

CHAPTER FOUR--THE GOVERNESS

And the best of it was that the danger was all over already. There was no danger any more. The supposed nephew's appearance had a purpose. He had come, full, full to trembling--with the bigness of his news. There must have been rumours already as to the shaky position of the de Barral's concerns; but only amongst those in the very inmost know. No rumour or echo of rumour had reached the profane in the West-End--let alone in the guileless marine suburb of Hove. The Fynes had no suspicion; the governess, playing with cold, distinguished exclusiveness the part of mother to the fabulously wealthy Miss de Barral, had no suspicion; the masters of music, of drawing, of dancing to Miss de Barral, had no idea; the minds of her medical man, of her dentist, of the servants in the house, of the tradesmen proud of having the name of de Barral on their books, were in a state of absolute serenity. Thus, that fellow, who had unexpectedly received a most alarming straight tip from somebody in the City arrived in Brighton, at about lunch-time, with something very much in the nature of a deadly bomb in his possession. But he knew better than to throw it on the public pavement. He ate his lunch impenetrably, sitting opposite Flora de Barral, and then, on some excuse, closeted himself with the woman whom little Fyne's charity described (with a slight hesitation of speech however) as his "Aunt."

What they said to each other in private we can imagine. She came out of her own sitting-room with red spots on her cheek-bones, which having provoked a question from her "beloved" charge, were accounted for by a curt "I have a headache coming on." But we may be certain that the talk being over she must have said to that young blackguard: "You had better take her out for a ride as usual." We have proof positive of this in Fyne and Mrs. Fyne observing them mount at the door and pass under the windows of their sitting-room, talking together, and the poor girl all smiles; because she enjoyed in all innocence the company of Charley. She made no secret of it whatever to Mrs. Fyne; in fact, she had confided to her, long before, that she liked him very much: a confidence which had filled Mrs. Fyne with desolation and that sense of powerless anguish which is experienced in certain kinds of nightmare. For how could she warn the girl? She did venture to tell her once that she didn't like Mr. Charley. Miss de Barral heard her with astonishment. How was it possible not to like Charley? Afterwards with naive loyalty she told Mrs. Fyne that, immensely as she was fond of her she could not hear a word against Charley--the wonderful Charley.

The daughter of de Barral probably enjoyed her jolly ride with the jolly Charley (infinitely more jolly than going out with a stupid old riding-master), very much indeed, because the Fynes saw them coming back at a later hour than usual. In

fact it was getting nearly dark. On dismounting, helped off by the delightful Charley, she patted the neck of her horse and went up the steps. Her last ride. She was then within a few days of her sixteenth birthday, a slight figure in a riding habit, rather shorter than the average height for her age, in a black bowler hat from under which her fine rippling dark hair cut square at the ends was hanging well down her back. The delightful Charley mounted again to take the two horses round to the mews. Mrs. Fyne remaining at the window saw the house door close on Miss de Barral returning from her last ride.

And meantime what had the governess (out of a nobleman's family) so judiciously selected (a lady, and connected with well-known county people as she said) to direct the studies, guard the health, form the mind, polish the manners, and generally play the perfect mother to that luckless child--what had she been doing? Well, having got rid of her charge by the most natural device possible, which proved her practical sense, she started packing her belongings, an act which showed her clear view of the situation. She had worked methodically, rapidly, and well, emptying the drawers, clearing the tables in her special apartment of that big house, with something silently passionate in her thoroughness; taking everything belonging to her and some things of less unquestionable ownership, a jewelled penholder, an ivory and gold paper knife (the house was full of common, costly objects), some chased silver boxes presented by de Barral and other trifles; but the photograph of Flora de Barral, with the loving inscription, which stood on her writing desk, of the most modern and expensive style, in a silver-gilt frame, she neglected to take. Having accidentally, in the course of the operations, knocked it off on the floor she let it lie there after a downward glance. Thus it, or the frame at least, became, I suppose, part of the assets in the de Barral bankruptcy.

At dinner that evening the child found her company dull and brusque. It was uncommonly slow. She could get nothing from her governess but monosyllables, and the jolly Charley actually snubbed the various cheery openings of his "little chum"--as he used to call her at times,--but not at that time. No doubt the couple were nervous and preoccupied. For all this we have evidence, and for the fact that Flora being offended with the delightful nephew of her profoundly respected governess sulked through the rest of the evening and was glad to retire early. Mrs., Mrs.--I've really forgotten her name--the governess, invited her nephew to her sitting-room, mentioning aloud that it was to talk over some family matters. This was meant for Flora to hear, and she heard it--without the slightest interest. In fact there was nothing sufficiently unusual in such an invitation to arouse in her mind even a passing wonder. She went bored to bed and being tired with her long ride slept soundly all night. Her last sleep, I won't say of innocence--that word would not render my exact meaning, because it has a special meaning of its own--but I will say: of that ignorance, or better still, of that

unconsciousness of the world's ways, the unconsciousness of danger, of pain, of humiliation, of bitterness, of falsehood. An unconsciousness which in the case of other beings like herself is removed by a gradual process of experience and information, often only partial at that, with saving reserves, softening doubts, veiling theories. Her unconsciousness of the evil which lives in the secret thoughts and therefore in the open acts of mankind, whenever it happens that evil thought meets evil courage; her unconsciousness was to be broken into with profane violence with desecrating circumstances, like a temple violated by a mad, vengeful impiety. Yes, that very young girl, almost no more than a child--this was what was going to happen to her. And if you ask me, how, wherefore, for what reason? I will answer you: Why, by chance! By the merest chance, as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important or unimportant; and even things which are neither, things so completely neutral in character that you would wonder why they do happen at all if you didn't know that they, too, carry in their insignificance the seeds of further incalculable chances.

Of course, all the chances were that de Barral should have fallen upon a perfectly harmless, naive, usual, inefficient specimen of respectable governess for his daughter; or on a commonplace silly adventuress who would have tried, say, to marry him or work some other sort of common mischief in a small way. Or again he might have chanced on a model of all the virtues, or the repository of all knowledge, or anything equally harmless, conventional, and middle class. All calculations were in his favour; but, chance being incalculable, he fell upon an individuality whom it is much easier to define by opprobrious names than to classify in a calm and scientific spirit--but an individuality certainly, and a temperament as well. Rare? No. There is a certain amount of what I would politely call unscrupulousness in all of us. Think for instance of the excellent Mrs. Fyne, who herself, and in the bosom of her family, resembled a governess of a conventional type. Only, her mental excesses were theoretical, hedged in by so much humane feeling and conventional reserves, that they amounted to no more than mere libertinage of thought; whereas the other woman, the governess of Flora de Barral, was, as you may have noticed, severely practical--terribly practical. No! Hers was not a rare temperament, except in its fierce resentment of repression; a feeling which like genius or lunacy is apt to drive people into sudden irrelevancy. Hers was feminine irrelevancy. A male genius, a male ruffian, or even a male lunatic, would not have behaved exactly as she did behave. There is a softness in masculine nature, even the most brutal, which acts as a check.

