

BOOK THE SIXTH. FILIA DOLOROSA

CHAPTER 1

Amelius found it no easy matter to pass quickly through the people loitering and gossiping about him. There was greater freedom for a rapid walker in the road. He was on the point of stepping off the pavement, when a voice behind him--a sweet soft voice, though it spoke very faintly--said, "Are you good-natured, sir?"

He turned, and found himself face to face with one of the saddest sisterhood on earth--the sisterhood of the streets.

His heart ached as he looked at her, she was so poor and so young. The lost creature had, to all appearance, barely passed the boundary between childhood and girlhood--she could hardly be more than fifteen or sixteen years old. Her eyes, of the purest and loveliest blue, rested on Amelius with a vacantly patient look, like the eyes of a suffering child. The soft oval outline of her face would have been perfect if the cheeks had been filled out; they were wasted and hollow, and sadly pale. Her delicate lips had none of the rosy colour of youth; and her finely modelled chin was disfigured by a piece of plaster covering some injury. She was little and thin; her worn and scanty clothing showed her frail youthful figure still waiting for its perfection of growth. Her pretty little bare hands were reddened by the raw night air. She trembled as Amelius looked at her in silence, with compassionate wonder. But for the words in which she had accosted him, it would have been impossible to associate her with the lamentable life that she led. The appearance of the girl was artlessly virginal and innocent; she looked as if she had passed through the contamination of the streets without being touched by it, without fearing it, or feeling it, or understanding it. Robed in pure white, with her gentle blue eyes raised to heaven, a painter might have shown her on his canvas as a saint or an angel; and the critical world would have said, Here is the true ideal--Raphael himself might have painted this!

"You look very pale," said Amelius. "Are you ill?"

"No, sir--only hungry."

Her eyes half closed; she reeled from sheer weakness as she said the words. Amelius held her up, and looked round him. They were close to a stall at which coffee and slices of bread-and-butter were sold. He ordered some coffee to be poured out, and offered her the food. She thanked him and tried to eat. "I can't help it, sir," she said faintly. The bread dropped from her hand; her weary head sank on his shoulder.

Two young women--older members of the sad sisterhood--were passing at the moment. "She's too far gone, sir, to eat," said one of them. "I know what would do her good, if you don't mind going into a public-house."

"Where is it?" said Amelius. "Be quick!"

One of the women led the way. The other helped Amelius to support the girl. They entered the crowded public-house. In less than a minute, the first woman had forced her way through the drunken customers at the bar, and had returned with a glass of port-wine and cloves. The girl revived as the stimulant passed her lips. She opened her innocent blue eyes again, in vague surprise. "I shan't die this time," she said quietly.

A corner of the place was not occupied; a small empty cask stood there. Amelius made the poor creature sit down and rest a little. He had only gold in his purse; and, when the woman had paid for the wine, he offered her some of the change. She declined to take it. "I've got a shilling or two, sir," she said; "and I can take care of myself. Give it to Simple Sally."

"You'll save her a beating, sir, for one night at least," said the other woman. "We call her Simple Sally, because she's a little soft, poor soul--hasn't grown up, you know, in her mind, since she was a child. Give her some of your change, sir, and you'll be doing a kind thing."

All that is most unselfish, all that is most divinely compassionate and self-sacrificing in a woman's nature, was as beautiful and as undefiled as ever in these women--the outcasts of the hard highway!

Amelius turned to the girl. Her head had sunk on her bosom; she was half asleep. She looked up as he approached her.

"Would you have been beaten to-night," he asked, "if you had not met with me?"

"Father always beats me, sir," said Simple Sally, "if I don't bring money home. He threw a knife at me last night. It didn't hurt much--it only cut me

here," said the girl, pointing to the plaster on her chin.

One of the women touched Amelius on the shoulder, and whispered to him. "He's no more her father, sir, than I am. She's a helpless creature--and he takes advantage of her. If I only had a place to take her to, he should never set eyes on her again. Show the gentleman your bosom, Sally."

She opened her poor threadbare little shawl. Over the lovely girlish breast, still only growing to the rounded beauty of womanhood, there was a hideous blue-black bruise. Simple Sally smiled, and said, "That did hurt me, sir. I'd rather have the knife."

Some of the nearest drinkers at the bar looked round and laughed. Amelius tenderly drew the shawl over the girl's cold bosom. "For God's sake, let us get away from this place!" he said.

The influence of the cool night air completed Simple Sally's recovery. She was able to eat now. Amelius proposed retracing his steps to the provision-shop, and giving her the best food that the place afforded. She preferred the bread-and-butter at the coffee-stall. Those thick slices, piled up on the plate, tempted her as a luxury. On trying the luxury, one slice satisfied her. "I thought I was hungry enough to eat the whole plateful," said the girl, turning away from the stall, in the vacantly submissive manner which it saddened Amelius to see. He bought more of the bread-and-butter, on the chance that her appetite might revive. While he was wrapping it in a morsel of paper, one of her elder companions touched him and whispered, "There he is, sir!" Amelius looked at her. "The brute who calls himself her father," the woman explained impatiently.

Amelius turned, and saw Simple Sally with her arm in the grasp of a half-drunken ruffian; one of the swarming wild beasts of Low London, dirtied down from head to foot to the colour of the street mud--the living danger and disgrace of English civilization. As Amelius eyed him, he drew the girl away a step or two. "You've got a gentleman this time," he said to her; "I shall expect gold to-night, or else--!" He finished the sentence by lifting his monstrous fist, and shaking it in her face. Cautiously as he had lowered his tones in speaking, the words had reached the keenly sensitive ears of Amelius. Urged by his hot temper, he sprang forward. In another moment, he would have knocked the brute down--but for the timely interference of the arm of the law, clad in a policeman's great-coat. "Don't get yourself into trouble, sir," said the man good-humouredly. "Now, you Hell-fire (that's the nice name they know him by, sir, in these parts), be off with you!" The wild beast on two legs cowered at the voice of authority, like the wild beast on

four: he was lost to sight, at the dark end of the street, in a moment.

"I saw him threaten her with his fist," said Amelius, his eyes still aflame with indignation. "He has bruised her frightfully on the breast. Is there no protection for the poor creature?"

"Well, sir," the policeman answered, "you can summon him if you like. I dare say he'd get a month's hard labour. But, don't you see, it would be all the worse for her when he came out of prison."

The policeman's view of the girl's position was beyond dispute. Amelius turned to her gently; she was shivering with cold or terror, perhaps with both. "Tell me," he said, "is that man really your father?"

"Lord bless you, sir!" interposed the policeman, astonished at the gentleman's simplicity, "Simple Sally hasn't got father or mother--have you, my girl?"

She paid no heed to the policeman. The sorrow and sympathy, plainly visible in Amelius, filled her with a childish interest and surprise. She dimly understood that it was sorrow and sympathy for her. The bare idea of distressing this new friend, so unimaginably kind and considerate, seemed to frighten her. "Don't fret about me, sir," she said timidly; "I don't mind having no father nor mother; I don't mind being beaten." She appealed to the nearest of her two women-friends. "We get used to everything, don't we, Jenny?"

Amelius could bear no more. "It's enough to break one's heart to hear you, and see you!" he burst out--and suddenly turned his head aside. His generous nature was touched to the quick; he could only control himself by an effort of resolution that shook him, body and soul. "I can't and won't let that unfortunate creature go back to be beaten and starved!" he said, passionately addressing himself to the policeman. "Oh, look at her! How helpless, and how young!"

The policeman stared. These were strange words to him. But all true emotion carries with it, among all true people, its own title to respect. He spoke to Amelius with marked respect.

"It's a hard case, sir, no doubt," he said. "The girl's a quiet, well-disposed creature--and the other two there are the same. They're of the sort that keep to themselves, and don't drink. They all of them do well enough, as long as they don't let the liquor overcome them. Half the time it's the men's fault

when they do drink. Perhaps the workhouse might take her in for the night. What's this you've got girl, in your hand? Money?"

Amelius hastened to say that he had given her the money. "The workhouse!" he repeated. "The very sound of it is horrible."

"Make your mind easy, sir," said the policeman; "they won't take her in at the workhouse, with money in her hand."

In sheer despair, Amelius asked helplessly if there was no hotel near. The policeman pointed to Simple Sally's threadbare and scanty clothes, and left them to answer the question for themselves. "There's a place they call a coffee-house," he said, with the air of a man who thought he had better provoke as little further inquiry on that subject as possible.

Too completely pre-occupied, or too innocent in the ways of London, to understand the man, Amelius decided on trying the coffee-house. A suspicious old woman met them at the door, and spied the policeman in the background. Without waiting for any inquiries, she said, "All full for to-night,"--and shut the door in their faces.

"Is there no other place?" said Amelius.

"There's a lodging-house," the policeman answered, more doubtfully than ever. "It's getting late, sir; and I'm afraid you'll find 'em packed like herrings in a barrel. Come, and see for yourself."

He led the way into a wretchedly lighted by-street, and knocked with his foot on a trap-door in the pavement. The door was pushed open from below, by a sturdy boy with a dirty night-cap on his head.

"Any of 'em wanted to-night, sir?" asked the sturdy boy, the moment he saw the policeman.

"What does he mean?" said Amelius.

"There's a sprinkling of thieves among them, sir," the policeman explained. "Stand out of the way, Jacob, and let the gentleman look in."

He produced his lantern, and directed the light downwards, as he spoke. Amelius looked in. The policeman's figure of speech, likening the lodgers to "herrings in a barrel," accurately described the scene. On the floor of a kitchen, men, women, and children lay all huddled together in closely

packed rows. Ghastly faces rose terrified out of the seething obscurity, when the light of the lantern fell on them. The stench drove Amelius back, sickened and shuddering.

"How's the sore place on your head, Jacob?" the policeman inquired. "This is a civil boy," he explained to Amelius, "and I like to encourage him."

"I'm getting better, sir, as fast as I can," said the boy.

"Good night, Jacob."

"Good night, sir." The trap-door fell--and the lodging-house disappeared like the vision of a frightful dream.

