A DAUGHTER OF STRIFE

BY JANE H. FINDLATER

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A DAUGHTER OF STRIFE

BY

JANE HELEN FINDLATER

AUTHOR OF

"THE GREEN GRAVES OF BALGOWRIE"

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PART I

‘. . . *Old unhappy far-off things,*
And battles long ago.’

A Daughter of Strife

CHAPTER I

As long ago as the year 1710 there lived in London town a girl of the name of Anne Champion—a straw-plaiter by trade, and by hard fortune a beauty. Anne lived alone in a garret, and earned her bread by the sweat of her brow, plaiting straws for hats from early morning to late at night. Then she would go out and buy her food for the next day, if she had earned enough to buy food with, and if she had not, she would do without food and work on.

A hard life enough; but it was not to last for ever. For Anne had a fine lover at the wars—Surgeon Sebastian Shepley,—and ere very long he was to return, and Anne was to say farewell to work. Partings were partings in those days, and Anne never thought of getting a letter from Flanders more than once in seven or eight weeks. When she got one, poor girl, she could not read it—no, nor answer it; for she had no 'book-learning,' and had never been taught to write; but she used to take her letters to a former adorer of her own who served in a print-shop, and he kindly read his rival's love-letters aloud, and, when Anne could afford to send one in return, would even be forgiving enough to write it for her. Anne's fine lover had caused considerable jealousy among her neighbours, and old Mrs. Nare, the mother of Matthew, the young man in the news-shop, was never tired of hinting to Anne that no good ever came of such unequal alliances. When she saw that Anne was quite undisturbed by these prognostications, Mrs. Nare tried to persuade her that there was little chance Shepley would ever return from the wars.

'The surgeons do come by their deaths in war-time so well as the soldiers,' she would say; 'best not set your heart overly on him, Anne.' And Anne would whiten, and turn away at her words.

Yard's Entry, where Anne Champion and Mrs. Nare lived, is a place that smells of age now—it was counted old even in these far-away days I write of,—and the stone stairs leading up to Anne's garret were worn away into crescent shape by the tread of many generations. At the foot of these stairs, on warm evenings, Mrs. Nare used to stand and watch all her neighbours'

affairs; so it was natural enough that a stranger coming in to the Entry one evening should address himself to her when he made inquiry for Anne Champion. He was a young man with very bright eyes, and his voice, as clear as the note of a flute, echoed up the stair as he spoke.

'Doth Anne Champion live here, my good woman?' he asked.

'No, sir. Anne she lives at the top of the stair,' said Mrs. Nare, squinting up at the stranger out of her narrow old eyes, then, actuated by unknown motives, she added—

'Anne she've got a lover at the wars,' in a sort of interrogative tone. She had seen Shepley more than once, and knew this was not he; perhaps she wished to find out the stranger's errand.

'Thank you, thank you,' was all he said, however, as he disappeared up the winding old stair. Up and up he went, feeling his way, for there was little or no light to guide him, then he stumbled against a door, and knocked at haphazard, hoping it was the door he sought.

'Come in,' said some one, and at that the man, groping with the latch for a moment, at last got the door open, and stood on the threshold looking in.

The sunshine fell across the floor in a flood of smoky brightness, and full in the sun's beams sat Anne Champion, surrounded by the straw she was plaiting. It was piled up round her, within reach of her fingers, that moved like lightning at her mechanical toil.

Anne wore a gown of pink calico, and, whether for greater comfort or from mere untidiness, all her yellow hair hung over her shoulders in splendid confusion. She let her work fall at sight of a stranger, started up, and standing almost knee-deep among the straw, caught at her hair, and began to wind it up into a knot.

The young man stood still on the threshold for a full minute, as I have said. Then he seemed to recollect himself, and stepping across the floor he held out his hand to the girl, smiling very pleasantly.

'I scarce need to ask if you are Anne Champion,' he said.

Anne seemed too much taken aback by this unexpected visitor to make any reply. She stood looking at him and twisting her long yellow hair between her fingers. At last she said—

'Yes, sir, I be Anne Champion,' and waited for him to make known his errand.

The young man did not seem to be in any hurry, however. He looked round the bare little room, and then looked again at Anne before he spoke.

'I am come to make excuses,' he said then; 'and if you will allow me to sit down, for I am weak still from a fever, I shall make them to the best of my ability.'

Anne produced a stool from a corner and proffered it to her visitor.

'I am come from Flanders,' he began again; but he did not speak like one intent on his business: his bright eyes were fixed on Anne; he seemed to be speaking of one thing and thinking of another. His words, however, had a quick effect on Anne—her look of perplexed shyness had vanished.

'From Flanders? Ah, sir, 'tis welcome thrice over you are!' she cried; 'an' are you bringing me news of my dear man?' Her face was radiant; she smiled, and the beautiful dimples in her cheek were revealed, and her white even teeth. Her very eyes seemed to smile.

The young man began to speak again—with unaccountable stumblings and hesitations, still reading Anne's face with his quick bright eyes as he spoke.

'I am come—Sebastian Shepley,' he said, and paused.

At the sight of his perturbation Anne came quickly towards him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

'Sir, sir,' she cried. 'Don't tell me as there is aught amiss with my Sebastian.'

'Anne, I am come from your old lover Shepley, as you surmise,' began the young man again; 'he—he is well in health.'

The colour which had left Anne's face rushed back to it in a beautiful scarlet tide.

'Lord! sir, Sebastian's not old, begging your pardon, sir,' she said, letting her hand fall from his shoulder, rather ashamed of her sudden familiarity.

'I—'twas not that way I meant it, Anne; I scarce know,' stammered the young man. 'Come, sit down by me and I shall tell you all.'

Anne, however, would not have felt easy sitting down in the presence of this fine stranger in lace ruffles. She stood opposite him and still looked anxious in spite of his assurances.

'There hath ill come to him, sir; he's wounded; or—or—' she said.

The young man seemed suddenly to have collected himself; his embarrassment, if embarrassment it had been, vanished as suddenly as it had come. He rose and came over to where Anne stood.

'He hath no wound nor hurt of any sort, Anne, but he hath sent me with a message to you, and this is it:—The war is like to keep him so long in the Low Country he dare not ask you to wait.'

'I'd wait a lifetime for him,' laughed Anne. 'If that be all his message he hath troubled you for naught, sir.'

' 'Tis not all. The fact is Sebastian has married—married a pretty Dutch wife. He feared to exhaust your patience. He asked me to tell you. "For," said he, "Anne hath so many lovers 'twill be neither here nor there to her." As like as not he may be years abroad still.'

There was a moment's silence. Anne looked her visitor straight in the eyes; she had whitened down to her very lips.

'You are but fooling with me, sir,' she said, half whispering the words.

'I am in sober earnest; 'tis no matter for jest this,' said the young man, looking at Anne's blanching cheeks.

'O good Lord!' then cried Anne in a piteous crying voice—the note of a bird over its harried nest. She seemed to forget the presence of a stranger, and, sinking down against a settle that stood by the wall, she hid her face in her hands and sobbed, rocking herself back and forwards in her bitter grief.

'Sebastian, Sebastian dear, you are not wedded true and certain?' she cried. 'O God help me, an' what am I to do now? O Lord! O Lord!'

The young man who had brought this ill news did not go away and leave Anne alone with her sorrow, as most men would have done. He sat down on the settle she leant against and laid his hand kindly on her shoulder though he said nothing. Anne sobbed on, with hidden face, and all the time her visitor's bright eyes were roving round the room, taking in every detail of its poor arrangements, yet ever and again he would pat the girl's shoulder in token of sympathy.

Suddenly Anne rose to her feet.

'He's not worth a tear,' she said. 'He's like the rest of you. I had no opinion of men before that I took up with Sebastian, an' a fool I was to be deceived with him. You're all like that,' she cried, pointing to the pile of straw at her feet. 'A spark'll send you up in a blaze, and you're as much to be leaned on as that.' She plucked a straw from the heap, and snapped the

brittle yellow stalk across as she spoke, with an unconsciously dramatic gesture.

‘Come, not all,’ said the young man, surprised by her words.

‘Yes, all. Well, this I do say for Sebastian, he’s as fine a liar as he was a lover—would take in Judas hisself with them straight eyes o’ his.’

‘I am grieved to have borne such bitter news to any one,’ said the young man. ‘But you take it the right way, Anne, and when Shepley returns ’twill be to find a better man in his place.’

‘Better man! There’s not one good among ’em—no, not one,’ said Anne, bitterly. She walked away to the little window, through which the sunshine was pouring in with garish brightness, and leant her forehead against the panes.

‘Come, Anne,’ urged her visitor, following her to the window. ‘You must do your endeavour to forget him. ’Tis a scurvy trick he has played you, but there’s a proverb suited to your case I would have you remember, about the good fish in the sea! Come, here is a coin as yellow as your hair to help you to the forgetting. Buy yourself a new gown with ribbands and have a night at the play.’

Anne looked askance at the stranger’s gold for a moment; then she flung back her head and laughed a harsh-sounding mirthless laugh.

‘I had best make sure ’tis gold I’ve got this time!’ she said, catching up the coin and ringing it on the table.

‘I shall bid you good-night then, my good girl,’ said the stranger, and held out his hand once again.

A minute later he plunged down the dark old stair. ‘What is it like? going down thus into darkness?’ he said to himself; but he did not reply to the question.

CHAPTER II

The young man Richard Meadowes found a coach waiting for him round the corner of Yard's Entry; he jumped in and bade the coachman drive home to St. James' Square: a long drive, but Meadowes did not find it so, his thoughts were amply occupied. When he reached home he went in and sat down in a chair beside the fire, apparently in a brown study. What was he thinking about so intently all the time? About a lie: for the whole story of Sebastian Shepley's marriage had been invented by Richard Meadowes on the spur of the moment, as he stood stammering and hesitating before Anne Champion.

Meadowes had known Sebastian Shepley from his childhood. They had been born and brought up in the same little country village of Wynford, where Meadowes' father had owned the Manor House and the wide lands appertaining to it, while Shepley's father was the village apothecary. Then they both went to the wars; Meadowes to fight, Shepley to heal; now, tired of campaigning, which had never been to his mind, Meadowes had left the service and returned to England, where, since his parents' death, he had inherited, together with the Manor House of Fairmeadowes, this house in St. James' Square and enough of money to ruin most men.

But Richard Meadowes was neither idle nor without interests. The whole of life appealed vividly to him, every day was crowded with incident and amusement, his difficulty was to select between his pleasures: now of a sudden he had brought himself into a curious place. It had been from the easy pleasantness of his nature that Meadowes had offered, when leaving Flanders, to carry any letters home to Wynford for Dr. Sebastian Shepley. The young surgeon had hesitated for a moment before asking if, instead of bearing a letter to Wynford, Meadowes would deliver one in London.

'With all my heart—a dozen an' you please,' said Meadowes kindly; for he liked the young man with his steady blue eyes, who came moreover from Wynford like himself.

So Sebastian Shepley had intrusted a bulky letter to his care, and along with it a package containing, said he, some amber beads for 'Annie,' 'as yellow as her hair.' These were to be given to his sweetheart by Meadowes' own hand.

Now, like most men who are good at making pleasant promises, Meadowes was not quite so good at keeping them. He forgot all about Sebastian Shepley's love-letter for several weeks, and lost the amber beads, so that when at last he set out to deliver the letter, he had determined to make such apologies as he might for the loss of the beads.

But when first his eyes rested on Anne Champion he thought only of her beauty. He stood and stammered before her, and then there came a whisper: Shepley was in Flanders . . . might never return . . . might have forgotten Anne when he did . . . why could he not supplant him in the meantime?

No wonder he had hesitated for a little before inventing the story; but now that it was done a host of difficulties presented themselves to Meadowes' fancy. First of all, Shepley might write again to Anne any day—in all probability he would not do so for some weeks, but still he might—therefore Anne must be induced to leave her present home as quickly as might be. Secondly, Anne had impressed him as a self-respecting woman, quite able to take care of herself; she was no silly child to be easily deceived, and, so far as he could judge, not to be bought either. It is true Anne had taken the coin he offered her, but Meadowes acknowledged that she had scarcely seemed to know what she was about at the time. How then was he to gain favour in her eyes? How manage to ingratiate himself with her quickly without rousing her suspicions? He had no possible pretext for going to visit her again, yet go he must, and that speedily, or he ran the risk of Anne's having received another letter from her lover, which might make her disbelieve all the statements she had accepted to-day.

As Meadowes weighed the matter in his mind, he remembered Shepley's amber beads. Find them he must, and they might be offered to Anne as a farewell gift from her faithless adorer. So he prosecuted an active search for the missing package, and when at last it had been discovered, sat down and opened it. Then Meadowes slipped the warm yellow beads through his fingers like a monk at his devotions, but all the while darting fears and shivers of shame overcame him, for he was a man of quick sensitiveness, fully conscious of the base part he was playing.

There was no time to be lost; the next day at latest he must go to see Anne again.

Thus it came about that Meadowes stood once more at Anne Champion's door the next afternoon and knocked.

Anne opened it herself; she stood on the threshold, and did not invite her visitor to come in.

‘Oh, ’tis you again,’ was all she said for greeting.

‘I am come with the remainder of my message, Anne,’ said Meadowes. ‘I forgot yesterday to make over this part of it to you.’

‘Come in then,’ said Anne, curtly enough, and she moved across to the little window, which stood open for the heat. The room had a deserted air, Anne seemed to have been sitting idle, for there were no signs of her usual occupation.

‘Sit down, sir,’ she said, and waited for Meadowes to make known this further errand of his.

‘Shepley asked me to deliver this amber chain into your hand as a keepsake, and to bear him no ill will,’ he said, handing the necklace to Anne.

‘A likely thing it is I’ll have his gifts!’ cried the girl. She flushed angrily, and with a quick movement of her arm flung the chain out at the window; it fell on the opposite roof, and the smooth beads slid down the slates and lodged in some unseen crevice.

‘There they may rot for me!’ she cried.

‘Ah, come,’ began Meadowes; ‘he meant kindly by the gift.’

‘I’ll have none o’ his kindness then,’ said Anne. She did not seem disposed for further conversation. But Meadowes persisted:—

‘You seem scarce so busy to-day.’

‘No more I am, sir; I be tired of work.’

‘Have you ever lived in the country?’ queried Meadowes, who had since the day before evolved his plans a little. ‘Work is none so hard there, and living pleasant; quiet is good for a sad heart.’

‘You’ll have tried it, sir?’ said Anne sarcastically. ‘For sad hearts be mighty common.’

‘Ah! I have had my sad days too.’

‘I’d scarce have thought it, sir,’ said Anne, taking a survey of her visitor. ‘But there,’ she added, as if on second thoughts, ‘you have mayhap felt things like the rest of us.’

‘I have—I have. God knows I feel things,’ said Meadowes, with sudden curious earnestness. He crossed over to where Anne stood, and laid his fine, white, ringed hand on her arm for a moment.

‘I am grieved for you, Anne; indeed I am; I had not thought ’twould be such a stroke to you, this. I would it were in my power to help you.’

Anne shook her head.

‘ ’Tis kind of you, sir, and thank you; there’s but the cure of time for me, I do fear,’ she said, drawing back slightly from the touch of Meadowes’ hand as she spoke.

‘I have a cottage in the country,’ he began, ‘where an old nurse of mine keeps bees and flowers and the like: mayhap a change to country air would help you to the forgetting of your trouble.’

Anne shook her head and smiled.

‘I’d get no sale for my straw-plaits thereaway,’ she said.

‘Oh, I would pay you——’ began Meadowes, but Anne cut him short.

‘For what, sir?’ she asked sharply.

Meadowes became certain of what he had only suspected before,—that Anne Champion was quite able to take care of herself.

‘For your work, my good girl,’ he said, drawing himself up rather stiffly for a moment. ‘Martha hath over much on her hands between the bees and the flowers. If you care to live with her it would be to give her your assistance in these matters.’

‘I’ve no knowledge o’ flowers nor any skill with bees, sir,’ said Anne, still speaking in a suspicious tone. Then she added: ‘And where will this place be, sir? for I have been no more than ten miles from London all my days.’

‘Not farther than that; ’tis out Richmond way,’ said Meadowes. ‘But pray do not hasten yourself to decide. I can get another woman any day. ’Twas but that I fancied the country might change your thoughts for you that I made you the offer.’ He rose as he spoke and held out his hand.

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Anne, curtseying to her fine visitor, and rather impressed by his sudden assumption of dignity.

Meadowes was quick to observe the advantage he had gained.

‘If you care to take a week wherein to think over the offer,’ he said, ‘I shall keep the place vacant for you till then.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ again said Anne.

‘Shall I come and see you at the week’s end?’ asked Meadowes.

‘I thank you; yes, sir,’ said Anne.

When her visitor had gone Anne sat down by the window to consider the matter. ‘Him an’ his bees!’ was her first contemptuous conclusion, for, as she would have expressed it herself, ‘handsome women they do know their own know about the men.’ Then she thought over the past, with its hard work and scanty pay, over the present, that was swept empty of hope and pleasure, into a future, that had nothing to offer but work, work, work. It was a fixed belief with Anne that men were seldom wholly disinterested in their motives. She could not bring herself to imagine that Meadowes offered her this situation because he wished his work done—no, no, it was because she was ‘so rarely fine-looking,’ that was all. But then what if it proved to be a good situation—good pay, little work?—she would be a fool to refuse it. And further, she was well able to take care of herself.

There are moods of mind when only some change in the outward conditions of life can promise hope or comfort. It seemed to Anne impossible that she could stay on here in her old surroundings when everything in the future had changed for her. She was even weak and feminine enough to imagine the delight of Mrs. Nare when she discovered that her prophecies had come true and Anne’s fine lover had proved faithless. This thought recurred to her again and again, for women are curious creatures, and bad as they find it to be jilted, they perhaps find it worse still that other women should be able to marvel and gossip over their deserted state! Said Anne, when this thought had become intolerable, ‘I shall go away to the country; Mrs. Nare shall be none the wiser,’ and with that she decided to accept the offered situation, whatever it might prove to be.

So when on the following Sunday afternoon Meadowes appeared once more at Yard’s Entry, he found Anne quite ready to undertake the unknown duties she had hesitated over the week before.

‘I’m happy to go, sir,’ she said; ‘and if so be as I do fail at the work, ’tis your own fault, sir, offering the place to one as knows nought of country ways.’

‘You will learn—you will learn,’ said Meadowes hastily.

‘And your name, sir? if I may make bold to ask.’

‘Mr. Richard Sundon; I fancied I had given you my name ere this.’

‘No, sir, and mayhap you live in the country thereaway?’

It scarcely suited Meadowes to answer this with absolute veracity.

‘No, in town—in rooms just now; some day I shall settle down,’ he replied.

‘O yes, sir, a home’s a fine thing they do say,’ said Anne, in a dreary voice that had the echo of tears in it.

CHAPTER III

Meadowes did not pay much heed to where he was going as he left Yard's Entry that Sunday afternoon. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he walked forward without aim or direction. And these thoughts were curiously involved: a horror of what he was about; a determination to persist in it.

'What's this I am doing? what's this I've done? Broken a woman's heart, and played a good man false . . . and I am gaining (perhaps) my desires, and losing (certainly) my soul. . . . Soul? Have we got souls? I that am doing this, have I a soul? I doubt it . . . we are but as the beasts that perish—and yet——'

He stumbled along through the narrow, crowded streets. 'I'll go and pray,' he said, stopping suddenly before the door of one of the old city churches (it stands there yet, grey and cool).

'Here,' he said to the verger, 'is the church empty?'

'Empty as a new-made grave, sir,' said the man cheerfully.

Meadowes passed into the musty coolness of the church. He walked up the aisle and chose out the darkest corner he could find, where to offer up his strange petitions. There was a brass let into the wall here commemorating the brave fall of men who had died gallant deaths; a banner, bullet-singed and tattered, hung from the roof. Meadowes knelt under the faded fringes and covered his eyes with his hands, to shut out the world.

Then the former doubt invaded him, and the terror that the unseen was a delusion and man but a soulless higher brute with a hand-breadth of Time to sport in, overcame him with the blackness of despair.

'Better far have a lost soul than none at all,' he cried out in horror. He looked up at the banner above him; for things, after all, as intangible as the soul he doubted of, some happy mortals had bled and died—for Honour, Patriotism, Courage. Had they forfeited the merry years for shadows, been fools for their pains? Remembrances crowded on him of War and Death: he seemed to see whole spectral armies of the slain arise. He named them happy as they rose; for had they not died undoubtingly, bartering life for these intangible realities so worthy the life-blood of men! Ah for the

unquestioning heart—to be able to walk straight forward in a plain path! But for him question would rise upon question: and this, the darkest doubt, the poisoning of Effort at its very sources, was worst of all—no Unseen, nothing but the solid merry world really to be counted upon! If this was so, then good-bye to aspiration, grasp at the Seen, hold it fast, for seventy miserable years only were to be depended on—depended on! not seventy seconds were assured to him. 'Lord! I must have my pleasures!' he cried, remembering the few and evil years. Then in spite of the doubts that tormented him, Meadowes suddenly began to pray. He came before the God whose existence he could not be sure of, with a confession he would not have made to his fellow-men.

'O God,' he prayed, speaking low into his clasped hands, 'I have planned this thing and am going on with it—'tis pure devilry, but I am going on. Lord, I do it open-eyed. Some day punish me as I deserve—now I must take my pleasure——'

A curious prayer; but perhaps better than no prayer at all. For herein lies the world's hope, that every man—the blackest sinner amongst us—is on his own extraordinary terms with the Unseen. Were we as grossly material as appears, we were lost indeed.

Meadowes' faith truly was reduced to the minimum, and yet, and yet—to Something he made confession, assured only of this, that if any Presence listened it must be with pity. He rose from his knees and went out again into the crowded streets, filled not with any sudden resolutions of repentance, but with the determination to persist in the course he had originally planned out. He even felt a certain relief of conscience. '*I have explained it with God*,' he found himself saying, adding a moment later, 'If there be such an One.' Then his thoughts seemed to fall into question and answer:

'And doth that make all straight?'

'*Straighter: for I have said that such punishment as I deserve for this, I shall take.*'

'Did you mean what you prayed?'

'*If there are punishments in truth.*'

'Do you think there are?'

'*No: I doubt it.*'

'Then you will have your pleasure without risk?'

'*I hope for it.*'

But conscience had after all the last word, for it spoke suddenly and loudly then:—

‘*No, no; “a sword shall pierce thine own heart also.”*’

CHAPTER IV

Till a few years ago the cottage was still standing where Anne Champion went to live at the bounty of Richard Meadowes. It stood on one of the crossways leading off the great west London road; but few people passed down the green lane, few even looked that way. The cottage was one of those deep thatched old dwellings that look like an owl with its feathers drawn up over its head; it had a garden filled with flowers and bee-hives, and the straight walk leading up to the door was bordered with flowering shrubs. Anne worked in the garden, clumsily enough at first, and she looked after the bees and got stung frequently, and time went on. Each week the old woman, Martha Hare, who occupied the house along with her, received a certain sum of money to be divided between herself and Anne; but Meadowes only came occasionally to the cottage at first: he was very cautious, having weighed Anne's character pretty accurately. Then his visits became more frequent, and were somewhat prolonged, then he brought Anne a present from town. Anne began to draw her usual conclusions from these things: 'He's a-making up to me,' she said to Martha Hare.

But she was scarcely prepared for it when Meadowes suddenly asked her one day if she would marry him.

'I have been thinking of it for long, Anne,' he said.

'Sir, sir!' said vulgar Anne. 'I'm not your kind.'

'But that is just my difficulty, and if you will listen to me I shall explain it. You cannot but see, Anne, that you are scarce in my class, as you say, and for that reason 'twill be better to keep the matter private, else my father will cut me off with a shilling. But if you will marry me privately, Anne, I swear to you I'll be a good husband to you.'

Anne had been listening intently; but here she suddenly held up her hand.

'There,' she cried, 'I'll have you with no promises if I have you at all. I'll take you as I know you, sir, and trust you but so far as I sees you.'

'But you will trust me, Anne?' he said.

'No. I'll never trust no man again this side time. But I'll come an' live along of you, sir, if so be I'm done with work and care for ever.'

‘Anne, Anne, do not be so bitter,’ said Meadowes. Anne stood looking at him silently for a moment, then she laughed.

‘ ’Tis like I’m marrying you for love, sir?’ she said.

‘Well, I have done what I could for you,’ said Meadowes (but he blushed hotly as he spoke. ‘*I am a devil*,’ he said to himself).

‘You have, sir, one way, but now you’ve showed your hand, so to say. I knew as it would be this way some day—I’ve had lovers an’ lovers by the score. Not but that you’ve been civil and taken your time, sir. Well, as I do say, sir, you be kind and I’ll take you for that. But ’tis not for love, sir. I have no heart left in me now, but a stone where it once was. A woman she do have two throws o’ the dice in her life—one’s love an’ t’other’s money. Lose the first; you’d best, if you’re a wise woman, have a try for the second, for with never the one nor t’other you be in a sad case.’

Meadowes listened gravely to this, Anne’s gospel of prudence.

‘Well,’ he said at length, ‘that’s your way of thinking, Anne, and mayhap mine is not so different—to take what I can get.’

‘What are you gettin’, sir?’ asked Anne, turning suddenly to him. ‘Lor’ sakes, sir! what hath gone agin you in life that you take second best so soon?’

‘Second best?’ queried Meadowes.

‘Ay, second best. You’ll not make me believe as how you are wedding for love, sir.’

‘I—I am very fond of you,’ Meadowes began, but Anne stopped him impatiently.

‘Not you, sir. I’m rarely fine-looking, an’ men be terrible fools. You’ve a mind to marry—that’s short and long for it,—but for love——’

The silence that Anne ended her sentence with was more expressive than words. Then she turned and laid her hand in his.

‘Here, sir,’ she said, ‘I’ll ask no questions. Mayhap you’ve had your story like myself. Leastways you’ve been kind to me, and I’ll be a good wife to you if you’re wishful to marry with me. Like enough some day we may both forget——’

She turned hastily away with a sob that would not be kept back.

‘Shall we say Friday of next week, then, Anne?’ said Meadowes, passing his arm round her and patting her shoulder very kindly.

‘When you please, sir.’

‘And we shall be married here, not in church, for the reason I have mentioned?’

‘Any place you please, sir.’

‘My friend Mr. Prior will marry us.’

‘Any parson you have a mind for, sir.’

Meadowes drew Anne closer to him, and kissed her lovely tear-stained face. Then he bade her good-bye, and she went into the cottage and sat there face to face with life, as every woman is when she makes up her mind on what now-a-days we term the Marriage Problem.

Anne was very clear-sighted; she saw, as every woman with her wits about her must see, that it is not good for woman—especially pretty woman—to be alone. She saw in ‘Dick Sundon,’ as she called him, a protector whom she had every reason to like. In the bitterness of her heart she had vowed never to trust any man again, but she must have had some vague feeling of confidence in this kindly bright-eyed suitor, else Anne would have hesitated more than she did before coming to her decision. She had hitherto been rather suspicious of the attentions of ‘fine gentlemen,’ as she termed them, but this offer of marriage seemed honourable to a degree. ‘I’ll never forget Sebastian—not for all he hath done by me—but mayhap I’d be happier wedded to Dick Sundon than living alone all my days. Oh, he’s kind enough for certain, an’ free with his money, and now he do wish to marry me what better can I do?’ she asked herself.

Unanswerable arguments.

Meadowes, on his part, went home profoundly miserable. For the sinner who would sin enjoyably must be of another stuff from that of which this man was made. Just as he had achieved success, his heart turned with a perfectly genuine emotion of pity towards the woman he had deceived so cruelly.

Yet on he went.

That evening he called upon his friend Mr. Simon Prior, at his rooms in Piccadilly.

‘A somewhat late visitor, I fear, Prior,’ he said.

‘Never too late to be welcome,’ said Prior.

‘Well, I am come on business, which must be my excuse,’ said Meadowes. He sat down, and Prior waited to hear what the business might be.

‘The fact is, I wish you to do me a favour,—I wish your assistance to the carrying out of—of an affair of some delicacy.’

‘I shall be delighted; but I find it difficult to imagine . . . my money affairs,’ . . . began Prior, whose one idea of a difficulty was money.

‘I had best make a long story short,’ said Meadowes, ‘I want you to act cleric for me; I’ve seen your powers of mimicry ere this, and I swear you’d play the parson to a nicety.’

‘Phew!’ whistled Prior. ‘So ’tis a woman is the difficulty; but why, Meadowes, if I may intrude upon your secrets, why do you demand a parson?’

‘Ah! there is my difficulty. There are women, you see, who value their good name, and this woman is of the number. ’Tis unfortunate, but a fact I cannot get over. She hath promised to be my wife, however, and I have explained to her that family reasons make a private marriage necessary at present. I trusted to you for the rest of it.’

Simon Prior leant back in his chair and eyed his visitor narrowly.

‘And what are you going to give to me in return for these valuable services?’ he said.

Meadowes leant forward—his bright eyes blazed in the lamplight.

‘I’ll pay every debt you have, if that will do,’ he said.

Prior went through a quick mental sum.

‘Yes, that will do,’ he said, when it had been added up. ‘I have played many a part, and have no doubt I could acquit myself with credit in this. I’ll go to church and hear the parson’s drawl (I’ve not heard it this many a year), and I’ll reproduce it for you whenever you please with becoming gravity.’

‘Thanks! I’ve no manner of doubt you will. Then you will tell me what I owe you? And, by the way, this matter must never cross your lips, Prior; I may trust you for that?’

‘You may.’

‘Then on Saturday of next week, all being well?’

‘On Saturday of next week, all being well,’ repeated Prior, in such a startling reproduction of Meadowes’ voice that both men laughed aloud.

But laughter was not in Meadowes’ heart though it was on his lips. He rose to say good-night soon after, and Simon Prior lay back in his arm-chair and smiled.

CHAPTER V

Perhaps it was because he felt the knot so obligingly tied by Simon Prior not quite impossible to untie, that Richard Meadowes took his marital obligations very lightly. He was well pleased with his new acquisition, and used to ride out from town constantly to see Anne. They would walk out together in the long spring twilights, and gradually Anne began to lose her dread of such a fine lover and spoke to him freely and naturally.