While the girl slept those two, the woman of forty, an age in itself terrible, and that hopeless young "wrong 'un" of twenty-three (also well connected I believe) had some sort of subdued row in the cleared rooms: wardrobes open, drawers half pulled out and empty, trunks locked and strapped, furniture in idle disarray,

and not so much as a single scrap of paper left behind on the tables. The maid, whom the governess and the pupil shared between them, after finishing with Flora, came to the door as usual, but was not admitted. She heard the two voices in dispute before she knocked, and then being sent away retreated at once--the only person in the house convinced at that time that there was "something up."

Dark and, so to speak, inscrutable spaces being met with in life there must be such places in any statement dealing with life. In what I am telling you of now--an episode of one of my humdrum holidays in the green country, recalled quite naturally after all the years by our meeting a man who has been a blue-water sailor--this evening confabulation is a dark, inscrutable spot. And we may conjecture what we like. I have no difficulty in imagining that the woman--of forty, and the chief of the enterprise--must have raged at large. And perhaps the other did not rage enough. Youth feels deeply it is true, but it has not the same vivid sense of lost opportunities. It believes in the absolute reality of time. And then, in that abominable scamp with his youth already soiled, withered like a plucked flower ready to be flung on some rotting heap of rubbish, no very genuine feeling about anything could exist--not even about the hazards of his own unclean existence. A sneering half-laugh with some such remark as: "We are properly sold and no mistake" would have been enough to make trouble in that way. And then another sneer, "Waste time enough over it too," followed perhaps by the bitter retort from the other party "You seemed to like it well enough though, playing the fool with that chit of a girl." Something of that sort. Don't you see it--eh . . . "

Marlow looked at me with his dark penetrating glance. I was struck by the absolute verisimilitude of this suggestion. But we were always tilting at each other. I saw an opening and pushed my uncandid thrust.

"You have a ghastly imagination," I said with a cheerfully sceptical smile.

"Well, and if I have," he returned unabashed. "But let me remind you that this situation came to me unasked. I am like a puzzle-headed chief-mate we had once in the dear old Samarcand when I was a youngster. The fellow went gravely about trying to "account to himself"--his favourite expression--for a lot of things no one would care to bother one's head about. He was an old idiot but he was also an accomplished practical seaman. I was quite a boy and he impressed me. I must have caught the disposition from him."

"Well--go on with your accounting then," I said, assuming an air of resignation.

"That's just it." Marlow fell into his stride at once. "That's just it. Mere disappointed cupidity cannot account for the proceedings of the next morning;

proceedings which I shall not describe to you--but which I shall tell you of presently, not as a matter of conjecture but of actual fact. Meantime returning to that evening altercation in deadened tones within the private apartment of Miss de Barral's governess, what if I were to tell you that disappointment had most likely made them touchy with each other, but that perhaps the secret of his careless, railing behaviour, was in the thought, springing up within him with an emphatic oath of relief "Now there's nothing to prevent me from breaking away from that old woman." And that the secret of her envenomed rage, not against this miserable and attractive wretch, but against fate, accident and the whole course of human life, concentrating its venom on de Barral and including the innocent girl herself, was in the thought, in the fear crying within her "Now I have nothing to hold him with . . . "

I couldn't refuse Marlow the tribute of a prolonged whistle "Phew! So you suppose that . . . "

He waved his hand impatiently.

"I don't suppose. It was so. And anyhow why shouldn't you accept the supposition. Do you look upon governesses as creatures above suspicion or necessarily of moral perfection? I suppose their hearts would not stand looking into much better than other people's. Why shouldn't a governess have passions, all the passions, even that of libertinage, and even ungovernable passions; yet suppressed by the very same means which keep the rest of us in order: early training--necessity--circumstances--fear of consequences; till there comes an age, a time when the restraint of years becomes intolerable--and infatuation irresistible . . . "

"But if infatuation--quite possible I admit," I argued, "how do you account for the nature of the conspiracy."

"You expect a cogency of conduct not usual in women," said Marlow. "The subterfuges of a menaced passion are not to be fathomed. You think it is going on the way it looks, whereas it is capable, for its own ends, of walking backwards into a precipice.

When one once acknowledges that she was not a common woman, then all this is easily understood. She was abominable but she was not common. She had suffered in her life not from its constant inferiority but from constant self-repression. A common woman finding herself placed in a commanding position might have formed the design to become the second Mrs. de Barral. Which would have been impracticable. De Barral would not have known what to do with a wife. But even if by some impossible chance he had made advances, this

governess would have repulsed him with scorn. She had treated him always as an inferior being with an assured, distant politeness. In her composed, schooled manner she despised and disliked both father and daughter exceedingly. I have a notion that she had always disliked intensely all her charges including the two ducal (if they were ducal) little girls with whom she had dazzled de Barral. What an odious, ungratified existence it must have been for a woman as avid of all the sensuous emotions which life can give as most of her betters.

She had seen her youth vanish, her freshness disappear, her hopes die, and now she felt her flaming middle-age slipping away from her. No wonder that with her admirably dressed, abundant hair, thickly sprinkled with white threads and adding to her elegant aspect the piquant distinction of a powdered coiffure--no wonder, I say, that she clung desperately to her last infatuation for that graceless young scamp, even to the extent of hatching for him that amazing plot. He was not so far gone in degradation as to make him utterly hopeless for such an attempt. She hoped to keep him straight with that enormous bribe. She was clearly a woman uncommon enough to live without illusions--which, of course, does not mean that she was reasonable. She had said to herself, perhaps with a fury of self-contempt "In a few years I shall be too old for anybody. Meantime I shall have him--and I shall hold him by throwing to him the money of that ordinary, silly, little girl of no account." Well, it was a desperate expedient--but she thought it worth while. And besides there is hardly a woman in the world, no matter how hard, depraved or frantic, in whom something of the maternal instinct does not survive, unconsumed like a salamander, in the fires of the most abandoned passion. Yes there might have been that sentiment for him too. There was no doubt. So I say again: No wonder! No wonder that she raged at everything--and perhaps even at him, with contradictory reproaches: for regretting the girl, a little fool who would never in her life be worth anybody's attention, and for taking the disaster itself with a cynical levity in which she perceived a flavour of revolt.

