

ment? As I look back on the whole course of my relation to Louie, I am conscious only of a sickening sense of utter failure. Our father left her to me, and I have not been able to hold her back from—nay, I have helped to plunge her into the most obvious and commonplace ruin. Yet I am always asking myself, if it were to do again, could I do any better? Has any other force developed in me which would make it possible for me *now* to break through the barriers between her nature and mine, to love her sincerely, asking for nothing again, to help her to a saner and happier life?

'If sometimes I dream that so it is, it is to *her* I owe it—to *her* whom I carry on my bosom, and whose hand did once, or so it seemed, unlock to me the gates of God. *Lucy! my Lucy!*

'... All my past life becomes sometimes intolerable to me. I can see nothing in it that is not tarnished and flecked with black stains of egotism, pride, hardness, moral indolence.

'And the only reparation possible, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds," at which my fainting heart sinks.

'Sometimes I find much comfort in the saying of a lonely thinker, "Let us humbly accept from God even our own nature; not that we are called upon to accept the evil and the disease in us, but let us accept *ourselves* in spite of the evil and the disease."

'Que vivre est difficile—ô mon cœur fatigué!'

CHAPTER XI

By the end of December David Grieve was near breaking down. Dr. Mildmay insisted brusquely on his going away.

'As far as I can see you will live to be an old man,' he said, 'but if you go on like this, it will be with shattered powers. You are driving yourself to death, yet at the present moment you have no natural driving force. It is all artificial, a matter of will. Do, for heaven's sake, get away from these skies and these streets, and leave all work and all social reforms behind. The first business of the citizen—prate as you like!—is to keep his nerves and his digestion in going order.'

David laughed and yielded. The advice, in fact, corresponded to an inward thirst, and had, moreover, a coincidence to back it. In one of the Manchester papers two or three mornings before he had seen the advertisement of a farm to let, which had set vibrating all his passion for and memory of the moorland. It was a farm about half a mile from Needham Farm, on one of the lower slopes of Kinder Low. It had belonged to a peasant owner, lately dead. The heirs wished to sell, but failing a purchaser were willing to let on a short lease.

It was but a small grazing farm, and the rent was low. David went to the agent, took it at once, and in a few days, to the amazement of Reuben and Hannah, to whom he wrote only the night before he arrived, he and Sandy, and a servant, were estab-

lished with a minimum of furniture, but a sufficiency of blankets and coals, in two or three rooms of the little grey-walled house.

'Well, it caps me, it do!' Hannah said to herself, in her astonishment as she stood on her own doorstep the day after the arrival, and watched the figures of David and Sandy disappearing along the light crisp snow of the nearer fields in the direction of the Red Brook and the sheep-fold. They had looked in to ask for Reuben, and had gone in pursuit of him.

What on earth should make a man in the possession of his natural senses leave a warm town-house in January, and come to camp in 'owd Ben's' farm, was, indeed, past Hannah's divination. In reality, no sudden resolve could have been happier. Sandy was a hardy little fellow, and with the first breath of the moorland wind David felt a load, which had been growing too heavy to bear, lifting from his breast. His youth, his manhood, reasserted themselves. The bracing clearness of what seemed to be the setting-in of a long frost put a new life into him; winter's 'bright and intricate device' of ice-fringed stream, of rimy grass, of snow-clad moor, of steel-blue skies, filled him once more with natural joy, carried him out of himself. He could not keep himself indoors; he went about with Reuben or the shepherd, after the sheep; he fed the cattle at Needham Farm, and brought his old knowledge to bear on the rearing of a sickly calf; he watched for the grouse, or he carried his pockets full of bread for the few blackbirds or moor-pippits that cheered his walks into the fissured solitudes of the great Peak plateau, walks which no one to whom every inch of the ground was not familiar dared have ventured, seeing how misleading and treacherous even light snow-drifts may become in the black bog-land of these high and lonely moors; or he toiled up the side of the Scout with Sandy on his back, that he might put the boy on one of the boulders beside the top of the Downfall, and, holding him fast, bid him look down at the great icicles which marked its steep and waterless bed, gleaming in the short-lived sun.

