II - WINTERFIELD MAKES EXTRACTS.

First Extract.

April 11th, 1869.--Mrs. Eyrecourt and her daughter have left Beaupark to-day for London. Have I really made any impression on the heart of the beautiful Stella? In my miserable position--ignorant whether I am free or not--I have shrunk from formally acknowledging that I love her.

12th.--I am becoming superstitious! In the Obituary of to-day's Times the death is recorded of that unhappy woman whom I was mad enough to marry. After hearing nothing of her for seven years--I am free! Surely this is a good omen? Shall I follow the Eyrecourts to London, and declare myself? I have not confidence enough in my own power of attraction to run the risk. Better to write first, in strictest confidence, to Mrs. Eyrecourt.

14th.--An enchanting answer from my angel's mother, written in great haste. They are on the point of leaving for Paris. Stella is restless and dissatisfied; she wants change of scene; and Mrs. Eyrecourt adds, in so many words--"It is you who have upset her; why did you not speak while we were at Beaupark?" I am to hear again from Paris. Good old Father Newbliss said all along that she was fond of me, and wondered, like Mrs. Eyrecourt, why I failed to declare myself. How could I tell them of the hideous fetters which bound me in those days?

18th, Paris.--She has accepted me! Words are useless to express my happiness.

19th.--A letter from my lawyer, full of professional subtleties and delays. I have no patience to enumerate them. We move to Belgium to-morrow.

Not on our way back to England--Stella is so little desirous of leaving the Continent that we are likely to be married abroad. But she is weary of the perpetual gayety and glitter of Paris, and wants to see the old Belgian cities. Her mother leaves Paris with regret. The liveliest woman of her age that I ever met with.

Brussels, May 7.--My blessing on the old Belgian cities. Mrs. Eyrecourt is so eager to get away from them that she backs me in hurrying the marriage, and even consents, sorely against the grain, to let the wedding be celebrated at Brussels in a private and unpretending way. She has only stipulated that Lord and Lady Loring (old friends) shall be present. They are to arrive tomorrow, and two days afterward we are to be married.

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(An inclosure is inserted in this place. It consists of the death-bed confession of Mr. Winterfield's wife, and of the explanatory letter written by the rector of Belhaven. The circumstances related in these documents, already known to the reader, are left to speak for themselves, and the Extracts from the Diary are then continued.)

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Bingen, on the Rhine, May 19.--Letters from Devonshire at last, which relieve my wretchedness in some small degree. The frightful misfortune at Brussels will at least be kept secret, so far as I am concerned. Beaupark House is shut up, and the servants are dismissed, "in consequence of my residence abroad." To Father Newbliss I have privately written. Not daring to tell him the truth, I leave him to infer that my marriage engagement has been broken off, he writes back a kind and comforting letter. Time will, I suppose, help me to bear my sad lot.

Perhaps a day may come when Stella and her friends will know how cruelly they have wronged me.

London, November 18, 1860.--The old wound has been opened again. I met her accidentally in a picture gallery. She turned deadly pale, and left the place. Oh, Stella! Stella!

London, August 12, 1861.--Another meeting with her. And another shock to endure, which I might not have suffered if I had been a reader of the marriage announcements in the newspapers. Like other men, I am in the habit of leaving the marriage announcements to the women.

I went to visit an agreeable new acquaintance, Mr. Romayne. His wife drove up to the house while I was looking out of window. I recognized Stella! After two years, she has made use of the freedom which the law has given to her. I must not complain of that, or of her treating me like a stranger, when her husband innocently introduced us. But when are were afterward left together for a few minutes--no! I cannot write down the merciless words she said to me. Why am I fool enough to be as fond of her as ever?

Beaupark, November 16.--Stella's married life is not likely to be a happy one. To-day's newspaper announces the conversion of her husband to the Roman Catholic Faith. I can honestly say I am sorry for her, knowing how she has suffered, among her own relatives, by these conversions. But I so hate him, that this proof of his weakness is a downright consolation to me.

Beaupark, January 27, 1862.--A letter from Stella, so startling and deplorable that I cannot remain away from her after reading it. Her husband has deliberately deserted her. He has gone to Rome, to serve his term of probation for the priesthood. I travel to London by to-day's train.

