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QUALITY CORNER

A STUDY OF REMORSE

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‘NORTH WAS THE GARDEN’

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QUALITY CORNER

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Quality Corner

CHAPTER I

WHAT time is it?’ asked the man at the window.
‘Half-past twelve’, carelessly answered the man in the street, walking on with leisurely step.

It was not until he had gone some little way that the strangeness of the question struck him. Why, indeed, should, a man indoors ask the time of a man without? And at past midnight? The stroller stopped, reflected a moment, then turned back.

He was an observant, idly inquisitive man; an artist, and the public was beginning to recognise him as such, honouring him after the fashion of Heliogabalus, with much feasting and final smother. Mark Parfitt liked the feasting, and sat tight, lest any should take his place. He meant to move up higher bye-and-bye, and he did. To-night, however, when he answered that curious question addressed to him from an open window, he was but a new-comer at the feast, a young man of three and twenty, who had had singular success with his first picture. His artist friends said that was owing to its being the apotheosis of ugliness. To which criticism Mark briefly replied, ‘It pays.’

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This summer he was spending his holiday in a manufacturing town in the Midlands, painting the portrait of the mayor. The smoke and grime and squalor did not repel him. On the contrary, he was interested. There were subjects on all sides, and he made a number of sketches that were very useful to him later.

So the oddness of the incident struck him. Here might be another subject. At any rate, it was curious, and Parfitt turned back, as has been said.

The street was not attractive. A row of small houses on the right, a canal on the left, and behind and beyond tall buildings and taller chimneys; all dingy, squalid—the back-yard of King Gold.

Yet, under the black dome of night and smoke, the two magicians, Light and Shadow, threw an unreal picturesqueness on its dull misery. Away against the murky heaven sheet lightning played silently, incessantly, the Handwriting on the Wall. But few observed it, for the waving scarlet flames of yonder furnace leapt up every moment, not illuminating the darkness, but increasing it by bewilderment of olive-black shadows, fantastic, threatening, gigantic. The water in the canal shone glassy olive in the glare; while beyond, the dazzled eye saw nothing save yet blacker depths of gloom. When the

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flames sank for a minute's pause, the lightning showed the surroundings with tolerable clearness; and it was noticeable how, of the passers-by, those who walked easily by the lightning stumbled when the furnace flames shot up; whereas those who stepped confidently in the red glare hesitated when only that unheeded Handwriting lit the air.

It was by the swift white light of that Handwriting that Mark Parfitt had seen the face of the man at the

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window. The scarlet flames had sunk, and the lightning—it is more comfortable to call it lightning—had shone suddenly, broadly on the questioner; on the face of a student, a thinker, delicate, wide-browed, thoughtful, dreamy, hesitating. The deep eyes had looked out into the hot airless midnight with a kind of startled wonder; and the clear voice—a gentleman's voice, Parfitt noted—vibrated with a thrill as of breathless haste passing into apparent repose, like the motionless-seeming of the spinning world.

Mark was no fool. He recognised strong emotion when he met with it, and appreciated it as material that might be made useful to himself, as the sea-tides may furnish power to turn a merry-go-round. Also, he was naturally inquisitive. Here was something happening, something out of the common too, judging from the face revealed by the lightning. But Parfitt had lost the house. Which was it? All the shabby little houses looked alike. The window had been open, and a lamp burning within. Yes, but the night was hot, and people sit up late in manufacturing towns; many windows were open and lights burning downstairs along the street.

'About half-way, and had dark curtains,' said Mark to himself, as the red flames rose and fell, and the pallid lightning illumined the dingy dwellings he scrutinised so narrowly as he passed them. The gas lamps, only two in number, were useless, the glasses being hopelessly dirty and blurred, and the feeble flames within showing merely as yellow stars.

He must depend, as the inhabitants did, upon the furnace glare and any light that might shine from heaven. Here was a dark-curtained window, and here

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another and another. His footsteps sounded loudly on the pavement—Parfitt was one of those loosely- built men who walk heavily even in youth. He paused an instant, looking at the third house. Someone, a girl, drew the dark curtain a few inches aside and glanced out; then the curtain fell back in its place. In that moment she had seen Mark distinctly—a tall, narrow-shouldered man, slightly stooping, with sharp features, and pale eyes set too closely together. All this she saw by a quick outburst of scarlet light, while Parfitt, catching only the dim outline of a woman's head, turned disappointedly away, to search other windows equally in vain for that clear-cut, deep-eyed, pathetic face that had looked out at him so vividly in the lightning's gleam.

He walked quite to the end of the street, where it joined a main thoroughfare. Opposite was an open space with a large building, the hospital. To the left was a theatre; to the right a church with an illuminated clock. Parfitt glanced up at it; five minutes to one. Twenty minutes since that question, 'What time is it?' had been addressed to him. Once more he retraced his steps, walking quickly, his eyes rapidly noting each house as he passed. Again no result. 'Not worth while spending the night over,' he reflected, ' yet

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I had a sort of notion that fellow wanted me—wanted help somehow. Perhaps he didn't want me—didn't want anybody—rather not! Awful hole, anyway! '

And thus thinking, Mark turned the corner into another street and walked briskly to his hotel.

CHAPTER II

THE little town of Ringway sat huddled on its wood-crowned hill side like Puck on a leaf, and its ruler was the strong west wind that blew up from the Irish sea some twenty miles away. This warm wet sweeping wind clothed all the land with unfading green, as emerald in winter as in spring, and gave to Ringway a curious goblin beauty of sudden lights and transient glooms, of quick sparkling showers, of soft colouring of deep green moss and ashen-grey lichen and blue mist—a dusky Arcadia.

Strangers came and called it pretty; then, because they could not see colour, they said it had no colour, and they departed in search of chromolithographic scenery. Ringway cared nothing. For nearly a thousand years it had crouched there on the old red sandstone, watching the forests change into wide pastures, and a dark blur rise in the north-east—the cloud of smoke that hangs ever over busy manufacturing Woffendale. Ringway looked on serenely at the murky patch and thanked Heaven it was not as its neighbour. Yet the near presence of that grimy Publican undoubtedly gave a unique character to the little place, for there was always the underlying consciousness of the rush and clang of that roaring hive of men. Amidst the shrill twittering of the darting swallows one seemed to listen for the throb of engines, to look for the furnace flames in the sunrise. A sense of

strife emanated from that north-eastern blur—Tubalcain working in his smithy outside green Eden.

Ringway bred a sturdy race, not precisely what is understood by the word 'rural.' The people were quiet and stolid, with a slow fire in their veins that flamed up as suddenly as a naphtha well and burnt as inextinguishably. Norse blood is apt to turn Berserk. They felt uneasy about ghosts and the devil, witches and second-sight, and combined with all this a shrewdness in business and a proficiency in drawing eye-teeth that did not wholly please the stranger in Arcadia.

They were a long-memoried folk too, and had usually taken a hand—and that a heavy one—in public matters. Therefore, if you conversed with the elders in friendly fashion, you would bye-and-bye hear how this man's great-grandfather was ' out in the Forty- Five,' how that man's grandfather lost a leg at Peterloo, and how the forbears of another helped to kill the last wolf in the country, 'two mile away over yonder.'

The market-place might be called the heart of Ringway, and just where the high road turned out of it stood Quality Corner. The name was not in the Post Office Directory, but nobody in the town ever called it anything else. Strangers sometimes enquired the whereabouts of High Street, and were regarded with suspicion in consequence. But to ask for Quality Corner was a proof that you had belongings in Ringway, and were therefore probably respectable, even though you were personally unknown. The local

name too, as natives pointed out, was accurately descriptive, which the other appellation was not; for Quality Corner was not a street, but a corner, and quality had always lived there—witness the tall old houses, four in

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number, two on each side, their front doors opening on the street, and their long sunny back gardens spreading out down the slope of the hill like a peacock's tail. If you turned to the right out of the Corner, you were in the market-place; if to the left, you were on the wide white road that climbed the hill to Ringway woods, and then turned sharply west, winding by hamlet and town to an old walled city that had seen the Roman standards glitter against the blue. This last state of the high-road was better than its first, for it started from Woffendale, that dark blur on Ringway's north-eastern horizon. In summer the blur was grey, and the heaven above it grey too. In winter the blur was a darker stain, a blacker shadow on the sky; the smoke of the burning of health and life and fair peace and rest.

Quality Corner was neighbourly. It did not hold itself aloof. It liked looking out upon the market-place and the market-place reciprocated the interest, duly discussing the affairs of Quality Corner after it had settled its own, and before it turned to those of the nation. True, there were other clusters of houses— some old, embowered in greenery; some new, big stone villas built by Woffendale merchants; that claimed occasional attention from Ringway gossip. But all these were scattered outside the town, were not a part of it, as was Quality Corner.

This golden June day there chanced to be more to talk about than usual. Also, being market day, there were more people to talk, which was another advantage. That time in the afternoon when business is over, and the farmers are lounging about while their horses are being brought out, is the time when the
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thoughts of men turn lightly towards their neighbours' doings. Ringway market-place possessed two centres of gossip—the principal inn and old Solomon Ingers' shop. Solomon was a seedsman of repute, and supplied the town and the farmers round, as his father and grandfather had done before him. He was a little shrivelled old man, who looked as though the strong sun of life had bleached him, changing the ruddy tints to faint greys, ivory yellows, silver whites. His hair was silver, his eyes pale blue, his face colourless; and always he wore, summer and winter, a suit of lightest grey; with a long white seedsman's apron tied round him; and in his thin yellow fingers he carried an ancient snuff-box of wood, polished by constant use, and bearing on its lid a roughly carved profile of Prince Charlie. Old Sol was proud of this Jacobite relic. His people had been, in the phrase of the country-side, 'out in the Forty-Five,' and from one of these faithful enthusiasts the box had descended to him.

'Fur Church an' King,' he would say, tapping the lid, 'an' land,' taking a pinch, 'an' respectable folk.'

Other forms of tobacco he disdained:

'A pipe dunnot tell what a mon is. He con talk treason with it in's teeth, or waving it in's hond like a jackass's ear; but snuff is fur gentlemen an' them as holds with gentlemen. Did tha ever see a chap talk treason wi' a snuff-box in's hond? No, an' tha never will.'

He was rarely contradicted, for he possessed a tongue, and an intimate knowledge of the family history of every man in Ringway for three generations back, and more. Those who have lived in a country town

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will appreciate the strength of this combination. His forbears had lived and died in the same house which he now occupied in his turn—a small two-storeyed building with an oriel window, behind the panes of which bags of seed were piled high. Over this was the window of Sol's bedroom, whence he had almost as good a view of the market-place as from the steps. In fact, he lived in the market-place. From the time he was a tiny lad his eyes dwelt on those familiar stones, those familiar houses. He had broken his knees on the cobbles and barked his shins on the steps; on the worn pavement he had played marbles in summer and thrown snowballs in winter; and had been whipped in public by his grandfather for sliding thereon. All the familiar faces, gradually growing older, passed and re-passed before him daily. Now and then one disappeared, and instead, the familiar name was to be read in the old churchyard overlooking the valley—the dead town near the living one, in friendly wise. Few Ringway folk went far away, and they who did usually returned. The place had a curious fascination for all whose childish feet had trodden its paths.

In his youth Solomon Ingers had been crossed in love, a more serious matter north than south; consequently he had not married till late in life, when he had chosen an elderly widow with some property. As befitted a man of Sol's opinions, his cronies were men of substance; sturdy farmers, well-to-do tradesmen, and often 'th' better end,' *i. e.* the gentry, might be seen lingering on old Sol's steps. So old-world was he, and therefore so companionable.

This afternoon the June sun shone on his silver head as he stood on the top step, snuff-box in hand,

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the warm light seeming only to accentuate his shrivelled paleness, to glance off the surface as it were; whereas those same sunbeams rested genially, penetratingly on the group of ruddy-faced farmers just below him. They were discussing the unusual circumstance of Number One Quality Corner, changing its tenant. Three of the residents were the owners also, but Number One was occasionally to let, and had always been occupied by a doctor. The man who had now taken the practice and home of his predecessor was a stranger, therefore the minds of the Ringway people were much exercised respecting him.

' It isna th' house fur luck, that theer Number One,' remarked a sturdy farmer, gazing meditatively across the market-place at Quality Corner.

' Happen this new chap'll change th' luck, being a stranger,' suggested another. For Ringway believed in the superior luck of a stranger as against that of a native.

' Dr. Smith wurna a stranger,' said Sol, mentioning the last occupant of Number One.

' No more he wur! I'd forgot. Well, he got off better nor most. He isna dead o' th' house.'

' He said he'd dee if he stopped in it. But he wur a queer lot.'

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‘ Ay, he wur,’ acquiesced a bystander. ‘He wouldna take any soide in politics. He said he didna know which soide had getten th’ biggest fools.’

‘ Why th’ soide he wur on hissen, o’ course,’ observed another farmer.

‘ Ay, but tha sees, he were on no soide.’

‘ Then he mun ha’ been soft in th’ head! I dunnot

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wonder th’ place didna agree wi’ him! ’with the scorn of an old Athenian for the man of no party.

‘ But there is summat wrong about th’ house,’ persisted farmer Stretton, who had first spoken. ‘Dost tha mind, Sol, how th’ doctor afore Smith ended wi’ hanging hissen; an ’th’ one afore that died o’ drink, an’ th’ one afore him wur killed wi’ his horse running away? ’

‘ I mind it all well,’ responded Sol, ‘ an’ it wur th’ same i’ my grandfather’s time, fur I’ve heard him say so.’

‘ If yon house wur mine,’ said a broad pleasant- looking man with brown eyes, farmer Abel Gresty, ‘ I’d ha’ th’ parson in to pray a bit an’ see what that ’ud do.’

‘ Or an owd witch-woman,’ said farmer Stretton. ‘Wheer theer’s owt wrong wi’ house or beast, a witch- woman ’ll fettle ’em a sight better nor a parson. When my cows got th’ sickness i’ th’ spring—eight on ’em slaughtered—an’ I wur feart o’ th’ rest going, I sent fur parson to read th’ prayers fur th’ sick. He coom hot-foot, wi’ th’ prayer-book in’s hond, an’ by th’ gate he says to me, “ I am truly sorry to hear you have sickness in th’ home. It is a sore affliction.” “ Ah,” I says, “ yo’ may well say that, parson.” “ An’ where is th’ sick?” says he. “Here,” says I, leading th’ way to th’ shippon. He seemed surprised-like, but my moind wur that full o’ th’ cows that I never thought to explain. An’ would yo’believe it? When he got into th’ shippon an’ see th’ cows a’ standing ready, an’ me taking off my hat fur th’ praying, he wur downright mad an’ wouldna so much as read a verse, let alone a prayer. I says to him, “ Parson,

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tha’d a deal better read prayers o’er them innocent dumb beasts than o’er some folks in Ringway, an’ theer’s Scripture fur it too. Didna th’ Lord bless th’ cattle o’ Jacob?” But theer! yo’ know what parsons be. He were as stunt as a two-year-owd bull. So I says, “ Well, parson, we’ll say no more about it,” an’ off I went to th’ owd witch-woman by th’ Moss Brook.’

Here Stretton paused with the instinct of a born story-teller, halting at the most exciting point.

‘ An’ what happened? ’ asked his deeply interested audience, while old Solomon silently offered the historic snuff-box. Stretton took up about a teaspoonful between his finger and thumb, and resumed his tale. ‘Oh, th’ owd lass did first-rate. Hoo gave me some dry herbs to burn i’ th’ shippon day an’ neet, to drive off th’ sickness. An’ they did it too, fur th’ cows kept all reet. I lost no more. Ay, them wur powerful herbs. Yo’ could smell ’em fur half a mile when th’ wind set that way.’

‘ That’s what Basset up at Quality Corner is always sayin,’ remarked Gresty, speaking of his landlord. ‘He holds as the smell o’ herbs an’ flowers ’ll do anything. Summat o’ th’ sort mout be tried wi’ Number One. It mout turn th’ luck a bit.’

‘ Is the’ new chap married, Sol? ’ asked another farmer.

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Sol shook his head, replying laconically ‘ Bachelor.’

‘ ’Tis a queer thing,’ commented the last speaker, ‘that the’ folks i’ Number One are allus bachelors. Happen th’ house ’ud ha’ better luck if theer wur a woman in it.”

‘ Ay,’ said Gresty, blowing a sigh that was audible across the market-place, ‘a woman makes a sight o' difference

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i’ th’ house. I’m that moithered wi’ th’ children I conna tell barley fro’ th’ oats, an’ I’ve more’n half a moind to sleep i’ th’ shippon fur peace an’ quiet.’

‘ Cows isna bad company,’ remarked Stretton, ‘ but what’s wrong wi’ th’ little uns? ’

‘ Nowt, barring th’ want o’ a mother,’ responded the widower, and a murmur of commiseration ran through the group. Old Sol took a pinch of snuff and said impressively:

‘ Tha mun wed again, Gresty. No disrepect to her that’s gone. She made thee a good wife, an’ she wouldna be pleased to see th’ little uns running wildlike.’

‘ That’s true enow.’ Gresty blew another sigh. ‘It isna easy to choose. A young lass ’ud be too flighty, an’ I couldna stond an owd one.’

‘Theer’s Jane Worsley,’ suggested a friend; ‘ hoo’s neither young nor owd, but betwixt an’ between, wi’ th’ trifle o’ brass her grandfather left her, an’ a good lass too.’

‘ Ay, hoo’s a good lass,’ responded Gresty with a complete absence of enthusiasm.

Sol answered the tone.

‘ Jane isna exactly a beauty, but she’s a good sort, an’ theer’s th’ brass. Tha might do worse, Gresty.’

‘ I mout,’ he assented,‘ but I amna keen after brass, an’ I loike summat to look at. My missis that’s gone wur as pretty as a pansy.’

At this moment a man passed—a gentleman— going towards Quality Corner, walking with a light swift step. He looked about thirty, perhaps a little more, of middle height and slender build, yet of unusual

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breadth of shoulder. His hair and eyes were dark, and the quiet curves of the mouth, together with the observant kindly glance, spoke of great patience A thinker certainly, a dreamer perhaps, gentle by birth, gentle also in manner, and doubtless in disposition. Yet as the sweetest flowers may grow on the slope of a volcano, a man’s looks and manner do not proclaim absolutely what he will do in unexpected circumstances. James Cassilis was one about whom there was just that slight uncertainty which gives interest. One could not be quite sure what he would do. Suppose anybody kicked him? Would he go quietly home and send for his lawyer to demand an apology? Or would he instantly turn and retaliate? Roughly speaking, all mankind may be ranged into two divisions by this test. Sometimes the latter type may be compelled by circumstances to adopt the tactics of the former. But the restraining power of circumstances is not to be relied upon. If the steam- pressure is too great, there is a scattering of the boiler; likewise of the bystanders. Perhaps Cassilis chiefly impressed strangers as holding life lightly, yet taking a deep interest in it; therein differing from the majority of his fellows. For they hold life with a grip of death, cold, evilly mechanical, whining the while that there is naught in all this lovely world worth a moment’s thought.

‘ Theer’s th’ new chap,’ said one of the group on Sol’s steps, and all eyes followed Cassilis.

‘ He may ha’ getten some head-filling,’ Stretton observed, after three minutes’ deliberation. ‘I loike his looks. I’ve half a moind to try him fur my missis’s rheumatism. What dost think, Sol? ’

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‘ Well, he conna be a bigger fool than Smith wur,’ replied Sol drily, adding, ‘ I think he’ll do.’

Which favourable opinion at once gave ‘ th’ new chap ’ a recognised position in Ringway.

Cassilis paused a moment at his own door, and glanced back at the sunny market-place with its gossiping groups. It pleased him. He was a stranger, and the place looked friendly. There was a cool moist sweetness in the air, a softened gold in the sunshine, that insensibly calmed and soothed. The sounds were pleasant, and came gently to the ear as though muffled by some unknown attribute of the atmosphere. Homely sounds; the broad-vowelled hum of conversation, the ring of horses’ hoofs on the cobbles, and a sound unfamiliar to Cassilis’s ears, the clacking of wood on stone—clogs on the pavement— all scarcely audible, hushed, subdued, as though much farther away than the length of the market-place. Now this strange stillness, this curiously distant murmur to which all sound was reduced, seemed to the stranger as the surface ripple of a placid stream. Later, he associated this characteristic with all the country round, and thought of it as the undertone of the sea.

As he went indoors, the old housekeeper, who seemed to be transferred with the house like the gasfittings, met him with a note. ‘From Mr. Basset, next door,’ she said. It was an invitation to dinner that evening at Number Two, and Cassilis read it with pleasant anticipation. He liked going out. He was a man whom his fellow-men interested and who interested them.

‘Next door,’ he repeated, folding up the note; ‘is Mr. Basset married? ’

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‘No, sir, Mr. Basset never married. Miss Thea is his god-daughter. Her father and mother died when she was a child, and Mr. Basset adopted her.’

‘Oh. Who lives at Number Three?’

‘Miss Emily, sir, Miss Darnton. Her aunt, old Mrs. Darnton, died a month ago, so Miss Emily is alone now. The house is hers.’

‘ And Number Four? ’

‘Mr. Rudell, sir, the lawyer. Mrs. Rudell has her brother staying there, a gentleman from London.’

The old housekeeper retired, and Cassilis fell to idly wondering about the denizens of Number Two. ‘Thea ’—a pretty name; uncommon. Doubtless he would float into their kindly peaceful lives, and out again, lingering in their memory but as a passing stranger. True, he had bought the practice, but in these cases it often happens that there is little or no practice to buy. He had drifted about the world for ten years. It might be that he would drift again, and Ringway become only a memory of cool peace. He himself

would be forgotten; he would not forget. He never forgot. Loneliness is a great quickener of the memory, and Cassilis was a lonely man. He meant to stay in Ringway if he could. Already the spell of the North was upon him.

The long June day drew to evening. The mellow sunshine took a deeper gold, and in the lanes the sandy track was all in shadow, while the hedges on either side shone burnished emerald. The level rays just tipped the ears of farmer Stretton's old white mare as he drove slowly home, pondering many things. First he thought of the cows, ever the chief interest to a dairy farmer; then he reflected on the

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business he had done and the gossip he had heard, and settled in his own mind how much of both he should tell his wife. This was a complicated matter to arrange, because Mrs. Stretton had also been to market that morning, returning home early with a friend; so her husband could not be sure how much of the news had been imparted to her during those early morning hours. In the midst of this problem his eyes fell on a woman sitting on the hedge bank; a comely woman of perhaps thirty—fair, blue-eyed, fresh-complexioned, with smoothly banded brown hair, and a general look of calm alertness. Farmer Stretton noted with approval the simple cotton gown, the black shawl and bonnet; and, pulling up the mare, he addressed the stranger: 'Art tha going far, Missis? '

' I wur thinking o' going to Ringway,' she replied, and the tones of her voice were sweet and womanly. 'Happen I could find work there. I've walked o'er fro' Woffendale, where I've left my box.'

' Ay, I see,' responded Stretton thoughtfully. He was wondering why this pleasant-looking woman had left her friends—why she was apparently so alone in the world. Perceiving that she wore a wedding ring, he concluded she was a widow. 'Happen hoo an' her folks quarrelled o'er th' chap,' he reflected.

' I'm not afraid o' work,' the stranger went on. 'I wur brought up on a farm, out Marbury way.'

As she spoke, a brilliant idea flashed into Stretton's mind.

' Theer's a friend o' mine,' he said, ' a farmer—Abel Gresty—an' a regular good sort too, as mout be glad o' thee. His wife's dead, an' there's six little uns, an' nobbut an' owd lass o' sixty-five to look to 'em.

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He wur telling me to-day he wur fair moithered to death. If tha likes to try th' place, I'll drive thee o'er. 'Tis but a mile away,' pointing with his whip over the hedge. 'My name's Stretton—William Stretton, o' th' Yew Tree farm.'

' Thank yo',' she said simply, rising from the mossy bank on which she sat. 'I'd like th' place well. I'd be pleased to see to th' children.'

' Put thy foot on th' wheel, then. So—,'holding out his hand to assist her. She stepped deftly up beside Stretton, and the old white mare plodded on, shaking her ears in surprised remonstrance when unexpectedly turned out of the lane into a road that was certainly not the way home. It was called a road by courtesy, but was merely a peaty track leading down into the wide valley that lay below Ringway.

' 'Tis sweet to see th' country,' said the woman, looking round with the air of a returning exile.

‘ Ay, it’s noan like Woffendale, thank th’ Lord! ’ responded Stretton. ‘It fair beats me how folk con live in o’ that muck an’ grime. But I reckon tha couldna help thysen, Missis,’ he added politely glancing towards the dark blur on the north-eastern horizon.

‘ I didna live in Woffendale,’ she replied, ‘ I only got there this morning. I lived in Bramsall, nigh Birmingham. But afore I wur wed, my home wur nigh Marbury.’

‘ ’Tis pretty country about theer,’ said Stretton.

‘ All my folks are dead,’ resumed the stranger after a moment’s pause, ‘or I’d ha’ gone back home. So I took a thought to bide hereabouts.’

Stretton nodded. He felt much compassion for anyone compelled to the hardship of residence anywhere

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out of sight of green fields; and also, as his companion talked, a yet more brilliant idea dazzled him. Why should not his friend Gresty marry this good-looking widow? She was evidently quiet and respectable; neither too young nor too old; a woman alone in the world and poor, therefore likely to be glad of so good a home as Gresty could offer; fond of children and industrious. Why, the more Stretton considered the matter the more desirable did the marriage appear. He looked at the stranger again. Decidedly she was the wife for Gresty.

‘ I dunno as I wouldna wed her mysen if I wur wanting a missis,’ thought Stretton as he whipped up the mare past a little wood in whose green depths a belated cuckoo was calling.

‘ Theer’s th’ farm,’ he said aloud, pointing to a cluster of buildings just beyond the wood. Truly, the homestead looked a peaceful haven, and the peace was reflected in the woman’s eyes as she gazed upon it.

‘ ’Tis a pretty place fur a home,’ she said.

‘ Ay, it is, an’ Gresty looks after things well too,’ replied Stretton. ‘Theer he is! If tha’ll hold th’ reins a minute, I'll get down an’ speak to him.’

There was about the farm the sleepy stir of evening. The cows were being driven up from the meadows in that slow sauntering fashion which is so restful to watch. There were yellow fluffy chickens running about, and soft brown ducklings; and the six children all mixed up with the cows and chicks, ducklings and dogs. The woman’s eyes dwelt contentedly on the scene. She must have been a hopeful creature, ready to let the dead past drop and be quietly happy in the present, for her life had been

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hard and wretched for many years; yet the face retained its youthful freshness and the serenity that seemed her chief characteristic. There was no shadow in the blue eyes that so calmly met Gresty’s brown ones as he came forward after a brief conversation with his friend.

‘ I’ll be rarely pleased to ha’ thee here, Missis,’ he said. ‘I reckon we shallna quarrel about th’ payment. We’ll talk it o’er bye-and-bye. Coom in an’ set thee down comfortable; owd Martha ’ll get thee a cup o’ tea. Th’ owd lass’ll be glad enow to ha’ help wi’ th’ little uns, an’ so shall I.’

Thus June Heald became an inmate of the Moss Farm.

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Farmer Stretton drove home feeling the glow of satisfaction that so rarely follows doing good to one's neighbours. The little adventure exhilarated him, and he related it at length to his wife during their substantial tea.

' So I've done two folks a good turn to-day,' he observed when the meal was over and the story came to an end.

' I'll see th' woman afore I say owt about it,' replied his better half sententiously.

' Tha dunnot ask me whether hoo wur good-looking or no,' he presently remarked between two whiffs of his pipe.

' I amna a fool,' retorted Mrs. Stretton with asperity. 'Tha wouldna ha' taken a' that trouble fur a woman as wurna good-looking. I know thee men! '

' Nay—nay,' with a deprecatory wave of the pipe.

'I know thee men! ' repeated Mrs. Stretton firmly.

And no more was said about June Heald that night.

CHAPTER III

ALL the four houses of Quality Corner were alike in size and shape, with long rooms running from front to back, having windows at each end, one looking into the street, the other on the garden. Entering Number Two that evening, Cassilis was sensible of the pervading brightness and fragrance. Colour and the scent of pinks seemed everywhere; and what comfort and repose! His own abode was dingy in the extreme, a contrast indeed to this drawing-room of Basset's, with its gold-coloured walls above the dark panelling, its soft salmon-pink draperies and dark carpet. There were books and papers in plenty, and comfortable chairs with fluffy cushions for tired shoulders, one or two good pictures, several bookcases; but not an ornament anywhere save a few valuable bronzes and a wide majolica bowl filled with white pinks. Whether owing to the perfume of the pinks, or the charm of the house, or the grace and beauty of the girl who welcomed him, Cassilis felt himself in an atmosphere of exhilarating friendliness.

When he entered the room Thea Basset was standing by the farther window, looking into the garden. Hearing his step, she turned and came forward with a swift movement, as a swallow turns on the silent rush of his wings.

' I must introduce myself, Dr. Cassilis, but no doubt you have heard of me already. Mr. Basset is

my godfather. People call me his adopted daughter. I prefer to say he is my adopted father. He will be overcome with confusion when he finds you have arrived before he is here to welcome you.'

' Perhaps,' said Cassilis, 'my watch has sent me here too early.'

' Oh, no; it is Mr. Basset who is late. He is always either too soon or the reverse. He says he believes the proverb " Time was made for slaves," and he therefore takes every opportunity of asserting his freedom.'

She spoke with singular clearness and softness, and with a musical ripple in her voice as of running water. Where had Cassilis heard a voice that remotely resembled hers? And where had he seen that little gesture of the flung-out hand with which she finished?

It seemed oddly familiar. Yet he could not recall anyone like this girl. Never elsewhere had he seen those velvet-brown eyes with their long lashes so much darker than the thick coils of brown hair; that delicate face with its healthy pallor, red beneath the ivory—a paleness that he thought lovelier than any rosiness. Her gown, of some gauzy material—was the colour green or blue?—fell about her in floating folds, and was fastened at the throat by a narrow bar of opals. To Cassilis's fancy, these milk-white gems, each with a spark of fire in its heart, seemed peculiarly appropriate to the wearer. No other jewels would suit her; no others would give the impression that she herself gave, of pallor and vivid life. Again Cassilis told himself that he was positive he had seen no one even remotely resembling her; and at this moment his host came in.

Septimus Basset was a short, stout, fresh-complexioned

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man, with snow-white hair and kindly blue eyes.

‘ I must apologise for my late appearance, Dr. Cassilis,’ and he shook his guest's hand with extreme cordiality. ‘Has my god-daughter made an excuse for me? I cannot think of one for myself.’

‘ I have been told you object to the slavery of punctuality,’ said Cassilis.

Basset nodded. ‘That is my view. It reduces a man to a piece of machinery. There are times, however, when it is a duty, and this is one. I was detained, or rather I detained myself, giving advice. There is an extraordinary fascination about that same giving of advice. One could go on for ever. It is only when one is the advised that one takes to one's heels.’

‘ Do people ever follow your advice, Dr. Cassilis? ’ enquired Thea.

‘ Sometimes. But it is a perpetual surprise to me when they do.’

‘ You have the advantage that they cannot run away,’ said Basset as dinner was announced.

The dining-room was coloured like a pale violet. Some fine etchings and an old Venetian mirror decorated the walls, which were two shades of lilac above the panelling, the draperies being a warm amethyst. A silver bowl filled with white pinks stood in the centre of the table, and Cassilis remarked on their old-world beauty.

‘ I see your garden from my windows, and it looks like a bees' paradise,’ he said. ‘Now in mine I behold only huge prickly gooseberry bushes labelled “ Lancashire Lad ” and “ Thumper.” ’

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‘ Those gooseberries were the pride of your predecessor's heart.’ This from Thea.

‘ But they are really very monotonous from the landscape point of view. And besides, there is such an air of aggressive virtue about a gooseberry bush. It is so oppressively useful. There is absolutely nothing to be said against it. It is the Aristides of plants; therefore I wish to ostracise it. You perceive the instinctive ingratitude of fallen man! ’

‘ Why not banish the gooseberries to the farther end of the garden? ’

‘ Oh, I should know they were there.’

‘Do you find the scent of our pinks exhilarating?’ asked Basset.

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Cassilis paused a moment: ‘ I think so. There is a country cheeriness and peace about the perfume; a sort of Boyhood’s Home, you know.’

‘ Exactly. Now do you not think that perfumes are unwisely neglected in modern medicine? I have a theory on the subject. I consider them a great healing and educational force. To begin with, all healing resides in herbs; is not that so? ’

‘Yes, I agree with you there. Undoubtedly, if we took the trouble, we should find in the vegetable kingdom a cure for wellnigh every disease; only, we do not take the trouble.’

Thea turned her dark eyes upon him: ‘ Why do you not take the trouble? ’

‘ Because there are no substantial rewards for botanical research, and where the pay is, there will the heart be also.’

‘ Still, the general neglect is remarkable,’ observed Basset.

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‘ It is. But at present we prefer the contents of the Macbeth cauldron, and to doubt the efficacy of the brew is to be a voice crying in the wilderness.’

‘ That voice was heard,’ said Thea.

‘ Because it cried in a natural wilderness. Nowadays the wilderness is that hopelessly deaf waste, a crowd.’

‘ You think all the units of the crowd are deaf? ’

‘ Or wish to be. Listening is fatiguing. So is thinking. Perhaps, however, I ought rather to say that I am a man who has never done anything and who never will do anything.”

Thea smiled, a sudden illumination that sparkled in her eyes before it reached her lips. Cassilis saw that she did not in the least believe him, and he was pleased that she did not. A glow as of renewed youth warmed his veins. Years ago people had believed in him, had predicted great things of him; but he passed into the vast army of the unknown fighters, the men who are unnoticed in the turmoil. He had forgotten, or thought he had forgotten, the gladness of the May-time, till beneath the magic of Thea Basset’s smiling incredulity something of that gladness sprang up again, as though once more he had the world before him.

Basset surveyed his guest with obvious satisfaction. ‘I can see the pinks have a beneficial effect on you,’ he remarked: ‘ They are excellent for the table, as they stimulate conversation. Some perfumes rather tend to stifle it. I am convinced that almost every ailment of mind and body could be successfully treated by means of suitable odours. Certainly many could be prevented by the use of them! ’

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‘ You would smoke them out after the fashion of Tobit? ’

‘ Partly. In fact, that, like other ancient practices, is a survival of a truth which has become perverted in the course of centuries. We do not realise how much our emotions depend on our sense of smell. We know already we can produce langour, intoxication, frenzy, death, by different scents; why not other states? The slothful could be roused by pungent odours, the irascible soothed by gentle ones, such as sweet peas.’

‘ But suppose the irascible man swore at the peas? ’

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‘ Ah,’ rejoined Basset with a sigh, ‘ that brings me to the question of education. Our present methods are lamentable. I would stimulate the love of study by thyme, scent of thyme, always a favourite among the Greeks, you will remember. Negligence would be checked by other herbs. Of course I am aware the scheme sounds a little vague, but you understand the general principle? ’

‘ Perfectly.’ Cassilis felt considerably entertained by this discovery of his host’s hobby. Most hobbies are entertaining, so long as they are not political; and this particular one was quite a new kind, a gentle palfrey that made one think ‘ Time had run back and fetched the Age of Gold ’ into this present century of shot and steel.

‘ The idea of the scent education is delightful,’ said Thea. ‘The solitary drawback, as far as I can see, is that it would only be effectual with sensitive natures. Tommy So-and-so has lost his way among the Greek verbs; fetch the asafoetida and hold it under his nose. Now a refined Tommy So-and-so might

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have sufficient objection to the punishment to induce him to learn his Greek better. But the average Tommy So-and-so would not mind the asafoetida in the least. I have even a horrid suspicion that he would rather enjoy it.’

‘ With the probable increase of refinement, I should hope for this drawback to disappear,’ said her godfather.

‘Yes,’ doubtfully. ‘But for many years I fear another vegetable remedy will continue to be the most effectual.’

‘ And what is that? ’

‘ The cane, Daddy.’

Cassilis laughed outright, and so did Basset.

‘ You see, Dr. Cassilis,’ he said, ‘ I have not succeeded in impressing my god-daughter with the correctness of my theory.’

‘ Oh yes, you have,’ she cried, ‘ the theory is all right. The worst of it is that I am always agreeing with all sorts of absolutely perfect theories, but when I begin to imagine them being put in practice difficulties arise. It is evident I am not a born reformer, or I should never perceive any difficulties.’

‘ There certainly seems a perverse spirit of negation everywhere,’ said Cassilis. ‘The more gorgeous our schemes, the more chaotic their results: And we recur in despair to the primitive methods, a kick and a push and an occasional sugar-plum now and then—Dame Nature’s methods.’

‘ Dame Nature is really a very step-motherly person at times,’ murmured his host.

‘ She is. But we don’t seem to do any better.’

‘ I am afraid you are feeling the burden of universal

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human nature. That modern disease needs prompt treatment—rosemary or thyme or lemon- verbena. The scent of blossoming lime is also excellent for the complaint, which is very prevalent nowadays. Believe me, my dear sir, it is no use troubling oneself with human nature beyond one’s own individuality. That is quite enough human nature for any one man or woman to grapple with. Beyond it, one merely repeats the forlorn attempts of Sisyphus; the stone rolls back every time.’

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‘ Are you not contradicting your own words? ’ Cassilis was feeling more and more amused.

‘ Not at all—not at all. Help people, by all means, but don’t think about them too much If you do, your own natural joy of life will be overclouded, to the detriment of the world. This age is suffering from the want of natural joyousness. The century’s sense of smell is out of order,’ Basset continued earnestly; ‘that is what is the matter with it. Too much gas and tobacco, too little sunshine and wild thyme.’

‘ We have undoubtedly travelled beyond Falstaff’s definition of riotous living,’ said Cassilis. ‘It is no longer unusual to hear the chimes at midnight. It would be more unusual to hear them at any other time.’

Basset took up a white pink with a thoughtful air.

‘ Of course, anyone who makes an effort to heal humanity is a terrible nuisance. I feel that myself. Therefore I cultivate as far as possible a certain light-heartedness, and recommend it to others. You know the Irish saying, “ Take life aisy, and if ye cannot take it aisy, take it as aisy as ye can.” I am convinced that wisely chosen perfumes contribute materially

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to the light-heartedness we now so rarely see— light-heartedness as distinguished from boisterous enjoyment or feverish craving for amusement.’

‘ You mean “ the laughter that rose up like a fountain.” ’

‘Exactly; bubbling water in the sunshine. We do our best here in the Corner. Have you seen your remaining neighbours, Miss Darnton and the Rudells? ’

‘ No as yet they are only names to me. I have made one acquaintance—Mr. Galloway. He sent for me this afternoon.’

‘ Ah, Galloway’s sciatica. Gloomy house, is it not? We are old friends and wrangle perpetually. I don’t like his dinners and he does not care for mine. When you dine with him, you will understand my objections. As for the Corner, we have promised to take you in next door after dinner—Number Three— Miss Darnton’s. She is a cousin of the Occlestons. You will probably see Tony Occleston there. George, the elder brother, is married and lives at Outwood, a pretty place—his own—two miles off, beyond Ringway woods. His wife is a charming woman. She has some money—lucky for George Occleston in these days. There are two boys, nice little fellows. Sure to be patients of yours.’

‘I hardly know how to answer that,’ responded Cassilis. ‘If I say “ I hope so,” the remark sounds unfeeling. If I say, “ I hope not,” I imply a doubt of my own powers. Perhaps it would be safest to observe that I shall be delighted to make the Occlestons’ acquaintance under any circumstances.’

‘ They all belong in a way to Quality Corner,’ said

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Thea, ‘ and Emily Darnton’s house is the rallying point for the whole Corner. That is partly because she now lives alone, her aunt having died recently. So we feel it our duty to preserve her from dulness.’

‘ The Rudells are sure to be there,’ Basset went on. ‘Mrs. Rudell is a comparative stranger in the Corner. She married Rudell about a year ago, to everybody’s surprise. He

had been a widower so long that no one ever supposed he would take a second wife. I think she finds the place dull. By the way, her brother is staying with them, Mark Parfitt, the artist. He is doing a big fresco in the Woffendale Town Hall. Do you know him?'

' Only by repute.'

' I don't like him,' continued Basset. 'He seems to me almost as unpleasant as his pictures. So terribly indoor. Quite without air—pure air. His oil, the midnight oil. His water-colour, boiled water; nothing in it. But he makes money. Therefore he is a great artist. That is the touchstone nowadays. Not, are you gold? but, have you gold? Or at least, have you enough to make people think that you have more? '

Cassilis was willing to go anywhere, ready to be interested in anybody. This was his habitual mental attitude. He was incapable of being bored—a characteristic most often found among those who are isolated wanderers through existence, waifs and strays along life's highway. The beggar is more ready to converse than the millionaire; and Cassilis, drifting hither and thither as chance directed, was friendly and genial as any poverty-stricken wayfarer. His fellow-creatures were always more or less entertaining;

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just now they were more entertaining than usual. Life seemed warmer since he had entered that old house with its scent and sheen of colour, and met Thea Basset's dark eyes, and felt that subtle charm of manner that was so strangely familiar. His host, too, interested him—so curious a mingling of kindly eccentricity and shrewd common sense. Also, Basset's dinners were very good. Careless and semi-ascetic though Cassilis might be as regarded his own daily food, he was not ignorant of the difference between a good dinner and a bad one. A man must be wretched indeed, or hopelessly a churl, if he does not find the world pleasanter after a dinner such as Basset was wont to set before a guest. Everything was pleasant to James Cassilis just then. Outside in the quiet street the sunset streamed from the west in level orange radiance. Through the other window came cool sweet airs from the blossoming garden, which lay in partial shadow—luminous shadow hardly to be called shade. This soft grey shadow deepened, and suddenly into the stillness fell the quick pattering of summer rain, a sparkling shower laced by the sunbeams. It ceased well-nigh as suddenly as it came; a thrush began to sing, and the western glory turned redder.

' " 'Tis an elfin storm from faëryland," ' quoted Thea, with laughing eyes and the swift gesture of the open hand that Cassilis seemed to know so well.

' It must be,' he responded gravely. 'Nothing less can account for such a freak of the elements.'

' Troll-weather—that is what it is.' Thea continued. 'Long ago a spell was laid on Ringway, and has never been taken off, so the weather is always Troll-weather.

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Here we have no definitely marked morning, noon and night; but green, shining, showery days— fairy green; soft rain and sunshine falling through green leaves on green moss and grey lichen, with west winds that blow off the sea, and grey clouds like the lichen, and blue mists, and over all a rainbow tangle of sun and shower. That is Troll-weather. Do you think you will like living in a rainbow, Dr. Cassilis? '

' I shall like it very much,' he replied.

'Yes,'said Basset carelessly, ' Ringway wears " the fairies' fatal green." '

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CHAPTER IV

NUMBER THREE, Quality Corner, was briskly modern in the general effect of its rooms. The house had not the peculiar atmosphere of scholarly peace that distinguished Number Two, but its climate was friendly and vivacious. Its mistress and owner was likewise friendly and vivacious—a handsome girl of five-and-twenty, with eyes and hair of a curious light chestnut, and a pleasantly decisive manner. 'I am so glad to see you, Dr. Cassilis,' she said. 'A stranger in the land—I mean, in the Corner—is always such an excitement for all of us; and Dr. Smith gave us no chance of gratifying our natural curiosity. He was quite a hermit, and a hermit in the Corner is an anomaly with which we are not able to cope. Apparently his neighbours did not afford him any amusement, and what was worse, he did not amuse us.'

' I take the deepest interest in the Corner,' said Cassilis, and he spoke the truth.

' How nice of you. Emily, please explain to Dr. Cassilis that I am Number Four.'

The speaker was Mrs. Rudell. As Susette Parfitt she had been a schoolfellow of Emily Darnton, had visited her, and to everyone's astonishment, had married the elderly lawyer. Ringway bored her terribly, so did her husband; but she had gained what she wanted, a home. Now her one desire was to get back to town, and she would gladly have persuaded Rudell

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to live in London. On this point, however, he was inexorable. No power on earth would induce him to leave Ringway. So she turned her attention to finding a wife for her brother Mark. If he had a house in town, she could run up whenever she felt inclined. For which reason he had better marry someone she knew, and whom she could manage. Susette Rudell felt no doubt as to her own ability to manage Thea Basset when once Thea was married to a man of Mark's temper; and Basset was rich—there would be money. Of course Mark needed money. The commission that brought him down to Ringway was really most convenient, enabling him to look round and make up his mind without his visit being in any way conspicuous. Meanwhile, she herself was pleased to display to Ringway the tall narrow-chested man who now stood beside her chair, a half-open book in his hand— easy, careless, superciliously observant.

' Dr. Cassilis, Mrs. Rudell is your last neighbour,' said Emily. 'Perhaps you already know Mr. Parfitt? '

' By celebrity, certainly! ' The two men bowed, their glances crossing with a quick flash as of steel, the beginning of their duel, of which, when it ended, none could say who was the victor. In that moment Cassilis saw—not Emily Darnton's drawing-room, but a dingy street lit by lightning and furnace flame, and a stranger answering a question addressed to him from a window. For ten years—such long years— Cassilis had not seen that face, and even then had only seen it once. Yet instantly he recognised Mark Parfitt as the man who had replied to his aimless question that night. The ten years had not altered Parfitt greatly. He was not so weedy-looking, had filled out a little, and his hair,

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always scanty, had worn off his forehead in a way that his dearest friends called baldness. But there were the same sloping shoulders, the same awkward carriage of the head, the same cold sharp eyes set too closely together.

He looked prosperous, and he was. His life was altogether smooth and successful—that is to say, he was one of the devils own husks of humanity. There was no kernel in him whatever, and chaff flies high. It can ride on the lightest breeze when the good wheat falls earthward and is trodden under foot of men. Parfitt was neither good grain nor bad; he was simply the husk, and he flew high and looked solid, and was admired accordingly. For the rest, he was exactly ten years the worse. A decade ago he might possibly have done a stray kindness, provided the doing thereof gave him no trouble and some slight amusement. Now, the first flush of youth being gone, Mark had become the average unpleasant human being who bears you no particular malice for any particular thing, but a sort of general malice for being what you are, and will quietly trip you up if opportunity offers—and it usually does.

A sudden look of puzzled surprise came into Parfitt's eyes as he met Cassilis's glance, and the latter saw that the recognition was not so perfect as his own. The artist did not remember when or where they had encountered each other.

‘ He will soon recollect that,’ thought Cassilis, as his new hostess introduced him to Mr. Rudell, a small man with neat features and a bald head.

‘ Do you do anything in this line, Dr. Cassilis? ’ he asked, holding out an enamelled snuff-box. ‘No? Ah, I believe old Sol Ingers and myself will continue
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to be the only snuff-takers in Ringway. Queer old fellow, Sol. Estimable in many ways. You'll see him by-and-by.’

‘ I have already made his acquaintance, and have been offered a pinch out of the historic snuff-box.’

‘ You must have made a good impression. Did you take it? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Then your practice is assured. Old Sol will rake up every sick man for miles round and send him to you. He never forgave Smith for refusing snuff and having no political opinions. He used to go about telling the women that Smith's physic produced wrinkles. No wonder Smith couldn't get on!’

Cassilis laughed. ‘No doubt they would prefer Mr. Basset's remedies.’

‘ Ah, you mean Basset's medical and educational theories. Yes, when a man has no occupation he chooses a hobby, generally an unmanageable one, and its antics amuse him—and his friends.’

‘ I am disposed to agree with him to a certain extent,’ said Cassilis.

‘ So are we all, but we stop half way. We shirk the ditches. Basset takes them flying.’

‘ Dr. Cassilis,’ said Thea, waving her hand towards a swarthy bright-eyed young fellow sitting beside her, ‘ this is Anthony Occleston. Emily has forgotten him.’

‘ I don't live in the Corner,’ said Occleston, looking at Cassilis with friendly eyes, ‘ but I belong to it in a way. We were all brought up together, you see, in Ringway or thereabouts, so we are pretty much like one family.’

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‘ Did I hear Rudell scoffing at my theories? ’ enquired Basset. He had been talking to Parfitt.

‘ I, too, am an unbeliever,’ said Mrs. Rudell. ‘You once advised me to sniff mixed pickles, Mr. Basset.’

‘ Impossible, Mrs. Rudell! ’

‘ Well, perhaps it was nasturtiums. I ought to sniff nasturtiums. But they are pickles, you know.’

‘ I may have observed that the scent of nasturtiums is of the nature of a tonic, and has the advantage of being harmless.’

‘ A bunch of them would have been useful after that lecture we attended this afternoon,’ remarked Occleston.

‘ Why did we go to it? ’ Emily suddenly demanded.

‘ For the usual human reason—because we had nothing better to do,’ said Parfitt.

‘ What was it? ’ asked Thea. ‘And where? In Woffendale? ’

Emily answered:

‘ Yes, in Woffendale. I was there this afternoon, as you know, and I met Tony. Then, at the station, we two met Mrs. Rudell and Mr. Parfitt, and all four of us missed the Ringway train. So we strolled into the nearest place of amusement we could find. It was a lecture hall, and a man was lecturing on the Destiny of the Human Race. He was an extraordinary creature, positively grotesque. Wasn’t he, Tony?’ ’

‘ He said he was a self-made man,’ Occleston replied, with his wholesome boyish laugh, ‘ and upon my soul, I believe it. He looked like it, poor chap! ’

‘ But what was to be the destiny of the human race? ’

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‘ Tony! ’ cried Emily, ‘ come and help me with the tea.’

As Anthony rose obediently, Parfitt lounged across the room, and dropped into the seat beside Thea that Occleston had just vacated.

‘ The destiny appeared to be a vague one,’ said Mark, answering her question. ‘I am, however, under the impression that we were all to be presidents.’

‘ Not presidents,’ Emily corrected, ‘ Members of Parliament.’

‘ With all our sins,’ remarked Cassilis, ‘ I do not think we have deserved such a fate as that.’

‘ It seems to me,’ Thea observed meditatively, ‘ that lecturers need a course of instruction themselves.’

‘ Thea,’ said Emily solemnly, ‘ when our teachers of the various professions attain their desires, your fate is certain. People who criticise their rulers will be electrocuted.’

‘ Oh, I dare say the less zealous among them would give me the choice between banishment and adopting the new religion.’

‘ What is the new religion? ’ enquired Cassilis.

' None at all,’ with a sudden flash of laughter in her eyes; ‘ and as my mind is not constructed for change, I should seek refuge in a desert, if such a thing remains.’

‘ Are you not a little narrow? ’ Parfitt’s manner was at once confidential and superior, and Thea felt annoyed.

‘ I suppose so,’ she replied indifferently, ‘ like a Damascus sword.’

Cassilis met her glance and laughed, ‘ Of all the extraordinary comparisons——!

' I like a good sword.'

' So do I. It is one of the three perfect things.' Then, in response to her look of enquiry, he added: ' You know man has made three things so perfect that they cannot be improved—the sword, the violin, and— I forget the third.'

' Try to remember,' she urged. 'That interests me.'

' I will try hard, but I am afraid the third perfection has vanished from my memory.'

' Perhaps I can think of it myself. Is it lace? '

' I cannot tell. It may be. I am not sure. Is it possible to surpass old lace? '

Parfitt sat and listened and looked on with his usual impassive face. Inwardly he was angry, and his anger was cold, which is an unpleasant form of the complaint. He was no fool. He knew when he encountered his betters, but he was not pleased thereby. He perceived, with that same cold anger, the charm of this stranger; the mingling of perfect comprehension and sympathetic gentleness which was the reason Cassilis made warm friends, and enemies equally to be relied upon. For every good gift, like the magnet, has its repellent as well as its attracting pole, and in each case, like draws like. Ten years ago Parfitt had been drawn toward the face of the student—the dreamer. Now, being ten years the harder, and the student having changed into this calm-eyed observant man, Mark Parfitt felt no attraction, but the reverse, while he wondered where he had seen that face before.

' A country doctor, and poor,' he said to himself. 'Shabby dress-clothes. And he doesn't care, either. Puts them on well, though. I seem to know him. It's not the sort of face one forgets.' Thus he mused as he noticed with increasing annoyance the easy

friendliness that seemed to have sprung up between Thea Basset and the new tenant of Number One. Parfitt had contemplated the possibility of finding a wealthy wife during this visit of his to the North. He did not particularly wish to marry, but even a successful artist finds the making of money a wearisome task. For instance, this fresco in Woffendale Town Hall was profitable certainly, but it kept him down here in the country, which he detested. So bored was he that he seriously thought of freeing himself for ever from the necessity of accepting such commissions by marrying some well-dowered Woffendale girl. But the two or three whose fortunes were large were not themselves attractive. Parfitt was acutely sensitive to ridicule. His wife must not bounce, must not be apple-cheeked, neither must she be hopelessly insignificant. Thea Basset, though she might have less money, was undeniably beautiful. Moreover, she had been brought up by a man of culture. Basset might be eccentric, but he was a scholar and a gentleman; and his adopted daughter could be transplanted to London without Parfitt feeling apprehensive as to what she might possibly say or do. He reflected that he really might do worse than marry Thea Basset. His sister had told him that Basset was richer than he seemed, for he did not spend half his income and had been steadily saving for years. Altogether, the notion appeared an excellent one.

However, the artist was in no hurry. He was not quite sure that the money would compensate for the misfortune of being married. Perhaps he might have given up the idea if Thea had responded at all

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to his cool advances. But she remained absolutely indifferent, with a chill indifference that left no doubt on his mind. Therefore he looked at her again and again, almost resolving to marry her because of that same indifference. In town he would probably have forgotten her in a week. Here, in the green stillness of Ringway, his thoughts dwelt angrily on her beauty and her elusiveness. For there was about her a singular elusive quality, like the curious halo seen on dewy grass in moonlight—always just beyond. Stoop to look closely and it is gone. Walk on, and it glitters softly like an elf-lantern held before one's feet, and one must needs follow where it leads. In like manner Thea Basset seemed to be always just beyond, and perhaps in this elusiveness lay her greatest charm. And her beauty? Yes, that was as unique as her charm. Who would have expected to find in this out-of-the-way place a girl like warm ivory, with eyes deep as midnight, and dusky hair with gold glints in it. Absurd that such a face should be left in the provinces. How much would Basset give his goddaughter on her marriage? Parfitt wished he knew. He did not doubt his own power to induce Thea to marry him. 'Women never know their own minds,' he reflected contemptuously; and her dislike of him would give zest to what he called his ' training of her ' after marriage. For like all persons of his type, he was resolved upon destroying, or at least suppressing, the personality that had drawn his notice. There is a splendid butterfly; catch it. Well, what are you going to do with it? Why, pull off its wings, of course. There! it is only a common grub, after all. And the

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wings? Oh, they are nothing. Only a thin membrane and a little grey fluff—look! Certainly, they are nothing.

