

in it some new and heavy element she would not speak of, even to David. The evening meal came, and there was no sign or sound from that room upstairs where Louie had locked herself in.

David stood by the fire in the dining-room, his lips sternly set. He had despatched a servant to Louie's door with an offer to send up food for her and Cécile. But the girl had got no answer. Was he bound to go—bound to bring about the possible renewal of a degrading scene?

At this moment Lizzie, the little nurse, tapped at the door.

'If you please, sir—'

'Yes. Anything wrong with Master Sandy?'

David went to the door in a tremor. 'He won't go to sleep, sir. He wants you, and I'm afraid he'll disturb mistress again.'

David ran upstairs.

'Sandy, what do you want?'

Sandy was crying violently, far down under the bedclothes. When David drew him out, he was found to be grasping a piece of crumbling cake, sticky with tears.

'It's Cécile's cake,' he sobbed into his father's ear. 'I want to give it her.'

And in fact, after his onslaught upon her, Cécile had dropped the offending cake, which he had instantly picked up the moment before Louie struck him. He had held it tight gripped ever since, and repentance was busy in his small heart.

David thought a moment.

'Come with me, Sandy,' he said at last, and, wrapping up the child in an old shawl that hung near, he carried him off to Louie's door. 'Louie!' he called, after his knock, in a low voice, for he was uncomfortably aware that his household was on the watch for developments.

For a while there was no answer. Sandy, absorbed in the interest of the situation, clung close to his father and stopped crying.

At last Louie suddenly flung the door wide open.

'What do you want?' she said defiantly, with the gesture and bearing of a tragic actress. She was, however, deadly white, and David, looking past her, saw that Cécile was lying wide awake in her little bed.

'Sandy wants to give Cécile her cake,' he said quietly, 'and to tell her that he is sorry for striking her.'

He carried his boy up to Cécile. A smile flashed over the child's worn face. She held out her little arms. David, infinitely touched, laid down Sandy, and the children crooned together on the same pillow, he trying to stuff the cake into Cécile's mouth, she gently refusing.

'She's ill,' said Louie abruptly, 'she's feverish—I want a doctor.'

'We can get one directly,' he said. 'Will you come down and have some food? Lucy has gone to bed. If Lizzie comes

and sits by the children, perhaps they will go to sleep. I can carry Sandy back later.'

Louie paused irresolutely. Then she went up to the bed, knelt down by it, and took Cécile in her arms.

'You can take him away,' she said, pointing to Sandy. 'I will put her to sleep. Don't you send me anything to eat. I want a doctor. And if you won't order a fly for me at twenty minutes to nine to-morrow, I will go out myself, that's all.'

'Louie!' he cried, holding out his hand to her in despair, 'why will you treat us in this way—what have we done to you?'

'Never you mind,' she said sullenly, gathering the child to her and confronting him with steady eyes. There was a certain magnificence in their wide unconscious despair—in this one fierce passion.

She and Lucy did not meet again. In the morning David paid her her hundred pounds, and took her and Cécile to the station, a doctor having seen the child the night before, and prescribed medicine, which had given her a quiet night. Louie barely thanked him for the money. She was almost silent and still very pale.

Just before they parted, the thought of the tyranny of such a nature, of the life to which she was going back, wrung the brother's heart. The outrage of the day before dropped from his mind as of no account, effaced by sterner realities.

'Write to me, Louie!' he said to her just as the train was moving off; 'I could always come if there was trouble—or Dora.'

She did not answer, and her hand dropped from his. But he remembered afterwards that her eyes were fixed upon him, as long as the train was in sight, and the picture of her dark possessed look will be with him to the end.

CHAPTER VII

It was a warm April Sunday. Lucy and Dora were pacing up and down in the garden, and Lucy was talking in a quick, low voice.

'Oh! there was something, Dora. You know as well as I do there was something. That awful woman didn't say that for nothing. I suppose he'd tell me if I asked him.'

'Then why don't you ask him?' said Dora, with a little frown.

