CHAPTER SEVEN--ON THE PAVEMENT

Fyne was not willing to talk; but as I had been already let into the secret, the fair-minded little man recognized that I had some right to information if I insisted on it. And I did insist, after the third game. We were yet some way from the end of our journey.

"Oh, if you want to know," was his somewhat impatient opening. And then he talked rather volubly. First of all his wife had not given him to read the letter received from Flora (I had suspected him of having it in his pocket), but had told him all about the contents. It was not at all what it should have been even if the girl had wished to affirm her right to disregard the feelings of all the world. Her own had been trampled in the dirt out of all shape. Extraordinary thing to say--I would admit, for a young girl of her age. The whole tone of that letter was wrong, quite wrong. It was certainly not the product of a--say, of a well-balanced mind.

"If she were given some sort of footing in this world," I said, "if only no bigger than the palm of my hand, she would probably learn to keep a better balance."

Fyne ignored this little remark. His wife, he said, was not the sort of person to be addressed mockingly on a serious subject. There was an unpleasant strain of levity in that letter, extending even to the references to Captain Anthony himself. Such a disposition was enough, his wife had pointed out to him, to alarm one for the future, had all the circumstances of that preposterous project been as satisfactory as in fact they were not. Other parts of the letter seemed to have a challenging tone--as if daring them (the Fynes) to approve her conduct. And at the same time implying that she did not care, that it was for their own sakes that she hoped they would "go against the world--the horrid world which had crushed poor papa."

Fyne called upon me to admit that this was pretty cool--considering. And there was another thing, too. It seems that for the last six months (she had been assisting two ladies who kept a kindergarten school in Bayswater--a mere pittance), Flora had insisted on devoting all her spare time to the study of the trial. She had been looking up files of old newspapers, and working herself up into a state of indignation with what she called the injustice and the hypocrisy of the prosecution. Her father, Fyne reminded me, had made some palpable hits in his answers in Court, and she had fastened on them triumphantly. She had reached the conclusion of her father's innocence, and had been brooding over it. Mrs. Fyne had pointed out to him the danger of this.

The train ran into the station and Fyne, jumping out directly it came to a standstill, seemed glad to cut short the conversation. We walked in silence a little way, boarded a bus, then walked again. I don't suppose that since the days of his childhood, when surely he was taken to see the Tower, he had been once east of Temple Bar. He looked about him sullenly; and when I pointed out in the distance the rounded front of the Eastern Hotel at the bifurcation of two very broad, mean, shabby thoroughfares, rising like a grey stucco tower above the lowly roofs of the dirty-yellow, two-storey houses, he only grunted disapprovingly.

"I wouldn't lay too much stress on what you have been telling me," I observed quietly as we approached that unattractive building. "No man will believe a girl who has just accepted his suit to be not well balanced,--you know."

"Oh! Accepted his suit," muttered Fyne, who seemed to have been very thoroughly convinced indeed. "It may have been the other way about." And then he added: "I am going through with it."

I said that this was very praiseworthy but that a certain moderation of statement . . . He waved his hand at me and mended his pace. I guessed that he was anxious to get his mission over as quickly as possible. He barely gave himself time to shake hands with me and made a rush at the narrow glass door with the words Hotel Entrance on it. It swung to behind his back with no more noise than the snap of a toothless jaw.

The absurd temptation to remain and see what would come of it got over my better judgment. I hung about irresolute, wondering how long an embassy of that sort would take, and whether Fyne on coming out would consent to be communicative. I feared he would be shocked at finding me there, would consider my conduct incorrect, conceivably treat me with contempt. I walked off a few paces. Perhaps it would be possible to read something on Fyne's face as he came out; and, if necessary, I could always eclipse myself discreetly through the door of one of the bars. The ground floor of the Eastern Hotel was an unabashed pub, with plate-glass fronts, a display of brass rails, and divided into many compartments each having its own entrance.

But of course all this was silly. The marriage, the love, the affairs of Captain Anthony were none of my business. I was on the point of moving down the street for good when my attention was attracted by a girl approaching the hotel entrance from the west. She was dressed very modestly in black. It was the white straw hat of a good form and trimmed with a bunch of pale roses which had caught my eye. The whole figure seemed familiar. Of course! Flora de Barral. She was making for the hotel, she was going in. And Fyne was with Captain Anthony! To meet him could not be pleasant for her. I wished to save her from

the awkwardness, and as I hesitated what to do she looked up and our eyes happened to meet just as she was turning off the pavement into the hotel doorway. Instinctively I extended my arm. It was enough to make her stop. I suppose she had some faint notion that she had seen me before somewhere. She walked slowly forward, prudent and attentive, watching my faint smile.

"Excuse me," I said directly she had approached me near enough. "Perhaps you would like to know that Mr. Fyne is upstairs with Captain Anthony at this moment."

She uttered a faint "Ah! Mr. Fyne!" I could read in her eyes that she had recognized me now. Her serious expression extinguished the imbecile grin of which I was conscious. I raised my hat. She responded with a slow inclination of the head while her luminous, mistrustful, maiden's glance seemed to whisper, "What is this one doing here?"

"I came up to town with Fyne this morning," I said in a businesslike tone. "I have to see a friend in East India Dock. Fyne and I parted this moment at the door here . . . " The girl regarded me with darkening eyes . . . "Mrs. Fyne did not come with her husband," I went on, then hesitated before that white face so still in the pearly shadow thrown down by the hat-brim. "But she sent him," I murmured by way of warning.

Her eyelids fluttered slowly over the fixed stare. I imagine she was not much disconcerted by this development. "I live a long way from here," she whispered.

I said perfunctorily, "Do you?" And we remained gazing at each other. The uniform paleness of her complexion was not that of an anaemic girl. It had a transparent vitality and at that particular moment the faintest possible rosy tinge, the merest suspicion of colour; an equivalent, I suppose, in any other girl to blushing like a peony while she told me that Captain Anthony had arranged to show her the ship that morning.

It was easy to understand that she did not want to meet Fyne. And when I mentioned in a discreet murmur that he had come because of her letter she glanced at the hotel door quickly, and moved off a few steps to a position where she could watch the entrance without being seen. I followed her. At the junction of the two thoroughfares she stopped in the thin traffic of the broad pavement and turned to me with an air of challenge. "And so you know."

I told her that I had not seen the letter. I had only heard of it. She was a little impatient. "I mean all about me."

Yes. I knew all about her. The distress of Mr. and Mrs. Fyne--especially of Mrs. Fyne--was so great that they would have shared it with anybody almost--not belonging to their circle of friends. I happened to be at hand--that was all.

"You understand that I am not their friend. I am only a holiday acquaintance."

"She was not very much upset?" queried Flora de Barral, meaning, of course, Mrs. Fyne. And I admitted that she was less so than her husband--and even less than myself. Mrs. Fyne was a very self-possessed person which nothing could startle out of her extreme theoretical position. She did not seem startled when Fyne and I proposed going to the quarry.

"You put that notion into their heads," the girl said.

I advanced that the notion was in their heads already. But it was much more vividly in my head since I had seen her up there with my own eyes, tempting Providence.

She was looking at me with extreme attention, and murmured:

"Is that what you called it to them? Tempting . . . "

"No. I told them that you were making up your mind and I came along just then. I told them that you were saved by me. My shout checked you . . . " She moved her head gently from right to left in negation . . . "No? Well, have it your own way."

I thought to myself: She has found another issue. She wants to forget now. And no wonder. She wants to persuade herself that she had never known such an ugly and poignant minute in her life. "After all," I conceded aloud, "things are not always what they seem."

Her little head with its deep blue eyes, eyes of tenderness and anger under the black arch of fine eyebrows was very still. The mouth looked very red in the white face peeping from under the veil, the little pointed chin had in its form something aggressive. Slight and even angular in her modest black dress she was an appealing and--yes--she was a desirable little figure.

Her lips moved very fast asking me:

"And they believed you at once?"

"Yes, they believed me at once. Mrs. Fyne's word to us was "Go!"

A white gleam between the red lips was so short that I remained uncertain whether it was a smile or a ferocious baring of little even teeth. The rest of the face preserved its innocent, tense and enigmatical expression. She spoke rapidly.

"No, it wasn't your shout. I had been there some time before you saw me. And I was not there to tempt Providence, as you call it. I went up there for--for what you thought I was going to do. Yes. I climbed two fences. I did not mean to leave anything to Providence. There seem to be people for whom Providence can do nothing. I suppose you are shocked to hear me talk like that?"

I shook my head. I was not shocked. What had kept her back all that time, till I appeared on the scene below, she went on, was neither fear nor any other kind of hesitation. One reaches a point, she said with appalling youthful simplicity, where nothing that concerns one matters any longer. But something did keep her back. I should have never guessed what it was. She herself confessed that it seemed absurd to say. It was the Fyne dog.

Flora de Barral paused, looking at me, with a peculiar expression and then went on. You see, she imagined the dog had become extremely attached to her. She took it into her head that he might fall over or jump down after her. She tried to drive him away. She spoke sternly to him. It only made him more frisky. He barked and jumped about her skirt in his usual, idiotic, high spirits. He scampered away in circles between the pines charging upon her and leaping as high as her waist. She commanded, "Go away. Go home." She even picked up from the ground a bit of a broken branch and threw it at him. At this his delight knew no bounds; his rushes became faster, his yapping louder; he seemed to be having the time of his life. She was convinced that the moment she threw herself down he would spring over after her as if it were part of the game. She was vexed almost to tears. She was touched too. And when he stood still at some distance as if suddenly rooted to the ground wagging his tail slowly and watching her intensely with his shining eyes another fear came to her. She imagined herself gone and the creature sitting on the brink, its head thrown up to the sky and howling for hours. This thought was not to be borne. Then my shout reached her ears.

