

sharp knocks, at the same time violently shaking the handle.

'If the door was locked, what was the good of your standing before it?' Ransom inquired.

'So as you couldn't do that;' and the policeman nodded at Mr. Filer.

'You see your interference has done very little good.'

'I dunno; she has got to come out yet.'

Mr. Filer meanwhile had continued to thump and shake, demanding instant admission and inquiring if they were going to let the audience pull the house down. Another round of applause had broken out, directed perceptibly to some apology, some solemn circumlocution, of Selah Tarrant's; this covered the sound of the agent's voice, as well as that of a confused and divided response, proceeding from the parlour. For a minute nothing definite was audible; the door remained closed, and Matthias Pardon reappeared in the vestibule.

'He says she's just a little faint—from nervousness. She'll be all ready in about three minutes.' This announcement was Mr. Pardon's contribution to the crisis; and he added that the crowd was a lovely crowd, it was a real Boston crowd, it was perfectly good-humoured.

'There's a lovely crowd, and a real Boston one too, I guess, in here!' cried Mr. Filer, now banging very hard. 'I've handled prima donnas, and I've handled natural curiosities, but I've never seen anything up to this. Mind what I say, ladies; if you don't let me in, I'll smash down the door!'

'Don't seem as if *you* could make it much worse, does it?' the policeman observed to Ransom, strolling aside a little, with the air of being superseded.

XLII.

RANSOM made no reply; he was watching the door, which at that moment gave way from within. Verena stood there—it was she, evidently, who had opened it—and her eyes went straight to his. She was dressed in white, and her face was whiter than her garment; above it her hair seemed to shine like fire. She took a step forward; but before she could take another he had come down to her, on the threshold of the room. Her face was full of suffering, and he did not attempt—before all those eyes—to take her hand; he only said in a low tone, 'I have been waiting for you—a long time!'

'I know it—I saw you in your seat—I want to speak to you.'

'Well, Miss Tarrant, don't you think you'd better be on the platform?' cried Mr. Filer, making with both his arms a movement as if to sweep her before him, through the waiting-room, up into the presence of the public.

'In a moment I shall be ready. My father is making that all right.' And, to Ransom's surprise, she smiled, with all her sweetness, at the irrepressible agent; appeared to wish genuinely to reassure him.

The three had moved together into the waiting-room, and there at the farther end of it, beyond the vulgar, perfunctory chairs and tables, under the flaring gas, he saw Mrs. Tarrant sitting upright on a sofa, with immense rigidity, and a large flushed visage, full of suppressed distortion, and beside her prostrate, fallen over, her head buried in the lap of Verena's mother, the tragic figure of Olive Chancellor. Ransom could scarcely know how much Olive's having flung herself upon Mrs. Tarrant's bosom testified to the convulsive scene that had just taken place behind the

locked door. He closed it again, sharply, in the face of the reporter and the policeman, and at the same moment Selah Tarrant descended, through the aperture leading to the platform, from his brief communion with the public. On seeing Ransom he stopped short, and, gathering his waterproof about him, measured the young man from head to foot.

'Well, sir, perhaps *you* would like to go and explain our hitch,' he remarked, indulging in a smile so comprehensive that the corners of his mouth seemed almost to meet behind. 'I presume that you, better than any one else, can give them an insight into our difficulties!'

'Father, be still; father, it will come out all right in a moment!' cried Verena, below her breath, panting like an emergent diver.

'There's one thing I want to know: are we going to spend half an hour talking over our domestic affairs?' Mr. Filer demanded, wiping his indignant countenance. 'Is Miss Tarrant going to lecture, or ain't she going to lecture? If she ain't, she'll please to show cause why. Is she aware that every quarter of a second, at the present instant, is worth about five hundred dollars?'

'I know that—I know that, Mr. Filer; I will begin in a moment!' Verena went on. 'I only want to speak to Mr. Ransom—just three words. They are perfectly quiet—don't you see how quiet they are? They trust me, they trust me, don't they, father? I only want to speak to Mr. Ransom.'

