Celibates

George Moore

Title: Celibates

Author: George Moore

Release Date: July, 2004 [EBook #6005]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on October 15, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Charles Franks
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

CELIBATES

BY

GEORGE MOORE
Author of
"Spring Days," "A Mummer's Wife" Etc.

With Introduction By
TEMPLE SCOTT

NEW YORK
1915

INTRODUCTION.

Looking back over the twenty years since "Celibates" was first published I find that the George Moore of the earlier year is the George Moore of to-day. The novelist of 1895 and the novelist of 1915 are one and the same person. Each is really interested in himself; each is more concerned with how the world and its humanity appear to him than how they appear to the casual observer or how they may be in themselves. The writer is always expressing himself through the facts and personalities which have stirred his imagination to creative effort. George Moore has never been a reporter or a philosopher; he has always been an artist.

Now to say that the author of "Celibates" is always expressing himself does not at all mean that he is recording merely his private sensations, emotions, and moods. Egoist as he is, George Moore could not write his autobiography. He tried to do this lately in "Ave," "Vale," and "Salve," and failed--failed captivatingly. He is always most himself when he is dealing with what is not himself--with skies and hills and ocean and gardens and men and women. Moore is a naturalist in the finest sense of that word. He deals with nature as the artist must deal with it if nature is to be understood and enjoyed. For Moore's relationship with nature, and especially with human nature, is of that rare kind which is the experience of the very few--of those fine spirits endowed with the highest sympathy--a sympathy which is not a feeling with or for others but an actual union with others, a union which brings suffering as well as enjoyment. This is the artist's burden of sorrow and it is also his privilege. It is because of it that every true work of art has in it also something of a religious influence--a binding power which unites the separated onlookers in an experience of a common emotion. If the artist have not this peculiar sympathy he can have no vision and will never be a

creator; he will never show us or tell us the new and strange mysteries of life which nature is continually unfolding. The artist's mission is to reveal to us the visions he alone has been vouchsafed to see, and to reveal them so that the revelation is a creation. The men and women he is introducing to us must be as real and as living to us as they are to him. That is what George Moore has done in "Celibates" and that is why I say he is an artist.

"Celibates" consists of three stories--two of women and one of a man. Mildred Lawson and John Norton are celibates by nature. Agnes Lahens is a celibate from environment and circumstance. Each of the three is utterly different from the other, and yet all are alike in that they are the products of a modern civilization. Mildred and John are without that compulsive force which is known as the sexual passion. If they have it at all, it has been diluted by tradition and so-called culture into a mere sensation. Agnes's passion is an arrested one, so that what there is of it is easily diverted into an expression of religious aspiration.

Mildred Lawson would be called a born flirt. She is pretty, charming, and talented; but she is cold, unresponsive, selfish, and futile. She is also eminently respectable after the English middle-class manner. She has ambition, but she lacks the will-power to school herself and the determination to accomplish. She is rich in goods but very poor in goodness. She is often moved profoundly by beautiful thoughts and uplifting emotions of which she herself is the pleasing, pulsating centre; but her soul is negative, so that her spiritual states evaporate when the opportunity is given her for transforming them into acts. She never gets anywhere. She is self-conscious to a degree and unstable as water. After breaking one man's heart and deadening the hearts of three other men, she finally accepts an old and rejected sweetheart, only to be torn by suspicions that he no longer cares for her and is marrying her only for her money. We leave her a prey to thoughts of a life which, unconsciously, she has brought on herself.

John Norton might be called the born monk. He is, however, but the male embodiment of that cultured selfishness of which Mildred Lawson is the female expression. He is not a flirt. He takes life too seriously to be that; but he takes it so seriously that there is only room in the world for himself alone. He comes of a fine old English stock, is rich, and is his own master. He treats his mother as a cold-blooded English gentleman, with Norton's peculiar nature, would treat a mother--with polite but firm disregard of her claims. He has enough and to spare of will-power, but it is become degenerated into obstinacy. He fails because he wants too much, because he is unsocial at heart, and does not understand that life means giving as well as taking. His sexual passion finds expression in a religious fanaticism which is but the expression of utter selfishness, as all sexual passion is. In the company of Kitty he has moments of exaltation, when his degenerate passion scents the pure air of love; but he can never let himself go. When, on one occasion, he so far forgets himself as to allow his heart to be responsive to Kitty's natural purity and he kisses her, he is so shocked at what he has done that he runs away and leaves the girl to a terrible fate. We leave him also a prey to thoughts of what he might have prevented. He, too, like Mildred Lawson, must henceforth face a life of his own unconscious making.

Agnes Lahens is the victim of a heartless, selfish society in which the abuse of love has made its world a desert and its products Dead

Sea fruit. Out of a sheer impulse for self-protection she flies to the nunnery, which is ready to give her life at the price of her womanhood and her self-sacrifice.

As portraits, these of Mildred Lawson and John Norton are exquisitely finished. They are half-lengths, with a quality of coloring fascinating in its repelling truth. Every tint and shade have been cunningly and caressingly laid in, so that the features, living and animated, are yet filled with suggestions of the spiritual barrenness in the originals. Very human they are, and yet they are without those gracious qualities which link humanity with what we feel to be divine. There is the touch of nature here, but it is not the touch which makes the whole world kin. That touch we ourselves supply; and it speaks eloquently for Moore's art that in picturing these unlovely beings he throws us back on our better selves. Beyond the vision of these celibates here revealed we see a passionate humanity, working, hating, sorrowing, and dying, yet always loving, and in loving finding its fullest life in an earthly salvation. True love is a mighty democrat. Knowing these "Celibates," we welcome the more gladly those who, even if less gifted, are ready to walk with us, hand in hand, along the common human highway of the "pilgrim's progress."

TEMPLE SCOTT.

CONTENTS.

MILDRED LAWSON

JOHN NORTON

AGNES LAHENS

MILDRED LAWSON.

I.

The tall double stocks were breathing heavily in the dark garden; the delicate sweetness of the syringa moved as if on tip-toe towards the windows; but it was the aching smell of lilies that kept Mildred awake.

As she tossed to and fro the recollections of the day turned and turned in her brain, ticking loudly, and she could see each event as distinctly as the figures on the dial of a great clock.

'What a strange woman that Mrs. Fargus--her spectacles, her short hair, and that dreadful cap which she wore at the tennis party! It was impossible not to feel sorry for her, she did look so ridiculous. I wonder her husband allows her to make such a guy of herself. What a curious little man, his great cough and that foolish shouting manner;

a good-natured, empty-headed little fellow. They are a funny couple! Harold knew her husband at Oxford; they were at the same college. She took honours at Oxford; that's why she seemed out of place in a little town like Sutton. She is quite different from her husband; he couldn't pass his examinations; he had been obliged to leave. ... What made them marry?

'I don't know anything about Comte--I wish I did; it is so dreadful to be ignorant. I never felt my ignorance before, but that little woman does make me feel it, not that she intrudes her learning on any one; I wish she did, for I want to learn. I wish I could remember what she told me: that all knowledge passes through three states: the theological, the--the--metaphysical, and the scientific. We are religious when we are children, metaphysical when we are one-and-twenty, and as we get old we grow scientific. And I must not forget this, that what is true for the individual is true for the race. In the earliest ages man was religious (I wonder what our vicar would say if he heard this). In the Middle Ages man was metaphysical, and in these latter days he is growing scientific.

'The other day when I came into the drawing-room she didn't say a word. I waited and waited to see if she would speak--no, not a word. She sat reading. Occasionally she would look up, stare at the ceiling, and then take a note. I wonder what she put down on that slip of paper? But when I spoke she seemed glad to talk, and she told me about Oxford. It evidently was the pleasantest time of her life. It must have been very curious. There were a hundred girls, and they used to run in and out of each other's rooms, and they had dances; they danced with each other, and never thought about men. She told me she never enjoyed any dances so much as those; and they had a gymnasium, and special clothes to wear there--a sort of bloomer costume. It must have been very jolly. I wish I had gone to Oxford. Girls dancing together, and never thinking about men. How nice!

'At Oxford they say that marriage is not the only mission for women--that is to say, for some women. They don't despise marriage, but they think that for some women there is another mission. When I spoke to Mrs. Fargus about her marriage, she had to admit that she had written to her college friends to apologise--no, not to apologise, she said, but to explain. She was not ashamed, but she thought she owed them an explanation. Just fancy any of the girls in Sutton being ashamed of being married!'

The darkness was thick with wandering scents, and Mildred's thoughts withered in the heat. She closed her eyes; she lay quite still, but the fever of the night devoured her; the sheet burned like a flame; she opened her eyes, and was soon thinking as eagerly as before.

She thought of the various possibilities that marriage would shut out to her for ever. She reproached herself for having engaged herself to Alfred Stanby, and remembered that Harold had been opposed to the match, and had refused to give his consent until Alfred was in a position to settle five hundred a year upon her. ... Alfred would expect her to keep house for him exactly as she was now keeping house for her brother. Year after year the same thing, seeing Alfred go away in the morning, seeing him come home in the evening. That was how her life would pass. She did not wish to be cruel; she knew that Alfred would suffer terribly if she broke off her engagement, but it would be still more cruel to marry him if she did not think she would make him

happy, and the conviction that she would not make him happy pressed heavily upon her. What was she to do? She could not, she dared not, face the life he offered her. It would be selfish of her to do so.

The word 'selfish' suggested a new train of thought to Mildred. She argued that it was not for selfish motives that she desired freedom. If she thought that, she would marry him to-morrow. It was because she did not wish to lead a selfish life that she intended to break off her engagement. She wished to live for something; she wished to accomplish something; what could she do? There was art. She would like to be an artist! She paused, astonished at the possibility. But why not she as well as the other women whom she had met at Mrs. Fargus'? She had met many artists--ladies who had studios--at Mrs. Fargus'.

She had been to their studios and had admired their independence. They had spoken of study in Paris, and of a village near Paris where they went to paint landscape. Each had a room at the inn; they met at meal times, and spent the day in the woods and fields. Mildred had once been fond of drawing, and in the heat of the summer night she wondered if she could do anything worth doing. She knew that she would like to try. She would do anything sooner than settle down with Alfred. Marriage and children were not the only possibilities in woman's life. The girls she knew thought so, but the girls Mrs. Fargus knew didn't think so.

And rolling over in her hot bed she lamented that there was no escape for a girl from marriage. If so, why not Alfred Stanby--he as well as another? But no, she could not settle down to keep house for Alfred for the rest of her life. She asked herself again why she should marry at all--what it was that compelled all girls, rich or poor, it was all the same, to marry and keep house for their husbands. She remembered that she had five hundred a year, and that she would have four thousand a year if her brother died--the distillery was worth that. But money made no difference. There was something in life which forced all girls into marriage, with their will or against their will. Marriage, marriage, always marriage--always the eternal question of sex, as if there was nothing else in the world. But there was much else in life. There was a nobler purpose in life than keeping house for a man. Of that she felt quite sure, and she hoped that she would find a vocation. She must first educate herself, so far she knew, and that was all that was at present necessary for her to know.

'But how hot it is; I shan't be able to go out in the cart to-morrow. ... I wish everything would change, especially the weather. I want to go away. I hate living in a house without another woman. I wish Harold would let me have a companion--a nice elderly lady, but not too elderly--a woman about forty, who could talk; some one like Mrs. Fargus. When mother was alive it was different. She has been dead now three years. How long it seems! ... Poor mother! I wish she were here. I scarcely knew much of father; he went to the city every morning, just as Harold does, by that dreadful ten minutes past nine. It seems to me that I have never heard of anything all my life but that horrible ten minutes past nine and the half-past six from London Bridge. I don't hear so much about the half-past six, but the ten minutes past nine is never out of my head. Father is dead seven years, mother is dead three, and since her death I have kept house for Harold.'

Then as sleep pressed upon her eyelids Mildred's thoughts grew

disjointed. ... 'Alfred, I have thought it all over. I cannot marry you. ... Do not reproach me,' she said between dreaming and waking; and as the purple space of sky between the trees grew paler, she heard the first birds. Then dream and reality grew undistinguishable, and listening to the carolling of a thrush she saw a melancholy face, and then a dejected figure pass into the twilight.

II.

'What a fright I am looking! I did not get to sleep till after two o'clock; the heat was something dreadful, and to-day will be hotter still. One doesn't know what to wear.'

She settled the ribbons in her white dress, and looked once again in the glass to see if the soft, almost fluffy, hair, which the least breath disturbed was disarranged. She smoothed it with her short white hand. There was a wistful expression in her brown eyes, a little pathetic won't-you-care-for-me expression which she cultivated, knowing its charm in her somewhat short, rather broad face, which ended in a pointed chin: the nose was slightly tip-tilted, her teeth were white, but too large. Her figure was delicate, and with quick steps she hurried along the passages and down the high staircase. Harold was standing before the fireplace, reading the _Times,_ when she entered.

'You are rather late, Mildred. I am afraid I shall lose the ten minutes past nine.'

'My dear Harold, you have gone up to town for the last ten years by that train, and every day we go through a little scene of fears and doubts; you have never yet missed it, I may safely assume you will not miss it this morning.'

'I'm afraid I shall have to order the cart, and I like to get a walk if possible in the morning.'

'I can walk it in twelve minutes.'

'I shouldn't like to walk it in this broiling sun in fifteen. ... By the way, have you looked at the glass this morning?'

'No; I am tired of looking at it. It never moves from "set fair."'

'It is intolerably hot--can you sleep at night?'

'No; I didn't get to sleep till after two. I lay awake thinking of Mrs. Fargus.'

'I never saw you talk to a woman like that before. I wonder what you see in her. She's very plain. I daresay she's very clever, but she never says anything--at least not to me.'

'She talks fast enough on her own subjects. You didn't try to draw her out. She requires drawing out. ... But it wasn't so much Mrs. Fargus as having a woman in the house. It makes one's life so different; one

feels more at ease. I think I ought to have a companion.'

'Have a middle-aged lady here, who would bore me with her conversation all through dinner when I come home from the City tired and worn out!'

'But you don't think that your conversation when you "come home from the City tired and worn out" has no interest whatever for me; that this has turned out a good investment; that the shares have gone up, and will go up again? I should like to know how I am to interest myself in all that. What has it to do with me?'

'What has it to do with you! How do you think that this house and grounds, carriages and horses and servants, glasshouses without end, are paid for? Do I ever grumble about the dressmakers' bills?--and heaven knows they are high enough. I believe all your hats and hosiery are put down to house expenses, but I never grumble. I let you have everything you want--horses, carriages, dresses, servants. You ought to be the happiest girl in the world in this beautiful place.'

'Beautiful place! I hate the place; I hate it--a nasty, gaudy, vulgar place, in a vulgar suburb, where nothing but money-grubbing is thought of from morning, noon, till night; how much percentage can be got out of everything; cut down the salaries of the employees; work everything on the most economic basis; it does not matter what the employees suffer so long as seven per cent. dividend is declared at the end of the year. I hate the place.'

'My dear, dear Mildred, what are you saying? I never heard you talk like this before. Mrs. Fargus has been filling your head with nonsense. I wish I had never asked her to the house; absurd little creature, with her eternal talk about culture, her cropped hair, and her spectacles glimmering. What nonsense she has filled your head with!'

'Mrs. Fargus is a very clever woman. ... I think I should like go to Girton.'

'Go to Girton!'

'Yes, go to Girton. I've never had any proper education. I should like to learn Greek. Living here, cooped up with a man all one's life isn't my idea. I should like to see more of my own sex. Mrs. Fargus told me about the emulation of the class-rooms, about the gymnasium, about the

dances the girls had in each other's rooms. She never enjoyed any dances like those. She said that I must feel lonely living in a house without another woman.'

'I know what it'll be. I shall never hear the end of Mrs. Fargus. I wish I'd never asked them.'

'Men are so selfish! If by any chance they do anything that pleases any one but themselves, how they regret it.'

Harold was about the middle height, but he gave the impression of a small man. He was good-looking; but his features were without charm, for his mind was uninteresting--a dry, barren mind, a somewhat stubbly mind--but there was an honest kindliness in his little eyes which was absent from his sister's. The conversation had paused, and he glanced

quickly every now and then at her pretty, wistful face, expressive at this moment of much irritated and nervous dissatisfaction; also an irritated obstinacy lurked in her eyes, and, knowing how obstinate she was in her ideas, Harold sincerely dreaded that she might go off to Girton to learn Greek--any slightest word might precipitate the catastrophe.

'I think at least that I might have a companion,' she said at last.

'Of course you can have a companion if you like, Mildred; but I thought you were going to marry Alfred Stanby?'

'You objected to him; you said he had nothing--that he couldn't afford to marry.'

'Yes, until he got his appointment; but I hear now that he's nearly certain of it.'

'I don't think I could marry Alfred.'

'You threw Lumly over, who was an excellent match, for Alfred. So long as Alfred wasn't in a position to marry you, you would hear of no one else, and now--but you don't mean to say you are going to throw him over.'

'I don't know what I shall do.'

'Well, I have no time to discuss the matter with you now. It is seven minutes to nine. I shall only have just time to catch the train by walking very fast. Good-bye.'

'Please, mam, any orders to-day for the butcher?'

'Always the same question--how tired I am of hearing the same words. I suppose it is very wicked of me to be so discontented,' thought Mildred, as she sat on the sofa with her key-basket in her hand; 'but I have got so tired of Sutton. I know I shouldn't bother Harold; he is very good and he does his best to please me. It is very odd. I was all right till Mrs. Fargus came, she upset me. It was all in my mind before, no doubt; but she brought it out. Now I can't interest myself in anything. I really don't care to go to this tennis party, and the people who go there are not in the least interesting. I am certain I should not meet a soul whom I should care to speak to. No, I won't go there. There's a lot to be done in the greenhouses, and in the afternoon I will write a long letter to Mrs. Fargus. She promised to send me a list of books to read.'

There was nothing definite in her mind, but something was germinating within her, and when the work of the day was done, she wondered at the great tranquillity of the garden. A servant was there in a print dress, and the violet of the skies and the green of the trees seemed to be closing about her like a tomb. 'How beautiful!' Mildred mused softly; 'I wish I could paint that.'

A little surprised and startled, she went upstairs to look for her box of water-colours; she had not used it since she left school. She found also an old block, with a few sheets remaining; and she worked on and on, conscious only of the green stillness of the trees and the romance of rose and grey that the sky unfolded. She had begun her second

water-colour, and was so intent upon it as not to be aware that a new presence had come into the garden. Alfred Stanby was walking towards her. He was a tall, elegantly dressed, good-looking young man.

'What! painting? I thought you had given it up. Let me see.'

'Oh, Alfred, how you startled me!'

He took the sketch from the girl's lap, and handing it back, he said:

'I suppose you had nothing else to do this afternoon; it was too hot to go out in the cart. Do you like painting?'

'Yes, I think I do.'

They were looking at each other--and there was a questioning look in the girl's eyes--for she perceived in that moment more distinctly than she had before the difference in their natures.

'Have you finished the smoking cap you are making for me?'

'No; I did not feel inclined to go on with it.'

Something in Mildred's tone of voice and manner struck Alfred, and, dropping his self-consciousness, he said:

'You thought that I'd like a water-colour sketch better.'

Mildred did not answer.

'I should like to have some drawings to hang in the smoking-room when we're married. But I like figures better than landscapes. You never tried horses and dogs, did you?'

'No, I never did,' Mildred answered languidly, and she continued to work on her sky. But her thoughts were far from it, and she noticed that she was spoiling it. 'No, I never tried horses and dogs.'

'But you could, dearest, if you were to try. You could do anything you tried. You are so clever.'

'I don't know that I am; I should like to be.'

They looked at each other, and anxiously each strove to read the other's thoughts.

'Landscapes are more suited to a drawing-room than a smoking-room. It will look very well in your drawing-room when we're married. We shall want some pictures to cover the walls.'

At the word marriage, Mildred's lips seemed to grow thinner. The conversation paused. Alfred noticed that she hesitated, that she was striving to speak. She had broken off her engagement once before with him, and he had begun to fear that she was going to do so again. There was a look of mingled irresolution and determination in her face. She continued to work on her sky; but at every touch it grew worse, and, feeling that she had irretrievably spoilt her drawing, she said:

'But do you think that we shall ever be married, Alfred?'

'Of course. Why? Are you going to break it off?'

'We have been engaged nearly two years, and there seems no prospect of our being married. Harold will never consent. It does not seem fair to keep you waiting any longer.'

'I'd willingly wait twenty years for you, Mildred.'

She looked at him a little tenderly, and he continued more confidently. 'But I'm glad to say there is no longer any question of waiting. My father has consented to settle four hundred a year upon me, the same sum as your brother proposes to settle on you. We can be married when you like.'

She only looked at the spoilt water-colour, and it was with difficulty that Alfred restrained himself from snatching it out of her hands.

'You do not answer. You heard what I said, that my father had agreed to settle four hundred a year upon me?'

'I'm sure I'm very glad, for your sake.'

'That's a very cold answer, Mildred. I think I can say that I'm sure of the appointment.'

'I'm glad, indeed I am, Alfred.'

'But only for my sake?'

Mildred sat looking at the water-colour.

'You see our marriage has been delayed so long; many things have come between us.'

'What things?'

'Much that I'm afraid you'd not understand. You've often reproached me,' she said, her voice quickening a little, 'with coldness. I'm cold; it is not my fault. I'm afraid I'm not like other girls. ... I don't think I want to be married.'

'This is Mrs. Fargus' doing. What do you want?'

'I'm not quite sure. I should like to study.'

'This must be Mrs. Fargus.'

'I should like to do something.'

'But marriage--'

'Marriage is not everything. There are other things. I should like to study art.'

'But marriage won't prevent your studying art.'

'I want to go away, to leave Sutton. I should like to travel.'

'But we should travel--our honeymoon.'

'I don't think I could give up my freedom, Alfred; I've thought it all over. I'm afraid I'm not the wife for you.'

'Some one else has come between us? Some one richer. Who's this other fellow?'

'No; there's no one else. I assure you there's no one else. I don't think I shall marry at all. There are other things besides marriage.... I'm not fitted for marriage. I'm not strong. I don't think I could have children. It would kill me.'

'All this is the result of Mrs. Fargus. I can read her ideas in every word you say. Women like Mrs. Fargus ought to be ducked in the horse-pond. They're a curse.'

Mildred smiled.

'You're as strong as other girls. I never heard of anything being the matter with you. You're rather thin, that's all. You ought to go away for a change of air. I never heard such things; a young girl who has been brought up like you. I don't know what Harold would say--not fitted for marriage; not strong enough to bear children. What conversations you must have had with Mrs. Fargus; studying art, and the rest of it. Really, Mildred, I did not think a young girl ever thought of such things.'

'We cannot discuss the subject. We had better let it drop.'

