried, that cold light rising in her eyes. "This is just a trick. I believe you know something about Margaret. I fancy she ain't very far off sometimes, and I reckon you want to get hold of her and have her with you indoors, and that's why you want to turn me out."

Argument was useless when her temper began to rise. The next day Cuthbert shut himself up as well as he could in so small a place, but after five minutes solitude Lucy was at him.

"A fair in the next village. Come on"; and out she dragged him and kept him on foot till long after nightfall; and when they returned she would go out with a lantern to look for mushrooms; and after that it was too near morning to think of bed. They would take another long

walk. Cuthbert refused, this time after her own manner with an oath, and walked away, but she ran after, seized him by the legs, brought him down, even kicked him in her rage, and screamed so wildly that cottage folk who lived near appeared upon the scene supposing murder was being done. Lucy drove them off, but did not become quiet until Cuthbert consented to go with her a little way if he could, and then she smiled and was happy, and declared she loved him to distraction.

What was he to do? He dared not slip away from her, and to remain meant ruin if not death; for she was not only exhausting his resources but draining his life out. When he refused out of sheer exhaustion to keep pace with her movements it could only be because he was getting weary of her. Hers was the love of a disordered mind, and it was no good asking where she got her idealism from, for the answer was sure to come "from you."

Then it was Sunday and Lucy would go to church. As she refused to stir a yard from the cottage without Cuthbert, he was forced to accompany her into a smiling village and an old church; and they sat in a pew for ten minutes, until Lucy exclaimed audibly "Slow and rotten," and hurried out while Cuthbert shamefully followed.

"The sea, my boy," she was crying before they left the churchyard. "What fools we were to come here and think we should be happy in a cottage in a wood, all dreary and lonesome. To-morrow we'll go off to the sea. I want to feel myself in a crowd again. Why shouldn't we go this evening and travel all night?"

"We have been here less than a week," he groaned.

"There's no motion. I am smothered in that dark old wood. I only came here because you were set upon it; and I won't stay another day."

"Will you go without me?" he asked with a hopeless feeling.

"As if I could. Don't be a——"

"Why are you always swearing at me?"

"You make me. I can't help myself. It is what you would do in my place. I get mad with you because you don't love me half enough."

"I should love you far better if you behaved properly and talked like a lady," he said heavily.

"I won't have you say that," she replied fiercely. "It's all cant and hypocrisy. I am just as good as I can be; and for what is wrong in me blame yourself."

That evening there was a change in Lucy. She was sensitive, irritable, and so blasphemous that it became a punishment to remain with her. She declared some calamity was approaching, and she kept indoors having a feeling that if she went out something from the sky might strike her; and then she melted into a passion of love and desired Cuthbert to kill her and himself. Presently she turned against Bessie, who had got someone hidden in the kitchen, an ally of Margaret if not the enemy herself, and Cuthbert could only satisfy her by taking her over the cottage and letting her look into every cupboard and corner.

"I seem to feel Margaret," she kept on saying. "If she does come I'll strangle her."

She went to the door and looked out. "It's awful dark. Why did you bring me here? I feel frightened, Cuthbert."

"If it wasn't for the trees, miss, you might see the new moon," remarked Bessie. "There's luck in the new moon, they says."

"Curse you and the moon," cried Lucy savagely.

Travelling began again, and their next stop was Folkestone. It was during the season and the place was crowded, much to the satisfaction of the girl, who was happy for a few hours wherever she went until the lust for movement arose again. It was there, with the gay life all round, that Cuthbert decided to take the plunge. They were staying at an hotel; Bessie had been sent to

Windwhistle and was ignorant of their whereabouts ; he would watch his opportunity to leave, as he had left Buxton, and save himself by flight. If he could hide for a few weeks it would at least mean a rest, and he was curious to know what would happen to the girl without him. It seemed cruel to desert her, as he doubted whether she could remember Summerland, but then, he argued, it was a case of life or death ; he was rapidly becoming as ill and nervous as Margaret had been, and his broken sleep was haunted with bad dreams.

“ Old boy,” cried Lucy one evening. “ I’ve got it now. Here is the sea waiting for us ; we will cross it and go all over the world as fast as we can, from one country to another, and we won’t stop until we have seen every blooming place in the whole wide world. Let’s start to-morrow. We have rotted here for three days, and I’m fed up with it.”

This is the end, thought Cuthbert ; and he cast about for some opportunity to escape.

It was a close, hot evening ; a throng of well-dressed people sauntered along the Leas. Cuthbert and Lucy went with them, she full of excitement about their coming rush round the world, he silent, thinking out his plans. A band was playing in the midst of a sea of chairs. They turned aside to a seat which faced the shining water a few paces from the promenade, and Lucy was prevailed upon to sit down for a few minutes. She was full of talk, but Cuthbert heard hardly a word ; he was charged with dull thoughts which deafened him, admitting the plaintive music from the band-stand, but not the selfish rattle at his side ; thoughts of the years that had gone and the work which he had not done ; thoughts of the boy in the brake of bracken and the calm-eyed man with the golden beard ; thoughts of the pass of Penmaenmawr and the young spiritualist sitting on the rock ; thoughts of the materialist at the street-corner of Buxton.

"Oh, damn it all! I'm sleepy; confoundedly, properly sleepy," said Lucy.

It seemed to Cuthbert that the music of the band had changed into a march of triumph; the sea looked nearer, the light upon it was brighter; and each member of that crowd of pleasure-seekers passing by was looking at him and murmuring distinctly, "Cuthbert Orton! I am here."

"Who is it?" he cried with a violent shudder.

The white figure was there looking down upon them, the gentle breeze stirring the great beard faintly; and the eyes were not dreamy as in the mountain road, nor warning as at the street-corner; but they were fierce.

There was a sound; a little moan, a frightened movement; and Cuthbert beheld the soft sweet troubled face and eyes of Margaret.

CHAPTER XIV

QUIESCENT

WHEN good news came from the sea to Theodore he was speaking harshly to Polly Pedrack, who had lost much of the truth, and the key of the barn altogether. This building and a semi-detached water-wheel were all that remained of a mill which had been once attached to Cob Court; the wheel had been fixed for two generations and looked fragile with ferns; rich mosses garnished the stonework upon each side where moisture dripped all the year round with the steady drip of a clepsydra. The back wall of the barn made a boundary to the garden towards the sunrise. The tenant had not entered there for many months, and being in a roaming mood it had come into his mind to explore those hidden depths and kick the dust up. So he demanded the key, and Polly declared it was gone.

Trifles always loomed large around Theodore's orbit; some satellite of suspicion attracted him; he was preparing to bring beneath his influence a massive beam to batter the door in when the message came; and very soon afterwards he was making for his sister with four-foot strides.

Hortensia declined to diffuse sunshine when she heard that Margaret had come back. She behaved like a rain-cloud, chilling her brother horribly, beating all the joy out of him with a cold shower of words: "If it is good news

to-day there will be bad to-morrow. You will go for Margaret, bring her back, we shall have peace for a few days, or a few hours, and then the creature will begin to rave again. Margaret must not live here," she said decidedly. "Find a home for her, let her be kept under restraint until she is cured or dead—I'm not heartless, Theodore. The girl is a terror to me and a danger to both of us."

"The question of heartlessness we will not discuss," replied her brother, frowning. "That you are foolish is a fact. Women mostly are. If they had to be saved by logic few would find redemption. I insist upon being happy to-day; it is a month since I had the privilege. As for this pessimism I hate and abhor it."

"I am not a pessimist."

"A gloomy optimist, then. Margaret has come back, and she shall remain. We will surround her with flowers and soft music," he said fantastically. "Look you, little sister, at these last two words, 'marriage suggested.' There you have a spell to scatter your tenebrous doctrines. Sacharissa shall be further sweetened by matrimony; every impediment shall be swept away; she shall have her mind's desire. They say a longing for marriage is with some women a form of madness."

"Rubbish," muttered Hortensia.

"Women only," said Theodore, rubbing his hands excitedly. "Men are sane and strong. Women are like old china; they crack easily."

"I would rather see her dead than married to that brute."

"Orton is a genius as well," said Theodore. "If he were a lesser man I would hate him more; being what he is, I am sorry for him. It must be fearful to have a brain that buzzes. A man who commands the friendship of Father Ramrige is not to be treated as a brute. Orton has lived in solitude until his mind has become penetrated by

those gloomy thoughts which my only sister delights in. With a good inspiration he would be a worthy man. Surely, Hortensia."

"Theodore," she exclaimed bitterly. "You are defending a creature who has ruined your daughter's life."

"I insist upon optimism," he cried stubbornly, but it was easy to see he was acting. "Orton did not ravish Margaret from my house, nor did he ever speak to her. She went to him of her own free will. I will not admit there is baseness in my daughter, and to be just I cannot accuse him either, though he lied to me, but did so, as he confesses, out of fear. I am taking the brightest and best view. Evil has been done, but there is fortunately a remedy. My nervous little girl became so wildly infatuated with learning that she lost her senses, and actually went and cast her fragrance into a man's arms. To you, a pessimist of the baser sort, this rings very fearful; and even to me, a sound-livered optimist, it has been enervating. The thing has happened, Hortensia; it is over, like the deluge. Neither pessimism nor optimism can change a square into a circle. The wise man will solve his problems in a natural way, with commonsense, and without the α and γ of heat and passion. I respect learning, having myself a few fragments. I admire a high intellect, my own being but middle-class. There is a touch of the antique about wisdom which pleases me."

"I hate 'em all," cried Hortensia. "Orton is an unscrupulous scoundrel and Yalland is a good-for-nothing loafer. I hate Yalland the most," she added.

"A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place," chirped Theodore, "between little Sacharissa and Wisdom."

Then he went into the darkness of Cob Court, broke down, and blubbered into an ancient vase which was

riveted all over like a personality which had been disintegrated and put together again.

Chirping and hopping himself back into an equable state of mind, he decided to re-open hostilities against Polly Pedrack. He captured her in the kitchen, black-handed, again demanded the key of the barn, was met with the same sour ultimatum that it was lost beyond redemption, so he went for Hortensia, brought her as an ally, as he stood in no small fear of Polly, who was large of waist and scarlet-faced, muscular also, and of the age which is uncertain; and together they faced the woman, who looked foolish and incapable of cunning.

"The damosel denies me access to my barn," said Theodore.

"The key's lost and there's an end on't," replied Polly.

"Where one incident ends another begins," explained Theodore. "You have lost interest with the key. Mine commences at hearing that it is lost. This key was entrusted to your charge, you accepted the responsibility, and it is therefore your duty to produce it when called upon to do so."

"If I don't know where 'tis, what then?" cried Polly, keeping on the sheltered side of the truth.

"You light candles; you get brooms. You search for it," replied Theodore.

"Not me," said Polly, showing a sudden zeal in other duties.

"The damosel exhibits a trait of mulishness, little sister," whispered Theodore.

"You must know where the key is. You can't have lost a great big thing like that," said Hortensia sharply.

"Can't I?" said Polly. "I lost that there washing-tub for two weeks once."

"Because it was wanted," said Hortensia. "I shall search in your bedroom."

"'Twould be wonderful if you found it there," said Polly

with some uneasiness. "What's the use of going into the barn, master? There's nought but mice and spiders."

"Vitality was not bestowed upon me that I should argue with damosels," said Theodore stiffly. "I go to batter the door in."

He went off and wrestled with the beam; Polly followed, obviously distressed, and perceiving that her master meant to force an entry, and that it would be easy to do so as the woodwork was rotten, she went, her face like a scarlet runner, brought the key, flung it at the master's feet, and retired, slamming the back door violently.

"What's the matter with the woman?" muttered Hortensia; and then she heard her brother crying in amazement. "Mice and spiders! Extraordinary rodents! Marvellous arachnids! Little sister, come and see. A museum of mice, a treasury of spiders! The artful, designing, and perfidious damosel! She has swept the country."

The barn was well-stocked: clocks, chests, china, brass, copper, pewter; all manner of articles from heavy furniture to door-knockers and fenders, collected indiscriminately, smuggled there secretly, some of real value, many of little, others base; but great was Theodore's indignation when he found among them articles which he himself had bargained for and failed to win.

"That her plebeian tongue should have prevailed where my oratory and my flatteries were mocked at," he gasped. "Hortensia, there is more here than perfidy. There is rivalry, my sister, and something worse; the artistic soul is absent; I detect the odour of commerce and the stink of speculation. The damosel has aspirations towards the ideal of Hebraism."

He made for the kitchen crying, "Daughter of Zion, come forth, reveal yourself, explain. Why is my barn full of merchandise?" while Polly made angles of her arms

and merely snorted while pretending to be busy with a stew-pan, and would say nothing at all until Theodore approached nearer and said something laconic about a reduction of wages to meet a demand for rent. This kindled Polly and the fire followed.

"Well, sir, when I saw you going after the old stuff I thought I'd be going after it too. 'Twould be a funny thing, I reckoned, if I didn't know my way about better than you; and, bless you, sir, I picked that lot up cheap. I know the history of most folk here about, so when any of 'em got peevish and wouldn't part, or said they had promised 'em to you, I would answer, 'If you won't sell I'll talk.' I never knew the stuff was worth anything till you started running about after it."

"What do you propose doing with these possessions?" demanded Theodore.

"Same as you, sir. I'll keep 'em till I can make a bit o' money."

"I am not a merchant. I am a collector," said Theodore. "Damosel, I shall take an inventory and make you an offer. When you accept I shall appoint you my agent; you shall collect for me upon commission. If you refuse I shall empty the barn and charge you rent for storage in the past."

Polly declined; she desired her master to understand that she was a trade-rival, and would never be his agent; and she would remove the articles forthwith and store them in the barn of a friendly neighbour; and she had the further impertinence to add that two of a trade were not likely to agree. "I'll advertise the lot and have a sale," she said greedily.

"You have been over the country like a plague of locusts; you have made it barren," said Theodore angrily. "While I was bargaining for one little pewter mug you were looting upon every side. Do you come of business folk, damosel?"

"Well, sir, grandmother did keep a little sweet-shop, I've heard," she answered.

"You will not die of starvation," said Theodore, moving away as it was getting near the time to depart on his long journey, "but it is very likely you will perish of apoplexy. In the meantime I will retain the key."

"And I'll have the beam," she muttered.

"How did you bring those things here without my noticing anything?"

"Me and a neighbour slipped 'em in at night gradual," answered Polly cheerfully, feeling that the work had been well done.

"It is what I have often said, Hortensia," Theodore remarked to his sister presently. "These middle-aged domestics are becoming impregnated with a lust for wealth at any price. Our damosel has no more conscience——"

"Than you have yourself," finished Hortensia, shocking her brother with a true saying which he did not recognise, as he never stole from others, and only laid his hands upon things that were worthless, such as the stone hand of Bishop Vipont and Claud Yalland's golden glass; and when he looked upon these articles, which it might be suggested he had stolen, his title appeared good, they were rightly his, for they were things picked up.

Not that day, nor the next, did Margaret see her quiet quaint home. She was tired, ill, and weak as a new-born child. They brought her back slowly, avoiding noisy stopping-places, her father on one side, the master upon the other, always watchful, guarding her against shock. Cuthbert went back at once to Windwhistle, his erratic mind fixed upon duty, but horror was breaking out sometimes blackening his work. Here was a case where he had gone, or been dragged, too far; there was vengeance suggested, something resembling one of Nature's thunderbolts, a storm of madness, melancholy—that was the

word—a darkness in daylight for the experimentalist, as there must be sometimes a danger of explosion or the risk of poison for the analyst. Cuthbert went home feeling sick. He had seen the eyes of Margaret; they had looked into his beside the sea and beneath the crescent moon, those eyes which had lately burnt with passion for him; and then they were cold, there was no love in them, nor even friendship; the soul behind those eyes knew secretly what his mind had done. She turned from him in fear only, not knowing what had passed between them, merely trying to save herself from some evil which his presence suggested; and to whom could she turn except the master? She put out her hands to him seeking sanctuary, and he took them; and then her eyes lighted up.

Too late for the choice, but still she made it. She had turned from him among the bracken. She sought him by the sea. The same symbol was above; upon the ferns it had been a steady light; upon the fickle water it was broken.

Cuthbert lost no time. If he did not act upon the impulse he remained inactive. He went to Cob Court, presented himself to Theodore, and said, not much in the fashion of a lover, "I will marry your daughter."

They stood in the low room downstairs which was like a museum, one corner devoted to the Roman occupation, another to the Saxons; they met in the Jurassic period beside various oolites and a ten-footed lobster. A tall acanthus grew near the window, and its spines scraped the glass at every puff of wind. Theodore, himself like a thistle, was willing but afraid to scratch.

"I have two daughters," he said, almost in a whisper. "One is an angel, the other is a devil; and one body contains them both. One is still my dear daughter, the other appears already to be your wife. Who is this Lucy?" he piped suddenly.

"A personality," Cuthbert answered.

Theodore picked up a fossil, examined it, his face twitching, then dropped it.

"That was a living-creature once. Now it is a stone," he muttered. "Water and time petrify." He looked out of the window ; nothing there but sparrows twittering and water splashing by in a kind of loneliness ; he went to the door, listened, then came back, and now his brown face was altered and the voice which left his throat was not his own.

"Time will make you like that fossil ; time will petrify you. Night after night I have sat here ; my sister thought I was reading, while I was biting my fingers and shivering. I do not remember what I said. I dug curses out of old missals and muttered them ; I stood there and excommunicated you. My sister thought I was calm, and so I was, and callous too, when she came near me, but here alone, here in the lamplight with shadows all round me, I had to sob and moan, I had to curse. When a man is struck upon the heart he will gasp, and you have struck me there. A little brown man, they call me, a dry shrivelled little fellow ; but little brown men have hearts, little brown men reverence their dead wives, little brown men love their daughters. You have taken hold of my heart—you have hold of it now. At night I can hardly breathe ; I can only gasp, 'Let go ; you are killing me.' Mr Orton, let me go."

"I am not touching you."

"I thought you were nearer to me. It was the same when my wife was dying. It was not you then, but death ; something similar. It seemed to take hold of me so that I was dying, and yet I found myself alive when she was gone. You, like another death, force yourself into my home, as quietly, as secretly, all on tiptoe, and you take my Margaret's mind, defile it, poison it, kill her, give me your Lucy for my Margaret——"

"Shall I leave you ? " broke in Cuthbert.

"Now that Margaret has come back you offer to marry her."

"As a duty. I do not love Margaret, and I have come to hate Lucy."

"I thought everybody loved Margaret," murmured Theodore quaintly.

"I will marry her because I must. Lucy came to me and has been living with me as my wife. So much I confess. I could not resist her and she would not leave me. As Lucy she loves me, calls herself a part of me, yet is unwilling to marry me because she has a contempt for ceremonies, and being an undeveloped being hardly knows the difference between right and wrong."

A grating noise broke upon Cuthbert who was looking towards the window. He turned. Theodore was lying upon a rug gnawing the leg of a chair. Cuthbert saw the distorted face and the gleaming teeth, recoiled for a moment, then seized the small twisting body and held it fast until reason returned and the brown face began to plead that Hortensia should not be told.

"I heard a sound of words," he said hoarsely. "'Living with me.' I knew it, but when the truth came from you——" He shuddered again and half closed his eyes. "Margaret, my pearl-child, my sweet-scented Rose, my Corinna-maiden. Her eyes, her body—that was my first seizure," he said simply. "I find myself the same creature. There is no change, no forgetfulness, no happiness yet. You have done me the honour of seducing my daughter, Mr Orton. You perceive I can be polite; I can use an old-fashioned phrase as well as any man. Being a gentleman of honour as well as a man of acknowledged genius, you approach me and say, 'I have broken your home, broken your heart, broken your daughter body and soul, and what few remnants remain in the poor child of goodness, sweetness, and purity, I will even collect and take to my own home.' This is honour with an aspirate. Should a

poor epileptic stand against it? A pretty picture to my mind; Margaret and her husband, Margaret being dissected by her husband; and here is Lucy, his own Lucy, his bride Lucy; here are pretty pictures without end; Lucy and her husband in liquor, Lucy and her husband brawling in a church, Lucy and her husband defying civilisation; and here is yet another picture, the prettiest of all, a picture which did not even occur to my simplicity until the master held it before my eyes, with his own like rain-water, and bade me stare because it was the picture which could not be avoided since Nature will always have her way. It is in your mind, Mr Orton, a great one they say; it is there—you cannot get it out of your eyes. Build a chapel for it, hang it there, and let there be curtains of blue and gold, and call it if you will a virgin's chapel, the shrine of a sweet pure virgin who was yet the mother of a child——”

“Let us have an end of this,” Cuthbert broke in haughtily. “I propose to marry your daughter. Give your consent or withhold it. You shall have your revenge, for as Lucy she will ruin me, and as Margaret, I believe, she hates me.”

“She is upstairs, my little Sacharissa,” said Theodore tenderly. “Sitting with her eyes upon the sky and her pretty fingers trifling with flowers. She is listening again for those sounds which she never yet has caught. It was while listening for them she heard your voice calling to her, not once nor twice, but continuously, until at last she had to rise and go because you were too strong for her. ‘Come to me,’ you said. ‘You know nothing about yourself and I know everything. Come to me, and I will teach you all about the human mind. Come to me, and I will exchange your goodness and purity for my vice. Come to me, and I will make a harlot of you.’”

“You are a small man,” said Cuthbert threateningly.

"Small as a body goes. Put our hearts in the scales and yours would be flung out of sight."

"You refuse your consent?"

"With every negative that I know of."

"This means——"

"Strong souls conquer," cried Theodore. "Love wins, passion loses. That's true."

"You have been talking to someone wiser than yourself," said Cuthbert. "You are another man's parrot."

"Since I must be a bird call me a raven," answered Theodore. "Love will win. Love will win. That is my croak to the end of things."

"Keep it for Lucy when she comes again," said Cuthbert; then went out, frowning and angry, feeling virtuous and murmuring to himself, "Why is it people misunderstand me?"

All this time Margaret was in her room. She seemed to have no memory, she could not make herself think nor move; she was like a flower, fragrant and beautiful but fixed in the earth by its roots, waiting to be plucked; and sometimes she shuddered. This was when the wind came with some violence towards her from Windwhistle. She had changed during the past month; Cuthbert was no longer an attractive but a repulsive force; and yet her feet were inclined to move towards him. The same struggle was going on within her; Lucy, beaten down for a time, was fighting and always striving to look out of Margaret's eyes, to use Margaret's ears and tongue, to drive Margaret's feet towards that place which the mind of Margaret shrank from. When Theodore opened the door, with a quaint noise of singing to warn her he was near, she turned to face him, and said with that smile of sadness which is more pitiful than tears, "I know I have been mad. Don't try to deceive me as you did before, when you told me the story of the gypsy woman who was myself. I lost only a few hours then. This time I have

lost weeks. Time has been torn out of my poor life so cruelly." She looked towards the window, then added, "Everything has become colourless; the world is bleached."

"That is not true, darling. The world is as green as ever, and you are just as pink and peerless. There are black storms sometimes, winds lasting for an hour or a week, but they pass and we forget them. Your storm has passed; the sun of your life is shining——"

"Until the clouds come up again."

"We will shut them out. Cordelia of the tender heart, let us draw our curtains when the storm comes and say it is fine outside."

"Darkness or light; it is all the same when you are mad," she whispered.

"Melissa, singing-bee, listen to the truth," cried Theodore earnestly, kneeling beside her, hiding his troubled countenance behind those soft hands which Lucy had abused so shamefully. "You have not been mad. Your memory was taken away, a cloud drifted up between your mind and my Margaret, making her forget she was Theodore's daughter. The first time the cloud came I was afraid to tell you, so I invented a story. The second time it lasted longer and my folk-lore would not help."

"Get up, you damned little fool!" she exclaimed.

"Child darling," he gasped. "You are going. Stay with me."

"Why do you say that? I am here," she answered gently.

"Don't abuse me, little daughter. I cannot bear it—from you."

"I said 'dear old father,' as tenderly as I could. Do you call that abuse?"

"I thought it was something different. It did not sound like that; perhaps my ears are becoming uncertain," said Theodore hurriedly. "Be composed, darling. Do

not tremble. I am getting nervous and foolish ; I begin to imagine things."

"Is it imagination," said Margaret, "that makes me believe when I am not myself I hate myself? Who has made away with all the things I value, who has stolen my letters, who has torn my plain dresses and substituted these showy things which I would not be seen in? Look at my books; you will find scrawls all over them, blasphemies, and—indecent suggestions."

"Not in your writing," he murmured.

"My hand made them. It seems as if I had become illiterate and could not spell; but I recognise the form of certain letters; I know I wrote them. Father," she cried, almost pushing him away, "I have lost innocence and everything worth having. My whole body rises up against me, tells me I am no longer good, I have lost virtue with my memory. I am not fit to be here. It tells me that, during the hideous darkness out of which I have passed, womanhood has been forced upon me, my girlhood has been destroyed, my honour is gone. I look at the third finger of my left hand and I see a wedding-ring. Who has put it there? Loss of memory may hide much, but not everything. It cannot hide one thing. Tell me! Where was I during that time? Why did I come to myself at Folkestone, with Mr Ramrige holding me and Mr Orton sitting at my side? How did I come to be there at all? Tell me the whole truth; I can bear it, but this guesswork will make me mad indeed. Tell me," she whispered, "the name of my husband."

Now may God help me, thought Theodore. I did not know of the ring. I see no way except the truth and that will kill the child. "Ignorance," he muttered. "Ah yes, there's a happiness in ignorance. I must laugh and be at my ease, and find a few old jokes; I must put on a smiling countenance. I have played churchyard to her wedding-march and she is frightened."

"What are you saying?" asked Margaret sternly.

"Sacharissa, I have bought the pewter chalice. I gave thirty shillings for it," he cried boisterously.

"Forget your trifles."

"I will fill it brimming with milk, pearl-colour for Margaret, scatter a few bright petals, pink for Rose, and you shall drink. We will laugh and sing, child darling, for we don't last long. Memory is your trifle, the chalice is mine. We will make a compact and forget."

"I have no memory," she said. "I speak of knowledge."

"A more vexatious thing," cried miserable Theodore. "Knowledge is like a raw heel; the faster you try to run the more it worries. Darling, I often envy the village-folk because they are able to laugh; it is no effort to them. These country girls laugh at everything, at joy and sorrow, at disease and death, at rain or sunshine; but if they felt the raw heel of knowledge they would stop laughing. Forget your knowledge, sweetheart, and then you shall laugh like them."

"You know," she said with a shiver, "and you will not tell me."

"I will tell; I will speak out like an evangelist," piped Theodore, digging his nails into his palms. "I will answer yes or no; I will be a martyr, that is to say a witness; but remember, Crispiana, that when you question me you come near ignorance. You dread bad news. Behold me, bright and cheerful, and know your fears are made of mist."

"There is a tear upon your cheek," she said.

"Excitement, child. Happiness brings as many tears as sorrow. I have laughed so much lately"; and he laughed again with the noise of a raven croaking. "Listen to that," he said contentedly. "Listen to this, Corinna. I am going to take you away from dreamland. We will enjoy a very pleasant holiday together, and you will not

require any memory at all, and we will dig a deep hole and bury knowledge and set up ignorance as a tombstone. I shall spin a web of happiness and put you in the middle of it, and you will not be able to struggle out, and even if you did escape it would only be to fall into another web called love. That web is wonderfully holding, Sacharissa. Made of the best material, it cannot break."

"Where have I been during the last few weeks?"

"Here, child, with your antique father and flower-decked aunt."

Margaret held out her mother's photograph which Lucy had somehow spared.

"Take this in your hand and swear to tell me nothing but the truth. I know that lies spoken to console are not lies, but I will not hear them now. Swear by the soul of my dead mother to tell me all."

"No, no, darling; not an oath between father and child," cried the unhappy Theodore.

"You mean to deceive me?"

"Give me the photo," he cried. "Little missis, I am to tell our baby all the truth."

"That is not an oath."

"Little missis, I swear to try to tell her all the truth."

"Kiss the photograph," said Margaret; and he did so.

"Was I here all the time?" she went on.

"I have a fancy you were absent," he stammered.

"Where was I?"

"Travelling.

"Did I ever go to Windwhistle?"

Theodore struggled with himself, then answered bravely, "One day we missed you, darling, so the madrigal-man and I went to Windwhistle. We asked Mr Orton if you were there, and his reply bristled with negatives. He gave us leave to search the house. He was anxious we should explore the darkest cupboards."

"Where had I gone?"

"We could not find you."

"To God's Garden?" she said softly.

"We will inquire of Mr Ramrige. We will send for him this afternoon."

"Here are two questions which you must answer faithfully: how long was I away from home, and was I ever to your knowledge alone with Mr Orton?"

Theodore discovered perspiration, removed it, but could not answer with the truth. The little missis, he was certain, would have desired him to deceive the child, but it was not easy, for he had sworn to tell no lies, and in any case Margaret was sure to see through his blundering well-meant answer of deception. The time when fantastic stories could be of use was gone; but neither he nor she could face the truth when naked. The figure was too ugly, and silence would mean suspicion, and silence would speak the truth.

"Darling, Mr Orton is a wonderful genius, they say. He would not harm anyone, I feel sure," he said in an agitated voice. "Have you any feeling towards him, of tenderness or of admiration as you once had; or perhaps of hatred?"

"It is fear now; I am cold when I think of him. I seem to know what he is—inside," she replied in a shuddering fashion. "I have a horror of him, and yet I want to go to him. As myself I can resist him now; but when I am not myself what happens?"

"We must not walk too much in dreamland. There are snakes in the grass," said Theodore warningly.

"I know more than I ought to of himself, his character, and Windwhistle. Answer my questions," she said angrily; and Theodore sprang at once towards his cue.

"Remember yourself, Margaret Vipont," he said sharply. It was painful, but far less so than the truth. "You are not to speak to me in that commanding fashion,"

he went on noisily, remembering how he had faced and beaten her as Lucy when she would have destroyed the music. "I am your father, I will be obeyed; I am not to be ordered about by wenches, and told to answer foolish questions. Hold your tongue, Margaret. I am annoyed with you."