Anne could be a very amusing companion; for she had quick wits; and that for companionship is far better than being well educated. She would tell Meadowes all about her life; excepting one episode only, no mention of which ever crossed her lips—of the men who had courted her, and the women who had hated her, of the straits of poverty, and all she had seen and suffered and enjoyed in her five-and-twenty years' pilgrimage. In return, she would ask Meadowes about the unknown world to which he belonged. Had they always enough to eat without thinking about it or working for it? ('Lord sakes, how grand!') Had they never to walk when they were weary, or toil when they were faint? Was it possible he had never known what it was to be cold for want of clothing, or run out of fuel in the winter? ('You scarce know you're alive!') Or, sorest strait of all, was it possible he had never known sickness and want together? ('You've not felt the Lord's hand on you yet then, Dick.') And she would listen with delight to Meadowes' tales of his world. Outwardly, indeed, Anne was cheerful enough now; Meadowes began to think she was forgetting the past. Only her entire silence about Sebastian Shepley seemed to mark any feeling on the subject. Yet every now and then he fancied she was thinking of her former lover. Once as they walked together down the lane on a lovely summer night—the birds were singing as if their little throats would burst, the year's jubilee was at its height—Meadowes turned to her in his sudden, impulsive way.

' 'Tis fine to be alive and young,' he said; 'and the birds sing like the angels of Paradise!'

'I think to have heard the sparrows in the Green Park——' Anne began to say, almost as if she were speaking to herself—then she broke off in the middle of her sentence and turned away. A moment later she added—

'You do speak rarely clear, Dick—for all the world like a flute's note. I like to hearken to your voice better than them birds by far.'

Meadowes was charmed with this pretty speech; he flung his arm round Anne's waist and kissed her. She looked up at him with her brown eyes full of tears; but they may have been tears of mirth, for all she said was, 'Good sakes! but men be mortal vain,' and with that she drew herself away from his embrace.

'Why should she cry over the sparrows in the Green Park?' Meadowes wondered; how should he know how often Anne had walked there with Sebastian Shepley?

Time wore on, summer merged into autumn, and still Anne had never spoken once to Meadowes about Sebastian Shepley; they were the best of friends, Anne welcomed his coming and mourned at his going, but without a trace of sentiment, as Meadowes found himself forced to admit. Men do not like a want of sentiment in women: they may condone it in their own sex, it is considered an essential in ours; so Meadowes, who had never blamed himself for lacking this quality, found it in his heart to be surprised and a little indignant with Anne for doing so. 'She should be beginning to care more for me by now,' he thought; he had been a very devoted husband.

It was devotion indeed, which urged him to ride out from London one cruel night of wind and rain. The miles seemed as though they would never be got over; yet Meadowes rode on and on, out into the deep country, his head bowed before the lashing of the rain and the onslaught of the wind. At the Cross Roads Inn he dismounted, and leaving his horse there, strode on through the darkness to Anne's cottage.

'Good sakes, Dick, is it you!' cried Anne at sound of his knock. She flung open the door and he passed in, into the warmth and stillness of the cottage kitchen, where he stood laughing and breathless, the water dripping from his drenched clothes on to the sanded floor. Anne, exclamatory and sympathetic, stood beside him.

' 'Tis wetted through and through you are, Dick,' she said, wringing the flap of his riding-coat. 'For the love of heaven go and cast these wet clothes from off you, while I do heat up some ale for you on the fire. There be naught like hot ale for chills. Good lack! to think of mortal man riding from London this night!'

Meadowes laughed. 'I shall be none the worse, Anne. But not hot ale—mulled claret for me, my girl.'

'I have no knowledge of your fine sour-wine drinks, Dick. For certain the hot ale be far wholesomer,' urged Anne, who clung to tradition as surely

as Meadowes.

So to please her hot ale he drank, sitting by the wide cottage fireplace listening to the driving storm. The candle, which had been low in its socket, burned lower; then Anne put it out, and still they sat silently in the pleasant fire-lit room and heard the storm rave on outside. They were sitting side by side on the settle by the fire, Meadowes had his arm round Anne's shoulder in his kindly caressing fashion, but though Anne permitted the endearment she did not respond to it in any way.

'You are very quiet to-night?' said Meadowes at last. Anne shivered, and bent forward to stir up the fire for answer.

'What ails you, Anne? Has aught distressed you through the day?' he asked.

Anne turned round and looked at him; her eyes had a curiously wild, frightened expression.

' 'Tis like great guns,' she said. 'There, there. O Lord, I can't a-bear to hear it—guns and guns a-thundering on, and when it cometh round the corner o' the house 'tis for all the world like the shrieks of dying men.'

Meadowes was mystified by her words. He had never seen Anne fanciful before.

'Well, what of it?—'tis not unlike heavy firing, as you say,' he admitted. 'But you are safe enough here, my girl, in all truth.'

'Eh, Dick! don't *you* understand?' cried Anne. 'Battles, and guns, and all. . . . I do seem to hear from over seas, from Flanders, bringing to my mind all I've a mind to forget. I've sat all this day a-hearing of them guns, and times I'd stop my ears.—O Lord! there be the screams again.' And Anne, turning to the only helper she had, held out her hands to him with a trembling, childish gesture.

'Dick, Dick,' she said, 'you be quick to feel all things, and kind too, more nor I deserve, I that have married you, and my heart turning back to another.'

Quick to feel, Meadowes was feeling a hundred conflicting sensations at that moment. But first of all he must quiet Anne.

'Come, Anne,' he said, 'you are tired and fanciful. 'Tis time you were gone to bed, and by the morning you will have forgot the storm that scares you now. Ah, I understand altogether, Anne; aye, and feel for you too. But these things are better left alone, it but makes them harder to speak of them.'

‘Maybe, maybe,’ said Anne, rising to put a fresh candle in the candlestick. She had appealed to ‘Dick’ in vain, she thought, and would not attempt to make him understand.

‘I have some letters to write,’ said Meadowes, dismissing the subject; ‘I shall sit up and finish them.’

When Anne had gone, however, there, was not much letter-writing done. Meadowes sat and looked into the fire, coming to several conclusions. Well, here was the end of his amour; up to this time he had been quite content with Anne, delighted with her; but now—he simply could not stand this. If she was going to be always thinking about Sebastian Shepley, and even mentioning him, it was high time that the connection between himself and her was at an end. Meadowes, who was a very fastidious man, shuddered at the whole situation. ‘Horrible; truly ’twas in Providence I did not marry her,’ he said. Yet he had quite enough of conscience to make it a difficult matter for him to break with Anne. He dreaded beyond measure her anger when she found herself to have been so duped. It was indeed almost impossible to contemplate telling her. How would it best be done? Offer her money? Anne would never consider that a recompense. Just leave her? ‘Even I am not bad enough for that!’ Trust to time? Time would possibly make matters worse. Yet after hours of thought on the subject this last and very lame conclusion was the one which Meadowes finally adopted. He resolved not to see so much of her now and—to wait.

‘A plague upon Sebastian Shepley, and a plague upon Constancy and Love and all the Virtues!’ he said as he rose from his chair at last; ‘and equally a plague upon Richard Meadowes, and Treachery and Passion and all the Vices,’ he added, as he stood looking down at the last embers of the wood-fire that glowed on the hearth. He gave an angry kick to the red ashes with the toe of his riding-boot that sent a shower of scarlet sparks up into the air; they fell down a moment later in soft grey ash, and the fire was out.

‘The end of all hot fires,’ said Meadowes, as he groped his way across to the door.

CHAPTER VI

‘Business,’ Meadowes explained to Anne a few days after this, ‘was taking him out of London.’ His absence, too, might be somewhat prolonged. He left ample means with his friend Mr. Prior (‘the parson who wedded us, Anne’), and these moneys were to be forwarded by him to Anne at regular intervals; she would want for nothing. Anne took the news quietly, as was her way, and hoped his business might delay ‘Dick’ a shorter time than he anticipated.

Meadowes, however, knew his own mind now, and was quite decided as to the length of time he would be absent from Anne. In the spring a child would be born to them, and after that he would come and tell her everything; till then it might be brutal to disturb her present peace of mind. But after the event it must be done, and the sooner the better. This had been his ultimate decision.

Still, decisions being more easily taken than put into execution, Anne had been a very proud and happy mother for some eight weeks before Meadowes found it possible to speak to her of the matter of their supposed marriage. And even then his hand was, so to speak, forced. He had ridden out from town in haste one summer morning, and now sat in the porch with Anne, wondering why after all he had come, for tell her he could not, though he had started with the determination to do so.

‘For certain, Dick, you be mighty silent,’ said Anne at last, looking up from her sewing.

‘I am annoyed over business,’ said Meadowes lamely, looking down at the ground.

‘And a fine packet of letters unopened in your pocket too,’ laughed Anne, pointing with her needle at the bundle as she spoke.

‘I rode off in such haste,’ began Meadowes absently, then he took the letters from his pocket and turned them over one by one.

‘From my lawyer—from Simon Prior—from——’ He stopped short and looked hard at the third letter, shook his head, and broke the seal to glance at its contents.

‘Lor’, Dick! what hath come to you?’ cried Anne, throwing aside her work a moment later, for she had caught sight of his face; it was grown suddenly grey and rigid. She stepped behind him, laying her hand on his shoulder, and glanced down at the sheet of paper he held.

‘Nothing, Anne—a mere joke,’ said Meadowes quickly, crumpling up the paper as if Anne could have read what was written on it.

‘Dick, that’s a word from Sebastian Shepley, so sure as I do stand here,’ said Anne, her voice shaking; ‘I do know the looks of his name upon the sheet, for ’twas all ever I could read for myself of his letters, an’ many’s the one I had.’

‘Shepley? what would Shepley write to me of?’ asked Meadowes hotly, rising and walking away down the garden-walk towards the gate. But Anne would not be put off. She followed him down the walk and laid her hand on his arm.

‘Tell me, Dick,’ she said; ‘I had a deal rather hear straight all he hath to say.’

‘I swear to you——’ Meadowes began; but Anne interrupted him.

‘Then you swear false, Dick: ’tis writ by Sebastian’s own hand, or my name be not Anne Sundon. Best tell me what he saith.’

‘The letter is from a man Steven Shackleton, Anne. You mistook the lettering, being no scholar,’ persisted Meadowes, lying desperately now, his courage had so withered when brought to the point.

Anne faced round upon him; her big clever brown eyes seemed to be reading into his very soul.

‘You’re makin’ up tales, Dick,’ she said. ‘You won’t look me in the eyes and tell me that’s not Sebastian’s hand of write.’

‘There,’ cried Meadowes, facing round to meet her eyes directly. ‘The letter was from——’ His glance fell to the ground, as he added, ‘Steven Shackleton’ again.

‘If so be you speak straight——’ Anne began. But Meadowes with an impatient exclamation cut her short.

‘What do you take me for? Well, I must be off. A fool I was to leave town without reading my letters, for back to it I must go in a couple of hurries. Come, bid me good-bye, Anne,’ he added, bending down towards her.

‘Good-bye,’ said Anne absently, turning away into the cottage.

She sat beside the baby’s cradle, rocking it slowly, and gazed down at the floor. What did all this confusion and contradiction on Dick’s part mean? Why did he look like that, as scared as though he had seen a ghost? And why was he so angry, and why again so flushed?

Dick meantime was riding back to London at a great pace—riding as if the devil himself rode behind him. But when he reached town it was to ask himself why he had come there; for deep down in his heart he knew that the time had come, and that tell Anne he must—yes, the whole black truth from first to last. He had ridden away from her searching truth-compelling eyes, but they followed him still, and back he must go and have done with it all. Why would the earth not open and swallow him up?—Ah, happy Dathan and Abiram!

CHAPTER VII

The day passed slowly for Anne after Dick had left. Her mind was troubled by vague half-formulated doubts. Had Dick spoken truly, or had he lied to save her pain? Surely, surely she could never mistake Sebastian's signature, the same she had gazed at so often, and kissed, aye, and wept over also. She revolved these questions in her mind all day and found no satisfactory answers to them; when she lay down at night, one insistent suggestion whispered on in her ear, 'Why did Dick look like that? Was he lying? Did ever man look so mazed and scared when he spoke the truth?' Then Anne's tired eyes closed and she entered the beautiful dream-world. Now the dream-world holds sensations of indescribable vividness not attainable on the earth-world; here experiences come within the scope of words, there we experience the inexpressible.

In a dream, then, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep had fallen upon her, Anne dreamed and thought she awoke in Paradise. For Sebastian came to her (out of nowhere, after the fashion of dreams), and their souls seemed fused together in a warm silence. Not a word was spoken between them; yet the miserable past was blotted out for ever; a great light shone everywhere—a glow, a heat of forgiveness, a passion of fulfilment at last; and the beautiful thrilling silence of it all! They seemed alone in hollow space, out of reach of this world's hubbub. What need of explanations when all was understood? Her thoughts rested on that splendid wordless vacancy. 'Sure I be in heaven at last!' said poor Anne. 'A fine heaven too, that quiet as it is! The old one as I used to hear on was all noise o' trumpets an' hosannas—here's heaven indeed, with this grand quiet as is to go on for ever.'

Anne woke suddenly then—the appalling conviction of a dream was upon her: she might have spoken face to face with her dear lover, so vividly present he had seemed, such a sudden assurance of his faithfulness had come to her. She sat up in bed and called out aloud in the quiet room—

'Lord! be it a dream? Sebastian dear, what's this I'm feelin'? Have Dick Sundon fooled me out an' out a-tellin' lies of you all this long time? Help me, am I losing my judgment?'

She rose up, groped her way across the dark room, and drew back the window-curtain. The first streaks of day were showing in the sky, the

peaceful wooded land was half shrouded still in the mists of morning. With long whistling notes the birds gave welcome to the coming day; they called to each other, near at hand, and far off among the blossoming thickets, like happy spirits that sing together in the fields of joy. Anne leaned from the window and listened to these songs that went up so straight into the dim blue morning skies. A great fear held her fast,—the fear that Dick, her husband, her helper, had deceived her. In her dismay and bewilderment she could only repeat again and again, 'Lord help me, Lord help me,' scarcely knowing what she said. Then, afraid to lie down again, she dressed and went down-stairs and into the garden. Far off on the London road she heard the distant trotting of a horse and the roll of wheels; some one must be driving along in the quiet morning dimness. Anne stepped down the little walk and stood leaning against the gate.

The wheels came nearer, and then came down the lane. Anne turned away, for even in that dim light the passers-by must see her tears.

Then she heard the chaise stop at the gate; Dick's voice—how clear it sounded in the early stillness!—was speaking to the post-boy.

'There, my man; that's for your trouble all a dark night.'

'Thank you, sir—thanks to you,' said the boy as the chaise rattled off.

Anne turned and came down the little walk to meet Dick; her gown brushed the dew from the overgrown rose-bushes in showers as she passed. She came towards him silently, her face tear-stained, tragic. Dick held out both hands to her, but before he could speak Anne checked him with an upraised hand.

'God's spoke to me, Dick,' she said, stopping before him like an avenging angel.

'I have come to tell you everything,' said poor Dick; and at that moment he drank the dregs of a bitter cup, 'for I knew you guessed something when I left you.'

'God spoke to me in a dream,' repeated Anne. 'When I waked up I knew for sure you had lied to me.'

'Yes, Anne, I lied,' he said, almost in a whisper.

'About Sebastian?'

'Yes.'

'An' he never played me false, nor married a Dutch wife?'

‘Never.’

‘Come,’ said Anne. ‘Come then an’ try if you can speak truth this once.’ She pointed to the seat by the bee-hives, and in silence they crossed over to it and sat down.

‘Tell me now,’ said Anne.

Dick leant forward and began his story, and a pitiful story it was. Now that he was face to face with the worst he made no attempt at extenuation of his falsity; he might have been reading off the words from a printed page, they came so straight from his lips, his flute-clear voice never hesitated once till the whole was told. Anne on her part listened quietly enough; without the usual exclamatory interruptions which her sex commonly indulge in. When the story was done there was a moment’s silence, before she said, speaking very low—

‘Eh! but I’ve been a bitter fool.’ She rose then and stood looking down at Dick.

‘I’m goin’ now,’ she said. ‘If I’m no man’s wife, at least I’ll be no man’s mistress. An’ for the child, you’d best care for him yourself. You’ll maybe make him as good a man as his father some day.’

Dick sprang up and caught her hand. ‘Anne, Anne,’ he cried, ‘you must see how it is—you must understand—I scarce knew all your feeling for Shepley at first—I thought you had forgot—I thought women forgot always—I had not realised—not until that night you spoke of him—and then, then I could not bear it, and I resolved to tell you truly. I——’

‘Oh, you’ve acted mighty true for certain,’ said Anne quietly.

‘I have indeed told you all the truth——’

‘Yes, now.’

‘But, Anne, men are mortal—will fall before temptation. ’Tis hard to blame us too cruelly.’

‘O yes; for certain men be mortal.’

‘I shall in truth provide for you all your days, Anne; I thought of no other thing.’

‘Will you, sir?’ said Anne, with a curious smile, and Meadowes, not catching its meaning, pursued eagerly—

‘All your days truly, Anne; you shall have all that woman can wish, if you will but pardon me.’

Anne stood looking at him in a curious dispassionate way for a moment.

‘I’d sooner starve,’ she said then, shortly.

‘But, Anne, you can never suppose that I would let you want, after all there has come and gone between us, after——’

Anne smiled again her curious smile, and shook her head.

‘A strange man you be for certain, Dick,’ she said; ‘kind an’ tender when you’ve a mind to be, and one as feels quick. She paused before adding slowly, ‘*And just as false as hell*.’

Meadowes winced under the words, but he went on, ‘False or no, Anne, I must provide for you—for you and the child.’

‘For the child mayhap, never for me,’ said Anne. ‘You’d best see after him, for he’ll be set down to your account when all things is squared. See you train him up to be so good a man as you are, Dick.’

‘Then do you not wish to care for your son yourself, Anne?’ asked Meadowes incredulously, for, up to this time, Anne had doted on the boy.

‘No more I do. He be your son, Dick, and ’tis for you to fend for him.’

‘Then——’ Meadowes hesitated, waiting for Anne to make her intentions known.

‘I’ve worked before, and now I’ll work again; and if so be I get no work, then I’ll starve, as I’ve starved before,’ said Anne quietly. ‘Martha’s kind and up in years, best leave the boy with her.’

‘Are you going to leave him?’

‘Yes, an’ never see him nor you again,’ said Anne. She turned away into the house without another word, and Meadowes heard her go up-stairs and move about in her room gathering a few possessions together. She came out again before long, carrying a little bundle.

‘Good-bye, Dick,’ she said, holding out her hand to him; ‘good-bye to the part on you as was kind to me—the rest be rotten bad.’

‘It cannot be you are really going, Anne.’

‘Good-bye,’ said Anne for answer, and she walked away down the lane and turned off at the opening that led into the London road.

CHAPTER VIII

On a warm summer evening, some three weeks later, Richard Meadowes sat in the library of his town house thinking, perhaps not unnaturally, of Anne Champion and wondering where she was.

'Dr. Sebastian Shepley, to wait upon you, sir,' said the man-servant, showing some one in, and Meadowes rose to greet his visitor, feeling the room strangely warm.

'Ah, Shepley,' was all he said for welcome to the tall steady-eyed man who came forward into the room.

Shepley sat down opposite to Richard Meadowes and facing the sunlight. His pleasant blue eyes rested on Meadowes inquiringly for a moment.

'I fear I have intruded on you, sir,' he said, noticing the other man's embarrassment.

'I—I am pleased to see you,' said Meadowes, not with absolute veracity. The situation seemed at that moment intolerable to him—better, he thought, make a quick end of it.

'You have heard about Anne Champion?' he said, forcing himself to look straight at Sebastian Shepley.

'I am come for no other reason than to ask your aid in the matter,' said Shepley, 'for the last I have heard of Anne was the message of thanks you gave me from her anent the amber necklace. Often as I've writ to her I have heard never a word in answer. Tell me, sir, do you know aught of where she went?'

'I know naught of Anne now,' said Meadowes, looking down as he spoke.

'*Now?*' asked Shepley, for something in the other's voice attracted his attention.

'A year and more she lived with me, and she bore me a son,' said Meadowes.

There was a moment of silence that seemed to tingle.

‘There—swallow your lies!’ cried Shepley; and he struck with all his great strength across Meadowes’ lips. Without another word he left the room, passed out through the hall, and strode away down the Square.

‘Lies, lies—hellish black lies every word he spoke,’ he cried in his heart. ‘And ah! my poor Annie, what is come to you these weary years?’ Then remembering that Anne’s neighbours in Yard’s Entry might have some knowledge of her whereabouts he turned his steps in that direction.

It was drawing to sundown when at last he reached Yard’s Entry. He stood still for a moment and looked up at the little window he had known as Anne’s, and which used to reflect the sunlight. It was blazing scarlet just now. Then he went up to the doorway and knocked; Mrs. Nare appeared in answer to his summons.

‘A good even to you, mistress,’ said Shepley. ‘And can you tell me aught of Anne Champion, who lived here some two years since?’

Mrs. Nare squinted up at him out of her narrow old eyes.

‘Anne, she came back here some three weeks agone,’ she said. ‘Came and went her ways again. And now she hath come here mortal stricken—taken with a fever she’ve caught working amidst the rags for a Jew man in Flower and Dean Street.’

Sebastian waited to hear no more; he ran up the dark stair and unceremoniously opened the door of Anne’s room.

Such a blaze of light smote across his eyes as he came in that he was half-blinded, for the skies were scarlet that night from a great sunset, and all the room was lit up with the red glow. He stood for a moment in the doorway shading his eyes from the dazzle, then stepped across the crazy old floor, that creaked and gave under his heavy tread.

‘Annie, Annie!’ he cried, kneeling down beside her.

For Anne, she thought she dreamed again; the weary tossings of the desolate day were done—she tasted a supreme felicity. What if with the breaking day the vision fled, and she woke again to want and loneliness? enough that now it tarried with her. She would not move, she scarcely dared to breathe for dread lest the dream should depart; but lay very still and felt the kindly strength of Sebastian’s arm support her, and his cool hard cheek pressed against hers that burned with fever. ‘Annie,’ he said again, and this time Anne opened her eyes and smiled.

‘Eh, Sebastian, Sebastian, my dear man, stay—stay one minute, for dreams be terrible short,’ she cried. Nor would all Shepley’s words reassure her of his actual presence.

‘So many days as I’ve lain here, an’ such dreams and dreams! Lor’! them was dreams! You and Dick Sundon, Dick Sundon an’ you, back and fore you came and went the two of you. Sometimes Phil ’ud be there too (Phil my boy as is)—(Lord Christ, have a care on Phil, being that he’s so young and with none but Dick Sundon a-carin’ of him!) . . . then I’d dream of Dick for hours and hours, an’ now, Sebastian, ’tis you; Lord send this dream stays!’

Shepley knelt beside her, listening to all her strange babble of ‘Dick’ and ‘Phil;’ but feeling how the fever ran hot in her blood he pushed back the fears that came to him with her words. He looked round the room, with the stamp of relentless poverty set everywhere on it, and thanked Heaven he was there now. For poor Anne lay on the bare boards of this place that was now her shelter, and for covering she had thrown over her the dress she had taken off. No trace of meat or drink was to be seen anywhere.

As he sat thus taking in the bareness of poor Anne’s sick-room, with a perfunctory little knock the door was shoved open and Mistress Nare came in. She walked across the floor on tiptoe and stood looking at Anne.

‘The fever hath gotten that hold on her blood ’twill burn her up before the week is out,’ she said sagely, winking across at Sebastian. ‘And by your leave, sir, I’d make bold to say you’d best sit farther off from her—’tis a catching sickness I dare swear.’

‘I am come here to cure her,’ said Sebastian; ‘I am a surgeon to my trade.’

‘For certain then, sir, you’ve come too late,’ croaked the old woman.

Sebastian rose angrily.

‘Have a care what you say,’ he exclaimed. ‘And now, if you’ll do me a service, you shall go and buy all that Anne Champion needs—a bed to lie on ——’

‘And die on,’ interpolated Mrs. Nare viciously, but Sebastian gave no heed to her remark, only went on with his enumeration:—

‘And blankets to cover her, and food to eat and wine to drink—all these things she must have before the day is done; so hasten you—if so be you

wish for this.' He drew from his pocket a coin and laid it in the old woman's hand.

'A bed and blankets. Food and wine and fire,' repeated Mistress Nare. 'Good lack, sir, dyin' Anne she've not got so much as will buy a shroud to wrap her in!'

'Here,' said Sebastian hastily, shaking out from his purse a handful of coins. 'How much will you require?' Mrs. Nare was convinced.

'Happen three guineas, sir, to begin with,' she said, and her crooked old fingers closed greedily over the yellow coins.

'Well, hasten—hasten,' said Sebastian, and Mrs. Nare shuffled off down the stair chuckling and curious.

'Dyin' Annie's gotten a lover up to the last, Matthew,' she said as she passed her son on the stair. So much for maternal jealousy.

CHAPTER IX

The vision tarried. Anne never woke to another lonely day; always there was Sebastian sitting by her, Sebastian holding her hand, Sebastian bending over her, wise and tender.

Whenever the fever left her, Anne was trying to tell him something—something he would not listen to then. But at last one day, lying still and white, Anne suddenly spoke.

'Listen to me, Sebastian,' she said, 'for I'm not long for this world; you can't refuse to hear me now.' And with that she told him all her story. Sebastian sat beside her, his head bowed upon his hands, listening without word or comment.

'Now that I be come to death's dear, I've but the one thought. Dick, he's a man to look out for hisself—and you was ever straight, my man; but w'at's to come of Phil? Lord, I'd turn in my grave to think on him! for sure he's gotten part o' my soul, Sebastian—he hath truly.' Sebastian did not speak, and Anne went on—

'Dick'll fend for him an' no fear—make a fine gentleman of him most like—as fine as hisself, and then teach him lyin' ways an' false dealin's, an' my boy as hath half my soul he'll go down into hell with all the liars as find their place there, and who's to help?'

Still Sebastian did not speak.

'Eh!' cried Anne, half rising on her pillows. 'This once I seen you hard, Sebastian! 'Tis no fault o' the child's—no, nor mine neither, as he's there.'

'You can scarce expect me to love him, Anne,' said Sebastian at last. 'And what help can I give the child?'

'Eh! none, none, my man; maybe Heaven'll help him,' sobbed Anne, then she turned and laid her hands in Sebastian's.

'But as you love me,' she said, 'you'll make me this vow—you'll swear to me if ever you can help my poor Phil you'll do it; not for his own sake, Sebastian (an' forgettin' Dick Sundon an' all his lies), but for mine, as was Phil's mother, and gave him half her soul?'

‘Annie, Annie, I’d do more than that for you!’ said Sebastian. He prayed her then to lie still—she had spoken beyond her strength. Anne obeyed, and till late in the day she did not speak again, then she spoke suddenly—half-wanderingly this time.

‘You’ll live long and happy, Sebastian,’ she said; ‘you’ll marry, my pretty man, and another woman but me, she’ll be the joyful mother o’ your sons.’ Then with no change in her voice, but as if she suddenly addressed a third person in the room, she continued: ‘And, God, you’ll avenge me on Dick Sundon? You understand how it’s been with me, an’ how ’tis impossible I should forgive him? And, Lord, have a care of Phil, and give him a white heart—my caring of him be past an’ done with now.’ There fell a long silence then, poor Anne having disposed of all her earthly cares.

‘Come, Sebastian,’ she cried, then quickly—with that awful chanting voice of the dying—and she held out her arms to him. But even as he bent down, Sebastian felt a long straining shiver pass through her, the sorrows of death compassed her, the pains of hell took hold upon her. He caught her to his heart for a moment, but a Stronger than he was drawing Anne away from his embrace. As their lips met she smiled a far-away dreamy smile.

‘Ha’ done, my man—ha’ done,’ she said; ‘no more of earth.’

‘I’ll bury Annie,’ said Sebastian, ‘and then I’ll kill Richard Meadowes.’

It was in compliance with this resolution that Sebastian Shepley, a few days later, waited again upon Richard Meadowes.

Meadowes sat writing at the table with his back to the door, but at the sound of its opening he turned round, and at sight of his visitor sprang up; the two men faced each other silently for a moment. Sebastian’s eyes from under their overhanging brows flashed like blue flames.

‘I called you a liar,’ he said, advancing up the room, ‘and for that mistake I crave your pardon; you spoke truth, and now I am come to fight you for the truth you spoke.’

‘Fight with you, you damned surgeon! you son of a village leech! I fight with gentlemen!’ said Meadowes scornfully.

‘And I with men, so if you are one you had best show it,’ retorted Shepley; and he drew the sword that hung at his side with a drawing rattle from its sheath.

There was not much question then between them of rank. They fought with savage hatred on either side; but from the first the fortunes of the fight followed Sebastian.

The whole had been ended, and ended with it there would also have been the larger half of this story, if an unaccountable impulse had not moved Sebastian Shepley to mercy. Something, perhaps, of the futility of revenge, now that Anne was dead and could never know of it, came to him of a sudden, and stayed his hand.

'There,' he said. 'You have your life at my hand, for all it may be worth.' And he turned away as if to leave the house.

Meadowes leant against the wall, breathing hard after the struggle.

'Stop—one moment, Shepley,' he said, 'I—I would speak with you; Anne Champion, if I can find her, shall want for naught.'

'She wants for naught now,' said Shepley shortly.

'But,' interposed Meadowes, 'I should be the man to provide for her, I looked to do that always, I had indeed no intention——'

'Anne Champion is dead,' said Shepley slowly, pausing for a moment on the threshold. 'Anne is dead, and her blood be upon you and upon your children.'

PART II

‘*He that hath a wife and children hath given hostages to Fortune.*’

CHAPTER X

The war was ended, the Peace of Utrecht signed, and what remained of our armies after the twelve years' conflict was free to come home once more. With the soldiers came back the surgeons, to practise in peace the suggestive proficiency they had gained in war-time; and cleverest among them all was Dr. Sebastian Shepley.

Like all successful doctors, Shepley owed something to his personality. There was that in him which inspired others with a sense of his capacity. Not very much of a gentleman, but very much of a man; of gigantic size and easy rough address, he suggested all that was most cheerful and prosperous in life. Shepley had been through half the campaigns of the war, and now that peace was proclaimed he had the good luck to obtain an appointment under the then celebrated Dr. Joseph Barrington of Harley Street, Surgeon in Ordinary to his newly ascended Majesty King George the First. The appointment was a fortunate one for Shepley; but perhaps it was not quite so fortunate for Barrington, who found ere long that Sebastian Shepley was likely to prove an Absalom who would steal away the hearts of fashionable London from himself. But Barrington was very magnanimous—strangely magnanimous,—and seemed rather to like than to dislike the praises that were heaped upon the young man. The reason of his magnanimity was not very far to seek, nor had he any false delicacy in telling Shepley of it; for, as they sat together one day, the older man gave it as his opinion that marriage was a prudent step for a young man to take before taking up a practice.

'You should in truth be looking out for a wife, Shepley,' he concluded, and he gave a suggestive cough.