All these ideas had been simmering in Parfitt's mind before the advent of James Cassilis. There had also existed an obstacle to the artist's Alnaschar-like plans, namely, Anthony Occleston. Between him and Parfitt flourished a fine healthy animosity. Occleston greatly admired his old playmate Thea, and his honest affection made him sharp-sighted enough to perceive the drift of Mark's vague intentions. Even without this incentive to discord, the two men differed too essentially ever to have agreed. Tony nursed his wrath and counted the months that must elapse before the Woffendale fresco was finished. Parfitt met him with supercilious ease; Occleston could hardly prove a serious rival. But when Cassilis appeared on the scene the situation altered. He was not a man whom it was possible to ignore, and his instant popularity was easily seen. Evidently Basset liked him, Thea smiled upon him, Anthony Occleston was prepared to admire him, even though Thea so smiled. This Parfitt clearly saw as he sat in Emily Darnton's drawing-room that night, looking about him with cold unsmiling eyes and inwardly debating whether he would definitely enter the lists against Occleston, and possibly against Cassilis. Perhaps the grapes were not worth plucking. He would not acknowledge that they hung too high. How much money would Basset give the girl? She was beautiful, certainly, and there would be the amusement of taming a woman who disliked him. He would enjoy plucking off those shimmering wings, destroying that

odd quality of seeming always beyond reach. And through his thoughts ran ever the puzzle, where had he seen Cassilis?—where?—and when?

It was about half-past eleven when the Corner dispersed, Tony Occleston grumbling because he was obliged to return to Woffendale by the twelve train.

‘ Got to see a fellow on business at five, o’clock to-morrow morning. Such an hour! But he’s off abroad, that’s why. Pity to lose my walk home. It’s such a jolly night.’

This remark of Tony’s put an idea into Thea’s mind.

‘ Emily,’ she said when all the others had gone and only Basset, Cassilis, and herself were standing at the door of Number Three, ‘ this is the mystic Eve of St. John. Let us go up the hill and gather fern-seed in Mannannen’s garden.’

Emily shook her head. ‘I wish I could, but I am really too tired with walking about Woffendale this afternoon.’

‘ It is the only night in the year when you can gather fern-seed,’ protested Thea. ‘It falls at midnight. Will you come, Dr. Cassilis? ’

‘ With pleasure. I have never gathered fern-seed.’ ‘ Neither have I,’ laughed Emily. ‘Bring me some, please. Good-night.’

And she closed her door. Basset opened his with a latchkey.

‘ Come in, Cassilis,’ he said. ‘You had better put on a cloak, Thea.’

‘Yes, I meant to do so. I will not be a minute.’

She disappeared, and Basset took up a parcel that had come for him.

‘ Ah, this is the pamphlet I wanted. I think I will sit down and read it now.’

Here Thea returned, having thrown over her gown a long cloak of dove-coloured silk with a hood that she drew over her head.

‘ What an elfin garment! ’ said Cassilis.

‘ Is it not?’ she replied gaily. ‘Surely you would not have me gather fern-seed in a modern hat with a dead bird on it? This cloak might be Titania’s, made of grey cobweb. Now, Daddy, are you ready? ’

Basset was eagerly turning over the leaves of the pamphlet:

‘My dear, I should like to read this. Can you not go with Cassilis? ’

‘ Very well. Come along, Dr. Cassilis and I will show you a magic garden by starlight.’

CHAPTER V

SO Thea and Cassilis went out into the dim blue night, walking slowly up the road. There were still lights in most of the houses about the market-place, and Quality Corner was brilliant, every house brightly illuminated except Number One, which showed only a feeble glimmer in the hall.

‘ My abode presents a most dismal appearance,’ said Cassilis, glancing back. ‘I must tell my house-keeper to put more lights about, even if I am not at home.’

‘ People are accustomed to seeing it rather dark,’ said Thea. ‘Dr. Smith was also a solitary bachelor.’

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' So is Miss Darnton a solitary bachelor. My house shall look as cheerful as Miss Darnton's.'

The hill on which Ringway stood was a merciful elevation: it reared itself starward by a reasonable slope that could be mounted in leisurely fashion, without thought or effort; and thus strolling, Cassilis perceived on his first night in Ringway the peculiar quality of the air. It was of a cool, moist, velvety softness, with a scarcely perceptible forest scent in it, as though breathing from spaces of wet moss and fern. Yet how dry the road was, despite the brief shower that evening. Cassilis remarked on this.

' You will always find it so,' replied Thea. 'Most of the hill is sand, and what is not sand is peat. Perhaps that is why the rain here never seems to chill,

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though, as I told you, we live in a perpetual rainbow- shower. Or perhaps the real cause is the fairy spells that hold Ringway in their grasp. Remember this is Midsummer Eve, and speak respectfully of the Troll folk.'

' I begin to think I am walking with one,' looking at the hooded figure in glimmering grey beside him.

She laughed. 'Who knows? Are you afraid of coming with me? '

'Not in the least.'

They were now nearly at the top of the hill. Behind them the road stretched dimly down to Quality Corner, where the lights sparkled faintly in the distance. On either side were dark hedges and fields, with scattered houses looming darkly against the sky. From the gardens came a puff of mignonette, a puff of lily-scent; then the olive-black line of Ringway woods rose before them, and the forest odours of moss and fern again filled the soft warm night. Over the woods, low in the south-west, Antares blazed in the Scorpion's glittering curve.

' What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild-fowl? ' inquired Thea.

' " That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird," ' replied Cassilis promptly.

' I am glad you know your Shakespeare. Well, like Malvolio, I think more nobly of the soul. But were I a Pythagorean I should hope to become an owl on summer nights like this, that I might enjoy the dewy darkness and listen to the unaccustomed sounds. Night is the time when the earth talks to itself, and I like to hear it. Also, I like the stars.

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Do you see the Scorpion's Heart over there?—just above the trees.'

'Antares? Yes. The red star of summer. It is bright to-night.'

Then he turned to look at his companion's face by the light of the Scorpion's Heart and other stars, but starshine is dim, and the grey-clad figure beside him appeared shadowy, elf-like, in the gloom. He felt rather than saw the lustre of her eyes; still more he noticed the rippling cadences of her voice, ' soft as running water at night.'

Youth was returning to him, the youth that he had forgotten.

' We are not going into the woods,' said that wonderful voice, ' but on the hillside. This is the way.'

' This ' was a lane turning off the road northwards, with hedges and trees on either side, the interlacing branches forming a canopy so dense that no ray of starlight pierced

the obscurity. Cassilis could not see the ground whereon he walked. It was soft to the tread and sloped rapidly. Then he ran into the hedge and a startled bird flew out.

'Where are you, Dr. Cassilis? ' enquired the melodious voice, this time with laughter in its tones. 'You are waking all the birds! The lane is dark and the moss slippery, but we shall be out on the hillside in a moment.'

'Oh, the lane is moss-paven, is it? I thought it was too velvety for grass.'

' Everything is mossy here,' said Thea, as they emerged from the leafy tunnel. 'Come round this corner—there! Now listen! '

They were standing a little way down the hillside,

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facing north-west and looking over a wide dusky valley that spread grey and olive under the violet- blue of the sky. Behind, meadows rose steeply to the woods; in front, meadows sloped downwards, all grey, blurred, and shadowy, bounded by deeper shadows that were hedges. Farther away, yet deeper shadows lay on the olive-greyness—copses, thickets, farmhouse nestling among trees; and farther still, the olive-darkness melting into the blue. To the left ran the lane, pale in the night, with a few cottages at a little distance, their windows dark under the eaves; gnome- dwellings they looked at this hour—low, indistinct, half-hidden in leafage. A sinking crescent moon hung in the west, vividly reflected in a sheet of water— a silver point of light in the distance.

' Listen! ' repeated Thea. 'This is the time when the spring talks loudest.'

The night was very still and full of scent. Cassilis fancied he must be standing on thyme; then a wandering breeze brought from the meadows the sweet fresh smell of ripening grass, and from the hedges the breath of honeysuckle. He listened, and heard a liquid gurgle that seemed to come from the roots of an old thorn close beside him. It paused and whispered, then laughed and whispered again, all in singing ripples—was it a primæval Thea?

' Is it a Dryad? ' he asked.

' It is a little spring that rises below the hawthorn and flows away down the hill. By day one can hardly hear it, but at night it is almost a living thing.'

'Tell me some more,' said Cassilis. 'This place is bewitched. I feel it. Tell me more.'

Perhaps the place was not so much. bewitched as

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was Cassilis himself. He had always been so gentle, grave, and patient that people had unconsciously treated him as a man older than he really was; girls had appealed to him—relied upon him as on an elder brother. Thea Basset alone had regarded him as a comrade. There was exhilaration in her presence, in the oddness of standing beside her at midnight on this wild hillside. The very dimness of the owl-light gave strangeness to the charm of the scarcely visible figure in its rustling grey garments, rustling that might be only the rustling of the leaves. He knew how brilliant were the eyes, how lovely the face that he could not see for the folds of the hood.

She pointed towards the silver sparkle of the sinking moon on the distant water. 'Do you think that is fern-seed? It is said to shine like silver when it falls. Perhaps earth-clocks are wrong, and it is past midnight and the fern-seed has fallen.'

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‘ Doubtless that is the fern-seed shining,’ he replied. ‘It always shines too far away, always beyond our reach. But you possess one of its gifts, for you walk invisible.’

‘Did I not tell you I was a fairy? Now look down there, straight down below us. That pale line is an old road to Woffendale. One night, a hundred and fifty years ago, armed men rode along it; there were many Cheshire and Lancashire men “out in the forty-five,” if you know what that means? ’ interrogatively.

‘ Solomon Ingers was good enough to explain the phrase to me this morning. Is this history you are telling me? ’

‘ No, it is fact. Well, every man of the troop was

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killed. But the Ringway people say that they are often seen returning. They ride onward like a wave, with glints of steel here and there.’

‘ Surely,’ said Cassilis meditatively, ‘ the latter part of your story belongs to history, not fact.’

‘ To both. For there are glancing lights to be seen down there sometimes. Perhaps the gleams are star- reflections in the puddles, perhaps the Ringway men returning. Who shall say? ’

Thea paused a moment, and the little spring whispered and rippled and the night wind stirred the grasses.

‘ I believe it all,’ her listener protested, ‘ I believe everything! ’

‘ There are other and older stories of the hillside,’ she continued. ‘You are right in thinking it bewitched. Do you see a dark line in the north-west? That is a low hill called the Ridge, and on it lies buried a mighty wizard, Mannannen Mac-y-Leir. It is said he had a magic garden here, and that this hillside is therefore still under the enchantment of Mannannen’s spells.’

‘ What is their effect? ’

‘ Oh many things. Strange plants grow at midnight, blossom, and die in an hour. Some are good, some evil; and as people do not know which is which they are afraid of gathering them.’

‘ Even if they ever see them? ’

‘ Even when they see them,’ Thea corrected gravely. ‘Another legend says that not Mannannen but Canute is buried on the Ridge. A third tradition, and the one I like best, says that neither Mannannen nor Canute lies there, but a mightier Ruler than either,

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a king to whom all men once came for justice. He is still believed to ride about the country between here and the Ridge from sunset till dawn. If you could lay hand on his bridle you would obtain your heart’s desire. But he rides so swiftly that even as you hear the sound of his horse’s hoofs he is gone. In old times people worshipped at the king’s grave, and even now there is a curious feeling about the tumulus. No one when passing it speaks of any injustice, lest the king’s rest should be disturbed by hearing of wrong that he cannot right.’

‘ That is a fine idea,’ Cassilis observed thoughtfully.

‘Yes, is it not? It impressed me very much when I was a child. I used to wonder why he did not hear and see injustice when he was riding about, but there is always some inconsistency in these legends. Often I sat here at dusk and fancied I heard the galloping

hoofs. There is a measured beating in the air at times—the echo, I suppose, of some distant sound.'

' So the hillside is a magic garden where a king rides nightly, and slain men return from the battlefield. Are there any more legends? I am falling under the spell of these "enchantments old." I too shall return hither like the Ringway men.'

' Do you feel like a ghost already? '

' No—yes—no, I think not. I wish to gather some of the magic fern-seed before I die.'

' Then now is the time. The church clock is striking twelve. Hark! '

Slowly the strokes followed each other, filling the air with deep reverberations that seemed to float away

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over the valley. Then, to Cassilis's amazement, the chimes suddenly struck up the rollicking tune of—

' There is na luck about the house,
There is na luck at a',
There is na luck about the house
When my gudeman's awa'! '

' Of all the——,' he began, and burst into a fit of laughing, in which Thea joined; and their laughter echoed over the hillside, mingling with the jovial clanging of the chimes. Then the ringing ceased, the air trembled a little, and all the night again became hushed and still.

' What a goblin entertainment you are giving me! ' said Cassilis.

' Am I not? We are proud of those chimes. There is nothing like them anywhere.'

' I should imagine not! '

' And you were so busy laughing that you forgot to gather the fern-seed as midnight sounded. Look, it is gone.'

Cassilis looked to the left where the silver sparkle had shone. It had vanished. The crescent moon had sunk, and the water no longer glittered; all the valley was dark.

' Next Midsummer Eve,' he said, ' I will not be distracted from my purpose by those chimes. I will stuff my ears like the girl in the fairy tale. Then I may be more lucky. And if I am no longer here,'— what impelled him to utter the words?—' my ghost shall come. Perhaps ghosts are better able to gather fern-seed than we who are still in this mortal coil.'

' Oh! this is getting too weird altogether! ' cried

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Thea with a little shiver. 'The fern-seed is gone, Dr. Cassilis, and we must go too. If we stay here any longer we shall be turning into ghosts before our time.'

They turned back round the corner by the hawthorn and through the leafy darkness of the moss- paven lane, and out on the high-road again, where the Scorpion's Heart burnt redly in the blue south-west and the lights of Quality Corner glimmered below. A few

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minutes more brought them to Number Two, where Basset sat placidly reading his book.

‘ Got any fern-seed? ’ he enquired when the two appeared before him. Thea answered: ‘No. We might have done so, had not Dr. Cassilis broken the spell by laughing at the chimes. But we have seen the seed.’

‘ And it is a great satisfaction to know that it exists,’ said Cassilis.

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CHAPTER VI

SEVEN o’clock on Midsummer morning in Ringway; blue and beautiful—the pale blue of the north-west, where silvery mists hang in the air, giving the distance its peculiar softness. Through the blue dewiness James Cassilis climbed Ringway hill on its southern side, which was not the reasonable slope he had walked up to hear the chimes at midnight, but a tolerably steep ascent. He had discovered a flight of worn stone steps leading up to the church, and he ran up these with a boyish feeling of elation. His life in Ringway seemed to have begun well. He had fallen, not among thieves, but friends. Basset, Emily Darnton, Occleston, Rudell, a rich patient in Galloway, that unexpected ramble with Thea Basset on the hillside; then confused pleasant dreams, a summons at dawn to another patient farther away down in the vale; and now homeward in the sunny morning with that sense of renewed youth and hope that had so suddenly inspired him. Certainly there was Mark Parfitt, standing as it were like the grim guest at the feast. But Cassilis was not thinking of him as he sprang up the steps, pausing for a moment at the top to look at the old red sandstone church, rosy in the early sunlight, and the great southern sweep of valley below it. Then he turned his back on church and vale, and for a moment stood considering which of two roads

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to take—either would lead him back to the town. The more direct of the two was bordered by red-stemmed pines at equal distances, like sentinels beside the way. Someone was coming along this road; white gleams appeared and disappeared between the trees, and Cassilis was at once convinced that this was the best—indeed, the only route to take. He went pine-wards, and the gleams resolved themselves into Thea Basset, wearing a white gown and broad straw hat, and carrying a sheaf of blue and white iris.

‘ The iris was once called Gladwyn,’ she said, holding out the flowers by way of greeting. ‘I am taking these to decorate the church.’

She did not ask him why he was there, or where he had been, seeming to accept his presence as a matter of course on that quiet road in the morning light. Nor did Cassilis offer any explanation, but turned and walked beside her, saying in reply:

‘ This is St. John’s day, is it not? ’

‘ Therefore I decorate the church. I don’t do it for the other saints, only for the two St. Johns. I make favourites, you see.’

‘ Then what becomes of the other saints? ’

‘ Oh, other people look after them.’

‘ Will the doors be open at this hour? ’

‘ The vestry door. At least I think so. If not, I must get the key.’

The vestry door yielded to a push, and they entered the cool dim church, their footsteps echoing along the aisles. There was no one else there; only the summer morning filled the building. The sunshine struck through the mullioned windows in slant shafts of light that wherever they touched lit the red sandstone

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to rosy flame. Songs of birds came in on a little breeze, seeming to deepen the silence and the peace.

‘ I share your admiration of the Baptist,’ said Cassilis as Thea untied her sheaf of iris. ‘If he had chosen to preach a good average sermon free from personalities, he might have ended as Herod’s private chaplain. Instead, he preferred to be one of the world’s stupendous failures.’

‘ The failures that were deferred successes,’ said Thea.

‘ Yes, that is what I mean.’

Then he fell silent, watching Thea’s movements as she went to and fro, placing a handful of iris here, another handful there. The sunbeams streaming through the stained glass of the great east window filled all the chancel with rainbow lights—little pools of violet and rose on the red marble floor, amethyst and crimson flecks on Thea’s white gown, glimmerings of purple and amber high up on the warm sandstone of the walls; and it seemed to Cassilis as though he might stand for ever in that iris-scented rose-hued church, full of sunlit glory and silent save for those light footsteps on the marble and bird-songs without in the summer morning.

After a while he spoke. ‘Do you know the story of the Monk Felix? ’

‘ Am I not a Troll maiden? I know all stories.

“ As in a dream of rest,
Walked the Monk Felix.” ’

‘ Yes, well this is my dream of rest. Have I been here a few minutes or a hundred years? Is the world outside the same as when we left it? Or shall we

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find “ the nations’ airy navies grappling in the central blue ”?’

‘ If we do,’ said Thea, throwing back her head with a little defiant gesture, ‘ I am quite sure England’s navy will be on the top, nearest the Polestar.’

Cassilis laughed. ‘How patriotically warlike you are! ’

‘ Of course. I am always glad St. George of England is a fighting saint.’

‘ Certainly the Roman centurion seems a suitable patron for us. St. George’s military character would naturally impel him to cheer the British bull-dog on to the fight, instead of “with a little hoard of maxims preaching down a soldier’s heart.” ’

It was Thea who laughed now. ‘I see you are as warlike as I,’ she said, turning to her iris flowers again, and once more the sunny silence reigned in the church.

Presently Cassilis broke the stillness by remarking that nobody knew where he was.

‘ I let myself quietly out of the house when I was called to a patient, and forgot to leave a note to say where I was going. So if anyone wants me ——Never mind; this is better. Whether Quality Comer is preparing its breakfast, or the Red Cross of St. George

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blowing against the Polestar, as you suggest, it is all the same to me. I will enjoy my dream of rest. Perhaps it may last the hundred years. Perhaps for ever, your irises unfading and this midsummer morning eternal.'

Thea regarded him critically. 'Your mind is becoming unhinged, Monk Felix. Something must be done to bring you back to this present world. I

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will take you into the churchyard and show you the southern view of the valley. We can go out by the south porch.'

They went down the chancel steps into the nave, passing from the prismatic colours of the east window into the white sunshine that illumined the body of the church. In the west transept Thea stopped and looked back to where the chancel glowed in its rainbow light.

' My irises stand out well,' she said. 'Blue and white are the only colours one can use among all that ruby and violet.'

' They are dream-flowers,' said Cassilis. 'They belong to my dream of rest: their name means the rainbow, and they signify hope.'

' Your slumber, Monk Felix, appears to be unusually profound. Come out into the workaday world.' ' There is no workaday world,' he declared, as he followed her into the churchyard, ' if by workaday is meant prosaic. The natural world is perfect: and the artificial world—that is, civilised man and his doings —I have always found remarkably curious and interesting.'

' Sometimes. In patches.'

' I find him interesting all round, dead or living, at all times and all places.'

' These are interesting.' Thea extended one hand over the flat mossy gravestones under their feet. 'Some of them I knew, and of nearly all I know the histories and the descendants. There are a very few old stones on which the names are obliterated. This is dead Ringway. They live in the town down there behind us, and then lie here in the sunshine; the

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church bells ringing over them and their friends coming round them every Sunday. Does it not all seem simple and peaceful? '

' Very peaceful,' assented Cassilis.

Ringway churchyard did look very peaceful that brilliant June morning, lying as it did full to the south, overlooking the valley, the church seeming to gather the gravestones round her, protecting the dead while their slumber lasted—the dead who from childhood to old age had worshipped within those walls.

Thea led the way to a lilac bush. 'Here,' said she, looking down on a stone that bore the name of Martha Grundy, ' lies a nice old woman who kept a little shop where I used to buy beads at a halfpenny a thimbleful. She died when she was ninety. I wish she had lived to be a hundred.'

' I am not sure that old women who sell beads at a halfpenny a thimbleful ought to live to be a hundred. The price seems to me outrageous.'

" It was a very big thimble, and she was such a sweet old woman, always smiling.'

' No wonder!—with such profits.'

Thea's charming rippling laugh blended with the songs of the birds. Then she bent down a blossoming bough of the lilac.

'You know Daddy's theories? He says the scent of lilac fits people for gentle duties. Do you agree? ' She turned the lilac towards Cassilis, shaking it a little, so that the homely fragrance spread on the air.

' Perhaps,' he replied, ' to respect your old bead- woman may be a gentle duty. Already I feel mollified. No doubt that is the result of the lilac.'

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The bough swung back, faint purple against the turquoise sky.

' Everybody argues as to which side of Ringway is the prettier, the north or the south,' Thea continued.' It is a question that can never be settled, because it depends upon individual fancy; so they argue the more. I prefer the north; it is wilder, and has the legends. Do you like looking down on the homes of men from a height? I do. The being up aloft is soothing to one's vanity, I suppose. Have you any vanity, Dr. Cassilis? '

' Many vanities. They are more numerous than the hairs of my head.'

' What is your most rampant vanity? '

' The universal one—my own importance.'

Which statement was not true, for it never occurred to Cassilis to reflect whether he was important or not. But just now he was not heeding his utterances. The dewy peace of the morning, the pleasant novelty of Ringway, Thea Basset's presence, all sent his spirits up to a point of irresponsible joyousness that had not been his for many years. Was he ' fey '? Anyway, he was happy, and spoke with the carelessness of happiness.

His companion listened with the same smiling unbelief she had shown the previous evening, and again Cassilis felt the inspiriting effect of that unbelief. She pointed to the clock.

' A quarter to eight. Time to go home.'

' Let us stay and hear the chimes,' he suggested.

Thea shook her head. 'You can stay and hear them if you like, but we breakfast at a quarter past.'

' Very well,' resignedly.

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' What is your breakfast hour, Dr. Cassilis? '

' I have not the least idea.'

' Did you not order it? '

' No, I forgot all about it.'

' Then will you breakfast with us? When I tell Daddy I met you here he will expect to see you as a matter of course.'

' I should like it immensely, if you are sure I shall not be a nuisance. It's like befriending a stray dog, you know. He's never off the doorstep.'

' Why should he be? Is it not better to stay with one's friends?'

' At the risk of wearying them? '

' Daddy never grows weary of people, a characteristic for which I especially admire him. He merely feels somewhat harassed when he meets a man who has absolutely no sense of smell. He regards him as an outer barbarian, and is troubled. But you are in high favour, as being a promising subject for experiment in the matter of perfumes.'

' Mr. Basset shall experiment upon me to his heart's content,' responded Cassilis, as they turned out of the churchyard into the pine-bordered road. 'Ringway itself appears to be doing so already. Last night it smelt of moss and thyme. To-day it smells of iris and lilac. What will be to-morrow's scent? '

' Who can tell till to-morrow? ' said Thea, with the light soft gaiety that struck a strangely familiar chord in Cassilis's memory. Surely he had once met someone who resembled her, in manner at least. Yet he was positive he never had.

And so, talking idly, pleasantly, they walked home along the country road to Quality Corner.

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CHAPTER VII

ALL Quality Corner usually breakfasted at the same hour, therefore all Quality Corner was aware that the new tenant of Number One had accompanied Thea Basset home and was breakfasting at Number Two. Emily Darnton, sitting solitary at Number Three, told herself that perhaps it would have been wiser not to have refused the invitation to gather fern-seed the night before. For Emily had been impressed by the newcomer. 'But I can never compete with Thea out of doors,' she reflected. 'I carry the house with me, like a snail. My conversation is indoor, whereas Thea becomes a part of everything somehow. However, I don't suppose she wants the man. It is only her habit of talking to everybody. Besides, I am not sure——' Here Miss Darnton's thoughts wandered off into many possibilities.

At Number Four, Parfitt, half turning in his chair to look into the street, remarked carelessly:

' I have met him somewhere before.'

Rudell glanced up from his plate. 'Who? Cassilis?'

' Yes. I remembered his face the moment I saw him last night, but I cannot recall where I saw him, nor the circumstances.'

Mark's chill impassive tones had the property of conveying a subtle doubt of the person of whom he

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chanced to speak, so that Mrs. Rudell responded briskly:

' Do try to remember. I like to know things about people, especially when they come mysteriously into a place, as Dr. Cassilis has done.'

Rudell looked up again. 'My dear, there is nothing mysterious about Dr. Cassilis's arrival here. He bought the practice in the ordinary way, just as Smith did.'

' Oh, Dr. Smith was the sort of a man who never has any story. But this Dr. Cassilis might have a dozen stories belonging to him.'

' I have a vague idea that he is connected in my mind with a tale of some sort,' said Parfitt.

' Then try your very hardest to recollect,' cried his sister eagerly.

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‘ If I try to remember I shall infallibly forget. The way to remember is to try to forget.’

Rudell felt slightly annoyed. ‘Really, Susette, it is not fair to imply that a stranger’s past must necessarily be something he would rather hide. Dr. Cassilis’s affairs are no concern of ours. He seems a clever fellow. I wonder he has not done better in life; he can hardly be without ambition. If he is, that gives him an additional pull.’

‘How? I do not see that,’ demurred Mrs. Rudell.

‘ Don’t you? Which has the more time and opportunity for thinking and observing, the man who is scrambling up a ladder in company with a thousand others, all trying to get to the top at once, or the man who stands aside and watches the scramble? ’

‘ Now, Gregory, that is not polite to Mark, who is famous.’

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‘ Oh, well, Parfitt is at the top of the ladder.’

‘ Not quite the tipmost top,’ said Parfitt, with arrogant modesty. ‘But Cassilis’s indifference to the noble science of getting on may simply be a natural proneness to remain at the bottom.’

‘ Not with that head,’ said Rudell.

‘ In any case,’ pursued Mark blandly, ‘ he is admirably adapted to the people of Ringway, whose ambition appears to centre in the wish to remain where they are, physically and mentally.’

Parfitt was distinctly angry. There had been an implied rebuke in Rudell’s observations, and this the artist resented. However, his opinion of Ringway did not seem to ruffle his brother-in-law, for the latter replied serenely:

‘ I doubt whether there are many better fates for a man than to tread the same familiar ground from youth to age, and lay his bones at last among the gravestones over which he played leap-frog when a boy.’

Parfitt looked condescendingly incredulous. ‘Is leap-frog permitted in the churchyard? I should not have imagined so.’

‘ It is not. Hence the enjoyment.’

‘ What! ’ exclaimed his wife. ‘Do you mean to tell me, Gregory, that you played leap-frog in Ringway churchyard? ’

‘ Often, my dear, and so did Basset. Once I broke my leg in trying to out-leap Basset, and my father promised me a thrashing as soon as my leg was well. I got it too,’ added Rudell with a smile.

‘ And did it stop you playing leap-frog afterwards? ’ asked Parfitt.

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‘ Not in the least. But none the less was the thrash ing wholesome for me. It gave me a due sense of law and order. I may not have been better with it, but I should undoubtedly have been worse without it; therefore I was the better for the experience, and am still. No use looking for immediate results. The good effects of a judicious thrashing may not be visible for twenty years.’

‘ What surprises me,’ said Mrs. Rudell, ‘ is that anyone in Ringway can have the smallest respect for either you or Mr. Basset after witnessing, as they must have done, your youthful exploits.’

‘ Pooh, my dear. They like us all the better.’

‘ I comprehend,’ observed Parfitt slowly. ‘Quite clannish and antique—mediæval, rather. Well, that is against a stranger.’

His sister laughed. ‘Are you thinking of Dr. Cassilis? How he interests us all! Whatever he does or has done, I do hope he will not cure Mr. Galloway’s gout, for each attack means a new will to be made. I have had several new gowns out of those wills, and I want some more.’

Meanwhile Cassilis, unconscious that his doings aroused any particular interest, was enjoying his breakfast at Number Two. There certainly was something to be said for Basset’s theories of perfume and colour. How pleasant was that fragrant room with its varying shades of amethyst and faint purple, and the soft harmony of the pale lavender iris in the tall murrey-coloured glass.

‘Yes,’ said Basset, replying to a remark respecting the charm of the room; ‘after much reflection on the subject, I decided that violet in its lighter shades is

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the colour best adapted to promote cheerfulness in a company of human beings of varying temperaments. Dull muddy colouring is depressing, and a dark green or dark red dining-room is apt to foster a terrible self-consciousness. That is why agnostics and bad- tempered people usually take their defiant meals in apartments of those sulkily aggressive hues. On the other hand, sunny reds, greens, golds, soft June blues, might, by their very brightness, jar upon overworked or saddened men and women. Put pale violet— united rose and turquoise—is the exact mingling of gaiety and gravity suitable to every mood. Whether you are glad or sorrowful, violet harmonises and you eat and drink in peace; just as violets were strewn equally on table and on tomb by that nation of dinner- givers, the Romans.’

‘ And the iris? ’ said Cassilis interrogatively. He liked to see Basset well mounted on his hobby.

‘ I consider the scent of the iris,’ replied his host, ‘ a distinct stimulant—less soothing than the pinks, but more intellectual; and, equally with the pinks and all sweet odours, tending to lightheartedness. I should describe the iris perfume as debonair, soldierly, artistic. It is the Crusader, the Cellini; equally at home in war and art. We see the gold lilies of France flying against the blue in Palestine, the lily of St. Mark shining in Venetian marble, and the red lilies of Florence flame through Dante’s pages.’

‘ I thought,’ said Cassilis, ‘ that the lilies of Florence were the white iris? ’

‘ Once they were,’ said Thea. ‘Do you not remember how Dante laments the change of colour from white to red? ’

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‘ I do remember now. How could I have forgotten? I thought I knew my Dante well. But that is in the “ Paradise.” ’

‘ Do you not often walk in Paradise? ’

‘ Not often. My feet are more familiar with the descending circles.’

‘ When I was eight years old,’ Thea went on, ‘ I painted in childish fashion two pictures: one was the death of Buonconte. To my profound astonishment, nobody knew anything of Buonconte except my father—I mean my real father; it was before he died. He understood my picture at once, and repeated the passage. The incident shook my

faith in all other grown-up people. I reflected in my small mind that if they were ignorant of Dante they were ignorant indeed.'

Cassilis laughed. 'It would have been more surprising had they known. What was your other picture? '

' Whitsuntide merry-making—a people's holiday, you know. And as I naturally possessed no knowledge whatever of perspective, my merry-making looked like the Day of Judgment in a very old painting—rows and rows of figures going up and up to the top of the picture. Only when you observed it closely, you perceived such mundane vanities as merry-go-rounds, hurdy-gurdies, and dancing.'

'Where are these works of art?' asked Cassilis.

' Gone—lost—destroyed long ago. Who would keep such childish scribbles? '

' I wish they had been kept,' remarked Basset. 'I should like to have seen them. Not on account of their artistic merit,' he smiled, 'but because the subjects

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were curious for a child, and so dissimilar— opposite poles of human life.'

' Oh, I know you would have appreciated them, Daddy. Quite as much as my father did.'

' How does it happen,' said Cassilis, ' that you are not an artist, since your natural bent showed itself thus?'

' I do not think it was my natural bent,' replied Thea. 'I think those two pictures were not any evidence of capacity for art, they merely showed appreciation of dramatic effects. I had been impressed by the contention of the angels for Buonconte's soul, and by the humour of the Whitsuntide games.'

' What is art? ' queried Basset. 'The best definition of art that I have heard was given me by a woman artist—" Art is the perception of beauty with the genius for expressing it." That is it—the gift of the seer and speaker in one. The ancients made no difference whether the thought was expressed in colour, stone, or words; that is, words used as the painter uses colour and the sculptor light and shade—words that sound aright to the ear as well as mean aright. With the Greeks, you know, the spoken word was the test of excellence, and from their criticism there is no appeal. Language is sound, and should be harmonious sound. The written word is merely a chronicle of that sound. To write a sentence that splits one's ears is the same thing as uttering a screech. What should we say if a singer howled, and excused himself on the ground that the audience understood his meaning, and he had not time to cultivate his voice? ' He paused a moment, then continued, 'We talk so much of the literature of

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art that we have well-nigh lost the art of literature. Yet how simple it is! Let a man buy a Latin dictionary and a Greek lexicon, a Bible and a Shakespeare, a Mallory and a Pilgrim's Progress, and read these humbly and affectionately, and when possible, out of doors; and he will give us Orcagnas or Memlings, Corots or Gerard Douws, according to his individuality. As for the present-day craze for charnel-house knowledge,' pursued Basset, warming up to his subject, ' I have no words wherewith to express my opinion of it. What good does it do me to knew whether I have one, two, or a dozen bones in my legs? Is it not better to know how Bayard kept the bridge at Biagasso, and what manner of man he was? Such knowledge is stimulating—vivifying; the other is not.'

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‘ You perceive,’ said Thea, addressing Cassilis, ‘ that Daddy reads all the literature of which he disapproves. He has piles of new books and magazines. He devours them all and then sits down and screams.’

‘ Yes,’ Basset acquiesced. ‘Thea is the wiser. She only reads such books as commend themselves to her natural turn of mind, whereas I am in the position of a man who tastes things that do not agree with him. I do it because I wish to know what is going on in the world. Briefly, I am a martyr to a sense of duty—and curiosity.’

‘ I think,’ Cassilis observed reflectively, ‘ that our end-of-the-century literature is equal to our art.’

Basset slowly passed his hand over his face. ‘My dear Cassilis, in my most severe moods I have never said anything so bad as that.’

‘ I intended it for a compliment to both.’

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‘ Did you? Dear me! ’

‘ Daddy, you are unreasonable,’ said Thea. ‘This century is a very good century, books and all.’

' Where are our Ghiberti gates? ’ demanded Basset impressively. ‘Our buildings, what are they? And how long do they last? ’

‘ We cannot compete with the old builders,’ Cassilis agreed, looking at the pale iris flowers in the Tyrian glass. ‘I am inclined to think that the reason old stone carving is so good is because in those days every man could wield a weapon—learnt how to use it knowing that at any moment he might have to fight for his life. The accuracy and freedom of eye and hand thus obtained told, when the hand held the chisel. For example, Cellini prided himself equally upon his accuracy of stroke, whether dealing a mortal stab or carving a crucifix.’

‘ No doubt you are right,’ assented Basset. ‘What an entertaining scamp he was!—Cellini, I mean. Nowadays our rascals are terrible bores—an unpardonable fault. If a man will not be moral, he might at least be amusing. The old debonair gaiety is departing. People cannot even amuse themselves, much less others. Tristram no longer sings in Lyonesse, but puts his hat on the back of his head and yawns in a music-hall.’ He waved his hand towards the iris: ' “ Debonair,” a fine old word! But how can a man feel debonair in smoke-polluted towns and chemically-poisoned meadows, where there are no birds to teach him to sing in the joyousness of his heart? Earth, air, and water are contaminated by the twin Malebolgé demons called Science and Progress. Soon there will be neither birds nor sun. We shall sit under a canopy of smoke illumined

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by electric light, and talk about our bones—bones —bones.’

‘ Daddy,’ interposed Thea, ‘ do not be so sepulchral. Besides, Dr. Cassilis probably takes an interest in bones,’

‘ Only a professional interest. I am in complete accord with Mr. Basset’s sentiments.’

‘ Were you always so? ’ she enquired. ‘Or are your present convictions the transient effect of the iris scent? ’

‘ Not transient. They were in my mind, written in invisible ink as it were. My present surroundings are bringing them out.’

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Basset was wholly charmed with his guest. Here was an appreciative companion indeed! When at last Cassilis rose to go, his host allowed him to depart with visible reluctance.

‘ You have paid my breakfast-table a high compliment; you have talked as though you were at supper. I am greatly flattered.’

‘ Surely,’ replied Cassilis, ‘ the verb applies rather to me.’

‘ Will you dine with us again this evening? ’ Basset looked quite eager as he said this.

‘ Thank you, I should like it above all things. But Mr. Galloway asked me to dine there to-day, and I accepted.’

‘ Ah,’ with an indescribable inflection of voice. ‘Galloway is an excellent fellow, but his dinners are——’Basset paused to seek a suitable expression, ‘ they are what people call wholesome. And the colouring of his dining-room is calculated to provoke severe indigestion. I explained this to him some time ago. He

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replied that he never looked round while he was eating.’

‘ So when you dine there, Dr. Cassilis,’ said Thea, ‘ try not to look round while you are eating.’

‘ I fear,’ he responded, ‘ that my curiosity will impel me to run the risk of indigestion.’

‘ Well, dine with us to-morrow,’ said Basset. ‘And come in this afternoon if you can.’

‘ Fate is good to me/ said Cassilis. ‘Need I say I will come? ’

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CHAPTER VIII

IF Cassilis was ‘ fey,’ then to be fey is indeed to be happy. All that day he trod on air, iris-tinted air. He built no fairy castles in his mind; had no thought of the future. He simply enjoyed the sparkling present. If the circumstances seem but poor and slight thus to raise a man's spirit from the dust of many years:— only a new life in the green grey-clouded north-west, within sight—almost within sound—of Woffendale smoke and flame; a welcome from a little knot of neighbours; a hope of bread not too hardly earned— if these seem slight matters, be it remembered that over all these shone the light of a girl's dark eyes, and the man had led a lonely, remorseful life. Truly this sunny present so unexpectedly given to him was as a rainbow after the storm.

Entering his own house, Cassilis was met by his housekeeper with two messages from the town—two more patients. He began to explain to the old woman how he had been called early to a house at some distance, and had breakfasted next door, but she quietly replied that she had seen him go into Number Two, and the milkman’s boy had told her ‘ he had fetched the doctor that morning to Mr. Brown’s in the Vale.’

‘ Oh, the milkman’s boy was my guide, was he? ’ responded Cassilis, rather taken aback, and experiencing that sensation as of living in a glass house which is familiar to dwellers in country towns. But it was a

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pleasant sensation on the whole. After all, there is something very cheerful about a glass house, and undoubtedly it promotes friendliness. We all like a man the better if we can hang over his garden wall and tell him his best friend has cheated him in the matter of that horse he has just bought.

James Cassilis went out into the town with fresh enthusiasm, saw his patients, and, returning through the market-place about noon, was greeted by Solomon Ingers. The old seedsman stood sunning himself as usual on the top step of his shop, and conversing with a couple of bystanders, who discreetly withdrew as the doctor came up.

‘ A fine day, sir,’ said Solomon.

‘ It is,’ replied Cassilis, seeing in the old man’s eye an inclination to gossip, and stopping accordingly. ‘I had no idea Ring way was so pretty.’

‘ Then happen you’ll settle down here? ’ Sol observed enquiringly.

‘ I shall if the place will have me. I like it immensely.’

' Th’ place ’11 ha’ thee fast enow,’ dropping into the familiar thee and thou as meaning greater friendliness; ‘ th’ place ’ll be glad to ha’ thee.’

He opened the historic snuff-box and offered it to Cassilis, who took a pinch. Sol then took one; and after this ceremony there was a moment’s silence.

' There’s a queer owd chap, a friend o’ mine,’ Sol resumed, ‘ that’s likely to send fur yo’. His name’s Wheeler, an’ he’s been ailing off an’ on fur many a year; got a squeeze betwixt th’ buffers when he wur on th’ railway. After that, some brass coom to him, a matter o’ six pound a week, and that made him an’ his

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missis comfortable. Well, he fell out wi’ Dr. Smith nigh on two year ago. It wur one fine spring morning, an’ Wheeler wur hobbling round his garden wi’ a stick —he’s been pretty crooked sin’ th’ buffers hit him— when Smith coom up, an’ thinking to please him, says,
“ Your case is a very interesting one, Mr. Wheeler. I mun write an account of it fur a medical paper. It ’ud excite attention.” Eh, Wheeler wur that mad at th’ idea he says, “ If tha’ does, I’ll ha’ th’ law on thee.” Smith tells him it’s lawful enow, and Wheeler says, “ Then if tha does, my nevvy shall give thee a hiding, as I conna do it mysen.” Smith laughs an’ walks off. But Wheeler wouldna ha’ him again; he wur too mad.’

Here Sol paused, and Cassilis, feeling it was expected of him, enquired what medical man had the care of Mr. Wheeler’s health after Dr. Smith’s dismissal.

‘ Eh, never a one! His wife wanted to send for a doctor fro’ Woffendale, but he said happen a’ th’ doctors wur alike, an’ if he wur to dee, he’d dee wi’out a’ th’ world knowing a’ about it. It wurna reasonable,’ said Solomon apologetically, ‘ but Wheeler wur mad through an’ through. An’ fur to keep an eye on Smith, Wheeler starts taking a’ th’ medical papers he could hear on; an’ he says to me, “ Th’ minute I see my name i’ these here papers, I’ll set my nevvy on to Smith. Ay, I will that.” It wur a regular job fur Wheeler to read ’em; it took him a’ his toime, not being much of a scholar. They’d coom in batches every week fro’ th’ newspaper shop, an’ Wheeler he had to keep hard at ’em, fur to get one batch done afore another coom.’

‘ They could hardly have been very cheerful reading,’ remarked Cassilis.

‘ Happen they wurna, but when a mon’s mad he

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loikes reading owt that ’ll make him madder. He dunnot want to be soothed, yo’ see. Wheeler kept at ’em steady fur nigh two year, an’ then Smith left an’ went to Australia, afore yo’ coom, sir. So Wheeler says to me, “ I’m going to stop taking them papers. If he writes in ’em fro’ Australia, he mun write; for I conna send my nevvy o’er theer after him, an’ if I see my name in ’em an’ conna get at him, it’ll make me feel worse nor ever. So I’ll look no more.” ’

‘ Mr. Wheeler seems to be a very sensible man,’ said Cassilis.

‘ Oh, ay, he’s a sensible chap at th’ bottom, an’ he isna close wi’ money. He wur telling me last neet that he felt a bit dull now Smith wur gone an’ he’d stopped th’ papers; an’ he wur thinking o’ sending fur yo’ if he wur sure yo’ wouldna write about his being crooked/

Here Sol paused and looked politely interrogative.

‘ No, I will not,’

‘ So I told him,’ Sol continued calmly. ‘I told him I wur sure yo’ wurna that sort, an’ he told me he’d send for yo’ to-day or to-morrow, an’ I reckon he will, being that dull wi’out Smith an’ the papers. Eh, but them papers made a noice doment i’ th’ place last Christmas! ’

‘ Indeed? How was that? ’

‘ Well, Mrs. Wheeler didna like ’em, an’ she wur fair sick o’ seeing th’ piles an’ piles of ’em, so nigh on Christmas she sells a lot of ’em to Reid, th’ grocer an’ cheesemonger o’er theer,’ Sol pointed with his snuffbox across the market-place. ‘Being the week afore Christmas theer wur a goodish bit o’ trade being done o’er the’ counter, an’ in less than three days them medical papers wur a’ o’er th’ town. Eh! but theer

wur a noise! Folks talked it o’er among theirsen an’ a’ th’ women went up to Reid’s shop an’ hollered at him. “ What dost tha mean? ” they says, “ wrapping up Christian food i’ bits o’ paper a’ about folks deein’ an’ being cut up aloive an’ ha'ing a’ th’ plagues o’ Egypt! Noice things fur folks to read at Christmas! An’ a’ th’ little uns a-spelling ’em out too. Tha’s done it on purpose, wi’ thy nasty unbelief! Tha conna abide that Christian folk should ha’ their Christmas comfortable. That’s what’s th’ matter wi’ thee!” Fur Reid wurna exactly a Christian,’ said Sol parenthetically. ‘I dunnot know precisely what he wur, an’ I dunnot think he knew hissen, but it made him feel grand-like to say he wurna th’ same as his neighbours. But he wur took to at a’ th’ noise, fur he didna want to get a bad name an’ lose custom, so he put his two hands to his mouth—fur theer wur such a squealing yo’ couldna hear yoursen speak, an’ he shouts to th’ women, “ See here, it’s no good hollering at me. I didna know what wur in th’ papers. I bought ’em fro’ Mrs. Wheeler. Yo’ go an’ holler at Wheeler’s.” So they went, an’ Wheeler he coom out an’ says, “ Well, I didna know as my wife had sold any o’ them papers, but it’s no fault o’ mine. It’s a’ Dr. Smith’s doing, fur if it hadna been fur him I should never ha’ thought o’ taking ’em, as a’ th’ town knows.” So the women all went home mad wi’ Smith, an saying they wouldna ha’ him to doctor ’em. Eh, but it did Smith a sight o’ harm,’ remarked Sol with evident satisfaction, adding, ‘ Not but what he got summat fur hissen out of it, after a’.’

‘In what way?’ Cassilis enquired.

‘ Why, not long afore he went to Australia he met Mrs. Wheeler i’ th’ street, an’ he says to her, “ Have

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yo’ got any more o’ them papers, Mrs. Wheeler? ” fur of course he’d heard o’ th’ doment at Christmas. “ A year’s an’ more,” she says, “ an’ I hannot patience wi’ either Wheeler or th’ women. I conna sell ’em now, an th’ house is fair choked wi’ ’em.” “ How much did yo’ get fur ’em? ” asks Smith. “ Nobbut a halfpenny th’ pound,” she says, “ fur Reid’s a mean chap. But I wur glad to get shut on ’em.” “ I’ll give yo’ twopence a pound fur ’em,” says Smith, “ an’ they’ll be safe enough with me, yo’ know, Mrs. Wheeler.” So she let him have ’em, an’ never told Wheeler who she’d sold ’em to till Smith wur gone to Australia. Wheeler wur pretty mad to think he’d been buying papers fur to give Smith lessons in doctoring, as he said. I told him it wur real Scripture, a-heaping coals o’ fire on his enemy’s head; an’ Mrs. Wheeler, she said she didna care who had ’em so long as she got without ’em. So theer wur th’ end o’ th’ medical papers.’

Cassilis laughed and observed that on the whole he thought the papers were best in his predecessor’s hands.

‘ Oh, ay, th’ town’s well shut on ’em, an’ on Dr. Smith too,’ in a tone of conviction. ‘He wurna much o’ a gentleman, an’ he didna suit th’ place. Happen he’ll do better in Australia.’

In the old seedsman’s manner was a delicate intimation that Cassilis would suit the place. In truth, Sol was delighted with him. When had he had so good a listener as this grave deep-eyed stranger, who so sympathetically followed the windings of his gossip? Sol was a connoisseur in listeners. Not for nothing had he stood on that top step in the sun and gossiped for forty years and more. He perceived intuitively the

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absent mind, saw the wandering eye with the tail of his own, noted the restlessness of the feet that marks the uninterested or impatient listener. None of these obnoxious signs were visible about Cassilis; and old Sol, being fully aware that the newcomer had already dined and breakfasted at Number Two, said to himself that ‘ Wi’ Basset at one end an’ me at th’ other, it’ll go hard but what we’ll make his fortune betwixt us.’

On his part, Cassilis was well amused by the old seedsman—interested also. Solomon Ingers was of a type that is vanishing—the sober-minded man of the people, content to live and die in the house wherein he was born; concerning himself little about what was happening outside the two familiar counties, the one in which he lived and the one into which he could walk in half an hour were he minded to turn his steps towards Woffendale. These two counties constituted his world, and Ringway was its centre, and himself the centre of Ringway. Perhaps he was a trifle too strongly permeated with the conviction of the eminent usefulness of ‘ brass,’ but then he was of the burgher type, and his shrewdness was not unkindly. In stress, old Sol could be depended on; a spark could be struck out of him as out of flint if struck at the right angle; and he had the instinct of loyalty, which is a great matter.

In the short silence he meditatively tapped the profile of Charles Edward on his snuff-box. The sun shone on his silver head, making it the point of brightest light, to

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which his pale grey clothes, his white apron, his puckered face—yellow ivory, like the keys of an old spinet—all seemed to lead up; the silver glint of his hair was the only sparkle about him.

‘ Theer’s another friend o’ mine,’ he resumed, ‘ a

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farmer over there,’ with a wave of his hand north-west, ‘ who had a curious stroke o’ luck yesterday— leastways one conna tell whether or no a woman ’ll be a stroke o’ luck till one knows summat o’ her ways. It happened i’ this gait. Gresty, he’s a widower wi’ six little uns, and nobbut an owd lass o’ sixty-five—owd Martha Plows—to see to ’em. I wur advising him to wed a steady lass i’ th’ town, none too young, an’ wi’ a noice bit o’ brass in her pocket. But Gresty’s one o’ them chaps that mun ha’ a pretty face to look at. I oft tell ’em th’ Queen’s face on a sovereign is th’ prettiest face yo’ con look at, though I mout as well say nowt for a’ th’ notice taken! Well, owd Martha’s grandson works on th’ farm, an’ happening to coom into th’ town this morning, he told me that farmer Stretton, a friend o’ Gresty’s, had brought theer a widow-woman he’d found wanting a place. A tidy- looking body, th’ lad told me, and fond o’ children. I reckon if she’s good-looking an’ stirring, Gresty ’ll wed her. She’s in luck to ha’ the chance. Th’ Moss Farm isna a bad down-sitting, an’ Gresty’s an easygoing chap. Th’ lad says she gives out she wur a Marbury lass, but she wedded a mon belonging to Bramsall, somewhere down Birmingham way.’

‘ I spent some time in Bramsall once,’ said Cassilis. ‘It is a miserable hole.’

‘ I make no doubt on’t,’ replied Sol, ‘ an ’ seeing th’ woman belongs hereabouts, I’d be glad fur her to get a good home, if so be as she deserves it. She’s bound to coom into th’ town presently, an’ then I con see what sort she is. But Stretton isna a bad judge.’

Again! Surely it was very strange. During ten years Cassilis had wandered much, from town to town

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— never having had a practice of his own—self-imposed wanderings, not even staying where he might have stayed with advantage, till, as the years went on, he felt a greater peace and a greater desire for rest. Now in all these wanderings never once had he met anyone who had lived in, or who was familiar with Bramsall’s gloomy streets and murky atmosphere. Yet in this green fern-scented Ringway, on the first evening of his arrival he had seen again the man who had replied to his question that sultry midnight. And on this second day a waif from that dark city had drifted hither across his path. Not that this mattered, or even dimmed his new-found gladness. It was but the sombre cloud against which his rainbow was shining. Cassilis was not sufficiently modern to be jumping about on pinwire whenever anybody said ‘ Boo! ’ or fired a shot at him from behind a hedge. It was all in the day’s march. But it was curious. The oddness of it struck him forcibly as he bade old Sol good-day and walked home, a straggler of the Lord’s great army—one unworthy to be His soldier; merely a campfollower, helping that splendid host a little on its toilsome way.

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CHAPTER IX

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OLD Sol Ingers' friend Wheeler sent for Cassilis that afternoon, and as he was returning homewards he met Tony Occleston coming up from the station. Cassilis liked the young fellow. He was so bright-eyed and enthusiastic, so full of exuberant energy, with a kind of admiring shyness in his manner like a dog begging to be taken into favour.

' I am in my working clothes,' he said, with outstretched hand and swarthy face aglow. 'You must excuse my far from festive attire. I am in the Cyclops Works, as perhaps you know, and have to work like Tubalcain.'

He looked very well in the white oil-stained blouse that was his working dress. There was a picturesque squareness about Tony that seemed in harmony with furnace glare and dazzle of seething steel.

'I have great respect for Tubal-cain,' replied Cassilis.

Tony laughed. 'Yes, he must have been a capable sort of fellow. I like to think of him hammering away at his forge in the morning of the world, while old Adam sat outside on a stump and smoked his pipe in the sun. There are my diggings, over that shop;' he pointed to a chemist's in the market-place, ' but I don't spend much time there. My sister-in- law is good enough to keep a room always ready for me at Outwood, so I generally walk over from here.

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It's a nice place, and the two boys are jolly little chaps. You must come over with me. You would like George. Shall I see you at Number Two? '

'This afternoon? Yes.'

'Then we shall meet again in a few minutes. I have just time to get into civilised clothes.'

Occleston disappeared, and Cassilis turned into the Corner. He was grateful for Tony's friendliness. It gave another pleasant sensation to the man who had lived a life so curiously apart.

Twenty minutes later Cassilis appeared in Basset's drawing-room with radiant eyes, prepared to enjoy himself—even expectant of enjoyment. How many years had flown since he had felt that expectancy? But he was young again. After all, he was only thirty-six, and the weight of the remorseful past had rolled off him. He was in harmony with the brightness of the room, the sweetness of the iris-blossoms, and the unexpected sparkle of a little wood fire that flamed and crackled as the light breeze blew in through the open window.

'There is exquisite incongruity about a fire on Midsummer Day,' he laughingly remarked as he greeted the trio, Thea, Basset, and Tony Occleston.