And so the altercation in the night went on, over the irremediable. He arguing "What's the hurry? Why clear out like this?" perhaps a little sorry for the girl and as usual without a penny in his pocket, appreciating the comfortable quarters, wishing to linger on as long as possible in the shameless enjoyment of this already doomed luxury. There was really no hurry for a few days. Always time enough to vanish. And, with that, a touch of masculine softness, a sort of regard for appearances surviving his degradation: "You might behave decently at the last, Eliza." But there was no softness in the sallow face under the gala effect of powdered hair, its formal calmness gone, the dark-ringed eyes glaring at him with a sort of hunger. "No! No! If it is as you say then not a day, not an hour, not a moment." She stuck to it, very determined that there should be no more of that boy and girl philandering since the object of it was gone; angry with herself for

having suffered from it so much in the past, furious at its having been all in vain.

But she was reasonable enough not to quarrel with him finally. What was the good? She found means to placate him. The only means. As long as there was some money to be got she had hold of him. "Now go away. We shall do no good by any more of this sort of talk. I want to be alone for a bit." He went away, sulkily acquiescent. There was a room always kept ready for him on the same floor, at the further end of a short thickly carpeted passage.

How she passed the night, this woman with no illusions to help her through the hours which must have been sleepless I shouldn't like to say. It ended at last; and this strange victim of the de Barral failure, whose name would never be known to the Official Receiver, came down to breakfast, impenetrable in her everyday perfection. From the very first, somehow, she had accepted the fatal news for true. All her life she had never believed in her luck, with that pessimism of the passionate who at bottom feel themselves to be the outcasts of a morally restrained universe. But this did not make it any easier, on opening the morning paper feverishly, to see the thing confirmed. Oh yes! It was there. The Orb had suspended payment--the first growl of the storm faint as yet, but to the initiated the forerunner of a deluge. As an item of news it was not indecently displayed. It was not displayed at all in a sense. The serious paper, the only one of the great dailies which had always maintained an attitude of reserve towards the de Barral group of banks, had its "manner." Yes! a modest item of news! But there was also, on another page, a special financial article in a hostile tone beginning with the words "We have always feared" and a guarded, half-column leader, opening with the phrase: "It is a deplorable sign of the times" what was, in effect, an austere, general rebuke to the absurd infatuations of the investing public. She glanced through these articles, a line here and a line there--no more was necessary to catch beyond doubt the murmur of the oncoming flood. Several slighting references by name to de Barral revived her animosity against the man, suddenly, as by the effect of unforeseen moral support. The miserable wretch! . . . "

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"--You understand," Marlow interrupted the current of his narrative, "that in order to be consecutive in my relation of this affair I am telling you at once the details which I heard from Mrs. Fyne later in the day, as well as what little Fyne imparted to me with his usual solemnity during that morning call. As you may easily guess the Fynes, in their apartments, had read the news at the same time, and, as a matter of fact, in the same august and highly moral newspaper, as the governess in the luxurious mansion a few doors down on the opposite side of the street. But they read them with different feelings. They were thunderstruck. Fyne

had to explain the full purport of the intelligence to Mrs. Fyne whose first cry was that of relief. Then that poor child would be safe from these designing, horrid people. Mrs. Fyne did not know what it might mean to be suddenly reduced from riches to absolute penury. Fyne with his masculine imagination was less inclined to rejoice extravagantly at the girl's escape from the moral dangers which had been menacing her defenceless existence. It was a confoundedly big price to pay. What an unfortunate little thing she was! "We might be able to do something to comfort that poor child at any rate for the time she is here," said Mrs. Fyne. She felt under a sort of moral obligation not to be indifferent. But no comfort for anyone could be got by rushing out into the street at this early hour; and so, following the advice of Fyne not to act hastily, they both sat down at the window and stared feelingly at the great house, awful to their eyes in its stolid, prosperous, expensive respectability with ruin absolutely standing at the door.

By that time, or very soon after, all Brighton had the information and formed a more or less just appreciation of its gravity. The butler in Miss de Barral's big house had seen the news, perhaps earlier than anybody within a mile of the Parade, in the course of his morning duties of which one was to dry the freshly delivered paper before the fire--an occasion to glance at it which no intelligent man could have neglected. He communicated to the rest of the household his vaguely forcible impression that something had gone dreadfully wrong with the affairs of "her father in London."

This brought an atmosphere of constraint through the house, which Flora de Barral coming down somewhat later than usual could not help noticing in her own way. Everybody seemed to stare so stupidly somehow; she feared a dull day.

In the dining-room the governess in her place, a newspaper half-concealed under the cloth on her lap, after a few words exchanged with lips that seemed hardly to move, remaining motionless, her eyes fixed before her in an enduring silence; and presently Charley coming in to whom she did not even give a glance. He hardly said good morning, though he had a half-hearted try to smile at the girl, and sitting opposite her with his eyes on his plate and slight quivers passing along the line of his clean-shaven jaw, he too had nothing to say. It was dull, horribly dull to begin one's day like this; but she knew what it was. These never-ending family affairs! It was not for the first time that she had suffered from their depressing after-effects on these two. It was a shame that the delightful Charley should be made dull by these stupid talks, and it was perfectly stupid of him to let himself be upset like this by his aunt.

When after a period of still, as if calculating, immobility, her governess got up abruptly and went out with the paper in her hand, almost immediately afterwards followed by Charley who left his breakfast half eaten, the girl was positively

relieved. They would have it out that morning whatever it was, and be themselves again in the afternoon. At least Charley would be. To the moods of her governess she did not attach so much importance.

For the first time that morning the Fynes saw the front door of the awful house open and the objectionable young man issue forth, his rascality visible to their prejudiced eyes in his very bowler hat and in the smart cut of his short fawn overcoat. He walked away rapidly like a man hurrying to catch a train, glancing from side to side as though he were carrying something off. Could he be departing for good? Undoubtedly, undoubtedly! But Mrs. Fyne's fervent "thank goodness" turned out to be a bit, as the Americans--some Americans--say "previous." In a very short time the odious fellow appeared again, strolling, absolutely strolling back, his hat now tilted a little on one side, with an air of leisure and satisfaction. Mrs. Fyne groaned not only in the spirit, at this sight, but in the flesh, audibly; and asked her husband what it might mean. Fyne naturally couldn't say. Mrs. Fyne believed that there was something horrid in progress and meantime the object of her detestation had gone up the steps and had knocked at the door which at once opened to admit him.

He had been only as far as the bank.