Lucy gathered a sprig of budding lilac, and restlessly stripped off its young green.

'It isn't very pleasant,' she said at last, slowly. 'I dare say it's silly to expect your husband never to have looked at anybody else—'

She paused again, unable to explain herself. Dora glanced at her, and was somewhat struck by her thin and worn appearance. She had often, moreover, seemed to her cousin to be fretting during these last weeks. Not that there was much difference in her ways with David and Sandy. But her small vanities, prejudices,

and passions were certainly less apparent of late; she ordered her two servants about less; she was less interested in her clothes, less eager for social amusement. It was as though something clouding and dulling had passed over a personality which was naturally restless and vivacious.

Yet it was only to-day, in the course of some conversation about Louie, of whom nothing had been heard since her departure, that Lucy had for the first time broken silence on the subject of those insolent words of her sister-in-law, which Ancrum and Dora had listened to with painful shock, while to Reuben and Hannah, pre-occupied with their own long-matured ideas of Louie, they had been the mere froth of a venomous tongue.

'Why didn't you ask him about it at first—just after?' Dora resumed.

'I didn't want to,' said Lucy, after a minute, and then would say no more. But she walked along, thinking, unhappily, of the moment when David had taken her into the library to be out of the sound of Louie's rage; of her angry desire to ask him questions, checked by a childish fear she could not analyse, as to what the answers might be; of his troubled, stormy face; and of the tender ways by which he tried to calm and comfort her. It had seemed to her that once or twice he had been on the point of saying something grave and unusual, but in the end he had refrained. Louie had gone away; their everyday life had begun again; he had been very full, in the intervals of his hard daily business, of the rebuilding of the James Street court, and of the apprentices' school; and, led by a variety of impulses—by a sense of jeopardised possession and a conscience speaking with new emphasis and authority—she had taken care that he should talk to her about both; she had haunted him in the library, and her presence there, once the signal of antagonism and dispute, had ceased to have any such meaning for him. Her sympathy was not very intelligent, and there was at times a childish note of sulkiness and reluctance in it; she was extremely ready to say, 'I told you so,' if anything went wrong; but, nevertheless, there was a tacit renunciation at the root of her new manner to him which he perfectly understood, and rewarded in his own ardent, affectionate way.

As she sauntered along in this pale gleam of sun, now drinking in the soft April wind, now stooping to look at the few clumps of crocuses and daffodils which were pushing through the blackened earth, Lucy had once more a vague sense that her life this spring—this past year—had been hard. It was like the feeling of one who first realises the intensity of some long effort or struggle in looking back upon it. Her little life had been breathed into by a divine breath, and growth, expansion, had brought a pain and discontent she had never known before.

Dora meanwhile had her own thoughts. She was lost in memories of that first talk of hers with David Grieve after his return from Paris, with the marks of his fierce, mysterious grief

fresh upon him; then, pursuing her recollection of him through the years, she came to a point of feeling where she said, with sudden energy, throwing her arm round Lucy, and taking up the thread of their conversation:—

'I wouldn't let what Louie said worry you a bit, Lucy. Of course, she wanted to make mischief; but you know, and I know, what sort of a man David has been since you and he were married. That'll be enough for you, I should think.'

Lucy flushed. She had once possessed very little reticence, and had been quite ready to talk her husband over, any day and all day, with Dora. But now, though she would begin in the old way, there soon came a point when something tied her tongue.

This time she attacked the lilac-bushes again with a restless hand.

'Why, I thought you were shocked at his opinions,' she said, proudly.

Dora sighed. Her conscience had not waited for Lucy's remark to make her aware of the constant perplexity between authority and natural feeling into which David's ideals were perpetually throwing her.

'They make one very sad,' she said, looking away. 'But we must believe that God, who sees everything, judges as we cannot do.'

Lucy fired up at once. It annoyed her to have Dora making spiritual allowance for David in this way.

'I don't believe God wants anything but that people should be good,' she said. 'I am sure there are lots of things like that in the New Testament.'

