

And again he made a threatening step forward. But when he came close to her he broke down.

'I would have worked for you so,' he said thickly. 'For your sake I would have given up my country. I would have made myself French altogether. It should have been marriage or no marriage as you pleased. You should have been free to go or stay. Only I would have laid myself down for you to walk over. I have some money. I would have settled here. I would have protected you. It is not right for a woman to be alone—anyone so young and so pretty. I thought you understood—that you must understand—that your heart was melting to me. I should have done your work no harm—I should have been your slave—you know that. That *cursed, cursed art!*'

He spoke with a low intense emphasis; then turning away he buried his face in his hands.

'David!'

He looked up startled. She was stepping towards him, a smile of ineffable charm floating as it were upon her tears.

'I don't know what is the matter with me!' she said tremulously. 'There is trouble in it, I know! It is the broken glass coming true. *Mais, voyons! c'est plus fort que moi!* Do you care so much—would it break your heart—would you let me work—and never, *never* get in the way? Would you be content that art should come first and you second? I can promise you no more than that—not one little inch! *Would you be content? Say!*'

He ran to her with a cry. She let him put his arms round her, and a shiver of excitement ran through her.

'What does it mean?' she said breathlessly. 'One is so strong one moment—and the next—like this! Oh, why did you ever come?'

Then she burst into tears, hiding her eyes upon his breast.

'Oh! I have been so much alone! but I have got a heart somewhere all the same. If you will have it, you must take the consequences.'

Awed by the mingling of his silence with that painful throbbing beneath her cheek, she looked up. He stooped—and their young faces met.

CHAPTER VII

DURING the three weeks which had ended for David and Elise in this scene of passion, Louie had been deliberately going her own way, managing even in this unfamiliar *milieu* to extract from it almost all the excitement or amusement it was capable of yielding her. All the morning she dragged Madame Cervin about the Paris streets; in the afternoon she would sometimes pose for Montjoie, and sometimes not; he had to bring her bonbons and theatre tickets to bribe her, and learn new English wherewith to flatter her. Then in the evenings she made the Cervins take her

to theatres and various entertainments more or less reputable, for which of course David paid. It seemed to Madame Cervin, as she sat staring beside them, that her laughs never fell in with the laughs of other people. But whether she understood or no, it amused her, and go she would.

A looker-on might have found the relations between Madame Cervin and her boarder puzzling at first sight. In reality they represented a compromise between considerations of finance and considerations of morals—as the wife of the *ancien prix de Rome* understood these last. For the ex-modiste was by no means without her virtues or her scruples. She had ugly manners and ideas on many points, but she had lived a decent life at any rate since her marriage with a man for whom she had an incomprehensible affection, heavily as he burdened and exploited her; and though she took all company pretty much as it came, she had a much keener sense now than in her youth of the practical advantages of good behaviour to a woman, and of the general reasonableness of the *bourgeois* point of view with regard to marriage and the family. Her youth had been stormy; her middle age tended to a certain conservative philosophy of common sense, and to the development of a rough and ready conscience.

Especially was she conscious of the difficulties of virtue. When Elise Delaunay, for instance, was being scandalously handled by the talkers in her stuffy *salon*, Madame Cervin sat silent. Not only had she her own reasons for being grateful to the little artist, but with the memory of her own long-past adventures behind her she was capable by now of a secret admiration for an unprotected and struggling girl who had hitherto held her head high, worked hard, and avoided lovers.

So that when the artist's wife undertook the charge of the good-looking English girl she had done it honestly, up to her lights, and she had fulfilled it honestly. She had in fact hardly let Louie Grieve out of her sight since her boarder was handed over to her.

These facts, however, represent only one side of the situation. Madame Cervin was now respectable. She had relinquished years before the *chasse* for personal excitement; she had replaced it by 'the *chasse* of the five-franc piece.' She loved her money passionately; but at the same time she loved power, gossip, and small flatteries. They distracted her, these last, from the depressing spectacle of her husband's gradual and inevitable decay. So that her life represented a balance between these various instincts. For some time past she had gathered about her a train of small artists, whom she mothered and patronised, and whose wild talk and pecuniary straits diversified the monotony of her own childless middle age. Montjoie, whose undoubted talent imposed upon a woman governed during all her later life by the traditions and the admirations of the artist world, had some time before established a hold upon her, partly dependent

on a certain magnetism in the man, partly, as Elise had suspected, upon money relations. For the grasping little *bourgeoise* who would haggle for a morning over half a franc, and keep a lynx-eyed watch over the woman who came to do the weekly cleaning, lest the miserable creature should appropriate a crust or a cold potato, had a weak side for her artist friends who flattered and amused her. She would lend to them now and then out of her hoards; she had lent to Montjoie in the winter when, after months of wild dissipation, he was in dire straits and almost starving.

But having lent, the thought of her jeopardised money would throw her into agonies, and she would scheme perpetually to get it back. Like all the rest of Montjoie's creditors she was hanging on the Mænad, which promised indeed to be the *chef-d'œuvre* of an indisputable talent, could that talent only be kept to work. When the sculptor—whose curiosity had been originally roused by certain phrases of Barbier's in his preliminary letters to his nephew, phrases embellished by Dubois' habitual *fanfaronnade*—had first beheld the English girl, he had temporarily thrown up his work and was lounging about Paris in moody despair, to Madame Cervin's infinite disgust. But at sight of Louie his artist's zeal rekindled. Her wild nature, her half-human eye, the traces of Greek form in the dark features—these things fired and excited him.

'Get me that girl to sit,' he had said to Madame Cervin, 'and the Mænad will be sold in six weeks!'

And Madame Cervin, fully determined on the one hand that Montjoie should finish his statue and pay his debts, and on the other that the English girl should come to no harm from a man of notorious character, had first led up to the sittings, and then superintended them with the utmost vigilance. She meant no harm—the brother was a fool for his pains—but Montjoie should have his sitter. So she sat there, dragon-like, hour after hour, knitting away with her little fat hands, while Louie posed, and Montjoie worked; and groups of the sculptor's friends came in and out, providing the audience which excited the ambition of the man and the vanity of the girl.

So the days passed. At last there came a morning when Louie came out early from the Cervins' door, shut it behind her, and ran up the ladder-like stairs which led to David's room.

'David!'