' Daddy is a heathen, and that is his Baal-fire,' said Thea. 'His ancestors were Druids, and roasted people in wicker baskets. He misses the baskets, but comforts himself with the fire.'

Basset gently put on another log. 'I thank you, Cassilis, for the expression " exquisite incongruity." It exactly gives the idea. Naturally, everyone feels exhilarated by a midsummer fire. Human nature is instinctively attracted by anything incongruous—inconsistent;

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that is, anything inconsistent with the petty rules wherewith we fetter ourselves, and the platitudes wherewith we deaden our perceptions. In reality nothing is suitable that is not incongruous, nothing consistent that is not inconsistent.'

' I don't quite see that,' said Tony.

'Well, to explain fully would be to give the history of the human race from the Sixth Day to the present. But as regards the fire, the climate of Ringway is soft, cool, and damp; there is perpetual moisture in the air. Therefore a fire is consistent and grateful. Nevertheless, a fire at midsummer is inconsistent.'

' I think a wood fire is not inconsistent in summer,' observed Thea. 'It has a forest scent, and suggests green woodland. Coal belongs to the " swart fairies of the mine," and is, in short, depraved wood. Men have sung of the Yule log, but what poet in his senses would warble to a lump of coal? '

' I believe I could warble to a lump of coal on a frosty night,' said Tony, with his frank boyish laugh.

' No, Tony, you are not so prosaic as you pretend,' Thea declared. 'You might pat the coal on the head with a poker, but you would not warble to it.'

Cassilis sat contentedly drinking the tea Thea gave him, and listening to the conversation as it flowed on.

' The Rudells spoke of coming in this afternoon,' Basset presently announced. 'They are going to Woffendale to-night to dine with the Rusholms. Parfitt goes too.'

' Supercilious beast, Parfitt,' remarked Tony cheerfully.

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' There was a man in the train to-day with a nose just like his. I had a good mind to pull it! '

'Merely because it resembled Parfitt's?' inquired Basset. 'Rather hard on the stranger! Is not that carrying animosity a trifle far? '

' Perhaps it is,' Tony admitted; ' but just look at Parfitt! He inspires every feeling but a good one. I never see him without wanting to walk softly up behind him and suddenly administer a solid kick. That's mean, of course; but there are times when a fellow feels a real enjoyment in being deliberately, stupendously mean. Besides, I am positive Parfitt is mean himself, so why should he be treated with high- minded consideration? Sweets to the sweet, say I.'

' Certainly I do not care about Parfitt, neither do I admire his paintings,' said Basset. 'He is that terrible product of our age, a good mechanical workman—labour without thought.'

A thin veil of smoke floated across the garden, and there was a distinct smell of burning.

'Hullo! What's that?' exclaimed Tony, going out on the verandah, followed by the others.

The smoke came from the next garden, Number Three, where Emily Darnton was standing in front of a flaming pile of heterogeneous articles heaped together on the lawn. As the dividing wall was low, those on Basset's verandah had an excellent view of the proceedings, while over the farther wall appeared the heads belonging to the inmates of Number Four, Rudell evidently amused, Parfitt faintly interested, Mrs. Rudell indignant.

' Look at her! ' she cried across the garden, indicating

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Emily. 'I call it positively crazy! Why not give the things away? '
' Emily,' said Thea, with laughter in her voice, ' is it possible you are really burning your inheritance? '
' You see! ' replied Miss Darnton briefly, and with an air of triumph.
' But why not give them away? ' reiterated Mrs. Rudell.
' Because,' said Emily, addressing the Corner generally, ' I have been worried by them all my life, and I am resolved so to dispose of them that I cannot see them any more. Till now I have never been able to please myself, and I am doing it.'
' What larks!' said Tony. 'Here, I'll help! '
He got on the wall, and, dropping over on the other side, seized something that protruded from the blazing heap. It proved to be the pole of an old screen, and he stirred vigorously.
' My dear,' interposed Basset mildly, ' do I see a volume of Blair's sermons just catching fire?'
' Yes, Mr. Basset, you do,' Emily replied with stern determination. 'I had to read these sermons aloud to my aunt on wet Sundays. They are associated in my mind with damp. This will dry them.'
' Spare their lives and give them to the curate,' Thea suggested. 'He says he has considerable difficulty with his sermons. Those would help him.'
' I might do that,' Emily twitched the singed volume out with a stick.
' No,' she said, regarding the book, ' I know these sermons too well. If I heard even one sentence of

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them I should get up and walk out of church,' and she pushed Blair back into the flames. 'I have always wished to burn them. Sometimes I have even wished to burn the man who wrote them.'
' This is terrible,' said Parfitt. 'Is there no one to restrain her? '
Mrs. Rudell leant over the wall to see better. 'I think it is quite wicked of you, Emily.'
' I think so too,' Emily responded. 'That is why I am enjoying it so much. I have been as good as gold for twenty-five years, therefore it is a great relief to do something at last that other people think wrong. In fact, I know it is wrong. I ought to give these things away. But I will not.'
' What are those other books? ' asked Cassilis.
' Modern good books, Dr. Cassilis. I have also read them aloud/
' What's this stuff that smells like singed flannel? ' demanded Tony, holding up at the end of his pole a smouldering mass.
' Wool mats Tony, and wool rugs to pull over yourself when you go to sleep on the sofa. I never go to sleep on the sofa.'
Occleston let the mass fall on the top of the pyre, and energetically stirred the whole.
' Why, here's a clock! ' said he.
'The cuckoo-clock!' ejaculated Mrs. Rudell. 'Emily, it is shameful of you! Give me that clock at once. I shall like to have it.'

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‘ Not so! ’ Emily administered a rap that sent the clock down into the midst of the flames. ‘I should hear it through the wall, and when I came into your
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house. It used to sing “cuckoo ” while I was reading those sermons on wet Sundays till I could hardly refrain from hurling it through the window.’

Here old Sol Ingers’ white head appeared over the gate at the end of Basset’s garden.

‘ Is owt wrong, Basset? ’ he inquired in familiar north-country fashion, ‘th ’ lads want to know if they mun bring th’ hose an’ buckets.’

‘ It is all right, Sol, thank you. Miss Darnton is only burning a few things in the garden.’

‘ Ay, ’tis a good way o’ getting shut o’ rubbish,’ responded the old man with evident curiosity; ‘ but it mout ha’ been useful against th’ Fifth o’ November, if yo’ could ha’ kept it till then, Miss Emily.’

‘ Oh, I could not keep a lot of books that are no good to anybody,’ cried Emily; and Sol returned to his cronies with the information gained.

Emily Darnton’s reply had been dictated by motives of diplomacy. She did not wish the whole town to know the exact constituents of that merrily blazing pile. But the effect of her caution was to cover her punctilious aunt’s memory with wholly undeserved obloquy.

‘A-burning of books as is no good, an’ a’ Quality Corner looking on? Eh, who’d ha’ thowt it o’ th’ owd lass! Hoo mun ha’ kept ’em i’ th’ garret an’ read ’em on th’ sly. An’ hoo that particular an’ church-going! Dost tha mind how hoo gave owd Will Clearly five shilling because hoo heard him say he didna know how to swear? Th owd chap nobbut meant he’d lossen a’ his front teeth, but th’ owd lady took it he wur pretty nigh a saint. An’ to think hoo

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could keep books as wurna fit fur any Christian to read! Eh, I should never ha’ thowt it!’ But Sol was tolerant.

‘Let be,’ he said, ‘ yo ’ conna tell how it wur. Happen they belonged to th’ owd lass’s grandfather. He wur a rare un in his time, I’ve heard my father say. An’ if she did read ’em, what o’ that? Theer’s a mort o’ curious things in human nature.’

‘I dunnot hold wi’ it,’ rejoined the first speaker reflectively. ‘If hoo did read ’em, I dunnot hold wi’ it.’

‘That may be,’ said Sol, ‘ but theer’s a sight o’ things yo’ dunnot hold wi’ as has to be reckoned wi’. See theer, how th’ smoke’s rolling up! They’re making a rare pother.’

And all eyes dwelt interestedly on the dark column rising skyward from Number Three.

Presently, however, the column sank. Owing to Occleston’s vigorous assistance the fire did its work swiftly, and before long there remained only glowing ashes.

‘Do you feel happier, Miss Darnton? ’ Cassilis inquired when Emily and Tony walked triumphantly into Basset’s drawing-room after their incendiary efforts.

‘Much happier, thank you, Dr. Cassilis. I assure you those books, the cuckoo-clock, and all the other things quite depressed me. Every time I saw or heard them I was reminded of dismal hours. At last I feel free! ’

‘Susette will reproach you for ever about that clock,’ said Thea.

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‘ I only hope she will not buy one! It is always people who would not go a step to hear a real cuckoo who buy those horrid mechanical noises.’

‘ A happy expression, my dear,’ observed Basset approvingly. ‘You are perfectly correct. People do buy noises. The vibration of the air caused by mechanism is always a noise, not a sound.’

‘ And I do not know why Susette should make such a fuss,’ Emily went on. ‘She is so disagreeable that one would suppose she was one’s nearest relation! By the way, I hope that idea of the air being a vast phonograph is not true. It is so uncomfortable. All one’s words to be ground out at the Last Day. Think of the things one has said of people! ’

‘ They will not be able to beat you,’ said Tony consolingly.

‘ But imagine their rage! One’s intimate friends, too!’

‘ Then,’ asked Thea, ‘ why say things you do not wish to be ground out at the Last Day? ’

‘ Because it is my only chance of saying them. If I do not utter them now they will never be uttered.’

‘ Well then,’ said Basset, ‘ comfort yourself by the reflection that you will suffer in distinguished company. Even Moses spake unadvisedly, and did not Arago remark of a brother astronomer that he was the biggest scoundrel within the orbit of Neptune? There is a conprehensiveness about that observation,’ pursued Basset meditatively, ‘ that I find extremely soothing.’

‘Yes,’ said Cassilis, ‘the mind is calmed by the vastness of the sweep round our solar system.’

Emily jumped up. ‘I must go, or I shall never

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be ready for the Galloways’ dinner. Of course it will be over by ten o’clock, their dinners always are. So I shall be home by half-past, feeling very dull with nobody to talk to. May I come in here, Mr. Basset? ’

‘ My dear, I am surprised that you should think it necessary to ask. Number Two is open house to all the Corner at all times. We shall expect both you and Cassilis. Where are you going to spend the evening, Anthony? Dine with us.’

‘ Thank you, Mr. Basset, I wish I could. But I told George I’d be there to-night.’

‘ Give my love to Mary and the boys,’ said Thea.

‘ I will not forget,’ replied Occleston, as he and Emily prepared to go.

Cassilis rose too. ‘Then as I am permitted to return later, I need not say good-bye.’ He spoke to Thea. ‘Truly Ringway must be Elf-land if one never says good-bye!’

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CHAPTER X

A FORTNIGHT of green sparkling days had passed over Ringway—days that filled the air with scent of grassy meadows ripening for the scythe; a scent that is the breath of the summer fields, a honeyed mingling of clover and meadowsweet and many hidden flowers, and the fainter perfume of the tufted feathery grasses.

One sunny morning Mrs. Stretton announced her intention of going over to the Moss Farm for the purpose of inspecting June Heald.

‘ Well, tha’ll find her in th’ house,’ responded farmer Stretton, watching his cows filing out of the shippon into the near meadow. ‘Gresty tells me hoo’s a rare home-keeper. I’ll drive thee o’er if tha likes. I wur thinking o’ taking a look at th’ cow Gresty wur talking o’ sending to th’ Show. I mout send yon red un. I’ll warrant he’s none better than that. Hoo’s a real good un, an’ as sensible as a mon.’

‘ That isna saying much fur th’ beast,’ observed his wife drily.

Stretton opened his mouth to reply, but shut it again without speaking. He was a married man of many years’ standing, and the wisdom of silence had impressed itself on him.

‘ As fur Mrs. Heald,’ continued Mrs. Stretton, ‘ I

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dunnot want to hear what Gresty says about th’ woman. I’ve given her toime to settle down an’ redd up th’ place, an’ now I’m going to see fur mysen. Little Joe’s my godson an’ I con take him a cake. If tha’rt going o’er theer, it’ll save me th’ walk.’

‘ A’ reet,’ replied Stretton, ‘ I’ve nowt to do betwixt three an’ five. We’ll start at three.’

So that afternoon farmer Stretton’s old white mare trotted along the deep lanes and past the little wood to the Moss Farm. The quiet homestead seemed basking in the hush of the summer afternoon. Pigeons cooed on the roof, white ducks swam lazily round the pond that reflected the shining blue above, and in the roomy porch old Martha sat sewing, while the two youngest children played beside her.

Mrs. Stretton, sitting bolt upright, a basket on her arm containing little Joe’s cake, surveyed the scene with approval.

‘ It looks reet enow,’ she observed to her husband as they drove up. ‘If I’d ha’ found Mrs. Heald sitting in the porch while owd Martha wur busy i’ th’ house, I shouldna ha’ thowt much on her.’

‘Theer’s th’ owd lass running indoors to tell her we’re coming,’ said Stretton, ‘ I’ll go an’ look up Gresty, an’ leave yo’ an’ her to talk awhile.’

June Heald came out into the sunshine to meet her visitors. If Gresty had fitly compared his late wife to a pansy, then June might be said to suggest lavender. There was about her an atmosphere of serene homeliness and quiet comfort, just as lavender calls up the idea of simple country freshness and peace.

‘ Ay, I knew hoo’d be good-looking,’ Mrs. Stretton

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muttered triumphantly, as she noted June’s blue eyes and pink cheeks and smooth bands of brown hair.

‘ How d’ye do, Mrs. Heald? ’ said Stretton, getting down. ‘My wife thowt hoo’d loike to see little Joe, being her godson, an’ I’d a word to say to Gresty, so here we are.’

‘ I’m sure I’m very pleased to see yo.’ I’m greatly indebted to your husband fur his kindness in bringing me here, Mrs. Stretton.’

‘Well, it wur about toime some sensible body wur looking after th’ children,’ replied Mrs. Stretton in friendly tones, gratified by being thus deferentially addressed. ‘Not but

what Martha did her best, poor owd lass. Now, Joe,' as a small boy ran up and clutched her ample skirts, 'I've browt thee a cake, but Mrs. Heald '11 give it thee by-and-by.'

'Yo'll come into th' parlour and ha' a cup of tea?' said June. 'Th' kettle's boiling.'

Farmer Stretton, having ascertained that Gresty was at work in the upland field, betook himself thither, and his wife followed June through the kitchen, across the hall, and into the parlour. Here Mrs. Stretton seated herself on a sofa, untied her bonnet-strings, and looked round with keen eyes. The furniture had been newly polished, but nothing had been moved from the place it had occupied during the late Mrs. Gresty's lifetime. Even the bits of old china, heirlooms in the Gresty family, stood each on its own wool mat on the sideboard at equal distances as heretofore. This, Mrs. Stretton considered, showed proper feeling on June's part. It was not for her, being yet a stranger, to make any changes in the home. If she married Gresty, then

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indeed she might do as she pleased. Till then she was only in the house on sufferance as it were. Therefore this evidence of June's meekness inclined Mrs. Stretton to look favourably upon the stranger, so that when June appeared with the tea-tray it was with real cordiality that her visitor exclaimed:

'Now, Mrs. Heald, you'd no call to get out th' best china fur me! '

'I'm sure Mr. Gresty would wish it, Mrs. Stretton. A friend o' th' family like yoursen.'

'Well, they're pretty cups. I wur always fond o' lilac colour, an' th' gold rims set it off. They belonged to owd Mrs. Gresty, Gresty's mother. Hoo browt a sight o' good china here when hoo wur wed.'

''Tis pleasant to ha' things o' one's own to leave behind yo',' and there was a thrill of regret in June's voice.

Mrs. Stretton glanced sharply at her, but with sympathy.

'Ay, I reckon yo' happened on a husband as got rid o' everything. It's a real comfort to think he got rid o' hissen at last, fur it's nowt but waste o' time to wed a chap o' that sort. Yo're well shut on him. Yo'll be comfortable enow here, an' Gresty's easygoing in th' house.'

'I have not been so comfortable sin' I wur a lass at home,' replied June earnestly. 'I wur brought up at a farm, so it a' seems like th' owd times come back. 'Tis a real treat to me to take to the baking again after years o' baker's bread. Do yo' find th' bread good, Mrs. Stretton? I'm not sure that I've got my hand in yet.'

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'Th' bread couldna be better, Mrs. Heald. I wur just thinking to say so.'

And thus the two women arrived at an excellent understanding. Away in the upland field Stretton was listening to the recital of June's many virtues.

'Ay,' finished Gresty, 'tha did me a good turn when tha picked her up. Me an' th' little uns are as happy as bees i' clover, an' as fur owd Martha, hoo's living loike a lady sin' Mrs. Heald coom.'

'Well,' said Stretton, 'why doan't thee marry her? Tha couldna do better. A good-looking woman as con manage th' house an' th' children comfortable. What more dost tha want? '

'Nowt,' said Gresty emphatically.

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'Then if I wur thee, I'd ask her reet off an' put up th' banns next Sunday. Mrs. Heald seems to ha' settled down i' th' place. Hoo'll noan be like to keep thee waiting. A widow-woman isna skittish like a lass. Tha could be wed in less'n a month, an' then it 'ud be off thy moind afore th' oats want cutting.'

'Theer's summat i' that,' responded Gresty. 'It's a bit moithering fur a chap to be thinking o' getting wed, even if it isna first toime.'

'Ay, it is. Sometimes I've thowt happen winter's th' best season fur marrying; nigh on Christmas.'

Gresty shook his head. 'Nay, nay—summer's th' toime fur sweethearting, when th' sun's a-shining, an' th' birds a-singing an' warm evenings fur to stroll in.'

'True, true. I loike a bit o' romance mysen. Eh, it seems nobbut yesterday sin' I wur a slim young chap sitting whistling on a stile wi' my billycock a' on one soide an' a sprig o' honeysuckle i' th' band, an' white gloves for Sundays. Ay, them gloves! I

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mind 'em well. My mother wouldna wash 'em; hoo said hoo'd enow to do wi'out moithering o'er a lad's finery. So one day I made shift to wash 'em mysen, an' a muddling- job I wur making on't, when up coom that strapping lass o' Will Fitton's, her that married th' sergeant an' went to India. Well, hoo laughed fit to kill hersen when hoo caught sight o' me all o'er soapsuds, an' I wur as red as a pæony wi' her looking an' laughing. However, hoo offered to wash 'em fur me, an' thankful I wur. Hoo gave 'em to me on th' Saturday, a' ironed an' white as a daisy. I give her a kiss fur doing 'em, an' hoo fetched me a slap on th' cheek as fair echoed! I con feel that theer slap this minute. Eh,' with a prodigious sigh, 'young days is good days, Gresty. Theer isna a lass i' th' country as 'ud think it worth while to slap my face now.'

'O' course middle-age is middle-age,' responded Gresty, 'but theer's summat to be said fur it too. I loike to see th' children running about an' playing an' growing bigger, an' th' owd place same as ever it wur, only snugger an' a' that.'

'So do I, so do I. But it isna th' same thing. When a man's young he thinks he con kick th' world about as he loikes, an' when he's owd he finds it kicks him. That's about th' size on't. A' th' same, Gresty, I'd advise thee to wed Mrs. Heald.'

'I'll do it.'

The same idea dominated Mrs. Stretton's mind as she and her husband drove home in the mellow evening sunshine.

'Gresty couldna do better than marry Mrs. Heald, as fur as I con see,' she observed, as the old white

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mare climbed the hill and the Moss Farm sank out of sight in the green valley. 'Hoo isna loike a flighty lass. Hoo looks after th' children well, as I con see mysen, an' hoo knows farm ways. Seems to me hoo wur regular cut out for Gresty.'

'That's what I've been telling him,' said Stretton, 'an' he's about made up his mind. That'll be a good match o' my making! ' with pride.

'Trust thee men fur ha'ing a good opinion o' theesen. What about th' cow?'

'What cow?'

'Th' cow Gresty's going to send to th' Show. Tha said tha wur going to look at it.'

'Eh, I never gave a thowt to it,' said Stretton rather shamefacedly.

'Thee two men wur that busy talking o' Mrs. Heald tha never thowt o' th' cow? Well, I never!' with scorn.

Stretton prudently abstained from attempting to justify his forgetfulness.

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CHAPTER XI

THE following morning an accident happened at the Moss Farm. Little Joe tumbled off a waggon and broke his arm, and June's distress was great.

'Dunno fret thysen, Mrs. Heald,' said Gresty inspecting his offspring, ' I'll go up to th' town an' send th' new doctor. He looks loike a gentleman, an' owd Sol Ingers speaks well on him. Eh, Joe, how oft have I towd thee to leave climbing on th' waggons. Now tha sees what it ends in! '

Joe whimpered. 'Will th' doctor cut it off? '

'Thy arm? Well, reckon he willna this toime, but th' next toime tha does it, th' arm'll come off sure enow. Seeing as it's market day, Mrs. Heald, I dunnot think as I'll coom back wi' th' doctor. If he isna here presently, happen tha'll send one o' th' men to hurry him a bit.'

But Cassilis did not need hurrying. He was at breakfast when Gresty arrived, and refusing the farmer's offer of 'th' cart,' walked to the Moss Farm through the green dewiness of the morning. He was faintly curious to see the woman who had drifted hither,—Gresty had not mentioned her name—who had once lived in Bramsall, that murky city on which Cassilis looked back as Dante looked back on the hell he had traversed. And Cassilis had the greater reason for his horror. The hell of Dante was but the

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shadow of reality, whereas the hell of that earthly city was the reality itself. Yet as he walked up the hill where he had walked that night beneath the Scorpion's Heart with Thea, and down into the green scented valley where the Moss Farm lay like a pipit's nest in a meadow, as he so walked he felt no lessening of that strange exhilaration with which Ringway had filled his veins. He did not suppose the stranger was anyone whom he had known in Bramsall. Nay, he did not think, he did not care. We are told that Damocles did not enjoy his supper after he had seen the sword. Why not? Did the glitter overhead make the wine less cool, the honey less sweet? But Damocles was Greek. To grimmer blood that impending death would but have added a keener zest to the banquet. Did ever Englishman eat less for a bullet or two singing through his tent? There is much in the story of Achilles' heel. It was there that he was vulnerable; that is, a Greek might run away; the thing was possible. But in the old Saga, the Viking Sigurd was vulnerable only between his shoulders; which suggests one's back to a wall and a semi-circle of dead.

Cassilis did not care. He did not say so to himself, he did not seek to analyse his feelings. He was in a dream, his dream of rest. Nay, it was no dream. He was awake and resting and happy.

So he turned the corner of the little wood where the blackbird was singing and came face to face with June Heald. She was standing by the farm gate, shading her eyes from

the sun as she watched for the coming of the doctor, whose name she had not heard. Cassilis was not surprised, he seemed to have known

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it all along in some vague way. His first thought was that of course the woman from Bramsall could be none other than Jane Stanham; his second, being naturally a gentle compassionate man, was that he was glad to see her looking so much better and happier. For he recollected her as a miserable girl married to a brutal idle collier, and earning both his living and her own by letting lodgings in a back street where a blast-furnace roared night and day, filling the air with noise and flame. That was ten years ago, and here was the frightened over-worked girl, Cassilis's former landlady, grown into a placid fairfaced woman, here in the cool green country all freshness and peace.

'Why, Mrs. Stanham! ' said Cassilis, 'is it really you? I am very glad to see you so comfortably placed.' 'Yes indeed, sir, an' I couldna believe th' sight o' my own eyes when I saw you coming along by th' wood just now. To think as it should be you! '

'It is curious,' he assented.

'An' I call myself Mrs. Heald here, please sir. Heald was my maiden name, an' I never had any luck when I wur Stanham.'

'Quite right, Mrs. Heald. I'll not forget. Where is the boy?—my patient, I mean.'

Little Joe was disposed to howl at the sight of the dreaded doctor, but became reassured, and submittted to treatment with greater equanimity than was expected. Perhaps his self control was assisted by the half envious faces of his five brothers and sister who stood in a group at the end of the room, gazing solemnly at the doctor's movements, and feeling, one and all, that fate had made Joe much too important.

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'I will look in to-morrow.' said Cassilis, as he rose to go. 'This is a pretty place, Mrs. Heald.'

'It is, sir,' June was walking with him to the gate. 'I wur telling Mrs. Stretton yesterday that I wur glad to be at a farm again, being browt up at one when I wur a girl, as I think you have heard me say, sir.'

'Yes. I remember.'

They had reached the gate now. June stood by it, a slight hesitation visible in her manner.

'If you willna mind, sir,' she said, ' I'll not tell th' folks about my letting lodgings an' my husband being always drunk an' raging an' a' that. Not as I'm ungrateful fur a' you an' poor Mr. Thorold did fur me. If you two gentlemen hadna been lodging wi' me then, I conna tell whatever I should ha' done. But I've left th' place behind me, an' I'd like to leave a' that behind me too, an' not be answering folk's questions about it. An' besides my own troubles, sir, poor Mr. Thorold's poisoning himself accidental was what might seem awkward like, an' I dunnot care fur to be talking it e'er wi' folks here, which I shall ha' to do if I begin speaking o' my lodgers. Fur if I talk o' one, say you, sir, why I'm bound to mention th' other, Mr. Thorold an' it a' seems such a muddle, sir. An' I had to appear at th' inquest, an' altogether, sir, I conna see the need fur saying owt.'

'I will say nothing, Mrs. Heald. But how was it that you did not send for me at the inquest? I have always blamed myself for going away that night.'

'It wur I that persuaded you, sir. Seeing that th' poor gentleman was gone an' yo' couldna do any

good, it seemed a pity you should stay for naught an' lose th' appointment you were seeking. Yo' gave me an address, sir, if yo' recollect. I could ha' sent fur yo', but I didna see th' use.'

'I lost the appointment after all,' said Cassilis. 'I reached Irthdale all right, but I fell ill that night with fever, and was laid up for six weeks. As soon as I was better I went back to Bramsall, as I could not understand not having heard from you; but I found your house empty and closed, and your, neighbours did not know where you had gone.'

'I'm sure it wur main good of yo' to come back, sir. Things wur this way. My husband never came home that night, an' next day I found he wur i' custody for nigh killing a man. Then theer wur th' inquest on poor Mr. Thorold. The coroner didna ask me many questions. I reckon he saw I wur pretty well worrited to death, fur he knew about my husband being locked up. I said my other lodger—you, sir—wur gone, an' I suppose th' coroner thought you had gone before it happened. It didna seem worth while fur to say you was there, and' to fetch you back fur just nothing; fur what good could yo' ha' done, sir? '

'I was glad not to appear at the inquiry.'

As he spoke, Cassilis looked away up the green valley, understanding now what he had previously suspected—that this woman's kindly hand had drawn a veil of silence between him and that fatal night. He and his dead friend had been good to her and she was grateful, and had kept silence lest the appointment for which he had hoped should be lost

by her speaking, and so causing his immediate return.

It had been lost, and Cassilis had not regretted its loss. He had been thankful for the illness that had given him brief oblivion. Then, barely recovered, he had hastened back to that city of death, only to be confronted by an empty house. From that point began his wanderings.

'Yo' wur best away, sir. Yo' could ha' done nothing,' went on June's quiet voice. 'Theer wur naught to be done. Two lawyer gentlemen came fro' Mr. Thorold's friends. I heard the name o' one o' them; it wur Rudell.'

'Rudell! ' repeated Cassilis, startled; 'a Mr. Rudell lives close to me at Number Four, Quality Corner. He is a lawyer.'

'Indeed sir? But if he's th' same he'll scarce know me, I'm that different now. He wur talking to th' other gentleman, saying he'd only just heard o' th' death. It wur th' other gentleman that took Mr. Thorold away.'

'Away? '

'To be buried, sir. Nigh his own folk. Somewhere in Lincolnshire, I wur told.'

'Ah yes, of course.'

'An' then, sir, when it wur a' o'er an' poor Mr. Thorold gone an' a', theer wur my husband committed fur trial. He'd been locked up a' the time since that night, as I told you. Well, I didna care to take any more lodgers. I thowt happen I shouldna like 'em

after yo' an' Mr. Thorold, so I sold th' furniture an' went to lodge wi' a woman at th' other side o' th' town. That wur how yo' found th' house empty, sir,

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when yo' came back, fur I left it in less'n a month fro' that night an' I didna tell th' neighbours where I wur going.'

'I see.'

'Th' woman I lodged wi',' June resumed, ' took in sewing, an' I helped. My husband got three years, an' when he came out o' jail I wur silly enow to let him ha' th' furniture money, an' he off to America wi' it. An' I wur glad on't,' said June frankly. 'I wur fair wore out wi' him. I reckon he's theer now, fur I've heerd naught of him since. I stayed wi' th' sewing woman till she died an' then I couldna think where to go, when a' on a sudden it came to me that I were free to please mysen an' go back into th' country, like as if I wur a girl again. So I called mysen Heald, my old name, sir, an' here I am.'

'And here I hope you will stay, Mrs. Heald. I only came to Ringway a fortnight ago, but it seems to me a peaceful, happy place.'

'It does, sir. I am sure I wish you good luck in it. An' are you married, sir?'

'I!—oh no.' The question was a natural one, but marriage had been so little in Cassilis's thoughts during the past ten years that he felt quite surprised. 'Oh, no. I have wandered about from place to place a good deal since I last saw you, and have never been rich enough to marry. In fact, I have never stayed anywhere for any length of time. Perhaps I may settle here. I hope so. I like the town.'

'I'm sure I hope so too, sir. Wandering seems weary work. Maybe it's different for a gentleman.'

'No, it is not, Mrs. Heald,' said Cassilis, 'I too have found it weary.' And though he smiled as he spoke,

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there was a pathetic ring in his voice that contradicted the smile.

A brief silence followed; that is, a silence of human speech. In the heart of a cherry-tree a blackbird was singing, each note falling into the green stillness like a diamond; and Cassilis, listening unconsciously, thinking of all he had just heard, yet felt no clouding of his spirit's sunshine; but rather a greater contentment, a curious completeness—as though life were over and the rest and forgiveness of Paradise begun.

For ten years he had not heard his dead friend's name uttered. Here, where he had thought to find Lethe, the past had risen suddenly—unexpectedly. Ringway had promised forgetfulness, and in seeming elfin mockery had broken that promise Yet the broken promise failed to disturb the strange serenity of Cassilis's mind. How could he have hoped for— dreamt of forgetfulness when no such thing exists? But one might be happy even though Lethe is a myth. How beautiful the world was! The shining valley, the wood-crowned hill, the hidden blackbird dropping those diamond notes among the cherry leaves.

'I think,' he said, turning to June Heald with a smile, 'this must be the end of my wanderings. I do not know when I have felt so content.'

The words struck ominously on June's ears. She believed that when any man spoke thus, misfortune was nigh.

'I will come to-morrow morning,' he went on. 'If the boy does not seem well, send for me this evening.'
'Thank you, sir.'

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Cassilis nodded and walked away. As he climbed the hill a cloud sailing overhead suddenly darkened to indigo and a summer shower came on, a shower so heavy that he turned into the woods for shelter from the downpour.

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CHAPTER XII

RINGWAY WOODS were a lingering fragment of the dense forest that once stretched across the country; the green home of red squirrel, wild cat and grey wolf; the home too of innumerable birds and happy living things.
But with the clearing of the forest, grey wolf and wild cat have vanished long ago. The red squirrels and the brown owls are following them. Fewer ringdoves coo in the fir-tops, fewer woodpeckers tap the gnarled trunks of the old trees. And thus the air, less purified by the living green, becomes yearly less invigorating, less healthful, less fit for human breathing.
This Ringway fragment of the old forest was beautiful indeed; from its soil of sandy peat, so soft and elastic to the tired foot, to the leafy crowns of its forest giants of beech and chestnut, elm and yew.
As Cassilis passed under their sheltering arms the swift patter of the rain on the open path changed to a sibilant murmur overhead—Keats's 'whispering roof of leaves.'
He paused for a moment beside the smooth bole of a beech, then saw before him an immense chestnut, with buttressed trunk and spreading fans that gently waved like beckoning green fingers. And in its shade stood Thea.

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'May I share your shelter? ' he asked, crossing the intervening space. 'This troll-weather of yours is so erratic that one never knows whether it is a morning in Eden or the eve of the Flood.'
'Or a passing freak of this workaday world,' suggested Thea.
'There is no workaday world in Ringway,' Cassilis replied gravely. 'Did you tell me that, or have I discovered it for myself? '
'What matters, since you know it? '
As when they had met by the church in the early morning on the second day of his coming, so now Cassilis again noticed that Thea asked no questions as to where he had been, from whence he had come. Perhaps this indifference as to daily doings, joined with her peculiar insight as regarded thought and feeling, constituted a great part of the charm of Thea's society. For how restful is a comrade who never asks questions, who has no curiosity as to your doings; who gives the soothing airy companionship of the butterfly that accompanies you down the lane, now fluttering low over bank, now flying ahead, now lingering on the honeysuckle in the hedge, yet always keeping in its beautiful effortless flight within easy friendly distance of its human comrade.

Perhaps a lonely man like Cassilis, unused to having his movements commented on, felt this charm of non-interrogation more than one less solitary might have done. The quality had a curious effect on people. It either strongly attracted or strongly repelled. Parfitt, for instance, was distinctly offended by it. He was accustomed to women crowding round him, asking him a thousand questions; accustomed to have his

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goings and comings chronicled in the society papers. Naturally his vanity was ruffled when he was not interrogated as to his hours of work, the particular train he travelled by, the books, places, and persons he liked best.

But Cassilis, unknown and a wanderer, had the wanderer's instinct of friendliness devoid of curiosity, and he responded to like friendliness as the swallow responds to the spring.

They were standing close to the rugged chestnut trunk. Beyond the wide circumference of the branches the rain now fell in a thick veil of white water, through which the woodland shimmered in blurred outlines, as though frozen glass. Here and there through the leafy roof overhead a heavy water- drop fell like a fairy bullet, making the fine sand fly where it struck.

Cassilis glanced up, and Thea's eyes followed his glance.

'It is nothing,' she said, 'only a few drops. Rain never comes through more than that. This is my favourite tree.'

' Surely it must be the Tree of Knowledge, for I see a book in that hole just above your head. A modern novel, too. Truly a wonderful tree! '

Thea laughed.

'One likes a change of society at times,' she said. 'The chief use of books seems to me to be that of supplying one with an endless series of fascinating companions.'

'Quite so. But——'

'But that book is modern, and I said I seldom read anything modern. True, I am not consistent.

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Is consistency expected in Domrémy? This is the forest of Domrémy.'

'I am sure it is. I was only about to ask if you kept all your library in this same Domrémy; is every tree trunk a book-case? '

'In a sense—yes. Though I only put the book there to keep it from the rain.'

'A most elfin refuge. I wonder you did not step inside yourself.'

'The woodpeckers might not like that,' she replied gravely. 'They nest there every spring. In the winter, dormice sleep in the empty nest. Even now some small creature may have taken the furnished hole for awhile. It is deeper than it looks; the book is resting on a ledge halfway.'

Cassilis looked, not at the much-tenanted hollow, but at his companion. Hers was that beauty which is always beautiful, and it seemed heightened by the unreal effect produced by the sudden storm. The straight white rain still surrounded them as with walls of glass, and through it the light from the slowly-brightening sky struck upward under the deep green of the chestnut as the light strikes up into a deep-sea cave. In this strange pale radiance Thea's brilliant eyes were as wells that gathered up the light; the smooth almond of her skin seemed illumined; the brown waves of her hair took shifting

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shadows; the sinuous lines of her figure half melted into the gloom of the massive trunk against which she stood, as her voice blended with the sound of the falling rain on leaves and grass.

As has been said, the unexpected meeting with June Heald that morning had in no wise disturbed the singular

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elation that had lately swept over Cassilis. True, the aroused memories had stirred the very depths of his soul, but the result was an added exaltation, a sensation of being on the point of reaching some long- desired goal—the feeling of the runner the instant before the start. And combined with these, an equally singular calm, a loss of fever and fret, a renewal of happy irresponsible youth. All this, and the swift storm, the strange light, Thea's presence: in short, Cassilis was 'fey.'

'Tell me some more,' he said. 'Read me the runes on the leaves since you acknowledge the woods are your library. Surely you are the Fairy Melusina and la "prisoner pent in walls of glass." '

'These walls of glass will vanish as rapidly as those of Jericho in less than ten minutes,' she replied with a sudden smile like summer lightning. 'As for my woodland library, it is simply association. Have you never given "to airy nothings a local habitation"? For instance, that tall fir you see through the rain is Ariel's cloven pine; near it is the mossy stump on which Coleridge's Hermit offered up his orisons. Out of that thicket to the left Comus comes with his rabble of monsters. Bayard and the Red Cross Knight ride along that glade on the right, followed by all our dead heroes. Under that yew Savonarola sits meditating, while Fra Angelico stands by him watching a butterfly, whose wings he thinks will do for the Angel Gabriel.'

'But how?—why? ' began Cassilis.

'Oh, quite simply. When I was a child I was very lucky in never possessing any of those Dead Sea Apples called children's books. I cannot remember when I learnt to read. I seem always to have been able to

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read. Also, I never had a spelling book. When I saw one, it seemed to me foolish, for if you can read, you see the words, and can consequently spell them. Perhaps I was a born speller.'

'Some are born spellers, some achieve spelling, and some have spelling thrust upon them,' remarked her companion.

'Precisely. Well, Comus is the first book I remember reading. That I did not understand half the words was of no consequence. I made out the story. The poem attracted me by the pictures in it, the mental pictures, I mean. I could perfectly comprehend and imagine the violet-embroidered vale, the wood, the shepherd's hut, the palace of Comus, and the stream under which Sabrina sat knitting lilies into her hair. By the way, I will show you that stream some day.'

" Do,' said Cassilis. 'I should like to see it. Please go on.'

'The next things I remember are Manfred, Tam o' Shanter, and a translation of the Agamemnon. A most curious mixture, but I absorbed everything as a matter of course. I revelled in them all. I called up the Spirit of the Alps with Manfred, rode headlong from the witches with the immortal Tam, and hailed the beacon fires with the watchman at

Mycenae. Later, when I was ten, I saved up my pocket-money and bought a second-hand copy of Sale's Koran. It rather disappointed me. I thought it distinctly inferior to the Arabian Nights.'

'So it is. What is Mahomet's camel beside Prince Hoosein's carpet? And the Prophet's adventures are trivial compared to those of the Third Calender.'

'I see you understand. Now what are two of the

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most beautiful sights in the world? Frost on the briar on a sunny autumn morning, and sunshine on falling rain. The last you are just going to see— look! '

The rain was ceasing, falling not now like thick spun glass, but in a thin veil of sparkling waterdrops, The storm-clouds were passing. Away to the south shone a widening rift of blue and a dazzle of sunlight, changing the woodland beneath it to vivid emerald. On swept the spreading brightness, chasing the clouds, till it burst on the chestnut, and all the world was wrapped in diamond light, as though a rainbow had broken and fallen in innumerable scintillating sparks.

The rain was over, but not gone. It dripped in glittering rivulets from every leaf and spray. Raindrops ran along the bracken fronds and hung in trembling points of vari-coloured light from the bending tips. Every tiny blade of grass had its jewel, and every jewel its changing brilliance. Now sapphire, as it reflected only the blue overhead; now emerald, taking its hue from its resting place; now purest diamond, now orient ruby red.

'This is the heart of a rainbow,' said Thea. 'Come out into the path and try whether you can walk to that tree blindfolded. Everyone tries. It is the duty of every dweller in Ringway.'

They passed out of the shade of the chestnut into the glittering sunlit open. Before them the short fine sward sloped downwards to where, at the bottom of the grassy hollow, stood a solitary ash, the tree in question. Beyond it the ground rose again to a height parallel to where they were standing, and crowned with dense woodland.

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'Perhaps I may fall into a rabbit-hole; they look very large just about here,' Cassilis remarked as a handkerchief was being bound round his eyes.

'I will fetch somebody to dig you out. There! Now you are ready,'

Going down the slope, Cassilis wondered whether any patient might arrive unexpectedly on the scene, and behold his grave doctor wandering about in Blindman's Buff fashion. But Cassilis said to himself that he 'didn't care' and he didn't. He seemed to have reached the bottom of the grassy hollow, yet he felt no tree. He turned to the right; in vain. Then walked determinedly to the left, and heard Thea's soft laugh beside him.

'Oh, you are far away from the ash,' she said. 'Just as far as anybody else! '

He pulled off the handkerchief and looked round. The tree stood some distance to the right. He had walked into a grove of beeches, where the sunshine dappled the brown withered beech-mast underfoot.

'Listen! ' said Thea.

A steady tapping sounded through the rustling of the leaves.

'A woodpecker,' said Cassilis, looking up the smooth beech-boles for the bird.

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‘Not so. This is the castle of the Thane of Glamis and Cawdor, and you hear the knocking at the gate: “Wake Duncan with thy knocking? I would thou couldst! ” ’

This time the elf-arrow—sped so unconsciously— struck deep. The shaft was feathered by the memories that June Heald’s words had aroused. Also Cassilis was again startled by that odd elusive resemblance of

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Thea to someone whom he had once known. The turn of the head, the way in which she uttered the words; whom did she resemble?

‘Ah yes,’ he said, and looking up into the beeches, he repeated the quotation, ‘Wake Duncan with thy knocking? I would thou couldst! ’

His listener regarded him thoughtfully. She was struck by the peculiar intensity with which he spoke.

‘You say it well,’ she observed. ‘The association was created for me by my father—my real father, I mean. Once I came here with him, and he talked of that scene while a woodpecker was tapping, just as now. So I never hear a woodpecker without thinking of evil-hearted Glamis. But let us forget the Thane. Come out of the castle. I am going to make a ball of bracken. Did you ever see one?’

She ran out from under the beeches into a grassy space and gathered a handful of fern. Cassilis followed, but paused at the edge of the grove where the brown mast met the turf.

‘Do you think,’ he asked, ‘that the treachery of the Thane could ever be pardoned—by Duncan? ’

‘By Duncan? ’ echoed Thea, looking across the sunlit space to where he stood in the shadow. ‘Ah, that is a question one cannot answer. There is the treachery, you see.’

‘Yes, there is the treachery.’ He came out into the sunlight. ‘Where are we now? We have left the Thane’s castle.’

‘This is Arcadia, and we are going to play at ball. Catch! ’

He caught the little green globe that was thrown to him, and turned it over and over.

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‘This is most deftly woven. One would imagine a bird had made it. How is it done? ’

‘The ball has not been made to gratify curiosity, but for use,’ replied Thea gravely. ‘Throw it back.’

He did so, and again it was flung to him through the sunshiny air.

The beech-grove was left behind. A wide sandy path led away through the wet bright woods, and along this Thea and Cassilis passed as merrily as the chaffinches that twittered overhead. What if his fairy gold seemed changing to withered leaves, his fairy wine beginning to burn, his fairy music sounding like a knell? He was still in the rainbow’s heart, and his own beat gaily; perhaps all the more gaily for the memories within it, and the weary past. The blacker the cloud, the lovelier the bow.

So he followed Thea along the sun-dappled glades, and the ball of bracken flew lightly from hand to hand.

‘You catch it with both hands as though it were a heavy cricket ball,’ she cried. ‘Look at me! I catch it with one.’

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'There is nothing to catch,' protested Cassilis. 'It is like seizing gossamer. I am obliged to use both hands or my fingers would go through it. You must admit I make it fly.'

Here he threw the globe of woven fern with such superfluous energy that it soared into a larch and remained suspended on a twig high over their heads.

'There, what will you do now?' asked his companion.

Cassilis stopped beneath the larch and looked up.

'I could climb the tree easily. My only doubt is whether that bough would bear me.'

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'I am sure it would not. We must leave the ball up there.'

'Make another,' he suggested.

Thea shook her head smilingly.

'The ball-playing is over. Nothing repeats itself. We are at the end of our game and at the end of the woods.'

Cassilis came out of Arcadia with a sigh.

'Ah, this workaday world! ' he said. 'How shall we return to it? '

'Through this oat-field,' replied Thea, slipping between the irregularly placed stumps that served in lieu of a stile.

'That is so,' agreed Cassilis. 'The oats mean human labour, the woods do not. Only in the forest is one free from toil/ He looked back along the glimmering green aisles they had traversed. 'Yes, the hunter's life is best. You go out with your gun and shoot something, bring it home and your wife cooks it. All so simple. So much better than this frightful turmoil.'

'Where is the turmoil? '

'In oneself. No, not now. I have been very happy since I have been in Ringway. I am happy. I speak of the past. When a man comes out of a fight and sits down to rest, his thoughts naturally turn back to the racket.'

'Why? Better to live in the present.'

'It is all present. There is neither past nor future.'

His thoughts rose up like strong under-currents heaving to the surface, and it seemed easy to speak them in the light of those dark eyes meeting his own. He did not ask himself why it seemed so easy; he only

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felt a sense of repose, an impulse to utter the words that sprang to his lips without pausing to consider those words. Years ago—ten years ago, the same repose, the same impulse had been his when in the presence of his friend Thorold; but that he did not remember. Or rather, he remembered it dimly as in a dream—a pleasant dream returning.

'Past and present may seem one, for we know both,' said Thea, 'but not the future. Who can tell the future? '

'That is true:' he glanced back again at the woods as he followed her along the narrow path down the field. 'Yet the hunter's life must needs be happy, season following season in the free forest.'

'Your wife might get tired of staying indoors cooking.'

'Oh, I would help her. We could make pies to last a week.'

‘Hunters have no pies. For pies, cornfields are needed.’
‘So they are! Well then, rice puddings.’
‘I should like,’ said Thea decisively, ‘to put the entire medical profession on rice puddings for six weeks as their sole diet. I never yet knew a doctor who did not prescribe rice pudding, though I am positive he never tasted one since he wore petticoats.’
‘They are wholesome,’ pleaded Cassilis.
‘I doubt that! People who eat rice puddings are invariably cross. How, then, can the said puddings be wholesome? ’
‘Well, I give it up. I give up all puddings and pies. The hunter’s life is the best.’
‘You are a sportsman? ’

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‘I was, long ago.’
‘I thought so. I noticed the way you looked about in the woods, as though you expected to see a partridge under every fern and a pheasant on every bough.’
‘Miss Darnton would say I had given up killing things out of doors, and taken to killing things indoors.’
‘Anything for a change! ’ observed Thea lightly.
‘Now that is too bad! ’
‘I do not mean it,’ She turned in the narrow path and walked backwards, her gown brushing the oats on either side. ‘What do you suppose is going to happen when we reach the lane beyond this field? ’
‘I have not the least idea. The charm of life in Ringway consists in its unexpectedness.’
‘A carriage will come along the lane, and Daddy in it. I arranged to meet him there. He has gone to Outwood. Will you drive home with us? ’
‘I wish I could, but I have a patient to see near the lake, Pugh by name.’
‘I know him by sight. He believes that the earth is flat, and disapproves of preserving game.’
‘That’s the man.’
Thea stopped in her backward walk and looked over the waving oats at the glitter of water on the right.
‘There is Outwood,’ she said. ‘The house is old and delightful. Do you know the mere? ’
‘Only this side of it. Is not that Mr. Basset’s carriage in the lane? ’
It was, and Basset in it.
‘Well met,’ he said. ‘Come back to Outwood with us, Cassilis. I have just been telling Occleston that

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he ought to send for you to look at his sprained foot. He fell off a ladder this morning and gave his ankle a twist. Going to Pugh’s? Well, see him as you return, won’t that do?’
‘I dare say it will, thank you.’

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CHAPTER XIII

OUTWOOD was a picturesque and comfortable old house, built in the days when people desired homes, not hotels or sleeping-boxes. It stood half-way up the low hill overlooking Outwood Mere, a lake so narrow and curving that a stranger might have thought it a river; the letter S best expressing its form. In front of the house, however, it widened to a beautiful sheet of calm lily-sprinkled water reflecting the fringing trees and the old mansion above it. Part of the way to Outwood was tolerably familiar to Cassilis. The deep shady lane, ending in the broad highway, beside which the modern villa of the eccentric Mr. Pugh stood defiantly behind its gilt-adorned gates. Then the glitter of the mere through the trees on the right, with the chimneys of Outwood rising above them. Here the carriage turned down a woodland road that ran through a fir plantation, where the wheels rolled silently over the pine needles and ringdoves cooed all day long. The light of water gleamed again between the trunks as the narrow curving end of the mere came into sight, crossed by a moss-grown stone bridge barely wide enough for the carriage. On through another plantation, then past the lodge and up a flower-bordered drive.

'A fine old place,' Cassilis remarked as they drew up.

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'And kept in good order too,' said Basset. 'Occleston is fond of his home.'

'There are the boys and Mary on the terrace,' said Thea. 'They have just seen us. There is George limping. And—yes—it is Anthony. He must be taking a holiday.'

The two boys, manly little fellows of six and ten, welcomed Thea vociferously, while Basset explained how he had picked up Cassilis in the lane.

'I am so glad to see you, Dr. Cassilis,' said Mrs. Occleston, a fair serenely-smiling matron. 'Here is my husband walking about on a sprained foot; and a fortnight ago he was really ill, but I could not induce him to send for you.'

'I was too ill to have a doctor,' said Occleston gravely, but with a flash of humour in his eyes. 'If you send for a medical man, all your time is taken up in arguing with him, and that is too fatiguing when one feels bad. When one gets better, it is a great pleasure to see a doctor. I have very great pleasure in seeing you now. Dr. Cassilis. Excepting this foot, which is a trifle, I am all right to-day, and ready to argue.'

'Then we will begin at once,' said Cassilis. 'Why are you walking about on that foot?'

'Because I find I can.'

'Precisely. It would be better if you could not. If you will come indoors I will look at it.'

'I suppose Basset has told you how I did it?— fell off a ladder this morning. I was looking at a barn-roof that was being mended. Can't trust anybody's work nowadays. Have to stand over them. People learn everything but their business.'

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'And forget everything but other people's,' said Basset.

Occleston assented by an emphatic nod. He resembled his brother in face and manner. He was hospitable too, and genial; pressing Cassilis to stay to lunch and dinner—to spend the day at Outwood in fact—and seeming genuinely disappointed when the doctor said he could not.

'Well, some other day this week,' Occleston rejoined as he limped into the house to have his foot examined. 'It will be a real charity if I am tied indoors. And you'll come to the grouse supper next month of course? The Twelfth, you know. Do any shooting yourself? I can give you some. Poachers about a good deal, but I mean to be even with them presently.'

He led the way indoors, followed by his wife, Cassilis, and Basset; leaving Thea, Anthony, and the boys on the terrace overlooking the mere.

'Yes, boys,' Thea responded to their entreaties, 'I will come and look at the new pony and black rabbits. How does it happen that you are here, Tony?'

'Isn't it grand? 'he replied. 'Better than standing over hot iron in Woffendale. Strolling about on a summer morning gives one such a sense of bloated luxury. George sent for me to look at the new reaping machine. Something wrong with it. Up you go, young man!' this last to his youngest nephew, whom he snatched up and perched on his shoulder. 'Now for the pony and the rabbits! '

'Out-of-door occupations are much better for men than indoor ones,' continued Thea musingly, as the four left the terrace for the stables. 'Mr. Parfitt

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always impresses me as being so very indoor. I suppose that is why his pictures are so bad, and why people admire them so much.'

'What makes you think of that fellow? '

'Because he came in this morning after breakfast, and bored Daddy and me with his theories about chemicals and colours. He prides himself on being very scientific, and I imagine that he also fancied he was making himself agreeable to Daddy. Tony, what do you do when you see a scientific person coming?' 'Run away,' replied Anthony promptly.

'That is a good idea. It might apply to more serious crises of life. There is sometimes a tremendous amount of passive resistance in the mere fact of running away.'

'Well,' said Occleston, 'you see you have always the choice of two lines of conduct, either to hit out or to run away. The beauty of running away is that if you get tired of running you can always turn around and have a slap at the fellow you are running away from. Whereas if you hit out at once, you must keep on hitting till you have disabled your adversary. I mean, you mustn't hit and run. But you can run and then hit.'

'Yes, I see. Tony, you are the best moral teacher I know.'

'Oh, I say! '—there was positively a blush on his cheek. 'I thought you were talking about scientific people and things in general.'

'So I was, and scientific people have nothing to do with morals, have they? In fact, they haven't any morals. I am sure Mr. Parfitt would hit and run away. I wonder how it is that an instinctive fighter,

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like you, Tony, has generally a better idea of morals than one who could not hit another in the eye to save his life,'

'I don't see exactly what you are aiming at,' said Occleston; 'but I am sure I am right about the hitting and not running, and the rest of it.'

'Of course you are right,' Thea smiled on her old playfellow; 'you are always right. That is your only fault.'

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Whereupon Anthony's swarthy face reddened more than ever, and a great hopefulness rose in his heart. Had he been older, he would have felt less hopeful for that frank praise.

The pony and rabbits having been inspected and admired to the boy's content, the two strolled back to the house. George Occleston, his foot bandaged, was sitting by one of the library windows opening on the terrace, pointing out the landscape to Cassilis and grumbling at his own accident.

'I dare say the foot will be better for rest,' he said in reply to his wife's attempts at consolation, 'but it is very awkward. So many things to see to. Nowadays there is no peace for a man. About a dozen new laws sprung upon him every week, and each one of them apparently the product of a drivelling idiot. It is like being tormented by a legion of imps! '

'" The devil said his name was Legion,"' murmured Basset absently, looking out over the lake.

'Ah, in these days he calls himself Parish Councils,' Cassilis laughed. 'So bad as that? '

'Quite,' replied Occleston gravely.

'The Councils usually meet in rooms of unimaginative and aggressive colour,' said Basset, turning away

from the window. 'Something more brilliant and sympathetic is needed.'

'Not rose-colour, Basset. They see too much rose- colour in the ratepayers' pockets already. If you can devise any protective colouring for us poor landlords, you will be doing a noble act.'

'You perceive, Dr. Cassilis, that my husband does not possess his soul in peace respecting modem legislation;' this from Mrs. Occleston.

