BOOK THE EIGHTH. DAME NATURE DECIDES

CHAPTER 1

The day which had united the mother and daughter, only to part them again in this world for ever, had advanced to evening.

Amelius and Sally were together again in the cottage, sitting by the library fire. The silence in the room was uninterrupted. On the open desk, near Amelius, lay the letter which Mrs. Farnaby had written to him on the morning of her death.

He had found the letter--with the envelope unfastened--on the floor of the bedchamber, and had fortunately secured it before the landlady and the servant had ventured back to the room. The doctor, returning a few minutes afterwards, had warned the two women that a coroner's inquest would be held in the house, and had vainly cautioned them to be careful of what they said or did in the interval. Not only the subject of the death, but a discovery which had followed, revealing the name of the ill-fated woman marked on her linen, and showing that she had used an assumed name in taking the lodgings as Mrs. Ronald, became the gossip of the neighbourhood in a few hours. Under these circumstances, the catastrophe was made the subject of a paragraph in the evening journals; the name being added for the information of any surviving relatives who might be ignorant of the sad event. If the landlady had found the letter, that circumstance also would in all probability, have formed part of the statement in the newspapers, and the secret of Mrs. Farnaby's life and death would have been revealed to the public view.

"I can trust you, and you only," she wrote to Amelius, "to fulfil the last wishes of a dying woman. You know me, and you know how I looked forward to the prospect of a happy life in retirement with my child. The one hope that I lived for has proved to be a cruel delusion. I have only this morning discovered, beyond the possibility of doubt, that I have been made the victim of wretches who have deliberately lied to me from first to last. If I had been a happier woman, I might have had other interests to sustain me under this frightful disaster. Such as I am, Death is my one refuge left.

"My suicide will be known to no creature but yourself. Some years since, the idea of self destruction--concealed under the disguise of a common mistake--presented itself to my mind. I kept the means, very simple means, by me, thinking I might end in that way after all. When you read this I shall be at rest for ever. You will do what I have yet to ask of you, in merciful remembrance of me--I am sure of that.

"You have a long life before you, Amelius. My foolish fancy about you and my lost girl still lingers in my mind; I still think it may be just possible that you may meet with her, in the course of years.

"If this does happen, I implore you, by the tenderness and pity that you once felt for me, to tell no human creature that she is my daughter; and, if John Farnaby is living at the time, I forbid you, with the authority of a dying friend, to let her see him, or to let her know even that such a person exists. Are you at a loss to account for my motives? I may make the shameful confession which will enlighten you, now I know that we shall never meet again. My child was born before my marriage; and the man who afterwards became my husband--a man of low origin, I should tell you--was the father. He had calculated on this disgraceful circumstance to force my parents to make his fortune, by making me his wife. I now know, what I only vaguely suspected before, that he deliberately abandoned his child, as a likely cause of hindrance and scandal in the way of his prosperous career in life. Do you now think I am asking too much, when I entreat you never even to speak to my lost darling of this unnatural wretch? As for my own fair fame, I am not thinking of myself. With Death close at my side, I think of my poor mother, and of all that she suffered and sacrificed to save me from the disgrace that I had deserved. For her sake, not for mine, keep silence to friends and enemies alike if they ask you who my girl is--with the one exception of my lawyer. Years since, I left in his care the means of making a small provision for my child, on the chance that she might live to claim it. You can show him this letter as your authority, in case of need.

"Try not to forget me, Amelius--but don't grieve about me. I go to my death as you go to your sleep when you are tired. I leave you my grateful love--you have always been good to me. There is no more to write; I hear the servant returning from the chemist's, bringing with her only release from the hard burden of life without hope. May you be happier than I have been! Goodbye!"

So she parted from him for ever. But the fatal association of the unhappy woman's sorrows with the life and fortune of Amelius was not at an end yet.

He had neither hesitation nor misgiving in resolving to show a natural

respect to the wishes of the dead. Now that the miserable story of the past had been unreservedly disclosed to him, he would have felt himself bound in honour, even without instructions to guide him, to keep the discovery of the daughter a secret, for the mother's sake. With that conviction, he had read the distressing letter. With that conviction, he now rose to provide for the safe keeping of it under lock and key.

Just as he had secured the letter in a private drawer of his desk, Toff came in with a card, and announced that a gentleman wished to see him. Amelius, looking at the card, was surprised to find on it the name of "Mr. Melton." Some lines were written on it in pencil: "I have called to speak with you on a matter of serious importance." Wondering what his middle-aged rival could want with him, Amelius instructed Toff to admit the visitor.

Sally started to her feet, with her customary distrust of strangers. "May I run away before he comes in?" she asked. "If you like," Amelius answered quietly. She ran to the door of her room, at the moment when Toff appeared again, announcing the visitor. Mr. Melton entered just before she disappeared: he saw the flutter of her dress as the door closed behind her.

"I fear I am disturbing you?" he said, looking hard at the door.

He was perfectly dressed: his hat and gloves were models of what such things ought to be; he was melancholy and courteous; blandly distrustful of the flying skirts which he had seen at the door. When Amelius offered him a chair, he took it with a mysterious sigh; mournfully resigned to the sad necessity of sitting down. "I won't prolong my intrusion on you," he resumed. "You have no doubt seen the melancholy news in the evening papers?"

"I haven't seen the evening papers," Amelius answered; "what news do you mean?"

Mr. Melton leaned back in his chair, and expressed emotions of sorrow and surprise, in a perfect state of training, by gently raising his smooth white hands.

"Oh dear, dear! this is very sad. I had hoped to find you in full possession of the particulars--reconciled, as we must all be, to the inscrutable ways of Providence. Permit me to break it to you as gently as possible. I came here to inquire if you had heard yet from Miss Regina. Understand my motive! there must be no misapprehension between us on that subject. There is a very serious necessity--pray follow me carefully--I say, a very serious necessity

for my communicating immediately with Miss Regina's uncle; and I know of nobody who is so likely to hear from the travellers, so soon after their departure, as yourself. You are, in a certain sense, a member of the family--"

"Stop a minute," said Amelius.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Melton politely, at a loss to understand the interruption.

"I didn't at first know what you meant," Amelius explained. "You put it, if you will forgive me for saying so, in rather a roundabout way. If you are alluding, all this time, to Mrs. Farnaby's death, I must honestly tell you that I know of it already."

The bland self-possession of Mr. Melton's face began to show signs of being ruffled. He had been in a manner deluded into exhibiting his conventionally fluent eloquence, in the choicest modulations of his sonorous voice--and it wounded his self esteem to be placed in his present position. "I understood you to say," he remarked stiffly, "that you had not seen the evening newspapers."

"You are quite right," Amelius rejoined; "I have not seen them."

"Then may I inquire," Mr. Melton proceeded, "how you became informed of Mrs. Farnaby's death?"

Amelius replied with his customary frankness. "I went to call on the poor lady this morning," he said, "knowing nothing of what had happened. I met the doctor at the door; and I was present at her death."

Even Mr. Melton's carefully-trained composure was not proof against the revelation that now opened before him. He burst out with an exclamation of astonishment, like an ordinary man.

"Good heavens, what does this mean!"

Amelius took it as a question addressed to himself. "I'm sure I don't know," he said quietly.

Mr. Melton, misunderstanding Amelius on his side, interpreted those innocent words as an outbreak of vulgar interruption. "Pardon me," he said coldly. "I was about to explain myself. You will presently understand my surprise. After seeing the evening paper, I went at once to make inquiries at

the address mentioned. In Mr. Farnaby's absence, I felt bound to do this as his old friend. I saw the landlady, and, with her assistance, the doctor also. Both these persons spoke of a gentleman who had called that morning, accompanied by a young lady; and who had insisted on taking the young lady upstairs with him. Until you mentioned just now that you were present at the death, I had no suspicion that you were 'the gentleman'. Surprise on my part was, I think, only natural. I could hardly be expected to know that you were in Mrs. Farnaby's confidence about the place of her retreat. And with regard to the young lady, I am still quite at a loss to understand--"

"If you understand that the people at the house told you the truth, so far as I am concerned," Amelius interposed, "I hope that will be enough. With regard to the young lady, I must beg you to excuse me for speaking plainly. I have nothing to say about her, to you or to anybody."

Mr. Melton rose with the utmost dignity and the fullest possession of his vocal resources.

"Permit me to assure you," he said, with frigidly fluent politeness, "that I have no wish to force myself into your confidence. One remark I will venture to make. It is easy enough, no doubt, to keep your own secrets, when you are speaking to me. You will find some difficulty, I fear, in pursuing the same course, when you are called upon to give evidence before the coroner. I presume you know that you will be summoned as a witness at the inquest?"

"I left my name and address with the doctor for that purpose," Amelius rejoined as composedly as ever; "and I am ready to bear witness to what I saw at poor Mrs. Farnaby's bedside. But if all the coroners in England questioned me about anything else, I should say to them just what I have said to you."

Mr. Melton smiled with well bred irony. "We shall see," he said. "In the mean time, I presume I may ask you, in the interests of the family, to send me the address on the letter, as soon as you hear from Miss Regina. I have no other means of communicating with Mr. Farnaby. In respect to the melancholy event, I may add that I have undertaken to provide for the funeral, and to pay any little outstanding debts, and so forth. As Mr. Farnaby's old friend and representative--"

The conclusion of the sentence was interrupted by the entrance of Toff with a note, and an apology for his intrusion. "I beg your pardon, sir; the person is waiting. She says it's only a receipt to sign. The box is in the hall."

Amelius examined the enclosure. It was a formal document, acknowledging the receipt of Sally's clothes, returned to her by the authorities at the Home. As he took a pen to sign the receipt he looked towards the door of Sally's room. Mr. Melton, observing the look, prepared to retire. "I am only interrupting you," he said. "You have my address on my card. Good evening."

On his way out, he passed an elderly woman, waiting in the hall. Toff, hastening before him to open the garden gate, was saluted by the gruff voice of a cabman, outside. "The lady whom he had driven to the cottage had not paid him his right fare; he meant to have the money, or the lady's name and address, and summon her." Quietly crossing the road, Mr. Melton heard the woman's voice next: she had got her receipt, and had followed him out. In the dispute about fares and distances that ensued, the contending parties more than once mentioned the name of the Home and of the locality in which it was situated. Possessing this information, Mr. Melton looked in at his club; consulted a directory, under the heading of "Charitable Institutions;" and solved the mystery of the vanishing petticoats at the door. He had discovered an inmate of an asylum for lost women, in the house of the man to whom Regina was engaged to be married!

The next morning's post brought to Amelius a letter from Regina. It was dated from an hotel in Paris. Her "dear uncle" had over estimated his strength. He had refused to stay and rest for the night at Boulogne; and had suffered so severely from the fatigue of the long journey that he had been confined to his bed since his arrival. The English physician consulted had declined to say when he would be strong enough to travel again; the constitution of the patient must have received some serious shock; he was brought very low. Having carefully reported the new medical opinion, Regina was at liberty to indulge herself, next, in expressions of affection, and to assure Amelius of her anxiety to hear from him as soon as possible. But, in this case again, the "dear uncle's" convenience was still the first consideration. She reverted to Mr. Farnaby, in making her excuses for a hurriedly written letter. The poor invalid suffered from depression of spirits; his great consolation in his illness was to hear his niece read to him: he was calling for her, indeed, at that moment. The inevitable postscript warmed into a mild effusion of fondness, "How I wish you could be with us. But, alas, it cannot be!"

Amelius copied the address on the letter, and sent it to Mr. Melton immediately.

It was then the twenty-fourth day of the month. The tidal train did not leave

London early that morning; and the inquest was deferred, to suit other pressing engagements of the coroner, until the twenty-sixth. Mr. Melton decided, after his interview with Amelius, that the emergency was sufficiently serious to justify him in following his telegram to Paris. It was clearly his duty, as an old friend, to mention to Mr. Farnaby what he had discovered at the cottage, as well as what he had heard from the landlady and the doctor; leaving it to the uncle's discretion to act as he thought right in the interests of the niece. Whether that course of action might not also serve the interests of Mr. Melton himself, in the character of an unsuccessful suitor for Regina's hand, he did not stop to inquire. Beyond his duty it was, for the present at least, not his business to look.

That night, the two gentlemen held a private consultation in Paris; the doctor having previously certified that his patient was incapable of supporting the journey back to London, under any circumstances.

The question of the formal proceedings rendered necessary by Mrs. Farnaby's death having been discussed and disposed of, Mr. Melton next entered on the narrative which the obligations of friendship imperatively demanded from him. To his astonishment and alarm, Mr. Farnaby started up in the bed like a man panic-stricken. "Did you say," he stammered, as soon as he could speak, "you mean to make inquiries about that--that girl?"

"I certainly thought it desirable, bearing in mind Mr. Goldenheart's position in your family."

"Do nothing of the sort! Say nothing to Regina or to any living creature. Wait till I get well again--and leave me to deal with it. I am the proper person to take it in hand. Don't you see that for yourself? And, look here! there may be questions asked at the inquest. Some impudent scoundrel on the jury may want to pry into what doesn't concern him. The moment you're back in London, get a lawyer to represent us--the sharpest fellow that can be had for money. Tell him to stop all prying questions. Who the girl is, and what made that cursed young Socialist Goldenheart take her upstairs with him--all that sort of thing has nothing to do with the manner in which my wife met her death. You understand? I look to you, Melton, to see yourself that this is done. The less said at the infernal inquest, the better. In my position, it's an exposure that my enemies will make the most of, as it is. I'm too ill to go into the thing any further. No: I don't want Regina. Go to her in the sitting room, and tell the courier to get you something to eat and drink. And, I say! For God's sake don't be late for the Boulogne train tomorrow morning."

Left by himself, he gave full vent to his fury; he cursed Amelius with oaths

that are not to be written.

He had burnt the letter which Mrs. Farnaby had written to him, on leaving him forever; but he had not burnt out of his memory the words which that letter contained. With his wife's language vividly present to his mind, he could arrive at but one conclusion, after what Mr. Melton had told him. Amelius was concerned in the discovery of his deserted daughter; Amelius had taken the girl to her dying mother's bedside. With his idiotic Socialist notions, he would be perfectly capable of owning the truth, if inquiries were made. The unblemished reputation which John Farnaby had built up by the self-seeking hypocrisy of a lifetime was at the mercy of a visionary young fool, who believed that rich men were created for the benefit of the poor, and who proposed to regenerate society by reviving the obsolete morality of the Primitive Christians. Was it possible for him to come to terms with such a person as this? There was not an inch of common ground on which they could meet. He dropped back on his pillow in despair, and lay for a while frowning and biting his nails. Suddenly he sat up again in the bed, and wiped his moist forehead, and heaved a heavy breath of relief. Had his illness obscured his intelligence? How was it he had not seen at once the perfectly easy way out of the difficulty which was presented by the facts themselves? Here is a man, engaged to marry my niece, who has been discovered keeping a girl at his cottage--who even had the audacity to take her upstairs with him when he made a call on my wife. Charge him with it in plain words; break off the engagement publicly in the face of society; and, if the profligate scoundrel tries to defend himself by telling the truth, who will believe him--when the girl was seen running out of his room? and when he refused, on the question being put to him, to say who she was?

So, in ignorance of his wife's last instructions to Amelius--in equal ignorance of the compassionate silence which an honourable man preserves when a woman's reputation is at his mercy--the wretch needlessly plotted and planned to save his usurped reputation; seeing all things, as such men invariably do, through the foul light of his own inbred baseness and cruelty. He was troubled by no retributive emotions of shame or remorse, in contemplating this second sacrifice to his own interests of the daughter whom he had deserted in her infancy. If he felt any misgivings, they related wholly to himself. His head was throbbing, his tongue was dry; a dread of increasing his illness shook him suddenly. He drank some of the lemonade at his bedside, and lay down to compose himself to sleep.

It was not to be done; there was a burning in his eyeballs, there was a wild irregular beating at his heart, which kept him awake. In some degree, at least, retribution seemed to be on the way to him already.

Mr. Melton, delicately administering sympathy and consolation to Regina--whose affectionate nature felt keenly the calamity of her aunt's death--Mr. Melton, making himself modestly useful, by reading aloud certain devotional poems much prized by Regina, was called out of the room by the courier.