His reason for leaving his breakfast unfinished to run after Miss de Barral's governess, was to speak to her in reference to that very errand possessing the utmost possible importance in his eyes. He shrugged his shoulders at the nervousness of her eyes and hands, at the half-strangled whisper "I had to go out. I could hardly contain myself." That was her affair. He was, with a young man's squeamishness, rather sick of her ferocity. He did not understand it. Men do not accumulate hate against each other in tiny amounts, treasuring every pinch carefully till it grows at last into a monstrous and explosive hoard. He had run out after her to remind her of the balance at the bank. What about lifting that money without wasting any more time? She had promised him to leave nothing behind.

An account opened in her name for the expenses of the establishment in Brighton, had been fed by de Barral with deferential lavishness. The governess crossed the wide hall into a little room at the side where she sat down to write the cheque, which he hastened out to go and cash as if it were stolen or a forgery. As observed by the Fynes, his uneasy appearance on leaving the house arose from the fact that his first trouble having been caused by a cheque of doubtful authenticity, the possession of a document of the sort made him unreasonably uncomfortable till this one was safely cashed. And after all, you know it was stealing of an indirect sort; for the money was de Barral's money if the account was in the name of the accomplished lady. At any rate the cheque was cashed.

On getting hold of the notes and gold he recovered his jaunty bearing, it being well known that with certain natures the presence of money (even stolen) in the pocket, acts as a tonic, or at least as a stimulant. He cocked his hat a little on one side as though he had had a drink or two--which indeed he might have had in reality, to celebrate the occasion.

The governess had been waiting for his return in the hall, disregarding the side-glances of the butler as he went in and out of the dining-room clearing away the breakfast things. It was she, herself, who had opened the door so promptly. "It's all right," he said touching his breast-pocket; and she did not dare, the miserable wretch without illusions, she did not dare ask him to hand it over. They looked at each other in silence. He nodded significantly: "Where is she now?" and she whispered "Gone into the drawing-room. Want to see her again?" with an archly black look which he acknowledged by a muttered, surly: "I am damned if I do. Well, as you want to bolt like this, why don't we go now?"

She set her lips with cruel obstinacy and shook her head. She had her idea, her completed plan. At that moment the Fynes, still at the window and watching like a pair of private detectives, saw a man with a long grey beard and a jovial face go up the steps helping himself with a thick stick, and knock at the door. Who could he be?

He was one of Miss de Barral's masters. She had lately taken up painting in water-colours, having read in a high-class woman's weekly paper that a great many princesses of the European royal houses were cultivating that art. This was the water-colour morning; and the teacher, a veteran of many exhibitions, of a venerable and jovial aspect, had turned up with his usual punctuality. He was no great reader of morning papers, and even had he seen the news it is very likely he would not have understood its real purport. At any rate he turned up, as the governess expected him to do, and the Fynes saw him pass through the fateful door.

He bowed cordially to the lady in charge of Miss de Barral's education, whom he saw in the hall engaged in conversation with a very good-looking but somewhat raffish young gentleman. She turned to him graciously: "Flora is already waiting for you in the drawing-room."

The cultivation of the art said to be patronized by princesses was pursued in the drawing-room from considerations of the right kind of light. The governess preceded the master up the stairs and into the room where Miss de Barral was found arrayed in a holland pinafore (also of the right kind for the pursuit of the art) and smilingly expectant. The water-colour lesson enlivened by the jocular conversation of the kindly, humorous, old man was always great fun; and she felt

she would be compensated for the tiresome beginning of the day.

Her governess generally was present at the lesson; but on this occasion she only sat down till the master and pupil had gone to work in earnest, and then as though she had suddenly remembered some order to give, rose quietly and went out of the room.

Once outside, the servants summoned by the passing maid without a bell being rung, and quick, quick, let all this luggage be taken down into the hall, and let one of you call a cab. She stood outside the drawing-room door on the landing, looking at each piece, trunk, leather cases, portmanteaus, being carried past her, her brows knitted and her aspect so sombre and absorbed that it took some little time for the butler to muster courage enough to speak to her. But he reflected that he was a free-born Briton and had his rights. He spoke straight to the point but in the usual respectful manner.

"Beg you pardon, ma'am--but are you going away for good?"

He was startled by her tone. Its unexpected, unlady-like harshness fell on his trained ear with the disagreeable effect of a false note. "Yes. I am going away. And the best thing for all of you is to go away too, as soon as you like. You can go now, to-day, this moment. You had your wages paid you only last week. The longer you stay the greater your loss. But I have nothing to do with it now. You are the servants of Mr. de Barral--you know."

The butler was astounded by the manner of this advice, and as his eyes wandered to the drawing-room door the governess extended her arm as if to bar the way. "Nobody goes in there." And that was said still in another tone, such a tone that all trace of the trained respectfulness vanished from the butler's bearing. He stared at her with a frank wondering gaze. "Not till I am gone," she added, and there was such an expression on her face that the man was daunted by the mystery of it. He shrugged his shoulders slightly and without another word went down the stairs on his way to the basement, brushing in the hall past Mr. Charles who hat on head and both hands rammed deep into his overcoat pockets paced up and down as though on sentry duty there.

The ladies' maid was the only servant upstairs, hovering in the passage on the first floor, curious and as if fascinated by the woman who stood there guarding the door. Being beckoned closer imperiously and asked by the governess to bring out of the now empty rooms the hat and veil, the only objects besides the furniture still to be found there, she did so in silence but inwardly fluttered. And while waiting uneasily, with the veil, before that woman who, without moving a step away from the drawing-room door was pinning with careless haste her hat

on her head, she heard within a sudden burst of laughter from Miss de Barral enjoying the fun of the water-colour lesson given her for the last time by the cheery old man.

Mr. and Mrs. Fyne ambushed at their window--a most incredible occupation for people of their kind--saw with renewed anxiety a cab come to the door, and watched some luggage being carried out and put on its roof. The butler appeared for a moment, then went in again. What did it mean? Was Flora going to be taken to her father; or were these people, that woman and her horrible nephew, about to carry her off somewhere? Fyne couldn't tell. He doubted the last, Flora having now, he judged, no value, either positive or speculative. Though no great reader of character he did not credit the governess with humane intentions. He confessed to me naively that he was excited as if watching some action on the stage. Then the thought struck him that the girl might have had some money settled on her, be possessed of some means, of some little fortune of her own and therefore--

He imparted this theory to his wife who shared fully his consternation. "I can't believe the child will go away without running in to say good-bye to us," she murmured. "We must find out! I shall ask her." But at that very moment the cab rolled away, empty inside, and the door of the house which had been standing slightly ajar till then was pushed to.