Dora shook her head slowly. "'He that hath not the Son, hath not life,'" she said under her breath, a sudden passion leaping to her eye.

Lucy looked at her indignantly. 'I don't agree with you, Dora—there! And it all depends on what things mean.'

'The meaning is quite plain,' said Dora, with rigid persistence. 'O Lucy, don't be led away. I missed you at early service this morning.'

The look she threw her cousin melted into a pathetic and heavenly reproach.

'Well, I know,' said Lucy, ungraciously, 'I was tired. I don't know what's wrong with me these last weeks; I can't get up in the morning.'

Dora only looked grieved. Lucy understood that her plea seemed to her cousin too trivial and sinful to be noticed.

'Oh! I dare say I'd go,' she said in her own mind, defiantly, 'if he went.'

Aloud, she said:—

'Dora, just look at this cheek of mine; I can't think what the swelling is.'

And she turned her right cheek to Dora, pointing to a lump, not discoloured, but rather large, above the cheek-bone. Dora stopped, and looked at it carefully.

'Yes, I had noticed it,' she said. 'It is odd. Can't you account for it in any way?'

'No. It's been coming some little while. David says I must ask Dr. Mildmay about it. I don't think I shall. It'll go away. Oh! there they are.'

As she spoke, David and Sandy, who had been out for a Sunday walk together, appeared on the steps of the garden-door. David waved his hat to his wife, an example immediately followed by Sandy, who twisted his Scotch cap madly, and then set off running to her.

Lucy looked at them both with a sudden softening and brightening which gave her charm. David came up to her, ran his arm through hers, and began to give her a laughing account of Sandy's behaviour. The April wind had flushed him, tumbled his black hair, and called up spring lights in the eyes, which had been somewhat dimmed by overmuch sedentary work and a too small allowance of sleep. His plenitude of virile energy, the glow of health and power which hung round him this afternoon, did but make Lucy seem more languid and faded as she hung upon him, smiling at his stories of their walk and of Sandy's antics.

He broke off in the middle, and looked at her anxiously.

'She isn't the thing, is she, Dora? I believe she wants a change.'

'Oh! thank you!' cried Lucy, ironically—'with all Sandy's spring things and my own to look to, and some new shirts to get for you, and the spring cleaning to see to. Much obliged to you.'

'All those things, madam,' said David, patting her hand, 'wouldn't matter twopence, if it should please your lord and master to order you off. And if this fine weather goes on, you'll have to take advantage of it. By the way, I met Mildmay, and asked him to come in and see you.'

Lucy reddened.

'Why, there's nothing,' she said, pettishly. 'This'll go away directly.' Instinctively she put up her hand to her cheek.

'Oh! Mildmay won't worry you,' said David; 'he'll tell you what's wrong at once. You know you like him.'

'Well, I must go,' said Dora.

They understood that she had a mill-girls' Bible class at half-past five, and an evening service an hour later, so they did not press her to stay. Lucy kissed her, and Sandy escorted her half-way to the garden-door, giving her a breathless and magniloquent account of the 'hy'nas and kangawoos' she might expect to find congregated in the Merton Road outside. Dora, who was somewhat distressed by his powers of imaginative fiction, would not 'play up' as his father did, and he left her half-way to run back to David, who was always ready to turn road and back garden into 'Africa country' at a moment's notice, and people it to order with savages, elephants, boomerangs, kangaroos, and all other possible or impossible things that Sandy might chance to want.

Dora, looking back from the garden, saw them all three in a group together—Sandy tugging at his mother's skirts, and shouting at the top of his voice; David's curly black head bent over his wife, who was gathering her brown shawl round her throat, as though the light wind chilled her. But there was no chill in her look. That, for the moment, as she swayed between husband and child, had in it the qualities of the April sun—a brightness and promise all the more radiant by comparison with the winter or the cloud from which it had emerged.