She told me all this with simplicity. My voice had destroyed her poise--the suicide poise of her mind. Every act of ours, the most criminal, the most mad presupposes a balance of thought, feeling and will, like a correct attitude for an effective stroke in a game. And I had destroyed it. She was no longer in proper form for the act. She was not very much annoyed. Next day would do. She would have to slip away without attracting the notice of the dog. She thought of the necessity almost tenderly. She came down the path carrying her despair with

lucid calmness. But when she saw herself deserted by the dog, she had an impulse to turn round, go up again and be done with it. Not even that animal cared for her--in the end.

"I really did think that he was attached to me. What did he want to pretend for, like this? I thought nothing could hurt me any more. Oh yes. I would have gone up, but I felt suddenly so tired. So tired. And then you were there. I didn't know what you would do. You might have tried to follow me and I didn't think I could run--not up hill--not then."

She had raised her white face a little, and it was queer to hear her say these things. At that time of the morning there are comparatively few people out in that part of the town. The broad interminable perspective of the East India Dock Road, the great perspective of drab brick walls, of grey pavement, of muddy roadway rumbling dismally with loaded carts and vans lost itself in the distance, imposing and shabby in its spacious meanness of aspect, in its immeasurable poverty of forms, of colouring, of life--under a harsh, unconcerned sky dried by the wind to a clear blue. It had been raining during the night. The sunshine itself seemed poor. From time to time a few bits of paper, a little dust and straw whirled past us on the broad flat promontory of the pavement before the rounded front of the hotel.

Flora de Barral was silent for a while. I said:

"And next day you thought better of it."

Again she raised her eyes to mine with that peculiar expression of informed innocence; and again her white cheeks took on the faintest tinge of pink--the merest shadow of a blush.

"Next day," she uttered distinctly, "I didn't think. I remembered. That was enough. I remembered what I should never have forgotten. Never. And Captain Anthony arrived at the cottage in the evening."

"Ah yes. Captain Anthony," I murmured. And she repeated also in a murmur, "Yes! Captain Anthony." The faint flush of warm life left her face. I subdued my voice still more and not looking at her: "You found him sympathetic?" I ventured.

Her long dark lashes went down a little with an air of calculated discretion. At least so it seemed to me. And yet no one could say that I was inimical to that girl. But there you are! Explain it as you may, in this world the friendless, like the poor, are always a little suspect, as if honesty and delicacy were only possible to the privileged few.

"Why do you ask?" she said after a time, raising her eyes suddenly to mine in an effect of candour which on the same principle (of the disinherited not being to be trusted) might have been judged equivocal.

"If you mean what right I have . . . " She move slightly a hand in a worn brown glove as much as to say she could not question anyone's right against such an outcast as herself.

I ought to have been moved perhaps; but I only noted the total absence of humility . . . "No right at all," I continued, "but just interest. Mrs. Fyne--it's too difficult to explain how it came about--has talked to me of you--well--extensively."

No doubt Mrs. Fyne had told me the truth, Flora said brusquely with an unexpected hoarseness of tone. This very dress she was wearing had been given her by Mrs. Fyne. Of course I looked at it. It could not have been a recent gift. Close-fitting and black, with heliotrope silk facings under a figured net, it looked far from new, just on this side of shabbiness; in fact, it accentuated the slightness of her figure, it went well in its suggestion of half mourning with the white face in which the unsmiling red lips alone seemed warm with the rich blood of life and passion.

Little Fyne was staying up there an unconscionable time. Was he arguing, preaching, remonstrating? Had he discovered in himself a capacity and a taste for that sort of thing? Or was he perhaps, in an intense dislike for the job, beating about the bush and only puzzling Captain Anthony, the providential man, who, if he expected the girl to appear at any moment, must have been on tenterhooks all the time, and beside himself with impatience to see the back of his brother-in-law. How was it that he had not got rid of Fyne long before in any case? I don't mean by actually throwing him out of the window, but in some other resolute manner.

Surely Fyne had not impressed him. That he was an impressionable man I could not doubt. The presence of the girl there on the pavement before me proved this up to the hilt--and, well, yes, touchingly enough.

It so happened that in their wanderings to and fro our glances met. They met and remained in contact more familiar than a hand-clasp, more communicative, more expressive. There was something comic too in the whole situation, in the poor girl and myself waiting together on the broad pavement at a corner public-house for the issue of Fyne's ridiculous mission. But the comic when it is human becomes quickly painful. Yes, she was infinitely anxious. And I was asking myself whether this poignant tension of her suspense depended--to put it plainly-

-on hunger or love.

The answer would have been of some interest to Captain Anthony. For my part, in the presence of a young girl I always become convinced that the dreams of sentiment--like the consoling mysteries of Faith--are invincible; that it is never never reason which governs men and women.

Yet what sentiment could there have been on her part? I remembered her tone only a moment since when she said: "That evening Captain Anthony arrived at the cottage." And considering, too, what the arrival of Captain Anthony meant in this connection, I wondered at the calmness with which she could mention that fact. He arrived at the cottage. In the evening. I knew that late train. He probably walked from the station. The evening would be well advanced. I could almost see a dark indistinct figure opening the wicket gate of the garden. Where was she? Did she see him enter? Was she somewhere near by and did she hear without the slightest premonition his chance and fateful footsteps on the flagged path leading to the cottage door? In the shadow of the night made more cruelly sombre for her by the very shadow of death he must have appeared too strange, too remote, too unknown to impress himself on her thought as a living force--such a force as a man can bring to bear on a woman's destiny.

She glanced towards the hotel door again; I followed suit and then our eyes met once more, this time intentionally. A tentative, uncertain intimacy was springing up between us two. She said simply: "You are waiting for Mr. Fyne to come out; are you?"

I admitted to her that I was waiting to see Mr. Fyne come out. That was all. I had nothing to say to him.

"I have said yesterday all I had to say to him," I added meaningly. "I have said it to them both, in fact. I have also heard all they had to say."

"About me?" she murmured.

"Yes. The conversation was about you."

"I wonder if they told you everything."

If she wondered I could do nothing else but wonder too. But I did not tell her that. I only smiled. The material point was that Captain Anthony should be told everything. But as to that I was very certain that the good sister would see to it. Was there anything more to disclose--some other misery, some other deception of which that girl had been a victim? It seemed hardly probable. It was not even

easy to imagine. What struck me most was her--I suppose I must call it--composure. One could not tell whether she understood what she had done. One wondered. She was not so much unreadable as blank; and I did not know whether to admire her for it or dismiss her from my thoughts as a passive butt of ferocious misfortune.

Looking back at the occasion when we first got on speaking terms on the road by the quarry, I had to admit that she presented some points of a problematic appearance. I don't know why I imagined Captain Anthony as the sort of man who would not be likely to take the initiative; not perhaps from indifference but from that peculiar timidity before women which often enough is found in conjunction with chivalrous instincts, with a great need for affection and great stability of feelings. Such men are easily moved. At the least encouragement they go forward with the eagerness, with the recklessness of starvation. This accounted for the suddenness of the affair. No! With all her inexperience this girl could not have found any great difficulty in her conquering enterprise. She must have begun it. And yet there she was, patient, almost unmoved, almost pitiful, waiting outside like a beggar, without a right to anything but compassion, for a promised dole.

Every moment people were passing close by us, singly, in two and threes; the inhabitants of that end of the town where life goes on unadorned by grace or splendour; they passed us in their shabby garments, with sallow faces, haggard, anxious or weary, or simply without expression, in an unsmiling sombre stream not made up of lives but of mere unconsidered existences whose joys, struggles, thoughts, sorrows and their very hopes were miserable, glamourless, and of no account in the world. And when one thought of their reality to themselves one's heart became oppressed. But of all the individuals who passed by none appeared to me for the moment so pathetic in unconscious patience as the girl standing before me; none more difficult to understand. It is perhaps because I was thinking of things which I could not ask her about.

In fact we had nothing to say to each other; but we two, strangers as we really were to each other, had dealt with the most intimate and final of subjects, the subject of death. It had created a sort of bond between us. It made our silence weighty and uneasy. I ought to have left her there and then; but, as I think I've told you before, the fact of having shouted her away from the edge of a precipice seemed somehow to have engaged my responsibility as to this other leap. And so we had still an intimate subject between us to lend more weight and more uneasiness to our silence. The subject of marriage. I use the word not so much in reference to the ceremony itself (I had no doubt of this, Captain Anthony being a decent fellow) or in view of the social institution in general, as to which I have no opinion, but in regard to the human relation. The first two views are not

particularly interesting. The ceremony, I suppose, is adequate; the institution, I dare say, is useful or it would not have endured. But the human relation thus recognized is a mysterious thing in its origins, character and consequences. Unfortunately you can't buttonhole familiarly a young girl as you would a young fellow. I don't think that even another woman could really do it. She would not be trusted. There is not between women that fund of at least conditional loyalty which men may depend on in their dealings with each other. I believe that any woman would rather trust a man. The difficulty in such a delicate case was how to get on terms.

So we held our peace in the odious uproar of that wide roadway thronged with heavy carts. Great vans carrying enormous piled-up loads advanced swaying like mountains. It was as if the whole world existed only for selling and buying and those who had nothing to do with the movement of merchandise were of no account.

"You must be tired," I said. One had to say something if only to assert oneself against that wearisome, passionless and crushing uproar. She raised her eyes for a moment. No, she was not. Not very. She had not walked all the way. She came by train as far as Whitechapel Station and had only walked from there.