'Yes,' he said, 'we'd better say no more; the least said the soonest mended. You're ill, you don't know what you're saying. You're not looking well; you've been brooding over things. You'd better go away for a change. When you come back you'll think differently.'

'Go away for a change! Yes,' she said, 'I've been thinking over things and am not feeling well. But I know my own mind now. I can never love you as I should like to.'

'Then you'd like to love me. Ah, I will make you love me.. I'll teach you to love me! Only give me the chance.'

'I don't think I shall ever love--at least, not as other girls do.'

He leaned forward and took her hand; he caught her other hand, and the movement expressed his belief in his power to make her love him.

'No,' she said, resisting him. 'You cannot. I'm as cold as ice.'

'Think what you're doing, Mildred. You're sacrificing a great love--(no man will ever love you as I do)--and for a lot of stuff about education that Mrs. Fargus has filled your head with. You're sacrificing your life for that,' he said, pointing to the sketch that had fallen on the grass. 'Is it worth it?'

She picked up the sketch.

'It was better before you came,' she said, examining it absent-mindedly. 'I went on working at it; I've spoiled it.' Then, noticing

the incongruity, she added, 'But it doesn't matter. Art is not the only thing in the world. There is good to be done if one only knew how to do it. I don't mean charity, such goodness is only on the surface, it is merely a short cut to the real true goodness. Art may be only selfishness, indeed I'm inclined to think it is, but art is education, not the best, perhaps, but the best within my reach.'

'Mildred, I really do not understand. You cannot be well, or you wouldn't talk so.'

'I'm quite well,' she said. 'I hardly expected you would understand. But I beg you to believe that I cannot act otherwise. My life is not with you. I feel sure of that.'

The words were spoken so decisively that he knew he would not succeed in changing her. Then his face grew pale with anger, and he said: 'Then everything you've said--all your promises--everything was a lie, a wretched lie.'

'No, Alfred, I tried to believe. I did believe, but I had not thought much then. Remember, I was only eighteen.' She gathered up her painting materials, and, holding out her hand, said, 'Won't you forgive me?'

'No, I cannot forgive you.' She saw him walk down the pathway, she saw him disappear in the shadow. And this rupture was all that seemed real in their love story. It was in his departure that she felt, for the first time, the touch of reality.

III.

Mildred did not see Alfred again. In the pauses of her painting she wondered if he thought of her, if he missed her. Something had gone out of her life, but a great deal more had come into it.

Mr. Hoskin, a young painter, whose pictures were sometimes rejected in the Academy, but who was a little lion in the minor exhibitions, came once a week to give her lessons, and when she went to town she called at his studio with her sketches. Mr. Hoskin's studio was near the King's Road, the last of a row of red houses, with gables, cross-beams, and palings. He was a good-looking, blond man, somewhat inclined to the poetical and melancholy type; his hair bristled, and he wore a close-cut red beard; the moustache was long and silky; there was a gentle, pathetic look in his pale blue eyes; and a slight hesitation of speech, an inability to express himself in words, created a passing impression of a rather foolish, tiresome person. But beneath this exterior there lay a deep, true nature, which found expression in twilit landscapes, the tenderness of cottage lights in the gloaming, vague silhouettes, and vague skies and fields. Ralph Hoskin was very poor: his pathetic pictures did not find many purchasers, and he lived principally by teaching.

But he had not given Mildred her fourth lesson in landscape painting when he received an advantageous offer to copy two pictures by Turner in the National Gallery. Would it be convenient to her to take her

lesson on Friday instead of on Thursday? She listened to him, her eyes wide open, and then in her little allusive way suggested that she would like to copy something. She might as well take her lesson in the National Gallery as in Sutton. Besides, he would be able to take her round the gallery and explain the merits of the pictures.

She was anxious to get away from Sutton, and the prospect of long days spent in London pleased her, and on the following Thursday Harold took her up to London by the ten minutes past nine. For the first time she found something romantic in that train. They drove from Victoria in a. hansom. Mr. Hoskin was waiting for her on the steps of the National Gallery.

'I'm so frightened,' she said; 'I'm afraid I don't paint well enough.'

'You'll get on all right. I'll see you through. This way. I've got your easel, and your place is taken.'

They went up to the galleries.

'Oh, dear me, this seems rather alarming!' she exclaimed, stopping before the crowd of easels, the paint-boxes, the palettes on the thumbs, the sheaves of brushes, the maulsticks in the air. She glanced at the work, seeking eagerly for copies, worse than any she was likely to perpetrate. Mr. Hoskin assured her that there were many in the gallery who could not do as well as she. And she experienced a little thrill when he led her to the easel. A beautiful white canvas stood on it ready for her to begin, and on a chair by the side of the easel was her paint-box and brushes. He told her where she would find him, in the Turner room, and that she must not hesitate to come and fetch him whenever she was in difficulties.

'I should like you to see the drawing,' she said, 'before I begin to paint.'

'I shall look to your drawing many times before I allow you to begin painting. It will take you at least a couple of days to get it right.... Don't be afraid,' he said, glancing round; 'lots of them can't do as well as you. I shall be back about lunch time.'

The picture that Mildred had elected to copy was Reynolds's angel heads. She looked at the brown gold of their hair, and wondered what combination of umber and sienna would produce it. She studied the delicate bloom of their cheeks, and wondered what mysterious proportions of white, ochre, and carmine she would have to use to obtain it. The bright blue and grey of the eyes frightened her. She felt sure that such colour did not exist in the little tin tubes that lay in rows in the black japanned box by her side. Already she despaired. But before she began to paint she would have to draw those heavenly faces in every feature. It was more difficult than sketching from nature. She could not follow the drawing, it seemed to escape her. It did not exist in lines which she could measure, which she could follow. It seemed to have grown out of the canvas rather than to have been placed there. The faces were leaned over--illusive foreshortenings which she could not hope to catch. The girl in front of her was making, it seemed to Mildred, a perfect copy. There seemed to be no difference, or very little, between her work and Reynolds's. Mildred felt that she could copy the copy easier than she could the original.

But on the whole she got on better than she had expected, and it was not till she came to the fifth head, that she found she had drawn them all a little too large, and had not sufficient space left on her canvas. This was a disappointment. There was nothing for it but to dust out her drawing and begin it all again. She grew absorbed in her work; she did not see the girl in front of her, nor the young man copying opposite; she did not notice their visits to each other's easels; she forgot everything in the passion of drawing. Time went by without her perceiving it; she was startled by the sound of her master's voice and looked in glad surprise.

'How are you getting on?' he said.

'Very badly. Can't you see?'

'No, not so badly. Will you let me sit down? Will you give me your charcoal?'

'The first thing is to get the heads into their places on the canvas; don't think of detail; but of two or three points, the crown of the head, the point of the chin, the placing of the ear. If you get them exactly right the rest will come easily. You see there was not much to correct.' He worked on the drawing for some few minutes, and then getting up he said, 'But you'll want some lunch; it is one o'clock. There's a refreshment room downstairs. Let me introduce you to Miss Laurence,' he said. The women bowed. 'You're doing an excellent copy, Miss Laurence.'

'Praise from you is praise indeed.'

'I would give anything to paint like that,' said Mildred.

'You've only just begun painting,' said Miss Laurence.

'Only a few months,' said Mildred.

'Miss Lawson does some very pretty sketches from nature,' said Mr. Hoskin; 'this is her first attempt at copying.'

'I shall never get those colours,' said Mildred. 'You must tell me which you use.'

'Mr. Hoskin can tell you better than I. You can't have a better master.'

'Do you copy much here?' asked Mildred.

'I paint portraits when I can get them to do; when I can't, I come here and copy.... We're in the same boat,' she said, turning to Mr. Hoskin. 'Mr. Hoskin paints beautiful landscapes as long as he can find customers; when he can't, he undertakes to copy a Turner.'

Mildred noticed the expression that passed over her master's face. It quickly disappeared, and he said, 'Will you take Miss Lawson to the refreshment room, Miss Laurence? You're going there I suppose.'

'Yes, I'm going to the lunch-room, and shall be very glad to show Miss Lawson the way.'

And, in company with quite a number of students, they walked through the galleries. Mildred noticed that Miss Laurence's nose was hooked, that her feet were small, and that she wore brown-leather shoes. Suddenly Miss Laurence said 'This way,' and she went through a door marked 'Students only.' Mr. Hoskin held the door open for her, they went down some stone steps looking on a courtyard. Mr. Hoskin said, 'I always think of Peter De Hooch when I go down these stairs. The contrast between its twilight and the brightness of the courtyard is quite in his manner.'

'And I always think how much I can afford to spend on my lunch,' said Elsie laughing.

The men turned to the left top to go to their room, the women turned to the right to go to theirs.

'This way,' said Miss Laurence, and she opened a glass door, and Mildred found herself in what looked like an eating-house of the poorer sort. There was a counter where tea and coffee and rolls and butter were sold. Plates of beef and ham could be had there, too. The students paid for their food at the counter, and carried it to the tables.

'I can still afford a plate of beef,' said Miss Laurence, 'but I don't know how long I shall be able to if things go on as they've been going. But you don't know what it is to want money,' and in a rapid glance Miss Laurence roughly calculated the price of Mildred's clothes.

A tall, rather handsome girl, with dark coarse hair and a face lit up by round grey eyes, entered.

'So you are here, Elsie,' and she stared at Mildred.

'Let me introduce you to Miss Lawson. Miss Lawson, Miss Cissy Clive.'

'I'm as hungry as a hawk,' Cissy said, and she selected the plate on which there was most beef.

'I haven't seen you here before, Miss Lawson. Is this your first day?'

'Yes, this is my first day.'

They took their food to the nearest table and Elsie asked Cissy if she had finished her copy of Etty's 'Bather.' Cissy told how the old gentleman in charge of the gallery had read her a lecture on the subject. He did not like to see such pictures copied, especially by young women. Copies of such pictures attracted visitors. But Cissy had insisted, and he had put her and the picture into a little room off the main gallery, where she could pursue her nefarious work unperceived.

The girls laughed heartily. Elsie asked for whom Cissy was making the copy.

'For a friend of Freddy's--a very rich fellow. Herbert is going to get him to give me a commission for a set of nude figures. Freddy has just

come back from Monte Carlo. He has lost all his money.... He says he's "stony" and doesn't know how he'll pull through.'

'Was he here this morning?'

'He ran in for a moment to see me.... I'm dining with him to-night.'

You're not at home, then?'

'No, I forgot to tell you, I'm staying with you, so be careful not to give me away if you should meet mother. Freddy will be back this afternoon. I'll get him to ask you if you'll come.'

'I promised to go out with Walter to-night.'

'You can put him off. Say that you've some work to finish--some black and white.'

'Then he'd want to come round to the studio. I don't like to put him off.'

'As you like.... It'll be a very jolly dinner. Johnny and Herbert are coming. But I daresay Freddy'll ask Walter. He'll do anything I ask him.'

When lunch was over Cissy and Elsie took each other's arms and went upstairs together. Mildred heard Cissy ask who she was.

Elsie whispered, 'A pupil of Ralph's. You shouldn't have talked so openly before her.'

'So his name is Ralph,' Mildred said to herself, and thought that she liked the name.

IV.

Mildred soon began to perceive and to understand the intimate life of the galleries, a strange life full of its special idiosyncrasies. There were titled ladies who came with their maids and commanded respect from the keeper of the gallery, and there was a lady with bright yellow hair who occasioned him much anxiety. For she allowed visitors not only to enter into conversation with her, but if they pleased her fancy she would walk about the galleries with them and take them out to lunch. There was an old man who copied Hogarth, he was madly in love with a young woman who copied Rossetti. But she was in love with an academy student who patronised all the girls and spent his time in correcting their drawings. A little further away was another old man who copied Turner. By a special permission he came at eight o'clock, two hours before the galleries were open. It was said that with a tree from one picture, a foreground from another, a piece of distance from a third, a sky from a fourth, he had made a picture which had taken in the Academicians, and had been hung in Burlington House as an original work by Crome. Most of his work was done before the students entered the galleries; he did very little after ten o'clock; he pottered round from easel to easel chattering; but he

never imparted the least of his secrets. He knew how to evade questions, and after ten minutes' cross-examination he would say 'Good morning,' and leave the student no wiser than he was before. A legend was in circulation that to imitate Turner's rough surfaces he covered his canvas with plaster of Paris and glazed upon it.

The little life of the galleries was alive with story. Walter was a fair young man with abundant hair and conversation. Elsie hung about his easel. He covered a canvas with erratic blots of colour and quaint signs, but his plausive eloquence carried him through, and Elsie thought more highly of his talents than he did of hers. They were garrulous one as the other, and it was pleasant to see them strolling about the galleries criticising and admiring, until Elsie said:

'Now, Walter, I must get back to my work, and don't you think it would be better if you went on with yours?'

So far as Mildred could see, Elsie's life seemed from the beginning to have been made up of painting and young men. She was fond of Walter, but she wasn't sure that she did not like Henry best, and later, others--a Jim, a Hubert, and a Charles--knocked at her studio door, and they were all admitted, and they wasted Elsie's time and drank her tea. Very often they addressed their attentions to Mildred, but she said she could not encourage them, they were all fast, and she said she did not like fast men.

'I never knew a girl like you; you're not like other girls. Did you never like a man? I never really. I once thought you liked Ralph.'

'Yes, I do like him. But he's different from these men; he doesn't make love to me. I like him to like me, but I don't think I should like him if he made love to me.'

'You're an odd girl; I don't believe there's another like you.'

'I can't think how you can like all these men to make love to you.'

'They don't all make love to me,' Elsie answered quickly. 'I hope you don't think there's anything wrong. It is merely Platonic.'

'I should hope so. But they waste a great deal of your time.'

'Yes, that's the worst of it. I like men, men are my life, I don't mind admitting it. But I know they've interfered with my painting. That's the worst of it.'

Then the conversation turned on Cissy Clive. 'Cissy is a funny girl,' Elsie said. 'For nine months out of every twelve she leads a highly-respectable life in West Kensington. But every now and then the fit takes her, and she tells her mother, who believes every word she says, that she's staying with me. In reality, she takes rooms in Clarges Street, and has a high old time.'

'I once heard her whispering to you something about not giving her away if you should happen to meet her mother.'

'I remember, about Hopwood Blunt. He had just returned from Monte Carlo.'

'But I suppose it is all right. She likes talking to him.'

'I don't think she can find much to talk about to Hopwood Blunt,' said Elsie, laughing. 'Haven't you seen him? He is often in the galleries.'

'What does she say?'

'She says he's a great baby--that he amuses her.'

Next day, Mildred went to visit Cissy in the unfrequented gallery where her 'Bather' would not give scandal to the visitors. She had nearly completed her copy; it was excellent, and Mildred could not praise it sufficiently. Then the girls spoke of Elsie and Walter. Mildred said:

'She seems very fond of him.'

'And of how many others? Elsie never could be true to a man. It was just the same in the Academy schools. And that studio of hers? Have you been to any of her tea-parties? They turn down the lights, don't they?'

As Mildred was about to answer, Cissy said, 'Oh, here's Freddy.'

Mr. Hopwood Blunt was tall and fair, a brawny young Englishman still, though the champagne of fashionable restaurants and racecourses was beginning to show itself in a slight puffiness in his handsome florid cheeks. He shook hands carelessly with Miss Clive, whom he called Cis, and declared himself dead beat. She hastened to hand him her chair.

'I know what's the matter with you,' she said, 'too much champagne last night at the Cafe Royal.'

'Wrong again. We weren't at the Cafe Royal, we dined at the Bristol. Don't like the place; give me the good old Cafe Savoy.'

'How many bottles?'

'Don't know; know that I didn't drink my share. It was something I had after.'

Then followed an account of the company and the dinner. The conversation was carried on in allusions, and Mildred heard something about Tommy's girl and a horse that was worth backing at Kempton. At last it occurred to Cissy to introduce Mildred. Mr. Hopwood Blunt made a faint pretence of rising from his chair, and the conversation turned on the 'Bather.'

'I think you ought to make her a little better looking. What do you say, Miss Lawson? Cis is painting that picture for a smoking-room, and in the smoking-room we like pretty girls.'

He thought that they ought to see a little more of the lady's face; and he did not approve of the drapery. Cissy argued that she could not alter Etty's composition; she reproved him for his facetiousness, and was visibly annoyed at the glances he bestowed on Mildred. A moment after Ralph appeared.

'Don't let me disturb you,' he said, 'I did not know where you were,

Miss Lawson, that was all. I thought you might like me to see how you're getting on.'

Ralph and Mildred walked through two galleries in silence. Elsie had gone out to lunch with Walter; the old lady with the grey ringlets, who copied Gainsborough's 'Watering Place,' was downstairs having a cup of coffee and a roll; the cripple leaned on his crutch, and compared his drawing of Mrs. Siddons's nose with Gainsborough's. Ralph waited till he hopped away, and Mildred was grateful to him for the delay; she did not care for her neighbours to see what work her master did on her picture.

'You've got the background wrong,' he said, taking off a yellowish grey with the knife. 'The cloud in the left-hand corner is the deepest dark you have in the picture,' and he prepared a tone. 'What a lovely quality Reynolds has got into the sky! ... This face is not sufficiently foreshortened. Too long from the nose to the chin,' he said, taking off an eighth of an inch. Then the mouth had to be raised. Mildred watched, nervous with apprehension lest Elsie or the old lady or the cripple should return and interrupt him.

'There, it is better now,' he said, surveying the picture, his head on one side.

'I should think it was,' she answered enthusiastically. 'I shall be able to get on now. I could not get the drawing of that face right. And the sky--what a difference! I like it as well as the original. It's quite as good.'

Ralph laughed, and they walked through the galleries. The question, of course, arose, which was the greater, the Turner or the Claude?

Mildred thought that she liked the Claude.

'One is romance, the other is common sense.'

'If the Turner is romance, I wonder I don't prefer it to the Claude. I love romance.'

'School-girl romance, very likely.' Mildred didn't answer and, without noticing her, Ralph continued, 'I like Turner best in the grey and English manner: that picture, for instance, on the other side of the doorway. How much simpler, how much more original, how much more beautiful. That grey and yellow sky, the delicacy of the purple in the clouds. But even in classical landscape Turner did better than Claude --Turner created--all that architecture is dreamed; Claude copied his.'

At the end of each little sentence he stared at Mildred, half ashamed at having expressed himself so badly, half surprised at having expressed himself so well. Anxious to draw him out, she said:

'But the picture you admire is merely a strip of sea with some fishing-boats. I've seen it a hundred times before--at Brighton, at Westgate, at whatever seaside place we go to, just like that, only not quite so dark.'

'Yes, just like that, only not quite so dark. That "not quite so dark" makes the difference. Turner didn't copy, he transposed what he saw.

Transposed what he saw,' he repeated. 'I don't explain myself very well, I don't know if you understand. But what I mean is that the more realistic you are the better; so long as you transpose, there must always be a transposition of tones.'

Mildred admitted that she did not quite understand. Ralph stammered, and relinquished the attempt to explain. They walked in silence until they came to the Rembrandts--the portrait of the painter as a young man and the portrait of the 'Jew Merchant.' Mildred preferred the portrait of the young man. 'But not because it's a young man,' she pleaded, 'but because it is, it is---'

'Compared with the "Jew Merchant" it is like a coloured photograph... Look at him, he rises up grand and mysterious as a pyramid, the other is as insignificant as life. Look at the Jew's face, it is done with one tint; a synthesis, a dark red, and the face is as it were made out of nothing--hardly anything, and yet everything is said... You can't say where the picture begins or ends, the Jew surges out of the darkness like a vision. Look at his robe, a few folds, that is all, and yet he's completely dressed, and his hand, how large, how great... Don't you see, don't you understand?'

'I think I do,' Mildred replied a little wistfully, and she cast a last look on the young man whom she must admire no more. Ralph opened the door marked _students only_, and they went down the stone steps. When they came to where the men and women separated for their different rooms, Mildred asked Ralph if he were going out to lunch? He hesitated, and then answered that it took too long to go to a restaurant. Mildred guessed by his manner that he had no money.

'There's no place in the gallery where we can get lunch--you women are luckier than us men. What do they give you in your room?'

'You mean in the way of meat? Cold meat, beef and ham, pork pies. But I don't care for meat, I never touch it.'

'What do you eat?'

'There are some nice cakes. I'll go and get some; we'll share them.'

'No, no, I really am not hungry, much obliged.'

'Oh, do let me go and get some cakes, it'll be such fun, and so much nicer than sitting with a lot of women in that little room.'

They shared their cakes, walking up and down the great stone passages, and this was the beginning of their intimacy. On the following week she wrote to say what train she was coming up by; he met her at the station, and they went together to the National Gallery. But their way led through St. James' Park; they lingered there, and, as the season advanced, their lingerings in the park grew longer and longer.

'What a pretty park this is. It always seems to me like a lady's boudoir, or what I imagine a lady's boudoir must be like.'

'Have you never seen a lady's boudoir?'

'No; I don't think I have. I've never been in what you call society. I had to make my living ever since I was sixteen. My father was a small

tradesman in Brixton. When I was sixteen I had to make my own living. I used to draw in the illustrated papers. I began by making two pounds a week. Then, as I got on, I used to live as much as possible in the country. You can't paint landscapes in London.'

'You must have had a hard time.'

'I suppose I had. It was all right as long as I kept to my newspaper work. But I was ambitious, and wanted to paint in oils; but I never had a hundred pounds in front of me. I could only get away for a fortnight or a month at a time. Then, as things got better, I had to help my family. My father died, and I had to look after my mother.'

Mildred raised her eyes and looked at him affectionately.

'I think I could have done something if I had had a fair chance.'

'Done something? But you have done something. Have you forgotten what the _Spectator_ said of your farmyard?'

'That's nothing. If I hadn't to think of getting my living I could do better than that. Oil painting is the easiest material of all until you come to a certain point; after that point, when you begin to think of quality and transparency, it is most difficult.'

They were standing on the bridge. The water below them was full of ducks. The birds balanced themselves like little boats on the waves, and Mildred thought of her five hundred a year and the pleasure it would be to help Ralph to paint the pictures he wanted to paint. She imagined him a great artist; his success would be her doing. At that same moment he was thinking that there never had been any pleasure in his life; and Mildred--her hat, her expensive dress, her sunshade--seemed in such bitter contrast to himself, to his own life, that he could not hide a natural irritation.

'Your life has been all pleasure,' he said, glancing at her disdainfully.

'No, indeed, it has not. My life has been miserable enough. We are rich, it is true, but our riches have never brought me happiness. The best time I've had has been since I met you.'

'Is that true? I wonder if that's true.'

Their eyes met and she said hastily, with seeming desire to change the subject:

'So you're a Londoner born and bred, and yet you'd like to live in the country.'

'Only for my painting. I love London, but you can't paint landscapes in London.'