Dora went home as quickly as tramcar and fast walking could take her. She still lived in the same Ancoats rooms with her shirt-making friend, who had kept company, poor thing! for four years with a young man, and had then given him up with anguish because he was not 'the sort of man she'd been taking him for,' though no one but Dora had ever known what qualities or practices, intolerable to a pure mind, the sad phrase covered. Dora might long ago have moved to more comfortable rooms and a better quarter of the town had she been so minded, for her wages as an admirable forewoman and an exceptionally skilled hand were high; but she passionately preferred to be near St. Damian's and amongst her 'girls.' Also, there was the thought that by staying in the place whither she had originally moved she would be more easily discoverable if ever,—ay, if ever—Daddy should come back to her. She was certain that he was still alive; and great as the probabilities on the other side became with every passing year, few people had the heart to insist upon them in the face of her sensitive faith, whereof the bravery was so close akin to tears.

Only once in all these years had there been a trace of Daddy. Through a silk-merchant acquaintance of his, having relations with Lyons and other foreign centres, David had once come across a rumour which had seemed to promise a clue. He had himself gone across to Lyons at once, and had done all he could. But the clue broke in his hand, and the tanned, long-faced lunatic from Manchester, whereof report had spoken, could be only doubtfully identified with a man who bore no likeness at all to Daddy.

Dora's expectation and hope had been stirred to their depths, and she bore her disappointment hardly. But she did not therefore cease to hope. Instinctively on this Sunday night, when she reached home, she put Daddy's chair, which had been pushed aside, in its right place by the fire, and she tenderly propped up a stuffed bird, originally shot by Daddy in the Vosges, and now vilely overtaken by Manchester moths. Then she set round chairs and books for her girls.

Soon they came trooping up the stairs, in their neat Sunday dresses, so sharply distinguished from the mill-gear of the week, and she spent with them a moving and mystical hour. She was expounding to them a little handbook of 'The Blessed Sacra-

ment,' and her explanations wound up with a close appeal to each one of them to make more use of the means of grace, to surrender themselves more fully to the awful and unspeakable mystery by which the Lord gave them His very flesh to eat, His very blood to drink, so fashioning within them, Communion after Communion, the immortal and incorruptible body which should be theirs in the Resurrection.

She spoke in a low, vibrating voice, somewhat monotonous in tone; her eyes shone with strange light under her round, prominent brow; all that she said of the joys of frequent Communion, of the mortal perils of unworthy participation, of treating the heavenly food lightly—coming to it, that is, unfasting and unprepared—of the need especially of Lenten self-denial, of giving up 'what each one of you likes best, so far as you can,' in preparation for the great Easter Eucharist—came evidently from the depths of her own intense conviction. Her girls listened to her with answering excitement and awe; one of them she had saved from drink, all of them had been her Sunday-school children for years, and many of them possessed, under the Lancashire exterior, the deep-lying poetry and emotion of the North.

When she dismissed them she hurried off to church, to sit once more dissolved in feeling, aspiration, penitence; to feel the thrill of the organ, the pathos of the bare altar, and the Lenten hymns.

After the service she had two or three things to settle with one of the curates and with some of her co-helpers in the good works of the congregation, so that when she reached home she was late and tired out. Her fellow-lodger was spending the Sunday with friends; there was no one to talk to her at her supper; and after supper she fell, sitting by the fire, into a mood of some flatness and reaction. She tried to read a religious book, but the religious nerve could respond no more, and other interests, save those of her daily occupations, she had none.

In Daddy's neighbourhood, what with his travels, his whims, and his quotations, there had been always something to stir the daughter's mind, even if it were only to reprobation. But since he had left her the circle of her thoughts had steadily and irrevocably narrowed. All secular knowledge, especially the reading of other than religious books, had become gradually and painfully identified, for her, with those sinister influences which made David Grieve an 'unbeliever,' and so many of the best Manchester workmen 'atheists.'

So now, in her physical and moral slackness, she sat and thought with some bitterness of a 'young woman' who had recently entered the shop which employed her, and, by dint of a clever tongue, was gaining the ear of the authorities, to the disturbance of some of Dora's cherished methods of distributing and organising the work. They might have trusted her more after all these years; but nobody appreciated her; she counted for nothing.