She had had an ugly pilgrimage; but whether of love or of necessity who could tell? And that precisely was what I should have liked to get at. This was not however a question to be asked point-blank, and I could not think of any effective circumlocution. It occurred to me too that she might conceivably know nothing of it herself--I mean by reflection. That young woman had been obviously considering death. She had gone the length of forming some conception of it. But as to its companion fatality--love, she, I was certain, had never reflected upon its meaning.

With that man in the hotel, whom I did not know, and this girl standing before me in the street I felt that it was an exceptional case. He had broken away from his surroundings; she stood outside the pale. One aspect of conventions which people who declaim against them lose sight of is that conventions make both joy and suffering easier to bear in a becoming manner. But those two were outside all conventions. They would be as untrammelled in a sense as the first man and the first woman. The trouble was that I could not imagine anything about Flora de Barral and the brother of Mrs. Fyne. Or, if you like, I could imagine anything which comes practically to the same thing. Darkness and chaos are first cousins. I should have liked to ask the girl for a word which would give my imagination its line. But how was one to venture so far? I can be rough sometimes but I am not naturally impertinent. I would have liked to ask her for instance: "Do you know what you have done with yourself?" A question like that. Anyhow it was time for

one of us to say something. A question it must be. And the question I asked was: "So he's going to show you the ship?"

She seemed glad I had spoken at last and glad of the opportunity to speak herself.

"Yes. He said he would--this morning. Did you say you did not know Captain Anthony?"

"No. I don't know him. Is he anything like his sister?"

She looked startled and murmured "Sister!" in a puzzled tone which astonished me. "Oh! Mrs. Fyne," she exclaimed, recollecting herself, and avoiding my eyes while I looked at her curiously.

What an extraordinary detachment! And all the time the stream of shabby people was hastening by us, with the continuous dreary shuffling of weary footsteps on the flagstones. The sunshine falling on the grime of surfaces, on the poverty of tones and forms seemed of an inferior quality, its joy faded, its brilliance tarnished and dusty. I had to raise my voice in the dull vibrating noise of the roadway.

"You don't mean to say you have forgotten the connection?"

She cried readily enough: "I wasn't thinking." And then, while I wondered what could have been the images occupying her brain at this time, she asked me: "You didn't see my letter to Mrs. Fyne--did you?"

"No. I didn't," I shouted. Just then the racket was distracting, a pair- horse trolly lightly loaded with loose rods of iron passing slowly very near us. "I wasn't trusted so far." And remembering Mrs. Fyne's hints that the girl was unbalanced, I added: "Was it an unreserved confession you wrote?"

She did not answer me for a time, and as I waited I thought that there's nothing like a confession to make one look mad; and that of all confessions a written one is the most detrimental all round. Never confess! Never, never! An untimely joke is a source of bitter regret always. Sometimes it may ruin a man; not because it is a joke, but because it is untimely. And a confession of whatever sort is always untimely. The only thing which makes it supportable for a while is curiosity. You smile? Ah, but it is so, or else people would be sent to the rightabout at the second sentence. How many sympathetic souls can you reckon on in the world? One in ten, one in a hundred--in a thousand--in ten thousand? Ah! What a sell these confessions are! What a horrible sell! You seek sympathy, and all you get

is the most evanescent sense of relief--if you get that much. For a confession, whatever it may be, stirs the secret depths of the hearer's character. Often depths that he himself is but dimly aware of. And so the righteous triumph secretly, the lucky are amused, the strong are disgusted, the weak either upset or irritated with you according to the measure of their sincerity with themselves. And all of them in their hearts brand you for either mad or impudent . . . "

I had seldom seen Marlow so vehement, so pessimistic, so earnestly cynical before. I cut his declamation short by asking what answer Flora de Barral had given to his question. "Did the poor girl admit firing off her confidences at Mrs. Fyne--eight pages of close writing--that sort of thing?"

Marlow shook his head.

"She did not tell me. I accepted her silence, as a kind of answer and remarked that it would have been better if she had simply announced the fact to Mrs. Fyne at the cottage. "Why didn't you do it?" I asked point- blank.

She said: "I am not a very plucky girl." She looked up at me and added meaningly: "And you know it. And you know why."

I must remark that she seemed to have become very subdued since our first meeting at the quarry. Almost a different person from the defiant, angry and despairing girl with quivering lips and resentful glances.

"I thought it was very sensible of you to get away from that sheer drop," I said.

She looked up with something of that old expression.

"That's not what I mean. I see you will have it that you saved my life. Nothing of the kind. I was concerned for that vile little beast of a dog. No! It was the idea of--of doing away with myself which was cowardly. That's what I meant by saying I am not a very plucky girl."

"Oh!" I retorted airily. "That little dog. He isn't really a bad little dog." But she lowered her eyelids and went on:

"I was so miserable that I could think only of myself. This was mean. It was cruel too. And besides I had not given it up--not then."

* * * * *

Marlow changed his tone.

"I don't know much of the psychology of self-destruction. It's a sort of subject one has few opportunities to study closely. I knew a man once who came to my rooms one evening, and while smoking a cigar confessed to me moodily that he was trying to discover some graceful way of retiring out of existence. I didn't study his case, but I had a glimpse of him the other day at a cricket match, with some women, having a good time. That seems a fairly reasonable attitude. Considered as a sin, it is a case for repentance before the throne of a merciful God. But I imagine that Flora de Barral's religion under the care of the distinguished governess could have been nothing but outward formality. Remorse in the sense of gnawing shame and unavailing regret is only understandable to me when some wrong had been done to a fellow-creature. But why she, that girl who existed on sufferance, so to speak--why she should writhe inwardly with remorse because she had once thought of getting rid of a life which was nothing in every respect but a curse--that I could not understand. I thought it was very likely some obscure influence of common forms of speech, some traditional or inherited feeling--a vague notion that suicide is a legal crime; words of old moralists and preachers which remain in the air and help to form all the authorized moral conventions. Yes, I was surprised at her remorse. But lowering her glance unexpectedly till her dark eye-lashes seemed to rest against her white cheeks she presented a perfectly demure aspect. It was so attractive that I could not help a faint smile. That Flora de Barral should ever, in any aspect, have the power to evoke a smile was the very last thing I should have believed. She went on after a slight hesitation:

"One day I started for there, for that place."

Look at the influence of a mere play of physiognomy! If you remember what we were talking about you will hardly believe that I caught myself grinning down at that demure little girl. I must say too that I felt more friendly to her at the moment than ever before.

"Oh, you did? To take that jump? You are a determined young person. Well, what happened that time?"

An almost imperceptible alteration in her bearing; a slight droop of her head perhaps--a mere nothing--made her look more demure than ever.

"I had left the cottage," she began a little hurriedly. "I was walking along the road--you know, the road. I had made up my mind I was not coming back this time."

I won't deny that these words spoken from under the brim of her hat (oh yes,

certainly, her head was down--she had put it down) gave me a thrill; for indeed I had never doubted her sincerity. It could never have been a make-believe despair.

"Yes," I whispered. "You were going along the road."

"When . . . " Again she hesitated with an effect of innocent shyness worlds asunder from tragic issues; then glided on . . . "When suddenly Captain Anthony came through a gate out of a field."

I coughed down the beginning of a most improper fit of laughter, and felt ashamed of myself. Her eyes raised for a moment seemed full of innocent suffering and unexpressed menace in the depths of the dilated pupils within the rings of sombre blue. It was--how shall I say it?--a night effect when you seem to see vague shapes and don't know what reality you may come upon at any time. Then she lowered her eyelids again, shutting all mysteriousness out of the situation except for the sobering memory of that glance, nightlike in the sunshine, expressively still in the brutal unrest of the street.

"So Captain Anthony joined you--did he?"

"He opened a field-gate and walked out on the road. He crossed to my side and went on with me. He had his pipe in his hand. He said: 'Are you going far this morning?'"

These words (I was watching her white face as she spoke) gave me a slight shudder. She remained demure, almost prim. And I remarked:

"You have been talking together before, of course."

"Not more than twenty words altogether since he arrived," she declared without emphasis. "That day he had said 'Good morning' to me when we met at breakfast two hours before. And I said good morning to him. I did not see him afterwards till he came out on the road."

I thought to myself that this was not accidental. He had been observing her. I felt certain also that he had not been asking any questions of Mrs. Fyne.

"I wouldn't look at him," said Flora de Barral. "I had done with looking at people. He said to me: 'My sister does not put herself out much for us. We had better keep each other company. I have read every book there is in that cottage.' I walked on. He did not leave me. I thought he ought to. But he didn't. He didn't seem to notice that I would not talk to him."

She was now perfectly still. The wretched little parasol hung down against her dress from her joined hands. I was rigid with attention. It isn't every day that one culls such a volunteered tale on a girl's lips. The ugly street-noises swelling up for a moment covered the next few words she said. It was vexing. The next word I heard was "worried."

"It worried you to have him there, walking by your side."

"Yes. Just that," she went on with downcast eyes. There was something prettily comical in her attitude and her tone, while I pictured to myself a poor white-faced girl walking to her death with an unconscious man striding by her side. Unconscious? I don't know. First of all, I felt certain that this was no chance meeting. Something had happened before. Was he a man for a coup-de-foudre, the lightning stroke of love? I don't think so. That sort of susceptibility is luckily rare. A world of inflammable lovers of the Romeo and Juliet type would very soon end in barbarism and misery. But it is a fact that in every man (not in every woman) there lives a lover; a lover who is called out in all his potentialities often by the most insignificant little things--as long as they come at the psychological moment: the glimpse of a face at an unusual angle, an evanescent attitude, the curve of a cheek often looked at before, perhaps, but then, at the moment, charged with astonishing significance. These are great mysteries, of course. Magic signs.