'No, by Jove! ' growled George. 'A man's soul will soon be the only thing left him, and a good many people would deny him even the possession of that! Nowadays I cannot understand my own language. Words have not the same meaning they had in my boyhood. A Free Library means a library that one man is compelled to pay for that another may be amused free of cost to himself. Government has turned highwayman, searches my pockets, and strips me to my shirt and trousers.'

'George! ' expostulated his wife.

But Occleston had settled fairly into his stride.

'To my shirt and trousers,' he repeated emphatically. 'There is no reason Mary, why I should not mention my shirt and trousers. This Robin Hood system says "You have denied yourself and saved. This chap has done neither. Therefore you must give him the cash you have gained by your carefulness." I don't see it. But I've got to do it. I am taxed to provide, against my convictions, a godless education for the nation. Is that compulsion of conscience, or is it not? If I refuse to pay, my goods are seized. Is that religious persecution, or is it not? This is the age of robbery and cant. The only liberty left is the

liberty to make my neighbour's life a burden to him. I may do that to my heart's content. But I may not strive to be quiet and mind my own business. I may not even follow the religion of my forefathers without being called a fool for so doing! '

'Our rulers multiply,' said Cassilis.

Occleston nodded. 'Of course. The lower forms of life always multiply. And a pretty noise they make about liberty. What liberty do they mean? The liberty to restrain other people. Presently I too shall begin bawling for that particular sort of liberty—the liberty to restrain *them.* You are not going yet, surely?' as Cassilis rose.

'I am afraid I must. I am due at your opposite neighbour's.'

'Pugh? Oh, never mind him. I'll swear there is nothing the matter with him.'

'He suffers a good deal from indigestion.'

'I don't wonder at it. A man may well have indigestion when he swallows such theories as Pugh's. They are worse than Basset's.'

'If my success in Mr. Pugh's case depends on my persuading him to relinquish his views, I fear his chance of recovery is small.'

'Has he told you that the earth is flat? ' pursued Occleston.

'Yes.'

'And that a man's soul may be cleansed by a judicious course of mineral water from all the sins he has committed or intends to commit.'

'Something of that sort.'

'And that the preserving of partridges is wicked?'

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'I have not yet heard about the partridges.'

'Ah, you will. Particularly if you join our shooting-party. Whenever he hears poachers have been busy on my domains he tells me it is a judgment. Basset, why don't you bring your brother-philosopher to reason? '

'I deny that Pugh is a brother-philosopher,' said Basset placidly. 'He is simply a fool. Many people consider the two synonymous, but in this case they are not so. Pugh is a man with a mission. I am a man with convictions.'

'But people with missions are people with convictions,' said Anthony.

'True, my dear boy. The reverse, however, is not true. People with convictions are not necessarily people with missions. The more justice there is in a man's opinions the less chance there is of others agreeing with him. Wherefore, if he values his peace, he will refrain from too strenuous endeavour to spread those opinions. I value my peace.'

'I do not think Mr. Pugh has convictions,' said Thea reflectively. 'He has retired from business having never known anything but business. So his mind being empty and an idle life seeming dull, he snatches at the first ideas that present themselves. He is dull, poor man, that is all. Perhaps he will get into Parliament some day. Then that will amuse him.'

'Pray Heaven he doesn't get into the County Council! That would amuse him too much. He is a terrible nuisance anywhere. Is he not at this moment depriving me of a pleasant companion? '

Occleston uttered these last words with a genial grace of manner that struck the wanderer afresh.

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‘I will do my best to deserve that epithet when I come again,’ he said.
And so Cassilis departed.
‘I like that fellow,’ said Occleston. ‘Got some sense in him. He’ll not aim at my ear when we go out shooting together. He notices things. He has that faculty of acute observation which is seldom possessed by any man who is not either a sportsman or the immediate descendant of one. Pugh says it’s slaughter, but when the rabbits eat his cabbages, Pugh sings out for slaughter as loudly an anybody. You cannot shut your eyes to facts, and the all-seeing eye of a sportsman is a fact. Of course I am not speaking of the man who shoots in a poultry-yard, with a couple of flunkeys to hand him his guns, and who, if he misses his birds, never by any chance misses his friends. But the man who has walked over miles of stubble and heather with only his dogs to keep him company, will see more in five minutes than the most learned ass will perceive in a year. Old Xenophon was right. Curious that we never get beyond the Greeks in these matters. If I were really ill, I’d send for my head gamekeeper to nurse me. Then I should not be poisoned by accident, or killed by any other tom-fool notion.’
‘I think I should like an old man-o’-war’s man for a nurse,’ said Thea; ‘sailors are always such splendid and sympathetic nurses.’
‘There you are again,’ said George; ‘it is the trained fighting man—the trained killer, if you like— who can be trusted to think of consequences. He knows that when a bullet goes into a man it is apt to

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prove troublesome. Therefore he will not be too fond of dosing you with drugs. The average doctor regards your poor body as a target for practice, and fires away as contentedly as a yokel at a fair, six shots a penny. He may hit the bull’s-eye or not, probably not. Meanwhile the rest of the target suffers—oh, Lord!’
‘Well, Cassilis is careful enough,’ said Anthony. ‘He thinks a lot.’
‘I don’t believe he does,’ responded George. ‘He knows better. He observes and acts. There is too much thinking nowadays. People think and think till they don’t know what they think, and then they sit down and write about it.’
Basset nodded and rose, glancing at Thea, who was talking to Mrs. Occleston. ‘We must be going,’ he said.
‘Where? ’ inquired Occleston. ‘Home? Nonsense. You and Thea must stay to lunch. We have heard none of the news from Quality Corner as yet.’
‘There is a very good lunch waiting at home,’ said Basset irresolutely.
‘You old sybarite!—there is just as good a one here.
‘Thea has agreed to stay,’ interposed Mrs. Occleston.
‘Oh, then I must,’ rejoined Basset meekly.
‘That’s right,’ said his host in a tone of satisfaction. ‘I have just got some Burgundy that beats yours, Basset.’
‘Impossible.’
‘As good then. Presently one will apply for official

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permission to put a bottle on the table, or to say one’s prayers. The Deluge approaches, a universe of wheels, taxes, reformations. I shall be put into a reformatory. You, Basset, will be put out of the world.'

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'Why?'

'Because you enjoy it so much.'

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CHAPTER XIV

MEANWHILE Cassilis had gone down the drive, past the lodge, and into the dusky fir plantation where the old stone bridge spanned the narrow curving lake. Here he stopped for a moment looking down into the still water beneath. Outwood Mere was very deep, much deeper than a stranger would be likely to suppose; and its sides were nearly precipitous, by reason of the hollow of the lake being no shelving cup of land, but a cleft in the sandstone rock. Perhaps the depth of the water gave it that dark glassiness. Cassilis leant over the rough stone parapet and looked into the sombre mere as into a mirror. Under the shadows of the firs on either side, its clear darkness changed to black, the blackness of night—that is, not opaque, but possessing a certain transparency; and everywhere it held an under-world of dim reflections, not shifting nor blurred, but as in a glass darkly. The shadow of a bird crossed the bough shadows; a pale shadow, a ringdove surely, for the little woods were full of doves, and their cooing seemed to emphasise the silence. A blue dragonfly shot past, returned, and settled on a tuft of sunlit moss by the edge of the parapet, the sunshine caught in its quivering wings. The insect made a spot of jewel-like brilliancy on the shadowed bridge, the transparent glistening wings and body of vivid sapphire against the deep bright green of the moss.

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In another moment it darted away, and Cassilis's eye followed its angular flight beyond the woods. There, where the widening mere lay in sunshine between meadow and hill, the water was pearl-grey tinted with faintest blue—the blue of the pale northern sky above it. The shower of two hours ago had left no traces, save a brighter sheen on the grass—a green as of earliest spring. Again he noticed the subtle colouring of the landscape—green, grey, blue, and this deep dark water flowing under his feet. The singular stillness and restraint, as it were, of this northern summer; the cooing of the doves; the soft coolness of the moist breeze that rustled in the fir- boughs; the sun-flecked ground, here strewn with pine-needles, there green with velvet patches of moss. Somehow it all suggested no change of season, no rush of spring, no heat of summer, autumnal glow, nor winter cold; but rather the unchanging beauty of the Tir-fa-Ton—the land beneath the sea, where the wind blows ever from the west, and the light is the light of an opal, and the turmoil of the world comes to the ear but as the rolling of the waves.

That was an unexpected murmur from the past that Cassilis had heard this morning. His mind recurred to it as he leant over the mossy parapet. Strange that June Stanham should be here. 'June Heald' she wished to be called. He must remember that. Poor woman! she had had a hard life. Well, she seemed comfortable enough now. A grateful soul she had always been; she had done him a good turn. Yes, but why had he been such a fool as to go off after that appointment? He might have known he would not get it. And for every reason how much

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better it would have been to have stayed—how much wiser! There was no reason why he should not have stayed. But that heedless going away had placed him in a position impossible of explanation should need of explanation arise. That was not likely. Yet June had mentioned a lawyer named Rudell. Was he Rudell of Quality Corner? Thorold had never spoken of Ringway, nor uttered the name of Rudell. True, once, when they were discussing the appointment that Cassilis scarcely hoped to gain, Thorold, the consoler, had said he knew a place in the North where he thought there was a good opening for a medical man. He had friends there, he added. Then the subject dropped, Cassilis being too absorbed with the immediate chance to think much of this faraway one. Could Ringway have been the place to which Thorold had alluded? It was possible; civil engineers drift about to many places and make many friends. After all he, Cassilis, had known but little of his rescuer Thorold. If the two Rudells were identical, and Parfitt happened to talk of that night ten years ago? Here Cassilis fell to wondering if he, James Cassilis, were indeed the same man who had stood by the window that night.

'When we have learnt to see our mistakes,' he said aloud, 'it is too late to mend them.'

Far down in the depths of the mere, among the interlacing reflections, he saw, in fancy, the poor room, and himself standing by the open window, his old wretched half-starved self; June Heald, a slim scared girl; and his friend Thorold—yes, his friend's face, handsome, sunny, kindly, rose up clearly before him.

'Our mistakes,' he repeated, 'and our unpardonable

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sins, which are our worst mistakes; not to be mended even hereafter.'

Thoughts and feelings surged up like strong currents as the visions of bygone days rose in his mind and shadowed themselves in the deep water as he gazed; and thus thinking, yet another thought arose, strong, vigorous. Seeing that neither in this world nor in the next could the past be undone, his dead friend and he meet as before that fatal moment that brought death to the one and lifelong remorse to the other—seeing that these things could not be changed, why should not he, Cassilis enjoy the present? To the past he had sacrificed his ambition, had drifted hither and thither in obscurity of his own free will. For the future?—to all men comes death, and after death judgment, when he would meet with the due reward of his deed. But till then—why, he was only thirty-six. Long years of happiness he might enjoy here in this green silent land of sun and shower whither fate had led him. Once more he spoke aloud.

'To live in the present is the secret of happiness. I will live in the present,' he said, turning away from the dark glass of the mere to the sun-dappled, pine- scented woods around him. 'I will be happy as other men are—happier.'

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CHAPTER XV

DID not Hermes remark that if Prometheus were prosperous he would be intolerable? Quite so. And why? Because he possessed greater capacity than all the rabble of Olympus put together. Therefore fasten him to his rock, for of course if you have power to torment him, his capacity cannot be so great after all. At any rate, it is of no use to him. Bound as he is, he cannot earn a decent meal for himself. Obviously he is a failure. Let us hear no more nonsense about his possessing the sacred fire. No fire is worth

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anything unless you can cook by it. Finally, whether one has any particular reason or not, it is always pleasant to worry one's Prometheus.

Just now Cassilis happened to be Parfitt's Prometheus. Chiefly on account of Thea, but also by reason of a combination of circumstances that brought Mark's worst side uppermost. He was essentially an artist made, not born. A man of talent, not of genius. He had accepted the commission to paint the eastward fresco in Woffendale Town Hall because he wanted the money offered, but he disliked the work because it kept him out of town. He did not especially object to sitting in a gloomy hall outside whose windows hovered a perpetual fog of smoke. Provided there was enough light to work by, the cloudy sky and sooty atmosphere troubled him not at all. A

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man of a higher type, feeling the need of pure colour amid the dinginess of that grimy workshop called Woffendale, would have made the walls glow like the curtains of the Tabernacle. Parfitt had very little sense of colour. He prided himself on his realism; that is, he could see the mud puddle, not the rainbow glory. Therefore the conditions of his work did not disturb him. But when the day was over and the train bore him out to green fern-scented Ringway, to the little world of Quality Corner, he felt that he was sitting under a microscope, and he resented the calm scrutiny to which he was subjected. It was for the provinces to admire, not to criticise. Parfitt did not exactly acknowledge this to himself, he possessed some glimmer of humour. Nevertheless offended vanity was the underlying cause of the feeling of general annoyance with which he regarded Ringway and the inhabitants thereof. Certainly they had treated him well as far as hospitality went; yet there was a decided absence of the deference he had expected when he condescended to stay in a smaller town, instead of putting up at a Woffendale hotel, and running up to London every week as he might have done. Of course he had accepted his sister's invitation with a view to 'marrying a rich wife. But the wife had proved more difficult to obtain than he had anticipated. Parfitt did not imagine things that were non-existent. He saw that Thea was as indifferent to him as ever, for which reason he had almost decided on marrying her. Mark was not accustomed to failure. This last fortnight had convinced him that Cassilis was becoming a far too prominent figure in Quality Corner. The artist had noticed his increasing

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buoyancy, the jovousness that seemed to radiate from him and shone in his glance. Here was a flame of life rising too high, burning too brightly to please Parfitt. He said to himself that the fellow was growing intolerable, and where had he met him before? Surely he had not only seen that face, but had drawn it.

Among Parfitt's impedimenta was a portfolio of old sketches. He had brought them down with him thinking they might be of use. Now on this particular morning, as he sat before his fresco in a distinctly bad temper, he remembered that portfolio and proceeded to turn over its contents. Apparently the search was satisfactory, for he drew out and rolled up a charcoal drawing. Then putting away his brushes and telling the attendant he should do no more work that day, Mark made his way through the hot noisy streets to the station.

Half-an-hour later he surprised his sister by walking into the drawing-room of Number Four.

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'Why, Mark! ' she said, 'I thought you got the best working light at this time.'

'Art is long and Time is fleeting, therefore it behooves us to make the best of Time and let Art take care of itself,' he replied, dropping into a comfortable chair—it was characteristic of Parfitt that he always chose the most comfortable chairs. 'Look at that!' As he spoke, he unrolled the drawing and handed it to his sister.

'Dr. Cassilis, is it not? But you have made him too young.'

'I did it ten years ago. There's the date in the corner. I was sure I had seen him before.'

'Where?'

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'Ah, that I cannot recollect. But I have no doubt I shall remember presently,'

'Did you think of putting him in a picture? It is a picturesque sort of face.'

'It is the face of a man who will never succeed,' said Parfitt, taking the drawing from Mrs. Rudell and regarding it critically. 'He will be too conscientious, or too hesitating, or too amusing, or too something or other.'

'I do not see how a man can be too amusing to succeed,' said Mrs. Rudell.

'Easily enough. To succeed you must give the impression of having succeeded. That is, you must wear a good coat and expect other people to amuse you. Then they believe you have a big balance at your banker's, and they hasten to 'make it bigger. If you are too brilliant, the dear creatures think you have dined on a turnip, which is the privilege of genius, not of success.'

'I do not think brilliancy would last long if fed on turnip.'

'That is the use of the turnip-diet. Like war, it clears off the strong and gives others a chance. If all our geniuses had a good dinner every day, poor talented devils like myself would be nowhere.'

'Everyone thinks you a great genius, Mark.'

'And I will take care they think it to the end,' responded her brother. 'I possess at least one undoubted talent, that of getting on.'

He looked again at the drawing, and his sister looked at him.

'He is a brute,' she thought; and then she reflected that he was just the husband for Thea

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Basset, whom Susette did not like. As the adopted daughter of an easy-going old bachelor with plenty of money, Thea was really far too independent to please Mrs. Rudell; who, being herself thoroughly commonplace, was further annoyed by the girl's individuality. Most people demand that others shall be a copy of themselves—a feeble copy of course, and they regard the infinite variety in the work of the Master Potter as rather due to His adversary the devil tampering with the clay. That interlacing of thought and feeling, swiftly changing moods of dreamy insight, gay jest, and generous sympathy, and the curious impression of remoteness that she gave, as of a spirit, while yet of so marked a personality that none could ignore her; a subtle force always to be reckoned with, like dew which may be frost; in short, all that was Thea merely inspired Susette with a desire to blur, if not to destroy, these rare and delicate mouldings

fashioned by the Potter's hand. Nothing of that sort could long exist beside Mark Parfitt, therefore he was clearly the right husband for the girl. And he needed money. Thus thinking, his sister spoke:

'You really ought to pay Thea Basset more attention, Mark.'

He was still looking at the charcoal sketch of Cassilis that he held in his hand.

'A good Hamlet face,' he said musingly. 'Now where was I when I did this? There was some story connected with it too, I am pretty certain.'

'Did you hear what I said about Thea? '

'I heard. But the most essential thing is to clear this fellow out of the way. How much has Basset? '

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'Gregory says his income is nearly three thousand a year, and he has never spent even a thousand. He has been saving for years.'

'Where does the money come from? '

'Oh, a coal-mine, I believe. He owns one, or part of one, or something or other. I don't exactly understand it. Gregory will explain. He knows all Mr. Basset's affairs. There is some land also, one or two farms.'

'Land is no good nowadays,' said Parfitt, still looking at the drawing, 'and I dare say the coals go to some relatives at his death.'

'I never heard he had any.'

'Must have. No man is free from that sort of impedimenta. However, there must be a nice little sum laid by, worth trying for perhaps. Meanwhile, I will oust this fellow, I am determined.'

'You will not do so if you are not more devoted in your manner to Thea herself. There is Tony Occleston as well.'

'Pooh! a boy.'

'He is four-and-twenty.'

'A boy,' repeated Parfitt. 'The first thing is to settle Cassilis. I wish I could remember when and where I did this,' laying down the drawing.

'Why do you not show it to Mr. Basset and say you have heard some queer story about him. I am sure that is simple enough.'

'Simple certainly, but not enough. I must have something substantial to go upon. It is only a doctor who can make people swallow anything, either in drugs or statements.' He leant back in his chair and stifled a yawn. 'This is a dull hole. Hunting Cassilis down will amuse me, whether I decide to marry Thea Basset or not.'

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'She may decide on marrying someone else while you are deliberating.'

'In that case I shall still remain free.'

'I have no more heiresses for you. Emily has only her house and a mere pittance.'

'And would not suit me either. What is that on the table? I think I see my name.'

'Oh, it is an invitation to the grouse supper at Outwood on the Twelfth.'

'What sort of entertainment is it? '

'Just a grouse supper, nothing more. It is an annual affair. If the night is fine, we walk over through the woods—all Quality Corner, I mean, and eat grouse cooked in

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every way you can imagine, and then walk back. If the weather is bad, we drive. That is all.'

'I suppose all the Corner goes? '

'Yes. Everybody.'

'What time? '

'The supper? Ten o'clock. Who is that at the door? '

The visitor was Emily Darnton, and after a few minutes' desultory conversation Mrs. Rudell took the opportunity of utilising her brother's sketch.

'Do you recognise this?' she asked, holding up the drawing.

Emily did recognise it, and would have said so had she not caught a sudden look of expectant cunning in Susette's eyes. It was gone in a moment, but Emily had seen it. Therefore she scrutinised the drawing with an uncertain air, and at last said doubtfully:

'Is it intended for Dr. Cassilis? '

Mark answered: 'It is a sketch of him that I made ten years ago, as you see by the date on the drawing. Singular thing that I should come across him again

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here, and I accidentally found the sketch to-day when looking over an old portfolio. However, I had better put it away. I don't suppose Cassilis would be exactly pleased.'

'You mean you drew this portrait without his knowledge. Certainly I should consider that rather a liberty.'

Emily said this with the intention of annoying Parfitt. She was displeased by his manner, which suggested something derogatory to Cassilis.

'People are only too delighted if an artist like Mark will take the trouble to draw them/ Mrs. Rudell observed with considerable asperity.

'Some people,' rejoined Emily coolly.

'You are quite right, Miss Darnton, but the pleasure or otherwise depends more on the circumstances under which the drawing is taken than on the people. Not so much who, as when, and where.' Mark paused, then, picking up the sketch, added as though half speaking to himself, 'I thought of showing this to Mr. Basset, but perhaps I had better not.'

'Show it to my cousin Tony Occleston,' said Emily, rising to go. 'He would take great interest in it, I am sure. Good-bye, Susette.'

Parfitt understood the remark. He knew right well what would be Occleston's view of the matter. But he did not care in the least, of which fact Emily was quite aware.

'Of course he would not care about Tony's indignation,' she mused as she went into her own house. 'However, it was something disagreeable to say, and I am glad I said it.'

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CHAPTER XVI

EMILY DARNTON sat down to write letters. That is, she pulled out pen and paper, then leant back in her chair by the window looking into the street. The stillness of the July afternoon lay upon Quality Corner, a stillness broken now and then by cart-wheels rolling over the cobbles of the market-place, or the sharper ring of a horse's hoofs along the road, where little puffs of grey dust rose up here and there as the light breeze bestirred itself.

Emily bent forward to see more of the Corner.

'Our curtains are rather characteristic,' she thought. 'Susette's frilled muslin with blue bows, my Pompeian reds, Mr. Basset's silken lavender draperies, and Dr. Cassilis's perfectly correct and proper old-fashioned lace, very white and stiff. I suppose he bought them with the furniture and the old woman. I wonder why those curtains give such an air of respectability to a house. They are certainly the wisest sort for a bachelor doctor. If he hung up some pretty art muslin with pink ribbons, people would require him to marry before they would consult him.'

Emily's eyes still rested on the lace curtains, her thoughts occupied with their owner. He would do well to marry Thea. Perhaps she might refuse him? Yet that was hardly probable; she evidently liked the man, and he was undeniably attractive. Was there a story behind him? Well, the charm of the man himself

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was such that one felt an interest in the story and wished to hear it. Also, one was prepared to become aggressive about it, to defend him if need be. Here Miss Darnton paused to consider whether her championship of Cassilis rose from liking for him or dislike of Susette Rudell and her brother.

'Something of both,' Emily decided. 'One is always more ready to do a bad turn than a good one, and when it is possible to combine the two one's conscience is at rest and one's heart elated.'

The sound of wheels came down the road; Thea and Mr. Basset were returning from Outwood. Emily resolutely began her letter-writing. 'If I run in there, I shall be telling her about the portrait. And I had better not. At least, I think not.'

But the letter was not half written when a swift soft rush of garments swept in and Thea's voice exclaimed laughingly:

'Is it possible that you condescend to those horrors called letter-cards? How do you stick down those miles of edges? Do you use your own poor tongue, or do you have the dog in? '

'I have the dog in,' pointing to a mat whereon reposed an aged setter.

'Dear old Ponto! What an occupation for his old age! Emily, we have been at Outwood.'

'So I supposed. Where did you meet Dr. Cassilis? '

'In the woods. We took him to see George, who has hurt his ankle. How did you know? '

'I did not know. I merely saw Dr. Cassilis going into his own house with an air of decided exhilaration, like a schoolboy who has not only stolen apples, but has eaten them too. And as I have observed that your

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society usually produces that effect on the masculine countenance, I drew my own conclusions.'

During this speech a variety of expressions flitted across Thea Basset's face; slight surprise, slight contempt, slight anger, and considerable amusement.

'Do you not think, Emily, that this is a little—just a little——? '

'Yes, it is. I am already ashamed of myself. I must find something to amuse me at once, or I perceive I shall become intolerable.'

'Would it amuse you just now to have tea with me? I came to ask you and Ponto. Daddy has gone into the market-place to hear the news of the town, so I am alone.'

'Of course I will come,' Emily rose briskly. 'So will the dog. He likes visiting as much as I do.'

There was always something peculiarly soothing about that dark-panelled gold-tinted room of Number Two. Emily settled herself in a chair with an air of placid enjoyment, while the old setter drew instinctively towards the flickering wood fire and curled himself up on the rug.

'I am wondering,' she said, lazily watching Thea at the spindle-legged tea-table, 'why your rooms give such a sense of well-being, of serene gaiety. Is it that almost perpetual fire you keep up? There is an idea of household virtue about the hearth-fire, and a summer fire fanned by open windows denotes wideness of mind. When it is a wood fire, one may safely expect culture and independent thought.'

'Combined with the household virtues of which you spoke? ' Thea inquired with that lightning-like smile of hers.

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'Of course. Culture implies the household virtues. It appreciates rest, therefore it attends to the fire and all other home comforts. Nowadays people are so busy running about that one hardly ever sees a nice bright fire except in Quality Corner and at Outwood. Sitting still is a noble art going out of fashion. I wish I could find a man who has never ridden a bicycle.'

'Why? What would you do with him? '

'Marry him,' said Emily calmly, and Thea laughed.

'It is no laughing matter,' Emily protested. 'Nothing would induce me to ride a bicycle. It would not amuse me any more that it would you. But if one's husband rides and one does not, some odious woman on wheels rides with him.'

'He probably would not want her.'

'Whether he wanted her or not, she would be there,' gloomily. 'I think I had better marry a sailor. Then he will not have so much time for running about on land.'

'You seem very much harassed on the subject of marriage! '

'I am. At one time I thought I would remain single. Now I have decided to marry. But whom? On the whole, I think a sailor would be best. What is your opinion? '

'Why not drift into it or not into it, as life's tide swings you? '

'I could not drift,' said Emily emphatically. 'I shall marry with the deliberate intention of marrying. I have not your gift of enjoying the passing moods of life. I need more occupation. Therefore, I must marry. How else shall I spend my time? Thea, you

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have given that dog eight biscuits in ten minutes. Please stop.'

'How would you like to be limited as to cups of tea? Let Ponto decide for himself. I respect freewill,' and she threw another biscuit to the setter.

'I also respect free-will, except where it clashes with mine.'

'Be a reformer, Emily. That sentiment is admirable.'

Miss Darnton shook her head.

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‘The world is past mending. It is a garment so old and worn that every patch put on its rents slits it worse in some other direction. The only way to reform it is to tip up the Atlantic.’

‘Decidedly, dear, you were intended to be a reformer.’

‘Not so. I perceive too clearly the need of the Atlantic. I must marry a man who is nice and narrow. Then he will do something. These wide outlooks are very discouraging.’

‘You are as melancholy as George. He was uttering lamentations as usual. Reasonable ones, I admit. But still lamentations.’

‘I sympathise with him. Mary sent me the grouse supper invitation to-day. I suppose the whole Corner will go, including that man Parfitt, who will doubtless confide his hopes to you as we walk through the woods.’

‘He has no hopes,’ replied Thea with the airy lightness characteristic of her. ‘He merely makes arrangements for his future. At present, however, I do not think I come into his arrangements. He was never quite sure whether he would marry me or not, and just now he is thoroughly tired of me.’

‘No, not tired.’

‘Yes, tired. The situation has been a triangular one from the first. Susette is quite sure I shall marry her brother, I am quite sure I shall not; and Mr. Parfitt, after giving considerable thought to the subject, is more than half inclined to relinquish the idea. I bore him so terribly.’

‘Here,’ thought Emily, ‘is my opportunity of mentioning that portrait of Dr. Cassilis. Yet after all, what is there to tell? ’

She watched Thea stirring the smouldering log in the grate, a miniature log that had once been an apple-bough, and was now passing away in soft feathery flame—the delicate flame of burning wood, fanned by the cool air from the blossoming garden. Outside in the street, voices and echoing footsteps broke on the silence of the room.

‘Mr. Parfitt is not bored, he is jealous,’ said Emily so suddenly that Thea, stooping over the fire, looked round in laughing surprise.

‘Why speak so explosively? ’

‘Oh, because I wish he had never come here, because I feel that he will somehow break up the peace of the Corner, and I adore the Corner. It is unique. He has got a drawing of Dr. Cassilis done ten years ago, and there is some story about it. At least, he and Susette implied that by their manner.’

‘Are you imagining the peace of the Corner imperiled by Susette’s fancies? Neither portrait nor story, assuming that they exist, can concern us.’

‘Perhaps not,’ Emily responded doubtfully.

‘And Dr. Cassilis is able to take care of himself.’

‘I am not sure of that. He takes care of other

people, which is a distinctly bad habit for a man’s own interests. Then he himself is unusual, which is worse.’

‘It gives him friends.’

'And enemies. Directly a man or woman seems to be worth anything, people begin looking about for half-bricks. That is how you can test the worth of a human being, by observing the number of the flying half-bricks and the sort of people who throw them. Mr. Basset is lucky in being a rich man. If he were not, the atmosphere would be thick with missiles. You, Thea, are protected by Mr. Basset.'

'Thanks for the implied compliment.'

'It is true. When is that man going to finish his fresco? '

'I do not know.'

'Has he not told you? '

'No, he expects to be asked.'

Emily laughed. 'He is detestable, and so is Susette. I hope they will not upset the Corner. I feel responsible, because Mark Parfitt's presence here is my doing. Had I never invited Susette, she would never have married Mr. Rudell, and her brother would never have seen Ringway. I have a sort of second-sight; something disagreeable will happen.'

'Is the sketch a large one? '

'Of Dr. Cassilis? No, only head and shoulders, and younger than he is now.'

'I daresay Mr. Parfitt has done it just lately. Why has he not shown it before? '

'Whether the drawing is new or not will make no difference. If they have anything unpleasant to say about Dr. Cassilis, they will say it. If they have not.

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they will say it just the same. Then everybody will takes sides, and what becomes of the Corner?'

'Emily, I find your conversation most depressing! '

'So do I.'

'Then why put things in so doleful a manner? Here comes Daddy! I will tell him you are as sad as though you were a millionaire.'

'How is that?' said Basset, entering. 'Emily sad? My dear, can I do anything? '

'Oh no, Mr. Basset, thank you. It is nothing. A passing and a foolish mood.'

'Then, my dear, let me prescribe for the mood. Stay and dine with us. The scent of tea-roses, which is our house-perfume to-day, usually produces serenity of mind; and the dinner, I assure you, is one calculated to raise the spirits.'

'I am sure it is. You see I am more cheerful already. I will go home and put on a smart gown.'

'Do, my dear, and fascinate Parfitt.'

'Is he coming? '

'Do not look so disgusted, Emily,' said Thea. 'This is one of our duty dinners, and you must help us with it. We will invite you to a really nice entertainment presently as a reward.'

'I do not like the fellow myself,' said Basset, 'but I wished to ask the Rudells, and one can hardly ignore their guest and relative. I hoped to have had Cassilis, but he is dining elsewhere. Perhaps he may drop in later.'

'Well then, good-bye for ten minutes. What is to be done with Ponto? '

'Leave him here, he is also a guest,' replied Thea.

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CHAPTER XVII

THERE had been rain in the night, and a westerly wind, warm and strong, was blowing under ask of luminous dappled-grey cloud. No blue—not so much as would have made a corn-flower; only the milk-white, ashen-grey clouds, blown up from the sea and moving eastward in swift shining procession. The sky of pearl deepened the green of grass and tree to vivid emerald, and the vanished blue reappeared in the woods and on the far horizon as violet mist.

Cassilis was walking to the Moss Farm to see his small patient there. On the brow of the hill he paused, glancing round at the now familiar landscape, the woods behind him, the wide valley in front, and far away to the left a gleam of light that he knew to be the extreme end of Outwood Mere, which he had seen reflecting the crescent moon on St. John's Eve.

'The mystic fern-seed!' he said aloud, smiling as he recalled Thea's fanciful explanation of that faraway glitter. The mere had a curious attraction for him. It harmonised so completely with this wet green country of moss and grey lichen, of blue mist and blowing cloud. Yet was there not something sinister about that singularly picturesque sheet of water, some fairy glamour that might or might not be friendly? Here Cassilis laughed at his own idle thought, and quickened his steps towards the farm. Here was no fantasy, but homely peace and unhurrying toil.

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Little Joe, now positively elated by the possession of a broken arm, was sitting on an upturned bucket in the farmyard, and steadily eating his way through a large slice of bread and honey that, owing to his disregard for the comers, fitted his face like a sickle. Beside him a crowd of ducks jostled each other over the yellow meal that old Martha threw to them out of a wooden bowl.

'This is the best life,' thought Cassilis as his eyes fell on the scene, 'the life that is nearest to Mother Earth—that makes friends of the seasons; the life that this century is doing its best to destroy.'

Here the old woman, seeing him, hastened indoors to fetch June; who came out apologising for young Joe's extremely sticky condition.

'Yo' see, sir, eating is such an amusement.'

And Cassilis quite agreed that eating was a great amusement.

'You are looking well, Mrs. Heald,' he remarked when the boy had been inspected and dismissed to his upturned bucket and bread and honey; 'this life evidently suits you.'

'Why yes, sir, I've about settled to stay. Mr. Gresty has asked me to marry him, an' I've consented.'

'I am sure I am very glad indeed to hear it/ said Cassilis heartily; 'I congratulate you both.'

'Thank you, sir. An' that reminds me, sir, to tell you I have a little parcel here that I thought maybe yo'd like to take.'

They were standing in the old-fashioned parlour, and June, turning to a cupboard in the wall, took out

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something wrapped in brown paper. Its outline seemed vaguely familiar to Cassilis.
‘What is it? ’ he asked.
‘Th' little machine, sir, that Mr. Thorold was always making.’
He stepped back with a quick gesture of abhorrence: ‘I have no use for it.’
June did not see the gesture. She was unwrapping the brown paper.
‘No, I suppose not, sir,' she replied, ‘but Mr. Thorold used to say there wur money in it, an’ I thought yo’ might be able to send it to his family. He had a little girl, you know, sir. He often used to talk of her.'
‘Why was it not taken away at the time? ’
‘I forgot it, sir. I’d put it in the cupboard lest it should get broken, and what with th’ inquest, an’ my husband being took up an’ a’, I never gave a thought to it till I wur looking round afore leaving th’ house. I couldna recollect th’ name o’ th’ place i’ Lincolnshire where Mr. Thorold wur buried, so I took th’ machine an’ kept it by me, thinking some day I might meet Mr. Thorold’s friends an’ give it to them. But of course yo’ll be better able to find them than me, sir.’
‘I cannot find them,’ said Cassilis.
June looked disappointed.
‘I’d like to be rid of it now,' she said gently. ‘Poor Mr. Thorold set such store by it that I wur bound to keep it safe; an’ when I found you wur here, sir, I put it i’ paper ready, thinking yo’d maybe know where to send it.’
‘I have no idea where Mr. Thorold’s friends lived.

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I only met him in Bramsall. He spoke of leaving his motherless child with relatives in Lincolnshire, but he never mentioned either their names or the name of the place.’
‘I wish as I could remember th’ village where he wur buried,’ said June; ‘being that moithered at th’ time, I didna heed. I wur telling Mr. Gresty how yo’d been main good to me when my husband wur spending a’ an’ carrying on. I didna speak o’ Mr. Thorold, though he were as good to me as yoursen, sir. But as I wur saying to yo’, I didna care to be talking o’ that time more’n I could help, an’ so,’ looking rather wistfully at the parcel on the table, ‘I’d like to be rid on’t.’ A rush of remorseful feeling swept over Cassilis. She would like to be rid of it—and so would he—so would he! Yet had the dead man no claim upon him?
‘I will take it,’ he said suddenly. ‘I can but keep it as you have done. Try to remember the name of the village, and I will send it there.’
‘Thank yo’, sir,’ June’s pleasant voice had a ring of relief. ‘I will surely do my best to remember.’ She paused a moment, then added, ‘Mr. Rudell would know, sir, th’ Mr. Rudell yo’ said wur living here i’ th’ town, if he’s th’ same gentleman as I saw at the inquest. His name isna common, an’ he might be th’ same.’
‘Yes,’ assented Cassilis, taking up the parcel, ‘he might be the same. And when are you and Gresty to be married? ’
‘Well, sir, seeing there’s nothing to wait fur, we thought o’ next week.’

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‘Gresty is a lucky man. I shall tell him so when I see him.’

June smiled happily. ''Tis a peaceful home,' she said as she lifted the old-fashioned latch for Cassilis to pass out, 'an' I wur always one for peace, you know, sir.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'I too love peace.'

Then he went away up the hill under the blowing pearl-grey clouds, the strong soft wind sweeping past him, over him, through him—every leaf and branch and blade of grass blowing eastward too, beneath the steady pressure of that invisible hand. The trees, the tall bracken, not wrestling with the gale but bending before it—each leaf turning its pale underside to the breath that blew, and quivering like the water- weeds in a swift stream. Like the rushing of water too was the song of the wind that filled the air—a primæval sound that fell harmlessly, pleasantly, despite its volume, on the ear as the roar of the summer sea.

This moist rushing wind swept Cassilis's thoughts along with it. Was he not also swept onward by a resistless wind of fate. Here in this place of green peace, wrought as it were by the magic of water, a place of grey cloud, soft shadow of blue mist, and cool wet mossiness—a place of dusk and dreams. What goblin mockery was it that here he should find—not clear dark-flowing Lethe, but the terrible waters of Eunoe the memory-bringer.

He walked swiftly, his spirit burdened by this risen thing as the herbage was bent by the wind. Was it for this he had come to Ringway? Oh, of course, were

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he either a better or a worse man he would not feel thus troubled by that which he carried. A better man would seek out those to whom it rightfully belonged, and take his chance of the result. A worse would simply drop it into Outwood Mere.

Here Cassilis looked back at the far-shining end of the mere, just visible from where he stood on the hillside. The grey pearliness of the day seemed to accentuate its glitter; it was the one point of light in the cloud-shadowed landscape. Was that still water Lethe or Eunoe? His thoughts rushed on. No, he could not do that. He knew himself incapable of that act of common sense—of treachery. It would be a second Judas deed. One was enough for a man's lifetime. No, his first holiday must be to Bramsall. Possibly there he could get some old newspapers that would tell him the forgotten address. Consult Rudell?—never. He was not likely to be the same man. And if he were? Oh, it was natural for June Heald, in her simple integrity, to propose such a course, but how could he, Cassilis, explain his leaving Bramsall on that fatal night? That was a step impossible of explanation. True, he had returned—too late.

Here a wave of angry bitterness passed over his mind. To succeed in life a man should be consistent; he should be that stupendous product of civilisation, a thoroughly reasonable being; doing just so much evil as will smooth his own path, yet not enough to startle his neighbours; only enough to give them a comfortable fellow-feeling in his presence. But to do evil and repent thereof, what fatal inconsistency—involving such erratic action as must needs tangle one's thread of life.

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He reached the top of the hill, passed the woods, and saw before him the road winding down into Ringway. Eddies of grey dust rose up here and there and whirled fantastically; then fell again into scattered atoms to be trodden underfoot. Cassilis looked at them as he passed on with his peculiarly light elastic step. What were men but

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eddies of grey dust raised up by the Breath of Life, whirling fantastically for a little space, falling into scattered atoms again when the Breath forsook them? And with what wild gyrations those same eddies danced and twirled! Well, he was not yet weary of his own gyrations along the road of this present life, not since they had led him to Quality Corner. He could see the four tall old houses now, and beyond them the market-place, and all was pleasant in his eyes. Already Ringway was 'home.'

He mentally summed up his position. The sudden resurrection of his dead friend's handiwork, that little model, had startled him for the time. That was all. As soon as he could get away he would go to Bramsall. Meanwhile there was his life here, there was Quality Corner. His thoughts turned to Basset. Cassilis felt that the kindly eccentric gentleman would believe his story. Others would not. Why should they? His journey that night was a mistake not to be remedied. George Occleston? Yes, he might believe. Both he and Basset were independent spirits; judging, weighing for themselves. But the position of a man vaguely suspected of a crime, whether he has friends or not, is very different to the position of a man who has never been suspected of anything. He, James Cassilis, poor and unknown, yet gifted and of good reputation,

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might dream of Basset's adopted daughter. Whereas James Cassilis, poor and unknown, with an incident in his past that he could not explain in any reasonable manner, would stand in worse case than ever he had stood in all his wandering years.

Till now the past had never risen against him; not till now, when youth and hope once more asserted themselves. After all, he was but thirty-six. Now, when life seemed too precious to waste in useless remorse; when home, friends, fortune, love, shone not quite out of reach; here and now the past loomed suddenly, a threatening shadow, between him and that fair promise of dawn.

Yet many shadows drift harmlessly away. The danger was not from June, but from Parfitt, whose memory might at any moment recall the night when he had strolled along the murky canal-bordered street in Bramsall. On the other hand, if Parfitt should finish his work in Woffendale before he recollected the incident, Cassilis might feel secure. Mark so thoroughly hated Ringway that he was most unlikely to visit the town again; he could meet his sister elsewhere. This was the critical time. Perhaps June Heald's presence in the neighbourhood complicated matters a little. If Rudell were the lawyer she had seen in Bramsall he might remember her, and in speaking of the past might hear from Gresty that Cassilis had lodged at her house. However, by itself that was nothing. Parfitt's possible recognition of him was the real danger, and instinctively Cassilis knew that the artist would believe him innocent, yet seek to prove him guilty; an attitude not uncommon among mankind.

The dust eddies whirled and fell and rose again,

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the strong nor'-wester swept on, fresh from the sea and the sandhills, and in its salt exhilarating breath Cassilis regained the feeling of elevation that had warmed his veins since his first night in Ringway. He told himself he cared little for Mark Parfitt's hostility. Indeed, he was not sure that he cared at all; and it was with a glow at his heart that he ran up the steps of his own house. In his consulting- room was a cupboard built in the wall after the fashion of old houses. Here, still in its brown-paper wrappings, he

placed the model, and turned the key. The thing could wait; it had waited so long already.

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CHAPTER XVIII

QUALITY CORNER had gone on a holiday. It usually scattered itself from the middle of July till the second week in August. Basset and Thea went to Ireland, Parfitt and the Rudells abroad, while Emily Darnton joined the Out wood Occlestons and Anthony in wanderings about Cornwall. Thus Cassilis and Emily's old dog, of whom he had taken charge in neighbourly fashion, had the Corner to themselves.

'Come with us,' Basset had urged, 'I will ensure you a welcome. I have a dozen cousins there.'

But Cassilis had replied that he was not yet on sufficiently familiar terms with Ringway to take the liberty of a holiday. So he remained, and was rewarded by gaining several new patients, and by hearing rather more than usual of the cheerful homely gossip of the market-place. Just now public opinion was chiefly occupied with Farmer Gresty's approaching marriage to June Heald, which met with general approval.

'O' course theer's noan brass in it,' observed old Sol Ingers, addressing a group of his cronies from his doorstep, 'but Gresty being one o' them chaps as conna do wi'out summat to look at, I dunnot see as he could do better. Mrs. Heald's comely enow, an'

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a reasonable age fur Gresty, an' hoo's done well by th' little uns and' th' house. Taking it a' round, 'tis sensible enow, an' Gresty's i' luck to get her.'

'Th' match is o' my making,' said farmer Stretton with pride, 'an' so my missis an' I have settled to go to church wi' em. It wur me as found th' bride an' it'll be me as'll give her away.

'A widow-woman dunnot want a mon to give her away,' said a bystander who was faintly jealous of Stretton's glory.

'What dost tha know about it? Tha never wur wed at a'! ' retorted Stretton scornfully. And the bystander was put to silence.

But June Heald's perverse fate did not permit her thread of life to run less smoothly. One warm afternoon a week later, farmer Stretton entered his own comfortable kitchen and seated himself at table with an air of regretful abstraction, swallowed a cup of scalding tea with a gulp and a sigh, and remarked sententiously:

'Theer's a mort o' trouble i' this world! '

'Would tha like it better i' th' next?' asked his wife. 'Thee men seem allus to be set on saving trouble fur theesen i' another life. I'd rather take my share i' this.'

Stretton sighed again, and pensively helped himself to buttered toast.

'Eh, Sarah, tha'd ha' been sorry fur Gresty if tha'd seen him.'

'Gresty! ' echoed Mrs. Stretton, her curiosity instantly on the alert, 'what's wrong wi' him? He's to be wed to-morrow.'

'Nay, he isna,' mysteriously.

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Mrs. Stretton eyed her husband with contemptuous impatience.

'Out wi' it! ' she said. 'He's i' th' lockups, I'll warrant. What's he been doing? '

'It's noan lockups, an' he's doing nowt either. 'Tis th' parson. He says he conna marry Gresty an' Mrs. Heald.'

'Why fur no? ' in astonishment.

'Well,' settling himself to tell the tale, 'Gresty went up to fix th' toime fur th' wedding, an' parson began asking a sight o' questions an' walked down to th' farm an' asked Mrs. Heald a sight more; an' it came out as Mrs. Heald's husband wur a bad lot an' run off to America some seven year back, an' hoo never heard more on him. So hoo thowt hersen a widow.'

'An' so hoo is,' commented Mrs. Stretton.

'Parson dunnot think so. He says hoo ought leave th' farm an' live by hersen till hoo hears summat fro' America. An' Gresty wants to know what he an' th' little uns mun do wi'out her! '

'Is Mrs. Heald going?'

'Hoo hannot gone yet. It's a' an' upset-like, tha sees. Gresty is fur setting up as man an' wife, an' if so be as they hear th' chap's dead, they con get wed. Seems to me parson had better ha' married 'em and ha' done wi' it. Eh, well, theer's bound to be trouble wheer theer's a woman.'

'Who's had th' making o' this trouble I'd like to know?' demanded Mrs. Stretton sternly. 'Here's a woman wed to a wastrel who runs off an' leaves her to shift for hersen; an' then when hoo wants to settle down wi' a quiet chap, in comes a meddling parson

as conna be content to do his work wi'out asking questions! I reckon a' this trouble is yo' men's doing sure enow. If I'd ha' been i' Mrs. Heald's shoes, I'd ha' said th' chap wur dead.'

'Ay, but that mout ha' been a sort o' bigamy,' observed farmer Stretton reflectively.

'I dunnot care what it 'ud be. I'd ha' said it,' responded his wife. 'An' when tha's done thy tea tha con put th' owd white mare i' th' cart.'

'Art tha going to th' Moss Farm? '

'Ay, I am.'

'A' reet, I'll go too.'

About the time that the Strettons were thus discussing June's affairs, Cassilis was listening to Gresty's indignant comments upon the curate's conduct.

'Th' parson's nobbut a fool. Thot's what's th' matter wi' him. He's one o' them sprung-up chaps as is allus meddling. I wish we'd th' owd parson back again. He wur a real gentleman, he wur. Yo' never found *him* asking questions. An' he wur a good judge o' cattle too. This un knows neither man nor beasts. Eh! it's a noice job a' round.'

'I was extremely sorry when I heard of it this morning,' said Cassilis.

'Ay, I thowt happen yo'd be sorry, seeing as Mrs. Heald tells me yo' wur lodging wi' her an' yon wastrel o' a husband.'

'He was a thoroughly bad lot.'

'I con well believe it. An' if he isna dead, he ought be.'

They were standing in the home meadow, where the mowers were at work. Most of the grass was cut

and lying in long lines across the field. That yet uncut stood tall and fragant, a softly rustling mass, with a purple flush over its greenness, and vari-coloured shimmerings of rose and gold and silken white as the wind swayed its feathery plumes. Nowhere is there so deep a sense of peace and security as in these meadows standing ready for the scythe, the green billows breaking into iridescent foam of flowers.

And the rest of their restlessness! There is no sound like that long whispering swish of deep ripe grass. It is the very breath of sleep—tranquil, profound: the softest lullaby of the world. Beyond all this living opal of the grass of the field spread the dusky marshland, 'moss' in north-country tongue, that gave the farm its name. There was summer luxuriance here too, but of a darker, fiercer kind. Tussocks of rank grass, tall thick rushes by the pools, tangle of bracken and willow and hazel, with here and there the crimson glow of heather where the ground rose higher. The Moss was not nearly so large as other tracts of marsh and moor in the neighbourhood, but it had the same characteristics as they, the same uncanny wildness, the same sinister beauty. One's eyes instinctively turned to the glittering mere curving out from the woods beyond the western verge of the Moss. Did the marsh drain into the mere? Or was that shining water the cause of those dark pools? Or were moss and mere evenly balanced, exhaling, distributing the primæval element to earth and air that the wonderful meadows might grow and bloom and powder one's sleeve with pollen as one passed

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These wandering thoughts, and many others, floated through James Cassilis's mind as he listened to Gresty. It seemed pitiful that June Heald should be thus driven from the rest she had found. But fate seldom tires of hitting those who are down, reflected Cassilis grimly. A darker fancy flitted across his spirit. Did that death, Thorold's accidental death— yes, it was accidental—throw a shadow of evil over those indirectly concerned in it? June's husband, June herself, Cassilis? Then he scoffed at the fantastic idea. What had June's husband done? Nothing. He was not even in the house at the time. He had always been a worthless fellow, and had happily vanished. What had June done? Nothing save conceal the fact that Cassilis had been present. Perhaps it might be better for him if she left the neighbourhood; but for her?—where else would she find such a home as Gresty offered?

Thus thinking and listening, Cassilis watched the mowers, the sweeping hiss of the scythes coming to the ear with a sharp insistence, above the singing whisper of the grass and the more distant sough of the trees; and the long green iridescent billows were falling—falling before the steel.

Gresty followed Cassilis's glance.

'Av,' he said, with the Norse poetic feeling, 'seems a pity to see Th' pretty stuff cut down a' in a minute, doan't it? But it's had its day, and that's summit. Th' Bible says as th' glory o' man is as th' flower o' th' grass, but theer's some folks as willna let yo' ha' any glory at a'. They'll cut yo' off i' th' green if yo' let 'em. I never wur one o' that sort. I'm fur letting folks ha' their glory, just what it may be. Some likes

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this, some likes that. Let 'em ha' it, say I. Now yon parson, he isna pleased to see th' flower o' any man's glory, be it love, or farming, or learning, or owt else. He thinks it mun be topped a bit, loike yo' top broad beans fur fear o' blight. But th' Lord didna

liken folk to th' beans, He likened 'em to th' grass o' th' field as never needs topping. It's queer to me as parson conna see that. But theer! he knows nowt about owt, as I said afore.'

'I am afraid,' said Cassilis, 'he could hardly act differently in this matter.'

'Oh, I'm noan blaming him fur saying he couldna marry us when he couldna tell if yon wastrel wur dead or no. But what call had he fur to ask about him? Mrs. Heald wurna thinking o' th' chap one way or another. An' I wur taking fur granted that he wur dead. Why couldna th' parson take it fur granted too? A gentleman doesna moither his neighbours wi' asking questions. He wouldna demean hissen to ferret about loike this new chap. It's nowt but love o' worriting folks, that's what's th! matter wi' him. Will yo' go in an' see Mrs. Heald, sir? Hoo's that moithered wi' th' parson's chunnering, hoo's a'most ready to think hoo mun go out i' th' world again. An' what's to become o' me an 'th' little uns? ' finished Gresty pathetically.

'I should certainly advise Mrs. Heald to remain here, both for her own sake and that of your household.'

'Then will yo' go in an' tell her so, sir?' this in a tone of hopeful relief. 'Happen hoo'll heed what yo' say. It'll help fur to drive th' parson's notions out o' her head. Hoo's doing a bit o' sewing in th' porch.'

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The porch was a pleasant place on a summer afternoon, and June Heald was a pleasant sight as she sat there. She rose and greeted Cassilis with her usual serenity, but her cheerfulness was plainly an effort, and after the first few words she spoke of her frustrated marriage.

'But 'tis parson saying I mun leave th' farm that worrits me most,' she finished simply.

'Do not leave it, Mrs. Heald,' said Cassilis. 'You are content here, and the world is a hard place. I have been thinking that possibly your husband may be dead. Would you like enquiries made? I am a poor man still,' he smiled, 'but not quite so poor as I was when I lodged with you. I could spare a few pounds.'

But this offer June refused with energy.

'No, sir, thank you. I dunnot want ever to hear owt o' Stanham, good or bad, living or dead. I dunnot want him to find me. He spoilt my life when I wur young, but he shallna spoil it when I'm owd. I willna make enquiries. I towd th' parson so, an' I amna one to change my mind. I belong to these parts. He doesna. An' Stanham didna either.'

In her words, as in her soul, was the subtle antagonism of race, only vaguely known to herself, for she spoke merely of the few miles of country that encircled her youth. Her underlying idea was that she owed no allegiance to a man not of her own people, not of the North; and who, moreover, had failed to keep his part of the covenant. A dim thought this, but the instinctive, determined, and contemptuous recoil that produced it was linked directly with the far past, when June's Norse forbears trampled down

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the Saxon. There is no getting over the radical instinct. It may remain in abeyance for years, but sooner or later it surges upward like a heavy wave, and the human being swings back to the ancestral strain which is the strongest in him, be it Norse or Roman,

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Saxon or Celt, noble or churl, freeman or slave. And where the race is strong, argument is useless, for you argue, not with the individual, but with the whole race.

Cassilis understood perfectly, and therefore said no more concerning the missing Stanham. It was this gift of sympathetic comprehension that had always won him friends, both now and in the past. He returned to the question of June remaining at the farm.

'Well, Mrs. Heald, I strongly advise you to stay here. Circumstances may change and enable you and Gresty to marry. In any case, do not act hastily, and do not go without seeing me. I might be able to do something.'

'Thank you, sir. I'll tell you if I leave. 'Tis in my mind to stay, if th' folks dunnot throw it up against me. I couldna put up wi' ill-feeling i' th' place, an' I shouldna like to set Gresty by th' ears wi' his neighbours.'

'I feel sure the neighbours will wish you to stay, and I think I see two of them coming to see you now.'

June's face brightened as she saw Stretton's old white mare turn the corner by the wood, with the farmer and his wife sitting behind in the cart; and Cassilis took his leave, tolerably certain that Gresty and his ' young uns ' would not be forsaken.

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Yet the situation had its awkwardness. He acknowledged this to himself as he walked on. And of course he had given the advice most harmful to himself. Was it best for June Heald? It seemed so to him. For a woman to be wandering about the world was a miserable thing. Probably she would end in accepting a home far inferior to the Moss Farm. Here was best for her.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Stretton was conferring with June Heald in the farm parlour, and Stretton himself sought out Gresty in the meadow.