Then her mind wandered on to the familiar grievances of Sandy's religious teaching and Lucy's gradual defection from

St. Damian's. She must make more efforts with Lucy, even if it angered David. She looked back on what she had done to bring about the marriage, and lashed herself into a morbid sense of responsibility.

But her missionary projects were no more cheering to her than her thoughts about the shop and her work, and she felt an intense sense of relief when she heard the step of her room-mate, Mary Styles, upon the stairs. She made Mary go into every little incident of her day; she was insatiable for gossip—a very rare mood for her—and could not be chattered to enough.

And all through she leant her head against her father's chair, recalling Lucy on her husband's arm, and the child at her skirts, with the pathetic inarticulate longing which makes the tragedy of the single life. She could have loved so well, and no one had ever wished to make her his wife; the wound of it bled sometimes in her inmost heart.

Meanwhile, on this same April Sunday, Lucy, after Sandy was safe in bed, brought down some needlework to do beside David while he read. It was not very long since she had induced herself to make so great a breach in the Sunday habits of her youth. As soon as David's ideals began to tease her out of thought and sympathy, his freedoms also began to affect her. She was no longer so much chilled by his strictness, or so much shocked by his laxity.

David had spoken of a busy evening. In reality, a lazy fit overtook him. He sat smoking, and turning over the pages of Eckermann's 'Conversations with Goethe.'

'What are you reading?' said Lucy at last, struck by his face of enjoyment. 'Why do you like it so much?'

'Because there is no one else in the world who hits the right nail on the head so often as Goethe,' he said, throwing himself back with a stretch of pleasure. 'So wide a brain—so acute and sane a temper!'

Lucy looked a little lost, as she generally did when David made literary remarks to her. But she did not drop the subject.

'You said something to Professor Madgwick the other day about a line of Goethe you used to like so when you were a boy. What did it mean?'

She flushed, as though she were venturing on something which would make her ridiculous.

'A line of Goethe?' repeated David, pondering. 'Oh! I know. Yes, it was a line from Goethe's novel of "Werther." When I was young and foolish—when you and I were first acquainted, in fact, and you used to scold me for going to the Hall of Science!—I often said this line to myself over and over. I didn't know much German, but the swing of it carried me away.'

And, with a deep voice and rhythmic accent, he repeated: '*Handwerker trugen ihn; kein Geistlicher hat ihn begleitet.*'

'What does it mean?' said Lucy.

'Well, it comes at the end of the story. The hero commits suicide for love, and Goethe says that at his burial, on the night after his death, "labouring men bore him; no priest went with him."' "

He bent forward, clasping his hands tightly, with the half smiling, half dreamy look of one who recalls a bygone thrill of feeling, partly in sympathy, partly in irony.

'Then he wasn't a Christian?' said Lucy, wondering. 'Do you still hate priests so much, David?'

'It doesn't look like it, does it, madam,' he said, laughing, 'when you think of all my clergymen friends?'

And, in fact, as Lucy's mind pondered his answer, she easily remembered the readiness with which any of the clergy at St. Damian's would ask his help in sending away a sick child, or giving a man a fresh start in life, or setting the necessary authorities to work in the case of some moral or sanitary scandal. She thought also of various Dissenting ministers who called on him and corresponded with him; of his reverent affection for Canon Aylwin, for Ancrum.

'Well, anyway, you care about the labouring men,' she went on persistently. 'I suppose you're what father used to call a "canting Socialist"?'

'No,' said David, quietly—'no, I'm not a Socialist, except'—and he smiled—'in the sense in which some one said the other day, "we are all Socialists now."' "

'Well, what does it mean?' said Lucy, threading another needle, and feeling a certain excitement in this prolonged mental effort.

David tried to explain to her the common Socialist ideal in simple terms—the hope of a millennium, when all the instruments of production shall be owned by the State, and when the surplus profit produced by labour, over and above the maintenance of the worker and the general cost of production, will go, not to the capitalist, the individual rich man, but to the whole community of workers; when everybody will be made to work, and as little advantage as possible will be allowed to one worker above another.