Her voice was pitched in no amiable key, as she violently shook the handle of the door. But, call and shake as she might, there was no answer, and after a while she paused, feeling a certain bewilderment.

'It is ridiculous! He can't be out; it isn't half-past eight. It's just his tiresomeness.'

And she made another and still more vehement attempt, all to no purpose. Not a sound was to be heard from the room

within. But as she was again standing irresolute, she heard a footstep behind her on the narrow stairs, and looking round saw the *concierge*, Madame Merichat. The woman's thin and sallow face—the face of a born pessimist—had a certain sinister flutter in it.

She held out a letter to the astonished Louie, saying at the same time with a disagreeable smile:

'What is the use of knocking the house down when there is no one there?'

'Where is he?' cried Louie, not understanding her, and looking at the letter with stupefaction.

The woman put it into her hand.

'No one came back last night,' she said with a shrug. 'Neither monsieur nor mademoiselle; and this morning I receive orders to send letters to "Barbizon, près Fontainebleau."'

Louie tore open her letter. It was from David, and dated Barbizon. He would be there, it said, for nearly a month. If she could wait with Madame Cervin till he himself could take her home, well and good. But if that were disagreeable to her, let her communicate with him 'chez Madame Pyat, Barbizon, Fontainebleau,' and he would write to Dora Lomax at once, and make arrangements for her to lodge there, till he returned to Manchester. Some one could easily be found to look after her on the homeward journey if Madame Cervin took her to the train. Meanwhile he enclosed the money for two weeks' *pension* and twenty francs for pocket money.

No other person was mentioned in the letter, and the writer offered neither explanation nor excuses.

Louie crushed the sheet in her hand, with an exclamation, her cheeks flaming.

'So they are amusing themselves at Fontainebleau?' inquired Madame Merichat, who had been leaning against the wall, twisting her apron and studying the English girl with her hard, malicious eyes. 'Oh! I don't complain; there was a letter for me too. Monsieur has paid all. But I regret for mademoiselle—if mademoiselle is surprised.'

She spoke to deaf ears.

Louie pushed past her, flew downstairs, and rang the Cervins' bell violently. Madame Cervin herself opened the door, and the girl threw herself upon her, dragged her into the *salon*, and then said with the look and tone of a fury:

'Read that!'

She held out the crumpled letter. Madame Cervin adjusted her spectacles with shaking hands.

'But it is in English!' she cried in despair.

Louie could have beaten her for not understanding. But, herself trembling with excitement, she was forced to bring all the French words she knew to bear, and between them, somehow, piecemeal, Madame Cervin was brought to a vague understanding of the letter.

'Gone to Fontainebleau!' she cried, subsiding on to the sofa. 'But why, with whom?'

'Why, with that girl, that *creature*—can't you understand?' said Louie, pacing up and down.

'Ah, I will go and find out all about that!' said Madame Cervin, and hastily exchanging the blue cotton apron and jacket she wore in the mornings in the privacy of her own apartment for her walking dress, she whisked out to make inquiries.

Louie was left behind, striding from end to end of the little *salon*, brows knit, every feature and limb tense with excitement. As the meaning of her discovery grew plainer to her, as she realised what had happened, and what the bearing of it must be on herself and her own position, the tumult within her rose and rose. After that day in the Louvre her native shrewdness had of course very soon informed her of David's infatuation for the little artist. And when it became plain, not only to her, but to all Elise Delaunay's acquaintance, there was much laughter and gossip on the subject in the Cervins' apartment. It was soon discovered that Louie had taken a dislike, which, perhaps, from the beginning had been an intuitive jealousy, to Elise, and had, moreover, no inconvenient sensitiveness on her brother's account, which need prevent the discussion of his love affairs in her presence. So the discussion went freely on, and Louie only regretted that, do what she would to improve herself in French, she understood so little of it. But the tone towards Elise among Montjoie's set, especially from Montjoie himself, was clearly contemptuous and hostile; and Louie instinctively enjoyed the mud which she felt sure was being thrown.

Yet, incredible as it may seem, with all this knowledge on her part, all this amusement at her brother's expense, all this blackening of Elise's character, the possibility of such an event as had actually occurred had never entered the sister's calculations.

And the reason lay in the profound impression which one side of his character had made upon her during the five months they had been together. A complete stranger to the ferment of the lad's imagination, she had been a constant and chafed spectator of his daily life. The strong self-restraint of it had been one of the main barriers between them. She knew that she was always jarring upon him, and that he was always blaming her recklessness and self-indulgence. She hated his Spartan ways—his teetotalism, the small store he set by any personal comfort or luxury, his powers of long-continued work, his indifference to the pleasures and amusements of his age, so far as Manchester could provide them. They were a reflection upon her, and many a gibe she had flung out at him about them. But all the same these ways of his had left a mark upon her; they had rooted a certain conception of him in her mind. She knew perfectly well that Dora Lomax was in love with him, and what did he care? 'Not a ha'porth!' She had never seen him turn his head for any girl; and when he had shown himself sarcastic on the subject of

her companions, she had cast about in vain for materials wherewith to retort.

And now! That he should fall in love with this French girl—that was natural enough; it had amused and pleased her to see him lose his head and make a fool of himself like other people; but that he should run away with her after a fortnight, without apparently a word of marrying her—leaving his sister in the lurch—

'*Hypocrite!*'

She clenched her hands as she walked. What was really surging in her was that feeling of *ownership* with regard to David which had played so large a part in their childhood, even when she had teased and plagued him most. She might worry and defy him; but no sooner did another woman appropriate him, threaten to terminate for good that hold of his sister upon him which had been so lately renewed, than she was flooded with jealous rage. David had escaped her—he was hers no longer—he was Elise Delaunay's! Nothing that she did could scandalise or make him angry any more. He had sent her money and washed his hands of her. As to his escorting her back to England in two or three weeks, that was just a lie! A man who takes such a plunge does not emerge so soon or so easily. No, she would have to go back by herself, leaving him to his intrigue. The very calmness and secretiveness of his letter was an insult. 'Mind your own business, little girl—go home to work—and be good!'—that was what it seemed to say to her. She set her teeth over it in her wild anger and pride.

At the same moment the outer door opened and Madame Cervin came bustling back again, bursting with news and indignation.