'Some day, mayhap, sir, some day,' said Shepley. His face fell suddenly into a half hard, half tragical expression, very foreign to that it generally wore, and he passed his hand quickly across his lips. Barrington, a keen observer of faces, gave a sharp glance at him for a moment.

'Such wounds, Shepley, are best treated not too tenderly,' he said. 'It but keeps them open.'

'There may be truth in that you say, sir, but it goes against nature,' said Shepley.

‘Like many a good drastic cure,’ said Barrington. ‘Come (if you will have my advice), bury this old trouble, whatever it may be, and begin life from where you are. Many a happy match hath begun coolishly, many an ill one hotly: and this is the wisdom of a man old enough to be your father.’

‘I thank you, sir; I shall give some thought to the matter,’ said Shepley, and would have changed the subject, but Barrington pursued—

‘You scarce need a proof of my goodwill; Shepley; yet I’ll give you one. There’s not another man in London to whom I would sooner give my daughter Emma than yourself.’

‘My dear sir——’

‘There, there, I have but given you a piece of my mind and something of a hint. Let the matter rest. I pray you to be in no haste: no prudent marriage was ever yet hasty, nor any hasty one prudent; time, time and thought——’

‘Yes, sir, as you say, time and thought—’tis a great step in life,’ said Shepley. But he took the older man’s hand in his as he spoke, and shook it warmly.

‘I thank you, sir,’ he said. ‘And this story you guess at—well, I give you my hand on’t that if ever I marry Emma she hears it all.’

‘Tush! keep your heart’s history to yourself,’ said Barrington, smiling. ‘The woman who supposes herself any man’s first love is a fool.’

Emma, whose name had been thus bandied between Sebastian Shepley and her father, was the younger of Dr. Barrington’s two daughters. The elder daughter, Charlotte by name, had married early, and ‘well,’ as the phrase goes, having allied her fortunes with those of a certain Sir James Mallow, who, though only a knight, was the possessor of a handsome income, and had converted Charlotte from plain Miss Barrington without a fortune to ‘My Lady’ with one. The marriage had been a source of vast gratification to Emma as well as to the fortunate Charlotte, for it seemed to be in the very blood and bones of the Barringtons to aspire in matters social. Their father’s promotion to Court practice had given these young women another help on the painful uphill path, and had made it not only possible but quite natural for them to mention persons of title frequently in conversation. Now Emma drove out daily in Lady Mallow’s coach, and dreamt of even greater splendours to come. She was an extremely pretty girl, slim and tall, with fine auburn hair and delicate colouring. ‘With her looks,’ said Lady Mallow, ‘Emma must have a baronet.’ And indeed she repeated this so often that

Emma came to think of the baronet as a reality, and never contemplated the possibility of any suitor of lower degree.

It gave her, therefore, quite a painful shock to discover suddenly one fine day that she was beginning to care a great deal about a man who was not even distantly connected with a baronetcy. Emma made this discovery some time after Sebastian Shepley had been presented to her; but she put the thought aside at first as quite unworthy. To confirm herself in dismissing such an idea, she spoke with some sharpness to Charlotte about the spectral bridegroom.

'I wish you would in truth present me to a baronet, Charlotte, instead of speaking so frequently of doing so,' she said.

Charlotte was a little nettled by the remark, probably because she knew no baronet whom she could present to her sister, yet was unwilling to acknowledge the fact.

'I take good care to present no man to you whom I do not consider suitable to be your husband,' she said coldly.

'I may get tired of waiting,' said pretty Emma. This was all she said then, but some months later, in a burst of girlish despair, she confided to Lady Mallow what she feared was her hopeless passion for Dr. Sebastian Shepley. 'I should not care for fifty baronets now,' she concluded, burying her face on Charlotte's not very sympathetic breast.

'Tush! Emma,' said her Ladyship; 'you should look higher——' She could think of no more weighty argument. But Emma could not listen even to this. She sobbed and sobbed, and prayed Charlotte, if she loved her, to try to help her. For a long time Charlotte resisted these entreaties, then she determined to tell her father the state of the case.

'So this is what ails Emma?' he said. 'Gad! but I'll make short work with it. Shepley is a fine man—no finer surgeon have I come across this many a year. If he will take Emma he shall have her, and welcome.'

So not very many days later, Dr. Barrington, as you have heard, approached Shepley on the subject of marriage.

At first it seemed as if nothing were to come of the conversation; then quite suddenly Shepley came one day to announce to Dr. Barrington that Emma had agreed to marry him.

'My blessings on you for a sensible man,' said Barrington. 'You were so long about it I half feared you would not take my counsel at all.'

‘I took it so well that I did not hurry in the matter,’ laughed Sebastian.

He laughed himself down-stairs, laughed his adieus to Emma, and swaggered off down the street with his fine swinging gait, as gay and hearty a man as you might see in all England.

But oh, inscrutable heart of man! what were these curious old words that so rang in his ears? He seemed to be walking to the tune of them.

‘*If I forget thee*,’ said the voice of the heart that speaks ever whitest truth,—‘*If I forget thee, let my right hand forget its cunning.*’

And he shook his head and smiled, and looked down at his clever right hand.

CHAPTER XI

Sebastian and Emma Shepley began their married life in a little house in Jermyn Street—'small,' as Emma would have described it, 'but genteel.' It would be impossible to exaggerate the pride and pleasure which Emma had in the arrangements of her house, and in the fact that she was married to the (to her) finest and dearest of men; but to Sebastian marriage appeared in a very different light. For him it showed as the end of Youth, the voluntary rejection of romance, the light of common day. He had reasoned himself into it; acknowledging (and the man who does this need never call himself young again) that he had better take what he could get and be thankful for it. He had laid Passion in the grave; and, turning away, he met Life with her resolute face waiting for him inexorable as of old. Marriage was probably the first and most prudent step he could take, and Emma was fond of him, and Emma, after all, was pretty. A home, a wife, children—these solid anchors of the soul, presented themselves almost invitingly to his fancy after a time—and farewell to Love and Youth!

In these curiously differing moods of mind Emma and Sebastian entered into the estate of matrimony—Sebastian with his eyes open, Emma with hers firmly shut.

'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' asks that eternally unanswerable book the Bible. Not comfortably, certainly, but they can halt along somehow, far out of step it may be, yet on the same road. I am afraid that when all was said and done the walk of Emma and Sebastian was somewhat after this halting kind. For Emma had not been married for many weeks before she began to see how curiously she disagreed from Sebastian on almost every point. Strange is the glamour of love that she had not found this out sooner! It said something for both of them that after having made the discovery Emma continued to love her husband as much as ever—only, the glamour was gone now. He had been to her a faultless romantic hero, she found him to be a man with several pronounced faults, who frequently offended her taste, who constantly opposed her, who plainly told her that he had once loved another woman, and loved her memory still.

Sebastian on his part owned that Emma was occasionally quite exasperating to him; but he also acknowledged her entire goodness of heart and the excellence of her housekeeping. Their marriage in fact was just one

of the ordinary ruck of marriages; not unhappy, not ideal—merely a little disappointing to Emma, a little hardening and coarsening to Sebastian. The great bone of contention was of a social nature. For gentility was dear as life itself to Emma, while to Sebastian all the little affectations and conventions which his wife valued so highly were the merest moonshine. He submitted graciously enough to correction in matters of etiquette, and laughed with imperturbable good humour when Emma called him to task for eating with his knife and wiping his lips with the back of his hand. But when it came to the question of friends and acquaintances matters were more complicated.

Emma had, so to speak, passed her acquaintances through a fine sieve, and the sifted few who came through, they, and they alone, were her intimates. Sebastian, on the other hand, had only one reason for making friends with any one—whether he liked them or not. As a matter of fact he liked the greater part of the world, and was liked by them in return, but anything like an ulterior end in making acquaintances was unknown to him. Emma's rules for the making of so-called friends, therefore, filled him with amazement; while Emma, on her part, looked with little short of dismay upon the men whom Sebastian welcomed to his table. Certainly there was scarcely one among all his acquaintance that could have been called a gentleman. 'As why should they, Emma? I am no gentleman myself,' Sebastian had retorted when taxed with his preference for low company. Emma objected most of all to the soldiers whom her husband had known abroad, and who were continually coming to the house; she might be entertaining her most select lady-friends to a dish of tea, and talking the latest Court gossip with them, when, into this refined circle, and quite undismayed by its frigidly genteel atmosphere, would enter Sebastian, bringing with him, as likely as not, his friend Sergeant Cartwright, or young Tillet the bugler, who played at Ramillies. The Sergeant had lost an arm at Blenheim, and Emma shrank away instinctively from the empty sleeve he wore pinned across his breast; no historic association could reconcile her to the presence of these men in her parlour, and when they were bidden to supper Mrs. Shepley sat at the head of the table with an air of studied aloofness that was fine to see. Now and then she would raise her pretty eyebrows expressively, as when Cartwright spat on the floor, or Tillet made use of expressions not usually heard in parlours; but she came at last to see that remonstrance with Sebastian on this score was useless, and resigned herself as best she might to see the hero of her first love make merry with such friends.

But perhaps Emma's sorest moments were when those whom she naively termed 'persons of importance' came to visit Sebastian. To Emma,

every one with a title was a person of importance, be they never so unimportant in reality, and it seemed to her that Sebastian intentionally said and did the wrong things to such personages. There was one terrible night when 'a Marquis' (enough that the mystic dignity was his) honoured the little house in Jermyn Street with a visit, and Sebastian, all unheeding of coughs and frowns from his wife, must press this exalted visitor to sup with them. Now on this ill-fated night Emma had chosen to feed her lord and master on pig's feet and fried liver—viands whose price, or rather want of price, is almost proverbial. It was, indeed, from no sordid motives of economy that Emma had so furnished forth her board, but from the desire to please Sebastian, whose taste in food was incurably vulgar. How could she have anticipated that burning moment when her faltering tongue must frame the words—

'My Lord, may I offer you some of these pig's feet, or mayhap your Lordship would relish some of this fried liver more?'

And as if this was not bitter enough, did not Sebastian break into a laugh that shook the glasses on the table, crying out—

'Faith, Emma, had you known we were to entertain the quality to-night, I had not had my liver and pig's feet!'

Emma smiled faintly, for tears were not far off; and the Marquis, seeing her perturbation, told the story of the liver they got at Blenheim, that the officers swore was shoe-leather,—'A different dish from your fine cookery, madam,' he said, begging for another helping of the dish. But it was a life-long lesson to poor Emma: she never ordered liver for supper again without a pang of foreboding.

Then the matter of Church observances had arisen between these young people. Emma was a devout Church-woman; Sebastian did not hold much to one persuasion or another, and certainly was not fond of Church services. Emma all her life had gone every Sunday to the curious little old church of St. Mary Minories, and after her marriage expected Sebastian to go there with her. The first Sunday morning after her marriage Emma came down-stairs in her church-going attire, and in rather a shocked voice expressed her astonishment to find Sebastian smoking by the fire, instead of making any preparation for coming with her.

'Charlotte will be here in the coach immediately,' she said. 'Hasten, Sebastian, we shall be late at St. Mary's.'

'St. Mary's?' queried Sebastian.

‘St. Mary Minories, where it hath always been our custom to attend divine service—come, Sebastian, pray lay aside your pipe!’

Sebastian leant forward, pressing down the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. He made no reply.

‘Are you not coming to church? Perhaps some patients require your care ——’ began Emma. She came and laid her hand on his shoulder in gentle remonstrance.

‘No, I cannot come.’

‘Mayhap you might come to meet us—you think little of such a walk,’ suggested Emma.

‘No!’ said Sebastian curtly. Emma had never seen him so cross before. Her eyes filled with tears, and she withdrew her hand from his shoulder, and turned away.

‘I fear I have displeased you, sir!’ she said, feeling a sudden inclination to desert this young man, who could behave so strangely to her one short week after their marriage. But the next moment she forgave him; for Sebastian, at the tearful sound of her voice, jumped up and came over to where she stood, holding out his hands to her.

‘Pardon me, Emma; ’tis no fault of yours, but a fancy of my own. I never pass that way an I can help it, Emma—that’s all.’

‘Why——!’ began stupid Emma; but she dried her tears.

‘Because Anne Champion lived there, and there I saw her die, and I’m like to weep tears of blood when I pass by that way,’ said Sebastian, who, whatever he was, would have no secrets from his wife, in spite of Dr. Barrington’s wisdom.

If Emma had been a crafty woman she would have discontinued her attendance at St. Mary Minories after this; but she was not, and instead, she went there weekly, and very frequently she would say, ‘Sebastian, if so be that you cannot worship along with me, why do you not go to some other church?’ And Sebastian scarcely knew whether to laugh more at her singular lack of tact or to be provoked by it.

After this sort of fashion time went on; and then, whatever little differences there may have been between the Shepleys, were forgotten for a time in the wonderfully uniting interest which came to them with the birth of their daughter. All Emma’s first admiration for Sebastian returned to her, when she saw how delightfully he played the part of a father. And indeed, to

see him with this enchanting milky-skinned baby in his arms was a sight to please any heart; they looked so wholly incongruous.

‘Lord! to think of your fathering such a dainty piece of goods, doctor!’ exclaimed Emma’s pet aversion, the Sergeant, at sight of Sebastian and his tiny daughter. Emma was too proud and pleased at the moment to find fault with the speech, so, lifting little Miss Shepley from her husband’s arms, she brought her to be kissed by the Sergeant.

‘She is very beautiful,’ said the proud mother in a conclusive manner, after the salute had been very unwillingly given. ‘And we intend to name her Caroline, after my mother.’

So let this be my reader’s first introduction to Caroline Shepley.

CHAPTER XII

All observant (or is it only unobservant?) persons must surely have remarked that children seem to grow up suddenly in a night like Jack's beanstalk. The child that only yesterday we dandled in our arms, to-day runs about and talks with the best of us, and to-morrow he will be married, and the day after to-morrow his children in their turn will be beginning the whole curious magic mushroom-growth over again for another generation! So those who only in the last page saw Caroline Shepley in long clothes will perhaps not be altogether surprised to recognise her on this page as a child of six years, trotting along the pavements under the charge of a very good-looking young nurse-maid.

Seven years had not changed the ambitions of Mrs. Shepley; but they had been transferred during that period, and now she was no longer ambitious for herself, but for her beautiful little daughter Caroline.

'Carrie must have a maid of her own, like other gentlefolk's children,' she had said, and though her husband laughed at the idea as pretentious nonsense, he made no further objections, and Mrs. Shepley engaged the services of a young woman, Patty Blount, whose duty it became to walk out daily with little Caroline, as is the custom in all well-regulated families.

Patty, though not eminently conscientious in other matters, performed this duty with the most praiseworthy regularity. No sooner had the hall-clock chimed eleven than this punctual young person issued from the door of the little house in Jermyn Street leading Caroline by the hand. Their walks had a curious sameness, tending as they almost invariably did in the direction of St. James' Square; and Carrie, a conversational little person, noticed that about the hour of their walk Patty was curiously absent-minded. She was always looking round her, and sometimes would even fairly stand still, with an air of expectation as if she were waiting for some one.

At last one morning as they sauntered through the Square, the door of one of the houses opened, and a young gentleman, Carrie's senior by some four years, came down the steps attended by a tall man-servant wearing prune liveries. Carrie, who was feeling very dull at that moment, poor child, plucked her careless companion by the skirt.

‘See, Patty,’ she whispered; ‘there is a boy who must be nearly my own age.’

Patty was not absent-minded now. She seemed to have suddenly wakened up; and giving Carrie that curious dragging shake which seems an hereditary action in the nurse-maid class, she turned her head pointedly in the opposite direction from the approaching figures, and hurried Carrie along the Square at a great pace.

‘You should think shame, Miss Carrie, to be a-noticin’ of strangers in the streets,’ she said.

They passed the boy and the tall footman as she spoke, and turned the corner of the Square. A moment later Carrie heard a voice behind them address Patty, and turning round she beheld the tall footman walking alongside.

‘Lor’, Mr. Peter,’ exclaimed Patty, all affability and surprise. Then she shoved Carrie before her, and the footman shoved his charge before him, and they turned back into the Square again, apparently by mutual consent.

The children looked at each other dumbly for a moment.

‘What’s your name?’ then says Carrie, taking the initiative.

‘Philip-William-Richard-Frederick-Sundon-Meadowes.’

‘Oh, that’s far too long; I can never say that.’

‘Well, Phil they call me.’

‘Yes, that will do; I am called Caroline—I was named after my grandmother.’

‘I was named after my grandfather. I never saw him; he was dead long before I began.’

‘Was he? my grandfather is still alive,’ said Carrie. ‘But he is not like my father at all; I love my father more than any one.’

‘Well, do you know, Caroline, I do not love my father at all,’ said Phil with curious candour. As he spoke he turned and looked at Carrie with a pair of wonderfully glittering grey eyes.

‘O, what strange eyes you have, Phil! Why do they cut into me?’ cried Carrie.

Phil was rather offended. ‘My eyes are quite as good as yours, Caroline,’ he said. ‘I think I shall return to Peter.’ And with an air of great dignity he

fell back a step or two. But Peter and Patty were deep in conversation, nor would they allow themselves to be interrupted for all Phil's dignity. So after a minute or two of sullenness, Phil was forced to rejoin Carrie, and make overtures of peace by silently placing a hand on the hoop she trundled, and giving an interrogative grunt. Carrie had nothing to forgive: the pavement was clear before them for many tempting yards, and off they ran with shouts of pleasure.

'This is where I live,' said Phil, as they reached the house he had appeared from. 'Look, Carrie, when Peter is in good temper, or if I can catch my father as he goes out, I can get them to put me on their shoulders, and then I am so high up that I can get my hand into the torch-snuffer; it comes out black, I can tell you!'

Carrie looked longingly at the torch-snuffer; she too would have liked to blacken her plump white fingers.

'Shall I ask Peter? he looks pleased,' said Phil.

'Do,' urged Carrie in great excitement, peering up into the snuffer. ' 'Tis like an iron nightcap,' she added.

' 'Tis not often Peter will do it, for you see he has to wash my hands,' said Phil. 'Father is better. O good luck, Carrie, here he comes!' for as the children stood together on the steps, the great door with its iron knocker swung open, and a man came out, closing the door behind him.

'Hillo, Phil! alone? Where hath Peter disappeared to? And who is the lady you have forgathered with?' he said, as he looked down in amusement at the children. Peter came swinging along the Square, red to his powdered locks, and Patty, overcome with confusion, stood still at some distance and beckoned to Carrie to run to her.

'O no, sir, I am not alone; Peter is talking to a woman there, and——' said Phil.

'And you are following his example,' laughed Phil's father. 'And what is your name, my little lady?'

Carrie was smitten with sudden shyness, and thought of beginning to cry. She thrust her dimpled hand into her eye and rubbed it hard, and did not speak. Peter came up breathless and apologetic.

'I was but speaking with a friend, sir,' he exclaimed; 'an' Master Phil he did run away along the Square, sir, and——'

‘Tush, Peter, there is little harm done,’ said his master, and would have passed on, but Phil barred his path.

‘If you please, sir, Caroline would like to put her hand into the torch-snuffer: will you lift her?’

‘And what will Caroline’s maid say?’ laughed Phil’s father.

‘Nothing, sir, if you do it,’ Phil urged, and at that his father stooped down and swung Carrie up on to his shoulder, and bade her poke her fingers into the envied grime of the snuffer.

‘And now give me a kiss for it,’ he said; and Carrie, her shyness quite cured by the delightfully black aspect of her fingers, gave the salute with great freedom.

‘Wasn’t that most agreeable?’ asked Phil; he alluded not to the kiss, but to the soot. Patty at this moment, seeing some interference necessary, came forward with a curtsey to claim her charge.

‘I fear I have led your little lady into mischief,’ said Phil’s father to her, smiling very pleasantly. Patty murmured incoherent excuses, curtseyed again, and bade Carrie say good-day to the gentleman. As they walked away Carrie heard Phil’s voice—it was singularly clear—echoing along the quiet Square.

‘Caroline, sir.’ And then, in reply to another question—

‘Caroline, sir; I do not know what else.’ It was well for Carrie that she could not overhear what followed—

‘A child of singular beauty. . . . Peter, who is she?’

‘I—I cannot say, sir. I am slightly acquainted with the young woman as looks after her, sir,’ said Peter, and he looked so ashamed of himself, and so uncomfortable, that his master did not question him further, but passed down the steps, laughing as he went.

Patty on the homeward way was very silent. When they reached Jermyn Street she took Carrie straight up-stairs and closed the nursery door. Then she stood in front of the child menacingly.

‘Mind, Miss Caroline, if ever you do say to master or to mistress one word of meeting with this little gentleman, I’ll—I’ll lock you up in a black hole.’

‘Why, Patty?’ began Carrie.

‘Well, you had best ask no questions, or mayhap I’ll put you in the hole for that,’ said Patty; and then, because in the main she was a good-hearted girl, and hated to frighten Carrie, she kissed the child and assured her over and over again that if no word of this meeting ever crossed her lips, she would have chestnuts to roast on the ribs of the nursery grate, and nuts to eat by the handful.

So Carrie agreed to be silent.

CHAPTER XIII

Now so pleasant and easy is it to tread the primrose path, that after the first difficulty of being silent about her new playmate was got over, Carrie never thought about the matter, and it became quite a daily thing that the children met and walked together while Patty and Peter sauntered in the rear, very much occupied with each other.

Phil was a curious boy, of great strength of character: a hot-tempered, domineering child, horribly clever for his age, very imaginative, and withal sadly spoilt. Peter, it is true, held his young master in very scant reverence, and would speak to him at times with great sharpness, but his was the only control that was ever exercised over the child. Carrie, who had no temper at all, was frightened almost out of her little judgment the first time she saw Phil in one of his worst fits of anger. They were walking in St. James' Park, and Phil began to throw stones into the water at the water-fowl, spluttering his fine new velvet suit at each splash.

'Mustn't be after that game, Master Phil,' said Peter, and Phil continued his stone-throwing with aristocratic indifference.

'Did you hear, Master Phil? You're spoilin' them new clothes,' said Peter, and approaching to where Phil stood he forcibly removed the stones from his hands. Phil's face was convulsed in a moment with horrid passion. He fell on his knees on the walk and scraped up the mud and gravel in handfuls, pelting the stately Mr. Peter's calves in futile anger.

'I shall do as I please, Peter; you are a servant, and you shall not stop me throwing stones—there—and there—and there.' He emphasised each word with another handful of gravel.

Carrie drew away to Patty's side, shocked into silence. Patty said 'Lor',' and Peter smiled.

' 'E's a little imp,' he said; 'there's but the one way to manage him,' And with that he lifted Phil suddenly to his feet, shook him sharply, and boxed his ears till the child began to cry.

'There, that'll settle you,' he said. He pushed poor Phil before him along the path, and stooped down to brush from his immaculate stockinged legs the marks of this ignoble conflict.

Carrie, being admonished by Patty to rejoin her companion, advanced rather timidly towards him. Phil was quite white now, and shook all over.

'I think I shall go home now, Peter,' he said in a very humble little voice; 'I feel most terribly tired—will you take me home?'

'Yes, Master Phil,' said Peter, quite pleasantly, and with adieux to Carrie and Patty, they walked off together up the Mall.

'Lor'! what a life Mr. Peter do lead with the boy!' said Patty occultly. Carrie was silent, and watched the retreating forms of the little Phil and the mighty Peter till they became merged in the throng.

As they came to see more and more of each other the children's intercourse assumed a definite character, which one often notices in childish friendships. Phil, as the elder and more original-minded of the two, assumed as it were command, led the conversation, and Carrie, deeply admiring his powers of mind, and quite content to be commanded, took all her ideas from him. Phil indeed was vastly entertaining to her after the pre-occupied silence of Patty, but sometimes his views rather startled her childish fancy.

They had gone far afield one fine day in late autumn—even to the Park—a world of delight to the children, and Peter and Patty, having seated themselves under one of the trees, Phil and Carrie followed the example of their elders and sat down also.

'I wish God would come,' said Phil suddenly, gazing up through the branches above him. 'Do you not, Carrie?'

'No—o,' admitted the feeble-minded Carrie.

'I do, and I shall tell you why. Peter took me to his meeting-house, where they pray without a book, and they prayed, "*Rend the heavens and come down*." Well, since that I've lain down whenever I've got a chance and looked up into the sky. 'Tis too bright to look into nicely most days, but if God were to make a rent in that blue bit we see' (he pointed up as he spoke, and Carrie glanced upwards, half expecting to see some Beatific Vision), 'if He were to make a hole to come down through, you know, we should see something brighter than that behind, I believe. And then He'd come down—oh, like that!' Phil brought his hands together with a crack that made Carrie jump.

'I'd be frightened,' she said, taking a reassuring peep at the placid blue that smiled above them. It showed no signs of cracking open, she thought.

‘Pooh,’ said Phil contemptuously. ‘I believe you had rather that the other God came—the Jesus God. He is quite different, and will not come the same way at all. I fancy He’d *walk* into the town: coming the Richmond way perhaps, about the blossomy time of the year. We would just be walking along Piccadilly perhaps, and we’d see every one turning to look, and . . .’

Phil’s imagination gave out here; he had not given enough of thought to the subject to visualise it perfectly, so he returned to his former and more favourite imagining—

‘Now what pleases me about t’other God coming would be the noise—drums, and bugles. Don’t you love ’em, Carrie? I went with my father to the Horse Guards t’other day. Oh, you should have heard it! Well, God will have gold bugles of course—the ones I heard were just tin, I think—and the gold bugles and God’s drums together, they’d make a noise no one could get away from. Now what do you suppose every one we know would do? I wonder what my father would do? Peter would come running up the back stair to look after *me*—I’m sure of that—in case I was afraid. Not that I would be,’ he added hastily.

‘When do you think it will happen?’ asked Carrie, very much awed, though Phil had finished off with a shrill little twirl of laughter.

‘Oh, perhaps next week, or perhaps to-night, Peter says. I believe God will come down on the gilt top of St. Paul’s myself. Such a fine place to land on from the sky,’ continued the little prophet, inspired as all prophets are by a credulous audience. ‘He’d—He’d—oh, I don’t know what I was going to say. Carrie, look round the tree and see if Peter is kissing Patty, for I want to climb the tree, and ’tis safe to begin if he’s doing that.’

Carrie obediently reconnoitred; ‘I think he’s going to,’ she reported. ‘He has his arm round her waist, and he always begins that way.’

‘Come on then,’ said the prophet, leaving the Second Advent unceremoniously behind him, as he addressed himself to the ascent of a very smutty tree-trunk, much to the detriment of his own and Carrie’s finery.

CHAPTER XIV

One day not very long after this Patty came into the nursery breathless and agitated.

‘Lord save us! Miss Carrie, what do you think? Master Phil hath near killed himself! I’m but just in from a message, and who should I meet but Mr. Peter, running like mad, and with never a hat to his head! ’Taint often as Mr. Peter passeth by me in the street, but he waved and passed on without one word, and up to the door of Dr. James and kicks till the door do near split across. When he’d given his message he found time to return to where I was a-standin’—for in troth I had such a terror at the sight of Mr. Peter flyin’ down the street that I stood as if I had the palsy, and must so stand there till he returned. “Well, Mr. Peter,” I said, “you seem pressed for time this day.” “Miss Patty,” saith he (and believe me he could scarce get out the words for agitation),—“*Miss Patty, my young master’s near burned to death*.” ’

Patty was breathless with agitation herself at this point, and to recover her breath and relieve her surcharged feelings she seized a brush and began to arrange Carrie’s locks with more energy than gentleness. Carrie, deeply stirred by this tale, listened in great anxiety for further details. Patty then proceeded—

‘Being dinner-time, all the house was still, and Master Phil slips from the nursery and into the master’s own room he do go, and commences playing with the log fire. He hath a great fancy for pilin’ on the logs, same as he seeth Mr. Peter a-doing, and he’d lifted one too heavy an’ overbalanced hisself into the fire. He’d on a silk suit with ruffles, and it fired direct, and the whole body of him was blazing in a moment. The master’s gentleman, as was in the dressing-room a-putting away of the master’s clothes, he came running in and pulled Master Phil out from the heart o’ the fire! They’d a business tearing off his clothes! and now there he do lie in the master’s own bed a-screamin’ in agony.’

Carrie was deeply impressed; it was not her nature to weep easily over anything, but she approached the nursery fire and stood gazing at the cruel element that had worked such sad havoc on her poor little playmate.

Patty, with hysteric exclamations, pulled her back and declared she would never have an easy moment again—never. But a few moments later she found it necessary to flounce off to the kitchen, to repeat her tale there with many sappy additions.

Carrie, thus deserted, quietly drew her little chair close to the fire, and looked at the flames with a very serious face. She even extended one of her fat little fingers towards the bars experimentally, withdrawing it, however, with less caution, and a moment later she said 'Poor Phil!' with heart-felt compassion.

Patty ran in then, and shook her roughly. 'What did I say, Miss Carrie?—never beyond the rug, and there you do sit close in to the very blaze! How, Miss Carrie, mind you obey me better, and partickerly in this, never to say one word of Master Phil to the master or the mistress. And if so be you do, well, of this I'm sure as I stand in my shoes: you'll never play again with Master Phil so long as you live.'

Carrie did not in the least understand the reason of all this mystery about Phil; but she reiterated once more her promise of secrecy.

That night as she curtseyed to her parents at bedtime, she said suddenly —

'Doth burning hurt, dada?'

Sebastian laughed. 'Are you going to the stake, Carrie?' he said.

'No, not *me*,' said Carrie, with some congratulation in her tones.

One day, some three weeks after this, Patty said mysteriously to Carrie that they were going out that afternoon to pay a visit. 'We are to see Master Phil,' she said, when they were in the street; and Carrie jumped for joy.

'O Patty, I am so glad! Is he better? Where are we to see him?' she cried.

'In his bed, miss, but mind if ever you do say a word——'

Carrie was quite impatient.

'You are most strange about Phil, Patty,' she said; 'I am sure he is nicer far to speak about than any one else I know.'

'Oh, well, Miss Carrie, we'll be going home then; we'll say no more about the visit,' said Patty, making a feint of turning back.

'No, no, 'tis all right, I shall say nothing,' said Carrie. On the steps of the great house, which Carrie knew quite well now, she saw the familiar figure

of Mr. Peter, evidently waiting for them.

'I'll trouble you to enter by the back way,' he said, as he greeted them, and with that he conducted his visitors to the kitchen regions. Everything here was bustle and hurry, for up-stairs dinner was being served. They met a French cook in a white paper cap dashing out of the kitchen with a saucepan in his hand, and ran against another man-servant, as tall as Mr. Peter, who carried a silver dish. Then, leaving these regions, they began to climb long, long stairs, and came out at last on to a polished oak corridor hung with pictures.

