

'And that's the time you choose for your walk?' Ransom said, smiling.

'Well, it's the time my old lady has least need of me; she's too absorbed.'

Doctor Prance dealt in facts; Ransom had already discovered that; and some of her facts were very interesting.

'The Music Hall—isn't that your great building?' he asked.

'Well, it's the biggest we've got; it's pretty big, but it isn't so big as Miss Chancellor's ideas,' added Doctor Prance. 'She has taken it to bring out Miss Tarrant before the general public—she has never appeared that way in Boston—on a great scale. She expects her to make a big sensation. It will be a great night, and they are preparing for it. They consider it her real beginning.'

'And this is the preparation?' Basil Ransom said.

'Yes; as I say, it's their principal interest.'

Ransom listened, and while he listened he meditated. He had thought it possible Verena's principles might have been shaken by the profession of faith to which he treated her in New York; but this hardly looked like it. For some moments Doctor Prance and he stood together in silence.

'You don't hear the words,' the doctor remarked, with a smile which, in the dark, looked Mephistophelean.

'Oh, I know the words!' the young man exclaimed, with rather a groan, as he offered her his hand for good-night.

XXXVI.

A CERTAIN prudence had determined him to put off his visit till the morning; he thought it more probable that at that time he should be able to see Verena alone, whereas in the evening the two young women would be sure to be sitting together. When the morrow dawned, however, Basil Ransom felt none of the trepidation of the procrastinator; he knew nothing of the reception that awaited him, but he took his way to the cottage designated to him overnight by Doctor Prance, with the step of a man much more conscious of his own purpose than of possible obstacles. He made the reflection, as he went, that to see a place for the first time at night is like reading a foreign author in a translation. At the present hour—it was getting towards eleven o'clock—he felt that he was dealing with the original. The little straggling, loosely-clustered town lay along the edge of a blue inlet, on the other side of which was a low, wooded shore, with a gleam of white sand where it touched the water. The narrow bay carried the vision outward to a picture that seemed at once bright and dim—a shining, slumbering summer-sea, and a far-off, circling line of coast, which, under the August sun, was hazy and delicate. Ransom regarded the place as a town because Doctor Prance had called it one; but it was a town where you smelt the breath of the hay in the streets and you might gather blackberries in the principal square. The houses looked at each other across the grass—low, rusty, crooked, distended houses, with dry, cracked faces and the dim eyes of small-paned, stiffly-sliding windows. Their little door-yards bristled with rank, old-fashioned flowers, mostly yellow; and on the quarter that stood back from the sea the fields sloped upward, and the woods in which

they presently lost themselves looked down over the roofs. Bolts and bars were not a part of the domestic machinery of Marmion, and the responsive menial, receiving the visitor on the threshold, was a creature rather desired than definitely possessed; so that Basil Ransom found Miss Chancellor's house-door gaping wide (as he had seen it the night before), and destitute even of a knocker or a bell-handle. From where he stood in the porch he could see the whole of the little sitting-room on the left of the hall—see that it stretched straight through to the back windows; that it was garnished with photographs of foreign works of art, pinned upon the walls, and enriched with a piano and other little extemporised embellishments, such as ingenious women lavish upon the houses they hire for a few weeks. Verena told him afterwards that Olive had taken her cottage furnished, but that the paucity of chairs and tables and bedsteads was such that their little party used almost to sit down, to lie down, in turn. On the other hand they had all George Eliot's writings, and two photographs of the Sistine Madonna. Ransom rapped with his stick on the lintel of the door, but no one came to receive him; so he made his way into the parlour, where he observed that his cousin Olive had as many German books as ever lying about. He dipped into this literature, momentarily, according to his wont, and then remembered that this was not what he had come for and that as he waited at the door he had seen, through another door, opening at the opposite end of the hall, signs of a small verandah attached to the other face of the house. Thinking the ladies might be assembled there in the shade, he pushed aside the muslin curtain of the back window, and saw that the advantages of Miss Chancellor's summer-residence were in this quarter. There was a verandah, in fact, to which a wide, horizontal trellis, covered with an ancient vine, formed a kind of extension. Beyond the trellis was a small, lonely garden; beyond the garden was a large, vague, woody space, where a few piles of old timber were disposed, and which he afterwards learned to be a relic of the shipbuilding era described to him by Doctor Prance; and still beyond this again was the charming lake-like estuary he had already