'Who the devil is Mr. Ransom?' cried the exasperated, bewildered Filer.

Verena spoke to the others, but she looked at her lover, and the expression of her eyes was ineffably touching and beseeching. She trembled with nervous passion, there were sobs and supplications in her voice, and Ransom felt himself flushing with pure pity for her pain—her inevitable agony. But at the same moment he had another perception, which brushed aside remorse; he saw that he could do what he wanted, that she begged him, with all her being, to spare her, but that so long as he should protest she was submissive, helpless. What he wanted, in this light, flamed before

him and challenged all his manhood, tossing his determination to a height from which not only Doctor Tarrant, and Mr. Filer, and Olive, over there, in her sightless, soundless shame, but the great expectant hall as well, and the mighty multitude, in suspense, keeping quiet from minute to minute and holding the breath of its anger—from which all these things looked small, surmountable, and of the moment only. He didn't quite understand, as yet, however; he saw that Verena had not refused, but temporised, that the spell upon her—thanks to which he should still be able to rescue her—had been the knowledge that he was near.

'Come away, come away,' he murmured, quickly, putting out his two hands to her.

She took one of them, as if to plead, not to consent. 'Oh, let me off, let me off—for *her*, for the others! It's too terrible, it's impossible!'

'What I want to know is why Mr. Ransom isn't in the hands of the police!' wailed Mrs. Tarrant, from her sofa.

'I have been, madam, for the last quarter of an hour.' Ransom felt more and more that he could manage it, if he only kept cool. He bent over Verena with a tenderness in which he was careless, now, of observation. 'Dearest, I told you, I warned you. I left you alone for ten weeks; but could that make you doubt it was coming? Not for worlds, not for millions, shall you give yourself to that roaring crowd. Don't ask me to care for them, or for any one! What do they care for you but to gape and grin and babble? You are mine, you are not theirs.'

'What under the sun is the man talking about? With the most magnificent audience ever brought together! The city of Boston is under this roof!' Mr. Filer gaspingly interposed.

'The city of Boston be damned!' said Ransom.

'Mr. Ransom is very much interested in my daughter. He doesn't approve of our views,' Selah Tarrant explained.

'It's the most horrible, wicked, immoral selfishness I ever heard in my life!' roared Mrs. Tarrant.

'Selfishness! Mrs. Tarrant, do you suppose I pretend not to be selfish?'

'Do you want us all murdered by the mob, then?'

'They can have their money—can't you give them back their money?' cried Verena, turning frantically round the circle.

'Verena Tarrant, you don't mean to say you are going to back down?' her mother shrieked.

'Good God! that I should make her suffer like this!' said Ransom to himself; and to put an end to the odious scene he would have seized Verena in his arms and broken away into the outer world, if Olive, who at Mrs. Tarrant's last loud challenge had sprung to her feet, had not at the same time thrown herself between them with a force which made the girl relinquish her grasp of Ransom's hand. To his astonishment, the eyes that looked at him out of her scared, haggard face were, like Verena's, eyes of tremendous entreaty. There was a moment during which she would have been ready to go down on her knees to him, in order that the lecture should go on.

'If you don't agree with her, take her up on the platform, and have it out there; the public would like that, first-rate!' Mr. Filer said to Ransom, as if he thought this suggestion practical.

'She had prepared a lovely address!' Selah remarked, mournfully, as if to the company in general.

No one appeared to heed the observation, but his wife broke out again. 'Verena Tarrant, I should like to slap you! Do you call such a man as that a gentleman? I don't know where your father's spirit is, to let him stay!'

Olive, meanwhile, was literally praying to her kinsman. 'Let her appear this once, just this once: not to ruin, not to shame! Haven't you any pity; do you want me to be hooted? It's only for an hour. Haven't you any soul?'

Her face and voice were terrible to Ransom; she had flung herself upon Verena and was holding her close, and he could see that her friend's suffering was faint in comparison to her own. 'Why for an hour, when it's all false and damnable? An hour is as bad as ten years! She's mine or she isn't, and if she's mine, she's all mine!'