'I think it's absurd!' said Lucy, up in arms at once for all the superiorities she loved. 'What nonsense! Why, they can't ever do it!'

'Well, it's about that!' said David, smiling at her. 'Still, no doubt it *could* be done, if it ought to be done. But Socialism, as a system, seems to me, at any rate, to strike down and weaken the most precious thing in the world, that on which the whole of civilised life and progress rests—the spring of will and conscience in the individual. Socialism as a spirit, as an influence, is as old as organised thought—and from the beginning it has forced us to think of the many when otherwise we should be sunk in thinking of the one. But, as a modern dogmatism, it is like other dogmatisms. The new truth of the future will emerge from it as a bud from its sheath, taking here and leaving there.'

He sat looking into the fire, forgetting his wife a little.

'Well, any way, I'm sure you and I won't have anything to do with it,' said Lucy positively. 'I don't a bit believe Lady Driffield will have to work in the mills, though Mrs. Shepton did say it would do her good. I shouldn't mind something, perhaps, which would make her and Colonel Danby less uppish.'

She drew her needle in and out with vindictive energy.

'Well, I don't see much prospect of uppish people dying out of the world,' said David, throwing himself back in his chair; 'until—'

He paused.

'Until what?' inquired Lucy.

'Well, of course,' he said after a minute, in a low voice, 'we must always hold that the world is tending to be better, that the Divine Life in it will somehow realise itself, that pride will become gentleness, and selfishness love. But the better life cannot be imposed from without—it must grow from within.'

Lucy pondered a moment.

'Then is it—is it because you think working-men *better* than other people that you are so much more interested in them? Because you are, you know.'

'Oh dear no!' he said, smiling at her from under the hand which shaded his eyes; 'they have their own crying faults and follies. But—so many of them lack the first elementary conditions which make the better life possible—that is what tugs at one's heart and fills one's mind! How can *we*—we who have gained for ourselves health and comfort and knowledge—how can we stand by patiently and see our brother diseased and miserable and ignorant?—how can we bear our luxuries, so long as a child is growing up in savagery whom we might have taught,—or a man is poisoning himself with drink whom we might have saved,—or a woman is dropping from sorrow and overwork whom we might have cherished and helped? We are not our own—we are parts of the whole. Generations of workers have toiled for us in the past. And are we, in return, to carry our wretched bone off to our own miserable corner!—sharing and giving nothing? Woe to us if we do! Upon such comes indeed the "second death,"—the separation final and irretrievable, as far, at any rate, as this world is concerned, between us and the life of God!'

Lucy had dropped her work. She sat staring at him—at the shining eyes, at the hand against the brow which shook a little, at the paleness which went so readily in him with any expression of deep emotion. Never had he so spoken to her before; never, all these years. In general no one shrank more than he from 'high phrases'; no one was more anxious than he to give all philanthropic talk a shrewd business-like aspect, which might prevent questions as to what lay beneath.

Her heart fluttered a little.

'David!' she broke out, 'what is it you believe? You know Dora thinks you believe nothing.'

'Does she?' he said, with evident shrinking. 'No, I don't think she does.'

Lucy instinctively moved her chair closer to him, and laid her head against his knee.

'Yes, she does. But I don't mind about that. I just wish you'd tell me why you believe in God, when you won't go to church, and when you think Jesus was just—just a man.'

She drew her breath quickly. She was making a first voyage of discovery in her husband's deepest mind, and she was astonished at her own venturesomeness.

He put out a hand and touched her hair.

'I can't read Nature and life any other way,' he said at last, after a silence. 'There seems to me something in myself, and in other human beings, which is beyond Nature—which, instead of being made by Nature, is the condition of our knowing there is a Nature at all. This something—reason, consciousness, soul, call it what you will—unites us to the world; for everywhere in the world reason is at home, and gradually finds itself; it makes us aware of a great order in which we move; it breaks down the barriers of sense between us and the absolute consciousness, the eternal life—"not ourselves," yet in us and akin to us!—whence, if there is any validity in human logic, that order must spring. And so, in its most perfect work, it carries us to God—it bids us claim our sonship—it gives us hope of immortality!'