Oh, there was no doubt at all about it, they had gone off together! Madame Merichat had seen them come downstairs about noon the day before. He was carrying a black bag and a couple of parcels. She also was laden; and about halfway down the street, Madame Merichat, watching from her window, had seen them hail a cab, get into it, and drive away, the cab turning to the right when they reached the Boulevard.

Madame Cervin's wrath was loud, and stimulated moreover by personal alarm. One moment, remembering the scene in Montjoie's studio, she cried out, like the sister, on the brother's hypocrisy; the next she reminded her boarder that there was two weeks' *pension* owing.

Louie smiled scornfully, drew out the notes from David's letter and flung them on the table. Then Madame Cervin softened, and took occasion to remember that condolence with the sister was at least as appropriate to the situation as abuse of the brother. She attempted some consolation, nay, even some caresses, but Louie very soon shook her off.

'Don't talk to me! don't kiss me!' she said impatiently.

And she swept out of the room, went to her own, and locked

the door. Then she threw herself face downwards on her bed, and remained there for some time hardly moving. But with every minute that passed, as it seemed, the inward smart grew sharper. She had been hardly conscious of it, at first, this smart, in her rage and pride, but it was there.

At last she could bear it quietly no longer. She sprang up and looked about her. There, just inside the open press which held her wardrobe, were some soft white folds of stuff. Her eye gleamed: she ran to the cupboard and took out the Mænad's dress. During the last few days she had somewhat tired of the sittings—she had at any rate been capricious and tiresome about them; and Montjoie, who was more in earnest about this statue than he had been about any work for years, was at his wit's end, first to control his own temper, and next so to lure or drive his strange sitter as to manage her without offending her.

But to-day the dress recalled David—promised distraction and retaliation. She slipped off her tight gingham with hasty fingers, and in a few seconds she was transformed. The light folds floated about her as she walked impetuously up and down, studying every movement in the glass, intoxicated by the polished clearness and whiteness of her own neck and shoulders, the curves of her own grace and youth. Many a night, even after a long sitting, had she locked her door, made the gas flare, and sat absorbed before her mirror in this guise, throwing herself into one attitude after another, naïvely regretting that sculpture took so long, and that Montjoie could not fix them all. The ecstasy of self-worship in which the whole process issued was but the fruition of that childish habit which had wrought with childish things for the same end—with a couple of rushlights, an old sheet and primroses from the brook.

Her black abundant hair was still curled about her head. Well, she could pull it down in the studio—now for a wrap—and then no noise! She would slip downstairs so that madame should know nothing about it. She was tired of that woman always at her elbow. Let her go marketing and leave other people in peace.

But before she threw on her wrap she stood still a moment, her nostril quivering, expanding, one hand on her hip, the other swinging her Mænad's tambourine. She knew very little of this sculptor-man—she did not understand him; but he interested, to some extent overawed, her. He had poured out upon her the coarsest flatteries, yet she realised that he had not made love to her. Perhaps Madame Cervin had been in the way. Well, now for a surprise and a *tête-à-tête!* A dare-devil look—her mother's look—sprang into her eyes.

She opened the door, and listened. No one in the little passage, only a distant sound of rapid talking, which suggested to the girl that madame was at that moment enjoying the discussion of her boarder's affairs with monsieur, who was still in bed. She hurried on a waterproof which covered her almost

from top to toe. Then, holding up her draperies, she stole out, and on to the public stairs.

They were deserted, and running down them she turned to the right at the bottom and soon found herself at the high studio door.

As she raised her hand to the bell she flushed with passion.

'I'll let him see whether I'll go home whining to Dora, while he's amusing himself,' she said under her breath.

The door was opened to her by Montjoie himself, in his working blouse, a cigarette in his mouth. His hands and dress were daubed with clay, and he had the brutal look of a man in the blackest of tempers. But no sooner did he perceive Louie Grieve's stately figure in the passage than his expression changed.

'You—you here! and for a sitting?'

She nodded, smiling. Her look had an excitement which he perceived at once. His eye travelled to the white drapery and the beautiful bare arm emerging from the cloak; then he looked behind her for Madame Cervin.

No one—except this Mænad in a waterproof. Montjoie threw away his cigarette.

'*Entrez, entrez, mademoiselle!*' he said, bowing low to her. 'When the heavens are blackest, then they open. I was in a mind to wring the Mænad's neck three minutes ago. Come and save your portrait!'

He led her in through the ante-room into the large outer studio. There stood the Mænad on her revolving stand, and there was the raised platform for the model. A heap of clay was to one side, and water was dripping from the statue on to the floor. The studio light had a clear evenness; and, after the heat outside, the coolness of the great bare room was refreshing.

They stood and looked at the statue together, Louie still in her cloak. Montjoie pointed out to her that he was at work on the shoulders and the left arm, and was driven mad by the difficulties of the pose. '*Tonnerre de Dieu!* when I heard you knock, I felt like a murderer; I rushed out to let fly at someone. And there was my Mænad on the mat!—all by herself, too, without that little piece of ugliness from upstairs behind her. I little thought this day—this cursed day—was to turn out so. I thought you were tired of the poor sculptor—that you had deserted him for good and all. Ah! *déesse—je vous salue!*'

He drew back from her, scanning her from head to foot, a new tone in his voice, a new boldness in his deep-set eyes—eyes which were already old. Louie stood instinctively shrinking, yet smiling, understanding something of what he said, guessing more.

There was a bull-necked strength about the man, with his dark, square, weather-beaten head, and black eyebrows, which made her afraid, in spite of the smooth and deprecating manner in which he generally spoke to women. But her fear of him was not unpleasant to her. She liked him; she would have liked above all to quarrel with him; she felt that he was her match.

He stepped forward, touched her arm, and took a tone of command.

'Quick, mademoiselle, with that cloak!'

She mounted the steps, threw off her cloak, and fell into her attitude without an instant's hesitation. Montjoie, putting his hands over his eyes to look at her, exclaimed under his breath.