London, January 27.--Short as it is, I looked at Stella's letter again and again on the journey. The tone of the closing sentences is still studiously cold. After informing me that she is staying with her mother in London, she concludes her letter in these terms:

"Be under no fear that the burden of my troubles will be laid on your shoulders. Since the fatal day when we met at Ten Acres, you have shown forbearance and compassion toward me. I don't stop to inquire if you are sincere--it rests with you to prove that. But I have some questions to ask, which no person but you can answer. For the rest, my friendless position will perhaps plead with you not to misunderstand me. May I write again?"

Inveterate distrust in every sentence! If any other woman had treated me in this way, I should have put her letter into the fire, and should not have stirred from my comfortable house.

January 29.--A day missed out of my Diary. The events of yesterday unnerved me for the time.

Arriving at Derwent's Hotel on the evening of the 27th, I sent a line to Stella by messenger, to ask when she could receive me.

It is strange how the merest trifles seem to touch women! Her note in reply contains the first expression of friendly feeling toward me which has escaped her since we parted at Brussels. And this expression proceeds from her ungovernable surprise and gratitude at my taking the trouble to travel from Devonshire to London on her account!

For the rest, she proposed to call on me at the hotel the next morning. She and her mother, it appeared, differed in opinion on the subject of Mr.

Romayne's behavior to her; and she wished to see me, in the first instance, unrestrained by Mrs. Eyrecourt's interference.

There was little sleep for me that night. I passed most of the time in smoking and walking up and down the room. My one relief was afforded by Traveler--he begged so hard to go to London with me, I could not resist him. The dog always sleeps in my room. His surprise at my extraordinary restlessness (ending in downright anxiety and alarm) was expressed in his eyes, and in his little whinings and cries, quite as intelligibly as if he had put his meaning into words. Who first called a dog a dumb creature? It must have been a man, I think--and a thoroughly unlovable man, too, from a dog's point of view.

Soon after ten, on the morning of the 28th, she entered my sitting-room.

In her personal appearance, I saw a change for the worse: produced, I suppose, by the troubles that have tried her sorely, poor thing. There was a sad loss of delicacy in her features, and of purity in her complexion. Even her dress--I should certainly not have noticed it in any other woman--seemed to be loose and slovenly. In the agitation of the moment, I forgot the long estrangement between us; I half lifted my hand to take hers, and checked myself. Was I mistaken in supposing that she yielded to the same impulse, and resisted it as I did? She concealed her embarrassment, if she felt any, by patting the dog.

"I am ashamed that you should have taken the journey to London in this wintry weather--" she began.

It was impossible, in her situation, to let her assume this commonplace tone with me. "I sincerely feel for you," I said, "and sincerely wish to help you, if I can."

She looked at me for the first time. Did she believe me? or did she still doubt? Before I could decide, she took a letter from her pocket, opened it, and handed it to me.

"Women often exaggerate their troubles," she said. "It is perhaps an unfair trial of your patience--but I should like you to satisfy yourself that I have not made the worst of my situation. That letter will place it before you in Mr. Romayne's own words. Read it, except where the page is turned down."

It was her husband's letter of farewell.

The language was scrupulously delicate and considerate. But to my mind it entirely failed to disguise the fanatical cruelty of the man's resolution, addressed to his wife. In substance, it came to this:--

"He had discovered the marriage at Brussels, which she had deliberately concealed from him when he took her for his wife. She had afterward persisted in that concealment, under circumstances which made it impossible that he could ever trust her again." (This no doubt referred to her ill-advised reception of me, as a total stranger, at Ten Acres Lodge.) "In the miserable break-up of his domestic life, the Church to which he now belonged offered him not only her divine consolation, but the honor, above all earthly distinctions, of serving the cause of religion in the sacred ranks of the priesthood. Before his departure for Rome he bade her a last farewell in this world, and forgave her the injuries that she had inflicted on him. For her sake he asked leave to say some few words more. In the first place, he desired to do her every justice, in a worldly sense. Ten Acres Lodge was offered to her as a free gift for her lifetime, with a sufficient income for all her wants. In the second place, he was anxious that she should not misinterpret his motives. Whatever his opinion of her conduct might be, he did not rely on it as affording his only justification for leaving her. Setting personal feeling aside, he felt religious scruples (connected with his marriage) which left him no other alternative than the separation on which he had resolved. He would

briefly explain those scruples, and mention his authority for entertaining them, before he closed his letter."