There was a moment of silence among the little group on the pavement. It was not easy to solve the question of what to do next. "There seems to be some difficulty," the policeman remarked, "about housing this girl for the night."

"Why shouldn't we take her along with us?" one of the women suggested. "She won't mind sleeping three in a bed, I know."

"What are you thinking of?" the other woman remonstrated. "When he finds she don't come home, our place will be the first place he looks for her in."

Amelius settled the difficulty, in his own headlong way, "I'll take care of her for the night," he said. "Sally, will you trust yourself with me?"

She put her hand in his, with the air of a child who was ready to go home. Her wan face brightened for the first time. "Thank you, sir," she said; "I'll go anywhere along with you."

The policeman smiled. The two women looked thunderstruck. Before they had recovered themselves, Amelius forced them to take some money from him, and cordially shook hands with them. "You're good creatures," he said, in his eager, hearty way; "I'm sincerely sorry for you. Now, Mr. Policeman, show me where to find a cab--and take that for the trouble I am giving you. You're a humane man, and a credit to the force."

In five minutes more, Amelius was on the way to his lodgings, with Simple Sally by his side. The act of reckless imprudence which he was committing was nothing but an act of Christian duty, to his mind. Not the slightest misgiving troubled him. "I shall provide for her in some way!" he thought to

himself cheerfully. He looked at her. The weary outcast was asleep already in her corner of the cab. From time to time she still shivered, even in her sleep. Amelius took off his great-coat, and covered her with it. How some of his friends at the club would have laughed, if they had seen him at that moment!

He was obliged to wake her when the cab stopped. His key admitted them to the house. He lit his candle in the hall, and led her up the stairs. "You'll soon be asleep again, Sally," he whispered.

She looked round the little sitting-room with drowsy admiration. "What a pretty place to live in!" she said.

"Are you hungry again?" Amelius asked.

She shook her head, and took off her shabby bonnet; her pretty light-brown hair fell about her face and her shoulders. "I think I'm too tired, sir, to be hungry. Might I take the sofa-pillow, and lay down on the hearth-rug?"

Amelius opened the door of his bedroom. "You are to pass the night more comfortably than that," he answered. "There is a bed for you here."

She followed him in, and looked round the bedroom, with renewed admiration of everything that she saw. At the sight of the hairbrushes and the comb, she clapped her hands in ecstasy. "Oh, how different from mine!" she exclaimed. "Is the comb tortoise-shell, sir, like one sees in the shop-windows?" The bath and the towels attracted her next; she stood, looking at them with longing eyes, completely forgetful of the wonderful comb. "I've often peeped into the ironmongers' shops," she said, "and thought I should be the happiest girl in the world, if I had such a bath as that. A little pitcher is all I have got of my own, and they swear at me when I want it filled more than once. In all my life, I have never had as much water as I should like." She paused, and thought for a moment. The forlorn, vacant look appeared again, and dimmed the beauty of her blue eyes. "It will be hard to go back, after seeing all these pretty things," she said to herself--and sighed, with that inborn submission to her fate so melancholy to see in a creature so young.

"You shall never go back again to that dreadful life," Amelius interposed. "Never speak of it, never think of it any more. Oh, don't look at me like that!"

She was listening with an expression of pain, and with both her hands lifted to her head. There was something so wonderful in the idea which he had

suggested to her, that her mind was not able to take it all in at once. "You make my head giddy," she said. "I'm such a poor stupid girl--I feel out of myself, like, when a gentleman like you sets me thinking of new things. Would you mind saying it again, sir?"

"I'll say it to-morrow morning," Amelius rejoined kindly. "You are tired, Sally--go to rest."

She roused herself, and looked at the bed. "Is that your bed, sir?"

"It's your bed to-night," said Amelius. "I shall sleep on the sofa, in the next room."

Her eyes rested on him, for a moment, in speechless surprise; she looked back again at the bed. "Are you going to leave me by myself?" she asked wonderingly. Not the faintest suggestion of immodesty--nothing that the most profligate man living could have interpreted impurely--showed itself in her look or manner, as she said those words.

Amelius thought of what one of her women-friends had told him. "She hasn't grown up, you know, in her mind, since she was a child." There were other senses in the poor victim that were still undeveloped, besides the mental sense. He was at a loss how to answer her, with the respect which was due to that all-atoning ignorance. His silence amazed and frightened her.

"Have I said anything to make you angry with me?" she asked.

Amelius hesitated no longer. "My poor girl," he said, "I pity you from the bottom of my heart! Sleep well, Simple Sally--sleep well." He left her hurriedly, and shut the door between them.

She followed him as far as the closed door; and stood there alone, trying to understand him, and trying all in vain! After a while, she found courage enough to whisper through the door. "If you please, sir--" She stopped, startled by her own boldness. He never heard her; he was standing at the window, looking out thoughtfully at the night; feeling less confident of the future already. She still stood at the door, wretched in the firm persuasion that she had offended him. Once she lifted her hand to knock at the door, and let it drop again at her side. A second time she made the effort, and desperately summoned the resolution to knock. He opened the door directly.

"I'm very sorry if I said anything wrong," she began faintly, her breath coming and going in quick hysteric gasps. "Please forgive me, and wish me

good night." Amelius took her hand; he said good night with the utmost gentleness, but he said it sorrowfully. She was not quite comforted yet. "Would you mind, sir--?" She paused awkwardly, afraid to go on. There was something so completely childlike in the artless perplexity of her eyes, that Amelius smiled. The change in his expression gave her back her courage in an instant; her pale delicate lips reflected his smile prettily. "Would you mind giving me a kiss, sir?" she said. Amelius kissed her. Let the man who can honestly say he would have done otherwise, blame him. He shut the door between them once more. She was quite happy now. He heard her singing to herself as she got ready for bed.

Once, in the wakeful watches of the night, she startled him. He heard a cry of pain or terror in the bedroom. "What is it?" he asked through the door; "what has frightened you?" There was no answer. After a minute or two, the cry was repeated. He opened the door, and looked in. She was sleeping, and dreaming as she slept. One little thin white arm was lifted in the air, and waved restlessly to and fro over her head. "Don't kill me!" she murmured, in low moaning tones--"oh, don't kill me!" Amelius took her arm gently, and laid it back on the coverlet of the bed. His touch seemed to exercise some calming influence over her: she sighed, and turned her head on the pillow; a faint flush rose on her wasted cheeks, and passed away again--she sank quietly into dreamless sleep.

Amelius returned to his sofa, and fell into a broken slumber. The hours of the night passed. The sad light of the November morning dawned mistily through the uncurtained window, and woke him.

He started up, and looked at the bedroom door. "Now what is to be done?" That was his first thought, on waking: he was beginning to feel his responsibilities at last.

CHAPTER 2

The landlady of the lodgings decided what was to be done.

"You will be so good, sir, as to leave my apartments immediately," she said to Amelius. "I make no claim to the week's rent, in consideration of the short notice. This is a respectable house, and it shall be kept respectable at any sacrifice."

Amelius explained and protested; he appealed to the landlady's sense of justice and sense of duty, as a Christian woman.

The reasoning which would have been irresistible at Tadmor was reasoning completely thrown away in London. The landlady remained as impenetrable as the Egyptian Sphinx. "If that creature in the bedroom is not out of my house in an hour's time, I shall send for the police." Having answered her lodger's arguments in those terms, she left the room, and banged the door after her.

"Thank you, sir, for being so kind to me. I'll go away directly--and then, perhaps, the lady will forgive you."

Amelius looked round. Simple Sally had heard it all. She was dressed in her wretched clothes, and was standing at the open bedroom door, crying,

"Wait a little," said Amelius, wiping her eyes with his own handkerchief; "and we will go away together. I want to get you some better clothes; and I don't exactly know how to set about it. Don't cry, my dear--don't cry."

The deaf maid-of-all-work came in, as he spoke. She too was in tears. Amelius had been good to her, in many little ways--and she was the guilty person who had led to the discovery in the bedroom. "If you had only told me, sir," she said penitently, "I'd have kep' it secret. But, there, I went in with your 'ot water, as usual, and, O Lor', I was that startled I dropped the jug, and run downstairs again--!"

Amelius stopped the further progress of the apology. "I don't blame you, Maria," he said; "I'm in a difficulty. Help me out of it; and you will do me a kindness."

Maria partially heard him, and no more. Afraid of reaching the landlady's

ears, as well as the maid's ears, if he raised his voice, he asked if she could read writing. Yes, she could read writing, if it was plain. Amelius immediately reduced the expression of his necessities to writing, in large text. Maria was delighted. She knew the nearest shop at which ready-made outer clothing for women could be obtained, and nothing was wanted, as a certain guide to an ignorant man, but two pieces of string. With one piece, she measured Simple Sally's height, and with the other she took the slender girth of the girl's waist--while Amelius opened his writing-desk, and supplied himself with the last sum of spare money that he possessed. He had just closed the desk again, when the voice of the merciless landlady was heard, calling imperatively for Maria.

The maid-of-all-work handed the two indicative strings to Amelius. "They'll 'elp you at the shop," she said--and shuffled out of the room.

Amelius turned to Simple Sally. "I am going to get you some new clothes," he began.

The girl stopped him there: she was incapable of listening to a word more. Every trace of sorrow vanished from her face in an instant. She clapped her hands. "Oh!" she cried, "new clothes! clean clothes! Let me go with you."

Even Amelius saw that it was impossible to take her out in the streets with him in broad daylight, dressed as she was then. "No, no," he said, "wait here till you get your new things. I won't be half an hour gone. Lock yourself in if you're afraid, and open the door to nobody till I come back!"

Sally hesitated; she began to look frightened.

"Think of the new dress, and the pretty bonnet," suggested Amelius, speaking unconsciously in the tone in which he might have promised a toy to a child.

He had taken the right way with her. Her face brightened again. "I'll do anything you tell me," she said.

He put the key in her hand, and was out in the street directly.