It was perfectly true that, libertine as he was, he had so far felt no inclination whatever to make love to the English girl. Nor was the effect merely the result of Madame Cervin's vigilance. Personally, for all her extraordinary beauty, his new model left him cold. Originally he had been a man of the most complex artistic instincts, the most delicate and varied perceptions. They and his craftsman's skill were all foundering now in a sea of evil living. But occasionally they were active still, and they had served him for the instant detection of that common egotistical paste of which Louie Grieve was made. He would have liked to chain her to his model's platform, to make her the slave of his fevered degenerating art. But she had no thrill for him. While he was working from her his mind was often running on some little *grisette* or other, who had not half Louie Grieve's physical perfection, but who had charm, provocation, wit—all that makes the natural heritage of the French woman, of whatever class. At the same time it had been an irritation and an absurdity to him that, under Madame Cervin's eye, he had been compelled to treat her with the ceremonies due to *une jeune fille honnête*. For he had at once detected the girl's reckless temper. From what social stratum did she come—she and the brother? In her, at least, there was some wild blood! When he sounded Madame Cervin, however, she, with her incurable habit of vain mendacity, had only put her lodger in a light which Montjoie felt certain was a false one.

But this morning! Never had she been so superb, so inspiring! All the vindictive passion, all the rage with David that was surging within her, did but give the more daring and decision to her attitude, and a wilder power to her look. Moreover, the boldness of her unaccompanied visit to him provoked and challenged him. He looked at her irresolutely; then with an effort he turned to his statue and fell to work. The touch of the clay, the reaction from past despondency prevailed; before half an hour was over he was more enamoured of his task than he had ever yet been, and more fiercely bent on success. Insensibly as the time passed, his tone with her became more and more short, brusque, imperious. Once or twice he made some rough alteration in the pose, with the overbearing haste of a man who can hardly bear to leave the work under his hands even for an instant. When he first assumed this manner Louie opened her great eyes. Then it seemed to please her. She felt no regret whatever for the smooth voice; the more dictatorial he became the better she liked it, and the more submissive she was.

This went on for about a couple of hours—an orgie of work

on his side, of excited persistence on hers. Her rival in the clay grew in life and daring under her eyes, rousing in her, whenever she was allowed to rest a minute and look, a new intoxication with herself. They hardly talked. He was too much absorbed in what he was doing; and she also was either bent upon her task, or choked by wild gusts of jealous and revengeful thought. Every now and then as she stood there, in her attitude of eager listening, the wall of the studio would fade before her eyes, and she would see nothing but a torturing vision of David at Fontainebleau, wrapt up in 'that creature,' and only remembering his sister to rejoice that he had shaken her off. *Ah!* How could she sufficiently avenge herself! how could she throw all his canting counsels to the winds with most emphasis and effect!

At last a curious thing happened. Was it mere nervous reaction after such a strain of will and passion, or was it the sudden emergence of something in the sister which was also common to the brother—a certain tragic susceptibility, the capacity for a wild melancholy? For, in an instant, while she was thinking vaguely of Madame Cervin and her money affairs, *despair* seized her—shuddering, measureless despair—rushing in upon her, and sweeping away everything else before it. She tottered under it, fighting down the clutch of it as long as she could. It had no words, it was like a physical agony. All that was clear to her for one lurid moment was that she would like to kill herself.

The studio swam before her, and she dropped into the chair behind her.

Montjoie gave a protesting cry.

'Twenty minutes more!—*Courage!*'

Then, as she made no answer, he went up to her and put a violent hand on her shoulder—beside himself.

'You *shall* not be tired, I tell you. Look up! look at me!'

Under the stimulus of his master's tone she slowly recovered herself—her great black eyes lifted. He gazed into them steadily; his voice sank.

'You belong to me,' he said with breathless rapidity. 'Do you understand? What is the matter with you? What are those tears?'

A cry of nature broke from her.

'My brother has left me—with that girl!'

She breathed out the words into the ears of the man stooping towards her. His great brow lifted—he gave a little laugh. Then eagerly, triumphantly, he seized her again by the arms. '*A la bonne heure!*' Then it is plainer still. You belong to me and I to you. In that statue we live and die together. Another hour, and it will be a masterpiece. Come! one more!'

She drank in his tone of mad excitement as though it were wine, and it revived her. The strange grip upon her heart relaxed; the nightmare was dashed aside. Her colour came back, and, pushing him proudly away from her, she resumed her pose without a word.

CHAPTER VIII

'Do you know, sir, that that good woman has brought in the soup for the second time? I can see her fidgeting about the table through the window. If we go on like this, she will depart and leave us to wait on ourselves. Then see if you get any soup out of *me*.'

David, for all answer, put his arm close round the speaker. She threw herself back against him, smiling into his face. But neither could see the other, for it was nearly dark, and through the acacia trees above them the stars glimmered in the warm sky. To their left, across a small grass-plot, was a tiny thatched house, buried under a great vine which embowered it all from top to base, and overhung by trees which drooped on to the roof, and swept the windows with their branches. Through a lower window, opening on to the gravel path, could be seen a small bare room, with a paper of coarse brown and blue pattern, brightly illuminated by a paraffin lamp, which also threw a square of light far out into the garden. The lamp stood on a table which was spread for a meal, and a stout woman, in a white cap and blue cotton apron, could be seen moving beside it.

'Come in!' said Elise, springing to her feet, and laying a compelling hand on her companion. 'Get it over! The moon is waiting for us out there!'

And she pointed to where, beyond the roofs of the neighbouring houses, rose the dark fringe of trees which marked the edge of the forest.

They went in, hand in hand, and sat opposite each other at the little rickety table, while the peasant woman from whom they had taken the house waited upon them. The day before, after looking at the *auberge*, and finding it full of artists come down to look for spring subjects in the forest, they had wandered on searching for something less public, more poetical. And they had stumbled upon this tiny overgrown house in its tangled garden. The woman to whom it belonged had let it for the season, but till the beginning of her 'let' there was a month; and, after much persuasion, she had consented to allow the strangers to hire it and her services as *bonne*, by the week, for a sum more congruous with the old and primitive days of Barbizon than with the later claims of the little place to fashion and fame. As the lovers stood together in the *salon*, exclaiming with delight at its bare floor, its low ceiling, its old bureau, its hard sofa with the Empire legs, and the dilapidated sphinxes on the arms, the owner of the house looked them up and down, from the door, with comprehending eyes. Barbizon had known adventures like this before!