He made a pitiful attempt to appear indignant; slapped his trembling hands, stamped his nervous feet, while his quaint face was full of tenderness and sorrow and his eyes were running over. Still Margaret was taken by surprise, for she had never been addressed like that before.

"Come out with me," he said, as cruelly as he could for the sake of kindness. "I cannot have you moping here all day, conjuring up horrors and believing they are true; and then speaking to me rudely. Answer me this and answer me that! It is not the way for a child to behave. I had a nice story to tell you, quite a pretty story, but you shan't hear it now. I have never been so annoyed with you; I have it in my mind to box your ears; I am trembling all over with indignation. Put on your hat and come into the garden. Obey at once, Margaret, and not another word or I shall lose my temper altogether."

"Send for Mr Ramrige," she prayed. "He will tell me."

"Be quiet, you—you little wretch," cried Theodore; but he could do no more, and staggered out with his hands across his face as if he would have plucked his tongue out, muttering, "I shall go first. Another harsh word and I should have been rolling on the floor."

Pausing upon the stairs to get rid of dizziness and that humming in his ears, he placed his brown forehead against the cold wall and went on muttering, "If there is a heaven my little missis is there; and if so, she cannot be far from the Almighty. She ought to be able to ask a favour for my little baby and my old brown husband. A word from the Almighty would put things right. It seems so simple.

If I were in her place I would soon see to things," he said sharply, not in the least knowing what he said.

"Father," called a sad voice. "Are you talking to me?"

"Hold your tongue, you chit, you paltry, peevish child," cried Theodore, grinning with pain, but obsessed with the idea that he must stop those questions at any cost; and then he blundered down, saying, "The photograph of my little missis was crying. I have a contempt for dead people," he went on in the same foolish manner. "They appear to me to do nothing useful."

Margaret came presently into the garden, and Theodore remained with her, himself again, but allowing no questions; and so the day wore on towards evening, and the green oaks beyond were coloured pink as they often were when the time had come for the sun's last struggle, and the bracken gave out its smell as the damp settled upon the fronds, and the breeze made them move, and the rabbits ran through; at every delicate movement the smell went forth, but Margaret did not perceive it. She remained without motion until Hortensia came running up with the news that the robber was singing upon the pear-tree and might then be slain; and Margaret turned her head to watch Theodore walking heavily into the house, returning with his gun, and following Hortensia towards the fruit-garden.

The pear-tree was surrounded with the glory of the setting sun, rich and golden, for it was fruit-time when the light is heavy and luscious; high up on a topmost bough he sang, this thievish blackbird, sang his brightest and best, a song of thankfulness for fruit and of praise for the giver of it; with a note of sadness now and then as if the bird remembered it was not always the month of harvest, cold time was coming on, hard days of frost and bitter nights when he and his kind must struggle to keep alive, and the only voices of darkness would be the priest-like

alarms of beneficed owls from their barns. The bird was doing his best, adding to the music of the world. Part of the evening would have been lost without him.

"The brute has robbed my garden all the year. Shoot, Theodore!" cried Hortensia.

Her brother put up his arms; two weak hands drew them down, and a sad voice said, "Father, can you kill the bird while he is saying his prayers?"

CHAPTER XV

CARDINAL

JASPER, descending through the wood, paused where there was an opening to look at the chimney-stack, a mass of ivy, and patches of white wall, things which made up Cob Court. He was thinking of growth, of silence, and the uncomplaining way in which the little children of Nature faced their lives; so unlike human beings who were always grumbling and complaining of ill-luck. Herbs and grasses simply grew; they aimed at nothing beyond perfect development; they did not break their silence with a murmur. Nor did they ever give up and call life foolish. Even the humblest weed struggled for its place and seemed happy to be a living thing; joy in the midst of suffering, for nothing in all Nature is more persecuted than a grass-blade. Every four-footed creature tears it, and if spared by them it is only allowed to reach its prime in order that it may be killed by the murderous guillotine of the hay-maker; but through all that slaughter and shedding of sap, and in all that withering, there is not a moan. The plants die as they have lived, in splendid silence.

"We look into our own minds too much," the master murmured. "We should be wiser if we used our eyes and discovered wisdom by way of vision. It seems to me that in the herb we find perfection; persistent progress, no faltering, no doubting. If it were not for the life of

the plant I might despair of immortality. We men live in a state of confusion, our minds are restless, while the plant is patient. When we think of beginning and ending, of birth, of resurrection, we have to get away from ourselves and open our eyes in the wood. The answer we may come to will be there ; and if we would learn we must grow, we must be silent, we must not complain."

Another matter was also in his mind ; the ever-changing forms of character. Whatever the life of the plant might be, its nature was always changing ; there were the three lives of leaf, blossom, and seed, each of these divided into personalities ; the young leaf was not the same as the old, the bud was very different from the bloom, and the state of seed had many phases ; the berries of the dog-wood were first green, then red, then black, a change of colour merely, but as certainly a change of character. During May the ground would be covered with pale-green stems, each crested with a brown spiral volute ; bracken, these brittle juicy stems were called. During August the wood was bushy with tall waving growths dark-green and tough ; and still called bracken. During October one saw a mass of brown and yellow undergrowth ; still bracken. Three different characters in the life of one.

This steep wood, hanging on the side of the moor by means of strong roots struck into the peat of the bogs and the soil made out of its own decayed vegetation, consisted for the most part, entirely so far as the casual eye was concerned, in addition to the grass which is everywhere, of oaks and ferns. The two clung together in a kind of matrimony. The bracken especially seemed wedded to the oak, growing closely to the trees, mingling root with root, oak-leaves and fronds browning, rotting year after year together to make a bed for their spring children ; so intimate was the union between tree and fern that the bracken through its stem, cut it where one would, contained the sign of the tree, a miniature oak perfect in

every detail from root to top. There was some secret here, not well explained; some symbol in this union between ruggedness and hard-wood strength and the fern's fragility. It was like the union between a man who is calm and able to protect and the woman who sees visions, the mystical fern-woman who is troubled by the winds underneath the arms of her oak-husband who thinks himself able to defy the winds, therefore ignores them, and cannot understand the woman who is shaken by them. The oaks above and the bracken below; there seemed a space between them, but it was not so, for their roots were joined together.

"You have brought Melissa back without her virgin-honey. Margaret has lost her pearl. Rose has been robbed of her sweetness. She has come back, but my daughter has been left behind." Thus spake Theodore when he saw the master at the gate of the garden; while Hortensia added, "The poison of Lucy is in her still."

"In what way has she changed in your sight?"

"Her body is weaker and her mind is stronger. When she speaks Lucy is not far off, trying to prompt her. She is also more callous. She will speak almost calmly upon matters which a few months ago would have made her mad. Sometimes she swears at me when she is trying to speak kindly."

"Last night she put her arms round my neck to kiss me," said Hortensia. "Instead she bit me savagely. Look! here is the mark. She thought she had kissed me and my scream alarmed her."

"In other respects she is the same," said Theodore hopefully. "She loves her music and all things which make music. She would not let me destroy a blackbird though it is a notorious scoundrel."

"Nature pays us a high dividend for our investments in her soil. We can spare the birds their small commission," said the master. "You see it is the true spirit of Mar-

garet ; even with the effort of restraining Lucy she can be more merciful than yourselves."

"It is a black brute, that bird," cried the vindictive Hortensia, pitiless where her garden was concerned. "Gooseberries, currants, strawberries ; and now plums and pears. He can outstuff a schoolboy."

"What is not lovely to you is lovely to a lover," the master answered. "You perceive a robber worthy of death ; Margaret inhales his song and desires him to live for ever. I am thankful, for I know she is here like the song of the bird which you would have silenced ; altered perhaps, but if she retains the spirit of mercy she is Margaret still."

"The master is right. You are not to kill the fowls of the air, little sister. Let them have pears and apples. I had forgotten that they sing to us," said Theodore.

"The garden is not yours ; it is mine," said the stubborn lady. "I will not have my fruit stolen and my flowers pecked to pieces. Sparrows and blackbirds are a disgrace to the creation."

A good little woman that, but elderly and a maid, therefore jealous of the garden which seemed to be hers altogether without any partnership with Nature ; with a husband the garden would have been second, sometimes at least ; with a child it would have been chronically third ; but being lonely it was her world, and every bird that entered there was thief and trespasser. She was not to know that the birds had as much right to enter as herself ; if she had worked in the garden, so had they. Her little world, as she called it, though it was not hers since she held it in common with all manner of creatures, and was forced by Nature to sublet portions and small holdings to the slugs and snails and a host of other forms of life, would not have been beautiful without those birds which oppressed the caterpillar and the insects which gave new form of colour to the flowers. While she grumbled the

busy fly *Bombilius* was blundering past her nose with a burden of male pollen-grain to smear upon the sticky female stigma, working indeed for its own necessities and going to the stigma because of sweetness which meant food, yet doing good work in the garden all the same ; while the robber blackbird, half-filled with semi-digested pear-meat, cracked the shell of a snail for a relish down beside the herb-garden ; both working selfishly, but had not *Hortensia* done the same by planting a garden for her own delight and not always remembering to sing in thankfulness for the produce ?

“ This place belongs to me,” she repeated with that emphasis male minds cannot alter. “ I may kill the birds and insects if I like.”

Margaret and the master came together, and he decided to let her know the truth. Her questions could only be avoided by leaving them unanswered, as it was not in him to make fictions. Only he must not shock her. The truth concerning Lucy flashed forth suddenly might shatter Margaret for ever. He led her down the garden towards the broken hedge and the green river, keeping a little distance between them as if afraid of contact which might turn the light of reason into the flame of passion ; not the lover’s fire, but that selfish desire to have the pupil to himself and keep the world and death away, the passion to possess her mind and call it his. A dangerous work awaited him. Margaret and Lucy were both prepared to listen, Lucy well aware that the mind of Margaret was between the speaker and herself, Margaret unconscious that Lucy was there at all ; the work must be done tenderly lest Margaret should succumb and Lucy be made free again. It was as if two women stood before him, the one good, the other evil ; and he was to speak to both and conquer the stronger if he could.

Being low down they were hidden from the house. Across the stream stood bracken at the bottom of the bank which

sloped upwards to the clouds, all green and silent for there was no wind that evening to make the oak-leaves whisper. They could hear the splashing of water-wheels and hammers ringing upon anvils ; and nearer those other sounds which few attend to, the murmur of the river and of insects, the nibbling of a water-vole, the flight of birds. Margaret could see a small branch throbbing as the water passing down dragged at its lowest leaves, a throb each second, making of the branch a time-keeper.

"We have met twice before. This is our third meeting," said Jasper.

She looked up at him with eyes in wonderland, which said together, "Many more times than that."

"Twice," he repeated. "It is not enough to come together, speak, and part. I met you once in that wood, on a glorious white morning when all the world was in flower. I met you on a black evening when your feet were carrying you towards Windwhistle. Out of the whiteness I spoke to you concerning the mystery of yourself ; from the blackness I implored you to choose between two masters. This is our third meeting ; its colour is red."

"I do not like red," she replied restlessly ; yet making the master content, for he knew it was Margaret speaking.

"It is the colour of creation, the colour of the law. Nature shows herself in a green mantle, but her body is like fire. It is the colour of commotion, of danger, also of conscience, since it is the colour of sacrifice, as it is of judgment, redemption, and sanctification. The child looking out upon the world for the first time takes little heed of black or of green, but laughs when it sees the red. Every strong deed of our lives brings red before our eyes."

"I'm not going to stick here and listen to that rot," she said.

"Silence," he cried, just as in the old days he had called Cuthbert to order ; then reached forward and held her hand, saying, "Stay with me, Margaret. She is listening

I know, and sometimes she will answer, but we will not let her out."

"Of whom are you speaking?" she asked, still struggling.

"Of the female side of Cuthbert Orton's mind."

"What has that to do with me?"

"Do not tremble. Rest your eyes upon the ferns and your body upon my arm. That is well. Margaret, would you had rested so before. Ask no question now. I have a dream to tell you, one that came to me between sleeping and waking the night before I set you free at Folkestone. You were in my mind, and Orton—and another; and I had been murmuring to myself, 'Create; if a man may make what is evil he can surely make what is good; the painter will produce beauty as well as ugliness, a sculptor may carve his angel as surely as his satyr; if Orton could draw you, Lucy, out of the goodness and innocence of Margaret——'"

"Oh, damn you," a fierce voice muttered, as if the speaker was far away.

"Down," cried the master. "Keep down. I say if Orton could do as much, should not I be able to draw out of you, Margaret, out of your inspired brain, a saint? And in my dream, as it seemed to me, I was walking beside my stream, longing for the Creator's power, an hour and no more, that I might do good to those that I loved, and bring perfect justice into their lives, and produce new forms. There, leaning upon a rock, I saw the outlines of a figure without a face. I could not describe the shape of that figure, nor yet the size, and though I was conscious of a mighty head I could see no face, but the invisible mouth seemed near my ear and I heard the question, 'What is your wish?' and I answered, 'That I might have the power of life and death.' And then it seemed to me I awoke in a glory, and when I looked the whole world was spread beneath me far away, and yet all things

were visible and every human being stood out clearly so that I could see what each one was doing ; and beneath my left hand I perceived was lightning, and beneath my right were golden apples ; and while I stood and wondered the voice came near and said to me, ' The power is yours.'

" How gladly I grasped the golden apples that I might cast them down as blessings on my friends ; but as I touched them, my eyes, which beheld the whole world, fell upon my brother, the man whom I loved and trusted ; and I saw myself also, as a human being lying fast asleep, while my brother stood near looking down with covetousness in his heart as I knew by the supernatural power which was mine ; and upon high I watched him gazing at me, producing a bag, approaching my bedside, and I remembered he was poor while I was rich. My brother was about to rob me ; and though I was then his God, and that sleeping figure was like himself one of my creatures, my left hand seized and hurled the lightning and I saw my brother blasted ; and then the voice came to me again and said, ' This is how a man would use the power of God.' I perceived then, Margaret, that the strongest may endure so much and no more, that at the point the resolute man loses control over himself the power of God begins, that where his mind gives up in despair the beginning of divine wisdom has not been reached. I perceived also the awful danger of trying to rule one's fellow-creatures, the peril of teaching them new doctrines, of shaping their minds to fit the moulds we have made ourselves, of attempting to hew out of this complex being, of which we understand no single part, some different form of life. We are doing the work of God with human hands."

" I am resting now," said Margaret simply.

" Margaret, I desire you to put forth all your strength. Answer me as you will, only remember you are Margaret ; and if any evil suggestion of another's presence comes,

lean upon me, call out to me. Come closer ; I must hold you. Tell me your name, child."

" Why, I am Margaret," she whispered.

" Your other name ? "

" Rose."

" Still unconscious, Mary ? "

She shuddered, and the master called, " Wake up," so loudly that Hortensia in the garden heard him.

" Why do you call me Mary ? "

" I address the excellence of your virtue and your purity. The appeal is to your brain. You are harbouring a St Cecilia, and I would bring her out."

" You had better not try," said a different, a fierce, voice.

" Lucy," he cried. " I know you are listening. Dear Margaret, be calm. Lend me your ears that I may speak to Lucy. Do you hear me ? "

" Yes, of course."

" Who are you ? "

" Lucy."

" Do you know what you are ? "

" An ordinary sort of girl. Impulsive, high-spirited, all that sort of thing."

" You are a part of Margaret."

" What are you saying to me ? " said Margaret ; then she added in a changed voice, " What a damned lie."

" You are a part which has been put into Margaret. You have been grafted upon her mind. When she was a child you existed only as a symptom. As she grew up you were able to assert yourself by taking advantage of the weak and nervous state of the body which surrounded you. Life could only be given you by the mind of another as low and grovelling as yourself. The work of Orton attracted, not Margaret, but you, and by much brooding upon that work your personality grew stronger. It was his will which gave you freedom. His life is yours."

"I'm all right. Leave me alone," said the sulky voice.

"Are you listening, Margaret?"

"What have I done? You seem to be abusing me," she said pitifully.

"I will tell you, Lucy. At the will of Orton, which you could not resist, you left your home and went to Wind-whistle. You have been living with this man as his wife. I am aware that when he knew you he was afraid and would have escaped, and that you would not leave him, but you were his for he created you. He and you together have wandered from place to place, you his evil spirit giving him no rest, spending his money, wearing him out body and soul. You two dark creatures flitted away from God's daylight, until at the call of Orton I was led to you both, to set him and Margaret free, and to drive you back."

"Hold your jaw, do," muttered a weary voice.

"You are unable to realise how you have injured the life of Margaret."

"Why do you speak to me in this disconnected way?" asked the soft voice plaintively.

"Lucy," he called again.

"Gas away, old boy. I'm listening."

"I have only this to say: if you break out again we will show you no mercy, we will lock you up, keep you away from the man you pretend to love; we will terrify you into submission. The bond is broken here between Orton and myself," he went on loudly. "I cast the two ends of it into the air, and if he will turn and put them together he may. Only he shall not come to you, and you shall not go to him, Lucy."

"Go and bury yourself. At your time of life you ought to leave the girls alone."

"Good-bye."

"Oh, we shall meet again, and don't you forget it."

"If we do you shall die."

"What is all this about?" asked Margaret, with a struggle.

"You know? You understand?" he asked earnestly.

"I heard you talking, but only a few words reached me."

"I have told you what happened during the period of your unconsciousness."

"But I never heard you. Tell me again, more slowly," she pleaded.

"I spoke distinctly and slowly," he said, smiling. "If you did not follow me then, how should you now?"

"Who is this Lucy?"

"She is, Margaret, the name which you give yourself when you forget yourself," he said, very tenderly and clearly.

She looked frightened, perplexed; then closed her eyes and might have fallen had not those strong arms been round her.

"Do not think," he prayed. "You are safe and you shall be happy. Thought will unsettle you, as it did in the past when you would shut yourself in your room to understand your mind."

"I could not help it. When an idea came I would worry over it day and night. It was like a piece of music; I could not rid myself of it. And now I am mad."

"That too belongs to the past."

"You spoke to me. I heard and answered; but I do not know what you said or how I answered. What am I? Who am I? Whose daughter? Whose wife? If I am mad when I cease to be Margaret, why do I hate myself, why do I destroy my own things, my own body and life and happiness, why do I scrawl filthy suggestions in my own books? What am I like then? What have I done?"

"Answer your own questions with one name," said the master.

"You mean Lucy. Now that you have mentioned that name I shall never forget it. Lucy is Margaret mad, and

Margaret sane is not herself. That name will be before me until it is mine and I am mad for ever."

"Yes, keep it before you, hate it, curse it. Wear out its power by opposition. I warned but could not teach you that evening when you felt the influence beating upon your life, parting you asunder. I would have told you then but there was war within you. Now it is peace. You have done no wrong."

"I must suffer."

"The sufferings of innocence we call martyrdom. Banish the name of Lucy like a defeated foe, and tell me what other is within your mind."

"There is no other."

"The name of a man."

She looked about her in a troubled fashion, and the master watched her eyes crossing the river in a gentle flight to rest upon the ferns, and then passing upward to the oaks, and so on to where the topmost leaves were lost in mountain mist. He felt she could understand the union between mystery and strength; his whole soul went out to help her conquer the last lingering fascination of a perilous ideal. "There is a man," she murmured. "I cannot speak his name, but I know his influence has been upon me; he has made me think; he has frightened me."

"Describe him, Margaret."

"Is it you that has made me shameless? You, my master?" she said calmly, without looking at him.

"If a girl is shameless when she speaks the truth I would have her so."

"A woman," she corrected coldly.

"I am speaking to the virgin soul of Margaret."

"This man fascinated me. He was like a strong sun attracting me, but his light was so powerful I could not look at him. Then he terrified me because he knew so much. I felt that if he put out all his strength he could draw me to him; he might make me safe. I could not

tell. And at last when I was in a horror of darkness and about to die he appeared before me. I loved him then."

"That love you have lost?" said the master in a wondering voice, for the last part of her confession troubled him.

She looked at him with the eyes of Margaret, and Lucy seemed to be lying dead at last in some secret chamber. She looked at the great white figure, confessing with that eloquence of woman's silence that the love was not dead, for it was young and tender, born a few days ago, fragrant and new to the world and longing to be cherished; like an orphaned love bereft of parents, lifting up its young arms towards the strength of Nature, asking in its dumb way to be saved from destruction. The name of Orton had been in his mind, but the name in the eyes of Margaret was his own.

What were years to the things growing in the world? What was the age of the oak-tree to the young and changing bracken which grew closely to the hard-wood strength seeking protection from the winds, mingling root with root, loving the tree so fondly as to bear the image of its beloved stamped all through, dying every year and living every year, giving body after body to the oak, youth to the aged, weakness to strength, but its root with the oak-root always?

Within the mind of the strong old man acorns of imagination were bursting into growth. Was not the oldest oak-tree young in the life that it handed on? and if love proceeded from the soul that love was young. The body dated from the birth of love. But knowledge was there, a bitter sense of waste, confusion, and folly, heaped like the decayed leaves of many an autumn about him, preventing him from saying, "You are mine; not pupil, but teacher; not old man and child, for we are of the same age since we do not live in our bodies but by our roots." Those hands were held out, but he had not taken

them because he could not believe they were meant for him, and his eyes were busy in space trying to read the future where it was not written. The letters of divination were upon the ground within the wood, and though he walked there often he could not find them. They were hidden by the leaves, buried like the roots, and he would take his spade to heaven to dig them out. He had been attracted by the planets like a child pleased with shining things ; he had gone outside the world to find the knowledge of the world, stumbling over the book of the future which was lying upon his doorstep. He had attempted to lead Cuthbert and Margaret, and they had dragged him into courses of their own ; and the knowledge came to him then that had he turned his eyes away from the flickering lamp, and the mysteries of which it was the symbol, had he tempered his spiritualism with a sufficient amount of materialism, and not gone to one extreme as Cuthbert had gone to another, he might have saved them both, he might have protected Margaret, given her more strength, shown her the way ; he might have shamed Cuthbert by exposure, or given him over to destruction by refusing to obey his call.

They stood and looked at each other, two ends meeting like a day in March, beginning with snow and frost, changing into warm wind and sunshine, winter and spring coming together and blending naturally. There was no need for question and answer ; it was a time of inspiration. Margaret was alive and well ; Cuthbert had spent his force and was receding ; only Lucy was his, and Margaret was the master's ; and as all the evening gathered itself about them with a song, and things took upon themselves new colours, and as the light died out in a rich September heaviness, the last doubt of each was vanquished and they loved. She saw the massive figure with eyes of adoration, the tender face so finely carved, the skin so fresh and smooth across the forehead, the cheeks a childish

pink above the glorious beard all white like may-blossom ; old-age was not present, for he looked immortal. He saw the slight figure shivering no longer, taller he thought, free from dread, the face less pale, the quivering features resting ; and he put out his long white hands and drew her near, feeling that the world of Nature loved them both.

“ Pupil ? ” he said, with that voice he had never found before.

“ Wife,” she whispered.

“ Master ? ”

“ Husband.”

“ There is nothing now but rest.”

Even while he spoke she resisted, tried to free herself, pushed him away ; but he held on while the expression on her face altered, her eyes became wild and careless, her tongue muttered in anger and despair, “ You are beating me ” ; and then the effort ceased, Margaret looked up and said, “ I make the choice, if it is not too late. I will try to be good. I am Margaret, and I will be Margaret always.”

“ Orton no longer influences you ? ”

“ I knew him once. I have forgotten him now. I knew him in bad dreams and now I am awake. I know you have been with me. Your name and your being have possessed me. I know what you were telling me just now ; during the time when I called myself Lucy I became yours, I was with you ; God’s Garden was my natural home, I was made your wife. I went to sleep with your name on my lips and your image in my mind, and I awoke with you beside me and still with your name upon my lips.”

“ Alone ? ”

“ Alone and beside the sea.”

For the moment she has forgotten Orton, he reasoned. New life has banished him. From henceforth he belongs

to Lucy only. While Margaret is mine. She has solved her difficulties for herself.

"For the rest of life," she murmured.

"For the rest of life," he repeated, starting at the sadness of his voice.

All that was given to Margaret of Lucy's wild life with Cuthbert was one great fact of womanhood, and the rest dream-stuff. That she had been made a wife was certain ; the mind of Margaret could not admit a relationship less binding. Lucy had sunk beneath the surface, carrying Cuthbert with her and taking him unconsciously out of Margaret's existence ; and like night departing and the sun rising, Jasper had taken his place in the mind free for the first time and able to receive him. As for the dream, all that remained was a kind of shadow of what seemed matrimony ; the profane passion of Cuthbert and Lucy became sanctified by the mind of Margaret into sacred love between the master and herself. By her knowledge of the fact she loved him because it was a delight to do so ; by the faint memory she loved him as a duty.

The master could only repeat her words ; wisdom was not helping. She supposed herself wedded to him, she had a certain right to think so, and might wonder when her senses opened wider why she still lived with her father when her home was at God's Garden. How was it possible to suggest the ceremony which she supposed had already taken place and been forgotten ? Glancing at her left hand, he too was startled to see the wedding ring which Cuthbert had placed for shame upon her finger ; and that unblest ring, which Lucy had taken upon her finger as a shining bauble, was then the marriage symbol between Margaret and himself.

"Some day you must tell me our story. When I am well and strong," she murmured.

"Do you trust me so well, Margaret ? Can you give the tender blossom of your life into an old teacher's care ? "

"I have done so. I shall always call you master, for you have taught me to take the best. When was it? The sweet moments of my life are all forgotten."

"Here is my hand. It holds my heart."

"Will you not take me with you?" she asked dreamily. "I have a fancy now to look after you."

"For the present we must part. I will light a fire in God's Garden, and standing here, or sitting in your room, you will see its light. Let the fire be to you as my spirit."

"My place is with you. Here I feel exposed to all manner of dangers. Did you bring me here because I was mad Lucy? I am Margaret now; my eyes are open, I have no evil thought, I do assure you, unless it is evil to wish to be with you. I should be safe with you. I have a right to claim your protection. Do you love me so little as to leave me, master?"

"Child Margaret," he said. "God's twilight is between us. Trust me."

"I must be with you," she went on, in the same patient way, making his eyesight dim. "I am not happy; I am frightened again, for I feel an enemy is quite close, waiting for you to leave me. With you I am safe. Without you I am unprotected."

"My fire will comfort you," he said heavily. "I will stand beside it and read the service of matrimony for you and for me, and at the last word I will extinguish the fire; and when you see the darkness, know it is bringing my blessing to you. Be strong, Margaret."

"Must you leave me?" she cried.

"Until the morning."

"Not by the wood. It is dark and horrible; I smell the ferns. Go by the road."

"The path by the wood is shorter."

"It is too dark."

"It is a pleasant darkness."

"You may tread on something. The great roots may make you fall."

"You would come with me through the wood?"

"Yes, gladly," she said in the old way.

"You shall choose my path," he said.

"The road. Must you go?"

"For a few hours."

"I will sit at my window and follow your words. My heart will reach across and listen. Is this good-bye?"

"It is good-night, God's child"; and he gathered her fingers in his hand like rose-petals and shed his blessings on them; then left her trembling, not for a night, nor for a few days, but for all time.

Darkness fell and firelight danced merrily upon God's Garden between earth and sky. Margaret from her window watched the flames rising and falling like the music of a march; and she seemed to hear the voice of her master reading, the gentle voice which was the only sound on earth that soothed her then, reading the solemn service which was to comfort her with new strength, new mind and brain. Never had flames played such music; never had firelight played the priest. "Wilt thou have this woman?" asked a long red tongue; and her own faltered in reply, "I will"; and the smoke whirled away in the shape of a dark tempestuous ring going upward to receive a blessing, and more smoke made a veil which the flames licked away, and still more hid the fire altogether, until new life in the form of light broke out staining the sky with the colour of wine and blood. It seemed to Margaret a sacrifice and a purification; her own self was being consumed, her mind was being purged; and out of those white ashes she would rise again, rebaptized to beauty, married to strength, dead to evil thoughts, the victim of the sacrifice and the goddess to whom it was offered. A

withered body was being burnt, and fresh from the roots new growth would spring, more beautiful, because more perfect, than the short-lived body of the year before.

Again the flames darted up; and then began to die down because the ceremony was over, and Margaret was a bride about to die.

The murderer entered, clad in black. Had he loved her less he would have left her to herself, but having a great affection for his daughter he sought her out, wondering that she should be sitting in the dark, fearing to let her remain alone with the enemy of herself so near. He entered very quietly with some soothing words, made his way to her side, and knelt as if about to ask her pardon and to say good-bye. She did not want him because the fire had put new life and strength into her. Those fiery tongues had spoken from God's Garden, saying, "You are Margaret. No power of darkness shall prevail against you now."

"It is over," she said in her own soft childish voice. "The darkness has come again, and as he promised with the blessing. I can feel it like music in the night. It is gentle and healing. It gives me back my mind, my memory, and my life. Mad Lucy is dead, and sane Margaret lives."

"This is the master's doing," cried happy Theodore.

"He has told me everything. I know who I am," cried Margaret, singing her swan-song. "I know I am a wife and I glory in it. I know I am to be a mother and I glory in that; for my husband is mine and I am his. I love him with my heart, I love him with my mind, I love him with my brain."

"You love him," muttered Theodore on his knees. "Proud to love him."

"Very proud, for he has saved me."

"Proud of shame!" cried Theodore bitterly, bringing his knife out, remembering only his own pain, supposing

there was nothing to keep hidden. "Proud of being the mother of Cuthbert Orton's child."