"I have just looked in at Mr. Farnaby, sir," said the man; "and I am afraid he is worse."

The physician was sent for. He thought so seriously of the change in the patient, that he obliged Regina to accept the services of a professed nurse. When Mr. Melton started on his return journey the next morning, he left his friend in a high fever.

CHAPTER 2

The inquiry into the circumstances under which Mrs. Farnaby had died was held in the forenoon of the next day.

Mr. Melton surprised Amelius by calling for him, and taking him to the inquest. The carriage stopped on the way, and a gentleman joined them, who was introduced as Mr. Melton's legal adviser. He spoke to Amelius about the inquest; stating, as his excuse for asking certain discreet questions, that his object was to suppress any painful disclosures. On reaching the house, Mr. Melton and his lawyer said a few words to the coroner downstairs, while the jury were assembling on the floor above.

The first witness examined was the landlady.

After deposing to the date at which the late Mrs. Farnaby had hired her lodgings, and verifying the statements which had appeared in the newspapers, she was questioned about the life and habits of the deceased. She described her late lodger as a respectable lady, punctual in her payments, and quiet and orderly in her way of life: she received letters, but saw no friends. On several occasions, an old woman was admitted to speak with her; and these visits seemed to be anything but agreeable to the deceased. Asked if she knew anything of the old woman, or of what had passed at the interviews described, the witness answered both questions in the negative. When the woman called, she always told the servant to announce her as "the nurse."

Mr. Melton was next examined, to prove the identity of the deceased.

He declared that he was quite unable to explain why she had left her husband's house under an assumed name. Asked if Mr. and Mrs. Farnaby had lived together on affectionate terms, he acknowledged that he had heard, at various times, of a want of harmony between them, but was not acquainted with the cause. Mr. Farnaby's high character and position in the commercial world spoke for themselves: the restraints of a gentleman guided him in his relations with his wife. The medical certificate of his illness in Paris was then put in; and Mr. Melton's examination came to an end.

The chemist who had made up the prescription was the third witness. He knew the woman who brought it to his shop to be in the service of the first witness examined; an old customer of his, and a highly respected resident in

the neighbourhood. He made up all prescriptions himself in which poisons were conspicuous ingredients; and he had affixed to the bottle a slip of paper, bearing the word "Poison," printed in large letters. The bottle was produced and identified; and the directions in the prescription were shown to have been accurately copied on the label.

A general sensation of interest was excited by the appearance of the next witness--the woman servant. It was anticipated that her evidence would explain how the fatal mistake about the medicine had occurred. After replying to the formal inquiries, she proceeded as follows:

"When I answered the bell, at the time I have mentioned, I found the deceased standing at the fireplace. There was a bottle of medicine on the table, by her writing desk. It was a much larger bottle than that which the last witness identified, and it was more than three parts full of some colourless medicine. The deceased gave me a prescription to take to the chemist's, with instructions to wait, and bring back the physic. She said, 'I don't feel at all well this morning; I thought of trying some of this medicine,' pointing to the bottle by her desk; 'but I am not sure it is the right thing for me. I think I want a tonic. The prescription I have given you is a tonic.' I went out at once to our chemist and got it. I found her writing a letter when I came back, but she finished it immediately, and pushed it away from her. When I put the bottle I had brought from the chemist on the table, she looked at the other larger bottle which she had by her; and she said, 'You will think me very undecided; I have been doubting, since I sent you to the chemist, whether I had not better begin with this medicine here, before I try the tonic. It's a medicine for the stomach; and I fancy it's only indigestion that's the matter with me, after all.' I said, 'You eat but a poor breakfast, ma'am, this morning. It isn't for me to advise; but, as you seem to be in doubt about yourself, wouldn't it be better to send for a doctor?' She shook her head, and said she didn't want to have a doctor if she could possibly help it. 'I'll try the medicine for indigestion first,' she says; 'and if it doesn't relieve me, we will see what is to be done, later in the day.' While we were talking, the tonic was left in its sealed paper cover, just as I had brought it from the shop. She took up the bottle containing the stomach medicine, and read the directions on it: 'Two tablespoonsful by measure-glass twice a day.' I asked if she had a measure-glass; and she said, Yes, and sent me to her bedroom to look for it. I couldn't find it. While I was looking, I heard her cry out, and ran back to the drawing-room to see what was the matter. 'Oh!' she says, 'how clumsy I am! I've broken the bottle.' She held up the bottle of the stomach medicine and showed it to me, broken just below the neck. 'Go back to the bedroom,' she says, 'and see if you can find an empty bottle; I don't want to waste the medicine if I can help it.' There was only one empty

bottle in the bedroom, a bottle on the chimney-piece. I took it to her immediately. She gave me the broken bottle; and while I poured the medicine into the bottle which I had found in the bedroom, she opened the paper which covered the tonic I had brought from the chemist. When I had done, and the two bottles were together on the table--the bottle that I had filled, and the bottle that I had brought front the chemist--I noticed that they were both of the same size, and that both had a label pasted on them, marked 'Poison.' I said to her, 'You must take care, ma'am, you don't make any mistake, the two bottles are so exactly alike.' 'I can easily prevent that,' she says, and dipped her pen in the ink, and copied the directions on the broken bottle, on to the label of the bottle that I had just filled. 'There!' she said. 'Now I hope your mind's at ease?' She spoke cheerfully, as if she was joking with me. And then she said, 'But where's the measure-glass?' I went back to the bedroom to look for it, and couldn't find it again. She changed all at once, upon that--she became quite angry; and walked up and down in a fume, abusing me for my stupidity. It was very unlike her. On all other occasions she was a most considerate lady. I made allowances for her. She had been very much upset earlier in the morning, when she had received a letter, which she told me herself contained bad news. Yes; another person was present at the time--the same woman that my mistress told you of. The woman looked at the address on the letter, and seemed to know who it was from. I told her a squint-eyed man had brought it to the house--and then she left directly. I don't know where she went, or the address at which she lives, or who the messenger was who brought the letter. As I have said, I made allowances for the deceased lady. I went downstairs, without answering, and got a tumbler and a tablespoon to serve instead of the measure-glass. When I came back with the things, she was still walking about in a temper. She took no notice of me. I left the room again quietly, seeing she was not in a state to be spoken to. I saw nothing more of her, until we were alarmed by hearing her scream. We found the poor lady on the floor in a kind of fit. I ran out and fetched the nearest doctor. This is the whole truth, on my oath; and this is all I know about it."

The landlady was recalled at the request of the jury, and questioned again about the old woman. She could give no information. Being asked next if any letters or papers belonging to, or written by, the deceased lady had been found, she declared that, after the strictest search, nothing had been discovered but two medical prescriptions. The writing desk was empty.

The doctor was the next witness.

He described the state in which he found the patient, on being called to the house. The symptoms were those of poisoning by strychnine. Examination of

the prescriptions and the bottles, aided by the servant's information, convinced him that a fatal mistake had been made by the deceased; the nature of which he explained to the jury as he had already explained it to Amelius. Having mentioned the meeting with Amelius at the house-door, and the events which had followed, he closed his evidence by stating the result of the postmortem examination, proving that the death was caused by the poison called strychnine.

The landlady and the servant were examined again. They were instructed to inform the jury exactly of the time that had elapsed, from the moment when the servant had left the deceased alone in the drawing-room, to the time when the screams were first heard. Having both given the same evidence, on this point, they were next asked whether any person, besides the old woman, had visited the deceased lady--or had on any pretence obtained access to her in the interval. Both swore positively that there had not even been a knock at the house-door in the interval, and that the area-gate was locked, and the key in the possession of the landlady. This evidence placed it beyond the possibility of doubt that the deceased had herself taken the poison. The question whether she had taken it by accident was the only question left to decide, when Amelius was called as the next witness.

The lawyer retained by Mr. Melton, to watch the case on behalf of Mr. Farnaby, had hitherto not interfered. It was observed that he paid the closest attention to the inquiry, at the stage which it had now reached.

Amelius was nervous at the outset. The early training in America, which had hardened him to face an audience and speak with self-possession on social and political subjects had not prepared him for the very difficult ordeal of a first appearance as a witness. Having answered the customary inquiries, he was so painfully agitated in describing Mrs. Farnaby's sufferings, that the coroner suspended the examination for a few minutes, to give him time to control himself. He failed, however, to recover his composure, until the narrative part of his evidence had come to an end. When the critical questions, bearing on his relations with Mrs. Farnaby, began, the audience noticed that he lifted his head, and looked and spoke, for the first time, like a man with a settled resolution in him, sure of himself.

The questions proceeded:

Was he in Mrs. Farnaby's confidence, on the subject of her domestic differences with her husband? Did those differences lead to her withdrawing herself from her husband's roof? Did Mrs. Farnaby inform him of the place of her retreat? To these three questions the witness, speaking quite readily

in each case, answered Yes. Asked next, what the nature of the 'domestic differences' had been; whether they were likely to affect Mrs. Farnaby's mind seriously; why she had passed under an assumed name, and why she had confided the troubles of her married life to a young man like himself, only introduced to her a few months since, the witness simply declined to reply to the inquiries addressed to him. "The confidence Mrs. Farnaby placed in me," he said to the coroner, "was a confidence which I gave her my word of honour to respect. When I have said that, I hope the jury will understand that I owe it to the memory of the dead to say no more."

There was a murmur of approval among the audience, instantly checked by the coroner. The foreman of the jury rose, and remarked that scruples of honour were out of place at a serious inquiry of that sort. Hearing this, the lawyer saw his opportunity, and got on his legs. "I represent the husband of the deceased lady," he said. "Mr. Goldenheart has appealed to the law of honour to justify him in keeping silence. I am astonished that there is a man to be found in this assembly who fails to sympathize with him. But as there appears to be such a person present, I ask permission, sir, to put a question to the witness. It may, or may not, satisfy the foreman of the jury; but it will certainly assist the object of the present inquiry."

The coroner, after a glance at Mr. Melton, permitted the lawyer to put his question in these terms:--

"Did your knowledge of Mrs. Farnaby's domestic troubles give you any reason to apprehend that they might urge her to commit suicide?

"Certainly not," Amelius answered. "When I called on her, on the morning of her death, I had no apprehension whatever of her committing suicide. I went to the house as the bearer of good news; and I said so to the doctor, when he first spoke to me."

The doctor confirmed this. The foreman was silenced, if not convinced. One of his brother-jurymen, however, feeling the force of example, interrupted the proceedings, by assailing Amelius with another question:--"We have heard that you were accompanied by a young lady at the time you have mentioned, and that you took her upstairs with you. We want to know what business the young lady had in the house?"

The lawyer interfered again. "I object to that question," he said. "The purpose of the inquest is to ascertain how Mrs. Farnaby met with her death. What has the young lady to do with it? The doctor's evidence has already told us that she was not at the house, until after he had been called in, and

the deadly action of the poison had begun. I appeal, sir, to the law of evidence, and to you, as the presiding authority, to enforce it. Mr. Goldenheart, who is acquainted with the circumstances of the deceased lady's life, has declared on his oath that there was nothing in those circumstances to inspire him with any apprehension of her committing suicide. The evidence of the servant at the lodgings points plainly to the conclusion already arrived at by the medical witness, that the death was the result of a lamentable mistake, and of that alone. Is our time to be wasted in irrelevant questions, and are the feelings of the surviving relatives to be cruelly lacerated to no purpose, to satisfy the curiosity of strangers?"

A strong expression of approval from the audience followed this. The lawyer whispered to Mr. Melton, "It's all right!"

Order being restored, the coroner ruled that the juryman's question was not admissible, and that the servant's evidence, taken with the statements of the doctor and the chemist, was the only evidence for the consideration of the jury. Summing up to this effect, he recalled Amelius, at the request of the foreman, to inquire if the witness knew anything of the old woman who had been frequently alluded to in the course of the proceedings. Amelius could answer this question as honestly as he had answered the questions preceding it. He neither knew the woman's name, nor where she was to be found. The coroner inquired, with a touch of irony, if the jury wished the inquest to be adjourned, under existing circumstances.

For the sake of appearances, the jury consulted together. But the luncheon-hour was approaching; the servant's evidence was undeniably clear and conclusive; the coroner, in summing up, had requested them not to forget that the deceased had lost her temper with the servant, and that an angry woman might well make a mistake which would be unlikely in her cooler moments. All these influences led the jury irrepressibly, over the obstacles of obstinacy, on the way to submission. After a needless delay, they returned a verdict of "death by misadventure." The secret of Mrs. Farnaby's suicide remained inviolate; the reputation of her vile husband stood as high as ever; and the future life of Amelius was, from that fatal moment, turned irrevocably into a new course.

CHAPTER 3

On the conclusion of the proceedings, Mr. Melton, having no further need of Amelius or the lawyer, drove away by himself. But he was too inveterately polite to omit making his excuses for leaving them in a hurry; he expected, he said, to find a telegram from Paris waiting at his house. Amelius only delayed his departure to ask the landlady if the day of the funeral was settled. Hearing that it was arranged for the next morning, he thanked her, and returned at once to the cottage.

Sally was waiting his arrival to complete some purchases of mourning for her unhappy mother; Toff's wife being in attendance to take care of her. She was curious to know how the inquest had ended. In answering her question, Amelius was careful to warn her, if her companion made any inquiries, only to say that she had lost her mother under very sad circumstances. The two having left the cottage, he instructed Toff to let in a stranger, who was to call by previous appointment, and to close the door to every one else. In a few minutes, the expected person, a young man, who gave the name of Morcross, made his appearance, and sorely puzzled the old Frenchman. He was well dressed; his manner was quiet and self-possessed--and yet he did not look like a gentleman. In fact, he was a policeman of the higher order, in plain clothes.

Being introduced to the library, he spread out on the table some sheets of manuscript, in the handwriting of Amelius, with notes in red ink on the margin, made by himself.

"I understand, sir," he began, "that you have reasons for not bringing this case to trial in a court of law?"

"I am sorry to say," Amelius answered, "that I dare not consent to the exposure of a public trial, for the sake of persons living and dead. For the same reason, I have written the account of the conspiracy with certain reserves. I hope I have not thrown any needless difficulties in your way?"

"Certainly not, sir. But I should wish to ask, what you propose to do, in case I discover the people concerned in the conspiracy?"

Amelius owned, very reluctantly, that he could do nothing with the old woman who had been the accomplice. "Unless," he added, "I can induce her to assist me in bringing the man to justice for other crimes which I believe

him to have committed."

"Meaning the man named Jervy, sir, in this statement?"

"Yes. I have reason to believe that he has been obliged to leave the United States, after committing some serious offence--"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir. Is it serious enough to charge him with, under the treaty between the two countries?"

"I don't doubt it's serious enough. I have telegraphed to the persons who formerly employed him, for the particulars. Mind this! I will stick at no sacrifice to make that scoundrel suffer for what he has done."

In those plain words Amelius revealed, as frankly as usual, the purpose that was in him. The terrible remembrances associated with Mrs. Farnaby's last moments had kindled, in his just and generous nature, a burning sense of the wrong inflicted on the poor heart-broken creature who had trusted and loved him. The unendurable thought that the wretch who had tortured her, robbed her, and driven her to her death had escaped with impunity, literally haunted him night and day. Eager to provide for Sally's future, he had followed Mrs. Farnaby's instructions, and had seen the lawyer privately, during the period that had elapsed between the death and the inquest. Hearing that there were formalities to be complied with, which would probably cause some delay, he had at once announced his determination to employ the interval in attempting the pursuit of Jervy. The lawyer--after vainly pointing out the serious objections to the course proposed--so far yielded to the irresistible earnestness and good faith of Amelius as to recommend him to a competent man, who could be trusted not to deceive him. The same day the man had received a written statement of the case; and he had now arrived to report the result of his first proceedings to his employer.

"One thing I want to know, before you tell me anything else," Amelius resumed. "Is my written description of Jervy plain enough to help you to find him?"

"It's so plain, sir, that some of the older men in our office have recognized him by it--under another name than the name you give him."

"Does that add to the difficulty of tracing him?"