But she might think what she liked; it mattered nothing to her lodgers. To 'a pair of romantics out of date,' the queer overgrown place she owned was perfection, and they took pos-

session of it in a dream of excitement and joy. From the top loft, still bare and echoing, where the highly respectable summer tenants were to put up the cots of their children, to the outside den which served for a kitchen, whence a wooden ladder led to a recess among the rafters, occupied by Madame Pyat as a bedroom; from the masses of Virginia creeper on the thatched roof to the thicket of acacias and roses on the front grass-plot, and the high flowery wall which shut them off from the curious eyes of the street, it was all, in the lovers' feeling, the predestined setting for such an idyll as theirs.

And if this was so in the hot mornings and afternoons, how much more in the heavenly evenings and nights, when the forest lay whispering and murmuring under the moonlight, and they, wandering together arm in arm under the gaunt and twisted oaks of the Bas Bréau, or among the limestone blocks which strew the heights of this strange woodland, felt themselves part of the world about them, dissolved into its quivering harmonious life, shades among its shadows!

On this particular evening, after the hurried and homely meal, David brought Elise's large black hat, and the lace scarf which had bewitched him at St. Germain—oh, the joy of handling such things in this familiar, sacrilegious way!—and they strolled out into the long uneven street beyond their garden wall, on their way to the forest. The old inn to the left was in a clatter. Two *diligences* had just arrived, and the horses were drooping and panting at the door. A maidservant was lighting guests across the belittered courtyard with a flaring candle. There was a red glimpse of the kitchen with its brass and copper pans, and on the bench outside the gateway sat a silent trio of artists, who had worked well and dined abundantly, and were now enjoying their last smoke before the sleep, to which they were already nodding, should overtake them. The two lovers stepped quickly past, making with all haste for that leafy mystery beyond cleft by the retreating whiteness of the Fontainebleau road—into which the village melted on either side.

Such moonlight! All the tones of the street, its white and greys, the reddish brown of the roofs, were to be discerned under it; and outside in the forest it was a phantasmagoria, an intoxication. The little paths they were soon threading, paths strewn with limestone dust, wound like white threads among the rocks and through the blackness of the firs. They climbed them hand in hand, and soon they were on a height looking over a great hollow of the forest to the plain beyond, as it were a vast cup overflowing with moonlight and melting into a silver sky. The width of the heavens, the dim immensity of the earth, drove them close together in a delicious silence. The girl put the warmth of her lover's arm between her and the overpowering greatness of a too august nature. The man, on the other hand, rising in this to that higher stature which was truly his, felt himself carried out into nature on the wave of his own boundless emotion. That

cold Deism he had held so loosely broke into passion. The humblest phrases of worship, of entreaty, swept across the brain.

'Could one ever have guessed,' he asked her, his words stumbling and broken, 'that such happiness was possible?'

She shook her head, smiling at him.

'Yes, certainly!—if one has read poems and novels. Nothing to me is ever *more* than I expect,—generally less.'

Then she broke off hesitating, and hid her face against his breast. A pang smote him. He cried out in the old common-places that he was not worthy, that she must tire of him, that there was nothing in him to hold, to satisfy her.

'And three weeks ago,' she said, interrupting him, 'we had never heard each other's names. Strange—life is strange! Well, now,' and she quickly drew herself away from him, and holding him by both hands lightly swung his arms backwards and forwards, 'this can't last for ever, you know. In the first place—we shall *die*:' and throwing herself back, she pulled against him childishly, a spray of ivy he had wound round her hat drooping with fantastic shadows over her face and neck.

'Do you know what you are like?' he asked her, evading what she had said, while his eyes devoured her.

'No!'

'You are like that picture in the Louvre,—Da Vinci's St. John, that you say should be a Bacchus.'

'Which means that you find me a queer,—heathenish,—sort of creature?' she said, still laughing and swaying. 'So I am. Take care! Well now, a truce to love-making! I am tired of being meek and charming—this night excites me. Come and see the oaks in the Bas Bréau.'

And running down the rocky path before them she led him in and out through twisted leafy ways, till at last they stood among the blasted giants of the forest, the oaks of the Bas Bréau. In the emboldening daylight, David, with certain English wood scenes in his mind, would swear the famous trees of Fontainebleau had neither size nor age to speak of. But at night they laid their avenging spell upon him. They stood so finely on the broken ground, each of them with a kingly space about him; there was so wild a fantasy in their gnarled and broken limbs; and under the night their scanty crowns of leaf, from which the sap was yearly ebbing, had so lofty a remoteness.

They found a rocky seat in front of a certain leafless monster, which had been struck by lightning in a winter storm years before, and rent from top to bottom. The bare trunk with its torn branches yawning stood out against the rest, a black and melancholy shape, preaching desolation. But Elise studied it coolly.

'I know that tree by heart,' she declared. 'Corot, Rousseau, Diaz—it has served them all. I could draw it with my eyes shut.'

Then with the mention of drawing she began to twist her fingers restlessly.

'I wonder what the *concours* was to-day,' she said. 'Now that I am away that Bréal girl will carry off everything. There will be no bearing her—she was never second till I came.'

David took a very scornful view of this contingency. 'When you go back you will beat them all again; let them have their few weeks' respite! You told me yesterday you had forgotten the *atelier*.'

'Did I?' she said with a strange little sigh. 'It wasn't true—I haven't.'

With a sudden whim she pulled off his broad hat and threw it down. Reaching forward she took his head between her hands, and arranged his black curls about his brow in a way to suit her. Then, still holding him, she drew back with her head on one side to look at him. The moon above them, now at its full zenith of brightness, threw the whole massive face into strong relief, and her own look melted into delight.

'There is no model in Paris,' she declared, 'with so fine a head.' Then with another sigh she dropped her hold, and propping her chin on her hands, she stared straight before her in silence.

'Do you imagine you are *the first*?' she asked him presently, with a queer abruptness.

There was a pause.

'You told me so,' he said, at last, his voice quivering; 'don't deceive me—there is no fun in it—I believe it all!'

She laughed, and did not answer for a moment. He put out his covetous arms and would have drawn her to him, but she withdrew herself.

'What did I tell you? I don't remember. In the first place there was a cousin—there is always a cousin!'

He stared at her, his face flushing, and asked her slowly what she meant.

'You have seen his portrait in my room,' she said coolly.

He racked his brains.

'Oh! that portrait on the wall,' he burst out at last, in vain trying for a tone as self-possessed as her own, 'that man with a short beard?'