'I wonder why not. You said you loved this park. There's nothing more beautiful in the country--those trees, this quiet, misty lake; it is exquisite, and yet I suppose it wouldn't make a picture.'

'I don't know. I've often thought of trying to do something with it. But what's beautiful to look at doesn't do well in a picture. The

hills and dales in the Green Park are perfect--their artificiality is their beauty. There's one bit that I like especially.'

'Which is that?'

'The bit by Buckingham Palace where the sheep feed; the trees there are beautiful, large spreading trees, and they give the place a false air of Arcady. But in a picture it wouldn't do.'

'Why?'

'I can't say. I don't think it would mean much if it were painted.'

'You couldn't have a shepherd, or if you had he'd have to be cross-gartered, and his lady-love in flowery silk would have to be sitting on a bank, and there is not a bank there, you'd have to invent one.'

'That's it; the park is eighteenth century, a comedy of the restoration.'

'But why couldn't you paint that?' said Mildred, pointing to where a beautiful building passed across the vista.

'I suppose one ought to be able to. The turrets in the distance are fine. But no, it wouldn't make a picture. The landscape painter never will be able to do much with London. He'll have to live in the country, and if he can't afford to do that he'd better turn it up.'

'Elsie Laurence and Cissy Clive are going to France soon. They say that's the only place to study. In the summer they're going to a place called Barbizon, near Fontainebleau. I was thinking of going with them.'

'Were you? I wish I were going. Especially to Barbizon. The country would suit me.'

Mildred longed to say, 'I shall be glad if you'll let me lend you the money,' but she didn't dare. At the end of a long silence, Ralph said:

'I think we'd better be going on. It must be nearly ten.'

V.

As the spring advanced they spent more and more time in the park. They learnt to know it in its slightest aspects; they anticipated each bend of the lake's bank; they looked out for the tall trees at the end of the island, and often thought of the tree that leaned until its lower leaves swept the water's edge. Close to this tree was their favourite seat. And, as they sat by the water's edge in the vaporous afternoons, the park seemed part and parcel of their love of each other; it was their refuge; it was only there that they were alone; the park was a relief from the promiscuity of the galleries. In the park they could talk without fear of being overheard, and they took interest in the changes that spring was effecting in this beautiful friendly nature--their friend and their accomplice.

'The park is greener than it was yesterday,' he said. 'Look at that tree! How bright the green, and how strange it seems amid all the blackness.'

'And that rose cloud and the reflection of the evening in the lake, how tranquil.'

'And that great block of buildings, Queen Anne's Mansions, is it not beautiful in the blue atmosphere? In London the ugliest things are beautiful in the evening. No city has so pictorial an atmosphere.'

'Not Paris?'

'I've not seen Paris; I've never been out of England.'

'Then you're speaking of things you haven't seen.'

'Of things that I've only imagined.'

The conversation paused a moment, and then Ralph said:

'Are you still thinking of going to Paris with Elsie Laurence and Cissy Clive?'

'I think so. Paris is the only place one can study art, so they say.'

'You'll be away a long while--several months?'

'It wouldn't be much good going if I didn't stop some time, six or seven months, would it?'

'I suppose not.'

Mildred raised her eyes cautiously and looked at him. His eyes were averted. He was looking where some ducks were swimming. They came towards the bank slowly--a drake and two ducks. A third duck paddled aimlessly about at some little distance. There was a slight mist on the water.

'If you go to Paris I hope I may write to you. Send me your drawings to correct. Any advice I can give you is at your service; I shall only be too pleased.'

'Oh, yes, I hope you will write to me. I shall be so glad to hear from you. I shall be lonely all that time away from home.'

'And you'll write to me?'

'Of course. And if I write to you, you won't misunderstand?'

Ralph looked up surprised.

'I mean, if I write affectionately you won't misunderstand. It will be because---'

'Because you feel lonely?'

'Partly. But you don't misunderstand, do you?'

They watched the ducks in silence. At last Mildred said, 'That duck wanders about by herself; why doesn't she join the others?'

'Perhaps she can't find a drake.'

'Perhaps she prefers to be alone.'

'We shall see--the drake is going to her.'

'She is going away from him. She doesn't want him.'

'She's jealous of the others. If there were no other she would.'

'There are always others.'

'Do you think so?'

Mildred did not answer. Ralph waited a few moments, then he said:

'So you're going away for six or seven months; the time will seem very long while you're away.'

Again Mildred was tempted to ask him if she might lend him the money to go to Paris. She raised her eyes to his (he wondered what was passing in her mind), but he did not find courage to speak until some days later. He had asked her to come to his studio to see a picture he had begun. It was nearly six o'clock; Mildred had been there nearly an hour; the composition had been exhaustively admired; but something still unsaid seemed to float in the air, and every moment that something seemed to grow more imminent.

'You are decided to go to France. When do you leave?'

'Some time next week. The day is not yet fixed.'

'Elsie Laurence and Cissy Clive are going?'

'Yes.... Why don't you come too?'

'I wish I could. I can't. I have no money.'

'But I can lend you what you want. I have more than I require. Let me lend you a hundred pounds. Do.'

Ralph smiled through his red moustache, and his grey gentle eyes smiled too, a melancholy little smile that passed quickly.

'It is very kind of you. But it would be impossible for me to borrow money from you. Even if I had the money, I could hardly go with you.'

'Why not, there's a party. Walter is going, and Hopwood Blunt is going. I'm the fifth wheel.'

Ralph was about to say something, but he checked himself; he never spoke ill of any one. So, putting his criticism of her companions aside, he said:

'Only under one condition could I go abroad with you. You know,

Mildred, I love you.'

An expression of pleasure came upon her face, and, seeing it, he threw his arms out to draw her closer. She drew away.

'You shrink from me.... I suppose I'm too rough. You could never care for me.'

'Yes, indeed, Ralph, I do care for you. I like you very much indeed, but not like that.'

'You could not like me enough to marry me.'

'I don't think I could marry any one.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.'

'Do you care for any one else?'

'No, indeed I don't. I like you very much. I want you to be my friend.... But you don't understand. Men never do. I suppose affection would not satisfy you.'

'But you could not marry me?'

'I'd sooner marry you than any one. But---'

'But what?'

Mildred told the story of her engagement, and how in the end she had been forced to break it off.

'And you think if you engaged yourself to me it might end in the same way?'

'Yes. And I would not cause you pain. Forgive me.'

'But if you never intend to marry, what do you intend to do?'

'There are other things to do surely.'

'What?'

'There's art.'

'Art!'

'You think I shall not succeed with my painting?'

'No. I did not mean that. I hope you will. But painting is very difficult. I've found it so. It seems hopeless.'

'You think I shall be a failure? You think that I'd better remain at home and marry than go to France and study?'

'It's impossible to say who will succeed. I only know it is very difficult--too difficult for me.... Women never have succeeded in

painting.'

'Some have, to a certain extent.'

'But you're not angry, offended at my having spoken?'

'No; I hope we shall always be friends. You know that I like you very much.'

'Then why not, why not be engaged? It will give you time to consider, to find out if you could.'

'But, you see, I've broken off one engagement, so that I might be free to devote myself to painting.'

'But that man was not congenial to you. He was not an artist, he would have opposed your painting; you'd have had to give up painting if you had married him. But I'm quite different. I should help and encourage you in your art. All you know I have taught you. I could teach you a great deal more. Mildred---'

'Do you think that you could?'

'Yes; will you let me try?'

'But, you see, I'm going away. Shall I see you again before I go?'

'When you like. When? To-morrow?'

'To-morrow would be nice.'

'Where--in the National?'

'No, in the park. It will be nicer in the park. Then about eleven.'

At five minutes past eleven he saw her coming through the trees, and she signed to him with a little movement of her parasol, which was particularly charming, and which seemed to him to express her. They walked from the bridge along the western bank; the trees were prettier there, and from their favourite seat they saw the morning light silver the water, the light mist evaporate, and the trees on the other bank emerge from vague masses into individualities of trunk and bough. The day was warm, though there was little sun, and the park swung a great mass of greenery under a soft, grey sky.

The drake and the two ducks came swimming towards them--the drake, of course, in the middle, looking very handsome and pleased, and at a little distance the third duck pursued her rejected and disconsolate courtship. Whenever she approached too near, the drake rushed at her with open beak, and drove her back. Then she affected not to know where she was going, wandering in an aimless, absent-minded fashion, getting near and nearer her recalcitrant drake. But these ruses were wasted upon him; he saw through them all, and at last he attacked the poor broken-hearted duck so determinedly that she was obliged to seek safety in flight. And the entire while of the little aquatic comedy the wisdom of an engagement had been discussed between Ralph and Mildred. She had consented. But her promise had not convinced Ralph, and he said, referring to the duck which they had both been watching:

'I shall dangle round you for a time, and when I come too near you'll chase me away until at last you'll make up your mind that you can stand it no longer, and will refuse ever to see me again.'

VI.

She had had a rough passage: sea sickness still haunted in her, she was pale with fatigue, and her eyes longed for sleep. But Elsie and Cissy were coming to take her to the studio at ten o'clock. So she asked to be called at nine, and she got up when she was called.

The gilt clock was striking ten in the empty drawing-room when she entered. 'I didn't expect her to get up at six to receive me, but she might be up at ten, I think. However, it doesn't much matter. I suppose she's looking after her sick husband. ... Well, I don't think much of her drawing-room. Red plush sofas and chairs. It is just like an hotel, and the street is dingy enough,' thought Mildred, as she pulled one of the narrow lace curtains aside: I don't think much of Paris. But it doesn't matter, I shall be at the studio nearly all day.'

A moment after Mrs. Fargus entered. 'I'm so sorry,' she said, 'I wasn't up to receive you, but---'

'I didn't expect you to get up at five, which you would have had to do. I was here soon after six.'

Mrs. Fargus asked her if she had had a good passage, if she felt fatigued, and what she thought of Paris. And then the conversation dropped.

'She's a good little soul,' thought Mildred, 'even though she does dress shabbily. It is pure kindness of her to have me here; she doesn't want the three pounds a week I pay her. But I had to pay something. I couldn't sponge on her hospitality for six months... I wonder she doesn't say something. I suppose I must.'

'You know it is very kind of you to have me here. I don't know how to thank you.'

Mrs. Fargus' thoughts seemed on their way back from a thousand miles. 'From the depths of Comte,' thought Mildred.

'My dear, you wanted to study.'

'Yes, but if it hadn't been for you I should never have got the chance. As it was Harold did his best to keep me. He said he'd have to get a housekeeper, and it would put him to a great deal of inconvenience: men are so selfish. He'd like me to keep house for him always.'

'We're all selfish, Mildred. Men aren't worse than women, only it takes another form. We only recognise selfishness when it takes a form different from our practice.'

Mildred listened intently, but Mrs. Fargus said no more, and the conversation seemed as if it were going to drop. Suddenly, to Mildred's surprise, Mrs. Fargus said:

'When do you propose to begin work?'

'This morning. Elsie Laurence and Cissy Clive are coming to take me to the studio. I'm expecting them every moment. They're late.'

'They know the studio they're taking you to, I suppose?'

'Oh yes, they've worked there before... The question is whether I ought to work in the men's studio, or if it would be better, safer, to join the ladies' class.'

'What does Miss Laurence say?'

'Oh, Elsie and Cissy are going to work with the men. They wouldn't work with a lot of women.'

'Why?'

'Because they like being with men in the first place.'

'Oh! But you?'

'No, I don't mind, and yet I don't think I should care to be cooped up all day with a lot of women.'

'You mean that there would be more emulation in a mixed class?'

'Yes; and Elsie says it is better to work in the men's studio. There are cleverer pupils there than in the ladies' studio, and one learns as much from one's neighbours as from the professor; more.'

'Are you sure of that? Do you not think that we are all far too ready to assume that whatever men do is the best?'

'I suppose we are.'

'Men kept us uneducated till a hundred years ago; we are only gaining our rights inch by inch, prejudice is only being overcome very slowly, and whenever women have had equal, or nearly equal, advantages they have proved themselves equal or superior to men. Women's inferiority in physical strength is immaterial, for, as mankind grows more civilised, force will be found in the brain and not in the muscles.'

Mrs. Fargus was now fairly afloat on her favourite theme, viz., if men were kind to women, their kindness was worse than their cruelty--it was demoralising.

Eventually the conversation returned whence it had started, and Mrs. Fargus said:

'Then why do you hesitate? What is the objection to the men's studio?'

'I do not know that there is any particular objection, nothing that I ought to let stand in the way of my studies. It was only something that Elsie and Cissy said. They said the men's conversation wasn't

always very nice. But they weren't sure, for they understand French hardly at all--they may have been mistaken. But if the conversation were coarse it would be very unpleasant for me; the students would know that I understood... Then there's the model, there's that to be got over. But Elsie and Cissy say that the model's nothing; no more than a statue.'

'The model is undraped?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Really Mildred---'

'That's the disadvantage of being a girl. Prejudice closes the opportunity of study to one.'

Mrs. Fargus did not speak for a long time. At last she said:

'Of course, Mildred, you must consult your own feeling; if it's the custom, if it's necessary--Your vocation is of course everything.'

Then it was Mildred's turn to pause before answering. At last she said:

'It does seem rather--well, disgusting, but if it is necessary for one's art. In a way I'd as soon work in the ladies' studio.'

'I daresay you derive just as much advantage.'

'Do you think so? It's from the students round one that one learns, and there's no use coming to Paris if one doesn't make the most of one's opportunities.'

'You might give the ladies' studio a trial, and if you didn't find you were getting on you could join the men's.'

'After having wasted three months! As you say my vocation is everything. It would be useless for me to think of taking up painting as a profession, if I did not work in the men's studio.'

'But are you going there?'

'I can't make up my mind. You have frightened me, you've put me off it.'

'I think I hardly offered an opinion.'

'Perhaps Harold would not like me to go there.'

'You might write to him. Yes, write to him.'

'Write to Harold about such a thing--the most conventional man in the world!'

At that moment the servant announced Elsie and Cissy. They wore their best dresses and were clearly atingle with desire of conversation and Paris.

'We're a little late, aren't we, dear. We're so sorry,' said Elsie.

'How do you do, dear,' said Cissy.

Mildred introduced her friends. They bowed, and shook hands with Mrs. Fargus, but were at no pains to conceal their indifference to the drab and dowdy little woman in the soiled sage green, and the glimmering spectacles. 'What a complexion,' whispered Elsie the moment they were outside the door. 'What's her husband like?' asked Cissy as they descended the first flight. Mildred answered that Mr. Fargus suffered from asthma, and hoped no further questions would be asked, so happy was she in the sense of real emancipation from the bondage of home--so delighted was she in the spectacle of the great boulevard, now radiant with spring sunlight.

She wondered at the large blue cravats of idlers, sitting in cafes freshly strewn with bright clean sand, at the aprons of the waiters,--the waiters were now pouring out green absinthe,--at the little shop girls in tight black dresses and frizzled hair, passing three together arm in arm; all the boulevard amused and interested Mildred. It looked so different, she said, from what it had done four hours before. 'But none of us look our best at six in the morning,' she added laughing, and her friends laughed too. Elsie and Cissy chattered of some project to dine with Walter, and go to the theatre afterwards, and incidentally Mildred learnt that Hopwood Blunt would not be in Paris before the end of the week. But where was the studio? The _kiosques_ were now open, the morning papers were selling briskly, the roadway was full of _fiacres_ plying for hire, or were drawn up in lines three deep, the red waistcoated coachmen slept on their box-seats. But where was the studio?

Suddenly they turned into an Arcade. The shops on either side were filled with jet ornaments, fancy glass, bon-bons, boxes, and fans. Cissy thought of a present for Hopwood--that case of liqueur glasses. Mildred examined a jet brooch which she thought would suit Mrs. Fargus. Elsie wished that Walter would present her with a fan; and then they went up a flight of wooden stairs and pushed open a swing door. In a small room furnished with a divan, a desk, and a couple of cane chairs, they met M. Daveau. He wore a short jacket and a brown-black beard. He shook hands with Elsie and Cissy, and was introduced to Mildred. Elsie said:

'You speak better than we do. Tell him you've come here to study.'

'I've come to Paris to study painting,' said Mildred. 'But I don't know which I shall join, the ladies' studio or the men's studio. Miss Laurence and Miss Clive advised me to work here, in the men's studio.'

'I know Miss Laurence and Miss Clive very well.' There was charm in his voice, and Mildred was already interested in him. Cissy and Elsie had drawn a curtain at the end of the room and were peeping into the studio. 'Miss Laurence and Miss Clive,' he said, 'worked here for more than a year. They made a great deal of progress--a great deal. They worked also in the ladies' studio, opposite.'

'Ah, that is what I wanted to speak to you about. Would you advise me to work in the men's studio? Do you think it would be advisable? Do you think there would be any advantages?'

'We have some very clever pupils here--very clever; of course it is of

great advantage to work with clever pupils.'

'That is what I think, but I am not certain.'

'If Mademoiselle intends to study painting seriously.'

'Oh, but I do; I am very serious.'

'Then I do not think there can be any doubt which studio she should choose.'

'Very well.'

'This studio is a hundred francs a month--for a lady; the ladies' studio is sixty francs a month.'

'Why is that?'

'Because, if it were not so, we should be overcrowded. Ladies prefer to work in this studio, it is much more advantageous. If you would like to see the studio first?'

There were more than thirty in the studio; about twenty men and fifteen women. Some sat on low stools close under the platform whereon the model stood, some worked at easels drawn close together in a semicircle round the room. The model was less shocking than Mildred had imagined; he stood with his hands on his hip, a staff in his hand; and, had it not been for a slight swaying motion, she would hardly have known he was alive. She had never drawn before from the living model, and was puzzled to know how to begin. She was going to ask Elsie to tell her, when M. Daveau drew the curtain aside, and picking his way through the pupils, came straight to her. He took the stool next her, and with a pleasant smile asked if she had ever drawn from the life.

'No,' she said, 'I have only copied a few pictures, you learn nothing from copying.'

He told her how she must count the number of heads, and explained to her the advantage of the plumb-line in determining the action of the figure. Mildred was much interested; she wondered if she would be able to put the instruction she was receiving into practice, and was disappointed when the model got down from the table and put on his trousers.

'The model rests for ten minutes every three quarters of an hour. He'll take the pose again presently. It is now eleven o'clock.'

M. Daveau laid the charcoal upon her easel, and promised to come and see how she was getting on later in the afternoon. But, just as the model was about to take the pose again, a young girl entered the studio.

'Do you want a model?'

'Yes, if she has a good figure,' said a student. 'Have you a good figure?' he added with a smile.

'Some people think so. You must judge for yourselves,' she answered,

taking off her hat.

'Surely she is not going to undress in public!' said Mildred to Elsie, who had come to her easel.

VII.

Mildred worked hard in the studio. She was always one of the first to arrive, and she did not leave till the model had finished sitting, and during the eight hours, interrupted only by an hour in the middle of the day for lunch, she applied herself to her drawing, eschewing conversation with the students, whether French or English. She did not leave her easel when the model rested; she waited patiently sharpening her pencils or reading--she never came to the studio unprovided with a book. And she made a pretty picture sitting on her high stool, and the students often sketched her during the rests. Although quietly, she was always beautifully dressed. Simple though they appeared to be, her black _crepe de chine_ skirts told of large sums of money spent in fashionable millinery establishments, and her large hats profusely trimmed with ostrich feathers, which suited her so well, contrasted strangely with the poor head-gear of the other girls; and when the weather grew warmer she appeared in a charming shot silk grey and pink, and a black straw hat lightly trimmed with red flowers. In answer to Elsie, who had said that she looked as if she were going to a garden-party, Mildred said:

'I don't see why, because you're an artist, you should be a slattern. I don't feel comfortable in a dirty dress. It makes me feel quite ill.'

Although Mildred was constantly with Elsie and Cissy she never seemed to be of their company; and seeing them sitting together in the _Bouillon Duval_, at their table next the window, an observer would be sure to wonder what accident had sent out that rare and subtle girl with such cheerful commonness as Elsie and Cissy. The contrast was even more striking when they entered the eating-house, Mildred looking a little annoyed, and always forgetful of the tariff card which she should take from the door-keeper. Elsie and Cissy triumphant, making for the staircase, as Mildred said to herself, 'with a flourish of cards.' Mildred instinctively hated the _Bouillon Duval_, and only went there because her friends could not afford a restaurant. The traffic of the _Bouillon_ disgusted her; the food, she admitted, was well enough, but, as she said, it was mealing--feeding like an animal in a cage,--not dining or breakfasting. Very often she protested.

'Oh, nonsense,' said Cissy, 'we shall get one of Catherine's tables if we make haste.'

Catherine was their favourite waitress. Like a hen she seemed to have taken them under her protection. And she told them what were the best dishes, and devoted a large part of her time to attending on them. She liked Mildred especially; she paid her compliments and so became a contrary influence in Mildred's dislike of the _Bouillon_. She seemed to understand them thoroughly from the first. Elsie and Cissy she knew would eat everything, they were never without their appetites, but

Mildred very often said she could eat nothing. Then Catherine would come to the rescue with a tempting suggestion, _Une belle aile de poulet avec sauce remoulade_. 'Well, perhaps I could pick a bone,' Mildred would answer, and these wings of chicken seemed to her the best she had ever eaten. She liked the tiny strawberries which were beginning to come into season; she liked _les petites suisses_; and she liked the chatter of her friends, and her own chatter across the little marble table. She thought that she had never enjoyed talking so much before.

One evening, as they stirred their coffee, Elsie said, looking down the street, 'What a pretty effect.'

Mildred leaned over her friend's shoulder and saw the jagged outline of the street and a spire beautiful in the sunset. She was annoyed that she had not first discovered the picturesqueness of the perspective, and, when Elsie sketched the street on the marble table, she felt that she would never be able to draw like that.

The weather grew warmer, and, in June, M. Daveau and three or four of the leading students proposed that they should make up a party to spend Sunday at Bas Mendon. To arrive at Bas Mendon in time for breakfast they would have to catch the ten o'clock boat from the Pont Neuf. Cissy, Elsie, and Mildred were asked: there were no French girls to ask, so, as Elsie said, 'they'd have the men to themselves.'

The day impressed itself singularly on Mildred's mind. She never forgot the drive to the Pont Neuf in the early morning, the sunshine had seemed especially lovely; she did not forget her fear lest she should be late--she was only just in time; they were waiting for her, their paint-boxes slung over their shoulders, and the boat was moving alongside as she ran down the steps. She did not forget M. Daveau's black beard; she saw it and remembered it long afterwards. But she never could recall her impressions of the journey--she only remembered that it had seemed a long while, and that she was very hungry when they arrived. She remembered the trellis and the boiled eggs and the cutlets, and that after breakfast M. Daveau had painted a high stairway that led to the top of the hill and she remembered how she had stood behind him wondering at the ease with which he drew in the steps. In the evening there had been a little exhibition of sketches, and in the boat going home he had talked to her; and she had enjoyed talking to him. Of his conversation she only recalled one sentence. She had asked him if he liked classical music, and he had answered, 'There is no music except classical music.' And it was this chance phrase that made the day memorable; its very sententiousness had pleased her; in that calm bright evening she had realised and it had helped her to realise that there existed a higher plane of appreciation and feeling than that on which her mind moved.