The moral surroundings, too, of the change were cheering. There, over the brow, in the comfortable little cottage, where he had long since placed her, with a woman to look after her, was Margaret—quite childish and out of her mind, but happy and well cared for. He and Sandy would trudge over from time to time to see her, he carrying the boy in a plaid slung round his shoulders when the snow was deep. Once Sandy went to Frimley with the Needham Farm shepherd, and when David came to fetch him he found the boy and Margaret playing cat's-cradle together by the fire, and the eagerness in Sandy's pursed lips, and on the ethereally blanched and shrunken face of Margaret, brought the tears to David's eyes, as he stood smiling and looking on. But she did not suffer; for memory was gone; only the gentle 'imperishable child' remained.

And at Needham Farm he had never known the atmosphere so still. Reuben was singularly cheerful and placid. Whether

by the mere physical weakening of years, or by some slow softening of the soul, Hannah and her ways were no longer the daily scourge and perplexity to her husband they had once been. She was a harsh and tyrannous woman still, but not now openly viperish or cruel. With the disappearance of old temptations, the character had, to some extent, righted itself. Her sins of avarice and oppression towards Sandy's orphans had raised no Nemesis that could be traced, either within or without. It is doubtful whether she ever knew what self-reproach might mean; in word, at any rate, she was to the end as loudly confident as at the first. Nevertheless it might certainly be said that at sixty she was a better and more tolerable human being than she had been at fifty.

'Aye, if yo do but live long enoof, yo get past t' bad bits o' t' road,' Reuben said one night, with a long breath, to David, and then checked himself, brought up either by a look at his nephew's mourning dress, or by a recollection of what David had told him of Louie the night before.

It troubled Reuben indeed, something in the old fashion, that his wife would show no concern whatever for Louie when he repeated to her the details of that disappearance whereof so far he and she had known only the bare fact.

'Aye, I thowt she 'd bin and married soom mak o' rabblement,' remarked Hannah. 'Yo doant suppose ony decent mon ud put up wi her. What Davy wants wi lookin for her I doant know. He'll be hard-set when he's fand her, I should think.'

She was equally impervious and sarcastic with regard to David's social efforts. Her sharp tongue exercised itself on the 'poor way' in which he seemed to live, and when Reuben repeated to her, with some bewilderment, the facts which she had egged him on to get out of David, her scorn knew no bounds.

'Weel, it's like t' Bible after aw, Hannah,' said Reuben, perplexed and remonstrating; 'theer 's things, yo'll remember, abeawt gien t' coat off your back, an sellin aw a mon has, an th' loike, 'at fairly beats me soomtimes.'

'Oh—go long wi yo!' said Hannah in high wrath. 'He an his loike 'll mak a halliblash of us aw soon, wi their silly faddle, an pamperin o' workin men, wha never wor an never will be noa better nor they should be. But—thank the Lord—I'll not be theer to see.'

And after this communication she found it very difficult to treat David civilly.

But to David's son—to Sandy—Hannah Grieve capitulated, for the first and only time in her life.

On the second and third day after his arrival, Sandy came over with the servant to ask Hannah's help in some small matter of the new household. As they neared the farm door, Tim, the aged Tim, who was slouching behind, was suddenly set upon by a new and ill-tempered collie of Reuben's, who threatened very soon to shake the life out of his poor toothless victim. But

Sandy, who had a stick, rushed at him, his cheeks and eyes glowing with passion.

'Get away! you great big dog, you! and leave my middle-sized dog alone!'

And he belaboured and pulled at the collie, without a thought of fear, till the farm-man and Hannah came and separated the combatants,—stalking into the farm kitchen afterwards in a speechless rage at the cowardly injustice which had been done to Tim. As he sat in the big rocking-chair, fiercely cuddling Tim and sucking his thumb, his stormy breath subsiding by degrees, Hannah thought him, as she confessed to the only female friend she possessed in the world, 'the pluckiest and bonniest little grig i' th' cuntry side.'

Thenceforward, so far as her queer temper would allow, she became his nurse and slave, and David, with all the memorials of his own hard childhood about him, could not believe his eyes, when he found Sandy established day after day in the Needham Farm kitchen, sucking his thumb in a corner of the settle, and ordering Hannah about with the airs of a three-tailed bashaw. She stuffed him with hot girdle-cakes; she provided for him a store of 'humbugs,' the indigenous sweet of the district, which she made and baked with her own hands, and had not made before for forty years; she took him about with her, 'rootin,' as she expressed it, after the hens and pigs and the calves; till, Sandy's exactions growing with her compliance, the common fate of tyrants overtook him. He one day asked too much and his slave rebelled. David saw him come in one afternoon, and found him a minute or two after viciously biting the blind-cord in the parlour, in a black temper. When his father inquired what was the matter, Sandy broke out in a sudden wail of tears.