Hortensia heard her brother screaming against the wall, afraid to look and to see who it was triumphing in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI

COWARDLY

THERE were many sounds about God's Garden in the night ; ventriloquial effects, haunting repetitions of footsteps and voices. It would have been wonderful if the early inhabitants had not peopled the place with fairies, for even in an age supposed to be less ignorant these sounds were often incomprehensible ; while unable to alarm a strong mind, they were not easy to trace to an origin. There was the talking sound, a windy muttering of the vox humana beneath the windows when no human being was near ; a singing sound, the vox cœlestis, not so clear, and no doubt a trick of some reed-current of air as it fluted its way up and down the mountain side ; the musical sound, which was the most haunting of all because quite real. The footstep sound was somewhat terrible upon a silent night, especially when preceded by the creeping sound. There were no laughing sounds, and the crying ones were natural. The bell-ringing and the knocking sounds occurred often, but they are common everywhere. The dripping sound was curious on a dry night when all the ground was parched. The sliding sound was perhaps the only one unpleasant ; it began some distance up the mountain side, and for a long time could not reach the house ; it would stop suddenly, return to the starting point, and begin again ; and at last it would glide through the garden and reach the door with a gentle shock. Some-

times it would be accompanied by the footstep sound, and then it was disquieting ; and when the talking sound was also added it became almost fearful. These sounds had created folk-lore, and called fairy-tales into existence. Nature and the human ear were the parents of them ; conscience was the interpreter ; cowardice and courage supplied the story.

The bell-ringing sound was frequent. Jasper listened and was glad to hear the merry noise so clearly. After that came the musical sound, beautiful but sad. These spirits of the night could use only two instruments, organ and piano ; they had no knowledge of stringed instruments. That night they brought a piano down the windy space, placed it beneath Jasper's window, but not too close for they were subtle artists, and one of the creatures played. This could not be delusion for every note was clear, nothing was out of harmony, the spiritual skill was marvellous ; and Jasper stood near the window listening, his head moving, too absorbed to wonder.

Midnight brought the sliding sound, shaking the door at its first attempt, and Jasper was troubled by it because the moving body appeared more weighty than usual. He descended from his bedroom ; he had done so before, prepared to find some messenger at his doorstep. Then, as upon other nights, he saw dim outlines only, bushes and rocks all silent, and beyond them utter darkness for the clouds were heavy, and below spread a mist hiding the lower garden, making a roof to it, so that his house looked as if it had been built upon the brink of a sea of cloud, and the tide was high.

The footstep sound was passing through the mist, and it was real, for when a man walked side by side with the mischievous puck of the mountain the sounds each made could clearly be distinguished. Although the night was dark, the mist was white and the waves of it reached the terrace where Jasper stood. All above was clear so that

he could stand and listen to this mist-merged being slowly rising to the surface like some amphibian coming up to breathe ; and when he turned to enter the house, being somewhat nervous, he cried out ; for near his feet and upon that sea appeared a man's head and eyes, then his shoulders and two hands, and all seemed struggling as if the mist had been a stormy sea and the terrace a rocky shore towards which the lost man struggled.

" You come to frighten me," cried Jasper.

It was Cuthbert, and as he passed clear the illusion of the drowning man remained, for he was distressed with the haste he had made, and the steep climb, and the agitation which had brought him there ; but underneath the calm contempt remained.

" He is fond of the night. He makes his living by night. He seeks his pleasures by night ; and now he comes to me for help at midnight," said the master, looking bitterly at the figure dripping with mist, standing a little below him, sobbing in its attempt to speak with lack of breath. " When everything goes well with you, what am I but a master to be avoided because he would set a task ? " he went on plainly. " When danger threatens, how easily you remember me. Not once have you sought me as a friend. When I was lonely you would not visit me. When I was sick you avoided me. If you could give me happiness with one motion of your hand you would not make it. If all the world was yours to portion out, my share from you would be nothing but a wilderness. I have exhausted my love upon you ; I have failed to hold you straight. You must wriggle on your crooked way to death."

" Stop your preaching. Lucy has come back worse than ever. I am driven out of my house ; I dare not go back," Cuthbert panted. " I have run all the way from Windwhistle."

At the first word the master turned his face towards

the house. Cuthbert saw the great figure stagger, as if it would topple over and splash into that sea of mist. He saw a hand grope forward and safely reach the door-post ; he heard also a groan which was not a trick of the wind ; and then a deep low voice, asking, " Is this your work also ? "

" Do you think I want her back ? I would give all I possess to get rid of her for ever," said Cuthbert. " I heard her coming—she was making noise enough to reach you here—and I slipped out. She is furiously angry ; I listened and could hear her threaten me. She thinks I have deserted her and tried to make away with her. She has taken possession of Windwhistle, and there she will stay ; and I haven't the courage in me to go back."

" Frightened at the fire he has himself kindled," Jasper muttered.

" Will you take me in ? I'll go to-morrow."

" Seeking my help again, asking with his hands empty. ' Will you excuse me, sir ? I know nothing of the lesson ; I will not work. Will you let me off that imposition ? May I go out this afternoon ? I must have my pleasures. This woman is a leech upon me ; will you take her away, sir ? This one is a consuming fire ; will you quench her for me ? ' The man's a child. The lesson is over, Orton. You may go."

" Let me come in, Ramrige. It's a bit weird over there. She is raging in that lonely place ; screams have a nasty sound at night."

" You shall not bring your atmosphere into my house. We have travelled together to this terminus, and here we part," said the master. " You have led me to the edge of your darkness ; another step and I may enter it. This climbing has tired me out," he said impatiently. " Go down, Orton. It is your direction. Go down and preserve your breath, for you will want it."

Standing there in the increasing darkness, with the

white mist ebbing from his feet, Cuthbert saw the master enter his house, heard the door closed and locked against him, felt he had lost something ; and then he went away in a hurry, crushed and miserable, very much of a coward, for he was only brave when the game seemed his. He plunged downward, escaped into the road, and returned to Windwhistle, hovering about his own house like a thief until he attracted Seabroke's attention. The man climbed stealthily through the window and joined his master in the bracken.

"Where is she ? " Cuthbert asked.

"Upstairs, sir. Sitting and watching the door, Bessie says. Don't go in, sir. She's listening for the door."

"Has she been violent ? "

"Screamed a lot, sir. She's quiet now. Watching the door, sir—with a knife in her hand. Took it out of the kitchen. I sharpened it yesterday."

"Would you call her mad ? "

"I call her what you like, sir."

"What has she been saying about me ? "

"You and Miss Vipont—Miss Margaret Vipont, sir—set upon her, took away her liberty, and tried to kill her."

"This is madness," said Cuthbert eagerly.

"That's right, sir."

"You remember what she was, Seabroke. She has changed ? "

"Hates you now, sir. Better move back a little. The window is on the other side, but 'tis open."

"Could we get the knife away from her, and take her home ? "

"She's sitting in the dark," said the man grimly.

"I shall go then—for to-night. Slip down to my study, Seabroke. In the second drawer of my writing-table you will find a pile of manuscript. Wrap it carefully and bring it to me."

The man made an awkward movement, and seemed afraid to speak or to obey.

"Go along," said Cuthbert sharply.

"Begging your pardon, sir, 'tis too late," muttered Seabroke.

"What do you mean?"

"She has been there, sir. Destroyed everything that she could."

Cuthbert felt dizzy. The work of a year gone and the hand to strike this blow was Lucy's. Her life and being made the subject of that work. She had destroyed her own biography, not knowing what it was, and now she was ready to take away his life, not knowing it was hers.

"She's done a lot of mischief, sir," said Seabroke simply; and as he spoke they heard Bessie whispering keenly, "She's coming down. She has heard the master."

Not a sound followed, though Cuthbert waited, listening; there was neither voice nor movement in the house, but both men knew that Bessie was reliable, and Lucy would be passing through the house with the stealthy noiselessness of a cat. The night was too dark to see through, but presently Seabroke whispered, "She is outside, sir. There's broken glass by the door and I heard it rattle"; and Cuthbert left him then and ran from his home, crushing the ferns, stumbling over brambles, making all those noises of flight which are violent in the night; and coming out into the road between fields, he dropped into a walk, furious with himself to think that this was the second time he had fled away in terror from a girl.

He took his ease and the road which would lead in time to a wayside inn where he could obtain rough shelter for the night. Blows were falling upon him fast; during an hour cast off by the master, driven out of his own home, the work of months cremated. One hour could give or take so much, and even a second was long enough to die in; but it was not Lucy, nor Jasper, nor his ruined master-

piece, which kept uppermost in his thoughts, though he tried to make them so ; the little old blind dog had that position, and he prayed that Lucy might still be merciful to animals, and would not harm the only being that he loved.

As he went on the wind seemed to sob across the field and to rise along the road and come at him with a gasp. Another moment passed, and he was shivering. Eyes were in that wind which became a body ; a hand was there suggesting butcher's work ; this human and mental tempest was bursting upon him, and he could not be too quick. Again he trusted to his feet, going down—it was easy that way—slope after slope, through country that was called beautiful, not daring to stop, for when a man is terrified of his shadow he runs well, until he splashed into the maze of dark and stony lanes belonging to Claud Yalland by poetic licence ; and by virtue of a light no larger than a child's small lantern remembered he was near the dwelling of an honest man, whom he had sneered at because he did his best so badly, but who might yet be useful to him at a pinch.

A piece of chintz hung half-across the window which was closed and smelt rotten. Approaching the glass Cuthbert saw his fellow craftsman apparently sleeping, his head lying upon an arm which the table supported with uncharitable wobblings ; the room was filled with smoke, black specks were floating everywhere, descending upon the snorer like rain ; a small oil-stove in a corner, which gave all the light there was, caused this eruption, for the flame had been turned too high ; it glowed like a danger signal through the soot ; and a flaw in the glass made the scene infernal. A poet's home, a gardener's cottage ; it looked nearer hell than heaven.

Cuthbert knocked with his boot, then pushed the door open, releasing smoke and smuts ; and Claud started up spluttering and calling defensively, " I will stay here ;

I'm happy. If you won't go by the door I'll heave you out of the window."

"I am Orton," called the visitor. "This fellow was going to stifle himself," he muttered.

"All right. I understand now. I woke with a start, and I fancied you were—never mind what. I thought you had come to turn me out," said Claud, cracking his fingers nervously. "It's a bit smoky in here. I'm used to that; it's nothing. The oil-stove will play these tricks, but I have no decorated walls. I fling the two doors open and the wind sweeps through and scours the place."

"It's hardly the time for a visit," said Cuthbert awkwardly.

"My visitors come in the middle of the night. You are the second in twenty years. You want me, Mr Orton? Nobody would come to see me unless I was wanted."

"I am tired. I have hurt my foot," said Cuthbert. "May I stay and talk with you till morning?"

"It is an honour," said the poet, laughing. "You are getting at the end of the alphabet when you reach Y. I am quite at the end, Mr Orton, but for purposes of existence, selfish reasons, I try to get at the beginning. I am a fixed body and you are a rolling one. I have the moss and you have the money. I was boiling some water to make myself a cup of cocoa; it is the only refreshment I can offer you."

"I want nothing but a rest," said Cuthbert, seating himself near the door where he could listen.

"You are hot and short of breath. Like me you walk too fast, but you don't possess my inexhaustible wind-bag; it must have been meant for a dog or a horse, but I got it somehow. There is a churchyard draught there; I do not take cold, but why should I? A coarse weed stands all weathers. Sit here, Mr Orton."

Cuthbert did not move. Claud gave him a quick glance, decided all was not well, then went to the cupboard for

the cocoa-tin. He opened it, plunged a spoon in, a spider scuttled out, and the spoon brought forth nothing but a small dry bulb."

"Those pixies again," he laughed. "They play pranks with my larder. I had forgotten the tin was empty."

He filled a cup with hot water and began to sip it cheerily. Cuthbert closed the door suddenly, with a certain movement about the shoulders perceived by Claud, and came near the poet, saying carelessly, "You look very tired."

"The garden. Have you heard scandal about me and the garden?" asked Claud. "There's not much to see in the house, but the progress outside is wonderful. That thing which you are looking at now is a present; part-payment of a debt, I might call it. The postman brought it wrapped in paper and boxes. It has something to do with religion, which is a tangled affair; I have no brain for it. A man who works well and does not curse the weather is sure of a future. If I were a Catholic I should call that a Madonna for one mood and St Francis for another. It is intended for Buddha who was a prophet and a gentleman, but it serves as well for the devil or the Venus de Milo. Art is a matter of light and temperament. Give a statuette a smoky oil-stove and fancy adds the form. Vipont sent me that thing, but it has done nothing for me. Would you like it, Mr Orton?" Claud asked in his boyish way.

"Would you hand on bad luck to me?" said Cuthbert, trying to smile but listening always. He was some distance from Windwhistle but not far enough to be safe, and the picture of Lucy bursting in upon them would not go.

"It wouldn't harm you," said Claud. "You wear the ring of Polycrates. No, I don't mean that," he went on hurriedly. "I talk so little I am apt to blunder."

"I would like to see you do better than this, Yalland," said Cuthbert, rousing himself and trying to pay for his shelter. "At your age a man should be settled. This

sort of living cannot be happiness though you may laugh and pretend to like it. You must give up the poetry."

Claud had set the table in order and lighted the best lamp. He went and stood before the fireplace cracking his fingers again; then drew the chintz curtain across the window so that nobody could look in; and the look of relief upon the visitor's face convinced him that Cuthbert was that night a fugitive and had come there to hide himself; and though he was downcast and somewhat afraid to look easterly where his future was rising, he still exulted, knowing he had a right to be happy and his mind at least was free. "Thank you, Mr Orton," he said simply. "I am glad you mentioned that subject. If I have any unhappiness it is because my little temple of friendship does not attract a congregation. A passion to write poetry is an evil, no doubt; but there is a greater evil still. It is the passion to make a garden."

"A pleasure garden you mean?"

"By any name it is a vice. Free from that passion one may at least live. Contract it and you are ruined. For years I lived in the middle of a wilderness and was satisfied. Then the lust for gardening came upon me and I fell. I have performed wonders outside, but I have done nothing inside. The cursed passion has absorbed my soul and my body; I rush out early in the morning to get on with the work, I live for my garden, dream of it; I call it my pleasure when it is my curse. If I try to write my fingers begin to scrawl plans of flower-beds, mounds, and paths. I throw down my mattock with an oath sometimes and force myself in here, but my hands tremble so I cannot hold the pen, and I can think of nothing but the thing outside and what it will be like when I have made it and finished it. As if it could ever be finished!" said Claud bitterly. "That's the devilry of the thing. A garden is more jealous than a harem of ladies. It strangles every rival. I speak to you frankly, Mr Orton. The garden

has ruined me. I have no work done, no money coming in. I am living on my capital; the last few pounds of money given me when I started during the mythical period of my life by my mother. I have dunged that piece of ground outside with my immortal soul, and now it wants to be watered with my blood. A garden is either a rich man's pleasure or a poor man's folly. He must either cast a slave to it or it will devour himself."

"Give them both up; the garden and poetry. They are sensual pleasures," said Cuthbert in his superior way, offering the advice he had never been able to follow. "It is easy," he added.

"For a strong-minded man, but I am weak," said Claud hopelessly. "I do not love my writing now. I find it arduous and irksome. The garden has become an overwhelming passion. It is to me what liquor is to the drunkard. I cannot keep away from it and I have made a vow to beat Miss Hortensia. She is coming to see what progress I have made. I shall have to draw the curtains and lock the door, for she mustn't look in here. The fertility of the garden has made the home barren. I have a notion I should do well if I smashed you into uncountable fragments," he said angrily to the sooty little idol which squatted upon the mantelshelf all limbs and heads.

"You should have a time for everything," advised Cuthbert. "Give yourself to work in the morning and to your garden in the evening; and never go into the garden during work-time whatever your mood may be. It is merely a matter of will."

"A garden has no conscience. It is making me as immoral as itself. I shall try again, Mr Orton; I must or I will not be able to pay my rent. I could pray for a month of tempest which would keep me in the house."

This fellow is done for, thought Cuthbert. We are both hunted by our hobby. "Yalland, I'm dead tired," he said. "Let me lie down a bit."

"You shall have my bed," said the kindly fellow. "It's not like your own, but a sheet is always a sheet when it's clean enough. There are holes in the window and gaps in the roof, and horticulture won't mend 'em. By the time I am taking prizes for my flowers my bed will be among them. Don't be alarmed, Mr Orton; it was nothing but my mellifluous frog. I have built him a choir-stall in the wet corner of my kitchen—not every gardener can boast of a bog upon the premises—and he chirps me anthems till the sun rises; his name is Theodore. That's the way to the back-door," he added.

For a moment Cuthbert was inclined to tell Claud why he had come, but he was more than tired and happened to remember how the poet had once spied upon him. The tenant of this poor cottage was not a friend, but a human being obeying the natural instinct of affording shelter to another of his kind and simple enough to babble of his troubles. Cuthbert had no friends; his work was known the world over, but the only creature that loved him then was a little blind dog who could not see his faults. His greatest enemies were Lucy and himself.

"Where will you sleep?" he asked, putting a hand to his head which was giddy when he stood upright.

"I have slept," said Claud. "You came and woke me; and now it's time for my walk. If I want any more I will curl myself up on the table. I can sleep working or walking, but I can't sleep gardening."

He went out, reached Moab Lane, bathed his head, and rambled on wondering aloud as usual, "By the look in his eyes he was frightened; he had been running; his trousers were splashed with clay, so he came through that back lane from Windwhistle and he missed the bridge, either because he didn't see it or he was pressed and had to splash through the clay bottoms. Whom was he running from? Himself. I knew how it would be," said Claud firmly. "His own house has frightened him. I would

rather be Claud Yalland than Cuthbert Orton. It's better to have the dirt on your hands and in your ears than caked all round your soul. I would sooner kick my last in a flower-garden than in a madhouse."

He passed along many lanes, all of them as dark as crypts, for the sky was covered with storm-clouds and trees met overhead; but Claud had no need to walk slowly, knowing every yard, and where to turn aside because of water, and where to pick his way over rocks. At last he reached the lane which would lead him into the road, and as he came near the turning where the sign-post stood, he heard a new sound. It was a wailing noise, and Claud did not like it because it sounded unnatural, but he went on and reached the edge of the patch of grass, still seeing nothing, but certain some being was quite near him crying for something it had lost. So he called gently, but there was no reply.

"Are you lost?" he asked, creeping back a little, afraid somehow of the invisible presence, and not having with him the means of making a light. The wailing went on as if he had not been there.

"May I help you? My name is Claud Yalland," he said foolishly. "I think I am to be trusted. If your home is near I will take you to it."

He heard neither movement nor answer. The wailing went on and Claud found himself cold all over, for it seemed to him he was near a mystery; he began to doubt whether it was a human being, whether there was any presence there at all. He could see nothing. He dared not put out his hand.

"It is not natural," he whispered. "It is worse than human sorrow."

He broke into a perspiration and ran as Cuthbert had done, a great horror over him, convinced that some creature from another world was wailing by that sign-post; never dreaming that the body which had once been

Margaret's, the body he had worshipped from a distance, the body which had inspired him to write sonnets and to make posies ; then, hidden by the shadows of night-clouds and the branches of oak-trees, crying for all it had lost, wailing an awful dirge for dead Margaret who had been driven out of the world.

CHAPTER XVII

RAVENOUS

ANOTHER year, now three months old, was urging its growths along. Windwhistle had been closed for two seasons, grass had arisen round it, brambles reached across the lower windows, its walls were stained and bruised by winds which had struck them all winter and carried the wet inside. The house looked haunted ; rust and damp had become personalities ; and, looking down upon the place from one of the hills adjacent, nothing was more obvious than the dull carpet made of bracken, the produce of a year lying low, brown with decay, weighed down with the heaviness of moisture, for rain, snow, and hoar-frost had been upon it since November ; nothing but dead stuff then waiting for the spring to dry it up, all the smell and sap gone out of it, but still beautiful, unlike dead animal life, for when March sunshine passed between the oaks and spread itself across that floor, these dead bodies seemed to revive, to struggle again as if they felt the roots which had thrown them off awakening ; and took a new colour out of the sun, and painted themselves with it like vain women, a brighter and healthier brown which seemed to them living green while the warmth lasted ; but when the light went out, and that colour was taken away, they could feel again the new growths writhing in the peat, they sank and knew that they were dead.

God's Garden was not filled with war-like grass nor

bristling with brambles, and yet no war had been waged against them. They seemed to fear the presence of human beings, and the fact that the house was occupied had hindered them from encroaching; these shy wild things attacked the house which stood deserted, claiming it as a ruin, possessing the garden, rising against the walls simply because no man walked there; but God's Garden was occupied, and the terror of wonderful beings who passed to and fro continually, and had large hooks at the end of their branching arms which could tear all weeds to pieces, kept the intruders back.

Nor were there any weeds at Cob Court; not a bramble dared to thrust itself into Hortensia's garden where the little lady toiled, often in weariness, for she knew well enough that a garden can only occupy one of the four corners of life, and when the other three are empty the one that is too full becomes a tyrant; and human nature rebels against tyranny even while it loves the tyrant. Love, happiness, companionship, the remaining corners of the house of life, were empty, and the fourth, which was running over and wasting its contents, lost its pleasure often because no love came into it, no real happiness shared it, no companionship walked in it. The only voice which sounded there belonged to Polly Pedrack, rambling endlessly, twisting round Hortensia like bindweed, talking with a contempt for pronouns. "We've had no winter again, but I don't grumble. I don't know what has come over the weather these last ten years; everything seems to have gone wrong, and we gets Januaries in Junes, and a sun at Christmas hot enough to ripen they tomato-apples of yours. The folk grumble, but I don't. Why, when I was a maiden there used to be proper winters once a year, beginning in December and ending in February as punctual as clocks and thermometers; on the day the almanack said winter was to start, he did, and there warn't none of this nonsense, not knowing his own mind and giving us

strawberries in February and influenzy in August. When 'twas time for snow he snaw, and when 'twas time for ice there 'twas; and now we get a shifty winter, neither one thing nor t'other, mostly mud and this here mist what a body swallows into her belly and gets dyspepsy, and mud all over the house; as fast as you mops him up there 'tis again, and water running down the walls faster than you can wipe him up; and just as you reckons summer be coming along, and we gets the things out of the house for spring cleaning, down comes the snow, and the farmers reckon they're ruined this time for certain, and none of us do know exactly where they are. We've had no winter again, but I'd be the last to grumble. And you mark my words, there won't be no spring this year nor yet summer neither, and as soon as your peas come out of the ground the frost'll have 'em. I'm a cheerful woman, I looks on the bright side, but 'tis a sure thing that the weather is as bad as he can be, and 'tis killing folk right and left, old and young, he makes no difference; undertakers don't hardly know what job to see to first, they say, and they're the only ones what ain't complaining, 'cept 'tis me and I don't believe in it, for words ain't no good with the weather; but we've had no winter, and now 'tis the middle o' March, and in a week or two we shall fancy ourselves at Christmas, and I'll be the only one to see that you can't make things better by grumbling, but 'tis a scandalous thing that we can't be given our weather proper. Well, I reckon I'd best go and clean the doorstep, though 'tis a waste of time, for he'll be as bad again in an hour or two with all the rain and mud there be about, and you walking in and out bringing half the garden in with ye."

That was the sort of talk Hortensia had to listen to, for she lived alone with Polly. Her brother was with Lucy and the master at God's Garden. Since that morning, when Cuthbert had disappeared and the girl had been carried home unconscious by Yalland and a stonebreaker,

God's Garden had been her home. Lucy was a prisoner and a pupil ; she had to be watched and taught like an infant ; she was at school and Jasper was her master, striving against the mind of Cuthbert, which was in her an unpolished stone, not cut and glittering as in him ; and it was necessary for Theodore to be there also, so that people might not be set whispering about the body of Margaret ; a body that was mad, the people whispered as they were meant to ; a body which had been taken to the house high up in mistland that it might be cured by the winds ; not to whisper about the spells of old Ramrige who was a magician, as cottagers could testify, for he had sat with old folk past all healing, which was rumour's version, had given them the benefit of his presence, had read to them those wonderful stories which were like portions of himself cut off and clothed in white ; and those old folk had presently rejected the idea of dying and had walked out again to repeat those stories to others.

This meant dulness for Hortensia ; it made her think and question her own infallibility, and wonder whether it was true or no that she owned a temper ; and if true what was the remedy ? Certainly she had a trick of snapping, forgetting there should be a period between question and answer, a time to think and count five before replying ; she did not even count one, she tacked answer to question, she would not admit the smallest comma of punctuation, she answered bite with bark. It meant nothing, it was only noise like women's talk when the tongue reaches no root into the brain ; every remark seemed to her a sword-thrust, and she had to parry at once, merely in self-defence, or be wounded ; having only one weapon, her tongue, she worked it too much and used it heedlessly, so that what sounded like offence was really defence ; it was rough like that of a cat which scratches even when it licks affectionately. Her reply to a quip sounded often like a snarl, but it was merely tongue-work. The mind of a woman works

in a zig-zag manner, and the words which fall from her mouth are so different from those dictated by the mind that the logical nature of men becomes confounded.

Hortensia concluded that her moral health was excellent, but her life required a tonic. The temper, if it existed, denoted her species merely ; the rose without a thorn would be classified differently. To spend her forces upon a man was the obvious remedy suggested by Nature ; not exactly to abuse him ; the idea which started from her mind was to love, honour and obey, but obedience was lost at the first zig-zag, honour at the second, and at about the fifth love became a bristling thing like a thistle, altogether different from what it was at the start ; but then she was an old maid and had to defend herself, not with the weapon of abuse, but to let the man know he was descended from a race of hairy anthropoids which chose to take life easily and watch the weaker sex stagger beneath burdens. According to the mind of Hortensia men were almost divine ; some way along the zig-zags they became merely gorillas, but after all fine ones ; and according to her tongue they were the equals of those oleaginous slugs which promenaded her garden slowly after the manner of retired officials, and were relegated when discovered to a position between the ground and the flat heel of her shoe to be speedily separated from lettuces and all other advantages of a successful existence.

The man to be persecuted properly would require to be free, that is to say not under the persecution of any other women ; and tame, by which Hortensia meant meek under suffering, not given to answering back, with no love for the last syllable of an argument, and with a certain repose in manner and appearance resembling the slug as the heel descended. It was needless to attempt creative art since Nature was prepared to deliver a large specimen of the desired species ready-made ; although why Nature should perform so indifferently as to produce material which

desired to burn incense before the muse called heavenly, and could never get the stuff to kindle because no fire had been given him, was not a matter soluble by a mind which worked in zig-zags, nor in circles, nor in lines as straight as roads to Acheron.

There was the anthropoid, however, and Hortensia hated it. Yalland was objectionable in every facet. He was a writer and a failure; hateful because he was a writer and could not succeed at his profession, and he would have been equally repulsive if he had succeeded; detestable because he was large and bearded, though had he been small and clean-shaven he would have been beyond all doubt contemptible; abominable because of his clothes and occasional lapses from soap; and especially loathsome because he was making a garden. What right had the wretch to oppose her, to accept her plants, and attempt to grow from them flowers to rival hers? The creature was insulting her maidenhood by attending to her instructions; he could only have committed one act as odious and have disregarded them. The next thing would be a herb-garden as fine as her own. This fellow would be patronising her in time, teaching her how things ought to be done, making his own vile suggestions about the layering of carnations, or the proper food for sweet-peas. He would soon be standing at the hedge and sneering because she could not work as hard as he did. Such slugs should be squashed at once.

Associations clustering about Cob Court, chiefly of night-walks, often brought Claud that way, and it was only decent to call, bid the lady of the garden good-day, report his own progress and inquire after hers; but on such occasions it had pleased Hortensia to be out. Sometimes she would be as conspicuous as a harvest-moon while she raked or weeded in the middle distance, but so long as she kept her back towards the visitor she could safely be away from home. Claud could not develop the

negative of Hortensia's mind, but perceiving he had become objectionable ceased his visits, wrote an ode to Inconstancy which brought him nothing, learned a little severe language but turned his head towards his own cultivated plot so that the malediction might fall there; then went forth to Moab Lane and washed—his hands were the colour of dried herbs and had lost their literary contour—murmuring sharply, "If I don't soon settle to work I shall become poor."

There came a note for Claud Yalland, rectangular, scented, and well stamped with the postman's thumb-marks; but as occult as the apocalypse. Why couldn't the man come to see her sometimes? Heaven knew it was dull enough now that Theodore had gone, and her niece was worse than dead; and there was a plague of wireworms in the garden, not to mention the east winds which kept her sneezing—Hortensia had a poor literary style—and did the man know any specific which would stop sneezes, kill wireworms, and prevent a daphne from shedding its leaves? If he did, he had better come and tell her with neighbourly kindness, and not sit in his dirty cottage trying to write stuff which no human being would care to read, though she liked his essays upon Nature sometimes, but she could probably do as well herself if she tried, and better if she had been at it twenty years. Why the man made a point of calling when he knew she would be out, and why he never offered to stay until she returned, and why the man refused to give her any information as to how his garden was progressing, were matters beyond all human conjecture. If the man liked to call on Sunday afternoon he would find her upon the premises, but if the man preferred to stay away she hoped he would, as if it was impossible for him to entertain a friendly spirit for his fellow-creatures, and he found it easier to hate and despise them all like that brute Orton, whose methods it appeared to her he was attempting to imitate and with

considerable success, he would be better dead, buried and forgotten. There was a great deal of underlining, none of which was necessary, and the third postscript very much resembled a parliamentary whip.

"Birds I can understand, and beasts I can understand," Claud muttered, "but these women obfuscate me."

The excellent thickhead did not perceive how Hortensia found herself in those days ashamed of being seen in gauntlets and goloshes ready for warfare with weeds. Old clothes and a hot face were good enough for slugs, but when it came to the heroic deed of man-squashing there must be neat apparel down to open-worked stockings, a maid's shoes and, by all the futility of that foolish tilting of years against hearts, a ribbon holding the white hair back, cherry-coloured too, which seemed to make things worse, and even more of this vanity, to wit a piece of geranium to match the ribbon and caught therein. Small wonder that the poet gasped and longed for a fresh seclusion in the presence of towels, soap, and water at boiling point; he had done much, but not enough in comparison, while Hortensia apparently had passed through a valley of scented things, and emerged rejuvenated like Vidförull casting his skin before Charlemagne—Claud knew some classics—appearing before him in her flower-decked room holding out those greatest of wonders in the poet's eyes—clean hands. She must have worked, he reflected; she must almost have sweated to have restored those fingernails to a state of virtue; he knew how the making of a garden is the ending of comely hands. She represented herself as less motherly; not so much a rival in this earth-grubbing business as a partner; her ownership of ten more years than he could claim made her a kind of sister, kind that is to say, not related; all was confusion on the side of poetry, because it was not used to scented apartments, and it had troubles and was weak since its days

had been lately Fridays without fish, while breakfasts and dinners had been according to the rule of St Benedict.