Amelius possessed one valuable moral quality which is exceedingly rare among Englishmen. He was not in the least ashamed of putting himself in a ridiculous position, when he was conscious that his own motives justified him. The smiling and tittering of the shop-women, when he stated the nature of his errand, and produced his two pieces of string, failed to annoy

him in the smallest degree. He laughed too. "Funny, isn't it," he said, "a man like me buying gowns and the rest of it? She can't come herself--and you'll advise me, like good creatures, won't you?" They advised their handsome young customer to such good purpose, that he was in possession of a gray walking costume, a black cloth jacket, a plain lavender-coloured bonnet, a pair of black gloves, and a paper of pins, in little more than ten minutes' time. The nearest trunk-maker supplied a travelling-box to hold all these treasures; and a passing cab took Amelius back to his lodgings, just as the half-hour was out. But one event had happened during his absence. The landlady had knocked at the door, had called through it in a terrible voice, "Half an hour more!" and had retired again without waiting for an answer.

Amelius carried the box into the bedroom. "Be as quick as you can, Sally," he said--and left her alone, to enjoy the full rapture of discovering the new clothes.

When she opened the door and showed herself, the change was so wonderful that Amelius was literally unable to speak to her. Joy flushed her pale cheeks, and diffused its tender radiance over her pure blue eyes. A more charming little creature, in that momentary transfiguration of pride and delight, no man's eyes ever looked on. She ran across the room to Amelius, and threw her arms round his neck. "Let me be your servant!" she cried; "I want to live with you all my life. Jump me up! I'm wild--I want to fly through the window." She caught sight of herself in the looking-glass, and suddenly became composed and serious. "Oh," she said, with the quaintest mixture of awe and astonishment, "was there ever such another bonnet as this? Do look at it--do please look at it!"

Amelius good-naturedly approached to look at it. At the same moment the sitting-room door was opened, without any preliminary ceremony of knocking--and Rufus walked into the room. "It's half after ten," he said, "and the breakfast is spoiling as fast as it can."

Before Amelius could make his excuses for having completely forgotten his engagement, Rufus discovered Sally. No woman, young or old, high in rank or low in rank, ever found the New Englander unprepared with his own characteristic acknowledgment of the debt of courtesy which he owed to the sex. With his customary vast strides, he marched up to Sally and insisted on shaking hands with her. "How do you find yourself, miss? I take pleasure in making your acquaintance." The girl turned to Amelius with wide-eyed wonder and doubt. "Go into the next room, Sally, for a minute or two," he said. "This gentleman is a friend of mine, and I have something to say to him."

"That's an active little girl," said Rufus, looking after her as she ran to the friendly shelter of the bedroom. "Reminds me of one of our girls at Coolspring--she does. Well, now, and who may Sally be?"

Amelius answered the question, as usual, without the slightest reserve. Rufus waited in impenetrable silence until he had completed his narrative--then took him gently by the arm, and led him to the window. With his hands in his pockets and his long legs planted wide apart on his big feet, the American carefully studied the face of his young friend under the strongest light that could fall on it.

"No," said Rufus, speaking quietly to himself, "the boy is not raving mad, so far as I can see. He has every appearance on him of meaning what he says. And this is what comes of the Community of Tadmor, is it? Well, civil and religious liberty is dearly purchased sometimes in the United States--and that's a fact."

Amelius turned away to pack his portmanteau. "I don't understand you," he said.

"I don't suppose you do," Rufus remarked. "I am at a similar loss myself to understand you. My store of sensible remarks is copious on most occasions--but I'm darned if I ain't dried up in the face of this! Might I venture to ask what that venerable Chief Christian at Tadmor would say to the predicament in which I find my young Socialist this morning?"

"What would he say?" Amelius repeated. "Just what he said when Mellicent first came among us. 'Ah, dear me! Another of the Fallen Leaves!' I wish I had the dear old man here to help me. He would know how to restore that poor starved, outraged, beaten creature to the happy place on God's earth which God intended her to fill!"

Rufus abruptly took him by the hand. "You mean that?" he said.

"What else could I mean?" Amelius rejoined sharply.

"Bring her right away to breakfast at the hotel!" cried Rufus, with every appearance of feeling infinitely relieved. "I don't say I can supply you with the venerable Chief Christian--but I can find a woman to fix you, who is as nigh to being an angel, barring the wings, as any she-creature since the time of mother Eve." He knocked at the bedroom door, turning a deaf ear to every appeal for further information which Amelius could address to him.

"Breakfast is waiting, miss!" he called out; "and I'm bound to tell you that the temper of the cook at our hotel is a long way on the wrong side of uncertain. Well, Amelius, this is the age of exhibition. If there's ever an exhibition of ignorance in the business of packing a portmanteau, you run for the Gold Medal--and a unanimous jury will vote it, I reckon, to a young man from Tadmor. Clear out, will you, and leave it to me."

He pulled off his coat, and conquered the difficulties of packing in a hurry, as if he had done nothing else all his life. The landlady herself, appearing with pitiless punctuality exactly at the expiration of the hour, "smoothed her horrid front" in the polite and placable presence of Rufus. He insisted on shaking hands with her; he took pleasure in making her acquaintance; she reminded him, he did assure her, of the lady of the captain-general of the Coolspring Branch of the St. Vitus Commandery; and he would take the liberty to inquire whether they were related or not. Under cover of this fashionable conversation, Simple Sally was taken out of the room by Amelius without attracting notice. She insisted on carrying her threadbare old clothes away with her in the box which had contained the new dress. "I want to look at them sometimes," she said, "and think how much better off I am now." Rufus was the last to take his departure; he persisted in talking to the landlady all the way down the stairs and out to the street door.

While Amelius was waiting for his friend on the house-steps, a young man driving by in a cab leaned out and looked at him. The young man was Jervy, on his way from Mr. Ronald's tombstone to Doctors' Commons.

CHAPTER 3

With a rapid succession of events the morning had begun. With a rapid succession of events the day went on.

The breakfast being over, rooms at the hotel were engaged by Rufus for his "two young friends." After this, the next thing to be done was to provide Simple Sally with certain necessary, but invisible, articles of clothing, which Amelius had never thought of. A note to the nearest shop produced the speedy arrival of a smart lady, accompanied by a boy and a large basket. There was some difficulty in persuading Sally to trust herself alone in her room with the stranger. She was afraid, poor soul, of everybody but Amelius. Even the good American failed to win her confidence. The distrust implanted in her feeble mind by the terrible life that she had led, was the instinctive distrust of a wild animal. "Why must I go among other people?" she whispered piteously to Amelius. "I only want to be with You!" It was as completely useless to reason with her as it would have been to explain the advantages of a comfortable cage to a newly caught bird. There was but one way of inducing her to submit to the most gently exerted interference. Amelius had only to say, "Do it, Sally, to please me." And Sally sighed, and did it.

In her absence Amelius reiterated his inquiries, in relation to that unknown friend whom Rufus had not scrupled to describe as "an angel--barring the wings."

The lady in question, the American briefly explained, was an Englishwoman--the wife of one of his countrymen, established in London as a merchant. He had known them both intimately before their departure from the United States; and the old friendship had been cordially renewed on his arrival in England. Associated with many other charitable institutions, Mrs. Payson was one of the managing committee of a "Home for Friendless Women," especially adapted to receive poor girls in Sally's melancholy position. Rufus offered to write a note to Mrs. Payson; inquiring at what hour she could receive his friend and himself, and obtain permission for them to see the "Home." Amelius, after some hesitation, accepted the proposal. The messenger had not been long despatched with the note before the smart person from the shop made her appearance once more, reporting that "the young lady's outfit had been perfectly arranged," and presenting the inevitable result in the shape of a bill. The last farthing of ready money in the possession of Amelius proved to be insufficient to discharge the debt. He

accepted a loan from Rufus, until he could give his bankers the necessary order to sell out some of his money invested in the Funds. His answer, when Rufus protested against this course, was characteristic of the teaching which he owed to the Community. "My dear fellow, I am bound to return the money you have lent to me--in the interests of our poor brethren. The next friend who borrows of you may not have the means of paying you back."

After waiting for the return of Simple Sally, and waiting in vain, Amelius sent a chambermaid to her room, with a message to her. Rufus disapproved of this hasty proceeding. "Why disturb the girl at her looking-glass?" asked the old bachelor, with his quaintly humorous smile.

Sally came in with no bright pleasure in her eyes this time; the girl looked worn and haggard. She drew Amelius away into a corner, and whispered to him. "I get a pain sometimes where the bruise is," she said; "and I've got it bad, now." She glanced, with an odd furtive jealousy, at Rufus. "I kept away from you," she explained, "because I didn't want him to know." She stopped, and put her hand on her bosom, and clenched her teeth fast. "Never mind," she said cheerfully, as the pang passed away again; "I can bear it."

Amelius, acting on impulse, as usual, instantly ordered the most comfortable carriage that the hotel possessed. He had heard terrible stories of the possible result of an injury to a woman's bosom. "I shall take her to the best doctor in London," he announced. Sally whispered to him again--still with her eye on Rufus. "Is he going with us?" she asked. "No," said Amelius; "one of us must stay here to receive a message." Rufus looked after them very gravely, as the two left the room together.

Applying for information to the mistress of the hotel, Amelius obtained the address of a consulting surgeon of great celebrity, while Sally was getting ready to go out.

"Why don't you like my good friend upstairs?" he said to the girl as they drove away from the house. The answer came swift and straight from the heart of the daughter of Eve. "Because you like him!" Amelius changed the subject: he asked if she was still in pain. She shook her head impatiently. Pain or no pain, the uppermost idea in her mind was still that idea of being his servant, which had already found expression in words before they left the lodgings. "Will you let me keep my beautiful new dress for going out on Sundays?" she asked. "The shabby old things will do when I am your servant. I can black your boots, and brush your clothes, and keep your room tidy--and I will try hard to learn, if you will have me taught to cook." Amelius attempted to change the subject again. He might as well have

talked to her in an unknown tongue. The glorious prospect of being his servant absorbed the whole of her attention. "I'm little and I'm stupid," she went on; "but I do think I could learn to cook, if I knew I was doing it for You." She paused, and looked at him anxiously. "Do let me try!" she pleaded; "I haven't had much pleasure in my life--and I should like it so!" It was impossible to resist this. "You shall be as happy as I can make you, Sally," Amelius answered; "God knows it isn't much you ask for!"