'Why can't she be a Kangawoo when I want her to?'

Whereupon David, with the picture of Hannah's grim figure, cap and all, before his mind's eye, went into the first fit of side-shaking laughter that had befallen him for many and many a month.

On a certain gusty afternoon towards the middle of February, David was standing alone beside the old smithy. The frost, after a temporary thaw, had set in again, there had been tolerably heavy snow the night before, and it was evident from the shifting of the wind and the look of the clouds that were coming up from the north-east over the Scout that another fall was impending. But the day had been fine, and the sun, setting over the Cheshire hills, threw a flood of pale rose into the white bosom of the Scout and on the heavy clouds piling themselves above it. It was a moment of exquisite beauty and wildness. The sunlit snow gleamed against the stormy sky; the icicles lining the steep channel of the Downfall shone jagged and rough between the white and smoothly rounded banks of moor, or the snow-wreathed shapes of the grit boulders; to his left was the murmur of the

Red Brook creeping between its frozen banks; while close beside him about twenty of the moor sheep were huddling against the southern wall of the smithy in prescience of the coming storm. Almost within reach of his stick was the pan of his childish joy, the water left in it by the December rains frozen hard and white; and in the crevice of the wall he had just discovered the mouldering remains of a toy-boat.

He stood and looked out over the wide winter world, rejoicing in its austerity, its solemn beauty. Physically he was conscious of recovered health; and in the mind also there was a new energy of life and work. Nature seemed to say to him, 'Do but keep thy heart open to me, and I have a myriad aspects and moods wherewith to interest and gladden and teach thee to the end;' while, as his eye wandered to the point where Manchester lay hidden on the horizon, the world of men, of knowledge, of duty, summoned him back to it with much of the old magic and power in the call. His grief, his love, no man should take from him; but he must play his part.

Yes—he and Sandy must go home—and soon. Yet even as he so decided, the love of the familiar scene, its freedom, its loneliness, its unstainedness, rose high within him. He stood lost in a trance of memory. Here he and Louie had listened to 'Lias; there, far away amid the boulders of the Downfall, they had waited for the witch; among those snow-laden bushes yonder Louie had hidden when she played Jenny Crum for the discomfiture of the prayer-meeting; and it was on the slope at his feet that she had pushed the butter-scotch into his mouth, the one and only sign of affection she had ever given him, that he could remember, in all their forlorn childhood.

As these things rose before him, the moor, the wind, the rising voice of the storm became to him so many channels, whereby the bitter memory of his sister rushed upon him and took possession. Everything spoke of her, suggested her. Then with inexorable force his visualising gift carried him on past her childhood to the scenes of her miserable marriage; and as he thought of her child's death, the desolation and madness of her flight, the mystery of her fate, his soul was flooded once more for the hundredth time with anguish and horror. Here in this place, where their childish lives had been so closely intertwined, he could not resign himself for ever to ignorance, to silence; his whole being went out in protest, in passionate remorseful desire.

The wind was beginning to blow fiercely; the rosy glow was gone; darkness was already falling. Wild gusts swept from time to time round the white amphitheatre of moor and crag; the ghostly sounds of night and storm were on the hills. Suddenly it was to him as though he heard his name called from a great distance—breathed shrilly and lingeringly along the face of the Scout.

'David!'

It was Louie's voice. The illusion was so strong that, as he

raised his hand to his ear, turning towards the Downfall, whence the sound seemed to come, he trembled from head to foot.

'David!'

Was it the call of some distant boy or shepherd? He could not tell, could not collect himself. He sank down on one of the grit-boulders by the snow-wreathed door of the smithy and sat there long, heedless of the storm and cold, his mind working, a sudden purpose rising and unfolding, with a mysterious rapidity and excitement.

Early on the following morning he made his way down through the deep snow to the station, having first asked Hannah to take charge of Sandy for a day or two; and by the night mail he left London for Paris.

It was not till he walked into Mr. O'Kelly's office, on the ground floor of a house in the Rue d'Assas, at about eleven o'clock on the next day, that he was conscious of any reaction. Then for a bewildered instant he wondered why he had come, and what he was to say.

But to his amazement the lawyer rose at once, throwing up his hands with the gesture of one who notes some singular and unexpected stroke of good fortune.