"He has been a long time away from England, sir; and it's by no means easy

to trace him, on that account. I have been to the young woman, named Phoebe in your statement, to find out what she can tell me about him. She's ready enough, in the intervals of crying, to help us to lay our hands on the man who has deserted her. It's the old story of a fellow getting at a girl's secrets and a girl's money, under pretence of marrying her. At one time, she's furious with him, and at another she's ready to cry her eyes out. I got some information from her; it's not much, but it may help us. The name of the old woman, who has been the go-between in the business, is Mrs. Sowler--known to the police as an inveterate drunkard, and worse. I don't think there will be much difficulty in tracing Mrs. Sowler. As to Jervy, if the young woman is to be believed, and I think she is, there's little doubt that he has got the money from the lady mentioned in my instructions here, and that he has bolted with the sum about him. Wait a bit, sir, I haven't done with my discoveries yet. I asked the young woman, of course, if she had his photograph. He's a sharp fellow; she had it, but he got it away from her, on pretence of giving her a better one, before he took himself off. Having missed this chance, I asked next if she knew where he lived last. She directed me to the place; and I have had a talk with the landlord. He tells me of a squint-eyed man, who was a good deal about the house, doing Jervy's dirty work for him. If I am not misled by the description, I think I know the man. I have my own notion of what he's capable of doing, if he gets the chance--and I propose to begin by finding our way to him, and using him as a means of tracing Jervy. It's only right to tell you that it may take some time to do this--for which reason I have to propose, in the mean while, trying a shorter way to the end in view. Do you object, sir, to the expense of sending a copy of your description of Jervy to every police-station in London?"

"I object to nothing which may help to find him. Do you think the police have got him anywhere?"

"You forget, sir, that the police have no orders to take him. What I'm speculating on is the chance that he has got the money about him--say in small banknotes, for convenience of changing them, you know."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, the people he lives among--the squint-eyed man, for instance!--don't stick at trifles. If any of them have found out that Jervy's purse is worth having--"

"You mean they would rob him?"

"And murder him too, sir, if he tried to resist."

Amelius started to his feet. "Send round to the police-stations without losing another minute," he said. "And let me hear what the answer is, the instant you receive it."

"Suppose I get the answer late at night, sir?"

"I don't care when you get it, night or day. Dead or living, I will undertake to identify him. Here's a duplicate key of the garden gate. Come this way, and I'll show you where my bedroom is. If we are all in bed, tap at the window--and I will be ready for you at a moment's notice."

On that understanding Morcross left the cottage.

The day when the mortal remains of Mrs. Farnaby were laid at rest was a day of heavy rain. Mr. Melton, and two or three other old friends, were the attendants at the funeral. When the coffin was borne into the damp and reeking burial ground, a young man and a woman were the only persons, beside the sexton and his assistants, who stood by the open grave. Mr. Melton, recognizing Amelius, was at a loss to understand who his companion could be. It was impossible to suppose that he would profane that solemn ceremony by bringing to it the lost woman at the cottage. The thick black veil of the person with him hid her face from view. No visible expressions of grief escaped her. When the last sublime words of the burial service had been read, those two mourners were left, after the others had all departed, still standing together by the grave. Mr. Melton decided on mentioning the circumstance confidentially when he wrote to his friend in Paris. Telegrams from Regina, in reply to his telegrams from London, had informed him that Mr. Farnaby had felt the benefit of the remedies employed, and was slowly on the way to recovery. It seemed likely that he would, in no long time, take the right course for the protection of his niece. For the enlightenment which might, or might not, come with that time, Mr. Melton was resigned to wait, with the disciplined patience to which he had been mainly indebted for his success in life.

"Always remember your mother tenderly, my child," said Amelius, as they left the burial ground. "She was sorely tried, poor thing, in her life time, and she loved you very dearly."

"Do you know anything of my father?" Sally asked timidly. "Is he still living?"

"My dear, you will never see your father. I must be all that the kindest father and mother could have been to you, now. Oh, my poor little girl!"

She pressed his arm to her as she held it. "Why should you pity me?" she said. "Haven't I got You?"

They passed the day together quietly at the cottage. Amelius took down some of his books, and pleased Sally by giving her his first lessons. Soon after ten o'clock she withdrew, at the usual early hour, to her room. In her absence, he sent for Toff, intending to warn him not to be alarmed if he heard footsteps in the garden, after they had all gone to bed. The old servant had barely entered the library, when he was called away by the bell at the outer gate. Amelius, looking into the hall, discovered Morcross, and signed to him eagerly to come in. The police-officer closed the door cautiously behind him. He had arrived with news that Jervy was found.

CHAPTER 4

"Where has he been found?" Amelius asked, snatching up his hat.

"There's no hurry, sir," Morcross answered quietly. "When I had the honour of seeing you yesterday, you said you meant to make Jervy suffer for what he had done. Somebody else has saved you the trouble. He was found this evening in the river."

"Drowned?"

"Stabbed in three places, sir; and put out of the way in the river--that's the surgeon's report. Robbed of everything he possessed--that's the police report, after searching his pockets."

Amelius was silent. It had not entered into his calculations that crime breeds crime, and that the criminal might escape him under that law. For the moment, he was conscious of a sense of disappointment, revealing plainly that the desire for vengeance had mingled with the higher motives which animated him. He felt uneasy and ashamed, and longed as usual to take refuge in action from his own unwelcome thoughts. "Are you sure it is the man?" he asked. "My description may have misled the police--I should like to see him myself."

"Certainly, sir. While we are about it, if you feel any curiosity to trace Jervy's ill-gotten money, there's a chance (from what I have heard) of finding the man with the squint. The people at our place think it's likely he may have been concerned in the robbery, if he hasn't committed the murder."

In an hour after, under the guidance of Morcross, Amelius passed through the dreary doors of a deadhouse, situated on the southern bank of the Thames, and saw the body of Jervy stretched out on a stone slab. The guardian who held the lantern, inured to such horrible sights, declared that the corpse could not have been in the water more than two days. To any one who had seen the murdered man, the face, undisfigured by injury of any kind, was perfectly recognizable. Amelius knew him again, dead, as certainly as he had known him again, living, when he was waiting for Phoebe in the street.

"If you're satisfied, sir," said Morcross, "the inspector at the police-station is sending a sergeant to look after 'Wall-Eyes'--the name they give hereabouts

to the man suspected of the robbery. We can take the sergeant with us in the cab, if you like."

Still keeping on the southern bank of the river, they drove for a quarter of an hour in a westerly direction, and stopped at a public-house. The sergeant of police went in by himself to make the first inquiries.

"We are a day too late, sir," he said to Amelius, on returning to the cab. "Wall-Eyes was here last night, and Mother Sowler with him, judging by the description. Both of them drunk--and the woman the worse of the two. The landlord knew nothing more about it; but there's a man at the bar tells me he heard of them this morning (still drinking) at the Dairy."

"The Dairy?" Amelius repeated.

Morcross interposed with the necessary explanation. "An old house, sir, which once stood by itself in the fields. It was a dairy a hundred years ago; and it has kept the name ever since, though it's nothing but a low lodging house now."

"One of the worst places on this side of the river," the sergeant added, "The landlord's a returned convict. Sly as he is we shall have him again yet, for receiving stolen goods. There's every sort of thief among his lodgers, from a pickpocket to a housebreaker. It's my duty to continue the inquiry, sir; but a gentleman like you will be better, I should say, out of such a place as that."

Still disquieted by the sight that he had seen in the deadhouse, and by the associations which that sight had recalled, Amelius was ready for any adventure which might relieve his mind. Even the prospect of a visit to a thieves' lodging house was more welcome to him than the prospect of going home alone. "If there's no serious objection to it," he said, "I own I should like to see the place."

"You'll be safe enough with us," the sergeant replied. "If you don't mind filthy people and bad language--all right, sir! Cabman, drive to the Dairy."

Their direction was now towards the south, through a perfect labyrinth of mean and dirty streets. Twice the driver was obliged to ask his way. On the second occasion the sergeant, putting his head out of the window to stop the cab, cried, "Hullo! there's something up."

They got out in front of a long low rambling house, a complete contrast to the modern buildings about it. Late as the hour was, a mob had assembled

in front of the door. The police were on the spot keeping the people in order.

Morcross and the sergeant pushed their way through the crowd, leading Amelius between them. "Something wrong, sir, in the back kitchen," said one of the policemen answering the sergeant while he opened the street door. A few yards down the passage there was a second door, with a man on the watch by it. "There's a nice to-do downstairs," the man announced, recognizing the sergeant, and unlocking the door with a key which he took from his pocket. "The landlord at the Dairy knows his lodgers, sir," Morcross whispered to Amelius; "the place is kept like a prison." As they passed through the second door, a frantic voice startled them, shouting in fury from below. An old man came hobbling up the kitchen stairs, his eyes wild with fear, his long grey hair all tumbled over his face. "Oh, Lord, have you got the tools for breaking open the door?" he asked, wringing his dirty hands in an agony of supplication. "She'll set the house on fire! she'll kill my wife and daughter!" The sergeant pushed him contemptuously out of the way, and looked round for Amelius. "It's only the landlord, sir; keep near Morcross, and follow me."

They descended the kitchen stairs, the frantic cries below growing louder and louder at every step they took; and made their way through the thieves and vagabonds crowding together in the passage. Passing on their right hand a solid old oaken door fast closed, they reached an open wicket-gate of iron which led into a stone-paved yard. A heavily barred window was now visible in the back wall of the house, raised three or four feet from the pavement of the yard. The room within was illuminated by a blaze of gaslight. More policemen were here, keeping back more inquisitive lodgers. Among the spectators was a man with a hideous outward squint, holding by the window-bars in a state of drunken terror. The sergeant looked at him, and beckoned to one of the policemen. "Take him to the station; I shall have something to say to Wall-Eyes when he's sober. Now then! stand back all of you, and let's see what's going on in the kitchen."

He took Amelius by the arm, and led him to the window. Even the sergeant started when the scene inside met his view. "By God!" he cried, "it's Mother Sowler herself."

It was Mother Sowler. The horrible woman was tramping round and round in the middle of the kitchen, like a beast in a cage; raving in the dreadful drink-madness called delirium tremens. In the farthest corner of the room, barricaded behind the table, the landlord's wife and daughter crouched in terror of their lives. The gas, turned full on, blazed high enough to blacken the ceiling, and showed the heavy bolts shot at the top and bottom of the

solid door. Nothing less than a battering-ram could have burst that door in from the outer side; an hour's work with the file would have failed to break a passage through the bars over the window. "How did she get there?" the sergeant asked. "Run downstairs, and bolted herself in, while the missus and the young 'un were cooking"--was the answering cry from the people in the yard. As they spoke, another vain attempt was made to break in the door from the passage. The noise of the heavy blows redoubled the frenzy of the terrible creature in the kitchen, still tramping round and round under the blazing gaslight. Suddenly, she made a dart at the window, and confronted the men looking in from the yard. Her staring eyes were bloodshot; a purple-red flush was over her face; her hair waved wildly about her, torn away in places by her own hands. "Cats!" she screamed, glaring out of the window, "millions of cats! all their months wide open spitting at me! Fire! fire to scare away the cats!" She searched furiously in her pocket, and tore out a handful of loose papers. One of them escaped, and fluttered downward to a wooden press under the window. Amelius was nearest, and saw it plainly as it fell, "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "it's a bank-note!" "Wall-Eyes' money!" shouted the thieves in the yard; "She's going to burn Wall-Eyes' money!" The madwoman turned back to the middle of the kitchen, leapt up at the gas-burner, and set fire to the bank-notes. She scattered them flaming all round her on the kitchen floor. "Away with you!" she shouted, shaking her fists at the visionary multitude of cats. "Away with you, up the chimney! Away with you, out of the window!" She sprang back to the window, with her crooked fingers twisted in her hair! "The snakes!" she shrieked; "the snakes are hissing again in my hair! the beetles are crawling over my face!" She tore at her hair; she scraped her face with long black nails that lacerated the flesh. Amelius turned away, unable to endure the sight of her. Morcross took his place, eyed her steadily for a moment, and saw the way to end it. "A quarter of gin!" he shouted. "Quick! before she leaves the window!" In a minute he had the pewter measure in his hand, and tapped at the window. "Gin, Mother Sowler! Break the window, and have a drop of gin!" For a moment, the drunkard mastered her own dreadful visions at the sight of the liquor. She broke a pane of glass with her clenched fist. "The door!" cried Morcross, to the panic-stricken women, barricaded behind the table. "The door!" he reiterated, as he handed the gin in through the bars. The elder woman was too terrified to understand him; her bolder daughter crawled under the table, rushed across the kitchen, and drew the bolts. As the madwoman turned to attack her, the room was filled with men, headed by the sergeant. Three of them were barely enough to control the frantic wretch, and bind her hand and foot. When Amelius entered the kitchen, after she had been conveyed to the hospital, a five-pound note on the press (secured by one of the police), and a few frail black ashes scattered thinly on the kitchen floor, were the only relics left of the ill-

gotten money.

After-inquiry, patiently pursued in more than one direction, failed to throw any light on the mystery of Jervy's death. Morcross's report to Amelius, towards the close of the investigation, was little more than ingenious guess-work.

"It seems pretty clear, sir, in the first place, that Mother Sowler must have overtaken Wall-Eyes, after he had left the letter at Mrs. Farnaby's lodgings. In the second place, we are justified (as I shall show you directly) in assuming that she told him of the money in Jervy's possession, and that the two succeeded in discovering Jervy--no doubt through Wall-Eyes' superior knowledge of his master's movements. The evidence concerning the bank-notes proves this. We know, by the examination of the people at the Dairy, that Wall-Eyes took from his pocket a handful of notes, when they refused to send for liquor without having the money first. We are also informed, that the breaking-out of the drink-madness in Mother Sowler showed itself in her snatching the notes out of his hand, and trying to strangle him--before she ran down into the kitchen and bolted herself in. Lastly, Mrs. Farnaby's bankers have identified the note saved from the burning, as one of forty five-pound notes paid to her cheque. So much for the tracing of the money.

"I wish I could give an equally satisfactory account of the tracing of the crime. We can make nothing of Wall-Eyes. He declares that he didn't even know Jervy was dead, till we told him; and he swears he found the money dropped in the street. It is needless to say that this last assertion is a lie. Opinions are divided among us as to whether he is answerable for the murder as well as the robbery, or whether there was a third person concerned in it. My own belief is that Jervy was drugged by the old woman (with a young woman very likely used as a decoy), in some house by the riverside, and then murdered by Wall-Eyes in cold blood. We have done our best to clear the matter up, and we have not succeeded. The doctors give us no hope of any assistance from Mother Sowler. If she gets over the attack (which is doubtful), they say she will die to a certainty of liver disease. In short, my own fear is that this will prove to be one more of those murders which are mysteries to the police as well as the public."

The report of the case excited some interest, published in the newspapers in conspicuous type. Meddlesome readers wrote letters, offering complacently stupid suggestions to the police. After a while, another crime attracted general attention; and the murder of Jervy disappeared from the public memory, among other forgotten murders of modern times.

CHAPTER 5

The last dreary days of November came to their end.

No longer darkened by the shadows of crime and torment and death, the life of Amelius glided insensibly into the peaceful byways of seclusion, brightened by the companionship of Sally. The winter days followed one another in a happy uniformity of occupations and amusements. There were lessons to fill up the morning, and walks to occupy the afternoon--and, in the evenings, sometimes reading, sometimes singing, sometimes nothing but the lazy luxury of talk. In the vast world of London, with its monstrous extremes of wealth and poverty, and its all-permeating malady of life at fever-heat, there was one supremely innocent and supremely happy creature. Sally had heard of Heaven, attainable on the hard condition of first paying the debt of death. "I have found a kinder Heaven," she said, one day. "It is here in the cottage; and Amelius has shown me the way to it."