admired. His eyes did not rest upon the distance; they were attracted by a figure seated under the trellis, where the chequers of sun, in the interstices of the vine-leaves, fell upon a bright-coloured rug spread out on the ground. The floor of the roughly-constructed verandah was so low that there was virtually no difference in the level. It took Ransom only a moment to recognise Miss Birdseye, though her back was turned to the house. She was alone; she sat there motionless (she had a newspaper in her lap, but her attitude was not that of a reader), looking at the shimmering bay. She might be asleep; that was why Ransom moderated the process of his long legs as he came round through the house to join her. This precaution represented his only scruple. He stepped across the verandah and stood close to her, but she did not appear to notice him. Visibly, she was dozing, or presumably, rather, for her head was enveloped in an old faded straw-hat, which concealed the upper part of her face. There were two or three other chairs near her, and a table on which were half a dozen books and periodicals, together with a glass containing a colourless liquid, on the top of which a spoon was laid. Ransom desired only to respect her repose, so he sat down in one of the chairs and waited till she should become aware of his presence. He thought Miss Chancellor's back-garden a delightful spot, and his jaded senses tasted the breeze—the idle, wandering summer-wind—that stirred the vine-leaves over his head. The hazy shores on the other side of the water, which had tints more delicate than the street-vistas of New York (they seemed powdered with silver, a sort of midsummer light), suggested to him a land of dreams, a country in a picture. Basil Ransom had seen very few pictures, there were none in Mississippi; but he had a vision at times of something that would be more refined than the real world, and the situation in which he now found himself pleased him almost as much as if it had been a striking work of art. He was unable to see, as I have said, whether Miss Birdseye were taking in the prospect through open or only, imagination aiding (she had plenty of that), through closed, tired, dazzled eyes. She appeared to him, as the minutes elapsed and he sat beside

her, the incarnation of well-earned rest, of patient, submissive superannuation. At the end of her long day's work she might have been placed there to enjoy this dim prevision of the peaceful river, the gleaming shores, of the paradise her unselfish life had certainly qualified her to enter, and which, apparently, would so soon be opened to her. After a while she said, placidly, without turning:

'I suppose it's about time I should take my remedy again. It does seem as if she had found the right thing; don't you think so?'

'Do you mean the contents of that tumbler? I shall be delighted to give it to you, and you must tell me how much you take.' And Basil Ransom, getting up, possessed himself of the glass on the table.

At the sound of his voice Miss Birdseye pushed back her straw-hat by a movement that was familiar to her, and twisting about her muffled figure a little (even in August she felt the cold, and had to be much covered up to sit out), directed at him a speculative, unastonished gaze.

'One spoonful—two?' Ransom asked, stirring the dose and smiling.

'Well, I guess I'll take two this time.'

'Certainly, Doctor Prance couldn't help finding the right thing,' Ransom said, as he administered the medicine; while the movement with which she extended her face to take it made her seem doubly childlike.

He put down the glass, and she relapsed into her position; she seemed to be considering. 'It's homœopathic,' she remarked, in a moment.

'Oh, I have no doubt of that; I presume you wouldn't take anything else.'

'Well, it's generally admitted now to be the true system.'

Ransom moved closer to her, placed himself where she could see him better. 'It's a great thing to have the true system,' he said, bending towards her in a friendly way; 'I'm sure you have it in everything.' He was not often hypocritical; but when he was he went all lengths.

'Well, I don't know that any one has a right to say that. I thought you were Verena,' she added in a moment, taking him in again with her mild, deliberate vision.

'I have been waiting for you to recognise me; of course you didn't know I was here—I only arrived last night.'

'Well, I'm glad you have come to see Olive now.'

'You remember that I wouldn't do that when I met you last?'

'You asked me not to mention to her that I had met you; that's what I principally recall.'

'And don't you remember what I told you I wanted to do? I wanted to go out to Cambridge and see Miss Tarrant. Thanks to the information that you were so good as to give me, I was able to do so.'