At the end of July, Elsie and Cissy spoke of going into the country, and they asked Mildred to come with them. Barbizon was a village close to the Forest of Fontainebleau. There was an inn where they would be comfortable: all the clever young fellows went to Barbizon for the summer. But Mildred thought that on the whole it would be better for her to continue working in the studio without interruption. Elsie and Cissy did not agree with her. They told her that she would find the studio almost deserted and quite intolerable in August. Bad tobacco, drains, and Italian models--Faugh! But their description of what the studio would become in the hot weather did not stir Mildred's

resolution. M. Daveau had told her that landscape painting would come to her very easily when she had learnt to draw, and that the way to learn to draw was to draw from the nude. So she bore with the heat and the smells for eight hours a day. There were but four or five other pupils beside herself; this was an advantage in a way, but these few were not inclined for work; idleness is contagious, and Mildred experienced much difficulty in remaining at her easel.

In the evenings her only distraction was to go for a drive with Mrs. Fargus. But too often Mrs. Fargus could not leave her husband, and these evenings Mildred spent in reading or in writing letters. The dullness of her life and the narrowness and aridity of her acquaintance induced her to write very often to Ralph, and depression of spirits often tempted her to express herself more affectionately than she would have done in wider and pleasanter circumstances. She once spoke of the pleasure it would give her to see him, she said that she would like to see him walk into the studio. But when he took her at her word and she saw him draw aside the curtain and look in, a cloud of annoyance gathered on her face. But she easily assumed her pretty mysterious smile and said:

'When did you arrive?'

'Only this morning. You said you'd like to see me. I had to come.... I hope you are not angry.'

Then noticing that the girl next them was an English girl, Ralph spoke about Mildred's drawing. She did not like him to see it, but he asked her for the charcoal and said if she would give him her place he would see if he could find out what was wrong; he did not think she had got enough movement into the figure.

'Ah, that's what the professor says when he comes round _toujours un peu froid comme mouvement._ I can get the proportions; it is the movement that bothers me.'

'Movement is drawing in the real sense of the word. If they would only teach you to draw by the movement.'

He continued to correct Mildred's drawing for some time. When he laid down the charcoal, he said:

'How hot it is here! I wonder how you can bear it.'

'Yes, the heat is dreadful. I'm too exhausted to do much work. Supposing we go out.'

They went downstairs and some way along the Passage des Panoramas without speaking. At last Mildred said:

'Are you going to be in Paris for long?'

'No, I'm going back at once, perhaps to-morrow. You know I've a lot of work on hand. I'm getting on, luck has turned. I've sold several pictures. I must get back.'

'Why, to-morrow?--it was hardly worth while coming for so short a time.'

'I only came to see you. You know I couldn't--you know--I mean that I felt that I must see you.'

Mildred looked up, it was an affectionate glance; and she swung her parasol in a way that recalled their walks in the Green Park. They passed out of the _passage_ into the boulevard. As they crossed the Rue Vivienne, Ralph said in his abrupt fragmentary way:

'You said you'd like to see me, I could see from your letters that you were unhappy.'

'No, I'm not unhappy--a little dull at times, that is all.'

'You wrote me some charming letters. I hope you meant all you said.'

'Did I say so much, then? I daresay I said more than I intended.'

'No, don't say that, don't say that.'

The absinthe drinkers, the green trees, the blue roofs of the great houses, all these signs of the boulevard, intruded upon and interrupted their thoughts; then the boulevard passed out of their sight and they were again conscious of nothing but each other.

'I met your brother. He was anxious about you. He wondered if you were getting on and I said that I'd go and see.'

'And do you think I'm getting on?'

Yes, I think you've made progress. You couldn't have done that drawing before you went to Paris.'

'You really think so.... I was right to go to Paris.... I must show you my other drawings. I've some better than that.'

The artistic question was discussed till they reached the Place de l'Opera.

'That is the opera-house,' Mildred said, 'and that is the Cafe de la Paix.... You haven't been to Paris before?'

'No; this is my first visit. But I didn't come to Paris to see Paris. I came to see you. I could not help myself. Your letters were so charming. I have read them over a thousand times. I couldn't go on reading them without seeing you.... I got afraid that you'd find some one here you'd fall in love with. Some one whom you'd prefer to me. Have you?'

'No; I don't know that I have.'

'Then why shouldn't we be married? That's what I've come to ask you.'

'You mean now, in Paris?'

'Why not? If you haven't met any one you like better, you know.'

'And give up my painting, and just at the time I'm beginning to get on! You said I had improved in my drawing.'

'Ah, your drawing interests you more than I.'

'I'd give anything to draw like Misal. You don't know him--a student of the _Beaux Arts._'

'When you'd learnt all he knows, you wouldn't be any nearer to painting a picture.'

'That isn't very polite. You don't think much of my chances of success.... But we shall see.'

'Mildred, you don't understand me. This is not fair to me. Only say when you'll marry me, and I'll wait, I'll wait, yes, as long as you like--only fix a time.'

'When I've learnt to draw.'

'You're laughing at me.'

Her face darkened, and they did not speak again till the green roof of the Madeleine appeared, striking sharp against a piece of blue sky. Mildred said:

'This is my way,' and she turned to the right.

'You take offence without cause. When you have learnt to draw! We're always learning to draw. No one has ever learnt to draw perfectly.'

'I have no other answer.'

'Mildred, this isn't fair.'

'If you're not satisfied I release you from your engagement. Yes, I release you from your engagement.'

'Mildred, you're cruel. You seem to take pleasure in torturing me. But this cannot be. I cannot live without you. What am I to do?'

'You must try.'

'No, I shall not try,' he answered sullenly.

'What will you do?'

'My plans are made. I shall not live.'

'Oh, Ralph, you will not kill yourself. It would not be worth while. You've your art to live for. You are--how old are you--thirty? You're no longer a sentimental boy. You've got your man's life to lead. You must think of it.'

'I don't feel as if I could. Life seems impossible.'

She looked into his pale gentle eyes and the thought crossed her mind that his was perhaps one of those narrow, gentle natures that cannot outlive such a disappointment as she intended to inflict. It would be very terrible if he did commit suicide, the object of his visit to Paris would transpire. But no, he would not commit suicide, she was quite safe, and on that thought she said:

'I cannot remain out any longer.'

VIII.

She stopped in the middle of the room, and, holding in her hand her large hat decorated with ostrich feathers, she assured herself that it was not at all likely that he would commit suicide. Yet men did commit suicide.... She did not want him to kill himself, that anything so terrible should happen would grieve her very much. She was quite sincere, yet the thought persisted that it would be very wonderful if he did do so. It would make a great scandal. That a man should kill himself for her! No woman had ever obtained more than that. Standing in the middle of the room, twirling her hat, she asked herself if she really wished him to kill himself. Of course not. Then she thought of herself, of how strange she was. She was very strange, she had never quite understood herself.

Mechanically, as if in a dream, she opened a bandbox and put her hat away. She smoothed her soft hair before the glass. Her appearance pleased her, and she wondered if she were worth a man's life. She was a dainty morsel, no doubt, so dainty that life was unendurable without her. But she was wronging herself, she did not wish him to kill himself.... Men had done so before for women.... If it came to the point, she would do everything in her power to prevent such a thing. She would do everything, yes, everything except marry him. She couldn't settle down to watch him painting pictures. She wanted to paint pictures herself. Would she succeed? He didn't think so, but that was because he wanted her to marry him. And, if she didn't succeed, she would have to marry him or some one else. She would have to live with a man, give up her whole life to him, submit herself to him. She must succeed. Success meant so much. If she succeeded, she would be spoken of in the newspapers, and, best of all, she would hear people say when she came into a room, 'That is Mildred Lawson....'

She didn't want to marry, but she would like to have all the nicest men in love with her.... Meanwhile she was doing the right thing. She must learn to draw, and the studio was the only place she could learn. But she did not want to paint large portraits with dark backgrounds. She could not see herself doing things like that. Chaplin was her idea. She had always admired him. His women were so dainty, so elegant, so eighteenth century--wicked little women in swings, as wicked as their ankles, as their lovers' guitars.

But she would have to work two or three years before any one could tell her whether she would succeed. Two or three years! It was a long time, but a woman must do something if she wishes to attract attention, to be a success. A little success in art went a long way in society. But Paris was so dull, Elsie and Cissy were still away. There was no one in the studio who interested her; moreover, Elsie had told her that any flirtation there might easily bring banishment to the ladies' studio across the way. So it was provoking that Ralph had forced her to throw him over at that particular moment. She would have liked to have kept him on, at least till the end of the month, when Elsie and Cissy would return. The break with Ralph was certainly not

convenient. She still felt some interest in him. She would write to him.

IX.

'We've come back,' said Elsie. 'We heard at the studio that you had gone away feeling ill, so we came on here to find out how you were.'

'Oh, it is nothing,' said Mildred. 'I've been working rather hard lately, that's all.'

'You should have come with us,' said Cissy. 'We've had an awfully jolly time.'

'We'll go into the drawing-room. Wait a minute till I find my slippers.'

'Oh, don't trouble to get up; we only came to see how you were,' said Elsie.

'But I'm quite well, there's really nothing the matter. It was only that I felt I couldn't go on working this afternoon. The model bored me, and it was so hot. It was very good of you to come and see me like this.'

'We've had a jolly time and have done a lot of work.'

'Elsie has done a girl weaving a daisy-chain in a meadow. It is wonderful how she has got the sunlight on the grass. All our things are in the studio, you will see them to-morrow.'

'I don't see why I shouldn't see them to-day. I'll dress myself.'

The account they gave of their summer outing was tantalising to the tired and jaded girl. She imagined the hushed and shady places, the murmuring mystery of bird and insect life. She could see them going forth in the mornings with their painting materials, sitting at their easels under the tall trees, intent on their work or lying on rugs spread in the shade, the blue smoke of cigarettes curling and going out, or later in the evening packing up easels and paint-boxes, and finding their way out of the forest.

It was Elsie who did most of the talking. Cissy reminded her now and then of something she had forgotten, and, when they turned into the Passage des Panoramas, Elsie was deep in an explanation of the folly of square brush work. Both were converts to open brush work. They had learnt it from a very clever fellow, an impressionist. All his shadows were violet. She did not hold with his theory regarding the division of the tones: at least not yet. Perhaps she would come to it in time.

Mildred liked Elsie's lady in a white dress reading under a rhododendron tree in full blossom. Cissy had painted a naked woman in the garden sunshine. Mildred did not think that flesh could be so violet as that, but there was a dash and go about it that she felt she would never attain. It seemed to her a miracle, and, in her admiration

for her friend's work, she forgot her own failure. The girls dined at a Bouillon Duval and afterwards they went to the theatre together. Next morning they met, all three, in the studio; the model was interesting, Mildred caught the movement more happily than usual; her friends' advice had helped her.

But at least two years would have to pass before she would know if she had the necessary talent to succeed as an artist. For that while she must endure the drudgery of the studio and the boredom of evenings alone with Mrs. Fargus. She went out with Elsie and Cissy sometimes, but the men they introduced her to were not to her taste. She had seen no one who interested her in Paris, except perhaps M. Daveau. That thick-set, black-bearded southern, with his subtle southern manner, had appealed to her, in a way. But M. Daveau had been ordered suddenly to Royon for gout and rheumatism, and Mildred was left without any one to exercise her attractions upon. She spent evening after evening with Mrs. Fargus, until the cropped hair, the spectacles, above all, the black satin dress with the crimson scarf, getting more and more twisted, became intolerable. And Mr. Fargus' cough and his vacuous conversation, in which no shadow of an idea ever appeared, tried her temper. But she forebore, seeing how anxious they were to please her. That was the worst. These simple kind-hearted people saw that their sitting-room bored Mildred, and they often took her for drives in the Bois after dinner. Crazed with boredom Mildred cast side-long glances of hatred at Mrs. Fargus, who sat by her side a mute little figure lost in Comte. Mr. Fargus' sallow-complexioned face was always opposite her; he uttered commonplaces in a loud voice, and Mildred longed to fling herself from the carriage. At last, unable to bear with reality, she chattered, laughed, and told stories and joked until her morose friends wondered at her happiness. Her friends were her audience; they sufficed to stimulate the histrionic spirit in her, and she felt pleased like an actor who has amused an audience which he despises.

She had now been in Paris seven months, but she had seen little of Paris except the studio and the Bouillon Duval where she went to breakfast with Elsie and Cissy. The spectacle of the Boulevards, the trees and the cafes always the same, had begun to weary her. Her health, too, troubled her a little, she was not very strong, and she had begun to think that a change would do her good. She would return to Paris in the spring; she would spend next summer in Barbizon; she was determined to allow nothing to interfere with her education; but, for the moment, she felt that she must go back to Sutton. Every day her craving for England grew more intolerable. She craved for England, for her home, for its food, for its associations. She longed for her own room, for her garden, for the trap. She wanted to see all the girls, to hear what they thought of her absence. She wanted to see Harold.

At first his letters had irritated her, she had said that he wanted her to look after his house; she had argued that a man never hesitates to put aside a woman's education, if it suits his convenience. But now it seemed to her that it would be unkind to leave Harold alone any longer. It was manifestly her duty to go home, to spend Christmas with him. She was only going to Sutton for a while. She loved France, and would certainly return. She knew now what Paris was like, and when she returned it would be alone, or in different company. Mrs. Fargus was very well, but she could not go on living with her for ever. She would come in useful another time. But, for the moment, she could not go on

living with her, she had become a sort of Old Man of the Sea, and the only way to rid herself of her was by returning to England.

An imperative instinct was drawing her back to England, but another instinct equally strong said: 'As soon as I am rested, nothing shall prevent me from returning to Paris.'

X.

The sea was calm and full of old-fashioned brigs and barques. She watched them growing small like pictures floating between a green sea and a mauve sky; and then was surprised to see the white cliffs so near; and the blowing woodland was welcome after the treeless French plain.

Harold was to meet her at Victoria, and when she had answered his questions regarding the crossing, and they had taken their seats in the suburban train, he said:

'You're looking a little tired, you've been over-doing it.'

'Yes, I've been working pretty hard,' she said, and the conversation paused.

The trap was waiting for them at the station and, when they got in, Mildred said: 'I wonder what there will be for dinner.'

'I think there is boiled salmon and a roast leg of mutton. Will that suit you?'

'Well,' said Mildred, 'isn't that taking a somewhat sudden leap?'

'Leap where?'

'Why, into England. I should have thought that some sort of dish--a roast chicken or a boiled chicken would have been a _pas de Calais_ kind of dish.'

'You shall have roast chicken to-morrow, or would you like them boiled?'

'I don't mind,' said Mildred, more disappointed at the failure of her joke than at the too substantial fare that awaited her. 'Poor Harold,' she thought, 'is the best of fellows, but, like all of them, he can't see a joke. The cooking I can alter, but he'll always remain boiled and roast leg of mutton.'

But, though with little sense of humour, Harold was not as dense as Mildred thought. He saw that her spirits were forced, that she was in ill-health, and required a long rest. So he was not surprised to hear in the morning that she was too tired to come down to breakfast; she had a cup of tea in her room, and when she came down to the dining-room she turned from the breakfast table. She could touch nothing, and went out of doors to see what kind of day it was.

The skies were grey and lowering, the little avenue that led to the gate was full of dead leaves; they fluttered down from the branches; the lawn was soaked, and the few flowers that remained were pale and worn. A sense of death and desolation pervaded the damp, moist air; Mildred felt sorrow mounting in her throat, and a sense of dread, occasioned by the sudden showering of a bough, caused her to burst into tears. She had no strength left, she felt that she was going to be ill, and trembled lest she should die.

To die, and she so young! No, she would live, she would succeed. But to do that she must take more care of her health. She would eat no more bon-bons; she threw the box away. And, conquering her repugnance to butchers' meat, she finished a chop and drank a couple of glasses of wine for lunch. The food did her good, and she determined to take a long rest. For a month she would do nothing but rest, she would not think of painting, she would not even draw on the blotting-pad. Rest was what she wanted, and there was no better place to rest than Sutton.

'If it weren't so dull.' She sighed and looked out on the wet lawn. No one would call, no one knew she had come home. Was it wise for her to venture out, and on such a day? She felt that it was not, and immediately after ordered the trap.

She went to call on some friends.... If they would allow her to bring Mabel back to dinner it would be nice, she could show Mabel her dresses and tell her about Paris. But Mabel was staying with friends in London. This was very disappointing, but determined to see some one Mildred went a long way in search of a girl who used to bore her dreadfully. But she too was out. Coming home Mildred was caught in the rain; the exertion of changing her clothes had exhausted her, and sitting in the warmth of the drawing-room fire she grew fainter and fainter. The footman brought in the lamp. She got up in some vague intention of fetching a book, but, as she crossed the room, she fell full length along the floor.

XI.

When she was able to leave her room she was ordered to the sea-side. After a fortnight in Brighton she went to stay with some friends in town. Christmas she spent in Sutton. There was a large party of Harold's friends, business folk, whom Mildred hated. She was glad when they left, and she was free to choose the room that suited her purpose best. She purchased draperies, and hired models, and commenced a picture. She commenced a second picture, but that too went wrong; she then tried a few studies. She got on better with these, but it soon became clear to her that she could not carry out her ideas until she had learned to draw.

Another two years of hard work in the studio were necessary. But as she was not going to Paris till the spring her thoughts turned to the National Gallery, and on the following week she commenced copying a head by Greuse. She had barely finished sketching in the head when Miss Brand told her that Ralph was very ill and was not expected to live. She laid her charcoal on the easel, the movement was very slow,

and she lifted a frightened face.

'What is the matter with him? Do you know?'

'He caught a bad cold about a month ago, he doesn't seem ever to have got over it. But for a long time he has been looking worried, you know the look of a man who has something on his mind.'

A close observer might have noticed that the expression on Mildred's face changed a little. 'He is dying for me,' she thought. 'He is dying for love of me.' And as in a ray of sunlight she basked for a moment in a little glow of self-satisfaction. Then, almost angrily, she defended herself against herself. She was not responsible for so casual a thought, the greatest saint might be the victim of a wandering thought. She was, of course, glad that he liked her, but she was sorry that she had caused him suffering. He must have suffered. Men will sacrifice anything for their passions. But no, Ralph had always been nice with her, she owed him a great deal; they had had pleasant times together--in this very gallery. She could remember almost every word he said. She had liked him to lean over her shoulder, and correct her drawing. He would never do so again.

Good heavens! ... Just before Miss Brand came up to speak to her she was wondering if she should meet him in the gallery, and what he would think of the Greuse. He wouldn't care much about it. He didn't care much about the French eighteenth century, of course he admired Watteau, but it was an impersonal admiration, there was nothing of the Watteau, Greuse, Pater, or Lancret in him. He was purely English. He took no interest in the unreal charm that that head expressed. Of course, no such girl had ever existed or could exist, those melting eyes and the impossible innocence of that mouth! It was the soul of a courtesan in the body of a virgin. She was like that, somewhat like that; and, inspired by the likeness between herself and the picture, Mildred took up her charcoal and continued her drawing.

But she must have been thinking vaguely all the while of Ralph, for suddenly her thoughts became clear and she heard the words as if they had been read to her: 'Lots of men have killed themselves for women, but to die of a broken heart proves a great deal more. Few women have inspired such a love as that.... If it were known--if--she pushed the thought angrily aside as one might a piece of furniture over which one has stumbled in the dark. It was shocking that thoughts should come uncalled for, and such thoughts! the very opposite of what she really felt. That man had been very good to her; she had liked him very much. It was shocking that she had been the cause of his death. It was too terrible. But it was most improbable, it was much more likely that his illness was the effect of the cold he had caught last month. Men did not die of broken hearts. She had nothing whatever to do with it.... And yet she didn't know. When men like him set their hearts on a woman--she was very sorry, she was sorry. But there was no use thinking any more about it...

So she locked up her paint-box and left the gallery. She was nervous; her egotism had frightened her a little. He was dying, and for her, yet she felt nothing. Not only were her eyes dry, but her heart was too. A pebble with her own name written on it, that was her heart. She wished to feel, she longed for the long ache of regret which she read of in books, she yearned for tears. Tears were a divine solace, grief was beautiful. And all along the streets she continued to woo sorrow--

she thought of his tenderness, the real goodness of his nature, his solicitude for her, and she allowed her thoughts to dwell on the pleasant hours they had passed together.

Her heart remained unmoved, but her feet led her towards St. James' Park. She thought she would like to see it again, and when she stood on the bridge where they had so often stood, when she visited the seat where they had often sat chatting under the budding trees her eyes would surely fill with tears, and she would grieve for her dying lover as appropriately as any other woman.

But that day the park was submerged in blue mist. The shadows of the island fell into the lake, still as death; and the birds, moving through the little light that lingered on the water, seemed like shadows, strange and woe-begone. To Mildred it seemed all like death. She would never again walk with him in the pretty spring mornings when light mist and faint sunlight play together, and the trees shake out their foliage in the warm air. How sad it all was. But she did feel sorry for him, she really was sorry, though she wasn't overcome with grief. But she had done nothing wrong. In justice to herself she could not admit that she had. She always knew just where to draw the line, and if other girls did not, so much the worse for them. He had wanted to marry her, but that was no reason why she should marry him. She may have led him to expect that she would sooner or later, but in breaking with him she had done the wisest thing. She would not have made him happy; she was not sure that she could make any man happy...

Awaking from her thoughts she reproached herself for her selfishness, she was always thinking of herself... and that poor fellow was dying for love of her! She knew what death was; she too had been ill. She was quite well now, but she had been ill enough to see to the edge of that narrow little slit in the ground, that terrible black little slit whence Ralph was going, going out of her sight for ever, out of sight of the park, this park which would be as beautiful as ever in another couple of months, and where he had walked with her. How terrible it was, how awful--and how cold, she could not stand on the bridge any longer. She shivered and said, 'I'm catching a cold.'

For the sake of her figure she never wore quite enough clothes, and she regretted her imprudence in standing so long on the misty bridge. She must take care of herself, for her to feel ill would serve no purpose--she would not be able to see Ralph, and she wanted to see him above all things. As she crossed the open space in front of Buckingham Palace the desire to see him laid hold of her. She must know if he were really dying. She would, drive straight to his studio. She had been there before, but then she knew no one would be there. She would have to risk the chance of some one seeing her going in and coming out. But no matter who saw her, she must go. She hailed a hansom, and the discovery that she was capable of so much adventure, pleased her. She thought of his poor sick-bed in the dark room behind the studio. She had caught sight of his bedroom as she had passed through the passage. She believed herself capable and willing to sit by his sick-bed and nurse him. She did not as a rule care for sick people, but she thought she would like to nurse him.