Hortensia concluded something was wrong. The man was always stupid, but to-day he was offensively idiotic, he gaped like a young chick, and could not speak grammatically; his eyes wandered and he nodded sometimes as if he had been listening to sermons. She had asked various questions about the garden, and none of them had been answered with zeal or politeness, while the stimulating remarks had been ignored altogether. She hated him still more.

"Look here, man," she cried at last. "Will you answer me? I have asked you a dozen times, twice at least, if you are ready for the herbs."

"If you please," he replied vacantly. "I'll take them with me."

"I decline to give you a thing if you won't speak properly. Are you ill?" she asked crossly.

"I am beaten," he said in a low voice which she called sulky.

"Well, go on," she snapped. "How are you beaten? Who? What? Why? I could convert a race of savages to Christianity while waiting for you to answer."

"The garden has done it," Claud answered.

"Done what?" cried Hortensia, glancing at the fire-irons, longing to use them for offensive purposes. "If the man was mine how I would use him," she muttered.

"Beaten me," said the poet steadily at last and strongly. "Shown me which way the wind blows. Made an old man of me." He drew the Indian idol from his pocket and placed it upon the carpet between them. "That thing is a devil," he went on simply. "I had a piece of golden glass, only rubbish, but it seemed to keep me going. Your brother took it and sent in exchange this little Indian beast which has brought me ill-luck. I have been playing the game of life with my own set of rules, and now I am

beaten, but I don't know by whom. When you engage in the battle of life you don't know who your opponents are. You make ready to hit out but you can't find an enemy; and yet one is there and he beats you. I was happy and succeeded in making a living until I lost the golden glass; and then this devil came and I started on the garden."

"That was my idea," said Hortensia. "Not the devil's."

"I began the garden," he went on. "It took hold of me like ten thousand hooks; I could not get away from it. It made me forget my work, my future, and my fellow-creatures. It was a damnable pleasure, worse than opium."

"The man's filthy. He's all damns and devils," she muttered.

"One night Orton came in. You will remember——"

"I have forgotten all about it. The night he went," she interrupted.

"He woke me up. I perceived that I had no work done; my average of accepted manuscripts is only one in five. I saw other things, including the larder. Then I went out and cursed the garden; I destroyed the mounds which I had built, I pulled down the pergola, I demolished the trellis-work. I went out into the lanes, dug up brambles, docks, and nettles, and I planted them in my garden. They are growing nicely," he said savagely.

Hortensia was very white and angry, but said nothing just then.

"I tried to work again but the garden had spoilt me; I could not force myself back into the old groove. That's what I mean when I say I am beaten. I have done my best all the winter and nothing has come of it. Writers who were in their prime when I came to Summerland are now dead and forgotten, while young fellows and girls who were not born then have stepped into their places. Everybody has moved on while I have remained motionless like a rotten sign-post. It's too late now. The sap

is drying up. You can't make an old tree bend. I have lost everything except happiness, and that's in danger. I have pictured myself in that cottage ten years hence——"

He stopped, actually yawned, brought his heel down upon the idol, scattered it into fragments, then continued placidly, "I have written to my father, telling him we were both fools but he was the wisest one; I have asked him for a clerkship in the business. It was not an easy thing to do. Pretty lives are for the wealthy or wise. We nondescripts must get under the smoke. I don't want your herbs, Miss Vipont, thank you," he said boisterously. "Keep the beastly little things."

Hortensia flamed up. She came across to him, hovered as if she intended to pounce and strike; and the colour upon her cheeks was not æsthetic; it was rude poppy-red, not rose-flush.

"You're a brute!" she cried passionately. "That's what you are. I hate you writers, you Yallands and Ortons who think yourselves Shakespeares and Bacons when you are worms and caterpillars. You are a brute and you have lived like one, in beastliness for twenty years, and when a woman is fool enough to pity you and show you what you might be, and point out to you how you should improve yourself, you turn and abuse her. You swear at her, call her an old devil. You declare she has brought you ill-luck."

Claud sat in sorrow and silence, his ruined hands clasped, his eyes staring at the fragments of Gautama, almost longing for Birmingham and the varnish brush. Women became more marvellous in his sight than ever.

"You have been hanging about Cob Court all the time we've been here," this dreadful little creature continued. "First it was poor Margaret you were after—I know what filthy minds you writers have—and when she would have nothing to do with you it's Theodore you try to flatter.

I've no doubt you have borrowed money off him ; and then you say he has broken into your miserable pig-sty and robbed you. What have you ever possessed ? Your golden glass—and I suppose he stole your silver as well, your family plate, your heirlooms ? ”

“ I must go home,” Claud muttered, rising and blundering to the door, thinking of his lonely lanes ; but Hortensia swept before him like a thunderstorm so that he could not escape.

“ Then you try me,” she shouted. “ A simple old thing you thought me, one of these silly old maids who live to be squeezed by others. She's got some money and I'll get it out of her ; I'll go round and praise her garden, I'll flatter her by making a garden myself. It will please the old fool, and it won't cost me anything as she will lend me the tools and give me the plants. That's what you said to yourself. You called me old ; I know you called me old, and that's why I hate you. Call me as silly as you like, but I won't be called old.”

“ I'll call you what I like,” said Claud roughly. “ You can't hate me more than I hate you.”

“ Get out,” screamed Hortensia, never ceasing to prevent him from doing so. “ Get out and hang yourself. You tried to win my sympathy, you did all you could to make me sorry for your poverty, and you tried to wheedle money out of me to pay your rent, and—and to buy things for other women.”

“ That's a whopper,” said simple Claud. “ I'd like to bump your head against the wall for that.”

“ You have been hanging about here all the winter. Polly tells me she has sent you off dozens of times. You came to see what you could pick up, and you stole my trowel and my best gardening-gloves ; I know you did for I can't find them, and you say you're a poacher.”

“ What good would your beastly gloves be to me ? ”

" You could sell them and get yourself a loaf of bread."

" This is what they call female nature," he muttered.

" That's it. Begin to swear again. You came here to-day to call me a devil, to damn me—on a Sunday too—to curse me with the filthy language which is part of your daily life. You write of ferns and bluebells. A dictionary of foul language is more in your line."

" I would dedicate it to you," he growled.

" I'll tell all the neighbours what I think of you ; I'll get them to mob you. I'll buy your dirty little cottage and turn you out ; I'll persecute you wherever you go. I'll teach you to call me an old woman and make a fool of me. You have ruined my life, you have destroyed my faith in human nature, and now you have got all you can out of me, you laugh and sneer and call me an old maid."

" I can laugh as much as I like. I don't get many chances. If I want to laugh at you, or a scarecrow, I will," said Claud fiercely. " You have done for me. I managed to scrape along until you put this miserable craze for gardening into my head. You wanted to ruin me and you have succeeded, but I'll beat you yet. I am going out of the place and back to Birmingham ; I'll smear myself with varnish and get rich ; and poetry and gardening can go to the deuce ; and I hope your garden will be plagued with wireworms and cankerworms and every other sort of worm. I hope a cloud of locusts will descend upon it and slugs as large as rats ; I hope there won't be a single green thing left. Buy my cottage if you like, and may the next wind blow it down, for I shan't be in it ; I am going to leave my lonely lanes. It's no use telling you how I love them for you have no sympathy with Nature, your garden is just a silly piece of vanity, the pleasure of idleness ; it is a vice and you are a humbug. I don't want your sympathy and help ; they are brambles and nettles, and I can get them in any hedge. I am

going into the smoke, to turn my flowers into varnish and my poems into oil-barrels. If it was lawful for a man to shake a woman I should be delighted," he concluded.

There was only one course open to Hortensia, and this she took. Subsiding into a chair she wept bitterly, leaving the way to the door unprotected; and the ill-mannered Claud made towards it at once, longing for the outer atmosphere and freedom.

"Come back," sobbed Hortensia. "You must stay. I'll scream for Polly. I'll rouse the neighbours. I will not be treated in this way."

Claud hesitated, then came to her side slowly; he was feeling faint, as that Sunday had been more of a Friday than usual.

"I don't mean it," she sobbed. "You know I don't. I am angry and worried through living here alone without Theodore or Margaret; and Mr Ramrige hasn't been near me for weeks. I am sick of everything. You didn't mean all those nasty things you said?"

"I meant them all," he answered; and at that she sobbed more noisily than ever.

"You hate me and I hate you," he went on.

"My hatred is not actual loathing. I can tolerate you sometimes," she murmured.

"I thoroughly detest you always," he said. "Give me your handkerchief," he went on roughly, muttering, "I never saw such a mess," as he dabbed her eyes and scoured her cheeks like a charwoman scrubbing a floor until Hortensia cried for mercy; and then all of a sudden they found themselves laughing.

"You must stay and have supper. There is plenty of cold beef and an apple-tart. You shall stay. I will tell Polly"; and Hortensia hurried off, quite a different being, feeling she had somehow avenged the insult upon her honour, while Claud made some awkward movements and

decided he would stay because it seemed necessary, and then he went to the grandfather clock and pushed the hands on recklessly.

When the mistress returned Polly attended her in a breathless fashion—the excellent domestic had a trick of perspiring when doing nothing—and she exclaimed at once :

“ There ain’t no time for doing nothing ; soon as a body has finished one meal there’s another. ’Tis all work and worry from morning to night, but I don’t grumble. Not an hour to myself ; I ain’t been inside chapel since Christmas, and I ain’t been off my legs since seven o’clock, when it ought to have been light but it warn’t, and I couldn’t find the matches and broke a lamp-glass and trod on the pieces and cut my foot ; and I did think I was going to sit down and read my Bible for half an hour, and now ’tis supper-time, and then bed, and up again to work and worry, and the weather’s cruel, and the old clock’s a liar, missis, but ’tis no use my giving an opinion for you never listens. I’ll be found dead on the kitchen floor one of these days, and you’ll never get another woman to work for ye same as I’ve done, without a word of complaint from one year’s end to the other.”

“ Polly seems to possess a personality,” said Claud, as they went out into the garden.

“ And it gets no smaller,” Hortensia answered.

The change in them both was complete. They were no longer slug and gardener, but man and woman, and the hostility between them was no larger than a pin-point ; but it was there, for both were fretting, Hortensia for tenants to occupy those three unlet corners of her life, Claud for his lanes and liberty and those restless mid-nights, all of which were to be taken from him. Disappointment was heavy, but that was not the burden which made him unsteady in his walk and uncertain in his answers. He had overestimated his strength and had

taxed his body too much ; it was in rebellion and declining to be satisfied with the Benedictine rule.

“ If you want to be a gardener you must teach yourself,” Hortensia was saying, unable to think of any subject except the one which had possessed her life. “ Have nothing to do with books or you will give up the whole thing in a week. Before you put in a single plant you are directed to dig what they call a trench ; you must turn your garden into a sewage-farm, and as for taking cuttings, why, my dear soul, it must be done at a certain time, a particular kind of slip is to be cut with a certain instrument in a certain part, and put into a certain kind of soil at a certain angle. They have to write all that stuff to make a book, but it’s utter rubbish. When I put in my plants I scratch up the soil with my fingers, ram the roots in, tread ’em down, and they grow just as well as if I’d dug a grave beneath ’em ; and when I want a cutting I break off the first bit which comes handy, stick it in anywhere, and it always grows. Plants are like animals, and if you are fond of the things you can do what you like with them.”

Hortensia rambled on for a time, and then her anger began to bubble again like boiling pitch. The man was paying no attention whatever ; he walked beside her, staring blankly, stumbling in sheer clumsiness, treating her as contemptuously as the earth he trod on. She stood it as well as she could, but when she received in reply to one of her questions a remark which was as inappropriate as any epistolary *non sequitur* of her own, her eyes darkened.

“ You are not listening to a word that I say,” she cried.

“ Really,” replied Claud stupidly.

“ Making a complete idiot of me,” she snapped. “ He’ll call me a devil again presently.”

They came to the gate which divided the upper from the lower garden, and Hortensia stood aside to let the

man open it. He did no such thing, but made another stumble, more grievous than any which had preceded it, and set his large boot upon the crown of a polyanthus doing it no good.

"The sulky brute; did it intentionally. Open the gate," she cried sharply.

The poet heard her and was aroused; his pride came back, and he instructed her shortly to make less noise.

"Open that gate," she shouted.

"If it was a heavy one I might," he said solemnly. "But it's light. You can open it just as well as I can. I'm not your servant," he added angrily.

"You shall open it. I'll stand here till midnight."

"Then you'll catch cold. I'll go round," said Claud. "I'd walk twenty miles rather than open it. This creature thinks she can trample on me."

"If you leave me I'll pick up stones and throw them at you. I'll break your head."

"Women can't throw. I've learnt that much about them," said Claud; then he put a hand to his head as if he felt giddy. Hortensia had already noticed that he looked ill but put it down to the man's vile temper. She stood there, somewhat frail and pretty, called him several names, expressed a hope that his father would have nothing to do with him, and concluded by mentioning that her hatred had at last entered the malignant stage. "All men are brutes," she said. "But the blasphemous brute is the vilest thing on earth."

Suddenly Claud woke up. He took her by the arm, pushed her forward, and said in a threatening voice, "Open that gate. Do as I tell you, and don't speak a word. Go on! Open it!"

She obeyed; why she never knew, and it was also impossible to explain what pleasure there could be in seeing that great truculent brute standing there, and hearing him shout at her, and feeling she was obeying him. She

not only opened the gate but held it so while the imperious poet passed through; but she reviled him all the same, though he took no notice and walked on, into the house as if it had been his own, lurching from side to side, and trampling on the flower-beds as if intent upon doing all the damage to the garden that he could.

Hortensia lagged behind, somewhat frightened, and disgusted to discover how rapidly her anger was departing, and amazed when a certain emotion essentially feminine came and remained in its stead and she found that weakness pity in her heart. This man, usually so polite and tractable, so helpless and adapted to be trodden on, had been as savage as herself, had opposed and beaten her, and had incidentally almost made her cease to loathe him. Was it his poverty that had changed him, or his pride, or the feeling that he might be leaving Summerland for ever, or did he really look upon her with disgust because with all kindness she had harmed his life by compelling him to make a garden?

"I won't be afraid of the man. I'll talk to him again," she said. "He behaves as if he owned the place."

Approaching the wall of her cottage, she heard a noise, not at all a pleasant one, a kind of ravening, and she stopped, remembering that the window of the tiny dining-room, where meals were always spread when she had guests, was close and screened from her by the ivy; and it was generally left open as the little room was stuffy; and as it was Sunday evening Polly would have laid the supper and then gone to her Bible reading. Hortensia made another step and shivered. The sounds were beastly; there was nothing man-like about them; there were gasps and chokings and gulplings, as if some creature was being strangled and struggled to find breath. There were moans too, and sighs of eagerness or of relief, and then a voice half-stifled panted, "I can't help it. I don't know what she'll say."

Hortensia put up her hands and very gently pressed the ivy leaves aside. It was a low window ; the table was necessarily close beside it ; and not a yard from her face was another, that of Claud, but no longer human. This poet, usually so gentle and quiet, so thorough a man, was now a beast ; the animal type was plainly marked upon that face, especially in the eyes and in the mouth and working neck, and his hands had become claws which snatched at food and tore it, disdaining cutlery, and his nostrils were dilated as if they were sniffing at fresh meat, while without a moment's pause he gulped and ravened ; for he had reached that stage of starvation which makes the perfect man an animal ; and finding himself within sight and smell of good food restraint was not possible ; he could not wait for the mistress or for her invitation to partake of it, but stupid and half fainting for lack of it he had hurried to the table like a famished dog, and like a dog to swallow without biting.

Hortensia did a simple thing. She passed indoors, and called in a voice she hoped was angry, " Don't wait for me, Mr Yalland. I am not hungry " ; and then she went upstairs and hid her face upon the bed, and like many a sad old maiden owned to heaven that she was starving too.

CHAPTER XVIII

TEMPESTUOUS

EVERY morning Jasper entered the school-room upstairs carrying a small portfolio of engravings, for pictures were his text-books, to give the pupil a lesson when she was in the mood to attend. Theodore would listen at the door, starting violently when he heard a laugh or a word which suggested Margaret, and shrinking with a sigh when the next sound would be an oath ; it was impossible to cure Lucy of her trick of swearing, but Jasper would not despair of training her in other ways. Books had taken meteoric flights from the window ; at his favourite tales she put her fingers in her ears ; he showed her pictures and she was conquered.

A gradual process ; some of those treasured engravings were destroyed, but the skill of the teacher struggled against the current, his eyes subdued hers, his mind made her sleepy, his hands and tongue brought scenes before her ; now a street in Cologne, and he cast upon her the spell of architecture ; a fisherman's wife praying beside a wayside cross for her husband's return ; or an old-fashioned garden which made for peace. The master chose his subjects carefully, bringing no picture likely to make her restless, carefully avoiding any reference to passion or what made for a hasty growth ; forced love and Nature's suggestion of it, the sun upon moist peat, insects dancing upon a swamp. He left the low woods

and sought the heights. Somewhere before him was the mind of Margaret which had loved the arts, therefore he sought to teach Lucy by an appeal to the arts.

In these efforts he had been aided by the atmosphere. Never until then did he realise how greatly the elements influenced human nature. There seemed to him something of the hibernating animal about Lucy; she was a sun-basking creature and the fierceness of the winter made her torpid. She accepted her imprisonment because she had no energy to fight against it; she rubbed her eyes and yawned, blasphemed contentedly, and was well satisfied to sleep; that wild life had gone out. The growth had died down, the root was passing through its winter; new life would not return until the ground was hot again.

"Who gave you the name of Lucy?" he asked, but she could not tell him, though it seemed to her a ridiculous question as she could not imagine herself called by any other name; so Jasper spoke to Theodore and he referred the matter to his sister; and then it came to them that when Margaret had been ten years old, a servant girl, engaged in a house opposite their own, had murdered her mistress for the sake of a few trinkets, and the child had been terrified for weeks afterwards because she had seen a fearful shadow upon the blind of that room; and the name of this servant, who had been referred to by the judge at her trial as "a most infamous person," was Lucy. This explanation was not convincing, especially as Lucy was a common name about the neighbourhood of Summerland, but it served. Terror and crime leave marks upon the mind of a child, and Margaret had always been sensitive.

During a warm week at the beginning of April life stirred. Lucy arose one night and in a wonderfully silent manner made a ruin of her room.

"I have been buried," she cried. "I feel as if I was making my way out of the earth. One must do something," she told her father, but so brightly and contentedly

that he could not feel afraid of her. She seemed indeed happy as if knowing that the time of her imprisonment was over ; and when Jasper came she smacked his face lightly and pulled his beard, as if she had been a child, and laughing like one ; but this mirth was to him terrible and made him fear his teaching had been wasted. Lucy was not dead, she had only been sleeping, and now she was to continue the life she had been compelled to abandon during the storms and frosts of last November.

" See here, old man," she said merrily, when he came at school-time. " I've been living with you long enough. I must get off now and find my own mate. I'm a young girl, you know, and we can't go on like this. You must get hold of someone older."

He presented one of her favourite pictures, but she knocked it out of his hands and told him not to make a fool of himself.

" I will tell you the story of Melusina," he said.

" Go and stuff yourself with your stories. What do you take me for ? " she said crossly. " The sun is shining and I must go."

" Where ? "

" Home, of course. Back to Windwhistle. I have been here for days ; more than a week I should think."

So she knew nothing of the five months' sleep ; the life of Margaret had been put off during autumn with that dreadful wailing which Claud had listened to, and now new life was rising from the root.

" There's something wrong, though," she went on. " I can't get about like I used. What makes me like this ? Have you been playing any larks with me ? "

Jasper left her. He could not bear that question from lips which had once been Margaret's. Going to Theodore he told him of the change and owned, " I have worked. Like most men I have failed. Your daughter must go along the way which has been made for her."

The little antiquary had been happier of late. He had acquired an ancient clock and had found joy in taking it to pieces and in reconstructing it; and the long lethargy of Lucy had given him hope. His faith in Jasper was unbounded; if anyone could bring Margaret back he would; and he had imagined himself back at Cob Court by summer time, criticising the doings of Hortensia, with his little delicate Melissa listening to the murmur of the water and the song of the wind. Now that he heard this new voice of the master he trembled.

"There is a menace in that word go," he chirped dismally. "You would connect with it the word insanity?"

The master walked to the window and gazed at the untroubled sky, so far away and yet so near his eyes. To this sky he spoke, without turning himself, "Vengeance should only follow an injury when it may do good. Leave your enemy to punish himself, but if your friend hurts you strike him. The man who thinks he can follow all his life a course of vice is a fool; he is a creature running from a foe, who moves slowly, but is sure to overtake him."

"When you talk like that I count my fingers," said Theodore in his quaint and sorrowful way.

"She must go to perform her duty," the master said. "If the death of Margaret is to be avenged let the blow be struck by the hand which was Margaret's. There is a justice in this. I had not foreseen it; I have foreseen nothing. I can only write the word failure now and stand aside. Lucy shall have her liberty. She would take it in spite of us now that her strength has returned. We men are given too much liberty," he went on, thinking again of Cuthbert. "We move about as we like, and apparently the only restraining influences over us are the laws which we make ourselves. We pass through life destroying for the sake of recreation; we wear out ourselves and others, we kill the beasts, we trample down the plants; we are always killing, and when we do try to

restore, what a pitiable attempt it is ; and so we think ourselves strong because life yields before us, until one day we tread upon some poisonous thing, too small to be noticed, and then we go down like a bruised grass-stem. I have been a master and have taught no one, not even myself."

"What has this to do with Margaret ? " asked Theodore, who had no liking for philosophy.

"Do not mention that name."

"I will not call her Lucy," cried the antiquary bitterly. "She has no right to that name. I thought you would bring my little girl back ; I felt sure of it when I heard how interested she could be in your pictures. My resolution is to return that ancient glass to the poet," he muttered. "It has shed upon me no golden light."

"I have called to Margaret every day, but she has not answered," said Jasper. "My effort has been to educate Lucy, and so to get beneath her wild self and find the vital force which is the real Margaret. It is there ; sometimes I have felt myself approaching it, or could hear as I thought its cry, and I have held out my hands in response as if they could help. I have struggled my hardest, but failure is the end of it. Lucy must have her liberty, go to Orton and drag him down with her."

"I will not have it," cried Theodore excitedly. "Mr Ramrige, sir, poetry and philosophy have played havoc with the house of Vipont. We have been illustrious, we have lions, golden and open-mouthed, upon our coat of arms, and shall a daughter of this ancient house go forth to walk the streets ? Bishops of undoubted respectability are among my ancestors," he said wildly, using any word or lie that came to him, having long ago persuaded himself he had been born a Vipont and not stolen the name from the stone-dead bishop. "My daughter, Sacharissa Dominica—such were the names I had intended for her, but her mother had a simple soul, the best in the world

but for a Vipont simple, and she knew no Latin—my daughter, Mr Philosopher, is not under any conditions whatsoever to dwell with any man, however famous, in a state of concubinage. That she has done so already is not to me a sufficient reason why she should do so again. That she is of an age to choose her own way and her own profession is also no reason. Because your experiment has failed you would let her go, but I shall remain with her, follow her by day and night ; if the evil spirit will not leave the child, neither will her father. I have a shortness of breath, Mr Ramrige ; I have also a buzzing in my ears. Excuse me, please ” ; and the queer little man succumbed upon the floor.

“ One of the evils of a strong mind is a contempt for weakness,” the master murmured as he held the antiquary’s hands, for at such moments Theodore had a trick of gnawing his fingers. “ This man’s love for his daughter has always taken the form of helplessness where her safety was concerned. Her mind was allowed to blow about loosely. She grew without support. Some growths do not need any ; others fall to the ground without a stay. If a father is not a support, a daughter must find one for herself ; and the prop which calls itself a lover is often rotten.”

He sent for Hortensia, as he had promised to do if any emergency arose, but when she came it was hard to know her, for money had been spent of late in the booths of Vanity Fair. Short skirts and boots never made for moorland pathways, a new and complete manner of arranging the hair, a cunning hat, and an abundance of jingling trifles to avert the evil eye or to attract the right one. Hortensia had become exaltata in the highest, forgetful of horticulture, full of plans for laying out herself and making a spring garden of her face. The work was well done. No woman is a spinster at heart ; and if she desires to alter her condition, and at the same time makes

no attempt to play the flower and spread a small feast of honey for the drones, her want of effort is certainly disgraceful.

"It is getting darker," said Jasper. "Let us hope that is a sign we are near the dawn, but before it comes another storm or two must trouble you."

"It won't," she said decidedly. "I have become completely callous. I am as selfish as a cat upon the hearthrug. I seem to have been an old maid all my life, and for the future I mean to compel existence to pay what it owes. It is no use submitting. If you want anything you must first ask, then shout, and if you are not given it then, the best plan is to go and take it. At the present time I'm in the shouting stage."

"I must speak to you about your brother," he said. "He is in danger of becoming a confirmed epileptic."

"It is worry about the poor child. Theodore has a curious way of expressing devotion. If you had seen him with his wife you would have supposed she was his greatest burden, and yet he loved her, and I know has never ceased to long for her. It has always been my impression that he worried her so much to get well that he killed her."

"He eats little and sleeps less. I hear him walking about his bedroom at night and talking, changing his voice continually until I have been almost persuaded he was not alone."

"It is worry," she repeated. "He would be well again if he had Margaret. It is she you want to speak about. You deepest men are shallow where a woman is concerned. You have failed with her; I can read that in your eyes. You have something unpleasant to say; I can see that too. Well, speak out, and for goodness' sake forget I'm an old maid, and regard me as a human being, a doctor, lawyer, confessor, anyone you can talk to without pulling up your tongue every instant."

"It is a difficult matter," he answered. "We men who

pass our lives in the gentle atmosphere of the library feel stunned when we are compelled to face the realisms of Nature——”

“Stop that roundabout way. Regard me as a matron, not as a simpering school-girl. I am tired of repeating that old maids are perfectly well aware that their nativity has no connection with the kitchen-garden. We will blush as much as you like, but we will not plead an impossible state of ignorance. When will it take place?”

“I was preparing myself to ask you that question. I desire your presence, then, for the sake of Theodore.”

Hortensia gave the promise, and added, “Dr Hele, I suppose?”

“He is inclined to gossip.”

“Generally, but not about a thing like this; he is too respectable. I will frighten him, anyhow; threaten to beat him if he says a word. He’s a quiet, gentle old thing, and only gossips to hide his enthusiasm for erysipelas and his ignorance of everything else.”

“A doctor is associated in my mind with various attendants.”

“Nurses, undertakers, sextons,” she said lightly, when he paused. “We must keep them out. If a woman is wanted I’ll be one. Midwives drink and chatter. There has not been a breath of scandal so far; the poor girl has lost her senses and stays under the protection of the magician in his castle upon the hill until she recovers. The people are sorry for us and her, and suspect nothing.”

“My housekeeper would give her services. She has received a medical training, and has been married.”

“Then she is far better educated than I am. I shall not be required,” said Hortensia; and that matter being settled she went off on a fresh tack. “Have you heard anything of the man lately, the drivelling man? I hate the creature, but take an interest in it.”

“Yalland, you mean? You change your subject so

violently. I have seen him, and he told me his father is dead, leaving him nothing——”

“That’s as good as a legacy to me. I am glad,” said the little woman savagely. “He deserves nothing, for he’s a brute. I believe he passes my garden in the night like the creature in the parable, and throws his dock-seed and nettle-seed over my flower-beds.”

“He has been in deep water lately.”

“Deep mud,” she snapped.

“He wrote asking for some position in the business. His brother replied, mentioned that their father had died lately, and refused poor Claud’s application in a very unkindly way.”

“I would like to have that letter,” she said. “It should be framed and hung in my sitting-room, so that I could point it out to the wretch every time he came to abuse me.”

“You are hard upon the man,” said Jasper. “Great difficulties and poverty should command sympathy. He was meant to be a poet, but reached the world during an age which is deaf to poetry, and his early training was a drag; that and his lack of concentration, for he has been idle I fear, he has not done his best; he has spent years of life walking in his lanes, dreaming of power, expecting it to burst forth, and now he has reached an age when the fire should be burning clearly and there is scarcely a smoulder. Another of my pupils,” he mused. “Like the rest, a failure.”

“A big coarse fellow; a rough rude pachyderm—I hope that’s the word. With those great hands he ought to be rolling barrels. I suppose he’ll starve now,” she said cheerfully. “Next time I see him I’ll give him twopence.”

“You are not the Miss Vipont whom I used to watch gardening. You have put off years and put on unkindliness.”

"This Yalland insulted me, swore at me, called me old," she cried, standing none too closely by the truth. "I have listened to you often; I am a result of your teaching. You found something in me that was nearly dead, and you brought it to life and made it grow; and now you say you don't understand what you have done. Have you ever preserved poppy-seed, Mr Ramrige? One year I saved the seed of my favourite poppy, and next spring I sowed it, and from that seed I had a crop of every kind of poppy, both double and single, but not a single specimen of the flower which had given me the seed. You have cast some of yours upon a woman's mind, and the growth is very different from what you looked for. You may know something of the seed, but you don't understand the soil in which you plant it. What man of you can cultivate a woman's mind and tell what the result will be? When men try to teach women, they are like children digging in the sand; they make no progress, their books are at fault, their reasoning is done for. You must seize hold of a woman, roughly if you like, kiss her, swear you love her—it matters little whether you speak the truth or not," cried Hortensia with moist eyes and a hot face. "But that's the only way you men can teach a woman's mind to open."