'Good haying weather! ' he observed by way of beginning the conversation. 'I've browt th' missis to see Mrs. Heald,' with a jerk of his thumb towards the homestead.

'Thank ye both fur coming,' responded Gresty mournfully.

For a few moments there was silence. Then Stretton heaved a sigh and remarked:

'I dunnot know when owt upset me as much as a' this doment wi' parson an' a'. It's worse nor swine fever i' th' place.'

'Nay,' said Gresty, 'I conna hold wi' that. Theer's ways o' getting o'er this, but theer's no ways o' getting o'er swine fever as I know on. Not but what its bad enow! ' he added.

'Well,' after a pause, 'hast tha thowt o' asking Basset's opinion? He's thy landlord, an' he isna a bad sort, an' sharp too.'

'Ay, he is. I ne'er thowt o' going to him. An' he's away.'

'He'll be back fur th' Twelfth. A' Quality Corner comes back for th' Outwood supper.'

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Gresty nodded. 'I know. I'll up an' tell him a' about it.'

The idea proved so cheering that both men fell to talking of barns and shippons and many things, and the time passed to the swish of the mowers' scythes till the lengthening shadows warned Stretton of the hour.

'I mun be setting towards whoam,' he observed, ' though I'll warrant th' missis hasna said more'n half her say yet. It fair beats me how women'll talk! '

And this in the face of the fact that he and Gresty had that moment finished a gossip of more than two hours! Verily the heart of man is deceitful above all things.

In the farm parlour Mrs. Stretton was expressing a similar opinion of her husband.

'If I dunnot fetch him up he'll chunner till midneet, an' forget a' about th' mare an' me. But theer, when it comes to talking, there's nowt to choose betwixt one mon an' another. They're a' alike i' that. Yo' never see a gate-post wi'out a mon leaning agen it, an' another mon hanging o'er the gate telling him th' news.'

'I'm main obliged to yo' fur coming,' said June ' When one doesna know what's best to do, it's a comfort to ha' someone to talk to. I mun think it o'er afore parson cooms again,' she added with a sigh.

'Woman,' said Mrs. Stretton emphatically, using the word in friendly north-country fashion, ' if I wur thee I'd stay wheer I wur, an' let parson chunner. He's nobbut young, an' he's 'never had to shift fur hissen, an' he isna a woman, an' them three things make a sight o' difference.'

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CHAPTER XIX

DURING the next three weeks the situation at the Moss Farm was the chief topic of interest in Ringway. The market-place discussed it from every possible point of view. At the farm life went on as usual, June ruling the household with old Martha as lieutenant.

About twice a week Gresty joined the perennial group of gossipers round Sol Ingers' doorstep, his presence adding to the general interest.

'I've made up my moind to see what Basset says to it a',' he announced each time that he appeared 'an' I'll abide by what he says, if so be as it seems to me reasonable-loike.'

Which is an eminently judicious position to take up in the face of advice, admitting of advance or retreat as may be convenient.

'I conna see how Basset '11 fettle it,' observed a bystander one day. 'He conna make th' parson marry 'em if he willna. But o' course th' parson's nobbut a fool, as Gresty says. He ought marry 'em an' say no more about it. If a wastrel runs off to America an' willna coom back, he's as good as dead.'

This speech met with universal assent. Old Sol, standing on the top step, slowly took a large pinch of snuff out of the historical box, and holding the powder between his finger and thumb, said impressively:

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'Parson's reet.' He then applied the snuff to his nose, and after a pause of enjoyment, added with equal emphasis: ' An' so are we! '

'Eh, but yo' conna both be reet,' said another listener.

Sol regarded the speaker with tolerant disdain.

'Lad, if so be as tha lives seventy years, an' th' Lord grants thee more sense than tha's getten now, tha'll know that folks con say opposite things an' yet both be reet.

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That's one o' th' ways o' this world that a mon learns just when he's getting ready to go out on't.'

So passed the green and grey days, with blowing winds from the sea, and soft showers, and gleams of sunshine, and this was summer in Ringway.

The second week of August brought the wanderers back to Quality Corner. Emily Darnton was the first to return. She drove up one afternoon with the Outwood Occlestons in their family omnibus, and received an excited welcome from her old dog.

'You have taken good care of Ponto, and I am duly grateful,' she said as Cassilis came out to greet them all.

'It seems very unfair that Dr. Cassilis should stay at home taking care of a dog while we have all been enjoying ourselves;' this from Mrs. Occleston.

'I shall begin to enjoy myself now my neighbours are returning,' he replied.

'I should like to know how my particular neighbour has been enjoying himself,' said Occleston. 'How has he been passing the time?—Pugh, I mean. Poisoning my pheasants? Or giving socialistic tracts to my keepers? Or writing letters in the county

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papers to prove me a bloated ruffian, and that preserving game is rather worse than burglary and murder? '

'None of these things. His rheumatism has kept him busy.'

'Well, I'm sorry for the poor chap if he is screwed up with rheumatism. I have felt so amiable lately that I have thought once or twice of asking him to the grouse supper. It seems uncivil to hold a festival and not to invite the fellow at one's gates.'

'He would probably accept,' said Cassilis, 'but he is still in bed and not likely to get out at present. '

'I'd send him a brace of birds if he would eat them, but when I sent them last year he solemnly buried them in his garden as a protest! Well, we must be going. See you all on Saturday.'

And the omnibus lumbered off up the road, Mrs. Occleston and the boys waving farewell.

Cassilis turned to Emily.

'Now what can I do for you? '

'Nothing, thank you,' she replied gaily. 'My modest luggage is already indoors, and I told the servants to have something in the house.'

'" Something " is a little vague. My dinner is on the point of being served. It is a small bird, just large enough for two. Would it be very improper if I invited you to dine with me?'

'I am afraid it would. What a pity! '

'I have been told that Ringway is Fairyland. Can it be possible that Mrs. Grundy exists in Fairyland?'

'Oh, Dr. Cassilis, she exists everywhere.'

'How would it do if we had the dinner-table brought

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out into the road here, so that everyone might observe our innocent feasting? '

Emily laughed. 'Think of the dust blowing over the bird—so gritty! '

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'True. Then I have another idea. I believe a consulting room is universally acknowledged to be beyond reproach. Shall we dine in my consulting room? I could prescribe half the bird, you know, and eat the other half myself by way of proving the harmlessness of the dose.'

'You are most kind, but—— '

'I see you hesitate. Well, I will send my whole dinner into your house, and perhaps you will throw me the scraps when you have finished.'

'Oh no, I could not possibly so spoil your dinner. Thank you all the same. I really could not be so greedy.'

'Then how——?' Cassilis left the sentence unfinished, for at that moment Thea and Basset turned into the Corner.

'I thought you two were still away! ' exclaimed Emily.

'We are just walking up from the station,' replied Thea.

'Hearing terrible scandals by the way,' put in Basset. 'Old Sol buttonholed us as we passed the market-place.'

'Can old Sol be the Mrs. Grundy of whom Miss Darnton stands in fear?' suggested Cassilis. 'She, like yourselves, has just arrived, and I have vainly tried to persuade her to dine with me. Finally I proposed to send her my dinner on condition that

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she left me a few scraps. At that point of our discussion you came up.'

'Dine with me, both of you." said Basset decisively. 'Dinner in an hour.'

Thus the pleasant life recommenced; the mingled atmosphere of friendliness, culture, irresponsibility and comfort that made Basset's house so attractive; and the solitary man's heart was light as the blowing dust when again he stood in the familiar drawing-room, with its flickering wood fire that brightened as the August twilight fell.

' The air is full of mignonette,' he said as he entered. 'Does it come from the garden, or is it here? '

' Both,' replied Thea. 'Emily and I have filled all the bowls and glasses. It is our home-coming perfume. To-night you will dine with mignonette and ship-logs, a kind of sea and land entertainment.'

She was standing near the long window opening into the verandah and the dark rustling garden, and the light behind her was dim and blue. Through the opposite window came the dying red of the sunset, and little wavering violet flames shot up from the burning logs. In the dusky room these crossing lights gave an air of unreality to the slender graceful figure, the filmy grey draperies, the brown coils of hair, all shadowy, undefined, only the sparkle of a jewel here and there, and the deeper brilliance of the dark eyes.

Cassilis looked, and his first thought of her came back to him. Yes, she gave the idea of a Dryad. There seemed no incongruity in the fancy that she might melt into the twilight, taking shape again as

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rustling leaf and smooth shining stem. Or as he remembered her on the hillside at midnight, a dim shadow with starry eyes in the midst of shadows, an almost invisible presence in the dewy gloom, with the Scorpion's star-jewels blazing above the woods. All the glamour of her presence rushed over him afresh, the reckless exhilaration that

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she inspired. What was the past to him?—or all the entangling net that seemed to be round his feet? He cared for nothing save that subtle charm that was so peculiarly Thea's; the impression of transience, of dew, of changing light and shadow, of something just beyond reach and therefore the more desired. The eternal perversity of human nature! Why could he not choose Emily Darnton. She would make him an excellent wife; good-looking, pleasant, clever, suitable in every way. But Cassilis turned instinctively, as he had done ten years before, to that inspiring joyousness which made him forget his troubles, to the airy brightness that lifted him above his forebodings, that restored to him in a measure the happy expectancy which the starving years destroy:—all this he had once found in his dead friend's companionship, and had lost; and now that such companionship again beckoned, what wonder that he followed?

He strove to check the turmoil of his brain; to listen to what Basset was saying.

' Mignonette I consider the scent of home, of serenity, of the country. It will not flourish in towns, it needs sun and dew. It has neither colour nor form to attract the eye; but is simply an exquisite perfume of grey old gardens, calming and refreshing.'

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' Together with the fire,' said Emily. 'What is more calming than a fire? I always welcome September, because then one can pretend it is winter.'

'Why pretend it is winter?' asked Thea. 'Why not have the courage of your convictions and light a fire when you wish for one, as we do? The fire- worshipper is the free man. He who shivers before an empty grate is a slave to prejudice and penny almanacs.'

' I always buy a threepenny one,' said Cassilis.

'That is worse! Two-pennyworth more of prejudice,' she rejoined laughing.

Here a servant came in with a message for Basset.

' Mr. Eade wishes to see me,' he said, rising. Mr. Eade was the senior curate in whose charge Ringway had been placed by its absent vicar. 'If he stays more than a few minutes I shall ask him to dine with us. Anything is better than keeping dinner waiting. I have invited him before, but he has refused. He does not wholly approve of me—an unreasonable attitude on his part, for I am a most orthodox Churchman. He prefers Galloway, and often dines there; probably because the food is so terrible and the colouring of the rooms penitential. I do not know why bad dinners and aggressively-coloured walls should be regarded as proofs of true religion? '

' They are mortifications of body and soul,' suggested Thea.

' And is that true religion? '

' Oh, Daddy, don't stand here asking riddles, but go and see Mr. Eade. Dinner will be ready in ten minutes.'

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Basset walked towards the door. 'Have you ever met him, Cassilis? '

'Eade? Oh yes. At patients' bedsides. I agree with him very well.'

' Do you? ' Basset stopped, evidently impressed. 'How do you manage it? '

' Oh, I never contradict.'

' Ah,' Basset started towards the door again. 'There are times, my dear Cassilis, when contradiction is inevitable, and I have a conviction that this is going to be one of the times.'

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It was once remarked of an eminent statesman that he was a good man in the worst sense of the term. Perhaps the same observation might apply equally well to the Reverend Philip Eade, for he was one of those good men who are the despair of the wise. Nature having denied him every quality necessary in a ruler, he naturally aspired to be one; and the capers he joyfully cut when dressed in his little brief authority not only made the angels weep, but exasperated his fellow men, which was worse.

The position of a senior curate whose vicar is abroad is usually an enviable one; he can make himself such a stupendous nuisance if he feels so inclined. In Ringway, however, there is a restraining force not less strong because at first unfelt. The quietude of the stream of life here was deceptive; in it were unsuspected currents against which no man could pull. Philip Eade had previously lived in a southern cathedral city, where life was as a brawling brook, clear, shallow, tinkling. Therefore he set out gaily on the slow tide of Ringway, deeming it but a sluggish canal.

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Presently he became aware of an opposing current. Nobody said anything, nobody did anything. His various sacerdotal experiments met with no resistance save that subtle resistance which is not to be resisted, the resistance of race. He felt he made little or no impression on the place. The stream flowed on and carried him with it despite his efforts.

Now power is the one thing most desired by all mankind; it appeals alike to age and youth, to saint and sinner. He who is too young or too saintly to clutch at gold, too old or too dull for love, will grasp at power. The senior curate ardently desired to rule, and this desire neutralised such good qualities as he possessed. Failing to understand the people, he disliked them, and imagined many slights where none had been intended; notably in the instance of Stretton sending for him to offer up a prayer for the cows. Indeed the Reverend Philip had never forgotten that occurrence. It rankled in his mind at intervals, giving him a feeling of distrust towards the Ringway farmers, and a dim wish to get the better of one of them some day. Not that he would have acknowledged this for a moment, even to himself. He would have been shocked at its sinfulness. Yet the wish was assuredly there, and swayed him considerably in his attitude towards the Moss Farm. In short, Stretton had offended him, therefore he would take it out of Gresty! It is curious that people with severe consciences have no conscientiousness. They will do things that for pure meanness and glaring injustice fairly raise the hair of the average sinner, and will still remain happily persuaded that they

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themselves are the most honourable of mankind. Had Stretton’s cows never needed prayer, Eade would have married June and Gresty without putting the questions that made that marriage impossible. But Stretton had introduced June Heald to the Moss Farm, and Stretton and Gresty were old friends; therefore Eade felt it his duty to make careful inquiries, and was rewarded. He told himself, however, that he was very sorry.

So this evening, hearing that Basset had returned home, the Reverend Philip resolved to lose no time, and now sat in Basset’s study, explaining the situation.

‘ I heard the story in the market-place this afternoon,’ said Basset when the curate paused.

Eade looked slightly taken aback.

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'From Gresty? '

' Oh no, old Ingers told me.'

' That man is a terrible gossip,' vexedly.

' I fear I am another,' Basset rejoined. 'I am interested in my neighbours and tenants, and I was sorry to hear there were difficulties in the way of the marriage, which seemed to me very suitable. Why have you come to me in the matter? '

Eade hesitated a moment.

' I thought that being Gresty's landlord, you would remonstrate with him on the impropriety of the woman remaining there.'

' A pity you did not marry them before you were aware that Mrs. Heald was not a widow. Certainly it would be awkward if the husband should turn up. Husbands have a trick of appearing at inconvenient moments. That is why I have remained a bachelor.

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I have always been so afraid of appearing at an inconvenient moment. How did you hear that the man was living? '

'From Mrs. Heald herself when I made further inquiries as to who she was, and how long she had been a widow. She stated that she has had no news of him since he went to America seven years ago.'

'Is that all? Why did you make the inquiries? '

' I thought I ought to know,' replied the curate, unconscious that he thereby ' let in ' his adversary, who blandly responded:

' Ah, there it is!—the old bait of knowledge. We cannot get rid of Eden, our curiosity is rampant as ever. We all take a bite out of the apple now and then, some of us from the green side, others from the rosy; but we all bite more or less, sooner or later. A trick to be regretted, as knowledge really seems to bring a deal of trouble in its train, from the stitching of the fig-leaves down to too close acquaintance with our neighbours' lives.'

' It is a duty to oppose a bigamous marriage,' remarked Eade with severity.

'Undoubtedly. But in this case the man is possibly dead. Also, in Gresty's class a risk may be run which would be too dangerous in ours. I do not see how I can interfere. In fact, I would rather not.'

' But I am told that Gresty meditates getting the marriage ceremony performed elsewhere.'

'A capital idea! ' responded Basset, smiling.

' Do you call it moral, Mr. Basset? '

' I am not sure. It will, however, be conducive to morals.'

The curate shook his head.

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' Allow me to explain,' continued Basset. 'I am aware that in this matter I am wrong. I cannot defend my own attitude. And I fear I am also aware that I shall continue in the same indefensible attitude.'

' That is much to be deplored,' said the curate gravely.

' It is,' Basset agreed. 'This is another instance of the extremely annoying nature of evil-doing. Because the man Heald behaved badly seven years ago, I now feel obliged to encourage Gresty to contract an illegal marriage with another man's wife.'

' I see no obligation to encourage wrongdoing.'

' Well, if I oppose the idea, Gresty and the woman will simply set up housekeeping together without any ceremony; in which case poor Mrs. Heald runs the risk of being turned out some day. I do not think Gresty would do it, but in these matters no man is to be trusted. Whereas he will consider himself bound by a ceremony. That it is perhaps an illegal one is of no consequence. He will believe in it.'

' I should feel it my duty to protest.'

' I hope not. Very likely the man Heald is dead. You might therefore be protesting against a perfectly legal marriage.'

This was another view of the case. Eade was silent for a moment; then he said irritably:

' It seems to me that people behave very badly.'

' They do,' replied Basset sympathetically, ' they always do. We all behave badly more or less—so those invariably say who try to govern us. And now to turn to a more pleasant subject. In my house the dinner bell is never rung. I consider the noise barbarous—in fact, scholastic, which is a degree lower

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than barbarism. But the hour tells me that the meal is ready. I hope you will join us. Miss Darnton is here, and Cassilis '

' No, thank you. I have ordered a chop at my lodgings.'

Basset shuddered.

' My dear sir,' he said earnestly, ' a chop is a terrible thing unless prepared with the utmost judgment. I beg of you to stay and dine with me, and let the chop remain what it is now—a vision, not a reality.'

And rather to his own surprise, the curate accepted Basset's invitation.

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CHAPTER XX

THE next day dawned warm and blue, and Quality Corner spent the hours in hearing each other's adventures and relating their own. Gresty, in his best clothes and wearing a hopeful and determined air, presented himself at Number Two almost before Basset had finished breakfast.

'I thowt I'd be betimes,' he remarked apologetically when Basset came into the study, 'but I didna mean fur to disturb folks at their meals. I con wait, Basset.'

'No, no. I am glad to see you. I think I can guess what has brought you here. Old Sol told me something of it yesterday.'

'Ay, did he? Then yo' see how 'tis wi' me an' Mrs. Heald an' yon parson,' and Gresty poured out his woes and perplexities with evident relief.

'But I wur saying to owd Sol,' he concluded, 'that theer's more churches nor one, an' parsons as dunnot spend a' their toime i' asking questions. I've more'n half a mind fur to get wed elsewheer, an' Mrs. Heald is agreeable, but hoo's feart o' th' parson getting wind on't an' bouncing up to forbid th' banns.'

'Try Woffendale,' suggested Basset. 'No one will notice the names there.'

'Ay, that would do,' replied Gresty reflectively. 'I reckon one or other of us mun lodge theer a bit, an' I conna leave the farm. It'll ha' to be Mrs. Heald, an'

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that's bad enow, wi' nobbut owd Martha to see to things. But happen we could make shift. I'm sending green-stuff twice a week to th' market theer. I could go o'er i' th' carts an' see her. Fur that matter, hoo could coom out here by th' train fur th' day. Ay, it 'ud do well. Speaking o' names, Mrs. Heald tells me th' mon's name wur Stanham.'

'Stanham? ' repeated Basset.

'Ay, Stanham it wur. But seeing he wur a bad lot, hoo took her own name again, which wur Heald. Happen we'd best put th' name down as Stanham? I towd her I'd ask yo' about it.'

'I think so,' said Basset. 'I will see what Mr. Rudell says and will let you know to-day. By the way, what is Mrs. Heald's Christian name? '

' " June," ' replied Gresty with pride. ''Tis a pretty name, and hoo's like it.'

'It is a pretty name,' Basset agreed. 'I should advise you to lose no time, Gresty.'

'I dunnot mean to. I've loissen toime enow a'ready wi' th' worrit on't. I'm much obliged to you', Basset, fur talking it o'er, an' so will Mrs. Heald be. Hoo's a good-looking woman,' he added as he rose to go. 'I'd like y' to see her.'

'I will drive down to the farm this afternoon,' said Basset. 'Wait a moment.'

He turned to a writing-table and slipped a banknote into an envelope.

'Give this to Mrs. Heald with my best wishes. It will pay expenses and buy her a new gown.'

'Eh, now, Basset, theer wur no call fur yo' to do that. But hoo'll be main pleased, thank yo'.'

Gresty departed, leaving Basset with the consciousness

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of having done a good action which would be condemned by all right-minded persons. Rudell was one of these same persons. He strolled in later for chess, and having heard the story over the game, he slowly took a pinch of snuff, remarking with emphasis:

' Basset, it is clear to me that one of these days I shall see you in the dock, and myself running about for counsel to defend you.'

'Well, get the best. I shall not grudge the expense.'

'It is monstrous. The parson is right and you are wrong.'

'Pooh! The man is most likely dead.'

'Not he. When a man ought to die, he never does. That marriage of Gresty's will probably not be legal.'

'They will think it is.'

'I don't see what that has to do with it.'

'But I do.'

'One of these days Gresty will find out the illegality and throw the woman over,'

'No, he won't. He has no more belief in the law than you have.'

'I? Why I belong to it.'

'Therefore you don't believe in it, save for others. That is the way we all believe in it.'

Here Basset moved a pawn, which Rudell captured.

'I believe in law and order,' said Rudell.

'Oh, law—law. There are things above law.'

'Above? '

'Well, beyond law.'

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

‘Do you consider your advice to Gresty moral? ’
‘That is what the curate asked me last night,’ said

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Basset reflectively, contemplating the chessboard. ‘I am sure I do not know. What is one to do? Sometimes there really seems nothing for it but to put one's morals in one’s pocket and go ahead.’
‘For an orthodox Christian, Basset, your sentiments are atrocious.’
Basset sighed and moved his king.
‘It is the wise men who do the most foolish things,’ Rudell went on. ‘Why could you not consult me before advising Gresty? ’
Basset shook his head. ‘To consult others is to cramp one’s individuality. To preserve one’s freedom it is necessary to act first and discuss the action afterwards.’
‘At the risk of possible repentance?’
‘Why not? If you are afraid of being drowned you will never learn to swim.’
Silence again for awhile.
‘Ah, I have lost,’ said Rudell, ‘and I do not think there is time for another game before lunch. Look here, Basset, that Gresty business is a mistake. You would do better to be the virtuous landlord and urge Gresty to let the woman go and seek her husband, which she would probably do.’
‘Impossible! ’
‘Nothing is impossible, save universal reform. Lord! it makes me grin to hear our teachers predict the virtuous era that is coming. As if mankind will ever be different in the main to what they have ever been. The human race is a spinning top, swaying from side to side and preserving its equilibrium by that same swaying. One generation is sober and vicious, the next is drunk and virtuous. One generation believes

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in law and order and behaves accordingly. Its successor kicks over the traces and howls for all-satisfying anarchy.’
‘Can anarchy be all-satisfying? ’
‘It cannot. Therefore they howl for it. When did men clamour for any reasonable thing? Mankind have cried for the moon ever since it shone in heaven, and it is only a dead world after all.’
‘Why, Rudell, you are positively brilliant! ’
‘Oh, I think a little at times. Just for a change, and to keep up my reputation for being old-fashioned.’
Basset laughed. ‘By the way,’ he said, ‘I told Gresty I would ask you whether Mrs. Heald must be married in her husband’s surname? It seems she dropped it and resumed her maiden name.’
‘Considering the marriage is pretty certain to be illegal it cannot much matter what name she is married in,’ responded the lawyer drily. ‘But she had better stick to the husband’s. What was it? ’
‘Stanham,’ said Basset.
‘Stanham? ’ echoed Rudell; ‘and you say she lived in Bramsall! Do you mean to tell me this June Heald is June Stanham, of Mill Street? ’

'She may not be the same, though I confess the name struck me. It is unusual.'
'I will go down to the farm with you and look at her. I should know her.'
'Well,' Basset spoke reluctantly, 'of course you can see her, but I would rather not have that old trouble stirred up. We cannot bring poor Thorold back again, and why harass the living? She seemed to have done her best.'
'I am not sure of that.'

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'You were satisfied with her evidence.'
'I am never satisfied with any evidence, but I have to accept it if I cannot prove it false. Nobody speaks the truth unless by accident.'
'The evidence was reasonable and probable enough.'
'Which makes me doubt it. The unreasonable and improbable things are those that really happen. For instance, what could seem more improbable, than that June Stanham should drift here and marry a tenant of yours? '
'Leave her in peace,' said Basset. 'She appears to have had enough trouble of her own. Do not cross-question her again about that old grief of ours. We cannot bring Thorold back. I feel as certain now as I did ten years ago that it was pure accident. He is not the first man who has swallowed the wrong medicine.'
'It was not the wrong medicine. It was poison in mistake for medicine. How did it get among his things? The woman did not seem to know. I believe she did know.'
'Thorold was rather given to having chemicals about.'
'I don't call prussic acid a chemical. Besides, he had just then a fad for inventing some machine or other, goodness knows what! If you had not been laid up at the time, Basset, you would not have been so easily satisfied that all was right.'
'Was I easily satisfied? From your account of the matter, it appeared to be an unhappy accident, for which no one but Thorold himself was responsible. I thought you concurred in the verdict.'
'"Death by misadventure"—yes, I did in a way.

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What else could I do But when I have turned the affair over in my mind I have doubted the misadventure. I should like to unravel the mystery.'
'I see no reason to imagine any mystery. Let the past rest.'
'If it will. My experience is that the past has a trick of waking up in the most unexpected manner.' Here Rudell took out his snuff-box again. 'Most, singular that June Stanham should come to this place. Well, I must be going. Nice way of spending the morning! Chess and gossip.'
'I know no better way of spending a summer morning—at our age. It is not profitable to sit grey-haired in the sun, remembering the old dreams. But you are a married man.'
'And I shall have the fact impressed upon me if I am not back in time for lunch. Where is Cassilis? '
'Do you want him? He has gone to Outwood for the day's shooting.'
'Whether his patients will let him or no? '
'He could be fetched. Anthony is there too,'
'So is Parfitt. I wish somebody would shoot him by accident. I'm sick of him.'

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'Pleasing sentiments towards a brother-in-law! ' remarked Basset.
'Because he chances to be my brother-in-law. All relationships are more or less annoying, generally more. He will be back by five, ready to walk over to the supper later.'
'Cassilis said he should be home by six. I asked him to dinner.'
Rudell eyed his friend sternly. 'Do you mean to say, Basset, that you intend to eat a seven o'clock dinner—one of your

dinners—by way of preparation for a grouse supper at ten? '
'Why not? But dinner is at six to-night.'
'Well—er—I wish you would invite me also. My wife has ordered a sort of meal called high tea.'
'Better bring your wife too, and Parfitt with her. I believe Thea has asked Emily Darnton, and I rather expect Tony Occleston.'
'You will not drive? '
'Not on such a night as this promises to be.'
They were standing at Basset's door, looking into the hot sunny street, where the grey dust lay thickly.
'Not a water-cart this morning! ' growled Rudell.
'Of course not. They never disturb the harmony of things. That is why they only appear after a shower.'
Rudell laughed and descended the steps.
'Well, good-bye for the present. Thanks for the invitation.'

CHAPTER XXI
THAT hot Twelfth died in crimson flame behind a low bank of purple cloud. Then the red west slowly changed through orange to luminous green, in which lingered a faint warm stain like wine dropped into clear sea-water. By-and-by even this stain faded, leaving only that mysterious green light which in its far-away shining gives such a curious sense of infinity.
The light still glimmered in the west when Quality Corner collected itself and set off to walk to Outwood through the sapphire dusk. The eight went up the dim white road in straggling fashion, endeavouring to sort themselves to their own satisfaction and their neighbours' annoyance. The result, however, only pleased one individual, Mark Parfitt, who contrived to place himself by Thea's side, and kept the position. Emily Darnton, who would have liked Cassilis for a companion, found herself talking to Tony Occleston. While Cassilis was swept off by Mrs. Rudell, who kept well in the rear, together with Basset and Rudell, who strolled along discussing various matters on which they never agreed.
The night was one of breathless heat and stillness. There was no moon, but the blue overhead was star- sown. Cassilis looked towards the south-west. There shone the Scorpion's Heart; redly, angrily; as it had shone on Midsummer Eve when he and Thea Basset

had gone to gather fern-seed on this same hillside, up this same road. Years seemed to have passed since then, yet the actual time was but a few weeks. And still looking at blazing Antares, he further decided that Parfitt's behaviour this evening was intolerable, and that on the return journey it should not be permitted. Meanwhile the artist, having got a fair start, was endeavouring to make the best of his time. But nature, in bestowing on him unlimited vanity, had hopelessly handicapped him as a lover. The two passions are incompatible. Love and hate, as fire and wind, harmonise well enough. A man will kick another fellow into a ditch with all the greater energy if the latter chances to be a rival; and will finish up by doing his own love-making with vastly increased fervour. But love and vanity, as fire and water, cannot co-exist; one or the other must go. Parfitt's vanity could not go. It was ingrain. Now the distinctive effect of vanity on the character is monotony. The mind is fixed on the contemplation of the mighty Ego, an excellent attitude for getting on in the world, but a terribly boring one in a companion. Whereas the capacity for being a good lover, whether masculine or feminine, includes all the infinite variety of life; the whole personality swings like the magnetic needle, true to the one point, but also ranging the whole compass of the world; responsive to every touch of feeling, every varying mood of nature, or passing phase of circumstance.

Not being a born lover, the witchery of that summer night had no effect on Mark Parfitt. He talked on; smooth, ready, fairly amusing; his level chilly tones changing not for any influence from without, taking no deeper softer ring from dew and

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stars and the wonderful gloom of the woods. For that gloom of the moonless summer night was very wonderful within those woods. As the little company passed from the comparative light of the road into the vast leafy shadow, the low-lying cloud on the western horizon rose higher, arabesques of summer lightning playing over its darkness. The leafy aisles looked like dim caverns of dark serpentine or lapis-lazuli, lit by the sudden flickering gleams of the lightning and the faint shining of the stars. Scents of moss and peat and wild thyme filled the warm air. Now and then the breathless silence was broken by soft scurries of some small animal, the flutter of a startled bird, and that slow whispering sigh that is always heard in woods, no matter how still the air.

'Alive like sound '—few notice how living is sound; that is, natural sound. There is only one non-natural sound that is alive, the violin. All others are dead unless the life of the world, the Breath of God—call it which you will, it is the same—animates that which makes them; whether creature or leaf, swing of water or rush of wind. Without living sound, the earth is a vision. Here in the dewy darkness, all might have been a dream but for these stirrings of the life hidden in the velvet gloom. There are world-sounds so delicate that save in extreme stillness they cannot be heard at all. The well-nigh inaudible flutter of ripening growth in the full tide of summer; the tinkling of dropping seeds; the feathery whirr of moths; the singular click of the green dragonfly's wings as he turns in his zigzag flight; and in time of snow, the faint crackling of dead leaves shrivelling under the fiery

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touch of the frost. These are Earth's heart-beats, and you must lie very close to hear them.

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To-night these little eerie sounds that ruffled the silence as a breeze ruffles the sea, deepened the curious sense of unreality that stole over most of those whose feet passed so noiselessly over the soft path of sand or moss, fir-needles, or the short elastic turf of the open glades. Where were they going?—to Outwood through Ringway Woods? Or were they drifting for ever onward through the forest of Broceliande, where Merlin lies in unquiet slumber and the leaves whisper spells: a dim enchanted world of crouching shadows, of fierce unseen life, waiting to take sudden shape and form, to spring and vanish, swift as the white lightning that flared now and again through that close roof of whispering leaves. Unconsciously the voices changed, took somewhat of the velvet of the gloom. Conversation ceased to be continuous; a few words seemed enough in that levin-lit darkness. Parfitt alone kept up a steady flow of small talk, his clear flat tones sounding oddly incongruous. But his perceptions were fairly keen, and as he thus talked on he was sensible that he would not much longer be able to keep Thea by his side. The company showed an inclination to draw together, probably with a view to rearranging themselves in more congenial fashion. Also, Thea's step was lingering and Mark felt that her attention was given to him from politeness, not interest. Yet he did not think she wished for Cassilis's or Anthony's companionship. He had an impression that she was pondering some question of which he was wholly ignorant; an engrossing question too, for there seemed a certain tension about her that puzzled him.

They were crossing the broad glade where Cassilis and Thea had taken shelter under the chestnut the day he first went to Outwood. Here the dense olive shadow of the close-growing trees changed to the blue dusk of the starlit open space; the short turf looking dark in the starlight, dim grey when the lightning quivered over it. Away to the right was the sloping ground down which Cassilis had walked blindfolded; the clump of beeches—he recalled it all as he listened to Mr. Rudell's shrill chatter, and meditated how to deprive Parfitt of his companion. Before them the wood closed in again; mysterious caverns of lovely blue-green darkness filled with flickering glimmers. Here in the open the air had a different perfume; not of moss or resinous fir, but that peculiar scent of sun-burnt earth and fern that the touch of night releases, a pungent odour that mingles with the wild thyme and mints, and is the breath of fullest summer. As they crossed the glade Thea stopped and waved her hand towards Antares flaming in the southern blue.

'The Scorpion's Heart beats well up there,' she said, addressing the company generally.

'Trust a Scorpion's Heart to beat well,' responded Anthony. 'It is only our poor human hearts that go all anyhow.'

Thea laughed softly. 'How dismal you are, Tony! '. 'And when I have been doing my best to entertain him! ' protested Emily.

'Do you find this world so unsatisfactory? ' enquired Parfitt with a faint ring of mockery in his cool tones.

'I am not crying for the next, if you mean that,'

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replied Anthony aggressively. 'I don't see the use of going to Heaven before you have had all you want here.' 'How dreadfully greedy!—to wish for the best of both worlds! ' this from Emily.

'Well, I'll choose this,' said Tony doggedly, 'and chance the next.'

'That is what most people do, and lose both,' commented Rudell.

Here Basset interposed. 'How do you know? Eight out of every ten of us lose this world; but your assertion respecting the next is a statement so wild that one would think you were in the witness-box. I have always observed,' added Basset dreamily, 'that the wildest statements are made in what are humorously called courts of Justice.'

Rudell chuckled. 'The witness-box is a useful institution,' he remarked. 'Indeed, one may say that law is an eminently useful institution. You would be all the better for more of it. In fact, I am of opinion that I should make an admirable despot.'

'So far as my memory goes,' said Basset drily, 'the only lawyer who ever attained to absolute power was Robespierre, and he can hardly be considered a success.'

'That's a nasty one,' Rudell observed meditatively, consoling himself with a pinch of snuff; 'and I don't seem to have an answer ready. Never mind, some brilliant response will occur to me by-and-by.'

During this conversation the little company had drawn more closely together, and were walking in a straggling cluster. There seemed a chance of casting Parfitt into outer darkness and taking his place: so Cassilis, having dexterously got Basset on the other

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side of Mrs. Rudell, quietly moved away towards Thea, His intentions, however, were observed and promptly frustrated by Mark's sister.

'Dr. Cassilis! Where are you?' she cried. 'We must have your opinion. Which world do you recommend? But I am sure you will point us to Heaven.'

'Your belief is hardly complimentary to my professional skill,' he responded. 'Am I not expected to keep people on this earth as long as possible? '

Tony Occleston lifted up his voice again: 'And as for losing both by enjoying this, it's downright nonsense. For of course by the best of this one means the best, not the worst; and to get the best one must do one's best. So why should not one have both?'

'The whole question depends on what one regards as the best of this world,' said Cassilis.

'Well, not the loaves and fishes,' said Tony.

' Do I hear the Corner engaged in a theological discussion while on its way to the Grouse Supper?' asked a voice from the shadowy aisles ahead—a masculine voice, clear, full, and sweet; half-laughing, half- imperious. Cassilis wondered what the owner of that voice was like.

Quality Corner responded by a general chorus of greeting.

'Why, Herries,' said Basset, 'I did not know you were home again.'

'I returned two days ago,' replied the new-corner. 'This evening I rode over to Outwood and then walked on to meet you; but was fearing you had gone by the road, when your voices reached my ear.'

'Tony was uttering the most terrible sentiments.'

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said Thea, ‘and because in our secret hearts we all agreed with him, we were preparing to fall upon and rend him. This is the subject of dispute: what is the best of this world? ’

‘I should say there cannot be the smallest difficulty in deciding that,’ replied Herries.

A broad gleam of lightning lit the glade, changing the olive and sapphire shadows to fierce black, and the dusky grass to blurred grey. For a moment every face was visible in the white glare. Then it vanished, and the deep subtle colouring of the blue summer night reappeared in the starlight.

That brief moment showed the speaker to be a young man, perhaps thirty; tall, broad-shouldered, rather heavily built; with a general look of activity about him. There was also another look about him, the indefinite yet unmistakable air of the lover—a buoyant, hopeful lover.

The pale electric blaze showed also the disorganised condition of the party. Herries’ arrival seemed to have had the effect of completing the scattering tendency that had begun when the glade was reached. Only he and Thea were side by side; the others stood here and there, widely apart. Emily Darnton and Rudell looked amused, Anthony troubled, Basset pleased, Susette Rudell puzzled and annoyed, while Parfitt wore his most supercilious aspect.

‘No difficulty whatever! ’ repeated Herries as the soft gloom fell round them once more. Then he and Thea seemed to melt into the woodland shadows ahead; the murmur of their voices coming faintly back on the warm air.

It was Basset who next broke the silence:

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‘There may be heaven; there must be hell;
Meantime, there is our earth here.

We were young once, eh, Rudell? ’

‘I was never young,’ replied Rudell emphatically. ‘Not in your sense.’

‘What is the meaning of all this? Who is this fellow? ’ Parfitt irritably asked his sister; subduing his voice, however, that the others might not hear.

‘Oh, he lives about twelve miles off, beyond Outwood,’ replied Mrs. Rudell in the same subdued tones. ‘He has a nice place, but no money. I thought she had refused him. He went off somewhere about four months ago.’

‘A pretty fool you have let me make of myself! ’

‘Not at all. You have just as much chance as he has.’

‘I don’t think I care to take any more chances. You ought to have told me of this Herries in the background.’

‘Tony Occleston will hear you.’

‘Let him! ’ said Parfitt, moving away.

The party had arranged itself anew and followed Thea and Herries through the dark aisles. Cassilis was walking with Emily Darnton, so Mark joined Basset; while Anthony, depressed in spirit, drifted into desultory conversation with Susette Rudell and her husband.

Did Antares wield a malign influence over that walk to Outwood? The Scorpion’s Heart beating redly in the blue brought little peace to the hearts that beat along that dusky woodland way. For more than one the Scorpion had its sting.

That sting ran deepest into Cassilis. Yet he felt a

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certain degree of forlorn amusement in the situation, for there is sometimes amusement to be got even out of one's misfortunes. Never had he dreamt of a rival such as Herries. So completely had he settled down in the Corner, had become identified with it and its interests, that his very recent arrival in Ringway had passed out of his mind. He had unconsciously imagined he knew all the familiar friends who circled round Basset and his adopted daughter. Fool that he had been to forget that he himself was a stranger but newly welcomed to their pleasant life. Here was one who evidently was the friend of years; old comradeship spoke in the manner of those who greeted Herries' sudden appearance, and in the easy way in which Thea walked on with him. Comradeship?—yes, it might very well be that on her part, and nothing else; the same airy companionship she had often given to himself, Cassilis. His thoughts whirled round this, that, and the other point while he listened to Emily Darnton, who for reasons of her own was talking about Herries.

'We all like him so much. He lives at a place called Wandesleys, twelve miles away. A delightful old hall with a moat round it, a rusty portcullis that is never lowered, and a drawbridge that won't draw; all so nice! He went to Finland in May. It seems an interesting country. Have you ever been there, Dr. Cassilis?'

'No, never. I am nothing of a traveller.'

'Perhaps,' reflectively, 'there is something Satanic about travelling. "Going to and fro on the earth" was an ancient and favourite occupation of the "auld Mahoun." '

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'I should say that is an excellent reason for good Christians to do likewise. Why should Satan enjoy himself and his betters mope? '

Emily laughed a little.

'I can understand sorrowful people travelling,' she said, 'but if you are happy, why not stay where you are? '

'Does that refer to Mr. Herries? Did he travel for sorrow or joy?'

'Sorrow,' with mock gravity, 'or at least, we all thought so. We believed he went to Finland because Thea snubbed him.'

'He appears to have recovered from the snub. Is Finland a cure for depression of that kind? '

'I am telling you all the affairs of the Corner! '

'Do I not also belong to the Corner? '

'That is why I tell you. Ah, now we are out of the woods,' in a tone of relief. 'I do not like them when they are dark and ghostly and full of poachers. This field is more human.'

'I seem to be always asking questions. Are not poachers human? '

'They are very unpleasant. Perhaps you will say that is human? '

'The thought crossed my mind. But I understand your feeling about the woods; a field is not so uncanny. Also, we can see the lights in our friend Pugh's house; signs that we are approaching "haunts of happy men." '

'I should hardly imagine Mr. Pugh a particularly happy man.'

'Why not? He seems so to me. There is no happiness so great as that of believing your neighbours

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wicked, and being in a position to watch their doings. The hardened saint and the perfect sinner are the happy men. It's the bumping up and down between those extremes that upsets the average human.'

'I suppose so. Yet I see no reason why such oscillation should exist.'

'Human nature,' responded Cassilis. 'Or what is the same thing, free-will bestowed upon a handful of dust. What wonder that the dust develops erratic action at times.'

After the gloom of the woods, the starlit field seemed wide and light, the oaten stubble having the effect of dusky sand, through which the dim little procession passed along the narrow path. Then the lane, the high road, and that deepest night of the fir plantation, with the steel-like gleam of the black water of the mere beneath the flickering lightning.

Cassilis paused a moment as they crossed the bridge.

'I have never seen anything so weird as this end of the mere,' he said. 'It seems to possess a sinister fascination, a drawing on as it were, like a magnet. One thinks of it after one has left it.'

'Yes, I know what you mean. It is like a bad dream. I told Thea so one day, but she did not agree with me. She said it had a tragic beauty.'

'So it has. One wants to hear the tragedy. Has the mere a story? '

'Now that I know. How cheerful Outwood looks! ' — as they emerged from the plantation shadows and saw the old house above them, brightly lit and with wide-open doors.

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'I thought you people were never coming,' called Occleston, appearing in the doorway with his wife and several guests. 'Do you know you are ten minutes late?

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CHAPTER XXII

ON this hot night the long windows of the Outwood dining-room were open and uncurtained, so that one looked from the brightness and the lights on to the terrace and the glimmering mere below, with its dark line of fringing woods and the dim horizon beyond, where the summer lightning flickered on its background of cloud.

The cool moist air coming up from the lake mingled in the room with the fragrance of carnations— red and blush, white and salmon-coloured—decking the long table. Thea too wore the same flowers at her throat, but hers were the old-world deep crimson clove-scented ones, looking darker still against the pale yellow of her gown. She sat opposite, between Herries and a thin grey-haired man whom Cassilis did not know. Except the Quality Corner contingent, most of the guests were strange to him, including a bland church dignitary whom he presently found to be the Bishop of Woffendale. His lordship sat next to Mrs. Occleston, talking much and softly, and appeared to be an adept in the art of not hearing anything he did not wish to hear. So the conversation swept on without let or hindrance.

'I tell you,' said George Occleston energetically, replying to some remark of Rudell's, 'man is born to be kicked as the sparks fly upward! '

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Here the Bishop's face twitched, but he made no comment, and Occleston continued.

ʽIt's wholesome for him. If every Home and Foreign Secretary had a sound kick administered to him on entering office, we should be astonished at the result.'

'I don't doubt that,' said the thin man drily.

ʽI mean, it would be a good result. A friendly kicking, you know. This sort of thing: "My dear fellow, don't make an ass of yourself. Here is a kick to help you to silence and common sense." There is too much talking. Listen to the perpetual chatter everywhere on imperial matters, and contrast it with the dignified reticence when the nation was contending with war abroad and the mutiny at the Nore at one and the same time. And why the difference? Because a man with a joint of roast mutton and a bottle of port under his waistcoat felt inclined to hold his tongue and use some genial common sense. Nowadays he swallows lemonade, puffs a cigarette, and jabbers like my old aunt's parrot, and with as much knowledge of his subject as the bird! '

ʽTalking of aunts and parrots,' said a young naval lieutenant to Emily Darnton, who sat between him and the Bishop, ʽI had an awful time with one just lately.'

ʽWith an aunt? '

ʽNo, with a parrot. Oh', and with the aunt too, in the end.'

And the lieutenant proceeded to relate the tale in an undertone, while the main current of the conversation swung on.

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'George believes that modern Socialism is the result of tinned meats and teetotal principles,' said Herries, laughing.

'So it is,' responded his host. 'Feed a man on beef and ale and thrash him judiciously when young, and he will become a reasonable being, loyal and Godfearing. Give him potted salmon and tea, and unlimited petting, and he will yell himself hoarse in Trafalgar Square and live under police supervision.'

'But do you not consider that people think more than they used to do? ' said the thin man.

'Oh, thinkers never do anything.'

'That,' observed Cassilis, 'is just as well, for when thinkers take to doing, it is usually undoing.'

Which remark caused the Bishop to regard him critically.

'Quite so,' assented Occleston, 'they are all alike, big thinkers and little ones. That fellow in Woffendale, Hay, who writes books to prove that everything is something else, and that he himself is considerably wiser than the Almighty, is own brother to Pugh here, who would cheerfully destroy the empire to stop me from preserving the game, supposing that the one depended on the other.'

'Is Mr. Hay an educated man?' enquired the Bishop.

'He is not a cultivated one,' responded Basset. 'I have seen a dictionary in his house. No cultivated man owns a dictionary.'

'But suppose you come across such a word as "amphihexahedral," ' suggested Parfitt.

'Ignore it. The base jargon of science is on a level with thieves' slang and lawyers' English; an

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unpleasant dialect invented by a troublesome body of men for their own convenience. A cultivated man has no use for such perversion of sound.'

The Bishop smiled. 'I am charmed to make your acquaintance, Mr. Basset.'

'Most people are, my lord. I shall hope to continue in your good opinion.'

'Quality Corner is undoubtedly an attractive place,' the Bishop turned gallantly to Emily. 'As a bachelor, I am uncertain whether to regret the distance between it and Woffendale, or to rejoice that I am so far removed from disturbing influences.'

Emily Darnton was looking her best this evening. She wore black, but it was black of the fluffy and sparkling kind. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed, her chestnut hair shining in the lamplight, as she replied gaily:

'I fear you would not always approve of us. What would you say if I confessed to having burnt Blair's sermons because I was so tired of them? '

'Don't tell anybody,' responded the Bishop, lowering his voice, 'but I once did worse than that. I sold the "Whole Duty of Man" for two white mice! I beg you not to repeat this, Miss Darnton. It would be such an excellent paragraph for the evening papers.'

Woffendale's prelate had seen more than fifty years of this curious world, but those years had polished, not eroded him. As Emily noted the well set-up figure, the keen features, the shrewd yet not unkindly glitter of the eye, the bland self-possession of the manner, with its faint shade of coquetry—if such a word may be applied to a priest; she mentally decided that the Right Reverend Father was not fatherly;

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that, in short, the Bishop might be regarded as standing beside other men in the marriage market. Of course he was not James Cassilis, but the thought crossed Emily's mind that if Cassilis married Thea, she—Emily—might find consolation in ruling the episcopal palace and its master. 'I could never face a solitary life,' she reflected. 'I should be so bored.' Then she glanced across the table at Thea and Herries. If Herries won, Emily did not for a moment doubt that she herself would ultimately marry Cassilis. He was just then attending to the wants of his right-hand neighbour, a pretty woman with fair hair.

'Yes,' Emily heard her say, 'we live quite near to Mr. Herries. It will be so pleasant when he is married.'

Evidently the fair-haired woman regarded the girl sitting opposite as the future mistress of that old moated home called Wandesleys. 'And doubtless she was right,' thought Cassilis himself, as he made some vague response. As far as appearance went they seemed well suited. Herries was a good-looking man, with a chivalrous gentleness of manner that was very attractive. At this moment he was speaking to Thea.

'The Outwood carnations are good this year. I see you remain faithful to the old crimson cloves.'

'My Sops-in-Wine, as Spenser calls them. Yes, I like them best. Is it not Spenser? ' smilingly appealing to Cassilis.

Herries noticed the glance and a swift shadow crossed his face. Just as he himself had been an unexpected surprise to Cassilis, so also he now felt the same shock in discovering a stranger so evidently occupying the position of friend and comrade at

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Number Two, Quality Corner. He mentally called himself names for having stayed away so long. Then he reflected that his continual presence would not have helped him, considering the cause of his absence. He had gone away as a result of a distinctly unsatisfactory interview with Thea; then had resolved to take heart and see what time might bring him. This, however, did not promise well. He took a quick yet comprehensive survey of Cassilis and decided that he was likely to prove a dangerous rival; a rival, too, who was always on the spot; whereas he—Herries— lived a dozen miles from Ringway.

'"Bring Coronations and Sops-in-Wine," ' quoted Cassilis in reply. 'Yes, I think it is Spenser.'

'But why were the flowers called Sops-in-Wine? ' asked the fair-haired woman.

'Because,' answered Thea, 'their scent and colour reminded people of the cake floating in wine that was offered to wedding guests. I like those old flower names; Bachelors' Buttons, Fair Maids of France, and all the rest.'

'So do I,' said Herries. Then he addressed Cassilis. 'Perhaps you are interested in old books? I have some curious black-letter things at Wandesleys that I should be pleased to show you.'

'Thank you. I should like to see them very much.' Here Occleston's voice broke in, arguing with somebody:

'... And that's what comes of our scientific knowledge. Scientific engineering wanted to make that precious Channel Tunnel! '

'I have always regarded science as another form of the devil,' observed Basset placidly, 'a popular

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form, you know. It has poisoned the air and the water, has filled our towns with men and women inferior to their fathers, and now it is busy poisoning our fields and our animals, and has attempted, as George says, to destroy our great wet ditch around our island fortress. I trust,' turning to the Bishop, 'you will pardon my allusion to the Enemy of mankind? It is perhaps somewhat of a trespass on your preserves.'

'Not at all, Mr. Basset, not at all,' responded the Bishop sweetly. 'I am inclined to think that the laity have greater proprietary rights in those coverts than ourselves.'

'I assure you my only sin is that of encouraging other sinners.'

'So I heard this morning,' drily.

'Ah,' murmured Basset, 'my friend the curate! ' Then aloud, 'Surely you do not wholly condemn my sympathy? If I could persuade you to dine with me, I have little doubt that I should succeed in convincing you of the wisdom of my views.'

'Are your dinners so serious as that? '

'So beneficial. I never use the word "serious" in connection with dinner. To do so defeats the object of the meal. May I hope for your presence at my table?'

'In two months' time, Mr. Basset, I shall be most happy. I am going away till October. On my return, if you will invite me to Quality Corner,' here the Bishop's eyes rested a moment on Emily Darnton,

'I shall deem myself fortunate.'

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'Basset will be fortunate,' said Occleston from the other end of the table. 'It is high time the church

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took him in hand. Of all the sacrilegious old Pagans——! '

'Gently,' interposed Basset.

'I don't believe a parson ever enters his house except to quarrel with him,' Occleston went on.

'That is why I do not like them,' said Basset plaintively, and the Bishop smiled.

'He has no proper respect for the clergy,' George persisted. 'I tell him they are one of the main sources of our supply of heroes. Recipe for a good soldier: — take a parson father, a quiet pottering parson; a clever mother; and there is your soldier! '

Whereupon Woffendale's Bishop looked thoughtful. 'If,' continued Occleston, 'we could raise an army of sons of country parsons and Quakers and tried soldiers of that stamp, we could sweep the earth! — and then go on and clear out the Bottomless Pit. There's nothing like an out-of-door Puritan ancestry; let folks scoff as they please. Look at the men of the Mutiny time!—the men who saved India for us. It is astonishing how many of them came from homes of that sort. Yes, and were thoroughly good fellows themselves too.'

'Ah, yes,' said the Bishop softly,—

'All that chivalry of His,
The soldier-saints.

I am proud to belong to the same nation as they. As for others who have served their country well, yet have failed in their private lives, these are our gifted pagans. Paganism judges a man by his public life only, leaving him pretty much to his own devices aside from his duty to his country.'

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'Then,' remarked Basset, 'I am certainly no pagan, for I think my private life is better than my public one! '

'I am afraid,' the Bishop responded with extreme suavity, 'that Christianity demands the whole of a man's life, both public and private.'

'That is so, I admit. I am aware there is no loophole for escape. But I protest I have the greatest possible respect for the clergy. That they do not often come to my house is purely a matter of incompatibility. I confess their goodness terrifies me. Is is possible that my wickedness terrifies them? '

'I will certainly come and dine with you, Mr. Basset,' said the Bishop with decision.

Supper is a lingering meal, and perhaps the grouse suppers at Outwood were even more elongated than most of their kind. But even an Outwood grouse supper comes to an end. The last tales were told, the last arguments over, and the departing guests were standing at the door saying good-night. The night had not changed. There was the same violet star-strewn sky, the same cloudy horizon with its flickering lightning, the same dark mere below.

Only in the south-west Antares no longer blazed. The Scorpion had dipped with the turning earth, and was gone.