Something in those compassionate words set her thinking in another direction. It was sad to see how slowly and painfully she realized the idea that had been suggested to her.

"I wonder whether you can make me happy?" she said. "I suppose I have been happy before this--but I don't know when. I don't remember a time when I was not hungry or cold. Wait a bit. I do think I was happy once. It was a long while ago, and it took me a weary time to do it--but I did learn at last to play a tune on the fiddle. The old man and his wife took it in turns to teach me. Somebody gave me to the old man and his wife; I don't know who it was, and I don't remember their names. They were musicians. In the fine streets they sang hymns, and in the poor streets they sang comic songs. It was cold, to be sure, standing barefoot on the pavement--but I got plenty of halfpence. The people said I was so little it was a shame to send me out, and so I got halfpence. I had bread and apples for supper, and a nice little corner under the staircase, to sleep in. Do you know, I do think I did enjoy myself at that time," she concluded, still a little doubtful whether those faint and far-off remembrances were really to be relied on.

Amelius tried to lead her to other recollections. He asked her how old she was when she played the fiddle.

"I don't know," she answered; "I don't know how old I am now. I don't remember anything before the fiddle. I can't call to mind how long it was first--but there came a time when the old man and his wife got into trouble. They went to prison, and I never saw them afterwards. I ran away with the fiddle; to get the halfpence, you know, all to myself. I think I should have got a deal of money, if it hadn't been for the boys. They're so cruel, the boys are. They broke my fiddle. I tried selling pencils after that; but people didn't seem to want pencils. They found me out begging. I got took up, and brought before the what-do-you-call-him--the gentleman who sits in a high place, you know, behind a desk. Oh, but I was frightened, when they took me before the gentleman! He looked very much puzzled. He says, 'Bring her up here; she's so small I can hardly see her.' He says, 'Good God! what am I to do with this unfortunate child?' There was plenty of people about. One of

them says, 'The workhouse ought to take her.' And a lady came in, and she says, 'I'll take her, sir, if you'll let me.' And he knew her, and he let her. She took me to a place they called a Refuge--for wandering children, you know. It was very strict at the Refuge. They did give us plenty to eat, to be sure, and they taught us lessons. They told us about Our Father up in Heaven. I said a wrong thing--I said, 'I don't want him up in Heaven; I want him down here.' They were very much ashamed of me when I said that. I was a bad girl; I turned ungrateful. After a time, I ran away. You see, it was so strict, and I was so used to the streets. I met with a Scotchman in the streets. He wore a kilt, and played the pipes; he taught me to dance, and dressed me up like a Scotch girl. He had a curious wife, a sort of half-black woman. She used to dance too--on a bit of carpet, you know, so as not to spoil her fine shoes. They taught me songs; he taught me a Scotch song. And one day his wife said she was English (I don't know how that was, being a half-black woman), and I should learn an English song. And they quarrelled about it. And she had her way. She taught me 'Sally in our Alley'. That's how I come to be called Sally. I hadn't any name of my own--I always had nicknames. Sally was the last of them, and Sally has stuck to me. I hope it isn't too common a name to please you? Oh, what a fine house! Are we really going in? Will they let me in? How stupid I am! I forgot my beautiful clothes. You won't tell them, will you, if they take me for a lady?"

The carriage had stopped at the great surgeon's house: the waiting-room was full of patients. Some of them were trying to read the books and newspapers on the table; and some of them were looking at each other, not only without the slightest sympathy, but occasionally even with downright distrust and dislike. Amelius took up a newspaper, and gave Sally an illustrated book to amuse her, while they waited to see the Surgeon in their turn.

Two long hours passed, before the servant summoned Amelius to the consulting-room. Sally was wearily asleep in her chair. He left her undisturbed, having questions to put relating to the imperfectly developed state of her mind, which could not be asked in her presence. The surgeon listened, with no ordinary interest, to the young stranger's simple and straightforward narrative of what had happened on the previous night. "You are very unlike other young men," he said; "may I ask how you have been brought up?" The reply surprised him. "This opens quite a new view of Socialism," he said. "I thought your conduct highly imprudent at first--it seems to be the natural result of your teaching now. Let me see what I can do to help you."

He was very grave and very gentle, when Sally was presented to him. His

opinion of the injury to her bosom relieved the anxiety of Amelius: there might be pain for some little time to come, but there were no serious consequences to fear. Having written his prescription, and having put several questions to Sally, the surgeon sent her back, with marked kindness of manner, to wait for Amelius in the patients' room.

"I have young daughters of my own," he said, when the door was closed; "and I cannot but feel for that unhappy creature, when I contrast her life with theirs. So far as I can see it, the natural growth of her senses--her higher and her lower senses alike--has been stunted, like the natural growth of her body, by starvation, terror, exposure to cold, and other influences inherent in the life that she has led. With nourishing food, pure air, and above all kind and careful treatment, I see no reason, at her age, why she should not develop into an intelligent and healthy young woman. Pardon me if I venture on giving you a word of advice. At your time of life, you will do well to place her at once under competent and proper care. You may live to regret it, if you are too confident in your own good motives in such a case as this. Come to me again, if I can be of any use to you. No," he continued, refusing to take his fee; "my help to that poor lost girl is help given freely." He shook hands with Amelius--a worthy member of the noble order to which he belonged.

The surgeon's parting advice, following on the quaint protest of Rufus, had its effect on Amelius. He was silent and thoughtful when he got into the carriage again.

Simple Sally looked at him with a vague sense of alarm. Her heart beat fast, under the perpetually recurring fear that she had done something or said something to offend him. "Was it bad behaviour in me," she asked, "to fall asleep in the chair?" Reassured, so far, she was still as anxious as ever to get at the truth. After long hesitation, and long previous thought, she ventured to try another question. "The gentleman sent me out of the room--did he say anything to set you against me?"

"The gentleman said everything that was kind of you," Amelius replied, "and everything to make me hope that you will live to be a happy girl."

She said nothing to that; vague assurances were no assurances to her--she only looked at him with the dumb fidelity of a dog. Suddenly, she dropped on her knees in the carriage, hid her face in her hands, and cried silently. Surprised and distressed, he attempted to raise her and console her. "No!" she said obstinately. "Something has happened to vex you, and you won't tell me what it is. Do, do, do tell me what it is!"

"My dear child," said Amelius, "I was only thinking anxiously about you, in the time to come."

She looked up at him quickly. "What! have you forgotten already?" she exclaimed. "I'm to be your servant in the time to come." She dried her eyes, and took her place again joyously by his side. "You did frighten me," she said, "and all for nothing. But you didn't mean it, did you?"

An older man might have had the courage to undeceive her: Amelius shrank from it. He tried to lead her back to the melancholy story--so common and so terrible; so pitiable in its utter absence of sentiment or romance--the story of her past life.

"No," she answered, with that quick insight where her feelings were concerned, which was the only quick insight that she possessed. "I don't like making you sorry; and you did look sorry--you did--when I talked about it before. The streets, the streets, the streets; little girl, or big girl, it's only the streets; and always being hungry or cold; and cruel men when it isn't cruel boys. I want to be happy! I want to enjoy my new clothes! You tell me about your own self. What makes you so kind? I can't make it out; try as I may, I can't make it out."

Some time elapsed before they got back to the hotel. Amelius drove as far as the City, to give the necessary instructions to his bankers.

On returning to the sitting-room at last, he discovered that his American friend was not alone. A gray-haired lady with a bright benevolent face was talking earnestly to Rufus. The instant Sally discovered the stranger, she started back, fled to the shelter of her bedchamber, and locked herself in. Amelius, entering the room after a little hesitation, was presented to Mrs. Payson.

"There was something in my old friend's note," said the lady, smiling and turning to Rufus, "which suggested to me that I should do well to answer it personally. I am not too old yet to follow the impulse of the moment, sometimes; and I am very glad that I did so. I have heard what is, to me, a very interesting story. Mr. Goldenheart, I respect you! And I will prove it by helping you, with all my heart and soul, to save that poor little girl who has just run away from me. Pray don't make excuses for her; I should have run away too, at her age. We have arranged," she continued, looking again at Rufus, "that I shall take you both to the Home, this afternoon. If we can prevail on Sally to go with us, one serious obstacle in our way will be

overcome. Tell me the number of her room. I want to try if I can't make friends with her. I have had some experience; and I don't despair of bringing her back here, hand in hand with the terrible person who has frightened her."

The two men were left together. Amelius attempted to speak.

"Keep it down," said Rufus; "no premature outbreak of opinion, if you please, yet awhile. Wait till she has fixed Sally, and shown us the Paradise of the poor girls. It's within the London postal district, and that's all I know about it. Well, now, and did you go to the doctor? Thunder! what's come to the boy? Seems as though he had left his complexion in the carriage! He looks, I do declare, as if he wanted medical tinkering himself."

Amelius explained that his past night had been a wakeful one, and that the events of the day had not allowed him any opportunities of repose. "Since the morning," he said, "things have hurried so, one on the top of the other, that I am beginning to feel a little dazed and weary." Without a word of remark, Rufus produced the remedy. The materials were ready on the sideboard--he made a cocktail.

"Another?" asked the New Englander, after a reasonable lapse of time.

Amelius declined taking another. He stretched himself on the sofa; his good friend considerably took up a newspaper. For the first time that day, he had now the prospect of a quiet interval for rest and thought. In less than a minute the delusive prospect vanished. He started to his feet again, disturbed by a new anxiety. Having leisure to think, he had thought of Regina. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed; "she's waiting to see me--and I never remembered it till this moment!" He looked at his watch: it was five o'clock. "What am I to do?" he said helplessly.

Rufus laid down the newspaper, and considered the new difficulty in its various aspects.

"We are bound to go with Mrs. Payson to the Home," he said; "and, I tell you this, Amelius, the matter of Sally is not a matter to be played with; it's a thing that's got to be done. In your place I should write politely to Miss Regina, and put it off till to-morrow."