She went off to perform one of those charitable acts which women delight in, but doing it in secret, and murmuring to herself, "He preached to me about the duties of women, but all that he succeeded in doing was to make me see the rights of women. Yalland has taught me how to swear, and to show I have profited by his lesson I will say, 'Damn the injustice which condemns a woman to lead a lonely life whether she wants it or not.' Mine is a loving nature and I have been told to get rid of it; I have longed for children of my own, I have cried for them, feeling sure I was meant to have them; and one philosopher will tell me my longings are indecent, and another

that a woman cannot justify her existence if she dies childless. And now I am too old ; I am fifty ; my life is empty and useless to myself. I am told I must devote myself to others and have nothing for myself. The conclusion of the matter is I am in rebellion against civilisation."

The master murmured as he watched her sprightly figure going out, " I am beginning to learn. She too has taught me something."

His mind had always been engrossed upon the future while he had watched the present slipping past, regarding it as a matter of far less importance than the days which were to come, forgetting that a man may shape his future largely out of the material afforded by the present, or rather believing that the future was fixed and inevitable, not to be changed by any effort, but as constant as the movements of the planets round the sun. While he concentrated his thoughts upon teaching Lucy he was thinking of her future, trying to bring it nearer, for that by the law of attraction seemed possible ; he was preparing her for the future, as in the old days he had prepared boys for their battle with the world. " This will be of use," had been his motto and when a lad did well he would say, " Your success in life will come the sooner " ; and yet he could not perceive the simple truth that the future was a result and a mutable quality, that the history of a life was not written beforehand, but compiled slowly like a diary day by day. As a mystic he was inconsequent because of the impossibility of finding premises upon which to base his reasoning.

It seemed like one of Nature's satires that Lucy should be more innocent than Hortensia ; and yet it was so. Fiery and passionate as she was she knew nothing of herself, nor of the duties and responsibilities of womanhood ; she knew of Margaret, and yet all that Margaret knew was hidden from her. She had scoffed at the idea of matrimony

because she could not understand what it meant. There was pathos in this ignorance because it could not possibly be enlightened. She simply grew and felt strong or weak, clinging to life, struggling to retain it, but unable to progress mentally beyond the birth-stage. Like Cuthbert she was incapable of loving, but she clung to him madly during the time of growth because he was the principle of her existence. This longing for Cuthbert was returning during the warm days when his mind would be active, but with it came another and a fresh emotion, for new growth was beginning, and Lucy was afraid.

One evening the master found her in a state of terror. She had been screaming and Theodore, frightened by the memory of those night-cries of Margaret, ran out of the house and made himself a ludicrous sight by tumbling down the terraces.

"Where is that woman?" she cried, holding Jasper's arm, shivering violently.

"There is no woman near except the housekeeper," he answered.

"She is in the next room. I heard her move; I thought I heard her speak. Keep her out. She means to kill me."

"Are you thinking of Margaret?"

"Margaret be damned. She is a weak little fool. This woman is cold and strong—awful strong. She could throw you down and jump on you. I should have no chance to beat her if she got hold of me. I don't know anything much about her, but I know she's here. I heard her outside and got in a beastly funk; she could do for me with one hand."

"Does any name occur to you?" he asked tremulously.

"So you're in a funk too. Of course I know her name. You told me once. You gave me an idea she was about looking for me; you ain't half a bad old chap for giving me the tip. Where can I get to hide if she finds me?"

"The name," he cried.

"Mary. You know that as well as I do."

That moment the past returned and Jasper was again walking in the grounds of the school, but far away from that fretful boy, passing into the chapel, gazing at the red lamp, shaping his golden beard between his hands, and thinking secretly that he might yet be made something much greater than his fellow-men, half god, half hero. He had conquered, given new life, made a living creature; he had played the creative god against Cuthbert's creative devil. Too much pride and strength were there then as in the past.

"I know her," he said deeply. "She is mine. I called her while you were in the winter sleep. I looked into her eyes and taught her, and brought light to her as she lay in prison. I showed her what was good and pure and beautiful; and now she lives and stirs."

"You have got her here—in the house," screamed Lucy. "She will catch hold of me with those great white hands—I can see them as hard as marble—she'll take me by the throat and choke my life out. Let me out; let me go home. It frightens me—that cold white face."

She almost flung herself at the door and tried to barricade it; while the master folded his arms and watched her with as much pity as a victor has.

"You have never seen her," he said.

"I know what she is like. She hates me."

"You hated Margaret. You showed her no pity."

"She was brutal to me. She kept me locked up—I could beat her. Mary is too strong."

"She is not outside, Lucy."

"You swear that? You haven't got her in the house? I believe you have trapped me. Why am I here? Why am I like this? I'm a poor ignorant girl. Why am I treated so cruelly?"

"Margaret, Margaret," he murmured. "If you could only come into your own eyes, how I would pity her."

"There is someone outside ; moving about, listening," she cried, holding on to him. "Save me from her. I ain't done nothing to you, mister," she wailed in a touching illiterate way. "Everyone seems to be against me, but I don't bear any ill-will, except 'tis for Margaret. I'll do what you tell me ; I'll look at the pictures and listen to the stories ; I'll do what you like if you will keep Mary away."

It was only Theodore listening, mopping his forehead which was hot and scratched with his tumbles, saying mournfully, "The voice of Lucy but the scream of Sacharissa. I thought she was in one of her bad dreams and calling me."

That night the mouth of the hell of myth seemed to open in God's Garden. The sky had been clear at sunset ; later some clouds swept up like smoke from a burning, and wind followed. The air was dry and filled with quivering moonlight ; there was no moisture upon the grass nor any spot of rain ; merely wind.

Those screams were not all connected with the atmosphere. Every door seemed to be blown open and a wild light was in every room, either the glow of a lamp, or an emanation from those whirling clouds, or mystical moonlight. The hidden sources of life were welling up. The master found himself in the passage shuddering like the house ; at Theodore's door appeared a face, no longer brown and small, and every feature was fixed, stone-like and frozen, even the eyes which were distended, seeing nothing, but curious and interested as if they were gazing upon a marvellous pageant such as no human eye had seen before.

"I must not speak to him," the master murmured.

Those screams continued, and when Jasper opened the door of Lucy's room they struck him like a gust :

"Take her away. She has been leaning over the bed trying to get her hands on me. Cuthbert, come to me.

Save me, Cuthbert. I am yours and you have deserted me. Cuthbert! Cuthbert!"

"Help me, Vipont," he cried incautiously as her hands came upon his face.

The sound of his name acted like a bullet in Theodore's brain. He dropped at once, the expression on his face altered, and in spite of the wind the master could hear the dull grating of his teeth upon a baluster.

"This is a scene to be forgotten," he cried.

"Cuthbert, my love and my life. They have taken me away from you. I cannot find you; I am lost and done for if you will not come. Cuthbert!" she screamed so wildly that another door opened and the quiet house-keeper appeared.

"See to him," her master shouted, and the woman removed Theodore's head from the balusters and supported him in her arms as if she had been nursing a child.

The screams became incoherent but the name of Cuthbert kept on sounding like the strokes of a passing bell. "Cuthbert, come to me. Cuthbert, save me from Mary. Cuthbert, give me back my liberty. Cuthbert, save me from death. Cuthbert, my maker and my life"; and the tempest went on roaring, and the moonlight which seemed dreadful fell upon their faces.

The master stood beside the bed holding Lucy down until, as her agony increased, all traces of humanity left her, and from scratching and spitting her conduct became so vile that he could hardly touch her or stay near; while Theodore who had freed himself ran to and fro laughing joyously.

"Let me hold her, master," cried the woman.

"Get a towel and wipe her face—her poor face."

There was another struggle, a rending of sheets and as it seemed of life; and then Theodore trotted forth conceitedly with a blanket coiled upon his shoulder and passed cautiously along the passage muttering, "I shall have

him. He has escaped me once and I had to fly for my life, but I shall have him in my net at the next cast. There he is edging away under the wall. Hark at the people shouting. I have fought in this character a hundred times, and I've killed the man with the sword every time. They will put up a statue to me in one of the public places, to the modern Hercules, the famous Theodore. An opening ! I have him ! " he yelled and cast his blanket across the rail of the staircase, then rushed back to his room shouting, " Another miss ! he's after me," banged the door, dragged himself beneath the bed ; while the screams of Lucy began to lose their violence, and the wind descended, and every minute made the moonlight brighter.

" She is dying," said Jasper.

" No, sir," the woman answered. " But it is time for the doctor."

" I will fight my way to Summerland. It will be calm in the valley. Is it safe to leave you ? "

" She is worn out, and the gentleman would harm no one. He's quiet now and will go to sleep."

" All over," he murmured. " The house is almost quiet. Only a few minutes, but we live many lives while a storm passes."

" Mind the wind on the terrace, sir."

" I will keep beside the wall," he answered ; and wrapping his cloak tightly round him he went out, thankful to be in the free and open spaces away from the horror of the house.

Morning came, very cold like a departed spirit revisiting the earth clad in misty stuff ; without sun to add the warm body of life ; almost terrible as an April morning can be ; but the wind was exhausted, and none of the mystical sounds of the moor approached God's Garden where the master sat in his misty room with his eyes shut waiting, and Hortensia walked the passages trembling, and Theodore lay upon his bed twitching, laughing and

bubbling at the mouth. A certain door was shut. The silence was not much broken even there.

A young doctor, recently qualified, was in attendance, the old practitioner of the district being ill. The planets were working well if they had sent him, for Dr Hele had no strength of mind to do what was dreadful, even if it seemed necessary that shame and horror might be spared; but young men have steadiness of nerves and are more apt to serve their fellow-creatures when the pinch comes.

Jasper looked up as the doctor joined him. So gloomy was the room that they could hardly see each other's face and it was as well; but the old man knew that the younger had an ugliness with him, for he had not yet learnt to control himself and he moved like a messenger of evil. The master threw drowsiness away, lifted himself, and said, "You bring bad news?"

Hesitation was an answer. The young man began to walk up and down the room somewhat excitedly, but stepping gently as if afraid of making any noise.

"You may require me to do you a service," he said at last.

"She is alive?"

"She lives but is extremely weak." He stopped his walk and said sharply, "Would you care to tell me the history of this case?"

So Jasper told as much of the story as he could, referring to Cuthbert merely as "a well-known man."

"Influence of a morbid mind upon one weak, nervous, neurotic. This young lady is not married?"

"She is not."

"An affair of passion under unique circumstances."

"What have you come to tell me?" Jasper whispered.

"The woman does not know. I sent her out of the room and have locked the door. I am the only one who knows."

Jasper noticed then he was holding a key.

"Come with me."

"Miss Vipont must be told."

"She may be told," came the answer. "But she must not join us."

Then the doctor paused and added, "You are strong?"

"I call myself so."

"Then come."

"Tell me," said Jasper tremulously. "Is it male or female?"

"That is a natural question; but I cannot answer it."

Lucy was lying motionless, looking dead, but her pulse was normal. The master looked, and the blinds were drawn down.

"Alive?"

"It will live and grow."

"Unless——" Jasper whispered.

"It must be so. We have a certain latitude in such matters. Only you and I will know."

"Thank you," said Jasper simply.

"Leave me for a few moments," said the doctor, taking something out of his bag.

The master went out and heard the door locked behind him.

He went to Hortensia, who was lying down as she felt ill with all the whisperings, and told her, "It is over. There will be nothing to make us—to make you—remember."

"Is it dead?" she whispered.

"It is dead."

The doctor came out. His face was ghastly and he asked for brandy.

"A strange start to my career," he said, trying to smile. "Would you empty that basin? My hands are unsteady. I have wrapped it up. I will make out the certificate for a still-birth. Get it buried at once."

Jasper went to Hortensia, remained with her a few minutes, then returned.

“Miss Vipont agrees with me,” he said. “Her brother is too ill to be approached. We must preserve this scandal from the neighbourhood. As there was no life—my grounds are lonely; I have marked a place beside the stream where I would like to lie myself. The ground is soft there and easy to dig.”

Before the mists had cleared away the thing was done.

CHAPTER XIX

BIOGENETIC

HORTENSIA had settled down to a course of grumbling. On the one side her brother, on the other a young woman who was no relation ; and between them her own florid and budding self listening to the call of the garden, for it was the fourth month of the year, the time when she should have been an earth-opening goddess, single-minded, one-idea'd, with rich soil for husband and young plants for children, attending dutifully to the one and nourishing the others. Without her there could be no garden, she thought, and was wrong as usual, for spring would have come along as well in her absence, strangling her little bairns or turning them out of their beds cuckoo-fashion, and substituting growths which were rough and horny-leaved because they were not made for beauty but for roadside work and to struggle for existence. Hortensia was only an artificial goddess ; if her semi-divine hands remained idle for a week a shower of warm rain and a touch of sunshine did all the godlike work after their own manner, spoiling hers, and showing her what a very little force she was. Sunshine was over the land then, therefore she grumbled because the rapid spring-time would not wait.

" I can feel the weeds growing," she cried to Jasper, " and if I turn a man loose in the garden he will desolate everything. A man can only dig ; bare earth is what he aims at ; to satisfy that ambition every plant must die.

I had one once ; his soul was among the cabbages. He played the very quadruped with my flowers ; every plant that was not eatable perished. A man treats a garden as he does a woman ; he keeps what he likes and ruins the rest."

"My dear lady," said the master. "A garden is an excellent thing, but it must not be a tyrant. Your brother is more to you than primroses."

"I am thinking of seedlings," she murmured.

"Flowers alone cannot make a home happy. There is more joy among weeds where love is than among flowers in a solitude."

"Why, that's true. You have found me out," she said. "Custom is custom ; and this is April."

"The month of fools."

"Caught again," she laughed. "Your tongue is in a hitting mood. I'll be a good little woman this once. I will sacrifice my garden, give it over to the weeds ; and I'll look upon a wilderness this summer and try to believe it is doing my soul good. There," she said defiantly, "what do you think of me as a woman ?"

"Impulsive and thoughtless," said the master.

"Anything else ?"

"Vain."

"That all ?"

"Worthy of a man's love."

"I think I've won it," she said ; and then began to murmur, "Hortensia without a garden. I feel Jane again. I am glad he made me change my name. Sensitive plants, which have flourished for Hortensia, would droop at the sound of Jane Sims. I would not like him to know that my name was not Hortensia."

The pronouns he and him could not have referred to the same male being. Had Hortensia spoken in Greek more information would have been forthcoming ; the more merciful if less complete English language made her

speech obscure ; but she understood what she was saying, therefore her next remark was more relevant than one might think. " That brute will jeer when he sees the weeds. He will stand by the hedge and curse me, perhaps throw stones. I will tell the policeman he's a poacher."

Theodore knew nothing concerning the acts of the previous night. He lay upon his bed in one room, almost as helpless as his daughter in the next ; but she did not speak and never stirred, while he was in continual restless motion, talking of her and his little missis, glad that the crisis was past, but worrying over the expense ; for he was Jim again, a harassed clerk, and he knew how hard it was to keep things going.

" Jane, my dear, you have heard the news," he said contentedly. " We have a small daughter, Dominica a Sunday child, Crispiana of the curly hair, Angelica for beauty, Euphemia for character, Faustina for good-report, Fidelia for faithfulness, Cordelia for warm heart. She shall have all these names and as many more as I can think of presently. The bells are ringing, little sister, calling people to go upon their knees, but to me they are announcing to this same world of Christendom the birth of my princess. Adelia is the word. She shall have that name as well. It is foolish to feel pride, my dear, as the birth of a child is a very common event ; nevertheless the feelings of a father must be respected. The coming of a child adds fullness to life, rounds it off, makes it in his sight perfection by completing the circle of existence. It is all that a man of small talent can do. He is unable to enrich the world with learning, but he can add to it beauty and goodness. If he can bequeath to his fellow-creatures one lovely maiden, his life has not been wasted ; he has done his duty, which is all that a man may do. This maiden may be the salvation of her country for all he knows. It is useless to deny my pride, dear Jane, and the little missis is proud too."

"Lie down, you poor fellow. Go to sleep," his sister pleaded.

"It is Sunday morning according to all the authorities, and I may lie as long as I please," said Theodore happily. "I was kept late at the office and was up half the night. Anxiety was natural, Jane, and now I am somewhat tired. We have to consider," he went on in his quaint style, "what sort of a woman a daughter of mine is likely to grow into. They call me a fantastic fellow, little sister, but I have yet to satisfy myself that this view can be justified. I have a love for the antique, it is indeed somewhat of a passion, therefore my daughter may be interested in what is mystical, or at least unusual, but not in any unpleasant way, my dear Jane. She will perhaps be curious to inquire into first causes, as it is probable her mind will have a philosophic bent, but she will do so with discretion. She will be, I imagine, of a retiring disposition, not anxious to make friends, fond of seclusion. She will be very good and virtuous, never likely to cause me trouble, attached to her home, and desirous of cultivating the arts which make for comfort. There will be anxieties sometimes, small matters, peculiarities of human nature; I have a mind which bids me take, but it is a weakness I have conquered, and not even the little missis suspects how hard it is to restrain myself and how necessary I find it to retain my hands in my nethermost pockets when my eyes are confronted by those seductions which are commonly referred to as bric-à-brac. This is a constitutional weakness which I trust will not be communicated to my little maiden. I do not look for perfection, Jane, but I know she will be good, and I trust beautiful. She shall be happy in her life, she shall be fortunate; and not a tongue shall ever urge a fault against her."

"Be quiet," said Hortensia, almost angrily, for Theodore was laughing merrily.

"There is the Chelsea vase," he continued. "That

must go to pay the doctor and restore to us the privileges of gaslight. The pain of losing it will be tempered with the knowledge that its destruction will not concern me. When your income is limited, Jane, never invest your few odd pounds in china. The Chelsea vase has given me spasms. As I sit in the office I quake to think of it. The little missis has chipped it twice. Lock up your money in old silver, my dear. The broom and the duster cannot prevail against that. To-morrow morning, during the first hour of commerce, that vase shall go; brittle china for bullion. Daughters must be paid for. When in the stage of infancy, my dear, they are fascinating as curios; it is my present purpose to acquire a collection of them. Daughters shall take the place of china-shepherdesses. The Sims collection may become famous, the Sacharissa type of daughter, white, solid, crystalline, intensely sweet, little sister, glazed in a fashion to shame ceramic art, with the shimmer of pearls and the tint of roses, bathed in sunshine, washed in milk; they will be the desire of all who love beauty and perfection, who search after rarity, who desire to steep their souls in radiance emanating from the ——” He broke off with a spasmodic movement and presently added, chirping mournfully, “A bit of brain gave way and it is whirling round in my head all loose.”

“Lie down, Theodore,” his sister pleaded, trying to force him, but it was useless. In less than a minute he was up again, sitting in a huddled shape, his arms around his knees, smiling, bubbling, talking continually. The doctor came as evening drew on and administered a sedative which made him quiet, although he kept on smiling as if he had been the happiest being in the world.

“It has not yet come to pass,” said Jasper, as he received the doctor at the door of Lucy’s room.

“She will recover,” he said quickly.

“I did not mean that. Her eyes have not opened.”

“You have an idea the missing girl may return? We

will try her," said the young and professionally interested man. "This unconsciousness baffles me. Otherwise her state is normal. Have you spoken to her?"

"I was afraid of a shock."

"Speak to her now."

Twilight was coming on. Jasper lighted a lamp and brought it near the bed where Lucy was lying upon her right side, breathing gently but never moving, her eyes closed tightly, her lips well parted, the whole face like a waxen mask. The two men looked down upon her, the one slim, almost at the beginning of life, eager to learn and to gain experience; the other great and rugged, far upon the descent, full of wisdom which had only been a torment. And while they stood there the talking sound came down the moor and passed the house still muttering; but perhaps the young man did not hear it.

"Try her," he said.

Jasper bent down and called, "Margaret."

No change occurred and no answer came.

"Again—less sternly."

"Margaret. Come back! Awake, Margaret!"

Still no change. The figure went on sleeping.

"She is dead," said the master.

"She is alive and well."

"You misunderstand me again. Margaret is dead."

"Has this girl ever been hypnotised?"

"Never."

"Well, she is in a trance now. This unconsciousness is not natural sleep, nor is it caused by weakness."

"Lucy!" called the master suddenly. "If you are present, answer me."

The girl made no response. The doctor put down his hand and tried to force her eyelids apart; and could not.

"She is quite cold. Did you notice that she frowned when I touched her?"

"She seemed to shrink."

"She resisted me distinctly. She tried to prevent me from seeing her eyes."

"Do you still say she is in a trance?"

"I do not. I cannot explain it," said the doctor. "I believe she is conscious."

He put out his hand again and pinched her neck; but the girl did not wince; and he turned from the bedside conquered.

"I can make nothing of it. She will not respond to pain, and yet she resisted my attempt to open her eyes."

"Look!" cried Jasper.

The sleeper had not moved, but the expression on her face had changed. She was frowning again, her features were as cold as they felt. No softness was there, no gentleness at all; the appearance was that of a woman who had been wronged, who had sworn vengeance, who was even then thinking out a plan.

The doctor left, the house was peaceful, and Jasper sat in his study with the wonderful pictures of landscapes all about him. It was a frosty night, the stars were like lamps, but the master did not look at them. His eyes were upon papers strewn about his feet and upon a chart in his hand; and he knew what he had wasted; minutes at first, then hours, and after that days which had become weeks, months, and years; and so at length a lifetime had been spent upon a pursuit dictated by pure reason to human folly. He picked up another chart and read that. The year written at the head of each was the same; and then he looked at a third; and at last crumpled all three and groaned.

"For me this year peace, happiness, no troubles," he said. "For Orton great mental activity, prosperity, and immunity from danger. For her disaster. It is false. From beginning to end it is false, except in her case; and

there I find truth enough to lure me on. These small beliefs, these half-beliefs, how perilous they are! They tempt a man when he is young, draw him aside imperceptibly from well-known pathways, lure him with enticing voices, promising that if he continues along that half-lit road he will find the mystic secret out at last; and while he walks, enchanted by those voices, his lifetime passes; he does not know the way will soon be barred. To-night I am at the barrier. I look back. I cannot regain the road where I turned off, and if I could it is too late to go on travelling. The lot of a man who hunts a mystery is desolation. He is allowed sufficient light to see, but not enough to work in. He is shown the atmosphere of the region he is striving towards, but never can he reach the region itself. And he is not permitted to discover he is shadow-hunting until a flash of reason breaks at last across old age. I have devoted all the intellect that is in me to fortune-telling. It comes to that."

He gathered up some of the papers at his feet and destroyed them, tearing them into fragments as if in shame that anyone might read them, scattering them slowly on the fire.

"Small things we disregard," he said. "We let them grow and strangle us. Had I not taken to photography in my early years it is possible that I might have served my generation better. It was that defective plate which spoilt my life. A form appeared upon it, and I was mad enough to suppose I had photographed a spirit. I know now some defect in that plate caused this figure to appear, but at that time, during the eager and credulous stage of existence, I persuaded myself there was some mystic power within me. My affinity with Orton strengthened this folly. And yet mysticism is here. Why should I have been drawn to a boy so dreamy then, with a mind so brutal later? Why have I never been able to separate myself from him? Why have I appeared before him, now three

times, to warn, to help, and to save him from the consequences of his life? A mystery is there; we are surrounded with mysteries, the commonest actions of our lives are befogged in them; but we cannot explain, we cannot read the riddles; and he who attempts to do so loses his life and is lost himself. He who rebels against his ignorance is wise. He who rebels against the ignorance of the wisest is a fool. I still believe," he added stubbornly, looking out upon the frosty sky, "that the truth is written there but we cannot read it. You may all go," he said, dismissing the planets like schoolboys. "It is too dark. We will end the lesson here."

He went to Lucy's room, sat beside the bed, took one of the cold hands, watched the frowning face and the passionless eyelids, knowing a mystery was very near which he could not read. "They will open soon," he said to himself. "They must open to ask for nourishment, to look for a friend."

He passed into Theodore's room. The little man's tongue was quiet at last, his brown face humorous in sleep; he was snoring hilariously, always grotesque. Hortensia was near him reading a book which made her laugh.

"You are happy," the master said.

"Trying to be," she answered.

"We cannot force the emotions. You may put on mourning but it need not mean that you are sad. You may wear bright colours while your heart is breaking."

"Well, I am happy. Theodore is better and will be himself, I think, by morning. The crisis in that other room is over. It is freezing outside, so my work in the garden is not being delayed. And I am reading a funny story."

"You have found yourself," he said. "That is why you are happy. I have lost myself and so I am restless. I have done nothing to make people happy," he mused,

as he went on rambling. "I have brought no laughter. If I had devoted my intellect to writing one small book which would have won for me a single small child's laughter, I might have been less lonely now. The best master is he who makes the children laugh. They must have sorrow ; they need not have joy ; the teacher should force the joy upon them. One little story—it is so simple. I would not stop the children's laughter now. I would tell them there is no sorrow ; I would lie to them that they might be happy. Do as you like, children ; laugh and be glad. Teach that to your master, and let him turn you out to Nature for your lessons."

He left the house, hardly conscious that he was not among his books and pictures, until he reached the brow of the hill where the wind, when there was any, was sure to strike ; it was there and it pushed him back, but without awakening him, for he had spoken truly when he said some mystic power was in him, some secret personality which at certain times and seasons responded to an influence drawing him out to wander and find another life that he might help it. He passed along the track, turned where the rough walls ended, walked down a stony lane, very steep and scoured by running water. At the end was a stone quarry, deserted and somewhat ghastly in the starlight ; below was a cleave, its bottom white with broken water ; before him a high cliff, and upon its summit larches waved beating the air, and here on wildly rocking branches were owls making the place mournful. Beside the cart-track to the quarry heaved great rocks, some red by day, some grey, but then all black. They were seats, benches for pupils, and the master passed them one by one, touching each with his staff and calling out ; but none were occupied. Beneath the waterfall lower down more rocks were placed, out of the way of the wind but damp with spray, and towards these the master descended, calling out angrily, "Orton ! why won't you answer ? "

There was more light upon these rocks because the long cascade fell close to them, and the water which was very white seemed to cast a glow across them ; so that Jasper could perceive the figure of Cuthbert sitting there, wet with spray and stupid with cold. He did not move until the master touched him ; and then he started and said complainingly, for his thoughts also were far away, " It's no use, sir. I haven't prepared the lesson."

" Wake up, Orton," cried Jasper.

Cuthbert rose slowly and the master could feel him shivering, and wondered if any man had been so cold before.

" So you have found me. I thought you would. I have been near your house every night."

" You wrote to me ; your letters are very different from yourself. They are cynical and indifferent. You are cowardly. Do not shiver so."

" What is it to you ? Can you see me ? "

" I see you dimly."

" Wait until you see me in the light."

" Come back with me," said the master.

" The first time you sent for me to your room I was frightened. I was a little fellow and I had never been punished. The unknown frightened me. I am not compelled to obey you now. I cannot come with you, for the unknown frightens me."

" It is a matter of life or death, not merely of punishment. You shall come with me."

" To face her ? "

" She will not know you."

" Is she dying ? "

" Margaret is dead and Lucy is unconscious."

" If I speak to her——"

" You shall speak to her, and touch her."

" Tell me what I want to know."

" You could not bear it."

" Tell me."

"You are too weak. You can hardly stand. Wait until I get you in the house."

They went up the hill, saying nothing more. With Cuthbert speech was impossible; his laboured breathing was dreadful to listen to, and at last the master put out his arm and gave him help. So they reached the house, entered the study; the master turned the lamplight upon his pupil, made no sign, but merely drew him gently to the fire and held those two numbed hands in his.

"You have seen me," said Cuthbert. "You knew, of course. Your stars had told you."

"A year of prosperity, of great mental activity," Jasper murmured.

"It must come quickly," said Cuthbert mockingly.

His body was emaciated; his head a mere skull covered with thin white skin.

"It is not too late. I will save you," cried the master, forgetting all the past while he watched that figure, that ruined piece of human architecture which he had tried so often to restore.

"You think you know the name of my disease. You do not," said Cuthbert. "It is melancholia."

"That was marked," Jasper whispered. "But not yet. The whole story is there if I could read it."

"Tell me," said Cuthbert. "Don't blame me too much. You don't know what she was. I can bear anything, for what they call the organs of life are sound enough. I am poisoned by my own mind."

"You realise it now," the master said. "You understand how your mind first poisoned, then destroyed Margaret. This is not the time for censure. I say so much to prepare you, to let you know that such a union could not breed——" He stopped and placed a hand upon his eyes. Cuthbert was kneeling by the fire, bowed down, shivering like an aged man.

"Write it," he said hoarsely.

The master did so, and when Cuthbert read there was a sound in the room as if rain and wind were struggling outside.

"Alive?" he gasped.

The master whispered.

There was a long pause; and then Cuthbert rose and groped to the old man's side.

"I have a confession to make," he said, trembling so violently that Jasper became afraid of him. "It is true that I rejected the warning which your presence gave me in the pass of Penmaenmawr. I did not know it was a warning then, but I was cruel to Ethel, I was heartless, my mood made me desire to give pain to the one I loved. It is true that my apparent heartlessness killed her."

"This helps you," the master murmured.

"It is true that you saved me at Buxton, that you gave me my chance and I refused to profit by it. My mind was my enemy. I could have conquered it but would not try. I revelled in the ideas which it suggested to me; I let it become too strong for me. It made my work horrible; and then my life."

"All this helps," the master said.

"So the time came when I was the slave of my mind, which cared for nothing, and thought of little, but the evil passions. You know that women were attracted to me; why I do not know——"

"Men as well," said Jasper.

"I discovered my power when I was a boy," Cuthbert went on. "I wondered what it was that attracted you to me, as it was impossible to suppose there was any mysterious connection between us, until I began to understand that my mind was more powerful than yours and I was always urging you mentally to like me so that you would refrain from punishing me. This was merely the instinct of self-preservation, but one Sunday in chapel I found myself trying to influence the headmaster's daughter

who was sitting not far away with her back towards me. She was a girl, you will remember, of about my age. I noticed she was becoming restless. I ordered her mentally to drop her prayer-book, and she did so. I maintained the pressure upon her mind ; at last she fainted and had to be carried out. I began then to have some knowledge of my mental powers, and I confess to having made an unscrupulous use of them."

"Say no more. I still hope," said Jasper earnestly, "we may win Margaret back. You alone can do it. Come with me."