The hansom turned through the Chelsea streets getting nearer and nearer to the studio. She wondered who was nursing him--there must be some one there.... The hansom stopped. She got out and knocked. The door was opened by a young woman who looked like a servant, but

Mildred was not deceived by her appearance. 'One of his models come to nurse him,' she thought.

'I have heard,' she said, 'that Mr. Hoskin is ill.'

'Yes, he is very ill, I'm sorry to say.'

'I should like to see him. Will you inquire?'

'He's not well enough to see any one to-day. He has just dozed off. I couldn't awake him. But I'll give him any message.'

'Give him my card and say I would like to see him. Stay, I'll write a word upon it.'

While Mildred wrote on the card the girl watched her--her face was full of suspicion; and when she read the name, an involuntary 'Oh' escaped from her, and Mildred knew that Ralph had spoken of her. 'Probably,' she thought, 'she has been his mistress. She wouldn't be here nursing, if she hadn't been.'

'I'll give him your card.'

There was nothing for it but to lower her eyes and murmur 'thank you,' and before she reached the end of the street her discomfort had materially increased. She was humiliated and angry, humiliated that that girl should have seen through her so easily, angry that Ralph should have spoken about her to his mistress; for she was sure that the woman was, or had been, his mistress. She regretted having asked to see Ralph, but she had asked for an appointment, she could hardly get out of it now.... She would have to meet that woman again, but she wanted to see Ralph.

'Ralph, I suppose, told her the truth.'

A moment's reflection convinced Mildred that that was probably the case, and reassured, she went to bed wondering when she would get a letter. She might get one in the morning. She was. not disappointed; the first letter she opened read as follows:--

MADAM,--Mr. Hoskin begs me to thank you for your kind inquiry. He is feeling a little stronger and will be glad to see you. His best time is in the afternoon about three o'clock. Could you make it convenient to call about that time?

'I think it right to warn you that it would be well not to speak of anything that would be likely to excite him, for the doctor says that all hope of his recovery depends on his being kept quiet.--I am, Madam, yours truly,

'ELLEN GIBBS.'

'Ellen Gibbs, so that is her name,' thought Mildred. There was a note of authority in the letter which did not escape Mildred's notice and which she easily translated into a note of animosity, if not of hatred. Mildred did not like meeting this woman, something told her that it would be wiser not, but she wanted to see Ralph, and an expression of vindictiveness came into her cunning eyes. 'If she dares to try to oppose me, she'll soon find out her mistake. I'll very soon

settle her, a common woman like that. Moreover she has been his mistress, I have not, she will quail before me, I shall have no difficulty in getting the best of her.'

'To-morrow. This letter was written last night, so I have to go to see him to-day, this afternoon, three o'clock, I shall have to go up after lunch by the two o'clock train. That will get me there by three.... I wonder if he is really dying? If I were to go and see him and he were to recover it would be like beginning it over again.... But I don't know why every base thought and calculation enter my head. I don't know why such thoughts should come into my head, I don't know why they do come, I don't call them nor do their promptings affect me. I am going to see him because I was once very fond of him, because I caused him, through no fault of mine, a great deal of suffering--because it appears that he's dying for love of me. I know he'd like to see me before he dies, that's why I am going, and yet horrid thoughts will come into my head; to hear me thinking, any one would imagine it was only on account of my own vanity that I wanted to see him, whereas it is quite the contrary. As a rule I hate sick people, and I'm sure it is most disagreeable to me to meet that woman.'

The two o'clock train took her to town, a hansom from Victoria to the studio; she dismissed the hansom at the corner and walked up the street thinking of the woman who would open the door to her. There was something about the woman she didn't like. But it didn't matter; she would be shown in at once, and of course left alone with Ralph... Supposing the woman were to sit there all the while. But it was too late now, she had knocked.

'I've come to see Mr. Hoskin.' Feeling that her speech was too abrupt she added, 'I hope he is better to-day.'

'Yes, I'm thankful to say he's a little better.'

Mildred stopped in the passage, and Ellen said:

'Mr. Hoskin isn't in his bedroom. We've put him into the studio.'

'I hope she doesn't think that I've been in his bedroom,' thought Mildred. Ralph lay in a small iron bed, hardly more than a foot from the floor, and his large features, wasted by illness, seemed larger than ever. But a glow appeared in his dying eyes at the sight of Mildred. Ellen placed a chair by his bedside and said:

'I will go out for a short walk. I shan't be away more than half an hour.'

Their eyes said, 'We shall be alone for half an hour,' and she took the thin hand he extended to her.

'Oh, Ralph, I'm sorry to find you ill.... But you're better to-day, aren't you?'

'Yes, I feel a little better to-day. It was good of you to come.'

'I came at once.'

'How did you hear I was ill? We've not written to each other for a long while.'

'I heard it in the National. Miss Brand told me.'

'You know her?'

'I remember, she wrote about the new pictures for an American paper.'

'Yes. How familiar it sounds, those dear days in the National.'

Ralph's eyes were fixed upon her. She could not bear their wistfulness, and she lowered hers.

'She told me you were ill.'

'But when did you return from France? Tell me.'

'About six weeks ago. I fell ill the moment I got back.'

'What was the matter?'

'I had overdone it. I had overworked myself. I had let myself run down. The doctor said that I didn't eat enough meat. You know I never did care for meat.'

'I remember.'

'When I got better I was ordered to the seaside, then I went on a visit to some friends and didn't get back to Sutton till Christmas. We had a lot of stupid people staying with us. I couldn't do any work while they were in the house. When they left I began a picture, but I tried too difficult subjects and got into trouble with my drawing. You said I'd never succeed. I often thought of what you said. Well, then, I went to the National. Nellie Brand told me you were ill, that you had been ill for some time, at least a month.'

A thin smile curled Ralph's red lips and his eyes seemed to grow more wistful. 'I've been ill more than a month,' he said. 'But no matter, Nellie Brand told you and---'

'Of course I could not stay at the National. I felt I must see you. I didn't know how. ... My feet turned towards St. James' Park. I stood on the little bridge thinking. You know I was very fond of you, Ralph, only it was in my way and you weren't satisfied.' She looked at him sideways, so that her bright brown eyes might have all their charm; his pale eyes, wistful and dying, were fixed on her, not intently as a few moments before, but vaguely, and the thought stirred in her that he might die before her eyes. In that case what was she to do? 'Are you listening?' she said.

'Oh yes, I'm listening,' he answered, his smile was reassuring, and she said:

'Suddenly I felt that--that I must see you. I felt I must know what was the matter, so I took a cab and came straight here. Your servant---'

'You mean Ellen.'

'I thought she was your servant, she said that you were lying down and

could not be disturbed. She did not seem to wish me to see you or to know what was the matter.'

'I was asleep when you called yesterday, but when I heard of your visit I told her to write the letter which you received this morning. It was kind of you to come.'

'Kind of me to come! You must think badly of me if you think I could have stayed away. ... But now tell me, Ralph, what is the matter, what does the doctor say? Have you had the best medical advice, are you in want of anything? Can I do anything? Pray, don't hesitate. You know that I was, that I am, very fond of you, that I would do anything. You have been ill a long while now--what is the matter?'

'Thank you, dear. Things must take their course. What that course is it is impossible to say. I've had excellent medical advice and Ellen takes care of me.'

'But what is your illness? Nellie Brand told me that you caught a bad cold about a month ago. Perhaps a specialist---'

'Yes, I had a bad attack of influenza about a month or six weeks ago and I hadn't strength, the doctor said, to recover from it. I have been in bad health for some time. I've been disappointed. My painting hasn't gone very well lately. That was a disappointment. Disappointment, I think, is as often the cause of a man's death as anything else. The doctors give it a name: influenza, or paralysis of the brain, failure of the heart's action, but these are the superficial causes of death. There is often a deeper reason: one which medical science is unable to take into account.'

'Oh, Ralph, you mean me. Don't say that I am the cause. It was not my fault. If I broke my engagement it was because I knew I could not have made you happy. There's no reason to be jealous, it wasn't for any other man. There never will be another man. I was really very fond of you. ... It wasn't my fault.'

'No, dear, it wasn't your fault. It wasn't any one's fault, it was the fault of luck.'

Mildred longed for tears, but her eyes remained dry, and they wandered round the studio examining and wondering at the various canvases. A woman who had just left her bath passed her arms into the sleeves of a long white wrapper. There was something peculiarly attractive in the picture. The picture said something that had not been said before, and Mildred admired its naturalness. But she was still more interested in the fact that the picture had been painted from the woman who had opened the door to her.

'She sits for the figure and attends on him when he is ill, she must be his mistress. Since when I wonder?'

'How do you like it?' he asked.

'Very much. It is beautifully drawn, so natural and so original. How did you think of that movement? That is just how a woman passes her arms into her wrapper when she get out of her bath. How did you think of it?'

'I don't know. She took the pose. I think the movement is all right.'

'Yes; it is a movement that happens every morning, yet no one thought of it before. How did you think of it?'

'I don't know, I asked her to take some poses and it came like that. I think it is good. I'm glad you like it.'

'It is very different from the stupid things we draw in the studio.'

'I told you that you'd do no good by going to France.' 'I learnt a good deal there. Every one cannot learn by themselves as you did. Only genius can do that.'

'Genius! A few little pictures ... I think I might have done something if I had got the chance. I should have liked to have finished that picture. It is a good beginning. I never did better.'

'Dearest, you will live to paint your picture. I want you to finish it. I want you to: live for my sake. ... I will buy that picture.'

'There's only one thing I should care to live for.'

'And that you shall have.' 'Then I'll try to live.' He raised himself a little in bed. His eyes were fixed on her and he tried hard to believe. 'I'm afraid,' he said, 'it's too late now.' She watched him with the eyes she knew he loved, and though ashamed of the question, she could not put it back, and it slipped through her lips.

'Would you sooner live for me than for that picture?'

'One never knows what one would choose,' he said. 'Such speculations are always vain, and never were they vainer than now. ... But I'm glad you like that movement. It doesn't matter even if I never finish it, I don't think it looks bad in its present state, does it?'

'It is a sketch, one of those things that could not be finished. ... I recognise the model. _She_ sat for it, didn't she?'

'Yes.'

'You seem very intimate. ... She seems very devoted.'

'She has been very good to me. ... Don't say anything against her. I've nothing to conceal, Mildred. It is an old story. It began long before I knew you.'

'And continued while you knew me?'

'Yes.'

'And you never told me. Oh, Ralph, while you were telling me you loved me you were living with this woman.'

'It happened so. Things don't come out as straight or as nice as we'd like them to--that's the way things come out in life--a bit crooked, tangled, cracked. I only know that I loved you, I couldn't have done otherwise. That's the way things happened to come out. There's no other explanation.'

'And if I had consented to marry you, you'd have put her away.'

'Mildred, don't scold me. Things happened that way.'

Mildred did not answer and Ralph said:

'What are you thinking of?'

'Of the cruelty, of the wretchedness of it all.'

'Why look at that side of it? If I did wrong, I've been punished. She knows all. She has forgiven me. You can do as much? Forgive me, kiss me. I've never kissed you.'

'I cannot kiss you now. I hear her coming. Wipe those tears away. The doctor said that you were to be kept quiet.'

'Shall I see you again?'

'I don't think I can come again. She'll be here.'

'Mildred! What difference can it make?'

'We shall see. ...'

The door opened. Ellen came in, and Mildred got up to go.

'I hope you've enjoyed your walk, Miss Gibbs.'

'Yes, thank you. I haven't been out for some days.'

'Nursing is very fatiguing. ... Good-bye, Mr. Hoskin. I hope I shall soon hear that you're better. Perhaps Miss Gibbs will write.'

'Yes, I'll write, but I'm afraid Mr. Hoskin has been talking too much. ... Let me open the door for you.'

XII.

When she got home she went to her room. She took off her dress and put on an old wrapper, and then lay on the floor and cried. She could not cry in a pair of stays. To abandon herself wholly to grief she must have her figure free.

And all that evening she hardly spoke; she lay back in her chair, her soul lost in one of her most miserable of moods. Harold spoke a few words from time to time so that she should not perceive that he was aware of her depression.

Her novel lay on her knees unread, and she sat, her eyes fixed, staring into the heart of life. She had never seen so far into life before; she was looking into the heart of life, which is death. He was about to die--he had loved her even unto death; he had loved her even while he was living with another woman. As she sat thinking, her novel

on her knees, she could see that other woman sitting by his death-bed. Two candles were burning in the vast studio, and by their dim light she saw the shadow of the profile on the pillow. She thought of him as a man yearning for an ideal which he could never attain, and dying of his yearning in the end! And that so beautiful and so holy an aspiration should proceed from the common concubinage of a studio! Suddenly she decided that Ralph was not worthy of her. Her instinct had told her from the first that something was wrong. She had never known why she had refused him. Now she knew.

But in the morning she was, as she put it herself, better able to see things from a man's point of view, and she found some excuses for Ralph's life. This connection had been contracted long ago. ... Ralph had had to earn his living since he was sixteen--he had never been in society; he had never known nice women: the only women he had known were his models; what was he to do? A lonely life in a studio, his meals brought in from the public-house, no society but those women. ... She could understand. ... Nevertheless, it was a miserable thing to think that all the time he had been making love to her he had been living with that woman. 'He used to leave her to come to meet me in the park.'

This was a great bitterness. She thought that she hated him. But hatred was inconsistent with her present mood, and she reflected that, after all, Ralph was dying for love of her, that was a fact, and behind that fact it were not wise to look. No man could do more than die for the woman he loved, no man could prove his love more completely. ... But it was so sad to think he was dying. Could nothing be done to save him? Would he recover if she were to promise to be his wife? She need not carry out her promise; she didn't know if she could. But if a promise would cure him, she would promise. She would go as far as that. ... But for what good? To get him well so that he might continue living with that woman. ...

If he hadn't confessed, if she hadn't known of this shameful connection, if it hadn't been dragged under her eyes! Ralph might have spared her that. If he had spared her that she felt that she could promise to be his wife, and perhaps to keep her promise, for in the end she supposed she would have to marry some one. She didn't see how she was going to escape. ... Yes, if he had not told her, or better still, if he had not proved himself unworthy of her, she felt she would have been capable of the sacrifice.

She had been to see him! She knew that she ought not to have gone. Her instinct had told her not to go. But she had conquered her feeling. If she had known that she was going to meet that woman she would not have gone. Whenever we allow ourselves to be led by our better feelings we come to grief. That woman hated her; she knew she did. She could see it in her look. She wouldn't put herself in such a false position again. ... A moment after she was considering if she should go to Ellen and propose that she, Mildred, should offer to marry Ralph, but not seriously, only just to help him to get well. If the plan succeeded she would persuade Ralph that his duty was to marry Ellen. And intoxicated with her own altruism, Mildred's thoughts passed on and she imagined a dozen different dramas, in every one of which she appeared in the character of a heroine.

'Mildred, what is the matter?'

'Nothing, dear, I've only forgotten my pocket-handkerchief.'

How irritating were Harold's stupid interruptions. She had to ask him if he would take another cup of tea. He said that he thought he would just have time. He had still five minutes. She poured out the tea, thinking all the while of the sick man lying on his poor narrow bed in the corner of the great studio. It was shameful that he should die; tears rose to her eyes, and she had to walk across the room to hide them. It was a pitiful story. He was dying for her, and she wasn't worth it. She hadn't much heart; she knew it, perhaps one of these days she would meet some one who would make her feel. She hoped so, she wanted to feel. She wanted to love; if her brother were to die to-morrow, she didn't believe she would really care. It was terrible; if people only knew what she was like they would look the other way when she passed down the street.... But, no, all this was morbid nonsense; she was overwrought, and nervous, and that proved that she had a heart. Perhaps too much heart.

In the next few days Ralph died a hundred times, and had been rescued from death at least a dozen times by Mildred; she had watched by his bedside, she had even visited his grave. And at the end of each dream came the question: 'Would he live, would he die?' At last, unable to bear the suspense any longer, she went to the National Gallery to obtain news of him. But Miss Brand had little news of him. She was leaving the gallery, and the two girls went for a little walk. Mildred was glad of company, anything to save her from thinking of Ralph, and she laughed and talked with Nellie on the bridge in St. James' Park, until she began to feel that the girl must think her very heartless.

'How pale and ill you're looking, Mildred.'

'Am I? I feel all right.'

Nellie's remark delighted Mildred, 'Then I have a heart,' she thought, 'I'm not so unfeeling as I thought.'

The girls separated at Buckingham Palace. Mildred walked a little way, and then suddenly called a hansom and told the man to drive to Chelsea. But he had not driven far before thoughts of the woman he was living with obtruded upon her pity, and she decided that it would be unwise for her to venture on a second visit. The emotion of seeing her again might make him worse, might kill him. So she poked her parasol through the trap, and told the cabby to drive to Victoria Station. There she bought some violets, she kept a little bunch for herself, and sent him a large bouquet. 'They'll look nice in the studio,' she said, 'I think that will be best.'

Two days after she received a letter from Ellen Gibbs.

'MADAM,--It is my sad duty to inform you that Mr. Ralph Hoskin died this afternoon at two o'clock. He begged me to write and thank you for the violets you sent him, and he expressed a hope that you would come and see him when he was dead.

'The funeral will take place on Monday. If you come here to-morrow, you will see him before he is put into his coffin.--I am, yours truly,

'ELLEN GIBBS.'

The desire to see her dead lover was an instinct, and the journey from Sutton to Chelsea was unperceived by her, and she did not recover from the febrile obedience her desire imposed until Ellen opened the studio door.

'I received a letter from you....'

'Yes, I know, come in.'

Mildred hated the plain middle-class appearance and dress of this girl. She hated the tone of her voice. She walked straight into the studio. There was a sensation of judgment in the white profile, cold, calm, severe, and Mildred drew back affrighted. But she recovered a little when she saw that her violets lay under the dead hand. 'He thought of me to the end. I forgive him everything.'

As she stood watching the dead man, she could hear Ellen moving in the passage. She did not know what Ellen knew of her relations with Ralph. But there could be no doubt that Ellen was aware that they were of an intimate nature. She hoped, hurriedly, that Ellen did not suspect her of being Ralph's mistress, and listened again, wondering if Ellen would come into the studio. Or would she have the tact to leave her alone with the dead? If she did come in it would be rather awkward. She did not wish to appear heartless before Ellen, but tears might lead Ellen to suspect. As Mildred knelt down, Ellen entered. Mildred turned round.

'Don't let me disturb you,' said Ellen, 'when you have finished.'

'Will you not say a prayer with me?'

'I have said my prayers. Our prayers would not mingle.'

'What does she mean?' thought Mildred. She buried her face in her hands and asked herself what Ellen meant. 'Our prayers would not mingle. Why? Because I'm a pure woman, and she isn't. I wonder if she meant that. I hope she does not intend any violence. I must say nothing to annoy, her.' Her heart throbbed with fear, her knees trembled, she thought she would faint. Then it occurred to her that it would be a good idea to faint. Ellen would have to carry her into the street, and in the street she would be safe.

And resolved to faint on the slightest provocation she rose from her knees, and stood facing the other woman, whom she noticed, with some farther alarm, stood between her and the door. If she could get out of this difficulty she never would place herself in such a position again.... Mildred tried to speak, but words stuck fast in her throat, and it was some time before her terror allowed her to notice that the expression on Ellen's face was not one of anger, but of resignation.

She was safe.

'She has pretty eyes,' thought Mildred, 'a weak, nervous creature; I can do with her what I like. ... If she thinks that she can get the better of me, I'll very soon show her that she is mistaken. Of course, if it came to violence, I could do nothing but scream. I'm not strong.'

Then Mildred said in a firm voice:

'I'm much obliged to you for your letter. This is very sad, I'll send some more flowers for the coffin. Good morning.'

But a light came into Ellen's eyes, which Mildred did not like.

'Well,' she said, 'I hope you're satisfied. He died thinking of you. I hope you're satisfied.'

'Mr. Hoskin and I were intimate friends. It is only natural that he should think of me.'

'We were happy until you came... you've made dust and ashes of my life. Why did you take the trouble to do this? You were not in love with him, and I did you no injury.'

'I didn't know of your existence till the other day. I heard that---'

'That I was his mistress. Well, so I was. It appears that you were not. But, I should like to know which of us two is the most virtuous, which has done the least harm. I made him happy, you killed him.'

'This is madness.'

'No, it is not madness. I know all about you, Ralph told me everything.'

'It surprises me very much that he should have spoken about me. It was not like him. I hope that he didn't tell you, that he didn't suggest that there were any improper relations between me and him.'

'I daresay that you were virtuous, more or less, as far as your own body is concerned. Faugh! Women like you make virtue seem odious.'

'I cannot discuss such questions with you,' Mildred said timidly, and, swinging her parasol vaguely, she tried to pass Ellen by. But it was difficult to get by. The picture she had admired the other day blocked the way. Mildred's eyes glanced at it vindictively.

'Yes,' said Ellen in her sad doleful voice, 'You can look at it. I sat for it. I'm not ashamed, and perhaps I did more good by sitting for it than you'll do with your painting.... But look at him--there he lies. He might have been a great artist if he had not met you and I should have been a happy woman. Now I've nothing to live for.... You said that you didn't know of my existence till the other day. But you knew that, in making that man love you, you were robbing another woman.'

'That is very subtle.'

'You knew that you did not love him, and that it could end only in unhappiness. It has ended in death.'

Mildred looked at the cold face, so claylike, and trembled. The horror of the situation crept over her; she had no strength to go, and listened meekly to Ellen.

'He smiled a little, it was a little sad smile, when he told me that I was to write, saying that he would be glad if you would come to see him when he was dead. I think I know what was passing in his mind--he

hoped that his death might be a warning to you. Not many men die of broken hearts, but one never knows. One did. Look at him, take your lesson.'

'I assure you that we were merely friends. He liked me, I know--he loved me, if you will; I could not help that,' Mildred drew on the floor of the studio with her parasol. 'I am very sorry, it is most unfortunate. I did nothing wrong. I'm sure he never suggested---'

'How that one idea does run in your head. I wonder if your thoughts are equally chaste.'

Mildred did not answer.

'I read you in the first glance, one glance was enough, your eyes tell the tale of your cunning, mean little soul. Perhaps you sometimes try to resist, maybe your nature turns naturally to evil. There are people like that.'

'If I had done what you seem to think I ought to have done, he would have abandoned you.' And Mildred looked at her rival triumphantly.

'That would have been better than what has happened. Then there would have been only one heart broken, now there are two.'