There the page was turned down, and the explanation was concealed from me.

A faint color stole over her face as I handed the letter back to her.

"It is needless for you to read the end," she said. "You know, under his own hand, that he has left me; and (if such a thing pleads with you in his favor) you also know that he is liberal in providing for his deserted wife."

I attempted to speak. She saw in my face how I despised him, and stopped me.

"Whatever you may think of his conduct," she continued, "I beg that you will not speak of it to me. May I ask your opinion (now you have read his letter) on another matter, in which my own conduct is concerned? In former days--"

She paused, poor soul, in evident confusion and distress.

"Why speak of those days?" I ventured to say.

"I must speak of them. In former days, I think you were told that my father's will provided for my mother and for me. You know that we have enough to live on?"

I had heard of it, at the time of our betrothal--when the marriage settlement was in preparation. The mother and daughter had each a little income of a few hundreds a year. The exact amount had escaped my memory.

After answering her to this effect, I waited to hear more.

She suddenly became silent; the most painful embarrassment showed itself in her face and manner. "Never mind the rest," she said, mastering her confusion after an interval. "I have had some hard trials to bear; I forget things--" she made an effort to finish the sentence, and gave it up, and called to the dog to come to her. The tears were in her eyes, and that was the way she took to hide them from me.

In general, I am not quick at reading the minds of others--but I thought I understood Stella. Now that we were face to face, the impulse to trust me had, for the moment, got the better of her caution and her pride; she was half ashamed of it, half inclined to follow it. I hesitated no longer. The time for which I had waited--the time to prove, without any indelicacy on my side, that I had never been unworthy of her--had surely come at last.

"Do you remember my reply to your letter about Father Benwell?" I asked.

"Yes--every word of it."

"I promised, if you ever had need of me, to prove that I had never been unworthy of your confidence. In your present situation, I can honorably keep my promise. Shall I wait till you are calmer? or shall I go on at once?"

"At once!"

"When your mother and your friends took you from me," I resumed, "if you had shown any hesitation--"

She shuddered. The image of my unhappy wife, vindictively confronting us on the church steps, seemed to be recalled to her memory. "Don't go back to it!" she cried. "Spare me, I entreat you."

I opened the writing-case in which I keep the papers sent to me by the Rector of Belhaven, and placed them on the table by which she was sitting. The more plainly and briefly I spoke now, the better I thought it might be for both of us.

"Since we parted at Brussels," I said, "my wife has died. Here is a copy of the medical certificate of her death."

Stella refused to look at it. "I don't understand such things," she answered faintly. "What is this?"

She took up my wife's death-bed confession.

"Read it," I said.

She looked frightened. "What will it tell me?" she asked.

"It will tell you, Stella, that false appearances once led you into wronging an innocent man."

Having said this, I walked away to a window behind her, at the further end of the room, so that she might not see me while she read.

After a time--how much longer it seemed to be than it really was!--I heard her move. As I turned from the window, she ran to me, and fell on her knees at my feet. I tried to raise her; I entreated her to believe that she was forgiven. She seized my hands, and held them over her face--they were wet with her tears. "I am ashamed to look at you," she said. "Oh, Bernard, what a wretch I have been!"

I never was so distressed in my life. I don't know what I should have said, what I should have done, if my dear old dog had not helped me out of it. He, too, ran up to me, with the loving jealousy of his race, and tried to lick my hands, still fast in Stella's hold. His paws were on her shoulder; he attempted to push himself between us. I think I successfully assumed a tranquillity which I was far from really feeling. "Come, come!" I said, "you mustn't make Traveler jealous." She let me raise her. Ah, if she could have kissed me--but that was not to be done; she kissed the dog's head, and then she spoke to me. I shall not set down what she said in these pages. While I live, there is no fear of my forgetting those words.

I led her back to her chair. The letter addressed to me by the Rector of Belhaven still lay on the table, unread. It was of some importance to Stella's complete enlightenment, as containing evidence that the confession was genuine. But I hesitated, for her sake, to speak of it just yet.

"Now you know that you have a friend to help and advise you--" I began.

"No," she interposed; "more than a friend; say a brother."

I said it. "You had something to ask of me," I resumed, "and you never put the question."

She understood me.