"I have more to tell you," said Cuthbert. "I have been making a great effort to purge myself, to think cleanly, to devote my talents to some worthy work. I have tried to follow the line which you laid down for me. I have done my best to become the interpreter of Nature as she is, as I know she is, and of men and women who are in tune with her. But I cannot do it. My mind will not permit me to see what is good and beautiful ; it shows me only what is horrible ; it keeps me in the dark, in an inferno where I see creatures who have borrowed little from humanity except form, cursing, fighting one another, grovelling in the lowest form of lust. I know that the evil is not in them but in myself, or rather in the mind which has become my tyrant, which has poisoned my whole existence and my work. And when I try to search for the sunlight I cannot find it. All around me is this hell which has no place except in the fancy of my mind ; but it has grown so great that it is real. I cannot see the beauty of the flowers. They take the forms of these creatures which my mind has made, and the very leaves of the trees are claws rending the air in hatred. When I seek to describe a pure woman she seems to turn against me of her own will and become a harlot. When I look for virtue in a man he himself insists on calling it vice. I have let myself go too far along the experimental path ;

I can only look back, beckoning others to follow me, telling them I am right ; and they believe me because they think I am wiser than themselves, they come after me, and when I would try to convince them I am a false guide, and am myself the slave of one, I cannot find the words."

"The man who rebels against Nature will be punished by Nature," Jasper said ; and deeply moved, almost to tears, by what he thought was penitence but was actually terror, pitiful as a chaplain giving a final message to some man about to die, he placed his hand upon Cuthbert's head, and thought back with him until both reached the point where they had gone astray, the one towards the dark places, the other in the direction of the temple of the lamp. "Punishment like pleasure passes," he went on. "This melancholy is Nature's vengeance ; her frost upon you. It will not last."

"Have you forgiven me ?"

The master withdrew his hand. Something in that voice startled him and recalled the sullen boy begging for remission of his punishment with the voice of scorn.

"It is the eleventh hour, Orton. Would you deceive me now ?"

"I mean it. I spoke as earnestly as I could."

"I will put you to the proof. You shall come with me to Lucy's room and awake her. I believe you can ; and you must face the consequence."

"I will come," said Cuthbert humbly. "Ramrige, you and I are friends ?" Again the mocking devil in his voice made his words ring false, and Jasper hesitated.

"Remember how you promised to be more than a father to me."

"Since then what debts have you paid ?"

"I was not responsible," said Cuthbert. "Look upon me as a ruined man and as a dying man. You are my only friend."

"Except your dog," the master reminded him.

"Your friendship is as much—more to me than his love."

"Wait," said the master. "When we return to this room we will speak of this matter again. Let us have action and then words. Follow me, but walk softly."

He went towards the door; while Cuthbert, unable to restrain his madness longer, lifted his thin arm and shook his shadowy fist at the back of the great figure of the man whose forgiveness he had sought; hating him with his whole soul, supposing him to be responsible for his own misdeeds, seeking his friendship only for his own ends, desiring his protection and his help and nothing more. He had never liked the master though he feared him, he could not forgive the man who had deprived him of liberty at school, who had scoffed at him before schoolfellows, stroking his golden beard and smiling sardonically while so doing; and in his weak state of body the mind prevailed and whispered to him like a lying spirit that the master, not himself, had been his obstacle in life and was his enemy then.

The door of Lucy's room was open. There should have been a light, but none was visible. Jasper hesitated, then called the housekeeper and asked for the lamp.

"It is there, sir," she answered.

"The room is in darkness."

"I left the lamp burning, sir. I came out of the room only a few minutes ago. No one has been there since."

"There is no light," he repeated impatiently.

"She must have put it out herself, sir."

"Come, Orton," said the master faintly. "Another minute and we shall know."

They went into the room which was in utter darkness, both trembling, but hearing nothing; and there they waited for the woman to bring a light. There was no movement from the invisible bed, but a voice came, clear

and cold, saying distinctly, "The light hurt my eyes so I turned it down. Who are you?"

Cuthbert remained near the door. Jasper, who was standing well in the room, put out a hand to support himself and it fell upon the rail of the bed. For a moment he doubted whether the words came from there. He had never heard that voice before.

"I am Mr Ramrige," he answered. "This is my house that you are in."

"I do not know you," said the voice. "Can you tell me anything about a man named Orton?"

"He is here."

"Then let him answer for himself."

A glow entered the room. Cuthbert tried to take the lamp but his hands shook too much, so Jasper stepped back, turned with the light which fell upon the bed and revealed a white-faced woman with a frowning forehead and eyes that were cold as stones. She was sitting upright with her arms folded, regarding them haughtily; and there was a look of great strength about her. Her eyes passed from Jasper with a slightly puzzled expression and fell upon Cuthbert; and then she said:

"You are the man. I have tried to find you for a long time. I know what you have done; I have tried to warn others against you, but they would not listen. Perhaps they were too weak," she said disdainfully. "I thought you were strong. You do not look it. Are you the man who thinks he has conquered me? Are you the man who met me in—it is curious, but I cannot remember names. Yours sounds familiar," she said to Jasper. "Yet I do not know you. I am very weak physically," she said contemptuously. "So I have seen Cuthbert Orton," she went on, in the same cold way, "the man who is responsible for my illness, the man who tried to subdue me, who tried to destroy me utterly. You a man," she said, still more contemptuously, "you thin, shivering creature a man!

You white, trembling coward a man ! You wise philosopher whom people respect, you strong-minded animal, you lover of filth, you hater of men, you seducer of women, look at me if you can, look at these hands and imagine them round your neck in womanly love. So we have found one another at last. Go to your home—what is the name of it ? ”

“ Windwhistle,” said Jasper unsteadily.

“ Ah yes, I remember now. I have seen some that I have warned enter there. Go to your home and await me there.”

“ Who are you ? ” said Cuthbert, blazing up suddenly.

“ A woman. One who knows you. One who is going to put an end to you. Go to your home.”

“ I shall do as I please,” he said fiercely.

“ That is a motto which has served you well and has ruined others,” she answered as coldly as ever. “ Do as you please, but you will not escape. I will hunt you round the world. I will follow you—as other women have done. You have attracted them. You shall attract me. Go out of my room.”

Cuthbert went, muttering but not then greatly afraid ; while the master advanced asking, “ Have you nothing to say to me ? ”

“ Not at present,” she answered, less coldly but indifferently.

“ You will tell me your name ? ” he urged.

“ My name. Am I then a stranger in your house ? ”

“ You are not Margaret.”

“ Who is she ? I have not heard of her.”

“ Nor Lucy.”

“ I do not know her either.”

“ Is it really true,” he said amazed, “ that you know nothing whatever of Margaret and Lucy ? ”

“ Do not suggest, please, that I speak falsehoods,” she said in her forbidding way.

"Your name is Miss Vipont?"

"As you like," she said indifferently.

"Your Christian name?"

"Mary."

"I gave you that name," cried the master.

CHAPTER XX

PASSIONLESS

THE musical-box of Summerland played its one tune : water-wheels splashing, forge-fires gasping, hammers beating out iron, people whispering ; and the bee-garden murmuring in andante time. It looked as if no change could ever happen. A few old folk had dropped out quietly ; young ones had gone to make their lives better or worse in towns, continents and islands, but one did not miss them. There were plenty of familiar faces with the same wrinkles, and as for the houses nothing but an earthquake could have altered them. The snapdragons grew out of the wall, the stonecrop whitened the boulders upon Rockside, the moss upon the thatch was still the colour of green velvet. Life in that place remained the same size and shape ; a little round ball revolving clumsily.

Morning was fond of Summerland ; it gave the village its brightest light, its best sunshine, it was lavish of fine colours where this little cleave was concerned. Morning so loved the place that it had begged from the gods immortality for it, but had forgotten to ask also for eternal youth—or knew perhaps it was no use asking—and so the place was shrinking together with old age and changing that way ; losing a cottage or a few trees, but principally people who fell away like hair from an old man's head. The change was what is known as decay, but it was by no means universal because of this great gift of immortality

obtained by Morning ; it merely made the place old and caused it to shrink ; but rust could not take life away. Decay was in the houses and the people and upon everything they used, and in their animals too, but the lower forms of life appeared immune. The wall was decaying, but the snapdragons were as young as ever. Woodwork in the houses rotted but the green oaks seemed free from death. The lich-stone beside the gate of the burying-ground bore a sad burden every week, but the ferns in the wood retained the principle of life unaltered. It was as though Morning loved the forms of life which were always waiting to greet it as it came over the hills, and had begged from the gods the greatest gift for them, and had whispered to them the mystical secret which men were to miss, " Renew your existence every year. That is the secret of immortality." Men were not to learn that. They shut themselves in houses, excluded Morning as something hateful or dangerous, and worshipped false gods called comfort and luxury ; and did not discover until it was too late that the god comfort had a son named disease and the god luxury was nothing more than a bloody tyrant. Morning grew to hate men in time ; it asked no immortality for them. It took a pleasure to see their own false gods killing them about the time it appeared upon the hills, when the real immortals of the wood were full of strength. There were no roots for the higher forms of life, there was to be no renewal ; they were to be like doorposts and thatch to rot and decay ; so far from being immortal they were to be born diseased, with no real life in them at all. They were very low down in the matter of lasting. The doorposts were made of dead oak and the thatch out of dead rushes, and yet these things lasted longer in their death than men in their lives. Perhaps if men had always been ready to greet Morning they too might have learnt some secret about the roots.

The walls of Cob Court did not reckon by twelvemonths.

They had already smiled at centuries. Small change was there ; the garden perhaps less crowded than usual, but the enumerator of bees had no complaint of a falling birth-rate, and the output of sweetmeats was much the same ; the constellation of the clematis was as bright, the limes were as sticky, the drones as human as ever ; both doors were open as a sign of peace, and Polly was dusting mats and giving opinions without grumbling concerning weather and the time of her youth when the world had been a place worth dwelling in ; and above one of the doors was a window open and the morning went in there to look.

It was Margaret's room where she had dreamed and sighed for knowledge, where she had screamed and struggled, and where she had died. And yet she was there, arranging her hair with small cold hands, seeing herself in the glass, and wondering why people shivered when they looked at her, and why the villagers shrank away avoiding her, and why her own relations constantly reminded her she was someone else. In some respects she resembled Margaret, for her health was not good and she had a fondness for music ; but of the life of Lucy not a trace was left.

The room was differently arranged ; a small matter, but it served to show that Margaret must have changed. All luxuries had been abandoned ; the warm wall-paper had been removed and whitewash substituted. The room was like the cell of a nun. She dressed in black. Margaret had been fond of flowers but this stately woman would not touch them. She spoke as little as possible, always in the same passionless tones ; she never lost her temper, never smiled ; and when addressed would take time to think before replying.

Presently a faint voice called ; she went downstairs and joined Theodore, who rose and bowed himself before her, being still in awe of this cold woman who seemed to have borrowed nothing from his little girl, not even her name,

nor yet her affectionate nature, for Mary seemed incapable of emotion and regarded tender feelings as mere weakness. The disappearance of Lucy had been the salvation of Theodore. His new daughter, as he called this woman, was at least a lady, he could respect her even if she did not love him, and his home, if not his mind, was at peace again. He encouraged himself to believe that Margaret would still return, and while waiting for her he indulged his passion for collecting, tramping the country in his old way, or wheedling out of Polly, by using threats or showing money, her treasures one by one. This love for curios and old furniture was after all the chief thing in his life, and was good in its way since it filled his days and helped him to forget.

"I trust you are well," Mary said indifferently.

"Better, my dear, and stronger," he chirped respectfully. "I am a creature of the lower atmosphere. When the sun gets down to me I am cheerful. When rain falls I have a morbid touch. There is a letter for you, my dear child."

They seated themselves at the breakfast table, Theodore glancing anxiously at the black figure and the stately head, longing for his little missis more than ever. "She would not have this nonsense," he murmured inwardly. "She would take the child by the shoulders and shake her until Margaret came back. She would make her wear a white dress. The little missis would be obeyed. She would set the child to wash china all the morning; and the child would do it."

"I require a clean plate," said Mary. "Did you place this rubbish upon it?"

She pointed to a few flowers neatly arranged with some leaves of foliage.

"I ventured to, my dear. A little experiment," chirped Theodore dolefully. "It is a form of attention which used to please your mother."

"By this time you should have discovered that I abhor anything in the shape of frivolity," she said.

"Will you accept them with a smile, my dear child?" he begged. "Just to please me, an old fellow, your father? Will you wear them in your dress? Will you permit me to place a similar token beside, and not upon, your plate each morning? It would give me pleasure."

The girl remained for a few moments deep in thought. Then she answered, "This gift has a sentimental value only. It is intended to convince me of your affection. If that is real no such assurance can be needed. I am content to believe it is real, therefore these flowers have no value whatever. At the end of an hour they will have withered. Had you left them in the garden they would have continued to live."

"Sentiment, dear child. It is a lovely thing."

"Do not refer to me as a child. I am a woman and desire to be regarded as one. The sympathy of a fool would be a source of mortification. The sympathy, or love if you prefer the word, of a parent is natural and may be assumed without these frivolous presents or endearing epithets."

She passed the shrivelling form of Theodore and dropped the flowers into the ivy outside, while the little man murmured to his plum-jam, "I would give all my pewter, and some of my china, for one hour of the little missis."

The letter lying there was the first this girl had received since the days of Margaret, and in a certain fashion it recalled those days. The repetition of an incident, the use of a word spoken once before at a critical moment, the peculiar buzzing of some insect with a long proboscis, the odour of syringa, re-collected the fragments of past mornings. This letter and the rejected flowers were chapters explanatory of what had gone before; her sudden waking from a dream of old gardens where a masque was being played, and a white philosopher walked advising a

spectral woman to beware of an old man's love and a poet's mind; the pealing of a bee somewhat under the influence of lime-flowers; the brown face of her father beaming and publishing nonsense. This simple morning drama had been played before to the same scenery and accompaniment; and her interest had not been wholly that of a spectator. The flowers seemed to connect her with the dream-poet; she had an idea they should have been wild daisies, and the stems ought to have been bound together. Consciousness suggested the name of Cuthbert, but he was not a poet, although he might have been one under a different influence; no dream paints a picture clearly. A poor simple creature like Claud Yalland could not assert himself; if present at all he was merely a scene-shifter. The philosopher was certainly Mr Ramrige, but she had her doubts as to whether he was sound mentally; he was not composed enough for her, his doctrines sounded somewhat wild and inconsistent, as if he too was under the influence of the lime-flowers, or had been moved by the touch of some erratic moonbeam. Somehow she connected him with wide spaces of landscape, and with pictures of architecture too wild to be probable; ruined temples overgrown with wild clematis, standing in the midst of gloomy forests with altars huddling beneath fearfully twisted roots and tessellated pavement showing among the bursting bubbles of foul bog-mud, and broken turret-stairs emerging in wind, and castles like piles of rubbish hispid with rock-weeds. The dreams of Margaret could not be excluded from the life of Mary, but she regarded them as dreams, for the philosophic state which Margaret had aimed at and had failed to reach was by Mary attained.

The letter was from Cuthbert. It was addressed, that it might be saved from falling into the hands of Hortensia, to Miss M. Vipont which was safe and accurate. Anger and distrust appeared upon that stony face as the cold

eyes read the scribble. Here was Cuthbert in the form of pen and ink genuine at last ; there were no well-turned sentences ; cleverness and technique had abandoned him, and literary distinction was his only when he wrote dung-hill stuff ; all was incoherent, craven, and real. The blood of his life had become blanched. He told her he was ill, he had never known good-health, his mind had always been too strong for his body, he had done no evil willingly, others had brought the evil to him and insisted that he should share it with them. He tried to flatter her, begged her to concentrate her mind upon some form of art ; assured her she would be famous if she neglected the world and all the miserable creatures that were in it. He posed as an injured being, complaining that his purpose had always been misunderstood. Seeing her for the first time he decided there was something in her which appealed to him, and it became his object to draw this out and apply it to his life and work ; she had in short inspired him. Was it a sin to study a woman that he might bring out what was best in her, and if the result was not what he had looked for was any blame to be attached to him ? " I found you weak," he wrote. " I have succeeded in making you strong."

No memory of Lucy troubled Mary, although she knew there had been passages in her life which had to be forgotten, and the writer of that letter was responsible. So much she felt, for Lucy was still lying between Margaret and Mary, ready to spring back into fierce existence the moment cold Mary's philosophy failed and the weakness of Margaret returned. She knew Cuthbert had succeeded in bringing something out of her, but the knowledge that Lucy was the creature he had made was absent. What she was certain of was this : he had found her weak and made her weaker. He had not made her strong ; the master had done that.

Theodore was watching with his bird-like eyes, searching

for the place in her affections which he had lost and longing to regain it. He had noticed that she preferred Hortensia to himself, and could not understand it, for as Margaret she had displayed no particular feeling for her aunt and had attached herself to him. He gathered up his courage and asked timidly, "Will you allow me one moment of weakness, dear daughter?"

"Not one," she replied sternly. "Weakness can only inspire weakness. It is harmful to a man and ruinous to a woman. I notice you cannot address me without employing some endearing epithet, and I wish you to discontinue the habit. It lowers the moral standard and leads to mischief. I do not allude to you as my dear father, and I have no thought of doing so."

"I crave to call you Sacharissa, Melissa, and my most delightful Dulcissima," cried the poor little man in a comical way.

"This is deplorable," she said. "Are you unable to perceive that a woman shrinks instinctively from being made an object of ridicule? The appellations you propose suggest improprieties in character and manners which excite feelings of moral indignation, and impress me with a melancholy sense of human depravity."

"Suffer me to call you Drusilla? That means strong," he said.

"My name is Mary," she replied coldly.

"It is nothing of the kind," said Theodore, beginning to tremble courageously. "We called you Rose Margaret, at least the little missis did——"

"Oblige me by referring to my mother respectfully," she interrupted.

"If this new daughter would only lose her temper," said Theodore inwardly, "I could be pert with the baggage then, I could open my mind to the wench, I would play the Roman father to her damselship. I have the wish to scold her, to treat her as I did my second daughter,

who was devilish, but I have not the courage. Lucy cursed and was a coward. This one is excessively dauntless. Maybe this new manner proceeds from sauciness. I will be forward with her though she strikes me."

He gathered himself together, half rose from the table, leaning over it, and shot the words at her sharply, "My conclusion is that I am at liberty to address you as I please. I decline to call you Mary, though it is a good name; I have no fault to find with it except that it is short, has no feminine termination, and is derived from Marah and means bitter; it was your mother's name, but for all that I will not indulge in Mariolatry so far as you are concerned. A father is speaking, Margaret. He intends to be obeyed."

Philosophy was not forthcoming, but the black figure rose, a cold hand touched Theodore upon the shoulder, a stern voice said, "Follow me," after the manner of an officer making an arrest; and the father without authority yielded and went after her into the sitting-room, saw the door closed, and heard the voice of Mary saying, "Volition dictates to me the name of Mary; you and my aunt inform me I have no right to it. Reason tells me I am sane, and yet the action of the village people indicates fear of me, and their voices which I have overheard suggest that I am insane, or that I have passed through a period of insanity which has altered me both in appearance and manner. You are now to tell me the history of my past; I am bound to confess I cannot recall it by any effort of my own."

Theodore was in a net, strong and small-meshed, and could see no pleasant prospect of tearing himself free. He blundered and muttered, and finally stammered that there was nothing much to tell except that she had been born upon a Sunday while the church bells were ringing, and he had wished to call her Dominica, and she had been a beautiful child, and he wished with all his soul her mother

had not caught that cold ; but this was not at all the kind of history Mary wanted.

"In what way is Mr Ramrige related to me ? " she inquired, trying to get at the truth indirectly.

"He is a master. An old man of learning," chirped Theodore more cheerfully. "He undertook your education when you were——"

"Go on," she ordered when he stumbled and fell.

"A very good man, my dear, an excellent wise man, but no relation except in the way of affection."

"When I was insane, you would say ? "

"There was a time, my dear, when your actions and words were surprising, perhaps startling. You worked too hard, you made yourself ill, and wings affixed themselves to your memory. At the invitation of Mr Ramrige I took you to his house in order that you might benefit by the bracing breezes of the mountain. The experiment was a success ; the wings dropped off. I too have been ill, in danger of losing my reason, a sufferer from epileptic seizures ; but when you recovered I followed your most excellent example. There is nothing to be ashamed of in illness."

"Insanity is a sign of degeneracy. It is distressing on that account. I have my doubts," she said coldly, "whether you are at present a reasonable being."

Theodore nibbled his fingers, looking very brown and stale as he answered in his own defence, "I hope I am ; I try to be rational. 'Tis true I am whimsical in my words, but my heart is normal. I have been a picker up of curios all my life. It is a fantastic pursuit, my dear, and has made me possibly capricious, mercurial, excitable. When I discover some rarity in the hands of ignorant folk I am full of quicksilver ; if I find it no rarity at all, but a base fabrication, I am full of lead. There is no philosophy in me, I could tell you nothing of the instinctive principles of action, but I have some Latin, enough for an inscription,

and I possess a knowledge of hydrostatics ; I have never yet been confounded by a water-wheel."

"The question of my own identity remains unanswered," she said. "You gave me the name of Margaret, but I find myself unable to accept it. Mr Ramrige, for some purpose which I do not at present understand, has given me the name of Mary which is acceptable. What right had he to name me?"

"None at all. This is a matter of confusion and I will bear the blame for it," said Theodore. "Ever since you were born I have called you by names to which you were not entitled, names of affection only, and so it has come to pass that you have forgotten your own. There is nothing surprising in this. It is very possible that I was named James at my baptism, but it has gone and only Theodore has survived. My James has joined your Margaret in oblivion."

"I have an idea of you as James," she said presently.

"And I have an idea of you as Margaret," he cried joyfully. "Now we are on firm ground ; we are off the ice. The sun has not done shining on Cob Court. When your health returns you will laugh again and work at your music, and pat me on the shoulder as I return home laden with the antique treasures of farm-houses. I will call our dear Hortensia and draw her attention to the clearness of the sky."

Mary stood between him and the door hindering his departure. She looked vengeful, he thought, as she put her arms out, but there was no weakness about her, no sign of breaking down, nothing but calm strength, contempt, and bitterness, as she said, "I live for a deed ; I have done with laughter."

"I desire you to laugh," said Theodore faintly. "As a father I shall request you to be cheerful and to put off those black clothes, and to wear white dresses and pink ribbons. You are not in mourning——"

"Stop," she cried; and Theodore became quiet, feeling himself on the ice again, knowing it was cracking and giving.

"Not in mourning," she repeated wonderingly. "What is your foolish voice against my heart and brain? What is your lie against their story which tells me I have lost everything which life can give, character, virtue, purity, prudence, temperance, fortitude? What answer will you give when I ask you—am I a widow?"

Theodore's eyes were upon the door-handle, and his tongue was curled up at the back of his mouth.

"Give me the answer in a word."

"I am subject to fits," he answered.

"I have nothing to do with human weakness. Answer me."

"Hortensia," he cried feebly. "The child is at her questions again. Yes and no were never made for me."

"I am not a widow," she went on. "Where is my child?"

"I have been very ill, my dear."

"I am sorry if you suffered for me. What was it like? I have been tortured in my dreams."

"I heard you cry out. You would often do so. It was beautiful, my dear, as you were yourself that Sunday morning."

"So you are telling me at last," she said.

"I know nothing; I am not an authority. I was ill and I thought the little missis was telling me we must sell the Chelsea vase."

"Cannot you see that I am calm, incapable of emotion, that I am not to be moved or terrified? My heart, which was made for love, now lives for vengeance; my mind, which was pure once, has been poisoned; my brain remains cool. Sorrow has made it so."

"You are my daughter still. You are lovely and of good-report," piped Theodore sadly.

"I see one road before me," she continued. "I see it by day and night, and I know it better than my own heart. It is the road upon which I have lost my life, a lonely road beneath trees and between ferns. It is the road which leads from here to Windwhistle."

"You will not go that way," said Theodore beseechingly.

"I must wait for strength."

"There is another road, a stony one," he said. "It goes uphill towards God's Garden."

"I shall take the road to Windwhistle," she said.

CHAPTER XXI

MELANCHOLIC

CUTHBERT had left Windwhistle and been drawn back many times ; that house was the middle of the circle he had described about his life, and it was near God's Garden where he might hide at last if driven to sanctuary. What soundness of brain and vigour of intellect remained could be utilised in his home of mist, but not elsewhere. He had found once the centre of a circle which suited his health, and now it had become the only place where he could live. He would leave it no more ; his mind, increasing in strength and crowded with bacilli of melancholia, robbed the body of action so that it had neither energy to escape nor the skill to protect itself, but continued to revolve around Windwhistle, carried by its restless feet day by day to such places upon the circumference of that circle as the bogs of Rockside, the houses of Summerland, the steep wood and the moor ; rambles without method, wanderings without reason. It became a pain to show himself, he shrank from the sight even of labourers, and dared not look into the garden of Cob Court nor to visit the master. And his mind never ceased its torture, allowing him to sleep at night but during the day keeping him at work, thinking, reasoning the same point over and over again, arriving at a certain conclusion, then starting afresh only to reach the same decision by different methods, and commencing again until he reeled for exhaustion and thus

found sleep. There was no penitence in him nor any ability to consider what contrition meant ; nothing but this infernal reasoning, added to weakness and shattered nerves, with the presence of that black mind walking beside him like a separate being, urging him on to some deed, then holding him back from performing it ; telling him he must act, but warning him it was useless. Cuthbert had given the secret of his strength to another who was now using it against him. Like the young Arthur he had received Excalibur but had parted with it to Margaret ; Lucy had thrown the scabbard into the lake. Mary had found the sword.

He continued to write, but only letters and a small diary. Imagination had left him ; men and women were more than ever brutes, and the world was a charnel-house, and the sky an arch of black stuff covered with noisome growths. Morning was the only time he could write, and even then owing to weakness he was compelled to steady one hand with the other ; later in the day, when the pitiful strength lent him by sleep had worn off, he was able to do nothing but walk, stumbling over every stone or tree-root ; or would sit in a chair with his arms folded tightly—when he let them hang down his heart seemed to stop beating—thinking, reasoning, arguing aloud, not knowing and not hearing what he said. His letters were to Jasper. The master, like himself, was ill with a kind of melancholy which was not malignant in his case but pure sorrow for a waste of talent and of years and grief for the loss of pupils. Cuthbert wrote almost every day like a lover, hating and fearing the master, but regarding him still as a hope, as the old priest of the temple who could hide him behind the veil and hang the red lamp in front to signify that a mystery was there which was not to be approached or meddled with. Jasper must help him, he reasoned, for the sake of his own peace, but he had to be flattered nevertheless like a god with incense and prayers. From

time to time an answer came, "Why will you not visit me? It is easier to speak." And sometimes, "You are past my help. Nature has you now." But Cuthbert could not face either of his teachers since he had disowned them both.

His diary was still more of a wasted effort, never to be looked at again, a consolation for the moment of writing; and it contained scraps of all religions, for a man must needs fall back upon supernaturalism when Nature strives against him. Cuthbert had gone upon his knees a few times with thoughts which had risen no higher than God's Garden, to shiver out some prayers addressed to a man master; for no divinity could lawfully speak to Mary and tell her what had happened; the tongue of a man would be required to whisper all the truth and show her that other picture of ruined architecture, the life of Lucy. Perhaps this diary, like so many, was written for others to read. Had it been genuine there might have been pathos in the weekly record:

Sunday.—I felt a desire to relieve the pain of others. I repeated this wish several times and it seemed to help me. I have wasted my life in a vain search after things which are hidden, and perhaps do not exist at all. If I could return to life I would work differently.

Monday.—The melancholy of this day was terrible. I walked through the wood several times but was not conscious of any beauty. The shivering would not cease. I had thoughts of a monastery and tried to believe myself there, but was repelled. The monks had hideous faces and uncleanly habits. Their minds dwelt upon disgusting fancies. I hope God will pardon my own thoughts, and give me back my strength for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Tuesday.—I could not sleep. I was tortured with thoughts of Ethel who seemed alive but at an impossible distance. She had her face turned away from me. Rose and made myself some tea. Terribly frightened by a

large spider. Read a story of Balzac. Reproved myself and read St John's gospel, but found no interest. Slept and awoke sweating.

Wednesday.—I am to begin a new life. Wrote to J. R. asking him to supply me with rules. He is silent. Gave a shilling to a man I met upon the road. Rescued a bee which had fallen into the river. Felt a little better but very weak.

Thursday.—My day (Ethel). Woke very early and sat up in bed before it was light. Longed for some near relation. My father died before I was born, my mother soon afterwards; my guardian was a hard man. Tried to think kindly of everyone, but could not. When I looked from the window the outhouses were covered with sleet. Prayed. My eyes were swollen. I know of no reason why I should not go to heaven. Melancholy increased as the day went on.

Friday.—All is horror. I have been in a state of anguish. New moon. I ordered Seabroke to spend the day walking round the house. Roy failing; gave him brandy. He licked my hand and I kissed him. I am not able to persevere in the new life. Plataea incessantly. My nights are easier, but I seem to reach old age and to die every day. I am living on milk.

Saturday.—Shall I ever be at peace again? I tried to read the New Testament in Greek, but rejected it. A woman came to the door selling brooms. She was very badly dressed, but seemed happy and laughed a good deal. I gave her a trifle and she declared God would bless me. She seemed sure of it. I wondered why she was happy. The days pass like a succession of nightmares, yet nothing happens. I am alarmed without a cause.