His voice had the vibrating intensity of prayer. Lucy hardly understood what he said at all, but the tears came into her eyes as she sat hiding them against his knee.

'But what makes you think God is good—that He cares anything about us?' she said softly.

'Well—I look back on human life, and I ask what reason—which is the Divine Life communicated to us, striving to fulfil itself in us—has done, what light it throws upon its "great Original." And then I see that it has gradually expressed itself in law, in knowledge, in love; that it has gradually learnt, under the pressure of something which is itself and not itself, that to be gained life must be lost; that beauty, truth, love, are the *realities* which abide. Goodness has slowly proved itself in the world,—is every day proving itself,—like a light broadening in darkness!—to be that to which reason tends, in which it realises itself. And, if so, goodness here, imperfect and struggling as we see it always, must be the mere shadow and hint of that goodness which is in God!—and the utmost we can conceive of human tenderness, holiness, truth, though it tell us all we know, can yet suggest to us only the minutest fraction of what must be the Divine tenderness,—holiness,—truth.'

There was a silence.

'But this,' he added after a bit, 'is not to be *proved* by argument, though argument is necessary and inevitable, the mind being what it is. It can only be proved by living,—by taking it into our hearts,—by every little victory we gain over the evil self.'

The fire burnt quietly beside them. Everything was still in the house. Nothing stirred but their own hearts.

At last Lucy looked up quickly.

'I am glad,' she said with a kind of sob—'glad you think God loves us, and, if Sandy and I were to die, you would find us again.'

Instead of answering, he bent forward quickly and kissed her. She gave a little shrinking movement.

'Oh! that poor cheek!' he said remorsefully; 'did I touch it? I hope Dr. Mildmay won't forget to-morrow.'

'Oh! never mind about it,' she said, half impatiently. 'David!'

Her little thin face twitched and trembled. He was puzzled by her sudden change of expression, her agitation.

'David!—you know—you know what Louie said. I want you to tell me whether she—she meant anything.'

He gave a little start, then he understood perfectly.

'My dear wife,' he said, laying his hand on hers, which were crossed on his knee.

She waited breathlessly.

'You shall know all there is to know,' he said at last, with an effort. 'I thought perhaps you would have questioned me directly after that scene, and I would have told you; but as you did not, I could not bring myself to begin. What Louie said had to do with things that happened a year before I asked you to be my wife. When I spoke to you, they were dead and gone. The girl herself—was married. It was her story as well as my own, and it seemed to concern no one else in the world—not even you, dear. So I thought then, any way. Since, I have often wondered whether I was right.'

'Was it when you were in Paris?' she asked sharply.

He gave a sign of assent.

'I thought so!' she cried, drawing her breath. 'I always said there was more than being ill. I said so to Dora. Well, tell me—tell me at once! What was she like? Was she young, and good-looking?'

He could not help smiling at her—there was something so childish in her jealous curiosity.

'Let me tell you in order,' he said, 'and then we will both put it out of sight—at least, till I see Louie again.'

His heavy sigh puzzled her. But her strained and eager eyes summoned him to begin.

He told her everything, with singular simplicity and frankness. To Lucy it was indeed a critical and searching moment! No wife, whatever stuff she may be made of, can listen to such a story for the first time, from the husband she loves and respects, without passing thereafter into a new state of consciousness towards him. Sometimes she could hardly realise at all that it applied to David, this tale of passion he was putting, with averted face, into these short and sharp sentences. That conception of

him which the daily life of eight years, with its growing self-surrender, its expanding spiritual force, had graven on her mind, clashed so oddly with all that he was saying! A certain desolate feeling, too large and deep in all its issues to be harboured long in her slight nature, came over her now and then. She had been so near to him all these years, and had yet known nothing. It was the separateness of the individual lot—that awful and mysterious chasm which divides even lover from lover—which touched her here and there like a cold hand, from which she shrank.