"I meant to tell you," she said, "that I had written a letter of refusal to Mr. Romayne's lawyers. I have left Ten Acres, never to return; and I refuse to accept a farthing of Mr. Romayne's money. My mother--though she knows that we have enough to live on--tells me I have acted with inexcusable pride and folly. I wanted to ask if you blame me, Bernard, as she does?"

I daresay I was inexcusably proud and foolish too. It was the second time she had called me by my Christian name since the happy bygone time, never to come again. Under whatever influence I acted, I respected and admired her for that refusal, and I owned it in so many words. This little encouragement seemed to relieve her. She was so much calmer that I ventured to speak of the Rector's letter.

She wouldn't hear of it. "Oh, Bernard, have I not learned to trust you yet? Put away those papers. There is only one thing I want to know. Who gave them to you? The Rector?"

"No."

"How did they reach you, then?"

"Through Father Benwell."

She started at that name like a woman electrified.

"I knew it!" she cried. "It is the priest who has wrecked my married life--and he got his information from those letters, before he put them into your hands." She waited a while, and recovered herself. "That was the first of the questions I wanted to put to you," she said. "I am answered. I ask no more."

She was surely wrong about Father Benwell? I tried to show her why.

I told her that my reverend friend had put the letters into my hand, with the seal which protected them unbroken. She laughed disdainfully. Did I know him so little as to doubt for a moment that he could break a seal and replace it again? This view was entirely new to me; I was startled, but not convinced. I never desert my friends--even when they are friends of no very long standing--and I still tried to defend Father Benwell. The only result was to make her alter her intention of asking me no more questions. I innocently roused in her a new curiosity. She was eager to know how I had first become acquainted with the priest, and how he had contrived to possess himself of papers which were intended for my reading only.

There was but one way of answering her.

It was far from easy to a man like myself, unaccustomed to state circumstances in their proper order--but I had no other choice than to reply, by telling the long story of the theft and discovery of the Rector's papers. So far as Father Benwell was concerned, the narrative only confirmed her suspicions. For the rest, the circumstances which most interested her were the circumstances associated with the French boy.

"Anything connected with that poor creature," she said, "has a dreadful interest for me now."

"Did you know him?" I asked, with some surprise.

"I knew him and his mother--you shall hear how, at another time. I suppose I felt a presentiment that the boy would have some evil influence over me. At any rate, when I accidentally touched him, I trembled as if I had touched a serpent. You will think me superstitious--but, after what you have said, it is certainly true that he has been the indirect cause of the misfortune that has fallen on me. How came he to steal the papers? Did you ask the Rector, when you went to Belhaven?"

"I asked the Rector nothing. But he thought it his duty to tell me all that he knew of the theft."

She drew her chair nearer to me. "Let me hear every word of it!" she pleaded eagerly.

I felt some reluctance to comply with the request.

"Is it not fit for me to hear?" she asked.

This forced me to be plain with her. "If I repeat what the Rector told me," I said, "I must speak of my wife."

She took my hand. "You have pitied and forgiven her," she answered. "Speak of her, Bernard--and don't, for God's sake, think that my heart is harder than yours."

I kissed the hand that she had given to me--even her "brother" might do that!

"It began," I said, "in the grateful attachment which the boy felt for my wife. He refused to leave her bedside on the day when she dictated her confession to the Rector. As he was entirely ignorant of the English language, there seemed to be no objection to letting him have his own way. He became inquisitive as the writing went on. His questions annoyed the Rector--and as the easiest way of satisfying his curiosity, my wife told him that she was making her will. He knew just enough, from what he had heard at various times, to associate making a will with gifts of money--and the pretended explanation silenced and satisfied him."

"Did the Rector understand it?" Stella asked.

"Yes. Like many other Englishmen in his position, although he was not ready at speaking French, he could read the language, and could fairly well understand it, when it was spoken. After my wife's death, he kindly placed the boy, for a few days, under the care of his housekeeper. Her early life had been passed in the island of Martinique, and she was able to communicate with the friendless foreigner in his own language. When he disappeared, she was the only person who could throw any light on his motive for stealing the papers. On the day when he entered the house, she caught him peeping through the keyhole of the study door. He must have seen where the confession was placed, and the color of the old-fashioned blue paper, on which it was written, would help him to identify it. The next morning, during the Rector's absence, he brought the manuscript to the housekeeper, and asked her to translate it into French, so that he might know how much money was left to him in 'the will.' She severely reproved him, made him replace the paper in the desk from which he had taken it, and threatened to tell the Rector if his misconduct was repeated. He promised amendment, and the good-natured woman believed him. On that evening the papers were sealed, and locked up. In the morning the lock was found broken, and the papers and the boy were both missing together."