I don't know in what the sign consisted in this case. It might have been her pallor (it wasn't pasty nor yet papery) that white face with eyes like blue gleams of fire and lips like red coals. In certain lights, in certain poises of head it suggested tragic sorrow. Or it might have been her wavy hair. Or even just that pointed chin stuck out a little, resentful and not particularly distinguished, doing away with the mysterious aloofness of her fragile presence. But any way at a given moment Anthony must have suddenly seen the girl. And then, that something had happened to him. Perhaps nothing more than the thought coming into his head that this was "a possible woman."

Followed this waylaying! Its resolute character makes me think it was the chin's doing; that "common mortal" touch which stands in such good stead to some women. Because men, I mean really masculine men, those whose generations have evolved an ideal woman, are often very timid. Who wouldn't be before the ideal? It's your sentimental trifler, who has just missed being nothing at all, who is enterprising, simply because it is easy to appear enterprising when one does not mean to put one's belief to the test.

Well, whatever it was that encouraged him, Captain Anthony stuck to Flora de

Barral in a manner which in a timid man might have been called heroic if it had not been so simple. Whether policy, diplomacy, simplicity, or just inspiration, he kept up his talk, rather deliberate, with very few pauses. Then suddenly as if recollecting himself:

"It's funny. I don't think you are annoyed with me for giving you my company unasked. But why don't you say something?"

I asked Miss de Barral what answer she made to this query.

"I made no answer," she said in that even, unemotional low voice which seemed to be her voice for delicate confidences. "I walked on. He did not seem to mind. We came to the foot of the quarry where the road winds up hill, past the place where you were sitting by the roadside that day. I began to wonder what I should do. After we reached the top Captain Anthony said that he had not been for a walk with a lady for years and years--almost since he was a boy. We had then come to where I ought to have turned off and struck across a field. I thought of making a run of

it. But he would have caught me up. I knew he would; and, of course, he would not have allowed me. I couldn't give him the slip."

"Why didn't you ask him to leave you?" I inquired curiously.

"He would not have taken any notice," she went on steadily. "And what could I have done then? I could not have started quarrelling with him--could I? I hadn't enough energy to get angry. I felt very tired suddenly. I just stumbled on straight along the road. Captain Anthony told me that the family--some relations of his mother--he used to know in Liverpool was broken up now, and he had never made any friends since. All gone their different ways. All the girls married. Nice girls they were and very friendly to him when he was but little more than a boy. He repeated: 'Very nice, cheery, clever girls.' I sat down on a bank against a hedge and began to cry."

"You must have astonished him not a little," I observed.

Anthony, it seems, remained on the road looking down at her. He did not offer to approach her, neither did he make any other movement or gesture. Flora de Barral told me all this. She could see him through her tears, blurred to a mere shadow on the white road, and then again becoming more distinct, but always absolutely still and as if lost in thought before a strange phenomenon which demanded the closest possible attention.

Flora learned later that he had never seen a woman cry; not in that way, at least. He was impressed and interested by the mysteriousness of the effect. She was very conscious of being looked at, but was not able to stop herself crying. In fact, she was not capable of any effort. Suddenly he advanced two steps, stooped, caught hold of her hands lying on her lap and pulled her up to her feet; she found herself standing close to him almost before she realized what he had done. Some people were coming briskly along the road and Captain Anthony muttered: "You don't want to be stared at. What about that stile over there? Can we go back across the fields?"

She snatched her hands out of his grasp (it seems he had omitted to let them go), marched away from him and got over the stile. It was a big field sprinkled profusely with white sheep. A trodden path crossed it diagonally. After she had gone more than half way she turned her head for the first time. Keeping five feet or so behind, Captain Anthony was following her with an air of extreme interest. Interest or eagerness. At any rate she caught an expression on his face which frightened her. But not enough to make her run. And indeed it would have had to be something incredibly awful to scare into a run a girl who had come to the end of her courage to live.

As if encouraged by this glance over the shoulder Captain Anthony came up boldly, and now that he was by her side, she felt his nearness intimately, like a touch. She tried to disregard this sensation. But she was not angry with him now. It wasn't worth while. She was thankful that he had the sense not to ask questions as to this crying. Of course he didn't ask because he didn't care. No one in the world cared for her, neither those who pretended nor yet those who did not pretend. She preferred the latter.

Captain Anthony opened for her a gate into another field; when they got through he kept walking abreast, elbow to elbow almost. His voice growled pleasantly in her very ear. Staying in this dull place was enough to give anyone the blues. His sister scribbled all day. It was positively unkind. He alluded to his nieces as rude, selfish monkeys, without either feelings or manners. And he went on to talk about his ship being laid up for a month and dismantled for repairs. The worst was that on arriving in London he found he couldn't get the rooms he was used to, where they made him as comfortable as such a confirmed sea-dog as himself could be anywhere on shore.

In the effort to subdue by dint of talking and to keep in check the mysterious, the profound attraction he felt already for that delicate being of flesh and blood, with pale cheeks, with darkened eyelids and eyes scalded with hot tears, he went on speaking of himself as a confirmed enemy of life on shore--a perfect terror to a simple man, what with the fads and proprieties and the ceremonies and

affectations. He hated all that. He wasn't fit for it. There was no rest and peace and security but on the sea.

This gave one a view of Captain Anthony as a hermit withdrawn from a wicked world. It was amusingly unexpected to me and nothing more. But it must have appealed straight to that bruised and battered young soul. Still shrinking from his nearness she had ended by listening to him with avidity. His deep murmuring voice soothed her. And she thought suddenly that there was peace and rest in the grave too.

She heard him say: "Look at my sister. She isn't a bad woman by any means. She asks me here because it's right and proper, I suppose, but she has no use for me. There you have your shore people. I quite understand anybody crying. I would have been gone already, only, truth to say, I haven't any friends to go to." He added brusquely: "And you?"

She made a slight negative sign. He must have been observing her, putting two and two together. After a pause he said simply: "When I first came here I thought you were governess to these girls. My sister didn't say a word about you to me."

Then Flora spoke for the first time.

"Mrs. Fyne is my best friend."

"So she is mine," he said without the slightest irony or bitterness, but added with conviction: "That shows you what life ashore is. Much better be out of it."

As they were approaching the cottage he was heard again as though a long silent walk had not intervened: "But anyhow I shan't ask her anything about you."

He stopped short and she went on alone. His last words had impressed her. Everything he had said seemed somehow to have a special meaning under its obvious conversational sense. Till she went in at the door of the cottage she felt his eyes resting on her.

That is it. He had made himself felt. That girl was, one may say, washing about with slack limbs in the ugly surf of life with no opportunity to strike out for herself, when suddenly she had been made to feel that there was somebody beside her in the bitter water. A most considerable moral event for her; whether she was aware of it or not. They met again at the one o'clock dinner. I am inclined to think that, being a healthy girl under her frail appearance, and fast walking and what I may call relief-crying (there are many kinds of crying) making one hungry, she made a good meal. It was Captain Anthony who had no

appetite. His sister commented on it in a curt, businesslike manner, and the eldest of his delightful nieces said mockingly: "You have been taking too much exercise this morning, Uncle Roderick." The mild Uncle Roderick turned upon her with a "What do you know about it, young lady?" so charged with suppressed savagery that the whole round table gave one gasp and went dumb for the rest of the meal. He took no notice whatever of Flora de Barral. I don't think it was from prudence or any calculated motive. I believe he was so full of her aspects that he did not want to look in her direction when there were other people to hamper his imagination.

You understand I am piecing here bits of disconnected statements. Next day Flora saw him leaning over the field-gate. When she told me this, I didn't of course ask her how it was she was there. Probably she could not have told me how it was she was there. The difficulty here is to keep steadily in view the then conditions of her existence, a combination of dreariness and horror.

That hermit-like but not exactly misanthropic sailor was leaning over the gate moodily. When he saw the white-faced restless Flora drifting like a lost thing along the road he put his pipe in his pocket and called out "Good morning, Miss Smith" in a tone of amazing happiness. She, with one foot in life and the other in a nightmare, was at the same time inert and unstable, and very much at the mercy of sudden impulses. She swerved, came distractedly right up to the gate and looking straight into his eyes: "I am not Miss Smith. That's not my name. Don't call me by it."

She was shaking as if in a passion. His eyes expressed nothing; he only unlatched the gate in silence, grasped her arm and drew her in. Then closing it with a kick--

"Not your name? That's all one to me. Your name's the least thing about you I care for." He was leading her firmly away from the gate though she resisted slightly. There was a sort of joy in his eyes which frightened her. "You are not a princess in disguise," he said with an unexpected laugh she found blood-curdling. "And that's all I care for. You had better understand that I am not blind and not a fool. And then it's plain for even a fool to see that things have been going hard with you. You are on a lee shore and eating your heart out with worry."

What seemed most awful to her was the elated light in his eyes, the rapacious smile that would come and go on his lips as if he were gloating over her misery. But her misery was his opportunity and he rejoiced while the tenderest pity seemed to flood his whole being. He pointed out to her that she knew who he was. He was Mrs. Fyne's brother. And, well, if his sister was the best friend she

had in the world, then, by Jove, it was about time somebody came along to look after her a little.

Flora had tried more than once to free herself, but he tightened his grasp of her arm each time and even shook it a little without ceasing to speak. The nearness of his face intimidated her. He seemed striving to look her through. It was obvious the world had been using her ill. And even as he spoke with indignation the very marks and stamp of this ill- usage of which he was so certain seemed to add to the inexplicable attraction he felt for her person. It was not pity alone, I take it. It was something more spontaneous, perverse and exciting. It gave him the feeling that if only he could get hold of her, no woman would belong to him so completely as this woman.