They remained silent staring at it till Mrs. Fyne whispered doubtfully "I really think I must go over." Fyne didn't answer for a while (his is a reflective mind, you know), and then as if Mrs. Fyne's whispers had an occult power over that door it opened wide again and the white-bearded man issued, astonishingly active in his movements, using his stick almost like a leaping-pole to get down the steps; and hobbled away briskly along the pavement. Naturally the Fynes were too far off to make out the expression of his face. But it would not have helped them very much to a guess at the conditions inside the house. The expression was humorously puzzled--nothing more.

For, at the end of his lesson, seizing his trusty stick and coming out with his habitual vivacity, he very nearly cannoned just outside the drawing-room door into the back of Miss de Barral's governess. He stopped himself in time and she turned round swiftly. It was embarrassing; he apologised; but her face was not startled; it was not aware of him; it wore a singular expression of resolution. A very singular expression which, as it were, detained him for a moment. In order to cover his embarrassment, he made some inane remark on the weather, upon which, instead of returning another inane remark according to the tacit rules of the game, she only gave him a smile of unfathomable meaning. Nothing could have been more singular. The good-looking young gentleman of questionable

appearance took not the slightest notice of him in the hall. No servant was to be seen. He let himself out pulling the door to behind him with a crash as, in a manner, he was forced to do to get it shut at all.

When the echo of it had died away the woman on the landing leaned over the banister and called out bitterly to the man below "Don't you want to come up and say good-bye." He had an impatient movement of the shoulders and went on pacing to and fro as though he had not heard. But suddenly he checked himself, stood still for a moment, then with a gloomy face and without taking his hands out of his pockets ran smartly up the stairs. Already facing the door she turned her head for a whispered taunt: "Come! Confess you were dying to see her stupid little face once more,"--to which he disdained to answer.

Flora de Barral, still seated before the table at which she had been wording on her sketch, raised her head at the noise of the opening door. The invading manner of their entrance gave her the sense of something she had never seen before. She knew them well. She knew the woman better than she knew her father. There had been between them an intimacy of relation as great as it can possibly be without the final closeness of affection. The delightful Charley walked in, with his eyes fixed on the back of her governess whose raised veil hid her forehead like a brown band above the black line of the eyebrows. The girl was astounded and alarmed by the altogether unknown expression in the woman's face. The stress of passion often discloses an aspect of the personality completely ignored till then by its closest intimates. There was something like an emanation of evil from her eyes and from the face of the other, who, exactly behind her and overtopping her by half a head, kept his eyelids lowered in a sinister fashion--which in the poor girl, reached, stirred, set free that faculty of unreasoning explosive terror lying locked up at the bottom of all human hearts and of the hearts of animals as well. With suddenly enlarged pupils and a movement as instinctive almost as the bounding of a startled fawn, she jumped up and found herself in the middle of the big room, exclaiming at those amazing and familiar strangers.

"What do you want?"

You will note that she cried: What do you want? Not: What has happened? She told Mrs. Fyne that she had received suddenly the feeling of being personally attacked. And that must have been very terrifying. The woman before her had been the wisdom, the authority, the protection of life, security embodied and visible and undisputed.

You may imagine then the force of the shock in the intuitive perception not merely of danger, for she did not know what was alarming her, but in the sense of

the security being gone. And not only security. I don't know how to explain it clearly. Look! Even a small child lives, plays and suffers in terms of its conception of its own existence. Imagine, if you can, a fact coming in suddenly with a force capable of shattering that very conception itself. It was only because of the girl being still so much of a child that she escaped mental destruction; that, in other words she got over it. Could one conceive of her more mature, while still as ignorant as she was, one must conclude that she would have become an idiot on the spot--long before the end of that experience. Luckily, people, whether mature or not mature (and who really is ever mature?) are for the most part quite incapable of understanding what is happening to them: a merciful provision of nature to preserve an average amount of sanity for working purposes in this world . . . "

"But we, my dear Marlow, have the inestimable advantage of understanding what is happening to others," I struck in. "Or at least some of us seem to. Is that too a provision of nature? And what is it for? Is it that we may amuse ourselves gossiping about each other's affairs? You for instance seem--"

"I don't know what I seem," Marlow silenced me, "and surely life must be amused somehow. It would be still a very respectable provision if it were only for that end. But from that same provision of understanding, there springs in us compassion, charity, indignation, the sense of solidarity; and in minds of any largeness an inclination to that indulgence which is next door to affection. I don't mean to say that I am inclined to an indulgent view of the precious couple which broke in upon an unsuspecting girl. They came marching in (it's the very expression she used later on to Mrs. Fyne) but at her cry they stopped. It must have been startling enough to them. It was like having the mask torn off when you don't expect it. The man stopped for good; he didn't offer to move a step further. But, though the governess had come in there for the very purpose of taking the mask off for the first time in her life, she seemed to look upon the frightened cry as a fresh provocation. "What are you screaming for, you little fool?" she said advancing alone close to the girl who was affected exactly as if she had seen Medusa's head with serpentine locks set mysteriously on the shoulders of that familiar person, in that brown dress, under that hat she knew so well. It made her lose all her hold on reality. She told Mrs. Fyne: "I didn't know where I was. I didn't even know that I was frightened. If she had told me it was a joke I would have laughed. If she had told me to put on my hat and go out with her I would have gone to put on my hat and gone out with her and never said a single word; I should have been convinced I had been mad for a minute or so, and I would have worried myself to death rather than breathe a hint of it to her or anyone. But the wretch put her face close to mine and I could not move. Directly I had looked into her eyes I felt grown on to the carpet."

It was years afterwards that she used to talk like this to Mrs. Fyne--and to Mrs. Fyne alone. Nobody else ever heard the story from her lips. But it was never forgotten. It was always felt; it remained like a mark on her soul, a sort of mystic wound, to be contemplated, to be meditated over. And she said further to Mrs. Fyne, in the course of many confidences provoked by that contemplation, that, as long as that woman called her names, it was almost soothing, it was in a manner reassuring. Her imagination had, like her body, gone off in a wild bound to meet the unknown; and then to hear after all something which more in its tone than in its substance was mere venomous abuse, had steadied the inward flutter of all her being.

"She called me a little fool more times than I can remember. I! A fool! Why, Mrs. Fyne! I do assure you I had never yet thought at all; never of anything in the world, till then. I just went on living. And one can't be a fool without one has at least tried to think. But what had I ever to think about?"