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'We are late,' said someone.
'No,' said Tony Occleston, 'we are early. It all depends upon which side of the clock you look at it.'
'Why, what time is it? ' asked Parfitt, who was standing within the door.
And Cassilis, on the terrace without, answered unthinkingly,

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'Half-past twelve.'
As he spoke, the pale lightning gleamed over his face, and suddenly, more swiftly than the gleam, Parfitt remembered the hot night in Bramsall ten years ago, when Cassilis—younger, despairing—looked out from a window in the shabby little street, and asked the question which he himself had just now asked, receiving the same answer that Cassilis had just now given. Mark drew a long breath of satisfaction.
'How very curious,' he said, addressing Cassilis, 'that we should repeat the same enquiry and reply ten years after. I have frequently wondered where we had met before, but could not recollect till now. It was in Bramsall. You asked me what time it was as I passed along the street, and I told you half-past twelve. The date was the sixth of August.'
'I also recollect the circumstance,' said Cassilis. 'It is certainly curious.'
'I had an idea you needed help of some sort that night,' continued the artist, and paused.
'I think I did.'
'So I turned back when I reached the end of the street, but could not identify the house. There were so many of the little rat-holes, and all alike. Afterwards I heard some fellow had poisoned himself in one of them, and I naturally thought it was you, as your question was an odd one considering that you were indoors and I out, and intending suicides are given to queer fancies. But I was mistaken, for here you stand alive. Curious that all these years I should have been thinking of you as a dead man—that is, when I chanced to think of you at all.'
By this time Herries, standing close to both, had

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intuitively become aware that Parfitt was busily working a rack on which Cassilis was stretched; and with instinctive generosity he interposed.
'Occleston wishes to speak to you, I believe,' he said, turning to Mark and glancing into the hall where their host stood talking. Parfitt understood perfectly and was inclined to resent the interference, but there was that about Herries' voice and manner which made Mark feel rather as though he had received a spiritual black eye, with the not distant prospect of another. So reflecting that he had certainly got Cassilis at last, and could give the rack an extra screw whenever he pleased, he drew back and joined the group round George Occleston.
Herries turned to Cassilis.
'My place lies over there in a straight line,' he remarked casually, with a nod across the mere, 'only ten miles off. I shall be happy to welcome you, Dr. Cassilis, any time you have a spare day. Tony here will show you the way.'
'Thank you,' replied Cassilis. 'I will come with great pleasure,'

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‘So will I,’ Anthony chimed in. ‘I have not been to Wandesleys for ages.’ Then he added in Emily Darnton’s ear, ‘Good fellow, Herries! Snubbed Parfitt well, didn’t he! ’

‘Yes, but I did not quite hear what Mr. Parfitt was saying.’ This in a low voice as she and Tony walked down the drive.

‘Oh, Cassilis seems to have been in Bramsall ten years ago, and hard-up. I call it downright low to remind a fellow of his poverty.’

Herries’ interpretation of Parfitt’s observations was

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not so simple. He thought there certainly was something odd about that night ten years ago, not because Parfitt’s manner hinted it, but because his keener perceptions and his sympathy with Cassilis told him so. Kindly feeling impelled him to give the invitation. He was quite willing to receive his rival at his house. There Cassilis would at least be well away from Quality Corner.

During the brief scene, Thea had arrived at the same conclusion as Tony Occleston. Also, she had never liked Herries so well as when his easy interposition freed Cassilis from his tormentor. But her grateful glance did not cheer the deliverer’s breast. It revealed too much interest in the victim. Yet Herries contrived to be Thea’s companion when—a few minutes later—the Quality Corner people started on their return journey.

‘I did not know you were coming with us,’ she observed as they crossed the bridge in the fir plantation.

‘Only to the woods. I am riding home to-night.’

‘Are you? I wish I were riding too. Not home, but anywhere. In this blue darkness, with the lightning and the stars, one might meet all the people of whom one has ever heard.’

Herries was not, like Cassilis, able to follow the most erratic swallow-flights of thought, but he understood the restless mood that sent them winging; and therefore proceeded to say something which he hoped would be pleasant.

‘It would probably be better than meeting some of the people one sees. Parfitt, for instance, is a disagreeable

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fellow. How long does he mean to stay in Quality Corner? ’

‘I do not know. You are very good.’

‘Am I? ’ The praise did not appear to give any great satisfaction, for Herries’ tone was melancholy.

‘You seem to be able to manage Mr. Parfitt. I was surprised.’

‘Oh, that is not difficult.’ He paused; then resumed: ‘I am good, and I can manage Parfitt. I suppose I must be content with that.’

‘It is high praise. Nobody has hitherto succeeded in managing Mr. Parfitt.’

‘I will come over to Quality Corner and keep him in order.’

‘Yes, do,’ said Thea absently. She was thinking of that scene at the door of Outwood, and was not pleased. True, Cassilis had replied with the utmost calmness, had certainly held his ground; but Parfitt had not been quelled, had not retreated one inch. It was Herries who had compelled him to retire. Now no woman likes to see the man for whom she has a preference unable effectually to control another man. In her compassion there was a distinct tinge of disappointment, and her anger against Parfitt rose the more

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vehemently by reason of that disappointment. If Herries had hoped for encouragement when he spoke of coming to Quality Corner, he understood well enough by her manner of acquiescence that she was indifferent to his visit except as it might aid Cassilis; and they walked on for a few minutes in silence. Then the woods were reached and Herries stopped.

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'Good-night,' he said.

'Oh, I had forgotten you were not coming any farther with us. Good-night! ' holding out her hand.

Herries held it a moment.

'Do not let Parfitt annoy you. He is a bird of passage and will soon be gone. Here are the others,' as several dusky figures approached.

'What? Going, Herries? ' said Basset, who was the foremost. 'Come and dine with us next week. Any day will do.'

And in the general leave-taking, Thea and Cassilis strolled on into the olive gloom of the woods.

Herries sighed as he strode back along the field- path, but he knew right well that his only chance lay in steady patience. Then he thought of Parfitt and frowned. What was the difficulty about that night in Bramsall? There had been an ugly look on the artist's face. Herries had interfered, and, given the chance, would do so again, but he rather wished he knew the story, if there was a story. Perhaps it was nothing much, yet Basset really ought to be more careful how he admitted strangers to his house on intimate terms. At this point Herries pulled himself up, for, recalling Cassilis as he had seen him to-night, he felt the attraction that the wanderer had for most of his fellow-men. Besides, it suddenly occurred to Herries that Parfitt might also be a rival, and this idea made him very angry indeed. Which was unreasonable, as certainly Mark would be considered a more eligible suitor than the other. He had made himself a name and position, whereas Cassilis had neither. But Herries was observant, as became a good

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sportsman. He accurately summed up Parfitt as 'a cold-blooded brute,' and pondered wrathfully over the lamentable condition of Quality Corner till he reached Outwood again. There he bade good-night to Occleston and his wife, mounted his horse, and rode away into the night.

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CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN is one's sense of enjoyment the strongest? Is it when one sees one's string of jewels dropping into the abyss?— pleasures, hopes, dreams, all glittering for a moment ere they vanish. As the fern-scented darkness of the woods closed round Thea and himself, Cassilis felt that hour at least was his. All else had gone or was going; all his fairy jewels slipping from his grasp; his rainbow fading; his life lit only by that flickering lightning, that Handwriting on the Wall that had twice revealed him to his enemy; ten years ago in the dingy street, and now again on the terrace at Outwood. Well, here were the woods, sombre aisles of dusky leafage, and Thea, a dim figure—a clear voice in the dewy gloom; as she was that evening on the hillside.

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'We have the recipe of fern-seed, we walk invisible,' he quoted jestingly after a minute's silence.

'Are you pining for a moon? Or can you appreciate the starlight? '

'Is it starlight? I thought it was magic. This is a fairy night. Let us walk on to the end of the world and look over.'

Thea laughed softly. 'I should not care to look over. I am content with this world.'

'So am I—in these woods. Let us tell each other fairy-tales. Who is it that speaks of his life as "that Dark Fairy-tale"? '

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'I know, but I forget.'

'Well,' Cassilis paused a moment. Should he say anything respecting Parfitt's recognition of him? To what end? Yet he felt reluctant to keep silence when Thea had stood by him on the terrace, hearing and seeing Mark's words and manner and Herries' interposition. To say nothing seemed to admit Parfitt's insolence as deserved. Yet to say all would undoubtedly be to condemn himself utterly, for who would believe? Still poor human nature clamoured to justify itself, to place itself favourably by saying a little—only a little. And here was Cassilis his own old self, the hesitating self that had wrecked him. A stronger man would either have kept silence or have owned all.

'I was two years in Bramsall,' he said, 'and while there I fell into great poverty.'

'I am sorry,' and her voice partook of the dewy softness of the night.

'Thank you. But there are worse things even than poverty, though not many. I found a friend, who rescued me. Then I lost him—by death. I caught fever about that time. It was then that, standing one night at the open window, I asked the time of a passerby. The stranger was Parfitt. It was a foolish question; I don't know why I asked it. Naturally he thought it curious.'

'I do not see that it was or is any concern of Mr. Parfitt's.'

'Doubtless he expects an explanation. And I have none to give.'

'Is not Mr. Parfitt being made of too much importance? Why not ignore him? '

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'I will. This is the end of my fairy-tale.'

'It is too short. You have brought in the Ogre and disposed of him; but where is the rest of the story? '

'Not lived yet. You see, this is a real fairy-tale.'

Then he thought of the countless human lives, each one a different story, yet all finished by the same hand; that of the Rider on the Pale Horse.

'Real fairy-tales always end happily,' said Thea.

'Then I shall hope mine will.' But he knew it would not.

There was a subtle difference in the woodland. At ten o'clock there had been a sense of drowsy life; nothing was slumbering, only sinking into slumber; and the sunburnt open spaces gave up the dry curious odour of scorched grass and earth. Now, past midnight, that hot scent of summer was drowned in dew; the damp air redolent of moss and fern, and all the trees were sleeping. So profound was the slumber of the woods that the little sounds were well-nigh hushed; the tide of life was at the ebb.

The two walked on, each pondering the Dark Fairy-tale. Thea, with a gentle pity, thinking that Cassilis was unduly sensitive on the subject of his poverty. Cassilis

himself wondering what respite fate would give him. And now and then the perfume of Thea's carnations floated round them, fugitive breaths of clove fragrance in the dewiness. Presently she spoke: 'Do the midnight woods seem unreal to you? '

'No, not unreal. A different reality.'

'Yes, that is it. Perhaps when we say unreal we only mean unusual. It is our ignorance that speaks. Why should we not be more familiar with these differing

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realities, these unusual moods of the woods? We seem to neglect some of the loveliest aspects of the world.'

'Most of us do. But I cannot imagine anyone being more familiar with these woods than you are.'

'One never really knows them,' she replied. 'They change hourly. Can you tell where you are? We are passing the chestnut.'

'Your tree of knowledge? We do not seem to be in an open space.'

'We are on the other side of the tree.' She stopped a moment, then put a cool fan-shaped leaf into Cassilis's hand. 'Feel, that is chestnut.'

'So it is. Are there more books hidden in its trunk? '

'Not to-night. Now you can see the hollow on the left.'

They emerged from deepest shadow into starlight once more, and Cassilis looked at the silver-grey undulating ground sloping away downward, then dimly rising beyond. A murmur of voices reached them as again they passed into shadow.

'The others are walking more quickly,' said Thea, turning her head to look back, though no one was to be seen. 'Probably they are quarrelling. People never walk quickly on summer nights unless they are quarrelling. As for Emily and Tony, they seem to have disappeared altogether.'

'They were in front of us,' said Cassilis.

'Perhaps they have been quarrelling too, and have therefore reached home already,' Thea suggested with that rippling laugh of hers.

Cassilis laughed too. 'Quarrelling is so simple and

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easy,' he said, 'so thoroughly within the scope of everybody; and moreover, admits of such infinite variety, that it is really admirably adapted for the general occupation of mankind.'

'And agreement? '

'That demands other and rarer qualities.'

'Does not someone say that there are times when peace belongs to Satan, but that the fight is God's? '

'Ah, fighting is another matter. It is not quarrelling. To fight well needs every good quality that human nature can possess. The reason people quarrel so much is because they are devoid of the necessary gifts for fighting. No good fighter wastes his strength on trivial squabbles.'

'Evidently there are very few good fighters in the world,' said Thea musingly. After a moment or two she asked, 'What do you think of the Bishop? '

'I liked him. He seemed to have "good gifts and possibilities." '

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'He will be a new element in Quality Corner,' Thea continued. 'I am always interested when the Corner gains a new element.'

Thus talking in desultory fashion, they drifted on till the lapis-lazuli gloom of the sleeping woods gave place to the pale starlit road, so silent now in the heart of the night. Even the very dust seemed to lie closer, and the hedge-shadows were thicker, more velvety. The night, too, along the open road was not so protective; more impish, less feminine as it were; those velvet hedge-shadows less alluring, more menacing than the woodland glooms; no gracious soft-armed Dryads taking form and shape, but tricky gnomes, grotesque and mocking. The good hour in

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the woods was over. Yonder at the bottom of the hill were the faint lights of Quality Corner, and Cassilis realised afresh how ominously had begun the new chapter of his Dark Fairy-tale.

Then, presently, he and his companion turned into the Corner, where Emily Darnton and Tony Occleston were waiting; and their friendliness and Basset's warmed his heart anew. Cassilis was glad too that the Rudells and Parfitt passed on to Number Four without stopping. Let the Dark Fairy-tale rest to-night. He had read enough.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE day following the Grouse Supper was Sunday; hot and blue, with a west wind blowing softly—a wind that had come up from the sea with the dawn. It blew the sound of the church bells all over the town, and Quality Corner dressed itself and walked to church. Cassilis, from his dining-room window, watched them go. Basset, Thea, Emily Darnton; followed by Rudell, his wife, and Mark Parfitt; finally, Tony Occleston overtaking the first three with a rush. Then the sound of the bells and the sound of passing feet alike ceased, and the wind alone fluttered the Sunday quiet.

Cassilis had two or three patients to see, and he took the longest road to each, trying to walk off the turmoil of feeling that still surged within him. The green peace of this place; and the mockery of it! He felt inclined to laugh as he recalled the rest it promised. Rest?—why from that first evening when he saw Parfitt again after ten years he had been in spirit running like any poor hunted beast. He could look back on all the run; from the start and the quickening of the pace, to the breathless rush now. He slightly wondered what would be Parfitt's next attack. Then he told himself he did not care. Whatever it was, he was sure to go down before it.

One of his patients lived below the church, and on his way Cassilis turned into the churchyard, intending

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to cross it and descend into the vale by the steps. In the sunny stillness the deep tones of the organ floated out. The 'Te Deum' was being sung, and he paused for a moment to listen. Then, to his surprise, he saw that Thea Basset was sitting on the wooden bench round the old yew-tree by the southern porch. She turned her head and greeted him with a little smiling nod as he advanced.

'Did you find the church too warm? ' he asked.

'I have not been in it,' she replied.

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'But I thought I saw you go this morning.'

'Certainly. I escorted Daddy and Emily to the west door, and then retired hither.'

'But why? ' in astonishment.

She laughed. 'You are very inquisitive. Sit down and I will tell you.'

Cassilis sat down very willingly.

'Now listen,' said she; and there followed a silence of some minutes, during which the 'Te Deum' seemed to swing out of the church with the tramp of an army. Let us reverently thank Heaven that our Christian hymns and creeds were composed in martial ages. They have the ring of steel; the cry of life and death; the passion of supplication and praise. Our modern prayers smack of the counter, and have precisely the same grace and fervour—that is, none.

Sitting thus, a sense of remoteness stole over Cassilis, as on St. John's Day, when he had come with Thea in the early morning. It was good to be here. Once more he was the Monk Felix; listening, unconscious of time.

The closing chords ceased, and the only sound was the rustle of the trees in the warm wind.

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'I am listening,' said Cassilis enquiringly.

'Did you hear the "Te Deum"? ' she asked.

'Yes; but you said you would explain your reason for sitting here.'

'That,' with a wave of her hand, 'is a part of it. Occasionally I give myself this luxury of sitting outside the church on Sunday. One feels like the spirits on the green hillside in Dante. You read Dante? '

'Long ago I read him.'

' Then you will remember those spirits who are neither in Heaven nor Hell, not even in Purgatory; but are only waiting, listening to chants of angels, and talking of their own earthly life. Now, to sit here in this warm greenness and hear the service going on always reminds me of that hillside. Do you see the idea? '

'I see it perfectly. It is a kind of playing at being a ghost.'

The organ notes rolled out from the church again.

'There is the "Jubilate," ' said Thea, looking dreamily over the valley lying below in the August sunshine; and another listening silence succeeded. The 'Jubilate' died away and the Creed followed, ringing clearly over the churchyard. If ever words were beaten into steel by force of human feeling, those of the Creed were so beaten. It is a challenge to the world, a sword drawn in the world's face. One can hardly refrain from shouting it. Then the voices sank to the murmur of prayer, and still Cassilis and Thea sat silent.

'Truly she was right,' he thought. Here was the angel-guarded resting-place of grass and flowers, with blowing, scented winds; and here he sat waiting with

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Hell behind him. What lay before him he could not tell; but assuredly not Paradise. The words rose to his lips:

'Most of those waiting spirits are tardy penitents, are they not? They have not repented till the hour of death. I am recalling the passage. They wait to pass to Purgatory, and thence to Paradise; their bliss is certain, though delayed; they speak serenely of their past misdeeds, and are happy. It is a singular kind of happiness.'

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'In what way is it singular? '

'That they should consider their repentance obliterates those misdeeds.'

'And does it not? '

'Very rarely. It is impossible that their wrong-doing should not have affected others. Then what about those others? Are they also happy, or have their lives been spoilt? If the latter, how is it that the spoilers feel no remorse—are serene and happy? '

'The wrong-doing may have turned out well for those injured,' said Thea.

'Sometimes; but not in the majority of cases. We can see that for ourselves all round us. Repentance is good, doubtless, for the individual; but it seems to be regarded as restitution—reparation—which it is not, and cannot be. Suppose a man fired a cannon-ball down a crowded street. He might repent with the utmost sincerity, but his repentance would neither heal the maimed nor restore the dead. Moreover, his repentance would not check the course of the ball. It would go on maiming and destroying till its initial velocity was exhausted. No repenting can wipe out the

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past. A man may throw away the thirty pieces, and even hang himself; but his treachery remains and grows and bears its fruit.'

Cassilis paused a moment. He was looking over the valley, and speaking with a quiet intensity. The girl beside him could not know along what sombre winding ways of painful thought he trod; but her listening sympathetic presence soothed him. He resumed:

' And remorse is the fitting and inevitable punishment, the private hell which each wrong-doer makes for himself, and which will assuredly be his whether he reaches Paradise or not. But it is a better hell than the other, for remorse is true repentance.'

'Then what becomes of Paradise? '

'It remains Paradise,' he said, turning to her with a sudden smile. 'It is rest and repentance, though not forgetfulness. I merely protested against the remarkable cheerfulness displayed by the destroyers of others' peace. Of course Dante is right. That is the usual attitude of repentant sinners. They wish to forget, and they generally do.'

Another silence. Then Thea spoke:

'Surely in Paradise remorse would fade in time, as the sunshine whitens all things.'

'In long ages it might be so,' with another smile. 'The idea gives hope certainly.'

'I can hardly believe the pain of remorse should last for ever.'

'Except as a remembered pain perhaps. For the Christian there is no Lethe.'

'I do not think one would desire Lethe? '

Again the silence—the silence which is the surest test of comradeship. The wind blew showers of poppy

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petals over the low wall from the cottagers' gardens just without—wonderful petals, lavender and crimson, scarlet, pale violet and rose; strewing the grass and the mossy stones. Fragrance of sun-warmed stocks, too, came on the wind with the poppy petals.

Cassilis spoke as though there had been no pause in the conversation.

'You are right,' he said with shining eyes, 'one would not desire Lethe. You may even be right respecting the gradual fading of remorse as a stain fades. Perhaps if I sat here long enough I might agree with you in all things.'

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‘That would be a pity,’ she replied gravely. ‘A little variety is better.’

‘So it is,’ he agreed. ‘People often forget that, don’t they?—and develop a craze for moulding others; destroying the very individuality that attracts them. Pulling off the butterfly’s wings and then reproaching the poor thing for crawling.’

Cassilis paused again, and the wind blew more poppy petals over the wall.

‘There is Dante’s glow of colour on the grass,’ he said, looking at the scarlet and violet flecks. ‘We should grow very wise if we stayed long on this hillside, apart from the world, and looking down on life as we look down on the valley. But the insistent cricket-calls of daily existence summon us. One must always leave everything for them. We let even the dinner-bell draw us from Heaven—perhaps the only Heaven we shall ever have. Even this hillside is but a brief resting-place. Do you hear the sermon ending? Not my sermon, but the one in there,’ glancing towards the church.

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‘Yes.’ She leant back against the tree-trunk and looked up into the yew branches, dark beneath the jewel-blue. ‘I think you are mistaken in objecting to the cricket-calls. They prevent weariness of peace. You would grow tired of the hillside if you were not called away.’

‘No, I should not.’

‘Not? ’

‘No, I think the capacity for growing tired of things and people was somehow left out of my composition. I do not remember ever wearying of anything that has seemed pleasant to me.’

Cassilis rose as he spoke. He would not stay till the worshippers came out of church. The fragrant peace of that summer morning should remain unbroken in his memory.

‘I am obeying a cricket-call now,’ he continued. ‘I have a patient to see down in the vale.’

‘ Then good-bye till this evening,’ she replied, and watched him going away over the blowing poppy- strewn grass to the gap in the wall so considerately left by the old builders, that the wayfarer might take the shortest cut to the steep steps down the hillside. At the gap Cassilis turned and looked back at the graceful figure sitting on the bench beneath the yew. Seeing him turn, Thea smiled and waved her hand with a slight outward gesture that struck him like a remembered stab. Just so had his dead friend often bidden him farewell. He hesitated a moment, taking off his hat and standing bareheaded in the sunshine, reluctant to leave that place of silent sunny rest. The very gesture that startled, yet drew him. It had so strange and yet so familiar a charm. But he would

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not—could not go back to mingle with the crowd that in another minute would stream out of the old porch. He would remember that hillside only as the resting- place of Dante’s vision; a place of grass and flowers, with sound of psalms and blowing winds; and with not only peace but companionship. So he went away down the worn old steps to the valley below.

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CHAPTER XXV

ON Sunday afternoon Quality Corner was usually wrapped in slumber. At Number Two Basset dozed peacefully in his arm-chair by the wood fire, his fingers resting on a favourite book, and the summer wind lifting his white hair. Outside on the verandah, Thea and Emily were discussing last night's supper.

'I cannot decide,' said Emily, 'whether I enjoyed myself amazingly or not at all.'

Thea laughed. 'Why decide? Make up your mind that you enjoyed yourself tolerably well.'

'I didn't. I was either at the zenith or the nadir. Perhaps I was alternately at one or the other.' A pause. Then Emily added, 'Thea, I think I shall marry into the church.'

'What is your reason? I mean, who is your reason? '

'I told you I needed employment. There is lots of employment in the church.'

'I should think looking after one man quite employment enough.'

'If one is in love with him. But nobody falls in love with a clergyman; it would not be proper. To marry into the church is to choose a vocation. What are you laughing at? '

'Really I cannot follow the workings of your mind.' 'No wonder! I can hardly follow them myself.'

'But why marry if you are not in love? '

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'Have I not told you the reason? For employment.'

'Better wait and see if you can meet the right man.'

'Oh, I am not in a hurry. I am merely turning over the idea in my mind. But how seldom one meets the right man! If one cannot get wine, one must be content with water.'

'I do not see the necessity. Wherefore this sudden fancy for the church? It appears to date from last night. Also, I should rather describe the Bishop as one of those teetotal beverages which are considerably stronger than water.'

'I am not sure that I was thinking of the Bishop when I said that.'

'Of whom were you thinking? '

'Of no one. Of almost everyone. You see, I am looking for a husband, you expect a husband to look for you. Yes, the longer I reflect, the more impossible it becomes to decide whether I enjoyed the supper or not! Did I ever tell you that when I was in Devon with my aunt a few years ago, I met a doctor who, before we left, wrote me a note which may or may not have been a proposal. I could not tell, for it was written in the usual medical hieroglyphics. So I replied with vague sweetness that I was going home. I did not dare to say more. I could only read his signature. The rest looked like "an ounce of quinine to be taken every ten minutes," or something of that sort.'

'A chemist would have read it for you, a young sympathetic chemist.'

'So he would! What a truly gorgeous idea! I wish I had thought of it. Who knows what I may have missed? '

'Is it too late? '

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'Much too late: I have forgotten his name.'

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The conversation flowed on; the summer wind ruffled the leaves, making flickering shadows on the garden paths; and within Basset still slept in his chair. Presently he was aroused by the entrance of Rudell.

‘Ah, sit down,’ said Basset, ‘and I will get up a bottle of Burgundy.’

‘No, thanks. Look here; there is something queer about Cassilis.’

‘Nonsense! ’

‘I am afraid there is. You must really listen.’

‘Well, what is it? Did he “keep company with the wild Prince and Polns”? ’

‘It is a serious matter,’ said Rudell impatiently. ‘I am not fond of my brother-in-law, as you know, but look at this drawing of his, and observe its date.’ And Rudell spread out on a table at Basset’s elbow, the charcoal drawing that Parfitt had made ten years before. Basset took it up.

‘Is it intended for Cassilis? ’

‘It is Cassilis. Done ten years ago in Bramsall. Parfitt saw him at a window of a house in Mill Street at half-past twelve that night;’ and Rudell related the circumstances.

‘What concern is this of ours? ’ Basset asked, laying down the drawing.

‘Of ours? Why, I want the matter cleared up. I want to know what Cassilis was doing there, and whether he was implicated in poor Thorold’s death.’

‘My dear Rudell,’ said Basset gravely, after a moment’s silence, ‘let us not permit ourselves to suspect a mutual friend of a crime when we have not the slightest reason to suppose that a crime was committed.’

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‘I have long thought that Thorold was poisoned by somebody who wished to get hold of that invention of his, whatever it is. You will remember it vanished, and we had no proof that it ever existed, save in his mind, he mentioned it so vaguely. Pity he did not speak of it more freely to us. We might then have been able to trace it. Anyway, it must have been a failure, since Cassilis is poor. That is some satisfaction.’

‘To speak of a man like Cassilis in connection with suspicions such as these is really—excuse me, Rudell— monstrous! ’

‘Any man is capable of anything,’ said Rudell the lawyer.

‘Not so. Besides, I don’t care what he is capable of. I like him, and that is enough.’

‘I like him too, yet it is not enough.’

‘It should be. I do not know when I have met anyone so companionable, not since we lost poor Thorold. Of course Cassilis has not Thorold’s sunny brilliancy. He is graver, saddened somehow, and without ambition.’

‘There you are wrong, Basset. A man with that head and face, that clear incisive voice, and that quietude of manner, is one who means or has meant to do something big.’

‘If you were right, he would not be contentedly settling down here.’

‘I am not sure of that. This may be his St. Helena, I wish to trace his Waterloo. He has dropped here from the clouds, so to speak.’

‘To be a stranger is not a crime.’

‘We know nothing about him. He does not seem to have any relations.’

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'For that most people would be disposed to envy him.'

'Oh, I grant that. But he must have some. Why not speak of them? If I have a brute of an uncle, I say I've a brute of an uncle. It is respectable to have relations, even if they do chance to be own brothers to the Gadarene swine.'

'I do not see that a man is obliged to speak of his relatives.'

'But I do. They ought to be there. Good, bad, or indifferent, they ought to be in evidence.'

'You are influenced by Parfitt. Probably he is a liar, he looks like one.'

'He does,' Rudell admitted; 'but what motive can he have for lying?'

'A thousand motives,' replied Basset. 'Instinctive antagonism for one thing. A pleasure in making mischief for another. That is the form which love of power takes in mean natures. They can make mischief and they do, and the subsequent racket gratifies them because they are the authors of it. They may not be able to colour a stained glass window, but they can heave a stone through it, and the smashing gives a sense of power—a perverted sense, of course.'

' Still, there is some truth in Parfitt's story, for he tells me he spoke of it to Cassilis last night as they were leaving Outwood, and Cassilis acknowledged he was in Bramsall ten years ago.'

'Why should the matter have been mentioned last night? '

'Because it was only then that Parfitt recollected where he had seen Cassilis. He says that next day he casually heard of a suicide in that street, and supposed

Cassilis was the man. Of course he means Thorold's death, but either he did not hear the name or has forgotten it, so he does not connect the rumour with Thea.'

'Your wife will enlighten him.'

'She only knows poor Thorold died in Bramsall, she is not aware of the circumstances. Therefore it is hardly probable that she will perceive any link between our loss and her brother's memory. Though,' added Rudell, 'I myself see no reason for concealment.'

Basset was silent for some minutes.

'I think,' he said at last, 'that you are a little surprised by my reluctance to reopen the question of Thorold's death. I admit I am most reluctant. I prefer to believe it accidental. Your vague suspicions are merely the result of your mind having been turned upon the subject by hearing of Mrs. Heald, or rather Stanham.'

'I mean to question that woman,' said Rudell doggedly, 'and I shall find that Cassilis was the missing lodger who was supposed to have left long before. No doubt he made it worth her while to tell that tale at the inquest. She looked a wretched creature, worn and haggard, one who would be glad to say anything for a little money.'

'I shall be sorry if you trouble her, Rudell. I believe I said so yesterday when you were speaking of seeing her.'

'Things have taken a more serious turn. I feel bound to ask a few questions.'

'Well, she is now in Woffendale. When she and Gresty are married and she returns to the farm, I hope you will pause and consider a little before you give the old sorrow new life.'

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'My dear Basset, setting aside the duty which I think we owe to poor Thorold, there is another consideration which does not seem to occur to you. Cassillis undoubtedly admires Thea. Suppose she were to marry him? '

Basset glanced towards the verandah.

'Take care she does not hear you. She is out there with Emily. Well, I hardly think the contingency probable. I consider she is more likely to marry Herries, though she has refused him. Neither would be exactly the man for her. I may say, however, that personally I should offer no objection to Cassilis, though I should then make enquiries concerning his family. As for the suspicion you are entertaining, it seems to me so preposterous that I cannot regard it seriously.'

'The thing is not impossible. You see, Basset, you have adopted another man's daughter, and that makes complications. I have never approved of her being called by your name instead of her own.'

'She is not called by it. I wished the name to be Thorold-Basset.'

'And of course everyone calls her Basset. In all probability Cassilis has never heard her name, unless he happened to notice Herries speaking to her. He is the only one who never forgets she is Thorold.'

'What can it possibly matter? '

'I mean, the name might have acted as a warning to Cassilis to ascertain who she was before paying her any particular attentions. The more I turn things over in my mind the more ominous they seem. If Cassilis was the other lodger, his presence would account for the prussic acid which has always puzzled me, as

Thorold had no reason for getting it. I am resolved to sift the matter to the bottom. His very silence about his past is suspicious.'

'No,' said Basset, 'your conjectures are of the wildest. Look at them calmly. Because a man happens to be at the same time in the same town in which we lose a friend, you imagine he must of necessity be concerned in that friend's death.'

'He owns to being in the same street on the same night.'

'What of that? It amounts to nothing, to less than nothing. In short, it is Parfitt's doing, and I feel surprised that you should give the fancy a moment's credence.'

'How came that prussic acid in Thorold's room? It is not a common poison. But given a doctor in the house, its presence is at once explained.'

'Prejudice—cruel prejudice,' was Basset's reply. 'Cassilis is coming to dine with us to-day and I shall be delighted to see him. It must be nearly dinner-time now. Six on Sunday, you know.'

'For sheer obstinacy, Basset, I do not know your equal.'

'Call it firmness. That sounds better. Ah, Cassilis, I was just telling Rudell I expected you.'

For once Rudell was taken aback. He and Basset had been too busy talking to notice the opening of the door, and Cassilis was always so swift and noiseless in his movements, that almost before they realised his presence he was standing by them—and on the table lay his own portrait.

He saw and recognised it at once, saw also the place

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and date written on one corner, and seeing, knew that his having been in Bramsall that night was the subject of discussion.

‘I was not aware,’ he said, glancing at the drawing, ‘that Mr. Parfitt had done me the honour of making a sketch of me.’

The situation was beyond Rudell, but Basset rose to it.

‘Perhaps I may be excused saying that I have never admired Mr. Parfitt’s talent. It is one which I consider might with advantage have remained wrapped in a napkin.’

‘Say anything you please,’ replied Rudell briskly, getting up. ‘I don’t think much of it myself.’

‘Of what? ’ The questioner was Emily Darnton. She and Thea were coming in from the verandah. ‘Oh, that! ’ perceiving the drawing. ‘Susette showed it to me a week or two ago and I did not recognise any likeness then.’

‘Perhaps the artist has touched it up since,’ Thea suggested, smiling at Cassilis.

‘I think that is extremely probable,’ observed Basset. Rudell rolled up the drawing.

‘I will tell him all opinions are adverse,’ he said. ‘Evidently his gift is not portraiture. Good-bye. See you again presently.’

As Rudell departed, Tony Occleston arrived, and his presence was welcome, giving a different direction to the general conversation and dispersing the vague discomfort created by Parfitt’s sketch. Over Cassilis himself, however, the glamour of the morning yet lingered, the spell of the green hillside where the tumult of life had seemed hushed for a little space; and so

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complete was the spell that even that portrait upon Basset's table had not—as yet—stirred his spirit to pain. That would come later. So he enjoyed himself, and Thea, seeing his mood, echoed it, talking with soft sparkle of merriment, perhaps the brighter for the underlying pity and the anger roused by Parfitt’s conduct. The Dark Fairy-tale dwelt in her mind, and in the drawing that Rudell carried away she intuitively perceived another page of that tale, though written in a character she could not decipher.

Basset also, resolved that Cassilis should not imagine him influenced by the incident of the portrait, talked his best and cheeriest, helped by Tony Occleston’s high spirits. Emily Darnton was the one who felt most difficulty in ignoring the shadow of the unknown past. Her curiosity respecting it was greater than Thea’s because her comprehension of Cassilis was less, and therefore she was the more inclined both to analyse and to question him. But her occasional lapses into puzzled thoughtfulness were few and unnoticed. The time passed lightly—easily—as it invariably did in Number Two, Quality Corner.

Later, when standing alone with Basset for a moment on the doorstep, Cassilis spoke of the drawing.

‘I feel,’ he said, ‘that I owe you an explanation. But I can give none. It is true that I was in Bramsall, in that street, on that night; and I asked the time of Mr. Parfitt as he passed. I had no particular reason for asking the time. I was much troubled, and spoke vaguely—unthinkingly—as men do when flung out of their ordinary grooves of thought. More than this I do not wish to say.’

‘My dear Cassilis, I desire no explanation. A friendship

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is slight indeed if, like a house of cards, a stranger's breath can blow it down. Parfitt is a fool, and I should be another if I heeded him.'

'You are most generous.'

'Not so. But I hope I am reasonable. And I decidedly object to the neighbourliness of the Corner being disturbed by a stranger who will soon be gone from among us—the sooner the better. Forget him, as I do. Good-night! '

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CHAPTER XXVI

FOR a time life flowed on much as usual in Quality Corner. The August heat gave place to August rain—stormy showers that swept along the ground, pursued by the swift wind.

On these wild grey days Basset increased his fires and his guests; Cassilis, Emily Darnton, and Tony Occleston dining at Number Two about four evenings a week, together with other contingents from Outwood and Woffendale. Herries too came over once or twice, and seemed fairly content with his reception. He renewed his invitation to Cassilis with marked friendliness, so that the latter went to Wandesleys, staying the night, when he and his host sat and talked amicably over a blazing fire while the rain beat on the old mullioned windows. He liked Herries; it was something to grasp another friendly hand. At that time Cassilis was possessed by a feverish desire to throw himself as much into the life of the Corner as possible, living as it were wholly in each hour, resolutely ignoring both past and future.

During these days Number Four was the one household in the Corner not entirely at ease. It was not unhappy, for no household can be considered unhappy that is concocting mischief. But its calm was ruffled. Rudell, though determined to question June Heald respecting her missing lodger, yet felt that his action in the matter would be disapproved by Basset. On

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the other hand, Parfitt was annoyed by his brother-in- law's silence; while Mrs. Rudell, keeping the peace between the two, felt thoroughly angry with everyone concerned—most of all with Thea, who, as the primary cause of Parfitt's resolve to produce the drawing and tell his tale, was of course to blame for everything.

' Like the man who drew his bow at a venture, I have evidently made a lucky shot,' Mark observed one day to his sister, ' only I am not allowed to know the full extent of my achievement. I'm glad I shall soon be off to town. I could not stand much more of this. But I should like to see the result of my shot before I go.'

'I do not believe you will,' replied Susette irritably. 'Mr. Basset is quite offended that any one should dream of finding fault with Dr. Cassilis, nobody pays any attention to what you say, and the sole result is that the Corner is disagreeable to me.'

Mark glanced at her and smiled. 'You were as desirous as I that my story should be told.'

'Yes, but I thought the effect would be different.'

'If we could always be sure of the effect of our actions life would lose its unexpectedness, and would cease to be as amusing as it is.'

'Do you find it amusing? '

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'Certainly. Everything is amusing more or less. There is even a little amusement to be got out of baiting Cassilis; therefore I wish to make the most of it.'
At this moment Rudell came into the room and Parfitt turned to him:
'Look here, what is all this mystery about Cassilis? '

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'You should know best, since it was you who started it.'
' I?—I merely remark that I saw him ten years ago and produce a drawing of him, and you bolt off to old Basset with a face of as much importance as though you had found the missing heir to a million. Since then you have appeared lost in meditation over some stupendous discovery. Considering that I am the pioneer, you might be a trifle more communicative.'
'Merely a curious coincidence that I thought I would mention to Basset.'
'It is more than that,' rejoined Mark, staring hard at his brother-in-law, 'and I want my share of the fun. I declare I thought Cassilis was the chap that suicided. Queer thing to pick him up again here.'
'Not unusual. If you have met a man once you are very likely to meet him again.'
Parfitt yawned. 'Has old Basset taken offence on behalf of his favourite? We don't seem to be invited to dine there as often as formerly.'
'We are all three asked for to-morrow,' said his sister.
'Oh, will Cassilis be there? '
'He is dining at Outwood, I believe,' said Rudell.
'Ah, Basset's arrangement, I suppose. Or his own.'
'I do wish, Mark,' exclaimed Mrs. Rudell, 'that you would talk of something or somebody else. I am quite tired of Dr. Cassilis.'
So no more was said at that time.
Towards the end of August June Heald, having been married in Woffendale as Jane Stanham, widow, to Abel Gresty, widower, returned to the farm as its mistress; the bridegroom remarking of his wedding as

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he sat down to a heavy tea in the best parlour, that ' it wur a load off his mind, an' happen th' weather 'ud take up a bit now:'
To which cordial assent was given by Mr. and Mrs. Stretton, who had been invited to welcome the bride home.
The weather did 'take up.' September came with misty gold radiance of sunshine, and veiling sparkle of gossamer on the hedgerows.
One shimmering morning June Gresty, throwing meal to the ducks, saw Rudell coming up to the farm, and recognised him instantly. This gave her an advantage, for she thereby had time to decide on a plan of action while he was endeavouring to trace in the fresh comely woman before him, the worn haggard girl he had seen in Bramsall ten years ago.
'Mrs. Stanham, I think,' he said stopping at the gate.
'No, sir. My name is Gresty.'
'Ah, I beg pardon. But at one time it was Stanham.'
'My first husband's name, sir.'
'And then you lived in Bramsall.'

'Yes, sir.'
Rudell paused for a moment.
'When there you gave evidence at an inquest on a gentleman who lodged with you, Mr. Thorold. There was another gentleman lodging with you at the time, Dr. Cassilis.'
'Sir,' replied June, looking calmly at him, 'I mind well seeing yo' at th' inquest, an' I reckon yo' mind hearing an' I said. I have naught more to say, sir. An' I dunnot know as I care o'er much to speak o'

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a time that wur as full o' trouble as a wasp's nest o' stings.'
'I am aware,' said Rudell, 'that Dr. Cassilis was in the house on the night of Mr. Thorold's death, for my brother-in-law happened to walk down the street and saw him at the window.'
'I ha' no more to say, sir, than what I said then.'
'But, my good woman, you distinctly stated that your other lodger had left, yet Dr. Cassilis himself acknowledges that he was in Bramsall that night. I am intending to make further enquiries.'
'Very well, sir.'
June's unmoved serenity rather puzzled Rudell. He had expected her to be disconcerted, which she emphatically was not.
'What was your reason, Mrs. Gresty, for saying that Dr. Cassilis had left, when he was there?'
'Dr. Cassilis's name wur never mentioned, sir. I spoke o' my other lodger.'
'But Dr. Cassilis was your other lodger.' Rudell said this hoping to entrap June into the admission, for he was not sure of the identity of the lodger and Cassilis. The latter might have been staying at another house in the street.
June, however, continued speaking as though she had not heard.
'An' as fur Bramsall an' everything as happened there, I've no mind to be speaking on't. I've forgotten a deal, an' I mean to forget a' as I can. If so be as yo' wish to ask th' old questions o'er again, sir, th' answers'll be th' same as they wur then. Yo'll excuse my saying as I'm busy, there's a mort o' work to be done on a farm.'

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Here June threw the remainder of the meal to the ducks, and saying gravely, 'Good-day, sir,' disappeared indoors.
Now Rudell could have asked a good many more questions, and would have done so had not the thought of Basset's objections restrained him during the interview. He did not wish to quarrel with his old friend. And after all, he had gained the knowledge that June was here to be questioned further whenever he felt inclined.
'It is a good position she has taken up,' he mused as he went back, 'one from which it will be difficult to dislodge her. If she were in the witness-box! But the most one can do now is to make a few private enquiries. I wish Basset would hear reason. She did not deny that Cassilis and the missing lodger were one and the same. Of course they are the same! I have a great mind to ask Cassilis if she was his landlady. Basset will make a fuss about it if he hears. He'll say it is not fair. But——'
And Rudell walked slowly home, reflecting.

June Gresty also reflected. She was grateful to Cassilis for past acts of kindness, and felt concerned that his name should thus be brought up in connection with his friend's death, which she knew had been a great blow to him, and was, she could see, a painful memory now. She was an intelligent woman too, and understood the professional injury he would suffer if sinister rumours were spread abroad in Ringway.

'That Mr. Rudell's nigh ready to say as he killed poor Mr. Thorold,' she thought, recalling the arguments at the inquest as to whether it was suicide or

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accident and Rudell's suspicious attitude then. June recollected too seeing Parfitt walk past her house that night. She had looked out on hearing his footsteps, thinking it might be her husband returning. 'I shouldna ha' thowt a gentleman would ha' gone about to make mischief like yon! ' she murmured to herself as she cooked Gresty's dinner. Her anger with the artist was great and she shrewdly suspected his motive, farmer Gresty having naturally told her the gossip of the town.

There is a Spanish tale of a student who swallowed a poisoned love-philtre and straightway imagined himself to be made of glass. The inhabitants of every country town reverse the story. They believe themselves normally opaque, but are as clearest crystal to the eyes of those around them; their hopes—plans— all as distinctly visible to their fellows as the changes of the leaf, the sparkle of the snow.

Therefore Ringway was perfectly aware that Mark Parfitt had thought of marrying Basset's adopted daughter, that Herries had returned and meant to try his fortune again, that Tony Occleston also cherished vague hopes. Finally, Ringway suspected Cassilis of similar dreams, but in this case gossip was uncertain whether he dreamt of Thea Basset or Emily Darnton. To all this June had listened with interest, an interest which deepened when she discovered what Cassilis had never surmised for an instant, the identity of Dorothea Basset with the child Dolly Thorold of whom her father had spoken so lovingly during his fatal sojourn in Bramsall.

'O' course Miss Thea's name isna Basset,' Gresty had said, 'but folks call her so. Hoo wur left wi'out

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either mother or father;' and he proceeded to explain how her father had been a friend of Basset's, and how Basset had consequently adopted the child. 'An' I mind Mr. Thorold well. He stayed i' Quality Corner many a toime. It wur a pity he went an' poisoned hissen by accident. I reckon Miss Thea's as loike him as two peas, barring th' eyes an' her being a bit pale.'

Then June knew and looked at Thea with extreme interest when she chanced to come down to the farm one day with Basset. The little tricks of gesture that had so often reminded Cassilis of his dead friend were all recognised by June. As the weeks went by, she wondered whether gossip spake truly, whether Cassilis wished to marry Thorold's daughter, whether he was aware of her being that daughter, and whether the marriage would take place. To June's eyes it seemed a very suitable one. In her gratitude she was glad to think that Cassilis might have a smooth and happy life. A woman more talkative would probably have mentioned the fact of Thorold's child living in Quality Corner, but June's northern reserve had been increased by her life of repression in Bramsall. She quietly looked on. Rudell's questions now disturbed her. She realised that if Parfitt were

a rival, he could certainly injure Cassilis by exciting suspicion that he was concerned in Thorold's death. It now seemed a pity, June thought, that she had said Cassilis had gone away, when he had been in the house that night. But she had done it believing that if he were obliged to return to Bramsall for the inquest he would lose all chance of the appointment he so much desired, and she had seen enough of his poverty to comprehend how vital a thing the chance

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was to him. Hearing nothing, she had supposed all well, till from Cassilis himself this summer she learnt that fever had snatched away his chance, and almost his life; and that when barely recovered he had returned to know what had happened, and had found only an empty house. Still, had Parfitt not come to Ringway all would now have been well with Cassilis. And all might yet be well. Thus pondering, June resolved that having said he had gone before that night, she would still say so; or rather, she would still keep silence unless Cassilis desired her to speak. But chiefly she hoped to hear no more of the matter and therefore mentioned it to none.

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CHAPTER XXVII
BUT presently a breath of suspicion went abroad during these September days. Did Parfitt first whisper it? The rumour grew. People said Dr. Cassilis had done something in the past. What was it? No one knew; therefore the whisper was the more ominous. The secret had been discovered by Mr. Rudell; that was why the doctor was not now invited to Number Four. The tale reached Outwood, where George Occleston received it with derision, questioned Basset, and on hearing the origin of the story, scoffed the more.

'I never heard such rubbish in my life,' he declared to his wife. 'A pity Rudell has not more sense. As for Parfitt, I never liked him any more than Basset did. We were right. It is very unpleasant for Cassilis. I am extremely sorry. Not that I think the report will seriously injure him. When Parfitt has gone, the tale will die away if Rudell does not keep it up; and he will hardly do that in the face of Basset's opposition.'

'It is very awkward,' said Mrs. Occleston slowly. 'Dr. Cassilis owns to having been there when Mr. Thorold died.'

'For which reason I am convinced Rudell's suspicions are perfectly groundless; otherwise Cassilis would have denied it.'

'There is the portrait, you see.'

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'That proves nothing. He could have said Parfitt had done it lately.'

'But having owned so much, why does not Dr. Cassilis say more? '

'Probably hard up, as Anthony suggests. No man likes to talk about his poverty to strangers, and after all, we are strangers.'

'We know nothing whatever about him,' murmured Mrs. Occleston, still thoughtfully.

'Anybody can see what the man is,' replied her husband. 'I'll ask Herries' opinion. You'll find he will agree with me.'

'I dare say. But I have once or twice fancied that Dr. Cassilis admires Thea.'

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'Well, what if he does? There will be time enough to make further inquiries if he says anything. Besides, she would not take him. It would be a poor match for her.'
'That is a consideration just worth nothing at all.'
'Oh well, you'll see things will adjust themselves somehow. They generally do. But I shall not ask Parfitt here again, and I shall give Rudell a little advice. Lawyers seldom get any, and they need it more than most men.'
'It is all very awkward,' repeated Mrs. Occleston, still pondering.
There were others who recognised the awkwardness of the situation. Ringway was rapidly dividing into two camps, the believers in Cassilis and the nonbelievers. Old Sol Ingers, to whose ears the tale came soonest, opened his snuff-box, took a pinch with great deliberation; then snapping the lid before the fingers of the tale-bearer could insert themselves, demanded:

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'Dost tha' keep thy honds fro' picking an' stealing, lad?'
'Ay, I do,' indignantly.
'Then keep thy tongue fro' lying an' slandering too.'
But the old seedsman knew well how such reports travel and how they affect life in a country place. It was with real concern that he set himself, as far as in him lay, to silence the insidious whisper. Happily there were many others who ignored it; one being the eccentric Mr. Pugh, who, with well-meaning coarseness, sent for Cassilis and told him the rumour.
'Not as I believe it,' said Mr. Pugh sturdily, 'but folks as believe the world is round'll believe anything. You take my advice, doctor, and bring an action against Rudell and Parfitt.'
'The latter will be leaving soon. It is hardly worth while,' Cassilis replied, conscious that Pugh meant well, but still more conscious of a desire to throw him through his own window.
'I dunno about its not being worth while. It's always worth while to bring an action against a man who can pay, especially when he's a stranger. You see, a jury'll not be so likely to back him up. You're pretty sure to win if you've got any show of right on your side, and you certainly have. I don't mind lending you a trifle towards law-expenses,' added Mr. Pugh magnanimously.
'You are most kind, but I think not,' and Cassilis rose to go.
'Now you think over it,' said Mr. Pugh. 'I'm a business man and my advice is good. It's never any use to knuckle under. Folks think you're afraid. If

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a man said I'd done summat queer in times past I'd make him prove his words or pay for 'em. You think over it. I hear you dined over there last night,' indicating Outwood.
'Yes.'
'He's not a bad sort—Occleston, I mean,' Mr. Pugh continued. 'If he'd hear reason about them keepers, and beat his guns into pruning-hooks, and do away with them rabbits and things, and——'
'Be a totally different man to what he is,' suggested Cassilis.
'Well, yes,' complacently. 'I reckon we all need improvement. But it's summat to have a chap like that to stand by you.'

Here Cassilis perceived that Pugh was impressed by the fact of Occleston remaining friendly.

'You make yon Parfitt pay comfortable damages as you can lay by,' Pugh went on, 'and don't think o' leaving the place. You set still and put his money in your pocket. That's the sensible way o' taking things.'

'Do people think I am leaving?' Cassilis enquired, rather startled.

'Well, they do and they don't. Some on 'em think it's likely. Don't you make that mistake. Put some o' Parfitt's cash in your pocket, and everyone'll be backing you up. That's human nature that is,' observed Mr. Pugh reflectively. 'And besides, since the Woffendale folk are fools enough to pay the chap for them pictures, you may as well get hold o' some o' the money and keep it in the place so to speak. That's my opinion, and I'm a business man.'

Cassilis went home considerably surprised. He

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had long perceived the shrewdness that lay beneath his patient's eccentricities, but Pugh's attitude towards himself was unexpected.

That attitude resulted from two feelings of which Cassilis had little knowledge; the clannish dislike of a passing stranger, and an equally sincere liking for Cassilis himself. Pugh had found his doctor an unwearied listener who never agreed with him. Let anyone pause for a moment, and he will see how unique and cheering is this combination. Had Cassilis agreed with Pugh's theories, Pugh would have scorned him. Here it may be observed that very few theorists really desire to convert the world to their way of thinking, for in that case their amusement would vanish. What they enjoy is the social racket they create. They desire to draw attention to themselves, and there is no easier method of doing that than by posing as teachers. We can all teach something, even if it is only some new way of making a fool of oneself. Pugh had derived great pleasure from the perpetual effort to convert Cassilis to his views, and he was grateful. He showed his gratitude in the manner natural to him. Delicacy he had none. It seemed a reasonable and friendly act to mention the report, and to offer advice as to the best way of dealing with it. The effect upon Cassilis was one of mingled anger and astonishment. Presently, as he walked home, the anger died. However offensive Pugh might be, his intention in so speaking was friendly. The warning did not fall on ears wholly unprepared for it, yet the shock was a tolerably severe one. Cassilis felt that heart-chill of coming loss of work that only the worker knows; the icetouch

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that tells of the nearing frost, the pitiless whisper in the shrinking ear:—'Soon you will have nothing to do. You will earn nothing. The old times once more! The long sick days. The long shivering nights. The empty cupboard, and its winter companion the well-nigh fireless grate. The boots that let in wet and snow and stiffening rheumatism. The thin garments that will not keep out cold. The curious perpetual exhaustion arising from insufficient food. The mocking sunshine and the bitter cold. All the whole year's sickening, infuriating, infernal round.'

Here Cassilis recalled a peculiarly enraging memory; the bodily and mental pain caused by the smell of the next-door dinner in those days. He laughed as the vivid recollection swept over him, but the laugh was not joyous. There is a woeful lack of

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dignity about starvation. Hold up a scalded finger and sympathy will be general. But say your stomach has been too long half-empty to permit the rest of you to work well, and in the eyes of your listeners you will see the profound—pity? oh no, the contempt they feel for you. Modern wise men will tell you that physical pain is soon forgotten; which simply means that those same wise men have never suffered any pain, or else have no memories. The recollection or otherwise of bodily pain depends, like all recollections, on the sort of memory possessed by the sufferer. To James Cassilis had been given a memory of singular tenacity. He recalled perfectly his varied sensations during that time of penury; and recalling them, hated equally the memory and himself.

That night he got out the little model from its

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resting-place, and set it on the table before him. The irony of fate! Or to speak more truly, the consequences of his own failure. Had he but kept instinctively to that narrow sword-path of right, wherein the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err; that simple code of honour that a child may understand; he would not now have been a hunted remorseful man.

For a few minutes he pondered Mr. Pugh's suggestion. The advice was good; but like most advice, it had the slight drawback of being impossible to follow. To bring an action against Parfitt would be to condemn himself. How explain his apparent flight? —the concealment of his having been in the house?

'Rudell suspects me,' he muttered, 'of doing that which I did not do. But is it any blacker than the thing I did?'

Had the case been that of another man he could have answered the question. But as he himself was the criminal, he found no reply to it, but sat and looked at the accusing model till the dawn glimmered over Ringway.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THUS, despite the championship of Basset, the friendship of the Occlestons, the sturdy backing of Sol Ingers; softly, surely as the falling leaves, so fell on Cassilis the conviction that he must go—must leave this cloud shadowed country that had dazzled his eyes with so fair a rainbow. Even though that rainbow had well-nigh faded, he yet desired to linger awhile in this elfin corner of the workaday world; to linger at least till fate drove him out.