"Whatever your troubles," he said, "I am the man to take you away from them; that is, if you are not afraid. You told me you had no friends. Neither have I. Nobody ever cared for me as far as I can remember. Perhaps you could. Yes, I live on the sea. But who would you be parting from? No one. You have no one belonging to you."

At this point she broke away from him and ran. He did not pursue her. The tall hedges tossing in the wind, the wide fields, the clouds driving over the sky and the sky itself wheeled about her in masses of green and white and blue as if the world were breaking up silently in a whirl, and her foot at the next step were bound to find the void. She reached the gate all right, got out, and, once on the road, discovered that she had not the courage to look back. The rest of that day she spent with the Fyne girls who gave her to understand that she was a slow and unprofitable person. Long after tea, nearly at dusk, Captain Anthony (the son of the poet) appeared suddenly before her in the little garden in front of the cottage. They were alone for the moment. The wind had dropped. In the calm evening air the voices of Mrs. Fyne and the girls strolling aimlessly on the road could be heard. He said to her severely:

"You have understood?"

She looked at him in silence.

"That I love you," he finished.

She shook her head the least bit.

"Don't you believe me?" he asked in a low, infuriated voice.

"Nobody would love me," she answered in a very quiet tone. "Nobody could."

He was dumb for a time, astonished beyond measure, as he well might have been. He doubted his ears. He was outraged.

"Eh? What? Can't love you? What do you know about it? It's my affair, isn't it? You dare say that to a man who has just told you! You must be mad!"

"Very nearly," she said with the accent of pent-up sincerity, and even relieved because she was able to say something which she felt was true. For the last few days she had felt herself several times near that madness which is but an intolerable lucidity of apprehension.

The clear voices of Mrs. Fyne and the girls were coming nearer, sounding affected in the peace of the passion-laden earth. He began storming at her hastily.

"Nonsense! Nobody can . . . Indeed! Pah! You'll have to be shown that somebody can. I can. Nobody . . . " He made a contemptuous hissing noise. "More likely you can't. They have done something to you. Something's crushed your pluck. You can't face a man--that's what it is. What made you like this? Where do you come from? You have been put upon. The scoundrels--whoever they are, men or women, seem to have robbed you of your very name. You say you are not Miss Smith. Who are you, then?"

She did not answer. He muttered, "Not that I care," and fell silent, because the fatuous self-confident chatter of the Fyne girls could be heard at the very gate. But they were not going to bed yet. They passed on. He waited a little in silence and immobility, then stamped his foot and lost control of himself. He growled at her in a savage passion. She felt certain that he was threatening her and calling her names. She was no stranger to abuse, as we know, but there seemed to be a particular kind of ferocity in this which was new to her. She began to tremble. The especially terrifying thing was that she could not make out the nature of these awful menaces and names. Not a word. Yet it was not the shrinking anguish of her other experiences of angry scenes. She made a mighty effort, though her knees were knocking together, and in an expiring voice demanded that he should let her go indoors. "Don't stop me. It's no use. It's no use," she repeated faintly, feeling an invincible obstinacy rising within her, yet without anger against that raging man.

He became articulate suddenly, and, without raising his voice, perfectly audible.

"No use! No use! You dare stand here and tell me that--you white-faced wisp, you wreath of mist, you little ghost of all the sorrow in the world. You dare! Haven't I been looking at you? You are all eyes. What makes your cheeks always

so white as if you had seen something . . . Don't speak. I love it . . . No use! And you really think that I can now go to sea for a year or more, to the other side of the world somewhere, leaving you behind. Why! You would vanish . . . what little there is of you. Some rough wind will blow you away altogether. You have no holding ground on earth. Well, then trust yourself to me--to the sea--which is deep like your eyes."

She said: "Impossible." He kept quiet for a while, then asked in a totally changed tone, a tone of gloomy curiosity:

"You can't stand me then? Is that it?"

"No," she said, more steady herself. "I am not thinking of you at all."

The inane voices of the Fyne girls were heard over the sombre fields calling to each other, thin and clear. He muttered: "You could try to. Unless you are thinking of somebody else."

"Yes. I am thinking of somebody else, of someone who has nobody to think of him but me."

His shadowy form stepped out of her way, and suddenly leaned sideways against the wooden support of the porch. And as she stood still, surprised by this staggering movement, his voice spoke up in a tone quite strange to her.

"Go in then. Go out of my sight--I thought you said nobody could love you."

She was passing him when suddenly he struck her as so forlorn that she was inspired to say: "No one has ever loved me--not in that way--if that's what you mean. Nobody would."

He detached himself brusquely from the post, and she did not shrink; but Mrs. Fyne and the girls were already at the gate.

All he understood was that everything was not over yet. There was no time to lose; Mrs. Fyne and the girls had come in at the gate. He whispered "Wait" with such authority (he was the son of Carleon Anthony, the domestic autocrat) that it did arrest her for a moment, long enough to hear him say that he could not be left like this to puzzle over her nonsense all night. She was to slip down again into the garden later on, as soon as she could do so without being heard. He would be there waiting for her till--till daylight. She didn't think he could go to sleep, did she? And she had better come, or--he broke off on an unfinished threat.

She vanished into the unlighted cottage just as Mrs. Fyne came up to the porch. Nervous, holding her breath in the darkness of the living-room, she heard her best friend say: "You ought to have joined us, Roderick." And then: "Have you seen Miss Smith anywhere?"

Flora shuddered, expecting Anthony to break out into betraying imprecations on Miss Smith's head, and cause a painful and humiliating explanation. She imagined him full of his mysterious ferocity. To her great surprise, Anthony's voice sounded very much as usual, with perhaps a slight tinge of grimness. "Miss Smith! No. I've seen no Miss Smith."

Mrs. Fyne seemed satisfied--and not much concerned really.

Flora, relieved, got clear away to her room upstairs, and shutting her door quietly, dropped into a chair. She was used to reproaches, abuse, to all sorts of wicked ill usage--short of actual beating on her body. Otherwise inexplicable angers had cut and slashed and trampled down her youth without mercy--and mainly, it appeared, because she was the financier de Barral's daughter and also condemned to a degrading sort of poverty through the action of treacherous men who had turned upon her father in his hour of need. And she thought with the tenderest possible affection of that upright figure buttoned up in a long frock-coat, soft- voiced and having but little to say to his girl. She seemed to feel his hand closed round hers. On his flying visits to Brighton he would always walk hand in hand with her. People stared covertly at them; the band was playing; and there was the sea--the blue gaiety of the sea. They were quietly happy together . . . It was all over!

An immense anguish of the present wrung her heart, and she nearly cried aloud. That dread of what was before her which had been eating up her courage slowly in the course of odious years, flamed up into an access of panic, that sort of headlong panic which had already driven her out twice to the top of the cliff-like quarry. She jumped up saying to herself: "Why not now? At once! Yes. I'll do it now--in the dark!" The very horror of it seemed to give her additional resolution.

She came down the staircase quietly, and only on the point of opening the door and because of the discovery that it was unfastened, she remembered Captain Anthony's threat to stay in the garden all night. She hesitated. She did not understand the mood of that man clearly. He was violent. But she had gone beyond the point where things matter. What would he think of her coming down to him--as he would naturally suppose. And even that didn't matter. He could not despise her more than she despised herself. She must have been light-headed because the thought came into her mind that should he get into ungovernable

fury from disappointment, and perchance strangle her, it would be as good a way to be done with it as any.

"You had that thought," I exclaimed in wonder.

With downcast eyes and speaking with an almost painstaking precision (her very lips, her red lips, seemed to move just enough to be heard and no more), she said that, yes, the thought came into her head. This makes one shudder at the mysterious ways girls acquire knowledge. For this was a thought, wild enough, I admit, but which could only have come from the depths of that sort of experience which she had not had, and went far beyond a young girl's possible conception of the strongest and most veiled of human emotions.

"He was there, of course?" I said.

"Yes, he was there." She saw him on the path directly she stepped outside the porch. He was very still. It was as though he had been standing there with his face to the door for hours.

Shaken up by the changing moods of passion and tenderness, he must have been ready for any extravagance of conduct. Knowing the profound silence each night brought to that nook of the country, I could imagine them having the feeling of being the only two people on the wide earth. A row of six or seven lofty elms just across the road opposite the cottage made the night more obscure in that little garden. If these two could just make out each other that was all.

"Well! And were you very much terrified?" I asked.

She made me wait a little before she said, raising her eyes: "He was gentleness itself."

I noticed three abominable, drink-sodden loafers, sallow and dirty, who had come to range themselves in a row within ten feet of us against the front of the public-house. They stared at Flora de Barral's back with unseeing, mournful fixity.

"Let's move this way a little," I proposed.

She turned at once and we made a few paces; not too far to take us out of sight of the hotel door, but very nearly. I could just keep my eyes on it. After all, I had not been so very long with the girl. If you were to disentangle the words we actually exchanged from my comments you would see that they were not so very many, including everything she had so unexpectedly told me of her story. No, not so very many. And now it seemed as though there would be no more. No! I

could expect no more. The confidence was wonderful enough in its nature as far as it went, and perhaps not to have been expected from any other girl under the sun. And I felt a little ashamed. The origin of our intimacy was too gruesome. It was as if listening to her I had taken advantage of having seen her poor bewildered, scared soul without its veils. But I was curious, too; or, to render myself justice without false modesty--I was anxious; anxious to know a little more.

I felt like a blackmailer all the same when I made my attempt with a light-hearted remark.

"And so you gave up that walk you proposed to take?"

"Yes, I gave up the walk," she said slowly before raising her downcast eyes. When she did so it was with an extraordinary effect. It was like catching sight of a piece of blue sky, of a stretch of open water. And for a moment I understood the desire of that man to whom the sea and sky of his solitary life had appeared suddenly incomplete without that glance which seemed to belong to them both. He was not for nothing the son of a poet. I looked into those unabashed eyes while the girl went on, her demure appearance and precise tone changed to a very earnest expression. Woman is various indeed.