'Yes, she gave me quite a little description of your visit,' said Miss Birdseye, with a smile and a vague sound in her throat—a sort of pensive, private reference to the idea of laughter—of which Ransom never learned the exact significance, though he retained for a long time afterwards a kindly memory of the old lady's manner at the moment.

'I don't know how much she enjoyed it, but it was an immense pleasure to me; so great a one that, as you see, I have come to call upon her again.'

'Then, I presume, she *has* shaken you?'

'She has shaken me tremendously!' said Ransom, laughing.

'Well, you'll be a great addition,' Miss Birdseye returned.

'And this time your visit is also for Miss Chancellor?'

'That depends on whether she will receive me.'

'Well, if she knows you are shaken, that will go a great way,' said Miss Birdseye, a little musingly, as if even to her unsophisticated mind it had been manifested that one's relations with Miss Chancellor might be ticklish. 'But she can't receive you now—can she?—because she's out. She has gone to the post-office for the Boston letters, and they get so many every day that she had to take Verena with her to help her carry them home. One of them wanted to stay with me, because Doctor Prance has gone fishing, but I said I presumed I could be left alone for about seven minutes. I know how they love to be together; it seems as if one *couldn't* go out without the other. That's what they came down here for, because it's quiet, and it didn't look as if there was any one else they

would be much drawn to. So it would be a pity for me to come down after them just to spoil it !'

'I am afraid I shall spoil it, Miss Birdseye.'

'Oh, well, a gentleman,' murmured the ancient woman.

'Yes, what can you expect of a gentleman? I certainly shall spoil it if I can.'

'You had better go fishing with Doctor Prance,' said Miss Birdseye, with a serenity which showed that she was far from measuring the sinister quality of the announcement he had just made.

'I shan't object to that at all. The days here must be very long—very full of hours. Have you got the doctor with you?' Ransom inquired, as if he knew nothing at all about her.

'Yes, Miss Chancellor invited us both; she is very thoughtful. She is not merely a theoretic philanthropist—she goes into details,' said Miss Birdseye, presenting her large person, in her chair, as if she herself were only an item. 'It seems as if we were not so much wanted in Boston, just in August.'

'And here you sit and enjoy the breeze, and admire the view,' the young man remarked, wondering when the two messengers, whose seven minutes must long since have expired, would return from the post-office.

'Yes, I enjoy everything in this little old-world place; I didn't suppose I should be satisfied to be so passive. It's a great contrast to my former exertions. But somehow it doesn't seem as if there were any trouble or any wrong round here; and if there should be, there are Miss Chancellor and Miss Tarrant to look after it. They seem to think I had better fold my hands. Besides, when helpful, generous minds begin to flock in from *your* part of the country,' Miss Birdseye continued, looking at him from under the distorted and discoloured canopy of her hat with a benignity which completed the idea in any cheerful sense he chose.

He felt by this time that he was committed to rather a dishonest part; he was pledged not to give a shock to her optimism. This might cost him, in the coming days, a good deal of dissimulation, but he was now saved from any

further expenditure of ingenuity by certain warning sounds which admonished him that he must keep his wits about him for a purpose more urgent. There were voices in the hall of the house, voices he knew, which came nearer, quickly; so that before he had time to rise one of the speakers had come out with the exclamation—'Dear Miss Birdseye, here are seven letters for you!' The words fell to the ground, indeed, before they were fairly spoken, and when Ransom got up, turning, he saw Olive Chancellor standing there, with the parcel from the post-office in her hand. She stared at him in sudden horror; for the moment her self-possession completely deserted her. There was so little of any greeting in her face save the greeting of dismay, that he felt there was nothing for him to say to her, nothing that could mitigate the odious fact of his being there. He could only let her take it in, let her divine that, this time, he was not to be got rid of. In an instant—to ease off the situation—he held out his hand for Miss Birdseye's letters, and it was a proof of Olive's having turned rather faint and weak that she gave them up to him. He delivered the packet to the old lady, and now Verena had appeared in the doorway of the house. As soon as she saw him, she blushed crimson; but she did not, like Olive, stand voiceless.