Mildred hated the woman for the humiliation she was imposing upon her, but in her heart she could not but feel admiration for such single heartedness. Noticing on Mildred's face the change of expression, but misinterpreting it, Ellen said:

'I can read you through and through. You have wrecked two lives. Oh, that any one should be so wicked, that any one should delight in wickedness. I cannot understand.'

'You are accusing me wrongly.... But let me go. It is not likely that we shall arrive at any understanding.'

'Go then, you came to gloat; you have gloated, go.

Ellen threw herself on a chair by the bedside. Her head fell on her hands. Mildred whisked her black crape dress out of the studio.

XIII.

It was not until the spring was far advanced that the nostalgia of the boulevards began to creep into her life. Then, without intermission, the desire to get away grew more persistent, at last she could think of nothing else. Harold oppressed her. But Mrs. Fargus was not in France, she could not live alone. But why could she not live alone?

Although she asked herself this question, Mildred felt that she could not live alone in Paris. But she must go to Paris! but with whom? Not with Elsie or Cissy--they both had studios in London. Moreover, they were not quite the girls she would like to live with; they were very well as studio friends. Mildred thought she might hire a chaperon;

that would be very expensive! And for the solution of her difficulty Mildred sought in vain until one day, in the National Gallery, Miss Brand suggested that they should go to Paris together.

Miss Brand had told Mildred how she had begun life as a musician. When she was thirteen she had followed Rubenstein from London to Birmingham, from Birmingham to Manchester, and then to Liverpool. Her parents did not know what had become of her. Afterwards she studied counterpoint and harmony with Rubenstein in St. Petersburg, and also with Von Bulow in Leipsic. But she had given up music for journalism. Her specialty was musical criticism, to which, having been thrown a good deal with artists, she had added art criticism. Mildred could help her with her art criticism.... She thought they'd get on very well together.... She would willingly share the expenses, of a little flat.

Mildred was fascinated by the project; if she could possibly get Harold to agree.... He must agree. He would raise many objections. But that did not matter; she was determined. And at the end of the month Mildred and Miss Brand left for Paris.

They had decided that for fifteen hundred or two thousand francs a year they could find an apartment that would suit them, five or six rooms within easy reach of the studio, and, leaning back in their cab discussing the advantages or the disadvantages of the apartment they had seen, they grew conscious of their intimacy and Mildred rejoiced in the freedom of her life. Their only trouble was the furnishing. Mildred did not like to ask Harold for any more money, and credit was difficult to obtain. But even this difficulty was surmounted: and they found an upholsterer who agreed to furnish the apartment they had taken in the Rue Hauteville for five thousand francs, payable in monthly instalments. To have to pay five hundred francs every month would keep them very short of money for the first year, but that could not be helped. They would get on somehow; and the first dinner in the half-furnished dining-room, with the white porcelain stove in the corner, seemed to them the most delicious they had ever tasted. Josephine, their servant, was certainly an excellent cook; and so obliging; they could find no fault with her. But the upholsterer was dilatory, and days elapsed before he brought the chairs that were to match the sofa; nearly every piece of drapery was hung separately, and they had given up hope of the _etageres_ and girondoles. For a long while a grand piano was their principal piece of furniture. Though she never touched it, Miss Brand could not live without, a grand piano. 'What's the use?' she'd say. 'I've only to open the score to remember --to hear Rubenstein play the passage.'

When they were _tout a fait bien installees,_ they had friends to dinner, and they were especially proud of M. Daveau's company. Mildred liked this large, stout man. There was something strangely winning in his manner; a mystery seemed to surround him, and it was impossible not to wish to penetrate this mystery. Besides, was he not their master, the lord of the studio? Though a large, fat man, none was more illusive, more difficult to realise, harder to get on terms of intimacy with. These were temptations which appealed to Mildred and she had determined on his subduction. But the wily Southerner had read her through. Those little brown eyes of his had searched the bottom of her soul, and, with pleasant smiles and engaging courtesies, he had answered all her coquetries. But the difficulty of conquest only whetted her appetite for victory, and she might even have pursued her

quest with ridiculous attentions if accident had not made known to her the fact that M. Daveau was not only the lover of another lady in the studio, but that he loved her to the perfect exclusion of every other woman. Mildred's face darkened between the eyes, a black little cloud of hatred appeared and settled there. She invented strange stories about M. Daveau; and it surprised her that M. Daveau took no notice of her calumnies. She desired above all things to annoy the large mysterious Southerner who had resisted her attractions, who had preferred another, and who now seemed indifferent to anything she might say about him. But M. Daveau was only biding his time; and when Mildred came to renew her subscription to the studio, he told her that he was very sorry, but that he could not accept her any longer as a pupil. Mildred asked for a reason. M. Daveau smiled sweetly, enigmatically, and answered, that he wished to reduce the number of ladies in his studio. There were too many.

Expulsion from the studio made shipwreck of her life in Paris. There was no room in the flat in which she could paint. She had spent all her money, and could not afford to hire a studio. She took lessons in French and music, and began a novel, and when she wearied of her novel she joined another studio, a ladies' class. But Mildred did not like women; the admiration of men was the breath of her nostrils. With a difference, men were her life as much as they were Elsie's. She pined in this new studio; it grew hateful to her, and she spoke of returning to England.

But Miss Brand said that one of these days she would meet M. Daveau; that he would apologise if he had offended her, and that all would be made right. For Mildred had given Miss Brand to understand that M. Daveau had made love to her; then she said that he had tried to kiss her, and that it would be unpleasant for her to meet him again. And her story had been accepted as the true one by the American and English girls; the other students had assumed that Miss Lawson had given up painting or had taken a holiday. So she had got herself out of her difficulty very cleverly. And she listened complacently to Miss Brand's advice. There was something in what Nellie said. If she were to meet M. Daveau she felt that she could talk him over. But she did not know if she could bring herself to try after what had happened.... She hated him, and the desire, as she put it, to get even with him often rose up in her heart. At last she caught sight of him in the Louvre. He was looking at a picture on the other side of the gallery, and she crossed over so that he should see her. He bowed, and was about to pass on; but Mildred insisted, and, responding to the question why he had refused her subscription, he said:

'I think I told you at the time that I found myself obliged to reduce the number of pupils. But, tell me, are you copying here?'

'One doesn't learn anything from copying. Won't you allow me to come back?'

'I don't see how I can. There are so many ladies at present in the studio.'

'I hear that some have left? ... Madlle. Berge has left, hasn't she?'

'Yes, she has left.'

'If Madlle. Berge has left, there is no reason why I should not

return.'

M. Daveau did not answer; he smiled satirically and bade her good-bye. Mildred hated him more than ever, but when a subscription was started by the pupils to present him with a testimonial she did not neglect to subscribe. The presentation took place in the studio. 'I think this is an occasion to forget our differences,' he said, when he had finished his speech. 'If you wish to return you'll find my studio open to you.' And to show that he wished to let bygones be bygones, he often came and helped her with her drawing; he seemed to take an interest in her; and she tried to lead him on. But one day she discovered that she could not deceive him, and again she began to hate him; but remembering the price of her past indiscretions she refrained, and the matter was forgotten in another of more importance. Miss Brand suddenly fell out of health and was obliged to return to England.

Then the little flat became too expensive for Mildred; she let it, and went to live in a boarding-house on the other side of the water, where Cissy was staying. But, at the end of the first quarter, Mildred thought the neighbourhood did not suit her, and she went to live near St. Augustine. She remained there till the autumn, till Elsie came over, and then she went to Elsie's boarding-house. Elsie returned to England in the spring, and Mildred wandered from boarding-house to boarding-house. She took a studio and spent a good deal of money on models, frames, and costumes. But nothing she did satisfied her, and, after various failures, she returned to Daveau's, convinced that she must improve her drawing. She was, moreover, determined to put her talent to the test of severe study. She got to the studio every morning at eight, she worked there till five. As she did not know how to employ her evenings, she took M. Daveau's advice and joined his night-class.

For three months she bore the strain of these long days easily; but the fourth month pressed heavily upon her, and in the fifth month she was a mere mechanism. She counted the number of heads more correctly than she used to, she was more familiar with the proportions of the human figure. Alas! her drawing was no better. It was blacker, harder, less alive. And to drag her weariness all the way along the boulevards seemed impossible. That foul smelling studio repelled her from afar, the prospect of the eternal model--a man with his hand on his hip--a woman leaning one hand on a stool, frightened her; and her blackened drawing, that would not move out of its insipid ugliness, tempted her no more with false hopes.

Mildred paused in her dressing; it seemed that she could not get her clothes on. She had to sit down to rest. Tears welled up into her eyes; and, in the midst of much mental and physical weakness, the maid knocked at her door and handed her a letter. It was from Elsie.

'DEAREST MILDRED,--Here we are again in Barbizon, painting in the day and dancing in the evening. There are a nice lot of fellows here, one or two very clever ones. I have already picked up a lot of hints. How we did waste our time in that studio. Square brush work, drawing by the masses, what rot! I suppose you have abandoned it all long ago.... Cissy is here, she has thrown over Hopwood Blunt for good and all. She is at present much interested in a division of the tones man. A clever fellow, but not nearly so good-looking as mine. The inn stands in a large garden, and we dine and walk after dinner under the trees, and watch the stars come out. There's a fellow here who might interest

you--his painting would, even if he failed to respond to the gentle Platonism of your flirtations. The forest, too, would interest you. It is an immense joy. I'm sure you want change of air. Life here is very cheap, only five francs, room and meals--breakfast and dinner, everything included except coffee.'

Mildred rejoiced in the prospect of escape from the studio; and her life quickened at the thought of the inn with its young men, its new ideas, the friends, the open air, and the great forest that Elsie described as an immense joy. There was no reason why she should not go at once, that very day. And the knowledge that she could thus peremptorily decide her life was in itself a pleasure which she would not have dispensed with. There were difficulties in the way of clothes, she wanted some summer dresses. It would be difficult to get all she wanted before four o'clock. She would have to get the things ready made, others she could have sent after her. Muslins, trimmings, hats, stockings, shoes, and sunshades occupied Mildred all the morning, and she only just got to the Gare de Lyons in time to catch the four o'clock train. Elsie's letter gave explicit directions, she was not to go to Fontainebleau, she was to book to Melun, that was the nearest station, there she would find an omnibus waiting, which would take her to Barbizon, or, if she did not mind the expense, she could take a fly which would be pleasanter and quicker.

XIV.

A formal avenue of trim trees led out of the town of Melun. But these were soon exchanged for rough forest growths; and out of cabbage and corn lands the irruptive forest broke into islands; and the plain was girdled with a dark green belt of distant forest.

She lay back in the fly tasting in the pure air, the keen joy of returning health, and she thrilled a little at the delight of an expensive white muslin and a black sash which accentuated the smallness of her waist. She liked her little brown shoes and brown stockings and the white sunshade through whose strained silk the red sun showed.

At the cross roads she noticed a still more formal avenue, trees planted in single line and curving like a regiment of soldiers marching across country. The whitewashed stead and the lonely peasant scratching like an insect in the long tilth were painful impressions. She missed the familiar hedgerows which make England like a garden; and she noticed that there were trees everywhere except about the dwellings; and that there were neither hollybush or sunflowers in the white village they rolled through--a gaunt white village which was not Barbizon. The driver mentioned the name, but Mildred did not heed him. She looked from the blank white walls to her prettily posed feet and heard him say that Barbizon was still a mile away.

It lay at the end of the plain, and when the carriage entered the long street, it rocked over huge stones so that Mildred was nearly thrown out. She called to the driver to go slower; he smiled, and pointing with his whip said that the hotel that Mademoiselle wanted was at the end of the village, on the verge of the forest.

A few moments after the carriage drew up before an iron gateway, and Mildred saw a small house at the bottom of a small garden. There was a pavilion on the left and a numerous company were dining beneath the branches of a cedar. Elsie and Cissy got up, and dropping their napkins ran to meet their friend. She was led in triumph to the table, and all through dinner she had a rough impression of English girls in cheap linen dresses and of men in rough suits and flowing neck-ties.

She was given some soup, and when the plate of veal had been handed round, and Elsie and Cissy had exhausted their first store of questions, she was introduced to Morton Mitchell. His singularly small head was higher by some inches than any other, bright eyes, and white teeth showing through a red moustache, and a note of defiance in his open-hearted voice made him attractive. Mildred was also introduced to Rose Turner, the girl who sat next him, a weak girl with pretty eyes. Rose already looked at Mildred as if she anticipated rivalry, and was clearly jealous of every word that Morton did not address to her. Mildred looked at him again. He was better dressed than the others, and an air of success in his face made him seem younger than he was. He leaned across the table, and Mildred liked his brusque, but withal well-bred manner. She wondered what his pictures were like. At Daveau's only the names of the principal exhibitors at the Salon were known, and he had told her that he had not sent there for the last three years. He didn't care to send to the vulgar place more than he could help.

Mildred noticed that all listened to Morton; and she was sorry to leave the table, so interesting was his conversation. But Elsie and Cissy wanted to talk to her, and they marched about the grass plot, their arms about each other's waists; and, while questioning Mildred about herself and telling her about themselves, they frequently looked whither their lovers sat smoking. Sometimes Mildred felt them press her along the walk which passed by the dining table. But for half an hour their attractions were arrayed vainly against those of cigarettes and _petits verres_. Rose was the only woman who remained at table. She hung over her lover, desirous that he should listen to her. Mildred thought, 'What a fool.... We shall see presently.'

The moment the young men got up Cissy and Elsie forgot Mildred. An angry expression came upon her face and she went into the house. The walls had been painted all over--landscapes, still life, nude figures, rustic, and elegiac subjects. Every artist had painted something in memory of his visit, and Mildred sought vaguely for what Mr. Mitchell had painted. Then, remembering that he had chosen to walk about with the Turner girl, she abandoned her search and, leaning on the window-sill, watched the light fading in the garden. She could hear the frogs in a distant pond, and thought of the night in the forest amid millions of trees and stars.

Suddenly she heard some one behind her say:

'Do you like being alone?'

It was Morton.

'I'm so used to being alone.'

'Use is a second nature, I will not interrupt your solitude.'

'But sometimes one gets tired of solitude.'

'Would you like to share your solitude? You can have half of mine.'

'I'm sure it is very kind of you, but---' It was on Mildred's tongue to ask him what he had done with Rose Turner. She said instead, 'and where does your solitude hang out?'

'Chiefly in the forest. Shall we go there?'

'Is it far? I don't know where the others have gone.'

'They're in the forest, we walk there every evening; we shall meet them.'

'How far is the forest?'

'At our door. We're in the forest. Come and see. There is the forest,' he said, pointing to a long avenue. 'How bright the moonlight is, one can read by this light.'

'And how wonderfully the shadows of the tall trunks fall across the white road. How unreal, how phantasmal, is that grey avenue shimmering in the moonlight.'

'Yes, isn't the forest ghostlike. And isn't that picturesque,' he said, pointing to a booth that had been set up by the wayside. On a tiny stage a foot or so from the ground, by the light of a lantern and a few candle ends, a man and a woman were acting some rude improvisation.

Morton and Mildred stayed; but neither was in the mood to listen. They contributed a trifle each to these poor mummers of the lane's end, and it seemed that their charity had advanced them in their intimacy. Without hesitation they left the road, taking a sandy path which led through some rocks. Mildred's feet sank in the loose sand, and very soon it seemed to her that they had left Barbizon far behind. For the great grey rocks and the dismantled tree trunk which they had suddenly come upon frightened her; and she could hardly bear with the ghostly appearance the forest took in the stream of glittering light which flowed down from the moon.

She wished to turn back. But Morton said that they would meet the others beyond the hill, and she followed him through great rocks, filled with strange shadows. The pines stood round the hill-top making it seem like a shrine; a round yellow moon looked through; there was the awe of death in the lurid silence, and so clear was the sky that the points of the needles could be seen upon it.

'We must go back,' she said.

'If you like.'

But, at that moment, voices were heard coming over the brow of the hill.

'You see I did not deceive you. There are your friends, I knew we should meet them. That is Miss Laurence's voice, one can always

recognise it.'

'Then let us go to them.'

'If you like. But we can talk better here. Let me find you a place to sit down.' Before Mildred could answer, Elsie cried across the glade:

'So there you are.'

'What do you think of the forest?' shouted Cissy.

'Wonderful,' replied Mildred.

'Well, we won't disturb you... we shall be back presently.'

And, like ghosts, they passed into the shadow and mystery of the trees.

'So you work in the men's studio?'

'Does that shock you?'

'No, nothing shocks me.'

'In the studio a woman puts off her sex. There's no sex in art.'

'I quite agree with you. There's no sex in art, and a woman would be very foolish to let anything stand between her and her art.'

'I'm glad you think that. I've made great sacrifices for painting.'

'What sacrifices?'

'I'll tell you one of these days when I know you better.'

'Will you?'

The conversation paused a moment, and Mildred said:

'How wonderful it is here. Those pines, that sky, one hears the silence; it enters into one's very bones. It is a pity one cannot paint silence.'

'Millet painted silence. "The Angelus" is full of silence, the air trembles with silence and sunset.'

'But the silence of the moonlight is more awful, it really is very awful, I'm afraid.'

'Afraid of what? there's nothing to be afraid of. You asked me just now if I believed in Daveau's, I didn't like to say; I had only just been introduced to you; but it seems to me that I know you better now... Daveau's is a curse. It is the sterilisation of art. You must give up Daveau's, and come and work here.'

'I'm afraid it would make no difference. Elsie and Cissy have spent years here, and what they do does not amount to much. They wander from method to method, abandoning each in turn. I am utterly discouraged, and made up my mind to give up painting.'

'What are you going to do?'

'I don't know. One of these days I shall find out my true vocation.'

'You're young, you are beautiful---'

'No, I'm not beautiful, but there are times when I look nice.'

'Yes, indeed there are. Those hands, how white they are in the moonlight.' He took her hands. 'Why do you trouble and rack your soul about painting? A woman's hands are too beautiful for a palette and brushes.'

The words were on her tongue to ask him if he did not admire Rose's hands equally, but remembering the place, the hour, and the fact of her having made his acquaintance only a few hours before, she thought it more becoming to withdraw her hands, and to say:

'The others do not seem to be coming back. We had better return.'

They moved out of the shadows of the pines, and stood looking down the sandy pathway.

'How filmy and grey those top branches, did you ever see anything so delicate?'

'I never saw anything like this before. This is primeval.... I used to walk a good deal with a friend of mine in St. James' Park.'

'The park where the ducks are, and a little bridge. Your friend was not an artist.'

'Yes, he was, and a very clever artist too.'

'Then he admired the park because you were with him.'

'Perhaps that had something to do with it. But the park is very beautiful.'

'I don't think I care much about cultivated nature.'

'Don't you like a garden?'

'Yes; a disordered garden, a garden that has been let run wild.'

They walked down the sandy pathway, and came unexpectedly upon Elsie and her lover sitting behind a rock. They asked where the others were. Elsie did not know. But at that moment voices were heard, and Cissy cried from the bottom of the glade:

'So there you are; we've been looking for you.'

'Looking for us indeed,' said Mildred.

Now, Mildred, don't be prudish, this is Liberty Hall. You must lend us Mr. Mitchell, we want to dance.'

'What, here in the sand!'

'No, in the Salon.... Come along, Rose will play for us.'

XV.

Mildred was the first down. She wore a pretty _robe a fleurs,_ and her straw hat was trimmed with tremulous grasses and cornflowers. A faint sunshine floated in the wet garden.

A moment after Elsie cried from the door-step:

'Well, you have got yourself up. We don't run to anything like that here. You're going out flirting. It's easy to see that.'

'My flirtations don't amount to much. Kisses don't thrill me as they do you. I'm afraid I've never been what you call "in love."'

'You seem on the way there, if I'm to judge by last night,' Elsie answered rather tartly. 'You know, Mildred, I don't believe all you say, not quite all.'

A pained and perplexed expression came upon Mildred's face and she said:

'Perhaps I shall meet a man one of these days who will inspire passion in me.'

'I hope so. It would be a relief to all of us. I wouldn't mind subscribing to present that man with a testimonial.'

Mildred laughed.

'I often wonder what will become of me. I've changed a good deal in the last two years. I've had a great deal of trouble.'

'I'm sorry you're so depressed. I know what it is. That wretched painting, we give ourselves to it heart and soul, and it deceives us as you deceive your lovers.'

'So it does. I had not thought of it like that. Yes, I've been deceived just as I have deceived others. But you, Elsie, you've not been deceived, you can do something. If I could do what you do. You had a picture in the Salon. Cissy had a picture in the Salon.'

'That doesn't mean much. What we do doesn't amount to much.'

'But do you think that I shall ever do as much?'

Elsie did not think so, and the doubt caused her to hesitate. Mildred perceived the hesitation and said:

'Oh, there's no necessity for you to lie. I know the truth well enough. I have resolved to give up painting. I have given it up.'

You've given up painting! Do you really mean it?'

'Yes, I feel that I must. When I got your letter I was nearly dead with weariness and disappointment--what a relief your letter was--what a relief to be here!'

'Well, you see something has happened. Barbizon has happened, Morton has happened.'

'I wonder if anything will come of it. He's a nice fellow. I like him.'

'You're not the first. All the women are crazy about him. He was the lover of Merac, the actress of the _Francais_. They say she could only play Phedre when he was in the stage-box. He always produced that effect upon her. Then he was the lover of the Marquise de la--de la Per----I can't remember the name.'

'Is he in love with any one now?'

'No; we thought he was going to marry Rose.'

'That little thing!'

'Well, he seemed devoted to her. He seemed inclined to settle down.'

'Did he ever flirt with you?'

'No; he's not my style.'

'I know what that means,' thought Mildred.

The conversation paused, and then Elsie said:

'It really is a shame to upset him with Rose, unless you mean to marry him. Even the impressionists admit that he has talent. He belongs to the old school, it is true, but his work is interesting all the same.'

The English and American girls were dressed like Elsie and Cissy in cheap linen dresses; one of the French artists was living with a cocotte. She was dressed more elaborately; somewhat like Mildred, Elsie remarked, and the girls laughed, and sat down to their bowls of coffee.

Morton and Elsie's young man were almost the last to arrive. Swinging their paint-boxes they came forward talking gaily.

'Yours is the best looking,' said Elsie.

'Perhaps you'd like to get him from me.'

'No, I never do that.'

'What about Rose?'

Mildred bit her lips, and Elsie couldn't help thinking, 'How cruel she is, she likes to make that poor little thing miserable. It's only vanity, for I don't suppose she cares for Morton.'

Those who were painting in the adjoining fields and forest said they

would be back to the second breakfast at noon, those who were going further, and whose convenience it did not suit to return, took sandwiches with them. Morton was talking to Rose, but Mildred soon got his attention.

'You're going to paint in the forest,' she said, 'I wonder what your picture is like: you haven't shown it to me.'