She nodded.

'Oh, he is not bad at all, my cousin. He is the son of that uncle and aunt I told you of. Only while they were rusting in the Gironde, he was at Paris learning to be a doctor, and enlarging his mind by coming to see me every week. When they came up to town to put in a claim to me, *they* thought me a lump of wickedness, as I told you; I made their hair stand on end. But Guillaume knew a good deal more about me; and *he* was not scandalised at all; oh dear, no. He used to come every Saturday and sit in a corner while I painted—a long lanky creature, rather good looking, but with spectacles—he has ruined his eyes

with reading. Oh, he would have married me any day, and let his relations shriek as they please; so don't suppose, Monsieur David, that I have had no chances of respectability, or that my life began with you!' She threw him a curious look.

'Why do you talk about him?' cried David, beside himself. 'What is your cousin to either of us?'

'I shall talk of what I like,' she said wilfully, clasping her hands round her knees with the gesture of an obstinate child.

David stared away into the black shadow of the oaks, marveling at himself—at the strength of that sudden smart within him, that half-frenzied restlessness and dread which some of her lightest sayings had the power to awaken in him.

Then he repented him, and turning, bent his head over the little hands and kissed them passionately. She did not move or speak. He came close to her, trying to decipher her face in the moonlight. For the first time since that night in the studio there was a film of sudden tears in the wide grey eyes. He caught her in his arms and demanded why.

'You quarrel with me and dictate to me,' she cried, wrestling with herself, choked by some inexplicable emotion, 'when I have given you everything—when I am alone in the world with you—at your mercy—I who have been so proud, have held my head so high!'

He bent over her, pouring into her ear all the words that passion could find or forge. Her sudden attack upon him, poor fellow, seemed to him neither unjust nor extravagant. She *had* given him everything, and who and what was he that she should have thrown him so much as a look!

Gradually her mysterious irritation died away. The gentleness of the summer night, the serenity of the moonlight, the sea-like murmur of the forest—these things sank little by little into their hearts, and in the calm they made, youth and love spoke again—siren voices!—with the old magic. And when at last they loitered home, they moved in a trance of feeling which wanted no words. The moon dropped slowly into the western trees; midnight chimes came to them from the villages which ring the forest; and a playing wind sprang up about them, cooling the girl's hot cheeks, and freshening the verdurous ways through which they passed.

But in the years which came after, whenever David allowed his mind to dwell for a short shuddering instant on these days at Fontainebleau, it often occurred to him to wonder whether during their wild dream he had ever for one hour been truly happy. At the height of their passion had there been any of that exquisite give and take between them which may mark the simplest love of the rudest lovers, but which is in its essence moral, a thing not of the senses but of the soul? There is nothing else which is vital to love. Without it passion dies into space like

the flaming corona of the sun. With it, the humblest hearts may 'bear it out even to the edge of doom.'

There can be no question that after the storm of feeling, excitement, pity, which had swept her into his arms, he gained upon her vagrant fancy for a time day by day. Seen close, his social simplicity, his delicately tempered youth had the effect of great refinement. He had in him much of the peasant nature, but so modified by fine perception and wide-ranging emotion, that what had been coarseness in his ancestors was in him only a certain rich savour and fulness of being. His mere sympathetic, sensitive instinct had developed in him all the essentials of good manners, and books, poetry, observation had done the rest.

So that in the little matters of daily contact he touched and charmed her unexpectedly. He threw no veil whatever over his tradesman's circumstances, and enjoyed trying to make her understand what had been the conditions and prospects of his Manchester life. He had always, indeed, conceived his bookseller's profession with a certain dignity; and he was secretly proud, with a natural conceit, of the efforts and ability which had brought him so rapidly to the front. How oddly the Manchester names and facts sounded in the forest air! She would sit with her little head on one side listening; but privately he suspected that she understood very little of it; that she accepted him and his resources very much in the vague with the *insouciance* of Bohemia.

He himself, however, was by no means without plans for the future. In the first flush of his triumphant passion he had won from her the promise of a month alone with him, in or near Fontainebleau—her own suggestion—after which she was to go back in earnest to her painting, and he was to return to Manchester and make arrangements for their future life together. Louie must be provided for, and after that his ideas about himself were already tolerably clear. In one of his free intervals, during his first days in Paris, he had had a long conversation one evening with the owner of an important bookshop on the Quai St.-Michel. The man badly wanted an English clerk with English connections. David made certain of the opening, should he choose to apply for it. And if not there, then somewhere else. With the consciousness of capital, experience, and brains, to justify him, he had no fears. Meanwhile, John should keep on the Manchester shop, and he, David, would go over two or three times a year to stock-take and make up accounts. John was as honest as the day, and had already learnt much.

But although his old self had so far reasserted itself; although the contriving activity of the brain was all still there, ready to be brought to bear on this new life when it was wanted; Elise could never mistake him, or the true character of this crisis of his youth. The self-surrender of passion had transformed, developed him to an amazing extent, and it found its natural language. As she grew deeper and deeper into the boy's

heart, and as the cloud of diffidence which had enwrapped him since he came to Paris gave way, so that even in this brilliant France he ventured at last to express his feelings and ideas, the poet and thinker in him grew before her eyes. She felt a new consideration, a new intellectual respect for him.

But above all his tenderness, his womanish consideration and sweetness amazed her. She had been hotly wooed now and then, but with no one, not even 'the cousin,' had she ever been on terms of real intimacy. And for the rest she had lived a rough-and-tumble, independent life, defending herself first of all against the big boys of the farm, then against her father, or her comrades in the *atelier*, or her Bohemian suitors. The ingenuity of service David showed in shielding and waiting upon her bewildered her—had, for a time, a profound effect upon her.

And yet!—all the while—what jars and terrors from the very beginning! He seemed often to be groping in the dark with her. Whole tracts of her thought and experience were mysteries to him, and grew but little plainer with their new relation. Little as he knew or would have admitted it, the gulf of nationality yawned deep between them. And those artistic ambitions of hers—as soon as they re-emerged on the other side of the first intoxication of passion—they were as much of a jealousy and a dread to him as before. His soul was as alive as it had ever been to the threat and peril of them.