'Why, Mr. Ransom,' she cried out, 'where in the world were *you* washed ashore?' Miss Birdseye, meanwhile, taking her letters, had no appearance of observing that the encounter between Olive and her visitor was a kind of concussion.

It was Verena who eased off the situation; her gay challenge rose to her lips as promptly as if she had had no cause for embarrassment. She was not confused even when she blushed, and her alertness may perhaps be explained by the habit of public speaking. Ransom smiled at her while she came forward, but he spoke first to Olive, who had already turned her eyes away from him and gazed at the blue sea-view as if she were wondering what was going to happen to her at last.

'Of course you are very much surprised to see me; but I hope to be able to induce you to regard me not absolutely

in the light of an intruder. I found your door open, and I walked in, and Miss Birdseye seemed to think I might stay. Miss Birdseye, I put myself under your protection; I invoke you; I appeal to you,' the young man went on. 'Adopt me, answer for me, cover me with the mantle of your charity!'

Miss Birdseye looked up from her letters, as if at first she had only faintly heard his appeal. She turned her eyes from Olive to Verena; then she said, 'Doesn't it seem as if we had room for all? When I remember what I have seen in the South, Mr. Ransom's being here strikes me as a great triumph.'

Olive evidently failed to understand, and Verena broke in with eagerness, 'It was by my letter, of course, that you knew we were here. The one I wrote just before we came, Olive,' she went on. 'Don't you remember I showed it to you?'

At the mention of this act of submission on her friend's part Olive started, flashing her a strange look; then she said to Basil that she didn't see why he should explain so much about his coming; every one had a right to come. It was a very charming place; it ought to do any one good. 'But it will have one defect for you,' she added; 'three-quarters of the summer residents are women!'

This attempted pleasantry on Miss Chancellor's part, so unexpected, so incongruous, uttered with white lips and cold eyes, struck Ransom to that degree by its oddity that he could not resist exchanging a glance of wonder with Verena, who, if she had had the opportunity, could probably have explained to him the phenomenon. Olive had recovered herself, reminded herself that she was safe, that her companion in New York had repudiated, denounced her pursuer; and, as a proof to her own sense of her security, as well as a touching mark to Verena that now, after what had passed, she had no fear, she felt that a certain light mockery would be effective.

'Ah, Miss Olive, don't pretend to think I love your sex so little, when you know that what you really object to in me is that I love it too much!' Ransom was not brazen, he was not impudent, he was really a very modest man;

but he was aware that whatever he said or did he was condemned to seem impudent now, and he argued within himself that if he was to have the dishonour of being thought brazen he might as well have the comfort. He didn't care a straw, in truth, how he was judged or how he might offend; he had a purpose which swallowed up such inanities as that, and he was so full of it that it kept him firm, balanced him, gave him an assurance that might easily have been confounded with a cold detachment. 'This place will do me good,' he pursued; 'I haven't had a holiday for more than two years, I couldn't have gone another day; I was finished. I would have written to you beforehand that I was coming, but I only started at a few hours' notice. It occurred to me that this would be just what I wanted; I remembered what Miss Tarrant had said in her note, that it was a place where people could lie on the ground and wear their old clothes. I delight to lie on the ground, and all my clothes are old. I hope to be able to stay three or four weeks.'

Olive listened till he had done speaking; she stood a single moment longer, and then, without a word, a glance, she rushed into the house. Ransom saw that Miss Birdseye was immersed in her letters; so he went straight to Verena and stood before her, looking far into her eyes. He was not smiling now, as he had been in speaking to Olive. 'Will you come somewhere apart, where I can speak to you alone?'

'Why have you done this? It was not right in you to come!' Verena looked still as if she were blushing, but Ransom perceived he must allow for her having been delicately scorched by the sun.

'I have come because it is necessary—because I have something very important to say to you. A great number of things.'

'The same things you said in New York? I don't want to hear them again—they were horrible!'

'No, not the same—different ones. I want you to come out with me, away from here.'

'You always want me to come out! We can't go out here; we *are* out, as much as we can be!' Verena laughed.

She tried to turn it off—feeling that something really impended.