Their social isolation was at this time complete: they were two friendless people, perfectly insensible to all that was perilous and pitiable in their own position. They parted with a kiss at night, and they met again with a kiss in the morning--and they were as happily free from all mistrust of the future as a pair of birds. No visitors came to the house; the few friends and acquaintances of Amelius, forgotten by him, forgot him in return. Now and then, Toff's wife came to the cottage, and exhibited the "cherubim-baby." Now and then, Toff himself (a musician among his other accomplishments) brought his fiddle upstairs; and, saying modestly, "A little music helps to pass the time," played to the young master and mistress the cheerful tinkling tunes of the old vaudevilles of France. They were pleased with these small interruptions when they came; and they were not disappointed when the days passed, and the baby and the vaudevilles were hushed in absence and silence. So the happy winter time went by; and the howling winds brought no rheumatism with them, and even the tax-gatherer himself, looking in at this earthly paradise, departed without a curse when he left his little paper behind him.

Now and then, at long intervals, the outer world intruded itself in the form of a letter.

Regina wrote, always with the same placid affection; always entering into the same minute narrative of the slow progress of "dear uncle's" return to health. He was forbidden to exert himself in any way. His nerves were in a

state of lamentable irritability. "I dare not even mention your name to him, dear Amelius; it seems, I cannot think why, to make him--oh, so unreasonably angry. I can only submit, and pray that he may soon be himself again." Amelius wrote back, always in the same considerate and gentle tone; always laying the blame of his dull letters on the studious uniformity of his life. He preserved, with a perfectly easy conscience, the most absolute silence on the subject of Sally. While he was faithful to Regina, what reason had he to reproach himself with the protection that he offered to a poor motherless girl? When he was married, he might mention the circumstances under which he had met with Sally, and leave the rest to his wife's sympathy.

One morning, the letters with the Paris post-mark were varied by a few lines from Rufus.

"Every morning, my bright boy, I get up and say to myself, 'Well! I reckon it's about time to take the route for London;' and every morning, if you'll believe me, I put it off till next day. Whether it's in the good feeding (expensive, I admit; but when your cook helps you to digest instead of hindering you, a man of my dyspeptic nation is too grateful to complain)--or whether it's in the air, which reminds me, I do assure you, of our native atmosphere at Coolspring, Mass., is more than I can tell, with a hard steel pen on a leaf of flimsy paper. You have heard the saying, 'When a good American dies, he goes to Paris'. Maybe, sometimes, he's smart enough to discount his own death, and rationally enjoy the future time in the present. This you see is a poetic light. But, mercy be praised, the moral of my residence in Paris is plain:--If I can't go to Amelius, Amelius must come to me. Note the address Grand Hotel; and pack up, like a good boy, on receipt of this. Memorandum: The brown Miss is here. I saw her taking the air in a carriage, and raised my hat. She looked the other way.

"British--eminently British! But, there, I bear no malice; I am her most obedient servant, and yours affectionately, RUFUS.--Postscript: I want you to see some of our girls at this hotel. The genuine American material, sir, perfected by Worth."

Another morning brought with it a few sad lines from Phoebe. "After what had happened, she was quite unable to face her friends; she had no heart to seek employment in her own country--her present life was too dreary and too hopeless to be endured. A benevolent lady had made her an offer to accompany a party of emigrants to New Zealand; and she had accepted the proposal. Perhaps, among the new people, she might recover her self-respect and her spirits, and live to be a better woman. Meanwhile, she bade Mr.

Goldenheart farewell; and asked his pardon for taking the liberty of wishing him happy with Miss Regina."

Amelius wrote a few kind lines to Phoebe, and a cordial reply to Rufus, making the pursuit of his studies his excuse for remaining in London. After this, there was no further correspondence. The mornings succeeded each other, and the postman brought no more news from the world outside.

But the lessons went on; and the teacher and pupil were as inconsiderately happy as ever in each other's society. Observing with inexhaustible interest the progress of the mental development of Sally, Amelius was slow to perceive the physical development which was unobtrusively keeping pace with it. He was absolutely ignorant of the part which his own influence was taking in the gradual and delicate process of change. Ere long, the first forewarnings of the coming disturbance in their harmless relations towards each other, began to show themselves. Ere long, there were signs of a troubled mind in Sally, which were mysteries to Amelius, and subjects of wonderment, sometimes even trials of temper, to the girl herself.

One day, she looked in from the door of her room, in her white dressing-gown, and asked to be forgiven if she kept the lessons of the morning waiting for a little while.

"Come in," said Amelius, "and tell me why."

She hesitated. "You won't think me lazy, if you see me in my dressing-gown?"

"Of course not! Your dressing-gown, my dear, is as good as any other gown. A young girl like you looks best in white."

She came in with her work-basket, and her indoor dress over her arm.

Amelius laughed. "Why haven't you put it on?" he asked.

She sat down in a corner, and looked at her work-basket, instead of looking at Amelius. "It doesn't fit me so well as it did," she answered. "I am obliged to alter it."

Amelius looked at her--at the charming youthful figure that had filled out, at the softly-rounded outline of the face with no angles and hollows in it now. "Is it the dressmaker's fault?" he asked slyly.

Her eyes were still on the basket. "It's my fault," she said. "You remember what a poor little skinny creature I was, when you first saw me. I--you won't like me the worse for it, will you?--I am getting fat. I don't know why. They say happy people get fat. Perhaps that's why. I'm never hungry, and never frightened, and never miserable now--" She stopped; her dress slipped from her lap to the floor. "Don't look at me!" she said--and suddenly put her hands over her face.

Amelius saw the tears finding their way through the pretty plump fingers, which he remembered so shapeless and so thin. He crossed the room, and touched her gently on the shoulder. "My dear child! have I said anything to distress you?"

"Nothing."

"Then why are you crying?"

"I don't know." She hesitated; looked at him; and made a desperate effort to tell him what was in her mind. "I'm afraid you'll get tired of me. There's nothing about me to make you pity me now. You seem to be--not quite the same--no! it isn't that--I don't know what's come to me--I'm a greater fool than ever. Give me my lesson, Amelius! please give me my lesson!"

Amelius produced the books, in some little surprise at Sally's extraordinary anxiety to begin her lessons, while the unaltered dress lay neglected on the carpet at her feet. A discreet abstract of the history of England, published for the use of young persons, happened to be at the top of the books. The system of education under Amelius recognized the laws of chance: they began with the history, because it turned up first. Sally read aloud; and Sally's master explained obscure passages, and corrected occasional errors of pronunciation, as she went on. On that particular morning, there was little to explain and nothing to correct. "Am I doing it well today?" Sally inquired, on reaching the end of her task.

"Very well, indeed."

She shut the book, and looked at her teacher. "I wonder how it is," she resumed, "that I get on so much better with my lessons here than I did at the Home? And yet it's foolish of me to wonder. I get on better, because you are teaching me, of course. But I don't feel satisfied with myself. I'm the same helpless creature--I feel your kindness, and can't make any return to you--for all my learning. I should like--" She left the thought in her unexpressed, and opened her copy-book. "I'll do my writing now," she said,

in a quiet resigned way. "Perhaps I may improve enough, some day, to keep your accounts for you." She chose her pen a little absently, and began to write. Amelius looked over her shoulder, and laughed; she was writing his name. He pointed to the copper-plate copy on the top line, presenting an undeniable moral maxim, in characters beyond the reach of criticism:--Change Is A Law Of Nature. "There, my dear, you are to copy that till you're tired of it," said the easy master; "and then we'll try overleaf, another copy beginning with letter D."

Sally laid down her pen. "I don't like 'Change is a law of Nature'," she said, knitting her pretty eyebrows into a frown. "I looked at those words yesterday, and they made me miserable at night. I was foolish enough to think that we should always go on together as we go on now, till I saw that copy. I hate the copy! It came to my mind when I was awake in the dark, and it seemed to tell me that we were going to change some day. That's the worst of learning--one knows too much, and then there's an end of one's happiness. Thoughts come to you, when you don't want them. I thought of the young lady we saw last week in the park."

She spoke gravely and sadly. The bright contentment which had given a new charm to her eyes since she had been at the cottage, died out of them as Amelius looked at her. What had become of her childish manner and her artless smile? He drew his chair nearer to her. "What young lady do you mean?" he asked.

Sally shook her head, and traced lines with her pen on the blotting paper. "Oh, you can't have forgotten her! A young lady, riding on a grand white horse. All the people were admiring her. I wonder you cared to look at me, after that beautiful creature had gone by. Ah, she knows all sorts of things that I don't--she doesn't sound a note at a time on the piano, and as often as not the wrong one; she can say her multiplication table, and knows all the cities in the world. I dare say she's almost as learned as you are. If you had her living here with you, wouldn't you like it better than only having me!" She dropped her arms on the table, and laid her head on them wearily. "The dreadful streets!" she murmured, in low tones of despair. "Why did I think of the dreadful streets, and the night I met with you--after I had seen the young lady? Oh, Amelius, are you tired of me? are you ashamed of me?" She lifted her head again, before he could answer, and controlled herself by a sudden effort of resolution. "I don't know what's the matter with me this morning," she said, looking at him with a pleading fear in her eyes. "Never mind my nonsense--I'll do the copy!" She began to write the unendurable assertion that change is a law of Nature, with trembling fingers and fast heaving breath. Amelius took the pen gently out of her hand. His voice

faltered as he spoke to her.

"We will give up the lessons for today, Sally. You have had a bad night's rest, my dear, and you are feeling it--that's all. Do you think you are well enough to come out with me, and try if the air will revive you a little?"

She rose, and took his hand, and kissed it. "I believe, if I was dying, I should get well enough to go out with you! May I ask one little favour? Do you mind if we don't go into the park today?"

"What has made you take a dislike to the park, Sally?"

"We might meet the beautiful young lady again," she answered, with her head down. "I don't want to do that."

"We will go wherever you like, my child. You shall decide--not I."

She gathered up her dress from the floor, and hurried away to her room--without looking back at him as usual when she opened the door.

Left by himself, Amelius sat at the table, mechanically turning over the lesson-books. Sally had perplexed and even distressed him. His capacity to preserve the harmless relations between them, depended mainly on the mute appeal which the girl's ignorant innocence unconsciously addressed to him. He felt this vaguely, without absolutely realizing it. By some mysterious process of association which he was unable to follow, a saying of the wise Elder Brother at Tadmor revived in his memory, while he was trying to see his way through the difficulties that beset him. "You will meet with many temptations, Amelius, when you leave our Community," the old man had said at parting; "and most of them will come to you through women. Be especially on your guard, my son, if you meet with a woman who makes you feel truly sorry for her. She is on the high-road to your passions, through the open door of your sympathies--and all the more certainly if she is not aware of it herself." Amelius felt the truth expressed in those words as he had never felt it yet. There had been signs of a changing nature in Sally for some little time past. But they had expressed themselves too delicately to attract the attention of a man unprepared to be on the watch. Only on that morning, they had been marked enough to force themselves on his notice. Only on that morning, she had looked at him, and spoken to him, as she had never looked or spoken before. He began dimly to see the danger for both of them, to which he had shut his eyes thus far. Where was the remedy? what ought he to do? Those questions came naturally into his mind--and yet, his mind shrank from pursuing them.

He got up impatiently, and busied himself in putting away the lesson-books--a small duty hitherto always left to Toff.

It was useless; his mind dwelt persistently on Sally.

While he moved about the room, he still saw the look in her eyes, he still heard the tone of her voice, when she spoke of the young lady in the park. The words of the good physician whom he had consulted about her recurred to his memory now. "The natural growth of her senses 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." And then the doctor had spoken of nourishing food, pure air, and careful treatment--of the life, in short, which she had led at the cottage--and had predicted that she would develop into "an intelligent and healthy young woman." Again he asked himself, "What ought I to do?"

He turned aside to the window, and looked out. An idea occurred to him. How would it be, if he summoned courage enough to tell her that he was engaged to be married?

No! Setting aside his natural dread of the shock that he might inflict on the poor grateful girl who had only known happiness under his care, the detestable obstacle of Mr. Farnaby stood immovably in his way. Sally would be sure to ask questions about his engagement, and would never rest until they were answered. It had been necessarily impossible to conceal her mother's name from her. The discovery of her father, if she heard of Regina and Regina's uncle, would be simply a question of time. What might such a man be not capable of doing, what new act of treachery might he not commit, if he found himself claimed by the daughter whom he had deserted? Even if the expression of Mrs. Farnaby's last wishes had not been sacred to Amelius, this consideration alone would have kept him silent, for Sally's sake.

He now doubted for the first time if he had calculated wisely in planning to trust Sally's sad story, after his marriage, to the sympathies of his wife. The jealousy that she might naturally feel of a young girl, who was an object of interest to her husband, did not present the worst difficulty to contend with. She believed in her uncle's integrity as she believed in her religion. What would she say, what would she do, if the innocent witness to Farnaby's infamy was presented to her; if Amelius asked the protection for Sally which her own father had refused to her in her infancy; and if he said, as he must say, "Your uncle is the man"?

And yet, what prospect could he see but the prospect of making the disclosure when he looked to his own interests next, and thought of his wedding day? Again the sinister figure of Farnaby confronted him. How could he receive the wretch whom Regina would innocently welcome to the house? There would be no longer a choice left; it would be his duty to himself to tell his wife the terrible truth. And what would be the result? He recalled the whole course of his courtship, and saw Farnaby always on a level with himself in Regina's estimation. In spite of his natural cheerfulness, in spite of his inbred courage, his heart failed him, when he thought of the time to come.

As he turned away from the window, Sally's door opened: she joined him, ready for the walk. Her spirits had rallied, assisted by the cheering influence of dressing to go out. Her charming smile brightened her face. In sheer desperation, reckless of what he did or said, Amelius held out both hands to welcome her. "That's right, Sally!" he cried. "Look pleased and pretty, my dear; let's be happy while we can--and let the future take care of itself!"

CHAPTER 6

The capricious influences which combine to make us happy are never so certain to be absent influences as when we are foolish enough to talk about them. Amelius had talked about them. When he and Sally left the cottage, the road which led them away from the park was also the road which led them past a church. The influences of happiness left them at the church door.

Rows of carriages were in waiting; hundreds of idle people were assembled about the church steps; the thunderous music of the organ rolled out through the open doors--a grand wedding, with choral service, was in course of celebration. Sally begged Amelius to take her in to see it. They tried the front entrance, and found it impossible to get through the crowd. A side entrance, and a fee to a verger, succeeded better. They obtained space enough to stand on, with a view of the altar.

The bride was a tall buxom girl, splendidly dressed: she performed her part in the ceremony with the most unruffled composure. The bridegroom exhibited an instructive spectacle of aged Nature, sustained by Art. His hair, his complexion, his teeth, his breast, his shoulders, and his legs, showed what the wig-maker, the valet, the dentist, the tailor, and the hosier can do for a rich old man, who wishes to present a juvenile appearance while he is buying a young wife. No less than three clergymen were present, conducting the sale. The demeanour of the rich congregation was worthy of the glorious bygone days of the Golden Calf. So far as could be judged by appearances, one old lady, in a pew close to the place at which Amelius and Sally were standing, seemed to be the only person present who was not favourably impressed by the ceremony.

"I call it disgraceful," the old lady remarked to a charming young person seated next to her.

But the charming young person--being the legitimate product of the present time--had no more sympathy with questions of sentiment than a Hottentot. "How can you talk so, grandmamma!" she rejoined. "He has twenty thousand a year--and that lucky girl will be mistress of the most splendid house in London."

"I don't care," the old lady persisted; "it's not the less a disgrace to everybody concerned in it. There is many a poor friendless creature, driven by hunger

to the streets, who has a better claim to our sympathy than that shameless girl, selling herself in the house of God! I'll wait for you in the carriage--I won't see any more of it."

Sally touched Amelius. "Take me out!" she whispered faintly.

He supposed that the heat in the church had been too much for her. "Are you better now?" he asked, when they got into the open air.

She held fast by his arm. "Let's get farther away," she said. "That lady is coming after us--I don't want her to see me again. I am one of the creatures she talked about. Is the mark of the streets on me, after all you have done to rub it out?"

The wild misery in her words presented another development in her character which was entirely new to Amelius. "My dear child," he remonstrated, "you distress me when you talk in that way. God knows the life you are leading now."

But Sally's mind was still full of its own acutely painful sense of what the lady had said. "I saw her," she burst out--"I saw her look at me while she spoke!"

"And she thought you better worth looking at than the bride--and quite right, too!" Amelius rejoined. "Come, come, Sally, be like yourself. You don't want to make me unhappy about you, I am sure?"