Their relation itself, too—to her, perhaps, secretly a guarantee—was to him a perpetual restlessness. *L'union libre* as the French artist understands it was not in his social tradition, whatever might be his literary assimilation of French ideas. He might passionately adopt and defend it, because it was her will; none the less was he, at the bottom of his heart, both ashamed and afraid because of it. From the very beginning he had let her know that she had only to say the word and he was ready to marry her instantly. But she put him aside with an impatient wave of her little hand, a nervous, defiant look in her grey eyes. Yet one day, when in the little village shop of Barbizon, a woman standing beside Elise at the counter looked her insolently over from head to foot, and took no notice of a question addressed to her on the subject of one of the forest routes, the girl felt an unexpected pang of resentment and shame.

One afternoon, in a lonely part of the forest, she strained her foot by treading on a loose stone among the rocks. Tired with long rambling and jarred by the shock she sank down, looking white and ready to cry. Pain generally crushed and demoralised her. She was capable, indeed, of setting the body at defiance on occasion; but, as a rule, she had no physical fortitude, and did not pretend to it.

David was much perplexed. So far as he knew, they were not near any of the huts which are dotted over the forest and

provide the tourist with *consommations* and carved articles. There was no water wherewith to revive her or to bandage the foot, for Fontainebleau has no streams. All he could do was to carry her. And this he did, with the utmost skill, and with a leaping thrill of tenderness which made itself felt by the little elfish creature in the clasp of his arms, and in the happy leaning of his dark cheek to hers, as she held him round the neck.

'Paul and Virginia!' she said to him, laughing. '*He bore her in his arms!*'—all heroes do it—in reality, most women would break the hero's back. 'Confess I am even lighter than you thought!'

'As light as Venus' doves,' he swore to her. 'Bid me carry you to Paris and see.'

'Paris!' At the mention of it she fell silent, and the corners of her mouth drooped into gravity. But he strode happily on, perceiving nothing.

Then when they got home, she limping through the village, he put on the airs of a surgeon, ran across to the grocer, who kept a tiny *pharmacie* in one corner of his miscellaneous shop, and conferred with him to such effect that the injured limb was soon lotioned and bandaged in a manner which made David inordinately proud of himself. Once, as he was examining his handiwork, it occurred to him that it was Mr. Ancrum who had taught him to use his fingers neatly. *Mr. Ancrum!* At the thought of his name the young man felt an inward shrinking, as though from contact with a cold and alien order of things. How hard to realise, indeed, that the same world contained Manchester with its factories and chapels, and this perfumed forest, this little overgrown house!

Afterwards, as he sat beside her, reading, as quiet as a mouse, so that she might sleep if the tumble-down Empire sofa did but woo her that way, she suddenly put up her arm and drew him down to her.

'Who taught you all this—this tenderness?' she said to him, in a curious wistful tone, as though her question were the outcome of a long reverie. 'Was it your mother?'

David started. He had never spoken to her or to anyone of his mother, and he could not bring himself to do so now.

'My mother died when I was five years old,' he said reluctantly. 'Why don't you go to sleep, little restless thing? Is the bandage right?'

'Quite. I can imagine,' she said presently in a low tone, letting him go, 'I can imagine one might grow so dependent on all this cherishing, so horribly dependent!'

'Well, and why not?' he said, taking up her hand and kissing it. 'What are we made for, but to be your bondslaves?'

She drew her hand away, and let it fall beside her with an impatient sigh. The poor boy looked at her with frightened eyes. Then some quick instinct came to the rescue, and his expression changed completely.

'I have thought it all out,' he began, speaking with a brisk, business-like air, 'what I shall do at Manchester, and when I get back here.'

And he hung over her, chattering and laughing about his plans. What did she say to a garret and a studio somewhere near the Quai St.-Michel, in the Quartier Latin, rooms whence they might catch a glimpse of the Seine and Notre-Dame, where she would be within easy reach of Taranne's studio, and the Luxembourg, and the École des Beaux-Arts, and the Louvre, rooms where after their day's work they might meet, shut out the world and let in heaven—a home consecrate at once to art and love?

The quick bright words flowed without a check; his eye shone as though it caught the light of the future. But she lay turned away from him, silent, till at last she stopped him with a restless gesture.

'Don't—don't talk like that! As soon as one dares to reckon on Him—*le bon Dieu* strikes—just to let one know one's place. And don't drive me mad about my art! You saw me try to draw this morning; you might be quiet about it, I think, *par pitié!* If I ever had any talent—which is not likely, or I should have had some notices of my pictures by this time—it is all dead and done for.'

And turning quite away from him, she buried her face in the cushion.

'Look here,' he said to her, smiling and stooping, 'shall I tell you something? I forgot it till now.'

She shook her head, but he went on:

'You remember this morning while I was waiting for you, I went into the inn to ask about the way to the Gorges d'Affremont. I had your painting things with me. I didn't know whether you wanted them or not, and I laid them down on the table in the *cour*, while I went in to speak to madame. Well, when I came out, there were a couple of artists there, those men who have been here all the time painting, and they had undone the strap and were looking at the sketch—you know, that bit of beechwood with the rain coming on. I rushed at them. But they only grinned, and one of them, the young man with the fair moustache, sent you his compliments. You must have, he said, "very remarkable dispositions indeed." Perhaps I looked as if I knew that before! Whose pupil were you? I told him, and he said I was to tell you to stick to Taranne. You were one of the *peintres de tempérament*, and it was they especially who must learn their grammar, and learn it from the classics; and the other man, the old bear who never speaks to anybody, nodded and looked at the sketch again, and said it was "amusing—not bad at all," and you might make something of it for the next Salon.'

Cunning David! By this time Elise had her arm round his neck, and was devouring his face with her keen eyes. Every-

thing was shaken off—the pain of her foot, melancholy, fatigue—and all the horizons of the soul were bright again. She had a new idea!—what if she were to combine his portrait with the beechwood sketch, and make something large and important of it? He had the head of a poet—the forest was in its most poetical moment. Why not pose him at the foot of the great beech to the left, give him a book dropping from his hand, and call it '*Réverie*'?

For the rest of the day she talked or sketched incessantly. She would hardly be persuaded to give her bandaged foot the afternoon's rest, and by eight o'clock next morning they were off to the forest, she limping along with a stick.