Such entries testified to a state of terror; nothing nobler. Cuthbert was in pain every day, and yet the past troubled him far more than the present. One symptom of his melancholy was the mental restoration of certain

scenes of history, which remained with him for hours at a time compelling him to be a spectator, receding but only to return, for these scenes, like his own thoughts, repeated themselves endlessly, he could not escape from them, and while they remained they excluded everything else, becoming an agony of reality and compelling him to undergo the shame and anguish of the long-dead actors. "Plataea," or "Pertinax," were often noted in his diary as the cause of actual suffering. Both related to obscure matters of history; great and epoch-making events left him undisturbed; but as Cuthbert walked, or sat in his study, trying in vain to think of the present, the surroundings of the faithful little Grecian city rose before him with all its murderous details; the city which had done more than any other to preserve its country from falling into the hands of oriental despotism, and was rewarded by its country with destruction to satisfy a group of politicians; day after day Cuthbert watched the gates thrown open and the little garrison marched out to stand before the corrupt judges; again and again he heard the unjust question, "Have you during this war rendered any assistance to your enemies?" and watched the victims led away to slaughter, two hundred and twenty-five of them, and he felt the blow of the battle-axe each time, and saw the spurt of innocent blood, and heard the thud of the falling body until the last was dead; and then hordes of savage Thebans levelled houses and temples and made waste the walls; and immediately the city was blotted out, trumpets sounded, the gates were thrown open, the little garrison marched out, the question was asked, the two hundred and twenty-five murders were accomplished; thus the scene went on until the unhappy watcher could have struck his head against the wall.

No sooner had that vision worn itself out than another picture was presented; again one of violence, ingratitude and blood, and in some respects more terrible because the

life to be taken was great, only one personality stood forth to die, and the figure was venerable. Again gates were thrown open, not by a besieging army but by an equally bloodthirsty mob of Pretorian Guards, and the gates were only two, swinging upon round columns as Cuthbert saw them, and behind were curtains hiding the palace-hall. These parted with a suddenness always awful and a figure appeared, suggesting the master, for it was white and there was power about it, and confidence as if it felt secure in its own virtue, believing that it could wave or nod that human flood away. This was a horribly silent vision passing quickly, twice and sometimes thrice in one minute. One second the guards stood in awe, another second ashamed of their conspiracy, a third and it seemed they would give way, until—and that was the moment of horror—one of the roughest stepped out and struck the Emperor ; and a moment later, as it seemed to Cuthbert, a spear appeared above the tops of the trees, or outside his window, and upon it was the head of Pertinax with its eyes open.

Another symptom of his melancholia was the return of childhood, which had been suggested probably by a secret longing to begin afresh. Cuthbert shrank in fear of people because he imagined himself often trembling his way along a cold corridor which smelt of gas, trying to hide, dreading discovery and hearing questions put to him. He was afraid of bullies, for at such moments he felt sure he was a schoolboy and this was his first day at school ; the labourers going to their work, and even the abject Seabrookes, became gigantic schoolfellows, about to approach to twist his arm or kick him ; at the least to ask questions which he would shrink from answering because he was a coward. Secret lanes appeared to offer avenues of shelter ; they led to the rooms of masters who would protect him, but he could never reach, or lay his troubles before, them, and if he could have done so he knew they would answer, " You must go through it. Your turn will come some day."

Simultaneously there came scenes from his early manhood. After leaving school Cuthbert had been sent abroad for a time and had worked on a farm until his health failed. All this part of his life had been dead until now, but in that fierce and savage state of his mind these tombs also were opened and he went through that stage, not in memory but actually. A certain shiver, a smell of earth, the creaking of a cart, or things smaller and too subtle for description, were the picture-makers. On a cold damp morning he saw two men removing stones in a cart. As the wheels turned upon the grass, making deep impressions, Cuthbert found himself instantly standing beside a barn assisting to load a wagon with fence-posts. He did not imagine that scene ; it was there. He knew the day, the time, the state of the weather ; he saw the dull level plain about him, and the faces of his two companions no older than himself, and he knew what they were discussing ; their position in life twenty years hence ; would they still be loading fence-posts, or counting up their gains and drawing a splendid balance ? Just then Cuthbert experienced a thrill of hope ; he was only a boy, his work was before him, and he would do it well ; and then in a flash he found himself shivering, and the Pretorian Guards were rushing for the palace, or the gates of Plataea were battered down.

A man will bear many blows which ought to kill, but the smallest may break him. The death of a dog was that blow. It occurred early one morning ; the little animal had been moribund for days, kept alive by stimulants and careful nursing, and at last its life departed ; and Cuthbert stood in that chancel-like room with the tiny corpse in his arms and knew that he was alone. He had said that the best thing in life was the love of a dog, and now this best thing was dead.

He placed the body upon his bed ; it was stiff and mangy and smelt unpleasantly, but he left it there and went out. He was at war with Nature. He could only avenge him-

self by tearing up her plants, destroying her shrubs, and treading down her flowers; by spitting into her pure water; by cursing her atmosphere. She would do as she pleased, but he could not retaliate. He might take a few yards of ground and make them desolate, but whenever he looked up he would see her still triumphant, smiling scornfully with sunshine, presenting to others the beauties he had missed, making men and women, teaching them to plant gardens, not only round their houses, but within themselves, scattering about the world excellent things in abundance, in addition to her passions and lust for cruelty. She was just, had Cuthbert known it; if she had held out melancholy she had also extended happiness, and was not to blame because he had chosen the left hand.

He had been in rebellion against Nature all his life, and now he tried to strike her because she had killed his dog. She gave the usual answer: infants who will not suck must die; the man must either accept his lot or end his life; raindrops may defy the sunshine, but the effort is a wasted one. Submission is the greatest strength. The voice was not cruel. It subdued Cuthbert in spite of himself. It sentenced him to wander upon the moor and along the lanes and through the wood, to see all the things of beauty in a hideous form, to be half suffocated by the warm and scented breeze, and to beat himself in vain against the trees.

Towards evening he came near the larches upon the top of the cleave where the waterfall descended, and as he approached it seemed to him that a pleasant light surrounded the prospect; and when he saw that he fell upon his knees, broke down, and prayed earnestly and with all his soul, and asked that his senses might be taken away, that he might know nothing at all, but be like an animal which has no understanding.

The voice came again, and now it was religious, and

spoke about a life devoted to doing good, of a life in common with others, obeying the rules of a superior, submissive to an order. It was not a matter of accepting a creed, nor of embracing any belief ; it was far simpler than that. It consisted simply in doing one's best, in entering the lives of others very carefully, looking for good, not inventing evil. The glow upon the larches was the morning light of this new state. Cuthbert thought it real but it was not, for it was the vision formed by his own weakness and his cowardice crying out for a safe retreat, able to suggest nothing except the last resource of cowardice which is religion ; and so he found himself longing for a new condition, in another world far from the rough mountains, a place of fields and vineyards, and in the midst a garden surrounded by lofty walls shutting out punishment, vengeance, and all sin ; a place of refuge where the evil world and the past could not enter ; and in that safe quadrangle, like his old school life where there was no past to torment, memory would be dead, and the new state could be achieved, he could learn the language of flowers, listen to the song of the birds, and become in an hour, without any previous strugglings of his own, another St. Bernardino affecting his hearers to tears, making enemies embrace each other, teaching peace—but living in ease while so doing, and denying himself no comfort. For this new state was the desire of weakness, it was the longing of a coward for heroism, the ambition of a knight who dared not fight to protect his body with a monastic dress. It was nothing more than the cry of self for safety.

That night Cuthbert slept easily and had dreams of life and death, many of them fearful, but towards morning he awoke with a vision of Ethel. It was evening, and he walked out of a house which he did not know, and before him was the scene he had longed for ; the beautiful valley filled with flowers, the garden surrounded with walls ; the air was still and there was no sound except a bell, ringing

either from some unseen church tower or from the sheepfold; and Cuthbert walked to the gate which opened before him, entered the garden, and found himself among ferns as great as trees and strongly scented. Moisture dripped from them and every drop seemed to him a memory bringing back a day he had forgotten, until all his past life was with him, and every act and thought had broken out upon him in the form of drops of moisture from the fern-fronds, by the time that he reached the centre of the garden, where stone steps led upward to a little temple; and at the door of the temple Ethel was standing with a hand above her eyes; and Cuthbert stood upon the lowest step looking up at her, wishing to stand beside her, but feeling too sad to climb, and said, "So we have found each other at last. Many years ago, Ethel, I lost you, but you have not changed. You have not grown old."

"Where did you lose me?" she said.

"In a garden. And I have found you again in a garden."

"I do not know you," she said.

"I am Cuthbert."

"I love him," she said quickly, in her old sweet way.

"But you are not he."

"Look at me."

"We do not see faces here. We recognise others by their souls."

"I am Cuthbert whom you love."

"No, no," she said brightly. "You are not like him at all. If you were Cuthbert I should have run down and thrown my arms about your neck. I am always looking for him. He will come some day, and when that happens he will not need to tell me who he is."

"Remember how I loved you to wear a green dress."

"Ah, lying spirit!" she cried roguishly.

How unchanged and young she was. He had become an elderly man while she had remained a girl.

"Remember our walks to the poor artist in the cottage."

"You must not worry me, bad spirit," she said saucily. "Cuthbert's soul would be white, and yours is black."

"I am Cuthbert," he cried.

"Oh, quiet," she laughed.

The scene changed, and they were walking up the side of a hillock. Fir-trees grew upon the summit. It seemed to Cuthbert that the smoke of a city spread across the sky upon the right, but the left was clear, and here the country swelled away to a great distance, but it was getting dark and the atmosphere was blue. Ethel was very bright and happy. The ground was heavy, and she caught up her dress with a laugh which haunted, and she searched for blackberries, finding none for the frost had destroyed them, and she only pricked her pretty fingers in the search.

No wind troubled them upon the summit, but a great church tower came before Cuthbert's eyes and hindered him from looking out, and this tower moved with him so that he could not see the horizon nor the country below; but he was conscious of a clear sky, and beneath it one or two dark lonely houses, and the twisting lanes of Summerland.

"What is this place?" he said.

"The garden of mystery," she laughed. "It is where good boys and girls come to when they fall in love. They walk down there among the bracken. Listen! you can hear them whispering."

"Let us go down there."

"We are not boy and girl in love. I am your guide showing you the wonders of the garden. I am the priestess of the temple of the moon."

"Why have you brought me up here?"

"Look!" she cried.

"I cannot see. That church tower is before my eyes."

"Go away, church tower," she laughed ; and it vanished at once before her magic, and Cuthbert saw the faint new moon.

"Stand here," she said. "Bow yourself seven times to the goddess of the garden, but be quick for a cloud is coming up, and if it covers the moon before your seventh bow you cannot stay in the garden of mystery, and the house of love will be closed for ever."

Cuthbert bowed the first time.

"And you will never see me again."

He bowed the second time.

"And it will be because you are incapable of loving. Oh, be quick !"

He bowed the third time.

"And you will lose all hope."

He bowed the fourth time.

"And happiness."

He bent himself for the fifth time ; and suddenly Ethel became a dim outline, the cloud covered the moon, others rolled between them ; and then thick darkness, the hillock and the garden disappeared ; and Cuthbert was back in his dreary room at Windwhistle, hearing the noise of the wind and seeing the rain, feeling that dull despair and fear again, and shuddering at the sound of the postman's tread beneath his windows.

A letter was brought. The sight of that handwriting made him sick. "I have thought over what you wrote to me. I perceive you are weak and not responsible for much of the evil you have done. Therefore I forgive you. In your writings I have found much which appeals to me. Your philosophy appears often sound. There are many matters which I desire to discuss with you ; we may find in the course of conversation a bond of sympathy. Meet me upon Rockside at ten o'clock on Saturday night. Do

not fail. I will explain to you then why I have chosen this time and place. Your friend, if you will use her as such, Mary Vipont."

A faint and yellow ink had been used. Cuthbert read that note a dozen times during the course of that day, and each time he noticed that the ink was fainter ; and by the next morning the sheet was blank.

CHAPTER XXII

PENULTIMATE

ORDINARY artifice would not exclude Claud Yalland who had surveyed every yard of ground in the neighbourhood, had made unlawful rights of way for himself through brakes and hedges, and had an elfish habit of appearing from the midst of a bramble-patch looking about him with the serenity of a pedestrian taking a recognised short-cut. So the master was not astonished when a shaggy head rose to the level of his feet as they paused beside the waterfall in his wild garden, and his eyes discovered a mammalian body, half in the wire fence and half in water, struggling to force an illegal entry into the consecrated territory by way of the gorge.

"I have no right to do this," said a voice despondent. "My head is trespassing. Body and legs are upon duchy soil and in duchy water. I came up this way as I wanted to speak to you, and I knew you were to be found here. You passed me twice but I was afraid to speak."

"Have I grown harsh lately?" said Jasper.

"You looked severe; frowning and full of thought. Then I considered my position which probably appears ridiculous. I'm a regular vagabond; poacher and trespasser as well. I had an idea you might be angry if I interrupted."

"Come upon the path and be human. You are wet and your clothes must be torn to shreds."

Claud struggled clear of the barbs, leaving one or two with a sartorial decoration, came splashing up the water, and reached firm ground looking somewhat ashamed when he saw displeasure on the master's face.

"Clothes and skin don't matter," he said sullenly.

"If I went upon the road, and walked along it for days, I should hardly find any man more disreputable. You have made no attempt lately to keep yourself clean; your clothes are not only ragged but dirty, your condition dishonours the name of human being. Yalland, you have given way."

"Go on," muttered the poet. "I knew you would do me good. I thought you would dig into me and rake me. Here!" he said, picking up a stone and holding it out. "Take that and throw it at me. Aim at my great stupid head, and mind you don't miss."

"You child," said the master sadly. "You great careless boy. Cannot you grow up? A middle-aged man scrambling through brambles, climbing fences, chasing butterflies, playing in the mud. What have you done with manhood? Where have you left your mind? Yalland, I will tell you something about yourself."

"Abuse me. Paint me as black as you can," Claud muttered.

"Walk with me," said Jasper turning, and Claud began to plod heavily by his side watching the lively water which bubbled from his boots.

"When you were a boy you saw a vision," went on the master. "It came to you in your father's office and made you hate the life which seemed inevitable. Every day this vision became clearer, until the time came when you could endure your surroundings no longer, so you went out into the world very much as a child will run into the valley to find the end of a rainbow——"

"I did the right thing," Claud broke in roughly.

"From the poet's point of view. You were improvident. You would have done better to remain in your father's business until you had saved sufficient money to secure your independence. Poets and lovers are alike in their scorn for money, but this is no pastoral age and the food of the earth is not in common. I do not blame you. Life will not sting the hand which grasps it tightly. But you have played the fool with life."

"The gods don't forgive that," said Claud.

"They forgive slowly. What would you say of the young man who drinks, loafes about the street, consorts with fast women? Do you call him a workman? Will you say he does his best?"

"He deserves all the rags and poverty he gets," Claud answered.

"The loafing in fields," said the master gently, "the endless wanderings in lanes, the gathering of flowers."

"They were foolish, but very pleasant."

"They were vices. Nature will ruin a man as surely as any wanton woman if he gives his whole body to her. You surrendered work to idleness."

"I never knew it," said Claud piteously. "I was dreaming too well. I thought the work would come. When you met me you told me to listen, but it was too late then. Twenty years had gone; solitude and the lanes had made me heavy. I knew nothing of life nor of human beings; I hid myself out of poverty—and selfishness. I was so happy in the loneliness. It was splendid to sit at my cottage door and watch the sun setting, and to hear nothing, Mr Ramrige, not a voice, and to dream and dream again."

"Twenty years," the master murmured. "And mine are forty. Here are two men with sixty years between them wasted. A dream sixty years long stretched through two lives; and the greater dreamer rebukes the lesser one. Your vision has faded now," he went on. "The

shock of awakening has come and reality forces itself upon you."

"The garden did it."

"That old excuse when we stumble; an enemy has placed the obstacle in our way. To one flowers, to another stars. We must clear our own paths. Now you see another vision and it frightens you. The first was beautiful but you could not realise it; this one is terrible and like lightning. It is the end."

"I cannot face it," said Claud. "Leaving the little place, going out on the roads, looking for charity. I am not begging," he said roughly. "If you were to offer me anything, even a pair of boots, I would throw them away. I live on what I earn and that's sunshine."

"So you have given way. You have lost the one thing which kept you going—your happiness."

"I lost it weeks ago."

"Nothing can be lost. A change is not destruction. We must find this happiness in a new form. You are not beaten; you are tired, and when a man is exhausted he grows careless. You lose happiness, so you neglect yourself and go about in rags. You do not even take the trouble to clean yourself. Neglect is always shameful."

"Revile me, push me into the nettles, wake me up," Claud begged. "My old father might have left me a little though I did swear at him," he muttered.

"Surely an appeal to your brother might be of use?"

"That's what I came to see you about. Henry is here, or at least not far off, with his dreadful family," said Claud eagerly. "They are taking a holiday in Devonshire, and he has written to me saying he proposes coming to see for himself how his young brother lives, and he hopes I'll give him luncheon. I will, Mr Ramrige, I'll go into some field and steal a turnip and boil it for Henry. I'll give him poets' food and punch his head while he's eating it."

"Gently," said the master. "You cannot ask for friendship with an insult. A poor man must take his blows."

"I will take nothing from Henry except money, and that he owes me," said the excited poet. "If he jeers at me I'll take off my coat, if I have such a thing. I'll show him my poetic biceps."

"You must not mind a little badinage. Control your feelings and your tongue, humble yourself before him, and ask him to let you have a small allowance. If you cannot do it yourself, let him visit me and I will be your advocate."

"That is very kind," said Claud, "but you don't know Henry. He is sure to be a thick-headed man with a nasty smile and a prosperous look. He would arouse the homicidal instincts of an archangel. I could not cringe before him; I will die of starvation rather than bow myself down to his gold watchchain. He will roll into my cottage with the smell and pomp of all Birmingham, and my human nature will not be able to endure him. Here is his letter," cried Claud, tugging some discoloured documents from his coat-pocket. "He writes a vicious hand."

"The truth of the matter is you hate your brother. You will not acknowledge his superiority."

"He used to bully me," said Claud. "He hit me on the head with an inkstand once. He is not my superior. He was learning how to spell cat when I was in four syllables. The man's a fool, and so he's rich. Here is another letter, Mr Ramrige. I particularly want to show you this—from Miss Hortensia. A virulent woman, the poison of asps is in her tongue. I have done her no injury, and yet she hates me."

He handed the master a sheet which had been pink and dainty once, but was then soiled and crumpled, and proceeded, "Read it, please. I am sorry it is dirty but I stamped upon it."

Jasper read the passionate epistle and hardly knew whether to smile or frown. Being a woman Hortensia went too far in her malignancy, she wrote as she talked without stopping to count, and to a simple soul that letter was more than unkind, for it jeered at poverty, threatened persecution, and seemed to breathe hatred in every line.

"What do you think of that piece of wickedness?" asked Claud.

"I think it is far easier to read the minds of others than our own. Yours and Miss Vipont's are open books, but you cannot read them, just as I am unable to read my own. That is why we are so fond of meddling with the lives of others."

"This woman declares I assaulted her, robbed her; if I come near her again she shall consult a solicitor. She must be non-compos. There is madness in that family, Mr Ramrige, and Miss Hortensia ought to be placed in the hands of the lunacy commissioners. I was rude to her once, but she lost her temper and abused me, called me a poverty-stricken wretch—that's true, but when I put my hand into my pocket I find pride there, so I drew out a little and gave it to the woman."

"It is dangerous to interfere," said Jasper. "Nevertheless I will. Have you any other clothes?"

"A few, but they are worse than these. I put on my best to come and visit you," said the poet defiantly.

"I should like to take you to Miss Hortensia; I might be able to act the peacemaker between you, but you cannot come with me as you are now. You have let yourself down too far."

"You wonder how I exist. You think I ought to be gaunt and starving," said Claud in a hesitating fashion. "I'll tell you about a mystery. Twice a week regularly the postman delivers me a parcel. What do you think, Mr Ramrige?"

"Supplies," said the master.

"Groceries, baked meats, and cakes. Cunning little fellows full of cream. The first time the parcel came I was angry, but I was still more hungry ; it was a question whether I should throw away the food or my pride. Before the matter could be settled I was munching. These parcels keep on coming as steadily as wet days. I am putting on flesh and losing pride. Shall I tell you the name of my friend ? "

"I know it," said the master.

"You have a very wonderful mind," said Claud, "but you cannot know it."

"Take back your letter, consider the postscripts, and learn to understand a woman better," Jasper said, giving him the letter and the hint which he could not take.

"I would answer it if I dared, only I should say things quite as nasty and she might have me for slander. I would tell her I have a friend who looks after me, but that might make her worse. Her infamy might break out in a new place. This is an exceedingly dangerous woman."

"Who do you suppose is your benefactor ? "

"Emily," said Claud. "There can be no doubt about it. When the first parcel came I naturally looked at the postmark. It was Birmingham and every parcel since has also come from my native town. It could not be Henry, nor yet his wife, but they have a daughter whose name is Emily. It was then I peeped through the mystery. This young girl has heard about her uncle ; she is without doubt romantic, she loves poetry I am sure, and her father's coarseness must annoy her dreadfully. There came into her head the pretty fancy of sending her uncle a parcel of food twice weekly."

"How was she to know you are in want ? "

"She has been reading books which told her poets are always starving."

"Have you written to thank her?"

"So far I have not. There is enough pride left to make me shrink from taking my pen and writing anything so sordid as, 'I am most grateful for the meat and cakes.' If I wrote at all I should have to ask her to discontinue sending, and I am unwilling to do this, for I must own, Mr Ramrige, I have become somewhat dependent upon these food supplies from Birmingham."

"Claud," said the master, shaking his head, "too many mysteries surround us; we must not create others. Will you permit me to make peace between you and the lady of the garden?"

"I should like nothing better. I go in fear of her," the poet answered.

"Then make yourself as respectable as you can and return for me."

"Not to-day," said Claud. "These are my holiday clothes and I shall have to work hard at them. I am not deft with the needle. It is some weeks since I walked through Summerland," he went on. "I have become so shabby that I am ashamed to be seen."

"To-morrow, then," said the master.

"I knew you would help me," said Claud in his boyish way. "I am very grateful."

"And Emily?" the master added, with a smile.

"Yes, you and Emily are both good to me. You give me peace and Emily gives me food. I love you both," Claud muttered, and disappeared from the scene by way of wire-fence and bramble-patches.

That evening there came a knock upon the poet's door. Such knocks are often embarrassing to the man who lives alone, and Claud was that moment seated upon the table with a pair of shameful trousers across his knees, stitching mightily with a thread six feet long. Ask not how he was clad. He had been singing ballads but that dreadful cataclysmic knocking made him dumb; and then he

began to draw on those trousers, and the knock came again followed by a rattling of the latch, the door began to open, and Claud cried out as he heard a voice, "Anyone at 'ome?"

He was at least decent, so he hurried forward, with a large needle stuck in the knee of his trousers and two yards of thread trailing behind. Never had he looked more disreputable, for he had not washed, he wore no shirt, his beard was ragged, and his bare toes peeped from two shreds of shoes. This was his working costume; how could he suppose that the third visitor in twenty years would break upon his solitude at the very time he was preparing to become a visitor himself?

Claud knew who it was directly the door scraped back, and he saw a big red-faced man, town-bred and flabby, with a yellow moustache and waistcoat to match. It was a product of Birmingham, a thing of commerce, brother Henry the varnish merchant. Not all the sweet airs of Devonshire could remove those odours from him.

"I've made a mistake," said the visitor. "I was told a man named Yalland lived in a cottage somewhere about."

"You are brother Henry," said Claud.

"Good God!" said brother Henry.

He stood for a moment soaking himself with that revelation, and then he began to grin. It was a small thing at first, a mere twitch of the mouth, but it developed and went over his features, even into the eyes and forehead, until the entire red face was a mask of comedy; and presently noise began, that too gentle half-squeak, half-titter, until it swelled into a great coarse laugh; and brother Henry slapped his leg and made himself offensive.

"Well, I'm blowed," he gasped. "My brother Claud, a pauper, worse than a tramp, in receipt of parish-pay. All right, old chap, I must laugh a bit. Let's look inside. Good Lord, I wouldn't put my 'orses in 'ere. Well, you're my brother. I s'pose we'd better shake 'ands."

"You may go to the devil," said Claud fiercely. "That's all I have to say to you."

"Don't be a fool," said his brother roughly. "I'm sorry for you. I never thought you were like this, or I'd 'ave sent you a bit to go on with. Father supposed you were doing all right, and when you wrote I reckoned you were sponging. Why, man, you're worse off than any labourer. You're starving, you've 'ardly a rag to cover you. Those old trousers!" cried Henry, and exploded again with infernal laughter.

Claud was forced to put his hands behind his back. They were not safe in front of him. This was the man he was to cringe before, this was the being he was to bow down to and ask a favour of. That golden and protruding waistcoat was the shrine he was to kneel at. Claud made up his mind that starvation would be pleasanter.

"Thought I'd come and take a look at you as I was in the neighbourhood," Henry went on. "So I slipped over on a motor-bike, 'aving nothing much to do this afternoon."

"Is Emily with you?" Claud asked.

"Oh yes. Emily wouldn't be left be'ind."

Claud fell to thinking. Emily could not dwell in Devonshire and be sending him parcels from Birmingham.

"Is she fond of poetry?" he blurted.

"Emily fond of poetry. That's a good 'un. A penny novelette is more in her way of thinking. She's a fine girl, a bit flashy I guess, but girls get like that nowadays. Haven't got a whisky-and-soda I s'pose, Claud?" he went on. "Gosh! ain't it a stinking 'ole!"

"Look here, Henry," said Claud, as calmly as he could. "You have come to see me so that you can laugh and enjoy yourself. Now that you have seen me and had your laugh you can get out."

"There's precious little inducement to stay," growled Henry. "This is what education brings a fellow to.

Thank God I never took to it. Trade's good enough for me." He added a few critical remarks concerning poetry which were sound from a business point of view, and added offensively, "If you won't give me a drink, perhaps you'll be good enough to 'and me some disinfecting powder."

Claud replied by dragging the door open—it had a trick of sticking to the uneven floor—and making an inhospitable motion of his head. He was smouldering inwardly and fearful of some insult which would compel him to do this flabby man a mischief, for he was many times stronger than Henry who had breathed smoke all his life. Claud's body was filled with good air and his muscles were hard with gardening.

"If you won't be friendly, I will get out," said the visitor, staring very blankly at his brother, charitably supposing him to be deprived of reason. "I've offered you my 'and, Claud, and you wouldn't take it. I'd 'ave offered to pay your rent if you'd received me properly. 'Ere!" he cried, thrusting a spotty hand into his pocket. "Take this, and buy yourself a pair of working man's corduroy trousers"; and he slapped half-a-crown upon the table.

Claud picked it up, then turned to the door and flung the coin far out of sight into the field.

"You couldn't throw as far as that," he said simply.

"Well, I'm blowed," muttered Henry. "If that's the way he chucks his money about no wonder he's a pauper."

"I wouldn't take a penny from you. If you were to divide the business^{type} and offer me half I wouldn't look at it," said Claud.

"I'm done," was his brother's comment. "Good-bye, old chap," he said, rolling forward with his intolerable grin. "Do your best to keep out of the workhouse for the sake₂ of the family. It's a pity you haven't got a woman to look after you. We've a servant at 'ome who

would do for you, a good strong country girl who could mend those trousers of yours, and cook the dinner when you've got any. I'll ask her when I get back if she's fond of poetry. She would make a good wife for a working man, only she might want a better place than this to live in—now look 'ere, Claud, I'm not going to stand any nonsense," he went on in blustering tones. "If I've spoken a bit rough it's your own fault; you told me to go to the devil directly I set foot in the place. Let me get out"; for Claud had shut the door and bolted it, and there was quite a different expression in his eyes. Henry's last utterance had rubbed an old sore; and when Claud stepped forward the elder man remembered they were in a very lonely place, and he thought of all the tragedies he had read in his Sunday newspaper, of murders in country cottages, and men being done to death by lunatics, and skeletons found in woodstacks. His flabby face whitened and looked stupid.

"Put your 'ands down, old boy. Don't be a fool," he said feebly. "I'll send you a cheque when I get back. I'll buy a little 'ouse for you, Claud. Whatever shall I do if he 'its me in the face?" he whispered.

"I'm not going to touch you," said his brother firmly, "if you obey me," he added. "You have enjoyed your laugh and now I'm going to have mine. You have come to my cottage as a rich man, and you shall go away worse than a tramp. Take off your clothes."

"What do you mean, Claud? I say, old chap, I can't strip, you know," blurted Henry. "I can't take my clothes off. He's mad, that's what it is—the poor chap has lost his senses."

"I'll have those clothes," said Claud. "I'm not going to rob you; I'll give you a suit in exchange, but I'm going to let you know what it is to go through the country seeing the people grin at you, and hearing the children shout after you. Take off those clothes, or I'll do it for you"

" Good God, man, I can't go back in those things you're wearing."

" You are not going to. These are my best clothes. I've got a suit upstairs for you, and a shirt too, and a pair of socks, and boots, and a hat that will make the dogs bark at you. Come along upstairs. This is the day of poetry."

Henry almost wept.

What happened in the bedroom Claud described to one person only, and he was understood to mention that no violence had been necessary; but it must have been threatened, for loud were the exclamations and great the oaths which sent their echoes across the lonely fields. There emerged presently from the poet's cottage a shameful figure with its head down, and the hands clapped for shame across the largest rents, and this figure hurried towards the lane, mounted a machine, and sped away, having first assumed a small waterproof cape which made the nether rags more ludicrous by contrast; not to dwell upon the boots; there was pathos in those boots. One dropped off, it was said, in the middle of Summerland village, but its owner did not stay to claim it.

A stranger, thought the master, was approaching him as he walked upon his favourite path the following afternoon. This big good-natured man, well-dressed, he could not recognise until he came quite close, for in addition to the clothes of Henry, the glowing waistcoat not included, Claud had trimmed his beard and civilised himself intensively. Jasper asked no question but gathered a flower and handed it to the poet saying, " The one thing wanting."

" You would almost persuade me I am going courting," said Claud.

" What is your own idea ? "

" We are going on a mission of peace."

" Love is the only bringer of peace that I know of," Jasper answered.