"Do you think he showed the confession to any other person?" Stella asked. "I happen to know that he concealed it from his mother."

"After the housekeeper's reproof," I replied, "he would be cunning enough, in my opinion, not to run the risk of showing it to strangers. It is far more likely that he thought he might learn English enough to read it himself."

There the subject dropped. We were silent for a while. She was thinking, and I was looking at her. On a sudden, she raised her head. Her eyes rested on me gravely.

"It is very strange!" she said

"What is strange?"

"I have been thinking of the Lorings. They encouraged me to doubt you. They advised me to be silent about what happened at Brussels. And they too are concerned in my husband's desertion of me. He first met Father Benwell at their house." Her head drooped again; her next words were murmured to herself. "I am still a young woman," she said. "Oh, God, what is my future to be?"

This morbid way of thinking distressed me. I reminded her that she had dear and devoted friends.

"Not one," she answered, "but you."

"Have you not seen Lady Loring?" I asked.

"She and her husband have written most kindly, inviting me to make their house my home. I have no right to blame them--they meant well. But after what has happened, I can't go back to them."

"I am sorry to hear it," I said.

"Are you thinking of the Lorings?" she asked.

"I don't even know the Lorings. I can think of nobody but you."

I was still looking at her--and I am afraid my eyes said more than my words. If she had doubted it before, she must have now known that I was as fond of her as ever. She looked distressed rather than confused. I made an awkward attempt to set myself right.

"Surely your brother may speak plainly," I pleaded.

She agreed to this. But nevertheless she rose to go--with a friendly word, intended (as I hoped) to show me that I had got my pardon for that time. "Will you come and see us to-morrow?" she said. "Can you forgive my mother as generously as you have forgiven me? I will take care, Bernard, that she does you justice at last."

She held out her hand to take leave. How could I reply? If I had been a resolute man, I might have remembered that it would be best for me not to see too much of her. But I am a poor weak creature--I accepted her invitation for the next day.

January 30.--I have just returned from my visit.

My thoughts are in a state of indescribable conflict and confusion--and her mother is the cause of it. I wish I had not gone to the house. Am I a bad man, I wonder? and have I only found it out now?

Mrs. Eyrecourt was alone in the drawing-room when I went in. Judging by the easy manner in which she got up to receive me, the misfortune that has befallen her daughter seemed to have produced no sobering change in this frivolous woman.

"My dear Winterfield," she began, "I have behaved infamously. I won't say that appearances were against you at Brussels--I will only say I ought not to have trusted to appearances. You are the injured person; please forgive me. Shall we go on with the subject? or shall we shake hands, and say no more about it?"

I shook hands, of course. Mrs. Eyrecourt perceived that I was looking for Stella.

"Sit down," she said; "and be good enough to put up with no more attractive society than mine. Unless I set things straight, my good friend, you and my daughter--oh, with the best intentions!--will drift into a false position. You won't see Stella to-day. Quite impossible--and I will tell you why. I am the worldly old mother; I don't mind what I say. My innocent daughter would die before she would confess what I am going to tell you. Can I offer you anything? Have you had lunch?"

I begged her to continue. She perplexed--I am not sure that she did not even alarm me.

"Very well," she proceeded. "You may be surprised to hear it--but I don't mean to allow things to go on in this way. My contemptible son-in-law shall return to his wife."

This startled me, and I suppose I showed it.

"Wait a little," said Mrs. Eyrecourt. "There is nothing to be alarmed about. Romayne is a weak fool; and Father Benwell's greedy hands are (of course) in both his pockets. But he has, unless I am entirely mistaken, some small sense of shame, and some little human feeling still left. After the manner in which he has behaved, these are the merest possibilities, you will say. Very likely. I have boldly appealed to those possibilities nevertheless. He has already gone away to Rome; and I need hardly add--Father Benwell would take good care of that--he has left us no address. It doesn't in the least matter. One of the advantages of being so much in society as I am is that I have nice acquaintances everywhere, always ready to oblige me, provided I don't borrow money of them. I have written to Romayne, under cover to one of my friends living in Rome. Wherever he may be, there my letter will find him."