In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, a man who took Rufus for his counsellor was a man who acted wisely in every sense of the word. Events, however, of which Amelius and his friend were both ignorant alike, had so

ordered it, that the American's well-meant advice, in this one exceptional case, was the very worst advice that could have been given. In an hour more, Jervy and Mrs. Sowler were to meet at the tavern door. The one last hope of protecting Mrs. Farnaby from the abominable conspiracy of which she was the destined victim, rested solely on the fulfilment by Amelius of his engagement with Regina for that day. Always ready to interfere with the progress of the courtship, Mrs. Farnaby would be especially eager to seize the first opportunity of speaking to her young Socialist friend on the subject of his lecture. In the course of the talk between them, the idea which, in the present disturbed state of his mind, had not struck him yet--the idea that the outcast of the streets might, by the barest conceivable possibility, be identified with the lost daughter--would, in one way or another, be almost infallibly suggested to Amelius; and, at the eleventh hour, the conspiracy would be foiled. If, on the other hand, the American's fatal advice was followed, the next morning's post might bring a letter from Jervy to Mrs. Farnaby--with this disastrous result. At the first words spoken by Amelius, she would put an end to all further interest in the subject on his part, by telling him that the lost girl had been found, and found by another person.

Rufus pointed to the writing-materials on a side table, which he had himself used earlier in the day. The needful excuse was, unhappily, quite easy to find. A misunderstanding with his landlady had obliged Amelius to leave his lodgings at an hour's notice, and had occupied him in trying to find a new residence for the rest of the day. The note was written. Rufus, who was nearest to the bell, stretched out his hand to ring for the messenger. Amelius suddenly stopped him.

"She doesn't like me to disappoint her," he said. "I needn't stay long--I might get there and back in half an hour, in a fast cab."

His conscience was not quite easy. The sense of having forgotten Regina--no matter how naturally and excusably--oppressed him with a feeling of self-reproach. Rufus raised no objection; the hesitation of Amelius was unquestionably creditable to him. "If you must do it, my son," he said, "do it right away--and we'll wait for you."

Amelius took up his hat. The door opened as he approached it, and Mrs. Payson entered the room, leading Simple Sally by the hand.

"We are all going together," said the genial old lady, "to see my large family of daughters at the Home. We can have our talk in the carriage. It's an hour's drive from this place--and I must be back again to dinner at half-past seven."

Amelius and Rufus looked at each other. Amelius thought of pleading an engagement, and asking to be excused. Under the circumstances, it was assuredly not a very gracious thing to do. Before he could make up his mind, one way or the other, Sally stole to his side, and put her hand on his arm. Mrs. Payson had done wonders in conquering the girl's inveterate distrust of strangers, and, to a certain extent at least, winning her confidence. But no early influence could shake Sally's dog-like devotion to Amelius. Her jealous instinct discovered something suspicious in his sudden silence. "You must go with us," she said, "I won't go without you."

"Certainly not," Mrs. Payson added; "I promised her that, of course, beforehand."

Rufus rang the bell, and despatched the messenger to Regina. "That's the one way out of it, my son," he whispered to Amelius, as they followed Mrs. Payson and Sally down the stairs of the hotel.

They had just driven up to the gates of the Home, when Jervy and his accomplice met at the tavern, and entered on their consultation in a private room.

In spite of her poverty-stricken appearance, Mrs. Sowler was not absolutely destitute. In various underhand and wicked ways, she contrived to put a few shillings in her pocket from week to week. If she was half starved, it was for the very ordinary reason, among persons of her vicious class, that she preferred spending her money on drink. Stating his business with her, as reservedly and as cunningly as usual, Jervy found, to his astonishment, that even this squalid old creature presumed to bargain with him. The two wretches were on the point of a quarrel which might have delayed the execution of the plot against Mrs. Farnaby, but for the vile self-control which made Jervy one of the most formidable criminals living. He gave way on the question of money--and, from that moment, he had Mrs. Sowler absolutely at his disposal.

"Meet me to-morrow morning, to receive your instructions," he said. "The time is ten sharp; and the place is the powder-magazine in Hyde Park. And mind this! You must be decently dressed--you know where to hire the things. If I smell you of spirits to-morrow morning, I shall employ somebody else. No; not a farthing now. You will have your money--first instalment only, mind!--to-morrow at ten."

Left by himself, Jervy sent for pen, ink, and paper. Using his left hand,

which was just as serviceable to him as his right, he traced these lines:--

"You are informed, by an unknown friend, that a certain lost young lady is now living in a foreign country, and may be restored to her afflicted mother on receipt of a sufficient sum to pay expenses, and to reward the writer of this letter, who is undeservedly, in distressed circumstances.

"Are you, madam, the mother? I ask the question in the strictest confidence, knowing nothing certainly but that your husband was the person who put the young lady out to nurse in her infancy.

"I don't address your husband, because his inhuman desertion of the poor baby does not incline me to trust him. I run the risk of trusting you--to a certain extent--at starting. Shall I drop a hint which may help you to identify the child, in your own mind? It would be inexcusably foolish on my part to speak too plainly, just yet. The hint must be a vague one. Suppose I use a poetical expression, and say that the young lady is enveloped in mystery from head to foot--especially the foot?

"In the event of my addressing the right person, I beg to offer a suggestion for a preliminary interview.

"If you will take a walk on the bridge over the Serpentine River, on Kensington Gardens side, at half-past ten o'clock to-morrow morning, holding a white handkerchief in your left hand, you will meet the much-injured woman, who was deceived into taking charge of the infant child at Ramsgate, and will be satisfied so far that you are giving your confidence to persons who really deserve it."

Jervy addressed this infamous letter to Mrs. Farnaby, in an ordinary envelope, marked "Private." He posted it, that night, with his own hand.

CHAPTER 4

"Rufus! I don't quite like the way you look at me. You seem to think--"

"Give it tongue, my son. What do I seem to think?"

"You think I'm forgetting Regina. You don't believe I'm just as fond of her as ever. The fact is, you're an old bachelor."

"That is so. Where's the harm, Amelius?"

"I don't understand--"

"You're out there, my bright boy. I reckon I understand more than you think for. The wisest thing you ever did in your life is what you did this evening, when you committed Sally to the care of those ladies at the Home."

"Good night, Rufus. We shall quarrel if I stay here any longer."

"Good night, Amelius. We shan't quarrel, stay here as long as you like."

The good deed had been done; the sacrifice--already a painful sacrifice--had been made. Mrs. Payson was old enough to speak plainly, as well as seriously, to Amelius of the absolute necessity of separating himself from Simple Sally, without any needless delay. "You have seen for yourself," she said, "that the plan on which this little household is ruled is the unvarying plan of patience and kindness. So far as Sally is concerned, you can be quite sure that she will never hear a harsh word, never meet with a hard look, while she is under our care. The lamentable neglect under which the poor creature has suffered, will be tenderly remembered and atoned for, here. If we can't make her happy among us, I promise that she shall leave the Home, if she wishes it, in six weeks' time. As to yourself, consider your position if you persist in taking her back with you. Our good friend Rufus has told me that you are engaged to be married. Think of the misinterpretations, to say the least of it, to which you would subject yourself--think of the reports which would sooner or later find their way to the young lady's ears, and of the deplorable consequences that would follow. I believe implicitly in the purity of your motives. But remember Who taught us to pray that we may not be led into temptation--and complete the good work that you have begun, by leaving Sally among friends and sisters in this house."

To any honourable man, these were unanswerable words. Coming after what Rufus and the surgeon had already said to him, they left Amelius no alternative but to yield. He pleaded for leave to write to Sally, and to see her, at a later interval, when she might be reconciled to her new life. Mrs. Payson had just consented to both requests, Rufus had just heartily congratulated him on his decision--when the door was thrown violently open. Simple Sally ran into the room, followed by one of the women-attendants in a state of breathless surprise.

"She showed me a bedroom," cried Sally, pointing indignantly to the woman; "and she asked if I should like to sleep there." She turned to Amelius, and caught him by the hand to lead him away. The ineradicable instinct of distrust had been once more roused in her by the too zealous attendant. "I'm not going to stay here," she said; "I'm going away with You!"

Amelius glanced at Mrs. Payson. Sally tried to drag him to the door. He did his best to reassure her by a smile; he spoke confusedly some composing words. But his honest face, always accustomed to tell the truth, told the truth now. The poor lost creature, whose feeble intelligence was so slow to discern, so inapt to reflect, looked at him with the heart's instantaneous perception, and saw her doom. She let go of his hand. Her head sank. Without word or cry, she dropped on the floor at his feet.

The attendant instantly raised her, and placed her on a sofa. Mrs. Payson saw how resolutely Amelius struggled to control himself, and felt for him with all her heart. Turning aside for a moment, she hastily wrote a few lines, and returned to him. "Go, before we revive her," she whispered; "and give what I have written to the coachman. You shall suffer no anxiety that I can spare you," said the excellent woman; "I will stay here myself to-night, and reconcile her to the new life."

She held out her hand; Amelius kissed it in silence. Rufus led him out. Not a word dropped from his lips on the long drive back to London.

His mind was disturbed by other subjects besides the subject of Sally. He thought of his future, darkened by the doubtful marriage-engagement that was before him. Alone with Rufus, for the rest of the evening, he petulantly misunderstood the sympathy with which the kindly American regarded him. Their bedrooms were next to each other. Rufus heard him walking restlessly to and fro, and now and then talking to himself. After a while, these sounds ceased. He was evidently worn out, and was getting the rest that he needed, at last.

The next morning he received a few lines from Mrs. Payson, giving a favourable account of Sally, and promising further particulars in a day or two.

Encouraged by this good news, revived by a long night's sleep, he went towards noon to pay his postponed visit to Regina. At that early hour, he could feel sure that his interview with her would not be interrupted by visitors. She received him quietly and seriously, pressing his hand with a warmer fondness than usual. He had anticipated some complaint of his absence on the previous day, and some severe allusion to his appearance in the capacity of a Socialist lecturer. Regina's indulgence, or Regina's interest in circumstances of more pressing importance, preserved a merciful silence on both subjects.