‘Come down into the garden, and out beyond there—to the water, where we can speak. It’s what I have come for; it was not for what I told Miss Olive!’

He had lowered his voice, as if Miss Olive might still hear them, and there was something strangely grave—altogether solemn, indeed—in its tone. Verena looked around her, at the splendid summer day, at the much-swathed, formless figure of Miss Birdseye, holding her letter inside her hat. ‘Mr. Ransom!’ she articulated then, simply; and as her eyes met his again they showed him a couple of tears.

‘It’s not to make you suffer, I honestly believe. I don’t want to say anything that will hurt you. How can I possibly hurt you, when I feel to you as I do?’ he went on, with suppressed force.

She said no more, but all her face entreated him to let her off, to spare her; and as this look deepened, a quick sense of elation and success began to throb in his heart, for it told him exactly what he wanted to know. It told him that she was afraid of him, that she had ceased to trust herself, that the way he had read her nature was the right way (she was tremendously open to attack, she was meant for love, she was meant for him), and that his arriving at the point at which he wished to arrive was only a question of time. This happy consciousness made him extraordinarily tender to her; he couldn’t put enough reassurance into his smile, his low murmur, as he said: ‘Only give me ten minutes; don’t receive me by turning me away. It’s my holiday—my poor little holiday; don’t spoil it.’

Three minutes later Miss Birdseye, looking up from her letter, saw them move together through the bristling garden and traverse a gap in the old fence which inclosed the further side of it. They passed into the ancient shipyard which lay beyond, and which was now a mere vague, grass-grown approach to the waterside, bestrewn with a few remnants of supererogatory timber. She saw them stroll forward to the edge of the bay and stand there, taking the soft breeze in their faces. She watched them a

little, and it warmed her heart to see the stiff-necked young Southerner led captive by a daughter of New England trained in the right school, who would impose her opinions in their integrity. Considering how prejudiced he must have been he was certainly behaving very well; even at that distance Miss Birdseye dimly made out that there was something positively humble in the way he invited Verena Tarrant to seat herself on a low pile of weather-blackened planks, which constituted the principal furniture of the place, and something, perhaps, just a trifle too expressive of righteous triumph in the manner in which the girl put the suggestion by and stood where she liked, a little proudly, turning a good deal away from him. Miss Birdseye could see as much as this, but she couldn’t hear, so that she didn’t know what it was that made Verena turn suddenly back to him, at something he said. If she had known, perhaps his observation would have struck her as less singular—under the circumstances in which these two young persons met—than it may appear to the reader.

‘They have accepted one of my articles; I think it’s the best.’ These were the first words that passed Basil Ransom’s lips after the pair had withdrawn as far as it was possible to withdraw (in that direction) from the house.

‘Oh, is it printed—when does it appear?’ Verena asked that question instantly; it sprang from her lips in a manner that completely belied the air of keeping herself at a distance from him which she had worn a few moments before.

He didn’t tell her again this time, as he had told her when, on the occasion of their walk together in New York, she expressed an inconsequent hope that his fortune as a rejected contributor would take a turn—he didn’t remark to her once more that she was a delightful being; he only went on (as if her revulsion were a matter of course), to explain everything he could, so that she might as soon as possible know him better and see how completely she could trust him. ‘That was, at bottom, the reason I came here. The essay in question is the most important thing I have done in the way of a literary attempt, and I determined to give up the game or to persist, according as I should be

able to bring it to the light or not. The other day I got a letter from the editor of the "Rational Review," telling me that he should be very happy to print it, that he thought it very remarkable, and that he should be glad to hear from me again. He shall hear from me again—he needn't be afraid! It contained a good many of the opinions I have expressed to you, and a good many more besides. I really believe it will attract some attention. At any rate, the simple fact that it is to be published makes an era in my life. This will seem pitiful to you, no doubt, who publish yourself, have been before the world these several years, and are flushed with every kind of triumph; but to me it's simply a tremendous affair. It makes me believe I may do something; it has changed the whole way I look at my future. I have been building castles in the air, and I have put you in the biggest and fairest of them. That's a great change, and, as I say, it's really why I came on.'