'It's all packed up. But aren't you going into the forest? If you're going with Miss Laurence and Miss Clive you might come with me. You'd better take your painting materials; you'll find the time hang heavily, if you don't.'

'Oh no, the very thought of painting bores me.'

'Very well then. If you are ready we might make a start, mine is a mid-day effect. I hope you're a good walker. But you'll never be able to get along in those shoes and that dress--that's no dress for the forest. You've dressed as if for a garden-party.'

'It is only a little _robe a fleurs,_ there's nothing to spoil, and as for my shoes, you'll see I shall get along all right, unless it is very far.'

'It is more than a mile. I shall have to take you down to the local cobbler and get you measured. I never saw such feet.'

He was oddly matter of fact. There was something naive and childish about him, and he amused and interested Mildred.

'With whom,' she said, 'do you go out painting when I'm not here? Every Jack seems to have his own Jill in Barbizon.'

'And don't they everywhere else? It would be damned dull without.'

'Do you think it would? Have you always got a Jill?'

'I've been down in my luck lately.'

Mildred laughed.

'Which of the women here has the most talent?'

'Perhaps Miss Laurence. But Miss Clive does a nice thing occasionally.'

'What do you think of Miss Turner's work?'

'It's pretty good. She has talent. She had two pictures in the Salon last year.'

Mildred bit her lips. 'Have you ever been out with her?'

'Yes, but why do you ask?'

'Because I think she likes you. She looked very miserable when she heard that we were going out together. Just as if she were going to cry. If I thought I was making another person unhappy I would sooner give you--give up the pleasure of going out with you.'

'And what about me? Don't I count for anything?'

'I must not do a direct wrong to another. Each of us has a path to walk in, and if we deviate from our path we bring unhappiness upon ourselves and upon others.'

Morton stopped and looked at her, his stolid childish stare made her laugh, and it made her like him.

'I wonder if I am selfish?' said Mildred reflectively. 'Sometimes I think I am, sometimes I think I am not. I've suffered so much, my life has been all suffering. There's no heart left in me for anything. I wonder what will become of me. I often think I shall commit suicide. Or I might go into a convent.'

'You'd much better commit suicide than go into a convent. Those poor devils of nuns! as if there wasn't enough misery in this world. We are certain of the misery, and if we give up the pleasures, I should like to know where we are.'

Each had been so interested in the other that they had seen nothing else. But now the road led through an open space where every tree was torn and broken; Mildred stopped to wonder at the splintered trunks; and out of the charred spectre of a great oak crows flew and settled among the rocks, in the fissures of a rocky hill.

'But you're not going to ask me to climb those rocks,' said Mildred. 'There are miles and miles of rocks. It is like a landscape by Salvator Rosa.'

'Climb that hill! you couldn't. I'll wait until our cobbler has made you a pair of boots. But isn't that desolate region of blasted oaks and sundered rocks wonderful? You find everything in the forest. In a few minutes I shall show you some lovely underwood.'

And they had walked a very little way when he stopped and said: 'Don't you call that beautiful?' and, leaning against the same tree, Morton and Mildred looked into the dreamy depth of a summer wood. The trunks of the young elms rose straight, and through the pale leafage the sunlight quivered, full of the impulse of the morning. The ground was thick with grass and young shoots.... Something ran through the grass, paused, and then ran again.

'What is that?' Mildred asked.

'A squirrel, I think... yes, he's going up that tree.'

'How pretty he is, his paws set against the bark.'

'Come this way and we shall see him better.'

But they caught no further sight of the squirrel, and Morton asked Mildred the time.

'A quarter-past ten,' she said, glancing at the tiny watch which she wore in a bracelet.

'Then we must be moving on. I ought to be at work at half-past. One

can't work more than a couple of hours in this light.'

They passed out of the wood and crossed an open space where rough grass grew in patches. Mildred opened her parasol.

'You asked me just now if I ever went to England. Do you intend to go back, or do you intend to live in France?'

'That's my difficulty. So long as I was painting there was a reason for my remaining in France, now that I've given it up---'

'But you've not given it up.'

'Yes, I have. If I don't find something else to do I suppose I must go back. That's what I dread. We live in Sutton. But that conveys no idea to your mind. Sutton is a little town in Surrey. It was very nice once, but now it is little better than a London suburb. My brother is a distiller. He goes to town every day by the ten minutes past nine and he returns by the six o'clock. I've heard of nothing but those two trains all my life. We have ten acres of ground--gardens, greenhouses, and a number of servants. Then there's the cart--I go out for drives in the cart. We have tennis parties--the neighbours, you know, and I shall have to choose whether I shall look after my brother's house, or marry and look after my husband's.'

'It must be very lonely in Sutton.'

'Yes, it is very lonely. There are a number of people about, but I've no friends that I care about. There's Mrs. Fargus.'

'Who's Mrs. Fargus?'

'Oh, you should see Mrs. Fargus, she reads Comte, and has worn the same dinner dress ever since I knew her--a black satin with a crimson scarf. Her husband suffers from asthma, and speaks of his wife as a very clever woman. He wears an eyeglass and she wears spectacles. Does that give you an idea of my friends?'

'I should think it did. What damned bores they must be.'

'He bores me, she doesn't. I owe a good deal to Mrs. Fargus. If it hadn't been for her I shouldn't be here now.'

'What do you mean?'

They again passed out of the sunlight into the green shade of some beech trees. Mildred closed her parasol, and swaying it to and fro amid the ferns she continued in a low laughing voice her tale of Mrs. Fargus and the influence that this lady had exercised upon her. Her words floated along a current of quiet humour cadenced by the gentle swaying of her parasol, and brought into relief by a certain intentness of manner which was peculiar to her. And gradually Morton became more and more conscious of her, the charm of her voice stole upon him, and once he lingered, allowing her to get a few yards in front so that he might notice the quiet figure, a little demure, and intensely itself, in a yellow gown. When he first saw her she had seemed to him a little sedate, even a little dowdy, and when she had spoken of her intention to abandon painting, although her manner was far from cheerless, he had feared a bore. He now perceived that this

she at least was not--moreover, her determination to paint no more announced, an excellent sense of the realities of things in which the other women--the Elsies and the Cissys--seemed to him to be strangely deficient. And when he set up his easel her appreciation of his work helped him to further appreciation of her. He had spread the rug for her in a shady place, but for the present she preferred to stand behind him, her parasol slanted slightly, talking, he thought very well, of the art of the great men who had made Barbizon rememberable. And the light tone of banter in which she now admitted her failure seemed to Morton to be just the tone which she should adopt, and her ridicule of the impressionists and, above all, of the dottists amused him.

'I don't know why they come here at all,' he said, 'unless it be to prove to themselves that nature falls far short of their pictures. I wonder why they come here? They could paint their gummy tapestry stuff anywhere.'

'I can imagine your asking them what they thought of Corot. Their faces would assume a puzzled expression, I can see them scratching their heads reflectively; at last one of them would say:

'"Yes, there is _Chose_ who lives behind the Odeon--he admires Corot. _Pas de blague_, he really does." Then all the others in chorus: "he really does admire Corot; we'll bring him to see you next Tuesday."'

Morton laughed loudly, Mildred laughed quietly, and there was an intense intimacy of enjoyment in her laughter.

'I can see them,' she said, 'bringing _Chose, le petit Chose_, who lives behind the Odeon and admires Corot, to see you, bringing him, you know, as a sort of strange survival, a curious relic. It really is very funny.'

He was sorry when she said the sun was getting too hot for her, and she went and lay on the rug he had spread for her in the shade of the oak. She had brought a book to read, but she only read a line here and there. Her thoughts followed the white clouds for a while, and then she admired the man sitting easily on his camp-stool, his long legs wide apart. His small head, his big hat, the line of his bent back amused and interested her; she liked his abrupt speech, and wondered if she could love him. A couple of peasant women came by, bent under the weight of the faggots they had picked, and Mildred could see that Morton was watching the movement of these women, and she thought how well they would come into the picture he was painting.

Soon after he rose from his easel and walked towards her.

'Have you finished?' she said. 'No, not quite, but the light has changed. I cannot go on any more to-day. One can't work in the sunlight above an hour and a half.'

'You've been working longer than that.'

'But haven't touched the effect. I've been painting in some figures--two peasant women picking sticks, come and look.'

XVI.

Three days after Morton finished his picture. Mildred had been with him most of the time. And now lunch was over, and they lay on the rug under the oak tree talking eagerly.

'Corot never married,' Morton remarked, as he shaded his eyes with his hand, and asked himself if any paint appeared in his sky. There was a corner on the left that troubled him. 'He doesn't seem to have ever cared for any woman. They say he never had a mistress.'

'I hear that you have not followed his example.'

'Not more than I could help.'

His childish candour amused her so that she laughed outright, and she watched the stolid childish stare that she liked, until a longing to take him in her arms and kiss him came upon her. Her voice softened, and she asked him if he had ever been in love?

'Yes, I think I was.'

'How long did it last?'

'About five years.'

'And then?'

'A lot of rot about scruples of conscience. I said, I give you a week to think it over, and if I don't hear from you in that time I'm off to Italy.'

'Did she write?'

'Not until I had left Paris. Then she spent five-and-twenty pounds in telegrams trying to get me back.'

'But you wouldn't go back.'

'Not I; with me, when an affair of that sort is over, it is really over. Don't you think I'm right?'

'Perhaps so.... But I'm afraid we've learnt love in different schools.'

'Then the sooner you relearn it in my school the better.'

At that moment a light breeze came up the sandy path, carrying some dust on to the picture. Morton stamped and swore. For three minutes it was damn, damn, damn.

'Do you always swear like that in the presence of ladies?'

'What's a fellow to do when a blasted wind comes up smothering his picture in sand?'

Mildred could only laugh at him; and, while he packed up his canvases,

paint-box, and easel, she thought about him. She thought that she understood him, and fancied that she would be able to manage him. And convinced of her power she said aloud, as they plunged into the forest:

'I always think it is a pity that it is considered vulgar to walk arm in arm. I like to take an arm.... I suppose we can do what we like in the forest of Fontainebleau. But you're too heavily laden--'

'No, not a bit. I should like it.'

She took his arm and walked by his side with a sweet caressing movement, and they talked eagerly until they reached the motive of his second picture.

'What I've got on the canvas isn't very much like the view in front of you, is it?'

'No, not much, I don't like it as well as the other picture.'

'I began it late one evening. I've never been able to get the same effect again. Now it looks like a Puvis de Chavannes--not my picture, but that hillside, that large space of blue sky and the wood-cutters.'

'It does a little. Are you going on with it?'

'Why?'

'Because there is no shade for me to sit in. I shall be roasted if we remain here.'

'What shall we do? Lie down in some shady place?'

'We might do that.... I know what I should like.'

'What?'

'A long drive in the forest.'

'A capital idea. We can do that. We shall meet some one going to Barbizon. We'll ask them to send us a fly.'

Their way lay through a pine wood where the heat was stifling; the dry trees were like firewood scorched and ready to break into flame; and their steps dragged through the loose sand. And, when they had passed this wood, they came to a place where the trees had all been felled, and a green undergrowth of pines, two or three feet high, had sprung up. It was difficult to force their way through; the prickly branches were disagreeable to touch, and underneath the ground was spongy, with layers of fallen needles hardly covered with coarse grass.

Morton missed the way, and his paint-box and canvases had begun to weigh heavy when they came upon the road they were seeking. But where they came upon it, there was only a little burnt grass, and Morton proposed that they should toil on until they came to a pleasanter place.

The road ascended along the verge of a steep hill, at the top of which they met a bicyclist who promised to deliver Morton's note. There was

an opening in the trees, and below them the dark green forest waved for miles. It was pleasant to rest--they were tired. The forest murmured like a shell. They could distinguish here and there a tree, and their thoughts went to that tree. But, absorbed though they were by this vast nature, each was thinking intensely of the other. Mildred knew she was near the moment when Morton would take her hand and tell her that he loved her. She wondered what he would say. She did not think he would say he loved her, he would say: 'You're a damned pretty woman.' She could see he was thinking of something, and suspected him of thinking out a phrase or an oath appropriate to the occasion. She was nearly right. Morton was thinking how he should act. Mildred was not the common Barbizon art student whose one idea is to become the mistress of a painter so that she may learn to paint. She had encouraged him, but she had kept her little dignity. Moreover, he did not feel sure of her. So the minutes went by in awkward expectancy, and Morton had not kissed her before the carriage arrived.

She lay back in the fly smiling, Morton thought, superciliously. It seemed to him stupid to put his arm round her waist and try to kiss her. But, sooner or later, he would have to do this. Once this Rubicon was passed he would know where he was.... As he debated, the tall trunks rose branchless for thirty or forty feet; and Mildred said that they were like plumed lances.

'So they are,' he said, 'like plumed lances. And how beautifully that beech bends, what an exquisite curve, like a lance bent in the shock of the encounter.'

The underwood seemed to promise endless peace, happy life amid leaves and birds; and Mildred thought of a duel under the tall trees. She saw two men fighting to the death for her. A romantic story begun in a ball-room, she was not quite certain how. Morton remembered a drawing of fauns and nymphs. But there was hardly cover for a nymph to hide her whiteness. The ground was too open, the faun would soon overtake her. She could better elude his pursuit in the opposite wood. There the long branches of the beeches swept the heads of the ferns, and, in mysterious hollows, ferns made mysterious shade, places where nymphs and fauns might make noonday festival.

'What are you thinking of?' said Mildred.

'Of fauns and nymphs,' he answered. 'These woods seem to breathe antiquity.'

'But you never paint antiquity.'

'I try to. Millet got its spirit. Do you know the peasant girl who has taken off her clothes to bathe in a forest pool, her sheep wandering through the wood? By God! I should like you to see that picture.'

At the corner of the _carrefour_, the serpent catcher showed them two vipers in a low flat box. They darted their forked tongues against the wire netting, and the large green snake, which he took out of a bag, curled round his arm, seeking to escape. In questioning him they learnt that the snakes were on their way to the laboratory of a vivisectionist. This dissipated the mystery which they had suggested, and the carriage drove in silence down the long forest road.

'We might have bought those snakes from him, and set them at liberty.'

'We might have, but we didn't.'

'Why didn't we?'

'What would be the good? ... If we had, he would have caught others.'

'I suppose so. But I don't like the idea of that beautiful snake, which you compared to me, being vivisected.'

The forest now extended like a great temple, hushed in the beautiful ritual of the sunset. The light that suffused the green leaves overhead glossed the brown leaves underfoot, marking the smooth grosund as with a pattern. And, like chapels, every dell seemed in the tranquil light, and leading from them a labyrinthine architecture without design or end. Mildred's eyes wandered from the colonnades to the underwoods. She thought of the forest as of a great green prison; and then her soul fled to the scraps of blue that appeared through the thick leafage, and she longed for large spaces of sky, for a view of a plain, for a pine-plumed hill-top. Once more she admired, once more she wearied of the forest aisles, and was about to suggest returning to Barbizon when Morton said:

'We are nearly there now; I'm going to show you our lake.'

'A lake! Is there a lake?'

'Yes, there's a lake--not a very large one, it is true, but still a lake--on the top of a hill where you can see the forest. Under a sunset sky the view is magnificent.'

The carriage was to wait for them, and, a little excited by the adventure, Mildred followed Morton through rocks and furze bushes. When it was possible she took his arm, and once accidentally, or nearly accidentally, she sprang from a rock into his arms. She was surprised that he did not take advantage of the occasion to kiss her.

'Standing on this flat rock we're like figures in a landscape, by Wilson,' Mildred said.

'So we are,' said Morton, who was struck by the truth of the comparison. 'But there is too much colour in the scene for Wilson--he would have reduced it all to a beautiful blue, with only a yellow flush to tell where the sun had gone.'

'It would be very nice if you would make me a sketch of the lake. I'll lend you a lead pencil, the back of an envelope will do.'

'I've a water-colour box in my pocket and a block. Sit down there and I'll do you a sketch.'

'And, while you are accomplishing a work of genius, I'll supply the levity, and don't you think I'm just the person to supply the necessary leaven of lightness? Look at my frock and my sunshade.'

Morton laughed, the conversation paused, and the water-colour progressed. Suddenly Mildred said:

'What did you think of me the first time you saw me? What impression

did I produce on you?'

'Do you want me to tell you, to tell you exactly?'

'Yes, indeed I do.'

'I don't think I can.'

'What was it?' Mildred asked in a low affectionate tone, and she leaned towards him in an intimate affectionate way.

'Well--you struck me as being a little dowdy.'

'Dowdy! I had a nice new frock on. I don't think I could have looked dowdy, and among the dreadful old rags that the girls wear here.'

'It had nothing to do with the clothes you wore. It was a little quiet, sedate air.'

'I wasn't in good spirits when I came down here.'

'No, you weren't. I thought you might be a bore.'

'But I haven't been that, have I?'

'No, I'm damned if you're that.'

'But what a charming sketch you're making. You take that ordinary common grey from the palette, and it becomes beautiful. If I were to take the very same tint, and put it on the paper, it would be mud.'

Morton placed his sketch against a rock, and surveyed it from a little distance. 'I don't call it bad, do you? I think I've got the sensation of the lonely lake. But the effect changes so rapidly. Those clouds are quite different from what they were just now. I never saw a finer sky, it is wonderful. It is splendid as a battle'...

'Write underneath it, "That night the sky was like a battle."'

'No, it would do for my sketch.'

'You think the suggestion would overpower the reality.... But it is a charming sketch. It will remind me of a charming day, of a very happy day.'

She raised her eyes. The moment had come.

He threw one arm round her, and raised her face with the other hand. She gave her lips easily, with a naturalness that surprised and deceived him. He might marry her, or she might be his mistress, he didn't know which, but he was quite sure that he liked her better than any woman he had seen for a long time. He had not known her a week, and she already absorbed his thoughts. And, during the drive home, he hardly saw the forest. Once a birch, whose faint leaves and branches dissolved in a glittering light, drew his thoughts away from Mildred. She lay upon his shoulder, his arm was affectionately around her, and, looking at him out of eyes whose brown seemed to soften in affection, she said:

'Elsie said you'd get round me.'

'What did she mean?'

'Well,' said Mildred, nestling a little closer, and laughing low, 'haven't you got round me?'

Her playfulness enchanted her lover, and, when she discreetly sought his hand, he felt that he understood her account of Alfred's brutality. But her tenderness, in speaking of Ralph, quickened his jealousy.

'My violets lay under his hand, he must have died thinking of me.'

'But the woman who wrote to you, his mistress, she must have known all about his love for you. What did she say?'

'She said very little. She was very nice to me. She could see that I was a good woman....'

'But that made no difference so far as she was concerned. You took her lover away from her.'

'She knew that I hadn't done anything wrong, that we were merely friends.'

The conversation paused a moment, then Morton said: 'It seems to have been a mysterious kind of death. What did he die of?'

'Ah, no one ever knew. The doctors could make nothing of his case. He had been complaining a long time. They spoke of overwork, but--'

'But, what?'

'I believe he died of slow poisoning.'

'Slow poisoning! Who could have poisoned him?'

'Ellen Gibbs.'

'What an awful thing to say.... I suppose you have some reason for suspecting her?'

'His death was very mysterious. The doctors could not account for it. There ought to have been a _post-mortem_ examination.' Feeling that this was not sufficient reason, and remembering suddenly that Ralph held socialistic theories and was a member of a sect of socialists, she said: 'Ralph was a member of a secret society.... He was an anarchist--no one suspected it, but he told me everything, and it was I who persuaded him to leave the Brotherhood.'

'I do not see what that has to do with his death by slow poisoning.'

'Those who retire from these societies usually die.'

'But why Ellen Gibbs?'

'She was a member of the same society, it was she who got him to join. When he resigned it was her duty to--'

'Kill him! What a terrible story. I wonder if you're right.'

'I know I am right.'

At the end of a long silence, Morton said:

'I wonder if you like me as much as you liked Ralph.'

'It is very different. He was very good to me.'

'And do you think that I shall not be good to you?'

'Yes, I think you will,' she said looking up and taking the hand which pressed against her waist.

'You say he was a very clever artist. Do you like his work better than mine?'

'It was as different as you yourselves are.'

'I wonder if I should like it?'

'He would have liked that,' and she pointed with her parasol towards an oak glade, golden hearted and hushed.

'A sort of Diaz, then?'

'No, not the least like that. No, it wasn't the Rousseau palette.'

'That's a regular Diaz motive. It would be difficult to treat it differently.'

The carriage rolled through a tender summer twilight, through a whispering forest.

XVII.

At the end of September the green was duskier, yellow had begun to appear; and the crisped leaf falling through the still air stirred the heart like a memory.

The skies which rose above the dying forest had acquired gentler tints, a wistfulness had come into the blue which was in keeping with the fall of the leaf.

There was a scent of moisture in the underwoods, rills had begun to babble; on the hazel rods leaves fluttered pathetically, the branches of the plane trees hung out like plumes, their drooping leaves making wonderful patterns.

In the hotel gardens a sunflower watched the yellowing forest, then bent its head and died.

The great cedar was deserted, and in October Morton was painting

chrysanthemums on the walls of the dining-room. He called them the flowers of twilight, the flowers of the summer's twilight. Mildred watched him adding the last sprays to his bouquet of white and purple bloom.

The inveigling sweetness of these last bright days entered into life, quickening it with desire to catch and detain some tinge of autumn's melancholy. All were away in the fields and the forest; and, though little of their emotion transpired on their canvases, they were moved, as were Rousseau and Millet, by the grandeur of the blasted oak and the lonely byre standing against the long forest fringes, dimming in the violet twilight.

Elsie was delighted with her birch, and Cissy considered her rocks approvingly.

'You've caught the beauty of that birch,' said Cissy. 'How graceful it is in the languid air. It seems sad about something.'

'About the pine at the end of the glade,' said Elsie laughing. 'I brought the pine a little nearer. I think it composes better.'

'Yes, I think it does. You must come and see my rocks and ferns. There's one corner I don't know what to do with. But I like my oak.'

'I will come presently. I'm working at the effect; the light will have changed in another half hour.'

'I've done all I can do to mine. It would make a nice background for a hunting picture. There's a hunt to-day in the forest. Mildred and Morton are going to see the meet.'

Elsie continued painting, Cissy sat down on a stone and soon lost herself in meditations. She thought about the man she was in love with; he had gone back to Paris. She was now sure that she hated his method of painting, and, finding that his influence had not been a good one, she strove to look on the landscape with her own eyes. But she saw only various painters in it. The last was Morton Mitchell, and she thought if he had been her lover she might have learnt something from him. But he was entirely taken up with Mildred. She did not like Mildred any more, she had behaved very badly to that poor little Rose Turner. 'Poor little thing, she trembles like that birch.'

'What are you saying, Cissy? Who trembles like that birch?'