'Lor', Mr. Peter, this be terrible fine!' said Patty, quite overawed. Mr. Peter sniffed, and affected great unconsciousness.

'Walk quiet, if you please,' he said, 'and on the carpet, missie; these floors do mark very easy with boot-marks.'

He opened a door very cautiously, and looked into a large fire-lit room. It was very still.

' 'Ere's a visitor for you, Master Phil,' said Mr. Peter, stepping on tiptoe towards a huge canopied bed which occupied the side of the room and faced the fire. With a sign to Carrie to follow him, Mr. Peter drew back one of the satin curtains, and then, followed by Patty, tiptoed away again into the adjoining room. Carrie crept up to the side of the bed and peered into its tent-like depths. There lay Phil, propped up with pillows, white and thin, his shining restless eyes moving ceaselessly round him.

'Well,' said Carrie, after the unemotional manner of children.

'Hullo!' said Phil. He started up in bed, and then fell back against the pillows with a cry.

Carrie was tremendously impressed by all she saw around her:—the size and grandeur of the room, the satin hangings of the bed, embroidered all over with crests and coats of arms, the silk coverlet under which Phil reposed, the solemn quiet of the room, and the weird whiteness of her little companion's face.

It was all indelibly stamped upon her memory in a moment, a scene never to be forgotten.

She laid her little hand on the stiff silk cover and found nothing to say.

'Oh, I'm glad to see you, Carrie,' said Phil then, who was never at a loss for words. He tossed his head restlessly about as he spoke. 'They do not let me play, or anything, since I have been ill.'

‘Do you hurt much?’ asked Carrie, to whom pain was an unknown mystery and dignity.

‘Yes, my hands hurt most terribly; see, each finger is tied up by itself in a little bag—that is why I cannot play with anything.’

‘Shall I whistle to you?’ asked Carrie, struck by a sudden inspiration. ‘A friend of my father’s has taught me to whistle, and he says I do it to admiration.’ She jumped on to the edge of the bed, flung back her head, and whistled off a gay little roulade.

Phil laughed delightedly. ‘O do that again; you look like the poodles I saw in Paris. They threw back their heads and howled in a chorus,’ he cried.

‘Well, you pretend you are the other poodle,’ said Carrie; ‘I find it difficult whistling alone. Mr. Tillet, who teaches me, always whistles with me.’

‘Who’s Tillet?’ asked Phil.

‘He’s a soldier—a man my father knows.’

‘A soldier! oh, I suppose he will be a general—they are all generals,’ said Phil.

‘I think he is a bugler—is that the same?—something, I suppose; they all fight.’

‘Well, never mind; do it again, Carrie, ’tis such fun to see you.’

‘My mother does not like me to whistle,’ said Carrie, ‘but my father is ever teaching me new tunes, and Mr. Tillet, so I have to learn, but, if you please, I had rather look round the room, Phil; I want to look into that long mirror.’ So Carrie slipped down off the bed and walked (by irresistible feminine instinct drawn) towards the long French mirror, the like of which she had never seen before, and then she played for a few minutes with the Dresden china dishes on the dressing-table.

‘You take care with my father’s razors,’ warned Phil; ‘but they are not there—I forgot he wasn’t sleeping here. I have this room all to myself, and oh! it’s gloomy at night. You see that big wardrobe over there—well, I think all manner of things come out of it through the night. You see sometimes Peter sits with me, and sometimes nurse, but they both often go asleep, and then——’

Moved by this recital of nightly terrors, Carrie came back to the side of Phil’s bed and took another compassionate look at him.

‘I am so tired of lying here,’ he said crossly. ‘And you know, though my father makes a lot of me when I am well sometimes, he never comes near me now that I am ill—just when I would like him. My father is rather amusing sometimes, you know.’

‘What would he amuse you with?’ asked Carrie.

‘Oh, he teaches me a number of things. He can swear beautifully. I have learnt some of that, but when I used one of his expressions the other day they all laughed at me; ’twas rather hard, I thought. My father said: “Bravely tried, Phil, but you scarce apply it rightly yet,” and they all laughed again. I shall not learn for him again in a hurry.’

Carrie was very sympathetic, and Phil continued—

‘Then I play sometimes with him—we have shilling points; ’tis good fun that, Carrie, but my father says just now I am too cross to play with.’

‘Oh, let me play with you,’ Carrie cried, ‘I have learnt that too.’

Phil rolled over uneasily on his pillows. ‘Peter,’ he called, in a very lordly fashion,—‘Peter, bring a pack of cards.’

Peter obeyed with some reluctance. ‘See you ain’t a-hurtin’ of your hands, Master Phil,’ he said. ‘You let missie shuffle an’ deal, like a good young gen’l’man.’

‘Oh, you be damned, Peter!’ said Phil hastily, and Peter disappeared into the other room, drawing up his shoulders to his ears in a very expressive fashion.

‘Now, you sit on the end of the bed, Carrie, and we’ll have a jolly time,’ said Phil, his ill-temper as quickly gone as it had come.

Carrie scrambled up on to the stiff yellow satin coverlet, and dealt out the cards across it, while Phil obligingly flattened out his poor little burnt knees to form an even table.

They were deep in their game, when Patty came to take Carrie home. Phil’s cheeks were pink with excitement, and he called out to Peter to go away and let them play on. But Peter, with great unconcern, swept together the cards that lay on the quilt and lifted Carrie to the ground.

‘Peter, you are a beast; leave these cards, I tell you!’ cried Phil.

‘Sorry, Master Phil, ’tis too late,’ said Peter, extending his hand towards the cards that Phil still held; ‘missie must be goin’ now.’

Carrie stood on tiptoe to wave a better adieu to her playmate, but Phil did not notice her; he was gathering together all his sick little strength to avenge himself on the inexorable Peter.

'There, you devilled flunkey!' he screamed, pitching the cards into Peter's face and falling back against the pillows with a sharp cry of pain.

Peter covered the child gently with the bed-clothes, gathered up the cards in silence, and signed to Patty and Carrie to follow him out of the room.

'That's some of the master's speech he's pickin' up,' he said, with a shake of the head; 'he don't swear very skilful, as you may see, Miss Patty —no fear but he'll get at that yet,' he added, with a half smile, half sigh.

Carrie, rather awed at this scene, took tight hold of Patty's hand and did not speak till they were well out in the street again.

'I do not think Phil is very happy,' she said then.

'Not he, Miss Carrie—not for all his grand house an' altogether, for he's a bad boy he is,' responded the moral Patty.

CHAPTER XV

It was a long time until Carrie saw Phil again.

‘Master Phil hath gone off to the country to establish his ’ealth,’ Patty said, and it seemed as though he would never return again, Carrie thought; for often as she sighed for her little companion, he did not come, and finally Patty, who seemed to have occult communication with the household in St. James’ Square, informed her that Phil had gone to school. Patty wept as she gave this bit of information, and Carrie, partly, it must be confessed, out of the imitative faculty, wept also at the news. Time, they say, dries every tear—perhaps it does—certainly Carrie’s were soon dried; but she remembered Phil long and tenderly for all that, and used to ask Patty at intervals if she was never going to see him again. Patty always answered these questions with a burst of tears, which response had such a sobering effect upon Carrie that she at last feared to make the inquiry. But one day, fully a year from the date of Phil’s accident, as Patty and Carrie walked round the Square together they met a tall lad, having the shining eyes of Phil, but changed, it seemed, in every other way beyond recognition. He was walking along with another boy, and passed by Carrie with an unregarding stare. Carrie stood still, stamped her little foot in anger, and turned to Patty for sympathy.

‘ ’Twas Phil, Patty!’ she cried, ‘and he passed me without knowing me!’

Patty gave her head an upward toss.

‘Pay no heed to him, Miss Carrie; the men are all alike—not one to mend another,’ she said scornfully. They were passing at that moment the door whence the magnificent Peter had been wont to appear.

Carrie, however, was not so easily answered. She followed Phil’s retreating figure as it disappeared round the Square, before she spoke again, then she said, with great decision—

‘There goes my husband that is to be, Patty.’

‘Lor’! have a care what you say in the streets, Miss Carrie!’ cried Patty, with a delighted giggle.

Thus Phil passed out of Carrie’s life for the time being.

It was not an age of learned women, so though Carrie began her education about this time, she was not the disquieting receptacle of knowledge that modern childhood sometimes is in our progressive age. Carrie learned to read and write, she could do a little arithmetic, and began to sew a sampler of intricate stitchery; but she could not analyse her native tongue, or speak in any other, and I fear even her knowledge of geography was very hazy. Indeed, if the truth must be told about Carrie, she was entirely unintellectual in every way. Lessons were nothing but a pain to her, and as in these days a woman was not thought to add to her charms by wisdom, Carrie was not compelled to pursue her studies after she had attained to a certain very easy standard.

She was compelled, however, to learn all the housekeeping arts, and Mrs. Shepley expected nothing short of perfection in this branch of education. By the time Carrie was thirteen there was a good deal of friction between the mother and daughter. For Carrie, to her want of intellectuality, added a supreme carelessness, which was agonising to her conventional parent. If she had been an incapable girl it would have been different; but Carrie was far from incapable. When she chose, no girl of her age could accomplish any household task better. Yet, where it was a question of pleasure, Carrie would fling aside every duty and amuse herself without a thought. She had indeed a whole-heartedness of joy in living, that would have reconciled almost any one except Mrs. Shepley to her heedless ways. But to her they were unpardonable, and the worst of it all was, that Carrie's father encouraged her in her careless habits—making it almost useless for her to remonstrate.

How it would have fared between the mother and daughter later in life is hard to say. They were both spared this test. For soon after Carrie's fourteenth birthday was past, Mrs. Shepley fell ill of a lingering disorder, and lay for many a long month between life and death. Carrie grew less careless in these months of anxiety, grew quieter also, poor child—never shut the doors noisily, and almost forgot how to whistle, while Sebastian went about with a very grave face. Now that Emma was so ill, he recognised what a good wife she had been to him in spite of all her failings, and realised too what it would mean to him should he be left with Carrie motherless on his hands. Whatever Emma's faults had been, she had been a careful mother, and had given a zealous watchfulness to everything concerning Carrie that he never could have time to give.

It must have been weighing on Emma's mind also, this matter of how Carrie was to get on without her, but she looked at it in a characteristic light.

Almost with her latest breath she called Sebastian to her bedside to pray him to be particular about Carrie's associates.

'Let Charlotte Mallow see that Carrie makes no friends out of her own situation in life—beneath her, in fact.'

'Lord, Emma, the girl's all right. I am here to protect her,' said Sebastian.

' 'Tis the old trouble, Sebastian—you do not see what I mean.—Ah! let her grow up a gentlewoman.'

'I'll do my best, Emma,' he said.

'I pray you to send her to church each Lord's Day,' pursued Mrs. Shepley. 'Send her with Charlotte; you have ever been careless of the Church and its mysteries.'

'To church she shall go,' said Sebastian—'if that will make her a gentlewoman,' he added to himself.

So Mrs. Shepley, with her little gentilities and punctilios, her tactless ways and her zeal for ordinances, went the way of all flesh.

Sebastian was not broken-hearted, though the house felt empty enough, he thought, without poor Emma; and Carrie, after the first solemn months of mourning were over, missed her mother sadly little.

She lived a perfectly happy unconstrained existence, which accorded well with her simple nature. Sebastian, who was nothing if not truthful, sent her to church weekly with Lady Mallow, and these were the dreariest hours of Carrie's otherwise unclouded childhood. Each Sunday morning Lady Mallow appeared with horrible regularity, driving in a singularly gloomy-looking coach, which seemed to Carrie to swallow her up as she entered it. In silence they drove through the crowded streets (which on Sunday had a way of looking very gloomy too), and the coach drew up before the door of that sad little building, the church of St. Mary Minories. Lady Mallow occupied one of those carved oak pews which to this day you may see mouldering away in the church, and there in its genteel obscurity Carrie sat, with a sinking heart, counting the slow-passing minutes till she could breathe the fresher air of the everyday world again. Patty had once told her that 'persons of quality was buried in 'eaps under the floor in St. Mary Minories,' and Carrie's imagination hovered over this gruesome thought. She somehow connected that damp old smell which clings about the church with the 'heaps an' heaps of persons of quality' lying in their shrouds under the chancel, and each day as she asserted her belief in the resurrection of the

body, found herself wondering how the poor dead people would ever work their way up through those slabs of stone. So Carrie required all the fortitude and cheerfulness which she inherited from her father to sustain the ordeal of Sunday's gloom.

Service once over, however, she stepped into the auntly coach with a much lighter heart. The drive home seemed an altogether different matter from the drive to church, and each step of the way Carrie's spirits mounted higher and higher, till, when the coach drew up before the door, she could have danced for joy. Bidding a decorous adieu to her aunt, Carrie was handed out by the man-servant, and mounted the steps to the door with the greatest propriety. But it was well that the departing rumble of the wheels hid from Lady Mallow's ear that whoop of joy which Carrie uttered as she raced into the parlour and flung her arms round her father's neck, crying out,

' 'Tis done—done for another week, sir!'

Mrs. Shepley had never permitted such demonstrative greetings—they were indeed considered a great breach of decorum in those days; but I fear many polite rules were broken in upon by Carrie and her father, who neither of them cared as much as they should have done for the generally received ideas of the society of their day.

Such good friends were Carrie and her father that the girl sought for no friends of her own age; she went about everywhere with Sebastian when he had leisure to escort her, and when he was busy she amused herself at home, very well content with life and all things. In her father's company she visited many a strange scene; she would go with him to the hospitals sometimes, and—shade of Mrs. Shepley!—how many a sight she saw in these unsavoury tents of disease! Then Carrie entertained all her father's friends (those motley friends her poor mother had objected to so much), and in many ways grew up with more of the manners of a boy than of a girl. She was singularly free from the sillinesses and affectations of early girlhood, having heard no talk at all of lovers or admiration, nor having ever entered into rivalry with other women in the matter of looks and charm. Carrie was serenely unconscious that the world held a rival for her; she was the first with all the men of her own little world, and as yet she had not gone beyond it. If she compared her own looks with those of other girls, it was merely from curiosity quite untouched by jealous feeling. The fact was only distantly dawning upon her that she was fair beyond the common; just now she took it as her due from Fortune's kindly hand.

CHAPTER XVI

Miss Caroline Shepley, up to the age of seventeen years, had perhaps, in her own way, lived as happy a life as it is granted to many young persons to live. She looked like it too; wearing that air of pleased good humour that is a passport to every heart, and blooming like a rose, in spite of the fact that she had never been out of London all her days. Carrie was very tall, with just the same fearless brilliant blue eyes that her father had, but from her mother she had inherited a skin as white as milk, with a clear pink colour in the cheeks, two bewitching dimples, and ringlets of deep red hair. To see her pass along the streets!—— Do they grow now-a-days, these shining beauties that brightened the world of long ago, or is it that they are so common we scarcely regard them? But as time went on, Carrie's good looks became such as to be quite embarrassing both to herself and to her father, for she could never go out alone, and even in his company attracted a vast deal of attention.

'Now,' said Sebastian, 'I shall send Carrie to the country with her aunt, as she has so often been pressed to go, else her head will be turned altogether.'

Lady Mallow's establishment certainly promised to be dull enough for safety. Her Ladyship, who was rich enough to indulge in fancies about climate, had taken an idea that London did not suit her health. On her brother-in-law's suggestion, she had taken a house in the neighbourhood of Wynford, and there was passing the summer months in genteel and plethoric seclusion—for alas! Lady Mallow was becoming stout in middle life. From all he remembered of Wynford twenty years ago, Sebastian smiled to think of the conventual existence poor Carrie might lead there.

'You must go to the village of Wynford and see where your grandfather sold drugs; but there's not one of our name left there now,' he said.

'Sir! my dear sir! what would my aunt Charlotte say should I propose to visit where any one related to me had traded in anything, at any time?' said Carrie—and indeed she was right.

So one splendid May morning Lady Mallow's coach drew up before the door of the Shepleys' house, and the beautiful Carrie came out upon the

steps, drawing on her long gloves, while her baggage was stowed away in the rumble of the coach.

'Well, Carrie, adieu to you, and Heaven bless you!' said her father; and Carrie, unconventional as usual, turned suddenly, in the full view of her aunt's decorous footman, flung her arms round Sebastian, and kissed him tenderly.

'I do not wish to leave you, sir; I had rather far stay with you,' she cried; but Sebastian laughed at her, and bade her not keep those spirited animals which her aunt drove 'waiting upon her sentimentalities.'

The spirited animals waddled off down the street very deliberately, and Carrie sat back in the coach and waved her hand till she was out of sight. Though she had not been altogether pleased to leave home, it would certainly be a new and delightful thing to leave London smoke behind her, and drive far out into the wonderful green country. No train had yet snorted through these fair English meadows, and the depth of their tranquillity was like a dreamless sleep. To the heart that has known sorrow—and perhaps more to the heart that has missed joy—the jubilant burgeoning of spring will sometimes bring an intolerable sadness. But in the first blossom and fairness of her youth, with her sunny childhood barely left behind, with hope ahead, these stainless blue skies, and the rich promise of the bursting leafage, filled Carrie's heart with a sort of ecstasy. She fairly clapped her hands at the hackneyed old sight of a meadow where lambs were gambolling, and called out to the coachman, praying him to stop and let her buy a drink of milk at a cottage door where a cow was being milked. Towards the end of the day these pleasures began to pall a little, and when at last the coach drew up at Lady Mallow's door Carrie was not sorry to alight. The forty miles that lay between her and London seemed very long in the retrospect, and a sudden chill of home-sickness fell over her spirit as she entered the decorous portals of her aunt's abode. 'I wonder why I ever came,' she thought. 'Aunt Charlotte will fidget me to death—and I shall be so dull, and I think London is ever so much nicer than the country.' We must all be familiar with such misgivings, and familiar too with the extraordinary difference which a night's rest makes in such a case. Carrie rose up next morning with much more rose-coloured views of life. 'Aunt Charlotte is vastly dull, but how agreeable to be here!—and O how beautiful, how beautiful!' she said as she gazed out at the new surroundings, smelt the country sweetness, and longed for breakfast. Lady Mallow, indeed, was quite shocked by Carrie's appetite. 'You will become stout, my dear,' she said. ' 'Tis most ungenteel for a

young gentlewoman like you to eat so freely!' Carrie was a little ashamed of herself.

'You see, madam,' she explained, 'I live always with men, and perhaps their example has made me eat as they do. I do not think I shall become very fat, because all my life I have been hungry, and I have not become fat yet, you see.'

The restrictions of her aunt's society began to press upon Carrie pretty heavily by the afternoon. All morning she had had to sit indoors sewing at her embroidery, then, about two o'clock, she must drive out for a slow airing until dinner, then came two hours more of talk and embroidery, and after supper a game of whist with double-dummy. And outside, while all these golden hours dragged so slowly past, was the grand, twittering, budding spring world waiting to be explored! Carrie beat an impatient tattoo upon the floor with her little foot, and answered Lady Mallow's questions rather incoherently.

CHAPTER XVII

The next day was the same, and the next and the next. On the fourth day, urged by despair, Carrie sat down to write to Sebastian the whole tale of her woe.

'Sir, I shall die,' she wrote. ' 'Tis terrible; I do not like living with women, I find men vastly more agreeable. Pray, pray, dear sir—my dearest dada—write and summon me home, for I am weary of my life here at Wynford.'

Sebastian laughed a good deal over this mournful missive, and wrote Carrie to try to cultivate patience and the womanly graces.

But before his letter had reached her, help had come to Carrie from an unexpected quarter. Lady Mallow, by the kindness of Heaven, fell sick of an influenza, which painful disorder confined the poor lady to her bed, and set Carrie at liberty.

And *ennui* fled: and with happy hurrying feet Carrie raced down the avenue and along the sweet hedge-bordered roads, going she knew not whither—but away, away from bondage and embroidery and double-dummy whist!

She turned off into a side lane, and then stood looking across the country to see which direction seemed the most promising.

The river plainly beckoned her: so, thrusting her way through the hedge, Carrie set off across the meadows towards the silvery loops of water that slipped along so invitingly in the distance. The fields were white with anemone blossoms. She stood among them in perfect rapture, and then got down upon her knees and began to pull the flowers in handfuls; then further off, along the river bank, she saw a great thicket of blossoming thorn, white as snow, and off she ran towards it.

Carrie flung down all her freshly gathered flowers in a heap upon the grass when she reached the thorn bushes. For these blossoms were lovelier by far than anything she had seen yet; the little starry flowers set on to their jagged black stems had a beauty all their own. Undismayed by the assailing thorns, Carrie pressed into the thicket to gather some of the coveted branches. Her hair caught on the bushes, her dress gave a distracting tear,

and finally she scratched her plump white arm up to the elbow. This at last sobered her adventurous spirit. She tried to escape from the clinging branches, but being town-bred, she was ignorant of the fact that to turn round in a thorn thicket is to imprison yourself hopelessly there. So Carrie twisted quickly round, thinking to find herself free, and instead felt of a sudden twenty more thorns catch on her unfortunate person. She shook her head, and a branch a-dance in the breeze clutched her hair like a human hand.

'O you beautiful cross bushes!' cried Carrie in despair, 'I will not gather more of you, if you will but let me go!'

'Can I help you, madam?' said a voice behind her at this moment, and some one laughed. Carrie could not turn round to see who had come to her assistance, but she laughed also.

'O yes, I thank you,' she cried; 'I do not know what to do, I am all caught round and round.'

'Come out backwards; do not try to turn, I shall hold the branches here for you. Take heed for your eyes, madam,' said her helper. Carrie began to beat a slow retreat, disengaging herself from the clinging branches one by one. At last, torn and dishevelled, she shook off the last assailant and turned round to see who had come to her aid.

A young man with very shining eyes stood beside her, still holding back the thorn bushes with one hand. They looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then the young man exclaimed in a tone of surprised amusement,

'Now, by all the powers! 'Tis little Carrie Shepley!' And Carrie, in spite of her ruffled plumage, responded to this salutation with great urban ease of manner.

'And this is "Phil" that used to be?' she said, holding out her hand to him.

'Carrie, you are scarce changed at all, saving that you are grown to be near as tall as I am,' said Phil, and he eyed Carrie with great admiration as he took her hand.

'Nor you either, Mr.—Mr.—I forget your surname,' said Carrie, drawing herself up with some dignity at this rather free address from a stranger. But as she spoke she met Phil's shining eyes so ridiculously unchanged that she laughed outright and came down from her high horse without further delay.

‘You are not Mr. Anything, I think—only Phil,’ she said. ‘I could think, to look at us both just now, that we were playing in the Park, and that Patty and Peter would come round the corner in a moment to scold us! Pray, sir—Phil—where are you come from, and how do we meet here?’

‘Come and sit by the river, and I shall tell you everything you care to hear,’ said Phil. And Carrie, nothing loath, sat down on the bank, gathered her torn flounces around her, and gave a surreptitious smooth to her straying locks.

‘Well, I must tell you, you are a trespasser, Carrie, on my father’s land. But ’twould be an ungracious way to renew an old friendship to arrest you—so I let that pass. My father, if you must know, is Mr. Richard Meadowes of Fairmeadowes—the house you see far away there among the trees; that is how I come to be here.’

‘Do you live always here then?’ asked Carrie.

‘I? no—I am but come from Oxford for Easter. I am alone here though just now. My father is in town.—But you have not yet told me how you are here, Carrie?’

‘I am visiting my aunt, Lady Mallow. She hath taken Forde, the house which stands on the sloping ground about half a mile from here along the high road. And indeed, indeed, Phil, I have come near running away to London, so dull have I been these four days since I came to Wynford.’

‘Dull—ah, ’tis a terrible thing to be dull,’ said Phil sympathetically; ‘once I was dull—just once in life, and I made the resolve never to suffer it again. I can bear to be unhappy, or even to be in pain; but dulness—never. I’d sooner get drunk than be dull!’ And at that the young man went off into a curiously ringing laugh that sounded across the fields like a bell.

‘Then are you never dull here?’ asked Carrie in amazement.

‘O no—never. I come here once or twice in the year, and I bring with me books to last me all the time and more; sometimes I work hard, hard, till I feel as though my brain would crack—’tis rather nice that, and then I come down here by the river and amuse myself; or I ride, or shoot the crows, or anything else there is to shoot. But the first morning I waken at an end of my resources, that day I leave Wynford. Oh, but I love Fairmeadowes. I never tire here.’

‘You are just the same,’ said Carrie, more emphatically than before; ‘to hear you talk—’tis just as you used to.’ She looked down at Phil as she spoke. He had flung himself down on the bank at her feet, and was gazing

up at her in the frankest manner possible. ‘Why, how old are you?’ she asked suddenly, as unceremonious as he was, and Phil answered without a moment’s hesitation, ‘One-and-twenty, and horribly young it is—but there is all the world to conquer, to be sure, and only one life to do it in.’

Carrie opened her eyes at this statement. ‘How?’ she inquired.

‘How? ah, that is just the question! My father wished me to enter the Service—not I! “ ’Tis a profession for gentlemen,” he said. “Yes, and for fools,” said I, and he (who was in it himself, though he’s no fool!) was rarely angry with me. My father, you know, is a curious man—oh, I shall tell you all that another time,’ said Phil, rolling over on the bank in the most childish manner; then he rose and seated himself beside Carrie. Leaning his chin on his hand he looked down at the river as it flowed below them, and went on in a more serious tone—

‘I had no mind to enter the Service, you see, because I must have something to do that I care about. To speak now before crowds and crowds of people—that would be my ambition.’

‘But what would you speak about?’ asked Carrie laughingly—she was a splendid listener!

‘Speak! I’d speak about anything, Carrie. I’d speak eloquently for half an hour upon your shoe-strings and my entire unworthiness to unloose them!’

‘I believe you would,’ laughed Carrie; ‘you should enter the Church, Phil, then each Lord’s Day you must speak for a certain time.’

‘Not the Church for me, my imagination is by far too strong for that; ’twould have me before my Bishop in a jiffy. Oh, do you remember how scared you were once when I described to you how God would come down on the gilt top of St. Paul’s?’

‘Yes indeed; I should pity your hearers did you scare them after that fashion,’ said Carrie, with a smile of reminiscence.

‘I think I shall study for the Bar,’ began Phil, and then, because in spite of his volubility he was not a bore, he started up in genuine dismay.

‘Lord save us!’ he exclaimed; ‘here have I been talking of my own affairs so long you will never speak to me again, Carrie. Come, let me show you the path through the park, and as you love me, talk of some other matter!’

Carrie laughingly obeyed, talking in her turn of herself, and then they talked of childhood (that was not so very far behind either of them), and of Patty and of Peter. (‘He’s about the only man I respect in this world; if I could do my duty like him I should be proud,’ said Phil. ‘Why, he has never been late with my shaving-water for years.’ At this statement Carrie glanced up with a little grimace of amusement at Phil’s rather peach-like cheek, and he laughed ringingly. ‘Well, that is mayhap something of an exaggeration,’ he admitted.)

And so they sauntered on, abundantly amused with each other, till Carrie remembered with dismay the lateness of the hour, and bidding Phil a hurried farewell, ran off down the road in the direction of Forde.

Phil called after her as she ran: ‘Come again to-morrow, Carrie.’ And so they parted.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was not the nature of Mr. Philip Meadowes (as may have been gathered from his talk) to be reticent upon any subject. He had the acumen, however, which most talkative persons lack, to choose his listeners carefully; but with those whom he trusted Phil had absolutely no reserves. Chief among his confidants was Peter, the grave-faced elderly man-servant who had cuffed his ears in childhood, and now had discreetly forgotten the fact.

This evening, as Peter brought in his young master's wine, Phil, lying back in a chair, the book he had been reading thrown carelessly on the floor, addressed him quite impatiently.

'Why, where have you been all afternoon, Peter?' he said.—'Now whom do you think I met to-day, by all that is curious?'

Peter laid down the tray he carried, picked up the book from the floor, smoothed its ruffled pages, and made a feint of guessing.

'Mayhap the parson, sir?' he said.

'No, no, stupid; more interesting by far!'

'Mayhap the parson's daughter, sir?'

'Wrong again; some one a deuced deal prettier than the parson's daughter. But there, you can never guess—who but Carrie Shepley that I used to play with long ago in town, in the days when you were courting her maid Patty?'

Phil expected Peter to laugh at this resurrection of his former flirtations; but instead of laughing he stepped forward and laid his hand suddenly on his young master's arm.

'For the love of Heaven, sir, do you have naught to do with Miss Carrie Shepley!' he said.

Phil was surprised beyond measure to see the decorous Peter so startled out of his usual behaviour.

'Why, Peter, what the dickens is the matter with you?' he said.

‘This, sir, that there will be trouble betwixt you and the master if so be you takes up with Miss Carrie Shepley. I know not the rights nor the wrongs of the story, but this I knows, that there was a mighty quarrel once betwixt the master and Miss Carrie’s father, Dr. Shepley of Jermyn Street as is.’

‘Oh—ho!’ whistled Phil. ‘And what did the gentlemen fall out upon, Peter?’

‘On a woman, sir,’ said Peter, fidgeting a little uneasily.

‘And who was the woman?’

‘By the name of Anne Champion, as I gathered, sir. I overheard their quarrel, sir, through the folding-doors betwixt the rooms in St. James’ Square, sir.’

‘So that was why you and Patty were so particular that we met outside, and altogether—eh, Peter?’

‘The same, sir.’

‘Ah, Peter, I have hope for you yet! Sometimes I think you scarce human, you are so dutiful and faithful, but you stooped to some deceit, I’m glad to hear, once, all along of Patty!’

Peter smiled his demure smile.

‘ ’Twas as you say, sir,—all along of Patty,’ he assented.

Phil reverted then to the quarrel. ‘Anne Champion, Anne Champion,’ he repeated. ‘And who was Anne Champion, think you, Peter?’

Peter came up to the fireplace, re-arranged the ornaments on the mantel-shelf, blew away a speck of imaginary dust from the gilt top of the clock, and then, speaking low, he said at last—

‘Your mother, sir, if I made no mistake, sir.’

‘Eh?’ queried Phil, sitting forward in his chair, becoming suddenly sober.

‘The same, sir,’ repeated Peter.

‘And Shepley and my father fell out over my mother, by your way of it, then?’

‘ ’Twas that way for certain, sir.’

‘And what became of my mother, since you know so much, Peter?’