'Yours! Yours! Verena, think, think what you're doing!' Olive moaned, bending over her.

Mr. Filer was now pouring forth his nature in objurga-

tions and oaths, and brandishing before the culprits—Verena and Ransom—the extreme penalty of the law Mrs. Tarrant had burst into violent hysterics, while Selah revolved vaguely about the room and declared that it seemed as if the better day was going to be put off for quite a while. 'Don't you see how good, how sweet they are—giving us all this time? Don't you think that when they behave like that—without a sound, for five minutes—they ought to be rewarded?' Verena asked, smiling divinely, at Ransom. Nothing could have been more tender, more exquisite, than the way she put her appeal upon the ground of simple charity, kindness to the great good-natured, childish public.

'Miss Chancellor may reward them in any way she likes. Give them back their money and a little present to each.'

'Money and presents? I should like to shoot you, sir!' yelled Mr. Filer. The audience had really been very patient, and up to this point deserved Verena's praise; but it was now long past eight o'clock, and symptoms of irritation—cries and groans and hisses—began again to proceed from the hall. Mr. Filer launched himself into the passage leading to the stage, and Selah rushed after him. Mrs. Tarrant extended herself, sobbing, on the sofa, and Olive, quivering in the storm, inquired of Ransom what he wanted her to do, what humiliation, what degradation, what sacrifice he imposed.

'I'll do anything—I'll be abject—I'll be vile—I'll go down in the dust!'

'I ask nothing of you, and I have nothing to do with you,' Ransom said. 'That is, I ask, at the most, that you shouldn't expect that, wishing to make Verena my wife, I should say to her, "Oh yes, you can take an hour or two out of it!" Verena,' he went on, 'all this is out of it—dreadfully, odiously—and it's a great deal too much! Come, come as far away from here as possible, and we'll settle the rest!'

The combined effort of Mr. Filer and Selah Tarrant to pacify the public had not, apparently, the success it deserved; the house continued in uproar and the volume of sound increased. 'Leave us alone, leave us alone for a

single minute!' cried Verena; 'just let me speak to him, and it will be all right!' She rushed over to her mother, drew her, dragged her from the sofa, led her to the door of the room. Mrs. Tarrant, on the way, reunited herself with Olive (the horror of the situation had at least that compensation for her), and, clinging and staggering together, the distracted women, pushed by Verena, passed into the vestibule, now, as Ransom saw, deserted by the policeman and the reporter, who had rushed round to where the battle was thickest.

'Oh, why did you come—why, why?' And Verena, turning back, threw herself upon him with a protest which was all, and more than all, a surrender. She had never yet given herself to him so much as in that movement of reproach.

'Didn't you expect me, and weren't you sure?' he asked, smiling at her and standing there till she arrived.

'I didn't know—it was terrible—it's awful! I saw you in your place, in the house, when you came. As soon as we got here I went out to those steps that go up to the stage and I looked out, with my father—from behind him—and saw you in a minute. Then I felt too nervous to speak! I could never, never, if you were there! My father didn't know you, and I said nothing, but Olive guessed as soon as I came back. She rushed at me, and she looked at me—oh, how she looked! and she guessed. She didn't need to go out to see for herself, and when she saw how I was trembling she began to tremble herself, to believe, as I believed, we were lost. Listen to them, listen to them, in the house! Now I want you to go away—I will see you to-morrow, as long as you wish. That's all I want now; if you will only go away it's not too late, and everything will be all right!'

Preoccupied as Ransom was with the simple purpose of getting her bodily out of the place, he could yet notice her strange, touching tone, and her air of believing that she might really persuade him. She had evidently given up everything now—every pretence of a different conviction and of loyalty to her cause; all this had fallen from her as soon as she felt him near, and she asked him to go away

just as any plighted maiden might have asked any favour of her lover. But it was the poor girl's misfortune that, whatever she did or said, or left unsaid, only had the effect of making her dearer to him and making the people who were clamouring for her seem more and more a raving rabble.