So far, I listened quietly enough, naturally supposing that Mrs. Eyrecourt trusted to her own arguments and persuasions. I confess it even to myself, with shame. It was a relief to me to feel that the chances (with such a fanatic as Romayne) were a hundred to one against her.

This unworthy way of thinking was instantly checked by Mrs. Eyrecourt's next words.

"Don't suppose that I am foolish enough to attempt to reason with him," she went on. "My letter begins and ends on the first page. His wife has a claim on him, which no newly-married man can resist. Let me do him justice. He knew nothing of it before he went away. My letter--my

daughter has no suspicion that I have written it--tells him plainly what the claim is."

She paused. Her eyes softened, her voice sank low--she became quite unlike the Mrs. Eyrecourt whom I knew.

"In a few months more, Winterfield," she said, "my poor Stella will be a mother. My letter calls Romayne back to his wife--and his child."

Mrs. Eyrecourt paused, evidently expecting me to offer an opinion of some sort. For the moment I was really unable to speak. Stella's mother never had a very high opinion of my abilities. She now appeared to consider me the stupidest person in the circle of her acquaintance.

"Are you a little deaf, Winterfield?" she asked.

"Not that I know of."

"Do you understand me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then why can't you say something? I want a man's opinion of our prospects. Good gracious, how you fidget! Put yourself in Romayne's place, and tell me this. If you had left Stella--"

"I should never have left her, Mrs. Eyrecourt."

"Be quiet. You don't know what you would have done. I insist on your supposing yourself to be a weak, superstitious, conceited, fanatical fool. You understand? Now, tell me, then. Could you keep away from your wife, when you were called back to her in the name of your firstborn child? Could you resist that?"

"Most assuredly not!"

I contrived to reply with an appearance of tranquillity. It was not very easy to speak with composure. Envious, selfish, contemptible--no language is too strong to describe the turn my thoughts now took. I never hated any human being as I hated Romayne at that moment. "Damn him, he will come back!" There was my inmost feeling expressed in words.

In the meantime, Mrs. Eyrecourt was satisfied. She dashed at the next subject as fluent and as confident as ever.

"Now, Winterfield, it is surely plain to your mind that you must not see Stella again--except when I am present to tie the tongue of scandal. My daughter's conduct must not allow her husband--if you only knew how I detest that man!--must not, I say, allow her husband the slightest excuse for keeping away from her. If we give that odious old Jesuit the chance, he will make a priest of Romayne before we know where we are. The audacity of these Papists is really beyond belief. You remember how they made Bishops and Archbishops here, in flat defiance of our laws? Father Benwell follows that example, and sets our other laws at defiance--I mean our marriage laws. I am so indignant I can't express myself as clearly as usual. Did Stella tell you that he actually shook Romayne's belief in his own marriage? Ah, I understand--she kept that to herself, poor dear, and with good reason, too."

I thought of the turned-down page in the letter. Mrs. Eyrecourt readily revealed what her daughter's delicacy had forbidden me to read--including the monstrous assumption which connected my marriage before the registrar with her son-in-law's scruples.

"Yes," she proceeded, "these Catholics are all alike. My daughter--I don't mean my sweet Stella; I mean the unnatural creature in the nunnery--sets herself above her own mother. Did I ever tell you she was impudent enough to say she would pray for me? Father Benwell and the Papal Aggression over again! Now tell me, Winterfield, don't you think, taking the circumstances into consideration--that you will act like a thoroughly sensible man if you go back to Devonshire while we are in our present situation? What with foot-warmers in the carriage, and newspapers and magazines to amuse you, it isn't such a very long journey. And then Beaupark--dear Beaupark--is such a remarkably comfortable house in the winter; and you, you enviable creature, are such a popular man in the neighborhood. Oh, go back! go back!"

I got up and took my hat. She patted me on the shoulder. I could have throttled her at that moment. And yet she was right.

"You will make my excuses to Stella?" I said.

"You dear, good fellow, I will do more than make your excuses; I will sing your praises--as the poet says." In her ungovernable exultation at having got rid of me, she burst into extravagant language. "I feel like a mother to you," she went on, as we shook hands at parting. "I declare I could almost let you kiss me."

There was not a single kissable place about Mrs. Eyrecourt, unpainted, undyed, or unpowdered. I resisted temptation and opened the door. There was still one last request that I could not help making.