‘How she came by her death, sir, I have no knowledge, but this I can tell you as the master knew naught of her death till Shepley told him the same. I heard them speak it out. Saith the master, “I shall provide for her,” and saith Shepley, “She wants for naught,” and saith the master, “ ’Tis I should support her now,” and then saith Shepley, “Anne Champion is dead, and her blood be on you, and on your children,” and with that he walked out of the room and through the hall to the street door, and the whole was over. I made bold to enter the room, and there sat the master white and shakin’ like any leaf. “Sir,” says I, “there hath harm come to you,” but he made little of it, and bade me fetch him some wine. The same I did, and set to straighten the room, that was in a disorder such as never was. The master watched me a minute, and then saith he, “Can you be silent on this, Peter—no word of it to any in the house?” and with that what think you he did, sir? The most of gentlemen would have offered me money; the master he held out his hand to me like any other man. I’ve been silent on it all these years, sir, for that handshake.’

Phil had been listening breathlessly, his quick wits piecing together from Peter’s rather incoherent account some skeleton of the truth. But at this point he fairly laughed.

‘The devil he did!’ he said. ‘Now, was not that like him, Peter? Ah, you are a clever man, my good father!’

Peter smiled indulgently. ‘Now, sir, you do never give the master his due, if I may make bold to say so,’ he began. ‘But to finish with the story, sir. ’Twas not more than six weeks from then that you was brought to the house, sir, and that’s all I do know—but, sir, from it you’ll see how ’twould be if you took up with Miss Carrie Shepley.’

‘Well, Peter, if the case be so serious as you say, you and Patty should have hesitated ere you introduced us,’ said Phil mischievously.

‘Sir, sir, this is no laughing matter,’ said Peter in a sad tone, for Phil, with the incurable flippancy that characterised him, had burst into a peal of laughter at the man’s grave face.

‘Peter, you are a Methodist; pour me out my wine and go; there is no calculating what will come to me “all along of Carrie,” ’ he said. But when Peter had gone Phil rose and stood looking into the glass that hung on the wall, while he examined his features with a new interest. ‘Anne Champion,’ he repeated. And as, for the first time, he uttered his mother’s name a curious thrill passed through him. ‘Poor mother of mine,’ he said, ‘I hope I have more of you in me than of Richard Meadowes.’

CHAPTER XIX

‘Satan,’ says Dr. Watts, ‘finds mischief for idle hands to do.’ And Caroline Shepley, being very idle at Wynford, fell into mischief in a way which would have confirmed good Dr. Watts in his convictions. Lady Mallow’s influenza, by dint of coddling, had become very severe indeed, and Carrie was left quite to her own devices. What these were the readers who have followed this story so far will have little difficulty in guessing. Day after day Philip and Carrie met each other, and their acquaintance deepened and ripened with extraordinary rapidity. They seemed to have none of the preliminaries of friendship to go through, but to have arrived suddenly at intimacy. Carrie was no great letter-writer at any time, now all thoughts of writing had long ago left her; she had not put pen to paper for three weeks—so absorbing an interest is flirtation. The weather hitherto had been very fine, but at last one morning broke wet and grey. Carrie was sick at heart; how could she meet Philip out of doors on such a day? she asked herself.

Now dwellers in town may dread a wet day, yet they can scarcely dread it with that entire dismay of heart that falls upon the country dweller at sight of the blank grey heavens, the spongy roads, the dripping trees. The pleasures of the country are, in fact, entirely visionary in wet weather, its discomforts really practical. Carrie stood and looked out over the fields, yesterday so green, to-day so grey; up at the skies, yesterday so blue, to-day so leaden, and her heart died within her. What on earth should she do with herself all day? She went up-stairs and tried to be sympathetic over her aunt’s symptoms for an hour or more, then she came down-stairs again and worked at her embroidery, then she tried to read (Carrie was not intellectual, you remember), then she fell asleep and wakened to hear the dinner-bell ring, always a welcome summons to this hearty young heroine.

Dinner over, Carrie went again to inquire for the health of Lady Mallow, and as she stood beside the bed, listening with ill-concealed yawns to an enumeration of all the symptoms, Carrie became aware of a sudden lightening of the leaden skies, and a watery sunbeam shot in at the window. She could have clapped her hands for joy.

‘Now, Caroline,’ said Lady Mallow, ‘here is the *Gentlewoman’s Journal*, which contains much useful information, such as may be useful to you in

after life. I commend to your attention the article which relates to the making of wax-flowers, a most pretty accomplishment, and one which, along with other feminine parts of education, I fear your good father hath omitted from your course of study,' etc.

Carrie listened with very scant attention, but she took the Journal and made her escape from the room quickly enough.

There could be no doubt about it—the sun was trying to shine. It is true everything was dripping with moisture, but what of that? Carrie donned a long blue cloak, slipped a loose blue hood over her curls, and set off down the avenue without a thought. It must be confessed that a hope came to her that Phil too might be tempted out by this change in the weather. Nor was Carrie mistaken, for she had not gone very far along the roads—very miry they were—before she heard some one whistling gaily in the distance, and then Phil came across one of the fields, leaped the fence, and stood beside her.

'Now, how delightful, Carrie!' he began; 'I was just wondering how best I could meet you. 'Twas bold of you to venture out in such weather, but you have your reward, you see,' added this saucy young man.

'If you but knew the day I have passed!' cried Carrie. 'Come, Phil, take me to walk somewhere; I am near stifled with sitting in my aunt's chamber listening to her symptoms and reading the *Gentlewoman's Journal*.'

'We had best keep on the road, then; the fields are heavy walking to-day,' said Phil, and they stepped out along the road very well pleased with each other. It struck Carrie, however, that her companion scarcely looked so cheerful as he had done the day before; perhaps this dull weather affected his spirits, she thought.

'Tell me, what is your father like?' asked Phil suddenly. Carrie was rather surprised, but she answered with eager pride:—

'Tall above the common, and with eyes as blue as mine; and every one depends on him: half London come to him to be cured.' Phil walked along in silence for a little.

'What is the matter?' asked Carrie; 'you seem quiet to-day.'

'I was thinking—thinking of my father,' said Phil, then turning towards her with his sudden impulsive manner he burst out, ' 'Twould be strange to feel after that fashion for one's father! I'll tell you what my father is; I am so like him I can see—yes, see—straight into his mind, and I know every

thought that passes through it. All my life I've lived with him, and had everything from his hand, and for the life of me, Carrie, I cannot trust him!'

'Oh, Phil, have a care what you say!' exclaimed Carrie, but Phil, fairly driven on by the current of his words, continued without heeding her—

'Ninety-nine times he'd bless you, the hundredth time he'd curse you; his kindness, when he chooses, can't be known, and when it comes to an end he's as hard as these flints. Oh, but he is not bad through and through either, only like a rotten fruit—one bite so good and the next all gone to corruption. I sometimes look and look at him and wonder how 'twill end—the good or the bad. I'd like to have a bet on him, I'd back the devil in him though, and I'd win. And for all this, Carrie, when he talks to me, as he will sometimes for hours, 'tis all I can do not to worship him. He understands me full as well as I understand him, that's the strange thing, and he knows I know his heart. When I look at him and think about myself, I think sometimes that I am doomed to perdition. I'll go his way, only quicker, and that's the way that leads——'

All of a sudden Phil stopped, pointing down to the ground ominously.

'No,' said Carrie; 'for your eyes are open.'

'That's the way my father has gone; you don't suppose he sins with his eyes shut,' said Phil. 'He told me once (he's nothing if not frank) that——'

Round the corner of the road came a sudden sound of wheels, a jingle of harness, a plash of many horses' feet through the mire. Carrie glanced up to see a coach with outriders approaching; the men wore prune liveries, and at sight of them Phil stood still.

'*My father, Carrie*,' he said, and Carrie marvelled at his tense voice.

Splish-splash through the sparking mud came the horses, each with his jogging postilion a-back, whipping and spurring and cursing by turns, for the roads were heavy and the horses weary.

Phil and Carrie stood to the side, and Carrie took a curious glance into the coach, where a man sat, its only occupant. The next moment the coach had drawn up beside them, and the man, opening the door, stepped out on to the road, and bowed low before Carrie.

'I scarce expected to find my son in such fair company, madam,' he said, but with a little interrogative lift of his eyebrows.

Phil's face flushed, but he answered in a clear, steady voice.

‘Sir, may I have the honour to present to you Miss Caroline Shepley? It has been my good fortune to make Miss Shepley’s acquaintance since coming to Wynford.’

‘Good fortune indeed,’ said Richard Meadowes, though the name went through him like a stab. Nemesis, Nemesis!—what was this? A woman in a blue hood stood before him, who wore the very features of Sebastian Shepley, and did he dream that Philip called her by that name?

A good thing it is we do not see into men’s hearts as we look into their faces! Carrie, as she stood all unconscious by the roadside in her blue hood, saw in Richard Meadowes only an elderly man, alert-looking, and of courteous address, who smiled on her with such a singularly pleasant and interesting smile that at once she wished to see him smile again. To this end she smiled herself, and with a gesture towards Phil, she said very sweetly—

‘The fortune hath not been altogether on his side, sir, for indeed I should have fared ill at Wynford without your son’s society.’

‘Phil should know better than to ask a lady to walk out over such roads as these,’ said Meadowes, with a glance at Carrie’s shoes; for that careless young woman, who was very vain of her pretty feet, had come out in a pair of smart high-heeled satin shoes—now, alas! smart no longer.

‘Oh, we are not come so very far from home,’ said Carrie; ‘but, sir, Phil will wish to ride home with you. I shall not go farther now.’

‘You must allow me to have the honour of fetching you home in the coach,’ said Meadowes. He offered his hand to Carrie, and held open the door of the coach as he spoke.

Carrie considered it very good fun to ride home in a coach and four. She thought what fun she would make of it in her next letter to her father. But she noticed how silent Phil had become of a sudden. He sat on the back seat and allowed his father to carry on all the conversation.

At the gate of Lady Mallow’s house Carrie descended, and, with a farewell wave of her hand, tripped off up the avenue in her damp little shoes.

After Carrie had left the coach all efforts at conversation ceased entirely between father and son. But when they drew up at the door, Meadowes, as he got out, signified to Phil that he would speak with him at once in the library.

Phil followed his father with a shrug which was not noticed by the older man, as he seated himself in a large chair, and indicated to Phil that he should stand facing him.

'Where did you meet Miss Caroline Shepley?' was the first suavely put question which Phil had to answer.

'In the fields by the river, sir.'

'And what introduction had you to this fair lady?'

'I had met her before, sir.'

'Where?'

'In London.'

'At whose house in London?'

'In the Park.'

'And who presented you to her there?'

'A friend, sir.'

'What friend?'

'I cannot tell you, sir.'

'You must tell me.'

'I will not.'

There was a short silence. Phil leant against the mantel-shelf looking straight at his father, and waited for him to speak.

Meadowes folded his arms, unfolded them, leant back in his chair, finally spoke—

'Well, that is straight speech, my son, and mine shall be as straight: After this time you shall not with my permission have word or look again for Miss Caroline Shepley.'

'Have you aught against Carrie Shepley, sir?' asked Phil. He burned to tell his father all he knew, but the dread of bringing Peter into disgrace tied his tongue—he must try to extract the story for himself.

'I have: let that suffice you. Philip,' cried his father, starting forward in his seat, 'Philip, you are too young to question my commands after this fashion. Enough that I tell you to have no further speech with this young woman. 'Tis not for you to gainsay me.'

Phil drew himself up quickly from the easy lounging attitude he had stood in.

'Sir,' he said, 'speak with Carrie? I will speak with her, yes, and court her, yes, and marry her—that I'll do if Heaven so send that she'll have me.'

'On how long acquaintance have you taken this resolve?' asked his father dryly.

'Three weeks, sir.'

'Ah, long enough assuredly for so unimportant a step to be considered!'

Phil was too acute not to see that his adversary had scored here. He had, moreover, a trait of age seldom to be noticed in the young: he could laugh at his own foibles. He laughed now, well amused at his ardour, and, dropping lightly on his knees beside his father's chair, took Meadowes' long white hand in his with his sudden irresistible impetuosity.

'Sir, will you not tell me the story of your heart?' he said. 'Sure every man alive hath felt as I feel now!'

'My heart! 'twould be a history indeed,' said Meadowes. He spoke uneasily, for he had reached that stage of moral decay which refuses to answer any serious questioning. With a quick shuffle of the conversational cards he passed on:—

'A history indeed.—But to return to the subject in hand from which you try to escape: you have known Caroline Shepley for three weeks; you wish to marry her; I do not intend that you should; therefore there the case stands.'

Phil had risen and stood before his father again. There is nothing more irritating to the finer feelings than to have questions, which we put in all seriousness, answered lightly. Phil had for a moment thought he might gain his father's confidence, but he had been mistaken. He felt jarred and baffled.

'I am sorry, sir. I shall take my own way,' he said.

'Then I shall have no more to do with you, Philip.'

'Then I shall have to provide for myself. You have at least given me brains enough for that,' said Phil hotly.

'Do you think so? Well, brains are a good gift, better perhaps than gold.'

Phil stared at his father for a moment in blank amazement, then he turned on his heel and left the room without a word.

CHAPTER XX

After Philip had gone, Richard Meadowes leaned back in his chair with closed eyes for a long time. The past was stirred in him by this quarrel. In the twenty years that had elapsed since Anne Champion's death he had changed very little outwardly; but the soul had travelled a long road these twenty years. Now looking back over the 'Past's enormous disarray' he scarcely recognised himself for the same man he had been. He that had started so eagerly in the race, how he lagged now! he had not an enthusiasm left, and smiled to remember all he used to have. At one time too he remembered having thought about things spiritual; these did not visit him now. Once even he had feared death and judgment; death now-a-days had ceased to appall him, and for judgment he thought of it as an old-world fable. He could even think of Anne Champion's sad story and her cruel end with no more than a momentary pang of discomfort.

But for all this the soul was still partially alive in this man. He could still suffer, and that is a sign of vitality, and if he had a genuine sentiment left it was for his son.

His suffering indeed was of a purely egotistical sort. The vast failure he had made of life struck a sort of cold despair through him; Phil must make restitution for his failures; and now the coldest thought of all assailed him: he had not Phil's heart. He had lavished kindness on the boy all his life, yet sometimes Phil would look at him in his curiously expressive fashion and turn away quickly as if to hide the thought that leapt out from his speaking eyes: 'I know you, I understand you.'

But whether Phil loved him or not, thought he, he could not afford to quarrel with him after this fashion. Everything else in life had failed; Phil at least he must keep!

Meadowes rose hurriedly and went in search of Phil, who had gone out, it appeared, across the Park.

The sun had come out now, after the rain, and its warmth drew up the smell of the mould from the streaming moisture-laden earth.

'Earth, where I shall soon lie,' thought Meadowes; 'earth, that will absorb me into its elements again. Then the great failure will be at an end, the puzzle solved—no, not solved, only concluded: solved would mean

another life, and that would mean—— Ah! the opened Books, and the Face from which earth and heaven flee away, and the Voice crying: "*Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.*" Tush, why does that old nonsense so ring in the brain?'

'Phil, Phil,' he shouted; he could stand his own thoughts no longer.

It is always a difficult matter to retract one's words. But it was a characteristic of Richard Meadowes that he could generally extricate himself from any difficult situation with grace and composure.

It was, he admitted, quite unsuitable that, after having fairly warned Phil of the results of his disobedience, he should now retract all he had just said; but it must be done. Phil must stay with him at any cost.

So, putting the best face he could to it, he called and called again for Philip, who at last appeared: he had quite expected the summons.

'I suppose he desires to forget all that has just passed,' thought Phil, well aware of the sway he held over his father's affections.

'I think you called me, sir?' he said. He wore a very demure aspect.

'Yes; I wished to explain this matter further, Phil: 'twas perhaps scarcely fair in me not to give you a reason for my displeasure. Let us walk on and I shall tell you all.'

But it would, alas, have been as impossible for the Richard Meadowes of now-a-days to tell all the truth about any subject as it would be for a crab to discontinue the sidelong gait which is its inheritance; so he cut out one half of the story and padded up the other half, and summed up the whole in one easy sentence: ' 'Twas, in fact, jealousy on Shepley's part caused our quarrel,' he said—a half-truth which altered the facts of the case a little.

'Who was the woman?' asked Philip bluntly. 'I suppose she was my mother?'

'Yes, Anne Champion by name,' Meadowes said, but hurried on before Phil had time to question him further. 'So you can see, Philip, that I have reason on my side when I bid you have no more to do with Miss Caroline Shepley.'

'I scarce see why an old quarrel between our parents should come between us,' said Phil.

'My dear Phil,' said the candid father, 'I will be frank with you—'tis an old story, and I, for my part, would willingly bury it; but I know Shepley for

a man of vindictive passions, and I tell you this, that no power on earth would persuade him to give you his daughter's hand in marriage. 'Twill spare you perhaps much pain and unpleasantness with him if you but take my advice and see no more of the girl.'

Phil shook his head. But light had meantime come to Meadowes. He would make peace with Phil yet—all would be well.

'Well, Phil,' he said, 'I have told you the truth of how the matter stands, and how prudence should guide you; but moreover I have considered what I said to you in haste, and even should you persist in this folly I will not turn you from your home.'

Then with a sudden genuine impulse of feeling he laid his hand on Phil's arm.

'Phil, Phil, you are all that I have—you must stay with me were a hundred Carrie Shepleys in the case.' Phil did not speak, but he took his father's hand, bowing over it with the elaborate courtesy of the age.

'I can only ask you, give this matter your very careful consideration,' said his father, and with that he turned the conversation into another channel.

But a few hours later—when the dusk had fallen, a man on horseback left Fairmeadowes bearing a special and important missive to Dr. Sebastian Shepley of London. The horseman had orders to spend as little time on the road as might be, and the letter ran thus:—

> 'Sebastian Shepley,—Richard Meadowes must acquaint you with the fact that, unless you take prompt measures for the removal of your daughter from the house of her aunt Lady Mallow, she will undoubtedly contract a marriage with the son of that man who has the honour to sign himself
>
> 'Your Enemy.'

CHAPTER XXI

Carrie—unconscious, sleepy Carrie—laid herself down to rest that night in her four-post bed, and slept the dreamless sleep of youth and health, till the morning light stealing through the curtains disturbed her a little, when she dreamt she was riding down Piccadilly in a coach and four with Philip Meadowes, and wakened with a laugh.

And all this night, that had passed so quickly for Carrie, a man was spurring along the miry roads towards London, bearing a letter that was big with fate for her; while at Fairmeadowes Phil tossed about, revolving something in his mind that did not seem to take shape very easily; and Richard Meadowes too lay sleepless till the dawn.

Three sleepless men, 'all along of Carrie,' as Phil had so vulgarly put it!

The cause of Phil's sleeplessness was not far to seek, for, late that night, Peter had brought him a curious and disquieting piece of news.

'The master hath sent George a-ridin' express to town this night, sir,' he had said, and then, in a whisper, 'bearing a letter, sir, with the address "*To Dr. Sebastian Shepley*." For George is no scholar, and came to me to read the direction, sir, and there it was, so sure as I do stand in my shoes.'

Phil, who was not without youthful affectations, pretended to receive this intelligence with great unconcern; but when Peter had gone he strode up and down the room in great agitation. Then he threw up the window, and leant out into the velvety spring darkness. Thoughts throbbed through his brain that the cool night air could do very little to calm.

'By Heaven!' he said, speaking out into the darkness, 'he'll not outwit me.'

So this was what his father's sudden change of front had meant!—he wished to throw the blame upon Dr. Shepley if Carrie was taken away. Oh ho, that was very wily no doubt, 'but not all the fathers in Britain shall outwit me,' said the arrogant Philip, and began to revolve schemes in his busy, clever young head.

Towards morning he turned over on his pillow, and fell to sleep at last.

'I can but try my luck,' he murmured as his eyes closed.

The spring world was all a-dazzle with sunshine again after yesterday's rain, when Carrie came down-stairs. I regret to say that she came down-stairs late, bidding the maid 'not tell Lady Mallow' with such a charming smile that the austere elderly woman fibbed profusely to her mistress a few minutes later. After breakfast, Carrie went out on to the lawn, and stood, in apparent irresolution, looking round her. She smiled to herself out of mere pleasure of heart, and strolled away down the steps to the terrace, following her errant fancies. From the terrace there was a wide view far over the country. Carrie stood still here, shaded her eyes from the brilliant sunshine, and gazed intently in the direction of Fairmeadowes.

Far away among the fields she saw some one walking by the river bank. Carrie was irresolute no longer. She did not stay to put on her hat and her gloves, nor stop to consider that she had not yet visited her aunt's sick-room —no, she did none of these things, but ran off down the avenue, and, pushing through the hedge, walked with more sedateness across the fields. In the distance, now, she could hear a long clear whistle like a bird's note. It came nearer and nearer, then Phil came up through the long, reedy, flowering grasses by the riverside, with both hands held out to her; his shining eyes seemed to speak for him.

'I thought you were never coming, Carrie,' he said, and took her hands in his.

Hitherto their relations had been strictly unsentimental, now they had suddenly become lovers; without a word of explanation they both acknowledged it.

'Come and sit down, Carrie, I have all the world to say to you,' said Phil, and he flung his arm round her as he spoke. To Carrie it seemed the most natural thing that Phil should be in love with her—she had known it indeed for ten days past—she was not the least surprised at it, but what did surprise her now was to find that she too was in love, and that it was so natural—she seemed to have loved Phil always. It was no astonishing thing to her that she should sit here with Phil's arm round her, and hear him say all manner of things that only yesterday he would never have dreamed of saying. What did astonish her was that he had not said all this long ago! Why not yesterday? why not when they first met? Had they ever been strangers? Had they not understood each other always? It was ridiculous this sudden assumption of loverishness on Phil's part; they had been lovers from long long ago!

And from these happy thoughts Carrie was rudely wakened by what Phil was saying. His voice was urgent, his looks were anxious; he was actually telling her a story, in rather incoherent words, about both their parents, and a woman and a fight, and she did not take it all in.

'But what has all this to do with you and with me, Phil?' she asked, raising her face to his.

Phil turned and shook her ever so lightly.

'Oh, you dear dull darling that you are,' he cried; 'do you not see they will separate us?—take you away from me, Carrie—never allow you to see me again?'

'But I could not live without you,' said simple Carrie, unaware that the formula had been used before; it seemed quite an original argument to her.

'Nor I without you, of course,' cried Phil—quite as unoriginal, in spite of his quick wits (the poor and the rich in wits as in wealth meet together in some things), 'and for that reason you won't refuse me what I ask, Carrie—'tis the only plan—I've thought all the matter out, and unless you will do it, your father will be here to-night, and will carry you off to London, and you will never see my face again, as like as not.'

'Well?' asked Carrie dubiously.

'You'll run away with me, and marry me. 'Tis as easy as the alphabet if once we get to London.'

'Oh, but my father,' protested Carrie.

'Well, it has come to this: you must choose betwixt him and me; he will never allow you to marry me if he knows.'

'But 'tis so sudden, Phil!—if I had even a day to consider the matter.'

'You have scarce an hour,' said Phil; 'by now your father has that letter, by another hour, if I mistake not, he will be on his way here; by the evening he will have arrived. You must come with me now, now, now—or——'

The unspoken alternative of separation struck coldly on Carrie's ear. Yet another love, older, steadier, plucked at her heart—she was torn between the two.

'Ah, Phil,' she cried, 'I cannot leave you, and I cannot grieve my father. What am I to do? O what a sad thing trouble is—I have never known it before!'

(I doubt if she ever had.)

Phil was not, perhaps, as diligent a Biblical student as he might have been, but his researches in that direction came to his aid at this moment.

'Oh, you know, Carrie, there is Scripture for that,' he said, 'about "leaving father and mother and cleaving to your wife"—that's the rule for men, and I dare swear it holds good for women too.'

'Do you think so? But I would not grieve my father for the world,' hesitated Carrie.

Phil grew impatient, for time was racing on, the sun was high in the heavens now.

'You must—you must; can you bear to think of never seeing me again? I'd sooner miss the sun out of the sky than you, Carrie.'

Carrie seemed to herself to be whirled round and round in the eddies of Phil's passion; she could not gainsay him, and yet she trembled and held back.

'Yes—ah, yes—I would go to the world's end with you, Phil,' she said, 'if it were not for fear to grieve my father.' She rose and paced up and down the bank in an agony of indecision, clasping her hands together and then flinging them out with a gesture of helpless bewilderment. Never in life before had Carrie been called upon to make a decision of any importance, and now the two strongest affections of her heart warred together for the victory.

Phil came and paced beside her, arguing, beseeching, coaxing her by turns—till she turned at last in despair and laid her hands in his.

'I will come with you,' she said.

Phil did not allow the grass to grow under his feet.

'Come then, so quickly as you can, Carrie,' he cried, 'for each moment is precious. I shall return to Fairmeadowes and tell them I am gone out for the day. You must go home and put on your habit, and get one of your good aunt's horses.'

'I am not permitted to ride alone,' said Carrie, who saw lions in the way at every turn.

Phil laughed, and put his hand in his pocket. 'Here, Carrie,' he said, 'give me your hand.' Carrie all unsuspicious laid her hand in his.

‘That is what you must do to your aunt’s groom, my child; there never was groom yet but understood that argument,’ said Phil.

‘All this, Phil?’ said Carrie, as she eyed the yellow coin.

‘All that, and say, as you give it, that he must come to Wyntown for the horse at five o’ the clock.’

‘But he will wonder, Phil.’

‘Doubtless.—Oh, Carrie, but women waste time on trifles!’

Carrie was nettled by this remark, so she hastened off as fast as she could through the long meadow hay, determined that Phil should not find her so dilatory after all.

‘Meet me at the cross roads,’ Phil shouted, as he ran off in the direction of Fairmeadowes.

CHAPTER XXII

Philip, who knew every step of the road between Wynford and London, had some very disquieting thoughts as he rode down to the cross roads to meet Carrie.

Everything depended upon whether they could reach the half-way house at Wyntown before Dr. Shepley. For after Wyntown there were several roads which each led to town; but between Wynford and Wyntown there was only one road. Therefore if they met, they would in all probability meet upon that road. Phil determined to keep his fears to himself. It was a pleasant morning, and a pleasant ride. He found Carrie already waiting for him under the flickering shade of the beech-trees.

'You see I can make haste when I please, sir,' she said, trying to smile. The smile, however, was rather forced, and after a few ineffectual attempts at conversation they rode along in silence.

'The deuce take that horse of your aunt's!' at last quoth Phil in despair; 'can you not make him go a better pace, Carrie?'

Carrie smiled, and shook her head. 'My aunt will never permit her steeds to go beyond a slow trot,' she explained.

'Oh, your aunt be ——,' began Phil, and Carrie actually laughed outright at his irritation.

'Now you resemble a little boy I once knew who used bad words,' she said, looking up at him under her eyelashes.

'I ask your pardon, Carrie; 'tis that old cow you are riding irritates me,' he said, with an impatient flick of his riding-whip.

Phil affected more assurance than he felt, however, as they dismounted before the door of the inn at Wyntown. 'Heaven send Shepley is not here before us!' he thought as he lifted Carrie down and gave the horses to the ostler.

'We shall come up-stairs and dine, Carrie,' he said. 'Do you not feel as though you were my wife already?' He drew Carrie's rather limp little hand through his arm as he spoke, and they went up-stairs to the inn parlour, which overlooked the courtyard.

‘You are wearied, I fear, Carrie,’ he said.

‘Hot wearied, Phil, in the least, but not very happy,’ said Carrie, with a stifled sob.

Phil affected deafness, and requested the landlady to bring up dinner as quickly as might be. ‘For I am near famished with the morning air, Mistress Heathe,’ said he, with a smile to the good woman, an old acquaintance, ‘and so is this lady also; but she is somewhat weary, so see no stranger comes in while we are here.’

‘Just as you please, sir; just as you please,’ said Mistress Heathe, as she bustled round the table, and made bold to ask for his father’s health.

‘The same I did serve with a bottle of wine yesterday at this very hour. “Bad roads they are to-day, Mistress Heathe,” said he, for your father, sir, is ever so affable in the passing by, ’tis a pleasure serving such gentry as he, to be sure.’ And she gave a curious squint at Carrie meanwhile.

That young woman made a show of eating a little, but in truth it was Phil who cleared off the viands, and Lady Mallow would have been quite pleased by the genteel appetite of her niece, if she could have seen how she toyed with a scrap of chicken, and shook her head at sight of an apple tart.

‘I am sorry, Phil, I cannot eat,’ she said, ‘and somehow I cannot talk either, so perhaps we had best not try to talk.’

‘Never fear, Carrie; ’twill be all right soon,’ said Phil, and he crossed over to the window and sat there looking out into the yard.

Wyntown was nearly equidistant between London and Wynford, so, calculating that Dr. Shepley had left town at the same hour as they had left Wynford, he must arrive at Wyntown not much later than themselves—so calculated Philip. He had no real reason to suppose that Dr. Shepley would come at all; everything depended on the contents of that letter, but if he did

———

There was a rumble of wheels over the cobble-paved courtyard, and Phil saw a very tall grave-faced man jump down from the seat of a post-chaise and come up to the door. Carrie, at the sound of the wheels, came to the window. She laid her hand on Phil’s shoulder, and glanced out.

‘Phil! Phil!’ she cried, ‘ ’tis my dear father.’

In the one glance she had got of his face Carrie marked there a new stamp of anxiety she had never seen before—and it was she who had stamped it there! She turned away and buried her face on the cushions of the

settle. Phil, trying to be hard-hearted, affected no sympathy with her grief, but when at last there came a succession of quick gasping sobs, he crossed the room and bent over her.

'Come, Carrie, you must not grieve so,' he said rather lamely. Carrie sat up and dried her pretty eyes, that were all reddened with tears.

'O Phil,' she said, with a little choke in her voice, 'I have never seen him look thus. Ah, I must see him—speak with him—I shall explain!'

She rose and hurried to the door, but Phil barred her exit.

' 'Tis madness, Carrie—sheer madness this,' he expostulated; 'you'll never see my face again if Dr. Shepley discovers you here with me.'

'I cannot help it. Ah, Phil, do not be cruel! See him I must—then I shall go with you—then we will be married.'

'You are a fool, Carrie!' cried Phil, carried away by one of his sudden, hot fits of temper. ' "Then we will be married!"—do you suppose for one moment your father would permit our marriage?'

'Yes,' said Carrie, 'I think he would.'

'Then you think nonsense.'

'I know him better than you do, Phil.'

'Well, explain me this then—if so be he will not oppose our marriage, why doth he hasten from London at first hint of your meeting me?'

'He could not forbid it did he understand all I shall tell him; 'twould not be like my father to do so. Phil, you do not know him. You do not guess even at his generous heart—you——'

'Generous!' laughed Phil; 'no, no, not so generous as that.'

'Phil, I shall see him—whatever you say, I shall see him!' cried Carrie, and she tried once more to escape towards the door.