"It is a comfort to me to see you, Amelius," she said; "I am in trouble about my uncle, and I am weary of my own anxious thoughts. Something unpleasant has happened in Mr. Farnaby's business. He goes to the City earlier, and he returns much later, than usual. When he does come back, he doesn't speak to me--he locks himself into his room; and he looks worn and haggard when I make his breakfast for him in the morning. You know that he is one of the directors of the new bank? There was something about the bank in the newspaper yesterday which upset him dreadfully; he put down his cup of coffee--and went away to the City, without eating his breakfast. I don't like to worry you about it, Amelius. But my aunt seems to take no interest in her husband's affairs--and it is really a relief to me to talk of my troubles to you. I have kept the newspaper; do look at what it says about the bank, and tell me if you understand it!"

Amelius read the passage pointed out to him. He knew as little of banking business as Regina. "So far as I can make it out," he said, "they're paying away money to their shareholders which they haven't earned. How do they do that, I wonder?"

Regina changed the subject in despair. She asked Amelius if he had found new lodgings. Hearing that he had not yet succeeded in the search for a residence, she opened a drawer of her work-table, and took out a card.

"The brother of one of my schoolfellows is going to be married," she said. "He has a pretty bachelor cottage in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park--and he wants to sell it, with the furniture, just as it is. I don't know whether you care to encumber yourself with a little house of your own. His sister has asked me to distribute some of his cards, with the address and the

particulars. It might be worth your while, perhaps, to look at the cottage when you pass that way."

Amelius took the card. The small feminine restraints and gentlenesses of Regina, her quiet even voice, her serene grace of movement, had a pleasantly soothing effect on his mind after the anxieties of the last four and twenty hours. He looked at her bending over her embroidery, deftly and gracefully industrious--and drew his chair closer to her. She smiled softly over her work, conscious that he was admiring her, and placidly pleased to receive the tribute.

"I would buy the cottage at once," said Amelius, "if I thought you would come and live in it with me."

She looked up gravely, with her needle suspended in her hand.

"Don't let us return to that," she answered, and went on again with her embroidery.

"Why not?" Amelius asked.

She persisted in working, as industriously as if she had been a poor needlewoman, with serious reasons for being eager to get her money. "It is useless," she replied, "to speak of what cannot be for some time to come."

Amelius stopped the progress of the embroidery by taking her hand. Her devotion to her work irritated him.

"Look at me, Regina," he said, steadily controlling himself. "I want to propose that we shall give way a little on both sides. I won't hurry you; I will wait a reasonable time. If I promise that, surely you may yield a little in return. Money seems to be a hard taskmaster, my darling, after what you have told me about your uncle. See how he suffers because he is bent on being rich; and ask yourself if it isn't a warning to us not to follow his example! Would you like to see me too wretched to speak to you, or to eat my breakfast--and all for the sake of a little outward show? Come, come! let us think of ourselves. Why should we waste the best days of our life apart, when we are both free to be happy together? I have another good friend besides Rufus--the good friend of my father before me. He knows all sorts of great people, and he will help me to some employment. In six months' time I might have a little salary to add to my income. Say the sweetest words, my darling, that ever fell from your lips--say you will marry me in six months!"

It was not in a woman's nature to be insensible to such pleading as this. She all but yielded. "I should like to say it, dear!" she answered, with a little fluttering sigh.

"Say it, then!" Amelius suggested tenderly.

She took refuge again in her embroidery. "If you would only give me a little time," she suggested, "I might say it."

"Time for what, my own love?"

"Time to wait, dear, till my uncle is not quite so anxious as he is now."

"Don't talk of your uncle, Regina! You know as well as I do what he would say. Good heavens! why can't you decide for yourself? No! I don't want to hear over again about what you owe to Mr. Farnaby--I heard enough of it on that day in the shrubbery. Oh, my dear girl, do have some feeling for me! do for once have a will of your own!"

Those last words were an offence to her self-esteem. "I think it's very rude to tell me I have no will of my own," she said, "and very hard to press in this way when you know I am in trouble." The inevitable handkerchief appeared, adding emphasis to the protest--and the becoming tears showed themselves modestly in Regina's magnificent eyes.

Amelius started out of his chair, and walked away to the window. That last reference to Mr. Farnaby's pecuniary cares was more than he had patience to endure. "She can't even forget her uncle and his bank," he thought, "when I am speaking to her of our marriage!"

He kept his face hidden from her, at the window. By some subtle process of association which he was unable to trace, the image of Simple Sally rose in his mind. An irresistible influence forced him to think of her--not as the poor, starved, degraded, half-witted creature of the streets, but as the grateful girl who had asked for no happier future than to be his servant, who had dropped senseless at his feet at the bare prospect of parting with him. His sense of self-respect, his loyalty to his betrothed wife, resolutely resisted the unworthy conclusion to which his own thoughts were leading him. He turned back again to Regina; he spoke so loudly and so vehemently that the gathering flow of her tears was suspended in surprise. "You're right, you're quite right, my dear! I ought to give you time, of course. I try to control my hasty temper, but I don't always succeed--just at first. Pray forgive me; it shall be exactly as you wish."

Regina forgave him, with a gentle and ladylike astonishment at the excitable manner in which he made his excuses. She even neglected her embroidery, and put her face up to him to be kissed. "You are so nice, dear," she said, "when you are not violent and unreasonable. It is such a pity you were brought up in America. Won't you stay to lunch?"

Happily for Amelius, the footman appeared at this critical moment with a message: "My mistress wishes particularly to see you, sir, before you go."

This was the first occasion, in the experience of the lovers, on which Mrs. Farnaby had expressed her wishes through the medium of a servant, instead of appearing personally. The curiosity of Regina was mildly excited. "What a very odd message!" she said; "what does it mean? My aunt went out earlier than usual this morning, and I have not seen her since. I wonder whether she is going to consult you about my uncle's affairs?"

"I'll go and see," said Amelius.

"And stay to lunch?" Regina reiterated.

"Not to-day, my dear."

"To-morrow, then?"

"Yes, to-morrow." So he escaped. As he opened the door, he looked back, and kissed his hand. Regina raised her head for a moment, and smiled charmingly. She was hard at work again over her embroidery.

CHAPTER 5

The door of Mrs. Farnaby's ground-floor room, at the back of the house, was partially open. She was on the watch for Amelius.

"Come in!" she cried, the moment he appeared in the hall. She pulled him into the room, and shut the door with a bang. Her face was flushed, her eyes were wild. "I have something to tell you, you dear good fellow," she burst out excitedly--"Something in confidence, between you and me!" She paused, and looked at him with sudden anxiety and alarm. "What's the matter with you?" she asked.

The sight of the room, the reference to a secret, the prospect of another private conference, forced back the mind of Amelius, in one breathless instant, to his first memorable interview with Mrs. Farnaby. The mother's piteously hopeful words, in speaking of her lost daughter, rang in his ears again as if they had just fallen from her lips. "She may be lost in the labyrinth of London.... To-morrow, or ten years hence, you might meet with her." There were a hundred chances against it--a thousand, ten thousand chances against it. The startling possibility flashed across his brain, nevertheless, like a sudden flow of daylight across the dark. "Have I met with her, at the first chance?"

"Wait," he cried; "I have something to say before you speak to me. Don't deceive yourself with vain hopes. Promise me that, before I begin."

She waved her hand derisively. "Hopes?" she repeated; "I have done with hopes, I have done with fears--I have got to certainties, at last!"

He was too eager to heed anything that she said to him; his whole soul was absorbed in the coming disclosure. "Two nights since," he went on, "I was wandering about London, and I met--"

She burst out laughing. "Go on!" she cried, with a wild derisive gaiety.

Amelius stopped, perplexed and startled. "What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"Go on!" she repeated. "I defy you to surprise me. Out with it! Whom did you meet?"

Amelius proceeded doubtfully, by a word at a time. "I met a poor girl in the streets," he said, steadily watching her.

She changed completely at those words; she looked at him with an aspect of stern reproach. "No more of it," she interposed; "I have not waited all these miserable years for such a horrible end as that." Her face suddenly brightened; a radiant effusion of tenderness and triumph flowed over it, and made it young and happy again. "Amelius!" she said, "listen to this. My dream has come true--my girl is found! Thanks to you, though you don't know it."

Amelius looked at her. Was she speaking of something that had really happened? or had she been dreaming again?

Absorbed in her own happiness, she made no remark on his silence. "I have seen the woman," she went on. "This bright blessed morning I have seen the woman who took her away in the first days of her poor little life. The wretch swears she was not to blame. I tried to forgive her. Perhaps I almost did forgive her, in the joy of hearing what she had to tell me. I should never have heard it, Amelius, if you had not given that glorious lecture. The woman was one of your audience. She would never have spoken of those past days; she would never have thought of me--"

At those words, Mrs. Farnaby abruptly stopped, and turned her face away from Amelius. After waiting a little, finding her still silent, still immovable, he ventured on putting a question.

"Are you sure you are not deceived?" he asked. "I remember you told me that rogues had tried to impose on you, in past times when you employed people to find her."

"I have proof that I am not being imposed upon," Mrs. Farnaby answered, still keeping her face hidden from him. "One of them knows of the fault in her foot."

"One of them?" Amelius repeated. "How many of them are there?"

"Two. The old woman, and a young man."

"What are their names?"

"They won't tell me their names yet."

"Isn't that a little suspicious?"

"One of them knows," Mrs. Farnaby reiterated, "of the fault in her foot."

"May I ask which of them knows? The old woman, I suppose?"

"No, the young man."

"That's strange, isn't it? Have you seen the young man?"

"I know nothing of him, except the little that the woman told me. He has written me a letter."

"May I look at it?"

"I daren't let you look at it!"