He had taken the right way with her: she felt that simple appeal, and asked his pardon with all the old charm in her manner and her voice. For the moment, she was "Simple Sally" again. They walked on in silence. When they had lost sight of the church, Amelius felt her hand beginning to tremble on his arm. A mingled expression of tenderness and anxiety showed itself in her blue eyes as they looked up at him. "I am thinking of something else now," she said; "I am thinking of You. May I ask you something?"

Amelius smiled. The smile was not reflected as usual in Sally's face. "It's nothing particular," she explained in an odd hurried way; "the church put it into my head. You--" She hesitated, and tried it under another form. "Will you be married yourself, Amelius, one of these days?"

He did his best to evade the question. "I am not rich, Sally, like the old gentleman we have just seen."

Her eyes turned away from him; she sighed softly to herself. "You will be married some day," she said. "Will you do one kind thing more for me, Amelius, when I die? You remember my reading in the newspaper of the new invention for burning the dead--and my asking you about it. You said you thought it was better than burying, and you had a good mind to leave directions to be burnt instead of buried, when your time came. When my time has come, will you leave other directions about yourself, if I ask you?"

"My dear, you are talking in a very strange way! If you will have it that I am to be married some day, what has that to do with your death?"

"It doesn't matter, Amelius. When I have nothing left to live for, I suppose it's as likely as not I may die. Will you tell them to bury me in some quiet place, away from London, where there are very few graves? And when you leave your directions, don't say you are to be burnt. Say--when you have lived a long, long life, and enjoyed all the happiness you have deserved so well--say you are to be buried, and your grave is to be near mine. I should like to think of the same trees shading us, and the same flowers growing over us. No! don't tell me I'm talking strangely again--I can't bear it; I want you to humour me and be kind to me about this. Do you mind going home? I'm feeling a little tired--and I know I'm poor company for you today."

The talk flagged at dinner-time, though Toff did his best to keep it going.

In the evening, the excellent Frenchman made an effort to cheer the two dull young people. He came in confidentially with his fiddle, and said he had a favour to ask. "I possess some knowledge, sir, of the delightful art of dancing. Might I teach young Miss to dance? You see, if I may venture to say so, the other lessons--oh, most useful, most important, the other lessons! but they are just a little serious. Something to relieve her mind, sir--if you will forgive me for mentioning it. I plead for innocent gaiety--let us dance!"

He played a few notes on the fiddle, and placed his right foot in position, and waited amiably to begin. Sally thanked him, and made the excuse that she was tired. She wished Amelius good night, without waiting until they were alone together--and, for the first time, without giving him the customary kiss.

Toff waited until she had gone, and approached his master on tiptoe, with a low bow.

"May I take the liberty of expressing an opinion, sir. A young girl who rejects the remedy of the fiddle presents a case of extreme gravity. Don't despair,

sir! It is my pride and pleasure to be never at a loss, where your interests are concerned. This is, I think, a matter for the ministrations of a woman. If you have confidence in my wife, I venture to suggest a visit from Madame Toff."

He discreetly retired, and left his master to think about it.

The time passed--and Amelius was still thinking, and still as far as ever from arriving at a conclusion, when he heard a door opened behind him. Sally crossed the room before he could rise from his chair: her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were bright, her hair fell loose over her shoulders--she dropped at his feet, and hid her face on his knees. "I'm an ungrateful wretch!" she burst out; "I never kissed you when I said good night."

With the best intentions, Amelius took the worst possible way of composing her--he treated her trouble lightly. "Perhaps you forgot it?" he said.

She lifted her head, and looked at him, with the tears in her eyes. "I'm bad enough," she answered; "but not so bad as that. Oh, don't laugh! there's nothing to laugh at. Have you done with liking me? Are you angry with me for behaving so badly all day, and bidding you good night as if you were Toff? You shan't be angry with me!" She jumped up, and sat on his knee, and put her arms round his neck. "I haven't been to bed," she whispered; "I was too miserable to go to sleep. I don't know what's been the matter with me today. I seem to be losing the little sense I ever had. Oh, if I could only make you understand how fond I am of you! And yet I've had bitter thoughts, as if I was a burden to you, and I had done a wrong thing in coming here--and you would have told me so, only you pitied the poor wretch who had nowhere else to go." She tightened her hold round his neck, and laid her burning cheek against his face. "Oh, Amelius, my heart is sore! Kiss me, and say, 'Good night, Sally!'"

He was young--he was a man--for a moment he lost his self control; he kissed her as he had never kissed her yet.

Then, he remembered; he recovered himself; he put her gently away from him, and led her to the door of her room, and closed it on her in silence. For a little while, he waited alone. The interval over, he rang for Toff.

"Do you think your wife would take Miss Sally as an apprentice?" he asked.

Toff looked astonished. "Whatever you wish, sir, my wife will do. Her knowledge of the art of dressmaking is--" Words failed him to express his

wife's immense capacity as a dressmaker. He kissed his hand in mute enthusiasm, and blew the kiss in the direction of Madame Toff's establishment. "However," he proceeded, "I ought to tell you one thing, sir; the business is small, small, very small. But we are all in the hands of Providence--the business will improve, one day." He lifted his shoulders and lifted his eyebrows, and looked perfectly satisfied with his wife's prospects.

"I will go and speak to Madame Toff myself, tomorrow morning," Amelius resumed. "It's quite possible that I may be obliged to leave London for a little while--and I must provide in some way for Miss Sally. Don't say a word about it to her yet, Toff, and don't look miserable. If I go away, I shall take you with me. Good night."

Toff, with his handkerchief halfway to his eyes, recovered his native cheerfulness. "I am invariably sick at sea, sir," he said; "but, no matter, I will attend you to the uttermost ends of the earth."

So honest Amelius planned his way of escape from the critical position in which he found himself. He went to his bed, troubled by anxieties which kept him waking for many weary hours. Where was he to go to, when he left Sally? If he could have known what had happened, on that very day, on the other side of the Channel, he might have decided (in spite of the obstacle of Mr. Farnaby) on surprising Regina by a visit to Paris.

CHAPTER 7

On the morning when Amelius and Sally (in London) entered the church to look at the wedding. Rufus (in Paris) went to the Champs Elysees to take a walk.

He had advanced half-way up the magnificent avenue, when he saw Regina for the second time, taking her daily drive, with an elderly woman in attendance on her. Rufus took off his hat again, perfectly impenetrable to the cold reception which he had already experienced. Greatly to his surprise, Regina not only returned his salute, but stopped the carriage and beckoned to him to speak to her. Looking at her more closely, he perceived signs of suffering in her face which completely altered her expression as he remembered it. Her magnificent eyes were dim and red; she had lost her rich colour; her voice trembled as she spoke to him.

"Have you a few minutes to spare?" she asked.

"The whole day, if you like, Miss," Rufus answered.

She turned to the woman who accompanied her. "Wait here for me, Elizabeth; I have something to say to this gentleman."

With those words, she got out of the carriage. Rufus offered her his arm. She put her hand in it as readily as if they had been old friends. "Let us take one of the side paths," she said; "they are almost deserted at this time of day. I am afraid I surprise you very much. I can only trust to your kindness to forgive me for passing you without notice the last time we met. Perhaps it may be some excuse for me that I am in great trouble. It is just possible you may be able to relieve my mind. I believe you know I am engaged to be married?"

Rufus looked at her with a sudden expression of interest. "Is this about Amelius?" he asked.

She answered him almost inaudibly--"Yes."

Rufus still kept his eyes fixed on her. "I don't wish to say anything, Miss," he explained; "but, if you have any complaint to make of Amelius, I should take it as a favour if you would look me straight in the face, and mention it plainly."

In the embarrassment which troubled Regina at that moment, he had preferred the two requests of all others with which it was most impossible for her to comply. She still looked obstinately on the ground; and, instead of speaking of Amelius, she diverged to the subject of Mr. Farnaby's illness.

"I am staying in Paris with my uncle," she said. "He has had a long illness; but he is strong enough now to speak to me of things that have been on his mind for some time past. He has so surprised me; he has made me so miserable about Amelius--" She paused, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. Rufus said nothing to console her--he waited doggedly until she was ready to go on. "You know Amelius well," she resumed; "you are fond of him; you believe in him, don't you? Do you think he is capable of behaving basely to any person who trusts him? Is it likely, is it possible, he could be false and cruel to Me?"

The mere question roused the indignation of Rufus. "Whoever said that of him, Miss, told you a lie! I answer for my boy as I answer for myself."

She looked at him at last, with a sudden expression of relief. "I said so too," she rejoined; "I said some enemy had slandered him. My uncle won't tell me who it is. He positively forbids me to write to Amelius; he tells me I must never see Amelius again--he is going to write and break off the engagement. Oh, it's too cruel! too cruel!"

Thus far they had been walking on slowly. But now Rufus stopped, determined to make her speak plainly.

"Take a word of advice from me, Miss," he said. "Never trust anybody by halves. There's nothing I'm not ready to do, to set this matter right; but I must know what I'm about first. What's said against Amelius? Out with it, no matter what 'tis! I'm old enough to be your father; and I feel for you accordingly--I do."

The thorough sincerity of tone and manner which accompanied those words had its effect. Regina blushed and trembled--but she spoke out.

"My uncle says Amelius has disgraced himself, and insulted me; my uncle says there is a person--a girl living with him--" She stopped, with a faint cry of alarm. Her hand, still testing on the arm of Rufus, felt him start as the allusion to the girl passed her lips. "You have heard of it!" she cried. "Oh, God help me, it's true!"

"True?" Rufus repeated, with stern contempt. "What's come to you? Haven't I told you already, it's a lie? I'll answer to it, Amelius is true to you. Will that do? No? You're an obstinate one, Miss--that you are. Well! it's due to the boy that I should set him right with you, if words will do it. You know how he's been brought up at Tadmor? Bear that in mind--and now you shall have the truth of it, on the word of an honest man."

Without further preface, he told her how Amelius had met with Sally, insisting strongly on the motives of pure humanity by which his friend had been actuated. Regina listened with an obstinate expression of distrust which would have discouraged most men. Rufus persisted, nevertheless; and, to some extent at least, succeeded in producing the right impression. When he reached the close of the narrative--when he asserted that he had himself seen Amelius confide the girl unreservedly to the care of a lady who was a dear and valued friend of his own; and when he declared that there had been no after-meeting between them and no written correspondence--then, at last, Regina owned that he had not encouraged her to trust in the honour of Amelius, without reason to justify him. But, even under these circumstances, there was a residue of suspicion still left in her mind. She asked for the name of the lady to whose benevolent assistance Amelius had been indebted. Rufus took out one of his cards, and wrote Mrs. Payson's name and address on it.

"Your nature, my dear, is not quite so confiding as I could have wished to see it," he said, quietly handing her the card. "But we can't change our natures--can we? And you're not bound to believe a man like me, without witnesses to back him. Write to Mrs. Payson, and make your mind easy. And, while we are about it, tell me where I can telegraph to you tomorrow--I'm off to London by the night mail."

"Do you mean, you are going to see Amelius?

"That is so. I'm too fond of Amelius to let this trouble rest where 'tis now. I've been away from him, here in Paris, for some little time--and you may tell me (and quite right, too) I can't answer for what may have been going on in my absence. No! now we are about it, we'll have it out. I mean to see Amelius and see Mrs. Payson, tomorrow morning. Just tell your uncle to hold his hand, before he breaks off your marriage, and wait for a telegram from me. Well? and this is your address, is it? I know the hotel. A nice look-out on the Twillery Gardens--but a bad cellar of wine, as I hear. I'm at the Grand Hotel myself, if there's anything else that troubles you before evening. Now I look at you again, I reckon there's something more to be said, if you'll only let it find its way to your tongue. No; it ain't thanks. We'll take the gratitude for

granted, and get to what's behind it. There's your carriage--and the good lady looks tired of waiting. Well, now?"

"It's only one thing," Regina acknowledged, with her eyes on the ground again. "Perhaps, when you go to London, you may see the--"

"The girl?"

"Yes."

"It's not likely. Say I do see her--what then?"

Regina's colour began to show itself again. "If you do see her," she said, "I beg and entreat you won't speak of me in her hearing. I should die of the shame of it, if she thought herself asked to give him up out of pity for me. Promise I am not to be brought forward; promise you won't even mention my having spoken to you about it. On your word of honour!"

Rufus gave her his promise, without showing any hesitation, or making any remark. But when she shook hands with him, on returning to the carriage, he held her hand for a moment. "Please to excuse me, Miss, if I ask one question," he said, in tones too low to be heard by any other person. "Are you really fond of Amelius?"

"I am surprised you should doubt it," she answered; "I am more--much more than fond of him!"

Rufus handed her silently into the carriage, "Fond of him, are you?" he thought, as he walked away by himself. "I reckon it's a sort of fondness that don't wear well, and won't stand washing."

CHAPTER 8

Early the next morning, Rufus rang at the cottage gate.

"Well, Mr. Frenchman, and how do you git along? And how's Amelius?"

Toff, standing before the gate, answered with the utmost respect, but showed no inclination to let the visitor in.

"Amelius has his intervals of laziness," Rufus proceeded; "I bet he's in bed!"

"My young master was up and dressed an hour ago, sir--he has just gone out."

"That is so, is it? Well, I'll wait till he comes back." He pushed by Toff, and walked into the cottage. "Your foreign ceremonies are clean thrown away on me," he said, as Toff tried to stop him in the hall. "I'm the American savage; and I'm used up with travelling all night. Here's a little order for you: whisky, bitters, lemon, and ice--I'll take a cocktail in the library."

Toff made a last desperate effort to get between the visitor and the door. "I beg your pardon, sir, a thousand times; I must most respectfully entreat you to wait--"

Before he could explain himself, Rufus, with the most perfect good humour, pulled the old man out of his way. "What's troubling this venerable creature's mind--" he inquired of himself, "does he think I don't know my way in?"

He opened the library door--and found himself face to face with Sally. She had risen from her chair, hearing voices outside, and hesitating whether to leave the room or not. They confronted each other, on either side of the table, in silent dismay. For once Rufus was so completely bewildered, that he took refuge in his customary form of greeting before he was aware of it himself.

"How do you find yourself, Miss? I take pleasure in renewing our acquaintance,--Thunder! that's not it; I reckon I'm off my head. Do me the favour, young woman, to forget every word I've said to you. If any mortal creature had told me I should find you here, I should have said 'twas a lie--and I should have been the liar. That makes a man feel bad, I can tell you.

No! don't slide off, if you please, into the next room--that won't set things right, nohow. Sit you down again. Now I'm here, I have something to say. I'll speak first to Mr. Frenchman. Listen to this, old sir. If I happen to want a witness standing in the doorway, I'll ring the bell; for the present I can do without you. Bong Shewer, as we say in your country." He proceeded to shut the door on Toff and his remonstrances.

"I protest, sir, against acts of violence, unworthy of a gentleman!" cried Toff, struggling to get back again.

"Be as angry as you please in the kitchen," Rufus answered, persisting in closing the door; "I won't have a noise up here. If you know where your master is, go and fetch him--and the sooner the better." He turned back to Sally, and surveyed her for a while in terrible silence. She was afraid to look at him; her eyes were on the book which she had been reading when he came in. "You look to me," Rufus remarked, "as if you had been settled here for a time. Never mind your book now; you can go back to your reading after we've had a word or two together first." He reached out his long arm, and pulled the book to his own side of the table. Sally innocently silenced him for the second time. He opened the book, and discovered--the New Testament.

"It's my lesson, if you please, sir. I'm to learn it where the pencil mark is, before Amelius comes back." She offered her poor little explanation, trembling with terror. In spite of himself, Rufus began to look at her less sternly.

"So you call him 'Amelius', do you?" he said. "I note that, Miss, as an unfavourable sign to begin with. How long, if you please, has Amelius turned schoolmarm, for your young ladyship's benefit? Don't you understand? Well, you're not the only inhabitant of Great Britain who don't understand the English language. I'll put it plainer. When I last saw Amelius, you were learning your lessons at the Home. What ill wind, Miss, blew you in here? Did Amelius fetch you, or did you come of your own accord, without waiting to be whistled for?" He spoke coarsely but not ill-humouredly. Sally's pretty downcast face was pleading with him for mercy, and (as he felt, with supreme contempt for himself) was not altogether pleading in vain. "If I guessed that you ran away from the home," he resumed, "should I guess right?"