'This is *most* extraordinary, Mr. Grieve! I have not yet signed the letter on my desk—there it is!—summoning you to Paris. We have discovered Madame Montjoie! As constantly happens, we have been pursuing inquiries in all sorts of difficult and remote quarters, and she is here—at our doors, living for some weeks past, at any rate, without any disguise, at *Barbizon*, of all places in the world! *Barbizon près Fontainebleau*. You know it?'

David sat down.

'Yes,' he said, after an instant. 'I know it. Is he—is that man Brénart there?'

'Certainly. He has taken a miserable studio, and is making, or pretending to make, some winter studies of the forest. I hear that Madame Montjoie looks ill and worn; the neighbours say the *ménage* is a very uncomfortable one, and not likely to last long. I wish I had better news for you, Mr. Grieve.'

And the lawyer, remembering the handsome hollow-eyed boy of twenty who had first asked his help, studied with irrepressible curiosity the man's noble storm-beaten look and fast grizzled hair, as David sat before him with his head bent and his hat in his hands.

They talked a while longer, and then David said, rising:

'Can I get over there to-night? The snow will be deep in the forest.'

'I imagine they will keep that main road to Barbizon open in some fashion,' said the lawyer. 'You may find a sledge. Let me know how you speed and whether I can assist you. But, I fear,'—he shrugged his shoulders—'in the end this wild life *gets into the blood*. I have seen it so often.'

He spoke with the freedom and knowledge of one who had observed Louie Montjoie with some closeness for eleven years. David said nothing in answer; but at the door he turned to ask a question.

'You can't tell me anything of the habits of this man—this Brénart?'

'Stop!' said the lawyer, after a moment's thought; 'I remember this detail—my agent told me that M. Brénart was engaged in some work for 'D— et Cie'—he named a great picture-dealing firm on the Boulevard St. Germain, famous for their illustrated books and *éditions de luxe*.—'He did not hear what it was, but—ah! I remember,—it has taken him occasionally to Paris, or so he says, and it has been these absences which have led to some of the worst scenes between him and your sister. I suppose she put a jealous woman's interpretation on them. You want to see her alone?—when this man is out of the way? I have an idea: take my card and your own to this person—' he wrote out an address—'he is one of the junior partners in "D— et Cie"; I know him, and I got his firm the sale of a famous picture. He will do me a good turn. Ask him what the work is that M. Brénart is doing, and when he expects him next in Paris. It is possible you may get some useful information.'

David took the card and walked at once to the Boulevard St. Germain, which was close by. He was civilly received by the man to whom O'Kelly had sent him, and learned from him that Brénart was doing for the firm a series of etchings illustrating the forest in winter, and intended to make part of a great book on Fontainebleau and the Barbizon school. They were expecting the last batch from him, were indeed desperately impatient for them. But he was a difficult fellow to deal with—an exceedingly clever artist, but totally untrustworthy. In his last letter to them he had spoken of bringing the final instalment to them, and returning some corrected proofs by February 16—'to-morrow, I see,' said the speaker, glancing at an almanac on his office table. 'Well, we may get them, and we mayn't. If we don't, we shall have to take strong measures. And now, Monsieur, I think I have told you all I can tell you of our relations to M. Brénart.'

David bowed and took his leave. He made his way through the great shop with its picture-covered walls and its floors dotted with stands on which lay exposed the new etchings and engravings of the season. In front of him a lady in black was also making her way to the door and the street. No one was attending her, and instinctively he hurried forward to open the heavy glass door for her. As he did so a sudden sharp presentiment shot through him. The door swung to behind them, and he found himself in the covered entrance of the shop face to face with Elise Delaunay.

The meeting was so startling that neither could disguise the shock of it. He took off his hat mechanically; she grew white and leant against the glass window,

'You!—how can it be you?' she said in a quick whisper, then recovering herself—'Monsieur Grieve, old associations are painful, and I am neither strong—nor—nor stoical. Which way are you walking?'

'Towards the Rue de Seine,' he said, thrown into a bewildering mist of memory by her gesture, the crisp agitated decision of her manner. 'And you?'

'I also. We will walk a hundred yards together. What are you in Paris for?'

'I am here on some business of my sister's,' he said evasively.

She raised her eyes, and looked at him long and sharply. He, on his side, saw, with painful agitation, that her youth was gone, but not her grace, not her singular and wilful charm. The little face under her black hat was lined and sallow, and she was startlingly thin. The mouth had lost its colour; and gained instead the hard shrewdness of a woman left to battle with the world and poverty alone; but the eyes had their old plaintive trick; the dead gold of the hair, the rings and curls of it against the white temples, were still as beautiful as they had ever been; and the light form moved beside him with the same quick floating gait.