For the glamour of the north-west was very strong just then. It had flung off its habitual garments of ash-colour and emerald, and all the woods were tawny-orange and scarlet, and the air like wine. In the shining late September days, with their misty dawns, their blue warmth of noon, their fragrance of mignonette and moss and dry stubble, their exquisite chill as the mist returned at sunset, their shimmering moonlit nights—in all these changing hours Cassilis seemed to traverse the whole range of feeling; to understand how much there was to lose in life. He enjoyed himself with the savage enjoyment of the man who knows how soon all enjoyment will cease. He despaired with equal savagery. He scoffed too at his own enjoyment and his own despair. He even criticised both at times, with that habit of the bystander that had become second nature to him. It

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struck him now and then that the amount of knowledge he was acquiring was out of all proportion to its usefulness. But he was not asked whether or no he would read this chapter of the Dark Fairy-tale. There were the pages before his eyes, not to be passed over; pages that he meant to have been written so differently. Perhaps the reading was hardest at dawn, that most terrible hour of the twenty-four; the time when all the powers of life are at their fullest, when the vision is clearest, the pulse beats strongest, and all life is as crystal to the sight of spirit and soul and body. As the square of the window changed from black to blue, then paled to white and warmed to saffron, Cassilis, watching it, thought of the Greek Aurora and laughed in mockery. Aurora?—a children's fancy! Whatever the daybreak may be in Greece, here in the strong north the dawn is a Valkyria, and she bears a javelin. Yonder in the east is the white gleam of the steel. The wind rises, that wind of the dawn that seems to blow unlike any other. Through the air come the poignant notes of the waking birds—calling—calling, and the throbs of the waking heart answer them. All the world responds to that javelin touch of light; which, like the spear of the Sagas, slays and renews life, pierces and invigorates, at one and the same time.

Cassilis got somehow through the dawns, the noons, the nights; got through his daily work; as people do, even with Heaven and Hell raging within them; talked and laughed, jested and looked round on all things with the eyes of one condemned. Before very long he would see these things no more. He said 'things'

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when speaking to himself; he could not say these 'people.'

Yet was there a singular tenacity about him in that he had no thought of seeking death or of giving in. He meant to go on through the years of his life as he had done before he drifted into Ringway. Remorse had smitten him into endurance. Though neither in this world nor in the next was there anything to hope for, he prepared to face again the wandering, the loneliness, the insignificance that would become more intolerable as he grew older and as time went on.

There was also much else that he was prepared to face. The sum he had paid for this Ringway practice was literally all that he had. He would start life again with a few pounds. Doubtless he could have sold the practice again, but he could not bring himself to bargain over it. In truth, the hesitation that had undone him again rose to the surface in this matter. He could not take the irrevocable step that would banish him. He told himself he would go suddenly—some night—leaving farewell letters to Basset and others who had been his friends. He would not sell the practice. It should be his to the last moment. Of course, all this was folly, the greater folly because he knew right well the value of every sixpence he was throwing away; knowledge possessed only by those who have now and then had but a sixpence between them and destitution. Yet is such folly wholly foolishness? Cassilis had none dependent on him. He was free to return to the hell of poverty from which he had escaped.

To return to it. He thought a good deal about that return as September melted into October. There

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is monotony in repeating unpleasant experiences. It is only pleasant things that vary. No two pearl-white dawns are quite alike, no two rose-scarlet sunsets; and the blue gloom of one wonderful night is not the blue gloom of the next, though equally lovely and alluring. But the mud that you trudge through and the stinging sleet that cuts your face, are the same to-day as they were yesterday and will be the same to-morrow and always.

Of course poverty has its uses. It is not exactly the forcing-house of those convenient virtues of meekness and resignation that most good and respectable people believe it to be. Indeed, its moral instruction may be considered doubtful. But it teaches lots of other things and teaches them thoroughly. It is a better school than Squeers' establishment. The educational effect of 'w-i-n-d-e-r, window, go and clean it,' is nothing to that of 'w-o-l-f, wolf, go and fight it.' One carries the scars of the fight to one's death and probably after, but one never forgets what one has learnt in that struggle. One never throws away one's blows again; one knows how to plant them where each will tell. Whether the instruction is worth the cost of learning is another matter. Some preliminary qualification is needed to make a thoroughly good scholar. You must first have been Dives before you become Lazarus. Then by the time your training is finished you will be not only able, but thoroughly willing, to smite impartially both Dives and Lazarus, and to waste no sentiment upon either. For does not the first look a fool in his purple robes? And is not the second loathsome? And you know you have been both yourself, which makes you hit the harder.

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There are two passions that will curb this abiding ferocity caught from and characteristic of the wolf— Remorse and Love. That Cassilis had developed little of the wolf's savagery was owing to his having been under the dominion of the first feeling. As for the second, that holds out a cup of so strong wine that whosoever drinks, remembers his misery no more. But from this he was withheld by the strong coil of fate that he himself had twisted. It was a more complicated knot than he knew, but even as he saw it the interlacing was more than enough to destroy all hope of disentanglement being possible. Again and again Cassilis went over the miserable incidents of that fatal night. If only he had spoken while yet there was time. Spoken?—a gesture would have been enough. If only he had not gone away. 'It was the fever that already held me,' whispered the self-defending spirit within. But he knew right well that there are men whose instinctive honour no fever could shake. And that there are others—more numerous these—whose ordinary common-sense would not forsake them, though their honour might be non-existent.

'I was not only a traitor, but a fool,' he said to himself one misty October dawn, 'and above all, I am a failure—a stupendous one. I meant to be high- minded, and for meanness I should be hard to beat.' Here he laughed a little. 'I meant also to succeed in life, and I see before me ignominious starvation; not that of the besieged soldier holding his own, but that of the tramp in the ditch—and I deserve it.'

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CHAPTER XXIX

CASSILIS did not read this chapter of his Dark Fairy-tale alone. The whole Corner was engaged in either trying to decipher it, or in averting too keen eyes, and neither occupation was exhilarating. Yet, how could the Corner help itself? The fault was Parfitt's, who had accidentally come into possession of a leaf and held it up for all to see. Basset and Tony Occleston ignored the matter from friendship to Cassilis, Susette Rudell from sheer boredom; while Emily Darnton, Rudell, and Parfitt tried to read the tale, their reasons being different. Thea? Well, she neither tried to read nor turned her eyes away, but looked at what came before her vision and pondered.

Slowly as the deeper tints of October coloured the country-side, a faint shadow crept over the Corner; a sense of division—of strife.

'We seem to be playing a perpetual game of puss- in-the-corner,' Emily remarked one day when she and Thea were alone together. 'Our thoughts are absorbed in planning how to visit each other without the Rudells and Dr. Cassilis meeting. It is really becoming monotonous, and I feel that our habitual cheerfulness is giving way under the strain. All this merely because Dr. Cassilis was once poor and living in a dingy street! What nonsense it is! '

'Yes, it is nonsense,' echoed Thea abstractedly.

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'Tony says it is rubbish and Number Four ought to be ashamed,' Emily went on. 'I believe in Tony. Is there not an acid to test gold? Tony is my acid. I often test people by his opinion of them. He knows instinctively whether they are gold or parcel-gilt.'

'And don't you? '

'I am not sure.' Emily paused. 'This is October, is it not? Then the Bishop will soon be back. Just now I am more interested in the Bishop than in anybody else.'

'Really?'

'Really. He will restore cheerfulness to the Corner if he comes. If not, I shall meet him at Outwood. Mary is a sensible woman and will invite him when I wish.'

'I will make Daddy invite him when you wish. You know he is already pledged to one dinner. Are you serious? '

'Perfectly. I admire the Bishop. The Bishop admires me. It would be a pity to allow such commendable feeling to die away for want of a little encouragement.'

'It would indeed,' replied Thea gravely, with amusement in her eyes. 'Daddy and I will exert ourselves on your behalf, though Outwood has advantages over the Corner in that it provides strolls along the terrace and beside the mere.

'The Bishop has got beyond strolling on terraces,' said Emily with decision. 'He needs comfort. A good dinner would be more to the purpose, and Mr. Basset can give that.'

'But are you really in earnest? ' Thea asked this half incredulously.

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'I think so. I am too modern to take life as it chooses to present itself. I prefer to arrange my existence. Perhaps I may not like the Bishop when I see more of him. I will not for a moment entertain the thought that he may not like me! But supposing that our

mutual admiration continues, I believe I should find the episcopal palace more amusing as a permanent abode than Number Three, Quality Corner.'

'Woffendale smoke and youthful curates,' remarked Thea.

'I will mould the curates to better things. As for the smoke, I do not mind it. I am not an elfin creature like you. That love of prowling about wild places is your only fault.'

Thea rose. 'Will you come into the woods with me now? '

Emily shook her head. 'You know I cannot endure walking. Another point in favour of the Bishop— I could use the episcopal carriage. Why don't you drive? '

'Along roads?—made roads? Not I. When I am old I can drive. Come! The day is lovely.'

'I prefer to toast my toes and reflect on the Bishop. Take Ponto instead.'

Ponto went instead.

Something akin to Emily's dissatisfaction with the Corner was expressed by Susette Rudell to her husband.

'I do wish, Gregory, that either Dr. Cassilis had never come, or that we had never asked Mark down here. You men are always quarrelling, and we women have to put up with the consequent unpleasantness. What is it all about? We shall end by losing clients

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through it, you will see. Everbody seems to be taking part in it. I wish you would leave Mark to fight it out by himself. He began it with that stupid drawing of his, and nothing matters to him. He is not living here. Presently he will go away and leave all this fuss behind him, and this is all we shall gain by his visit. I thought he had more sense.'

The exasperation of Mark's sister was very natural, particularly as she had helped him to create the general disturbance; and Rudell felt there was a good deal of truth in his wife's observations. He himself was not altogether pleased by the turn affairs were taking.

'We cannot blame ourselves,' he said. 'Your brother has frequently been invited. If he had not come now, he would have been here some other time.'

'Oh, I don't know that. Mark hates the country. Only his painting brought him down. I wish he had never got the commission, or that he had never shown that old drawing. Ten years ago too! And nobody seems to know exactly what all the fuss is about except yourself.'

'Myself?'

'Yes. Mark is right. You have discovered something, and you will not say what it is. Is it going to do us any good? '

'Not that I am aware of.'

'Then I am sure you had better let it alone.'

The same advice was offered by Basset when he heard of the interview with June Gresty.

'She is a sensible woman,' he said. 'Give it up, Rudell. That Cassilis purposely caused Thorold's death I will never believe. If by any unhappy chance

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he was concerned in the miserable mistake which killed our friend, what would it profit us to know it? '

'There is our duty to Thorold.'

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'But is it our duty? I regret that you should hold the popular idea of duty—to make life intolerable for somebody; particularly if that somebody is in any way remarkable. I consider it a mistake to kick remarkable people into the gutter. They have a trick of getting up and hitting back a blow that echoes through the world.'

'Not if you hit hard enough.'

'Then they hit back in the next world, which is worse.'

'The next world is a long way off,' said Rudell. 'I think I will risk the return buffet. Thorold was quite as remarkable a personality, more remarkable in fact.
As I believe he was sent out of this life by Cassilis——'

'My dear Rudell,' interrupted Basset, 'I cannot— will not believe it.'

'Will not,' commented the other quietly. 'Precisely. You will not. But to ignore the facts that have come to our knowledge would be simply absurd. I am struck by the singular—I may say, providential —manner in which Cassilis's presence there has been brought to light. My brother-in-law's sketch; made carelessly, kept as carelessly, preserved as it were by fate, and brought down here the summer of Cassilis's arrival. You must really pardon my perseverance in the affair. I intend asking him whether he lodged in Mrs. Stanham's house when Thorold was there.'

'You will not! '

'Why not? The question is a legitimate one. I see you think him guilty.'

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'No, I do not. But I feel the meanness of endeavouring to entrap a man into an admission which may prove awkward for him, however innocent he may be.'

In truth, Basset felt himself somewhat in the position of one from whom the hunted quarry craves sanctuary. Cassilis's frank acknowledgment that Parfitt's tale was true, and equally frank statement that he did not wish to say anything more, had appealed strongly to his host, who felt bound to stand by this stranger at his gates. And Basset was an adept at shutting eyes and ears when he so pleased.

Rudell opened his snuff-box with great deliberation:

'We lawyers are permitted that sort of meanness.'

'No one can accuse your profession of neglecting to use the privilege,' said Basset.

The snuff-box closed with a snap.

'Basset, is it possible that we are quarrelling? And about a stranger? '

'If I have said too much, I apologise. But strangers have always been the cause of quarrelling. When we are young, the disturbing element is a woman or a horse. When we are old, it is a man or an investment.'

'Well,' getting up, 'I shall be away for a fortnight on business, so Cassilis will have a respite.'

'When you return, you will at least let me know what you intend doing? '

'Yes, I will let you know. I am convinced he was with Thorold. Ask him, and you'll see.'

'I shall not do so,' said Basset.

Now on this particular afternoon it so happened that Thea was sitting by the drawing-room fire, while

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the shadows gathered in the corners as the short day died. She was so buried in cushions that the dancing flames only glimmered on a hand here, a jewel there, and in two deep shining eyes. The October air was chilly and the fire was not the little gipsy-fire of the summer, but a glowing pyre of burning logs, throwing up flickering tongues of amethyst and indigo, sea- green and sapphire—dream flames, unlike the hot hard blaze of coal.

In those dream flames Dorothea Thorold saw again and again, each time more clearly, that page of the Dark Fairy-tale which Parfitt had held aloft and Cassilis had partially explained. She did not in the least resent the very fragmentary explanation. What she resented was the fact that Cassilis himself seemed unable to control the situation. He took it calmly enough, bore himself well throughout; yet the undeniable truth remained that he was powerless, or appeared to be powerless, to throw Parfitt, his drawings, his insolence, effectively and for ever into the background. Always she remembered that it was Herries, not Cassilis, who had checked Parfitt that night; and this failure is what no woman of strong feeling ever pardons. Sooner or later her thoughts will circle round this fatal flaw, and it is simply a matter of time before the man will be laid aside—gently and tenderly it may be, but still laid aside—amid the dolls of her childhood; and regarded with the same amused wonder and the same tolerant memory. It may also happen that he who is thus laid aside may never know that he is but a little dearer than her dog. Nevertheless it is true all the same.

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Yet Thea would undoubtedly have married Cassilis had he asked her at this time. The mists of morning are not the clearest atmosphere in which to look on life. It is the hour of belief in others, of self-abnegation even when that belief has moments of warning doubt. The hour when it seems good to cast pearls before swine, or at best to bestow them in charity on some half-transformed follower of Comus, or shrivelled philosopher, or dwarf-souled bore. There are few of the daughters of men who have not occasion to say with the immortal Bottom: ‘I have had a dream. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had!’

Not that Cassilis was ever either Comus-follower, dry philosopher, or bore. The fault in him was that element of unexpected weakness and indecision which seems inseparable from a complex character such as his. The crossing impulses are for a moment equally powerful, and so produce a temporary deadlock. What is needed is that some yet more powerful undercurrent of feeling should rise to the surface, and, bearing all before it, permanently control the stream of life. Failing this, there will surely be occasional deadlocks; as in the instance of Cassilis.

So, as Thea looked at the Dark Fairy-tale in those blue and violet flames, the scene which stood out most clearly was that in which Cassilis had failed to hold his own against another man. She did not concern herself about the reason. Had he but quelled Parfitt then, or beaten him subsequently, she would not have greatly troubled herself as to the right or wrong of the affair. That criticism comes later.

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But Cassilis’s attitude in this matter disappointed her, and the disappointment was a grave one. Linked with it were pity and an instinctive desire to shield, passing naturally into anger against Parfitt—the cause of all this turmoil in the Corner. Also, a slight unreasonable annoyance with Herries for having proved himself more capable of

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controlling an awkward moment than Cassilis. Over and above all these changing thoughts was the sense of pleasant companionship that Cassilis gave. Whether he was strong or weak, good or bad, he had undoubtedly the gift of being a peculiarly sympathetic comrade. Therefore, while idly watching those soft wood-flames that now deepened to indigo and glowed to violet, now shot up in vivid blue and fairy green, Thea recalled the many days and weeks of the past summer through which Cassilis's presence had seemed to sparkle like a gold thread running through the warp and woof of life. The Corner had been brightened by his coming, the Corner that now in these autumn days was divided against itself on his account.

Sound is a curious thing. We say we understand it scientifically, which is merely a way of disguising our very considerable ignorance. If you sat by the drawing-room fire as Thea was doing, you could hear what was said by a person standing just outside the study door, which was across the hall and at the end of a short passage. Whereas if you stood in the hall, you would only hear a confused murmur. Old houses have many such tricks of sound. Thus it chanced that when Rudell, at the close of his conversation with Basset, came out into the hall, his few

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last words were as distinctly audible to Thea as though he stood beside her.

'I am convinced he was with Thorold. Ask him, and you'll see.'

And Basset's voice replied.

'I shall not do so.'

These few words, as by a lightning flash, lit for Thea that dim page of the Dark Fairy-tale. She had of course known that Bramsall was the town in which her father had died ten years ago. She remembered him well, he had been the sort of man to be remembered by a child; but of the manner of his death, and of the inquest, she had never heard. Therefore she had not dreamt of any connection between her father's fatal stay in Bramsall and the accident of Cassilis having been there at the same time. Yet Rudell's words came to her with the odd sense of having been understood before—long ago—at some remote period. Of course Cassilis had been with her father in his last illness. That was it. And in some way he was blamed for its fatal termination. Thea sat up indignantly among her cushions as this idea shot through her mind simultaneously with the closing of the street door behind Rudell. Then Basset's footstep came along the hall.

'Daddy,' she said as he entered, 'supposing that Dr. Cassilis was with my father, why should the whole Corner worry about it? '

Basset stopped short.

'How—?' he began. Then he recollected the travelling of sound in the old house, and felt extreme vexation.

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'Rudell has a mistaken notion, my dear, that your father's life might have been saved had someone else been there. But we do not know that Dr. Cassilis ever saw your father. Rudell merely thinks so because Parfitt saw him in the street at the time. Of course it does not follow that he was in that house. Rudell wishes me to question him, but that seems to me both useless and impertinent. If Dr. Cassilis was there, I am sure he did his best. I might talk it over with him in a friendly way by-and-by. I am sorry you overheard Rudell's ill-judged remark.'

Basset stopped and drew a long breath, hoping his god-daughter would not notice the exceeding lameness of his speech.

'My dear Daddy,' she said, rising out of her chair and placing her hands upon his shoulders, 'it is you who are most troubled I believe, and that is not fair. Is there any reason to suppose my father was neglected in his last illness? '

'No, certainly not. He died very suddenly indeed —so suddenly that there was no time for medical treatment. Heart failure,' added Basset, determined to say anything that would keep Thea from the knowledge of the lawyer's suspicions. 'I tell Rudell so, but he thinks Dr. Cassilis had perhaps prescribed for him previously.'

Here Basset paused again, bewildered by his own remarks.

'But all this seems very vague,' said Thea, 'these ideas of Mr. Rudell's, I mean. Are they Mr. Parfitt's also? '

'Oh no. No one save Rudell is thinking of your father. Other people are only prejudiced by Parfitt;

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who appears to be making a mystery out of nothing. In fact, my dear, it is all nonsense, and has vexed me very much.'

'I see.' Thea was standing on the hearthrug, looking at the soft flickering sea-green flames that were momentarily changing to sapphire and back to green. Basset walked up and down the room two or three times, wondering what would be best to say next. Dorothea was the old bachelor's one interest in life. Her father and he, despite considerable difference in years, had been attached friends; and on Thorold's death, it had seemed not only the most natural but the most pleasant arrangement possible to adopt the orphan child. Hitherto Basset had sheltered her from the frets and troubles and ugly incidents of life. Now! For a moment even he was inclined to wish that Cassilis had never appeared in Ringway. Then he reproached himself for want of friendly feeling, and returned to the consideration of how to efface the impression of Rudell's unlucky words.

'My dear, I hope you will not allow this very trivial disagreement in the Corner to overshadow you in any way. I really do not know why so much has been made of it. I am a little surprised at Rudell. '

Thea turned her gaze from the rainbow flames to her godfather. 'It seems to me,' she observed, 'that Dr. Cassilis is being very unnecessarily and unreasonably harassed.'

'That is my own view,' replied Basset, relieved that she did not ask more questions about Bramsall.

'I was saying so to Rudell just now.'

'Well, as I am my father's sole descendant, surely the matter concerns me more than anyone else. So

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it is a mistake in courtesy for Mr. Rudell to—as it were—aid Mr. Parfitt; or at least, to trouble Dr. Cassilis without first consulting me. Is it not so? '

'You are quite right, my dear. I will speak seriously to Rudell. I regret we have not looked at the affair in that light. We are much to blame.'

' Then, Daddy, since you agree with me, we need not discuss it further, and you will, as far as possible, prevent others doing so? '

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'Certainly I will, my dear.' Basset's voice, unconsciously to himself, took the flatness of dismay. So long as Parfitt's remembrance of Cassilis and Parfitt's innuendoes were only being discussed by Rudell and himself, and talked over at Outwood, the affair had seemed a simple thing that might be checked, even though he knew rumours adverse to Cassilis had got abroad. Now that Thea was speaking of this disturbing influence, he suddenly perceived that it was not under his control.

As Basset now saw the question, either nothing must be done and the matter allowed to drop, or Thea must be told the whole story and herself decide. It was clearly her right to say whether the manner of her father's death should again be the subject of enquiry. Well, there was no reason why she should not know about that accidental dose of poison. Basset wished with all his heart that he had told her long ago. But it had seemed a melancholy tale to tell a child of ten, and then the years had passed. Who would have anticipated this return of the old grief, with its added confusion? Not that Basset believed there was any probability of Thea wishing to marry Cassilis. Time enough to deal with that unlikely contingency if it

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should arise. But her godfather did not desire her to be troubled by the shadow of that past grief. He marvelled at himself in that he had not sooner perceived how any enquiry such as Rudell proposed to make was not Rudell's concern so much as Thea's. Basset resolved by every means in his power to silence rumour and keep the lawyer quiet. After all, he thought more hopefully, it was chiefly Parfitt, who would soon be gone.

'I am astonished at my own want of thought,' Basset continued. 'Of course I ought to have told Rudell that the whole thing was your business, not his.'

'That was very natural, Daddy,' said Thea, smiling. 'When people have known one as a child they seldom realise that one's childhood passes. I dare say you still think of me as the small person whom you so generously brought here ten years ago.'

'My dear, I am more than repaid. No, I do not regard you as a child. The explanation of my mistaken attitude lies in the melancholy fact that the claims of those beside us are usually overlooked. Not intentionally it may be, but still overlooked.'

'I certainly cannot complain of being overlooked. I do not recollect my most trifling whim having been left ungratified.'

'That is different. People's whims are often gratified, their rights commonly ignored.'

'Oh, Daddy, there is no need for such solemnity! Tell Mr. Rudell to leave my family affairs to me, and let us be happy and cheerful again in the Corner as we used to be.'

'So we will,' said Basset.

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CHAPTER XXX

SO ended October. Rudell's absence was felt rather as a relief in Quality Corner, it seemed to slightly ease the friction. Parfitt was busy finishing his fresco, and announced his approaching departure; while Susette Rudell, wearied by the unsatisfactory development of her plans, accepted with tacit thankfulness the courtesies offered her by Numbers Two and Three.

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Basset cheered up, and hearing the Bishop of Woffendale was home again, invited him to dinner; carefully choosing an evening on which he knew Parfitt and his sister would be engaged elsewhere.

'Mr. Parfitt has a talent for disintegration,' Basset observed to his god-daughter. 'It is a gift that does not promote the success of a dinner-party. Therefore I will not risk the danger of his presence. I should really prefer the soup to be cold, if such a tragedy were possible at my table.'

'We must have Emily,' said Thea, mindful of her friend's confidences concerning the Bishop.

'Of course. And Cassilis. With George Occleston and his wife, Herries and Anthony, and some Woffendale people whom I wish to ask, we shall be about sixteen altogether. A convenient number.'

That dinner of Basset's was a success, and the most unhappy guest present—Cassilis—enjoyed it most. His time was so short, the hounds so close upon him now, the wonderful wine of the autumn air, pressed

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out from the dying leaves by sun and frost, running in his veins even as he himself seemed to be fleeing before his foes—all these mingled influences gave him the exhilaration of the man whose death-warrant is signed, whose execution is near and certain; increasing his power of enjoyment, his tingling sense of life, till he wrung from every moment all that it could give him— whether of wild regret, or brief delight, or savage despair.

So he enjoyed that evening at Basset's, enjoyed it all—all. He was the last of the guests to leave, his host having pressed him to linger:

'You have not far to go, Cassilis. Down one step and up another.'

He had lingered gladly. Then when he let himself into his own house, he turned into the chill dark consulting-room, and sitting down at the table, rested his head on his hands and recalled the light and warmth of the last few hours.

Yes, he had enjoyed it all. The soft violet colouring of Basset's dining-room, the masses of dull red chrysanthemums among the sheen and glitter, the easy cultured conversation, the pleasant laughter. Thea too had worn chrysanthemums among her laces; not red but tawny-petalled blooms, and with that same strange perfume that was pervading the autumn woods; a scent hardly to be called sweet, slightly pungent, subtle, like dry old wine—penetrating and intoxicating.

There was surely something in Basset's theories. Cassilis passed in thought back to the homely fragrance of the white pinks that had greeted him when first he entered Number Two. Then the flat nectarine-like

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scent of iris, the green earth-scents of moss and leafage, the dry scent of fern, the violet breath of mignonette, the spice perfume of carnation; and now, at last, this odour of chrysanthemum and the winter woods; not sweet, not to be distilled, but more heady—more powerful; clinging to the blood like a fever.

The night was fairly clear and the moon nearly at the full. By-and-by a ray of bluish moonlight slowly travelled across the room, shining in its transit on the bowed head of the man sitting at the table, a fairy radiance seeking him in the darkness; lingering

awhile, then passing away. Long Cassilis sat there, unconscious, in the seething revolt of his own spirit, of the gloom and the cold around him. Close at hand were many means of freeing. himself—so far as we know— from present pain. For instance, that almond-scented friend—enemy—which is it?—that brings such swift silence. But it was characteristic of him that never once did the idea enter his mind. His vitality was too strong, his imagination too vivid, his spirit too melancholy, his capacity for enjoyment too intense, to permit him to slip lightly out of ʽthat excellent piece of workmanship,' his body. These sombre natures cling' to life with greater tenacity than the lighter ones. They are born fighters—against themselves, against the world, against death.

So the night wore on, a night so filled with moonlight that the only darkness was indoors. At length that unreal blue shimmering changed—seemed to vanish even in its shining; to melt into a wonderful luminous pallor that grew and grew—not light in gloom, but light that turned the world to light. And Cassilis, roused by the whiteness that made all things visible,

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sprang to his feet with a smothered exclamation, and going upstairs, closed and locked his door, pulling the heavy curtains over the brightening window to shut out the terrible dawn which could not be shut out.

The day that followed that dawn was still and lovely. The scarlet of earlier autumn had given place to the gold and russet of November. Even the very air had an aureate tinge, caught from the mellow sunshine and the yellow leaves that gilded the woods like the pages of an old missal.

That afternoon Cassilis, walking home by Outwood Mere, passed through the fir plantation and stopped for a moment on the bridge. Beneath him the water was dark as ever in the shadow, and warm shining amber beyond, where the lake spread out below the terrace. His thoughts went back to that day in the summer when he had stood looking down into the black mirror as now. Then the place in its still beauty had seemed a haven of rest; even that deep uncanny mere, the blessed water of Lethe. He understood the fairy north better now. Lethe? No, Eunoe—Remembrance; and for him terrible remembrance. Rest! — the seeming peace was elfin mockery. The place was unchanged, save from grey-greenness to the glow and light of autumn. The stillness was here too—a deeper hush than before, a silence that to Cassilis's fancy was almost menacing.

He leant back over the parapet. A few yellow leaves floated on the dark glassy water. 'Fairy gold! ' he said half aloud. 'My fairy gold. Withered leaves! ' Yes, dead leaves on the black mere, that was all. It looked threatening too. What fate could one read in its sinister depths, as in a necromancer's crystal? Cassilis

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turned these fancies over in his mind, thinking them deliberately—clinging to these old world imaginings as pitiful spells wherewith to keep at arm's length the thoughts he feared to realise.

Yet with all his efforts he must needs remember that, standing here, he had promised himself happiness; had said he would forget the past, would enjoy the present; and when death came, and after death the Judgment, at least he would have been happy for awhile. There was time for years—many years of happiness, and every hour of those years he

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could enjoy. He leant farther over the parapet, and looked at a patch of moss in a crack of the stone. How emerald it was! He was vividly conscious of its colour as his thoughts whirled on. Enjoy? Yes!—every hour, every moment he could enjoy; from east to west—from zenith to nadir—from heaven to hell! A thousand years would not give time enough wherein to marvel at the powder on a moth's wing. Call it by any long-eared name you will, the mystery and beauty of that dust— and of other dust—remain the same. A thousand years too short in which to wonder over a flitting moth, so slight a thing! While as for the rest—for those other things not so slight? Whole waves of savagery swept over Cassilis's soul as he stood there, leaning over the black water. 'Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it,' he muttered, looking at the yellow leaves floating on the dark glassiness, and recalling the mighty line echoed by so many despairing spirits since it was written. 'Nor am I out of it,' he repeated slowly, raising himself from his leaning position.

Does the power to enjoy increase inversely to the

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opportunities of enjoyment? Or is there truth in the Irish belief that something fatal—unlucky—goes with the possession of unusual gifts? Surely the power to enjoy intensely is a gift indeed; or rather, a noble inheritance. Cassilis thought himself poor yet possessing that rare heritage he was rich exceedingly, with a wealth that was the accumulation of centuries of wholesome-living forbears; in short, the result of restraint; an inheritance which none but himself could destroy. He had not destroyed it, had not squandered this priceless possession. He had it in its fulness. Therefore, standing now on the old bridge, remorseful and despairing, hunted down, with exile and starvation waiting for him, it is difficult to say whether he was most to be pitied—or envied.

He walked away through the fir plantation to the high road, where a horseman pulled up on seeing him. It was George Occleston.

'Dine with us this evening,' he said, 'and would you care to join in a probable row afterwards, or would you consider it unprofessional? Herries and I and several more have arranged a regular battue. I have been nearly cleaned out by poachers lately, but we've got wind of a gang from Northover coming here tonight, so have planned a little surprise for 'em. Mean to beat 'em up and catch a few. Herries will be here, and several other fellows. I hear Parfitt is coming too. Not to dinner, but later with the Fenwicks. I suppose they invited him to join them. He might have waited till I asked him, I am tired of the fellow. Will you come? '

After all, Cassilis was young, and few entertainments

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are better than one combining a good dinner, pleasant company, and a fight for dessert. Besides, why not enjoy to the last? The end was soon coming.

He accepted with an alacrity that gratified Occleston: 'If you will excuse my going to see Pugh after dinner. He is in Woffendale for the day, and wishes to see me in the evening.'

'Unreasonable beggar, Pugh! ' remarked Occleston. 'The idea of dragging you out from Ringway at that hour for nothing. Well, it will be easier for you to walk across

from here. Better not tell him you intend taking a hand in the scrimmage. He might never send for you again.'

'On the contrary,' rejoined Cassilis, 'he would send for me all the more, in hope of hearing particulars.'

Occleston laughed. 'I did not think of that. No doubt I am a great solace to him in the way of amusement. Good-bye! See you again this evening.'

He nodded and rode away. Cassilis went along the road and so up into the woods, where a light white mist was gathering, and the reddening sunset behind him turned the yellow leaves to orange, the russet to copper. Here the air was filled with that curious pungent chrysanthemum odour of autumn, and Cassilis, breathing it, went again in thought over the previous evening, the night, the dawn, to-day, the future. Then swung back to the August night when these saffron-coloured woods were dim in the star-light and thyme-scented, and back to the rainbow shower when he had taken shelter under the chestnut, and yet back to St. John's Eve on the hillside, Mannannen's garden. The hillside? He would go home that way. The air would not be so heavily

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charged with this breath of the earth, these fumes as of heady wine.

He turned to the left, over the dank carpet of fallen leaves that sank a little beneath the foot because there had been rain the previous day; soft yellow leaves, mingled with brown and citron. Overhead the bare branches shone like bronze in the glow, the deep green of fir and gloom of yew seeming strange amidst the amber and orange light and colour. A few minutes more and Cassilis was out of the woods, and in the narrow hedgerow path that led down through the sloping meadow. Here the notes of a violin came through the still, moist air. He knew the player; a wizened old man living in one of the cottages down the hillside, who was known as ' Eli th' fiddler,' and whose playing might have soothed the madness of Saul. Eli's instrument was poor, but it sang as only a violin can sing, and its song was that miracle of sound, the 'Cujus Animam.' No words fit that music. It is an inarticulate cry to which each soul puts its own words, rising as on eagle wings, beating upward to the sun. Cassilis stopped a moment to listen, then walked slowly downward to the lane.

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CHAPTER XXXI

BESIDE the little spring that gushed out by the gnarled hawthorn into the lane was a rough wooden bench, placed for the convenience of the cottagers coming for water; and as Cassilis turned the corner of the meadow path, he saw Thea Basset sitting there alone, her dull blue garments almost the colour of the distant horizon, and a cluster of tawny chrysanthemums at her throat. She did not immediately perceive him, and he paused a moment with a sense of irrational exultation.

Truly this grim fairyland was good to him after its own mocking fashion. It scattered its gold royally —the gold that was but withered leaves; poured out its wine with kingly generosity—the wine that fevered. And again the sense as of swift breathless running came over Cassilis.

He walked on and greeted Thea.

'Are you going to the cottages? ' she enquired. 'I have just left a charitable parcel at one.'
'I am not going anywhere. I am returning from beyond Outwood.'
'Did you see any of the Outwood people? '
'Only Mr. Occleston. He was good enough to ask me to dine there to-night, and assist in capturing a few poachers. By the way, I have always admired the

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liberality of Ringway in the matter of rustic seats. Whenever one wishes to sit down, there is sure to be a bench handy.'
'Do you wish to sit down? ' Thea drew her blue skirts aside. 'You can have one end.'
'Thank you.'
'I am listening to old Eli's violin,' she continued. 'I remember that the violin is one of the three perfect things made by man, and I think the "Cujus Animam" is well-nigh perfect too.'
'Yes, it is,' assented Cassilis.
Then they sat silent, listening in Mannannen's garden to magic as potent as his. For it is one thing to hear that music within four walls, and another to hear it in a November sunset, looking over that wide valley, the dim east to the right, the crimson west to the left, the bubbling spring at one's feet, and the autumnal scent of burning leaves floating up the hillside in coils of thin blue smoke.
Still the violin sang, and Cassilis's whole being cried out in every note as the wonderful strain rose and rose —imploring, triumphant, ecstatic; sinking at last to a sigh of perfect content. Then all was silent, save for the whispering of the spring.
'Mannannen's spells still hold,' said Cassilis.
Thea shook her head, smiling. 'Old Eli is the wizard this time.'
'Is he likely to repeat it? '
'I think not. That is usually his swan song. Do you like the smell of burning leaves? I am rather fond of it. The particular pyre of the summer that is smoking now is in the far orchard, and a girl is stirring it. I was inclined to help her. but as she wore a new

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pink ribbon at her throat, I fancied she was expecting someone else; so I came away.'
'Is the wearing of a pink ribbon a sign of expecting somebody? '
'Unless the day is Sunday—yes.'
'You were probably right, for I think I see two figures down there in the shadows, whence the smoke- wreaths rise.'
A little silence. Then Thea spoke again.
'Which do you prefer, looking north over the valley from here, or south from the churchyard? There is a difference, I think, in the effect on one's spirit whether one looks north or south.'
'In what way? '
' Well, I believe one's thoughts become deeper, more sombre, more steady in flow; and one can sit looking north for a much longer time than one can look south.' 'Yet it seemed to me that I would gladly have prolonged that Sunday morning looking south from the churchyard, when we talked of Dante, and our neighbours prayed.'

'Ah, that was summer. The south needs summer for its charm, the north charms always. That is what I feel.'

Cassilis was leaning forward, his hands loosely clasped between his knees.

'I know that feeling,' he said. 'I think it is the race turning instinctively towards the cradle home, where the lava flows over the snow; for that swinging north like the compass is only felt by the descendants of the Norsemen. A true Saxon has not the faintest idea of it. Yes, one's thoughts grow sombre, as you say, and old legends crowd on one's mind.'

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He raised himself and glanced to the left, where the sun, a ball of crimson fire, was sinking into the violet mist on the horizon. The sunset was fading from the hill and valley, but the end of Outwood Mere shone liquid ruby, a splash of vivid colour in the distance.

'Do you remember,' Cassilis asked, drawing his companion's attention to the mere, 'that strange lake discovered by Semiramis in Ethiopia, the waters of which were scarlet and tasted like wine? Whoever drank those waters went mad and confessed his misdeeds.'

'I remember the story. The mere has reminded you of it? '

'So much so that I believe I must surely have drunk of that scarlet wine, for I am about to confess my misdeed. Would more of my Dark Fairy-tale weary you? '

'Is the question necessary? ' Thea spoke with the glance of sympathetic comprehension and the swift smile he knew so well.

'Thank you.' He paused a moment, looking straight before him, and rather wondered why he wished to say anything at all. What possible good could come from his speaking of the past? Yet an irresistible impulse drove him on.

'It is the end of the chapter,' he said, 'the chapter I left unfinished when I spoke of it in the woods on the night of the Outwood supper. What did I say then? That I once had a friend, and lost him by death. I think I also said that I was poor in those days. Jeffries, in one of his books, tells how he has gone to the National Gallery to sit down and rest when he was too

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poor to afford twopence for a glass of beer. That is real poverty; nothing else is—nothing short of that. Few people know anything of this real poverty. That is just as well, for it is not the nurse of virtue, but the parent of vices. All extremes are bad. Too great ease and too great hardship produce pretty much the same effect—deadness of sensation, which either results in crime, that is, the effort to obtain enjoyment, to spur the dying nerves of feeling by any means; or else in the apathy—sometimes brutal, sometimes idiotic— which is another form of degeneration. There are some men who can pass through any ordeal, even this, unscathed; but they are few indeed, perhaps one in a generation; and I do not belong to that noble brotherhood. Well, details of poverty are not entertaining. Like all miseries of civilisation, they sap a man's self-respect unless his force of character be great indeed. The savage hunter is at least a man, the starving citizen is not. I was becoming faintly interested in the question of how long I should hold out, when a stranger took lodgings in the same house. He was a civil

engineer, and had something to do on a new railway that was coming into the town—a man of unusual gifts, brilliant, generous, compassionate. To enter into particulars is needless. Enough that he saved me from starvation and despair, put new life into me physically and mentally, was a friend in the utmost sense of the word; and I believed that I was grateful, and that I felt for him the same friendship that he felt for me. I am even persuaded that I feel it now, though were he standing beside me he would mock at my words. And he would be right.'

Cassilis stopped, gathered a few blades of grass from the bank beside him, drew them slowly through

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his fingers and laid them gently down on a patch of dark moss, against which they shone like fairy pikes of emerald.

'My friend loved colour,' he said. 'I cannot even see those blades of grass without remembering how he would have admired their vivid green. He noticed the blue of the sky, whether sapphire or turquoise, the shadows of the clouds as they floated by. I cannot look upon the beauty of the world without being reminded of him, and of the fact that but for me, he would be living—enjoying.'

Cassilis paused again, and Thea, remembering Basset's answers when she questioned him about Rudell's remark, believed that Cassilis was reproaching himself for not having succeeded in saving her father's life in that sudden illness. Perhaps, she argued in her own mind, he had since thought of other treatment which might have been efficacious; and, pitying the regret which seemed too poignant for the cause, she would have uttered some consoling words, when Cassilis resumed his tale.

'We say the dead are happier than if living. They may be, but we say so because it soothes us to say so —one of the pretty poppies that lull our senses. In the face of the Christian Belief we Christians can hardly maintain that a disembodied state is happier than an embodied, when the resurrection of the body is the central fact in that Belief.

' Yet they always get the best of it—all these illtreated afflicted ones, sick and in misery, or those more swiftly dealt with—yes, they always get the best of it —as is just. Lazarus is greater than Dives, Naboth more kingly than Ahab. We shut them out from sun

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and happiness, and ever after we walk in their shadow, as is most fitting. I thrust my friend out of the warmth of life and light and the beauty of the world; and he has risen up immortal, mightier than I; possessing all these thing more than I. For the memory of the illtreated is like that dark cloud issuing from the Unsealed Jar by the shore. A small thing the Jar, a small thing the grave; and lo! the Rising Shadow fills heaven and earth. It is not wise to afflict any human being, they are so mighty in their death.'

The light in the mere was no longer ruby, but deepest crimson, going to purple. Eastward a moon of orange fire slowly swung up from the far mists of the valley.

'I knew little of my friend,' Cassilis went on, 'except that he was a widower with one child, for whom he strove to save every penny, for whose sake he lodged while in Bramsall in that poor back street. He had hopes of making a fortune by a machine he was inventing; and night after night he worked at the model, growing more and more sanguine. Meanwhile I had resolved to apply for a medical appointment in a distant

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town and was going there to make my application in person, as I knew something of a man who was on the committee and hoped for his influence to back me. I settled to go one evening in August, by a train that passed through Bramsall about one in the morning. I had been to see a man ill with fever whom I was attending—I found afterwards that I had caught it from him—and I came home to my lodgings at midnight. My friend looked worn but exultant. He greeted me and pointed triumphantly to the model before him on the table. He said he thought it was finished, and it

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would be a success. He was tired though, he said, and leaning back in his chair, he took, without looking, a small bottle from a shelf near. He was taking a sedative at that time, though I had told him he did not need it. He was in the habit too, of carelessly swallowing a dose out of the bottle. I kept medicine on that shelf, and, standing opposite to him, I saw what he did not—that he had taken the wrong bottle. The one that he took contained the swiftest poison known.'

A sense of unreality stole over Thea. Was this the familiar hillside she knew so well? Or was this dim height overlooking misty depths some 'faery land forlorn'? Did those eddies of pale smoke, with their scent as of wine spilt on dead leaves, coil upward from some wizard's cauldron? That purple light fast dying in the mere; those nearer pools left from yesterday's rain, shining with the bluish-silver gleam of steel, like weapons cast away upon a battle-field—a broken sword here, a twisted bayonet there: what did they all portend? She turned her gaze towards yonder orange moon slowly rising from the mists, and old words came into her mind even while she listened to Cassilis. 'The shield of the mighty,' yes, that was what the flaming copper disk resembled, 'the shield of the mighty was cast away... upon the mountains of Gilboa! ' Her thoughts went back automatically over the narrative. 'Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up? Tomorrow' shalt thou be with me... to-morrow shalt thou...? '

With sudden horror Thea dragged her mind away from the echoing death-sentence, looked away from the deep-coloured moon and the eastward mists to the west and Outwood Mere. The purple light was now

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but a pale glint like a lance-head; and Cassilis was speaking.

'"Three things," say the Arabs, "never return: the sped arrow, the spoken word, the lost opportunity." For one brief moment I had my opportunity, and in that moment the devil most surely entered into me.'

Again the hillside became as a dream to Thea. The broad copper-coloured moon dazzled her eyes and the old words once more rose in her mind. 'The shield of the mighty... cast away... Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?... Why hast thou disquieted me?. 'Whose words were those? It was a fantastic thought to connect them with her father! Could he be repeating them? If so, whose death- sentence was he uttering? 'To-morrow thou shalt be with me... To-morrow... 'Yet again she shook off the weird horror, turning her eyes away from glowing moon to the dark outline of the Ridge with a curious sense of seeking refuge. Whoever slept there, whether King or Wizard, had surely been a man in whose shadow was safety—in whose presence rest, else tradition had not handed down justice and compassion as his chiefest traits. How long does a man live in this world? Till his mortal body dies? or till his influence

ceases? Impressions made in childhood often rise up oddly in later life; and as before a storm the vision of the distant hills draws nearer, so now the personality of that Sleeper on the Ridge became more vivid in Thea's mind. There lay a mighty one whose shield was never cast away; who seemed to have made many rough places plain, many crooked things straight. In some strange way the thought of the dead Ruler had a quieting effect, bringing the girl back as it were to

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familiar associations, and she listened with calmer feeling and clearer head to Cassilis's story.

'Money,' he was saying, 'is the Ithuriel spear of life. Touch people with it, and the fiend starts up—strong, menacing. The moment which would have saved my friend, which would have saved us both had I spoken one word—nay, a gesture would have sufficed, in this moment I neither spoke nor moved. And so I kept silent, so remained motionless, because the thought shot through my mind that if my friend died then and there his invention and the fortune it would bring might become mine. He had told me that no one had seen the little model. He had not spoken of it, save vaguely. I alone knew that it was finished. Why that inconceivably base suggestion should have crossed my mind at that moment I do not know. Most solemnly do I declare that never before had the faintest idea of treachery entered my thoughts. I could not have believed myself capable of it. Had I been accused of harbouring such a thought, I should have repudiated the charge with the deepest indignation. Even now it seems incredible to me that I could have had that vile impulse. Yet I had it. For that moment I was held by it. I was silent.'

Again Cassilis stopped. He was sitting as before, with his hands loosely clasped between his knees, and as he said these last words he softly struck one closed hand into the palm of the other. The gesture was but slight, yet something in the way the action was done, something in the curve of the fingers, conveyed a suggestion of finality—of hopelessness.

'Yes,' he went on, 'I was silent. The next moment my opportunity was gone, and I was Judas indeed.

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My friend swallowed his usual dose at a gulp as he always did, knew the instant he had swallowed it the mistake he had made; knew too, that I had known in time to save him and had not done so; for in that instant his eyes met mine, and by the flash of intelligence in his I saw that he had read my guilt in mine. I have seen that look ever since. There seemed to be almost everything in it that human eyes can convey, except trust. It was but momentary, an instant's comprehension—amazement—scorn—reproach. Then the eyes closed, he fell sideways from his chair, and before my spellbound feet could get round the table his spirit had gone.

'With his fall the evil spell seemed to break. We were not alone in the room. Mrs. Stanham—June Heald, now Mrs. Gresty—had been preparing supper. She had not noticed my friend's fatal mistake, but seeing him fainting, as she imagined, she caught him when falling, and laid him on the floor. It was then that Parfitt walked down the street. I was standing by the window, dazed—bewildered by the depth of hell into which I had thrust myself. I asked him the time and he replied.

‘I had no reason for asking. I knew the time. But the murderer’s feeling of loneliness was fresh upon me, and my speaking was a blind reaching out for help of some sort.’

Once again Cassilis stopped. Perhaps he half hoped for some word from Thea. But she did not speak. The hush of the 'November twilight was on the hillside. In the north-west lay the Ridge, deep violet in colour. From the low-lying orchard the blue smoke of the burning leaves drifted upwards and across, passing in

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wreathing shapes, now veiling, now revealing those narrow pools shining with the glint of steel from out the dark herbage—the broken weapons of a stricken field. Away westward, was that the mere, or a lost spearhead gleaming? The moon rose higher, paling to topaz. Oh! that shield of the mighty so vilely cast away—the shield of honour!

‘After that,’ Cassilis resumed, ‘I made the fatal mistake of going away. Mrs. Gresty reminded me that my train left at one. I was intending to try for an appointment, you know. So confused was my mind, that telling her I would return for the inquest, and that she had better fetch a doctor at once, I actually left by the one o’clock train. By the time I had reached my journey’s end the fever had fairly seized me. I was too ill to do anything. Of course I lost the appointment; I never applied for it. Six weeks later, as soon as I could travel, I went back to Bramsall to see what had happened; and found the house shut up and Mrs. Gresty gone. I inquired for her, but the neighbours knew nothing save that she had left after the inquest was over. From that time—ten years ago—till I came here, I drifted from place to place, feeling that I who had deprived a friend of life had no right to any peace of life. Yet I have always wondered—I still wonder how it came about that I acted as I did. I never cared for money. Why, then, did the thought of greed wreck me? The evil must have been in me, or it could never have so dominated me. Are one’s dregs bound thus to rise? Well, retribution has most justly fallen on me. Here I thought I had found rest, friends, happiness; and here the ever-pursuing past has overtaken me. It was strange to find my former landlady, whom I remembered

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as a miserable girl ill-treated by a worthless husband, happily placed at Gresty’s farm. She was pleased to see me, and explained the reason of her leaving the house in Mill Street. Her husband had been in prison and afterwards ran away to America. She told me she had never mentioned me at the inquest; the verdict had been “Death by misadventure.” She also said she had forgotten to give the model to poor Thorold’s friends when he was taken away to be buried, but had kept it safely. “Would I take it and try to find his daughter?” I was most reluctant to handle the thing; I did not wish to look upon it again; but I felt that duty compelled me to place the machine in the hands of its rightful owner. So I took it and have it now. I shall search for the child and send it to her. She must be nineteen or twenty. Her father spoke of her as Dolly. Mrs. Gresty tells me Thorold was buried in Lincolnshire, but does not recollect the name of the village. That is all the clue I have. Well, after this strange reappearance of the model, Parfitt recognised me, and I saw that my punishment was only beginning when I thought it had ended. Most generously Mr. Basset forbore to question me about that fatal night, but the coils are tightening round me. It is strange indeed that I should have come here, among the friends of the man I slew—for undoubtedly I slew Thorold by my

silence. Rudell, I find, was present at the inquest. He, of course, never heard of my being in any way connected with Thorold till Parfitt told him I was in the house at half-past twelve that night. Naturally the concealment of my presence arouses his darkest suspicions, and my apparent flight condemns me. He thinks I deliberately poisoned my friend, and his belief

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is reasonable. Had I not gone by that one o'clock train these suspicions would hardly have fallen on me. But I can never explain that seemingly hurried departure. My hope of an appointment, my attack of fever—all merely appear so many excuses. Therefore, I am leaving Ringway. The accusation now hanging over me is one to which I have no answer. I was not the deliberate villain Rudell believes me to have been, but my sudden vile thought and consequent silence produced the same result. I deserve condemnation. I leave here to-morrow. My plans are uncertain. In fact, I have no plans, save to find Thorold's daughter and give her that accursed model.'

Cassilis ceased speaking. He had meant to say more —to have told the wretched tale differently. 'How is it,' he thought, 'that one invariably tells one's own story so badly, and the stories of others so well? '

Then his companion turned her face towards him, and in the mingling lights of glimmering west and climbing moon he saw she was very pale, and in her eyes was a great compassion.

'Forgive me,' he said. 'I had no right to trouble you with my tale of guilt. I should not have done so but for the suspicion that will rest upon me when I have left Ringway. I wished you to know the truth, lest you should deem me even blacker that I am. A foolish wish on my part, for why should I imagine that you will give even a passing thought to a stranger who came and went in the course of a few months? But this has truly been a magic garden to me; the one chapter of my Dark Fairy-tale that I could desire to live again. Is there no wizard spell to stay Time's flight? '

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Thea looked towards the dim Ridge where the King lay sleeping. She was minded to keep silence—to let Cassilis remain in ignorance that here, beside him, sat the child 'Dolly.' Yet she marvelled at his blindness, thinking that surely he must know her name. And while she sought for words that would not reveal the truth, he misunderstood her speechlessness.

'I inspire you with horror. That is just. I deserve it. I—'

She checked him by a swift gesture of negation. Often, very often, had Thea's hands, gestures, manner, reminded Cassilis startlingly of Thorold, yet his unconsciousness had been complete. But now, with his whole being vibrating with the terrible strain of the breathless race he had been running before his hunters; with the knowledge that to-morrow would see him once more a well-nigh penniless wanderer; with the excitement of his confession upon him; he at last comprehended—read in Thea's eyes the truth he had never once suspected.

'I understand,' he said quietly, and his voice sounded curiously flat; 'you are Thorold's daughter. Of course I might have guessed that long ago. The name misled me.'

'I thought you knew my name was Thorold.'

'No. And I had only heard of the child as 'Dolly.' "
'I am called Dorothea. To my father I was always Dolly.'
'I see. How simple it all is! I have been strangely blind, for I have often noticed your resemblance to him. But the different colouring deceived me; his eyes were blue and his complexion ruddy. The likeness is the likeness of gesture and manner and thought. Over

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and over again I have remarked it, yet never for one moment did I dream you were his daughter.'
There are some things so wildly improbable that when they happen no astonishment is felt. Or perhaps the surprise is so great that it ceases to be felt; the mind merely acquiesces. That Thea Basset should be Dorothea Thorold seemed to Cassilis so natural that he could have believed he had always known it. Of course she was Thorold's daughter—of course—of course! Who else could she be? Why, every gesture was Thorold's! Those varying inflexions of voice, that vivid personality—the flower, as it were, of Thorold's strong vitality; the keen perceptions, the quick turns of cultured thought—all were Thorold.
Cassilis rose. 'What can I say? ' he asked, looking down at her. 'What can I possibly say after having told you the story you ought never to have heard— least of all from me. All I can do is to go, and that speedily. I spoke of retribution. It is more complete than I imagined.'
'You are too merciless to yourself,' Thea replied, and her voice had the softness of the mist. 'It was a moment's evil thought caused by fever. Do you think you are wholly accountable for that half-delirious thought? You say you fell ill the next day; then you must have had the fever that night.'
'My mind was clear enough. I knew what I was doing and what I had done.'
'Still, you were not yourself. It was a terrible mistake, not a crime. I am sure '—she paused and looked at the violet gloom of the Ridge, then back again at Cassilis—'I am sure my father himself would say so.'
'Thank you.'

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'You speak of going away,' she went on, 'but all that Mr. Parfitt says will be forgotten when he leaves. Had you not better talk to Mr. Basset before you take such a step? '
'No man could have a better friend than Mr. Basset,' said Cassilis.
'I think he would be hurt if you went away without telling him of your intention.'
'I have thought of that.'
'Have you? I am glad. Then you will at least hear what he has to say? ' She stopped a moment, then added, 'He would believe you.'
'I am sure he would.'
A clock in one of the cottages below them struck six, the tinkling sounds coming clearly up the hillside in the stillness of the dusk, and Thea rose.
'That clock is wrong,' she said, speaking as people do of some trivial matter to relieve a spiritual strain. 'I think it is not much more than half-past five.'
'About that,' rejoined Cassilis, taking out his watch. 'Yes, half-past five.'
'I thought so because the west is not yet dark.'

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No, the western horizon was not yet dark, but shining with a wonderful ice-blue light thrown up from under the world's rim—a light that lit the rainpools and glimmered in the mere. The whitening moon still hung low in the east—too low to flood that eerie afterglow, only high enough for the moon rays to mingle tremulously with it in mid-air. And, as Thea stood beside him on this legend-haunted hillside, this place of dreams, this magic garden of the mighty Dead, Cassilis felt most vividly her singular attraction. She seemed a part of the soft mist and subtle lights of sunset and

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moonrise, living dust of earth and heaven, spirit of many spirits. Down through the centuries heart of soldier and soul of saint, grim toil of worker, hopes and fears of millions—all had helped to create that which was Thea. But Cassilis saw her too as Thorold's daughter; knew that she was to him what some one man or woman is to each man or woman—the one companion in whom all the charm of the world finds expression; and to him, unattainable. This was the waking from his dream of rest.