Amelius said no more. If he had felt the smallest suspicion that the disclosure volunteered by Mrs. Farnaby, at their first interview, had been overheard by the unknown person who had opened the swinging window in the kitchen, he might have recalled Phoebe's vindictive language at his lodgings, and the doubts suggested to him by his discovery of the vagabond waiting for her in the street. As it was, he was simply puzzled. The one plain conclusion to his mind was, unhappily, the natural conclusion after what he had heard--that Mrs. Farnaby had no sort of interest in the discovery of Simple Sally, and that he need trouble himself with no further anxiety in that matter. Strange as Mrs. Farnaby's mysterious revelation seemed, her correspondent's knowledge of the fault in the foot was circumstance in his favour, beyond dispute. Amelius still wondered inwardly how it was that the woman who had taken charge of the child had failed to discover what appeared to be known to another person. If he had been aware that Mrs. Sowler's occupation at the time was the occupation of a "baby-farmer," and that she had many other deserted children pining under her charge, he might have easily understood that she was the last person in the world to trouble herself with a minute examination of any one of the unfortunate little creatures abandoned to her drunken and merciless neglect. Jervy had satisfied himself, before he trusted her with his instructions, that she knew no more than the veriest stranger of any peculiarity in one or the other of the child's feet.

Interpreting Mrs. Farnaby's last reply to him as an intimation that their interview was at an end, Amelius took up his hat to go.

"I hope with all my heart," he said, "that what has begun so well will end well. If there is any service that I can do for you--"

She drew nearer to him, and put her hand gently on his shoulder. "Don't think that I distrust you," she said very earnestly; "I am unwilling to shock you--that is all. Even this great joy has a dark side to it; my miserable married life casts its shadow on everything that happens to me. Keep secret from everybody the little that I have told you--you will ruin me if you say one word of it to any living creature. I ought not to have opened my heart to you--but how could I help it, when the happiness that is coming to me has come through you? When you say good-bye to me to-day, Amelius, you say good-bye to me for the last time in this house. I am going away. Don't ask me why--that is one more among the things which I daren't tell you! You shall hear from me, or see me--I promise that. Give me some safe address to write to; some place where there are no inquisitive women who may open my letter in your absence."

She handed him her pocket-book. Amelius wrote down in it the address of his club.

She took his hand. "Think of me kindly," she said. "And, once more, don't be afraid of my being deceived. There is a hard part of me still left which keeps me on my guard. The old woman tried, this morning, to make me talk to her about that little fault we know of in my child's foot. But I thought to myself, 'If you had taken a proper interest in my poor baby while she was with you, you must sooner or later have found it out.' Not a word passed my lips. No, no, don't be anxious when you think of me. I am as sharp as they are; I mean to find out how the man who wrote to me discovered what he knows; he shall satisfy me, I promise you, when I see him or hear from him next. All this is between ourselves strictly, sacredly between ourselves. Say nothing--I know I can trust you. Good-bye, and forgive me for having been so often in your way with Regina. I shall never be in your way again. Marry her, if you think she is good enough for you; I have no more interest now in your being a roving bachelor, meeting with girls here, there, and everywhere. You shall know how it goes on. Oh, I am so happy!"

She burst into tears, and signed to Amelius with a wild gesture of treaty to leave her.

He pressed her hand in silence, and went out.

Almost as the door closed on him, the variable woman changed again. For a while she walked rapidly to and fro, talking to herself. The course of her

tears ceased. Her lips closed firmly; her eyes assumed an expression of savage resolve. She sat down at the table and opened her desk. "I'll read it once more," she said to herself, "before I seal it up."

She took from her desk a letter of her own writing, and spread it out before her. With her elbows on the table, and her hands clasped fiercely in her hair, she read these lines addressed to her husband:--

JOHN FARNABY,--I have always suspected that you had something to do with the disappearance of our child. I know for certain now that you deliberately cast your infant daughter on the mercy of the world, and condemned your wife to a life of wretchedness.

"Don't suppose that I have been deceived! I have spoken with the woman who waited by the garden-paling at Ramsgate, and who took the child from your hands. She saw you with me at the lecture; and she is absolutely sure that you are the man.

"Thanks to the meeting at the lecture-hall, I am at last on the trace of my lost daughter. This morning I heard the woman's story. She kept the child, on the chance of its being reclaimed, until she could afford to keep it no longer. She met with a person who was willing to adopt it, and who took it away with her to a foreign country, not mentioned to me yet. In that country my daughter is still living, and will be restored to me on conditions which will be communicated in a few days' time.

"Some of this story may be true, and some of it may be false; the woman may be lying to serve her own interests with me. Of one thing I am sure--my girl is identified, by means known to me of which there can be no doubt. And she must be still living, because the interest of the persons treating with me is an interest in her life.

"When you receive this letter, on your return from business to-night, I shall have left you, and left you for ever. The bare thought of even looking at you again fills me with horror. I have my own income, and I mean to take my own way. In your best interests I warn you, make no attempt to trace me. I declare solemnly that, rather than let your deserted daughter be polluted by the sight of you, I would kill you with my own hand, and die for it on the scaffold. If she ever asks for her father, I will do you one service. For the honour of human nature, I will tell her that her father is dead. It will not be all a falsehood. I repudiate you and your name--you are dead to me from this time forth.

"I sign myself by my father's name--

"EMMA RONALD."

She had said herself that she was unwilling to shock Amelius. This was the reason.

After thinking a little, she sealed and directed the letter. This done, she unlocked the wooden press which had once contained the baby's frock and cap, and those other memorials of the past which she called her "dead consolations." After satisfying herself that the press was empty, she wrote on a card, "To be called for by a messenger from my bankers"--and tied the card to a tin box in a corner, secured by a padlock. She lifted the box, and placed it in front of the press, so that it might be easily visible to any one entering the room. The safe keeping of her treasures provided for, she took the sealed letter, and, ascending the stairs, placed it on the table in her husband's dressing-room. She hurried out again, the instant after, as if the sight of the place were intolerable to her.

Passing to the other end of the corridor, she entered her own bedchamber, and put on her bonnet and cloak. A leather handbag was on the bed. She took it up, and looked round the large luxurious room with a shudder of disgust. What she had suffered, within those four walls, no human creature knew but herself. She hurried out, as she had hurried out of her husband's dressing-room.

Her niece was still in the drawing-room. As she reached the door, she hesitated, and stopped. The girl was a good girl, in her own dull placid way--and her sister's daughter, too. A last little act of kindness would perhaps be a welcome act to remember. She opened the door so suddenly that Regina started, with a small cry of alarm. "Oh, aunt, how you frighten one! Are you going out?" "Yes; I'm going out," was the short answer. "Come here. Give me a kiss." Regina looked up in wide-eyed astonishment. Mrs. Farnaby stamped impatiently on the floor. Regina rose, gracefully bewildered. "My dear aunt, how very odd!" she said--and gave the kiss demanded, with a serenely surprised elevation of her finely shaped eyebrows. "Yes," said Mrs. Farnaby; "that's it--one of my oddities. Go back to your work. Good-bye."

She left the room, as abruptly as she had entered it. With her firm heavy step she descended to the hall, passed out at the house door, and closed it behind her--never to return to it again.

CHAPTER 6

Amelius left Mrs. Farnaby, troubled by emotions of confusion and alarm, which he was the last man living to endure patiently. Her extraordinary story of the discovered daughter, the still more startling assertion of her solution to leave the house, the absence of any plain explanation, the burden of secrecy imposed on him--all combined together to irritate his sensitive nerves. "I hate mysteries," he thought; "and ever since I landed in England, I seem fated to be mixed up in them. Does she really mean to leave her husband and her niece? What will Farnaby do? What will become of Regina?"

To think of Regina was to think of the new repulse of which he had been made the subject. Again he had appealed to her love for him, and again she had refused to marry him at his own time.

He was especially perplexed and angry, when he reflected on the unassailably strong influence which her uncle appeared to have over her. All Regina's sympathy was with Mr. Farnaby and his troubles. Amelius might have understood her a little better, if she had told him what had passed between her uncle and herself on the night of Mr. Farnaby's return, in a state of indignation, from the lecture. In terror of the engagement being broken off, she had been forced to confess that she was too fond of Amelius to prevail on herself to part with him. If he attempted a second exposition of his Socialist principles on the platform, she owned that it might be impossible to receive him again as a suitor. But she pleaded hard for the granting of a pardon to the first offence, in the interests of her own tranquillity, if not in mercy to Amelius. Mr. Farnaby, already troubled by his commercial anxieties, had listened more amiably, and also more absently, than usual; and had granted her petition with the ready indulgence of a preoccupied man. It had been decided between them that the offence of the lecture should be passed over in discreet silence. Regina's gratitude for this concession inspired her sympathy with her uncle in his present state of suspense. She had been sorely tempted to tell Amelius what had happened. But the natural reserve of her character--fortified, in this instance, by the defensive pride which makes a woman unwilling, before marriage, to confess her weakness unreservedly to the man who has caused it--had sealed her lips. "When he is a little less violent and a little more humble," she thought, "perhaps I may tell him."

So it fell out that Amelius took his way through the streets, a mystified and

an angry man.

Arrived in sight of the hotel, he stopped, and looked about him.

It was impossible to disguise from himself that a lurking sense of regret was making itself felt, in his present frame of mind, when he thought of Simple Sally. In all probability, he would have quarrelled with any man who had accused him of actually lamenting the girl's absence, and wanting her back again. He happened to recollect her artless blue eyes, with their vague patient look, and her quaint childish questions put so openly in so sweet a voice--and that was all. Was there anything reprehensible, if you please, in an act of remembrance? Comforting himself with these considerations, he moved on again a step or two--and stopped once more. In his present humour, he shrank from facing Rufus. The American read him like a book; the American would ask irritating questions. He turned his back on the hotel, and looked at his watch. As he took it out, his finger and thumb touched something else in his waistcoat-pocket. It was the card that Regina had given to him--the card of the cottage to let. He had nothing to do, and nowhere to go. Why not look at the cottage? If it proved to be not worth seeing, the Zoological Gardens were in the neighbourhood--and there are periods in a man's life when he finds the society that walks on four feet a welcome relief from the society that walks on two.

It was a fairly fine day. He turned northward towards the Regent's Park.