'You have grown much older,' she said abruptly. 'You look as if you had suffered—but what of that?—*C'est comme tout le monde*.'

She withdrew her look a moment, with a little bitter gesture, then she resumed, drawn on by a curiosity and emotion she could not control.

'Are you married?'

'Yes, but my wife is dead.'

She gave a start; the first part of the answer had not prepared her for the second.

'*Ah, mon Dieu!*' she said, 'always grief—*always!* Is it long?'

'Eight months. I have a boy. And you?—I heard sad news of you once—the only time.'

'You might well,' she said, with a half-ironical accent, driving the point of her umbrella restlessly into the crevices of the stones, as they slowly crossed a paved street. 'My husband is only a cripple, confined to his chair,—I am no longer an artist but an artisan,—I have not painted a *picture* for years,—but what I paint sells for a trifle, and there is soup in the pot—of a sort. For the rest I spend my life in making *tisane*, in lifting weights too heavy for me, and bargaining for things to eat.'

'But—you are not unhappy!' he said to her boldly, with a change of tone.

She stopped, struck by the indescribable note in his voice. They had turned into a side street, whither she had unconsciously led him. She stood with her eyes on the ground, then she lifted them once more, and there was in them a faint beautiful gleam, which transformed the withered and sharpened face,

'You are quite right,' she said, 'if he will only live. He depends on me for everything. It is like a child, but it consoles. Adieu!'

That night David found himself in the little *auberge* at Barbizon. He had discovered a sledge to take him across the forest, and he and his driver had pushed their way under a sky of lead and through whirling clouds of fresh sleet past the central beech-wood, where the great boles stood straight and bare amid fantastic masses of drift; through the rock and fir region, where all was white, and the trees drooped under their wintry load; and beneath withered and leaning oaks, throwing gaunt limbs here and there from out the softening effacing mantle of the snow. Night fell when the journey was half over, and as the lights of the sledge flashed from side to side into these lonely fastnesses of cold, how was it possible to believe that summer and joy had ever tabernacled here?

He was received at the inn, as his driver had brought him—with astonishment. But Barbizon has been long accustomed, beyond most places in France, to the eccentricities of the English and American visitor; and being a home of artists, it understands the hunt for 'impressions,' and easily puts up with the unexpected. Before a couple of hours were over, David was installed in a freezing room, and was being discussed in the kitchen, where his arrival produced a certain animation, as the usual English madman in quest of a sensation, and no doubt ready to pay for it.

There were, however, three other guests in the inn, as he found, when he descended for dinner. They were all artists—young, noisy, *bons camarades*, and of a rough and humble social type. To them the winter at Barbizon was as attractive as anywhere else. Life at the inn was cheap, and free; they had the digestion of ostriches, eating anything that was put before them, and drinking oceans of red wine at ten sous a litre; on bad days they smoked, fed, worked at their pictures or played coarse practical jokes on each other and the people of the inn; in fine weather there was always the forest to be exploited, and the chance of some happy and profitable inspiration.

They stared at David a good deal during the *bifteck*, the black pudding which seemed to be a staple dish of the establishment, and the *omelette aux fines herbes*, which the landlord's wife had added in honour of the stranger. One of them, behind the shelter of his glasses, drew the outline of the Englishman's head and face on the table-cloth, and showed it to his neighbour.

'Poetical, grand style, *hein?*'

The other nodded carelessly. '*Pourtant—Thiver lui plaît.*' he hummed under his breath, having some lines of Hugo's, which he had chosen as a motto for a picture, running in his head.

After dinner everybody gathered round the great fire, which the servant had piled with logs, while the flames, and the wreaths of smoke from the four pipes alternately revealed and concealed

the rough sketches of all sorts—landscape, portrait, *genre*—legacies of bygone visitors, wherewith the walls of the *salle à manger* were covered. David sat in his corner smoking, ready enough to give an account of his journey across the forest, and to speak when he was spoken to.