When they were drawing near Cob Court the poet held back and was afraid to finish the journey. "I don't know why it is, but I feel nervous. I have eaten well, yet I have a sensation of emptiness. She will insult me and I shall lose my temper. It is no use ; there can be no peace between us, Mr Ramrige ; we hate each other too much. I can never forgive her for the things she said to me, and I lost control over myself once when I was hungry, I have exposed myself, she knows I am a brute, and as for herself her temper is vile and her tongue is horrible. I am imposing upon your good nature and wasting your time. I would rather not go to-day."

Jasper held Claud relentlessly by the arm and led him on, and the poet was not able to resist but merely murmured, "She may be out. If she knows I am with you she will say she is. That woman has told me dreadful lies."

"She expects us both. I sent her a message," said the master.

Hortensia was in her room prettily dressed, with yet another ribbon in her hair. She flushed when her visitors entered, smiled when Claud bumped his forehead, but froze again when she shook hands with him. This man could never be a friend ; he had sworn at her, had compelled her by brute force to open a gate for him, had eaten her out of house and home ; but she owned to her mind, which was far away at the other end of the zig-zags, that he made a passably good male figure in those well-cut clothes.

"My dear lady," said the master, "I have wasted forty years of my life in useless study, but I do not propose to waste even forty seconds now. This man and you have quarrelled for a year, and I am bringing you together in my own pedantic way because I am assured that without some assistance from a third party no understanding can ever be reached between you. Here is an old man who has

tried to do good, but has failed in every instance. Let him have the pleasure of placing to his account this one success."

"That man has been vile to me. He is a poet. He has——" began Hortensia, playing the same game of self-defence, which had then become more necessary than ever, but the master checked her.

"I understand you both; I know you well. Claud had to call up pride to hide his poverty; his life has been hard, he has failed in the work he set before himself, but I know of no man who has ever faced adversity with a face more smiling, and I believe there are few living more good-natured and more kind. You have been hasty with him for a reason which I can understand. Let me interfere this once. Look upon me still as master; be my pupils and let me teach you this. In our short lives it is terrible to make even one mistake. We are rewarded slowly for our best endeavours; we are punished very swiftly for our faults. Claud, good man, and Hortensia, good woman, understand one another before it is too late."

The poet came forward; Hortensia flushed brightly and murmured, "They have always called you a magician."

"Claud," said the master. "Here is Emily."

"What do you mean?" cried Hortensia, feeling suddenly warm and happy, and seeing those three corners of her life well occupied.

"Here is your Emily who sent you food from Birmingham."

"Oh, no, no," she cried, covering her face.

"Was that abuse, Claud Yalland?"

"You magician!" she said. "No one but you would have found me out."

"I told you once to listen, Claud: I tell you now to speak."

"Miss Hortensia," stammered the poet. "I never, never hated you."

"Then you always, always told me lies," she murmured.

"Learn as much as you can," said the master. And he went away quietly and shut the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

FINAL

JASPER was about to return home justified when Theodore followed, having watched from his museum window until the master left Hortensia's threshold, and requested him to visit Mary.

"She commands me to bring you. She has a way of issuing orders which her mother might have admired and would certainly have put a stop to. She has become an imperial woman and I am a subject, a mean creature, a tax-payer, overlooked by the personality of my own sovereign daughter. I do not mind paying tribute, but I would like recognition."

Jasper turned unwillingly, as the atmosphere about him seemed to change, and Theodore perceiving the hesitation rambled on, "She is friendly to you. No one in the world seems of much account to her except you. I have a feeling sometimes, when I hear her cold philosophy, that you have given me Mary even as Orton gave me Lucy."

The master did not answer. He walked on quickly, while Theodore quaked and bustled at his side.

"Take her away, Mr Ramrige. Give me back my little pearl-child. This one is sane but terrible; she looks upon me with contempt. Margaret was a Sunday child; this one has no beliefs, and religion is to her a superstition of weak minds. Margaret was Angelica; this one has no

good looks. Margaret was Cordelia ; this one has a heart of stone. Give me my little girl again."

"I cannot bring the dead to life," said Jasper.

"Margaret is not dead. She is sleeping," insisted Theodore. "I hear her in the night when she cries out and tries to free herself."

"We shall never reach her. Beneath Mary is Lucy. Margaret is the weakest person of this trinity. If Mary loses her strength it is Lucy who must return."

"Am I to live with this frozen Mary ? "

"That is your fate," said the master, changing and speaking coldly.

"For how long ? "

"Until death."

"This is a kind of matrimony," said Theodore mockingly. "Whom God has joined together—but God has not done it. This is the blundering foolish work of man. Margaret has fallen in the conflict of human minds. First it was human wickedness ; now it is human wisdom. That wisdom is all folly, Mr Ramrige."

"It is all folly," he repeated.

"I said to Orton when he came and sneered at me. 'Love will win.' I thought it would. But love died with Margaret. Everything is cold and fierce. You too are cold at last. Mary is your echo. I say again you have given her to me."

"I did my best," came the answer ; and now it was stern.

"I would rather the Almighty had done His worst," said Theodore.

Jasper went on into the house, while Theodore remained upon the path of inverted grave-stones muttering, "I trusted him and he has deceived me. He was Orton's master ; he taught him." He stood there bracketing wickedness and wisdom, deaf to the sounds which peace and happiness produced, not starting even when he heard

Hortensia exclaim, "We will build a hot-house by the herb-garden," alone with his own absence of mind, but never asking himself whether his habit of picking up things had anything to do with the mystery of Margaret and her loss.

Mary rose from a reading desk to receive the master, and bowed in a stately manner; while he recoiled, not daring to ask himself who she might be, only shocked to see her as she was. Where was the pretty face of the girl who had once clung to him? This woman was strong and passionless, and more, she was very plain, and had taken lately to wear spectacles, and upon her chin and upper lip a growth was forming of stiff hair. And while the master watched a voice was saying, using his own words to Cuthbert, "This mind is yours."

"I had expected you before," she said. "Our work had to be discussed, and as the time for it is drawing very near I was about to send for you. I have the thought you have avoided me."

"What work do you refer to?" he asked, speaking with difficulty, finding it almost impossible to meet her eyes, for she seemed to crush and dominate him like a personal idea, and he dreaded to hear her give utterance to some of his secret thoughts, exposing his hollowness, proving him inconsistent, convicting him of false pride. He started at every motion of that dress.

"My father might ask me such a question," she replied frigidly. "From you I look for understanding. I have here," she went on, lifting a heap of memoranda, "the notes which I have made bearing upon the philosophy of the subject. You will find them, I fear, inadequate but I have done my best," echoing his own words, "to convince myself that the work, if unpleasant, is necessary and can be justified. First, as regards the principle of resentment," she went on, taking the first slip. "Here we have to eliminate erroneous opinion and criminal habit;

from the last you and I are free, but we are liable to fall into the first. I desire you therefore to check me if I fall into any obvious error. This resentment is undoubtedly a natural desire, as it is founded upon a sentiment of ill-will, which will have to be considered in its relation to justice. It is instinctive, and thus may be said to exclude reason, since it suggests to us the necessity of avenging ourselves as completely as possible upon the cause, animate or inanimate, of our suffering without asking ourselves whether we are acting wisely. As rational beings the desire for vengeance is also deliberate, since it has been aroused by deliberate injury. Resentment urges us to put an end to the object which has disturbed our happiness."

Jasper was seated by the window looking ruinous. The breeze entered and played with his beard; otherwise the massive figure was quiescent. He knew what plan was working in her mind.

"Action is forced upon us," she said, taking the second slip. "It is our duty before undertaking it to decide whether we have a complete perception of what this action is, what emotion it produces, and with what feelings it is accompanied. If it gives us pain we may shrink from its performance out of selfishness. If it brings gratification we are to reflect whether the action may not have in it more of evil than of good. If it is accompanied by pity we may wish to hesitate through fear of destroying our peace of mind, and thus adding to our burden of unhappiness. We have furthermore to consider whether we are capable of performing the action. The heart, the brain, and bodily strength are involved here; not to dwell particularly upon judgment and courage.

"Character I must mention briefly," she continued. "We desire to be well thought of by our fellow-creatures, therefore when we contemplate an action which is punishable by laws which have nothing to do with nature, but have indeed been made to protect the community against

the sudden outbreak of natural passion, we require to be discreet and to act with secrecy from the two-fold motive of personal safety and self-esteem. An unpopular action creates an evil character. I trust there are no fallacies ? ” she asked coldly.

Jasper started and could only murmur, “ None ” ; but he was dazed and hardly heard her.

“ I proceed to justice,” she went on, taking another of those neat note-slips. “ It concerns action in this respect ; we are not to be influenced by selfish considerations, we are to consider the well-being of others, and protect those who are more weak-minded than ourselves from being injured and possibly destroyed by unscrupulous means. Justice implies also a desire of happiness, since it aims at removing a cause of suffering ; the malefactor, being a peril to the community, shall be either destroyed or rendered harmless. It is for justice to decide which course to take, and in so doing it is influenced by the enormity of the crime and the character of the accused. We have to remember when we sit in judgment not merely what is good for ourselves, but what will be a benefit to others. The clearest reason is required and this must over-ride all prejudice. The soundest impartiality must be practised. Justice regards conduct only, and is related to resentment by the virtue of benevolence, that is to say by a sincere wish to do good by putting an end to evil. It is for consciousness to dictate to the moral faculty what is evil in others.”

“ That is wrong,” said Jasper, waking up. “ Consciousness is concerned with the acts and feelings of our own minds.”

She removed her spectacles and wiped them, made a correction in her notes, and said sharply, “ We will discuss this point more fully at some other time. Consciousness is a matter of knowing well ; the minds of others as well as our own. Justice without consciousness would be

tyranny. What I was about to say is this : consciousness gives us the power of praising, or of bestowing censure, upon the deeds of others. Before we have a right to act we must be sure we are in a position to judge ; and before we condemn it is necessary to realise all that justice means.

"The next point," she continued impassively, "is the necessity of securing our own happiness. The desire to be happy is inseparable from human nature, and it may be said to influence almost every action of life. The cruelty and neglect of our fellow-creatures are the principal obstacles to happiness. The removal of such obstacles, whether by craft or violence, is, I imagine, a matter of justice to ourselves. Happiness therefore is often to be obtained by the simple process of removing those who are causing us suffering. The highest form of happiness consists, not in the gratification of bodily appetite, nor in the avoidance of physical pain, nor yet in absolutely correct conduct, but in tranquillity of the mind."

"I may have said so," the master murmured, "but I was wrong. There can be no peace of mind when the conduct is evil."

"I was about to give a definition," she replied.

"I know it. Conduct which may seem incorrect to others, but is not rebuked by our own conscience. A woman who avenges herself upon a man who has corrupted her may be adjudged guilty of a crime, though her conduct will be correct in her own sight."

"That is exactly the case I have quoted here," she said, and Jasper was put to silence.

"The sense of duty," she continued, "is responsible for moral conduct. This is not a result of education but an instinctive principle. It is a moral duty for a rational being to reciprocate the emotions of love and hatred. Reason is the interpreter of moral sense, showing us where and how we are to discharge our duty, indicating to us what it is, telling us what is necessary must be good.

Reason dictates every action, even the smallest duties of domestic life."

"What is the aim of this?" said Jasper, rousing himself to face the end, and fearing perhaps she would continue these philosophical ramblings indefinitely.

"Preparation," she replied. "We are not animals, that we should satisfy our resentment without thought or reason. We have to search our minds, satisfy ourselves that the deed we contemplate is founded upon justice, is likely to secure our happiness, and is necessary for the well-being of others."

"What action?"

"How is it you are so dull? The punishment of Cuthbert Orton."

"He is being punished by Nature."

She looked at him contemptuously, as if ashamed of his weakness, and said, "Nature is a blunderer; she strikes recklessly. We have to control the weapons that she uses."

"Who gave you these ideas?" he cried.

She hesitated and could not find an answer.

"We can only respond to Nature. We are earthen vessels holding a little fire."

"Have you always thought so?"

"There have been moments of folly and weakness," he confessed, remembering the time when his body had been so strong and the sun had made him feel divine.

"I have some knowledge of you as a teacher," she said. "I do not know when it was, or where, that I heard your voice and saw the pictures which you passed before me. I feel you have made me strong. I have tried to benefit by your teaching. Are you satisfied with me?" she asked almost anxiously.

"Continue," he said quickly. "Finish what you have to say."

"It is here," she said, taking another paper and frowning

at it. "When we contemplate a work of this kind it is necessary to employ skill and cunning. Great secrecy must be observed. The condemned has wronged us greatly. I have written, urging him to meet us upon Rockside at ten o'clock to-morrow night."

"What have I to do with this?"

"He has ruined your life as well as mine. We must act together. It is imperative that I should have a partner, for I am only a woman and my strength is mental, not physical. You say he will not come to Rockside? I reply that he will, for I wrote as a friend, forgiving him, and desiring to meet him as a friend. I wrote with ink which after twenty-four hours fades completely from the paper. All this is philosophic cunning. When we take vengeance we must hide ourselves from the eyes of the vulgar. It is very lonely upon Rockside; no wayfarer is likely to be passing at that hour; and it will be dark. I went there at ten o'clock last night to complete our preparations, taking a mattock belonging to my aunt. I passed across the river and through the wood, travelling with great secrecy. I had already examined the place carefully. It would be impossible to find a better for our purpose."

"This is not philosophy. It is crime."

"I concealed the mattock beneath some furze-bushes," she went on in the same cold way. "No doubt you are well acquainted with the locality. There are many bogs, and one is particularly large and deep. It is what is known as a quaking bog, and when a portion of the heavy moss has been cleared away a stone dropped upon the surface sinks from sight at once. To-morrow night I shall inform my father I am about to retire, but instead of doing so I shall leave the house by the back, after having placed a dummy in my bed—these tricks are despicable but necessary—climb upon Rockside by means of the wood and moor, where I can pass unperceived, giving myself time enough

to remove with the mattock still more of the moss from the surface of this bog. So dense is the moss that I have discovered by experiments not even a weighty body will sink through it with sufficient celerity for our purpose. About the same time you will leave God's Garden, travelling with equal secrecy, and when you arrive will hide yourself among the furze-bushes. I come now to what weakness bids me call the disagreeable part of our action."

"It is terrible," he murmured. "The moral sense is lacking altogether."

"The question whether the body should be consigned to the morass in a sensible or in an unconscious condition perplexes me," she continued. "I am prepared to be advised by you in this particular. You will perceive that noise must be avoided, on account of the clearness of this atmosphere which is a ready conductor of sound. One cry might arouse the morbid curiosity of the vulgar. I have prepared the place where the condemned is to stand; near the edge of the bog and in close proximity to the furze-bushes where you will have secreted yourself. It would be possible for me to push him sharply, but I might fail and his suspicions would be aroused. Or you could strike him upon the head with the mattock, if this proceeding would not be too unrefined. I am inclined to suggest a combination of forces; when I make a certain remark, to be agreed upon, you would rise and hurl him back, while at the same instant I would push him forward. This could hardly fail to be effectual as the physical condition of the condemned is poor. There would be a slight splash, the body would disappear instantly, possibly with some assistance from ourselves, we would then replace the moss and depart. Any emotion of pity we should probably be able to restrain. You will now perceive," she went on, with a final glance at her notes, "that our preparations are complete. We have satisfied ourselves regarding the ethical nature of the problem. Human

resentment is in certain cases laudable, a disagreeable action is not to be avoided when it becomes a duty, character must be maintained, the security of happiness is a right, and justice is our leading principle of action. We have prepared, with a certain amount of skill and cunning, a scheme which will not attract to us the curiosity and malevolence of the vulgar. Nothing remains but exertion. My rough draft is possibly capable of revision and improvement. Therefore if you have any suggestions to make I am prepared to hear them. Your silence, broken by occasional critical observations, does not denote enthusiasm."

"You propose a murder," he cried.

"Be more discreet," she said sharply. "The window is open."

"A murder," he whispered.

"It is called so in the vernacular. We use the expression of justice."

"Do not include me. This is your work. I have no share in it. Dare you propose to me that I should murder any man, least of all my friend?"

She gazed at him a long time, trying to reason and to understand; and then she asked, "Who gave me knowledge?"

"I do not know."

"You gave it me."

"If that is true, what am I?" he murmured, and his life flashed back showing him days of self-love and nights of foolish research from the golden spring to the white winter. He had opposed his powers to those of Cuthbert, he too had striven to create; if his pupil had been able to destroy Margaret and to make Lucy, he with his philosophic arts would destroy Lucy and make Mary. If Cuthbert could make a sinful woman he could make a saint; and there she was standing before him, a plain pathetic woman wearing glasses, with unwomanly hair forming upon her

chin, half-wise, half-natural, the woman he had made, the cold calculating unmoral woman knowing nothing of love, filled with criminal instincts which she called a sense of justice, eager to perform a murder, claiming him as a partner because he had been her teacher, supposing that all her ideas originated with him. It was the creature of his own mind that stood before him.

"I did not teach you this," he said.

"No one has taught me but you," she answered.

"Margaret," he cried. "If I could only find you."

"She is here—in me."

"Do you not remember the day I met you in the wood? How I spoke to you concerning the mystery of yourself? And the day you were carried to Windwhistle? And our last sad meeting in the garden?"

"She would remember. I do not."

"What do you propose now?"

"To put an end to Cuthbert Orton."

"And then?"

"To resume my studies with you. We shall work together and live for learning. We will found a school of new philosophy. We will read the stars. You claimed me once, you taught me, made me, you grew me out of some wild thing I have no knowledge of. What fault have you to find with me now?"

"A murderess! It is how men create when they do create."

"So you too are weak," she said disdainfully. "Is there no strength left? Am I to work alone? You may desert me but I will not desert you, and if you fail me——"

"As I must."

"This brain must work out another plan. Resentment will do its work. To-morrow night you shall meet me upon Rockside."

"You will not find me there—not alone."

Again she looked at him; and then, though her appear-

ance did not alter, she sank into the chair beside her desk and hid her face upon her arms. He approached, placed a hand upon her shoulder, listening to the happy life and murmur of the garden, but the only word he could utter was, "Margaret," and the only wish in his mind was that he could bring her back.

"This is folly," she said at last. "I perceive I am alone—abandoned. The end of life, as I understand it, is good, since it is the completion of a work. One life must come to an end. It is either Cuthbert Orton's or my own; for if he continues to live my mind will know no rest, happiness cannot be attained, justice will remain unsatisfied. The evil will go on. One of us must leave the world. The choice is with you. Of your two pupils, Cuthbert Orton and myself, you are to lose one, the woman or the man. Which is it to be—the woman you have made, or the man who has marred you?"

"Neither," he said in a trembling voice.

"You cannot prevent it with all your knowledge. One ends. You are the judge. Will you come upon Rockside and work with me?"

"I will not."

"You condemn me."

"Mary, you must be sane and strong."

"Shall you warn him?"

"I must."

"You condemn me," she said again. "Shall you inform my father?"

"It is my duty to do so."

"You condemn me," she said for the third time; and it seemed to him that Margaret, Lucy, and Mary had all spoken.

"We are not allowed to interfere with Nature," he said wildly, knowing that he himself had tried to do so.

"I shall wait until to-morrow night at ten o'clock," she went on, speaking in that passionless voice of deter-

mination which made him cold inwardly. "If it becomes necessary to leave this house before then, I shall do so and hide myself. If you and Cuthbert Orton fail to come upon Rockside at the time appointed, or if you are present and have warned him, I must die; and if you tell my father I must die; and if you abandon me I must die."

"Spare him," he prayed, "and me—and yourself."

"There has been too much yielding in the past. This is the end."

"I appeal to you, Margaret, to your goodness, gentleness, to your loving nature and desire for the beautiful."

"I know nothing of her," said Mary.

"Then I will shake you and destroy you, mine or not," he cried strongly. "I will shock you out of existence. You too shall go. I appeal to you, Lucy. Awake, Lucy! Come back with your wild immorality which is better than this cold unmorality. Lucy, come back! Answer me."

"This is madness," said Mary quietly. "Do not imagine you can terrify me with ghosts of the dead. What has this Lucy to do with my life?"

"Is there no struggle taking place within you?" he asked despairingly.

"None; I am cold and calm. My determination is fixed like the mountain behind us."

He knew that it was so. He had finished his teaching and here was the result: wisdom in the form of a murderess, philosophy working to its end with all the cruelty, lies, and cunning of the brain. A saint and her music; the ideal was as far distant as the planet Uranus; and instead of it, a cold produce of intellect, without the heart which had died with Margaret, or the passion which had failed with Lucy; a brain only which calculated and plotted to its end, and had no knowledge of affection nor of forgiveness. The thoughts passed rapidly. Not a moment could be

spared. A living second was of more account than forty dead years.

"Vipont!" he cried, knowing he was outside because flowers and leaves brushed his hands, and he felt the blessed sunlight on his eyes. He heard laughter which made him more wretched, and glad voices from Hortensia's quarters, with the dry cackle of Theodore added; and he went to put an end to that happiness, and to frighten them with his haggard face, his loss of control which was a new thing, and his agitated voice which broke and rumbled, "Vipont! She has ceased to be a rational being. Go to her at once. You too, Yalland. This is a game for strong men. Restrain her; use force if necessary. Do not leave her for one instant, or she will lay violent hands upon herself. Vipont, go at once."

"So she is mad at last," murmured Hortensia from the midst of her happiness. "It is perhaps the best thing which could happen short of the return of Margaret."

The men were soon back. They had found the room empty, and Mary was not in the house.

"She must be found. Inform the neighbourhood," said Jasper. "Yalland, you are a quick walker. Find her."

"She went out by the back," said Hortensia.

"Through the wood, then," said Claud, and he was off at once.

"To Windwhistle," whispered Theodore. "She declared she would go there."

The master started in that direction along the lonely road beneath the oaks and between the ferns. The cool of the evening was descending but he could not feel it. His body was in a sweat. Master and teacher no longer but judge, half-hero and half-god, the office he had longed for; the heroic state, higher than his fellow-men, had been attained, even forced upon him; it would not do to say he was unwilling for sentence must be pronounced

with divine wisdom upon one of his pupils, either upon Margaret whom he loved, or upon Cuthbert whom he—ah, but he loved him too, he could not help it; he knew as he hurried along that fatal road, with the dew of the evening falling on his sweat, unable to reject either, that he had been drawn to the mystical boy by something stronger than mere mastership; the bond existed in a red cord of blood and life, and was not to be snapped at a wish or by the entire effort of manhood; they were joined together still, and nothing but death could end that affinity or break the Saturn-like ring of mystery which hedged them round. He could not lose Cuthbert; he could not condemn Mary. Both stood before him awaiting sentence. One of you must stay; the other go. But which?

"Master is out, sir," said Seabroke. "He is always out. Eats nothing, sir. Walks all day."

"Where does he go usually?"

"Along the wood at the back of Summerland, sir."

"How has he been lately?"

"Cruel ill, sir. Something on his mind. Frets for the dog, sir."

"Why is it I cannot lose him?" the master panted, as he took to the road again. "He has given his life to dogs and dirt; and I am nothing. They must live, both of them. Give me the strength," he cried. "As well as power, the strength I have longed for; and wisdom to solve the riddle. Let me have wisdom and strength for one short day."

It was almost cold in the wood, clammy, and the bogs stank. Every leaf was wet, and the light was a ghostly green. Instead of an increase of strength the master felt it failing, and as he hurried on and saw no sign of Cuthbert, and heard no footsteps trampling the ferns, he became dizzy with weariness, while his thoughts went on working, and the knowledge that the time was short oppressed him,

and his tongue went on murmuring, "Which is it to be? Duty calls for Mary. The mind claims Cuthbert. I cannot see the way. I tell Cuthbert, and by so doing condemn Mary. If I do not tell him, he will go to Rockside and meet his fate. If I go there with Yalland to restrain her, she will destroy herself; if not then, later. The responsibility lies upon me. Whichever course I take death must lie at my door; I must either brand myself as a murderer or connive at a suicide. There is only one course. She must be restrained and kept in confinement until her life ends. If I could only meet Margaret again, walking here, nervous and beautiful, and still ready to place her life like a flower into my hand and to trust in me as she did in the garden, how gladly I would die to save her. If I could see Cuthbert again, with that longing expression on his face, and that haunting light of terror in his eyes as he tried to escape from his own mind in the mountain pass, how gladly I would die for him. It has been worked out to the end," he cried, as he lifted his white face towards the evening sky and saw the quivering world of Venus lighted there. "It is written there in simple characters, of which that light is one, and yet I cannot read."

His eyes left the pale sky and reached the dark-green depths, travelling many millions of miles in one instant yet seeing so little, and coming to rest upon the ferns. They were so large and strong in their tangled unity that the combined forces of the evening breezes could hardly stir them, but they murmured among them, making enough sound to be sad, and they brought the smell out. An owl glided out towards a dark cloud which was coming up, the last echoes of Summerland died away among the hills, the frogs began to make a cheerful hymn of night in the swamps, the great crushing wheel of Nature went round slowly, covering time not ground, making for life; and as the old philosopher felt its motion, his body became as

the handful of white ashes left by the burnt-out fire of sacrifice, and his soul beat into the evening light, and he knew that his own small circle was coming full round, that the song was near its end and the morning would dawn again upon the oaks and the ferns and the dark thatch of Summerland, and he would not be there to meet it; his teaching was finished; he would be taught elsewhere; and in that other life he might be asked by some wise master, "Brother, where are your pupils?"

He stood upon the highest point where it was open moorland, and he could look over the tops of the trees and see the gloomy outlines of Rockside, almost on a level with his eyes but a great way off; for Rockside was the summit of the cliff opposite, and between were the winding river and the road, the dense wood, and all the mountain nymphs, dryads, flower-spirits and river-gods which mystery have made. All were real in that mysterious light, all were eager and bustling, and were asking Jasper Ramrige, "Master, where are your pupils?"

They were ascending Rockside. Shadows were forming, night advanced with great strides, ascending from the valley to extinguish the last daylight upon the hill-top, and yet Jasper could see them, the man and the woman clad in black, conspicuous against the white rocks, ascending slowly side by side, like lovers or like children going to school, walking as companions and friends in the direction of the sunset, passing away silently like two clouds of day dissolving into night; and Jasper watched them, as a man in a dream may watch the two beings he loves best being carried along towards destruction and is unable to cry out or help them. What was the gift of a man's voice when only an angel's wings could serve him? He might stand there and shout, but who would hear him? His voice would drop into the ferns; the frogs would answer it. They had met in that wood, and Mary would have welcomed Cuthbert with words of forgiveness, and led him on

with her towards Rockside, speaking as a friend with that cold cunning which she called philosophy ; and the master could only watch and struggle as they went out of his life and beyond his teaching into the night, powerless to give a warning or prevent a deed.

"Let me be mistaken," he prayed. "Imagination tortures me. These two figures are mountain spirits, immortals. They are far away ; the shadows perplex me ; they are forms of the atmosphere and will melt " ; but the dryads came twisting and chattering out of every oak, mocking and pointing with green fingers, and screaming, "They are your pupils, master. We heard her feigning friendliness, and asking him to walk with her that they might talk as friends. They are your pupils, Jasper Ramrige."

"It is not true," he said aloud, "that I have ever been so fanatical as to think of taking Orton's life for the sake of his own future and for the sake of others."

Then the dryads came chattering out again and answered him, "It is true, master. You would not have done so certainly, but still the thought did come, and it was in your mind when you taught Lucy and showed her pictures of the ruined temples and altars choked with weeds. Mary is your pupil, Jasper Ramrige."

"At least I have done my best for Orton," he cried.

The oak-trees were silent, though they shook green bunches of their fingers at him ; but solemn voices came out of the ferns and answered, "When he was a boy you neglected him, because he would not devote himself to study. You allowed him to take his own way. You attended to those who were willing to work, to those who least required your help. You let his mind become assertive when you might have held it down. You watched him poison himself, and when the evil had been accomplished you busied yourself with efforts to restore him."

"That is the way these men work," said the immortal

dryads scornfully. "They place their hands upon the sides of a pot to remove it from the fire, and then complain because they burn and blacken their fingers. It does not occur to them to remove it by the handle."

"Light!" cried the master, as so many had done before him. "Let me have light."

But the night was upon them all; surrounding the two figures on Rockside. They walked into it and Jasper saw them no more.

He turned and descended towards the village; and when near the end of the wood a man came blundering out of the ferns, and the master heard the voice of Yalland, "I have searched from the river to the moor, but have not seen her."

"Go upon Rockside. Go as fast as you can, for I can do no more. I will follow and await you on the road."

It was a long way round. Darkness had fallen, making a passage through the wood impossible. An hour had passed before the poet and philosopher met upon the road, where the useless sign-post stood, and Jasper heard the message, "No one is there."

"You heard nothing?"

"Only ponies among the furze-bushes."

"What did you see?"

"The white rocks. It was too dark to see more. But she was not there."

"Did you notice anything?"

"A strong smell."

"Of mud?"

"Bog mud."

"Recently disturbed."

"I did not think of that," Claud whispered.

"Say nothing. It is the end. We keep this matter to ourselves, to our own minds—to our dreams at night."

It was morning, and Jasper stood upon Rockside. He had been to Windwhistle to discover the mechanical Sea-

brokes performing useless duties, and distressed because their master had not been heard of. He had gone also to Cob Court, where Hortensia and Claud were brushing shadows off their happiness, had asked for Theodore, and learnt that he was absent searching for his daughter. The sky was very dark ; rain was falling, splashing upon the black and sullen water of the bog. The greater part was covered with bright green moss ; the portion near his feet was bare, black as the past night with slime and water. In that struggle both had fallen. The surroundings were unquiet ; but peace would return with the first sunshine. Man would never mark that spot, but Nature might, during many a night to come, with two small lamps of mystery, two friar's lanterns, burning and hovering after sundown, to frighten the superstitious and the ignorant who would not know that these flickering candles were all that remained to earth of two lives ; two little unquiet lights, blue and terrible, playing beneath the moon.

"Here are my pupils," said the master.

THE END

8

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

NOV 15 1915

FEB 20 1916

AUG 5 1916

SEP 12 1916

JAN 27 1917
DEC 18 1917

JUL 13 1918

NOV 29 1918

JUN 20 1919

OCT 31 1919

AUG 24 1920

YB 32917

310165

Life Science

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