The cottage was in a by-road, just outside the park: a cottage in the strictest sense of the word. A sitting-room, a library, and a bedroom--all of small proportions--and, under them a kitchen and two more rooms, represented the whole of the little dwelling from top to bottom. It was simply and prettily furnished; and it was completely surrounded by its own tiny plot of garden-ground. The library especially was a perfect little retreat, looking out on the back garden; peaceful and shady, and adorned with bookcases of old carved oak.

Amelius had hardly looked round the room, before his inflammable brain was on fire with a new idea. Other idle men in trouble had found the solace and the occupation of their lives in books. Why should he not be one of them? Why not plunge into study in this delightful retirement--and perhaps, one day, astonish Regina and Mr. Farnaby by bursting on the world as the writer of a famous book? Exactly as Amelius, two days since, had seen himself in the future, a public lecturer in receipt of glorious fees--so he now saw himself the celebrated scholar and writer of a new era to come. The woman who showed the cottage happened to mention that a gentleman had

already looked over it that morning, and had seemed to like it. Amelius instantly gave her a shilling, and said, "I take it on the spot." The wondering woman referred him to the house-agent's address, and kept at a safe distance from the excitable stranger as she let him out. In less than another hour, Amelius had taken the cottage, and had returned to the hotel with a new interest in life and a new surprise for Rufus.

As usual, in cases of emergency, the American wasted no time in talking. He went out at once to see the cottage, and to make his own inquiries of the agent. The result amply proved that Amelius had not been imposed upon. If he repented of his bargain, the gentleman who had first seen the cottage was ready to take it off his hands, at a moment's notice.

Going back to the Hotel, Rufus found Amelius resolute to move into his new abode, and eager for the coming life of study and retirement. Knowing perfectly well before-hand how this latter project would end, the American tried the efficacy of a little worldly temptation. He had arranged, he said, "to have a good time of it in Paris"; and he proposed that Amelius should be his companion. The suggestion produced not the slightest effect; Amelius talked as if he was a confirmed recluse, in the decline of life. "Thank you," he said, with the most amazing gravity; "I prefer the company of my books, and the seclusion of my study." This declaration was followed by more selling-out of money in the Funds, and by a visit to a bookseller, which left a handsome pecuniary result inscribed on the right side of the ledger.

On the next day, Amelius presented himself towards two o'clock at Mr. Farnaby's house. He was not so selfishly absorbed in his own projects as to forget Mrs. Farnaby. On the contrary, he was honestly anxious for news of her.

A certain middle-aged man of business has been briefly referred to, in these pages, as one of Regina's faithful admirers, patiently submitting to the triumph of his favoured young rival. This gentleman, issuing from his carriage with his card-case ready in his hand, met Amelius at the door, with a face which announced plainly that a catastrophe had happened. "You have heard the sad news, no doubt?" he said, in a rich bass voice attuned to sadly courteous tones. The servant opened the door before Amelius could answer. After a contest of politeness, the middle-aged gentleman consented to make his inquiries first. "How is Mr. Farnaby? No better? And Miss Regina? Very poorly, oh? Dear, dear me! Say I called, if you please." He handed in two cards, with a severe enjoyment of the melancholy occasion and the rich bass sounds of his own voice. "Very sad, is it not?" he said, addressing his youthful rival with an air of paternal indulgence. "Good

morning." He bowed with melancholy grace, and got into his carriage.

Amelius looked after the prosperous merchant, as the prancing horses drew him away. "After all," he thought bitterly, "she might be happier with that rich prig than she could be with me." He stepped into the hall, and spoke to the servant. The man had his message ready. Miss Regina would see Mr. Goldenheart, if he would be so good as to wait in the dinning-room.

Regina appeared, pale and scared; her eyes inflamed with weeping. "Oh, Amelius, can you tell me what this dreadful misfortune means? Why has she left us? When she sent for you yesterday, what did she say?"

In his position, Amelius could make but one answer. "Your aunt said she thought of going away. But," he added, with perfect truth, "she refused to tell me why, or where she was going. I am quite as much at a loss to understand her as you are. What does your uncle propose to do?"

Mr. Farnaby's conduct, as described by Regina, thickened the mystery--he proposed to do nothing.

He had been found on the hearth-rug in his dressing-room; having apparently been seized with a fit, in the act of burning some paper. The ashes were discovered close by him, just inside the fender. On his recovery, his first anxiety was to know if a letter had been burnt. Satisfied on this point, he had ordered the servants to assemble round his bed, and had peremptorily forbidden them to open the door to their mistress, if she ever returned at any future time to the house. Regina's questions and remonstrances, when she was left alone with him, were answered, once for all, in these pitiless terms:--"If you wish to deserve the fatherly interest that I take in you, do as I do: forget that such a person as your aunt ever existed. We shall quarrel, if you ever mention her name in my hearing again." This said, he had instantly changed the subject; instructing Regina to write an excuse to "Mr. Melton" (otherwise, the middle-aged rival), with whom he had been engaged to dine that evening. Relating this latter event, Regina's ever-ready gratitude overflowed in the direction of Mr. Melton. "He was so kind! he left his guests in the evening, and came and sat with my uncle for nearly an hour." Amelius made no remark on this; he led the conversation back to the subject of Mrs. Farnaby. "She once spoke to me of her lawyers," he said. "Do they know nothing about her?"

The answer to this question showed that the sternly final decision of Mr. Farnaby was matched by equal resolution on the part of his wife.

One of the partners in the legal firm had called that morning, to see Regina on a matter of business. Mrs. Farnaby had appeared at the office on the previous day, and had briefly expressed her wish to make a small annual provision for her niece, in case of future need. Declining to enter into any explanation, she had waited until the necessary document had been drawn out; had requested that Regina might be informed of the circumstance; and had then taken her departure in absolute silence. Hearing that she had left her husband, the lawyer, like every one else, was completely at a loss to understand what it meant.

"And what does the doctor say?" Amelius asked next.

"My uncle is to be kept perfectly quiet," Regina answered; "and is not to return to business for some time to come. Mr. Melton, with his usual kindness, has undertaken to look after his affairs for him. Otherwise, my uncle, in his present state of anxiety about the bank, would never have consented to obey the doctor's orders. When he can safely travel, he is recommended to go abroad for the winter, and get well again in some warmer climate. He refuses to leave his business--and the doctor refuses to take the responsibility. There is to be a consultation of physicians tomorrow. Oh, Amelius, I was really fond of my aunt--I am heart-broken at this dreadful change!"

There was a momentary silence. If Mr. Melton had been present, he would have said a few neatly sympathetic words. Amelius knew no more than a savage of the art of conventional consolation. Tadmor had made him familiar with the social and political questions of the time, and had taught him to speak in public. But Tadmor, rich in books and newspapers, was a powerless training institution in the matter of small talk.

"Suppose Mr. Farnaby is obliged to go abroad," he suggested, after waiting a little, "what will you do?"

Regina looked at him, with an air of melancholy surprise. "I shall do my duty, of course," she answered gravely. "I shall accompany my dear uncle, if he wishes it." She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "It is time he took his medicine," she resumed; "you will excuse me, I am sure." She shook hands, not very warmly--and hastened out of the room.

Amelius left the house, with a conviction which disheartened him--the conviction that he had never understood Regina, and that he was not likely to understand her in the future. He turned for relief to the consideration of Mr. Farnaby's strange conduct, under the domestic disaster which had

befallen him.

Recalling what he had observed for himself, and what he had heard from Mrs. Farnaby when she had first taken him into her confidence, he inferred that the subject of the lost child had not only been a subject of estrangement between the husband and wife, but that the husband was, in some way, the person blamable for it. Assuming this theory to be the right one, there would be serious obstacles to the meeting of the mother and child, in the mother's home. The departure of Mrs. Farnaby was, in that case, no longer unintelligible--and Mr. Farnaby's otherwise inexplicable conduct had the light of a motive thrown on it, which might not unnaturally influence a hard-hearted man weary alike of his wife and his wife's troubles. Arriving at this conclusion by a far shorter process than is here indicated, Amelius pursued the subject no further. At the time when he had first visited the Farnabys, Rufus had advised him to withdraw from closer intercourse with them, while he had the chance. In his present mood, he was almost in danger of acknowledging to himself that Rufus had proved to be right.

He lunched with his American friend at the hotel. Before the meal was over Mrs. Payson called, to say a few cheering words about Sally.

It was not to be denied that the girl remained persistently silent and reserved. In other respects the report was highly favourable. She was obedient to the rules of the house; she was always ready with any little services that she could render to her companions; and she was so eager to improve herself, by means of her reading-lessons and writing-lessons, that it was not easy to induce her to lay aside her book and her slate. When the teacher offered her some small reward for her good conduct, and asked what she would like, the sad little face brightened, and the faithful creature's answer was always the same--"I should like to know what he is doing now." (Alas for Sally!--"he" meant Amelius.)

"You must wait a little longer before you write to her," Mrs. Payson concluded, "and you must not think of seeing her for some time to come. I know you will help us by consenting to this--for Sally's sake."

Amelius bowed in silence. He would not have confessed what he felt, at that moment, to any living soul--it is doubtful if he even confessed it to himself. Mrs. Payson, observing him with a woman's keen sympathy, relented a little. "I might give her a message," the good lady suggested--"just to say you are glad to hear she is behaving so well."

"Will you give her this?" Amelius asked.

He took from his pocket a little photograph of the cottage, which he had noticed on the house-agent's desk, and had taken away with him. "It is my cottage now," he explained, in tones that faltered a little; "I am going to live there; Sally might like to see it."

"Sally shall see it," Mrs. Payson agreed--"if you will only let me take this away first." She pointed to the address of the cottage, printed under the photograph. Past experience in the Home made her reluctant to trust Sally with the address in London at which Amelius was to be found.

Rufus produced a huge complex knife, out of the depths of which a pair of scissors burst on touching a spring. Mrs. Payson cut off the address, and placed the photograph in her pocket-book. "Now," she said, "Sally will be happy, and no harm can come of it."

"I've known you, ma'am, nigh on twenty years," Rufus remarked. "I do assure you that's the first rash observation I ever heard from your lips."