He indulged not in the smallest recognition of her request, and simply said, 'Surely Olive must have believed, must have known, I would come.'

'She would have been sure if you hadn't become so unexpectedly quiet after I left Marmion. You seemed to concur, to be willing to wait.'

'So I was, for a few weeks. But they ended yesterday. I was furious that morning, when I learned your flight, and during the week that followed I made two or three attempts to find you. Then I stopped—I thought it better. I saw you were very well hidden; I determined not even to write. I felt I *could* wait—with that last day at Marmion to think of. Besides, to leave you with her awhile, for the last, seemed more decent. Perhaps you'll tell me now where you were.'

'I was with father and mother. She sent me to them that morning, with a letter. I don't know what was in it. Perhaps there was money,' said Verena, who evidently now would tell him everything.

'And where did they take you?'

'I don't know—to places. I was in Boston once, for a day; but only in a carriage. They were as frightened as Olive; they were bound to save me!'

'They shouldn't have brought you here to-night then. How could you possibly doubt of my coming?'

'I don't know what I thought, and I didn't know, till I saw you, that all the strength I had hoped for would leave me in a flash, and that if I attempted to speak—with you sitting there—I should make the most shameful failure. We had a sickening scene here—I begged for delay, for time to recover. We waited and waited, and when I heard you at the door talking to the policeman, it seemed to me everything was gone. But it will still come back, if you will leave me. They are quiet again—father must be interesting them.'

'I hope he is!' Ransom exclaimed. 'If Miss Chancellor ordered the policeman, she must have expected me.'

'That was only after she knew you were in the house. She flew out into the lobby with father, and they seized him and posted him there. She locked the door; she seemed to think they would break it down. I didn't wait for that, but from the moment I knew you were on the other side of it I couldn't go on—I was paralysed. It has made me feel better to talk to you—and now I could appear,' Verena added.

'My darling child, haven't you a shawl or a mantle?' Ransom returned, for all answer, looking about him. He perceived, tossed upon a chair, a long, furred cloak, which he caught up, and, before she could resist, threw over her. She even let him arrange it and, standing there, draped from head to foot in it, contented herself with saying, after a moment:

'I don't understand—where shall we go? Where will you take me?'

'We shall catch the night-train for New York, and the first thing in the morning we shall be married.'

Verena remained gazing at him, with swimming eyes.

'And what will the people do? Listen, listen!'

'Your father is ceasing to interest them. They'll howl and thump, according to their nature.'

'Ah, their nature's fine!' Verena pleaded.

'Dearest, that's one of the fallacies I shall have to woo you from. Hear them, the senseless brutes!' The storm was now raging in the hall, and it deepened to such a point that Verena turned to him in a supreme appeal.

'I could soothe them with a word!'

'Keep your soothing words for me—you will have need of them all, in our coming time,' Ransom said, laughing. He pulled open the door again, which led into the lobby, but he was driven back, with Verena, by a furious onset from Mrs. Tarrant. Seeing her daughter fairly arrayed for departure, she hurled herself upon her, half in indignation, half in a blind impulse to cling, and with an outpouring of tears, reproaches, prayers, strange scraps of argument and iterations of farewell, closed her about with an embrace

which was partly a supreme caress, partly the salutary castigation she had, three minutes before, expressed the wish to administer, and altogether for the moment a check upon the girl's flight.