As soon as the strangeness of the new-comer had a little worn off, the three young fellows plunged into a flood of amusing gossip about the storm and the blocking of the roads, the scarcity of food in Barbizon, the place in general, and its inhabitants. David fell silent after a while, stiffening under a presentiment which was soon realised. He heard his sister's wretched lot discussed with shouts of laughter—the chances of Brénart's escape from the mistress he had already wearied of and deceived—the perils of 'la Montjoie's' jealousy. '*Il veut bien se débarrasser d'elle—mais on ne plaisante pas avec une tigresse!*' said one of the speakers. So long as there was information to be got which might serve him he sat motionless, withdrawn into the dark, forcing himself to listen. When the talk became mere scurrility and noise, he rose and went out.

He passed through the courtyard of the inn, and turned down the village street. The storm had gone down, and there were a few stars amid the breaking clouds. Here and there a light shone from the low houses on either hand; the snow, roughly shovelled from the foot pavements, lay piled in heaps along the roadway, the white roofs shone dimly against the wild sky. He passed Madame Pyat's *maisonnette*, pausing a moment to look over the wall. Not a sign of life in the dark building, and, between him and it, great drifts of snow choking up and burying the garden. A little further on, as he knew, lay the goal of his quest. He easily made out the house from Mr. O'Kelly's descriptions, and he lingered a minute, on the footway, under an overhanging roof to look at it. It was just a labourer's cottage standing back a little from the street, and to one side rose a high wooden addition which he guessed to be the studio. Through the torn blind came the light of a lamp, and as he stood there, himself invisible in his patch of darkness, he heard voices—an altercation, a woman's high shrill note.

Then he crept back to the inn vibrating through all his being to the shame of those young fellows' talk, the incredible difficulty of the whole enterprise. Could he possibly make any impression upon her whatever? What was done was done; and it would be a crime on his part to jeopardise in the smallest degree the wholesome brightness of Sandy's childhood by any rash proposals which it might be wholly beyond his power to carry out.

He carried up a basket of logs to his room, made them blaze, and crouched over them till far into the night. But in the end the doubt and trouble of his mind subsided; his purpose grew clear again. 'It was my own voice that spoke to me on the moor,' he thought, 'the voice of my own best life.'

About eight o'clock, with the first light of the morning, he was

roused by bustle and noise under his window. He got up, and, looking out, saw two sledges standing before the inn, in the cold grey light. Men were busy harnessing a couple of horses to each, and there were a few figures, muffled in great coats and carrying bags and wraps, standing about.

'They are going over to Fontainebleau station,' he thought; 'if that man keeps his appointment in Paris to-day, he will go with them.'

As the words passed through his mind, a figure came striding up from the lower end of the street, a young fair-haired man, in a heavy coat lined with sheepskin. His delicately made face—naturally merry and *bon enfant*—was flushed and scowling. He climbed into one of the sledges, complained of the lateness of the start, swore at the ostler, who made him take another seat on the plea that the one he had chosen was engaged, and finally subsided into a moody silence, pulling at his moustache, and staring out over the snow, till at last the signal was given, and the sledges flew off on the Fontainebleau road, under a shower of snowballs which a group of shivering bright-eyed urchins on their way to school threw after them, as soon as the great whips were at a safe distance.

David dressed and descended.

'Who was that fair-haired gentleman in the first sledge?' he casually asked of the landlord who was bringing some smoking hot coffee into the *salle à manger*.

'That was a M. Brénart, monsieur,' said the landlord, cheerfully, absorbed all the while in the laying of his table. '*C'est un drôle de corps, M. Brénart*. I don't take to him much myself; and as for madame—*qui n'est pas madame!*'

He shrugged his shoulders, saw that there were no fresh rolls, and departed with concern to fetch them.

David ate and drank. He would give her an hour yet.

When his watch told him that the time was come, he went out slowly, inquiring on the way if there would be any means of getting to Paris later in the day. Yes, the landlord thought a conveyance of some sort could be managed—if monsieur would pay for it!

A few minutes later David knocked at the door of Brénart's house. He could get no answer at all, and at last he tried the latch. It yielded to his hand, and he went in.

There was no one in the bare kitchen, but there were the remains of a fire, and of a meal. Both the crockery on the table and a few rough chairs and stools the room contained struck him as being in great disorder. There were two doors at the back. One led into a back room which was empty, the other down a few steps into a garden. He descended the steps and saw the long wooden erection of the studio stretching to his left. There was a door in the centre of its principal wall, which was ajar. He went up to it and softly pushed it open. There, at the further end,

huddled over an iron stove, her face buried in her hands, her shoulders shaken with fierce sobs, was Louie.