"But I want you to understand, Mr. . . . " she had actually to think of my name . . . "Mr. Marlow, that I have written to Mrs. Fyne that I haven't been--that I have done nothing to make Captain Anthony behave to me as he had behaved. I haven't. I haven't. It isn't my doing. It isn't my fault--if she likes to put it in that way. But she, with her ideas, ought to understand that I couldn't, that I couldn't . . . I know she hates me now. I think she never liked me. I think nobody ever cared for me. I was told once nobody could care for me; and I think it is true. At any rate I can't forget it."

Her abominable experience with the governess had implanted in her unlucky breast a lasting doubt, an ineradicable suspicion of herself and of others. I said:

"Remember, Miss de Barral, that to be fair you must trust a man altogether--or not at all."

She dropped her eyes suddenly. I thought I heard a faint sigh. I tried to take a light tone again, and yet it seemed impossible to get off the ground which gave me my standing with her.

"Mrs. Fyne is absurd. She's an excellent woman, but really you could not be expected to throw away your chance of life simply that she might cherish a good

opinion of your memory. That would be excessive."

"It was not of my life that I was thinking while Captain Anthony was--was speaking to me," said Flora de Barral with an effort.

I told her that she was wrong then. She ought to have been thinking of her life, and not only of her life but of the life of the man who was speaking to her too. She let me finish, then shook her head impatiently.

"I mean--death."

"Well," I said, "when he stood before you there, outside the cottage, he really stood between you and that. I have it out of your own mouth. You can't deny it."

"If you will have it that he saved my life, then he has got it. It was not for me. Oh no! It was not for me that I--It was not fear! There!" She finished petulantly: "And you may just as well know it."

She hung her head and swung the parasol slightly to and fro. I thought a little.

"Do you know French, Miss de Barral?" I asked.

She made a sign with her head that she did, but without showing any surprise at the question and without ceasing to swing her parasol.

"Well then, somehow or other I have the notion that Captain Anthony is what the French call un galant homme. I should like to think he is being treated as he deserves."

The form of her lips (I could see them under the brim of her hat) was suddenly altered into a line of seriousness. The parasol stopped swinging.

"I have given him what he wanted--that's myself," she said without a tremor and with a striking dignity of tone.

Impressed by the manner and the directness of the words, I hesitated for a moment what to say. Then made up my mind to clear up the point.

"And you have got what you wanted? Is that it?"

The daughter of the egregious financier de Barral did not answer at once this question going to the heart of things. Then raising her head and gazing wistfully across the street noisy with the endless transit of innumerable bargains, she said

with intense gravity:

"He has been most generous."

I was pleased to hear these words. Not that I doubted the infatuation of Roderick Anthony, but I was pleased to hear something which proved that she was sensible and open to the sentiment of gratitude which in this case was significant. In the face of man's desire a girl is excusable if she thinks herself priceless. I mean a girl of our civilization which has established a dithyrambic phraseology for the expression of love. A man in love will accept any convention exalting the object of his passion and in this indirect way his passion itself. In what way the captain of the ship Ferndale gave proofs of lover-like lavishness I could not guess very well. But I was glad she was appreciative. It is lucky that small things please women. And it is not silly of them to be thus pleased. It is in small things that the deepest loyalty, that which they need most, the loyalty of the passing moment, is best expressed.

She had remained thoughtful, letting her deep motionless eyes rest on the streaming jumble of traffic. Suddenly she said:

"And I wanted to ask you . . . I was really glad when I saw you actually here. Who would have expected you here, at this spot, before this hotel! I certainly never . . . You see it meant a lot to me. You are the only person who knows . . . who knows for certain . . . "

"Knows what?" I said, not discovering at first what she had in her mind. Then I saw it. "Why can't you leave that alone?" I remonstrated, rather annoyed at the invidious position she was forcing on me in a sense. "It's true that I was the only person to see," I added. "But, as it happens, after your mysterious disappearance I told the Fynes the story of our meeting."

Her eyes raised to mine had an expression of dreamy, unfathomable candour, if I dare say so. And if you wonder what I mean I can only say that I have seen the sea wear such an expression on one or two occasions shortly before sunrise on a calm, fresh day. She said as if meditating aloud that she supposed the Fynes were not likely to talk about that. She couldn't imagine any connection in which . . . Why should they?

As her tone had become interrogatory I assented. "To be sure. There's no reason whatever--" thinking to myself that they would be more likely indeed to keep quiet about it. They had other things to talk of. And then remembering little Fyne stuck upstairs for an unconscionable time, enough to blurt out everything he ever knew in his life, I reflected that he would assume naturally that Captain Anthony

had nothing to learn from him about Flora de Barral. It had been up to now my assumption too. I saw my mistake. The sincerest of women will make no unnecessary confidences to a man. And this is as it should be.

"No--no!" I said reassuringly. "It's most unlikely. Are you much concerned?"

"Well, you see, when I came down," she said again in that precise demure tone, "when I came down--into the garden Captain Anthony misunderstood--"

"Of course he would. Men are so conceited," I said.

I saw it well enough that he must have thought she had come down to him. What else could he have thought? And then he had been "gentleness itself." A new experience for that poor, delicate, and yet so resisting creature. Gentleness in passion! What could have been more seductive to the scared, starved heart of that girl? Perhaps had he been violent, she might have told him that what she came down to keep was the tryst of death--not of love. It occurred to me as I looked at her, young, fragile in aspect, and intensely alive in her quietness, that perhaps she did not know herself then what sort of tryst she was coming down to keep.

She smiled faintly, almost awkwardly as if she were totally unused to smiling, at my cheap jocularity. Then she said with that forced precision, a sort of conscious primness:

"I didn't want him to know."

I approved heartily. Quite right. Much better. Let him ever remain under his misapprehension which was so much more flattering for him.

I tried to keep it in the tone of comedy; but she was, I believe, too simple to understand my intention. She went on, looking down.

"Oh! You think so? When I saw you I didn't know why you were here. I

was glad when you spoke to me because this is exactly what I wanted to ask you for. I wanted to ask you if you ever meet Captain Anthony--by any chance--anywhere--you are a sailor too, are you not?--that you would never mention--never--that--that you had seen me over there."

"My dear young lady," I cried, horror-struck at the supposition. "Why should I? What makes you think I should dream of . . . "

She had raised her head at my vehemence. She did not understand it. The world had treated her so dishonourably that she had no notion even of what mere decency of feeling is like. It was not her fault. Indeed, I don't know why she should have put her trust in anybody's promises.

But I thought it would be better to promise. So I assured her that she could depend on my absolute silence.

"I am not likely to ever set eyes on Captain Anthony," I added with conviction--as a further guarantee.

She accepted my assurance in silence, without a sign. Her gravity had in it something acute, perhaps because of that chin. While we were still looking at each other she declared:

"There's no deception in it really. I want you to believe that if I am here, like this, to-day, it is not from fear. It is not!"

"I quite understand," I said. But her firm yet self-conscious gaze became doubtful. "I do," I insisted. "I understand perfectly that it was not of death that you were afraid."

She lowered her eyes slowly, and I went on:

"As to life, that's another thing. And I don't know that one ought to blame you very much--though it seemed rather an excessive step. I wonder now if it isn't the ugliness rather than the pain of the struggle which . . . "

She shuddered visibly: "But I do blame myself," she exclaimed with feeling. "I am ashamed." And, dropping her head, she looked in a moment the very picture of remorse and shame.

"Well, you will be going away from all its horrors," I said. "And surely you are not afraid of the sea. You are a sailor's granddaughter, I understand."

She sighed deeply. She remembered her grandfather only a little. He was a clean-shaven man with a ruddy complexion and long, perfectly white hair. He used to take her on his knee, and putting his face near hers, talk to her in loving whispers. If only he were alive now . . . !

She remained silent for a while.

"Aren't you anxious to see the ship?" I asked.

She lowered her head still more so that I could not see anything of her face.

"I don't know," she murmured.

I had already the suspicion that she did not know her own feelings. All this work of the merest chance had been so unexpected, so sudden. And she had nothing to fall back upon, no experience but such as to shake her belief in every human being. She was dreadfully and pitifully forlorn. It was almost in order to comfort my own depression that I remarked cheerfully:

"Well, I know of somebody who must be growing extremely anxious to see you."

"I am before my time," she confessed simply, rousing herself. "I had nothing to do. So I came out."

I had the sudden vision of a shabby, lonely little room at the other end of the town. It had grown intolerable to her restlessness. The mere thought of it oppressed her. Flora de Barral was looking frankly at her chance confidant,

"And I came this way," she went on. "I appointed the time myself yesterday, but Captain Anthony would not have minded. He told me he was going to look over some business papers till I came."

The idea of the son of the poet, the rescuer of the most forlorn damsel of modern times, the man of violence, gentleness and generosity, sitting up to his neck in ship's accounts amused me. "I am sure he would not have minded," I said, smiling. But the girl's stare was sombre, her thin white face seemed pathetically careworn.

"I can hardly believe yet," she murmured anxiously.

"It's quite real. Never fear," I said encouragingly, but had to change my tone at once. "You had better go down that way a little," I directed her abruptly.

* * * * *

I had seen Fyne come striding out of the hotel door. The intelligent girl, without staying to ask questions, walked away from me quietly down one street while I hurried on to meet Fyne coming up the other at his efficient pedestrian gait. My object was to stop him getting as far as the corner. He must have been thinking too hard to be aware of his surroundings. I put myself in his way, and he nearly walked into me.

"Hallo!" I said.