And Phil, fairly mastered now by his temper, flung the door wide open, crying out: 'Go to him then, if you love him the best.'

A moment later he saw Carrie swirl down the narrow panelled passage of the inn into the very arms of Sebastian, who had appeared at the far end of it.

'Lord, Carrie!' he heard Sebastian exclaim, as he laughed his jolly whole-hearted laugh and kissed his daughter on either cheek with more

fervour than gentility. Then there was an incoherent murmur of exclamation and sobs from Carrie, then Sebastian's voice again:—

'And how are you here, my girl? Have you run away from her Ladyship and the influenza?'

'Yes, sir—with Philip Meadowes, sir,' said Carrie, whose downright nature equalled her father's.

Phil held his breath to hear what Sebastian would reply.

'And where is Philip Meadowes?' he heard Sebastian say. A minute later Carrie came into the parlour, leading her father by the hand. There fell a moment of ominous silence. Neither of the men spoke, but Carrie, as she took a hand of each, and looked from one to the other in puzzled, pretty confusion, was the first to speak.

'This is Philip, sir,' she said; 'and indeed I am sure you cannot choose but love him.'

'There may be two opinions on that point mayhap,' said Sebastian grimly.

For all the antagonism of their mutual relations at the moment, Phil, with his extraordinarily sensitive nature, felt a sudden impulse of liking to this man, Carrie's father. 'Why have I not a father like that?' he thought—'some one to rely on without a shadow of distrust.' Poor Philip, for all his charm, was sadly alone in the difficult places of life, and youth, in spite of all its self-assertion, is conscious enough of its own need. Beside this resolute masterful man, Phil felt himself, of a sudden, boyish and foolish, as he had never felt before. But, assuming a great deal more self-confidence than he felt, he bowed to Dr. Shepley and 'feared the circumstances of their meeting would scarce conduce to an agreeable acquaintance between them.'

The older man did not reply to this remark; but drew back the window-curtain so that the light might fall full across Phil's face, and gazed intently at him for a few moments. Annie's son! Flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone—and Annie cold in her grave these twenty years! How say some among us that there is no resurrection? This is, instead, a world of resurrections, in which that man or woman is fortunate who can succeed in burying the past so deep that it cannot rise. Phil and Carrie, hot with their own impatient young desires, were only irritated by Sebastian's silence. How could they guess at that blinding back-flash of memory that held him silent at sight of Phil? How could they hear the voice Sebastian heard—an urgent tearful voice, '*Phil, that hath gotten half my soul*'; and again, '*If ever you can help*

Phil you'll do it, because I gave him half my soul,' . . . and . . . '*God give Phil a white heart*,' . . . and . . . '*Come, Sebastian?*'

'Sir, sir, speak!' cried Carrie, catching hold again of her father's hand.

At the touch of her hand, at the sound of her voice, Sebastian came back to the present—the important present.

'By Heaven!' he cried. 'Once in life is enough to be robbed by Richard Meadowes!'

'But, sir, I am not Richard Meadowes,' said Phil.

'His son; and twice accursed by that token. Never shall daughter of mine have my consent to marry with son of his—black-hearted lying devil that he is.'

Carrie shrank back, scared at her father's violence; she had never heard him speak like this before.

'Perhaps, sir, 'twould be better for you and me to discuss this matter by ourselves,' suggested Phil. There had, in fact, been no explanation given on either side as yet, a fact which Phil was the first to realise. Sebastian, beside himself with anger, at the sight of Carrie in company with the son of his enemy, had never stopped to ask any questions one way or other.

'There is little to discuss, I know, Mr. Meadowes,' he said. 'I have information this very day of your intentions, sent me by your father, and these intentions I cannot even discuss with you; I cannot give you my daughter. Even had you asked her hand of me in a fair and honourable manner, I would have denied it. Now doubly I do so since you thought to obtain it by stealth—a coward's trick, that savours of the man you have the honour to name your father.'

Carrie, who knew the hot temper of her lover, held her breath for fear. But Phil did not fly into a sudden passion. He looked Sebastian full in the face, but though he flushed with anger, his words were quiet enough.

'Did I not know the bitter provocation which makes you speak so, I would not stand here and listen to you in silence,' he said. 'My father may be all that you say, sir, but'—here Phil hesitated for a breath—'he is all the father I have, and moreover has been a kind parent enough to me, as the world counts kindness.'

'There—the boy speaks rightly,' said Sebastian. 'My words were perhaps over hasty; but the larger fact of our quarrel remains—that you have

induced my daughter to leave her home with you, instead of honestly asking her hand from me.'

'I knew, as you have indeed just told me, that that would be wasted breath; 'twas the only thing left me to do; now Carrie hath spoilt it all, and I suppose she means to return with you,' said Phil, his anger redoubled.

'I presume that to be her intention,' said Sebastian, turning to Carrie as he spoke.

'Sir, dearest sir, I must do as you command me now,' said Carrie. 'But'—and here she laid her hand in Phil's—'some day I must go with Phil, for he hath all my heart.'

'When you are old enough to take your own will against mine?' asked Sebastian.

'Yes, sir.'

'When that day comes, you choose betwixt him and me.'

'If so be I must make the choice,' said Carrie, 'I must choose Phil; I cannot, cannot forsake him.'

There fell a short silence, then Philip spoke.

'You must admit, sir,' he said, ' 'tis hard that Carrie and I should be parted by reason of your and my father's old quarrels. But I, in my turn, must admit I did wrong to make her leave home with me as I did—for that I must ask your forgiveness, but, as I live, sir, I swear you'd have done the same at my age!'

It was scarcely possible for Phil to harp very long on the serious string; inevitably his buoyant nature resented the restraint it was under, and broke through it. Frustrated, disappointed, angry, on the eve of being parted from Carrie, he must still find something to laugh at. And Sebastian, in spite of himself, very much in spite of himself, found it impossible not to laugh also.

' 'Pon my soul! the boy does not lack assurance! Yes, that I would!' he said, but added a moment later, 'I laugh, but that doth not retract my displeasure one whit, nor alter a word of what I have said: Carrie shall never marry you an I can prevent it.'

'How long must I wait ere you consider Carrie of an age to choose for herself?' asked Phil.

'Two years, at the earliest. You will then be of an age to judge for yourself, though young enough to marry, in all conscience.'

‘And during these two years how much may I see of Carrie?’

‘Nothing.’

‘I may write to her at times?’

‘No, never; you forget, Mr. Meadowes, that my object is that you should forget one another so speedily as may be.’

Philip bowed, accepting the inevitable.

‘If that be all, there remains nothing but that I should say my farewells,’ said he.

‘Nothing; the sooner and the shorter they are the better,’ said Sebastian. He looked at the two young people before him. Carrie stood scared and silent by the window.

Phil crossed over to where she stood and gathered her up in his arms, kissing her long and fondly.

‘If it must be.—Good-bye, sweetheart, I shall never forget,’ he said. And Carrie, as she raised her lips to his, smiled an almost happy smile.

They vowed at that moment an unspoken vow, and parted undoubtingly.

‘Come, dearest sir!’ said Carrie a moment later, when Phil was gone; ‘shall we return to London to-night—you and I?’

‘There! if you wish to see the last of him,’ said Sebastian. He pointed out to the courtyard, where the ostler had led out Phil’s horse.

‘Lord! what a temper the boy hath!’ said Sebastian, for Phil, without one backward look to the window where Carrie stood, gave a savage lash at the horse, which bounded out through the archway, and swung round the turn that led into the Wynford road with scant direction from its rider.

‘The Lord send him safe at Fairmeadowes,’ said Carrie softly, under her breath.

CHAPTER XXIII

Carrie and her father found it a little difficult to explain her sudden flight to Lady Mallow; but they patched up some sort of story that held together after a fashion, and before very long her Ladyship had forgotten all about Carrie's escapade, as she considered it.

Carrie meantime had returned to London with her father, and the time passed slowly enough at first. But Carrie had not the nature that broods over the inevitable, and she quieted her heart better than most girls of her age would have done in the same trying circumstances. There were all the cheerful businesses of home to attend to—Carrie was a notable housekeeper,—and these, after the forced idleness and gentility of her stay at Lady Mallow's, seemed doubly delightful. It was much more agreeable to eat the pasties and cakes of one's own making, she thought, than those prepared by the most practised cook, and, moreover, there was a new and inspiring thought at work in Carrie's brain. Some day she would be cooking all these good things for Philip! She did not stop to consider that Phil, like Lady Mallow, had servants to cook for him, so every day she would be trying new dishes, till Sebastian complained that the *cuisine* was too rich for his simple tastes, and Carrie blushed, and murmured something about her book of recipes. The afternoons, when her father was busy and her housekeeping labours were over for the day, were the longest time to get through. Carrie would take her needlework then and sit by the window, but she found plenty time for thought while she sewed, and her thoughts seemed always to travel in the direction of Wynford. Had Phil gone back to Oxford yet? she wondered; or was it possible he was come to town? When could she see him again? What was he doing? All the ingeniously ridiculous questions and suppositions of lovers passed through her head in these long afternoons of sewing. In the evenings Sebastian would take her out to walk or to the play, and Carrie could not be insensible of the admiration she excited in public places. Then summer wore away and winter was come. Carrie indulged in some new and very becoming winter garments, and was more fidgety than was her wont over the fit and the style of them. When these were ready she persuaded her father one fine Saturday afternoon to take her for an airing in the Mall. Sebastian hesitated a little, and professed himself too busy, but at last consented, and Carrie—exquisitely bewitching in her furry hood—walked at a slow pace down the Mall by his side, the admired of all

admirers. Now there exists between some people a mysterious sympathy—telepathy, we call it in the nineteenth century, in the eighteenth it was not named—which premonishes them of meeting, just as the quicksilver in an aneroid will foretell the weather of the coming day. When Carrie dressed herself in all her bravery, and prayed her father for his escort, she was convinced deep down in her heart that she would meet Phil that day. She had no reason whatever to suppose that he was in town; she had walked out every day since they parted and never met him, but to-day she felt certain she would do so. It came to her therefore as no surprise to hear her father say —

'Carrie, there comes Philip Meadowes.' She did not need to be admonished of the fact.

'May I speak with him, sir?'

'No.'

They had passed almost before the question and answer were spoken. Carrie did not even bow to him in the passing, but she smiled a brilliant flashing smile and blushed like a rose.

'Phil looks older, does he not, sir?' she asked, as they walked along—only her quick-drawn breath and the excited little pinch she gave to her father's arm betrayed her excitement.

Sebastian did not reply.

It was the next Sunday that Carrie made a delightful discovery: Phil had begun to come to church at St. Mary Minories! Carrie was just stifling a yawn behind her hand, when, across the little church, she caught sight of Phil. He sat just opposite her—why, why was the service so very short? Carrie, who was as regular a slumberer as she was an attendant upon Church services, now sat forward in the great square pew, wide awake, and any observant person must have noted how her eyes wandered across the church, and met those of the young man who occupied the opposite pew. Then she would flicker her eyelids and look down and blush an enchanting blush under the shade of the great feathered hat she wore, and then the same thing would be gone through over again. Phil, on his part, leant forward, staring unabashedly at Carrie. He was delighted to observe that her sole guardian during church hours was Lady Mallow, and Lady Mallow, like her niece, slept whenever it was possible to do so. After they had mutually made these pleasant discoveries I suppose it would have been difficult to find two happier young people than they were that morning. Every circumstance

seemed to be fortunate for them, for Phil saw to his delight that Lady Mallow, whose pew was near the door, seemed to be in the habit of letting all the congregation disperse before she left it. This quite suited Phil. He walked slowly down the aisle and passed so near Carrie that his sleeve brushed hers for a moment—for Carrie had risen, and now fumbled at the door of the pew in the most opportune manner.

Carrie said nothing about this to her father; she thought the meeting had been accidental; but when another, and yet another, and yet another Sunday passed, and on each day she saw Phil, Carrie, out of the depth of her honest heart, found it necessary to tell Sebastian about it. She came and stood behind his chair, let her pretty white hands fall one over each shoulder, and laid her cheek against his.

'Dear sir,' she said, 'I think I should tell you something—I think 'tis scarce honest in me to be silent about it.'

'Eh?' queried Sebastian, as he turned to kiss one of Carrie's hands.

'I must tell you, sir, that I see Philip Meadowes each Lord's day at church in St. Mary Minories. I have never spoken with him, but I fear we look at each other most part of the morning.'

'Well,' said Sebastian, 'what of it?'

'May I continue to go to church, sir? I feared you might forbid me,' said Carrie, her heart bounding with hope.

'The deuce take your honesty, Carrie. Do you think I can forbid you now?'

Carrie laughed with delight—words after all were not everything. If once each week she could sit and gaze at Philip, a year and a half would surely pass quickly enough!

CHAPTER XXIV

There is no reckoning with the infinite possibilities for variation in human character, which is one of the reasons why all ‘theories’ of education are doomed to failure. Yet you will sometimes hear the cleverest men and women lay down general axioms, forgetful of this qualifying phrase, that may upset the entire calculation.

Richard Meadowes—in other matters a man of considerable acuteness, fell into this common snare. The axiom which misled him was one which has been accepted—well-nigh proven by half the world: that youth is fickle and forgetful. Given fresh interests, new playthings, the young man does not live (said he) who will not soon forget what so lately charmed him most. Well, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred this may be true; but that elusive hundredth case must also be reckoned with if one would make certain.

‘Phil must go into society and see other women; ere six months are passed he will never give another thought to this Caroline Shepley,’ said the prudent parent, who had indeed, on his way through the world, seen many a man forget. Phil showed scant desire for society; he declared his inclinations lay rather in the way of study, and expressed a special yearning for legal research. But his father opposed this with wise moderation.

‘There was of course no reason against it—Phil might please himself—he was, by now, old enough to choose his own path in life—but, if he might suggest it, a Parliamentary career offered greater scope for his peculiar talents. Nothing would be easier. A few years hence . . . time passed quickly—there was much to see and learn meantime . . . there was the world to see, not to speak of the men in it. . . . Should they go the Grand Tour of Europe together? . . . No?—ah, well, there was time enough for that . . . He preferred London? Well, there was of course no society like London, and the proper study of mankind (“clever mankind, Phil, my son”) was certainly man—learn men and manners. He did not wish to go into society? Ah, well, he might stay at home and do some reading—no time was lost in reading—he had worked too hard at Oxford and deserved a rest this winter,’ etc. etc.

Phil listened to it all and smiled and took his own way; he knew perfectly well what his father’s thoughts were.

At first, after his parting with Carrie, Phil was inclined to be rather sulky and moody, but when he returned to town with his father, and after he began to attend church with so much regularity, he came to a more Christian frame of mind, and exhibited indeed such a markedly better temper that his father smiled to himself and said all was going well.

Phil now showed no disinclination for society, and indeed entered upon its pleasures with peculiar zest. He even plunged deep into a flirtation—a hopeful sign—with a certain Lady Hester Ware, a pretty, witty young Irishwoman, without a penny to her fortune. Meadowes was delighted; he would have welcomed a daughter of the beggar Lazarus as Phil's chosen bride at that moment.

With commendable caution he paid not the slightest attention to the affair; for he knew the contradictious human spirit, and Phil flirted on. But at last, when the matter seemed quite an established fact, he expressed to Phil his great admiration for Lady Hester.

'There's a clever woman!' he exclaimed in conclusion. But his breath was taken away by Phil's response—

'Clever? yes, deucedly clever. I hate clever women, and if you like 'em, sir, you're the first man that ever did!'

' 'Pon my soul!' exclaimed Meadowes, with a long whistle of astonishment; then he added severely, 'If you do not like Lady Hester, Phil, you do very wrong to trifle with her affections, as you have been doing this many a day.'

' 'Tis, as you say, sir, an unpardonable sin to play a woman false—may Heaven forbid I should fall into it!' said Phil in pious tones, and Meadowes, as he met the boy's bright eyes, turned uneasily away.

Richard Meadowes had, you see, not added this cynical axiom to his collection:—that most men, when desperate about one woman, will plunge into a flirtation with another: so he was at a loss to account for Phil's conduct, if it was not actuated by admiration.

Phil was not really doing anything extraordinary—he was only trying to find an answer to the question 'how best to pass two years?'—two years that seemed to him to expand into a lifetime as he looked ahead, for he was of an impatient temperament. Six months had passed before the happy expedient of seeing Carrie at church suggested itself to his mind; and by dint of this device six months more were got over. But with the spring's return came a crowd of tender remembrances, and Phil grew very sulky and despondent

again. His father had gone to Fairmeadowes, but Phil, grown now very emancipated, refused to leave London; 'The country was dull,' said he, who aforetime loved it so well. He had come to an end of his flirtation—and the lees of a flirtation are the sourest beverage; he could gain no distraction from it any longer: he was at his wit's end.

As he walked moodily down the Square one morning about this time, Phil heard his name spoken, and, turning round, found Mr. Simon Prior by his side.

Now, if there was a man that Philip disliked more than another it was this Simon Prior. A tall man, with shoulders so high that he seemed to be always shrugging them, and with prominent eyes that had a look of bullying challenge in them, he certainly did not carry innocence upon his face. He always assumed great familiarity with Phil—another point against him with the young man. But he, this morning, was so at a loss for a new shiver as almost to welcome this man; could he possibly yield him any amusement?

'Yes, my father is at Fairmeadowes, sir,' he said in response to the elder man's greeting, and they fell into step.

'And you, Philip? Once upon a time you too loved Fairmeadowes—why are times so changed?'

'Age, sir, age,' laughed Philip. 'And indeed I am become very old, for I can hit on nothing will amuse me these days.'

'A sad case. What have you tried?'

Phil was prudent; he might almost have been a Scotsman from his reply —

'What, sir, would you recommend?'

'Oh, there are many ways for passing the time, Philip.'

'That's not all I wish. 'Tis—'tis—oh, there's no new thing under the sun!'

'Women!—there's considerable variety there,' began Prior, and he treated Phil to one of his bullying stares.

Phil shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

'Well, if you do not fancy that—let me see—gaming, if you can gain or lose sufficiently large sums, is not amiss, for a distraction.'

‘Which means that you wish me to play with you?’ said Phil. ‘I shall do so gladly, sir, if so be you’ll play for large enough stakes.’

So Phil played his pockets empty that fine morning, and felt the amusing sensation of impecuniosity for a few weeks.

He came too into considerable familiarity with Simon Prior these days, a familiarity he had no wish to encourage, yet found it difficult to shake off. Wherever he went Prior was sure to appear—quite by accident, it would seem—till Philip began to suspect that his father had something to do in the matter. Once this thought had occurred to him, Phil, in sudden and hot resentment, behaved to Mr. Simon Prior with very scant courtesy. His resentment burned hotly also against his father. What was he that he should be spied upon in this way? If his father distrusted him, why could he not say so to his face instead of setting this odious man to spy upon him and report his every action? And he had been frank enough with his father when they first spoke about Carrie; he knew and, apparently, acquiesced in his resolution to win her. Why then all this curiosity?—‘Bah, it was disgusting,’ said Phil in his indignation. A day or two later he left for Fairmeadowes.

‘You had best have me under your own eye, sir,’ he said in reply to his father’s surprised greeting.

CHAPTER XXV

Carrie, as may be surmised, never spoke about Philip to her father. She was therefore rather surprised when one morning he passed her the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and pointed to a short paragraph in it:—

'Mr. Richard Meadowes and Mr. Philip Meadowes left London yesterday for Paris. They purpose making the Grand Tour of Europe, a circumstance which will deprive society of two of its greatest ornaments,' etc. etc.

Carrie blushed, and felt very miserable, thinking how long an absence that meant on Phil's part—he would not be in church next Sunday, nor any Sunday for months to come!—'Ah, Philip, why did you go?' she asked herself. Sebastian on his part was well content, and this perhaps made him acquiesce more than it was natural for him to do in a plan which Lady Mallow divulged to him that very afternoon. This was no less a scheme than Carrie's entrance into Society (with a large S).

'For a young gentlewoman of Carrie's parts and appearance she leads by far too quiet a life, sir,' said her Ladyship. 'And now that I am returned to town, I am resolved that Carrie shall make the figure she ought in Society. 'Twas her good mother's desire, I feel certain, and, moreover, Carrie herself will delight in it.'

'Perhaps you speak truly, Charlotte,' said Sebastian, 'and for certain my Carrie hath charms enough and to spare. I fear you'll have some difficulty with her adorers ere long if you take her into Society, as you call it; but if the girl is of the same mind with yourself, I have naught to say against it.'

Lady Mallow thought Carrie rather lack-lustre over this generous proposal. She did not seem to wish much to go to balls and routs, though she was far too good-natured to show her disinclination very openly—still there was a want of that exuberant whole-heartedness in the pursuit of pleasure which used to characterise her at one time. Carrie only smiled her charming smile and said—

'You are most kind, madam; 'twill be most agreeable, I am certain.'

She did not even kindle to great interest over her new dresses. What was the use? Philip would not see them.

Lady Mallow's 'circle,' as she would have called it, received the beautiful Caroline Shepley with open arms. She might have danced her pretty little feet off had she had a mind to, and might have had her head turned round on her shoulders if the compliments she received had only seemed to her worth the getting. But, alas, Carrie listened coldly to all the compliments that were showered upon her. She judged every man she met by one standard—Philip,—and none of them ever came up to it. There was indeed about Philip a certain careless elegance quite unattainable, or at least quite unattained, by the other young men of Carrie's acquaintance. He was not particular about anything he said or did, yet it seemed to Carrie he could say or do with impunity what, if done by any other man, would have offended her in every way. Lady Mallow made matters worse by continually urging Carrie to think seriously about this or that man who paid her attentions.

'Indeed, my dear niece, you should not be so saucy; for all your looks and the little money your good father may leave you, you will be left a maiden lady—that pitiable being,—if you despise good offers such as those of Mr. Sedgebrooke and Captain Cole, as pretty-mannered gentlemen both as you are like to meet, of good family (though untitled), and personable men to look at. Sedgebrooke hath a thousand a year to his fortune, and the Captain, though not so well to do, is an officer and a gentleman—two very good things.' Thus Lady Mallow.

But Carrie was obdurate.

'I cannot abide Sedgebrooke, madam, and for Cole, the sight of his hands is enough for me—bah, I hate fat hands: the hands of a gentleman should be thin and brown by my way of thinking.'

So both of these eligible gentlemen were refused. But as time wore on Lady Mallow was pleased to observe how much brighter Carrie had become. Her eyes had an exquisite sparkle, she seemed always smiling. 'Society hath begun to brighten Carrie,' she said to Sebastian, who growled, and remarked that he had never thought her dull. It was not Society, however, that was brightening Carrie, but the fact that Phil had returned to town.

She had met him one afternoon as she walked with her aunt in the gardens at Vauxhall.

'My dear Carrie, see there,' Lady Mallow had said. 'There is Mr. Philip Meadowes, the—I regret to say it—the natural son of Mr. Richard Meadowes of Fairmeadowes, the property which adjoins to mine at Wynford. For certain I thought it curious that he paid no attention to Sir

James, but his infrequent visits to Fairmeadowes no doubt explained the circumstance, for on every hand I have accounts of the affability both of the father and the son. They are beloved in the neighbourhood.'

The good lady rattled on long after the subject of her discourse had passed by. She did not guess how much Phil was beloved in a neighbourhood very close to her at that moment. Carrie listened to her aunt's talk with heightened colour and sparkling eyes. How different Philip had looked! how much older! He looked boyish no longer—and yet he was the same, her dearest Phil, who would come very soon to claim her now. . . . What would her father say that day? Carrie's joy was checked at the thought.

For the last month or two of these two years of waiting Carrie could not be tender enough to her father. She was with him every moment of his spare time, and sat by him in the evening, and held his hand till he laughed and asked her the reason of all this sentiment. Carrie laughed also, but her eyes filled with tears; she knew the blow that impended over him.

At last one night she determined to speak. She sat down beside her father and laid her face against his shoulder.

'Sir, I feel certain that ere long Philip Meadowes will come to claim your promise,' she said.

She felt her father draw in his breath hard before he spoke.

'I thought you had forgot Philip Meadowes,' he said at length.

'I—forgotten—oh, sir, so soon? What do you take me for?' cried Carrie. She raised her face for a moment as she spoke.

'Then you mean to have him?'

'Yes, sir; I can do no other thing.'

Sebastian rose, and pushed Carrie from him almost with roughness.

'If you marry this man, Carrie, you part from me; you cannot know all 'twould mean to me. You are too young, you have been ever too happy, even to guess at it. I repeat: Marry Philip Meadowes and part from me, or stay with me and part from him.'

Carrie in her agitation rose and stood beside her father. Then suddenly she flung herself into his arms in her impetuous childish fashion.

'Oh, sir, I must—I must. I cannot part from Philip; he is grown to be like part of myself,' she cried in a passion of tears.

Sebastian raised Carrie's face to his and kissed her.

'I do not blame you, Carrie—I cannot blame you, for you act too entirely as I would have acted myself. I only bid you good-bye.'

'Could you never know him and love him, sir?' asked Carrie timidly.

'May the Lord forgive me!—no, Carrie; not even for your sake.'

' 'Twill half break my heart to leave you, sir,' said Carrie; 'but 'twould break quite in two if I left Phil. Oh, what am I to do?'

'Leave me,' said Sebastian, and without another word he turned on his heel and went out.

CHAPTER XXVI

It would seem that this marriage was to cause sad feelings to more households than one; for not many days after Carrie and Sebastian had settled matters after this sad fashion, Phil and his father also came to an understanding on the same point.

'Philip,' said his father, 'I wish you would get married one of these days; 'tis a good thing for a young man to marry early: it settles him for life.'

Far from wishing Philip to marry, there was nothing his father was less anxious for; but he thought this a skilful way in which to discover whether his son still hankered after Caroline Shepley—a direct question was the last method ever employed by Richard Meadowes. He was therefore not a little taken aback at Phil's reply:

'Well, sir, that is exactly what I intend to do, if so be you will make me a sufficient settlement to marry upon.'

'And—the lady?' asked Meadowes. He looked down as he spoke, and twirled the ring he wore round and round upon his finger.

'Is Caroline Shepley, as you cannot doubt, sir.'

'Caroline Shepley! I thought, Phil, you had forgot all that nonsense long ago. Let me see: two years ago, is it not, since you first saw her? And since then you have not seen much of her, unless I mistake strangely.'

'Nothing. I promised her father to see nothing of her for two years.'

'You saw—Sebastian Shepley?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And have you had no communication with his daughter since?'

'I as good as promised him, sir; and I am in the habit of keeping my promises.'

'Of course—of course,' said Meadowes hurriedly; 'but in two years' time that handsome young woman must have found plenty other men to adore her charms. You make too sure of yourself, Phil, if you suppose she hath waited these two years.'

'I do not fear that I shall find myself supplanted,' said Phil.

‘And should she think of you, are you in earnest in your intention of marrying her?’

‘More in earnest than ever before in life.’

‘You cannot expect me to provide you with the means for a marriage of which I disapprove?’

Philip leaned forward, fixing his bright eyes on his father’s face. He held him captive while he spoke.

‘Yes, sir; I do not see how you can do otherwise; for you are my father, which makes you responsible for me. You have brought me up in luxury, but you have not educated me for any profession. You could not suppose that I would always do exactly as you desired just because I happened to be dependent upon you instead of having a profession such as most men have? I may be dependent on you for money, sir, but I am so only on condition that I am entirely independent of you in the conduct of my life. ’Tis your duty to give me the fortune you have always led me to expect; but if you refuse it because I intend to marry Caroline Shepley, I must then ask you to support me for a few years more till I can learn to support myself and her. If you refuse me this money it will not keep me from marrying her—nothing will; but I must repeat again that if you educate a man to expect a fortune at your hands, you cannot blame him for calculating upon it.’

Meadowes rose and paced up and down the room.

‘What you say is true, Phil,’ he said at last; ‘the money is yours.’

‘Thank you, sir! I trust you will not regret the decision.’

‘Philip,’ cried his father suddenly, crossing over to where the young man stood, and laying his hand on his arm,—‘Philip, as you love me do not marry this girl!’

There fell a short silence before Phil spoke:—

‘But the plain fact is, sir, *I do not love you!*’ he said.

The whirlwind! the whirlwind! How it swept now over the man, who, for half a lifetime, had been sowing the wind! It came up and smote the four corners of the house of life where he feasted at his ease, and before the inrush of the blast he trembled and was afraid.

‘Have I not done everything for you, Philip?’ he said, in a hard, cold voice.

‘Everything, sir. Do not misunderstand me; I am quite aware of all I owe you.’

‘What more can I do, Phil, that I have not done?’

‘Nothing, sir!’

‘Then why do you not love me?’

‘Because I cannot trust you—never have and never can,—though ’tis brutal of me to say so.’

‘I think you may go, Philip,’ said his father. He did not speak angrily, nor indeed did he feel any anger at Phil. But the end had come. His last chance for love in this world had failed. He had dreaded this for long. Year by year, as Phil grew older, the separation between them had been gradually widening, an estrangement which the very similarity of their natures, in some respects, seemed to emphasise. Now the breach was open. And Phil had, without doubt, the right of the matter. ‘I scarce know how I looked that he should trust me,’ thought the unhappy man, ‘but I have renounced so much for the boy’s sake,—I have renounced marriage even, lest another son should supplant him; and I doubt if Phil hath ever realised all this, else surely he had not spoken with such cruelty to-night. For the rest of it, youth is sharp to notice, and, when I consider, do I ever speak or act straightly now? Once I did surely? I cannot now. My whole nature leans sidewise, like the tower of Pisa, toppling but still standing. . . . I’m rotten through and through, and Phil knows it,—and—— Oh, forsaken, forsaken!’

He sat forward with his head bent on his clasped hands.

‘*A sword shall pierce thine own heart*,’ he said.

CHAPTER XXVII

After the plain speaking which had passed between Richard Meadowes and his son, a readjustment of their relationships seemed necessary. It was not possible for them to keep up the former pretence of amity, yet Meadowes was anxious that no hint of their differences should reach the outside world. He called Philip to him one day and explained the case to him.

'I would not have all the world know how it fares betwixt us, Phil,' he said. 'I had rather keep that bitter knowledge to myself; but things being as they are, 'twill be better for us now to live apart,—the one at Fairmeadowes, the other in town. I purpose after this date giving over the house in St. James' Square to you, while I reside myself at Fairmeadowes. I care no longer for the amusements of the town.'

Phil objected at first to this arrangement as too generous. 'You will tire of a rural existence, sir,' he said, 'ere six months are gone, and then—supposing me to have married in the meantime—I and my wife will have to rearrange our establishment once more. 'Twould be better for you to keep the house in town, and let me have another and smaller one.'

But Meadowes would not hear of this.