Yet he was not—had never been—her fitting mate. She needed one less complex, a nature of broader grander lines, a fire of life pure and strong as the colourless flames seen by the great Tuscan beyond the porphyry step.

'I thought,' said Cassilis, with a gesture towards-the mere, 'that I had there found Lethe, but it is Eunoe.'

'Do you so much desire Lethe? To wish for forgetfulness is to wish for loss of personality. You are too severe a judge of yourself. You were but half responsible for your thought. Remembrance need not be so terrible.'

She held out her hand. Cassilis raised it to his lips.

'Thank you,' he said. 'Yet I do desire Lethe.'

For here ended his dream of rest.

They walked silently up the hill, along the lane they had traversed the first night of Cassilis's arrival in Ringway, then out on the high road, where the lights of Quality Corner sparkled below in the dusk.

'I think Mr. Basset is in his study,' said Thea as they drew near the Corner.

'Your consideration is infinitely more than I deserve. I can only say that my gratitude is equal to my unworthiness.

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I will not come in now, for I have a patient to see before I go to Outwood.'

'Ah yes, you are dining there to-night. Good-bye then till to-morrow.'

'Good-bye,' said Cassilis, and standing in the road, he waited till she had disappeared within her own door. When it closed upon her, he turned and went swiftly up the road again. Half-way to the woods he stopped and looked back at the lights of Quality Corner.

'It only needed this,' he said aloud. 'Only this! ' He had thought himself hunted. Well, the chase was over now, the quarry pulled down. He would not think. Beside, what need for thought? Had he not known in some dim fashion all along? He must have known! He had a few hours left. He was going to Outwood. At the end of the hunt there was usually a feast, and he could eat, drink, and be merry with the best of them. Why not? The chill had not yet come, the fever still burnt in his veins. He would enjoy those last few hours. The loss of all things does not always produce stupor. Sometimes it

gives, for a little while, an added capacity for enjoyment—wild Berserk delight. So had it been for many days with Cassilis. So was it now. The blow he had received on the hillside had spent its staggering force. He had steadied under it, with but an acceleration of pulse—an added excitement. He was not to be pitied at this time. The time for pity would come, when pain had changed to dull despair.

He reached the woods, paused for a moment looking into the dark moon-flecked aisles; then returned to the town by another and a longer way.

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CHAPTER XXXII

AN hour later Cassilis, returning home, saw old Sol and stopped to speak to him. The old seedsman was standing on his doorstep as usual, the light from the shop illumining his white head and spare figure, and falling here and there on the lounging bystanders. Ringway was very cheerful at dusk. It lit its lamps and stirred its fires, left its windows uncurtained and gossiped at the front doors. To-night this cheeriness of the little town smote Cassilis with yet another pang of regret in that he must leave it. He liked the low hum of conversation in the increasing darkness, the home lights shining out from the houses, the pale moonlight on the roofs.

‘’Tis a fine night, sir,’ observed Sol, and the accustomed group of idlers politely melted away, leaving the two alone.

‘Yes, it is a lovely night.’

Sol offered the Charles Edward snuffbox, and then took a pinch himself, but spilt the greater portion, a sign with him of extreme perturbation.

‘Sir,’ lie said, slowly closing the lid, ‘I am an old man, and have spoken to many a gentleman, so I reckon yo’ willna take it ill that I should speak what’s in my mind?’

‘I shall not take it ill. What is it? ’

While thus replying, Cassilis’s thoughts took one of

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their comet-like sweeps again, describing a wide erratic orbit, yet with swift returning to the central controlling point. The uselessness of it all! Of the past years, of the future, of the evil thing which he had done. Oh, he would listen to all old Sol had to say; he liked the old man. Besides, Cassilis always listened, as was his duty. For surely when the Almighty has patience to hear what His dust-miracles have to say, they might have the grace to listen to each other.

‘Well, sir, to put it plainly, theer’s a tale about that Mr. Parfitt o’er theer,’ glancing towards the Corner, ‘knew yo’ years agone in Bramsall, when things wurna so well wi’ yo’, an’ that you’re thinking o’ leaving Ringway along o’ Mr. Parfitt an’ his sayings. Now, sir, dunnot do it. Theer’s nowt like holding on. Yo’ hold on an’ let yon Parfitt chunner his fill. I’ve seen a-many curious happenings. You’d be surprised, sir, what a deal a man sees standing on’s doorstep for forty year an’ more. Even sin’ my father died I’ve stood on this doorstep summer an’ winter, an’ I never knew any good come o’ turning one’s back to folk’s lies. Let ’em holler to your face; they’ll soon get tired on’t. Yon Parfitt’s going afore long, an’ I’ll warrant he’ll noan coom back again. If you’ll excuse my speaking, sir! ’

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His listener smiled. Here was Pugh's advice reiterated. No doubt both he and Sol were right. Had the situation been less hopeless, Cassilis would have probably done as advised. He had an instinct for holding on. But now, to his thinking, his overthrow was complete. He heard old Sol with full appreciation of the kindly old-world feudal feeling that prompted it, and also with an odd sensation as of bidding farewell.

'Thank you' he said, 'it is pleasant to find one has

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friends who believe in one. I am aware that Mr. Parfitt, intentionally or otherwise, has created some suspicion of me. But what he thinks, and what others think in consequence of his words, is not true.'

'Sir,' responded Sol, 'theer wur no need fur yo' to say that.'

'I know. But I preferred to say it.'

'I hope, sir, as yo'll think o'er what I say, an' I say it fur a-many folk beside mysen.'

'I will think over it.' He held out his hand to the old man, who grasped it with evident feeling.

'I suppose I am a liar,' Cassilis reflected as he went home, 'a shifty liar. Truly I am laying up treasure for myself hereafter—treasure that will sink me.'

He dressed for Outwood; then found he had a few minutes to spare, and looked around on his books, thinking that he would take them with him when he left Ringway in the dawn. They were so few. A couple of boxes would hold them. He unlocked the cupboard in which was the model. At last he could fulfil his charge; he could give Thorold's work to his daughter. The mockery of it all! Again, after all the years, Cassilis marvelled at his own exceeding baseness, which, like all baseness, the years had revealed to be also his own exceeding folly. 'And I never cared for money! 'He said aloud, laying his hand on the web of steel, 'nor do I now. What possessed me! '

He took the model out, feeling still the curious calm and exaltation that had dominated him since that hour on the hillside. There was a small square mahogany box that had accompanied him in his wandering. It would do. He placed the model in the box, tied it up, and addressed the parcel to Thea. Having done this,

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he went downstairs and found the cab waiting to take him to Outwood.

The night was full of moonlight and autumn scents, but Quality Corner lay in shadow. The climbing moon had not yet risen over the tall old houses. Standing on the pavement, Cassilis looked at Basset's windows, where firelight and lamplight glowed through the silken curtains. Those brightly-lit windows represented to him all that makes life more than mere existence, and he stood without—must needs so stand. Here the remembrance of familiar words came to him like seaweed dimly seen beneath the wave—'Without are murderers.' Yes, that was the sentence, 'Without are murderers.'

Then he drove away into the moonlight and the mist. He would see those windows again; on his return tonight, in to-morrow's dawn, and—as long as he lived.

But he meant to enjoy himself at Outwood. The strange exhilaration still held him, the fever still burnt in his veins. So long as that lasted, at least he lived— at least he lived! He said this over and again to himself as he was borne along the wide high-road, pale in the moonlight; past the scattered homes, past the dark woods, till the mere glimmered on the right, and the old house outlined itself against the sky. At this point of

the road Cassilis told the driver to stop first at Pugh's villa, for there was the chance of his having returned sooner than was expected, and to see him now was more convenient than visiting him later from Outwood. Best not to lose even one moment of this last night in civilisation.

''Tis easy to see owd Pugh is teetotaler,' said the driver resentfully, as he got down and struggled with

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the intricate fastening of the gates; 'a chap that took his beer regular 'ud ha' a sensible sort o' catch as 'ud open if yo' fell up against it, an' shut o' its own accord. This here toy puzzle takes a sober mon a good ten minutes an' a' his sense to see th' hang of it. Nobbut childish, I call it! But theer! teetotalers is as full o' whimsies as a two-year-owd babby.'

Here the gate suddenly flew open and as suddenly recoiled, hitting the mare on the nose as she walked forward; whereupon the driver expressed strong opinions as to Mr. Pugh's ultimate destiny. Cassilis laughed and sympathised. He had himself often wrestled with that fastening. Indeed, on one occasion he had solved the difficulty by getting over the gate, and the driver's feelings appealed to him. Also, he was in the mood to be amused. Was he not coming to Outwood for amusement?—his last amusement. Now that Ringway would soon be to him a memory only, he felt how congenial place and people alike had been to him. High and low, he had fraternised easily with them—had been pleased, amused, happy.

Pugh was not yet back; he would have to be seen later after all. So Cassilis drove on through the fir plantation, over the bridge, and up to the hospitable old house. He enjoyed himself at dinner of course. Anthony was there, and Herries, and several other men whom he knew.

'A pity you've got to waste time with Pugh,' Occleston remarked when dinner was nearly over, and all at the table were discussing the latest variety of poacher and the best way of catching him.

'Is Mr. Pugh ill? ' enquired Mrs. Occleston.

'Well, he says so,' replied Cassilis. 'Just now I do

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not agree with him, and we spend our time arguing about it.'

'I am surprised that he sends for you,' rejoined Mrs. Occleston, laughing.

'He wishes to convince me that I am mistaken.'

'Don't let him argue too long to-night,' said George, 'or you'll miss the fun. You know the rendezvous, and if the row has begun you will hear where we are.'

'I do not suppose I shall be more than ten minutes at Pugh's,' said Cassilis.

But he was rather longer than he expected, for Pugh, greatly interested, asked numberless questions about the Outwood poachers and the arrangements made to capture them.

Presently a shot broke the quiet, then another.

'Them's poachers,' observed Mr. Pugh. 'Do you call that Christian doings? '

'On the part of the poachers?—no,' said Cassilis.

'Is yon Parfitt there? '

'He was not at the house, but I heard he was to join the party later.'
'Well then,' with slow emphasis, 'if I was in your boots, doctor, I'd mistake him for a poacher! '
Cassilis laughed and shook his head.
'Ay, but I would,' persisted Mr. Pugh. 'There's a mort o' chaps as are all the better for mistakes o' that sort, and he's one on 'em. You should never let by a chance o' slipping into an enemy; it mightn't come again.'
'I thought you advocated peace at any price, Mr. Pugh.'
'O' course,' serenely, 'when folks is peaceable. But when they isn't, they've got to be made so, that's all.'

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'I see. Your attitude is perfectly simple and straightforward.'
'I think it is,' assented Mr. Pugh with pride. 'Now, if I'd my way, I'd hommer them poachers for poaching, and I'd hommer other folks for keeping the game. You've only got to hommer all round, and there you are! '
'Not always. Sometimes the result is, where are you? '
'I dunno about that. Now you heed what I say about yon Parfitt to-night, and don't look too hard to see who you're hitting. There's times when an accident is worth a good deal. And even if you don't lay him up, you'd feel a kind o' satisfaction in giving him one for himself. There goes another shot!—well, I never! Occleston might ha' been neighbourly and asked me to help.'
'To help?' echoed Cassilis, astonished.
'To be sure. Why not? I reckon I could do as well as yon Parfitt. He's a weedy-looking chap. Do you want a loaded stick? There's one by the hall-door. Take it as you go out.'
'No, thank you. I have my own. I will tell Mr. Occleston what you say about helping.'
'Ay, do. He might think on't some other time. Good-night. See you to-morrow.'
'Good-night.'
As he went into the moonlit chill of the November night, filled with woodland scents, Cassilis thought it was hardly probable that Pugh would see him either to-morrow or at any time again. For more and more he felt inclined to leave Ringway before to-morrow dawned. He told himself that he would enjoy to the

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last, and he did. After all, this was a good day that fate had given him; yes, a good day—this day of his doom. He had lived every hour of the past thirty. Whether he had been in hell or heaven, he had lived every minute. He was living them now. He would live them to the last, and then pass away to the poverty, stagnation, and vain remorse that are worse than death. Truly, the civilised gutter is an evil home for those not naturally akin to it. To work for mere bread,—as if man lived by bread alone! His blood boiled into savagery again as he thought this. Then his sense of justice rose up; he deserved his doom,—a traitorous murderer. He might have had all he wished, had but his honour held for one fatal moment. Moreover, had he not had more than his deserts? He had had six months of Ringway. He had seen what might have been, and though the vision was as the uttermost mockery, yet it was better to have seen the rainbow. He had

enjoyed; he was enjoying even now. What a night it was!—this November night of the north-west. Not the white moonlight and black shadows of summer and the south, but a blue shimmering lustre that was a caress in itself; a touch chill, subtle, ice in the wine. Turquoise-coloured moonlight shining through faint mist; a radiant haze that seemed almost to take shape and form here and there among the trees. Yonder, between the beeches, was it only moonlit mist—or was it Oona? Over there, that sudden glitter by the mere, was it only a shining pebble—or a jewel on Nimue's breast? And the lake itself, dim, mysterious, half veiled in soft blue vapour, with dazzling gleams where a moon-ray smote the water aslant like a lance. Cassilis saw it all, felt the delicate, elusive beauty of it, thought

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that if yonder luminous mist could take form it would be—Thea. How still the night was! Poacher and pursuer alike had vanished. Where were they all? He did not wish to think too much. Then he heard shouts and shots not far away in front, to the right over the water. Ah, that was better. The noise promised action; something to drag thought into another groove for perhaps ten minutes. This was his last night, and he meant to enjoy it—he was enjoying it. He quickened his pace to a run as the noise increased. All round him was silence and the woodland scents and shadows. Here was the bridge, the moonlight full upon it, and darkness at either end. He was running now at his top speed, and, as he sprang into the light, three men rushed from the shadows behind him. So sudden was the attack that, being thus seized from behind, Cassilis, after a violent but ineffectual effort to free himself, was lifted over the parapet and flung into the water below.

The struggle barely lasted a minute, and the men disappeared into the fir plantation beyond.

Cassilis was a good swimmer, and struck out instinctively, reaching the shore almost directly. To scramble out would have been tolerably easy, even though the bank was steep, for tree-roots and jutting sandstone gave firm grasp; but in being thrown over the parapet he had received a severe blow on the head which partially stunned him. Therefore, instead of climbing out, all he could do was to hold on to a grass-grown point of rock and try to call for help. Had he called? His head was too confused to know clearly what was happening. Yet he surely must have called; for there, on the bridge just above, stood Parfitt,

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motionless, looking down on him. The moonlight fell upon both, and Cassilis, looking up, met Parfitt's eyes, and knew that he was recognised—knew also that he would receive no assistance. In this Cassilis's perceptions were true. Parfitt did not intend to exert himself in the matter. He could swim a little, but the water of that deep mere would be deadly cold this November night, and he hated discomfort, as a man of his type always does. Besides, he was annoyed by the evident hostility displayed towards him on behalf of Cassilis by Basset and others, and the greatest vindictiveness is usually called forth by offended vanity. So, all things considered, Mark really felt no impulse to interfere. Let Cassilis get out by himself; doubtless he could. And if he could not—well, it was no affair of his—Parfitt's.

Here let 'no one stigmatise the artist's conduct as monstrous or unnatural. People have become so imbued with the idea of Christian chivalry that they positively think it is natural for one man to help another in a difficulty. It isn't. The natural impulse is to leave him alone. Parfitt simply did the natural thing. There was no reason why he should inconvenience himself by pulling Cassilis out, and he did not. The traitors, cowards, and dirty mean rascals, male and female, that one meets with are not the human monsters, the *lusus natura* one likes to imagine them. Oh, no; they are simply the natural man acting in accordance with natural dictates of self-preservation, self-advancement, and self-enjoyment. The human animal on the alert to keep out of harm's way, and to do the best for itself that circumstances permit, combined

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with an equally natural wish to destroy anything unusual, and therefore irritating. Many human beings revert to the Adam B.C. There is no need to search history for examples. One may find amazing instances of meanness and depravity within arm's length any day. Cassilis himself was an instance of a moment's falling back to the pre-Christian type. So Parfitt, the natural man, followed his inclinations, and remained on the bridge. Ten years ago he felt the impulse to help, but that had died with the self-indulgent years. He might have shouted for aid; there were a couple of dozen men within earshot, their voices coming on the air confusedly, making the silence by the bridge seem deeper. But Mark did not shout; it did not seem to him worth while. He did not choose to realise exactly what was happening, and possessed to the full that convenient faculty of only perceiving as much as one wishes to perceive. And the time was very brief. Perhaps, had it been longer, Mark might have strolled off to tell the others that Cassilis was in the mere. As it was, the few moments only sufficed for the artist's worst side to come uppermost.

To Cassilis, half stunned, striving to collect his strength that he might either climb out of the chilling water or summon help, these moments seemed hours. That dark, steady stream, too, from the wound on his head; he knew it ought to be staunched, but how? Then his brain cleared, and he saw Parfitt, and, as their eyes met, understood that Mark was present merely as a spectator—an enemy—not as a friend. Twice in his extremity had Cassilis appealed for help to this man. The memory struck him oddly as he looked up. If

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anyone but Parfitt stood there! Yet was it not better, far better, that this mere, in its fantastic beauty of mist and moonlight, should be the end rather than the squalid wandering that awaited him with longer life? Here, however, with his cleared thought, his strong vitality asserted itself—the fierce clinging to the union of body and spirit that was natural to him —and he made one desperate effort to lift himself up the bank. The attempt was useless, and left him dizzy and faint. He felt he could not hold on much longer. Would anyone come? Would Parfitt stand there for ever? Was that another shot he heard?—distant shouts?

Then things became a little vague to Cassilis. That figure on the bridge who looked on so coldly, was it Parfitt?—or Thorold, come from the dead to reproach him? The luminous mist beside him—was it Thea?

'Thorold! ' he muttered, 'you know I——'

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Then things became yet more vague. The tuft of matted grass to which he held seemed to turn to air— to melt in his grasp like the mist. Softly, gently he slipped back, and with a faint swirl the dark water closed over his head.

His disappearance seemed the signal for the silent spot to wake to life. The eddy had not reached the farther bank before Tony Occleston burst through the plantation, followed by several other men.

'He's gone!' shouted Tony, pulling off his coat. 'I saw him only a moment ago. Look at that blackguard Parfitt on the bridge! I believe he knows all about it.' And Tony plunged into the mere.

Parfitt, very angry now, turned to go off the bridge, and found himself confronting Herries.

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'What were you doing here? ' enquired the latter. 'You were standing still.'

Again Mark felt the sensation of being at a disadvantage somehow. He answered lamely:

'I had just come up, and was intending to seek assistance.'

'Apparently you were in no hurry,' observed Herries coolly, walking away to the bank.

Anthony Occleston had just come up from a second useless dive.

'Come out, Tony,' said Herries, 'and I will try.'

'Once more,' replied Tony, and went down again.

'Here!—let me,' interposed another man. 'I can stop under water as long as anybody, and crawl about on the bottom if necessary.'

'It is very deep here in the cleft,' replied Herries. 'Better that we should go down who know it.'

'Where's Parfitt? ' asked young Fenwick of his brother in a low tone.

'Don't know,' in the same tone. 'Gone off somewhere. I wish we had not brought him. It looked awfully queer, standing quietly on the bridge like that when we came up. Did you hear what Tony Occleston said? '

The other nodded, and turned his attention again to the mere, where Tony was being helped up the bank after his third unavailing dive.

'Better order out the boat and drags,' said Herries, 'in case I fail.' And he went in.

As Herries vanished beneath the moonlit surface, George Occleston arrived with more of his guests.

'What's all this? Who's in? We met Tony pelting off for the boat! '

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'It's Cassilis,' somebody answered.

At that moment Herries reappeared, and there was an instant stir, for he was grasping something.

'Take him,' he said laconically, and Cassilis was drawn up the bank.

'We'll get him to the house at once,' said George. 'How did it happen? '—this to Herries, who was putting on his coat.

'Nobody knows. Unless Parfitt does. He was on the bridge.'

'I hope Cassilis will be all right,' Occleston went on in concerned tones. 'I'll send for old Simpson. He has retired, you know, but will come in an emergency. Likes it. Feels a

little dull, I suspect. I was wondering why Cassilis did not turn up. I though Pugh must be keeping him. Well, we've got five of the gang. That's something. One has peppered himself with his own gun pretty badly; serve him right! Simpson must look at him. But I don't half like this accident to Cassilis.'

'Neither do I,' said Herries.

Stillness settled once more over the mere when Cassilis was carried up to the house. The dark water had done its work. It lay in the cleft like a sword, and the soft shining mist caressed it lovingly; now veiling the rippling steel, now showing gleams of light along the edge; but charily, as though wishing to hide its treasure within those glimmering folds. Not the faintest sound broke that eerie silence of blue vaporous moonlight, woodland, and mere.

That night Outwood was astir till dawn. Occleston refused to believe that Cassilis was dead; and he, Anthony, and Herries strove for hours to bring back the

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life they hoped was yet lingering. When finally even George saw the uselessness of their efforts, his regret was unfeigned.

'The nicest fellow I have met for many a day, and clever too! How in the world did it happen? '

'Parfitt,' said Tony.

'I am not so sure of that,' responded Herries, 'but certainly he made no attempt to save him.'

'I distinctly saw Cassilis holding on to the bank,' said Tony hotly. 'He was looking up at Parfitt, who could have saved him by merely running down and supporting him till we came up. He sank before I could reach him.'

'It looks ugly,' observed George thoughtfully. 'I wonder when Cassilis left Pugh. There will be an inquest. Well, I am sincerely sorry for our loss; the more sorry because had I not asked the poor fellow here to-night it would not have happened. But none of us can foresee things; and anyway I did not invite Parfitt.'

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CHAPTER XXXIII

NEWS travels swiftly in a country place. By eight o'clock next morning all Ringway knew what had happened at Outwood Mere. Parfitt had indeed returned to the Corner before midnight, but beyond telling his sister that Cassilis had fallen into the lake and been pulled out, had said no more. Leaving when he did, Mark was not certain that Cassilis was dead, and Tony Occleston had remained at Outwood. Therefore the tidings came by the accustomed channel of the country folk. Perhaps the Moss Farm was the first household to hear of the accident. A gamekeeper told Gresty in the early dawn, the 'wolf's brush,' while yet there was not light enough to see the colour of the fallen leaves, and Gresty, coming in to breakfast, repeated it to June.

'I'm feart it's true enow,' he added, 'an' a pity it is. He wur a real gentleman an' I liked him.'

'An' so did I,' replied June. 'I conna believe it's true.'

'No more con I. But things as yo' conna believe are mostly true.'

'He'll be missed by a-many,' said June.

'Ay, he will that,' Gresty paused a moment. 'I thowt I saw him an' Miss Thea on th' hillside yesterday, sitting by th' spring. Eh dear! theer's a mort o' trouble i' th' world.'
'Did th' keeper say how Dr. Cassilis got in? '

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'He didna exactly know. He says it mun ha' been th' poachers. Theer wur a regular fight wi' them last neet, as tha knows. Theer wur a lot on 'em, an' keeper says three of 'em passed him running off th' bridge. But Mr. Anthony wur saying that it wur Mr. Parfitt's doing somehow. O'er at Outwood they wur trying a' neet to rub th' life into th' doctor after they'd pulled him out. But he wur gone. Eh! but it's a pity. Most like theer'll be an inquest an' if I'm on th' jury I'll see as Dr. Cassilis has fair play, dead though he be.'
All that morning June pondered over what she had heard. Had Cassilis and Parfitt quarrelled? And about what? June had not seen Cassilis lately, save once or twice in the town. The rumour of his leaving had reached her ears, but she had not believed it, ascribing that and all other reports to Parfitt's jealousy. As for Rudell's evident suspicion, June thought of that with scorn. Had she not been present when Thorold died? Did she not know his death was the result of his own lamentable carelessness She was glad Rudell had not come to the farm again; and she had hoped for Cassilis's marriage to Thea; as that, June felt, would put both Parfitt and Rudell to silence. June Gresty was, as has been said, a grateful creature. Cassilis had no more sincere friend than she; and now that all was over and he beyond praise or blame, earthly happiness or misery, she recalled with superstitious awe the words he had spoken that summer morning when the blackbird was singing in the cherry-tree: 'Perhaps this is the end of my wanderings.'
It seemed a piteous end. An injustice somehow. June held that goodness should be rewarded by happiness, and she had seen nothing but good in Cassilis.

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Fate had been niggardly towards him, or so it seemed to June.
Later, having been into the town, Gresty came in with the news that there would be an inquest, and that Cassilis had probably been thrown into the mere by the three poachers seen by the gamekeeper.
'But folks are saying,' finished Gresty, 'as Parfitt wur standing on th' bridge a-looking on comfortable- loike while th' doctor wur drowning.'
'Then he wur as bad as th' poachers,' said June.
'Ay, he wur. 'Tis a pity him an' Dr. Cassilis couldna ha' changed places. But nowt never comes to harm! ' Rudell returned home the same morning, and found a gloom in Quality Corner that shadowed every house. Basset was taking upon himself the responsibility of arranging Cassilis's affairs.
'Apparently the poor fellow had no relatives, or none worth recognising,' he said to Rudell. 'There are no papers, except a few relating to his coming here. His books and personal possessions I shall take charge of in case anyone appears to claim them. Of course I shall put the death in the papers. There is money enough to pay the housekeeper and trifling accounts; if there were not I should settle those matters. The house is mine, and I shall not take the rent due, but keep it in case any claim is made by anyone in need. Have you seen Occleston? '

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'George? No, not yet. I have been hearing about it all from Parfitt. Old Sol Ingers just mentioned to me a preposterous report in the town.'

'You mean the belief that Parfitt was the cause of Cassilis's death? I fail to see that it is preposterous.'

'What?'

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'A little while ago you told me that any man was capable of anything.'

Rudell was slightly taken aback.

'True; I did.'

'I am not supposing,' Basset went on, 'that your brother-in-law deliberately threw poor Cassilis into the mere. But I think it possible that they quarrelled and a struggle ensued, and Cassilis may have lost his balance and fallen in. Whether that were so or not, it is indisputable that Parfitt might have saved him had he been willing.'

'He tells me there was not time.'

'When one does not wish to do a thing, there is never time to do it.'

'Well, the idea is, I believe, chiefly Tony Occleston's, and you know Tony is hasty in forming opinions.'

'I hear Herries noticed Parfitt's delay in summoning assistance, and spoke to him about it.'

'That sounds awkward, I admit. But it does not disprove Parfitt's statement.'

'He has told you there was not time. That may be true; but whether there was time or not, the ugly fact remains that he was not attempting to do anything. He was standing perfectly still on the bridge when the others came up.'

'There will be an inquest, of course?'

'To-morrow.'

'It seems a melancholy accident,' said Rudell, after a slight pause; 'yet for Cassilis it may be the best that could happen to him. He was getting under a cloud, you know.'

'A cloud of Parfitt's making, which would have disappeared with Parfitt. As for it being the best thing

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that could happen to Cassilis, why of course it is. The man who dies between thirty and fifty is lucky indeed. He has had as much as life can probably give him, and he escapes the long downward journey—the journey among thieves—evil years that snatch first one thing, then another; increasing toil and lessening strength; till—his good days past—the victim either dies of overwork or starvation; or lingers on lonely, weary, decrepit, cursing the training that restrains him from blowing out his miserable brains.'

'Oh come! ' said Rudell, 'some of us—many of us— are snug enough.'

'Yes, we who don't deserve it. I am snug enough, as you say. I have never toiled. I have outlived my hopes, fears, aspirations, and am content to aim at— the possession of a good cook! Are your aims much higher, Rudell? '

'What can one do, Basset? '

'Cassilis is lucky,' Basset went on. 'Every man and woman capable of thinking would say the same. But the world has lost a sympathetic and clever man, and I have lost a friend.'

Also, though of this he did not speak, Basset was perturbed on his god-daughter's account. Did she care for Cassilis or not? Emily Darnton went about with red-rimmed eyes, openly lamenting; whereas Thea only looked a little paler than usual, and she was always pale. Basset had found among the dead man's possessions the parcel addressed to her. Without examining it, he took it into his own house, where Thea was writing letters in the dining-room, and placing it beside her on the table, said simply, ' This is addressed to you, my dear,' and went back to Number

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One. When he returned an hour later, Thea was still writing letters, but the parcel was gone. She made no allusion to it, neither did Basset. Her silence, however, troubled him, as it showed greater feeling or greater indifference than her speaking would have done; and since he could hardly suppose it meant indifference, he was harassed by the question of how much feeling might be involved. Yet the silence might merely be courteous reticence towards the memory of a man who had laid the best that he had at her feet. Basset hoped it was so. At any rate, he thought, she had Emily Darnton to talk to if she wished.

But that sunny brilliancy of hers was the foam- sparkle over the still depths of the sea. Neither to Emily nor to anyone else was Thea likely to speak of Cassilis. As time went on, the years would show her how fatal was that flaw in his character; how infinitely better, finer, higher, is that innate Christian honour which comes from a long line of believing, self-repressing ancestry, and which cannot fail; the iron of centuries beaten into the steel that never breaks; on whose absolute, instinctive integrity of thought and action one may rely as on the return of the dawn or the Word of the Almighty—from Whom, originally, this splendid honour comes.

At this present time—as always—Thea kept silence. Before she opened the box she knew what it contained. Taking out the model when in her own room, she looked at it for a long time, much as Cassilis had done. A turmoil of thought seethed round it. Her father's toil over and pride in his invention—and it had caused his death! Then Cassilis's despairing remorse and long wandering. Best that the little model should

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vanish even as had those two whose lives were linked with it. Doubtless this miserable page of the Dark Fairy-tale would be read again hereafter, but then the crooked things would surely be made straight; Cassilis would surely be forgiven, and that which he had done would not be mentioned unto him.

Here she recalled that sunny morning in the churchyard when Cassilis had spoken of the uselessness of repentance—the immortality of remorse. Now, remembering his enduring regret, his long wanderings; remembering too how wholly unpremeditated was that fatal pause, his fate seemed hard to Thea—hard in its privations in this world, and in its burden of memory in the other. Yet he reaped the reward of his deed, and of that harvest no man can reasonably complain. To judge of an evil act it is as well to look at it from the point of view either of its victims or its consequences, or both. Thorold had been sent out of life by one whom he had rescued from starvation. That was the plain truth which Thorold's daughter saw with painful clearness, striving not to see. Of what avail was it to say other men were greater sinners and enjoyed their lives notwithstanding their misdeeds? That others were worse did not make Cassilis better. A

man is not measured by the standard of his fellows, but by that of the Almighty, and the two are not the same. This man had reaped his harvest of his base treachery. Those others would reap their harvest also. His Dark Fairy-tale was finished; the Rider of the Pale Horse had drawn rein and added the last few lines, as was his custom. Had but the tale been different! Yet it had been one of repentance, useless of

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course, but still repentance. The average human being regards repentance as wholly unnecessary till death, and then completely efficacious. Indeed, he will not only excuse the transgressions that attract him, but will weave petty sophistries to prove them right, or at least trivial—contemptible sophistries to draw the attention away from the evil of the offences, like the will-o'-the- wisps that flicker above the pestiferous marsh—lights that do not help the vision, but bewilder.

Cassilis had not sought to palliate his own wickedness. If he had fallen a slave to his own evil impulses for one fatal minute, he had undoubtedly been a free man all the rest of his life both before and after. Yet that model on the table bore mute witness of how Thorold had left this present world, and his daughter sat before it thinking; as he himself had often sat long ago, and as Cassilis had sat; all three with such different thoughts! Thorold interested and hopeful, Cassilis remorseful and despairing, Thea trying to reconcile the irreconcilable; refusing to see what yet she did see, the truth Cassilis had uttered on the hillside, that repentance and forgiveness do not and cannot annihilate evil once done.

The problem was insoluble. What use in thinking further? Thea rose and restored the model to its box. It should never be seen save by her. Best that it should vanish. By-and-by she would arrange its disappearance. Even to Basset she would not show it, Cassilis's confession was made to her alone.

That night she looked at the model again, touched it gently—curiously—feeling an interest in it apart from pain; wondered if her father had been proud of

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it, if he would prefer her to keep it. But that she could not do. She left it uncovered all night, and the moon- rays in their slow travelling glimmered on the steel as on some fantastic web meant for the entanglement of rarer things than flies.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

ALL Ringway went to the inquest, and those who could not get into the room discussed the matter outside. Public opinion emphatically objected to Parfitt. Tony Occleston's observations had been repeated far and wide and were accepted by the majority. Herries too, when he appeared as a witness, did not increase the artist's popularity by the statement that Mark was quietly standing on the bridge when the others came up. Neither was the jury likely to regard him favourably, for Mr. Pugh was foreman. A man of Pugh's idiosyncrasies thoroughly enjoys being on a jury, it affords such opportunity for contradiction.

Besides, Pugh sincerely regretted Cassilis's death. Where could he find such another companion? Life would be distinctly duller. When the rumour of Parfitt's guilt reached

his ears, Pugh believed it at once and for ever, and resolved to do his duty. This resolution was visible all over him as he walked solidly to his place as one of the twelve.

'Pugh means to be an awful handful,' said George Occleston to Rudell in a low voice. 'Look at the way he is sitting down. When a man settles himself in a seat as though he meant to stick to it throughout eternity, you know what to expect! '

'Why should Pugh concern himself particularly? ' inquired Rudell.

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'Well, he liked Cassilis. As everyone did except yourself, Rudell.'

'I always acknowledged that he was a capable man.'

'That is not liking. Parfitt was his enemy, and you listened to Parfitt. It is all over now,' continued Occleston. 'We need not quarrel about the poor fellow. But I esteemed him greatly and had much enjoyment in his society; and—hang it all, Rudell!—Parfitt could have pulled him out had he chosen to do so.'

'I am not prepared to admit that,' said Rudell.

'Herries says so. Ask him. There he is by the door, with Anthony and Basset.'

'And I am not responsible for my brother-in-law's actions,' continued Rudell.

'I should like to make him responsible for his own,' retorted Occleston.

The inquest was conducted on Ringway principles, that is, with a comfortable absence of ceremony. Parfitt's evidence was received in ominous silence, until Mr. Pugh pleasantly observed:

'My opinion is that Mark Parfitt an' James Cassilis had words on the bridge, an' Mark Parfitt threw James Cassilis over. '

'That's a lie! ' said Parfitt.

'All right,' responded Mr. Pugh, 'but thaï don't alter my opinion.'

Here the coroner interposed to ask Parfitt whether he could swim.

'A little.'

'Then why did you not go to the assistance of Dr. Cassilis? '

'I never supposed he needed any.'

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'I reckon,' said Mr. Pugh, addressing Parfitt, 'as your words to me 'ud come in handy now.'

The coroner, a meek little man, who felt the control of Pugh altogether beyond him, again interposed:

'But you saw he was holding on to the bank? '

'I did not notice.'

'At any rate, you saw him in the water. If you had gone down to the mere-side and supported him till help came he would have been alive now.'

'I supposed he could get out. There was really no time to do anything.'

'Other folks could get wet jackets in half a minute,' remarked Pugh. 'You didn't even wet your hands. But they'll need a deal o' washing to get rid o' this! '

A breath of approval passed through the listening crowd.

'Upon my soul! ' whispered Occleston in Basset's ear, 'I had no notion Pugh had so much in him.'

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'I perceive,' said Parfitt with cold anger, 'that a ridiculous attempt is being made to consider me responsible for this accident. But here is a keeper who saw me go on the bridge and stand there alone, and I have other witnesses.'

'We will take the keeper's evidence next,' said the coroner.

'Dr. Cassilis was all right when he left my house, as my gardener can testify, for he shut the gates after him,' said Pugh, 'an' that was twenty-five minutes past ten. There were three shots fired afore then an' eight after, for I counted 'em. Now where was Cassilis when them eight shots were fired? ' looking enquiringly towards Anthony Occleston, who replied:

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'The last shot was fired just as I saw Dr. Cassilis sink.'

'Well,' resumed Pugh, 'yon last shot was fired at fifteen to eleven. I'm particular about my clocks, as folks know; an' the doctor was in the water then. That gives twenty minutes to account for. Now,' turning to Parfitt, 'where was you them twenty minutes? '

'In the woods with the rest of the party.'

'Till you walked on the bridge? ' put in the coroner.

'Till I walked on the bridge, of course. But I was there no time to speak of.'

'Nay,' said Mr. Pugh, 'that's just the time as we want to speak of—the time when you was standing still on the bridge instead o' helping or hollering.'

At this point the coroner suggested that they might as well hear what the gamekeeper had to say.

'Why not all of 'em?' demanded Mr. Pugh. 'I'd like to hear what all the keepers have to say.'

However, it appeared that only two had any information to give. The first had been in the farther plantation, had seen three men rush by him from the direction of the bridge, and had started in pursuit, but stumbled over a tree-root and fell. When he picked himself up, the three men had vanished. So he went back towards the bridge, as the men had come from thence.

'Had you heard no noise before the men passed you? ' asked the coroner.

The keeper was not sure. There was a good deal of noise in the woods just then. He could hardly tell from what quarter it came. As he went back to the bridge he saw Mr. Parfitt in front of him.

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'An' where had Mr. Parfitt been afore you saw him? ' enquired Pugh.

That the witness did not know. But he saw him walk out on the bridge and stand there in the full moonlight alone. No one was with him. He—the keeper—then hurried off to where the fight was going on. Mr. Parfitt was standing quietly. There was no one about.

The keeper went on to say that from where he stood he could not see the water, therefore was not aware that Dr. Cassilis was in the mere; thought all was right because Mr. Parfitt was standing there quietly.

'No blame attaches to this man,' said the coroner.

'I want to know how many shots were fired while Mr. Parfitt was on the bridge,' said Pugh.

The keeper did not remember. He himself was in the thick of the fight in three minutes or so. When he arrived he saw Mr. Anthony and several other gentlemen break away in pursuit of two poachers. They ran towards the mere.

'An' that was how you got down to the mere an' saw Dr. Cassilis drowning,' looking again at Tony.

'Yes, that was it. He sank just as I caught sight of him.'

'That gives him seven or eight minutes in the water, at a rough guess,' continued Mr. Pugh, 'an' it leaves ten or twelve minutes. Where was Mr. Parfitt them ten minutes? '

But to Pugh's evident disappointment, which he was at no pains to conceal, the second keeper stated that he was with Parfitt up to the time when the latter walked on the bridge.

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'An' what was you two doing away from the fight? ' asked Pugh.

The man explained that he and Parfitt had gone to look for the rest of the gang, as some of the expected poachers were missing. He had heard a noise of running. Supposed it was caused by the three men seen by the previous witness. Could not see the bridge from where he and Mr. Parfitt stood at first. They walked towards it till it came in sight, and then separated, Mr. Parfitt going on the bridge and himself remaining in the plantation to look round. No one was anywhere about. He did not see Dr. Cassilis, as he did not go near the water. Mr. Parfitt was standing on the bridge in the moonlight. Then he heard Mr. Anthony and others coming, and went back in case Mr. Occleston wanted him. Questioned by Pugh respecting the eight shots, the keeper replied that he had not counted them, but Mr. Parfitt was either with him or within sight during the whole of the firing from first to last.

'Oh, was he! ' observed Pugh with obvious unbelief, 'an' them three poachers chucked the doctor in, I suppose?'

'That is certainly my opinion, Mr. Pugh,' said the coroner, 'and I shall hope for their discovery and arrest.'

Compelled to let his prey escape, Pugh drew his own conclusions; the three men were mythical, the keepers had been bribed. Of that he was positive, and therefore contrived to make the verdict as unpleasant as possible to Parfitt; the jury stating their opinion that Cassilis was thrown into the mere by ' some person or persons not in custody.'

'Unknown,' amended the coroner.

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'Not in custody,' repeated Pugh, fixing a deliberate eye on Mark; and the twelve also added a rider to the effect that Parfitt deserved severe censure for not attempting either to assist Cassilis or to summon assistance.

'These country juries are the most intolerable idiots living! ' began Parfitt as the crowd dispersed and he came out with Rudell. Close behind them was Pugh.

'How much did you give 'em? ' he enquired.

'Do you insinuate that I bribed my witnesses? ' asked Mark.

'I'm sure on't,' replied Pugh. 'No man can say as I insinuate. I'm sure on't! '

'Your words are actionable, Mr. Pugh.'

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'O' course. You bring the action an' I'll defend it. I'll spend the money cheerful.'

Rudell took his brother-in-law by the arm and led him away.

'Don't be a fool, Mark. Let the matter drop. You've got out of this better than you deserve. That standing on the bridge was awkward—very! '

'I shall return to town to-night,' said Parfitt. 'The whole affair is outrageous. I have been right about Cassilis all along. You don't deny there was something queer, though you won't tell. Yet I am first snubbed and then held up to ridicule. I'm deuced sorry I ever saw this hole! '

'I admit,' said Rudell, 'which you have some right on your side, but that standing on the bridge is indefensible. However, we need say no more about it. Cassilis is dead, Pugh is nobody, and you are going.'

'What was the story about Cassilis? ' enquired Mark.

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'Since he is gone, it is not worth while mentioning it. I may have been wrong in my surmises.'

'Did he pass himself off as the fellow who suicided? '

'Oh dear no, nothing of the kind. By the way, I think Basset would buy that sketch if you care to sell it.'

'Of Cassilis? Well, I may as well get rid of it. He has caused me so much annoyance that it is only fair I should make something out of him.'

'I will take it into Basset's this evening and bring back the money.'

'All right.'

This slightly soothed Parfitt, so that when he was back in Quality Corner, and his sister vexedly watched his packing, he suddenly invited her to return to town with him for awhile.

'You seem rather glum,' said he. 'You meant well, Susette, but your little scheme for my happiness has proved a failure. Looking at things all around, I am not sure which has won, Cassilis or myself. I about settled him, and he has settled me—or nearly so. Anyway, you would be the better for a change. Ask Rudell. And get ready at once.'

'Go, of course,' was Rudell's answer when consulted. 'I will join you later. I am afraid all this has been very unpleasant for you, Susette.'

'I think everybody has behaved as badly as possible,' replied Mrs. Rudell. 'I am quite tired of mysterious drownings and disagreeables.'

'We are rid of them now,' said her husband. 'Give me that portrait, Mark. I am going into Number Two.'

He found Basset sitting with Tony Occleston in the

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dusk and flickering firelight, Thea having gone in next door to see Emily Darnton.

Rudell produced the charcoal drawing of Cassilis.

'You wanted it,' he said.

'Yes.' Basset took it up. 'I will write a cheque for it now.'

'Do you mean to say,' exclaimed Tony, 'that Parfitt will take money for the portrait of the man he would not save! Well, of all the disgusting——' Tony stopped. He felt language was not equal to expressing his opinion of Parfitt at that moment:

'I am glad to have it,' said Basset, looking at the face —younger than that of the man he had known, yet the same.

'My brother-in-law goes to London to-night,' observed Rudell after a minute's silence.

'What time does he leave here? ' enquired Tony.

'My dear boy, professionally speaking, I don't know.'

'You mean you won't tell! '

'That is my meaning exactly. If I read yours aright, you intend waylaying him. Best not. He is not worth a fracas. Besides, my wife is going with him.'

'Oh,' said Tony disappointedly. 'I was waiting about here to tell him what I thought of him.'

'He knows it already,' rejoined the lawyer.

Basset straightened himself in his chair, sitting bolt upright.

' If Parfitt were not a relative of your wife's, I should permit myself to observe that I consider him a very low type—quite the lowest type it has been my misfortune to meet in presumably civilised society.'

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'I think I will tell him that,' said Rudell. 'It will annoy him.'

Here Tony Occleston, hearing Thea's returning footsteps in the hall, left the two elder men alone together.

'I regret Cassilis very deeply,' Basset added.

'He has disturbed our little world/ replied the other. 'A vivid personality always does. By-and-by the impression will fade, and he will be to us merely the remembrance of a passing stranger.'

'No,' said Basset.

'Yes,' insisted Rudell, 'it must be so. Only the brute and the fool are always recollected, because they leave a generation or so of entanglements behind them for other people to straighten. That keeps their memory green! But when a remarkable man dies—I admit Cassilis was a remarkable man, whatever may be my opinion of his doings—his contemporaries experience a certain relief. There is so much more room for them to stretch their legs.'

Basset passed his hand over his face.

'Rudell—pardon me—when you are in these moods you make me comprehend the general feeling towards lawyers.'

Rudell slowly took a pinch of snuff.

'Decidedly,' he said, 'Cassilis was a remarkable man. He causes quarrelling. That is the sure sign of a remarkable man. But I am willing to admit it is just possible that I may be altogether mistaken in my suspicions, though I cannot think I am. Yet,' Rudell paused, 'though not for a moment do I defend Parfitt's conduct at the bridge, it must be acknowledged that in all else he was right enough. It is that which annoys

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us. The man who is right is always a nuisance, particularly if we dislike him. He was perfectly justified in producing that portrait. As for the unhappy accident by which Cassilis lost his life, has it not struck you, Basset, that there was somehow a singular retribution in the whole affair? '

'I perceive none.'
'Yes, you do. Your tone tells me you do. It is most curious that Mark should have been present both at Thorold's death and at Cassilis's.'
'You cannot say that he was present at Thorold's.'
'Well, he was outside the house, and Cassilis addressed him that same night, and close upon the hour too. Assuming that my suspicions are correct, and that Cassilis was the cause of Thorold dying, I am impressed by the fact that Parfitt might have saved Cassilis, but did not. I am not excusing my brother-in- law's conduct, but he appears to me as an unconscious instrument of retribution. The more I reflect upon the circumstances the more singular they are. Mark really seems to have been brought here by an inscrutable Providence to explain and avenge Thorold's death.'
'I prefer not to think so,' said Basset, looking troubled.
'I am not excusing Mark,' Rudell repeated. 'I consider him a brute. But there the facts are.'
'I still believe in Cassilis.'
'I do not,' and Rudell rose.
'You will come in to-morrow? ' asked Basset. 'Emily Darnton is going to stay at Outwood for a week or two, so I am thinking of running over to Ireland with Thea.'
'Quality Corner needs a change,' said Rudell.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

THUS it happened that Cassilis never left Ringway, but slept among the dead Ringway folk on the green hillside looking south that Thea had likened to the waiting-place of repentant spirits. As the November moon waned, the gold of autumn faded and December came—the month that is like a peat fire, grey ash veiling the glow; the month in which the earth is still stirring drowsily before sinking into the deep sleep of January. In December there is the semiconsciousness of the woodland—the slowing of the pulse, the ash over the smouldering flame; the month in which the sense of life is so singularly acute, perhaps because so repressed. One is impelled to tread softly, to listen, like some wild four-footed thing. One reverts to the primaeval man, yet retaining all the added capacity for enjoyment that the centuries have bestowed. There is an extraordinary and apparently wholly unreasonable exhilaration of spirit when one treads the peat in December, an exhilaration second only to that given by the sea.
This year December was very beautiful in Ringway. Day after day brought a dawn of clearest light, a noontide of softened gold, a twilight of sombre crimson, a night of stars. At last, close upon Christmas, there came a morning when a little bitter wind blew from the north, and clouds shut out the blue, grey clouds with the faint tinge of yellow that betokens snow.

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Towards afternoon the wind dropped, but the air grew colder.
Now so long as the woods—the mere, basked in the same mellow sunshine, had much the same aspect they wore that last day of Cassilis's life, Thea Thorold had not cared to look upon them. She had acquiesced gladly in Basset's proposal to go away for awhile, so for three weeks the mahogany box had remained at Number Two. On her return the little model therein grew familiar to her eyes, for again and again and yet

again she sat before it far into the night—as those others, Thorold and Cassilis, had sat—thinking continually, yet to no purpose. The Dark Fairy-tale was finished. If the model could disappear, that would be the closing of the book till a mightier hand reopened it. Then the thought of the mere rose in Thea's mind. There was safe concealment—oblivion—in that deep cleft. The idea grew. Yes, the lake should take the fatal thing into its silent keeping. So when the faint icy wind arose, and the dreamy warmth of the early winter fled before it, Thea walked over to Outwood Mere. There was a waiting hush in the woods, a pause before the coming of the snow. Against the yellow-grey of the sky the leafless branches outlined themselves with that unexpectedness and variety of intricate interlacing that the eye follows with such a grateful sense of pleasure and rest. Unconsciously peace stole over Thea's spirit—the anodyne of the winter woods. Of what avail was it to try to solve that which is insoluble? She could not straighten this crooked thing—destroy the evil thought that had taken such fatal shape and form. Oh those devils incarnate that scared the good folk of mediaeval times, and could

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themselves be scared by bell, book, and candle! Small need to imagine these harmless demons, when by merely putting our evil thoughts into action we can create real devils that no exorcism can quell, no priest can daunt; devils that will go on working for us while we sleep in death, that they may, when we awake, display their finished task before us their creators; who stand responsible both for them and for their resultant labours.

Cassilis was happy in that the devil he had raised was one whose power for active evil in the world soon ceased. Merciful happenings had checked it at the onset. Basset had taken Thorold's desolate child, death had taken Cassilis. He left the shadow of painful knowledge and sorrowful regret; a faint umbra this beside the terrific phantoms men daily call up, give body to, and send forth; yet equally with these, undying—uncontrollable—and to be accounted for.

The mere lay in the cleft like dull steel beneath the lowering sky. There was no one about. Thea placed the box on the parapet and looked down into the water. Dimly that dark mass mirrored the arch of the bridge, the clouds, her own face. She lifted the box, holding it in both hands outstretched that it might fall clear. For a moment she hesitated, thinking again of her father's toil and thought expended on this thing—toil and thought lying dormant for years, and now to be lost for ever by her act. Yet what else could she do? Produce the model? Explain why and how it had come into her possession? Impossible! If her decision were wrong, she alone was responsible.

With a perplexed sigh, Thea dropped the box. It

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turned sideways as it fell, striking the water with a faint splash, and was gone. The little ripples caused by its fall flowed away to the banks, and the dark surface was quiet once more. It was gone—the thought that had been shaped into wood and steel. As for that other thought, Cassilis's evil thought, and its result, these were in abeyance; undone they could not be.

Thea looked down into the black water as though seeking to read some comfort there. In vain. The mere could keep a secret, it could give sanctuary from all the ills of

this life, but it could not solve a problem that lay beyond this visible world. Yet Cassilis had had a hard life—so hard a life resulting from one brief thought, and he had repented. His life had been hard mainly because he had repented. He had surely dree'd his weird. Then in Thea's mind the words formed themselves, as other words not dissimilar had shone in the banqueting hall at Babylon, 'I will render evil unto this people, even the fruit of their thoughts.'

After all, the real things are the things intangible— invisible; thought—feeling. These move the world for good or evil. Evil had been Cassilis's thought and its evil fruit had been rendered to him; and also to others, for no man liveth unto himself. 'Even the fruit of their thoughts! ' Again the words shaped themselves before Thea's mental vision, and the underlying Puritanism in her rose and sorrowfully acquiesced— that Puritanism which it is now the fashion to decry, but which nevertheless built the Empire, and is the only force that is capable of permanently maintaining it. There is no energy so great as that produced by the self-restraint of generations.

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'I will render evil unto this people, even the fruit of their thoughts.'

Standing here on the bridge, Thea felt the influence of the place more sinister than she had imagined it would be; the sight of it had a stronger effect upon her than she had anticipated. Yet she lingered some minutes from a feeling characteristic of her, an inborn asceticism that compelled her to remain because the remaining was not pleasant; a feeling of compassionate loyalty that forbade her to hasten from the spot where a friend had died, no matter how uselessly painful the lingering might be.

A snowflake floated slowly down. Then another and another, skirmishers of the White Company that the strong north was sending; soft feathery crystals whirling onward in fantastic manoeuvres, silent legionaries whose advance no man can withstand.

As if the first flake had been a messenger, Thea turned away homeward. Not hurrying; she was too much a creature of the elements to fear a snowstorm when her path lay through sheltering woods and the air was windless, but December days are short and the dusk would close in before she reached Quality Corner.

The snow fell thickly as she crossed the field where the barley had rustled in the summer—how long ago it seemed!—but within the woods the flakes descended more slowly, arrested by the interlacing branches. To Thea, who felt a stronger kinship with nature than most, the eddying whiteness brought a sort of forlorn comfort. The last few weeks had been so full of sadness and painful thought, that now the mere had closed

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over that mute accuser, now that the Dark Fairy-tale was ended, the book shut till the time when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, the youth in her clamoured for relief; turning gratefully to old familiar playmates of woodland and snow, old memories of pleasant childish days. She hastened her steps, thinking of Quality Corner and her godfather, and all the warmth and welcome and sunny life that had been hers there. The snowflakes powdered her shoulders, her hair, touched her cheek with their light chill; the twilight shadows giving a dim unreality to the falling whiteness. One moment she stopped by the chestnut, and glanced round the dusky woods with a renewed pang of

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regret for the man who had been such a good companion. A good companion, yes; but it needs a master-hand to bring out the full tones of a Guarnerius, and that Cassilis was not. He had but struck a few vibrating chords.

Then Thea went on. In a minute or two more she was outside the woods and hastened down the hill—a lithe snow-besprinkled figure, veiled in the softly-whirling flakes. There were the lights of Quality Corner shining faintly through the snow. People were coming up the road from the station; a train from Woffendale was just in. Basset had been all day in the grimy city, and here he was, turning into the Corner.

'Caught in the snow, my dear? ' he said, seeing his god-daughter. 'I have brought the Bishop back with me to dinner. I told him we expect Emily, and Herries, and the Occlestons.'

So they passed into the warm, brightly-lit, flower- scented old house, and the old life began again; while

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the soft sheltering snow fell more and more thickly far and wide—over town and wood and field, over hill and valley, over Mannannen's garden, and over the churchyard looking south where Cassilis slept among the dead Ringway folk, in the place of repentant spirits.

THE END

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