His surprise was extreme. "You here! You don't mean to say you have been waiting for me?"

I said negligently that I had been detained by unexpected business in the neighbourhood, and thus happened to catch sight of him coming out.

He stared at me with solemn distraction, obviously thinking of something else. I suggested that he had better take the next city-ward tramcar. He was inattentive, and I perceived that he was profoundly perturbed. As Miss de Barral (she had moved out of sight) could not possibly approach the hotel door as long as we remained where we were I proposed that we should wait for the car on the other side of the street. He obeyed rather the slight touch on his arm than my words, and while we were crossing the wide roadway in the midst of the lumbering wheeled traffic, he exclaimed in his deep tone, "I don't know which of these two is more mad than the other!"

"Really!" I said, pulling him forward from under the noses of two enormous sleepy-headed cart-horses. He skipped wildly out of the way and up on the curbstone with a purely instinctive precision; his mind had nothing to do with his movements. In the middle of his leap, and while in the act of sailing gravely through the air, he continued to relieve his outraged feelings.

"You would never believe! They are mad!"

I took care to place myself in such a position that to face me he had to turn his back on the hotel across the road. I believe he was glad I was there to talk to. But I thought there was some misapprehension in the first statement he shot out at me without loss of time, that Captain Anthony had been glad to see him. It was indeed difficult to believe that, directly he opened the door, his wife's "sailor-brother" had positively shouted: "Oh, it's you! The very man I wanted to see."

"I found him sitting there," went on Fyne impressively in his effortless, grave chest voice, "drafting his will."

This was unexpected, but I preserved a noncommittal attitude, knowing full well that our actions in themselves are neither mad nor sane. But I did not see what there was to be excited about. And Fyne was distinctly excited. I understood it better when I learned that the captain of the Ferndale wanted little Fyne to be one of the trustees. He was leaving everything to his wife. Naturally, a request which involved him into sanctioning in a way a proceeding which he had been sent by

his wife to oppose, must have appeared sufficiently mad to Fyne.

"Me! Me, of all people in the world!" he repeated portentously. But I could see that he was frightened. Such want of tact!

"He knew I came from his sister. You don't put a man into such an awkward position," complained Fyne. "It made me speak much more strongly against all this very painful business than I would have had the heart to do otherwise."

I pointed out to him concisely, and keeping my eyes on the door of the hotel, that he and his wife were the only bond with the land Captain Anthony had. Who else could he have asked?

"I explained to him that he was breaking this bond," declared Fyne solemnly. "Breaking it once for all. And for what--for what?"

He glared at me. I could perhaps have given him an inkling for what, but I said nothing. He started again:

"My wife assures me that the girl does not love him a bit. She goes by that letter she received from her. There is a passage in it where she practically admits that she was quite unscrupulous in accepting this offer of marriage, but says to my wife that she supposes she, my wife, will not blame her--as it was in self-defence. My wife has her own ideas, but this is an outrageous misapprehension of her views. Outrageous."

The good little man paused and then added weightily:

"I didn't tell that to my brother-in-law--I mean, my wife's views."

"No," I said. "What would have been the good?"

"It's positive infatuation," agreed little Fyne, in the tone as though he had made an awful discovery. "I have never seen anything so hopeless and inexplicable in my life. I--I felt quite frightened and sorry," he added, while I looked at him curiously asking myself whether this excellent civil servant and notable pedestrian had felt the breath of a great and fatal love-spell passing him by in the room of that East-end hotel. He did look for a moment as though he had seen a ghost, an other- world thing. But that look vanished instantaneously, and he nodded at me with mere exasperation at something quite of this world--whatever it was. "It's a bad business. My brother-in-law knows nothing of women," he cried with an air of profound, experienced wisdom.

What he imagined he knew of women himself I can't tell. I did not know anything of the opportunities he might have had. But this is a subject which, if approached with undue solemnity, is apt to elude one's grasp entirely. No doubt Fyne knew something of a woman who was Captain Anthony's sister. But that, admittedly, had been a very solemn study. I smiled at him gently, and as if encouraged or provoked, he completed his thought rather explosively.

"And that girl understands nothing . . . It's sheer lunacy."

"I don't know," I said, "whether the circumstances of isolation at sea would be any alleviation to the danger. But it's certain that they shall have the opportunity to learn everything about each other in a lonely tete-a-tete."

"But dash it all," he cried in hollow accents which at the same time had the tone of bitter irony--I had never before heard a sound so quaintly ugly and almost horrible--"You forget Mr. Smith."

"What Mr. Smith?" I asked innocently.

Fyne made an extraordinary simiesque grimace. I believe it was quite involuntary, but you know that a grave, much-lined, shaven countenance when distorted in an unusual way is extremely apelike. It was a surprising sight, and rendered me not only speechless but stopped the progress of my thought completely. I must have presented a remarkably imbecile appearance.

"My brother-in-law considered it amusing to chaff me about us introducing the girl as Miss Smith," said Fyne, going surly in a moment. "He said that perhaps if he had heard her real name from the first it might have restrained him. As it was, he made the discovery too late. Asked me to tell Zoe this together with a lot more nonsense."

Fyne gave me the impression of having escaped from a man inspired by a grimly playful ebullition of high spirits. It must have been most distasteful to him; and his solemnity got damaged somehow in the process, I perceived. There were holes in it through which I could see a new, an unknown Fyne.

"You wouldn't believe it," he went on, "but she looks upon her father exclusively as a victim. I don't know," he burst out suddenly through an enormous rent in his solemnity, "if she thinks him absolutely a saint, but she certainly imagines him to be a martyr."

It is one of the advantages of that magnificent invention, the prison, that you may forget people which are put there as though they were dead. One needn't worry

about them. Nothing can happen to them that you can help. They can do nothing which might possibly matter to anybody. They come out of it, though, but that seems hardly an advantage to themselves or anyone else. I had completely forgotten the financier de Barral. The girl for me was an orphan, but now I perceived suddenly the force of Fyne's qualifying statement, "to a certain extent." It would have been infinitely more kind all round for the law to have shot, beheaded, strangled, or otherwise destroyed this absurd de Barral, who was a danger to a moral world inhabited by a credulous multitude not fit to take care of itself. But I observed to Fyne that, however insane was the view she held, one could not declare the girl mad on that account.

"So she thinks of her father--does she? I suppose she would appear to us saner if she thought only of herself."

"I am positive," Fyne said earnestly, "that she went and made desperate eyes at Anthony . . . "

"Oh come!" I interrupted. "You haven't seen her make eyes. You don't know the colour of her eyes."

"Very well! It don't matter. But it could hardly have come to that if she hadn't . . . It's all one, though. I tell you she has led him on, or accepted him, if you like, simply because she was thinking of her father. She doesn't care a bit about Anthony, I believe. She cares for no one. Never cared for anyone. Ask Zoe. For myself I don't blame her," added Fyne, giving me another view of unsuspected things through the rags and tatters of his damaged solemnity. "No! by heavens, I don't blame her--the poor devil."

I agreed with him silently. I suppose affections are, in a sense, to be learned. If there exists a native spark of love in all of us, it must be fanned while we are young. Hers, if she ever had it, had been drenched in as ugly a lot of corrosive liquid as could be imagined. But I was surprised at Fyne obscurely feeling this.

"She loves no one except that preposterous advertising shark," he pursued venomously, but in a more deliberate manner. "And Anthony knows it."

"Does he?" I said doubtfully.

"She's quite capable of having told him herself," affirmed Fyne, with amazing insight. "But whether or no, I've told him."

"You did? From Mrs. Fyne, of course."

Fyne only blinked owlishly at this piece of my insight.

"And how did Captain Anthony receive this interesting information?" I asked further.

"Most improperly," said Fyne, who really was in a state in which he didn't mind what he blurted out. "He isn't himself. He begged me to tell his sister that he offered no remarks on her conduct. Very improper and inconsequent. He said . . . I was tired of this wrangling. I told him I made allowances for the state of excitement he was in."

"You know, Fyne," I said, "a man in jail seems to me such an incredible, cruel, nightmarish sort of thing that I can hardly believe in his existence. Certainly not in relation to any other existences."

"But dash it all," cried Fyne, "he isn't shut up for life. They are going to let him out. He's coming out! That's the whole trouble. What is he coming out to, I want to know? It seems a more cruel business than the shutting him up was. This has been the worry for weeks. Do you see now?"

I saw, all sorts of things! Immediately before me I saw the excitement of little Fyne--mere food for wonder. Further off, in a sort of gloom and beyond the light of day and the movement of the street, I saw the figure of a man, stiff like a ramrod, moving with small steps, a slight girlish figure by his side. And the gloom was like the gloom of villainous slums, of misery, of wretchedness, of a starved and degraded existence. It was a relief that I could see only their shabby hopeless backs. He was an awful ghost. But indeed to call him a ghost was only a refinement of polite speech, and a manner of concealing one's terror of such things. Prisons are wonderful contrivances. Shut--open. Very neat. Shut--open. And out comes some sort of corpse, to wander awfully in a world in which it has no possible connections and carrying with it the appalling tainted atmosphere of its silent abode. Marvellous arrangement. It works automatically, and, when you look at it, the perfection makes you sick; which for a mere mechanism is no mean triumph. Sick and scared. It had nearly scared that poor girl to her death. Fancy having to take such a thing by the hand! Now I understood the remorseful strain I had detected in her speeches.

"By Jove!" I said. "They are about to let him out! I never thought of that."

Fyne was contemptuous either of me or of things at large.

"You didn't suppose he was to be kept in jail for life?"