He closed the door behind him, and at the sound she turned, hastily. When she saw who it was she gave a cry, and, sinking back on her low canvas chair, she lay staring at him, and speechless. Her eyes were red with weeping; her beauty was a wreck; and in face of the despair which breathed from her, and from her miserable surroundings, all doubt, all repulsion, all condemnation fled from the brother's heart. The iron in his soul melted. He ran up to her, and, kneeling beside her, he put his arms round her, as he had never done in his life.

'Oh you poor thing—you poor thing!' he cried, scarcely knowing what he said. He took her worn, tear-stained face, and, laying it on his shoulder, he kissed her, breathing incoherent words of pity and consolation.

She submitted a while, helpless with shock and amazement, and still shaken with the tempest of her own passion. But there came a moment when she pushed him away and tried desperately to recover herself.

'I don't know what you want—you're not going to have anything to do with me now—you can't. Let me alone—it will be over soon—one way or the other.'

And she sat upright, one hand clenched on her knees, her frowning brows drawn together, and the tears falling in spite of her intense effort to drive them back.

He found a painter's stool, and sat down by her, pale and determined. He told her the history of his search; he implored her to be guided by him, to let him take her home to England and Manchester, where her story was unknown, save to Dora and John. He would make a home for her near his own; he would try to comfort her for the loss of her child; they would understand each other better, and the past should be buried.

Louie looked at him askance. Every now and then she ceased to listen to him at all; while, under the kindling of her own thoughts, her wild eyes flamed into fresh rage and agony.

'Don't!—leave me alone!' she broke out at last, springing up. 'I don't want your help, I don't want you; I only want *him*.—and I will have him, or we shall kill each other.'

She paced to and fro, her hands clasped on her breast, her white face setting into a ghastly calm. David gazed at her with horror. This was another note! one which in all their experience of each other he had never heard on her lips before. *She loved this man!*—this mean wretch, who had lived upon her and betrayed her, and, having got from her all she had to give, was probably just about to cast her off into the abyss which yawns for such women as Louie. He had thought of her flight to him before as the frenzy of a nature which must have distraction at any cost from the unfamiliar and intolerable weight of natural grief.

But this!—one moment it cut the roots from hope, the next it nerved him to more vigorous action.

'You cannot have him,' he said, steadily and sternly. 'I have listened to the talk here for your sake—he is already on the point of deserting you—everyone else in this place knows that he is tired of you—that he is unfaithful to you.'

She dropped into her chair with a groan. Even her energies were spent—she was all but fainting—and her miserable heart knew, with more certainty than David himself did, that all he said was true.

Her unexpected weakness, the collapse of her strained nerves, filled him with fresh hopes. He came close to her again and pleaded, by the memory of her child, of their father—that she would yield, and go away with him at once.

'What should I do'—she broke in passionately, her sense of opposition of absurdity reviving her, 'when I get to your hateful Manchester? Go to church and say my prayers! And you? In a week or two, I tell you, you would be sick of having soiled your hands with such *mud* as I am.'

She threw herself back in her chair with a superb gesture, and folded her arms, looking him defiance.

'Try me,' he said quietly, while his lip trembled. 'I am not as I was, Louie. There are things one can only learn by going down—down—into the depths—of sorrow. The night before Lucy died—she could hardly speak—she sent you a message: "I wish I had been kinder—ask her to come to Manchester when I am gone." I have not seen her die—not seen her whole life turn to love—through such unspeakable suffering—for nothing. Oh Louie—when we submit ourselves to God—when we ask for His life—and give up our own—then, and then only, there is peace—and strength. We ourselves are nothing—creatures of passion—miserable—weak—but in Him and through Him—'

His voice broke. He took her cold hand and pressed it tenderly. She trembled in spite of herself, and closed her eyes.

'Don't—I know all about that—why did the child die? There is no God—nothing. It's just talk. I told Him what I'd do—I vowed I'd go to the bad, for good and all—and I have. There—let me alone!'

But he only held her hand tighter.

'No!—never! Your trouble was awful—it might well drive you mad. But others have suffered, Louie—no less—and yet have believed—have hoped. It is not beyond our power—for it has been done again and again!—by the most weak, the most miserable. Oh! think of that—tear yourself first from the evil life—and you, too, will know what it is to be consoled—to be strengthened. The mere effort to come with me—I promise it you!—will bring you healing and comfort. We make for ourselves the promise of eternal life, by turning to the good. Then the hope of recovering our dear ones—which was nothing to us before—rises and roots itself in our heart. Come with me,—conquer yourself,—let us begin to love each other truly, give me comfort and yourself—and you will bear to think again of

Cécile and of God—there will be calm and peace beyond this pain.'