Verena lost not a word of this gentle, conciliatory, explicit statement; it was full of surprises for her, and as soon as Ransom had stopped speaking she inquired: 'Why, didn't you feel satisfied about your future before?'

Her tone made him feel how little she had suspected he could have the weakness of a discouragement, how little of a question it must have seemed to her that he would one day triumph on his own erratic line. It was the sweetest tribute he had yet received to the idea that he might have ability; the letter of the editor of the 'Rational Review' was nothing to it. 'No, I felt very blue; it didn't seem to me at all clear that there was a place for me in the world.'

'Gracious!' said Verena Tarrant.

A quarter of an hour later Miss Birdseye, who had returned to her letters (she had a correspondent at Framingham who usually wrote fifteen pages), became aware that Verena, who was now alone, was re-entering the house. She stopped her on her way, and said she hoped she hadn't pushed Mr. Ransom overboard.

'Oh no; he has gone off—round the other way.'

'Well, I hope he is going to speak for us soon.'

Verena hesitated a moment. 'He speaks with the pen.

He has written a very fine article—for the "Rational Review."

Miss Birdseye gazed at her young friend complacently; the sheets of her interminable letter fluttered in the breeze. 'Well, it's delightful to see the way it goes on, isn't it?'

Verena scarcely knew what to say; then, remembering that Doctor Prance had told her that they might lose their dear old companion any day, and confronting it with something Basil Ransom had just said—that the 'Rational Review' was a quarterly and the editor had notified him that his article would appear only in the number after the next—she reflected that perhaps Miss Birdseye wouldn't be there, so many months later, to see how it was her supposed consort had spoken. She might, therefore, be left to believe what she liked to believe, without fear of a day of reckoning. Verena committed herself to nothing more confirmatory than a kiss, however, which the old lady's displaced head-gear enabled her to imprint upon her forehead and which caused Miss Birdseye to exclaim, 'Why, Verena Tarrant, how cold your lips are!' It was not surprising to Verena to hear that her lips were cold; a mortal chill had crept over her, for she knew that this time she should have a tremendous scene with Olive.

She found her in her room, to which she had fled on quitting Mr. Ransom's presence; she sat in the window, having evidently sunk into a chair the moment she came in, a position from which she must have seen Verena walk through the garden and down to the water with the intruder. She remained as she had collapsed, quite prostrate; her attitude was the same as that other time Verena had found her waiting, in New York. What Olive was likely to say to her first the girl scarcely knew; her mind, at any rate, was full of an intention of her own. She went straight to her and fell on her knees before her, taking hold of the hands which were clasped together, with nervous intensity, in Miss Chancellor's lap. Verena remained a moment, looking up at her, and then said:

'There is something I want to tell you now, without a moment's delay; something I didn't tell you at the time it happened, nor afterwards. Mr. Ransom came out to see

me once, at Cambridge, a little while before we went to New York. He spent a couple of hours with me; we took a walk together and saw the colleges. It was after that that he wrote to me—when I answered his letter, as I told you in New York. I didn't tell you then of his visit. We had a great deal of talk about him, and I kept that back. I did so on purpose; I can't explain why, except that I didn't like to tell you, and that I thought it better. But now I want you to know everything; when you know that, you *will* know everything. It was only one visit—about two hours. I enjoyed it very much—he seemed so much interested. One reason I didn't tell you was that I didn't want you to know that he had come on to Boston, and called on me in Cambridge, without going to see you. I thought it might affect you disagreeably. I suppose you will think I deceived you; certainly I left you with a wrong impression. But now I want you to know all—all!

Verena spoke with breathless haste and eagerness; there was a kind of passion in the way she tried to expiate her former want of candour. Olive listened, staring; at first she seemed scarcely to understand. But Verena perceived that she understood sufficiently when she broke out: 'You deceived me—you deceived me! Well, I must say I like your deceit better than such dreadful revelations! And what does anything matter when he has come after you now? What does he want—what has he come for?'

'He has come to ask me to be his wife.'

Verena said this with the same eagerness, with as determined an air of not incurring any reproach this time. But as soon as she had spoken she buried her head in Olive's lap.