She grew a little cold and pale when he spoke of his weeks of despair, of the death from which Ancrum had rescued him. But any ordinary prudish word of blame, even for his silence towards her, never occurred to her. Once she asked him a wistful question:—

‘You and she thought that marrying didn’t matter at all when people loved each other—that nobody had a right to interfere? Do you think that now, David?’

‘No,’ he said, with deep emphasis. ‘No.—I have come to think the most disappointing and hopeless marriage, nobly borne, to be better worth having than what people call an “ideal passion,”—if the ideal passion must be enjoyed at the expense of one of those fundamental rules which poor human nature has worked out, with such infinite difficulty and pain, for the protection and help of its own weakness. I did not know it,—but, so far as in me lay, I was betraying and injuring that society which has given me all I have.’

She sat silent. ‘*The most disappointing marriage.*’ An echo from that overheard talk at Benet’s Park floated through her mind. She winced, and shrank, even as she realised his perfect innocence of any such reference.

Then, with eagerness, she threw herself into innumerable questions about Elise—her looks, her motives, the details of what she said and did. Beneath the satisfaction of her curiosity, of course, there was all the time a pang—a pang not to be silenced. In her flights of idle fancy she had often suspected something not unlike the truth, basing her conjecture on the mystery which had always hung round that Paris visit, partly on the world’s general experience of what happened to handsome young men. For, in her heart of hearts, had there not lurked all the time a wonder which was partly self-judgment? Had David, with such a temperament, never been more deeply moved than she knew herself to have moved him? More than once a secret inarticulate suspicion of this kind had crossed her. The poorest and shallowest soul may have these flashes of sad insight, under the kindling of its affections.

But now she *knew*, and the difference was vast. After she had asked all her questions, and delivered a vehement protest against the tenacity of his self-reproach with regard to Louie—for what decent girl need go wrong unless she has a mind to?—she laid her head down again on David’s knee.

‘I don’t think she cared much about you—I’m sure she couldn’t have,’ she said slowly, finding a certain pleasure in the words.

David did not answer. He was sunk in memory. How far away lay that world of art and the artist from this dusty, practical life in which he was now immersed! At no time had he been really akin to it. The only art to which he was naturally susceptible was the art of oratory and poetry. Elise had created in him an artificial taste, which had died with his passion. Yet now, as his quickened mind lingered in the past, he felt a certain wide philosophic regret for the complete divorce which had come about between him and so rich a section of human experience.

He was roused from his reverie, which would have reassured her, could she have followed it, more than any direct speech, by a movement from Lucy. Dropping the hand which had once more stolen over his brow, he saw her looking at him with wide, wet eyes.

‘David!’

‘Yes.’

‘Come here! close to me!’

He moved forward, and laid his arm round her shoulders, as she sat in her low chair beside him.

‘What is it, dear? I have been keeping you up too late.’

She lifted a hand, and brought his face near to hers.

‘David, I am a stupid little thing—but I do understand more than I did, and I would never, *never* desert you for anything,—for any sorrow or trouble in the world!’

The mixture of yearning, pain, triumphant affection in her tone, cannot be rendered in words.

His whole heart melted to her. As he held her to his breast, the hour they had just passed through took for both of them a sacred meaning and importance. Youth was going—their talk had not been the talk of youth. Was true love just beginning?

CHAPTER VIII

‘*My God! My God!*’

The cry was David’s. He had reeled back against the table in his study, his hand upon an open book, his face turned to Doctor Mildmay, who was standing by the fireplace.

‘Of course, I can’t be sure,’ said the doctor hastily, almost guiltily. ‘You must not take it on my authority alone. Try and throw it off your mind. Take your wife up to town to see Selby or Paget, and if I am wrong I shall be too thankful! And, above all, don’t frighten her. Take care—she will be down again directly.’

‘You say,’ said David, thickly, ‘that if it were what you suspect, operation would be difficult. Yes, I see there is something of the sort here.’

He turned, shaking all over, to the book beside him, which