"And no doubt," commented Marlow, "her life had been a mere life of sensations--the response to which can neither be foolish nor wise. It can only be temperamental; and I believe that she was of a generally happy disposition, a child of the average kind. Even when she was asked violently whether she imagined that there was anything in her, apart from her money, to induce any intelligent person to take any sort of interest in her existence, she only caught her breath in one dry sob and said nothing, made no other sound, made no movement. When she was viciously assured that she was in heart, mind, manner and appearance, an utterly common and insipid creature, she remained still, without indignation, without anger. She stood, a frail and passive vessel into which the other went on pouring all the accumulated dislike for all her pupils, her scorn of all her employers (the ducal one included), the accumulated resentment, the infinite hatred of all these unrelieved years of--I won't say hypocrisy. The practice of perfect hypocrisy is a relief in itself, a secret triumph of the vilest sort, no doubt, but still a way of getting even with the common morality from which some of us appear to suffer so much. No! I will say the years, the passionate, bitter years, of restraint, the iron, admirably mannered restraint at every moment, in a never-failing perfect correctness of speech, glances, movements, smiles, gestures, establishing for her a high reputation, an impressive record of success in her sphere. It had been like living half strangled for years.

And all this torture for nothing, in the end! What looked at last like a possible prize (oh, without illusions! but still a prize) broken in her hands, fallen in the dust, the bitter dust, of disappointment, she revelled in the miserable revenge--pretty safe too--only regretting the unworthiness of the girlish figure which stood for so much she had longed to be able to spit venom at, if only once, in perfect

liberty. The presence of the young man at her back increased both her satisfaction and her rage. But the very violence of the attack seemed to defeat its end by rendering the representative victim as it were insensible. The cause of this outrage naturally escaping the girl's imagination her attitude was in effect that of dense, hopeless stupidity. And it is a fact that the worst shocks of life are often received without outcries, without gestures, without a flow of tears and the convulsions of sobbing. The insatiable governess missed these signs exceedingly. This pitiful stolidity was only a fresh provocation. Yet the poor girl was deadly pale.

"I was cold," she used to explain to Mrs. Fyne. "I had had time to get terrified. She had pushed her face so near mine and her teeth looked as though she wanted to bite me. Her eyes seemed to have become quite dry, hard and small in a lot of horrible wrinkles. I was too afraid of her to shudder, too afraid of her to put my fingers to my ears. I didn't know what I expected her to call me next, but when she told me I was no better than a beggar--that there would be no more masters, no more servants, no more horses for me--I said to myself: Is that all? I should have laughed if I hadn't been too afraid of her to make the least little sound."

It seemed that poor Flora had to know all the possible phases of that sort of anguish, beginning with instinctive panic, through the bewildered stage, the frozen stage and the stage of blanched apprehension, down to the instinctive prudence of extreme terror--the stillness of the mouse. But when she heard herself called the child of a cheat and a swindler, the very monstrous unexpectedness of this caused in her a revulsion towards letting herself go. She screamed out all at once "You mustn't speak like this of Papa!"

The effort of it uprooted her from that spot where her little feet seemed dug deep into the thick luxurious carpet, and she retreated backwards to a distant part of the room, hearing herself repeat "You mustn't, you mustn't" as if it were somebody else screaming. She came to a chair and flung herself into it. Thereupon the somebody else ceased screaming and she lolled, exhausted, sightless, in a silent room, as if indifferent to everything and without a single thought in her head.

The next few seconds seemed to last for ever so long; a black abyss of time separating what was past and gone from the reappearance of the governess and the reawakening of fear. And that woman was forcing the words through her set teeth: "You say I mustn't, I mustn't. All the world will be speaking of him like this to-morrow. They will say it, and they'll print it. You shall hear it and you shall read it--and then you shall know whose daughter you are."

Her face lighted up with an atrocious satisfaction. "He's nothing but a thief," she cried, "this father of yours. As to you I have never been deceived in you for a moment. I have been growing more and more sick of you for years. You are a vulgar, silly nonentity, and you shall go back to where you belong, whatever low place you have sprung from, and beg your bread--that is if anybody's charity will have anything to do with you, which I doubt--"

She would have gone on regardless of the enormous eyes, of the open mouth of the girl who sat up suddenly with the wild staring expression of being choked by invisible fingers on her throat, and yet horribly pale. The effect on her constitution was so profound, Mrs. Fyne told me, that she who as a child had a rather pretty delicate colouring, showed a white bloodless face for a couple of years afterwards, and remained always liable at the slightest emotion to an extraordinary ghost-like whiteness. The end came in the abomination of desolation of the poor child's miserable cry for help: "Charley! Charley!" coming from her throat in hidden gasping efforts. Her enlarged eyes had discovered him where he stood motionless and dumb.

He started from his immobility, a hand withdrawn brusquely from the pocket of his overcoat, strode up to the woman, seized her by the arm from behind, saying in a rough commanding tone: "Come away, Eliza." In an instant the child saw them close together and remote, near the door, gone through the door, which she neither heard nor saw being opened or shut. But it was shut. Oh yes, it was shut. Her slow unseeing glance wandered all over the room. For some time longer she remained leaning forward, collecting her strength, doubting if she would be able to stand. She stood up at last. Everything about her spun round in an oppressive silence. She remembered perfectly--as she told Mrs. Fyne--that clinging to the arm of the chair she called out twice "Papa! Papa!" At the thought that he was far away in London everything about her became quite still. Then, frightened suddenly by the solitude of that empty room, she rushed out of it blindly.

* * * * *

With that fatal diffidence in well doing, inherent in the present condition of humanity, the Fynes continued to watch at their window. "It's always so difficult to know what to do for the best," Fyne assured me. It is. Good intentions stand in their own way so much. Whereas if you want to do harm to anyone you needn't hesitate. You have only to go on. No one will reproach you with your mistakes or call you a confounded, clumsy meddler. The Fynes watched the door, the closed street door inimical somehow to their benevolent thoughts, the face of the house cruelly impenetrable. It was just as on any other day. The unchanged daily aspect of inanimate things is so impressive that Fyne went back

into the room for a moment, picked up the paper again, and ran his eyes over the item of news. No doubt of it. It looked very bad. He came back to the window and Mrs. Fyne. Tired out as she was she sat there resolute and ready for responsibility. But she had no suggestion to offer. People do fear a rebuff wonderfully, and all her audacity was in her thoughts. She shrank from the incomparably insolent manner of the governess. Fyne stood by her side, as in those old-fashioned photographs of married couples where you see a husband with his hand on the back of his wife's chair. And they were about as efficient as an old photograph, and as still, till Mrs. Fyne started slightly. The street door had swung open, and, bursting out, appeared the young man, his hat (Mrs. Fyne observed) tilted forward over his eyes. After him the governess slipped through, turning round at once to shut the door behind her with care. Meantime the man went down the white steps and strode along the pavement, his hands rammed deep into the pockets of his fawn overcoat. The woman, that woman of composed movements, of deliberate superior manner, took a little run to catch up with him, and directly she had caught up with him tried to introduce her hand under his arm. Mrs. Fyne saw the brusque half turn of the fellow's body as one avoids an importunate contact, defeating her attempt rudely. She did not try again but kept pace with his stride, and Mrs. Fyne watched them, walking independently, turn the corner of the street side by side, disappear for ever.