Olive made no attempt to raise it again, and returned none of the pressure of her hands; she only sat silent for a time, during which Verena wondered that the idea of the episode at Cambridge, laid bare only after so many months, should not have struck her more deeply. Presently she saw it was because the horror of what had just happened drew her off from it. At last Olive asked: 'Is that what he told you, off there by the water?'

'Yes'—and Verena looked up—'he wanted me to know

it right away. He says it's only fair to you that he should give notice of his intentions. He wants to try and make me like him—so he says. He wants to see more of me, and he wants me to know him better.'

Olive lay back in her chair, with dilated eyes and parted lips. 'Verena Tarrant, what *is* there between you? what *can* I hold on to, what *can* I believe? Two hours, in Cambridge, before we went to New York?' The sense that Verena had been perfidious there—perfidious in her reticence—now began to roll over her. 'Mercy of heaven, how you did act!'

'Olive, it was to spare you.'

'To spare me? If you really wished to spare me he wouldn't be here now!'

Miss Chancellor flashed this out with a sudden violence, a spasm which threw Verena off and made her rise to her feet. For an instant the two young women stood confronted, and a person who had seen them at that moment might have taken them for enemies rather than friends. But any such opposition could last but a few seconds. Verena replied, with a tremor in her voice which was not that of passion, but of charity: 'Do you mean that I expected him, that I brought him? I never in my life was more surprised at anything than when I saw him there.'

'Hasn't he the delicacy of one of his own slave-drivers? Doesn't he know you loathe him?'

Verena looked at her friend with a degree of majesty which, with her, was rare. 'I don't loathe him—I only dislike his opinions.'

'Dislike! Oh, misery!' And Olive turned away to the open window, leaning her forehead against the lifted sash.

Verena hesitated, then went to her, passing her arm round her. 'Don't scold me! help me—help me!' she murmured.

Olive gave her a sidelong look; then, catching her up and facing her again—'Will you come away, now, by the next train?'

'Flee from him again, as I did in New York? No, no, Olive Chancellor, that's not the way,' Verena went on,

reasoningly, as if all the wisdom of the ages were seated on her lips. 'Then how can we leave Miss Birdseye, in her state? We must stay here—we must fight it out here.'

'Why not be honest, if you have been false—really honest, not only half so? Why not tell him plainly that you love him?'

'Love him, Olive? why, I scarcely know him.'

'You'll have a chance, if he stays a month!'

'I don't dislike him, certainly, as you do. But how can I love him when he tells me he wants me to give up everything, all our work, our faith, our future, never to give another address, to open my lips in public? How can I consent to that?' Verena went on, smiling strangely.

'He asks you that, just that way?'

'No; it's not that way. It's very kindly.'

'Kindly? Heaven help you, don't grovel! Doesn't he know it's my house?' Olive added, in a moment.

'Of course he won't come into it, if you forbid him.'

'So that you may meet him in other places—on the shore, in the country?'

'I certainly shan't avoid him, hide away from him,' said Verena, proudly. 'I thought I made you believe, in New York, that I really cared for our aspirations. The way for me then is to meet him, feeling conscious of my strength. What if I do like him? what does it matter? I like my work in the world, I like everything I believe in, better.'

Olive listened to this, and the memory of how, in the house in Tenth Street, Verena had rebuked her doubts, professed her own faith anew, came back to her with a force which made the present situation appear slightly less terrific. Nevertheless, she gave no assent to the girl's logic; she only replied: 'But you didn't meet him there; you hurried away from New York, after I was willing you should stay. He affected you very much there; you were not so calm when you came back to me from your expedition to the park as you pretend to be now. To get away from him you gave up all the rest.'

'I know I wasn't so calm. But now I have had three

months to think about it—about the way he affected me there. I take it very quietly.'

'No, you don't; you are not calm now!'

Verena was silent a moment, while Olive's eyes continued to search her, accuse her, condemn her. 'It's all the more reason you shouldn't give me stab after stab,' she replied, with a gentleness which was infinitely touching.

It had an instant effect upon Olive; she burst into tears, threw herself on her friend's bosom. 'Oh, don't desert me—don't desert me, or you'll kill me in torture,' she moaned, shuddering.

'You must help me—you must help me!' cried Verena, imploringly too.