'I was thinking of Rose, she seems dreadfully upset, Morton never looks at her now.'

'I think that Morton would have married her if Mildred hadn't appeared on the scene. I know he was thinking of settling down.'

'Mildred is a mystery. Her pleasure seems to be to upset people's lives. You remember poor Ralph Hoskin. He died of a broken heart. I can't make Mildred out, she tells a lot of lies. She's always talking about her virtue. But I hardly think that Morton would be as devoted to her as he is if he weren't her lover. Do you think so?'

'I don't know, men are very strange.'

Elsie rose to her feet. She put aside her camp stool, walked back a few yards, and looked at her picture. The motive of her picture was a bending birch at the end of the glade. Rough forest growth made clear its delicate drawing, and in the pale sky, washed by rains to a faded blue, clouds arose and evaporated. The road passed at the bottom of the hill and several huntsmen had already ridden by. Now a private carriage with a pair of horses stood waiting.

'That's Madame Delacour's carriage, she is waiting for Mildred and Morton.'

'The people at Fontainebleau?'

'Yes, the wife of the great Socialist Deputy. They're at Fontainebleau for the season. M. Delacour has taken the hunting. They say he has a fine collection of pictures. He buys Morton's pictures.... It was he who bought his "Sheepfold."'

Elsie did not admire Morton's masterpiece as much as Cissy. But they were agreed that Mildred might prove a disintegrating influence in the development of his talent. He had done no work since he had made her acquaintance. She was a mere society woman. She had never cared for painting; she had taken up painting because she thought that it would help her socially. She had taken up Morton for the same reason. He had introduced her to the Delacours. She had been a great success at the dinner they had given last week. No doubt she had exaggerated her success, but old Dedyier, who had been there too, had said that every one was talking of _la belle et la spirituelle anglaise_.

The girls sat watching the carriage stationed at the bottom of the hill. The conversation paused, a sound of wheels was heard, and a fly was seen approaching. The fly was dismissed, and Mildred took her seat next to Madame Delacour. Morton sat opposite. He settled the rug over the ladies' knees and the carriage drove rapidly away.

'They'll be late for the meet,' said Cissy.

And all the afternoon the girls listened to the hunting. In the afternoon three huntsmen crashed through the brushwood at the end of a glade, winding the long horns they wore about their shoulders. Once a strayed hound came very near them, Elsie threw the dog a piece of bread. It did not see the bread, and pricking up its ears it trotted away. The horns came nearer and nearer, and the girls were affrighted lest they should meet the hunted boar and be attacked. It must have turned at the bottom of the hill. The horns died through the twilight, a spectral moon was afloat in the sky, and some wood-cutters told them that they were three kilometres from Barbizon.

When about a mile from the village they were overtaken by the Delacours' carriage. Morton and Mildred bade Madame good-bye and walked home with them. Their talk was of hunting. The boar had been taken close to the central _carrefour,_ they had watched the fight with the dogs, seven of which he had disabled before M. Delacour succeeded in finally despatching him. The edible value of boar's head was discussed, until Mildred mentioned that Madame Delacour was going to give a ball. Elsie and Cissy were both jealous of Mildred, but they hoped she would get them invited. She said that she did not know Madame Delacour well enough to ask for invitations. Later on she would see what could be done; Morton thought that there would be no

difficulty, and Elsie asked Mildred what dress she was going to wear. Mildred said she was going to Paris to order some clothes and the conversation dropped.

At the end of the week the Delacours drove over to Barbizon and lunched at Lunions. The horses, the carriage, liveries, the dresses, the great name of the Deputy made a fine stir in the village.

'I wonder if she'll get us invited,' said Elsie.

'Not she,' said Cissy.

But Mildred was always unexpected. She introduced Monsieur and Madame Delacour to Elsie and Cissy; she insisted on their showing their paintings; they were invited to the ball, and Mildred drove away nodding and smiling.

Her dress was coming from Paris; she was staying with the Delacours until after the ball, so, as Cissy said, her way was nice and smooth and easy--very different indeed from theirs. They had to struggle with the inability and ignorance of a provincial dressmaker, working against time. At the last moment it became clear that their frocks could not be sent to Barbizon, that they would have to dress for the ball in Fontainebleau. But where! They would have to hire rooms at the hotel, and, having gone to the expense of hiring rooms, they had as well sleep at Fontainebleau. They could return with Mildred--she would have the Delacours' carriage. They could all four return together, that would be very jolly. The hotel omnibus was going to Melun to catch the half-past six train. If they went by train they would economise sufficiently in carriage hire to pay their hotel expenses, or very nearly. Morton agreed to accompany them. He got their tickets and found them places, but they noticed that he seemed a little thoughtful, not to say gloomy. Not the least,' as Elsie said, 'like a man who was going to meet his sweetheart at a ball.'

'I think,' whispered Cissy, 'that he's beginning to regret that he introduced her to the Delacours. He feels that it is as likely as not that she'll throw him over for some of the grand people she will meet there.'

Cissy had guessed rightly. A suspicion had entered into his heart that Mildred was beginning to perceive that her interest lay rather with the Delacours than with him. And he had not engaged himself to Mildred for any dances, because he wished to see if she would reserve any dances for him. This ball he felt would prove a turning-point in his love story. He suspected M. Delacour of entertaining some very personal admiration for Mildred; he would see if his suspicion were well founded; he would not rush to her at once; and, having shaken hands with his host and hostess, he sought a corner whence he could watch Mildred and the ball.

The rooms were already thronged, but the men were still separated from the women; the fusion of the sexes, which was the mission of the dance to accomplish, had hardly begun. Some few officers were selecting partners up and down the room, but the politicians, their secretaries, the prefects, and the sub-prefects had not yet moved from the doorways. The platitudes of public life were written in their eyes. But these made expressions were broken at the sight of some young girl's fragility, or the paraded charms of a woman of thirty; and then

each feared that his neighbour had discovered thoughts in him unappropriate to the red ribbon which he wore in his buttonhole.

'A cross between clergymen and actors,' thought Morton, and he indulged in philosophical reflections. The military had lost its prestige in the boudoir, Nothing short of a continental war could revive it, the actor and the tenor never did more than to lift the fringe of society's garment. The curate continues a very solid innings in the country; but in town the political lover is in the ascendent. 'A possible under-secretary is just the man to cut me out with Mildred.... They'd discuss the elections between kisses.' At that moment he saw Mildred struggling through the crowd with a young diplomatist, Le Comte de la Ferriere.

She wore white tulle laid upon white silk. The bodice was silver fish-scales, and she shimmered like a moonbeam. She laid her hand on her dancer's shoulder, moving forward with a motion that permeated her whole body. A silver shoe appeared, and Morton thought:

'What a vanity, only a vanity; but what a delicious and beautiful vanity.'

The waltz ended, some dancers passed out of the ball-room, and Mildred was surrounded. It looked as if her card would be filled before Morton could get near her. But she stood on tiptoe and, looking over the surrounding shoulders, cried that she would keep the fourteenth for him. 'Why did you not come before,' she asked smiling, and went out of the room on the arm of the young comte.

At that moment M. Delacour took Morton's arm and asked when would the picture he had ordered be finished. Morton hoped by the end of next week, and the men walked through the room talking of pictures... On the way back they met Mildred. She told Morton that she would make it all right later on. He must now go and talk to Madame Delacour. She had promised M. Delacour the next dance.

M. Delacour was fifty, but he was straight and thin, and there was no sign of grey in his black hair, which fitted close and tight as a skull cap. His face was red and brown, but he did not seem very old, and Morton wondered if it were possible for Mildred to love so old a man.

Madame Delacour sat in a high chair within the doorway, out of reach of any draught that might happen on the staircase. Her blond hair was drawn high up in an eighteenth century coiffure, and her high pale face looked like a cameo or an old coin. She spoke in a high clear voice, and expressed herself in French a little unfamiliar to her present company. 'She must have married beneath her,' thought Morton, and he wondered on what terms she lived with her husband. He spoke of Mildred as the prettiest woman in the room, and was disappointed that Madame Delacour did not contest the point...

When Cissy and Elsie came whirling by, Cissy unnecessarily large and bare, and Elsie intolerably pert and middle class, Morton regretted that he would have to ask them to dance. And, when he had danced with them and the three young ladies Madame Delacour had introduced him to, and had taken a comtesse into supper, he found that the fourteenth waltz was over. But Mildred bade him not to look so depressed, she had kept the cotillion for him. It was going to begin very soon. He had

better look after chairs. So he tied his handkerchief round a couple. But he knew what the cotillion meant. She would be always dancing with others. And the cotillion proved as he had expected. Everything happened, but it was all the same to him. Dancers had gone from the dancing-room and returned in masks and dominoes. A paper imitation of a sixteenth-century house had been brought in, ladies had shown themselves at the lattice, they had been serenaded, and had chosen serenaders to dance with. And when at the end of his inventions the leader fell back on the hand glass and the cushion, Mildred refused dance after dance. At last the leader called to Morton, he came up certain of triumph, but Mildred passed the handkerchief over the glass and drew the cushion from his knee. She danced both figures with M. Delacour.

She was covered with flowers and ribbons, and, though a little woman, she looked very handsome in her triumph. Morton hated her triumph, knowing that it robbed him of her. But he hid his jealousy as he would his hand in a game of cards, and, when the last guests were going, he bade her good-night with a calm face. He saw her go upstairs with M. Delacour. Madame Delacour had gone to her room; she had felt so tired that she could sit up no longer and had begged her husband to excuse her, and as Mildred went upstairs, three or four steps in front of M. Delacour, she stopped to arrange with Elsie and Cissy when she should come to fetch them, they were all going home together.

At that moment Morton saw her so clearly that the thought struck him that he had never seen her before. She appeared in that instant as a toy, a trivial toy made of coloured glass; and as a maleficent toy, for he felt if he played with it any longer that it would break and splinter in his fingers. 'As brilliant, as hard, and as dangerous as a piece of broken glass.' He wondered why he had been attracted by this bit of coloured glass; he laughed at his folly and went home certain that he could lose her without pain. But memory of her delicate neck and her wistful eyes suddenly assailed him; he threw himself over on his pillow, aching to clasp the lissome mould of her body--a mould which he knew so well that he seemed to feel its every shape in his arms; his nostrils recalled its perfume, and he asked himself if he would destroy his picture, 'The Sheepfold,' if, by destroying it, he could gain her. For six months with her in Italy he would destroy it, and he would not regret its destruction. But had she the qualities that make a nice mistress? Candidly, he did not think she had. He'd have to risk that. Anyhow, she wasn't common like the others.... In time she would become common; time makes all things common.

'But this is God-damned madness,' he cried out, and lay staring into the darkness, his eyes and heart on fire. Visions of Mildred and Delacour haunted his pillow, he did not know whether he slept or waked; and he rose from his bed weary, heavy-eyed, and pale.

He was to meet her at eleven on the terrace by the fish-pond, and had determined to come to an understanding with her, but his heart choked him when he saw her coming toward him along the gravel path. He bought some bread at the stall for the fish; and talking to her he grew so happy that he feared to imperil his happiness by reproaches. They wondered if they would see the fabled carp in whose noses rings had been put in the time of Louis XIV. The statues on their pedestals, high up in the clear, bright air, were singularly beautiful, and they saw the outlines of the red castle and the display of terraces reaching to the edge of the withering forest. They were conscious that

the place was worthy of its name, Fontainebleau. The name is evocative of stately days and traditions, and Mildred fancied herself a king's mistress--La Pompadour. The name is a romance, an excitement, and, throwing her arms on Morton's shoulders, she said:

'Morton, dear, don't be angry. I'm very fond of you, I really am.... I only stop with the Delacours because they amuse me.... It means nothing.'

'If I could only believe you,' said Morton, holding her arms in his hands and looking into her brown eyes.

'Why don't you believe me?' she said; but there was no longer any earnestness in her voice. It had again become a demure insincerity.

'If you were really fond of me, you'd give yourself.'

'Perhaps I will one of these days.'

'When... when you return to Barbizon?'

'I won't promise. When I promise I like to keep my promise.... You ask too much. You don't realise what it means to a woman to give herself. Have you never had a scruple about anything?'

'Scruple about anything! I don't know what you mean.... What scruple can you have? you're not a religious woman.'

'It isn't religion, it is--well, something.... I don't know.'

'This has gone on too long,' he said, 'if I don't get you now I shall lose you.'

'If you were really afraid of losing me you would ask me to marry you.'

Morton was taken aback.

'I never thought of marriage; but I would marry you. Do you mean it?'

'Yes, I mean it.'

'When?'

'One of these days.'

'I don't believe you. ... You're a bundle of falsehoods.'

'I'm not as false as you say. There's no use making me out worse than I am. I'm very fond of you, Morton.'

'I wonder,' said Morton. 'I asked you just now to be my mistress; you said you'd prefer to marry me. Very well, when will you marry me?'

'Don't ask me. I cannot say when. Besides, you don't want to marry me.'

'You think so?'

'You hesitated just now. A woman always knows. ... If you had wanted to marry me you would have begun by asking me.'

'This is tomfoolery. I asked you to be my mistress, and then, at your suggestion, I asked you to be my wife; I really don't see what more I can do. You say you're very fond of me, and yet you want to be neither mistress nor wife.'

A little dark cloud gathered between her eyes. She did not answer. She did not know what to answer, for she was acting in contradiction to her reason. Her liking for Morton was quite real; there were even moments when she thought that she would end by marrying. But mysterious occult influences which she could neither explain nor control were drawing her away from him. She asked herself, what was this power which abided in the bottom of her heart, from which she could not rid herself, and which said, 'thou shalt not marry him.' She asked herself if this essential force was the life of pleasure and publicity which the Delacours offered her. She had to admit that she was drawn to this life, and that she had felt strangely at ease in it. In the few days that she had spent with the Delacours she had, for the first time in her life, felt in agreement with her surroundings. She had always hated that dirty studio, and still more its dirty slangy frequenters.

And she lay awake a great part of the night thinking. She felt that she must act in obedience to her instinct whatever it might cost her, and her instinct drew her towards the Delacours and away from Morton. But her desire for Morton was not yet exhausted, and the struggle between the two forces resulted in one of her moods. Its blackness lay on forehead, between her eyes, and, in the influence of its mesmerism, she began to hate him. As she put it to herself, she began to feel ugly towards him. She hated to return to Barbizon, and when they met, she gave her cheek instead of her lips, and words which provoked and wounded him rose to her tongue's tip; she could not save herself from speaking them, and each day their estrangement grew more and more accentuated.

She came down one morning nervously calm, her face set in a definite and gathering expression of resolution. Elsie could see that something serious had happened. But Mildred did not seem inclined to explain, she only said that she must leave Barbizon at once. That she was going that very morning, that her boxes were packed, that she had ordered a carriage.

'Are you going back to Paris?'

'Yes, but I don't think I shall go to Melun, I shall go to Fontainebleau. I'd like to say good-bye to the Delacours.'

'This is hardly a day for a drive through the forest; you'll be blown to pieces.'

'I don't mind a little wind. I shall tie my veil tighter.'

Mildred admitted that she had quarrelled with Morton. But she would say no more. She declared, however, that she would not see him again. Her intention was to leave before he came down; and, as if unable to bear the delay any longer, she asked Cissy and Elsie to walk a little way with her. The carriage could follow.

The wind was rough, but they were burning to hear what Morton had done, and, hoping that Mildred would become more communicative when they got out of the village, they consented to accompany her.

'I'm sorry to leave,' said Mildred, 'but I cannot stay after what happened last night. Oh, dear!' she exclaimed, 'my hat nearly went that time. I'm afraid I shall have a rough drive.'

'You will indeed. You'd better stay,' said Elsie.

'I cannot. It would be impossible for me to see him again.'

'But what did he say to offend you?'

'It wasn't what he said, it was what he did.'

'What did he do?'

'He came into my room last night.'

'Did he! were you in bed?'

'Yes; I was in bed reading. I was awfully frightened. I never saw a man in such a state. I think he was mad.'

'What did you do?'

'I tried to calm him. I felt that I must not lose my presence of mind. I spoke to him gently. I appealed to his honour, and at last I persuaded him to go.'

'What did you say?'

'I at last persuaded him to go.'

'We can't talk in this wind,' screamed Elsie, 'we'd better go back.'

'We shall be killed,' cried Cissy starting back in alarm, for a young pine had crashed across the road not very far from where they were standing, and the girls could hear the wind trumpeting, careering, springing forward; it rushed, leaped, it paused, and the whole forest echoed its wrath.

When the first strength of the blast seemed ebbing, the girls looked round for shelter. They felt if they remained where they were, holding on to roots and grasses, that they would be carried away.

'Those rocks,' cried Cissy.

'We shan't get there in time, the trees will fall,' cried Elsie.

'Not a minute to lose,' said Mildred. 'Come!'

And the girls ran through the swaying trees at the peril of their lives. And, as they ran, the earth gave forth a rumbling sound and was lifted beneath their feet. It seemed as if subterranean had joined with aerial forces, for the crumbling sound they had heard as they ran through the scattered pines increased; it was the roots giving way;

and the pines bent, wavered, and fell this way and that. But about the rocks, where the girls crouched the trees grew so thickly that the wind could not destroy them singly; so it had taken the wood in violent and passionate grasp, and was striving to beat it down. But under the rocks all was quiet, the storm was above in the branches, and, hearing almost human cries, the girls looked up and saw great branches interlocked like serpents in the writhe of battle.

In half an hour the storm had blown itself out. But a loud wind shook through the stripped and broken forest; lament was in all the branches, the wind forced them upwards and they gesticulated their despair. The leaves rose and sank like cries of woe adown the raw air, and the roadway was littered with ruin. The whirl of the wind still continued and the frightened girls dreaded lest the storm should return, overtaking them as they passed through the avenue.

The avenue was nearly impassable with fallen trees, and Elsie said:

'You'll not be able to go to Fontainebleau to-day.'

'Then I shall go to Melun.'

As they entered the village they met the carriage, and Mildred bade her friends good-bye.

XVIII.

In the long autumn and winter evenings Harold often thought of his sister. His eyes often wandered to the writing table, and he asked himself if he should write to her again. There seemed little use. She either ignored his questions altogether, or alluded to them in a few

words and passed from them into various descriptive writing, the aspects of the towns she had visited, and the general vegetation of the landscapes she had seen; or she dilated on the discovery of a piece of china, a bronze, or an old engraving in some forgotten corner. Her intention to say nothing about herself was obvious.

In a general way he gathered that she had been to Nice and Monte Carlo, and he wondered why she had gone to the Pyrenees, and with whom she was living in the Boulevard Poissonier. That was her last address. The letter was dated the fifteenth of December, she had not written since, and it was now March. But scraps of news of her had reached him. One day he learnt from a paragraph in a newspaper that Miss Mildred Lawson had been received into the Church of Rome, he wrote to inquire if this was true, and a few days after a lady told him that she had heard that Mildred had entered a Carmelite convent and taken the veil. The lady's information did not seem very trustworthy, but Harold was nevertheless seriously alarmed, and, without waiting for an answer to the letter he had written the day before, he telegraphed to Mildred.

'I have not entered a convent and have no present intention of doing so.'

'Could anything be more unsatisfactory,' Harold thought. 'She does not say whether she has gone over to Rome. Perhaps that is untrue too. Shall I telegraph again?' He hesitated and then decided that he would not. She did not wish to be questioned, and would find an evasive answer that would leave him only more bewildered than before.

He hoped for an answer to his letter, but Mildred did not write, no doubt, being of opinion that her telegram met the necessity of the case, and he heard no more until some news of her came to him through Elsie Laurence, whom Harold met one afternoon as he was coming home from the city. From Elsie he learnt that Mildred was a great social success in Paris. She was living with the Delacours, she had met them at Fontainebleau. Morton Mitchell, that was the man she had thrown over, had introduced her to them. Harold had never heard of the Delacours, and he hastened to acquaint himself with them; Morton Mitchell he reserved for some future time; one flirtation more or less mattered little; but that his sister should be living with the Delacours, a radical and socialist deputy, a questionable financier, a company promoter, a journalist, was very shocking. Delacour was all these things and many more, according to Elsie, and she rattled on until Harold's brain whirled. He learnt, too, that it was with the Delacours that Mildred had been in the South.

'She wrote to me from some place in the Pyrenees.'

'From Lourdes? she was there.'

A cloud gathered on Harold's face.

'She didn't write to me from Lourdes,' he said. 'But Lourdes is, I suppose, the reason of her perversion to Rome?'

'No; Mildred told me that Lourdes had nothing to do with it.'

'You say that she now lives with these people, the Delacours.'

'Yes; she's just like one of the family. She invites her friends to dinner. She invited me to dinner. The Delacours are very rich, and Mildred is now all the rage in Paris.'

'And Madame Delacour, what kind of a woman is she?'

'Madame Delacour has very poor health, they say she was once a great beauty, but there's very little of her beauty left. ... She's very fond of Mildred. They are great friends.'

The next time that Harold heard of Mildred was through his solicitors. In the course of conversation regarding some investments, Messrs. Blunt and Hume mentioned that Miss Lawson had taken 5000 pounds out of mortgage. They did not know if she had re-invested it, she had merely requested them to pay the money into her banking account.

'Why did you not mention this to me before?'

'Miss Lawson has complete control over her private fortune. On a former occasion, you remember, when she required five hundred pounds to hire and furnish a studio, she wrote very sharply because we had written to you on the subject. She spoke of a breach of professional etiquette.'

'Then why do you tell me now about this 5000 pounds?'

'Strictly speaking we ought not to have done so, but we thought that we might venture on a confidential statement.'

Harold thought that Messrs. Blunt and Hume had a

Livros Grátis

(http://www.livrosgratis.com.br)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

Baixar livros de Administração
Baixar livros de Agronomia
Baixar livros de Arquitetura
Baixar livros de Artes
Baixar livros de Astronomia
Baixar livros de Biologia Geral
Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação
Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação
Baixar livros de Ciência Política
Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde
Baixar livros de Comunicação
Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE
Baixar livros de Defesa civil
Baixar livros de Direito
Baixar livros de Direitos humanos
Baixar livros de Economia
Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica
Baixar livros de Educação
Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito
Baixar livros de Educação Física
Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial
Baixar livros de Farmácia
Baixar livros de Filosofia
Baixar livros de Física
Baixar livros de Geociências
Baixar livros de Geografia
Baixar livros de História
Baixar livros de Línguas

Baixar livros de Literatura
Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel
Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil
Baixar livros de Matemática
Baixar livros de Medicina
Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária
Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente
Baixar livros de Meteorologia
Baixar Monografias e TCC
Baixar livros Multidisciplinar
Baixar livros de Música
Baixar livros de Psicologia
Baixar livros de Química
Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva
Baixar livros de Serviço Social
Baixar livros de Sociologia
Baixar livros de Teologia
Baixar livros de Trabalho
Baixar livros de Turismo