At that moment I caught sight of Flora de Barral at the junction of the two streets. Then some vehicles following each other in quick succession hid from my sight the black slight figure with just a touch of colour in her hat. She was walking slowly; and it might have been caution or reluctance. While listening to Fyne I stared hard past his shoulder trying to catch sight of her again. He was going on with positive heat, the rags of his solemnity dropping off him at every second sentence.

That was just it. His wife and he had been perfectly aware of it. Of course the girl never talked of her father with Mrs. Fyne. I suppose with her theory of innocence she found it difficult. But she must have been thinking of it day and night. What to do with him? Where to go? How to keep body and soul together? He had never made any friends. The only relations were the atrocious East-end cousins. We know what they were. Nothing but wretchedness, whichever way she turned in an unjust and prejudiced world. And to look at him helplessly she felt would be too much for her.

I won't say I was thinking these thoughts. It was not necessary. This complete knowledge was in my head while I stared hard across the wide road, so hard that I failed to hear little Fyne till he raised his deep voice indignantly.

"I don't blame the girl," he was saying. "He is infatuated with her. Anybody can see that. Why she should have got such a hold on him I can't understand. She said "Yes" to him only for the sake of that fatuous, swindling father of hers. It's perfectly plain if one thinks it over a moment. One needn't even think of it. We have it under her own hand. In that letter to my wife she says she has acted unscrupulously. She has owned up, then, for what else can it mean, I should like to know. And so they are to be married before that old idiot comes out . . . He will be surprised," commented Fyne suddenly in a strangely malignant tone. "He shall be met at the jail door by a Mrs. Anthony, a Mrs. Captain Anthony. Very pleasant for Zoe. And for all I know, my brother-in-law means to turn up dutifully too. A little family event. It's extremely pleasant to think of. Delightful. A charming family party. We three against the world--and all that sort of thing. And what for. For a girl that doesn't care twopence for him."

The demon of bitterness had entered into little Fyne. He amazed me as though he had changed his skin from white to black. It was quite as wonderful. And he kept it up, too.

"Luckily there are some advantages in the--the profession of a sailor. As long as they defy the world away at sea somewhere eighteen thousand miles from here, I don't mind so much. I wonder what that interesting old party will say. He will have another surprise. They mean to drag him along with them on board the

ship straight away. Rescue work. Just think of Roderick Anthony, the son of a gentleman, after all . . . "

He gave me a little shock. I thought he was going to say the "son of the poet" as usual; but his mind was not running on such vanities now. His unspoken thought must have gone on "and uncle of my girls." I suspect that he had been roughly handled by Captain Anthony up there, and the resentment gave a tremendous fillip to the slow play of his wits. Those men of sober fancy, when anything rouses their imaginative faculty, are very thorough. "Just think!" he cried. "The three of them crowded into a four-wheeler, and Anthony sitting deferentially opposite that astonished old jail-bird!"

The good little man laughed. An improper sound it was to come from his manly chest; and what made it worse was the thought that for the least thing, by a mere hair's breadth, he might have taken this affair sentimentally. But clearly Anthony was no diplomatist. His brother-in- law must have appeared to him, to use the language of shore people, a perfect philistine with a heart like a flint. What Fyne precisely meant by "wrangling" I don't know, but I had no doubt that these two had "wrangled" to a profoundly disturbing extent. How much the other was affected I could not even imagine; but the man before me was quite amazingly upset.

"In a four-wheeler! Take him on board!" I muttered, startled by the change in Fyne.

"That's the plan--nothing less. If I am to believe what I have been told, his feet will scarcely touch the ground between the prison-gates and the deck of that ship."

The transformed Fyne spoke in a forcibly lowered tone which I heard without difficulty. The rumbling, composite noises of the street were hushed for a moment, during one of these sudden breaks in the traffic as if the stream of commerce had dried up at its source. Having an unobstructed view past Fyne's shoulder, I was astonished to see that the girl was still there. I thought she had gone up long before. But there was her black slender figure, her white face under the roses of her hat. She stood on the edge of the pavement as people stand on the bank of a stream, very still, as if waiting--or as if unconscious of where she was. The three dismal, sodden loafers (I could see them too; they hadn't budged an inch) seemed to me to be watching her. Which was horrible.

Meantime Fyne was telling me rather remarkable things--for him. He declared first it was a mercy in a sense. Then he asked me if it were not real madness, to saddle one's existence with such a perpetual reminder. The daily existence. The

isolated sea-bound existence. To bring such an additional strain into the solitude already trying enough for two people was the craziest thing. Undesirable relations were bad enough on shore. One could cut them or at least forget their existence now and then. He himself was preparing to forget his brother-in-law's existence as much as possible.

That was the general sense of his remarks, not his exact words. I thought that his wife's brother's existence had never been very embarrassing to him but that now of course he would have to abstain from his allusions to the "son of the poet--you know." I said "yes, yes" in the pauses because I did not want him to turn round; and all the time I was watching the girl intently. I thought I knew now what she meant with her--"He was most generous." Yes. Generosity of character may carry a man through any situation. But why didn't she go then to her generous man? Why stand there as if clinging to this solid earth which she surely hated as one must hate the place where one has been tormented, hopeless, unhappy? Suddenly she stirred. Was she going to cross over? No. She turned and began to walk slowly close to the curbstone, reminding me of the time when I discovered her walking near the edge of a ninety-foot sheer drop. It was the same impression, the same carriage, straight, slim, with rigid head and the two hands hanging lightly clasped in front--only now a small sunshade was dangling from them. I saw something fateful in that deliberate pacing towards the inconspicuous door with the words Hotel Entrance on the glass panels.

She was abreast of it now and I thought that she would stop again; but no! She swerved rigidly--at the moment there was no one near her; she had that bit of pavement to herself--with inanimate slowness as if moved by something outside herself.

"A confounded convict," Fyne burst out.

With the sound of that word offending my ears I saw the girl extend her arm, push the door open a little way and glide in. I saw plainly that movement, the hand put out in advance with the gesture of a sleep-walker.

She had vanished, her black figure had melted in the darkness of the open door. For some time Fyne said nothing; and I thought of the girl going upstairs, appearing before the man. Were they looking at each other in silence and feeling they were alone in the world as lovers should at the moment of meeting? But that fine forgetfulness was surely impossible to Anthony the seaman directly after the wrangling interview with Fyne the emissary of an order of things which stops at the edge of the sea. How much he was disturbed I couldn't tell because I did not know what that impetuous lover had had to listen to.

"Going to take the old fellow to sea with them," I said. "Well I really don't see what else they could have done with him. You told your brother- in-law what you thought of it? I wonder how he took it."

"Very improperly," repeated Fyne. "His manner was offensive, derisive, from the first. I don't mean he was actually rude in words. Hang it all, I am not a contemptible ass. But he was exulting at having got hold of a miserable girl."

"It is pretty certain that she will be much less poor and miserable," I murmured.

It looked as if the exultation of Captain Anthony had got on Fyne's nerves. "I told the fellow very plainly that he was abominably selfish in this," he affirmed unexpectedly.

"You did! Selfish!" I said rather taken aback. "But what if the girl thought that, on the contrary, he was most generous."

"What do you know about it," growled Fyne. The rents and slashes of his solemnity were closing up gradually but it was going to be a surly solemnity. "Generosity! I am disposed to give it another name. No. Not folly," he shot out at me as though I had meant to interrupt him. "Still another. Something worse. I need not tell you what it is," he added with grim meaning.

"Certainly. You needn't--unless you like," I said blankly. Little Fyne had never interested me so much since the beginning of the de Barral-Anthony affair when I first perceived possibilities in him. The possibilities of dull men are exciting because when they happen they suggest legendary cases of "possession," not exactly by the devil but, anyhow, by a strange spirit.

"I told him it was a shame," said Fyne. "Even if the girl did make eyes at him--but I think with you that she did not. Yes! A shame to take advantage of a girl's--a distresses girl that does not love him in the least."

"You think it's so bad as that?" I said. "Because you know I don't."

"What can you think about it," he retorted on me with a solemn stare. "I go by her letter to my wife."

"Ah! that famous letter. But you haven't actually read it," I said.

"No, but my wife told me. Of course it was a most improper sort of letter to write considering the circumstances. It pained Mrs. Fyne to discover how thoroughly she had been misunderstood. But what is written is not all. It's what my wife

could read between the lines. She says that the girl is really terrified at heart."

"She had not much in life to give her any very special courage for it, or any great confidence in mankind. That's very true. But this seems an exaggeration."

"I should like to know what reasons you have to say that," asked Fyne with offended solemnity. "I really don't see any. But I had sufficient authority to tell my brother-in-law that if he thought he was going to do something chivalrous and fine he was mistaken. I can see very well that he will do everything she asks him to do--but, all the same, it is rather a pitiless transaction."

For a moment I felt it might be so. Fyne caught sight of an approaching tram-car and stepped out on the road to meet it. "Have you a more compassionate scheme ready?" I called after him. He made no answer, clambered on to the rear platform, and only then looked back. We exchanged a perfunctory wave of the hand. We also looked at each other, he rather angrily, I fancy, and I with wonder. I may also mention that it was for the last time. From that day I never set eyes on the Fynes. As usual the unexpected happened to me. It had nothing to do with Flora de Barral. The fact is that I went away. My call was not like her call. Mine was not urged on me with passionate vehemence or tender gentleness made all the finer and more compelling by the allurements of generosity which is a virtue as mysterious as any other but having a glamour of its own. No, it was just a prosaic offer of employment on rather good terms which, with a sudden sense of having wasted my time on shore long enough, I accepted without misgivings. And once started out of my indolence I went, as my habit was, very, very far away and for a long, long time. Which is another proof of my indolence. How far Flora went I can't say. But I will tell you my idea: my idea is that she went as far as she was able--as far as she could bear it--as far as she had to . . . "