The Fynes looked at each other eloquently, doubtfully: What do you think of this? Then with common accord turned their eyes back to the street door, closed, massive, dark; the great, clear-brass knocker shining in a quiet slant of sunshine cut by a diagonal line of heavy shade filling the further end of the street. Could the girl be already gone? Sent away to her father? Had she any relations? Nobody but de Barral himself ever came to see her, Mrs. Fyne remembered; and she had the instantaneous, profound, maternal perception of the child's loneliness--and a girl too! It was irresistible. And, besides, the departure of the governess was not without its encouraging influence. "I am going over at once to find out," she declared resolutely but still staring across the street. Her intention was arrested by the sight of that awful, sombrely glistening door, swinging back suddenly on the yawning darkness of the hall, out of which literally flew out, right out on the pavement, almost without touching the white steps, a little figure swathed in a holland pinafore up to the chin, its hair streaming back from its head, darting past a lamp-post, past the red pillar-box . . . "Here," cried Mrs. Fyne; "she's coming here! Run, John! Run!"

Fyne bounded out of the room. This is his own word. Bounded! He assured me with intensified solemnity that he bounded; and the sight of the short and muscular Fyne bounding gravely about the circumscribed passages and staircases of a small, very high class, private hotel, would have been worth any amount of money to a man greedy of memorable impressions. But as I looked at

him, the desire of laughter at my very lips, I asked myself: how many men could be found ready to compromise their cherished gravity for the sake of the unimportant child of a ruined financier with an ugly, black cloud already wreathing his head. I didn't laugh at little Fyne. I encouraged him: "You did!--very good . . . Well?"

His main thought was to save the child from some unpleasant interference. There was a porter downstairs, page boys; some people going away with their trunks in the passage; a railway omnibus at the door, white-breasted waiters dodging about the entrance.

He was in time. He was at the door before she reached it in her blind course. She did not recognize him; perhaps she did not see him. He caught her by the arm as she ran past and, very sensibly, without trying to check her, simply darted in with her and up the stairs, causing no end of consternation amongst the people in his way. They scattered. What might have been their thoughts at the spectacle of a shameless middle-aged man abducting headlong into the upper regions of a respectable hotel a terrified young girl obviously under age, I don't know. And Fyne (he told me so) did not care for what people might think. All he wanted was to reach his wife before the girl collapsed. For a time she ran with him but at the last flight of stairs he had to seize and half drag, half carry her to his wife. Mrs. Fyne waited at the door with her quite unmoved physiognomy and her readiness to confront any sort of responsibility, which already characterized her, long before she became a ruthless theorist. Relieved, his mission accomplished, Fyne closed hastily the door of the sitting-room.

But before long both Fynes became frightened. After a period of immobility in the arms of Mrs. Fyne, the girl, who had not said a word, tore herself out from that slightly rigid embrace. She struggled dumbly between them, they did not know why, soundless and ghastly, till she sank exhausted on a couch. Luckily the children were out with the two nurses. The hotel housemaid helped Mrs. Fyne to put Flora de Barral to bed. She was as if gone speechless and insane. She lay on her back, her face white like a piece of paper, her dark eyes staring at the ceiling, her awful immobility broken by sudden shivering fits with a loud chattering of teeth in the shadowy silence of the room, the blinds pulled down, Mrs. Fyne sitting by patiently, her arms folded, yet inwardly moved by the riddle of that distress of which she could not guess the word, and saying to herself: "That child is too emotional--much too emotional to be ever really sound!" As if anyone not made of stone could be perfectly sound in this world. And then how sound? In what sense--to resist what? Force or corruption? And even in the best armour of steel there are joints a treacherous stroke can always find if chance gives the opportunity.

General considerations never had the power to trouble Mrs. Fyne much. The girl not being in a state to be questioned she waited by the bedside. Fyne had crossed over to the house, his scruples overcome by his anxiety to discover what really had happened. He did not have to lift the knocker; the door stood open on the inside gloom of the hall; he walked into it and saw no one about, the servants having assembled for a fatuous consultation in the basement. Fyne's uplifted bass voice startled them down there, the butler coming up, staring and in his shirt sleeves, very suspicious at first, and then, on Fyne's explanation that he was the husband of a lady who had called several times at the house--Miss de Barral's mother's friend--becoming humanely concerned and communicative, in a man to man tone, but preserving his trained high-class servant's voice: "Oh bless you, sir, no! She does not mean to come back. She told me so herself"--he assured Fyne with a faint shade of contempt creeping into his tone.

As regards their young lady nobody downstairs had any idea that she had run out of the house. He dared say they all would have been willing to do their very best for her, for the time being; but since she was now with her mother's friends . . .

He fidgeted. He murmured that all this was very unexpected. He wanted to know what he had better do with letters or telegrams which might arrive in the course of the day.

"Letters addressed to Miss de Barral, you had better bring over to my hotel over there," said Fyne beginning to feel extremely worried about the future. The man said "Yes, sir," adding, "and if a letter comes addressed to Mrs. . . ."

Fyne stopped him by a gesture. "I don't know . . . Anything you like."

"Very well, sir."

The butler did not shut the street door after Fyne, but remained on the doorstep for a while, looking up and down the street in the spirit of independent expectation like a man who is again his own master. Mrs. Fyne hearing her husband return came out of the room where the girl was lying in bed. "No change," she whispered; and Fyne could only make a hopeless sign of ignorance as to what all this meant and how it would end.

He feared future complications--naturally; a man of limited means, in a public position, his time not his own. Yes. He owned to me in the parlour of my farmhouse that he had been very much concerned then at the possible consequences. But as he was making this artless confession I said to myself that, whatever consequences and complications he might have imagined, the

complication from which he was suffering now could never, never have presented itself to his mind. Slow but sure (for I conceive that the Book of Destiny has been written up from the beginning to the last page) it had been coming for something like six years--and now it had come. The complication was there! I looked at his unshaken solemnity with the amused pity we give the victim of a funny if somewhat ill-natured practical joke.