She answered with a sudden accession of confidence. "Don't blame Amelius," she said; "I did run away. I couldn't live without him."

"You don't know how you can live, young one, till you've tried the experiment. Well, and what did they do at the Home? Did they send after you, to fetch you back?"

"They wouldn't take me back--they sent my clothes here after me."

"Ah, those were the rules, I reckon. I begin to see my way to the end of it now. Amelius gave you house-room?"

She looked at him proudly. "He gave me a room of my own," she said.

His next question was the exact repetition of the question which he had put to Regina in Paris. The only variety was in the answer that he received.

"Are you fond of Amelius?"

"I would die for him!"

Rufus had hitherto spoken, standing. He now took a chair.

"If Amelius had not been brought up at Tadmor," he said, "I should take my hat, and wish you good morning. As things are, a word more may be a word in season. Your lessons here seem to have agreed with you, Miss. You're a different sort of girl to what you were when I last saw you."

She surprised him by receiving that remark in silence. The colour left her face. She sighed bitterly. The sigh puzzled Rufus: he held his opinion of her in suspense, until he had heard more.

"You said just now you would die for Amelius," he went on, eyeing her attentively. "I take that to be a woman's hysterical way of mentioning that she feels interest in Amelius. Are you fond enough of him to leave him, if you could only be persuaded that leaving him was for his good?"

She abruptly left the table, and went to the window. When her back was turned to Rufus, she spoke. "Am I a disgrace to him?" she asked, in tones so faint that he could barely hear them. "I have had my fears of it, before now."

If he had been less fond of Amelius, his natural kindness of heart might have kept him silent. Even as it was, he made no direct reply. "You remember how you were living when Amelius first met with you?" was all he said.

The sad blue eyes looked at him in patient sorrow; the low sweet voice answered--"Yes." Only a look and a word--only the influence of an instant--and, in that instant, Rufus's last doubts of her vanished!

"Don't think I say it reproachfully, my child! I know it was not your fault; I know you are to be pitied, and not blamed."

She turned her face towards him--pale, quiet, and resigned. "Pitied, and not blamed," she repeated. "Am I to be forgiven?"

He shrank from answering her. There was silence.

"You said just now," she went on, "that I looked like a different girl, since you last saw me. I am a different girl. I think of things that I never thought of before--some change, I don't know what, has come over me. Oh, my heart does hunger so to be good! I do so long to deserve what Amelius has done for me! You have got my book there--Amelius gave it to me; we read in it every day. If Christ had been on earth now, is it wrong to think that Christ would have forgiven me?"

"No, my dear; it's right to think so."

"And, while I live, if I do my best to lead a good life, and if my last prayer to God is to take me to heaven, shall I be heard?"

"You will be heard, my child, I don't doubt it. But, you see, you have got the world about you to reckon with--and the world has invented a religion of its own. There's no use looking for it in this book of yours. It's a religion with the pride of property at the bottom of it, and a veneer of benevolent sentiment at the top. It will be very sorry for you, and very charitable towards you: in short, it will do everything for you except taking you back again."

She had her answer to that. "Amelius has taken me back again," she said.

"Amelius has taken you back again," Rufus agreed. "But there's one thing he's forgotten to do; he has forgotten to count the cost. It seems to be left to me to do that. Look here, my girl! I own I doubted you when I first came into this room; and I'm sorry for it, and I beg your pardon. I do believe you're a good girl--I couldn't say why if I was asked, but I do believe it for all that. I wish there was no more to be said--but there is more; and neither you nor I must shirk it. Public opinion won't deal as tenderly with you as I do; public opinion will make the worst of you, and the worst of Amelius. While you're

living here with him--there's no disguising it--you're innocently in the way of the boy's prospects in life. I don't know whether you understand me?"

She had turned away from him; she was looking out of the window once more.

"I understand you," she answered. "On the night when Amelius met with me, he did wrong to take me away with him. He ought to have left me where I was."

"Wait a bit! that's as far from my meaning as far can be. There's a look-out for everybody; and, if you'll trust me, I'll find a look-out for you."

She paid no heed to what he said: her next words showed that she was pursuing her own train of thought.

"I am in the way of his prospects in life," she resumed. "You mean that he might be married some day, but for me?"

Rufus admitted it cautiously. "The thing might happen," was all he said.

"And his friends might come and see him," she went on; her face still turned away, and her voice sinking into dull subdued tones. "Nobody comes here now. You see I understand you. When shall I go away? I had better not say good-bye, I suppose?--it would only distress him. I could slip out of the house, couldn't I?"

Rufus began to feel uneasy. He was prepared for tears--but not for such resignation as this. After a little hesitation, he joined her at the window. She never turned towards him; she still looked out straight before her; her bright young face had turned pitiably rigid and pale. He spoke to her very gently; advising her to think of what he had said, and to do nothing in a hurry. She knew the hotel at which he stayed when he was in London; and she could write to him there. If she decided to begin a new life in another country, he was wholly and truly at her service. He would provide a passage for her in the same ship that took him back to America. At his age, and known as he was in his own neighbourhood, there would be no scandal to fear. He could get her reputably and profitably employed, in work which a young girl might undertake. "I'll be as good as a father to you, my poor child," he said, "don't think you're going to be friendless, if you leave Amelius. I'll see to that! You shall have honest people about you--and innocent pleasure in your new life."

She thanked him, still with the same dull tearless resignation. "What will

the honest people say," she asked, "when they know who I am?"

"They have no business to know who you are--and they shan't know it."

"Ah! it comes back to the same thing," she said. "You must deceive the honest people, or you can do nothing for me. Amelius had better have left me where I was! I disgraced nobody, I was a burden to nobody, there. Cold and hunger and ill-treatment can sometimes be merciful friends, in their way. If I had been left to them, they would have laid me at rest by this time." She turned to Rufus, before he could speak to her. "I'm not ungrateful, sir; I'll think of it, as you say; and I'll do all that a poor foolish creature can do, to be worthy of the interest you take in me." She lifted her hand to her head, with a momentary expression of pain. "I've got a dull kind of aching here," she said; "it reminds me of my old life, when I was sometimes beaten on the head. May I go and lie down a little, by myself?"

Rufus took her hand, and pressed it in silence. She looked back at him as she opened the door of her room. "Don't distress Amelius," she said; "I can bear anything but that."

Left alone in the library, Rufus walked restlessly to and fro, driven by a troubled mind. "I was bound to do it," he thought; "and I ought to be satisfied with myself. I'm not satisfied. The world is hard on women--and the rights of property is a darned bad reason for it!"

The door from the hall was suddenly thrown open. Amelius entered the room. He looked flushed and angry--he refused to take the hand that Rufus offered to him.

"What's this I hear from Toff? It seems that you forced your way in when Sally was here. There are limits to the liberties that a man may take in his friend's house."

"That's true," said Rufus quietly. "But when a man hasn't taken liberties, there don't seem much to be said. Sally was at the Home, when I last saw you--and nobody told me I should find her in this room."

"You might have left the room, when you found her here. You have been talking to her. If you have said anything about Regina--"

"I have said nothing about Miss Regina. You have a hot temper of your own, Amelius. Wait a bit, and let it cool."

"Never mind my temper. I want to know what you have been saying to Sally. Stop! I'll ask Sally herself." He crossed the room to the inner door, and knocked. "Come in here, my dear; I want to speak to you."

The answer reached him faintly through the door. "I have got a bad headache, Amelius. Please let me rest a little." He turned back to Rufus, and lowered his voice. But his eyes flashed; he was more angry than ever.

"You had better go," he said. "I can guess how you have been talking to her--I know what her headache means. Any man who distresses that dear little affectionate creature is a man whom I hold as my enemy. I spit upon all the worldly considerations which pass muster with people like you! No sweeter girl than poor Sally ever breathed the breath of life. Her happiness is more precious to me than words can say. She is sacred to me! And I have just proved it--I have just come from a good woman, who will teach her an honest way of earning her bread. Not a breath of scandal shall blow on her. If you, or any people like you, think I will consent to cast her adrift on the world, or consign her to a prison under the name of a Home, you little know my nature and my principles. Here"--he snatched up the New Testament from the table, and shook it at Rufus--"here are my principles, and I'm not ashamed of them!"

Rufus took up his hat.

"There's one thing you'll be ashamed of, my son, when you're cool enough to think about it," he said; "you'll be ashamed of the words you have spoken to a friend who loves you. I'm not a bit angry myself. You remind me of that time on board the steamer, when the quarter-master was going to shoot the bird. You made it up with him--and you'll come to my hotel and make it up with me. And then we'll shake hands, and talk about Sally. If it's not taking another liberty, I'll trouble you for a light." He helped himself to a match from the box on the chimney-piece, lit his cigar, and left the room.

He had not been gone half an hour, before the better nature of Amelius urged him to follow Rufus and make his apologies. But he was too anxious about Sally to leave the cottage, until he had seen her first. The tone in which she had answered him, when he knocked at her door, suggested, to his sensitive apprehension, that there was something more serious the matter with her than a mere headache. For another hour, he waited patiently, on the chance that he might hear her moving in her room. Nothing happened. No sound reached his ears, except the occasional rolling of carriage-wheels on the road outside.

His patience began to fail him, as the second hour moved on. He went to the door, and listened, and still heard nothing. A sudden dread struck him that she might have fainted. He opened the door a few inches, and spoke to her. There was no answer. He looked in. The room was empty.

He ran into the hall, and called to Toff. Was she, by any chance, downstairs? No. Or out in the garden? No. Master and man looked at each other in silence. Sally was gone.

CHAPTER 9

Toff was the first who recovered himself.

"Courage, sir!" he said. "With a little thinking, we shall see the way to find her. That rude American man, who talked with her this morning, may be the person who has brought this misfortune on us."

Amelius waited to hear no more. There was the chance, at least, that something might have been said which had induced her to take refuge with Rufus. He ran back to the library to get his hat.

Toff followed his master, with another suggestion. "One word more, sir, before you go. If the American man cannot help us, we must be ready to try another way. Permit me to accompany you as far as my wife's shop. I propose that she shall come back here with me, and examine poor little Miss's bedroom. We will wait, of course, for your return, before anything is done. In the mean time, I entreat you not to despair. It is at least possible that the means of discovery may be found in the bedroom."

They went out together, taking the first cab that passed them. Amelius proceeded alone to the hotel.

Rufus was in his room. "What's gone wrong?" he asked, the moment Amelius opened the door. "Shake hands, my son, and smother up that little trouble between us in silence. Your face alarms me--it does! What of Sally?"

Amelius started at the question. "Isn't she here?" he asked.

Rufus drew back. The mere action said, No, before he answered in words.

"Have you seen nothing of her? heard nothing of her?"

"Nothing. Steady, now! Meet it like a man; and tell me what has happened."

Amelius told him in two words. "Don't suppose I'm going to break out again as I did this morning," he went on; "I'm too wretched and too anxious to be angry. Only tell me, Rufus, have you said anything to her--?"

Rufus held up his hand. "I see what you're driving at. It will be more to the purpose to tell you what she said to me. From first to last, Amelius, I spoke

kindly to her, and I did her justice. Give me a minute to rummage my memory." After brief consideration, he carefully repeated the substance of what had passed between Sally and himself, during the latter part of the interview between them. "Have you looked about in her room?" he inquired, when he had done. "There might be a trifling something to help you, left behind her there."

Amelius told him of Toff's suggestion. They returned together at once to the cottage. Madame Toff was waiting to begin the search.

The first discovery was easily made. Sally had taken off one or two little trinkets--presents from Amelius, which she was in the habit of wearing--and had left them, wrapped up in paper, on the dressing-table. No such thing as a farewell letter was found near them. The examination of the wardrobe came next--and here a startling circumstance revealed itself. Every one of the dresses which Amelius had presented to her was hanging in its place. They were not many; and they had all, on previous occasions, been passed in review by Toff's wife. She was absolutely certain that the complete number of the dresses was there in the bedroom. Sally must have worn something, in place of her new clothes. What had she put on?

Looking round the room, Amelius noticed in a corner the box in which he had placed the first new dress that he had purchased for Sally, on the morning after they had met. He tried to open the box: it was locked--and the key was not to be found. The ever-ready Toff fetched a skewer from the kitchen, and picked the lock in two minutes. On lifting the cover, the box proved to be empty.

The one person present who understood what this meant was Amelius.

He remembered that Sally had taken her old threadbare clothes away with her in the box, when the angry landlady had insisted on his leaving the house. "I want to look at them sometimes," the poor girl had said, "and think how much better off I am now." In those miserable rags she had fled from the cottage, after hearing the cruel truth. "He had better have left me where I was," she had said. "Cold and hunger and ill-treatment would have laid me at rest by this time." Amelius fell on his knees before the empty box, in helpless despair. The conclusion that now forced itself on his mind completely unmanned him. She had gone back, in the old dress, to die under the cold, the hunger, and the horror of the old life.

Rufus took his hand, and spoke to him kindly. He rallied, and dashed the tears from his eyes, and rose to his feet. "I know where to look for her," was

all he said; "and I must do it alone." He refused to enter into any explanation, or to be assisted by any companion. "This is my secret and hers," he answered, "Go back to your hotel, Rufus--and pray that I may not bring news which will make a wretched man of you for the rest of your life." With that he left them.

In another hour he stood once more on the spot at which he and Sally had met.

The wild bustle and uproar of the costermongers' night market no longer rioted round him: the street by daylight was in a state of dreary repose. Slowly pacing up and down, from one end to another, he waited with but one hope to sustain him--the hope that she might have taken refuge with the two women who had been her only friends in the dark days of her life. Ignorant of the place in which they lived, he had no choice but to wait for the appearance of one or other of them in the street. He was quiet and resolved. For the rest of the day, and for the whole of the night if need be, his mind was made up to keep steadfastly on the watch.

When he could walk no longer, he obtained rest and refreshment in the cookshop which he remembered so well; sitting on a stool near the window, from which he could still command a view of the street. The gas-lamps were alight, and the long winter's night was beginning to set in, when he resumed his weary march from end to end of the pavement. As the darkness became complete, his patience was rewarded at last. Passing the door of a pawnbroker's shop, he met one of the women face to face, walking rapidly, with a little parcel under her arm.

She recognized him with a cry of joyful surprise.

"Oh, sir, how glad I am to see you, to be sure! You've come to look after Sally, haven't you? Yes, yes; she's safe in our poor place--but in such a dreadful state. Off her head! clean off her head! Talks of nothing but you. 'I'm in the way of his prospects in life.' Over and over and over again, she keeps on saying that. Don't be afraid; Jenny's at home, taking care of her. She wants to go out. Hot and wild, with a kind of fever on her, she wants to go out. She asked if it rained. 'The rain may kill me in these ragged clothes,' she says; 'and then I shan't be in the way of his prospects in life.' We tried to quiet her by telling her it didn't rain--but it was no use; she was as eager as ever to go out. 'I may get another blow on the bosom,' she says; 'and, maybe, it will fall on the right place this time.' No! there's no fear of the brute who used to beat her--he's in prison. Don't ask to see her just yet, sir; please don't! I'm afraid you would only make her worse, if I took you to her now; I

wouldn't dare to risk it. You see, we can't get her to sleep; and we thought of buying something to quiet her at the chemist's. Yes, sir, it would be better to get a doctor to her. But I wasn't going to the doctor. If I must tell you, I was obliged to take the sheets off the bed, to raise a little money--I was going to the pawnbroker's." She looked at the parcel under her arm, and smiled. "I may take the sheets back again, now I've met with you; and there's a good doctor lives close by--I can show you the way to him. Oh how pale you do look! Are you very much tired? It's only a little way to the doctor. I've got an arm at your service--but you mightn't like to be seen waiting with such a person as me."

Mentally and physically, Amelius was completely prostrated. The woman's melancholy narrative had overwhelmed him: he could neither speak nor act. He mechanically put his purse in her hand, and went with her to the house of the nearest medical man.