'I cannot tell you, Phil, how it is with me,' he said, leaning his head on his hand as he spoke. 'And—may you never understand—a great weariness hath fallen over me, that is of the mind, not of the body. I care for nothing; the game is played out. So make no further parley over this; take what I offer and welcome: as you pointed out to me 'tis but your due, in a sense.'

'Then you fully understand, sir, that I bring Carrie Shepley to live in your house?'

'Bring her and welcome—ah, you think that will bring you happiness, Phil, but you are mistaken. Happiness is a creature of the fancy, she is never caught and held; always flits ahead. You'll not find her in Carrie Shepley—no, nor in aught in this world.'

'My dear sir, I fear you will be turning monk, when I hear you despise the good things of this world, as you do just now,' said Phil. He laid his hand

on his father's shoulder with the caressing way he had to every one. Meadowes smiled.

'I know better than to think happiness lies there either,' he said.—'But to return to business: you mean to marry this girl as soon as may be?'

'So soon as she will have me, sir.'

'I shall make you an allowance then, Phil, and the house in St. James' Square; and you understand that the outer world still considers us as a devoted father and son.'

'They will be right to name you a generous father at least, sir,' said Phil, and he held out his hand suddenly to his father as he spoke. 'Don't name me ungrateful, sir,' he added; 'I see all you have done for me.'

It was a very painful moment to them both, for each understood how one spontaneous expression of affection on Phil's part would have taken away all difficulty from the situation; and yet the possibility of giving it was not there. Gratitude, however sincere it may be, if unwarmed by love, is cold as icicles.

Now that his affairs were arranged in this unsatisfactory fashion, Phil lost no time in presenting himself at Jermyn Street, to ask for the hand of Miss Caroline Shepley in marriage.

Carrie stood at the window that evening looking out into the dusty little street, when all at once she saw Phil come up the steps and heard his knock at the door. Her father sat by the fire reading, unsuspicious of the blow that was about to fall. Carrie turned away from the window and came towards him.

'Father,' she said, in a very tense voice, then waited for a moment, not knowing what to say; and Phil, who was very impatient that night, knocked again more loudly than before. 'I am sure my heart makes as much noise as the knocker!' thought Carrie, as she listened. Sebastian looked up—

'Well? what is it, my daughter?'

'*Philip*,' said Carrie.

Then as in a dream she heard Patty's familiar voice announce her lover's name, and a moment later saw her dear Phil stand beside her.

'How are you, Carrie?' he said, as if they had never been parted, and then he held out his hand to Sebastian.

'I fear I come as an unwelcome guest, sir,' he said.

‘I cannot welcome you,’ said Sebastian shortly; but he motioned to Phil to take a seat.

‘I need not tell you why I am come, sir,’ pursued Phil, who wasted no time upon preliminaries.

‘I have given Carrie her choice betwixt you and me; ’tis for her to speak,’ said Sebastian for answer.

Carrie had been standing behind her father during this conversation; she came now and sat on the arm of his chair, bent down, and whispered a few words in his ear. He rose, and taking her hand in his held it for a moment and then laid it in Phil’s.

‘She belongs to you now, Philip Meadowes,’ he said.

‘Oh, dada dear, love him too!’ pleaded Carrie, and the tears gathered in her blue eyes at the cold sound of her father’s voice.

‘You ask the impossible, Carrie,’ said he.

‘Perhaps, sir, time may soften the prejudice you entertain for me,’ said Phil. ‘Indeed I shall do my utmost to make Carrie a good husband.’

‘Do not misunderstand me, Meadowes,’ said Sebastian. ‘The feeling I have against you is quite impersonal, else I had not given you Carrie’s hand in marriage. I think you will make her happy; but for all that I cannot be your friend, I cannot bear to look upon your face!’ He rose at the last words and left the room, and Carrie and Phil looked at each in perplexity.

‘Ah, Phil, ’tis terrible,’ said Carrie, ‘and I so happy! my dearest father ____’

Phil refused to look upon the tragic side of the case, however. He was far too pleased to think anything very far wrong.

‘Dear heart, you must not grieve; Dr. Shepley will forget after a time; the best you can do is to marry me at once. When that is done he will forgive you. He thinks now to prevent the wedding by his displeasure, but when he sees that impossible his resentment will die out. Come, Carrie, the sooner you arrange for our marriage the better ’twill be for all concerned.’

Perhaps Carrie did not need very much persuasion. Two years of waiting had been quite long enough.

‘I shall see my aunt, Lady Mallow, and she will decide the date for us,’ she said, and then, as Phil prepared to go, she whispered, ‘I shall make her arrange it soon.’

CHAPTER XXVIII

In spite of her happiness Carrie made a very tearful bride. The parting from her father was exquisitely painful to her, and not all Phil's endearments could at first bring a smile to her lips. For Sebastian had told her that he could have nothing to do with her now, that their parting was final. The only way in which Carrie could hear of how he fared was by sending Peter to inquire of Patty, and Patty (a mature spinster), while she inwardly exclaimed over the turn of Fortune's wheel which thus brought her former admirer again to her door, was fain to invent messages which would reassure Carrie's anxious heart.

'Lor'! Mr. Peter,' she would say, ' 'tis distressful to see the Doctor now-a-days.—And how doth dear Miss Carrie (as was) do?'

'Mrs. Meadowes has her health perfect,' Peter would respond, 'but is ever fretting over the Doctor, so I had best make up some message from you, and mayhap some evening you might step down to the Square yourself and make her more easy in the mind about him?'

Patty, in spite of her years and her wisdom, would shake her head coquettishly at this suggestion, and invent some message for Peter which had no foundation in fact. 'The Doctor is well, madam, and eats hearty; was out the most part of the day at the hospital, and dined with his friend Dr. Munro,' Peter would announce. And on such fragments Carrie had to appease her hungry heart.

Sebastian, poor man, had never been less inclined for social intercourse; had never eaten his meals with so little 'heartiness'; had never visited the hospitals so seldom; but those two well-meaning retainers thought it kinder to suppress the true facts of the case—and perhaps they were right.

'Never fear, Carrie; he will come round—parents always do; they can't do without us,' Phil used to say. 'I wish you knew all the disputes I've had with my father!' But Carrie said the cases were not quite similar, she fancied, and refused to be comforted.

' 'Tis well I am so beautifully happy with you, Phil,' she said one day, 'for this trouble weighs so on my heart that had I any other 'twould break in two.'

‘Oh, no fear!’ laughed Phil. They led a very gay life, these two exceedingly irresponsible young people, and indeed, older heads were nodded in wisdom, and prophecies were made that Carrie would have trouble enough with her wild young husband. Philip seemed, for the present at least, to have given up work of any kind. He meant to be in Parliament some day, he told Carrie, meantime he would enjoy himself and see the world. He was also letting Carrie see it, a process she much enjoyed, and, in Phil’s company, entered into with all her heart, unlike the lack-lustre young woman who had gone about with Lady Mallow the preceding winter. Carrie was now introduced into far finer circles than those of her worthy aunt. Her name figured in all the reports of what we should in this vulgar age call ‘smart’ society—a fact which afforded her a good deal of natural mundane satisfaction. ‘The beautiful Mrs. Meadowes,’ ‘Handsome Mrs. Philip Meadowes,’ ‘That most charming lady, Mrs. Meadowes’—these and similar descriptions of herself made Carrie dimple with pleasure. But a woman in such a position, so young, so beautiful, so unsophisticated, would, to defend herself aright, require a beak and claws, whereas our gentle Carrie had not even a sharp tongue wherewith to chastise her enemies. She entered society with no protection but simplicity—a much vaunted armour which, alas for the world, is in reality sadly vulnerable. Brought up as she had been almost exclusively among men—and honest men into the bargain—Carrie was quite ignorant of the wiles of her own sex, and scolded Philip heartily when he ventured to warn her against them; while, for the sterner sex, she entertained almost pathetic feelings of confidence and liking. The men did not exist (in consequence) who could resist her, and this more than any other cause at last opened Carrie’s eyes a little to the involutions of the feminine character. Alas! too late; half the women in London were jealous of her before Carrie was even distantly aware of it. She had smilingly accepted flowers and attention from many a man before it occurred to her that other women might be wanting them instead.

‘Just singe your wings, my dear butterfly,’ said Phil, ‘then you will understand what the candle is.’

‘Philip, it must be from your father you take such base views of human nature,’ said Carrie. ‘For certainly you have not lived long enough yourself to learn such views. ’Tis not my fault that I am good-looking, and I do not believe for a moment that other women dislike me for it.’

‘Wait—ah, just wait, Carrie. I agree with you that they do not dislike you for it—*hate* is the word.’

‘Phil, I am ashamed to hear my husband say such things,’ said Carrie, though she laughed in spite of herself.

I have said that Carrie liked and trusted all men; but with one exception —she could not abide the sight of Simon Prior.

‘I cannot say what it is, Phil,’ she said one day, ‘but to speak with Mr. Prior doth turn me sick. Pray, my dearest, is he a great friend? Could you not intimate to him that he visits my drawing-room too frequently?’

Prior had certainly got into a strange habit of haunting the house in St. James’ Square, considering how very lukewarm a reception he always received there. Carrie was one of those fortunate women who find it quite impossible to be anything except pleasant to every one. She would sit, smiling and charming, beside Simon Prior, while all the time she loathed the sound of his voice.

‘Do not be so pleasant to the man, Carrie,’ Phil suggested; and Carrie in genuine amazement opened her blue eyes widely:—

‘Philip, I was most discourteous to him but yesterday! Twice he hinted at his wish to accompany me on my airing, and each time I took no notice of his remark.’

‘But you smiled all the time, and seemed merely not to have noticed the hint, Carrie—instead of appearing purposely to ignore it.’

‘I tried my best; in honesty, Phil, I tried my best to be disagreeable,’ sighed Carrie, ‘so you must do it for me if I cannot manage it.’

Phil had no scruples. He waited for Prior to call again, and then set about finding some matter to differ upon; but Prior himself brought about the dispute finally.

‘I should like a word with you, Philip,’ he said, as he rose to say good-bye, and Phil, with a quite perceptible shrug, led the way into the library.

‘I wondered—not to beat about the bush, for frankness between friends is a good thing—I wondered, in fact, Philip, if you could accommodate me with a small loan—some £20, or perhaps less; I happen to be very much pressed just now; I—in fact, ’twould be a great boon.’

‘No,’ said Phil curtly; ‘I fear I cannot oblige you.’

‘Oh, I am sure you can. Your father would advance me the money to-morrow were he in town, and I look upon you as his representative,’ began Prior.

‘Were I in the way of lending money, sir,’ said Phil with great deliberation, ‘ ’twould be to another sort of man than you.’

‘Ha, ha—very good—the poor ever with us,’ said Prior uneasily; ‘but indeed you make a mistake when you take me for a rich man. I am constantly pressed for funds, as you see me to-day; you could scarcely find a needier object for accommodation, you——’

‘I could easily find a better,’ said Phil.

‘Philip, you call my honour in question!’ cried Prior.

‘I would never trouble to do so,’ said Phil; ‘because I do not consider that you have got any.’

For far less provocation men in those fighting days had risked their precious lives, as Phil was well aware. He had calculated the chances of having to fight with Prior, and his calculations were verified: Prior had no intention of fighting; he had swallowed many an insult.

‘For your father’s sake, Philip, I will not go further into the dispute,’ he said with the sorry attempt at dignity of a man who knows himself in the wrong.

Philip walked to the door and flung it open.

‘Adieu, Mr. Simon Prior,’ he said with great mock ceremony. And Carrie was not troubled with any more visits.

CHAPTER XXIX

Simon Prior had come out to Fairmeadowes to beg. It was not the first time he had begged from Richard Meadowes, and he had little shame about doing it. He even assumed a slightly bullying air as he made his modest demand for £100—he had not gone so high with Philip.

Meadowes sat by the fire in his usual easy lounging attitude. He did not look like a man inclined to dispute anything, and he listened quietly to Prior's demand. But after he had considered it for a moment he spoke with the greatest decision of tone.

'No, Prior; I have decided to give you no more. You've been bleeding me these twenty years, now you'll bleed me no longer.'

Prior stood aghast, and Meadowes continued, 'Angry, I suppose? Well, take what revenge you will. Mine is an old story now. Your own character, such as it is, will suffer full as much as mine should you make it public.' He paused and drew his hand slowly across his eyes. 'The fact is, I care no longer: I have nothing to lose: life is done—I would it had never begun for me. Mistake upon mistake; and now a dead heart. D'you remember the old torment? They used to build living men into a wall slowly with bricks and mortar; every day the tomb closed more and more round them. Well, I am alive still, but the wall is closing round me; it hath reached the heart now and presses sore upon it—well-nigh hath pressed the life out of it. I have built myself into this living tomb with my own hands too—there's the special torture.' He paused, wondering if Prior understood one half of his meaning. He did not; the higher feelings had been left out of his nature; he did not even guess at his friend's mood.

'What ails you to-day, Meadowes?' he said; 'truly this country life is too quiet for you by half. Come, we shall return to town, play high, and forget care.'

'I have no care,' said Meadowes.

'What then?'

'A dead—rather a dying—heart, I tell you, only you do not understand.' Then, as impulsive men will often do, Meadowes told out all his sorrow to this man, just because he did not understand—it was the same relief as it

would have been to talk aloud to himself. ‘Phil loves me no more; there’s the fact on’t—I doubt if ever he hath loved me. I’ve borne a measure of disgrace for him, I’ve renounced marriage for his sake, I’ve nurtured him delicately, and willed half my fortune to him. I’ve loved that boy foolishly all his days, and now he turns and tells me he doth not love me. Where doth the advantage lie of loving aught but oneself? There’s no return for love, and a fool I’ve been to sacrifice myself for any man. ’Tis the last lesson I needed. All these fine theories we dealt in in our youth, theories of “love” and “sacrifice” and so on, are purest moonshine. But with the last shreds of belief I had in them, goes my last shred of caring for life.’

‘Tush, Meadowes! I must reason with you,’ said Prior. ‘A man at your time of life to speak thus! Come, Philip hath treated you shamefully, like the young scoundrel that he is. Let me advise you on this point. Bring him to his senses by some judicious coldness, and indeed this is not the first time I have urged you to marry. Now is the time; let no sentiments for a thankless knave like Philip keep you from it now; turn him off with a shilling—he deserves no more.’

Prior spoke earnestly, delighted to find some way of repaying the insult he had received at Phil’s hand. He flattered himself that he was making an impression, for his listener sat and listened to it all in silence. ‘Now, on the score of our old friendship—’ he went on, but Meadowes suddenly interrupted him.

‘There, I hate the very sight of you,’ he cried. ‘No friendship hath been betwixt us, only the bonds of iniquity, and heavy they’ve been. I’ll have it no more; I’ll go to hell alone—not in your company.’

Prior stood dumb with surprise; so long they had held together for evil, he could scarcely credit that the rupture had come at last.

‘But——’ he began.

‘No more, no more,’ said Meadowes, and he rose from his seat, and stretched out his hands in a sudden agonised way. ‘Don’t you know me yet, Prior? *I can’t be true.* Sooner or later I turn upon every man that leans on me. Man, I know myself—cruelly well; this is but the old story. You’ve served my turn, I need you no more, so I leave you. Yes, sink or swim for me. . . . You should have known better than to trust me.’

‘I’ve done your dirty work these twenty years,’ said Prior, with unblushing veracity, ‘and now you forget it all.’

‘Yes, I mean to forget.’

‘But I am indeed hard pressed for money.’

‘Well, find it elsewhere.’

‘Is this final?’

‘Quite.’

Prior moved towards the door, but he paused for a moment on the threshold and looked back. ‘They call you Judas in the Clubs,’ said he, ‘and they are right—no man ever yet trusted you but he was betrayed.’ He walked out, slamming the door behind him, and Meadowes listened to hear his footsteps die away along the passage.

‘A bad man,’ he meditated, ‘but not as bad as myself, though the world takes him to be worse. He’ll end on the gallows—the world will blame him; but the blame will lie with me—I who made him what he is—and I shall sleep with my fathers in the chapel like a Christian.’

Prior meantime walked away through the quiet winter woods—a figure which accorded ill with rural scenes, he so carried with him the savour of towns, the atmosphere of dissipation. A miserable man—to be moral,—pressed for money and at an end of his resources, at an end of pleasure and beginning to realise it; angry, baffled, rejected. He stood to take a last look at Fairmeadowes, lying so peacefully among its wooded fields, with the placid river flowing past it, and then, overpowered by anger, he shook his fist in the air and cursed aloud in that silent place.

‘By ——!’ he cried, ‘you’ll pay me yet for all I’ve done these twenty years! I’ll have your money, or’—his raised right hand fell—‘wanting that, I’ll have your blood.’

CHAPTER XXX

As time went on Society began to surmise that Philip Meadowes and his father were not upon the best of terms. The elder man seldom came to town, and when he did, never stayed at his own house, then tenanted by Philip; and this of itself was eloquent of differences. But as against this was the very fact of Philip's tenancy of the house—an arrangement which seemed to point to amiable relationship. The world wondered, but could do no more.

The feud between Meadowes and Simon Prior had, owing to peculiar caution on Prior's part, never got abroad either; he preferred to be still considered everywhere as Meadowes' friend.

One night (it was the night of the 9th of January, as Philip had afterwards reason enough to remember) fortune drew together in her net at a certain gaming-house, not a thousand miles from Pall Mall, Richard Meadowes, Philip, and Simon Prior. Phil and his father met quite easily; their quarrel had not been so serious as to make this the least difficult for them; but the rest of the men there watched the meeting with great curiosity. If they had only known, they had better have turned their scrutiny upon Meadowes' meeting with Prior; the cordiality with which these gentlemen met might perhaps, to the observant and cynically-minded, have given a key to their relations. But there probably was no cynic in the company; so Phil was the object of interest.

'My dear sir,' said Phil, as he stood beside his father, laying his hand on his shoulder, 'you have surely come to town unexpectedly? And but just in time to see me lose some money, or I am mistaken. Yesterday I won it—to-night (to make odds even) I am come to lose to the same man. Come, you shall watch our play, 'twill be fairish sport, I don't doubt.'

They set them down—Phil and his opponent—and a circle gathered round them to watch their play. Philip played out of the sheerest love of excitement, like a schoolboy, laughing and jesting as he threw down his money, the other man more gravely, pondering his cards. The play ran high; Philip had staked and lost all the money he had with him, and yet he played on. It grew late.

'Come, sir,' he said, and he leant across the table towards his father, with his sunny smile, 'I must play schoolboy again and have my father pay my

debts.' Meadowes, bewitched like every one else, handed him over all the gold pieces he carried, and thought himself well paid by Phil's smile.

'Now I've cleared out my father,' he said, 'and myself, I'll play you for my lace ruffles, good ones they are; come on, sir,' and he tore off the ruffles carelessly enough, and flung them on the table.

'Now you'll have my coat, 'tis a new silk one—there it goes,' he cried, flinging off the fine garment in question, as he leant forward with sparkling eyes to cut the cards.

'Lost again! My diamond shoe-buckles now—there—you have them also? Gad! I'll be stripped before I'm done—well, the shoes themselves. Lost them too!' and with a shout of laughter Phil flung down his cards and rose from the table.

'I must get home without my shoes and without my coat!—I thank you; no, sir, I'd like the sensation. We'll taste the sweets of poverty on a chill winter's night for once—to walk home with empty pockets, without a coat or shoes. By George, that's something new!'

'Phil, put on your coat; for all the world you act like a child,' laughed his father. And Phil certainly looked babyish enough as he stood there shoeless, in his ruffled cambric shirt, laughing and careless.

But Phil would not be persuaded. The coat was his no longer, said he, nor the shoes.

'Come, sir, if you are going my way,' he said, bowing to his father, and they stepped out into the passage together.

'We may go so far in company,' said Meadowes, as they passed out.

The other men who had been in the room waited to exchange comments on the father and son, only Simon Prior, after a few minutes, found that it was growing late, and he must make his way homewards.

He went through the passage and looked out into the inky darkness of the moonless January night; the sky was of a bluish blackness, only a shade less dense than the earth it canopied, and unpierced by any star. Prior listened intently for a moment, but no footsteps echoed down the street. Great London was asleep in these early morning hours, for it was nearing three o'clock. Once and again as he walked along Prior stopped to listen, then he bent down and slipped off his shoes, crammed one into each of the huge pockets of his long-skirted coat, and with noiseless flying footsteps sped down the street: the darkness received him.

Meantime Phil and his father were walking together in the direction of St. James' Square; Phil, gay as was his wont when excited, was pressing Meadowes to come home with him.

'You have scarce seen me for months, sir, and Carrie is a stranger to you,' he said.

'I cannot come to-night, Phil, mayhap to-morrow,' said Meadowes, as they paused at the corner where their ways parted.

'Carrie will think me lost; 'tis three of the clock at the least,' said Phil, and his father laughed.

'You have not yet acquired that fine indifference which comes with practice, Phil,' he said. 'You mention your wife with too palpable interest.'

'Maybe, maybe,' laughed Phil, whose heart indeed beat quicker at the sound of Carrie's name. He held out his hand then and bade Meadowes good-night.

'Ah, Philip, Philip, if only you loved me!' thought Meadowes, as he turned and walked away down the dark street. Phil was going home to the wife he adored, while he—how bleak a loveless life like his was, to be sure! There was not a human being that would mourn his death—even Phil would not think twice of it—more than that, 'I believe he would welcome it,' he thought bitterly; 'for all his frankness and his charm he cares nothing for me: I sometimes think he doth veritably hate me.'

Sad thoughts these on a winter's night. 'Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky, *thou dost not bite so nigh*,' he said, feeling the chill at his heart. A moment later he heard a step behind him, a light, unshod step, surely Phil returned. Could it be? Think if Phil were to come beside him in the darkness, touch his arm, speak one kind word, say that now all would be right between them! Surely even now the wilderness would rejoice—would blossom as the rose—at the coming of love. Surely he would leave his old crooked ways, live even yet a white, clean, straight year or two before all was ended, return, if he might do no more, to the attitude of heart that has at least a desire for good!

These, and half a hundred more, thoughts crowded through his fancy in that silly moment of expectancy. But it was a moment so dear—like the sudden thawing of a long frost—that he dared scarcely break it. His voice was thick with feeling when he spoke.

'Why are you returned, Phil?' he asked. It was too dark to make out more than the outline of the man's head against the sky, but the sound of his

shoeless feet, as he walked alongside, convinced Meadowes that Phil was there.

'Why are you returned?' he questioned again. There was no reply, then the man, with a sudden, quick movement, drew his sword and turned upon Meadowes, pinning him against the wall. He fell almost without a groan. The man knelt with one knee pressed down on Meadowes' chest, as if to squeeze his shortening breaths out of him, and spoke loudly in his ear.

'*I am Philip*,' he said.

Meadowes heard even through his clouding senses the high bell-clear voice. 'Is it—— Merciful Lord! doth my Phil torment me for my sins? . . . his voice. . . . Ah, surely not Phil,' he thought.

'*I am Philip*,' repeated the man, rising hastily; he dared not tarry even for the sweetness of revenge.

'Philip, Philip!—Ah, undone, undone!' murmured the dying man. He writhed over on the pavement as the weight of his adversary's knee was lifted off him; pressed his hand against his side as the last agony seized him, and the spirit, driven so roughly from its dwelling, lingered for a second on the threshold and looked back. In that second fifty years were reviewed like one day: childhood at sweet Fairmeadowes among the fields, youth and manhood, war and love and treachery, and all the busyness of life, passed before him in a flash. One remembrance stood out with extraordinary clearness:—the memory of a prayer offered long ago in one of the old City churches—a strange, seemingly unanswered prayer. Here, late in time, was its bitter answer. And then this memory passed also, and one only thought remained—Philip.

All this in a second's time. In that second, as the murderer rose to his feet, the glimmer of a lantern fell into the pressing darkness, and a hand appeared out of the gloom, clutched, and held him.

Meadowes did not see the light. His eyes were closed, but the one thought of Philip held possession of his brain.

'*Run, Phil, run, lest this bring you to trouble*,' he cried with his latest breath; the two struggling men could not choose but hear. The watchman let fall his lantern and they wrestled in the darkness, then with one great wrench the other freed himself, and flung aside his adversary, who fell heavily. It took him a moment to rise, and then he stood stupidly for a brief space to listen in what direction the murderer ran. But even the silent street scarcely

echoed back the light footsteps of the man wearing no shoes, as he scudded away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXI

Carrie had sat up late that night waiting for Philip to come in, then she grew sleepy, went to bed, and fell asleep. But her sleep cannot have been very sound, for the heavy foot of the watch who passed in the street below, and the echo of his voice as he chanted out the hour, wakened her widely.

'Three o'clock of a January night: a cold dark night with no moon.' He went under the window and his footsteps died away.

Carrie rubbed her eyes, and saw that the fire still burned brightly, lighting up the big room with its heavy hangings and huge pieces of furniture.

'Where can Phil be? why has he never come in?' asked Carrie, a little anxiously. She sat up to listen if she could not hear any sound in the house, tossing back her long red curls over her shoulder. Yes, some one was coming softly up-stairs; she knew the footstep well. A minute later the door opened and Philip came in. He wore no coat nor any shoes.

'Hullo, Carrie! are you too keeping a vigil?' he said lightly, as he paused at the door.

'Phil! where is your coat? and why are you without shoes?' cried Carrie.

'I played them away. I played the coat off my back and the shoes off my feet. I scarce ever before had such sport. And let me lie down, Carrie, my dear, for I am dog tired.'

And with that Phil cast himself down on the bed just as he was, rolled over on his side, dragged the satin quilt over his shoulder, and was asleep before the words were well said.

Carrie tried ineffectually to waken him. 'You will catch a chill for certain, Phil,' she said; but Phil would not listen, so she fetched a cloak and covered him with it as tenderly as a mother might wrap up a sleeping child, then lay down herself and tried to sleep. But she was wakeful for long, and thought of many things; of long ago, and the visit she had paid Phil in that very room where he lay, in that very bed, a sick and a very bad-tempered child. How strange the turns of Fortune's wheel were, to be sure! Then she thought of her father, and longed and longed to see him. 'I believe he will find me somewhat altered. I am become such a fine lady now-a-days,'

thought she, smiling in the darkness. At last she fell asleep, and dreamed pleasant dreams of meeting her father, and finding their quarrel had all been a mistake; and then suddenly she woke with a great noise going on downstairs. There came a terrific thunder at the outer door, a confusion of voices, and then footsteps came up the staircase. Then Peter's voice threatening, expostulating:—

'I'll tell my master. Stand back! I tell you you are mistook.'

'Phil,' cried Carrie, shaking him lightly. 'Phil, there is something wrong!'

Phil grumbled in his sleep. But the next moment the door was opened, and Peter, white and agitated, entered the room.

'Sir, sir, there is some mistake! For the love of Heaven waken and come out here.'

As he spoke two men followed him into the room, and one of them advanced to where Phil, yawning and rubbing his eyes, sat up on the edge of the bed, exclaiming impatiently to Peter,

'What the deuce is all this, Peter?'

'I arrest you in the King's name,' said one of the men, and he laid his hand on Phil's shoulder.

Phil was wide awake at last.

'My good fellow,' he said, 'you are indeed under some mistake, and you surely choose a strange place where to arrest me, and show little consideration for this lady's feelings.'

'I'm sorry indeed, my lady,' said the officer, as he bowed to Carrie; 'but my business is to secure my prisoner.'

Phil stood up.

'Of what crime am I accused, then, my good fellow?'

The man hesitated—glancing at Carrie, but Phil laughed.

'My wife can hear aught I'm accused of,' he said.

'*Of the murder of Richard Meadowes*,' said the man low into Philip's ear. He did not mean Carrie to hear; but she, leaning forward, caught the words. There was a moment's dismayed silence. Then Carrie shrieked aloud —three sharp little screams, and fell back against the pillows.

‘Come,’ said Philip, ‘I am ready to go with you.’ At the door he turned and came back to where Carrie lay, white and scared, staring after him.

‘ ’Tis some mistake, Carrie; have no fear,’ he said. ‘And, Peter, fetch me a coat and a pair of shoes.’

The day wore on somehow for Carrie after Phil’s arrest; she sat idle, hour by hour, looking for news of him and getting none. Late in the day she sent Peter out to make inquiries, but when he returned it was to bring her very scant comfort.

‘There was great excitement in town over the murder; nothing was known, no news was to be had,’ said Peter, but he concealed the half that he had really heard on all sides. Meantime Phil was detained for examination.

‘In prison—Phil in prison!’ cried poor Carrie incredulously. ‘Why, I thought to see him back ere half an hour had gone. O Peter, what can I do? ’Tis unbelievable.’

Peter was dumb with distress; he did not know what to think—the whole matter seemed to him like an ugly dream.

‘Mayhap Mr. Philip will return home on bail, madam,’ he said lamely, the only comfort he could suggest.

‘But that any one should even suppose him to have done it!’ sobbed Carrie. Ah, that was the sting.

Poor Carrie was to weep many tears before she saw the end of this sad matter.

CHAPTER XXXII

The Courts were crowded on the day that Philip Meadowes stood his trial at the Old Bailey. The case attracted a vast deal of attention in its day, and if all the cross-questioning of Phil's case were reported here, they would make a ponderous volume, that no one would ever finish. So the outlines of the trial must suffice for the story.

'*How say you, Philip Richard William Meadowes, Are you Guilty of the felony and murder whereof you stand indicted, or Not guilty?*'

'*Not guilty.*'

'*How will you be tried?*'

'*By God and my country.*'

'*God send you a good deliverance.*'

So ran the time-honoured prelude; and the listening crowds echoed the prayer, for Phil made a very interesting prisoner.

He stood in the dock and looked round him, nodding to right and left as he recognised friends among the crowd, as easy and self-possessed as any man in the house.

There was no trace of anxiety on his face, and he listened with interest and apparent unconcern to the damning evidence brought against him.

The watchman came up for examination first.

'May it please you, my Lord,' said he, 'this is all I know of this matter; that on the night of the 9th January, being a black dark night from want o' the moon, I came of a sudden round the corner of —— Street, and was half on top of something lying on the pavement before that I well knew what I was about. A man rose up from under my very feet, and, guessing there was something amiss, I caught at him, and we struggled a minute, but I'd to let go my lantern and it went out in the falling. That moment came a voice from the ground, "*Run, Phil, run, lest this bring you into trouble*," and with a great blow the man knocked me down and ran. I was a moment rising, and I stood to listen which way he'd gone, but I heard naught but the steps of a man without shoes a-scudding down the street, for all the world as you may have heard the tail of a codfish flapping the flags o' Billingsgate. I followed

after, but I lost him in the darkness before I well knew. I came back to see if aught could be done for the wounded man, but he was going fast by then, and did but breathe once or twice again, with never a word—and, my Lord, I know no more.'