"Oh hang it," he exclaimed--in no logical connection with what he had been relating to me. Nevertheless the exclamation was intelligible enough.

However at first there were, he admitted, no untoward complications, no embarrassing consequences. To a telegram in guarded terms dispatched to de Barral no answer was received for more than twenty-four hours. This certainly caused the Fynes some anxiety. When the answer arrived late on the evening of next day it was in the shape of an elderly man. An unexpected sort of man. Fyne explained to me with precision that he evidently belonged to what is most respectable in the lower middle classes. He was calm and slow in his speech. He was wearing a frock-coat, had grey whiskers meeting under his chin, and declared on entering that Mr. de Barral was his cousin. He hastened to add that he had not seen his cousin for many years, while he looked upon Fyne (who received him alone) with so much distrust that Fyne felt hurt (the person actually refusing at first the chair offered to him) and retorted tartly that he, for his part, had never seen Mr. de Barral, in his life, and that, since the visitor did not want to sit down, he, Fyne, begged him to state his business as shortly as possible. The man in black sat down then with a faint superior smile.

He had come for the girl. His cousin had asked him in a note delivered by a messenger to go to Brighton at once and take "his girl" over from a gentleman named Fyne and give her house-room for a time in his family. And there he was. His business had not allowed him to come sooner. His business was the manufacture on a large scale of cardboard boxes. He had two grown-up girls of his own. He had consulted his wife and so that was all right. The girl would get a welcome in his home. His home most likely was not what she had been used to but, etc. etc.

All the time Fyne felt subtly in that man's manner a derisive disapproval of everything that was not lower middle class, a profound respect for money, a mean sort of contempt for speculators that fail, and a conceited satisfaction with his own respectable vulgarity.

With Mrs. Fyne the manner of the obscure cousin of de Barral was but little less offensive. He looked at her rather slyly but her cold, decided demeanour impressed him. Mrs. Fyne on her side was simply appalled by the personage, but

did not show it outwardly. Not even when the man remarked with false simplicity that Florrie--her name was Florrie wasn't it? would probably miss at first all her grand friends. And when he was informed that the girl was in bed, not feeling well at all he showed an unsympathetic alarm. She wasn't an invalid was she? No. What was the matter with her then?

An extreme distaste for that respectable member of society was depicted in Fyne's face even as he was telling me of him after all these years. He was a specimen of precisely the class of which people like the Fynes have the least experience; and I imagine he jarred on them painfully. He possessed all the civic virtues in their very meanest form, and the finishing touch was given by a low sort of consciousness he manifested of possessing them. His industry was exemplary. He wished to catch the earliest possible train next morning. It seems that for seven and twenty years he had never missed being seated on his office-stool at the factory punctually at ten o'clock every day. He listened to Mrs. Fyne's objections with undisguised impatience. Why couldn't Florrie get up and have her breakfast at eight like other people? In his house the breakfast was at eight sharp. Mrs. Fyne's polite stoicism overcame him at last. He had come down at a very great personal inconvenience, he assured her with displeasure, but he gave up the early train.

The good Fynes didn't dare to look at each other before this unforeseen but perfectly authorized guardian, the same thought springing up in their minds: Poor girl! Poor girl! If the women of the family were like this too! . . . And of course they would be. Poor girl! But what could they have done even if they had been prepared to raise objections. The person in the frock-coat had the father's note; he had shown it to Fyne. Just a request to take care of the girl--as her nearest relative--without any explanation or a single allusion to the financial catastrophe, its tone strangely detached and in its very silence on the point giving occasion to think that the writer was not uneasy as to the child's future. Probably it was that very idea which had set the cousin so readily in motion. Men had come before out of commercial crashes with estates in the country and a comfortable income, if not for themselves then for their wives. And if a wife could be made comfortable by a little dexterous management then why not a daughter? Yes. This possibility might have been discussed in the person's household and judged worth acting upon.

The man actually hinted broadly that such was his belief and in face of Fyne's guarded replies gave him to understand that he was not the dupe of such reticences. Obviously he looked upon the Fynes as being disappointed because the girl was taken away from them. They, by a diplomatic sacrifice in the interests of poor Flora, had asked the man to dinner. He accepted ungraciously, remarking that he was not used to late hours. He had generally a bit of supper

about half-past eight or nine. However . . .

He gazed contemptuously round the prettily decorated dining-room. He wrinkled his nose in a puzzled way at the dishes offered to him by the waiter but refused none, devouring the food with a great appetite and drinking ("swilling" Fyne called it) gallons of ginger beer, which was procured for him (in stone bottles) at his request. The difficulty of keeping up a conversation with that being exhausted Mrs. Fyne herself, who had come to the table armed with adamant resolution. The only memorable thing he said was when, in a pause of gorging himself "with these French dishes" he deliberately let his eyes roam over the little tables occupied by parties of diners, and remarked that his wife did for a moment think of coming down with him, but that he was glad she didn't do so. "She wouldn't have been at all happy seeing all this alcohol about. Not at all happy," he declared weightily.

"You must have had a charming evening," I said to Fyne, "if I may judge from the way you have kept the memory green."

"Delightful," he growled with, positively, a flash of anger at the recollection, but lapsed back into his solemnity at once. After we had been silent for a while I asked whether the man took away the girl next day.

Fyne said that he did; in the afternoon, in a fly, with a few clothes the maid had got together and brought across from the big house. He only saw Flora again ten minutes before they left for the railway station, in the Fynes' sitting-room at the hotel. It was a most painful ten minutes for the Fynes. The respectable citizen addressed Miss de Barral as "Florrie" and "my dear," remarking to her that she was not very big "there's not much of you my dear" in a familiarly disparaging tone. Then turning to Mrs. Fyne, and quite loud "She's very white in the face. Why's that?" To this Mrs. Fyne made no reply. She had put the girl's hair up that morning with her own hands. It changed her very much, observed Fyne. He, naturally, played a subordinate, merely approving part. All he could do for Miss de Barral personally was to go downstairs and put her into the fly himself, while Miss de Barral's nearest relation, having been shouldered out of the way, stood by, with an umbrella and a little black bag, watching this proceeding with grim amusement, as it seemed. It was difficult to guess what the girl thought or what she felt. She no longer looked a child. She whispered to Fyne a faint "Thank you," from the fly, and he said to her in very distinct tones and while still holding her hand: "Pray don't forget to write fully to my wife in a day or two, Miss de Barral." Then Fyne stepped back and the cousin climbed into the fly muttering quite audibly: "I don't think you'll be troubled much with her in the future;" without however looking at Fyne on whom he did not even bestow a nod. The fly drove away.