The doctor was at home, mixing drugs in his little surgery. After one sharp look at Amelius, he ran into a back parlour, and returned with a glass of spirits. "Drink this, sir," he said--"unless you want to find yourself on the floor in a fainting fit. And don't presume again on your youth and strength to treat your heart as if it was made of cast-iron." He signed to Amelius to sit down and rest himself, and turned to the woman to hear what was wanted of him. After a few questions, he said she might go; promising to follow her in a few minutes, when the gentleman would be sufficiently recovered to accompany him.

"Well, sir, are you beginning to feel like yourself again?" He was mixing a composing draught, while he addressed Amelius in those terms. "You may trust that poor wretch, who has just left us, to take care of the sick girl," he went on, in the quaintly familiar manner which seemed to be habitual with him. "I don't ask how you got into her company--it's no business of mine. But I am pretty well acquainted with the people in my neighbourhood; and I can tell you one thing, in case you're anxious. The woman who brought you here, barring the one misfortune of her life, is as good a creature as ever breathed; and the other one who lives with her is the same. When I think of what they're exposed to--well! I take to my pipe, and compose my mind in that way. My early days were all passed as a ship's surgeon. I could get them both respectable employment in Australia, if I only had the money to fit them out. They'll die in the hospital, like the rest, if something isn't done for them. In my hopeful moments, I sometimes think of a subscription. What do you say? Will you put down a few shillings to set the example?"

"I will do more than that," Amelius answered. "I have reasons for wishing to

befriend both those two poor women; and I will gladly engage to find the outfit."

The familiar old doctor held out his hand over the counter. "You're a good fellow, if ever there was one yet!" he burst out. "I can show references which will satisfy you that I am not a rogue. In the mean time, let's see what is the matter with this little girl; you can tell me about her as we go along." He put his bottle of medicine in his pocket, and his arm in the arm of Amelius--and so led the way out.

When they reached the wretched lodging-house in which the women lived, he suggested that his companion would do well to wait at the door. "I'm used to sad sights: it would only distress you to see the place. I won't keep you long waiting."

He was as good as his word. In little more than ten minutes, he joined Amelius again in the street.

"Don't alarm yourself," he said. "The case is not so serious as it looks. The poor child is suffering under a severe shock to the brain and nervous system, caused by that sudden and violent distress you hinted at. My medicine will give her the one thing she wants to begin with--a good night's sleep."

Amelius asked when she would be well enough to see him.

"Ah, my young friend, it's not so easy to say, just yet! I could answer you to better purpose tomorrow. Won't that do? Must I venture on a rash opinion? She ought to be composed enough to see you in three or four days. And, when that time comes, it's my belief you will do more than I can do to set her right again."

Amelius was relieved, but not quite satisfied yet. He inquired if it was not possible to remove her from that miserable place.

"Quite impossible--without doing her serious injury. They have got money to go on with; and I have told you already, she will be well taken care of. I will look after her myself tomorrow morning. Go home, and get to bed, and eat a bit of supper first, and make your mind easy. Come to my house at twelve o'clock, noon, and you will find me ready with my references, and my report of the patient. Surgeon Pinfold, Blackacre Buildings; there's the address. Good night."

CHAPTER 10

After Amelius had left him, Rufus remembered his promise to communicate with Regina by telegraph.

With his strict regard for truth, it was no easy matter to decide on what message he should send. To inspire Regina, if possible, with his own unshaken belief in the good faith of Amelius, appeared, on reflection, to be all that he could honestly do, under present circumstances. With an anxious and foreboding mind, he despatched his telegram to Paris in these terms:-- "Be patient for a while, and do justice to A. He deserves it."

Having completed his business at the telegraph-office, Rufus went next to pay his visit to Mrs. Payson.

The good lady received him with a grave face and a distant manner, in startling contrast to the customary warmth of her welcome. "I used to think you were a man in a thousand," she began abruptly; "and I find you are no better than the rest of them. If you have come to speak to me about that blackguard young Socialist, understand, if you please, that I am not so easily imposed upon as Miss Regina. I have done my duty; I have opened her eyes to the truth, poor thing. Ah, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Rufus kept his temper, with his habitual self-command. "It's possible you may be right," he said quietly; "but the biggest rascal living has a claim to an explanation, when a lady puzzles him. Have you any particular objection, old friend, to tell me what you mean?"

The explanation was not of a nature to set his mind at ease.

Regina had written, by the mail which took Rufus to England, repeating to Mrs. Payson what had passed at the interview in the Champs Elysees, and appealing to her sympathy for information and advice. Receiving the letter that morning, Mrs. Payson, acting on her own generous and compassionate impulses, had already answered it, and sent it to the post. Her experience of the unfortunate persons received at the Home was far from inclining her to believe in the innocence of a runaway girl, placed under circumstances of temptation. As an act of justice towards Regina, she enclosed to her the letter in which Amelius had acknowledged that Sally had passed the night under his roof.

"I believe I am only telling you the shameful truth," Mrs. Payson had written, "when I add that the girl has been an inmate of Mr. Goldenheart's cottage ever since. If you can reconcile this disgraceful state of things, with Mr. Rufus Dingwell's assertion of his friend's fidelity to his marriage-engagement, I have no right, and no wish, to make any attempt to alter your opinion. But you have asked for my advice, and I must not shrink from giving it. I am bound as an honest woman, to tell you that your uncle's resolution to break off the engagement represents the course that I should have taken myself, if a daughter of my own had been placed in your painful and humiliating position."

There was still ample time to modify this strong expression of opinion by the day's post. Rufus appealed vainly to Mrs. Payson to reconsider the conclusion at which she had arrived. A more charitable and considerate woman, within the limits of her own daily routine, it would not be possible to find. But the largeness of mind which, having long and trustworthy experience of a rule, can nevertheless understand that other minds may have equal experience of the exception to the rule, was one of the qualities which had not been included in the moral composition of Mrs. Payson. She held firmly to her own narrowly conscientious sense of her duty; stimulated by a natural indignation against Amelius, who had bitterly disappointed her--against Rufus, who had not scrupled to take up his defence. The two old friends parted in coldness, for the first time in their lives.

Rufus returned to his hotel, to wait there for news from Amelius.

The day passed--and the one visitor who enlivened his solitude was an American friend and correspondent, connected with the agency which managed his affairs in England. The errand of this gentleman was to give his client the soundest and speediest advice, relating to the investment of money. Having indicated the safe and solid speculation, the visitor added a warning word, relating to the plausible and dangerous investments of the day. "For instance," he said, "there's that bank started by Farnaby--"

"No need to warn me against Farnaby," Rufus interposed; "I wouldn't take shares in his bank if he made me a present of them."

The American friend looked surprised. "Surely," he exclaimed, "you can't have heard the news already! They don't even know it yet on the Stock Exchange."

Rufus explained that he had only spoken under the influence of personal prejudice against Mr. Farnaby.

"What's in the wind now?" he asked.

He was confidentially informed that a coming storm was in the wind: in other words, that a serious discovery had been made at the bank. Some time since, the directors had advanced a large sum of money to a man in trade, under Mr. Farnaby's own guarantee. The man had just died; and examination of his affairs showed that he had only received a few hundred pounds, on condition of holding his tongue. The bulk of the money had been traced to Mr. Farnaby himself, and had all been swallowed up by his newspaper, his patent medicine, and his other rotten speculations, apart from his own proper business. "You may not know it," the American friend concluded, "but the fact is, Farnaby rose from the dregs. His bankruptcy is only a question of time--he will drop back to the dregs; and, quite possibly, make his appearance to answer a criminal charge in a court of law. I hear that Melton, whose credit has held up the bank lately, is off to see his friend in Paris. They say Farnaby's niece is a handsome girl, and Melton is sweet on her. Awkward for Melton."

Rufus listened attentively. In signing the order for his investments, he privately decided to stir no further, for the present, in the matter of his young friend's marriage-engagement.

For the rest of the day and evening, he still waited for Amelius, and waited in vain. It was drawing near to midnight, when Toff made his appearance with a message from his master. Amelius had discovered Sally, and had returned in such a state of fatigue that he was only fit to take some refreshment, and to go to his bed. He would be away from home again, on the next morning; but he hoped to call at the hotel in the course of the day. Observing Toff's face with grave and steady scrutiny, Rufus tried to extract some further information from him. But the old Frenchman stood on his dignity, in a state of immovable reserve.

"You took me by the shoulder this morning, sir, and spun me round," he said; "I do not desire to be treated a second time like a teetotum. For the rest, it is not my habit to intrude myself into my master's secrets."

"It's not my habit," Rufus coolly rejoined, "to bear malice. I beg to apologise sincerely, sir, for treating you like a teetotum; and I offer you my hand."

Toff had got as far as the door. He instantly returned, with the dignity which a Frenchman can always command in the serious emergencies of his life. "You appeal to my heart and my honour, sir," he said. "I bury the events of

the morning in oblivion; and I do myself the honour of taking your hand."

As the door closed on him, Rufus smiled grimly. "You're not in the habit of intruding yourself into your master's secrets," he repeated. "If Amelius reads your face as I read it, he'll look over his shoulder when he goes out tomorrow--and, ten to one, he'll see you behind him in the distance!"

Late on the next day, Amelius presented himself at the hotel. In speaking of Sally, he was unusually reserved, merely saying that she was ill, and under medical care, and then changing the subject. Struck by the depressed and anxious expression of his face, Rufus asked if he had heard from Regina. No: a longer time than usual had passed since Regina had written to him. "I don't understand it," he said sadly. "I suppose you didn't see anything of her in Paris?"

Rufus had kept his promise not to mention Regina's name in Sally's presence. But it was impossible for him to look at Amelius, without plainly answering the question put to him, for the sake of the friend whom he loved. "I'm afraid there's trouble coming to you, my son, from that quarter." With those warning words, he described all that had passed between Regina and himself. "Some unknown enemy of yours has spoken against you to her uncle," he concluded. "I suppose you have made enemies, my poor old boy, since you have been in London?"

"I know the man," Amelius answered. "He wanted to marry Regina before I met with her. His name is Melton."

Rufus started. "I heard only yesterday, he was in Paris with Farnaby. And that's not the worst of it, Amelius. There's another of them making mischief--a good friend of mine who has shown a twist in her temper, that has taken me by surprise after twenty years' experience of her. I reckon there's a drop of malice in the composition of the best woman that ever lived--and the men only discover it when another woman steps in, and stirs it up. Wait a bit!" he went on, when he had related the result of his visit to Mrs. Payson. "I have telegraphed to Miss Regina to be patient, and to trust you. Don't you write to defend yourself, till you hear how you stand in her estimation, after my message. Tomorrow's post may tell."

Tomorrow's post did tell.

Two letters reached Amelius from Paris. One from Mr. Farnaby, curt and insolent, breaking off the marriage-engagement. The other, from Regina, expressed with great severity of language. Her weak nature, like all weak

natures, ran easily into extremes, and, once roused into asserting itself, took refuge in violence as a shy person takes refuge in audacity. Only a woman of larger and firmer mind would have written of her wrongs in a more just and more moderate tone.

Regina began without any preliminary form of address. She had no heart to upbraid Amelius, and no wish to speak of what she was suffering, to a man who had but too plainly shown that he had no respect for himself, and neither love, nor pity even, for her. In justice to herself, she released him from his promise, and returned his letters and his presents. Her own letters might be sent in a sealed packet, addressed to her at her uncle's place of business in London. She would pray that he might be brought to a sense of the sin that he had committed, and that he might yet live to be a worthy and a happy man. For the rest, her decision was irrevocable. His own letter to Mrs. Payson condemned him--and the testimony of an old and honoured friend of her uncle proved that his wickedness was no mere act of impulse, but a deliberate course of infamy and falsehood, continued over many weeks. From the moment when she made that discovery, he was a stranger to her--and she now bade him farewell.

"Have you written to her?" Rufus asked, when he had seen the letters.

Amelius reddened with indignation. He was not aware of it himself--but his look and manner plainly revealed that Regina had lost her last hold on him. Her letter had inflicted an insult--not a wound: he was outraged and revolted; the deeper and gentler feelings, the emotions of a grieved and humiliated lover, had been killed in him by her stern words of dismissal and farewell.

"Do you think I would allow myself to be treated in that way, without a word of protest?" he said to Rufus. "I have written, refusing to take back my promise. 'I declare, on my word of honour, that I have been faithful to you and to my engagement'--that was how I put it--'and I scorn the vile construction which your uncle and his friend have placed upon an act of Christian mercy on my part.' I wrote more tenderly, before I finished my letter; feeling for her distress, and being anxious above all things not to add to it. We shall see if she has love enough left for me to trust my faith and honour, instead of trusting false appearances. I will give her time."

Rufus considerately abstained from expressing any opinion. He waited until the morning when a reply might be expected from Paris; and then he called at the cottage.

Without a word of comment, Amelius put a letter into his friend's hand. It was his own letter to Regina returned to him. On the back of it, there was a line in Mr. Farnaby's handwriting:--"If you send any more letters they will be burnt unopened." In those insolent terms the wretch wrote with bankruptcy and exposure hanging over his head.

Rufus spoke plainly upon this. "There's an end of it now," he said. "That girl would never have made the right wife for you, Amelius: you're well out of it. Forget that you ever knew these people; and let us talk of something else. How is Sally?"

At that ill-timed inquiry, Amelius showed his temper again. He was in a state of nervous irritability which made him apt to take offence, where no offence was intended. "Oh, you needn't be alarmed!" he answered petulantly; "there's no fear of the poor child coming back to live with me. She is still under the doctor's care."

Rufus passed over the angry reply without notice, and patted him on the shoulder. "I spoke of the girl," he said, "because I wanted to help her; and I can help her, if you will let me. Before long, my son, I shall be going back to the United States. I wish you would go with me!"

"And desert Sally!" cried Amelius.

"Nothing of the sort! Before we go, I'll see that Sally is provided for to your satisfaction. Will you think of it, to please me?"

Amelius relented. "Anything, to please you," he said.

Rufus noticed his hat and gloves on the table, and left him without saying more. "The trouble with Amelius," he thought, as he closed the cottage gate, "is not over yet."

CHAPTER 11

The day on which worthy old Surgeon Pinfold had predicted that Sally would be in a fair way of recovery had come and gone; and still the medical report to Amelius was the same:--"You must be patient, sir; she is not well enough to see you yet."

Toff, watching his young master anxiously, was alarmed by the steadily progressive change in him for the worse, which showed itself at this time. Now sad and silent, and now again bitter and irritable, he had deteriorated physically as well as morally, until he really looked like the shadow of his former self. He never exchanged a word with his faithful old servant, except when he said mechanically, "good morning" or "good night." Toff could endure it no longer. At the risk of being roughly misinterpreted, he followed his own kindly impulse, and spoke. "May I own to you, sir," he said, with perfect gentleness and respect, "that I am indeed heartily sorry to see you so ill?"

Amelius looked up at him sharply. "You servants always make a fuss about trifles. I am a little out of sorts; and I want a change--that's all. Perhaps I may go to America. You won't like that; I shan't complain if you look out for another situation."

The tears came into the old man's eyes. "Never!" he answered fervently. "My last service, sir, if you send me away, shall be my dearly loved service here."

All that was most tender in the nature of Amelius was touched to the quick. "Forgive me, Toff," he said; "I am lonely and wretched, and more anxious about Sally than words can tell. There can be no change in my life, until my mind is easy about that poor little girl. But if it does end in my going to America, you shall go with me--I wouldn't lose you, my good friend, for the world."

Toff still remained in the room, as if he had something left to say. Entirely ignorant of the marriage engagement between Amelius and Regina, and of the rupture in which it had ended, he vaguely suspected nevertheless that his master might have fallen into an entanglement with some lady unknown. The opportunity of putting the question was now before him. He risked it in a studiously modest form.

"Are you going to America to be married, sir?"

Amelius eyed him with a momentary suspicion. "What has put that in your head?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," Toff answered humbly--"unless it was my own vivid imagination. Would there be anything very wonderful in a gentleman of your age and appearance conducting some charming person to the altar?"

Amelius was conquered once more; he smiled faintly. "Enough of your nonsense, Toff! I shall never be married--understand that."

Toff's withered old face brightened slyly. He turned away to withdraw; hesitated; and suddenly went back to his master.