His eyes shone upon her through a mist. She said no more for a while. She lay exhausted and silent, the tears streaming once more down her haggard cheeks.

Then, thinking she had consented, he began to speak of arrangements for the journey—of the possibility of getting across the forest.

Instantly her passion returned. She sprang up and put him away from her.

'It is ridiculous, I tell you—*ridiculous!* How can I decide in such an instant? You must go away and leave me to think.'

'No,' he said firmly, 'my only chance is to stay with you.'

She walked up and down, saying wild incoherent things to herself under her breath. She wore the red dress she had worn at Manchester—now a torn and shabby rag—and over it, because of the cold, a long black cloak, a relic of better days. Her splendid hair, uncombed and dishevelled, hung almost loose round her head and neck; and the emaciation of face and figure made her height and slenderness more abnormal than ever as she swept tempestuously to and fro.

At last she paused in front of him.

'Well, I dare say I'll go with you,' she said, with the old reckless note. 'That fiend thinks he has me in his power for good, he amuses himself with threats of leaving *me*—perhaps I'll turn the tables. . . . But you must go—go for an hour. You can find out about a carriage. There will be an old woman here presently for the house-work. I'll get her to help me pack. You'll only be in the way.'

'You'll be ready for me in an hour?' he said, rising reluctantly.

'Well, it don't look, does it, as if there was much to pack in this hole!' she said with one of her wild laughs.

He looked round for the first time and saw a long bare studio, containing a table covered with etcher's apparatus and some blocks for wood engraving. There was besides an easel, and a picture upon it, with a pretentious historical subject just blocked in, a tall oak chair and stool of antique pattern, and in one corner a stand of miscellaneous arms such as many artists affect—an old flintlock gun or two, some Moorish or Spanish rapiers and daggers. The north window was half blocked by snow, and the atmosphere of the place, in spite of the stove, was freezing.

He moved to the door, loth, most loth, to go, yet well aware, by long experience, of the danger of crossing her temper or her whims. After all, it would take him some time to make his arrangements with the landlord, and he would be back to the moment.

She watched him intently with her poor red eyes. She herself opened the door for him, and to his amazement put a sudden

hand on his arm, and kissed him—roughly, vehemently, with lips that burnt.

'Oh, you fool!' she said, 'you fool!'

'What do you mean?' he said, stopping. 'I believe I *am* a fool, Louie, to leave you for a moment.'

'Nonsense! You are a fool to want to take me to Manchester, and I am a fool to think of going. There:—if I had never been born!—oh! go, for God's sake, go! and come back in an hour. I *must* have some time, I tell you—' and she gave a passionate stamp—'to think a bit, and put my things together.'

She pushed him out, and shut the door. With a great effort he mastered himself and went.

He made all arrangements for the two-horse sledge that was to take them to Fontainebleau. He called for his bill, and paid it. Then he hung about the entrance to the forest, looking with an unseeing eye at the tricks which the snow had been playing with the trees, at the gleams which a pale and struggling sun was shedding over the white world—till his watch told him it was time.

He walked briskly back to the cottage, opened the outer door, was astonished to hear neither voice nor movement, to see nothing of the charwoman Louie had spoken of—rushed to the studio and entered.

She sat in the tall chair, her hands dropping over the arms, her head hanging forward. The cold snow-light shone on her open and glazing eyes—on the red and black of her dress, on the life-stream dripping among the folds, on the sharp curved Algerian dagger at her feet. She was quite dead. Even in the midst of his words of hope, the thought of self-destruction—of her mother—had come upon her and absorbed her. That capacity for sudden intolerable despair which she had inherited, rose to its full height when she had driven David from her—guided her mad steps, her unshrinking hand.

He knelt by her—called for help, laid his ear to her heart, her lips. Then the awfulness of the shock, and of his self-reproach, the crumbling of all his hopes, became too much to bear. Consciousness left him, and when the woman of whom Louie had spoken did actually come in, a few minutes later, she found the brother lying against the sister's knee, his arms outstretched across her, while the dead Louie, with fixed and frowning brows, sat staring beyond him into eternity—a figure of wild fate—freed at last and for ever from that fierce burden of herself.

EPILOGUE