'Mother, dearest, it's all for the best, I can't help it, I love you just the same; let me go, let me go!' Verena stammered, kissing her again, struggling to free herself, and holding out her hand to Ransom. He saw now that she only wanted to get away, to leave everything behind her. Olive was close at hand, on the threshold of the room, and as soon as Ransom looked at her he became aware that the weakness she had just shown had passed away. She had straightened herself again, and she was upright in her desolation. The expression of her face was a thing to remain with him for ever; it was impossible to imagine a more vivid presentment of blighted hope and wounded pride. Dry, desperate, rigid, she yet wavered and seemed uncertain; her pale, glittering eyes straining forward, as if they were looking for death. Ransom had a vision, even at that crowded moment, that if she could have met it there and then, bristling with steel or lurid with fire, she would have rushed on it without a tremor, like the heroine that she was. All this while the great agitation in the hall rose and fell, in waves and surges, as if Selah Tarrant and the agent were talking to the multitude, trying to calm them, succeeding for the moment, and then letting them loose again. Whirled down by one of the fitful gusts, a lady and a gentleman issued from the passage, and Ransom, glancing at them, recognised Mrs. Farrinder and her husband.

'Well, Miss Chancellor,' said that more successful woman, with considerable asperity, 'if this is the way you're going to reinstate our sex!' She passed rapidly through the room, followed by Amariah, who remarked in his transit that it seemed as if there had been a want of organisation, and the two retreated expeditiously, without the lady's having taken the smallest notice of Verena, whose conflict with her mother prolonged itself. Ransom, striving, with all needful consideration for Mrs. Tarrant, to separate these two, addressed not a word to Olive; it was the last of her, for him, and he neither saw how her livid face

suddenly glowed, as if Mrs. Farrinder's words had been a lash, nor how, as if with a sudden inspiration, she rushed to the approach to the platform. If he had observed her, it might have seemed to him that she hoped to find the fierce expiation she sought for in exposure to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived, in offering herself to be trampled to death and torn to pieces. She might have suggested to him some feminine firebrand of Paris revolutions, erect on a barricade, or even the sacrificial figure of Hypatia, whirled through the furious mob of Alexandria. She was arrested an instant by the arrival of Mrs. Burrage and her son, who had quitted the stage on observing the withdrawal of the Farrinders, and who swept into the room in the manner of people seeking shelter from a thunder-storm. The mother's face expressed the well-bred surprise of a person who should have been asked out to dinner and seen the cloth pulled off the table; the young man, who supported her on his arm, instantly lost himself in the spectacle of Verena disengaging herself from Mrs. Tarrant, only to be again overwhelmed, and in the unexpected presence of the Mississippian. His handsome blue eyes turned from one to the other, and he looked infinitely annoyed and bewildered. It even seemed to occur to him that he might, perhaps, interpose with effect, and he evidently would have liked to say that, without really bragging, *he* would at least have kept the affair from turning into a row. But Verena, muffled and escaping, was deaf to him, and Ransom didn't look the right person to address such a remark as that to. Mrs. Burrage and Olive, as the latter shot past, exchanged a glance which represented quick irony on one side and indiscriminating defiance on the other.

'Oh, are *you* going to speak?' the lady from New York inquired, with her cursory laugh.

Olive had already disappeared; but Ransom heard her answer flung behind her into the room. 'I am going to be hissed and hooted and insulted!'

'Olive, Olive!' Verena suddenly shrieked; and her piercing cry might have reached the front. But Ransom had already, by muscular force, wrenched her away, and

was hurrying her out, leaving Mrs. Tarrant to heave herself into the arms of Mrs. Burrage, who, he was sure, would, within the minute, loom upon her attractively through her tears, and supply her with a reminiscence, destined to be valuable, of aristocratic support and clever composure. In the outer labyrinth hasty groups, a little scared, were leaving the hall, giving up the game. Ransom, as he went, thrust the hood of Verena's long cloak over her head, to conceal her face and her identity. It quite prevented recognition, and as they mingled in the issuing crowd he perceived the quick, complete, tremendous silence which, in the hall, had greeted Olive Chancellor's rush to the front. Every sound instantly dropped, the hush was respectful, the great public waited, and whatever she should say to them (and he thought she might indeed be rather embarrassed), it was not apparent that they were likely to hurl the benches at her. Ransom, palpitating with his victory, felt now a little sorry for her, and was relieved to know that, even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous. 'Ah, now I am glad!' said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed.

THE END.