"Have you any occasion for my services, sir, for an hour or two?" he asked.

"No. Be back before I go out, myself--be back at three o'clock."

"Thank you, sir. My little boy is below, if you want anything in my absence."

The little boy dutifully attending Toff to the gate, observed with grave surprise that his father snapped his fingers gaily at starting, and hummed the first bars of the Marseillaise. "Something is going to happen," said Toff's boy, on his way back to the house.

From the Regent's Park to Blackacre Buildings is almost a journey from one end of London to the other. Assisted for part of the way by an omnibus, Toff made the journey, and arrived at the residence of Surgeon Pinfold, with the easy confidence of a man who knew thoroughly well where he was going, and what he was about. The sagacity of Rufus had correctly penetrated his intentions; he had privately followed his master, and had introduced himself to the notice of the surgeon--with a mixture of motives, in which pure devotion to the interests of Amelius played the chief part. His experience of the world told him that Sally's departure was only the beginning of more trouble to come. "What is the use of me to my master," he had argued, "except to spare him trouble, in spite of himself?"

Surgeon Pinfold was prescribing for a row of sick people, seated before him on a bench. "You're not ill, are you?" he said sharply to Toff. "Very well, then, go into the parlour and wait."

The patients being dismissed, Toff attempted to explain the object of his visit. But the old naval surgeon insisted on clearing the ground by means of

a plain question first. "Has your master sent you here--or is this another private interview, like the last?"

"It is all that is most private," Toff answered; "my poor master is wasting away in unrelieved wretchedness and suspense. Something must be done for him. Oh, dear and good sir, help me in this most miserable state of things! Tell me the truth about Miss Sally!"

Old Pinfold put his hands in his pockets and leaned against the parlour wall, looking at the Frenchman with a complicated expression, in which genuine sympathy mingled oddly with a quaint sense of amusement. "You're a worthy chap," he said; "and you shall have the truth. I have been obliged to deceive your master about this troublesome young Sally; I have stuck to it that she is too ill to see him, or to answer his letters. Both lies. There's nothing the matter with her now, but a disease that I can't cure, the disease of a troubled mind. She's got it into her head that she has everlastingly degraded herself in his estimation by leaving him and coming here. It's no use telling her--what, mind you, is perfectly true--that she was all but out of her senses, and not in the least responsible for what she did at the time when she did it. She holds to her own opinion, nevertheless. 'What can he think of me, but that I have gone back willingly to the disgrace of my old life? I should throw myself out of the window, if he came into the room!' That's how she answers me--and, what makes matters worse still, she's breaking her heart about him all the time. The poor wretch is so eager for any little word of news about his health and his doings, that it's downright pitiable to see her. I don't think her fevered little brain will bear it much longer--and hang me if I can tell what to do next to set things right! The two women, her friends, have no sort of influence over her. When I saw her this morning, she was ungrateful enough to say, 'Why didn't you let me die?' How your master got among these unfortunate people is more than I know, and is no business of mine; I only wish he had been a different sort of man. Before I knew him as well as I know him now, I predicted, like a fool, that he would be just the person to help us in managing the girl. I have altered my opinion. He's such a glorious fellow--so impulsive and so tender-hearted--that he would be certain, in her present excited state, to do her more harm than good. Do you know if he is going to be married?"

Toff, listening thus far in silent distress, suddenly looked up.

"Why do you ask me, sir?"

"It's an idle question, I dare say," old Pinfold remarked. "Sally persists in telling us she's in the way of his prospects in life--and it's got somehow into

her perverse little head that his prospects in life mean his marriage, and she's in the way of that.--Hullo! are you going already?"

"I want to go to Miss Sally, sir. I believe I can say something to comfort her. Do you think she will see me?"

"Are you the man who has got the nickname of Toff? She sometimes talks about Toff."

"Yes, sir, yes! I am Theophile Leblond, otherwise Toff. Where can I find her?"

Surgeon Pinfold rang a bell. "My errand-boy is going past the house, to deliver some medicine," he answered. "It's a poor place; but you'll find it neat and nice enough--thanks to your good master. He's helping the two women to begin life again out of this country; and, while they're waiting their turn to get a passage, they've taken an extra room and hired some decent furniture, by your master's own wish. Oh, here's the boy; he'll show you the way. One word before you go. What do you think of saying to Sally?"

"I shall tell her, for one thing, sir, that my master is miserable for want of her."

Surgeon Pinfold shook his head. "That won't take you very far on the way to persuading her. You will make her miserable too--and there's about all you will get by it."

Toff lifted his indicative forefinger to the side of his nose. "Suppose I tell her something else, sir? Suppose I tell her my master is not going to be married to anybody?"

"She won't believe you know anything about it."

"She will believe, for this reason," said Toff, gravely; "I put the question to my master before I came here; and I have it from his own lips that there is no young lady in the way, and that he is not--positively not--going to be married. If I tell Miss Sally this, sir, how do you say it will end? Will you bet me a shilling it has no effect on her?"

"I won't bet a farthing! Follow the boy--and tell young Sally I have sent her a better doctor than I am."

While Toff was on his way to Sally, Toff's boy was disturbing Amelius by the announcement of a visitor. The card sent in bore this inscription: "Brother

Bawkwell, from Tadmor."

Amelius looked at the card; and ran into the hall to receive the visitor, with both hands held out in hearty welcome. "Oh, I am so glad to see you!" he cried. "Come in, and tell me all about Tadmor!"

Brother Bawkwell acknowledged the enthusiastic reception offered to him by a stare of grim surprise. He was a dry, hard old man, with a scrubby white beard, a narrow wrinkled forehead, and an obstinate lipless mouth; fitted neither by age nor temperament to be the intimate friend of any of his younger brethren among the Community. But, at that saddest time of his life, the heart of Amelius warmed to any one who reminded him of his tranquil and happy days at Tadmor. Even this frozen old Socialist now appeared to him, for the first time, under the borrowed aspect of a welcome friend.

Brother Bawkwell took the chair offered to him, and opened the proceedings, in solemn silence, by looking at his watch. "Twenty-five minutes past two," he said to himself--and put the watch back again.

"Are you pressed for time?" Amelius asked.

"Much may be done in ten minutes," Brother Bawkwell answered, in a Scotch accent which had survived the test of half a lifetime in America. "I would have you know I am in England on a mission from the Community, with a list of twenty-seven persons in all, whom I am appointed to confer with on matters of varying importance. Yours, friend Amelius, is a matter of minor importance. I can give you ten minutes."

He opened a big black pocket-book, stuffed with a mass of letters; and, placing two of them on the table before him, addressed Amelius as if he was making a speech at a public meeting.

"I have to request your attention to certain proceedings of the Council at Tadmor, bearing date the third of December last; and referring to a person under sentence of temporary separation from the Community, along with yourself--"

"Mellicent!" Amelius exclaimed.

"We have no time for interruptions," Brother Bawkwell remarked. "The person is Sister Mellicent; and the business before the Council was to consider a letter, under her signature, received December second. Said

letter," he proceeded, taking up one of his papers, "is abridged as follows by the Secretary to the Council. In substance, the writer states (first): 'That the married sister under whose protection she has been living at New York is about to settle in England with her husband, appointed to manage the branch of his business established in London. (Second): That she, meaning Sister Mellicent, has serious reasons for not accompanying her relatives to England, and has no other friends to take charge of her welfare, if she remains in New York. (Third): That she appeals to the mercy of the Council, under these circumstances, to accept the expression of her sincere repentance for the offence of violating a Rule, and to permit a friendless and penitent creature to return to the only home left to her, her home at Tadmor.' No, friend Amelius--we have no time for expressions of sympathy; the first half of the ten minutes has nearly expired. I have further to notify you that the question was put to the vote, in this form: 'Is it consistent with the serious responsibility which rests on the Council, to consider the remission of any sentence justly pronounced under the Book of Rules?' The result was very remarkable; the votes for and against being equally divided. In this event, as you know, our laws provide that the decision rests with the Elder Brother--who gave his vote thereupon for considering the remission of the sentence; and moved the next resolution that the sentence be remitted accordingly. Carried by a small majority. Whereupon, Sister Mellicent was received again at Tadmor."

"Ah, the dear old Elder Brother," cried Amelius--"always on the side of mercy!"

Brother Bawkwell held up his hand in protest. "You seem to have no idea," he said, "of the value of time. Do be quiet! As travelling representative of the Council, I am further instructed to say, that the sentence pronounced against yourself stands duly remitted, in consequence of the remission of the sentence against Sister Mellicent. You likewise are free to return to Tadmor, at your own will and pleasure. But--attend to what is coming, friend Amelius!--the Council holds to its resolution that your choice between us and the world shall be absolutely unbiased. In the fear of exercising even an indirect influence, we have purposely abstained from corresponding with you. With the same motive we now say, that if you do return to us, it must be with no interference on our part. We inform you of an event that has happened in your absence--and we do no more."

He paused, and looked again at his watch. Time proverbially works wonders. Time closed his lips.

Amelius replied with a heavy heart. The message from the Council had

recalled him from the remembrance of Mellicent to the sense of his own position. "My experience of the world has been a very hard one," he said. "I would gladly go back to Tadmor this very day, but for one consideration--" He hesitated; the image of Sally was before him. The tears rose in his eyes; he said no more.

Brother Bawkwell, driven hard by time, got on his legs, and handed to Amelius the second of the two papers which he had taken out of his pocket-book.

"Here is a purely informal document," he said; "being a few lines from Sister Mellicent, which I was charged to deliver to you. Be pleased to read it as quickly as you can, and tell me if there is any reply."

There was not much to read:--"The good people here, Amelius, have forgiven me and let me return to them. I am living happily now, dear, in my remembrances of you. I take the walks that we once took together--and sometimes I go out in the boat on the lake, and think of the time when I told you my sad story. Your poor little pet creatures are under my care; the dog, and the fawn, and the birds--all well, and waiting for you, with me. My belief that you will come back to me remains the same unshaken belief that it has been from the first. Once more I say it--you will find me the first to welcome you, when your spirits are sinking under the burden of life, and your heart turns again to the friends of your early days. Until that time comes, think of me now and then. Good-bye."

"I am waiting," said Brother Bawkwell, taking his hat in his hand.

Amelius answered with an effort. "Thank her kindly in my name," he said: "that is all." His head drooped while he spoke; he fell into thought as if he had been alone in the room.

But the emissary from Tadmor, warned by the minute-hand on the watch, recalled his attention to passing events. "You would do me a kindness," said Brother Bawkwell, producing a list of names and addresses, "if you could put me in the way of finding the person named, eighth from the top. It's getting on towards twenty minutes to three."

The address thus pointed out was at no great distance, on the northern side of the Regent's Park. Amelius, still silent and thoughtful, acted willingly as a guide. "Please thank the Council for their kindness to me," he said, when they reached their destination. Brother Bawkwell looked at friend Amelius with a calm inquiring eye. "I think you'll end in coming back to us," he said.

"I'll take the opportunity, when I see you at Tadmor, of making a few needful remarks on the value of time."

Amelius went back to the cottage, to see if Toff had returned, in his absence, before he paid his daily visit to Surgeon Pinfold. He called down the kitchen stairs, "Are you there, Toff?" And Toff answered briskly, "At your service, sir."

The sky had become cloudy, and threatened rain. Not finding his umbrella in the hall, Amelius went into the library to look for it. As he closed the door behind him, Toff and his boy appeared on the kitchen stairs; both walking on tiptoe, and both evidently on the watch for something.

Amelius found his umbrella. But it was characteristic of the melancholy change in him that he dropped languidly into the nearest chair, instead of going out at once with the easy activity of happier days. Sally was in his mind again; he was rousing his resolution to set the doctor's commands at defiance, and to insist on seeing her, come what might of it.

He suddenly looked up. A slight sound had startled him.

It was a faint rustling sound; and it came from the sadly silent room which had once been Sally's.

He listened, and heard it again. He sprang to his feet--his heart beat wildly--he opened the door of the room.

She was there.

Her hands were clasped over her fast-heaving breast. She was powerless to look at him, powerless to speak to him--powerless to move towards him, until he opened his arms to her. Then, all the love and all the sorrow in the tender little heart flowed outward to him in a low murmuring cry. She hid her blushing face on his bosom. The rosy colour softly tinged her neck--the unspoken confession of all she feared, and all she hoped.

It was a time beyond words. They were silent in each other's arms.

But under them, on the floor below, the stillness in the cottage was merrily broken by an outburst of dance-music--with a rhythmical thump-thump of feet, keeping time to the cheerful tune. Toff was playing his fiddle; and Toff's boy was dancing to his father's music.

CHAPTER 12

After waiting a day or two for news from Amelius, and hearing nothing, Rufus went to make inquiries at the cottage.

"My master has gone out of town, sir," said Toff, opening the door.

"Where?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Anybody with him?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Any news of Sally?"

"I don't know, sir."

Rufus stepped into the hall. "Look here, Mr. Frenchman, three times is enough. I have already apologized for treating you like a teetotum, on a former occasion. I'm afraid I shall do it again, sir, if I don't get an answer to my next question--my hands are itching to be at you, they are! When is Amelius expected back?"

"Your question is positive, sir," said Toff, with dignity. "I am happy to be able to meet it with a positive reply. My master is expected back in three weeks' time."

Having obtained some information at last, Rufus debated with himself what he should do next. He decided that "the boy was worth waiting for," and that his wisest course (as a good American) would be to go back, and wait in Paris.

Passing through the Garden of the Tuileries, two or three days later, and crossing to the Rue de Rivoli, the name of one of the hotels in that quarter reminded him of Regina. He yielded to the prompting of curiosity, and inquired if Mr. Farnaby and his niece were still in Paris.

The manager of the hotel was in the porter's lodge at the time. So far as he knew, he said, Mr. Farnaby and his niece, and an English gentleman with

them, were now on their travels. They had left the hotel with an appearance of mystery. The courier had been discharged; and the coachman of the hired carriage which took them away had been told to drive straight forward until further orders. In short, as the manager put it, the departure resembled a flight. Remembering what his American agent had told him, Rufus received this information without surprise. Even the apparently incomprehensible devotion of Mr. Melton to the interests of such a man as Farnaby, failed to present itself to him as a perplexing circumstance. To his mind, Mr. Melton's conduct was plainly attributable to a reward in prospect; and the name of that reward was--Miss Regina.

At the end of the three weeks, Rufus returned to London.

Once again, he and Toff confronted each other on the threshold of the door. This time, the genial old man presented an appearance that was little less than dazzling. From head to foot he was arrayed in new clothes; and he exhibited an immense rosette of white ribbon in his button-hole.

"Thunder!" cried Rufus. "Here's Mr. Frenchman going to be married!"

Toff declined to humour the joke. He stood on his dignity as stiffly as ever. "Pardon me, sir, I possess a wife and family already."

"Do you, now? Well--none of your know-nothing answers this time. Has Amelius come back?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what's the news of Sally?"

"Good news, sir. Miss Sally has come back too."

"You call that good news, do you? I'll say a word to Amelius. What are you standing there for? Let me by."

"Pardon me once more, sir. My master and Miss Sally do not receive visitors today."

"Your master and Miss Sally?" Rufus repeated. "Has this old creature been liquoring up a little too freely? What do you mean," he burst out, with a sudden change of tone to stern surprise--"what do you mean by putting your master and Sally together?"

Toff shot his bolt at last. "They will be together, sir, for the rest of their lives. They were married this morning."

Rufus received the blow in dead silence. He turned about, and went back to his hotel.

Reaching his room, he opened the despatch box in which he kept his correspondence, and picked out the long letter containing the description by Amelius of his introduction to the ladies of the Farnaby family. He took up the pen, and wrote the indorsement which has been quoted as an integral part of the letter itself, in the Second Book of this narrative:--

"Ah, poor Amelius! He had better have gone back to Miss Mellicent, and put up with the little drawback of her age. What a bright lovable fellow he was! Goodbye to Goldenheart!"

Were the forebodings of Rufus destined to be fulfilled? This question will be answered, it is hoped, in a Second Series of The Fallen Leaves. The narrative of the married life of Amelius presents a subject too important to be treated within the limits of the present story--and the First Series necessarily finds its end in the culminating event of his life, thus far.

THE END

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