Two or three days of perfect bliss followed. The picture promised excellently. Elise was in the most hopeful mood, alert and merry as a bird. And when they were driven home by hunger, the work still went on. For they had turned their top attic into a studio, and here as long as the light lasted she toiled on, wrestling with the head and the difficulties of the figure. But she was determined to make it substantially a picture *en plein air*. Her mind was full of all the daring conceptions and ideals which were then emerging in art, as in literature, from the decline of Romanticism. The passion for light, for truth, was, she declared, penetrating, and revolutionising the whole artistic world. Delacroix had a studio to the south; she also would 'bedare the sun.'

At the end of the third day she threw herself on him in a passion of gratitude and delight, lifting her soft mouth to be kissed.

'*Embrasse-moi! Embrasse-moi! Blague à part,—je commence à me sentir artiste!*'

And they wandered about their little garden till past midnight, hand close in hand. She could talk of nothing but her picture, and he, feeling himself doubly necessary and delightful to her, overflowed with happiness and praise.

But next day things went less well. She was torn, overcome by the difficulties of her task. Working now in the forest, now at home, the lights and values had suffered. The general tone had neither an indoor nor an outdoor truth. She must repaint certain parts, work only out of doors. Then all the torments of the outdoor painter began: wind, which put her in a nervous fever, and rain, which, after the long spell of fine weather, began to come down on them, and drive them into shelter.

Soon she was in despair. She had been too ambitious. The landscape should have been the principal thing, the figure only indicated, a suggestion in the middle distance. She had carried it too far; it fought with its surroundings: the picture had no unity, no repose. Oh, for some advice! How could one pull such a thing through without help? In three minutes Taranne would tell her what was wrong.

In twenty-four hours more she had fretted herself ill. The picture was there in the corner, turned to the wall; he could only just prevent her from driving her palette-knife through it. And she was sitting on the edge of the sofa, silent, a book on her knee, her hands hanging beside her, and her feverish eyes wandering—wandering round the room, if only they might escape from David, might avoid seeing him—or so he believed. Horrible! It was borne in upon him that in this moment of despair he was little more to her than the witness, the occasion, of her discomfiture.

Oh! his heart was sore. But he could do nothing. Caresses, encouragements, reproaches, were alike useless. For some time she would make no further attempts at drawing; nor would she be wooed and comforted. She held him passively at arm's length, and he could make nothing of her. It was the middle of their third week; still almost the half left of this month she had promised him. And already it was clear to him that he and love had lost their first hold, and that she was consumed with the unspoken wish to go back to Paris, and the *atelier*. Ah, no!—no! With a fierce yet dumb tenacity he held her to her bargain. Those weeks were his; they represented his only hope for the future; she *should* not have them back.

But he, too, fell into melancholy and silence, and on the afternoon when this change in him first showed itself she was, for a time, touched, ashamed. A few pale smiles returned for him, and in the evening, as he was sitting by the open window, a newspaper on his knee, staring into vacancy, she came up to him, knelt beside him, and drew his half-reluctant arm about her. Neither said anything, but gradually her presence there, on his breast, thrilled through all his veins, filled his heart to bursting. The paper slid away; he put both arms about her, and bowed his head on hers. She put up her small hand, and felt the tears on his cheek. Then a still stronger repentance woke up in her.

'*Pauvre enfant!*' she said, pushing herself away from him, and tremulously drying his eyes. 'Poor Monsieur David—I make you very unhappy! But I warned you—oh, I warned you! What evil star made you fall in love with me?'

In answer he found such plaintive and passionate things to say to her that she was fairly melted, and in the end there was an effusion on both sides, which seemed to bring back their golden hours. But at bottom, David's sensitive instinct, do what he would to silence it, told him, in truth, that all was changed. He was no longer the happy and triumphant lover. He was the beggar, living upon her alms.

CHAPTER IX

NEXT morning David went across to the village shop to buy some daily necessities, and found a few newspapers lying on the counter. He bought a *Débats*, seeing that there was a long

critique of the Salon in it, and hurried home with it to Elise. She tore it open and rushed through the article, putting him aside that he might not look over her. Her face blanched as she read, and at the end she flung the paper from her, and tottering to a chair sat there motionless, staring straight before her. David, beside himself with alarm, and finding caresses of no avail, took up the paper from the floor.

'Let it alone!' she said to him with a sudden imperious gesture. 'There is a whole paragraph about Bréal—her fortune is made. *La voilà lancée—arrivée!* And of me, not a line, not a mention! Three or four pupils of Taranne—all beginners—but *my* name—nowhere! Ah, but no—it is too much!'

Her little foot beat the ground, a hurricane was rising within her.

David tried to laugh the matter off. 'The man who wrote the wretched thing had been hurried—was an idiot, clearly, and what did one man's opinion matter, even if it were paid for at so much a column?'

'*Mais, tais-toi, donc!*' she cried at last, turning upon him in a fury. 'Can't you see that everything for an artist—especially a woman—depends on the *protections* she gets at the beginning? How can a girl—helpless—without friends—make her way by herself? Some one must hold out a hand, and for me it seems there is no one—no one!'

The outburst seemed to his common sense to imply the most grotesque oblivion of her success in the Salon, of Taranne's kindness—the most grotesque sensitiveness to a few casual lines of print. But it wrung his heart to see her agitation, her pale face, the handkerchief she was twisting to shreds in her restless hands. He came to plead with her—his passion lending him eloquence. Let her but trust herself and her gift. She had the praise of those she revered to go upon. How should the carelessness of a single critic affect her? *Imbéciles!*—they would be all with her, at her feet, some day. Let her despise them then and now! But his extravagances only made her impatient.

'Nonsense!' she said, drawing her hand away from him; 'I am not made of such superfine stuff—I never pretended to be! Do you think I should be content to be an unknown genius? *Never!*—I must have my fame counted out to me in good current coin, that all the world may hear and see. It may be vulgar—I don't care! it is so. *Ah, mon Dieu!*' and she began to pace the room with wild steps, 'and it is my fault—my fault! If I were there on the spot, I should be remembered—they would have to reckon with me—I could keep my claim in sight. But I have thrown away everything—wasted everything—*everything!*'

He stood with his back to the window, motionless, his hand on the table, stooping a little forward, looking at her with a passion of reproach and misery; it only angered her; she lost all self-control, and in one mad moment she avenged on his poor heart all the wounds and vexations of her vanity. *Why* had he