'Have you any notion of the hour?'

'The hour was some ten minutes before three o' the clock.'

'In what direction did the man run?'

'He ran in the direction of St. James' Square.'

There was a little ripple of excitement through the Court. Then Peter, looking older by ten years, was brought into the witness-box.

'At what hour did you open the door to your master?'

'At three o' the clock, my Lord; the watch had passed a moment before.'

'Did your master say anything to you on coming in?'

'He said, "I'm half asleep, like yourself, Peter," and passed on up the stairs.'

There was then brought forward a mass of secondary evidence, as to the relations which had existed between Philip and his father, and so on. But even with this the trial did not threaten to be a long one. No complications seemed to spring up, the whole case was virtually settled long before all these matters had been gone into. The summing up came at last:—

'Gentlemen of the Jury, you have heard a long evidence; I shall now take notice of a few points, which I think are the most material.

'The indictment against the prisoner at the bar is for a very great crime: it is for murder, and, moreover, for the murder of a parent. You must now consider the evidence.

'You have heard that for some time past the relations between the late Richard Meadowes and his son have been somewhat strained; but you have also heard evidence to-day, that on the night of the 9th January they met with apparent good feeling on both sides, that Meadowes borrowed money of his father, and that they went out together, apparently on good terms. You have heard, gentlemen of the Jury, that Meadowes, when he went out, wore no shoes. The chain of evidence which we have heard after this is curiously complete. The watchman has told us that the murderer who ran down the street wore no shoes, and that the dying man called him "Philip" twice by name, begging him to run for his life. You have evidence that the murderer

was discovered at his horrid task, at ten minutes before three of the clock, and that he ran in the direction of St. James' Square. The time which it would take to go quickly between —— Street and St. James' Square is about ten minutes. You have evidence that Meadowes came home at three of the clock. Gentlemen, I am very much puzzled in my thoughts, and am at a loss to find out what inducement there could be to draw Mr. Meadowes to commit such a horrid, barbarous murder. For though he hath not been on the best of terms with the late gentleman, his father, yet the supposed cause of their coolness—an imprudent marriage—is not a cause likely to lead to such tragic happenings as these. Nor can I see what Mr. Meadowes would gain by the crime, were it not his own undoing. But, against these considerations, you must weigh the extraordinary evidence which you have heard, and must judge whether it be a likely case that another man, known to Richard Meadowes as "Philip," and wearing no shoes, should have committed this crime. I do not say more, gentlemen; there is little more to say; go and consider your evidence, and I pray God direct you in giving your verdict.'

The Jury were absent for a very short time.

'Gentlemen, are you all agreed in your verdict?'

'Yes.'

'Who shall say for you?'

'Foreman.'

'Philip Richard William Meadowes, hold up thy hand.' Which he did.

'Look upon the prisoner. How say you? Is he Guilty of the murder whereof he stands indicted, or Not guilty?'

'Guilty.'

Philip listened, incredulous. Then, as the truth forced itself in upon his mind, the injustice and cruelty of fate overcame him. In his wrath and bitterness he stood silent, then, with a sudden hard bitter little laugh, and a dramatic movement of his hand, he leant forward to speak.

'My Lord,' he said, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just man.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

The trial then was over. And it seemed indeed that before very long Philip Meadowes' life too would be over. He who had laughed at imprisonment and laughed at trial could laugh no longer; he was forced to believe at last that the world held him to be a murderer, and that as such he must die. But even sitting in his cell, a man under sentence of death, Philip could not realise it. This the end of him? this, this, this? It was frankly impossible that this could be the end of Philip Meadowes and all his ambitions! of the beautiful life he and Carrie had meant to live together, of that passion clean and hot as flame that burned between them! Impossible! impossible!

And then, even above this cry of the heart, rose that keener note of anguish, that supreme utterance of the soul, the terror of unfulfilment. It lurks in every man, this protest of vitality against encompassing and ever encroaching mortality, and has its roots in life itself. With most men the feeling is quite unformulated and vague. 'They would not like to be altogether forgotten' is about all that it amounts to, and the fear, such as it is, finds ready cure in the laws of their being; having given hostages to Fortune they have no further dread that their memory will perish—the next generation will carry it on. But with another type of man the case is very different; for though the child of his body may be dearer to him than his own flesh, the child of the soul will be dearer yet.

It is this law of aspiration, effort, what you will, that moves on our world at all; for though it is not written that one man in a thousand shall influence the race, or one in a million leave an undying memory, yet it is written that every man, though half of them unknowingly, shall strive after some star, and some even shall succeed. And these myriads of agonising atoms form a great aggregate of achievement out of all proportion to their puny individual efforts, and slowly push the world on in its destined course.

Something of all this came over Philip now; above all his memories of this dear, warm, wooing world, that had so loved and courted him, came the agonising thought, 'I am virtually dead; I must depart, *leaving nothing behind*.' With extraordinary vividness of sensation he had lived; life had appeared to him as a long feast of rich and varied good things to which he had sat him down gaily. Some day he had thought to rise from it, gird on his

armour, and go forth to some stirring and valorous enterprise; he had never decided what the enterprise would be, but trusted that the kind and bountiful Giver of life's banquet would provide his children with work when they had feasted long enough. Now all these vague dreams of the future came down like a house of cards: he stood face to face with death, his work undone.

This was the thought which eclipsed every other as these strange days rolled on, each of them it seemed an eternity for length, each of them bringing Phil nearer and nearer to the gallows. The very gaolers pitied Philip for his youth and beauty; but they pitied Carrie more that day she obtained entrance to Newgate and a half-hour's interview with her husband.

Phil sat, as he always sat then, his eyes fixed on the floor, his chin resting on his hands. He did not even look up as the door was unlocked, but said merely, 'Lay it down, gaoler; I have little appetite these days,' thinking his food had been brought in. Then with a cry, inarticulate, between joy and agony, Carrie ran towards him. Phil did not stir nor speak, and Carrie knelt down beside him, and buried her face against his shoulder, sobbing. He passed his arm round her, but still he did not speak.

'O Phil! my darling, my joy, why can you not speak to me?' cried Carrie. She took his hand in hers, and held it to her heart, kissing it and crying over it; but Phil was silent.

When he raised his eyes from the ground at last and looked at her, Carrie started, such a grave new look there was in them, and all the shine seemed to have gone from them.

'What will you do, Carrie?' he said suddenly. They were the first words he uttered. 'Do you think your father will forgive you when you are left alone? will take you back to his home and care for you?'

'Don't! don't!' cried Carrie; but Phil went on—

'I shall be hanged on the 12th of next month, Carrie; there's no chance of a reprieve, they've tried for it in vain, the facts are too strong against me. I wish 'twere sooner, even for your sake, my poor darling. You'll dream of me being hanged each night twice over ere then.'

Carrie put her fingers in her ears. 'Stop, Phil! for Heaven's sake do not say these things,' she cried; 'they cannot kill you. Have you stopped speaking now? May I take my fingers from my ears?'

'Yes,' laughed Philip. 'Come, Carrie, tell me, have you no doubt of your husband these days when all the world calls him a murderer?'

‘Phil!’

‘Well, what do you make of it all—all this evidence?’

‘How did it happen?’ asked innocent Carrie.

‘I fear you know as much as I do. Prior did it, I fancy; took off his shoes and followed my father and killed him—that’s all I can think, but there’s not a ghost of fact to go to prove this. They had not even quarrelled, to my knowledge at least.’

‘O Phil! don’t look like that! Oh, you are not a boy any longer,’ said Carrie, for she had caught the strange new expression of his eyes again as he spoke.

‘I have been a boy too long,’ said Philip; he shook his head and smiled at Carrie as if she were a child; ‘and now I have grown old in a night—like Jack’s bean-stalk. Come and let me speak all my discontent to my love, and years after this she will remember, and will credit me with all I wished to do rather than all I left undone.’

Carrie looked up wonderingly, and Philip spoke on—

‘Oh, that’s the bitterness, Carrie; it’s not a shameful death, or leaving the happy world even—and hasn’t it been happy! No; I’d stand that if I left anything behind. But just to go out like a candle—phew!’—he blew into the air as if at a flame,—‘bright one minute, snuffed out the next. ’Tis ghastly. I cannot realise, it, Carrie; I won’t—I won’t, ’tis miserable injustice.’

Phil rose and paced about the cell for a moment, then he came and sat down beside Carrie again, and took her hand in his.

‘You don’t understand, you know, my heart,’ he said with something of his old lightness for a moment; ‘for I scarce think you ever felt thus. You now, if you were to die along with me, would not feel a pang, I believe.’

‘No, indeed, Phil; I should die gladly with you,’ said Carrie, mystified.

‘Ah, there’s the rub. I cannot die, Carrie; my personality cries out so loud against extinction ere it hath fulfilled itself. Foolish, vain talk; but I’ve thought of no other thing night and day since they passed sentence on me, except of you.’

Carrie, you know, was of another clay; she sat and looked at Phil with such a puzzled air that he fairly laughed aloud, and his ringing laugh struck strangely on the walls of Newgate. The poor old walls had heard many a groan, but so few laughs that the sound was scarcely recognised!

‘Did I puzzle her dear brains with nonsense?’ he said, taking Carrie’s face between his hands and kissing her. ‘Carrie, our jesting days are over, and sweet, sweet they’ve been for all their shortness.’

‘O Phil, they cannot be over,’ said Carrie; she was only twenty, poor child, an age that has little realisation.

‘Carrie, you must believe this,’ said her husband—he looked into her eyes as he spoke, and let his words fall slowly,—‘I shall be both dead and buried this day next month—dead and buried, Carrie, and you will be a widow. You must face this, must talk with me of what you are to do afterwards.’ But Carrie would only shudder and hide her face in her hands. Phil spoke on—a curious task to set his eloquence this—telling her unflinchingly all that would be, explaining, describing, till Carrie whitened and clutched his hand more tightly than ever.

‘Stop, Phil,’ she said, in a little choked whisper, ‘I believe it now.’

Then with a rattle of the bolts the door fell open, and the gaoler silently signed to Carrie that she must say her farewells.

‘I shall be allowed to see you once again, Phil,’ she whispered, before she turned away.

Carrie’s coach had been waiting for her at the prison gate all this time. And when she came out, Peter stepped forward to assist her. Carrie got in, and then sat staring before her in a bewildered fashion.

‘Shall we drive home, madam?’ asks Peter, his voice very husky.

‘To——. Yes—to my father’s,’ said Carrie.

CHAPTER XXXIV

In this moment of dismay Carrie's heart had turned to her father, as the needle turns to the north, with a tenacity of trustfulness that a thousand quarrels would never shake. Here, if anywhere, lay her help, her comfort. She alighted at the door of her old home and passed in without waiting to inquire of Patty whether her father was at home or no. Her trouble would be her passport; she made sure of welcome now, if it had been refused to her in her prosperity.

The dusk had fallen, but firelight lit up the room as Carrie entered; it shone brightly on the polished panelling of the walls with rosy reflection.

Sebastian had just come in; he stood beside the fire; his great figure in the half light seemed to fill the little room. Carrie ran towards him with her arms outstretched and a cry of joy; the sight of him came to her in her distress like the very peace of heaven.

'Save him! save him, dada!' she cried, turning back in her extremity to her childish speech.

'Eh, my poor Carrie!—so trouble hath come to you,' said Sebastian, 'and so you are come to me.' He paused, and looked curiously at his daughter as he spoke. Carrie had changed so much since they parted; in her splendid raiment, her jewels and her laces, she looked such a great lady that Sebastian scarcely recognised her. But Carrie was oblivious of everything, save the one thing at her heart. She caught both Sebastian's hands in hers, and cried again and again, 'Save him, dada! Oh, sir, they're going to hang him—to hang my Philip; he'll hang ere the month is out if you do not save him.'

Sebastian sat down and Carrie knelt beside him; there was no word of dispute between them now; she gazed up into his face in an agony of entreaty, an ecstasy of confidence.

'I feared 'twould go badly from the first,' said Sebastian. 'Have you seen your husband, Carrie, since the sentence?'

'Yes, this afternoon. Oh, sir, 'tis impossible that Phil can die.'

'And what doth he say—how explain this murder to you—to his wife?' asked Sebastian curiously.

‘He says Simon Prior—(a man, sir, that I always hated, a man I made Phil quarrel with not long ago)—he says Simon Prior must have done it, else he can offer no explanation.’

‘And you—do you not think your husband did it, Carrie?’

Carrie drew back from her father for a moment in horror.

‘Sir!’ she began—but added a moment later—‘but that is because you do not know Phil.’

‘Carrie,’ said Sebastian, leaning forward to take her hand in his, ‘tell me, my child, my joy, the better part of life for me—tell me, are you as happy with Philip as you thought to be? do you love him as first you did? for youthful passions are hot, and many a time burn themselves out.’

‘I love him more a thousand times than when first I loved.’

‘And you believe no ill of him?’

‘As soon I would believe it of you, sir.’

Sebastian rose and began to pace up and down the room.

‘Have they tried for a reprieve, Carrie?’

‘Vainly, sir.’

Carrie sank down, burying her face in the cushions of her father’s chair, and Sebastian paced through the room in silence.

A scheme was already in his mind which would easily enough gain Philip’s release; but whether to do it? Even the sight of Carrie kneeling there in such an abandonment of grief could not move him. Willingly he would see Philip Meadowes die: an offence to him in the very circumstances of his birth; the son of his bitter enemy; himself the man who had stolen Carrie from him—how was it possible that he should work for Philip’s release? Moreover, Philip was a murderer; Carrie might dotingly believe in his innocence—to the world he stood accused; it would be plainly wrong and unprincipled to assist at the reprieve of such a man. No, he would not do it, would never suggest the possibility to Carrie, to any one. Philip should die, and Carrie would return to her father’s house, and they would bury the past in the grave that closed over Richard Meadowes and his son.

So argued Sebastian, as he paced up and down the quiet fire-lit room; then the silence became full of voices—the past sung and whispered to his heart; he was young again, and Annie was with him. Annie seemed now to speak so clearly that she might have been pacing beside him—she spoke

always the same words, pleading with him for something with all her soul: —'*If ever you can help my Phil . . . for my sake . . . and forgettin' Dick Sundon and all his lies.*' She urged again and yet again. The time had come in truth; if ever Phil wanted a helper, he wanted one now, and yet Sebastian held back.

'Don't ask it of me, Annie!' he cried out aloud, forgetful of Carrie's presence in the fierceness of the mental struggle he was going through. Carrie sat up in surprise at the sound of his voice, and hearing a name she did not know.

'Did you speak, sir?' she asked. Her voice woke him to the present, to the realities of things, and his decision was taken in a moment. How had he ever questioned?—he had promised Annie once and for ever to help her son if it ever lay in his power to do so; worthy or unworthy, as Phil might be, that promise must be kept for the sake of the woman who had trusted him. Sebastian flung out his arms with a gesture of relief—like a man who has been long cramped. In the sudden rebound from the tense feeling of the last few minutes, he fairly laughed aloud, then bending over Carrie he raised her face to his, and kissed her wet blue eyes.

'Come, sweetheart,' he said. 'Take courage, mayhap we shall save him yet.'

Carrie held her breath, and Sebastian continued:—

'My Lady Y—— suffers from an obscure disease of the finger-joints.' . . . He paused and looked at Carrie for a moment.

'I scarce see how my Lady Y——'s finger-joints affect my husband's release, sir,' pouted Carrie, who thought that her father had taken a sudden and rather unfeeling divergence into his own affairs at this point; but her tears were dried none the less; she listened breathlessly for what Sebastian was going to say next.

'I have an idea the cure would be simple enough,' said Sebastian. 'I've seen more of what can be done with cutting than most men, and I'm not afraid of the knife.—Come, Carrie, mayhap we can cut this knot yet.'

'How? what?' queried Carrie, mystified.

'Plainly, I'll operate on your husband if he hath a mind to give a hand for his life, and an hour of agony.'

Carrie had heard—as what surgeon's daughter of that day had not heard? —of many a criminal who owed his life to her father's lancet. It was not an

uncommon means of escape from the gallows, though the horror of it made it in every case a last resort. The difficulty of obtaining subjects for operation in those days was such that the surgeons considered themselves lucky when they could get some hapless prisoner to buy his life at their hands. As I say, many a tale of the kind Carrie had heard, yet she whitened now as she realised all that the plan involved.

'Tush, Carrie,' laughed her father, patting her white cheek. 'Many's the man hath gone through worse at my hands. Ask your old friend Cartwright how I took off his arm, and he's here still to tell the tale.'

'Ugh,' shuddered Carrie.

'Come, I had not thought to see my daughter a coward,' urged Sebastian.

'Will—will you arrange about it, sir?' said Carrie faintly.

'I shall see the authorities—then Philip; I have no fear of his refusing: all that a man hath will he give for his life, Carrie.'

'Will it be very bad, sir?' asked Carrie.

'Well, I'll scarce guarantee him a pleasant hour,' laughed Sebastian. 'The last I had under my hands from Newgate made noise enough to deafen one; the one before that had made himself as drunk as a lord, which was wiser in him for certain.' Poor Carrie, treated to these details—for it was a robust age,—shivered and felt sick with horror.

'Sir, sir, be quiet!' she cried, with her fingers in her ears, and Sebastian laughed.

'Send your coach home, Carrie, and stay with me,' he said; 'where else would you stay, now you are in trouble?'

'Will you have me, sir?'

'Till brighter days return, my daughter.'

CHAPTER XXXV

I never enter an old house without wishing it had a voice and could tell me all its stories and secrets; but the secrets of Newgate would be such as none of us would listen to willingly—I think we would stop our ears and hasten on were these stones to cry out! Nevertheless one of the Newgate cells could tell of a sunny morning long ago when Caroline Meadowes, Sebastian Shepley, and their friend, Dr. Munro, came together to aid at the release of Carrie's husband. Philip needed all his light-heartedness that day, for though liberty was drawing near, he was to gain it by a dark enough entrance. As he stood beside the window and looked out into the sunshiny world where men walked free and happy, his thoughts were bitter enough; one man, at least, thought he, walked free that day who should not! Then the door was thrown open, and Carrie and her father came in, followed by Dr. Munro. Carrie was white as a lily, her blue eyes shone like stars; she ran towards her husband and clasped his hands—she could not speak, poor child. Sebastian wore his usual air of decision and cheerfulness; Munro looked with some curiosity at the three people brought together for such a strange purpose. Philip was the first to speak, coming forward with his graceful address to greet Sebastian, as though no disagreement had ever been between them.

'My dear sir,' he said, 'I have no words in which to express my indebtedness to you.'

He spoke with so much of his father's air and voice that Sebastian had almost recoiled from his outstretched hand, but, recollecting himself, he took it as cordially as might be.

'This is my friend Dr. Munro,' he said, 'who hath come to see us through with this ticklish business.'

'And hath Carrie come for the same end?' asked Phil, as he turned to his wife and laughed; 'I think 'twill be better for her to wait elsewhere till we are done with the matter.'

'So thought I,' said Sebastian, 'but so did not think Carrie. Two hours of fatherly eloquence have I wasted on her this day already, and she hath turned a deaf ear to it all. Come she would, and stay she will, so there's an end of it.

But this I say, the first sound she makes, or tear she sheds, she goes from the room.'

'Carrie, my sweet, better far go elsewhere and wait; 'twill not be long. I fear you'll find it painful to watch this,' said Phil, but Carrie shook her head.

'Let me stay, Phil; 'twould be harder far not to be near you. I shall not cry nor scream, believe me; I shall be quiet all the time.'

'Carrie is no coward in truth,' said her father proudly. 'Best give her her own way, Meadowes, as she seems determined in it.'

'As you please, sir,' he said; and there was a moment of ominous pause.

'Come,' said Sebastian; 'off with your coat, Meadowes; the quicker we get to work the better.' He turned up his own sleeves as he spoke, and Munro opened out the instruments he carried.

Philip flung off his coat.

'Which arm, sir? left, I hope?' he asked, beginning to roll up the shirt-sleeve off his left arm.

'Left,' said Sebastian shortly; 'now lie down and we'll be as quick as may be. Gad! a fine arm it is, and a fine hand—well, say farewell to it, my man, for 'twill not be fair again, I fear.'

He ran his fingers down Phil's strong young arm as he spoke. Carrie, who stood beside him, heard him mutter something under his breath. '*Flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone*,' he said, and Carrie with the self-importance of youth, concluded that her father spoke of her oneness with Philip; she thought of the wedding service: 'He should have said, "they twain shall be one flesh," ' she thought.

'Go on,' said Phil; and Sebastian cut sharply into the white flesh. Carrie whitened and shuddered as she saw the first drop of blood—the price of a life—redden her father's lancet. Then she went over to Phil's side, and took his right hand in hers and held it fast. Every moment she felt it thrill and twitch, but Phil gave no other sign of what he suffered. Sebastian and Munro, intent on their work, bent over him with a word now and then to each other—it was something in these days to have live tissue to operate on: and poor Philip, between them, suffering the torments of Hades, lay there wondering how long he could hold out, for every second seemed an eternity of pain. At first mere strength supported him, then strength of will, then strength of love, then, when all these resources had failed him, Philip groaned aloud, and fell into blissful forgetfulness.

‘Poor fellow!’ muttered Sebastian. He glanced across at Carrie; she did not stir a muscle.

‘We will not be long now, madam,’ said Munro, with pity for her white face.

‘There—he hath paid dearly for—for life,’ said Sebastian a few minutes later; ‘and I doubt, Munro, my Lady Y——’s courage will not bear her through the same!’ And both the men laughed.

Phil came to himself slowly; and lay white and trembling, his face drawn with pain.

‘When you feel able, Philip,’ said Sebastian, in a voice as kind as a mother’s, bending down to speak to him, ‘I shall take you back to my house —you and Carrie; ’twill be home for you now.’

Philip just smiled and closed his eyes, and wondered vaguely how Dr. Shepley ever got his voice to sound so soft; but Carrie, crossing over to where her father stood, buried her face on his breast and wept her long restrained tears.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Carrie, Philip, and Sebastian formed a curious little household for the next few weeks. Sebastian, who was first a doctor and then a man, deferred his judgment upon Philip's case in the meantime, and directed his energies to Philip's recovery. This, with a vigorous young constitution, was not very prolonged, and he was soon going about as usual, only with the maimed hand in a sling. Then, and not till then, Sebastian began to study Philip's character very carefully. He would sit in silence and look at the young man, puzzling what the truth of this strange business was. For the life of him Sebastian could not resist the charm of Phil's manner, and found himself unconsciously joining in his jests and his talk; but every one did that—what surprised him much more was to find that he esteemed Philip in his more serious moments. When Philip chose to be serious he was terribly in earnest, compelling attention to his subject, and Sebastian could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses when first he heard him speak in this way.

It was one evening as the two men sat alone together, Carrie having gone out of the room, that Philip began to speak of the future.

'You know, sir,' he said, 'I must begin to earn my living—I cannot let you support my wife, far less myself, and I do not suppose that the fortune which my father meant to leave me can be mine now. Even if it were, I scarce think I could touch it while all the world supposes me to be his murderer.'

Sebastian was silent for a moment, and Phil turned quickly and looked at him.

'Do you think I did that, sir?' he asked.

'If you did, you have the most extraordinary easy conscience of any man I have ever met,' said Sebastian.

Phil gave a light little sigh. 'Well, sir, 'tis more than generous of you to house a murderer, even for the sake of your dear daughter.—But to return to what I spoke of first. Murderer or no, I cannot let another man work for me and be idle myself, yet I fear, with the stigma that's on me now, I can scarce hope for success in any profession here. Sir, do you think I should leave England and make a home for my wife elsewhere?'

‘Yes,’ said Sebastian slowly; ‘I fear ’tis your only chance. But leave Carrie with me meantime—a living, far less a competency, is none so easy to make, as you’ll find when you begin to try to make one.’

‘Oh, I’ve been deucedly rich!’ cried Phil. ‘I should have been working years ago; but I’ll work now like twelve men, sir, to make up for lost time. Tell me, sir, isn’t work a splendid thing? Now, when I see you each day with more than you can overtake, I wish from my heart I’d belonged always to those that toil. Some fraction of it all must live, you know, even of work like yours, sir, that appears to be only from day to day, ’tis really moving the world on. Our horrible idle days are dead before they are half lived!’

‘I never saw you in earnest before, Philip,’ said Sebastian, with a smile for the heat of youth.

‘You see—pardon me—you have not seen very much of me,’ said Phil; ‘but I must be in earnest now: Heaven knows I’ve played myself long enough. ’Tis true I enter into life halt now,’ he added, in a sadder tone.

This was not the last conversation they had on this much-vexed subject of what Phil was to do; but things took on a different complexion suddenly, one night not long after.

There came a thunder upon the knocker and a note from Dr. Munro. It was dated from a house in —— Street, and contained only these words: ‘Do your endeavour to come as speedily as may be, bringing with you Philip Meadowes.’

Sebastian could not explain the strange summons. He passed the note to Philip.

‘Simon Prior lives there,’ said Phil, as he looked at the address.

‘Will you come, then?’

‘Yes, sir; I fancy he hath business with me,’ said Phil. When they reached the house, Munro met them on the stairway.

‘Come this way,’ he said, leading them into a sitting-room. He closed the door and signed to them to sit down.

‘This is the house of Simon Prior, the same who witnessed at your trial,’ he said, with a bow towards Philip. ‘And Simon Prior is taken with seizures that threaten to end his days ere long. Years ago he came under my hands in hospital (do you remember, Shepley? no, why should you?) from a street accident. He seemingly thought me skilful, for now he sends for me again, and this time the case is scarce so easy. Now, since I have been called in, the

man has seemed in great trouble of mind—a more arrant coward I never knew—and he takes no rest day nor night, tossing and crying out. Since this afternoon he calls continually to see you, "Philip Meadowes," and moreover hath made me send by special messenger summoning Judge Matthews to his bedside. His Lordship is not yet arrived, mayhap he will not trouble himself to come, but I have told him that the summons may have special bearings on a certain interesting case he lately tried, so I look to see him shortly.'

Philip said nothing; but he turned his sparkling eyes on Sebastian for a moment.

'Doth Prior wander in his mind then?' said Sebastian, a little anxiously.

'No, he fears death and judgment apparently, but when the terrors pass off him, he is in full possession of his senses.'

'And he seems anxious to see Philip?'

'After a fashion. At first he seemed to struggle long about the matter, then asked me if death was near, inevitably, for him, and when I replied that it was, he said, after a pause for thought, "Then send for Philip Meadowes." 'Twas after that he summoned Judge Matthews, seemingly an afterthought.'

They heard at this moment the sound of Matthews' arrival in the hall. Munro went out to meet him and usher him in. Philip found himself again in the presence of his Judge.

'A good evening to you, gentlemen,' said Matthews. Phil drew himself up proudly and met his surprised look with a steady glance.

'I fancy we are about to hear a curious statement from Mr. Simon Prior, my Lord,' said Munro, 'but before we go into his chamber I had best tell you of his condition. 'Tis critical to a degree, but his mind is clear still. The thoughts that distract him come, I fancy, from an evil conscience, so I have troubled you to come at his bidding and hear whatever he hath to say, in hopes that his mind being put at rest, his bodily state may be bettered. Gentlemen, shall we go into the sick-room?'

They followed Munro into a large dim-lighted room, a silent, curious trio.

Simon Prior at sound of their footsteps started up on his elbow, and peered into the dimness of the shadowy room.

'Are they come? are all come? Is Philip Meadowes come, and Shepley, and Judge Matthews?' he said, in an anxious, loud voice.

‘All are come, sir; calm yourself and lie back. My Lord here is willing to hear aught you may have to say,’ said Munro, laying Prior back against the pillows. Matthews stepped forward and stood beside the bed, but at sight of him Prior started up again.

‘The Judge! the Judge!’ he cried, ‘and before day shines I’ll stand before the Judge of All!’

‘Sir, sir, compose yourself,’ said Matthews, as he took a seat by the side of the bed and laid his hand kindly enough across the coverlet. ‘I am come to hear your story; take your time, I shall listen, however long it may be.’

‘Easily told, easily,’ said Prior. He seemed to have strung himself up to tell all his story, for he rattled it off now like a schoolboy who repeats his letters. ‘Easily told—just that I did it—killed Richard Meadowes. I took off my shoes and followed him, trusting to the dark night. Oh, it was all as easy as could be. Then I told him I was Philip—just for vengeance—just because Phil was the only thing he loved on earth, and I wished to make his heart bleed at the last. “I am Philip,” I said in this high voice’—(he broke out into it as he spoke)—‘just as Philip there speaks—and Meadowes believed me. He died believing it. Oh, I paid him out for his treachery, for a thousand treacheries, and he thought his own boy had turned traitor at the last! And I’m glad I did it, for he had thrown me over like an old shoe when I had served his turn. Oh, sin’s easy, easy; nothing so easy as sinning at the first, but now, how am I to die? how am I to die?’

He tossed himself back against the pillows, his arms flung above his head. Philip came forward and stood looking pityingly down at him.

‘Now you have cleared me of this crime, Prior,’ he said, ‘let your mind be easy of that. I am here alive and well, as you see. You have my forgiveness, if that is any comfort to you. Is this all you have to tell us?’

‘All? all?—that’s but the end of a hideous story; the beginning was so long ago I scarce remember it. Always money, money. There was the matter of Anne Champion; but he was to pay every debt I had, you know, and I was hard pressed at the time. Lord lay not that sin to my charge! ’Twas Meadowes’ sin, not mine; and there was that other affair in the year ’24 that ——’

‘There,’ said Phil, turning away, ‘I for one have heard all I wish to hear.’

But Prior talked on:—

‘There was the matter of Anne Champion, as I said; listen, Philip, for she was your mother, you know, and you, Shepley, you were her lover once, you

remember; come, and I shall tell you all of that I——'

'Sir, sir,' said Phil in a low quick whisper to Sebastian, and he pointed to the door. They passed out together, with the sound of Prior's voice still talking on and on as they closed the door. In silence they passed down the staircase and out into the silent street. They stood together there for a moment without speaking. Then Sebastian laid his hand on Phil's shoulder.

'Come, my son,' he said.

Phil and Carrie were perhaps the happiest man and woman in London that night. And Sebastian Shepley, watching their joy, entered into it and saw in them the bright end of a dark story.

Ah, untraceable jugglery of Time, and Change, and Fate! In all the arts of the conjurer is no trickery like this; from pain and dishonour and treachery, and broken hearts and blighted hopes, from such a soil life sends up her fresh and vigorous shoots, the immortal blossomings of the tree that cannot wither, whose leaves shall surely, at some far-off day, heal the nations!

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *A Daughter of Strife* by Jane Helen Findlater]